

THE EFFECT OF ELECTORAL INSTITUTIONS ON  
PARTY MEMBERSHIP IN CENTRAL AND EAST EUROPE

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## LIST OF PARTY ABBREVIATIONS

### **Bulgaria**

BSP*	Bulgarian Socialist Party ( <i>Bulgarska sotsialisticheska partiya</i> )
DPS	Movement for Rights and Freedoms ( <i>Dvizhenie za prava i svobodi</i> )
GERB	Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria ( <i>Grazhdani za evropeysko na Balgariya</i> )
SDS	Union of Democratic Forces ( <i>Sayuz na demokratichite sili</i> )

### **Croatia**

HDZ	Croatian Democratic Union ( <i>Hrvatska demokratska zajednica</i> )
HNS	Croatian People's Party ( <i>Hrvatska narodna stranka</i> )
HSS	Croatian Peasant Party ( <i>Hrvatska seljačka stranka</i> )
SDP	Social Democratic Party of Croatia ( <i>Socialdemokratska partija Hrvatske</i> )

### **Czech Republic**

ČSSD	Czech Social Democratic Party ( <i>Česká strana sociálně demokratická</i> )
KDU-ČSL	Christian Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party ( <i>Křesťanská a demokratická unie – Československá strana lidová</i> )
KSČM	Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia ( <i>Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy</i> )
ODS	Civic Democratic Party ( <i>Občanská demokratická strana</i> )

### **Estonia**

ER	Estonian Reform Party ( <i>Eesti Reformierakond</i> )
IRL	Pro Patria and Res Publica Union ( <i>Isamaa ja Res Publica Liit</i> )
EK	Estonian Centre Party ( <i>Eesti Keskerakond</i> )
SDE	Social Democratic Party ( <i>Sotsiaaldemokraatlik Erakond</i> )

### **Hungary**

Jobbik	Jobbik – The Movement for a Better Hungary ( <i>Jobbik Magyarországért mozgalom</i> )
MDF	Magyar Demokrata Fórum
MSZP	Hungarian Socialist Party ( <i>Magyar Szocialista Párt</i> )

*List of Abbreviations (Contd.)*

**Latvia**

JL	New Era ( <i>Jaunais laiks</i> )
SC	Harmony Centre ( <i>Saskaņas Centrs</i> )
TP	People's Party ( <i>Tautas Partija</i> )
ZZS	Union of Greens and Farmers ( <i>Zaļo un Zemnieku savienība</i> )

**Lithuania**

DP	Labour Party ( <i>Darbo Partija</i> )
LS	Liberal Movement ( <i>Liberalų Sąjūdis</i> )
LSDP	Social Democratic Party of Lithuania ( <i>Lietuvos socialdemokratų partija</i> )
TS-LKD	Homeland Union-Lithuanian Christian Democrats ( <i>Tėvynės sąjunga - Lietuvos krikščionys demokratai</i> )
TT	Order and Justice ( <i>Tvarka ir teisingumas</i> )

**Poland**

PO	Civic Platform ( <i>Platforma Obywatelska</i> )
PiS	Law and Justice ( <i>Prawo i Sprawiedliwość</i> )
PSL	Polish Peasants' Party ( <i>Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe</i> )
SLD	Democratic Left Alliance ( <i>Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej</i> )

**Romania**

PD-L	Democratic Liberal Party ( <i>Partidul Democrat-Liberal</i> )
PNL	National Liberal Party ( <i>Partidul Național Liberal</i> )
PSD	Social Democratic Party ( <i>Partidul Social Democrat</i> )

**Slovakia**

HZDS	Movement for a Democratic Slovakia ( <i>Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko</i> )
KDH	Christian Democratic Movement ( <i>Kresťanskodemokratické hnutie</i> )
MKP	Party of the Hungarian Coalition ( <i>Magyar Koalíció Pártja</i> )
SKDU-DS	Slovak Democratic and Christian Union – Democratic Party <i>Slovenská demokratická a kresťanská únia – Demokratická strana</i>
SMER-SD	Direction – Social Democracy ( <i>Smer – sociálna demokracia</i> )

**Slovenia**

DeSUS	Democratic Party of Pensioners in Slovenia ( <i>Demokratična stranka upokojujencev Slovenije</i> )
SD	Social Democrats ( <i>Socialni demokrati</i> )
SDS	Slovenian Democratic Party ( <i>Slovenska demokratska stranka</i> )

## ABSTRACT

# THE EFFECT OF ELECTORAL INSTITUTIONS ON PARTY MEMBERSHIP IN CENTRAL AND EAST EUROPE

Party membership levels in the new democracies of central and east European were predicted to remain universally low, stymied by post-communist legacies, the availability of state funding and the prevalence of mass media communications (van Biezen, 2003; Kopecký, 2007). However, more than two decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall, membership levels vary considerably between countries, and also between individual parties within party systems. Using freshly gathered party membership data, elite surveys and interviews, this thesis explores a number of institutional hypotheses to test whether, as in western democracies, electoral institutions influence how parties organise and campaign. This thesis finds that national electoral systems, municipal electoral rules and business funding regulations have an observable impact on how parties use their members. In particular, ‘decentralised’ electoral systems encourage greater involvement of members in voter contacting and other small campaign tasks. This thesis concludes that, contrary to the dominant literature, the availability of state funding has little impact on party membership recruitment. Instead, central and east European parties’ attitudes to members are shaped by a complex interaction of institutional, cultural, ideological and strategic factors.

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# 1

## **Parties and their Members in Modern Democracies**

Since the 1960s, scholars have sought to explain the declining role of members in political parties. In the modern world of mass media communications and state subsidies, it is often argued that the role of party members has been reduced to a ‘vestigial function’.<sup>1</sup> As a result, political parties in the new democracies of central and east Europe were not expected to recruit members.<sup>2</sup> However, this thesis argues that the reality is more nuanced. Party membership has risen in some central and east European democracies, but fallen in others.

After analysing country-level and party-level membership data, and drawing on the results of detailed surveys and interviews, this thesis will conclude that institutional rules influence the value of members, and thus whether or not parties invest in membership recruitment and retention. Relevant institutions include electoral systems at both national and local levels, funding regulations, party registration rules, and the length of any pre-election ‘silence period’. There is also, however, variation at the party system level, resulting from imbalances in the resources available to

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Mair and Ingrid van Biezen (2001), ‘Party Membership in Twenty European Democracies’, *Party Politics*, 7(1): 5-21; Herbert Kitschelt (2001), ‘Divergent Paths of Postcommunist Democracies’, in Larry Diamond and Richard Gunther (eds), *Political Parties and Democracy*, The Johns Hopkins University Press (Baltimore).

<sup>2</sup> Ingrid van Biezen (2003), *Political Parties in New Democracies: Party Organization in Southern and East-Central Europe*, Palgrave (Basingstoke).

individual parties, the ideological orientation and normative beliefs of party elites, and strategic considerations, such as the tactics of other political parties.

Since the 1960s, when Otto Kirchheimer predicted that ‘catch-all’ parties would prioritise electoral success over programmatic coherence, jettisoning members along the way,<sup>3</sup> successive scholars have developed models of professionalised, organisationally nimble parties, designed to take full advantage of modern communications. Such parties avoid significant investment in grass-roots activities, instead preferring to focus their efforts on slick media campaigns, largely bankrolled by state subsidies, which are fast becoming ubiquitous.<sup>4</sup> In 2001, Mair and van Biezen’s comparison of party membership in twenty European democracies appeared to confirm this picture of inexorable membership decline.<sup>5</sup> Ten years later, an updated report concluded that ‘membership has now reached such a low ebb that it may no longer constitute a relevant indicator of organisational capacity’.<sup>6</sup>

Against this backdrop, the chances of membership parties forming in the new democracies of central and east Europe were thought to be minimal. If western European parties maintained a membership base out of ‘organisational inertia or

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<sup>3</sup> Otto Kirchheimer (1969), ‘The Transformation of the Western European Party System’, in Federic S Burin and Kurt L Shell (Eds), *Politics, Law and Social Change: Selected Essays of Otto Kirchheimer*, Columbia University Press (New York).

<sup>4</sup> Angelo Panebianco (1988), *Political Parties: Organization and Power*, Cambridge University Press; Peter Mair and Richard S Katz (1997), ‘Party Organization, Party Democracy and the Emergence of the Cartel Party’, in Peter Mair (Ed), *Party System Change: Approaches and Interpretations*, Clarendon Press (Oxford).

<sup>5</sup> Peter Mair and Ingrid van Biezen (2001), ‘Party Membership in Twenty European Democracies’, *Party Politics*, 7 (1): 5-21.

<sup>6</sup> Ingrid van Biezen, Peter Mair and Thomas Poguntke (2012), ‘Going, going... gone? The Decline of Party Membership in Contemporary Europe’, *European Journal of Political Research*, 51 (1): 24.

nostalgia', no such sentimentality would apply in post-communist democracies.<sup>7</sup> By using their access to state funding and mass media, parties would have the opportunity to communicate their message directly to the electorate, bypassing the need to invest in the long and arduous process of membership recruitment.<sup>8</sup> Although electoral mobilisation would be 'more feeble' it would be 'relatively quick and easy to achieve'.<sup>9</sup> Herbert Kitschelt even commented that by avoiding the need to expend resources on mass organisations, central and east European parties would enjoy the 'advantages of backwardness.'<sup>10</sup>

More recently, however, scholars focussing on central and east Europe have questioned the 'end of membership' thesis. In Bulgaria, Maria Spirova found that party elites believed that members were essential for long-term electoral success in turbulent party systems.<sup>11</sup> In Estonia, Allan Sikk reported that parties engaged in a public battle to recruit the most members.<sup>12</sup> Raimondas Ibenskas found that party membership was an important predictor of the 'electoral persistence' of political parties in Lithuania.<sup>13</sup> Using quantitative data from the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary and Poland, Margit Tavits found that strong organisations helped parties to

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<sup>7</sup> Ingrid van Biezen (2003), *Political Parties in New Democracies*.

<sup>8</sup> Ingrid van Biezen (2003), *Political Parties in New Democracies*: pp 43-46; Petr Kopecný (2007), *Political Parties and the State in Post-Communist Europe*, Routledge p3.

<sup>9</sup> Ingrid van Biezen (2003), *Political Parties in New Democracies*, pp 43-46.

<sup>10</sup> Herbert Kitschelt, Zdenka Mansfeldova, Radoslaw Markowski and Gábor Tóka (1999), *Post-Communist Party Systems: Competition, Representation and Inter-Party Co-operation*, Cambridge University Press, p 396.

<sup>11</sup> Maria Spirova (2005), 'Political Parties in Bulgaria', *Party Politics*, 11(5): 601-622.

<sup>12</sup> Allan Sikk (2003), *Cartel Party System in Estonia?*, ECPR General Conference, p14.

<sup>13</sup> Raimondas Ibenskas (2012), 'Activists of Money? Explaining the Electoral Success and Persistence of Political Parties in Lithuania', *Party Politics*, published online 9<sup>th</sup> October 2012.

improve their vote share over time.<sup>14</sup> Taken together, these studies indicate that members may still have something to offer, even in these modern times, and even in new democracies.

This thesis aims to build on these recent studies by analysing region-wide trends in political party development, comparing membership recruitment across eleven post-communist democracies. Finding that membership levels are much higher in some countries than in others, the search begins for an explanation. Adopting an institutionalist perspective, this thesis confirms that the ‘electoral professional’ model of mobilisation is relatively effective in countries where electoral districts are large and campaign financing is plentiful. The latter almost always involves large quantities of business funding, since few democratic states can provide sufficient funds to bankroll a modern electoral-professional campaign. Where electoral districts are small, parties are more likely to involve members in voter contacting tasks, particularly where party financing rules are strict. Thus, incentives to membership recruitment vary considerably from country to country according to the institutional design. These findings suggest that the extant literature on the effect of electoral institutions on party organisations has some relevance in new democracies.

In addition to offering a regional overview of party membership in central and east European democracies, this thesis also contributes three case studies of countries with different electoral systems. These three chapters analyse precisely *how* institutions affect specific parties’ campaign strategies. By exploring the tasks that members perform in post-communist democracies, and the tactical reasoning behind the use of

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<sup>14</sup> Margit Tavits (2012), ‘Organizing for Success: Party Organizational Strength and Electoral Performance in Postcommunist Europe’, *The Journal of Politics*, 74 (1): 83-97.

members, it is possible to see how lines on maps and financial constraints shape the value of members. By providing empirical evidence to support the causal claim that institutions influence current levels of membership in central and east Europe, this thesis contributes to the study of party membership in new democracies.

### 1.1 ‘GOING, GOING...GONE?’<sup>15</sup> MEMBERSHIP IN MODERN DEMOCRACIES

The role of members within political parties has evolved significantly since the 1950s, when Duverger posited that the value of party members varied according to the ideology of the party. In those days, ‘mass parties’ were usually socialist parties, and members helped their party’s cause by raising money and providing a political education to the working class.<sup>16</sup> For cadre parties (typically, though not always, conservative or classical liberal parties), quality rather than quantity of members was important: prestige, connections and the ability to secure votes were valued. While cadre parties tended to adopt a decentralised and weakly knit structure, mass parties were more centralised and built stronger branch structures.<sup>17</sup> These branch structures facilitated the organisation and mobilisation of members, who were used for a wide variety of fundraising, campaigning and recruitment activities.

Since the 1960s, structural changes in society and the development of new technologies have, according to many scholars, altered the dynamics of political competition and revolutionised political communications, undermining the mass party

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<sup>15</sup> Ingrid van Biezen, Peter Mair and Thomas Poguntke (2012), ‘Going, going... gone?’ p 24.

<sup>16</sup> Maurice Duverger (1954), *Political Parties*, Western Printing Services Ltd, Bristol.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*

model in the process. Little more than a decade after Duverger predicted that mass parties would become a dominant force in politics, Otto Kirchheimer suggested that the use of this model was already becoming obsolete.<sup>18</sup> Observing that cadre and class based parties were being replaced by what he described as ‘catch-all’ parties – vote maximising organisations that prioritised electoral success over programmatic coherence - Kirchheimer predicted that membership parties would suffer an evolutionary disadvantage, being less ideologically nimble than their unencumbered competitors. Therefore, they would downgrade ‘the role of individual membership, a role considered a historical relic which may obscure the newly built-up catch-all party image’.<sup>19</sup>

Building on Kirchheimer’s theory in the 1980s, Angelo Panebianco argued that structural changes in society (particularly the blurring of class cleavages) and the influence of mass media in western societies had led to the emergence of what he described as ‘electoral-professional’ parties. Such parties had professional strategists rather than members at their core, and rapid developments in technology and communications allowed strategists to reach beyond traditional class cleavages. Once again, the role of members and activists was downgraded, since technological developments and the increased role of ‘electoral professionals’ changed the dynamics of organisational power.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Otto Kirchheimer (1969), ‘The Transformation of the Western European Party System’, p360.

<sup>19</sup> Otto Kirchheimer (1969), ‘The Transformation of the Western European Party System’, p360.

<sup>20</sup> Angelo Panebianco (1988), *Political Parties: Organization and Power*, Cambridge University Press, p266.

By the 1990s it was posited that the environmental factors identified by Panebianco were pushing parties into a closer relationship with the state. Richard Katz and Peter Mair argued that the rising costs of campaigns and the increasing difficulty of recruiting members encouraged parties to turn to the state in search of resources.<sup>21</sup> In their view, parties increasingly operated as cartels, using laws on media access, public financing and electoral systems to constrain the entry of new parties. Largely reliant on the state for financial resources and the mass media for communications, ‘cartel parties’ would value members for their ‘legitimising function’ only, making the role of members largely decorative.<sup>22</sup>

The ‘cartel party’ theory is significant because it describes a form of politics that is increasingly self-referential. Since its defining feature is a strong degree of collusion between political parties, the role of ideology is weak and inter-party competition is personality-based. Under such a system, members have little practical role to play, since parties will not go to the trouble of organising grass-roots activists to proselytise in local communities about their parties’ policies. Members are certainly not required to input into the policy-making process, since that task is the exclusive preserve of party elites.

In summary, it is often argued that members are a ‘vestigial function’ of modern political parties, offering all of their traditional disadvantages and none of their

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<sup>21</sup> Peter Mair and Richard S Katz (1997), ‘Party Organization, Party Democracy and the Emergence of the Cartel Party’, in Peter Mair, *Party System Change: Approaches and Interpretations*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, p96.

<sup>22</sup> Peter Mair and Richard S Katz (1997), Party Organization, ‘Party Democracy and the Emergence of the Cartel Party’, in Peter Mair, *Party System Change: Approaches and Interpretations*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, pp 110-111.

traditional advantages.<sup>23</sup> Members are no longer required, either for fundraising or communications purposes. Moreover, they are resource intensive to recruit and retain, especially in the modern world where traditional class cleavages have become blurred, loosening traditional loyalties. Potential members have many alternative leisure options, and parties must compete for their attention. To attract members, parties must offer ‘purposive incentives’ (usually the opportunity to shape the party’s ideological direction),<sup>24</sup> but these fetter the discretion of party elites and reduce the party’s ideological flexibility. Members, it is argued, may even damage the prospects of political parties by imposing vote-losing policy commitments.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, according to these accounts, the drop in party membership identified by Mair and van Biezen across twenty European democracies<sup>26</sup> is easy to explain: members are simply of little value to modern political parties.

However, qualitative studies from western democracies suggest that, while membership numbers have declined in absolute terms, political parties in western democracies continue to find a variety of uses for their members. Susan Scarrow’s detailed investigation of British and German parties found that members act as ‘ambassadors within the community’; they provide a socialising mechanism for future elites, offering a pool from which candidates can be selected; they participate in apolitical grass-roots activities, building links between parties and society; they provide a source of loyal and reliable voters; they provide parties with ‘legitimacy benefits’

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>24</sup> Peter B Clark and James Q Wilson (1961), ‘Incentive Systems: A Theory of Organizations’, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 6: 129-166.

<sup>25</sup> John May (1973), ‘Opinion Structure of Political Parties: The Special Law of Curvilinear Disparity’, *Political Studies*, 21: 135-151.

<sup>26</sup> Peter Mair and Ingrid van Biezen (2001), ‘Party Membership in Twenty European Democracies 1980-2000’, *Party Politics*, 7(5): 13.

since voters find the image of elite-based parties unattractive; they provide useful additional income; and they make a positive contribution to the policy-making process.<sup>27</sup> Karina Pedersen found that, far from using members as window dressing, Danish parties had upgraded the benefits that they offered to members in the hope of increasing their grass-roots base.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, a heavy reliance on electoral professionals may be a dangerous long-term strategy. A party without a membership base may, over time, suffer from a competitive disadvantage against a party that also has membership resources,<sup>29</sup> since parties with members can supplement their national media campaign (the ‘air war’) with a physical presence in communities (the ‘ground war’). Pure ‘electoral professional’ parties might also struggle to achieve longevity. Seyd and Whiteley argue that ‘the absence of a significant permanent organisation, a cadre of activists, and a coherent set of values to sustain the party through hard times eventually counts against them.’<sup>30</sup> As new (often anti-system) competitors emerged in the early 2000s, illusions of a cosy cartel were shattered. Mair, Müller and Plasser noted that the most pressing problem now faced by established parties was how to deal with popular disengagement and disaffection, which was feeding support for their new populist rivals.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Susan Scarrow (1995), *Political Parties and their Members: Organizing for Victory in Britain and Germany*, Oxford University Press (Oxford), p133.

<sup>28</sup> Karina Pedersen (2004), ‘From Aggregation to Cartel? The Danish Case’, in Kay Lawson and Thomas Poguntke (Eds), *How Political Parties Respond: Interest Aggregation Revisited*, Routledge (London).

<sup>29</sup> Paul F Whiteley and Patrick Seyd (2002), *High-Intensity Participation: The Dynamics of Party Activism in Britain*, The University of Michigan Press (Ann Arbor), p209.

<sup>30</sup> Paul F Whiteley and Patrick Seyd (2002), *High-Intensity Participation*.

<sup>31</sup> Peter Mair, Wolfgang C. Müller, and Fritz Plasser (eds) (2004), *Political Parties and Electoral Change*, SAGE (London).

A retreat to traditional organisational forms may be one solution to the problem of mass disillusionment. The Democrats in the United States have invested heavily in grass-roots mobilisation in recent years. Their advantage ‘on the ground’ over the Republicans has been credited as pivotal in achieving not only two presidential election victories (in 2008 and 2012), but also with raising turnout from previously dismal levels.<sup>32</sup> Britain’s Labour Party appears to be following suit: towards the end of 2012, they recruited Barack Obama’s ‘mentor’, Arnie Graf, to help rebuild the grass-roots of the Labour Party by introducing a post-modern campaign model based on ‘micro level community activism’.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, while members have declined in overall numbers, and electoral professionals coordinate grass-roots activists, it does not necessarily follow that the role of members and activists is obsolete. Indeed, grass-roots activity may be experiencing a revival, at least in some countries.

It is also far from certain that parties were converged around a single organisational form. While the Schumpeterian notion of political elites manoeuvring for power has been highly influential in the scholarly community, Müller and Strøm argue that three different motivations drive political parties: policy, office and votes.<sup>34</sup> Steven Wolinetz takes this argument a stage further by suggesting that these different motivations will influence how parties organise, including the extent to which they encourage

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<sup>32</sup> Costas Pangopoulos and Peter L Franca (2009), ‘Grassroots Mobilization in the 2008 Presidential Election’, *Journal of Political Marketing*, 8(4): 315-333.

<sup>33</sup> Dan Hodges, ‘Miliband hires Obama’s mentor to revive Labour’, *The New Statesman*, 6<sup>th</sup> January 2013, <http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/the-staggers/2011/01/graf-obama-labour-miliband> (accessed 3rd February 2013).

<sup>34</sup> Wolfgang C Müller and Kaare Strøm (1999), *Policy, Office or Votes? How Political Parties in Western Europe Make Hard Decisions*, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge).

membership participation in the policy-making process.<sup>35</sup> Even in these modern times, the normative values of different ‘party families’ may continue to exert influence on party organisations. Wolinetz also ascribes a role to the competitive dynamics of individual party systems, which can be affected by electoral systems and other institutional rules.<sup>36</sup>

In western democracies, it has been established that electoral systems influence how parties communicate with voters, and therefore how they use their members. While proportional electoral systems incentivise party-driven, centralised campaign strategies, single member district electoral systems encourage local campaigning, often with a heavy concentration of resources in marginal constituencies. Where electoral systems are ‘decentralised’, individual candidates also have an incentive to build their own reputations locally, rather than relying on ‘spin doctors’ in head office.<sup>37</sup>

Scholars of electoral behaviour in the United Kingdom have found that constituency campaigns are, by and large, effective in their aim of increasing the vote shares of political parties.<sup>38</sup> German parties (operating in a mixed electoral system) combine ‘electoral-professional’ strategies (communication through the mass media, political

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<sup>35</sup> Steven B Wolinetz, (2002) ‘Beyond the Catch-All Party: Approaches to the Study of Parties and Party Organization in Contemporary Democracies’, in Gunther, R., et al. eds., *Political Parties: Old Concepts and New Challenges* (Oxford: OUP), p155 table 6.3.

<sup>36</sup> Steven B Wolinetz (2002) *Beyond the Catch-All Party*, p164.

<sup>37</sup> Matthew S Shugart and John M Carey (1995), ‘Incentives to Cultivate a Personal Vote: A Rank Order of Electoral Formulas’, *Electoral Studies*, 14(4): 417-439.

<sup>38</sup> David Denver, Gordon Hands, Justin Fisher and Iain MacAllister (2003), ‘Constituency Campaigning in Britain 1992-2001, Centralization and Modernisation’, *Party Politics*, 9 (5): 541-559; Paul Whiteley and Patrick Seyd (2003), ‘How to Win a Landslide Without Really Trying: The Effects of Local Campaigning on Voting in the 1997 British General Elections’, *Electoral Studies*, 22 (2): 301-324; David Denver, Gordon Hands and Iain MacAllister (2004), ‘The Electoral Impact of Constituency Campaigning in Britain, 1992-2001’, *Political Studies*, 52(2): 289-309; Charles J Pattie and Ron J Johnston (2004), ‘Party Knowledge and Candidate Knowledge: Constituency Campaigning in Voting and the 1997 General Elections’, *Electoral Studies*, 23 (4): 795-819.

advertisements and large-scale rallies) with campaigning at the local level through stalls on market squares, social events and knocking on voters' front doors.<sup>39</sup> In mixed systems, candidates in single member districts adopt more individualised campaign strategies than list candidates.<sup>40</sup> They are more likely than their 'list' colleagues to adopt localised face-to-face approaches.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, members play less of a role in party campaigning under proportional systems than in single member districts.

There has been a tendency, thus far, to view the new democracies of central and east Europe as a special case. The era in which these countries democratised, where mass media was already established, state funding available and cleavages blurred, were thought to provide a fundamentally different context than the first and second wave democracies of Western Europe. If members were already a 'vestigial function' in Western Europe, why would they be recruited in new democracies? As Ingrid van Biezen pointed out, it is one thing to maintain a membership base that already exists, but quite another to 'spend time, money and energy recruiting and mobilizing a membership organization in the first place.'<sup>42</sup>

However, as we shall see in the following section, scholars have observed patterns of membership development in central and east Europe that seem at odds with the expected 'minimalist' electoral-professional approach. Some parties now have

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<sup>39</sup> Thomas Zittel and Thomas Gschwend (2008), 'Individualised Constituency Campaigns in Mixed-Member Electoral Systems: Candidates in the 2005 German Elections', *West European Politics*, Vol 31 No 5 pp 978-1003.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid* p 983.

<sup>41</sup> Kathleen Bawn and Michael F Thies (2003), 'A comparative theory of electoral incentives - Representing the unorganized under PR, plurality and mixed-member electoral systems', *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 15(1), p. 5-32.

<sup>42</sup> Ingrid van Biezen (2003), *Political Parties in New Democracies: Party Organization in Southern and East-Central Europe*, Palgrave (Basingstoke), p46.

membership bases larger than necessary for pure ‘electoral’ campaigning, suggesting that it is time to test the prediction that party membership across the region will remain universally low. Members must have a purpose, at least in some circumstances, or parties would not spend time and energy on membership recruitment.

### PARTY MEMBERSHIP IN POST-COMMUNIST DEMOCRACIES

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the fall of communism led to profound changes in the social, political and economic order of central and east Europe. The one party state gave way to an open electoral field where parties were free to organise and compete. The economic transition from command to market economy initially created a situation of extreme societal flux. The federations of the USSR, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia collapsed, adding the complication of state building to the transition process. At the end of the 1990s, party membership levels in central and east Europe were low: the mean member-to-electorate ratio in post-communist democracies was just 2.84%, compared to an overall mean of 4.99% across European democracies.<sup>43</sup> It could hardly have been otherwise, given the extreme political and economic instability. The question was whether this volatile first decade would have long-term consequences for political party development in the region.

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<sup>43</sup> Peter Mair and Ingrid van Biezen (2001), *Party Membership in Twenty European Democracies*, pp 5-21.

In the 1990s, Richard Rose spoke of ‘floating parties and floating voters’,<sup>44</sup> a context in which political elites were unable to focus on any goal beyond short-term survival.<sup>45</sup> In these circumstances, there was no prospect of membership parties emerging to represent ‘frozen cleavages’, generally considered to be the societal basis for programmatic parties in Western Europe.<sup>46</sup> Some scholars, most notably Ingrid van Biezen and Petr Kopecký,<sup>47</sup> argued that this would have the long-term result of pushing parties further towards the ‘electoral’ model of political mobilisation. Two questions then arise. Was there really such an absolute lack of social differentiation at the time of transition? And would such ‘genetic’ factors set the mould for central and east European party organisation in years to come?

Ingrid van Biezen argued that low levels of party membership were likely to persist in the new democracies of central and east Europe for three reasons.<sup>48</sup> Firstly, the sequencing of organisational development meant that parties acquired parliamentary representation immediately after their creation and, as such, were ‘internally created’. In van Biezen’s view, the emphasis on institution building in the early stages of transition would further encourage an orientation towards the state.<sup>49</sup> Secondly, the lack of social differentiation after decades of communism would push parties further towards the ‘electoral’ model, with the communist past a ‘thwarting experience for the

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<sup>44</sup> Richard Rose, (1995) ‘Mobilizing Demobilized Voters in Post-Communist Societies’, *Party Politics*, 1(4): 549-563.

<sup>45</sup> Paul G Lewis and Radziśława Gortat (1995), ‘Models of Party Development and Questions of State Dependence in Poland’, *Party Politics*, 1(4): 601.

<sup>46</sup> Seymour M Lipset and Stein Rokkan, (1967) *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives*, Free Press (New York).

<sup>47</sup> Ingrid van Biezen (2003), *Political Parties in New Democracies*, pp 43-46; Petr Kopecký (2007), *Political Parties and the State in Post-Communist Europe*, Routledge (Abingdon).

<sup>48</sup> Ingrid van Biezen (2003), *Political Parties in New Democracies*.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, pp31-33.

structural consolidation of both political and civil society.<sup>50</sup> Thirdly, van Biezen argued that the availability of state funding created an institutional disincentive for political parties to invest in membership recruitment.

Van Biezen later focussed on institutions. Noting that state funding was ubiquitous in new democracies, she suggested that parties were transforming from ‘traditionally voluntary private associations’ into ‘public utilities’.<sup>51</sup> Once parties had access to state funds, it was argued that they would have no incentive to build membership bases to ensure their survival. Van Biezen concluded that, while partisan mobilisation may be better for party stability, membership recruitment was time consuming, painstakingly slow and arduous. Petr Kopecný later built on the theory that state funding would act as a disincentive to membership recruitment, arguing that ‘once in possession of state resources, parties are significantly less compelled to engage in party-building strategies based on popular mobilization and extensive organisational development.’<sup>52</sup> Kopecný’s theory mirrors the cartel party theory in two important ways: first, it argues that parties act in unison, orientating towards the state rather than society; and second, it assumes that party systems lack a competitive dynamic that drives elites to seek any possible campaigning advantage over their competitors.

Scholars broadly concurred with the conclusion that central and east European parties would take the short cut of ‘electoralist’ mobilisation. This became the dominant theory of party organisational development in central and east Europe. However,

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p38.

<sup>51</sup> Ingrid van Biezen (2004), ‘Political Parties as Public Utilities’, *Party Politics*, 10(6): 701-722.

<sup>52</sup> Petr Kopecný (Ed) (2008) *Political Parties and the State in Post-Communist Europe*, p3.

during the early 2000s, case studies started to observe signs of life at the grassroots level in some central and east European democracies. Scholars noted parties publicly battling to recruit the most members in Estonia,<sup>53</sup> and members carrying out campaign tasks in Lithuania.<sup>54</sup> In Bulgaria, party elites commented that members provide an anchor in society for political parties, helping them to survive the stormy waters of post-communist politics.<sup>55</sup> A four-country comparison, published by Margit Tavits in 2012, found that parties with members were more likely to survive and succeed than their unencumbered ‘electoral-professional’ counterparts.<sup>56</sup> This chimes with Deegan-Krause and Haughton’s assertion that membership parties are the ‘hardy perennials’ of central and east European party systems, able to withstand short-term electoral setbacks and achieve relative longevity.<sup>57</sup> As observed by Whiteley and Seyd in Western Europe, the lack of an organisational base eventually counts against political parties.<sup>58</sup>

Therefore, it appears that central and east European political parties have not always found ‘electoral’ mobilisation to be an effective long-term strategy. A process of ‘natural selection’ might take place, with membership parties coming to dominate over time. Even in the Czech Republic and Hungary, countries highlighted as having low

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<sup>53</sup> Allan Sikk (2003), *A Cartel Party System in a Post-Communist Country? The Case of Estonia*, Paper Presented for the ECPR General Conference, Marburg, 18-21 September 2003.

<sup>54</sup> Raimondas Ibenskas (2012), ‘Activists of Money? Explaining the Electoral Success and Persistence of Political Parties in Lithuania’, *Party Politics*, published online 9<sup>th</sup> October 2012.

<sup>55</sup> Maria Spirova (2005), ‘Political Parties in Bulgaria: Organizational Trends in Comparative Perspective’, *Party Politics*, 11(5): 601-622.

<sup>56</sup> Margit Tavits (2012), ‘Organizing for Success: Party Organizational Strength and Electoral Performance in Postcommunist Europe’, *The Journal of Politics*, 74(1): 83-97.

<sup>57</sup> Kevin Deegan-Krause and Tim Haughton (2012), ‘The 2010 parliamentary elections in Slovakia’, *Electoral Studies*, 31(1): 222-225.

<sup>58</sup> Paul F Whiteley and Patrick Seyd (2002), *High-Intensity Participation: The Dynamics of Party Activism in Britain*, The University of Michigan Press (Ann Arbor), p209.

levels of membership, parties have made active efforts to attract more members.<sup>59</sup> However, the movement has not entirely been in one direction. In Slovakia, Marek Rybář observed declining membership numbers and levels of activity from the late 1990s onwards, a development that he attributed partially to the adoption of a purely proportional electoral system.<sup>60</sup>

These studies raise a number of questions that are overdue for comparative investigation. How widespread is membership recruitment across central and east Europe? If ‘electoral’ mobilisation is quick and easy, while membership recruitment is ‘time consuming and arduous’, why would party elites ever make an effort to recruit members in these modern times? What tasks do members perform, and do these tasks vary across different countries? Do some electoral institutions incentivise membership recruitment, while others make membership recruitment less worthwhile? This thesis will investigate that factors that influence party elites’ decisions about whether to invest in membership recruitment or not.

### 1.3 MEMBERSHIP RECRUITMENT IN NEW DEMOCRACIES: EXPLAINING VARIATION

For almost fifty years, the prevailing narrative of party membership in Western Europe has been one of decline. According to these accounts, the dealignment of traditional cleavages, combined with the availability of new communications technology, pushed parties further towards ‘electoral’ communication strategies, where

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<sup>59</sup> Zsolt Enyedi and Lukás Linek (2008), ‘Searching for the Right Organization: Ideology and Party Structure in East-Central Europe’, *Party Politics*, 14 (4): 471-472.

<sup>60</sup> Marek Rybář (2006), ‘Powered by the State: The Role of Public Resources in Party-Building in Slovakia’, *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 22(3): 320-340.

members were largely surplus to requirements. In recent years, state subsidies have also been singled out as a disincentive to membership recruitment, while communist legacies made the prospects for membership recruitment even less likely in central and east Europe than Western Europe.

Therefore, before considering the factors that may, or may not, drive membership recruitment in central and east Europe, it is first necessary to start unpicking the complex web of sociological, institutional and cultural factors that might potentially influence party elites' decisions about whether or not to recruit members. By analysing the current literature on political parties and party organisation, both globally and in central and east Europe, it is possible to develop a set of hypotheses that will allow us to move closer to explaining cross-country variation in membership trends.

*The sociological basis of party competition in central and east Europe*

The post-communist transitions were distinct from previous democratisations because they took place against a backdrop of extreme socio-economic flux. Democratisation usually involves a degree of instability while new political institutions are created, but the fundamental socio-economic fabric of the country remains in place. In Latin America and Southern Europe, for example, political parties could be founded to represent established societal groups; indeed, an active civil society and proto-parties often existed prior to the transition. On the contrary, societal differentiation had long

been suppressed under communist regimes through a combination of state control over the economy and the repression of political opposition.<sup>61</sup>

Civil society was not entirely absent in the communist countries of central and east Europe at the time of transition, but movements like Civic Forum/Public Against Violence in Czechoslovakia, Solidarity in Poland and Sajūdis in Lithuania tended to be loose alliances of anti-regime dissidents. Rather than representing distinct societal groups with common socio-economic or cultural interests, these movements united disparate groups of free-market democrats, social democrats, nationalists, clericalists and intellectuals. In practice, these movements were incapable of forming a coherent and unified political party, and disintegrated, often acrimoniously, in the early post-communist years.

However, many familiar faces from these movements later emerged as leaders representing more traditional societal cleavages. In some cases they were followed by activists from transition-era movements. As Evans and Whitefield noted in the early 1990s, the idea of the 'missing middle' (i.e. that traditional cleavages and civil society were almost entirely absent at the time of transition) was something of an over-generalisation. The situation varied from country to country.<sup>62</sup> In Poland, where the Catholic Church continued to operate under communism, the clerical/secular cleavage is prominent today. Many post-communist parliaments include a party representing an ethnic minority, whether Russian, Polish or Hungarian. Meanwhile, the owner/worker cleavage, traditionally the dominant axis of party competition in

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<sup>61</sup> Ingrid van Biezen (2003), *Political Parties in New Democracies*.

<sup>62</sup> Geoffrey Evans and Stephen Whitefield, (1993) 'Identifying the Bases of Party Competition in Eastern Europe', *British Journal of Political Science* 23: 521-548.

western democracies, became more pronounced over time. The transition to a market economy, often with fewer social safeguards than in Western Europe, has led to a rapidly widening gap between rich and poor. This has encouraged increasing differentiation between political parties competing on the economic dimension.<sup>63</sup>

Over time, therefore, cleavage structures have emerged, facilitating programmatic competition between parties. However, the initial lack of societal differentiation was only one reason why political parties in central and east Europe were expected to remain elite-based affairs. Ultimately, theories that ‘electoral’ parties would dominate were rooted in that assumption that party members had become a ‘vestigial function’ in Western Europe. If political elites have access to state funding and the mass media, why would they waste time and effort recruiting members? Therefore, structural explanations account for a sociological backdrop that has become broadly more favourable to membership recruitment over time. However, they still cannot explain why party elites would invest in the arduous process of membership recruitment.

#### *Cultural legacies and party membership in Central and East Europe*

Communist legacies were thought to make party membership less likely, since they tarnished the very notion of party membership amongst the general public.<sup>64</sup> If this were the case, we would expect to find a universal post-communist effect contributing to low party membership. Yet more nuanced analyses of political culture

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<sup>63</sup> Geoffrey Evans (Ed), (1999) *The End of Class Politics? Class Voting in Comparative Context*, Oxford University Press (Oxford).

<sup>64</sup> Ingrid van Biezen (2003), *Political Parties in New Democracies*; Petr Kopecký (2007), *Political Parties and the State*.

acknowledge that communism was not monolithic, and that there was much regional variation.<sup>65</sup> Herbert Kitschelt presented a typology of communism that could potentially account for cross-country variation.

According to Kitschelt's theory, parties operating in countries with a legacy of 'patrimonial communism' might retain large numbers of members on a 'clientelist' basis,<sup>66</sup> while programmatic political parties may be more likely to form in countries with a legacy of 'national accommodative' communism. In countries with a legacy of 'bureaucratic-authoritarian' communism, party membership may remain low, as these regimes were particularly repressive. That cultural variations might account for different outcomes is entirely plausible. However, we still cannot explain why any modern political parties would choose to recruit members, since the prevailing narrative is that disadvantages of members outweigh the advantages. Kitschelt himself argued that central and east Europeans would enjoy 'the advantages of backwardness' by not avoiding the need to build and maintain a membership base.<sup>67</sup>

Kitschelt's categories are difficult to operationalise as independent variables, since reliable allocation of central and east European countries within these three categories is impossible. The three Baltic States fall somewhere between the 'patrimonial' and 'national accommodative' categories, and Slovakia has arguably been influenced by crosscurrents of all three legacies. In any case, the difference in party membership

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<sup>65</sup> Juan J Linz and Alfred C Stepan (1996), *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe*, Johns Hopkins University Press (Baltimore).

<sup>66</sup> Herbert Kitschelt (2001), 'Divergent Paths of Postcommunist Democracies', in Larry Diamond and Richard Gunther (eds), *Political Parties and Democracy*, The Johns Hopkins University Press (Baltimore), p305.

<sup>67</sup> Ingrid van Biezen (2003), *Political Parties in New Democracies*; Petr Kopecký (2007), *Political Parties and the State*.

trends in three Baltic States suggests variation between three countries with apparently similar legacies. Estonia's major parties are showing a considerable growth in membership, while neighbouring Latvia's party membership is extremely low. This either means that these countries do not share the same legacy after all, or that legacy is not an important factor in membership recruitment.

Culture is unlikely to be irrelevant. However, the existing literature does not provide a satisfactory means of classifying central and east European democracies according to culture, nor does it suggest any testable hypotheses capable of explaining variation in membership levels. Rather, the existing literature suggests that communist legacies, combined with global trends in party organisation at the time of democratisation, will lead to very low levels of party membership in central and east Europe. Neither the cultural nor the sociological approaches suggest that parties will invest significant energy in recruiting new members, although some parties may draw on clientelist networks inherited from the old regime. Therefore, the first hypothesis to be considered by this thesis will be as follows:

***Hypothesis 1:*** *Political parties in central and east Europe have no incentive to invest in membership recruitment. Therefore, twenty years after democratisation, levels of party membership will remain universally low across central and east Europe.*

### *Institutional Design and Membership Recruitment*

This thesis seeks to explain the puzzle of why party members are recruited in some countries, but not others. At least in some contexts, members must have a function. According to Susan Scarrow, members have a number of potential uses to political parties, most notably legitimacy benefits; fundraising; policy input; as ‘ambassadors in the community’; as a recruiting and socialising pool for future candidates; as a source of loyal and reliable voters; and as ‘boots on the ground’ in national and local election campaigns.<sup>68</sup> These functions may be demanded in greater or lesser degrees by party elites according to their primary motivation (policy, office or votes) and a number of contextual factors, including the strategies of competitors and the institutional environment.<sup>69</sup> Potentially influential institutions include electoral systems, party funding regulations and regime type.

### State Funding of Political Parties

One of the institutions most commonly posited as affecting the value of members in central and east Europe is the availability of state funding. Ingrid van Biezen and Petr Kopecný both argue that, as an unintended consequence of state subsidies, party elites have little incentive to invest in membership recruitment.<sup>70</sup> These theories build upon

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<sup>68</sup> Susan E Scarrow (1995), *Political Parties and their Members: Organizing for Victory in Britain and Germany*, Oxford University Press (Oxford).

<sup>69</sup> Steven B Wolinetz (2002) ‘Beyond the Catch-All Party: Approaches to the Study of Parties and Party Organization in Contemporary Democracies’, in Gunther, R., et al. eds., *Political Parties: Old Concepts and New Challenges*, Oxford University Press (Oxford).

<sup>70</sup> Ingrid van Biezen (2003), *Political Parties in New Democracies*: Petr Kopecný (Ed) (2008) *Political Parties and the State*.

scholarship from western democracies, notably Katz and Mair's 'cartel party' theory, which argues that parties turn to the state in search of resources that would traditionally have been provided by party members.<sup>71</sup> According to these theories, the availability of state funding during the early democratisation period discourages membership recruitment.

A further possibility is that the effect of state funding varies according to its generosity, with greater state funding leading to lower levels of membership recruitment. For example, Dobrin Kanev pointed out that, in Bulgaria, 'there is no danger of 'étatization' of political parties' since 'the resources of the state budget in Bulgaria would be unequal to such a task.'<sup>72</sup> It is possible that more generous funding leads to reliance on the state, while smaller amounts of funding have little impact. Susan Scarrow has also suggested that the payout principle according to which funding is distributed might impact membership recruitment; where the state offers parties a small sum for each vote received, this may incentivise parties to improve turnout by investing in voter contact, a function traditionally carried out by members.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, membership may increase in countries where subsidies are awarded for each vote, but not in countries where funds are divided according to the proportion of total votes received.

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<sup>71</sup> Peter Mair and Richard S Katz (1997), 'Party Organization, Party Democracy and the Emergence of the Cartel Party', in Peter Mair, *Party System Change: Approaches and Interpretations*, Clarendon Press (Oxford).

<sup>72</sup> Dobrin Kanev, Campaign Finance in Bulgaria, in Danilo Smilov and Jurij Toplak (Eds) (2007), *Political Finance and Corruption in Eastern Europe*, Ashgate, p50.

<sup>73</sup> Susan E Scarrow (2006), 'Party Subsidies and the Freezing of Party Competition: Do Cartel Mechanisms Work?' *West European Politics*, 29(4): 621.

Other scholars argue that state funding will not necessarily have any effect on membership development at all. Michael Pinto-Duschinsky argues that it would be naïve to think that state funding can come close to covering the cost of modern electoral-professional campaigns, and that clientelist linkages are often even more expensive.<sup>74</sup> If this were the case, we would expect to see no relationship between party funding regulations and membership recruitment.

Based on the dominant theory that the state funding of political parties deters membership recruitment, the second hypothesis to be considered by this thesis is as follows:

***Hypothesis 2:*** *Where parties have access to state funding, they will not invest in membership recruitment.*

This thesis will also explore whether country-level variations in the distribution of state subsidies impact membership recruitment.

#### Executive – Legislative Relations

Another institutional feature often thought to influence party organisation, and therefore membership recruitment, is the balance of power between the executive and the legislature. M Steven Fish argues that stronger legislatures lead to stronger democracies, partly by offering incentives to invest in strong and cohesive legislative

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<sup>74</sup> Michael Pinto-Duschinsky (2002), 'Financing Politics: A Global View', *Journal of Democracy*, 13(4): 69-86.

parties.<sup>75</sup> This makes parties more likely to spend time and effort on organisational development, including membership recruitment and retention.

Others argue that regime type matters. Juan Linz argues that presidential systems offer disincentives for investing in party organisations because of the ‘winner takes all’ nature of the competition, and he was equally scathing about semi-presidentialism.<sup>76</sup> Presidential powers in central and east European democracies tend to be largely ceremonial, but Samuels and Shugart posit that, even where presidential powers are limited, semi-presidential regimes share two important characteristics with pure presidential regimes: the separate election and separate survival of the president.<sup>77</sup> Such a ‘separation of powers’ is thought to impede the development of strong party organisations by forcing candidates to appeal to ‘broad national electoral coalitions’.

Margit Tavits also suggested that a directly elected presidency provides ambitious elites with an incentive to form a new political party, rather than cooperating with existing organisations.<sup>78</sup> For example, they may be frustrated at being overlooked for the party’s presidential nomination, and choose a solo effort over continued teamwork. Whether ambitious elites take advantage of this opportunity depends on strategic calculations regarding the costs of entry, the benefits of office and the probability of

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<sup>75</sup> M. Steven Fish (2006) ‘Stronger Legislatures, Stronger Democracies’, *Journal of Democracy*, 17(1): 5-20.

<sup>76</sup> Juan Linz (1997), ‘Introduction’, in Ray Taras (Ed.), *Postcommunist Presidents*, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge), pp10-14.

<sup>77</sup> David J Samuels and Matthew S Shugart (2010), *Presidents, Parties and Prime Ministers: How the Separation of Powers Affects Party Organization and Behaviour*, Cambridge University Press, p5.

<sup>78</sup> Margit Tavits (2007), ‘Party Systems in the Making: The Emergence and Success of New Parties in New Democracies’, *British Journal of Political Science*, 38, p116.

electoral support.<sup>79</sup> Therefore, the third hypotheses to be considered by this thesis are as follows:

***Hypothesis 3a:*** *A high 'legislative powers index' score will be correlated positively with membership recruitment.*

***Hypothesis 3b:*** *A directly elected presidency reduces incentives for party building. Therefore, countries with directly elected presidencies will have lower levels of membership recruitment than parliamentary countries.*

## Electoral Systems

For the last two or more decades, the dominant view on party membership has been that electoral professionals can be hired, the taxpayers will subsidise their services, and members are redundant in the process.<sup>80</sup> However, there have been dissenting voices. Susan Scarrow argues that members continue to play a useful role in western democracies, albeit in smaller numbers than before.<sup>81</sup> Taking into account later research, it may not be a coincidence that her 1995 findings were based in two countries with relatively small electoral districts, Britain and Germany.

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<sup>79</sup> Margit Tavits (2007), 'Party Systems in the Making', p115.

<sup>80</sup> Ingrid van Biezen (2003), *Political Parties in New Democracies*; Petr Kopecný (2007), *Political Parties and the State*.

<sup>81</sup> Susan E Scarrow (1995), *Political Parties and their Members*; Paul F Whiteley and Patrick Seyd (2002), *High-Intensity Participation*.

Taagepera and Shugart argue that average district magnitude is the most crucial element of the electoral system affecting the evolution of party politics,<sup>82</sup> while Shugart and Carey posit that the electoral formula has a fundamental impact on whether election campaigns are ‘centralised’ or ‘decentralised’. In single member districts and small district proportional systems (such as single transferable vote), individual candidates cultivate personal reputations within a specific region. Thus, campaigns are decentralised. Under proportional representation, campaigns are highly centralised and individual candidates, relying on the party for their position on the single national list, focus their efforts on burnishing the reputation of the party as a whole.<sup>83</sup>

More recent research in Western European democracies suggests that electoral institutions influence the precise tasks that members carry out, and therefore their usefulness to political parties.<sup>84</sup> Proportional systems encourage ‘electoral-professional’ campaigning, while majoritarian systems lead to the use of localised ‘pre-modern’ campaign techniques. Mixed electoral systems incentivise a combination of the two strategies.<sup>85</sup> Small multi-member districts also encourage individual candidates to foster their own personal reputation discreetly, and thus adopt personalised (rather than mass media) strategies to avoid conflict with their co-

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<sup>82</sup> Rein Taagepera and Matthew S. Shugart (1989), *Seats and Votes: The Effects and Determinants of Electoral Systems*, Yale University Press (New Haven)

<sup>83</sup> Matthew S Shugart, M. S. and John M Carey (1995), ‘Incentives to Cultivate a Personal Vote: A Rank Order of Electoral Formulas’, *Electoral Studies*, 14(4): 417-439.

<sup>84</sup> Thomas Zittel and Thomas Gschwend (2008), ‘Individualised Constituency Campaigns in Mixed-Member Electoral Systems: Candidates in the 2005 German Elections’, *West European Politics*, 31(5): 983.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*

partisans.<sup>86</sup> Large district proportional systems encourage parties to communicate with voters through organised interest groups, while small district systems make it more advantageous to contact voters individually.<sup>87</sup>

As Rein Taagepera pointed out, new electoral rules are devised and adopted, then ‘over many electoral cycles, parties and voters learn how to use these rules within their socio-political context.’<sup>88</sup> Although little detailed research has so far been carried out to explore how electoral institutions impact party organisation in central and east Europe, there is no intuitive reasons to believe that parties in post-communist democracies will not, over time, respond to practical incentives in the same way as their Western European counterparts.<sup>89</sup> Smaller electoral districts may increase the usefulness of party members by promoting individual voter contacting (which encourages the use of members as ‘ambassadors in the community’ and grass-roots campaigners), and also increasing the demand for candidates across the country. Therefore, the fourth hypothesis tested in this thesis will be:

***Hypothesis 4:*** *Small electoral districts will be correlated with higher membership levels.*

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<sup>86</sup> Matthew S. Shugart (2001), ‘Electoral “Efficiency” and the Move to Mixed Member Systems’, *Electoral Studies*, 20(2): 173-193.

<sup>87</sup> Kathleen Bawn and Michael F Thies, (2003) ‘A Comparative Theory of Electoral Incentives: Representing the Unorganized Under PR, Plurality and Mixed-Member Electoral Systems’, *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 15(1): 5-32

<sup>88</sup> Rein Taagepera, ‘Designing Electoral Rules and Waiting for an Electoral System to Evolve’, Paper prepared for the international conference on “Constitutional Design 2000”, 9-11 December 1999, University of Notre Dame, <http://kellogg.nd.edu/faculty/research/pdfs/taagepera.pdf> (accessed 15th June 2013).

<sup>89</sup> For example, it has been found that Romania’s 2008 electoral system change had a swift impact on the types of candidates recruited, with local roots emphasised under the new decentralised electoral system. See Mihail Chiru (2010), ‘Legislative Recruitment and Electoral System Change: The Case of Romania’, MA Thesis Submitted to the Central European University, supervised by Professor Zsolt Enyedi.

This thesis will also consider the possible influence of other electoral institutions, which are less well explored in the current literature. Hermann Smith-Sivertsen has made a persuasive argument that variation in municipal electoral rules explains the difference in party membership between Lithuania and Latvia.<sup>90</sup> If members are, as Susan Scarrow argues, valued as loyal and reliable voters, we might find that this becomes a concern for parties operating in countries with very long pre-election ‘silence periods’. Chapter Three presents a series of micro-hypotheses about the precise mechanisms by which a variety of electoral institutions might influence the role of party members.

However, Chapter Two first tests the four broad hypotheses set out above. These hypotheses, which are derived from current literature on party organisations, offer a useful starting point to narrow down the factors that might explain variation in membership recruitment patterns in different countries. A more detailed set of micro-hypotheses, seeking to explore the causal mechanisms behind membership recruitment, follow from the results of Chapter Two. These micro-hypotheses are presented in Chapter Three and tested in Chapters Four, Five and Six.

#### 1.4 DATA AND METHODS

This thesis investigates how electoral institutions influence the extent to which membership recruitment and retention takes place. It also explores the causal mechanisms behind the data by considering the tasks that members perform in

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<sup>90</sup> Hermann Smith-Sivertsen (2004), ‘Why Bigger Party Membership Organisations in Lithuania than in Latvia, 1995-2000’, *East-European Quarterly*, 38(2): 215-259.

modern political parties. It begins by comparing membership trends across eleven post-communist democracies, both at the country level and the party level. By testing a series of institutional hypotheses, the number of potential variables is narrowed down, suggesting a link between electoral systems and membership recruitment. A qualitative analysis of three countries then permits a more detailed exploration of the factors influencing membership recruitment in new democracies, and allows for the consideration of sociological and cultural factors.

### *Membership Trends in Eleven Post-Communist Democracies*

According to both Freedom House and Polity IV, eleven post-communist countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia) maintained democratic systems between the years 2000 and 2010.<sup>91</sup> Since every post-communist democracy is included in the initial analysis, selection bias is avoided. All eleven countries began political and economic transitions between the years 1989 and 1991. Seven countries (Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Slovenia) also became independent states. The transition to democracy was not smooth in all cases (the challenges of nation building in Croatia and Slovakia led to setbacks in the democratisation process

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<sup>91</sup> These countries were classed as democracies by both Freedom House and Polity IV between 2001 and 2011. Polity IV, 2008 <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity06.htm#eur> and Freedom House, 2010, <http://www.freedomhouse.org>. Democracy is notoriously difficult to define and measure, and these two indexes are based on very different assumptions and methodologies. However, given the inevitable subjectivity involved in defining and measuring democracy, concurrence on these two indicators is the best available method of selecting cases for a comparative study of party membership.

in the 1990s),<sup>92</sup> but all eleven countries had established democratic governments by the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Crucially, all eleven countries began their transitions from communism at the same time. Therefore, we can control for the effect of prevailing global trends. This is important because it is commonly argued that factors specific to late 20th and early 21<sup>st</sup> century life (the impact of globalisation, individualisation and mass communications) are responsible for declining party membership in western democracies, and make members redundant in new democracies.<sup>93</sup> It has also been argued that the founding context (the circumstances of parties' initial formation and development) has a lasting impact on party organisation.<sup>94</sup> By exploring party membership across 'fourth wave' democracies, we can control as far as possible for those factors.

Two types of data were used to explore the initial hypotheses about the effect of institutions on party membership: country-level data collected by cross-national surveys; and membership data collected from individual parties for the specific purposes of this thesis. Data from cross-national surveys is primarily drawn from two surveys conducted in central and east Europe: the 1999 European Values Survey

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<sup>92</sup> Tim Haughton and Sharon Fisher (2008), 'From the Politics of State-Building to Programmatic Politics: The Post-Federal Experience and the Development of Centre-Right Politics in Croatia and Slovakia', *Party Politics*, 14 (4): 446.

<sup>93</sup> Stefano Bartolini and Peter Mair (2001), 'Challenges to Contemporary Political Parties', in Larry Diamond and Richard Gunther (Eds) *Political Parties and Democracy*, The John Hopkins University Press, pp328-329.

<sup>94</sup> Ingrid van Biezen (2003), *Political Parties in New Democracies*.

(EVS)<sup>95</sup> and the 2008 European Social Survey (ESS).<sup>96</sup> The EVS and ESS surveys include data from ten countries: Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. Since Lithuania was not included in either the ESS or the EVS surveys, the EVS and ESS data were supplemented with data from a similar survey carried out by Eurequal.<sup>97</sup> Each survey asked interviewees whether or not they were members of a political party.

The methodological limitations of survey data are borne in mind during the course of the analysis. Any research that samples a population is subject to a margin of error. This is particularly significant where surveys seek to capture a phenomenon that is relatively rare in society, like party membership. For example, in a country with a population of five million, of which 3% are party members, a sample size of 1,000 citizens will tell us that there is a 95% chance that political party membership lies between 1.94% and 4.06%. This large window means that individual surveys cannot be relied on to pick up subtle changes in membership trends. Moreover, one in twenty surveys will produce a result that falls outside this margin of error.<sup>98</sup> To address this problem, the membership data obtained from individual parties were used to corroborate the survey data.

Membership data were collected from political parties across eleven countries. The focus was primarily on parties that survived the entire period of 2000 to 2011.

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<sup>95</sup> [www.europeanvaluesstudy.eu](http://www.europeanvaluesstudy.eu)

<sup>96</sup> <http://ess.nsd.uib.no/>

<sup>97</sup> <http://eurequal.politics.ox.ac.uk/>

<sup>98</sup> The 2008 European Social Survey figure from Croatia appears to fall into this category. It suggests a membership level of 9%, but the data from individual parties indicates that the actual figure is nearer to 4.5%. By the time that this thesis is completed, another round of ESS data will have been published. Assuming that the new figure is more reliable, it will be used in the final draft of this thesis.

However, strong new entrants that survived at least two electoral cycles were also included. Individual parties were asked, initially by email, to supply their current membership figures and, if possible, historical membership figures dating back to 1999. Romanian and Bulgarian political parties did not reply to these emails, and membership data was gathered by visiting individual party offices in the summer of 2011.

Members can be perceived as a source of legitimacy for parties, so there is always a risk that political parties are tempted to exaggerate their membership numbers.<sup>99</sup> While these figures cannot be verified conclusively, they were corroborated using historical membership figures reported in existing scholarship and old press reports. Any suspicious fluctuations in membership figures, or occasions where the data provided by the party is inconsistent with other sources, are discussed in the analysis. Although many parties have apparently provided membership figures ‘rounded up’ to the nearest thousand, they are otherwise generally consistent with both previous reports and current survey data.

Some parties that experienced significant decline during the 2000s were only prepared to reveal their current membership figures on a confidential basis. Since it would be unethical to print these figures, they have been used simply to assist with corroborating survey data. Where parties finished the 1990s with relatively high membership levels but now barely maintain an electoral foothold, the reader must infer that membership numbers have taken a very significant knock. The reluctance of parties to admit

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<sup>99</sup> Peter Mair and Ingrid van Biezen (2001), ‘Party Membership in Twenty European Democracies’, p7.

publicly to large losses of membership suggests that, even in new democracies, parties take the 'legitimisation' function of members seriously.

The two data sources were used to corroborate each other, and in most cases there was no discrepancy. In the case of Croatia, the survey data and the party-level data contradicted each other, with the survey data showing rising party membership and the party-level data suggesting that party membership fell substantially between the years 2000 and 2011. In this case, the party-level data was deemed more credible, since the circumstances of Croatia's double transition had led to a drastic fall in support for HDZ, the formerly large and dominant party of Franjo Tudjman.

Chapter Two uses the eleven country data to test the institutional hypotheses set out above using descriptive statistics. These data confirm that significant membership recruitment has taken place in some countries, but that membership levels have fallen in other countries. The results suggest convergence between communist successor parties (which often lost members) and centre-right parties (which often grew). However, in terms of the absolute numbers of members in each country two decades after the transition from communism, there appeared to be a correlation between electoral systems, party funding regulations and membership recruitment. However, given the number of other factors that could influence membership recruitment, and the lack of previous comparative scholarship on party membership in central and east Europe, qualitative research was necessary to investigate the motivations for political parties to recruit members.

Much discussion of party membership in the new democracies of central and east Europe focuses on the supposed redundancy of members in these modern times of mass communications and state subsidies. Therefore, as part of the process of exploring the relationship between institutional design and party membership recruitment and retention, it is relevant to ask *why* members are useful to any modern political party. Qualitative research offers the opportunity to look behind the data and explore causal mechanisms in detail. Therefore, research is carried out in three countries to explore what members *do* for political parties, and the extent to which institutional design affects their purpose and value, and therefore whether parties make an effort to recruit and retain members.

Three post-communist democracies, Estonia, Lithuania and Slovakia, were selected for detailed investigation according to the principles of ‘most similar’ research design.<sup>100</sup> Since electoral system choice is thought to be a key independent variable, these three countries have been selected because Estonia has a low district magnitude proportional system, Lithuania has a mixed system and Slovakia has a very high district magnitude proportional system. In each country two parties are analysed: the main centre-right party and the main centre-left party. This permits exploration of the extent to which party organisation varies according to ideology. Traditional scholarship suggests that different ideologies are reflected in party organisation:

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<sup>100</sup> Gary King, Robert O Keohane and Sidney Verba (1994), *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*, Princeton University Press.

centre-right parties are likely to be elite-based, while centre-left parties are more likely to see mass membership as normatively desirable.<sup>101</sup>

The organisational differences between left and right parties have become blurred in recent decades in western democracies,<sup>102</sup> and application of this research to central and east Europe is further complicated by the roots of many centre-left parties as ‘communist successor’ parties. Enyedi and Linek found organisational convergence between party types in Central Europe.<sup>103</sup> However, the extent to which organisations vary between communist successor parties and centre-right parties is worth considering. The former have often inherited some degree of organisation from the communist era,<sup>104</sup> while the latter are more likely to be the ‘internally created’ parties described by van Biezen.

Due to time constraints, it was only possible to examine two parties in each of the three countries. In Lithuania, the selection was straightforward, since the centre-right TS-LKD and the centre-left LSDP have formed the backbone of the party system, in one form or another, since the time of the transition. In Estonia, the Reform Party was analysed from the centre-right because it has governed for all but three years since the transition, and therefore might be considered the ‘main’ party of the centre-right. The SDE was chosen from the centre-left in Estonia because it follows a traditional social democratic ideology unlike, for example, the Centre Party, which takes a

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<sup>101</sup> Maurice Duverger (1954), *Political Parties*, Western Printing Services Ltd, (Bristol).

<sup>102</sup> Susan E Scarrow (1995), *Political Parties and their Members*

<sup>103</sup> Zsolt Enyedi and Lukás Linek (2008), ‘Searching for the Right Organization: Ideology and Party Structure in East-Central Europe’, *Party Politics*, 14(4): 455-477.

<sup>104</sup> John T Ishiyama (2001), Party Organization and the Political Success of the Communist Successor Parties, *Social Science Quarterly*, 82(4): 87-112.

charismatic-populist approach. In Slovakia, there is one main centre-left party (SMER-SD) but four small parties with ideologies that might be considered centre-right. SDKU-DS was selected on the same basis as the Reform Party in Estonia: that it has taken the lead in forming governments over a number of electoral cycles. It is borne in mind throughout, however, that an analysis of different political parties might not have yielded identical results. Throughout the thesis, variation between parties will be analysed, in addition to variation between countries.

Other factors are held constant as far as possible. Estonia, Lithuania and Slovakia are all small countries with similar per capita GDP. With populations ranging between one million and five million, these countries are all among the smaller post-communist democracies, an important factor given that overall size of the polity is thought to influence membership recruitment.<sup>105</sup> All three made political, economic and national transitions. There is slight variation in their per capita GDP (Estonia: \$17,908, Lithuania: \$16,543, Slovakia: \$21,245), but all three countries are clustered around the eleven-country mean of \$18,169.<sup>106</sup>

Efforts have been made to control for the effect of historical legacies, although there are limitations to the extent that this is possible. Every post-communist nation state has a different story: even the three Baltic States are distinct in terms of culture and identity. Estonia, Lithuania and Slovakia (then Czechoslovakia) all established short-

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<sup>105</sup> Steven Weldon (2006), 'Downsize My Polity? The Impact of Size on Party Membership and Member Activism', *Party Politics*, 12 (4): 467-481; Peter Mair and Ingrid van Biezen (2001), 'Party Membership in Twenty European Democracies'.

<sup>106</sup> Per-capita GDP (PPP) figures for the full sample of eleven countries are: Bulgaria-\$11,900, Croatia-\$17,703, Czech Republic-\$24,093, Estonia-\$17,908, Hungary-\$18,567, Latvia-\$14,255, Lithuania-\$16,543, Poland-\$18,072, Romania-\$11,917, Slovenia-\$27,654 and Slovakia-\$21,245. The sample average is \$18,169. Source, IMF 2009.

lived parliamentary democracies during the inter-war period. During communism, both the Soviet and the Czechoslovak governments engaged in heavy-handed attempts to promote civic identities at the expense of ethnic ones. All three countries have an agrarian heritage.<sup>107</sup>

Although Estonia, Slovakia and Lithuania have enough in common to be suitable for comparison under a ‘most similar’ case design, there are also some important differences, which will be addressed during the qualitative chapters of this thesis. Estonia and Lithuania had relatively smooth state-building processes in the 1990s, although simultaneously undergoing political and economic transition. Their experience of nation building was perhaps easier because they had been independent states during the inter-war period. Furthermore, they exited the Soviet Union before their founding elections.<sup>108</sup> In Slovakia, however, attention focussed on statehood issues during the immediate post-communist period. Czechoslovakia was peacefully dissolved on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1993, but the newly independent Slovak Republic took an authoritarian turn under Vladimir Mečiar. The Slovaks soon checked these authoritarian impulses through the democratic process, voting out the Mečiar government in 1998, but these events undoubtedly disrupted the evolution of the Slovak party system.

There are also differences in levels of corruption between the three countries.

Transparency International finds that Estonia is the least corrupt of all post-

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<sup>107</sup> Herbert Kitschelt (2001), *Divergent Paths of Postcommunist Democracies*.

<sup>108</sup> Tim Haughton and Sharon Fisher (2008), ‘From the Politics of State-Building to Programmatic Politics: The Post-Federal Experience and the Development of Centre-Right Politics in Croatia and Slovakia’, *Party Politics*, 14(4): 446.

communist countries. At 26<sup>th</sup> in the world, it ranks among many long-established democracies. At 46<sup>th</sup> in the world, Lithuania fares slightly better than post-communist average. Levels of corruption in Slovakia are slightly worse than the post-communist average (59<sup>th</sup> in the world).<sup>109</sup> Since corruption is defined as ‘the abuse of authority for private benefit’,<sup>110</sup> it is unlikely that this is without impact on party organisations. Corruption in the political process may be closely linked to both the existence of party funding regulations, and the ability of regulatory institutions (particularly electoral commissions) to implement the rules. The wider party-funding environment in each country will be considered in this thesis.

Therefore, Estonia, Lithuania and Slovakia are suitable for comparison as three small countries with similar levels of economic development and some historical and cultural similarities. However, country level differences will not be forgotten. Variation on the electoral system variable allows the impact of electoral district size on party organisation to be explored in detail, alongside consideration of other electoral institutions. The benefit of a qualitative analysis is that it permits a focus on the precise mechanisms driving membership recruitment decisions in each country, which means that any differences in culture will be highlighted rather than obscured.

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<sup>109</sup> Transparency International measures corruption on a scale of one to ten. A score of one means that the country is highly corrupt, while a score of ten indicates very low levels of corruption. Across the eleven democracies analysed in this thesis, the scores are: Estonia, 6.5 (26<sup>th</sup> in the world); Slovenia, 6.4 (27<sup>th</sup> in the world); Poland, 5.3 (41<sup>st</sup>); Lithuania, 5.0 (46<sup>th</sup>); Hungary, 4.7 (50<sup>th</sup>); Czech Republic, 4.6 (53<sup>rd</sup>); Latvia, 4.3 (=59<sup>th</sup>); Slovakia, 4.3 (=59<sup>th</sup>); Croatia, 4.1 (62<sup>nd</sup>); Romania, 3.7 (69<sup>th</sup>); and Bulgaria, 3.6 (73<sup>rd</sup>). [http://transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi/2010/results](http://transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2010/results) (last accessed 11th June 2013).

<sup>110</sup> Vito Tanzi (1998), ‘Corruption Around the World: Causes, Consequences, Scopes and Cures’, *IMF Staff Papers*, Vol 45(4).

## *Data*

The qualitative analysis of party organisation in Estonia, Lithuania and Slovakia relies on three types of data: survey data from a questionnaire distributed electronically amongst national and regional elites; interviews with elected representatives, party staff and activists; and party rules, particularly their official statutes. These data are designed to shed light on: a) the status of party members according to internal rules; b) the practical roles that members play in both electoral campaigns and day-to-day organisational life; c) the resources available to political parties; and d) the motivation for recruiting party members, and the types of members that parties aim to recruit.

Chapter Three of this thesis will set out, in detail, how different electoral institutions might affect the functions of members, and therefore the extent to which members are likely to be recruited and retained. If electoral institutions affect how parties organise and campaign, we would expect to observe variation in the specific tasks that they perform. The role of members will be viewed through a modified version of Susan Scarrow's analysis of the function of party activists in the UK and Germany.<sup>111</sup> Scarrow's 1995 analysis has been updated to include recent developments in mass and social media. Some of the categories have also been slightly simplified, to ensure that concepts can be translated reliably across different languages and cultures.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Susan Scarrow (1995), *Political Parties and their Members*. p133.

<sup>112</sup> Particularly in relation to policy-making, Scarrow had two categories – linkage and input. The distinction between the two is important, but it would be difficult to distinguish these concepts reliably in questionnaires. Issues of linkage will be considered during the case studies, but the surveys focus on input.

The ten questions in the survey are designed to probe: (1) grassroots campaigning activities: whether members contribute to campaigning by displaying posters, delivering leaflets to individual voters, staffing street stalls, attending party meetings, canvassing voters etc, and the frequency of such actions;<sup>113</sup> (2) fundraising: the extent to which members contribute financially to party coffers, either directly (through membership fees) or indirectly (by organising fundraising events); (3) legitimacy: i.e. whether the party believes that it creates a positive impression on voters if there is a visible presence on the ground, or if the party has a large or growing membership; (4) candidate recruitment: questions designed to probe the demand for candidates, and the extent to which parties prefer to recruit from a pool of loyal party members. (5) ‘ambassadors in the community’: do parties hope that members will spread their party’s message to their friends, colleagues, family and social media networks? (6) policy making: do parties consider that members make a useful contribution by linking party elites with the rest of society, and by providing fresh and interesting ideas for policies? Or do they consider that, in the fast moving world of twenty-four hour media, membership involvement in policy-making is impractical and/or burdensome? (7) members as loyal voters: to what extent are party members valued simply as a loyal source of support, particularly in environments where ‘get out the vote’ campaigns are not permitted?<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Preliminary field work carried out in 2011 suggests that, as in western democracies, members often carry out these activities in central and east European democracies.

<sup>114</sup> In the new democracies of central and east Europe, campaigning on polling day is commonly banned with the intention of minimising opportunities for harassment, vote buying and fraud.

Native speakers with political science backgrounds translated the surveys from English into Estonian, Lithuanian and Slovakian.<sup>115</sup> Their political expertise was crucial to ensure reliable translation. Copies of the surveys, both in English and the three languages, are provided in appendix 1. The Estonian surveys were distributed in May and June 2012, and yielded 38 responses from the Social Democrats (out of 110, 34.5%) and 42 responses from the Reform Party (out of 160, 26.3%). Lithuanian parties were surveyed in July 2012, and the surveys yielded 31 responses from the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (out of 150, 21%) and 45 responses (out of 160, 28%) from Homeland Union-Lithuanian Christian Democrats.

In Slovakia, parties were surveyed in September 2012. The response rate was 20 out of 138 (14.5%) for SKDU-DS and 10 out of 122 (8%) for SMER-SD. The latter party rarely cooperates with academic research, and their participation in the interviews was also minimal. From a methodological perspective, their survey participation rate was clearly too low to draw any firm conclusions. As chapter six describes in full, SMER's opponents make many allegations against them, while the party itself paints an idealised picture of its organisation, particularly the source of its funding. Although much remains obscured, it is useful to present the available data and consider what insights can be gained.

On-line surveys were distributed, by email, amongst branch chairs and party executive members. Each party representative was contacted individually, using their personal email address, with a link to the survey. Since replies were anonymous, it is impossible to know who responded. However, the surveys were conducted in batches (organised

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<sup>115</sup> The translations were carried out by Illimar Lepik (Estonia); Raimondis Ibenskas (Lithuania) and Kristina Mikulova (Slovakia). This was funded by the ESRC.

geographically), and the even pace of responses suggests that a good degree of geographical dispersal was achieved. Although steps were taken to minimise selection bias, it is possible that some people may have felt more motivated than others to cooperate with an academic study, and responses may be weighted in favour of those with altruistic or idealistic tendencies, or a political science background themselves. This may lead to data that reflects a perceived 'ideal type' rather than the reality on the ground. Since the survey recipients were primarily men and women of middle-age (or older) living across different regions, it is unlikely that they were colluding to paint an idealised picture. Furthermore, survey respondents have not shied away from giving apparently honest answers to some of the more controversial questions, for example on the importance of career opportunities in attracting new members.

In order to interpret the data, and to gain a richer understanding of party organisation in each of the three countries, interviews were carried out. Interviewees were recruited using snowball sampling. The subgroups of potential interviewees were defined (MPs, councillors, party staff, party activists), and potential participants were referred through networking. In a closed environment like a political party, where trust of outsiders is low, participants are not accessible through any other sampling strategy. This represents a further methodological constraint, since the sample is again skewed towards those who are inclined to cooperate.

Interviews were recorded, and informed consent to anonymous quotation was obtained in advance. The majority of interviews were carried out in English (one was conducted in Slovak through an interpreter). Interviewees were asked a number of

semi-structured questions about party organisation and the role of members.<sup>116</sup> They were then offered seven laminated picture cards depicting the functions of members (spreading the party’s message through grassroots campaigning; candidates for municipal and parliamentary elections; loyal and reliable voters; providing ideas to help formulate policies; raising money; spread the party’s message through social media; and speak positively to friends, family and colleagues). They were asked to choose which of these two functions they thought were most important, and which were least important, and to describe their reasoning behind those decisions. This approach was helpful in covering areas of the Scarrow typology that were difficult to reach through semi-structured questions, and also helped to clarify the perceived priorities of the party. At the end of the interview, participants completed the questionnaire that had already been distributed to local branch chairs.

*Table 1.1: Backgrounds of Interview Subjects*

	Estonia (April/May 2012)		Lithuania (June/July 2012)		Slovakia (Aug/Sep 2012)	
	ER	SDE	TS-LKD	LSDP	SDKU-DS	SMER-SD
MP	1	1	1	1	2	1
Councillor	-	1	-	1	1	-
Party Staff	1	2	2		1	1
Activist/Candidate	1	1	-	1	-	-

Table 1.1 shows the backgrounds of the interviewees from each party. In addition to official recorded interviewees, numerous informal discussions took place with representatives and activists from other political parties. This was useful for verifying information, acting as a ‘corrective’ where official interviewees offered an idealised

<sup>116</sup> Interview questions can be found in appendix 2.

view of their own party. It was also important to gain a rounded picture of the party system as a whole. Informal discussions also took place with members and activists who did not wish to be formally interviewed. Again, these were useful because discussions were notably franker than the recorded interviews. However, for obvious ethical reasons, they were used for background only.

The third source of information and data were party statutes. On paper at least, these offer an insight into party organisational structures, decision-making hierarchies and the means by which candidates for public office are selected. They also tell us about the rights and responsibilities of members, and the conditions that prospective members should fulfil. Statutes are subject to two methodological limitations: firstly, they only tell us the official story, and informal practices may deviate significantly; secondly, the information contained is merely the bare bones of how parties organise, and the surveys and interviews are required to add flesh to these bones. Notwithstanding these drawbacks, the statutes are a valuable source of information regarding the incentives that parties offer to recruit members, and the tasks that members are required to perform. The conditions that parties apply to membership offer a clear indication of whether parties prioritise quantity over quality of members, and vice versa.

While each of the data sources used in this thesis is subject to methodological limitations, taken together they make a valuable empirical contribution to the understanding of party membership in central and east Europe, a topic on which few detailed studies have yet taken place.

## 1.5 PARTIES AND MEMBERS IN CENTRAL AND EAST EUROPE: CHAPTER PLAN

This thesis investigates potential explanations for the cross-country variation in membership levels across central and east Europe. It begins by debunking the myth that members are *necessarily* a burden in modern democracies, pointing out that party membership is rising in some countries and falling in others. This finding contradicts the dominant theories of party development in the region, presenting a puzzle that requires an explanation. Membership data from eleven central and east European democracies are presented and compared in Chapter Two, along with an analysis of the institutional factors that might lead to a variation in membership trends.

It is established in Chapter Two that state subsidies do not, as expected, discourage membership recruitment. Other electoral institutions, particularly electoral systems, seem to have a greater influence on party membership levels. This is consistent with existing literature in Western Europe, which suggests that electoral district size influences how parties communicate with voters, and therefore how they use members, with individual voter contacting more likely to be used where electoral districts are small. Therefore, Chapter Three offers a detailed analysis of how institutional design might influence the value of members in central and east Europe. It presents a set of micro-hypotheses about the likely effect of institutions on party organisations in Estonia, Lithuania and Slovakia. These are tested in Chapters Four, Five and Six using survey and interview data collected from each of these three countries.

The final chapters compare the findings across the three counties, and consider the broader conclusions that can be reached about the effect of electoral institutions on party membership in central and east Europe. Firstly, state subsidies may have little impact because it is a rare democracy that can offer its political parties enough public money to finance expensive modern mass media campaigns. Secondly, in common with western democracies, mass media strategies are most effective where electoral districts are large, and individual voter contacting is more likely where electoral districts are small. The latter creates a role for members as ‘ambassadors in the community’ and grass-roots campaigners. Thirdly, partisan competition at the municipal level creates a nationwide demand for members as a recruiting pool for candidates. Therefore, party membership in post-communist democracies may be developing in a way that is less distinct from Western Europe than previously thought.

# 2

## **Institutional Design and Membership Recruitment**

With membership parties regarded as a declining phenomenon in western democracies, political scientists saw no reason to expect that the new parties in central and east Europe would invest in the ‘time consuming, arduous and painstakingly slow’ business of membership recruitment.<sup>117</sup> However in light of recent case studies demonstrating that membership parties are more stable and electorally successful than their ‘unencumbered’ counterparts,<sup>118</sup> it is time to reconsider the role of party members in new democracies, and the circumstances in which they will be valued. This chapter provides an overview of membership trends in central and east Europe, and tests the hypotheses about the effects of electoral institutions on party membership introduced in Chapter One. The hypotheses use extant theories to explore the effects of party funding regulations, executive-legislative relations, regime type and electoral systems on membership numbers.

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<sup>117</sup> Ingrid van Biezen (2003), *Political Parties in New Democracies*; Herbert Kitschelt (2001), ‘Divergent Paths of Postcommunist Democracies’, p320.

<sup>118</sup> Raimondas Ibenskas (2012), ‘Activists of Money?; Margit Tavits (2012), ‘Organizing for Success’, pp 83-97; Maria Spirova (2005), ‘Political Parties in Bulgaria’, pp 601-622.

## 2.1: LOW MEMBERSHIP: A UNIVERSAL POST-COMMUNIST TREND?

**H1:** *Political parties in central and east Europe have no incentive to invest in membership recruitment. Therefore, twenty years after democratisation, levels of party membership will remain universally low across central and east Europe.*

Any comparative study of membership recruitment in central and east Europe must first establish how many members political parties have, whether overall numbers are rising or falling, and whether variation occurs primarily at the party level or the country level. Membership figures for the main parties across eleven central and east European democracies are presented in Table 2.1 (p52). Even a cursory glance reveals enormous variation, both across the region and within individual countries. While all the major Romanian political parties have in excess of 100,000 members, Latvian political parties do seem to follow the ‘electoral’ model, rarely carrying more than 1,000 members.<sup>119</sup> While some of this variation might be explained by differences in culture, we are still left wondering why Latvia’s Baltic neighbours, Estonia and Lithuania, have much higher levels of party membership.

The data show no evidence of convergence around a very low membership ‘electoralist’ model. Such parties undoubtedly do exist in central and east Europe, particularly amongst parties that have not yet lasted two electoral cycles. For example, the new Slovak party Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (*Obyčajní Ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti*, OL’aNO) is said to have four members. Elements of electoral instability remain in most central and east European party systems, and most

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<sup>119</sup> The European Social Survey corroborates these numbers: the percentage of the population with political party membership ranges from 0.8% in Latvia to 6% in Romania.

elections see new parties enter and existing parties dip below the electoral threshold. However, this research focuses on parties that have survived two electoral cycles or more, and only in Latvia do such parties seem able to sustain themselves in the medium to long term.

There is also variation within individual party systems. Communist ‘successor parties’ generally shed members, albeit at a much slower pace than in the immediate post-transition period.<sup>120</sup> Croatia and Slovakia’s ‘dominant parties’ from the 1990s sustained heavy losses in membership, reflecting their declining electoral fortunes.<sup>121</sup> However, many centre-right parties, on the other hand, expanded their memberships between the years 2001 and 2010. GERB in Bulgaria, ODS in the Czech Republic, the Reform Party in Estonia, Fidesz in Hungary, Civic Platform and Law and Justice in Poland, and the Slovenian Democrats all grew by 50% or more.

Zsolt Enyedi and Lukás Linek noted a degree of organisational convergence between electorally successful centre-right and centre-left parties, including between communist successor parties and their more recently formed counterparts. As table 2.1 shows, in Hungary, Lithuania and Poland, the centre-right and centre-left are now almost evenly matched. There has also been a trend towards convergence amongst the major parties in Bulgaria, Croatia and the Czech Republic.

Table 2.1: Party Membership in Eleven Central and East European Democracies

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<sup>120</sup> John T Ishiyama (2001), Party Organization and the Political Success of the Communist Successor Parties, *Social Science Quarterly*, 82(4): 87-112.

<sup>121</sup> Following the defeat of Mečiar’s government in 1998, Slovakia’s HZDS collapsed from a membership of 72,200 (in the late 1990s) to a rump ten years later. The party failed to win parliamentary representation in 2010 and 2012 elections, and has now been unofficially incorporated into SMER-SD. Croatia’s HDZ fared only slightly better. It remained a political force, but lost half its members between 2000 and 2008.

	Party	2000/2001	2004/2005	2010/2011
Bulgaria	BSP	210,000	191,601	150,000
Population: 7,364,570	DPS	58,000		60,000
Registered to vote: 5,969,019	GERB (f. 2006)	n/a	n/a	62,688
	SDS	35,000	n/a	n/a <sup>7</sup>
Croatia	HDZ	432,000	220,000	n/a
Population: 4,397,400	HNS	24,700	27,100	40,038
Registered to vote: 3,484,950	HSS	45,000	43,000	50,000
	SDP	30,000	25,000	30,000
Czech Rep.	ČSSD	18,762	16,328	24,000
Population: 10,500,000	KDU-ČSL	56,615	44,308	34,747
Registered to Vote: 8,415,8892	KSČM	136,516	90,000	66,627
	ODS	19,335	23,138	30,234
Estonia	ER	1,207	3,365	9,000
Population: 1,340,000	IRL (f. 2006)	n/a	4,525	7,000
Registered to Vote: 912,565	EK	2,925	7,600	12,000
	SDE	1,200	2,871	3,766
Hungary	Fidesz	15,600	25,630	40,000
Population: 9,971,000	Jobbik (f. 2003)	n/a	n/a	11,000
Registered to Vote: 8,034,395	MDF	22,000	16,500	n/a
	MSZP	38,000	36,436	33,157
Latvia	JL		400	1,381
Population: 2,260,000	PCTVL/SC		375	
Registered to Vote: 1,540,532	TP		1,800	1,162
	ZZS		3520/1,200	
Lithuania	DP (f. 2003)			18,000
Population: 3,286,820	LS (f. 2006)			7,000
Registered to Vote: 2,696,090	LSDP			20,000
	TS-LKD	19,487	12,269	16,734
	TT (f. 2002)			14,212
Poland	PO (f. 2001)	n/a	15,000	50,307
Population: 38,186,860	PiS (f. 2001)	n/a	6,000	20,000
Registered to Vote: 28,469,100	PSL	150,000	120,000	
	SLD	87,000	80,000	57,327
Romania	PD-L (f. 2007)	n/a		500,000
Population: 21,904,551	PNL	n/a		252,000
Registered to Vote: 18,303,224	PSD	309,000		350,000
Slovak Rep.	HZDS	72,200		n/a
Population: 5,429,763	KDH	30,000		15,360
Registered to Vote: 4,362,369	MKP	n/a		10,500
	SKDU-DS	n/a	5,650	7,318
	SMER-SD	n/a	7,294	16,263
Slovenia	DeSUS			13,690
Population: 2,048,951	SD	27,000		40,000
Registered to Vote: 1,696,437	SDS			29,000

Given that so many parties, particularly on the centre-right of the political spectrum, have recruited members over the last decade, we can reject the hypothesis that levels of party membership will show no increase between the years 2000 and 2010. Many of the more long-term successful parties in the region are adopting a model somewhere in between the skeletal electoral-professional party and the mass party. The most common pattern in central and east European democracies is a communist successor or former 'dominant' party with falling membership, and a main opponent with rising membership.

There is no communist 'successor' party in Estonia or Latvia: membership numbers rose uniformly in the former country, but remained universally low in the latter. The fact that the main parties in many of the eleven countries are converging, at least in terms of membership numbers, suggests that country-specific factors may be influencing the extent to which parties recruit and retain members. It is entirely possible that levels of political party membership are defined by a combination of institutional incentives and competitive dynamics.

## 2.2 STATE SUBSIDIES AND MEMBERSHIP RECRUITMENT

In recent decades, it has become increasingly common for political parties to receive subsidies from the state.<sup>122</sup> While state funding is usually justified on the grounds that it replaces business funding, concerns have been raised that it has, instead, replaced

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<sup>122</sup> Michael Pinto-Duschinsky (2002), 'Financing Politics: A Global View', *Journal of Democracy*, 13(4): 69-86.

the fundraising function formerly fulfilled by members. According to Duverger's classic analysis, fundraising was traditionally an important function of mass party members, since they did not have the same access to big donors as cadre parties.<sup>123</sup> Some scholars argue that state funding removes this important incentive for parties to mobilise members.<sup>124</sup>

Katz and Mair argue that the growing dependence of parties on the state treasury encourages them to manage the state for their own good rather than for the entire polity.<sup>125</sup> This tendency is the defining characteristic of the 'cartel party', a theory that was adapted to the central and east European context by both Ingrid van Biezen and Petr Kopecký, who argued that the availability of state subsidies partially explained low levels of party membership in central and eastern European democracies after the first decade of democratisation.<sup>126</sup> Because parties had access to power, and therefore state resources, at an early stage of development, 'internally created' central and east European parties were expected to continue with low levels of membership,<sup>127</sup> relying on the 'electoral-professional' model of communicating their message primarily through the mass media.

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<sup>123</sup> Maurice Duverger (1954), *Political Parties*, Western Printing Services (Bristol).

<sup>124</sup> Lars Bille (1994), 'Denmark: The Decline of the Membership Party?' in Katz and Mair (Eds) *How Parties Organize*, p145.

<sup>125</sup> Richard S Katz and Peter Mair (1995), 'Changing Models of Party Organization: The Emergence of the Cartel Party', *Party Politics*, 1(1): 5-28.

<sup>126</sup> Ingrid van Biezen (2003), *Political Parties in New Democracies*; Petr Kopecký (Ed) (2007) *Political Parties and the State*.

<sup>127</sup> Ingrid van Biezen (2003), *Political Parties in New Democracies*.

***Hypothesis 2a:*** *Where parties have access to state funding, they will not invest in membership recruitment.*

State funding for political parties is the rule, rather than the exception, across central and east Europe. There are two reasons why state funding quickly became ubiquitous. First, given the strength of communist successor parties in the early days of transition, there was a perceived need to level the playing field for their anti-communist competitors. In Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Slovenia, state subsidies were introduced at a very early stage of transition in order to help new parties compete with communist successor parties that maintained significant organisational resources. In the other countries in the region, state subsidies were introduced after two or three electoral cycles, often in response to funding scandals. In these countries, state funding was usually the ‘carrot’ accompanying the ‘stick’ of new legislation restricting private donations. New rules often imposed greater obligations towards financial reporting and transparency.<sup>128</sup> These aimed to reduce the influence of private corporations and wealthy individuals in politics. In practice, of course, much depends on whether these new rules are enforced via robust and independent regulatory bodies.

State funding can take two forms: direct payments (funding campaigns and year-round operations)<sup>129</sup> and indirect payments (benefits in kind, typically free mailings

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<sup>128</sup> Susan E Scarrow (2006), ‘Party Subsidies and the Freezing of Party Competition: Do Cartel Mechanisms Work?’ *West European Politics*, 29(4): 621.

<sup>129</sup> Defined by Susan Scarrow as of ‘subsidies paid to parties to carry out their extra-parliamentary work’. *Ibid*, p 624.

during elections and free broadcast time on television or radio). Table 2.2 (p56) summarises the types of funding provided in each country. Indirect funding does not contribute towards parties' running costs. Therefore alternative sources of funding must still be obtained to ensure inter-election survival. In contrast, direct funding potentially covers a large proportion of parties' running costs. Although indirect funding helps parties to communicate their policies, it is direct funding that has been specifically criticised for squeezing out membership funding.<sup>130</sup>

Table 2.2: *Party Subsidies in Central and East Europe* <sup>131</sup>

Country	Year Subsidies Introduced	Costs Funded by Subsidies		
		Indirect contributions	Campaign Expenses	General running costs
Bulgaria	2001	Yes	No	Yes
Croatia	1993	Yes	Yes	Yes
Czech Rep*	1990	Yes	Yes	Yes
Estonia	1996	No	No	Yes
Hungary	1990	Yes	Yes	Yes
Latvia	2012	Yes	No	No
Lithuania	1999	Yes	Yes	Yes
Poland	1997	Yes	Yes	Yes
Romania	1996	Yes	No	Yes
Slovakia*	1990	Yes	Yes	Yes
Slovenia	1989	Yes	Yes	Yes

\* Czechoslovakia was dissolved on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1993. Both the Czech Republic and Slovakia maintained state subsidies for political parties.

<sup>130</sup> Ingrid van Biezen (2003), *Political Parties in New Democracies*.

<sup>131</sup> Daniel Smilov and Jurij Toplak (Eds) (2007), *Political Finance and Corruption in Eastern Europe*, Ashgate; Steven D Roper and Janis Ikstens (2008), *Public Finance and Post-Communist Party Development*, Ashgate Publishing; Perottino, M., Chmaj, M. and Walecki, M. et al (2005), *Legislation and Control Mechanisms of Political Parties' Funding: Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, Ukraine*, Institutul pentru politici publice Bucuresti (Bucharest); Paul Webb and Stephen White (2007) *Party Politics in New Democracies*, Oxford University Press (Oxford); Marek Rybář (2006), 'Powered by the State: The Role of Public Resources in Party-Building in Slovakia', *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 22(3): 320-340; OSCE Election Monitoring Reports.

As Table 2.2 (p56) demonstrates, it is something of a misconception that most parties across the region had access to state funds since the time of their founding. Far from being part of the general ‘founding context’ of central and east European parties,<sup>132</sup> in most countries parties survived the first two or three electoral cycles without subsidies. In fact, there was a gradual diffusion of state funding across the region. By the late 1990s most countries had some form of state funding, but it was not introduced in Bulgaria until 2001 and Latvia in 2012.

*Table 2.3: Membership Trends and the Availability of Direct State Funding*

Country	Membership Change	Direct State Funding Available, 1999-2010
Bulgaria	+26%	Yes
Croatia	-50%	Yes
Czech Republic	-19%	Yes
Estonia	+206%	Yes
Hungary	-18%	Yes
Latvia	-58%	No
Lithuania	+100%	Yes
Poland	+11%	Yes
Romania	+163%	Yes
Slovakia	-75%	Yes
Slovenia	+47%	Yes

It is often argued that state subsidies blur the distinction between parties and the state, diluting parties’ roles as voluntaristic, representative structures.<sup>133</sup> Has the availability of state funding suppressed membership recruitment in central and east Europe?

Table 2.3 summarises membership trends in eleven central and east European

<sup>132</sup> Ingrid van Biezen (2003), *Political Parties in New Democracies*.

<sup>133</sup> Charles S Maier (Ed) (1987), *Changing Boundaries of the Political*, Cambridge University Press; Richard S Katz and Peter Mair (1995), ‘Changing Models of Party Organization: The Emergence of the Cartel Party’, *Party Politics*, 1(1): 5-28.

democracies. The picture is very mixed, with membership levels expanding in several countries (Bulgaria, Estonia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovenia) despite the availability of state funding. Membership levels dropped substantially in Croatia and Slovakia, the two countries that experienced ‘double transitions’. Since state funding of political parties was introduced in Czechoslovakia in 1990, funding hypotheses cannot explain why Slovak membership levels were very high in the 1990s but fell dramatically in the 2000s. The state funding hypothesis also cannot explain why, at the individual party level, some parties recruit members but others do not.

Therefore, we can reject the hypothesis that state funding of political parties automatically suppresses membership recruitment. Growing levels of membership are found in some countries where parties receive state funding, while the lowest levels of membership in the region are found in Latvia, the only country where political parties did not have access to state subsidies throughout the entire period of the dataset. Indeed, it has been argued that the absence of state funding, and the concomitant lack of regulation of corporate donations, led to an unhealthy relationship between business donors and politics in Latvia, where state funding was eventually introduced following intensive lobbying by civil society organisations.<sup>134</sup> It is too early to assess the impact of these institutional changes.

The wide variation in membership patterns across the region, and within individual party systems, suggests that state funding does not, *per se*, deter membership

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<sup>134</sup> ‘Latvian Political Parties starting to receive public funding as of 2012,’ Latvian Corruption Prevention and Combating Bureau (KNAB), 16<sup>th</sup> January 2012, <http://www.knab.gov.lv/en/knab/news/article.php?id=355779> (last accessed 31<sup>st</sup> July 2013).

recruitment. Therefore, we will now test the hypothesis that the specific designs of party funding regulation can incentivise, or disincentivise, membership recruitment.

***Hypothesis 2b:*** *The relative generosity of state funding will determine whether or not parties recruit members.*

State subsidies vary greatly in their generosity. In some countries, the amounts involved do little more than make a small contribution towards financial survival. For example, Dobrin Kanev pointed out that, in Bulgaria, ‘there is no danger of ‘étatization’ of political parties and of excessive public funding leading to the alienation of voters and citizens from politics. The resources of the state budget in Bulgaria would be unequal to such a task.’<sup>135</sup> However, in other countries, including Croatia, Poland, and Slovakia it has been noted that party funding is quite generous and comprises a substantial proportion of parties’ overall finances,<sup>136</sup> at least according to official returns. Whether official records are reliable is another question altogether. Reports from the OSCE suggest, for example, that party funding in Slovakia remains opaque.<sup>137</sup>

The process of comparing the relative generosity of state funding across eleven countries is fraught with methodological difficulties. Whether or not subsidies are ‘generous’ depends less on the amount of money disbursed than the cost of doing

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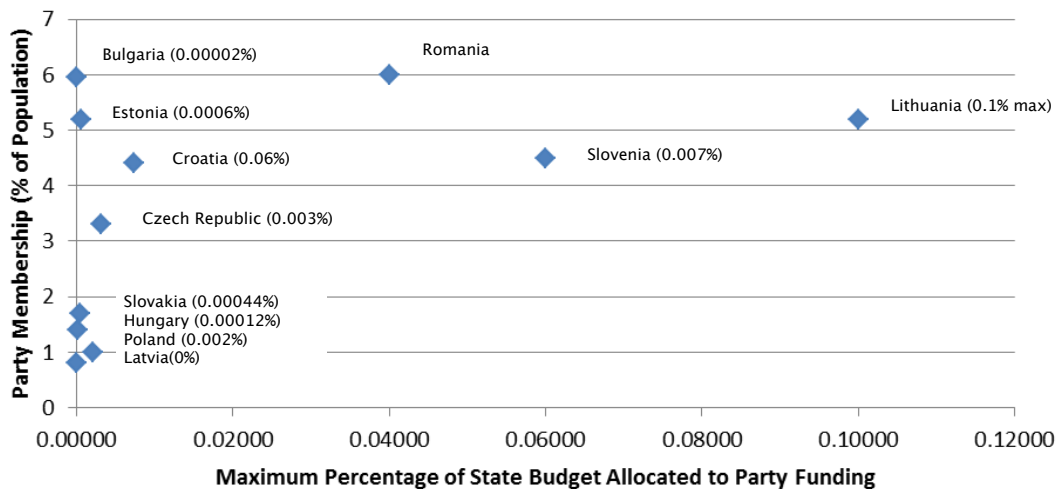
<sup>135</sup> Dobrin Kanev, Campaign Finance in Bulgaria, in Danilo Smilov and Jurij Toplak (Eds) (2007), *Political Finance and Corruption in Eastern Europe*, Ashgate, p50.

<sup>136</sup> Zdrako Petak, ‘Financing Political Parties in Croatia: Parliamentary Elections in 2003’, *Politicka misao*, Vol XL (2008) No 5 pp 68-74; Erik Lastic (2004), ‘Parties and the Government in Slovakia: A Fatal Attraction?’ In Gyarfassova and Meseznikov (Eds) *Party Government in Slovakia*, IVO, Bratislava, pp101-113; Marcin Walecki, Direct Public Funding of Political Parties: Recommendations Prepared for the Latvian Corruption Prevention and Combating Bureau, 2 June 2006.

<sup>137</sup> OSCE/ODIHR Election Assessment Mission Final Report, Slovak Republic Parliamentary Elections, 12<sup>th</sup> June 2010, p1.

politics in each country. The basic running costs for political parties (including salaries for professional staff, rent for offices and the cost of advertising) vary enormously across the region. On top of the day-to-day costs of running a year-round political operation, the cost of election campaigning is highly dependent on the competitive and institutional environment. For example, do parties engage in expensive ‘ads wars’, or is television advertising restricted? Furthermore, Michael Pinto-Duschinsky argues that, contrary to popular perceptions, old-fashioned electioneering, which revolves around vote-buying, gift-giving and labour-intensive techniques of reaching individual voters, can be more even more expensive than professional image making through the mass media.<sup>138</sup>

Figure 2.4: The Generosity of State Funding and Membership Recruitment



example, the Lithuanian law on political parties allowed up to 0.1% of the state budget to be spent on political parties, but the actual amount spent varied each year and was usually very much smaller. Moreover, an allocation of 0.002% of the budget in Poland, a country of 38 million people, provides each party with greater funding than 0.007% of the state’s budget in Slovenia. Although Polish parties must, of

<sup>138</sup> Michael Pinto-Duschinsky (2002), ‘Financing Politics: A Global View’, *Journal of Democracy*, 13(4): 82.

course, use their funds to reach many more voters, the basic running costs of running the ‘party in central office’ are unlikely to be proportional to the number of voters in the country. Nevertheless, if state funding of political parties is thought to deter membership recruitment, it is important to consider whether the variation in membership levels between different countries can be explained by the relative generosity of funding.

Even taking into account the considerable methodological caveats detailed above, there is no evidence of a correlation between the generosity of state funding and membership recruitment. As Figure 2.4 (p60) shows, many countries with relatively generous state funding also have high levels of membership. State funding has not deterred parties in Romania, Slovenia and Lithuania from recruiting members. Meanwhile, the lack of state funding in Latvia has not encouraged parties to invest in membership recruitment. Therefore, we can reject the hypothesis that high levels of state subsidies lead to low levels of membership recruitment. Something else is driving political elites’ decisions about membership recruitment.

***Hypothesis 2c:*** *Where state funding is paid on a ‘per mandate’ basis, parties will have no incentive to recruit members. However, where state funding is paid on a ‘per vote’ basis, membership recruitment will take place.*

State funding of political parties is commonly allocated by dividing a pre-determined subsidy (often a percentage of the state budget) between parties according to either their vote share, or the proportion of seats gained in the national parliament. However, some countries provide a small amount per vote cast in each party’s favour.

Susan Scarrow argues that the latter approach may favour membership recruitment, since parties are rewarded for boosting turnout levels.<sup>139</sup> Since voter contacting, a task typically performed by members, increases voter turnout,<sup>140</sup> per-vote subsidies might incentivise parties to recruit members.

*Table 2.5: Pay-out Principles for State Subsidies (1999-2008)*

Country	Pay-out Principles			Membership Trend
	Number of Seats	Vote Share	Number of Votes	
Bulgaria	Yes	No	Yes	+26%
Croatia	Yes	No	No	-50%
Czech Rep	No	Yes	No	-19%
Estonia	Yes	No	No	+206%
Hungary	No	Yes	No	-18%
Latvia	-	-	-	-58%
Lithuania	No	No	Yes	+100%
Poland	Yes	No	Yes	+11%
Romania	Yes	No	No	+163%
Slovakia	Yes	No	Yes	-75%
Slovenia	No	Yes	Yes	+47%

As Table 2.5 (above) shows, in the majority of central and east European democracies, parties are subsidised according to the proportion of votes that they receive or the number of seats that they win in parliament. None of the countries in this research offer specific incentives to membership recruitment, for example using state funding to ‘match’ membership donations and fundraising. Croatia, Estonia and Romania allocate funds according to the number of seats gained in parliament, while the Czech Republic and Hungary use the proportion of votes received to divide funds (see Table 2.5). Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia operate mixed systems, topping up subsidies paid

<sup>139</sup> Susan E Scarrow (2006), Party Subsidies and the Freezing of Party Competition: Do Cartel Mechanisms Work? *West European Politics*, 29(4): 624.

<sup>140</sup> Jeffrey A Karp and Susan A Banducci (2007), ‘Party Mobilization and Political Participation in New and Old Democracies’, *Party Politics*, 13(2): 217-234.

for the proportion of seats or votes gained with an additional payment for each vote received.

During the period in question (1999-2008) only Lithuania allocated state subsidies to political parties entirely according to the number of votes received. Bulgaria switched to this system in 2008, while Latvia's new system, which was introduced in 2012, also operates on a per-vote basis. This trend towards incentivising turnout is an interesting development, but it is too early to tell whether the potential monetary reward will be sufficient to stimulate membership recruitment. Latvia's political parties have developed for more than two decades as vehicles for business interests, and the regulation of private funding is likely to present significant challenges.

These data show no systematic pattern suggesting that membership recruitment is influenced by the pay-out principles of state subsidies (Table 2.5, p62). Membership rates doubled in Lithuania, the only country in the sample to allocate funding entirely according to the number of votes received. However, large increases in membership levels were also seen in Estonia, a country that allocated subsidies by the proportion of votes or seats gained. Meanwhile, awarding an element of party funding for each vote received apparently offered little incentive to membership recruitment for political parties in Slovakia, where membership levels fell.

The differing trends in overall membership recruitment across central and east European democracies cannot, therefore, be attributed to incentives provided by pay-out principles. The relationship between voter turnout and membership recruitment is likely too indirect to provide a meaningful incentive for parties to recruit members.

Furthermore, political parties in western democracies often stimulate differential turnout by running ‘get out the vote’ operations on polling day. Such tactics are rare in central and east European democracies, since campaigning is often banned on polling day. Therefore, we can reject the hypothesis that parties are more likely to recruit members if funding is offered on a ‘per vote’ rather than a ‘per mandate’ basis.

*State Funding and Membership Recruitment: A Minimal Impact*

Fears that state subsidies would deter parties from investing in membership recruitment appear to have been overstated. Many parties have recruited members despite the availability of generous state funding, and the only country in the region without state funding has the lowest level of membership. There are several reasons why parties might continue to invest in membership recruitment despite the availability of state subsidies. Firstly, as Pinto-Duschinsky pointed out, ‘a party or candidate who obtains public monies, knowing full well that such monies are equally available to competitors, will not therefore stop looking for more money with which to outspend and outmanoeuvre political opponents.’<sup>141</sup> Since state funding is available to all parties, parties are likely to seek to maximise and diversify their income in every possible way.

Secondly, state funding is not a reliable source of income in an unstable environment. Excessive reliance on state funding would mean that one bad election result could be fatal. Thirdly, the data from central and east Europe chime with Pierre, Svasand and Widfeldt’s findings in western Europe that parties continue to implement grass-roots

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<sup>141</sup> Michael Pinto-Duschinsky (2002), ‘Financing Politics: A Global View’, p 78.

mobilisation campaigns despite the availability of public funding because members play a greater role than simply raising money.<sup>142</sup>

Taking a global view, Michael Pinto-Duschinsky concluded that public subsidies for electoral politics have achieved neither the benefits claimed by supporters (of cleaning up politics) nor the drawbacks feared by their critics. However, some central and east European polities continue in their attempts to combat political corruption by offering increased state funding in exchange for a clampdown on business donations. Most recently, Lithuania increased state funding in exchange for a total ban on business donations, while Latvia used state funding as a ‘carrot’ to introduce tough new reporting regulations.

While van Biezen and Kopecký raised valid concerns that state funding might encourage political parties to embed themselves in the state rather than reaching out to society, the real dilemma in central and east Europe has been how to create a separation between business, politics and the state. Communism was defined by the state ownership of the means of production. The process of creating a market economy at the same time as a multi-party political system was always going to be fraught with potential conflicts of interest, and the regulatory environment was virtually non-existent. As we shall see in the case studies (Chapters Four, Five and Six), the extent to which state funding *actually* helps to clean up politics depends on the regulatory authorities charged with enforcing electoral rules. In and of itself, state funding has little impact on the relationship between members and money.

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<sup>142</sup> Jon Pierre, Lars Svasand and Anders Widfeldt (2000), ‘State Subsidies to Political Parties: Confronting Rhetoric with Reality’, *West European Politics*, 23(3):15.

## 2.3 REGIME TYPE AND MEMBERSHIP RECRUITMENT

During the transition to democracy, two Western European models of regime type had a strong influence on institutional design in central and east Europe: France's mixed presidential-parliamentary model and Germany's parliamentary model.<sup>143</sup> As a result, Bulgarian, Croatian, Lithuanian, Polish, Romanian, Slovenian and Slovakian presidents are elected by popular vote, while Hungary, Estonia and Latvia appoint their presidents indirectly through their parliaments. The Czech Republic initially elected its president indirectly, but switched to a system of direct presidential elections in 2013.

Existing scholarship argues that regime type may influence parties' membership recruitment decisions in two ways. M Steven Fish argues that legislative strength encourages parties to invest in membership recruitment,<sup>144</sup> while strong presidential powers have the opposite effect. According to Fish, the existence of a directly elected president need not be a hindrance to party development provided a strong legislature exists to spur party building and hold the president accountable.<sup>145</sup> Others disagree, arguing that the 'separation of powers' involved in semi-presidentialism leads to competing incentives that may hinder party building.<sup>146</sup> If the whole country chooses between candidates for a single post on a 'winner takes all' basis, this may encourage

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<sup>143</sup> Valerie Bunce (1997), 'Presidents and the Transition in Eastern Europe', in Kurt Von Mettenheim (Ed) *Presidential Institutions and Democratic Politics: Comparing Regional and National Contexts*, The John Hopkins University Press (Baltimore).

<sup>144</sup> M Steven Fish (2006), 'Stronger Legislatures, Stronger Democracies', *Journal of Democracy*, 17(1)5-20.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> David J Samuels and Matthew S Shugart (2010), *Presidents, Parties and Prime Ministers: How the Separation of Powers Affects Party Organization and Behaviour*, Cambridge University Press, p5.

candidates to communicate with their voters through the mass media, reducing the need for grass-roots party building.

***Hypothesis 3a:*** *High 'legislative powers index' scores will be correlated positively with membership recruitment.*

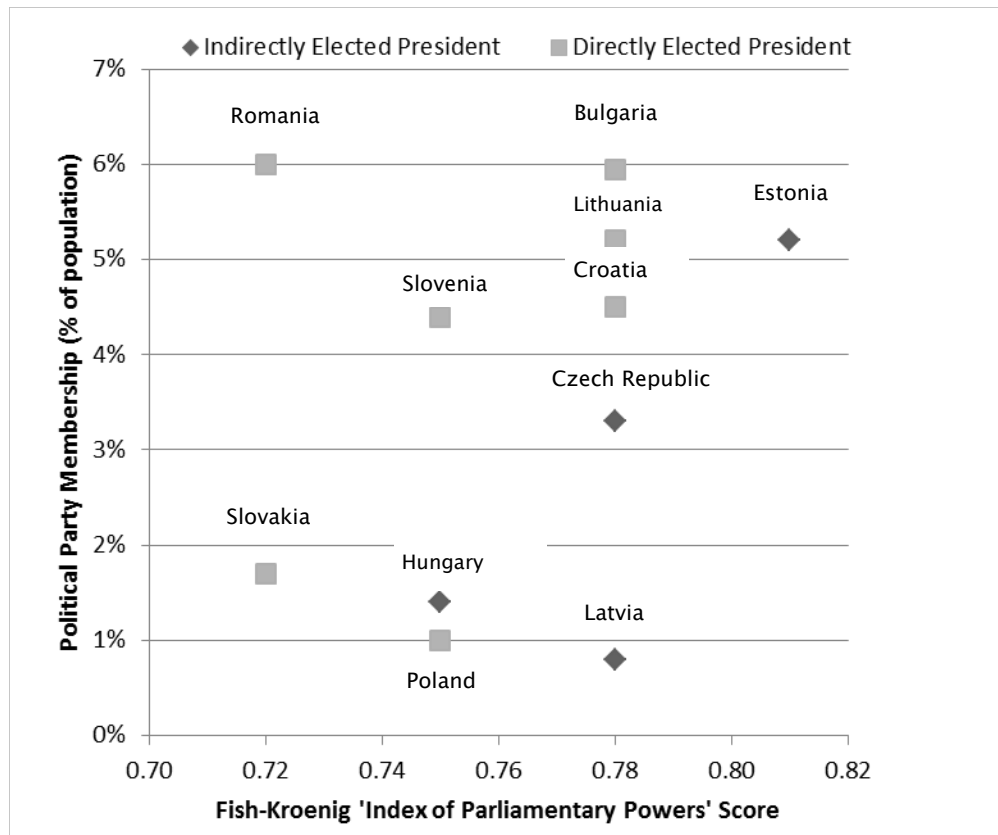
If strong parliaments spur membership recruitment, then we would expect to find that higher scores on the Parliamentary Powers Index are correlated with higher levels of party membership. M Steven Fish claims that it is not the existence of directly presidential elections that affects membership recruitment, but rather the balance of power between the president and the parliament. Together with his colleague, Matthew Kroenig, Fish used 32 indicators to develop a scale of parliamentary power.<sup>147</sup> According to this scale, a high score means a powerful parliament, which should be correlated with stronger parties and, as a result, higher levels of membership recruitment.

Figure 2.6 (p68) plots eleven countries' 'Parliamentary Powers Index' scores relative to the percentage of the population that were members of a political party in 2008. There appears to be little relation between parliamentary power (at least as measured by the 'Parliamentary Powers Index') and membership levels. The two countries with the lowest PPI score in the region (0.72) showed wide variation in membership levels: six percent of Romanians were members of political parties, as opposed to 1.7% of Slovaks. There was similar variation among the counties with the highest PPI scores (0.78-0.81): membership levels varied between 0.8% in Latvia and 5.95% in Bulgaria.

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<sup>147</sup> M. Steven Fish and Matthew Kroenig (2009), *The Handbook of National Legislatures: A Global Survey*, Cambridge University Press.

Figure 2.6: Legislative Power and Membership Recruitment



It is likely that the Parliamentary Powers Index is simply not sensitive enough to measure accurately the differences in parliamentary power between the central and east European democracies. The scale attributes equal weight to all 32 indicators surveyed, and Fish and Kroenig acknowledge that it is only a ‘rough guide’.<sup>148</sup> The scale was developed to cover all constitutional types from parliamentary democracies to dictatorships. In a global context, all of the democracies in central and east Europe have relatively strong legislatures. Nevertheless, countries with similar levels of legislative powers have very different levels of party membership. Therefore variation

<sup>148</sup> Fish and Kroenig state that: ‘To arrive at the Parliamentary Powers Index for each country, we divide the total number of affirmative answers by the total number of items in the survey. This procedure is simple and cannot provide anything more than a rough guide to the power of the legislature.’ M Steven Fish and Matthew Kroenig (2009), *The Handbook of National Legislatures: A Global Survey*, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge), p13.

in levels of legislative power, at least as measured by the Parliamentary Powers Index, cannot explain the diverging membership trends in central and east Europe.

*Hypothesis 3b: A directly elected presidency reduces incentives for party building. Therefore, countries with directly elected presidencies will have lower levels of membership recruitment than parliamentary countries.*

Juan Linz argues that presidential systems offer disincentives for investing in party organisations because of the ‘winner takes all’ nature of the competition, and he believed that many of the same problems applied to semi-presidentialism. Although presidential powers in central and east Europe are typically largely ceremonial, Samuels and Shugart argue that semi-presidential regimes share two important characteristics with pure presidential regimes: separate election and separate survival of the president.<sup>149</sup> Such a ‘separation of powers’ is thought to impede the development of strong party organisations, forcing candidates to appeal to ‘broad national electoral coalitions’. In these circumstances, there may be less incentive for those seeking legislative office to coalesce in large parties,<sup>150</sup> and would-be candidates may even benefit from founding an entirely new party.<sup>151</sup> Therefore, the mere existence of direct presidential elections could reduce incentives for party building.

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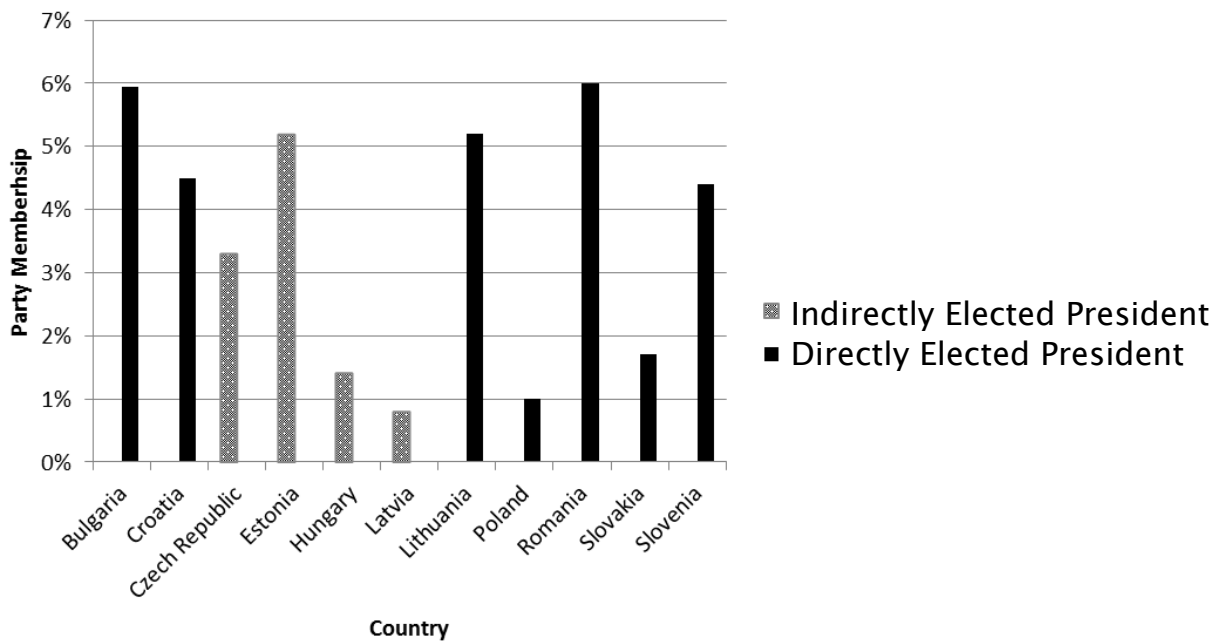
<sup>149</sup> David J Samuels and Matthew S Shugart (2010), *Presidents, Parties and Prime Ministers: How the Separation of Powers Affects Party Organization and Behaviour*, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge), p5.

<sup>150</sup> Scott Mainwaring (1993), ‘Presidentialism, Multipartyism and Democracy: The Difficult Combination’, *Comparative Political Studies*, 26(2): 198-228.

<sup>151</sup> Margit Tavits (2007), ‘Party Systems in the Making: The Emergence and Success of New Parties in New Democracies’, *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol 38, pp113-133.

If the existence of direct presidential elections discourages party building, then we would expect to find that Bulgaria, Croatia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia have lower membership levels than the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary and Latvia. However, the data presented in Figure 2.7 suggest no correlation between direct presidential elections and party membership. Party membership varies considerably between both countries with indirectly elected presidents (from 0.8% in Latvia to 5.2% in Estonia) and countries with directly elected presidents (from 1% in Poland to 5.95% in Bulgaria). Indeed, the mean membership level was higher in countries with directly elected president (mean=4.11%) than in countries with indirectly elected presidents (mean=2.68%).

Figure 2.7: Direct Presidential Elections and Party Membership Levels (2008)



<sup>152</sup> Terry D Clark and Jill N Wittrock (2005), *Presidentialism and the Effect of Electoral Law in Postcommunist Systems: Regime Type Matters*, *Comparative Political Studies*, 38(2): 171-188.

## 2.4 ELECTORAL SYSTEMS AND MEMBERSHIP RECRUITMENT

The effect of electoral laws on party systems has been the focus of a substantial body of empirical investigation in western democracies. Over time, proportional electoral systems have provided strong incentives for party-driven, centralised campaign strategies,<sup>153</sup> while single member districts encouraged localised campaigning, albeit with resources concentrated in marginal constituencies.<sup>154</sup> Scholars of electoral behaviour in the UK found that constituency campaigns increased the vote shares of political parties.<sup>155</sup> German parties (operating in a mixed electoral system) used the mass media, political advertisements and large-scale rallies, but campaigning also took place at the local level through stalls on market squares, social events and knocking on voters' front doors.<sup>156</sup> In Germany, candidates seeking election in single member districts adopted more individualised campaign strategies than list candidates.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Shaun Bowler and David M Farrell (1992), 'Conclusion: The Contemporary Election Campaign', in Shaun Bowler and David M Farrell (Eds), *Electoral Strategies and Political Marketing*; David L Swanson and Paolo Mancini (Eds) (1996), *Politics, Media and Modern Democracy: An International Study of Innovations in Electoral Campaigning and their Consequences*, Praeger.

<sup>154</sup> Gary W Cox (1990), 'Electoral Rules and the Calculus of Mobilization', *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 24(3): 387-419.

<sup>155</sup> David Denver, Gordon Hands, Justin Fisher and Iain MacAllister (2003) 'Constituency Campaigning in Britain 1992-2001, Centralization and Modernisation', *Party Politics*, 9(5): 541-559; Paul Whiteley and Patrick Seyd (2003), 'How to Win a Landslide Without Really Trying: The Effects of Local Campaigning on Voting in the 1997 British General Elections', *Electoral Studies*, 22(2): 301-324; David Denver, Gordon Hands and Iain MacAllister (2004), 'The Electoral Impact of Constituency Campaigning in Britain, 1992-2001', *Political Studies*, 52 (2): 289-306.; Charles J Pattie and Ron J Johnston (2004), 'Party Knowledge and Candidate Knowledge: Constituency Campaigning in Voting and the 1997 General Elections', *Electoral Studies*, 23(4): 795-819.

<sup>156</sup> Thomas Zittel and Thomas Gschwend (2008), 'Individualised Constituency Campaigns in Mixed-Member Electoral Systems: Candidates in the 2005 German Elections', *West European Politics*, 31(5) 978-1003.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid* p 983.

Karp and Banducci suggested that, in both old and new democracies, decentralised electoral systems offered incentives for candidates to develop a personal vote through contacting efforts.<sup>158</sup> As Shugart and Carey pointed out, decentralised electoral systems offer individual candidates an incentive to build their reputations in a specific constituency.<sup>159</sup> Party spin doctors in head office are unlikely to pay much attention to a first time candidate standing in a peripheral single member district. Such candidates will have every incentive to invest time and effort building a campaign team locally.

In addition, small district sizes may make members easier to recruit. Scholars have long debated the link between polity size, citizen participation and the nature of democracy, arguing that citizens are more likely to join parties in small polities.<sup>160</sup> Mair and van Biezen found that larger polities had lower overall levels of party membership,<sup>161</sup> and Steven Weldon found that small polities had higher levels of participation.<sup>162</sup> He added that federalism could overcome the negative effects of size, with parties developing a more complex organisation, hence more opportunities for effective participation. Therefore, extant scholarship does indicate that smaller electoral units encourage political involvement.

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<sup>158</sup> Jeffrey A Karp and Susan A Banducci (2007), 'Party Mobilization and Political Participation in New and Old Democracies', *Party Politics*, 13(2): 217-234.

<sup>159</sup> Matthew S Shugart and John M Carey (1995), 'Incentives to Cultivate a Personal Vote: A Rank Order of Electoral Formulas', *Electoral Studies*, 14(4): 417-439.

<sup>160</sup> Robert A Dahl and Edward R Tufte (1973), *Size and Democracy*, Stanford University Press (Stanford).

<sup>161</sup> Peter Mair and Ingrid van Biezen (2001), 'Party Membership in Twenty European Democracies', *Party Politics*, 7(1): 5-21.

<sup>162</sup> Steven Weldon (2006), 'Downsize my Polity? The Impact of Size on Party Membership and Member Activism', *Party Politics*, 12(4): 467-481.

Although considerable scholarly attention has been paid to the effects of electoral systems on party system fragmentation, the role of electoral systems in shaping membership development in central and east Europe has remained unconsidered. This is a surprising omission given that scholarship developed in western democracies, summarised above, suggests that small electoral units (low district magnitude) are correlated with higher levels of party membership.

***Hypothesis 4:*** *Small electoral districts will be correlated with higher membership levels.*

Electoral systems govern how voters are allocated into districts, and how votes are converted into seats.<sup>163</sup> An overview of the district format and vote to seat conversion formulae in eleven central and east European democracies is presented in Table 2.8 (p74). There is considerable variation in electoral systems across the region. Bulgaria, Hungary, Lithuania and Romania use mixed systems, allocating seats by a combination of majoritarian and proportional formulae. Such systems were rare prior to the post-communist transitions, but were popular with electoral system reformers because they represented a compromise in the institutional bargaining process,<sup>164</sup> allowing elites to hedge their bets under conditions of uncertainty.

Bulgaria and Lithuania adopted unlinked mixed systems, while Hungary adopted a linked system that was similar in principle to the German system. Romania's system is also linked, but with an unusual twist. 315 of its 334 seats are contested under first

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<sup>163</sup> Sarah Birch (2003), *Electoral Systems and Political Transformation in Post-Communist Europe*, Palgrave Macmillan p 28.

<sup>164</sup> Matthew S Shugart and Martin P Wattenberg (2002), *Mixed Member Electoral Systems: The Best of Both Worlds*, Oxford University Press (Oxford).

past the post rules. However, if no candidate gains an absolute majority in a constituency, the votes for unelected candidates are tallied nationally and the unfilled seats are distributed among political parties in proportion to their share of the vote.

*Table 2.8: Electoral Systems in Eleven Post-Communist Democracies<sup>165</sup>*

Country	Size of Chamber	Number of Districts (Lower plus Upper Tier)	Number of upper tier seats	Proportion PR Seats (%)	Single Party Threshold (first tier PR seats) (%)	Preferences in PR list voting	Success requirement in single-member seats
Bulgaria	240	31 + 31	209	87%	4	No	Plurality
Croatia	148 *	10 (+minority+ diaspora)	None	100	5	No	-
Czech Republic	200	14	None	100	5❖	Yes	-
Estonia	101	12	26	100	5	Yes	-
Hungary	386	176+20+1	64	54%	5	No	Abs. Maj
Latvia	100	5	None	100	5	Yes	-
Lithuania	141	71 + 1	70	100	5	No	20% Maj
Poland	460	41	None	100	5❖	Yes	-
Romania	334	315+1+1 (18 minority seats)	Variable†	Variable	5❖	No	Abs Maj.
Slovakia	150	1	None	100	5	Yes	-
Slovenia	90	8+1 (2 minority seats)	None	100	4	Yes	-

❖ Higher threshold for coalitions

\* In Croatia eight members are elected from a special national constituency provided to represent minorities, and an unfixed quota of MPs are elected by Croatians residing abroad.

† Romania has 315 single member constituencies, eighteen minority seats and one overhang seat. Candidates who win over 50% of the vote are elected. Votes for unelected candidates are tallied nationally and the remaining seats are distributed among political parties in proportion to their share of the vote.

Non-compensatory proportional systems, which were adopted in Croatia, the Czech Republic, Latvia, Poland and Slovenia, divide their countries into multi-member electoral districts, but with no upper tier to correct for the loss of proportionality that stems from the sub-division of the state (see Table 2.8). Estonia is divided into twelve electoral districts, but there is an additional upper tier to improve proportionality.

<sup>165</sup> Adapted and updated from Sarah Birch (2003), *Electoral Systems and Political Transformation in Post-Communist Europe*, Palgrave Macmillan (Basingstoke).

Slovakia is the only country with a purely proportional system, where the whole country is treated as a single electoral unit. All countries adopted a threshold of either four or five percent for the proportional vote.

*Table 2.9: Average Number of Voters per Constituency (Lowest Tier)*

Country	Electoral System Type	Total Number of Voters	Average Number of electors per district (lowest tier)	2008 Party Membership Level (%)	Membership change (%) 1999-2008
Bulgaria	Mixed	5,969,019	192,549	5.95%	+26%
Croatia	Proportional	3,484,950	348,495	4.5%	-50%
Czech Republic	Proportional	8,415,892	600,000	3.3%	-19%
Estonia	Proportional	912,565	76,047	5.2%	+233%
Hungary	Mixed	8,034,395	45,650	1.4%	-18%
Latvia	Proportional	1,540,532	308,106	0.8%	-58%
Lithuania	Mixed	2,696,090	37,973	5.2%	+100%
Poland	Proportional	28,469,100	694,368	1%	+11%
Romania	Mixed	18,303,224	58,105	6%	+163%
Slovakia	Proportional	4,362,369	4,362,368	1.7%	-75%
Slovenia	Proportional	1,696,437	212,055	4.4%	+47%

Table 2.9 shows the average number of voters per constituency in each of the eleven central and east European democracies. While Lijphart defined district magnitude as ‘the number of representatives elected in a district (constituency),<sup>166</sup> this thesis focuses on the number of voters that each elected representative must attempt to contact, either directly or indirectly, since this is more likely to define how parties and individual candidates communicate with voters. As a general rule, larger

<sup>166</sup> Arend Lijphart, A. (1994), *Electoral Systems and Party Systems: A Study of Twenty-Seven Democracies*, Oxford University Press, p11

constituencies are more proportional,<sup>167</sup> but increased proportionality comes at the cost of weakening the representation function of parliamentarians.<sup>168</sup>

For the purposes of this research, the values for the average elector numbers per district were obtained by dividing the total number of voters by the number of constituencies at the lowest parliamentary tier. In countries with bicameral legislatures, the average number of voters in the lower house districts was used. There is great variation in the average number of electors per district across the region, ranging from less than 40,000 in Lithuania's single member districts to over 4 million in Slovakia's purely proportional system. What impact does constituency size have on the recruitment of party members?

As Table 2.9 (p75) shows, many countries with small districts ( 100,000 voters per district), party membership levels were high and rising. Conversely, the countries with the highest number of voters per district, Poland and Slovakia, had very low levels of membership. In countries with mid-sized electoral districts, the picture was mixed: membership grew in Bulgaria and Slovenia, but fell in the Czech Republic and Latvia. The countries with the largest electoral districts, Poland and Slovakia, had very low levels of party membership. Indeed, Slovakia's party membership has fallen by 75% since adopting a single proportional electoral district in 1998 (see Table 2.9).

Hungary and Latvia are notable outliers, with lower membership levels than their electoral district size would suggest. As Brigid Fowler's analysis of Hungarian politics

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<sup>167</sup> Douglas W Rae (1967), *The Political Consequences of Electoral Systems*, Yale University Press, (New Haven).

<sup>168</sup> Michael A E Dummett (1997), *Principles of Electoral Reform*, Oxford University Press (Oxford), p4.

points out, the effects of electoral systems are not automatic: they also depend on parties reacting ‘appropriately’ to the incentives provided.<sup>169</sup> Hermann Smith-Sivertsen argued that, in an environment where no party has a significant membership base, political elites feel no pressure to invest in membership recruitment.<sup>170</sup> Elite learning and strategic action will always mediate the effect of institutions.

Other institutional and cultural factors may also interact with electoral systems. For example, the regulation of business funding, institutional rules at the municipal level and other electoral institutions (party registration requirements and ‘silence periods’) may also be relevant. There may also be variation in the strategies of individual parties within party systems according to the individual resources in terms of wealth, access to the media and availability of charismatic representatives. Qualitative investigation is required to investigate whether there is, in fact, a link between small electoral districts and party membership, and which other factors influence parties’ membership recruitment decisions. Does the role of party members vary across different countries and, if so, why?

## 2.5 DISCUSSION

In seeking to explain the wide variation in party membership levels across central and east European democracies, this chapter examined four sets of hypotheses. The first hypothesis, that universal post-communist effects stifle party membership in central

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<sup>169</sup> Brigid Fowler (2004), ‘Concentrated Orange: Fidesz and the Remaking on the Hungarian Centre Right, 1994-2002’, *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 20 (3): 111.

<sup>170</sup> Hermann Smith-Sivertsen (2004), ‘Why Bigger Party Membership Organisations in Lithuania than in Latvia, 1995-2000’, *East-European Quarterly*, 38(2): 215-259.

and east Europe, was rejected. There is considerable variation across the region, both in trends (membership is rising in some countries, and stable or falling in others) and in overall numbers. Second, a set of three hypotheses regarding the effect of state funding of political parties was tested. Contrary to concerns that generous state funding of political parties would act as a disincentive to membership recruitment in new democracies, there was no relationship between state funding and membership recruitment. Some countries with generous state funding had high levels of membership recruitment, while the country with the lowest membership was also the only country that offered no state funding until 2012. This demonstrates that parties will not necessarily recruit members where there is no state funding, just as they are not necessarily deterred from membership recruitment where state funding is available. Something else is driving membership recruitment decisions.

The third set of hypotheses considered the effect of regime type. The presence of direct presidential elections in seven of the eleven countries did not appear to deter membership recruitment; indeed, average membership figures were slightly higher in countries with directly elected presidents than those with indirectly elected presidents. However, given that there was considerable variation within both groups, it is unlikely that the absence or presence of direct presidential elections has a strong impact on party membership. There was also no evidence that membership levels varied according to parliamentary strength. Since all eleven central and east European democracies have strong parliaments by international standards, it is likely that parties in the region take parliamentary elections seriously, regardless of whether or not there is also a directly elected president.

The fourth hypothesis related to electoral systems. Scholarship from western democracies suggests that parties operating in small district electoral systems have been less than whole-hearted in embracing the ‘electoral-professional’ model. While highly centralised campaigning, including communication through the mass media, may be an effective strategy in large district magnitude proportional systems, ‘pre-modern’ campaigning techniques survive at the single member district level.<sup>171</sup> The data presented in this chapter finds tentative support for the idea that membership recruitment in central and east European democracies is influenced by such practicalities. In most of the eleven countries examined, membership was very low where electoral districts were large, but larger memberships were found where electoral districts were small. There were two outliers – Latvia and Hungary – and it is highly unlikely that national level electoral systems are the *only* factor influencing membership recruitment. However, the relationship between electoral institutions and party membership, previously observed in Western Europe, merits further investigation in the central and east European context.

Small district electoral systems require more candidates than centralised electoral systems, since parties hoping for a national reach will need to field competent candidates in every district. Where possible, parties usually prefer to field candidates that are already socialised within the organisation, since existing members are likely to be more ideologically reliable and less prone to defection.<sup>172</sup> Single member districts encourage a focus on individual candidates, whereas centralised closed lists place the

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<sup>171</sup> Thomas Zittel and Thomas Gschwend (2008), ‘Individualised Constituency Campaigns in Mixed-Member Electoral Systems: Candidates in the 2005 German Elections’, *West European Politics*, 31(5): 983.

<sup>172</sup> Susan Scarrow (1995), *Parties and their Members: Organising for Victory in Britain and Germany*, Oxford University Press; E Spencer Wellhofer (1972), ‘Dimensions of Party Development: A Study in Organizational Dynamics’, *The Journal of Politics*, 34(1): 153-182.

focus on party brands.<sup>173</sup> Furthermore, in decentralised electoral systems candidates are often required to take a local leadership role.<sup>174</sup> The best way to improve the pool of potential candidates is to invest in membership recruitment.

Small district electoral systems also influence the ways that parties communicate with voters. Once again, this is a matter of sheer practicality. In small districts, candidates often seek to communicate with individual voters. Where districts are very large, this is not an option, and communication usually takes place via organised groups.<sup>175</sup> Where candidates compete in small districts through open lists, the tendency towards individual communication is further heightened, since candidates must stand out from their co-partisans without inviting public conflict.<sup>176</sup>

If the link between party membership and electoral systems is one of individual versus collective communication, then there is no reason why electoral systems (and possibly other electoral institutions) should not influence membership recruitment decisions in central and east Europe. This may help us to explain the puzzle that several case studies of central and east European parties have identified: that despite theories predicting the dominance of ‘electoral’ mobilisation in central and east Europe, significant membership recruitment has taken place in some countries.

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<sup>173</sup> Jeffrey A Karp and Susan A Banducci (2007), ‘Party Mobilization and Political Participation in New and Old Democracies’, *Party Politics*, 13(2): 217-234.

<sup>174</sup> Thomas Zittel and Thomas Gschwend (2008), ‘Individualised Constituency Campaigns in Mixed-Member Electoral Systems’, p983.

<sup>175</sup> Kathleen Bawn and Michael F Thies (2003), ‘A Comparative Theory of Electoral Incentives: Representing the Unorganised Under PR, Plurality and Mixed-Member Electoral Systems’, *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 15(1): 5-32.

<sup>176</sup> Matthew S Shugart (2001), ‘Electoral “Efficiency” and the Move to Mixed Member Systems’, *Electoral Studies*, 20(2): 173-193.

Therefore, the remainder of this thesis will explore the effect of institutional design on membership recruitment. Chapter Three will go back to basics, considering the roles that members might play in modern political parties, and how these functions might be influenced by electoral institutions. A set of micro-hypotheses will be developed, which will be tested in Chapters Four, Five and Six. Through detailed qualitative work, this thesis will demonstrate that institutions *do* influence membership recruitment. However, contrary to current dominant theories, state funding and regime type are less important than other institutional factors – national electoral systems, local electoral systems, restrictions on business funding and a host of other seemingly minor electoral rules and regulations, including party registration requirements and ‘silence’ periods.

# 3

## **Institutions and the Functions of Members**

The analysis in Chapter Two found that, contrary to existing theories, the availability of state subsidies for political parties had little impact on membership development in central and east European political parties. Electoral district size, on the contrary, did appear to influence party membership figures, although it was unlikely to be the only factor explaining the wide variation observed. This finding is interesting because it mirrors Western European research, which has established that parties' campaign techniques, including the ways that members are utilised, vary according to electoral system type. Where electoral districts are large, party campaigns concentrate on communication through the mass media and organised interest groups. Under these circumstances, members have little practical purpose. However, where electoral districts are small, the mass media is a less effective tool because its reach into individual electoral districts is poor. Under these circumstances, parties often supplement 'electoral professional' strategies with campaigning at the grass-roots level.

This chapter will consider the effect of different electoral institutions on party membership. It considers the traditional functions of members, and the ways in which institutions have influenced those functions in established democracies. A series of sub-hypotheses are presented, predicting how parties might use members in three

countries with very different electoral institutions. These sub-hypotheses will provide the basis for analysing the causal mechanisms by which electoral institutions influence membership recruitment.

### *What Members Do, and Why?*

In laying the theoretical ground for a small-n comparison of the institutional determinants of membership development in new democracies, this chapter considers benefits that members might bring to political parties, and how these vary according to the institutional environment. Therefore, a close analysis of the functions of members, and how electoral institutions influence these functions, is undertaken. The analysis is structured around the functions of members identified by Susan Scarrow, which can be summarised as follows: 1) Ambassadors in the community; 2) A source of loyal and reliable voters; 3) An additional and untainted income stream; 4) A valuable source of policy ideas and linkage with society; 5) A recruiting pool for candidates; 6) A source of free labour, particularly at the grassroots level; and 7) A means of improving the image and ‘legitimacy’ of political parties in the eyes of the general public.<sup>177</sup>

For each of the seven functions, the potential impact of electoral institutions is considered, followed by a discussion of how the institutions might affect outcomes in three central and east European countries with very different electoral systems:

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<sup>177</sup> Susan Scarrow (1995), *Parties and their Members: Organising for Victory in Britain and Germany*, Oxford University Press. Other researchers have described a similar set of functions for British party members: 1) constituting an important part of the party’s campaign machine; 2) as a testing ground for party policy; 3) recruiting and socialising the party’s leaders and representatives; 4) fuelling and funding the party organisation; and 5) as the party’s ambassadors in the wider community. See also Alan Martin and Philip Cowley (1999), ‘Ambassadors in the Community? Labour Party Members in Society’, *Politics*, 19 (2): 89.

Estonia (which has a small district proportional system); Lithuania (which has a non-compensatory mixed system); and Slovakia (which has a large district proportional system). The sub-hypotheses developed in this chapter will be tested in Chapters Four (Estonia), Five (Lithuania) and six (Slovakia), which present findings from each country in turn, and in Chapter Seven, which provides a cross-country comparison of the three countries. This permits examination of the functions of members under different electoral systems, and also to assess the impact of other electoral institutions in each country.

### 3.1 AMBASSADORS IN THE COMMUNITY

Parties can broadcast their message through the media, but voters will not always listen. In the midst of an advertising war, it is difficult for parties to stand out from their competitors, and even harder to build trust. Slick television advertising, mail-merged direct mail or impersonal email messages arriving in the days and weeks prior to polling day may not persuade cynical citizens. However, recommendations from friends, neighbours and family usually receive a more positive reception. German parties have long valued members' ambassadorial functions: it is an explicitly stated obligation of party membership.<sup>178</sup> They see members as playing 'an important role as *multipliers* and *translators* in more or less casual conversations about politics'.<sup>179</sup>

This function is informally recognised in other countries. Labour party members in the UK reported that friends and colleagues often asked their opinions, and over half

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<sup>178</sup> Susan E Scarrow, *Parties and their Members* (1995) pp 134-135.

<sup>179</sup> Susan E Scarrow (1994), 'The Paradox of Enrolment: Assessing the Costs and Benefits of Party Memberships', *European Journal of Political Science*, 25, p 48.

thought they had an impact on those to whom they talked.<sup>180</sup> As Martin and Cowley point out, ‘the trust and closeness built by friendships and/or work relationships may provide a basis for members informally to influence each other’.<sup>181</sup> Susan Scarrow adds that the everyday contacts of party members can be valuable to long-established parties facing popular disenchantment with politics; new parties trying to break into otherwise stable party systems; or parties trying to gain legitimacy in newly democratised regimes.<sup>182</sup> There are some reports of increased use of face-to-face voter contacting in central and east Europe. Alan Sikk described how, during the ‘advertising war’ of the 2003 Estonian parliamentary elections, newcomers *Res Publica* stood out by adopting more of a face-to-face approach.<sup>183</sup>

Electoral institutions may influence the value of individual members’ networks to political parties. Parties are more likely to communicate with individual voters through personalised and targeted campaigns where electoral districts are small and decentralised. In closed list proportional representation systems, parties communicate primarily via interest groups, and barely respond at all to unorganised interests.<sup>184</sup> In mixed systems, individual MPs often become ‘specialists’ depending on the origin of their mandate: list MPs are highly sensitive to organised interests, while single member district MPs focus on personal vote-seeking behaviour.<sup>185</sup> Thus, we expect candidates

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<sup>180</sup> Alan Martin and Philip Cowley (1999), ‘Ambassadors in the Community? Labour Party Members in Society’, *Politics*, 19(2): 96.

<sup>181</sup> Alan Martin and Philip Cowley (1999), ‘Ambassadors in the Community?’ p90.

<sup>182</sup> Susan E Scarrow (1994), ‘The Paradox of Enrolment’, p48.

<sup>183</sup> Alan Sikk reports that when such a situation arose in the 2003 Estonian election, *Res Publica* stood out from its competitors by using more canvassing. Alan Sikk, *Cartel Party System in Estonia*, ECPR General Conference, 2003, p 14.

<sup>184</sup> Kathleen Bawn and Michael F Thies (2003) ‘A comparative Theory of Electoral Incentives’, pp5-32.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

in small electoral districts to adopt individualised campaign tactics. Candidates and party members may attempt to make face-to-face contact with a large proportion of the electorate.

Candidates' incentives may also vary according to whether they are competing in an open list, closed list or single member district. Where electoral districts are small and party lists are 'open', candidates must compete against their own co-partisans.<sup>186</sup> In such circumstances, the ability to compete through policy differentiation is limited and personal attacks against co-partisans are likely to be frowned upon. Investment in face-to-face contact is often the most reliable and inoffensive form of mobilisation available. Such an electoral system exists in Estonia, where we would expect survey respondents to place a particularly strong premium on the 'ambassadorial' role of members and supporters.

In Lithuania, the mixed system should encourage variation in tactics between list candidates and single member district candidates. Of course, this division is not always clear-cut; many candidates have dual positions on party lists *and* as single member district candidates. Overall, however, Lithuanian political parties should value members for their ambassadorial role. This role, in contrast, is likely to be less pronounced in Slovakia, where parties compete through centralised party lists covering the entire country. According to theories developed in western democracies, Slovak parties would be expected to prioritise relationships with organised societal interests, with individual level campaigning simply being too inefficient. Candidates

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<sup>186</sup> Matthew S Shugart (2001), 'Electoral "Efficiency" and the Move to Mixed Member Systems', *Electoral Studies*, 20(2): 184.

for national parliament will focus their energies almost entirely on building the party's reputation, rather than burnishing their individual credentials at the local level.

If the personal networks of party members are a useful resource to political parties in small district electoral systems, what is the significance of new social media? Zhang et al found that use of networking sites such as YouTube, Facebook and MySpace was positively correlated with civic participation, but not with political participation or confidence in government.<sup>187</sup> Therefore, while traditional political parties will not wish to be left behind, these tools may be more valuable for 'insurgent' opposition parties than for conventional political parties. The rise of social media can create headaches for political elites and their 'electoral-professional' campaign managers. Bad publicity can spread just as quickly as good news, and it is harder for electoral-professionals to control the party's message.<sup>188</sup>

Unlike with traditional mass media, there is a potential role for members in new social media, since 'tweeting' and 'sharing' to one's own social network carries the impression of an endorsement. However, this role is highly passive, and is unlikely to lead to membership recruitment. While the 'ambassadorial' role is best carried out by committed members in a traditional face-to-face environment, a 'retweet' takes a fraction of a second and can just as easily be executed by a supporter as a member.

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<sup>187</sup> Zhang et al (2010), 'The Revolution Will be Networked: The Influence of Social Networking Sites on Political Attitudes and Behaviour', *Social Science Computer Review*, 28 (1) pp 75-92.

<sup>188</sup> Robin Effing, Jos van Hillegersberg and Theo Huibers (2011), 'Social Media and Political Participation: Are Facebook, Twitter and YouTube Democratising our Political Systems?' *Lecture Notes in Computer Science*, Volume 6847, pp 25-35.

Writing before the explosion of social media in the 2000s, Pippa Norris predicted that the internet would be used alongside other campaign techniques.<sup>189</sup> There is some evidence that prediction is being realised. However, the greatest use of new media has been made where electoral districts are large, i.e. in circumstances where already favourable to communication by traditional mass media. Effing, van Hillegersberg and Huibers found that new social networking played a significant role in Dutch national elections (where parties compete in a large district proportional system), but not in municipal or local state elections.<sup>190</sup>

Therefore, drawing from the existing research, the Slovak circumstances should be favourable for parties seeking to mobilise voters using social media. In Estonia and the Lithuanian single member districts, social media will likely be used only as a supplement to traditional forms of voter communication. In any case, the search for ‘ambassadors in the on-line community’ is unlikely to drive formal membership recruitment, since this task can almost as easily be carried out by supporters.

*Sub-hypothesis 1: Members will be valued as ‘ambassadors in the community’ where electoral districts are small. Thus, Estonian and Lithuanian parties will attach greater importance to this role than Slovak parties. ‘Ambassadors’ will be particularly valued in Estonia, since candidates must compete in small districts against their own co-partisans.*

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<sup>189</sup> Pippa Norris (2000), *A Virtuous Cycle: Political Communications in Post-Industrial Societies*, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge).

<sup>190</sup> Robin Effing, Jos van Hillegersberg and Theo Huibers (2011), ‘Social Media and Political Participation’, p31.

### 3.2 LOYAL AND RELIABLE VOTERS

In the new democracies of central and east Europe, partisan campaigning is often banned on polling day, and sometimes even for several days before. This reduces opportunities for electoral manipulations, but may also be associated with reduced turnout.<sup>191</sup> While a visitor to the USA might see ‘roving armies of canvassers [going] door to door’ on polling day in an attempt to boost their differential turnout,<sup>192</sup> a ban on voter contacting leaves political parties with two choices: let electoral dynamics run their course, or attempt to build voter loyalty.

Although party members typically comprise only a small proportion of total voters, their strong partisan allegiance means that they have high turnout rates. Suggesting this could be a reason for parties to recruit members, Susan Scarrow cited a speech by the chairman of the German SPD party, who pointed out that the outcome of the election might ‘hinge on whether a local party’s membership was one percent or four percent’.<sup>193</sup> In single member districts, where the ‘winner takes all’, a single vote can make the difference between winning and losing. Therefore, members are likely to be valued most as a source of loyal and reliable voters where ‘silence periods’ are long and elections are conducted at least partially through single member districts.

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<sup>191</sup> Jeffrey A Karp and Susan A Banducci (2007), ‘Party Mobilization and Political Participation in New and Old Democracies’, *Party Politics*, 13(2): 217-234.

<sup>192</sup> Donald P Green and Alan S Gerber (2008), *Get Out the Vote: How to Increase Voter Turnout*, The Brookings Institution Press (Washington DC), p4.

<sup>193</sup> Susan E Scarrow (1994), ‘The Paradox of Enrolment: Assessing the Costs and Benefits of Party Memberships’, *European Journal of Political Science*, Vol 25, p 47.

Estonia, Lithuania and Slovakia have very different rules regarding ‘silence periods’. In Estonia, a 24-hour silence period remains, but its effect has been softened in recent years by increased options for early voting, including internet voting. In Lithuania, a 72-hour silence period is strictly enforced and options for pre-polling are also very limited. This is unlikely to be relaxed in the foreseeable future, since the 2012 parliamentary election was marred by a vote-buying scandal (which has been successfully prosecuted). In Slovakia, parties are permitted to campaign on polling day. Therefore, of the three countries, we can hypothesise that Lithuanian parties will have the greatest appreciation for members as ‘loyal and reliable voters’ than Slovak or Estonian parties.

*Sub-hypothesis 2: In countries with long pre-election ‘silence periods’, parties will value voters as a source of loyal and reliable electoral support. This will be of much greater concern to Lithuanian parties than Estonian or Slovak parties.*

### 3.3 FUNDRAISING

For Duverger’s ‘mass parties’, members were an important source of financial support.<sup>194</sup> Unlike ‘cadre parties’, which were funded by businesses and wealthy individual benefactors, mass parties (examples of which included Britain’s Labour Party and the German SPD) were funded by small annual membership subscriptions. These were collected, door-to-door, by their fellow members. This task, of course, is now obsolete following technological advances.<sup>195</sup> According to some scholars,

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<sup>194</sup> Maurice Duverger (1954), *Political Parties*, Western Printing Services Ltd (Bristol).

<sup>195</sup> Susan Scarrow (1995), *Parties and their Members: Organising for Victory in Britain and Germany*, Oxford University Press (Oxford).

parties' reliance on membership fees is also a thing of the past, with state subsidies undermining the traditional fundraising role of members.<sup>196</sup>

State subsidies have increasingly been viewed as disincentivising party organisation-building since the 1990s, when Katz and Mair argued that 'as parties move further from society, they band together as a cartel to exclude 'outsiders', awarding themselves ever larger state subventions to make up the gap from declining membership funding.'<sup>197</sup> Ingrid van Biezen and Petr Kopecný applied theory that state funding replaces membership funding to the central and east European context, arguing that state subsidies give party elites no incentive to recruit members in new democracies.<sup>198</sup> The subtext of their argument is that the other roles that members might play (for example, voter contacting) had, in any case, been replaced by 'electoral-professional' methods.

However, the purported impact of state funding on party development may be overstated. In Chapter Two of this thesis, no correlation was found between relatively generous state funding and low levels of membership recruitment. Modern election campaigns are expensive and state funding will rarely be sufficient to meet parties' needs.<sup>199</sup> In reality, political parties cannot usually 'award themselves ever larger state subventions' when anti-system and populist parties pose a growing threat, often

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<sup>196</sup> Ingrid van Biezen (2003), *Political Parties in New Democracies: Party Organization in Southern and East-Central Europe*, Palgrave, pp 43-46; Petr Kopecný (2007), *Political Parties and the State in Post-Communist Europe*, Routledge, p3.

<sup>197</sup> Peter Mair and Richard S Katz (1997), Party Organization, 'Party Democracy and the Emergence of the Cartel Party', in Peter Mair, *Party System Change: Approaches and Interpretations*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, pp110-111.

<sup>198</sup> Ingrid van Biezen (2003), *Political Parties in New Democracies*, pp 43-46; Petr Kopecný (2007), *Political Parties and the State*, p3.

<sup>199</sup> Michael Pinto-Duschinsky (2002), 'Financing Politics: A Global View', *Journal of Democracy*, 13(4): 82.

scoring political points by challenging the cost of politics. At its core, politics remains a fundamentally competitive affair, and parties are still likely to seek any possible advantage over their opponents. Raising money from members, or using members as a source of free labour, can be a way of stretching a limited campaign war chest further.

Whether money comes from the state or business, fundraising potential is not evenly distributed amongst all parties. Parties that consistently win a large percentage of the vote will find it easier to raise money than ‘minor’ parties. Current or prospective ‘coalition potential’ also makes business fundraising easier. Smaller parties have fewer options. They are faced with a choice: be grateful for the relatively small proportion of state funding that they receive (as the cartel party theory suggests), or seek to increase their resources by recruiting members and mobilising them as a source of money, communications and free labour. The latter option offers the potential for small parties to improve their position vis-à-vis larger parties, and is therefore likely to prove attractive in at least some cases. It can be hypothesised that small parties are more likely than large parties to rely on members as a source of money or labour.

Contrary to theories that state funding replaces membership funding, it may, in some cases, squeeze out business funding instead, at least if successfully used as a ‘carrot’ with which to gain approval for the tighter regulation of business funding.<sup>200</sup> In Chapter Two of this thesis, it was noted that Latvia, the only country in the region with no state funding (until 2012) and few restrictions on business funding, had the lowest rates of party membership in the region. Large-scale business funding corrodes

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<sup>200</sup> Susan E. Scarrow (2006), ‘Party Subsidies and the Freezing of Party Competition: Do Cartel Mechanisms Work?’ *West European Politics*, 29(4): 619-639.

the linkages between political parties and society by adding to the perception that politics exists to serve business elites rather than ordinary people. Unlike state funding, there is a realistic possibility of business funding sufficiently generous to bankroll a full electoral-professional campaign. Therefore, parties may be more likely to recruit members where restrictions on business funding are either absent or loosely enforced.

The relationship between political parties and business funding is notoriously difficult to measure. Even in countries where business donations are legal, donors may provide financial support ‘under the table’ or ‘in kind’, meaning that donations frequently go unreported. In countries where business donations are illegal, they will not be reported at all. It would be naive to assume they do not exist. For example, in May 2012, Estonia’s two biggest parties, the Reform Party and the Centre Party, were accused of ‘funnelling’ money of undeclared origin into their parties’ budgets.<sup>201</sup> In response, the Social Democrats (SDE), Estonia’s smallest parliamentary party, presented draft legislation proposing an upper limit for election expenses of €400,000.<sup>202</sup> With annual state subventions in Estonia currently set at €1,000 per annum per MP, the SDE, with 19 of Estonia’s 101 MPs, currently receive €19,000 per annum from the state budget. When the country’s *poorest* major party proposes an upper expenses limit of four hundred times the annual state subsidy per mandate, it is apparent that state subsidies are little more than ‘loose change’ to established political parties.

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<sup>201</sup> ‘Financing Scandal Expands to Centre Party’, ERR News, 25<sup>th</sup> May 2012, <http://news.err.ee/politics/c6ed9839-f136-4e13-a498-0c3d1d48203c> (accessed 15<sup>th</sup> June 2013).

<sup>202</sup> Sotsiaaldemokraadid: erakondade valimiskuludele tuleb seada 400000 eurone ülempiir’ (Social Democrats, Party Election Expenditure of €400,000 to be Set), <http://www.sotsdem.ee/sotsiaaldemokraadid-erakondade-valimiskuludele-tuleb-seada-400000-eurone-ulempiir/> (accessed 15<sup>th</sup> June 2013).

It is very difficult to measure business funding with any degree of reliability. However, we can first ask ‘what are the rules?’ and then ‘does this country have a culture of enforcing the rules?’ Business donations are banned entirely in both Estonia and (recently) Lithuania, and prosecutions have recently been brought or credibly threatened in both countries for funding and/or electoral irregularities.<sup>203</sup> This indicates that there is both the institutional capacity and the will to enforce electoral rules, even when the accused is a member of a governing political party. Therefore, although irregular donations almost certainly exist, the ability of political parties’ to access business funding is constrained in Estonia and Lithuania. In these circumstances, parties might look to members as a source of money and free labour.

In the Slovak Republic, however, no politician or government official has ever been seriously investigated for corruption. Even the ‘Gorila’ scandal, a massive corruption scandal that swept through Slovak politics in 2011/2012, implicating most of the major parties,<sup>204</sup> had little impact. Following the 2012 election, SMER-SD initially promised that the opposition could appoint nominees to the Public Procurement Office (ÚVO), the General Prosecutor and the Supreme Office. However, the governing party has since reneged on that promise and instead nominated its own sympathisers. As a result, oversight of party funding is very lax in Slovakia.

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<sup>203</sup> Prosecutors: Clouds of Suspicion Hang Over Reform Party Scandal, ERR News, 16<sup>th</sup> October 2012, <http://news.err.ee/politics/8966f3a3-d645-4d90-946f-e46ebca59b31>. Although this case was ultimately unsuccessful due to lack of evidence, it was made clear that the prosecutors will pursue criminal charges where allegations of irregular donations are made, even if the amounts involved are relatively small, and even if the allegations relate to a governing party; Labour Party Leader Uspaskich’s Legal Immunity Revoked, 20<sup>th</sup> December 2012, the Lithuania Tribune, <http://www.lithuaniatribune.com/25815/labour-party-leader-uspaskichs-legal-immunity-revoked-201225815/> (accessed 16<sup>th</sup> June 2013).

<sup>204</sup> Tom Nicholson (2012), *Gorila*, Dixit (Bratislava)

Opportunities for political parties and individual politicians to raise money from any source, legal or illegal, abound. Since Slovak parties face few constraints on their ability to raise money, there will be less demand for members as a source of small individual donations or free labour.

Overall, with regard to members and money, we expect to find that Estonian parties, which have faced the strictest limitations on business fundraising for the longest period, will be the most likely to look to members as a potential source of free labour, and perhaps money. In Lithuania, where business fundraising was banned in 2012, we expect parties to begin exploring ways in which they can use members to plug this gap. In Slovakia, however, opportunities for fundraising are constrained only by business's willingness to give.

*Sub-hypothesis 3: Parties may look to members as a source of money and/or free labour where business funding is restricted. Therefore, Estonian and Lithuanian parties are more likely to value contributions from members in this regard than Slovak parties.*

### 3.4 POLICY IDEAS AND LINKAGE

Policymaking is traditionally an area of party activity where members seek influence in return for their voluntary efforts. Supporters are often persuaded to become full members by the offer of 'purposive incentives', including opportunities to contribute towards the party's ideological aims.<sup>205</sup> But whether party members provide a useful linkage function, or are extremists ready to impose idealistic (and therefore vote-losing)

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<sup>205</sup> Peter B Clark and James Q Wilson (1961), 'Incentive Systems: A Theory of Organizations', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 6: 129-166.

policies, has been a matter of scholarly debate. While some argue that members are a valuable source of ideas, helping political parties to avoid stagnation and keeping parties in touch with ‘normal’ citizens,<sup>206</sup> others argue that members, being unrepresentative of ‘normal’ citizens, do not always have a positive impact on party policy-making.<sup>207</sup> In reality, the usefulness of membership involvement in policy-making is likely to vary according to the composition of party membership.

The growing dominance of the 24-hour media has drastically shortened the response times for the day-to-day policy issues that arise. Party elites can scarcely operate without some policy leeway in the current era of twenty-four hour rolling news. According to ‘catch all’ and ‘electoral professional’ party theories, elites will seek to maximise their party’s nimbleness in the policy-making arena, seeking to avoid long-term commitments.<sup>208</sup> However, this may not be an effective long-term strategy. As Mair, Müller and Plasser point out, maintaining a position of absolute policy flexibility, while seemingly an effective strategy in the short term, ultimately sows the seeds of ‘popular disengagement and disaffection’.<sup>209</sup>

The situation is further complicated in the new democracies of central and east Europe, where the sociological upheaval made it impossible for programmatic parties

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<sup>206</sup> Paul F Whiteley and Patrick Seyd (2002), *High-Intensity Participation: The Dynamics of Party Activism in Britain*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press (Ann Arbor).

<sup>207</sup> John May (1973), ‘Opinion Structure of Political Parties: The Special Law of Curvilinear Disparity’, *Political Studies*, 21:135-151.

<sup>208</sup> <sup>32</sup> Otto Kirchheimer (1969), ‘The Transformation of the Western European Party System’, in Federic S Burin and Kurt L Shell (Eds) *Politics, Law and Social Change: Selected Essays of Otto Kirchheimer*, New York: Columbia University Press, p360; Angelo Panebianco (1988), *Political Parties: Organization and Power*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p266.

<sup>209</sup> Peter Mair, Wolfgang Müller and Fritz Plasser eds., (2004) *Political Parties and Electoral Change*, SAGE (London), p273.

to spring up representing well-defined sociological cleavages, described by Lipset and Rokkan as the bedrock of traditional Western European party competition. To this day, the 'linkage' function of party members appears to be weaker in central and east Europe than in Western Europe. Unlike their western counterparts, Rohrschneider and Whitefield found that mass party organisations in central and east Europe do not help parties to achieve party-voter agreement.<sup>210</sup> As a result, they wondered if parties were 'hollow shells' of the variety argued by Ingrid van Biezen. If this is the case, we can hypothesise that central and east European political elites will prefer to keep as much control of the policy-making process as possible.

Steven Wolinetz argued that parties primarily seek policy, office or votes, and that the prevalence of one type of party might reflect 'competitive dynamics, cultural factors, institutions, electoral systems, or simply the kinds of parties that got entrenched first'.<sup>211</sup> Dominant theories of central and east European politics suggest that this region will be dominated by vote-seeking and office-seeking parties, in which case we would expect to find the following organisational features: (1) little time spent on policy debate at meetings; diffuse and unfocused when it takes place; (2) policy making confined to the leadership or policy committee; (3) medium to low consistency of policy positions; (4) minimal infrastructure to support policy-making (for example, think tanks, research bureaux or other affiliated organisations).<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Robert Rohrschneider and Stephen Whitefield (2012), *The Strain of Representation: How Parties Represent Diverse Voters in Western and Eastern Europe*, Oxford: OUP, p136.

<sup>211</sup> Steven B Wolinetz (2002) 'Beyond the Catch-All Party: Approaches to the Study of Parties and Party Organization in Contemporary Democracies', in Gunther, R., et al. eds., *Political Parties: Old Concepts and New Challenges*, Oxford: OUP, p164.

<sup>212</sup> Steven B Wolinetz (2002) 'Beyond the Catch-All Party: Table 6.3: Policy, Vote and Office Seeking Parties: Operational Measures.

*Sub-hypothesis 4: Policy-making in central and east European parties will be largely an elite-based affair. Parties in Estonia, Lithuania and Slovakia will show low levels of policy consistency, minimal policy-making infrastructure and will not involve members to a significant degree.*

### 3.5 A RECRUITING POOL FOR CANDIDATES

To ensure their long-term survival, parties must recruit and socialise the next generation of their elite.<sup>213</sup> Unless candidates and office-bearers can present a united front and share a common vision, objective and political culture, the internal coherence of the party is likely to remain weak and vulnerable. It has even been argued that parties *exist* in order to find solutions of ‘organizational and elite socialization problems’.<sup>214</sup> A party’s membership pool is an environment where future elites are integrated into the party’s culture, organisational strategy and core ideology. It is not unusual for parties at an advanced stage of development to require a long affiliation prior to a member taking up an elite position. This increases the confidence of parties’ elites that any new colleagues are loyal to the organisation.<sup>215</sup>

Established relatively recently, the parties of central and east Europe are not always in a position to demand a long prior affiliation from their candidates, particularly at the local government level. If they seek to compete at all levels of government, and across the whole country, the need for quantity will often trump the desire for quality.

Achieving organisational coverage across the country allows parties to access regional

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<sup>213</sup> E Spencer Wellhofer, (1972) ‘Dimensions of Party Development: A Study in Organizational Dynamics’, *The Journal of Politics*, Vol 34 p168.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>215</sup> E Spencer Wellhofer (1972), ‘Dimensions of Party Development: A Study in Organizational Dynamics’, *The Journal of Politics*, Vol 34, p158.

communities, where they can begin the process of seeking potential candidates. If the party has no presence in a community, they are unlikely to attract good candidates for local government. As the membership base slowly builds, selecting candidates from a known membership pool allows a degree of confidence that candidates are committed to party policies.<sup>216</sup> This reduces the possibility of embarrassing public disagreements, gaffes and even defections at a future date. As the party organisation matures, a large and stable pool of members allows parties to increase barriers to elite entry over time, thus improving loyalty and continuity.

In recent years, the traditional hierarchical approach has, at times, been relaxed to make way for candidates with broad public appeal. The importance of mass media communications, and the ‘anti-politics’ mood amongst the public has encouraged parties to recruit apolitical candidates, often from outside the party.<sup>217</sup> Parties market such candidates as people who have ‘done something in life’, responding to public suspicion of ‘career politicians’. However, the lack of prior socialisation of ‘apolitical’ candidates can cause problems, particularly under single member district electoral systems like the UK, where candidates are often expected to run their own local campaigns, but then remain loyal to the party, waiting their turn in a strict hierarchy, once elected.

In 2010, the British Conservative Party adopted a strategy of fielding ‘apolitical’ candidates, known as ‘Cameron’s A-list’, in an attempt to refresh the party’s image

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<sup>216</sup> Susan Scarrow (1995), *Political Parties and their Members: Organizing for Victory in Britain and Germany*, Oxford University Press (Oxford), p133.

<sup>217</sup> Peter Mair, Wolfgang C Müller and Fritz Plasser (eds) (2004) *Political Parties and Electoral Change*, SAGE (London), p1.

and broaden its appeal. However, this was not an unmitigated success. Some candidates struggled to adjust to the micro-politics of single member district campaigns, while others who were successfully elected were shocked to encounter the disciplinary regime expected by the party whips. One new British MP, previously a doctor, publicly stated, “I was elected to speak my mind. So why does Cameron [the Conservative Party leader] keep ignoring me?”<sup>218</sup> This reminds us that parties take risks when they nominate candidates that have not been socialised into the party’s culture and beliefs. Therefore, whatever the attractions of ‘apolitical’ candidates, complex processes of socialisation persist in western democracies. This may be an important driver of membership recruitment in some central and east European democracies.

The qualities that parties look for in candidates are likely to vary across different electoral systems and at different levels of government. Where political parties compete through closed, centralised national lists, party leaders, pressure group representatives and parliamentary specialists usually occupy the top spots.<sup>219</sup> We can hypothesise that parties operating in centralised proportional system, like Slovakia, will value charisma and national name recognition. Party loyalty is also very important, and there is usually a high degree of overlap between the top ranked candidates and the tip of the party hierarchy. ‘Celebrity’ candidates with national name recognition

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<sup>218</sup> ‘Sarah Wollaston: ‘I was elected to speak my mind. So why does Cameron keep ignoring me?’ The Guardian, 16<sup>th</sup> June 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/jun/16/sarah-wollaston-speak-my-mind?view=mobile>. A further high profile example of the problems ‘apolitical’ candidates can bring is seen in the case of a novelist, Louise Mensch, who was elected as the Conservative MP for Corby in 2010, but resigned before completing her first term. ‘Louise Mensch, her hasty husband and two stories of why she threw in the towel’, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/9639537/Louise-Mensch-her-hasty-husband-and-two-stories-of-why-she-threw-in-the-towel.html>.

<sup>219</sup> Matthew S Shugart and Martin P Wattenberg eds., (2001) *Mixed-Member Electoral Systems: The Best of Both Worlds?* Oxford University Press (Oxford), p489.

may add interest to the list. In these cases the requirement for prior membership will occasionally be waived entirely.

Under decentralised electoral systems (the majoritarian section of mixed systems (as seen in Lithuania); small district proportional systems (as seen in Estonia); and pure first-past-the-post or AV) candidates usually require a link to the specific area that they seek to represent. Local connections are therefore often more important than national profile. This encourages parties to maintain a membership base across the country. Although ideological loyalty is valued (the party will wish to avoid embarrassing expressions of disloyalty), we can hypothesise that the main qualities valued in candidates will be local (not national) name recognition and a capacity for the day-to-day grind of district-level campaigns. Leadership skills are also important, since candidates in decentralised districts must often build their own campaign teams.<sup>220</sup> Similar considerations are likely to apply in selection for local government nominations, where campaigns are also decentralised.

Academics have debated the extent to which the two layers (single member district and proportional) in mixed electoral systems ‘contaminate’ each other in terms of the incentives provided to parties and candidates,<sup>221</sup> and the result is influenced by the specifics of institutional design. Lithuania’s mixed system is ‘unlinked’ and ‘non-compensatory’. Unlike in ‘compensatory’ systems, where a seat gained at the SMD level results in loss at the proportional level, Lithuanian parties get to ‘keep’ any gains made at the single member district level. Moreover, any boost to the list vote as a by-

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<sup>220</sup> Matthew S Shugart and Martin P Wattenberg eds., (2001) *Mixed-Member Electoral Systems*.

<sup>221</sup> Federico Ferrara and Erik S Herron (Jan 2005) ‘Going it alone? Strategic Entry Under Mixed Electoral Rules’, *American Journal of Political Science*, 49(1): 16-31.

product of local campaigns is also valuable. Parties therefore have an incentive to nominate good candidates in as many single member districts as possible.<sup>222</sup> Thus, the incentives to nationwide party building are very high in Lithuania, compared to the centralised proportional system used in Slovakia.

Estonian national elections are also conducted via a mixed system, although the bulk of the seats are distributed via a decentralised proportional representation system, where mandates are distributed via an open-list.<sup>223</sup> The country is divided into twelve electoral districts, each returning between seven and thirteen members. The votes are counted in three stages: first, seats are awarded to individual candidates who meet their quota; then, mandates are awarded to candidates on the regional list whose parties have received 5% of the national vote, in order of the number of individual votes that they received;<sup>224</sup> finally, the remaining mandates are distributed through a national list. Therefore, as in Lithuania, a large proportion of the competition for parliamentary seats is decentralised, giving parties an incentive to recruit and retain a pool of potential candidates in every region.

Local elections are often neglected altogether, or skimmed over, in analyses of party organisations and elite recruitment. Steven Wolinetz, for example, writes that ‘a vote-seeking party should be organised to win office at almost all levels (local, regional, provincial or national) in which elections take place, but is likely to maintain only the

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<sup>222</sup> Federico Ferrara and Erik S Herron (Jan 2005) ‘Going it alone?’ It should be noted that Lithuania’s single member district campaigns are conducted in two rounds, with the list ballots cast at the same time as the first round of the SMD campaign.

<sup>223</sup> The Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs explains the electoral system here. <http://www.vm.ee/?q=node/10996> (accessed 16th June 2013).

<sup>224</sup> Candidates are ranked according to the number of individual mandates that they received.

minimum degree of organisation required to do this'.<sup>225</sup> However, the 'minimal organisation' required to compete nationwide at every level of government is likely to be significant. Susan Scarrow points out that, even in the days of 'mass parties', British and German parties needed actively to recruit and socialise people with the 'character, ability, or experience' to stand in local government elections.<sup>226</sup> Presumably new parties must invest substantial efforts in building a nationwide organisation *if* they are to compete in all (or even most) municipal districts.

Parties will naturally hope to recruit local government candidates whose partisan sympathies align with theirs. However, the minimum prior affiliation period will be, on average, much shorter for local candidates than for national candidates, particularly where municipal district sizes are small and numerous. At the local level, prior membership requirements may be waived altogether for otherwise attractive candidates. The extent to which parties can recruit candidates with a lengthy prior membership affiliation will depend on the size of their current membership base, the numbers of candidates required, and availability in the local area.

The size of municipalities can vary enormously: Slovakia has almost 2,817 municipalities, Lithuania has 60 and Estonia has 227. Tiny rural municipalities are unlikely to become party political battlegrounds unless there is an institutional nudge towards party competition (for example the banning of independent candidates). In Lithuania, political parties have a monopoly in candidate nomination in local

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<sup>225</sup> Steven B Wolinetz (2002) 'Beyond the Catch-All Party', p164.

<sup>226</sup> Susan Scarrow (1994), 'The Paradox of Enrolment': Assessing the Costs and Benefits of Party Membership', *European Journal of Political Science*, Vol 25, pp 41-60.

elections. In Estonia, the balance shifted towards party political competition after a law banning independent candidates was proposed. Although the law was eventually judged to be unconstitutional, the prospect of this rule change prompted a politicisation of local politics. In Slovakia, however, independent candidates are permitted. Therefore, specific institutional rules on municipal candidate nomination may influence the extent to which parties expand into the regions. In all cases, the barriers to party nomination are likely to be lower for local government elections than national government elections, and that local name recognition will be valued more highly than ideological loyalty.

*Sub-hypothesis 5a: Where municipal districts are small and decentralised, prior affiliation periods for candidates will be low. This would be expected in Estonia and Slovakia, but not in Lithuania where electoral districts are relatively large.*

*Sub-hypothesis 5b: Restrictions on independent municipal candidates will encourage parties to compete nationwide, creating a demand for party members in the regions. Thus, a demand for partisan candidates will be created in Lithuania (where independent candidates are banned) and Estonia (where the Supreme Court overturned a ban on independent candidates, but parties reportedly adjusted their strategies as a result), but not in Slovakia (where independent candidates have always been permitted).*

### 3.6 MEMBERS AS A CAMPAIGNING RESOURCE

‘Electoral’ theories of party organisation argue that, in modern times, parties reject membership-intensive grassroots campaigning in favour of ‘electoral professional’ strategies.<sup>227</sup> However, a minority of scholars insist that party members have retained an important campaigning function, although their work has changed in response to technological advances. In the mid-1990s, Susan Scarrow argued that British and German parties were less wholehearted than might be expected in embracing new technology, since they harboured doubts that mass media communication would be sufficient to shape public opinion.<sup>228</sup> More recently, Pippa Norris found that political parties responded to the fragmentation of the media by moving towards a ‘post-modern’ form of campaigning, which placed a renewed emphasis on grassroots campaigning, albeit with an emphasis on centralised coordination and ‘targeting’ of key seats’.<sup>229</sup> Noting the growing chasm between voters and political elites in Australia, Ian Ward noted the ‘localisation of national campaigns as a political marketing response to widespread alienation.’<sup>230</sup>

Case studies demonstrating political parties’ ambivalence about the ‘electoral-professional’ approach usually emanate from countries with majoritarian or mixed electoral systems. In western democracies, it has long been noted that electoral

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<sup>227</sup> Ingrid van Biezen (2003), *Political Parties in New Democracies*.

<sup>228</sup> Susan Scarrow (1995), *Parties and their Members*, pp 110-111.

<sup>229</sup> Pippa Norris (2000) *A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Postindustrial Societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>230</sup> Ian Ward (2003), ‘Localizing the National: The Rediscovery and Reshaping of Local Campaigning in Australia’, *Party Politics*, 9(5): 583-600.

systems may affect how parties communicate with the electorate (face-to-face or mass media), and whether parties communicate more with organised or unorganised interests. Case studies of parties operating in proportional systems are more likely to emphasise the electoral professional approach. In the Netherlands, for example, where more than twelve million registered citizens vote in a single electoral district, Ruud Koole noted that party members are small in number, and primarily involved in fundraising, maintaining the party organisation and providing candidates for election.<sup>231</sup>

Where electoral districts are small, campaigns often utilise the following ‘old fashioned’ strategies: door-to-door leafleting; door-to-door canvassing; street stalls; and local social events, perhaps with a fundraising purpose. Party propaganda often promotes individual candidates in addition to the party brand, and candidates seek to address local concerns in addition to national party policy. These strategies will usually run in parallel with a national-level mass media campaign. In single member districts, ‘key seats’ are often ‘targeted’ in order to focus resources where they will make the biggest difference. The extent to which this process is centrally managed by electoral professionals depends on party resources: while wealthier parties may attempt to micro-manage local campaigns, poorer parties only have the resources to equip local volunteers and election agents with basic campaigning skills.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Ruud A Koole (1994), ‘The Vulnerability of the Modern Cadre Party in the Netherlands’, in Katz and Mair (Eds), *How Parties Organize: Change and Adaptation in Party Organizations in Western Democracies*, SAGE (London).

<sup>232</sup> David Denver, Gordon Hands, Justin Fisher and Iain MacAllister (2003), ‘Constituency Campaigning in Britain, 1992-2001: Centralization and Modernization’, *Party Politics*, 9 (5): 541-559.

As in the Netherlands, parties campaigning under closed list proportional rules usually adopt a more centralised style, with media relations organised by electoral professionals. Where attempts are made to communicate with voters more directly, relations are usually conducted through organised groups, and there is little attempt to communicate with unorganised voters on an individual level.<sup>233</sup> To some extent, this simply reflects practicalities. It is impossible to communicate with millions of voters individually. Furthermore, specific representatives are not usually linked with a particular region or constituency, so they have no incentive to invest in personal reputation building, and instead focus on promoting the national message of the party.<sup>234</sup>

Mixed systems are common in central and east European democracies. Lithuania operates an unlinked 'mixed' system, with seats divided evenly between the single member district level and a national list. There we expect to see features of localised 'majoritarian' campaigning at the SMD level and proportional campaigning at the national level, while bearing in mind that the simultaneous competing incentives may lead to 'contamination' between the two levels. Therefore, it is likely that Lithuanian single member district candidates will adopt a localised approach to campaigning, with elements of micro messaging and communication with individuals rather than organised groups, perhaps door-to-door. We would also expect the party central offices to adopt some form of 'targeting' strategy, concentrating campaigning resources in specific geographic areas.

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<sup>233</sup> Kathleen Bawn and Michael F Thies (2003) 'A comparative theory of electoral incentives - Representing the unorganized under PR, plurality and mixed- member electoral systems,' *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 15(1): 5-32.

<sup>234</sup> Matthew S Shugart and John M Carey (1995), 'Incentives to Cultivate a Personal Vote: A Rank Order of Electoral Formulas', *Electoral Studies*, 14(4): 417-439.

The Estonian system is also technically a mixed system, since it has a small top-up component, but the majority of mandates are distributed through multi-member constituencies in twelve electoral districts. As Matthew Søberg Shugart points out, candidates competing against co-partisans in small districts have an added incentive to cultivate their own personal reputations. This helps them to enhance their electoral prospects by attracting votes to their party, and also to establish a ‘unique personal reputation to stand out in a crowded field of co-partisans’.<sup>235</sup> Thus, we would expect Estonian politicians in the regions to communicate with voters on an individual basis at the constituency level.

In Slovakia, national politicians are likely to focus their efforts on building the party’s reputation overall and gaining the highest possible position on the party’s list. Predominant campaigning techniques will be media appearances, social media and visits to places where large numbers of voters are likely to be gathered. There will be little attempt to connect with voters on the individual level, and only a minimal role for party members. In a constituency of almost five million voters, it is simply not efficient to contact voters individually.

The effect of district magnitude on campaign strategies can also be confirmed by looking at the difference between how parties campaign at the local and national levels. In Estonia and Slovakia, local government is conducted on a much smaller scale than national government, and we therefore expect to find more micro-level campaigning at the municipal level. In Lithuania, on the other hand, there are 71

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<sup>235</sup> Matthew S Shugart (2001), ‘Electoral “Efficiency” and the Move to Mixed-Member Systems’, *Electoral Studies*, 20, p183.

single member districts for the *seimas* and 60 municipalities. Vilnius, for example, a city of 550,000 citizens, is a single municipality but is divided into ten single member districts for the *seimas* elections. Therefore, we expect to see a broad overlap in campaign strategies between national and municipal elections, except in Vilnius, where there might be more localised campaigning at the national than the municipal level.

*Sub-hypothesis 6: Where electoral districts are small, campaigns will be tailored towards communicating concerns about local issues to individual constituents. Members may be involved in these tasks. Where electoral districts are large, the 'electoral-professional' model is likely to prevail, and the role of members will be minimal. Therefore, we expect to find individual voter contacting taking place in Estonia and Lithuania, but a greater focus on the 'electoral professional' approach will prevail in Slovakia.*

### 3.7 IMAGE AND LEGITIMACY

Despite arguing that the role of party members has been downgraded in recent years, proponents of 'electoralist' theories posit that members in Western European democracies remain valued for their 'legitimacy benefits'.<sup>236</sup> According to this theory, parties will not wish to be seen purely as vehicles for the ambitions of political elites, and will seek to project the image that they are in touch with ordinary voters. Susan Scarrow also commented that parties value members for their legitimising function, although she did not consider this to be their primary role. She pointed out that

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<sup>236</sup> Peter Mair and Richard S Katz (1997), 'Party Organization, Party Democracy and the Emergence of the Cartel Party', pp110-111.

parties would not like to be seen as *losing* members, since this could be reported by the media as evidence of falling popularity.

Recruiting members for a purely decorative purpose is an unlikely use of parties' time and resources in the new democracies of central and east Europe. As Ingrid van Biezen points out, there is some logic in maintaining an existing membership base for the sake of appearances, but it would be quite another matter entirely to recruit members solely for this purpose.<sup>237</sup> Furthermore, the concept of 'legitimacy benefits' is vague, and can easily be confused with the normative values that party elites might hold about how political parties in democracies *should* be organised. Even competitive instinct might inspire party leaders to build a bigger membership base than their rivals. Since the concept of 'legitimacy benefits' as used in the existing literature is vague, and there is no potential link to electoral institutions, no hypothesis is proposed regarding membership and legitimacy. However, issues relating to normative values and public perceptions of membership parties will be borne in mind throughout this thesis.

### 3.8 SUMMARY

This chapter has presented a number of micro-hypotheses about the potential effect of institutions on party membership in Estonia, Lithuania and Slovakia. The micro-hypotheses are summarised in Table 3.1 (p112), and will be tested in the following chapters. Institutions that might influence membership recruitment include national electoral systems, municipal electoral regulations, pre-polling day 'silence periods' and

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<sup>237</sup> Ingrid van Biezen (2003), *Political Parties in New Democracies* pp 43-46.

party funding regulations. It is argued that members will be of greatest value in small district electoral systems where local government is politicised and business funding is restricted. Pre-polling day 'silence' periods may also increase the value of members. On the contrary, where electoral districts are very large, local government is dominated by independents and business funding is limited only by businesses' willingness to donate, then the 'electoral' model is likely to prevail. These hypotheses will be tested across three central and east European democracies: Estonia, Lithuania and Slovakia.

Table 3.1: Summary of hypotheses

<p>➔ <b>Institutional rules</b></p> <p><b>Functions of members</b> ↓</p>	<p><b>ESTONIA</b> National ES: Small multi-member districts Municipal ES: Small districts Funding: state funding available, ban on business funding. Silence period: short</p>	<p><b>LITHUANIA</b> National ES: Mixed with small SMDs. Municipal ES: Large districts (independents banned) Funding: State funding available, recent ban on business funding Silence period: long</p>	<p><b>SLOVAKIA</b> National ES: Very large multi-member district. Municipal ES: Very small districts. Funding: State funding available, business funding plentiful. Silence period: none</p>
<p><b>Ambassadors in the Community</b> Hypothesis: Important where districts are small, particularly in multi-member districts where competition takes place between co-partisans. EE-high; LT-mid; SK-low</p>	<p>Competition against co-partisans in small districts will make members especially valued as ‘ambassadors in the community’.</p>	<p>Single member districts will encourage individual voter contacting. However, since this competition can take place in public, the ‘ambassadorial’ will be less important than in Estonia.</p>	<p>Parties may appreciate positive word of mouth from members, but are unlikely to recruit on the basis of the ambassadorial role.</p>
<p><b>Loyal and reliable voters</b> Hypothesis: important where there is a long silence period before polling day. Small districts mean more competition for individual votes. EE-mid; LT-high; SK-low</p>	<p>Silence period is short and porous. Electoral system puts a premium on individual votes =&gt; value of reliable voters more than Slovakia but less than Lithuania.</p>	<p>72-hour silence period means that loyal and reliable voters are at a premium, particularly in SMDs where every vote counts.</p>	<p>Combination of large electoral district and lack of silence period make members less valued as loyal and reliable voters.</p>
<p><b>Fundraising</b> Hypothesis: Tightening business funding regulations may slowly increase importance of members as source of funding and free labour. EE-mid; LT-mid; SK-low</p>	<p>Ban on business funding is enforced, therefore parties may look to members as a source of free labour and funding. This may be more prominent where parties are relatively poor.</p>	<p>Ban on business funding is enforced, therefore parties may look to members as a source of free labour and funding. This may be more prominent where parties are relatively poor.</p>	<p>No limits on business funding. OSCE reports suggest that funding is ‘opaque’. Members unlikely to be valued for either free labour or fundraising.</p>
<p><b>Policy-making</b> Hypothesis: Policy-making structures will be minimal and decisions will be made primarily at elite level. EE-low; LT-low; SK-low</p>	<p>Policy making primarily made at the elite level. Very little policy-making structures or involvement of members.</p>	<p>Policy making primarily made at the elite level. Very little policy-making structures or involvement of members.</p>	<p>Policy making primarily made at the elite level. Very little policy-making structures or involvement of members.</p>
<p><b>Recruiting pool for candidates</b> Hypothesis: Small municipal districts create a demand for candidates. However, nationwide coverage not inevitable where ‘independents’ are permitted. EE-high; LT-low; SK-high</p>	<p>Very small municipal districts create a demand for candidates. Attempts to ban independent candidates, while ultimately unsuccessful, led to a politicisation of local government.</p>	<p>Independent candidates banned. However, relatively large municipal districts make nationwide coverage relatively easy to achieve =&gt; demand for candidates low.</p>	<p>Very small municipal districts create a demand for candidates. However, independent candidates are permitted, so parties have the option to eschew competition at the municipal level.</p>
<p><b>Grass-roots campaigning</b> Hypothesis: Individual (and member-intense) contacting strategies likely to be used where electoral districts are small. EE-high; LT-high; SK-low</p>	<p>Electoral districts are small so individual voter contacting is likely. This creates an important role for members.</p>	<p>Electoral districts are small so individual voter contacting is likely. This creates an important role for members.</p>	<p>Large electoral districts encourage electoral-professional campaigns through mass and social media. Minimal role for members.</p>

EE: Estonia; LT: Lithuania; SK: Slovakia

# 4

## Estonia

Since the early 2000s, Estonian political parties, competing for the votes of less than a million registered voters, have expanded their membership bases.<sup>238</sup> The Reform Party and the Centre Party publicly battled to build the biggest membership base, with the former proudly announcing in March 2013 that it had inched ahead with 13,416 members compared to its rival's 13,410 members.<sup>239</sup> This presents an interesting puzzle because the development of parties with membership bases was not predicted in Estonia. Have these members purely been recruited for 'legitimacy benefits', or do they serve a practical purpose?

All of the major Estonian political parties were founded in the post-communist period,<sup>240</sup> with access to mass media and, eventually, state funding. Rather than being inherited from communist-era organisations, membership bases were built from scratch. This chapter examines the role of members in Estonian political parties, exploring why membership recruitment has taken place, and the purpose that party members serve. The micro-hypotheses outlined in Chapter Three will be tested

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<sup>238</sup> Allan Sikk (2003) A Cartel Party System in a Post-Communist Country? The Case of Estonia, Paper Presented for the ECPR General Conference, Marburg, 18-21 September 2003.

<sup>239</sup> <http://www.reform.ee/et/reformierakond/Pressiruum/uudised/5822/reformierakond-sai-ecsti-suurimaks-erakonnaks>

<sup>240</sup> The Estonian Socialist Party Foreign Society operated in exile during the communist period and provided some continuity but little organisational structure to the SDE.

utilising original survey and interview data, the analysis of party statutes, and newspaper reports.

The results suggest that institutional design has incentivised membership recruitment in Estonia. A highly decentralised municipal government structure, which is increasingly dominated by political parties rather than independent candidates, creates a requirement for large number of candidates in the regions. An organisational structure capable of supporting regional campaigns is therefore also needed. Meanwhile, the ‘open list’, small district electoral system encourages candidates to use grassroots tactics to differentiate themselves from their co-partisans during elections for the national parliament (*Riigikogu*). Culture also plays a role: Estonia’s small size creates an expectation of personal contact between political parties and the general public. Therefore, under such conditions, Estonian political parties find investment in membership recruitment to be worthwhile, despite the fact that their organisations concurrently run expensive electoral professional campaigns.

#### 4.1 THE ESTONIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM

Estonia is a unicameral parliamentary democracy. Every four years, 101 members are elected to the *Riigikogu*. Mandates are distributed using an open-list proportional representation system. The country is divided into twelve electoral districts, each allocating between seven and thirteen seats.<sup>241</sup> Estonia has a five percent electoral threshold, and electoral alliances have been banned since 2002.<sup>242</sup> Although

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<sup>241</sup> The Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs explains the electoral system here. <http://www.vm.ee/?q=node/10996> (accessed 16th June 2013).

<sup>242</sup> *Riigikogu* Parliament Election Act as amended on 7 June 2006, s29.

independent candidates are legally permitted to participate, they may be nominated in one district only, and cannot lodge an electoral list. No independent candidate has yet overcome these significant obstacles to achieve a mandate at the *Riigikogu* level.<sup>243</sup> The only new party to gain representation in the last decade, *Res Publica*, was a well-established debating club before it emerged as a formal political force.<sup>244</sup>

There are 227 municipalities in Estonia, and these are divided into two types, urban (*linnad*) and rural (*vallad*). Two-thirds of Estonia's municipalities have a population of less than 3,000 people. In the early years of democratisation, the major parties focussed primarily on national elections.<sup>245</sup> However, in 2002 a proposal to ban civic electoral alliances from local elections was debated and, although the law ultimately remained unchanged following a legal battle, the influence of civic lists had weakened by the time of the 2005 local elections.<sup>246</sup> Local electoral alliances still hold up to one third of seats in the municipalities,<sup>247</sup> but the national parties have gradually increased their penetration.

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<sup>243</sup> Riigikogu Parliament Election Act as amended on 7 June 2006, s27. However, an independent candidate was elected in the 2009 European election following a protest vote over 'closed list' electoral system. There are currently independent MPs in the Riigikogu, who defected from the Centre Party in 2012. They are likely to join SDE prior to the next election.

<sup>244</sup> Rein Taagepera, Meteoric Trajectory: The Res Publica Party in Estonia, *Democratization*, 13:1 (2006), pp78-94.

<sup>245</sup> [http://www.estonica.org/en/Society/Development\\_of\\_the\\_Estonian\\_political\\_landscape\\_until\\_2006/Local\\_elections\\_1993-2005/](http://www.estonica.org/en/Society/Development_of_the_Estonian_political_landscape_until_2006/Local_elections_1993-2005/) (accessed 19<sup>th</sup> January 2012). See also Vello Pettai (2003), 'Estonia', *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol 42 Issue 7-8, p937

<sup>246</sup> [http://www.estonica.org/en/Society/Development\\_of\\_the\\_Estonian\\_political\\_landscape\\_until\\_2006/Local\\_elections\\_1993-2005/](http://www.estonica.org/en/Society/Development_of_the_Estonian_political_landscape_until_2006/Local_elections_1993-2005/) (accessed 16<sup>th</sup> June 2013)

<sup>247</sup> Local electoral alliances persist partially because founding a new political party in Estonia is legally complex. Parties must recruit a minimum of 1,000 members, making the formation of regionally based parties virtually impossible in a country with less than one million voters. The rules regarding party membership are enforced by the National Electoral Committee, which requires parties to submit a precise membership list (s28 of the Public Information Act).

Overall, Estonia's electoral institutions are likely to expose the limitations of modern electoral professional strategies. It is difficult to imagine how an organisationally lean, highly centralised party could communicate localised messages across twelve parliamentary districts and 227 municipalities. Moreover, the availability of state funding is unlikely to fundamentally affect the value of members to political parties, since the costs of Estonian campaigns have spiralled and restrictions on non-state funding have become ever more stringent. Business donations are banned, and even relatively minor infringements of this law incur negative publicity and run the risk of prosecution. Members are unlikely to have a substantial fundraising role, but the constant upwards pressure on campaign budgets, combined with restrictive fundraising rules and the desire to avoid scandals, could lead to members being valued as a source of voluntary labour.

Therefore, according to Estonia's institutional design, we would expect to find that Estonian party members are valued as a recruiting pool for candidates, particularly at the local level. Parties may also seek to involve members in grassroots campaigning activities, which are well suited to small-scale campaigning in the regions. Given the tightly knit nature of Estonian communities and the requirement for candidates to campaign directly against their own co-partisans, party members are likely to be greatly appreciated in an 'ambassadorial' role.

## *The Parties*

This chapter examines the role of members in two Estonian political parties: the centre-right Reform Party (*Eesti Reformierakond*, ER), which follows a classical liberal ideology, and the centre-left Social Democratic Party (*Sotsiaaldemokraatlik Erakond*, SDE). Both parties have been a constant presence in the *Riigikogu* since the early 1990s, and have gradually increased their organisational complexity, establishing regional offices and further sub-units in many municipalities. In April 2013, the Reform Party had 13,416 members, while the SDE had 6,069 members. Both were growing rapidly.

The Estonian Reform Party (*Eesti Reformierakond*, ER) was established in 1994 by the then-President of the Bank of Estonia, Siim Kallas. In 1995 it won 19 out of 101 seats in the *Riigikogu*, and it has participated in government for all but three years since. It describes its policy as ‘based on simple liberal values like the individual’s freedom of choice, the protection of ambitious people and entrepreneurs, low taxes and tolerance.’<sup>248</sup> In addition to the local organisations, the Reform Party runs a Women’s Association, a Senior Citizen’s Club, and an Entrepreneurship Club. Its youth circle (which is open to young people aged between 15 and 35) has 4,500 participants, some of whom are also full members. It has seventeen regional organisations, each supported by at least one full time staff member, and maintains local organisations in 167 of Estonia’s 227 municipalities.

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<sup>248</sup> Ideology: A Better Estonian for Everyone, <http://www.reform.ee/en/About-us/Ideology/Ideology>, accessed 1<sup>st</sup> June 2012.

Despite having no direct links to the former regime, the Social Democratic Party (*Sotsiaaldemokraatlik Erakond*, SDE) and its predecessor parties initially struggled to find an audience in post-communist Estonia, where left-wing policies were greeted with the taunt of ‘Back to the USSR’. Its fortunes have recently improved: opinion polls conducted in 2012 suggested that SDE’s support currently stands at 30%,<sup>249</sup> slightly more than the Reform Party, indicating that Estonia’s party system is moving beyond its post-communist centre-right bias towards a more traditional left-right continuum. Given its previous ‘Cinderella’ status, SDE is the smallest of Estonia’s four main parties in both membership and representation. However, it is growing rapidly: between April 2012 and March 2013 its membership grew from 4,500 to 6,069.

The current party emerged from a complex series of mergers beginning in September 1990, when Estonia’s *perestroika*-era social democratic movements joined to form the Estonian Social Democratic Party (ESDP).<sup>250</sup> The party re-named itself the Social Democratic Party (SDE) on February 2004. Between the 1992 and 2011 elections, SDE’s representation in the *Riigikogu* ranged from a low of six seats to its current representation of 19 seats. The party has participated in government as junior coalition partners for several brief periods.<sup>251</sup> It has branches in each of Estonia’s seventeen regions, and is currently seeking to expand its coverage at municipality level. Four staff members liaise with the regions, each covering several regions. The party

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<sup>249</sup> Emor poll commissioned by the Baltic News Service, 27<sup>th</sup> March 2012. <http://news.err.ee/politics/a942201d-b718-47d9-b189-1457b5acebdd>

<sup>250</sup> In 1996, the ESDP merged with Estonian Rural Centre Party to form the Moderates, re-named the People’s Party Moderates following a merger with the centre-right People’s Party in 1999. More recently, mergers have taken place with the People’s Union (*Eestimaa Rahviliit*) in 2010 and the Russian Party of Estonia (*Vene Erakond Eestis*, VEE) in February 2012. The Social Democratic Party has also provided a home to several former Centre Party parliamentarians, including current leader Sven Mikser, who defected to the SDE in 2005.

<sup>251</sup> 1992-1994, 1994-1995, 1999-2001, 2007-2009.

has a youth wing, which is open to young people aged between 15 and 30. It also has a women's organisation and a parents' organisation. Thus, we can see that the Reform Party has a significant advantage over the Social Democrats in terms of resources. This may also affect their attitude towards members.

Party activists, councillors, MPs and staff from both parties were surveyed and interviewed for this research in April and May 2012. Copies of the survey can be found in both English and Estonian in appendix 1. Combined with party statutes and press reports, the results of the surveys and interviews are used to test the hypotheses developed in Chapter Three. The results are presented below.

#### 4.2 AMBASSADORS IN THE COMMUNITY

With Estonia's relatively small electoral districts, it was hypothesised that individualised, face-to-face campaigning would be important to Estonian political parties. Estonia is one of Europe's smallest countries, and its communities are tight-knit, particularly in rural areas. One MP remarked that the help of members is essential because, "Estonia is small, but not so small that you can meet everybody. You can't go everywhere yourself."<sup>252</sup> The survey results presented in Table 4.1 (p120) show that respondents from both parties thought that discussions with friends, families and neighbours are the most effective way of spreading their party's message.

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<sup>252</sup> Interview E2, Eesti Riigikogu, Tallinn, 7th May 2012.

Table 4.1: What is the most effective way of spreading your party's message?

	Very effective		Moderately Effective		Somewhat Effective		Not Effective	
	ER	SDE	ER	SDE	ER	SDE	ER	SDE
ER n=34 SDE n=32								
National TV and Radio	15.2%	53%	30.3%	18.7%	33.3%	18.7%	21.2%	9.4%
Local TV and Radio	6.3%	21.9%	37.5%	34.4%	21.9%	25%	34.4%	15.6%
Print Media	6.3%	28.1%	68.8%	59.4%	21.9%	12.5%	3.1%	0%
Social Media	18.8%	25%	40.6%	28.1%	25.0%	31.3%	16.6%	0%
Discussions with friends, family and neighbours	78.1%	71.8%	15.6%	21.9%	0%	6.3%	6.3%	0%

Almost four fifths of respondents from both parties believed that word of mouth was a 'very effective' means of spreading the party's message, and most of the rest though that it was a 'moderately effective' means of communication. By comparison, neither party's respondents were as convinced of the effectiveness of traditional mass media or new social media. However, there was substantial variation in the two parties' attitudes to the mass media. More than half of all ER respondents categorised communication through television and radio as only 'somewhat effective' or 'not effective' (Table 4.1), while the SDE was much more positive about the mass media.

The Reform Party's cynicism was perhaps surprising, since the Estonian media has traditionally leaned towards the centre-right. However, after governing throughout the global financial crisis, the Reform Party is acutely aware that mass media can be critical as often as it is supportive.<sup>253</sup> The Reform Party's political capital, already

<sup>253</sup> Interview E1, Reform Party Headquarters, Tallinn, 5<sup>th</sup> April 2012.

waning after a long period in government, plummeted after the Prime Minister, Andrus Ansip, vocally supported the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement in February 2012.<sup>254</sup> This is an emotive issue in Estonia, and was seized on as evidence that the Reform Party was out of touch with public opinion. Since then, the negative headlines have been relentless. SDE, on the other hand, are currently riding the crest of a wave of popularity, and are much more comfortable with the mass media as a result.

This exposes a significant limitation of the ‘electoral professional’ approach. There is no doubt that both parties invest considerable resources in ‘spin doctors’ and other electoral professional. However, theories of ‘catch-all’ parties, ‘electoral professional’ parties and ‘cartel’ parties all assume that, after employing skilled media professionals, parties will find the mass media the most efficient way of communicating their message. Yet news outlets are businesses. They compete for readers by publishing interesting stories, an industry that has become increasingly cut-throat since the emergence of social media. Given the choice of printing a press release generated by a party ‘spin doctor’ or a juicy story about corrupt politicians, most media outlets will choose the latter, regardless of their ideological slant.

Furthermore, mass media communications are not seen as an effective way of building bonds of trust with voters. Parties believe that communication through friends and family works because candidates are being introduced within the context of trusted networks. Table 4.2 (p129) shows that a third of Reform Party survey respondents and just under a third of Social Democrat respondents thought that the

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<sup>254</sup> PM’s ACTA Remarks Foil Reform Party Popularity Rating, ERR News, 27<sup>th</sup> February 2012, <http://news.err.ee/Politics/ad536af3-0492-419c-8c53-41f4e11758c0> (accessed 16th June 2013).

single most important function of members was to spread the party's message amongst friends, family and neighbours. As one Reform Party MP said:

“My main campaign was on the streets and I believe it worked better. If someone who is not known goes on television and says ‘vote for me’ I think if I’m a voter ‘why should I vote for you? I’ve never seen you, I know nothing about you.’”<sup>255</sup>

To some degree, this implies a different strategy for candidates who do not yet have an established media profile. One young MP took the idea of campaigning through networks of friends and family a stage further by formally asking local members to contact members of their own social group on his behalf. The purpose of these calls was to introduce the candidate, explain what he stood for, offer a personalised invitation to a meeting, and pass on the candidate's cell phone number if they had any questions. The MP explained that, “My team member can reach his parents better than I can, and if the parents have any additional questions, I can meet them.”<sup>256</sup> This is a classic example of candidates standing in an open-list electoral system, and making use of members as ‘ambassadors in the community’, both to promote their party's platform, and also to distinguish themselves from their co-partisans.

Networks within communities can be an effective means of demonstrating to the wider public that they are not a remote elite, and that they are accountable for the decisions that they take. A Social Democratic Party central office staff member stated

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<sup>255</sup> Interview E2, *Eesti Riigikogu*, Tallinn, 7<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

<sup>256</sup> Interview E2, *Eesti Riigikogu*, Tallinn, 7<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

that improving the party's reach into communities was the prime motivation for the party's recent membership recruitment campaign. She said:

“We had the idea to make this membership campaign, to show that it is not just that our people are talking in the TV or magazines. It is important that we have this face-to-face contact also to show that we are not somewhere far away, but we are here. That is why we also need this network, and it was a little bit too small.”<sup>257</sup>

This is related to the legitimisation function, discussed in Section 4.7 below. However, the aim of such ‘face-to-face contact’ is more than simply an attempt to keep up appearances as a mass party. The intention is to bring the party physically closer to voters through networks in communities. As Table 4.1 (p120) shows, this is seen by two ideologically very different parties as the best way of building trust with voters in these times of voter cynicism. The logic is clear: for politicians, appearing on the TV or in the print press is an essential part of modern politics, but face-to-face contact, while time-consuming, is a better way to build stable support.

Over the last five years, new social media has emerged as an important means of communication. Estonia is proud of its high-tech economy and all of the MPs, councillors and candidates interviewed used social media. Many also maintained blogs. Interviewees agreed that even elderly Estonians use Facebook and Twitter, with one Reform Party council candidate commenting that, “In Estonia, using the internet

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<sup>257</sup> Interview E4, SDE Headquarters, Tallinn, 10<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

is the same as eating bread.”<sup>258</sup> What is more surprising, then, is that parties did not place more faith in this new media. As shown in Table 4.1 (p120), only 18.1% of ER respondents and 25% of SDE respondents thought it was a ‘very effective’ means of communication.

Exploring these results through interviews, it emerged that internet communication was seen as suffering from the same deficiencies of trust as traditional mass media. Furthermore, there was a perception that voters switch off if they are bombarded via social media at election time. One MP, an assiduous blogger, pointed out that blogging is only effective if maintained between elections, building up a loyal following over time. “If we have elections and seventy people start writing at once,” he said, “people don’t pay attention anymore.”<sup>259</sup> In addition, some interviewees were wary of the power of social media, since bad news can spread as quickly as good news. As one Reform Party campaign manager pointed out, “A negative message can be spread to thousands in seconds.”<sup>260</sup>

Despite their reservations about its effectiveness, both ER and SDE representatives encouraged members to spread the party’s word using blogs and social media, acting as ‘ambassadors in the on-line community’.<sup>261</sup> However, these activities supplemented, rather than replaced, traditional face-to-face contact. One young SDE MP suggested that the impact of social media has so far had been overstated, explaining that:

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<sup>258</sup> Interview E3, Südalinn, Tallinn, 10<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

<sup>259</sup> Interview E2, Eesti Riigikogu, Tallinn, 7<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

<sup>260</sup> Interview E1, Reform Party Headquarters, Tallinn, 5<sup>th</sup> April 2012.

<sup>261</sup> To paraphrase Susan Scarrow’s description as members acting as ‘ambassadors in the community’.

“I personally spend quite a lot of energy communicating via social media, but I think most parties overdid it this last election. The amount of energy spent did not really have the hoped for result. So I think that most politics is still done in the traditional way, but obviously this [social media] is something that is on the rise.”<sup>262</sup>

The on-going importance of ‘ambassadors in the community’ speaks to the inherent limitations of the ‘electoral professional’ approach, which was predicted to dominate throughout new democracies. Naturally, both parties employ professional staff. The Reform Party, the wealthier of the two, has even hired Estonia’s top marketing agency to work on its branding. They are unapologetically fastidious about insisting on the use of yellow and blue background colours, and of their distinctive squirrel logo. Their glossy members’ magazine would not look out of place on a commercial newsstand. From this point of view, their communication style has much in common with the post-modern means of political marketing identified by Pippa Norris, where grass-roots campaigning takes place, but is directed by central office.<sup>263</sup> However, after a long period in government, both parties thought there was no substitute for face-to-face contact.

‘Ambassadors in the community’ are, therefore, important to Estonian political parties because they enable parties to build stable bonds with society in a way that is simply impossible through the mass media. They also help individual candidates to build

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<sup>262</sup> Interview E6, Eesti Riigikogu, Tallinn, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

<sup>263</sup> Pippa Norris (2000), *A Virtuous Cycle: Political Communications in Post-Industrial Societies*, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge).

networks in the community, since they perceive that the main question for sceptical Estonian voters is, “You can make promises, but can you keep them?”<sup>264</sup> In the view of Estonian politicians and activists, the only way to reassure voters of their good faith is to invest in the laborious process of building networks in individual communities.

#### 4.3 LOYAL AND RELIABLE VOTERS

Responding to a question about the most important function of members, one Social Democrat councillor colourfully summed up the majority view, exclaiming, “Votes! Votes! Votes! That is the most important thing!”<sup>265</sup> Although the Estonian party system is stable by the standards of post-communist democracies, it lacks the strong ties of intergenerational party loyalty found in long-established democracies, where party systems emerged from pre-existing social cleavages. Although interviewees expressed the view that voter behaviour has stabilised over the last five years, they meant that the majority of voters have decided on a preferred ideology, with attitudes towards the ‘flat rate’ of taxation usually viewed as the main dividing line between the centre-left and the centre-right. Loyalty towards a specific party was still in the process of formation, and interviewees saw membership recruitment as a means of promoting loyalty.<sup>266</sup>

In Chapter Three, it was hypothesised that members would be particularly valued as loyal voters where campaigning was banned on polling day. This was not a particular

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<sup>264</sup> Interview E2, Eesti Riigikogu, Tallinn, 7<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

<sup>265</sup> Interview E7, Tallinn City Council HQ, 17<sup>th</sup> May 2012

<sup>266</sup> Interview E1, Reform Party Headquarters, Tallinn, 5<sup>th</sup> April 2012.

concern in Estonia, however, since many voters now cast their ballots in advance of polling day, either through pre-polling or internet voting.<sup>267</sup> Nevertheless, membership recruitment was seen as an opportunity to ‘lock in’ voters’ support for their particular party. In these days of electronic communications, the marginal cost of maintaining inactive members is negligible. One SDE MP referred to this group of members as ‘consumers of information’, a captive audience for the party’s press releases and newsletters.<sup>268</sup> They hope that offering this information reinforces the bond between the member and the party, building loyalty over time. Therefore, while the role of members as loyal and reliable voters is not always a top priority for Estonian political parties, it is regarded as a useful by-product.

#### 4.4 FUNDRAISING

In Chapter Three, it was hypothesised that fundraising would not be a key role of party members, but that tightening party funding regulations might encourage parties to look to members as a source of free labour and/or funds. Although Estonian electoral law places few limitations on how money can be spent, restrictions on how money can be raised are much more extensive. Under the terms of the Political Parties Act, party funding may consist of membership fees, allocations from the state budget, donations from natural persons, and loans or credits.<sup>269</sup> Business donations

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<sup>267</sup> The Riigikogu Election Act, as amended in June 2006, governs permitted methods of campaigning. Electioneering is banned on polling day, preventing parties from running targeted operations to ‘get the vote out’. However, there are opportunities to vote, and for parties to influence votes, before polling day. In each municipality there is one pre-poll station, where residents can cast their votes between nine and thirteen days before elections.<sup>267</sup> Since the 2005 municipal election, voters have also had the opportunity to cast their ballot electronically using the internet. E-voting is available between four and six days prior to the election date.<sup>267</sup> In 2011, 15.4% of eligible voters cast their ballot on-line.<sup>267</sup>

<sup>268</sup> Interview E6, Eesti Riigikogu, Tallinn, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

<sup>269</sup> Sections 12.1(1) and (4), Political Parties Act 1994 (as amended).

are strictly banned. Political parties currently receive an annual payment of €1,000 (£855) from the state for each seat that they hold in the *Riigikogu* and free airtime through public broadcasting prior to elections. However, this comes nowhere near to funding the campaigns that Estonian parties would like to run. Attempts by political parties to circumvent the ban on business donations have led to frequent funding scandals in recent years. For example, in May 2012 both the Reform Party and the Centre Party were accused of ‘funneling’ money of undeclared origin into their parties’ budgets.<sup>270</sup> Interviewees from both parties expressed the view that ‘we can always use more money’.<sup>271</sup>

However, parties were concerned that asking members for money might be an unacceptable imposition, and appeared to be more comfortable with the idea of using members as voluntary labour. The Reform Party has a basic membership fee of €10. The Social Democratic party asks unwaged members to pay €5, those earning less than €1,000 a year to pay €10 and higher earners to pay €20. However, non-payment does not result in loss of membership in either party. One SDE MP admitted that:

“Only 15 to 20% of our party members actually pay anything into the budget in terms of membership fees, and at least 60% of membership fees come from leading politicians. This is something that we are working on this year, trying to explain to our members that we are investing in a common idea, and for that money you will get events and things. I don’t think a single party has ever

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<sup>270</sup> ‘Financing Scandal Expands to Centre Party, ERR News, 25<sup>th</sup> May 2012, <http://news.err.ee/politics/c6ed9839-f136-4e13-a498-0c3d1d48203c> (accessed 30th May 2012).

<sup>271</sup> Interview E6, Eesti Riigikogu, Tallinn, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2012; Interview E2, Eesti Riigikogu, Tallinn, 7<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

enforced the rule that in order to be a member you have to pay a membership fee.”<sup>272</sup>

The Reform Party insists that membership fees are compulsory. However, true to the party’s free-market ideology, discounts are offered as a means of incentivising membership recruitment. If a member recruits a new member, their annual membership fee is waived. The new recruit’s first year’s membership of the Reform Party is also free. Therefore, while the *de jure* position in both parties is that payment of a small membership fee is compulsory, the reality is that both parties would rather have an extra member on their register than let members lapse over non-payment.

*Table 4.2 Perceptions of the Most Important Role of Members*

Question: What is the most important function of members in your party (choose only one answer)		
ER n=34 SDE n=32	ER	SDE
To contribute money	3%	0%
To spread the party’s message	33.3%	28.1%
To develop help develop policies	42.4%	53.1%
To demonstrate that the party has the support of the people, not just the elite	18.2%	9.4%
To help with election campaigns	3%	9.4%
To provide candidates for local and national elections	0%	3.1%

As Table 4.2 shows, both the Reform Party and the Social Democratic Party ranked contributing money as one of the least important functions of party members. It is therefore unsurprising that neither party holds small-scale fundraisers, nor do they ask their members for money at congresses, meetings or social events. They prefer to keep these events exclusively for party business or socialising. Indeed, interviewees

<sup>272</sup> Interview E6, Eesti Riigikogu, Tallinn, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

expressed some distaste for what they perceived as American-style fundraising, described by one interviewee as “holding dinners where they pump people for money”.<sup>273</sup>

To a limited extent, Estonian political parties have the luxury of being relaxed about membership fundraising because generous state funding covers their basic operating costs. However, this money does not stretch all that far, considering the high costs of election campaigns; interviewees from both parties expressed views like ‘democracy is expensive’.<sup>274</sup> It is commonplace for candidates from both parties to make significant financial contributions to their own campaigns, although this is not a formal requirement.<sup>275</sup> The Social Democratic Party requires MPs to donate a portion of their salary to the party. The Reform Party makes no such demand formally, but MPs must raise money for their own regional election campaigns.<sup>276</sup>

The role of business donations in Estonian politics is difficult to gauge. They are technically illegal, but almost certainly exist across all parties. Interviewees suggested that ‘in kind’ donations are common: for example, a supportive business might pay the bill for the printing of a leaflet. A 2009 investigation by the *Äripäev* (Business Day) newspaper accused three Reform Party politicians of allowing businessmen to pick up the tab for campaign expenses.<sup>277</sup> Some interviewees couched discussions of business

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<sup>273</sup> Interview E1, Reform Party Headquarters, Tallinn, 5<sup>th</sup> April 2012.

<sup>274</sup> Interview E6, Eesti Riigikogu, Tallinn, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

<sup>275</sup> Indeed, the majority of survey respondents in both parties believed that ability to contribute financially was not an important quality in a candidate. See table 4.5, p142.

<sup>276</sup> Interview E2, Eesti Riigikogu, Tallinn, 7<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

<sup>277</sup> Dodgy Party Financing No Surprise, Say Commentators, Estonian Public Broadcasting (website), <http://news.err.ee/politics/b6f5c156-7822-40c0-892a-aa007bb2f38d> (accessed 23rd May 2012).

funding in terms of “donations from friends who are entrepreneurs”, but others acknowledged that “each party has a few companies that have their back”.<sup>278</sup>

Although membership fees make up only a small portion of overall party funding in Estonia, both parties pass the money raised to local branches, where it is used to cover the cost of meetings and social events. The SDE also gives one extra euro to local organisations for every euro that is raised from membership fees. This incentivises branches to recruit more members and to ensure that they pay their fees.<sup>279</sup> However, both parties seemed to be more comfortable asking rank-and-file members for their time than their money. As the poorest of the main four parties, SDE interviewees talked of their reliance on members as a source of voluntary labour. A central office campaign manager said:

“A lot of people in the party work for free. We are thinking very strongly about how to hold these people. We are open to them. We are next to them. We want them to feel good here. We want to thank them always that they have this mission to be a Social Democrat.”<sup>280</sup>

The SDE was preparing to ask members to make a greater financial contribution, but interviewees expressed uncertainty about how this would be received, since this would be a novel innovation in Estonian political culture. One MP expressed uncertainty

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<sup>278</sup> Interview E3, Südalinn, Tallinn, 10<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

<sup>279</sup> Interview E5, SDE Headquarters, Tallinn, 10<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

<sup>280</sup> Interview E4, SDE Headquarters, Tallinn, 10<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

that members would be “willing to chip in when it comes to financing all the activities that are necessary for the party to be successful”.<sup>281</sup>

In summary, theories that state subsidies discourage investment in party-building strategies simply do not hold in Estonia. The sums involved are insufficient. Although parties are reluctant to squeeze their members for financial contributions the SDE, in particular, relies on voluntary labour, and hopes to raise more money from members in the future. This raises an interesting question about Katz and Mair’s cartel party theory, which assumes that small parties will accept their position in the pecking order, rather than gathering every possible resource to challenge the status quo. As the smallest and poorest of Estonia’s parliamentary parties, SDE is gathering every resource available in order to take advantage of a recent surge of popularity. In the words of one SDE councillor, “Campaigns need a lot of money. Now, to make it a little bit cheaper, if you have the members you can use them in the course of the campaign.”<sup>282</sup>

#### 4.5 POLICY IDEAS AND ‘LINKAGE’

In Chapter Three, it was hypothesised that policies would be formulated primarily by party elites. However, it was interesting to note that the survey data (Table 4.2, p129) suggests that both the Reform Party and the Social Democratic Party view input into the policy-making process as the single most important function of party members. Interviews revealed that policy-making at the parliamentary level might best be

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<sup>281</sup> Interview E6, Eesti Riigikogu, Tallinn, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

<sup>282</sup> Interview E7, Tallinn City Council HQ, 17<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

described as ‘collaborative’. Both parties make conspicuous efforts to involve members, but the final decision rests with the party elites. There was also variation between policy making at the national and local levels, with considerable freedom afforded to local council groups at the municipality level.

As might be expected of a left-wing party, SDE’s policy-making process is hierarchical, allowing for a degree of upwards transmission from local branches to the General Assembly. According to the party’s statutes, the highest policy-making body is the General Assembly (*Üldkogu*), which meets annually. This is a policy-making forum, although most disagreements are ironed out at an earlier stage in the policy-making process and votes are usually a formality.<sup>283</sup> Delegates are elected to the General Assembly. Between General Assembly meetings, the supreme body is the Council (*Volikogu*), which meets at least four times a year. The Council comprises the twenty executive board members and two elected representatives from each region (except Tallinn, which has six representatives).

The *Volikogu* also runs twelve sub-committees on different policy areas, ranging from minority rights to foreign affairs. According to the party’s web site, these committees are mandated to ‘actively involve the membership in policy-making’.<sup>284</sup> In addition, the Executive Board (*Juhatus*) comprises twenty members, is chaired by the party chairman, and is elected to the General Assembly biannually. Each of the seventeen regions also has a formal committee structure, including policy committees. As a Social Democrat central office staff member summarised the overall process:

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<sup>283</sup> Interview E4, SDE Headquarters, Tallinn, 10<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

<sup>284</sup> <http://www.sotsdem.ee/erakonnast/volikogu/volikogu-komisjonid/>

“Mostly we work in small groups to make platforms [policies]. Then the congress comes together to decide. It is not like different groups make different papers and we choose which paper to take. Mostly, we have one paper that goes through different stages – the council, the board, local organisations, before congress. All the local organisations have their own congress, where a board member goes and introduces it [the policy paper]. It is not usually a fight by the time of [the] Congress.”<sup>285</sup>

In the Reform Party, all members are invited to attend the *Üldkogu*, but discussion of party business is minimal. The party chairman (currently the Estonia’s Prime Minister, Andrus Ansip) presents an overview of the previous year’s activities and members are treated to entertainment, usually in the form of a popular band.<sup>286</sup> Party policy is primarily decided at the *Juhatus* (Executive), which contains fifteen members. It is chaired by the party chairman and elected biannually. The *Volikogu* (Council) brings together all the leaders of the local districts. It meets biannually, and approves the candidates’ lists for *Riigikogu* and European Parliament elections. Candidates’ lists for municipal elections are approved locally. Although all members are entitled to stand for election to, and vote in elections for, the *Juhatus* and the *Volikogu*, the Reform Party’s elite-led policy-making structure appears to be more in line with the classical ‘cadre party’ typology,

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<sup>285</sup> Interview E4, SDE Headquarters, Tallinn, 10<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

<sup>286</sup> Interview E1, Reform Party Headquarters, Tallinn, 5<sup>th</sup> April 2012.

However, party elites are careful to ensure that members feel involved. Their input into party policies primarily takes place through participation in working groups. These discussions take place around the country, in a convivial atmosphere, often over food and drink, and are usually led by the MP who is the spokesperson for the issue under discussion. Local members and councillors are invited to attend. However, this is fundamentally a listening exercise, designed to make members *feel* involved. An MP commented that, “People are interested to hear what will happen in their region. Then they feel members of parliament come to their place and discuss topics with them. They really appreciate it.”<sup>287</sup>

Eighteen months before each election, the Reform Party organises working groups on different topics – health, education, social issues, rural concerns – and gathers ideas for the manifesto. Members can attend a working group personally, and they can also contribute over the internet, phone or email. A senior Reform Party central office staffer commented that, “All ideas are considered, but many cannot be used because they are impractical, usually costing too much.”<sup>288</sup>

Although the Reform and Social Democrat parties’ formal policy-making processes are quite distinct from each other on paper, it is open to question whether they are very dissimilar in practice. Reflecting common attitudes in both parties, one SDE MP noted that, “Most members do not have the sufficient expertise to contribute substantially to rather complex issues.”<sup>289</sup> Furthermore, Estonia’s small size means

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<sup>287</sup> Interview E2, Eesti Riigikogu, Tallinn, 7<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

<sup>288</sup> Interview E1, Reform Party Headquarters, Tallinn, 5<sup>th</sup> April 2012.

<sup>289</sup> Interview E6, Eesti Riigikogu, Tallinn, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

that party members can often discuss ideas and concerns directly with members of parliament, and these informal practices are perhaps even more common in the Social Democratic Party, where the membership is smaller and where MPs are less occupied with the business of government. The same Social Democratic Party MP said:

“People who do not hold any high party positions but have expertise in certain fields have very easy access to Members of Parliament or other people of high rank. I think this is the most efficient way of influencing policy.”<sup>290</sup>

While such informal processes are neither transparent nor objectively ‘fair’, it is clear that both parties wish to strike a balance between gathering new ideas and keeping members involved, while avoiding vote losing commitments, public disagreements or inefficiency. In reality, few modern parties allow their members to ‘impose’ policies on the elite, and the Reform Party and the Social Democratic Party are no exceptions. Both look for ways to gain the advantages of membership involvement in policymaking while avoiding the potential drawbacks.

Estonian parties are also clearly driven by the need to provide ‘purposive incentives’ in order to attract members, usually involvement in the policy-making process.<sup>291</sup> This is reflected in Table 4.3 (p137), which shows that survey respondents from both parties agreed that the best way to attract more members was to offer prospective members more opportunities to shape policies. Interviewees from both parties were conscious that new recruits might hope to contribute in this way, and some interviewees expressed doubts that members were satisfied with their current role in policymaking.

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<sup>290</sup> Interview E6, Eesti Riigikogu, Tallinn, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

<sup>291</sup> Peter B Clark and James Q Wilson, ‘Incentive Systems: A Theory of Organizations’, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 6 (1991) pp 129-66.

One SDE councillor commented that, “People who want to be active members of any party are *yearning* for the possibility to take part in decision-making or formulating the principles.”<sup>292</sup>

*Table 4.3: If your party wants to recruit more members, it should...*

	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	ER	SDE	ER	SDE	ER	SDE	ER	SDE
ER n=34 SDE n=32								
Organise more social events	38.7%	40.6%	48.4%	53.1%	9.7%	3.1%	3.2%	0%
Create more career opportunities	12.9%	28.1%	29.0%	37.5%	45.2%	28.1%	12.9%	0%
Appoint a more charismatic leader	25.8%	31.2%	61.3%	46.9%	9.7%	9.4%	3.2%	6.3%
Give members more say in candidate selection	51.6%	43.7%	45.2%	43.7%	0%	12.5%	3.2%	0%
Offer members more opportunities to shape policies	58.1%	68.7%	41.9%	28.1%	0%	3.1%	0%	0%

While members’ influence over national policy is limited, both the Reform Party and the Social Democrats allow local parties almost unlimited freedom in policy-making at the municipal level. A Reform Party organiser said:

“Problems in Tallinn are not like problems in Tartu. The important thing is that people who join the party know what liberalism is. Then they use these principles in their decision-making. [The] Central Office intrudes as little as possible.”<sup>293</sup>

<sup>292</sup> Interview E7, Tallinn City Council HQ, 17<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

<sup>293</sup> Interview E1, Reform Party Headquarters, Tallinn, 5<sup>th</sup> April 2012.

Municipal campaigns focus on local concerns. Examples cited by interviewees included whether or not to give planning permission for a new golf course.<sup>294</sup> Although these decisions are of little concern to national politicians or the national media, they can arouse passions locally, giving an important outlet for those who seek purposive incentives. Estonian parties take local elections very seriously. This, perhaps, explains why so many survey respondents from both parties (ER 42.4% and SDE 53.1%) believed that contributing to policy-making was the single most important contribution that members made (Table 4.2, p129). However, further research would be required on this specific topic to reach any reliable conclusions.

Given the post-communist context, it is interesting to note the programmatic consistency of both the Reform Party and the Social Democratic Party at the national level. Both parties take distinct, identifiable positions on key issues,<sup>295</sup> and both are anxious to restrict party membership to those who shared their fundamental ideological vision. The Reform Party describes its policy as ‘based on simple liberal values like the individual’s freedom of choice, the protection of ambitious people and entrepreneurs, low taxes and tolerance.’<sup>296</sup> It has consistently advocated and implemented market-oriented business policies, including a low flat-rate income tax and a 0% corporate tax, and was unapologetic about implementing an extreme austerity programme during the financial crisis. ER primarily attracts votes from

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<sup>294</sup> Interview E3, S udalinn, Tallinn, 10<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

<sup>295</sup> This was particularly apparent during the financial crisis, when the Reform Party led government stuck firmly to a classically liberal economic programme despite pressure to adopt a Keynesian approach of deficit spending.

<sup>296</sup> Ideology: A Better Estonian for Everyone, <http://www.reform.ee/en/About-us/Ideology/Ideology>, accessed 1<sup>st</sup> June 2012.

young, educated professionals, particularly in urban areas. It has an in-house think tank ‘Academy of Liberalism’<sup>297</sup> and the Friedrich Naumann Stiftung.<sup>298</sup> It maintains strong links with its European sister parties.

Ideologically, the Social Democratic Party looks to European traditions of social democracy. The party has very close links with its sister organisation in Finland. It is a member of the Party of European Socialists and the Socialist International. SDE also has informal links with Estonia’s traditionally weak trades unions.<sup>299</sup> Its core belief is that ‘the strong must help the weak and support those who are not as fortunate in life’. The party argues for the values of ‘fairness, caring and solidarity’,<sup>300</sup> and opposes the flat tax, which is the single biggest dividing line between left and right in Estonian politics. In the 2011 election, the Social Democrats’ main policies were to triple child support payments, reduce VAT on essential groceries from 20% to 5% and double funding for advanced vocational training.<sup>301</sup> They are explicit in promoting the welfare state model.

Therefore, both parties appear to take policy consistency seriously, and they have more complex policy-making mechanisms than might be expected from pure ‘vote seeking’ or ‘office seeking’ parties. The Reform Party has an in-house think tank and the SDE has a complex committee system within the party. Although the amount of

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<sup>297</sup> An associated think tank based in the same building as the Reform Party headquarters.

<sup>298</sup> A German think tank promoting free-market liberal values, with links to Germany’s Free Democratic Party.

<sup>299</sup> Interview E6, Eesti Riigikogu, Tallinn, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

<sup>300</sup> The Social Manifesto (approved by the General Assembly SDE 19/02/2012) <http://www.sotsdem.ee/maailmavaade/sotsiaaldemokraatlik-manifest/>

<sup>301</sup> <http://valimised2011.sotsdem.ee/> (accessed 1<sup>st</sup> June 2011)

influence that ordinary members can achieve in the policy-making process is open to question, both parties attempt to involve members. This is viewed both as a means of attracting new members, and also as a potential source of good ideas.

#### 4.6 A RECRUITING POOL FOR CANDIDATES

In Chapter Three, it was hypothesised that Estonia's small local government districts, in which competition is often highly politicised, would generate a significant demand for council candidates. Interviewees from both parties often joked that any party member who showed more than a passing interest in policy-making would instantly be invited to stand for the local council. In a country with 227 municipalities, each requiring between 7 and 63 candidates, even the largest parties struggle to find enough good candidates for local government elections. One of the Social Democrats' primary aims for the October 2013 municipal election is to field at least one candidate in each municipality, a task that required considerable organisational effort.<sup>302</sup>

In these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that Estonian parties demanded shorter periods of prior affiliation from local than national candidates. As table 4.4 (p141) shows, both parties were likely to consider nominating good candidates for local government even if they were not party members, but were much less likely to extend the same flexibility to the national list.

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<sup>302</sup> Interview E4, SDE Headquarters, Tallinn, 10<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

Table 4.4: Length of prior affiliation

Q: How long do potential candidates need to be members before standing for election on your party's list?

	Local Elections		National Elections	
	ER	SDE	ER	SDE
ER n=34 SDE n=32				
Suitable candidates do not need to be party members	56.3%	87.5%	9.4%	21.9%
Candidates need to join the party before standing on the party ticket	28.1%	9.3%	50%	53.1%
Candidates need to have been members for several months before becoming candidates	3.1%	3.1%	6.3%	12.5%
Candidates should be members for a year before becoming candidates	12.5%	0%	18.8%	12.5%
Candidates should be members for three years before becoming candidates	0%	0%	15.6%	0%

There was a notable difference between the Social Democratic Party and the Reform Party in terms of their willingness to nominate non-members to party lists. As Table 4.4 demonstrates, most SDE respondents believed that local government candidates need not be party members at all, while just only half of the Reform Party respondents would accept local candidates who were not members. At the national level, Reform Party respondents were far more likely than their SDE counterparts to insist that prospective candidates should have been party members for a year or more. It is likely that these differences in perception are linked to the relative availability of candidates. With its higher regional penetration, the Reform Party is more likely to have better options for nominating party members to stand as municipal candidates, while the SDE struggles to find sufficient candidates.

Table 4.5: What qualities are important in choosing candidates for the Riigikogu?

	Very important		Somewhat important		Not very important		Not important at all	
	ER	SDE	ER	SDE	ER	SDE	ER	SDE
ER n=34 SDE n=32								
Ability to contribute financially	0%	0%	9.4%	3.1%	53.1%	34.4%	37.5%	59.4%
Well-known in the local community	65.6%	56.4%	28.1%	40.6%	6.3%	0%	0%	0%
Ideologically loyal	53.1%	34.4%	40.6%	56.3%	6.3%	6.2%	0%	0%
Strong leadership	32.3%	21.9%	41.9%	46.9%	6.5%	18.8%	0%	12.5%
Works hard for local people	58.1%	37.5%	35.5%	59.4%	0%	3.1%	0%	0%
Charismatic	33.3%	37.5%	53.3%	34.4%	6.7%	25%	6.7%	0%

There were also subtle differences in perceptions between the two parties regarding the qualities that were most desirable in *Riigikogu* candidates (see table 4.5). While there was agreement across both parties that ability to contribute financially was not very important, and that name-recognition was crucial, the Reform Party also valued hard work at the local level and loyalty. This, again, is likely explained by the relative positions of the two parties. The Reform Party, having been in government for a long time, has no shortage of ‘big hitters’, while the Social Democratic Party is playing catch-up in this respect.

Estonia remains a young democracy, and its parties are still developing organisationally. E Spencer Wellhofer posited that there are three stages of organisational development and elite socialisation. At stage one, the boundary between members and supporters was likely to be blurred. At stage two, prior affiliation would be required for elite positions. At stage three, parties would start to

require longer affiliation for elite positions, increasing loyalty to the organisation.<sup>303</sup> This pattern is clear in the relative development of the SDE and ER. Having long struggled to gain a foothold in Estonia's party system, the SDE has a relatively underdeveloped organisation, and cannot always be fussy if it hopes to field a full slate of candidates, particularly at the municipal level. The ER, however, requires a greater level of prior affiliation, particularly at the *Riigikogu* level, placing a higher premium on length of membership and ideological loyalty.

The importance of name recognition has become slightly problematic in local government elections, particularly in elections for Tallinn City Council, where well-known personalities (often musicians or sports personalities in the case of the Centre Party, and government ministers in the case of the Reform Party) top party lists even though they have no intention of taking seats on the Council. One Social Democrat MP acknowledged, the use of 'vote magnets' (as they are described in Estonia) "creates some problems in terms of voters' trust in politicians", but expressed frustration that "I don't see a way out of it either". It is, of course, typical of proportional electoral systems that party lists are topped by candidates with strong name recognition.

Both parties view their youth wings as recruiting grounds, not just for members but also for the next generation of Estonian politicians. The Reform Party's Youth website explicitly states that 'the aim of the Youth Council is to guarantee the emergence of new exemplary members and politicians of the Reform Party.'<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> E Spencer Wellhofer (1972), 'Dimensions of Party Development', *The Journal of Politics*, Vol 34, p158.

<sup>304</sup> <http://www.reform.ee/en/About-us/Organisation/Estonian-Reform-Party-Youth-Council>

However, the emergence of the next generation is not always wholly without problems for the current elite, who may resent competition for prized spots on the national list. Some also expressed dismay at the growing dominance of ‘career politicians’. One veteran of the transition noted that:

“It is now a career which one can start in youth organisations and continue at municipality, then the government or parliament if you are clever enough. I am representing a generation that says if you want success in politics then you have to show you can be successful in another part of life. You must gain something before you become a ‘broiler’ in the political system.”<sup>305</sup>

While the new parties of central and east Europe are not yet in a position to demand long prior affiliation, selecting candidates from the membership pool allows a degree of confidence that candidates are committed to party policies.<sup>306</sup> This reduces the possibility of embarrassing public disagreements, and even defections, at a future date. As the more organisationally advanced party, the ER is now taking formal steps to nurture the next generation of its elite. The difference between ER and SDE’s current priorities, taking into account their relative strengths, suggests that, as the supply of members increases over time, party loyalty will become a bigger factor in candidate selection for SDE as well.

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<sup>305</sup> Interview E7, Tallinn City Council HQ, 17<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

<sup>306</sup> Susan Scarrow, *Political Parties and their Members: Organizing for Victory in Britain and Germany*, Oxford University Press p133.

#### 4.7 MEMBERS AS A GRASSROOTS CAMPAIGNING RESOURCE

It has been widely argued that parties ‘internally created’ in the post-communist context would rely on the ‘electoral model’,<sup>307</sup> eschewing the arduous and time-consuming business of electoral mobilisation. The Reform Party is a classic ‘internally created’ party, having been formed from within the government, and having been in power for all but three years since the transition. However, Chapter Three hypothesised that Estonia’s decentralised electoral system would encourage grassroots-style campaigning, including attempts to contact individual voters.

Surveys and interviews indicate that both parties utilise old-fashioned pavement politics: distributing handbills, going door-to-door and setting up street stalls. Activity between elections takes the form of apolitical campaigns about local issues, for example moving a bus stop, opening a local kindergarten or fixing holes in the road. One council candidate told of a long-standing and successful campaign against a new golf course in Tallinn.<sup>308</sup> Open political competition breaks out only in the months immediately prior to elections.

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<sup>307</sup> Ingrid van Biezen (2003), *Political Parties in New Democracies*.

<sup>308</sup> Interview E3, Südalinn, Tallinn, 10<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

Table 4.6 Participation of members in grassroots activities (local elections)

	Often		Sometimes		Rarely		Never	
	ER	SDE	ER	SDE	ER	SDE	ER	SDE
ER n=34 SDE n=32								
Contact voters by telephone	27.3%	3.1%	45.5%	40.6%	24.2%	28.1%	3.0%	15.6%
Contact voters door-to-door	25.0%	6.2%	46.9%	40.6%	12.5%	25.0%	15.6%	25.0%
Distribute handbills door-to-door	18.2%	21.9%	45.5%	34.8%	30.3%	28.1%	6.1%	6.2%
Hand out leaflets in the street	48.4%	46.9%	32.3%	28.1%	16.1%	21.9%	3.2%	0%
Organise and attend meetings	59.4%	59.4%	37.5%	21.9%	3.1%	0%	0%	0%
Participate in rallies and events	65.6%	56.3%	28.1%	37.5%	6.3%	3.1%	0%	0%
Persuade friends, family and neighbours to vote for the party	78.1%	65.6%	18.8%	28.1%	3.1%	3.1%	0%	0%

Tables 4.6 and 4.7 (above and p147) summarise the frequency with which parties engage in grassroots activities. Perhaps surprisingly, the ‘internally created’ Reform Party makes more use of direct voter contacting than the ‘externally created’ Social Democratic Party, most likely because they have the resources to do so, and also because they had little access to positive media coverage at the time of research. Three quarters of Reform Party respondents indicated that activists ‘often’ or ‘sometimes’ contacted voters door-to-door or by telephone during national election campaigns, while this figure was less than half for Social Democratic Party respondents. Both parties used activists to distribute handbills on the street, to organise or attend meetings, and to participate in rallies. Anecdotal evidence suggests that members also engage in arguably less ethical (though not currently illegal) activities like ‘helping’ elderly people to vote using the internet.

Table 4.7 Participation of members in grassroots activities (national elections)

	Often		Sometimes		Rarely		Never	
	ER	SDE	ER	SDE	ER	SDE	ER	SDE
ER n=34 SDE n=32								
Contact voters by telephone	25%	9.3%	40.6%	25%	28.1%	53.1%	6.3%	15.6%
Contact voters door-to-door	15.6%	6.2%	43.8%	37.5%	28.1%	28.1%	12.5%	28.1%
Distribute handbills door-to-door	21.2%	21.7%	48.5%	46.9%	30.3%	25%	3%	3.1%
Hand out leaflets in the street	42.4%	50%	39.4%	43.8%	15.2%	9.3%	3%	0%
Organise and attend meetings	43.8%	46.9%	43.8%	50%	12.5%	3.1%	0%	0%
Participate in rallies and events	46.7%	56.3%	46.7%	37.5%	6.7%	3.1%	0%	0%
Persuade friends, family and neighbours to vote for the party	77.4%	59.4%	19.4%	34.8%	3.2%	6.2%	0%	0%

There were subtle differences in tactics between national elections (table 4.7) and local elections (table 4.6). Both parties were more likely to ask members to contact voters in their own homes (by telephone and door-to-door) during local campaigns than national campaigns. Members were also more likely to attend or organise rallies and meetings during local campaigns than national campaigns. Overall, this suggests that parties are slightly more likely to use grassroots tactics in local campaigns than national campaigns, a result that is in keeping with the hypothesis that grassroots campaigning is more likely to be used where electoral districts are small.

Grassroots tactics might also persist in national campaigns for several reasons. Firstly, as discussed earlier, all parties find it difficult to raise sufficient funds to cover the high cost of parliamentary campaigns. Several SDE interviewees spoke of using volunteer labour to reduce the cost of campaigns. “If you have the members,” said one Tallinn councillor, “Then you can use them in the course of the campaign, distributing materials and organising or doing technical works.”

Secondly, Estonian members of parliament are elected using an open list system.<sup>309</sup> This means that candidates must establish a ‘unique personal reputation to stand out in a crowded field of co-partisans’, in addition to competing against other parties’ candidates.<sup>310</sup> Therefore, with the exception of the biggest names, each candidate runs his or her own campaign in parallel to the party’s main election campaign. Relatively unknown newcomers must rely on grassroots campaigns to win votes on the regional list, while well-established figures (for example, government ministers) gain votes on the back of their name recognition, often standing on the central list. The best way to gain votes while avoiding conflict with co-partisans is to invest in personalised strategies.

Thirdly, as noted above (Table 4.1, p120), Reform Party elites were dubious about the efficacy of mass media campaigns, having faced a barrage of negative press in recent years. A mass media strategy may, as van Biezen suggests, be ‘quick and easy’. However, interviews suggest that parties are reluctant to put all their eggs in one basket, and seek to maximise their chances of success by engaging in both a ‘ground war’ and an ‘air war’. One Social Democratic Party MP summed up the general consensus:

“There are basically two different strategies that are about universal. One is presence in the media and the other is face-to-face contact. I don’t know

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<sup>309</sup> Regional lists are open: voters can choose candidates as well as parties.

<sup>310</sup> Matthew S Shugart, ‘Electoral “Efficiency” and the move to mixed-member systems’, *Electoral Studies*, 2001, 20, p183

which one of them is more efficient. I've had mixed results from that, so usually everyone does both of them.”

For Estonian political parties, the fundamental question is not whether or not it is convenient, but whether it works.

#### 4.8 LEGITIMACY BENEFITS

Proponents of the ‘catch all’, ‘electoral professional’ and ‘cartel party’ theories argue that political parties downgrade the costs and benefits of membership, but nonetheless maintain a membership base in order to ‘keep up appearances’. Although it was not possible to derive an institutional hypothesis from this literature, it is interesting to consider how Estonian parties view the issue of ‘legitimacy benefits’. Interviews revealed that Estonian parties did value members for reasons of legitimisation, although this was not considered to be their primary function. Surveys found that 18.2% of ER respondents and 9.4% of SDE respondents thought ‘demonstrating that the party has the support of the people, not just the elite’ was the most important function of members (table 4.2, p129).

However, the two parties described the legitimising role of members in quite different terms. The SDE expressed an idealistic view that membership parties legitimise the political system as a whole. They spoke of the desire to emulate “the democracy that we are used to, in the 60s onwards European sense”.<sup>311</sup> There was some nostalgia for

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<sup>311</sup> Interview E7, Tallinn City Council HQ, 17<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

the days of the ‘mass party’ in Europe, even linking the current crisis in Europe to the growing distance between ordinary citizens and elites.<sup>312</sup>

The Reform Party, on the other hand, was more inclined to emphasise the importance of members as evidence that it was popular and in touch with ordinary Estonians. Indeed, their initial decision to invest in membership recruitment was driven by a desire to improve the party’s image. “Ten or fifteen years ago, people thought we were a party just for bankers,” said one Reform Party MP, “so we made a conscious decision to widen our base.”<sup>313</sup> At the time of the interviews (April and May 2012), the Reform Party was locked in a long-term race with the Centre Party to become the biggest party. In March 2013, they announced, with evident pride, that they had become the biggest party, with 13,416 members, an increase of 3,000 on the previous year. Their closest rival, the Centre Party, had 13,410 members.<sup>314</sup>

While both parties agreed that it was important for the public to see that they had a membership base, they naturally disagreed about whether the size of that base mattered. A Reform Party interviewee suggested that voters “like to be on the winners’ side all the time”, arguing that:

“If you look stronger they trust you, if you look bigger they trust you, they think if 10 or 11,000 people have joined, why shouldn’t I? If they see a very small party, then it doesn’t work.”<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>312</sup> Interview E7, Tallinn City Council HQ, 17th May 2012.

<sup>313</sup> Interview E2, Eesti Riigikogu, Tallinn, 7th May 2012.

<sup>314</sup> <http://www.reform.ee/et/reformierakond/Pressiruum/uudised/5822/reformierakond-sai-estis-suurimaks-erakonnaks>

<sup>315</sup> Interview E2, Eesti Riigikogu, Tallinn, 7th May 2012.

Interviewees from the Social Democratic Party, which is half the size of the Reform Party (but also growing rapidly), were dismissive of the idea that size matters, with one MP arguing that:

“If you look at correlation between party membership and the popularity of the party, there is almost none. The Social Democrats are currently the smallest party by far, but we are doing best in the polls.”<sup>316</sup>

At the same time, however, SDE interviewees acknowledged that they would be unable to translate their current poll rating into electoral success without an increased presence in the ground. This was their main motivation for investing heavily in membership recruitment. They were more concerned with their relative lack of grassroots penetration in the regions, and a shortage of council candidates going into the October 2013 municipal elections, rather than how voters might perceive their relative strength in terms of membership numbers.

Neither party thought that recruiting ‘paper’ members purely for image purposes would fool voters, and both parties were anxious that an expansion of the membership base should not be achieved by diluting the ‘quality’ of members. They aimed to recruit only members who shared the ideological goals of the party, and were keen to avoid links with anyone who might bring the party into disrepute. For this reason, both parties had a strong preference for recruiting new members through the existing social networks of current members. According to their statutes,

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<sup>316</sup> Interview E6, Eesti Riigikogu, Tallinn, 15<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

applications for Reform Party membership require an endorsement from one current party member. They are prepared to waive this requirement, but in this case they check the prospective member's suitability by asking them ideological questions, such as whether they agree with the flat tax. Social Democratic Party interviewees felt that recruiting through existing social networks would bring them active members, which were preferable to inactive members since they could offer the party more assistance.

Therefore, Estonian parties do hold strong normative assumptions that parties should have members. However, they believe that the *quality* of members reflects on the party as much as the quantity. They are both lowering barriers to entry, and are willing to accept that members might be inactive. However, they are not prepared to compromise on ideological quality. Furthermore, they were dismissive of the idea that, in tight-knit Estonian communities, voters would be deceived by the use of members as window dressing. The centre-left SDE was more likely to see members as legitimisers from an ideological perspective, looking to emulate traditional western European socialist parties, while the centre-right Reform Party saw a large membership as evidence of competitive success.

#### 4.9 DISCUSSION

There is no doubt that membership recruitment, retention and organisation is a time consuming and arduous process. One Reform Party MP described how he and his fellow activists organise street stalls and are happy with their day's work if three in every fifty conversations yields a potential member.<sup>317</sup> Despite the effort involved,

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<sup>317</sup> Interview E2, Eesti Riigikogu, Tallinn, 7<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

survey respondents and interviewees were clear that they considered membership recruitment to be crucial to their party's success. Interviewees stated that their parties intended to invest significant resources in membership recruitment in the coming year. Judging by the significant increases in party membership between 2012 and 2013, these efforts were bearing fruit.

It is important to note that Estonian political parties have a slightly different definition of 'membership' than many western European parties. Susan Scarrow distinguished members from supporters by their obligations and privileges. Common obligations imposed by parties included refraining from joining other parties and contributing to party funds. Common privileges included the right to participate in candidate selection and the right to influence programmatic decisions.<sup>318</sup> Since membership of Estonian parties does not necessarily lapse if membership dues are unpaid, the line between members and supporters is undoubtedly blurred.

Nevertheless, it was commonly estimated that between 10 and 25 percent of Estonian members are actively involved in party activities. These members are engaged in a similar range of tasks to those identified by Scarrow in modern Western democracies, tasks that are also consistent with the incentives provided by Estonia's electoral rules. According to the institutional hypotheses set out in Chapter Three, we expected Estonian parties to value members because parliamentary electoral systems are decided by open lists in small districts, and municipal districts are small but local competition is politicised. In such circumstances 'electoral professional' means of

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<sup>318</sup> Susan E Scarrow (1996), *Parties and the Membership: Organising for Victory in Britain and Germany*, Oxford University Press, p16.

communication are likely to be of limited effectiveness, since much competition takes place at the local level, where the mass media cannot reach.

With the exception of local newspapers, the bulk of Estonia's media has national coverage, but electoral rules ensure that much competition takes place in the regions. Particularly at the municipal level, debates focus on local issues like potholes in roads, the opening or closure of a new hospital unit, or the relocation of a bus stop. These issues are hardly likely to feature in national press coverage. Furthermore, if parties are to compete at all, they need to find candidates who reside in the municipality. Scholars including Steven Wolinetz have spoken of 'vote seeking' parties, which seek to compete at all levels of government, but 'maintain only the minimum degree of organization required to recruit and select candidates and get them elected'.<sup>319</sup> However, this can, in practice, amount to a significant investment of time and effort if electoral districts are small and parties hope to nominate high-quality candidates who are socialised into the parties' policies and beliefs. Parties must consider how members can be recruited and retained, including offering purposive incentives like involvement in the policy-making process.

Furthermore, the 'open list' electoral system means that individual candidates must distinguish themselves from their own co-partisans. They often find that the best way to maximise their individual vote while avoiding damaging clashes with their co-partisans is to build their own personal links with voters through members. Thus, the role of 'ambassadors in the community' was very important. Both parties also agree

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<sup>319</sup> Steven B Wolinetz (2002) 'Beyond the Catch-All Party: Approaches to the Study of Parties and Party Organization in Contemporary Democracies', in Richard Gunther et al. eds., *Political Parties: Old Concepts and New Challenges*, Oxford University Press (Oxford), pp 151-152

that voters would not trust a party whose only presence was on the television and in magazines.

As expected, the availability of state funding does not deter parties from recruiting members, since it covers only the most basic costs. Business funding used to dominate, but this became progressively harder to access as laws became both tighter and more strictly enforced. Although ‘under the table’ funding undoubtedly still exists, Estonia’s rules on business funding are now amongst the strictest in Europe, and this was driving parties to think about being more creative about legitimate fundraising. Parties were reluctant to ask members for money, since this was not an established practice in Estonia. However, both were keen to utilise members as a source of free labour, and the poorer of the two parties, the SDE, was also preparing to launch initiatives to persuade members to become involved in fundraising.

While both parties shared the normative viewpoint that successful parties should have members, the primary driver of membership recruitment was a pragmatic adaptation to electoral rules and the competitive environment. Estonian parties’ reservations about the electoral professional approach were best illustrated by the Social Democratic Party’s current strategy. Traditionally Estonia’s smallest major party, SDE has recently surged in the opinion polls, partly because of other parties’ misfortunes, but also because the global financial crisis increased the audience for left-wing ideas in Estonia. The SDE’s response has been instructive. Rather than simply riding the wave of this popularity and relying on the electoral professional approach, it identified its relatively small membership base as a bottleneck and redoubled its membership recruitment efforts. Rather than hiring more ‘spin doctors’ or professional organisers,

SDE expanded their organisation on the ground with the aim of translating their bounce in the polls into a solid base of local government representation.

Therefore, as hypothesised, Estonia's small electoral districts and open lists have encouraged parties to engage in micro-level campaigning. In these circumstances, electoral-professional strategies are only of limited usefulness, and parties compete using a combination of modern political marketing techniques and traditional grassroots mobilisation. Over the last decade, parties have progressively expanded, since the level of organisation required to provide reputable candidates and effective campaigns for municipal elections nationwide is significant. Individual parliamentary candidates also invest in organisational networks as a means of competing against their own co-partisans while avoiding open conflict.

The data presented in this chapter demonstrates, therefore, that Estonian political parties have been reluctant to rely on the electoral-professional approach, fearing that they will be out-competed by their rivals if they do not also organise on the ground. This challenges theories that political parties in new democracies will always choose the 'relatively quick and easy' route of electoral mobilisation. Parties care first and foremost about winning elections. If a country's institutional design and competitive dynamics mean that the best way to win is to invest in the laborious process of membership recruitment, then successful political elites will divert resources for that purpose.

# 5

## Lithuania

After more than two decades of democratic consolidation, the Lithuanian party system remains volatile. With at least one new party entering the *seimas* (parliament) after each election, Lithuanians commonly joke that ‘in this country, there are three political parties for every two people’. However, there are also sources of stability. The centre-right Homeland Union-Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS-LKD) and the centre-left Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (LSDP) have, in one form or another, provided a backbone to the party system since the transition. Both parties currently have approximately 17,000 members, a number that has remained stable through the 2000s while other parties, most notably the Labour Party, have started to catch up.

This chapter examines the role of party members within these two parties. Information was gathered from surveys and interviews, which were conducted with party activists, staff, councillors and MPs in June and July 2012. Further information was gathered from party statutes and newspaper reports. These data are used to test the hypotheses outlined in Chapter Three, which examine the effect of institutions on the role of members in political parties. Lithuania’s mixed electoral system and partisan monopoly on local government nominations, combined with a tightening of business funding regulations will, it was hypothesised, create roles for members as

grassroots campaigners and municipal candidates. The 72-hour ‘silence period’ prior to elections may also increase members’ value as loyal and reliable voters.

## 5.1 THE LITHUANIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM

Lithuania has a unicameral parliament, the *seimas*, and a directly elected president. 141 members of parliament are elected via a non-compensatory mixed electoral system. Seventy-one mandates are allocated through single member district elections, which are held over two rounds. If a candidate wins more than 50% of the votes in the first round (provided the turnout is at least 40%) then he or she is elected. If no winner emerges from the first round, a ‘run off’ takes place between the two most popular candidates. The remaining seventy members are elected by proportional representation, with the entire country forming a single electoral unit.

It is common for new parties to emerge via the list section of the electoral system, while established parties dominate the single member district section of the ballot, particularly in the second round. As in the German mixed electoral system, parties might combine ‘electoral’ strategies (communication through the mass media, political advertisements and large-scale rallies) with grass-roots campaigning and individual voter contacting at the local level (street stalls, social events and knocking on voters’ front doors).<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> Thomas Zittel and Thomas Gschwend (2008), ‘Individualised Constituency Campaigns in Mixed-Member electoral systems: Candidates in the 2005 German Elections’, *West European Politics*, 31(5): 978-1003.

Lithuania has sixty municipalities. Most have populations of between 20,000 and 70,000. However, two have fewer than 10,000 inhabitants and five have more than 100,000 inhabitants. The largest municipality is Vilnius, which has 550,000 registered voters. Each municipality is a multi-member constituency, with between 21 to 51 councillors elected by proportional representation. Only parties registered according to the Law on Political Parties can nominate candidates for local elections; independent candidates are not permitted.<sup>321</sup> It has been posited that this law partially explains why Lithuania has much higher levels of party membership than neighbouring Latvia.<sup>322</sup> Parties need candidates in order to compete at the municipal level. All things being equal, they will prefer to nominate individuals who are already socialised into the values and conventions of the party.<sup>323</sup> This reduces the risk of public disagreements and future defections.

The surveys and interviews for this thesis were conducted in the summer of 2012, at which time parties were adjusting to substantial changes to campaign financing laws, and preparing for the October 2012 election. The new laws banned all business donations to political parties. Donations must now be made by ‘natural persons’, with any donation over €10 subject to rigorous reporting requirements. As compensation for this loss of income, state funding has increased, and the new law also incentivises individuals to make payroll donations. Citizens can now set aside 1% of their municipal tax to fund a political party of their choice. Alternatively, they can set aside

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<sup>321</sup> Republic of Lithuania, Law on Elections to Municipal Councils, 7 July 1994 No I-532 (as amended on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2010 No XI-848), article 34(2).

<sup>322</sup> Hermann Smith-Sivertsen, Why Bigger Party Membership Organisations in Lithuania than Latvia, *East European Quarterly*, Summer 2004, 38(2): 215-259.

<sup>323</sup> E Spencer Wellhofer (1972), ‘Dimensions of Party Development: A Study in Organizational Dynamics’, *The Journal of Politics*, 34 (1): 153-182.

2% of their municipal tax to fund a church group or an NGO. These new rules are intended to nurture a philanthropic society, with the long-term aim of funding political parties through multiple small individual donations.

### *The Parties*

Eight parties were represented in the *seimas* in 2012, when this research was conducted. The party system retains elements of instability, with new parties entering and older parties failing to gain representation at each election. Despite this volatility, two parties have formed the backbone of the Lithuanian party system since the early 1990s, albeit in shifting forms: the centre-right Homeland Union-Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS-LKD) and the centre-left Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (LSDP). Neither of these two main parties was built from scratch following the collapse of communism. The LSDP was formed from a merger between the communist successor party, and a social democrat party with a small organisational legacy from the inter-war democratic period. TS-LKD inherited members from the anti-communist *sąjūdis* movement, including Catholic oppositionists and deportees' organisations. This chapter analyses the role of members in these two parties.

Homeland Union–Lithuanian Christian Democrats (*Tėvynės sąjunga - Lietuvos krikščionys demokratai, TS-LKD*) has almost 17,000 members. Vytautas Landsbergis, a key figure in the Lithuanian independence movement, founded Homeland Union in 1993. The party later merged with the Lithuanian Union of Political Prisoners and Deportees and Right Union of Lithuania in 2004, and the Lithuanian Nationalist Union and the Lithuanian Christian Democrats in May 2008. As the main centre-right party in

Lithuania, its issue positions are moderately nationalist (anti-Russian), socially conservative and economically liberal.

TS-LKD is organisationally complex, incorporating heritage from each of its constituent parties and movements. For example, it has three affiliated youth organisations. The TS-LKD youth organisation was established in 2009 to ‘enliven dialogue between the generations, promote the exchange of ideas, and have a positive impact by refreshing the Party for the future’.<sup>324</sup> The Youth Conservative League was established in 1993 as the youth wing of Homeland Union. It has strong international links through the International Forum of Young Conservatives, and has, over the years, provided many candidates for party lists at the municipal level, several city mayors and a future member of the European Parliament.<sup>325</sup> Finally, the Young Nationalist Organisation was founded in 2007 with the main purpose of ‘uniting and preparing the youth of Lithuania for the social and cultural life of the country’.<sup>326</sup> TS-LKD also has a women’s group (which currently has 6,858 members), a senior citizens’ group and nationalist group. The groups for women and seniors, in particular, have strong international links through the European People’s Party. TS-LKD has 71 branches, one for each single member district.

The Lithuanian Social Democratic Party (*Lietuvos socialdemokratų partija*, LSDP) also has a membership of just over 17,000. It was formed from a merger of the (anti-communist) Lithuanian Social-Democratic Party and the ex-communist Democratic

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<sup>324</sup> [http://www.tsajunga.lt/index.php/jaunimo\\_bendruomene/4195](http://www.tsajunga.lt/index.php/jaunimo_bendruomene/4195) (accessed 17th June 2013)

<sup>325</sup> [http://www.tsajunga.lt/index.php/jaunuju\\_konservatoriu\\_lyga/39](http://www.tsajunga.lt/index.php/jaunuju_konservatoriu_lyga/39) (accessed 17th June 2013).

<sup>326</sup> [http://www.tsajunga.lt/index.php/jaunuju\\_tautininku\\_organizacija/805](http://www.tsajunga.lt/index.php/jaunuju_tautininku_organizacija/805) (accessed 17th June 2013)

Labour Party of Lithuania (LDDP) in 2001. The former was founded in 1896 and forced into exile during the communist period, returning to Lithuania in 1989. Although both of these parties had a long (and often conflicting) organisational heritage, the merged party shows surprisingly few cracks. The LSDP aims to provide good social security and narrow the gap between rich and poor, through income redistribution if necessary.<sup>327</sup> Their attitude towards Russia is generally cooperative.

The LSDP has sixty branches, the boundaries of which are contiguous with the country's municipalities. The youth movement has approximately 4,000 members, 2000 of whom are also members of LSDP. The party also has an active women's organisation with approximately 3,000 members; some are not members of the party but are involved in associated actions and campaigns. LSDP has close links with some trades union organisations. Three leaders of the Lithuanian Trades Union Confederation stood on their 2012 party list.

Therefore, neither TS-LKD nor LSDP are organisationally nimble electoral professional parties. Both carry complex organisations. TS-LKD's organisation is somewhat sprawling, maintaining the identities of its constituent parties, while LSDP is hierarchical.

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<sup>327</sup> <http://www.lsdplit.lt/straipsniai/223-2011-m-rinkimai-i-savivaldybiu-tarybas.html> (accessed 24th June 2012).

## THE ROLE OF MEMBERS IN LITHUANIAN POLITICAL PARTIES

The following section explores the hypotheses developed in Chapter Three through surveys, interviews and analysis of party statutes. Party activists, councillors, MPs and staff were surveyed and interviewed for this research in June and July 2012. Copies of the survey can be found in both English and Lithuanian in Appendix 1. The results are presented below.

### 5.2 AMBASSADORS IN THE COMMUNITY

It was hypothesised in Chapter Three that the single member district section of Lithuania's national elections would encourage localised and face-to-face campaigning, a situation where members can be useful as 'ambassadors in the community'. Surveys and interviews show that both parties perceive the 'ambassadorial' role of members as important. Positive word of mouth helps to build trust, which is an invaluable resource where the public is highly suspicious of both political parties and the media. A March 2013 Vilnius public opinion survey found that trust in political parties stood at 7.2%, while 62.5% did not trust political parties.<sup>328</sup> Both parties blamed populist competitors, particularly the Labour Party (a charismatic party led by the millionaire businessman, Viktor Uspaskich) for citizens' lack of trust in politics. One MP summed up the common sentiment:

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<sup>328</sup> 'Trust in majority of Lithuanian institutions is up, trust in banks is down', Lithuania Tribune 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2013, <http://www.lithuaniantribune.com/32205/trust-in-majority-of-lithuanian-institutions-is-up-trust-in-banks-is-down-201332205/> (accessed 26<sup>th</sup> June 2013). On a positive note, trust in political parties had risen to from 4.2% to 7.2%.

“This party is very populist. The rule of law doesn’t exist in their mind. And they propose various populist ideas like a minimum salary of 1,800 litas and so on. Uspaskich is a very rich man, and of course his accounts – their financial mechanisms – got him arrested. [...] They have second hand money and they create a big political campaign.”<sup>329</sup>

Operating in these circumstances, the ‘traditional’ parties (a term commonly used in Lithuania by both politicians and political commentators to describe the three parties with consistent, internationally recognisable ideologies, TS-LKD, LSDP and the Liberal Movement) felt a duty to distinguish themselves.<sup>330</sup> Using members as ‘ambassadors’ was an effective way to achieve this aim.

Both parties actively encouraged members to talk openly with friends, family and neighbours. A TS-LKD strategist said, “We persuade our party members to go to their neighbours to speak to them, because the face to face approach is the most important thing.”<sup>331</sup> One of his colleagues added that, “These people contribute a great deal in the sense that they talk and they spread the message to the wider public.”<sup>332</sup> One LSDP youth leader pointed out that normal people, in conversations with friends, family and neighbours, are free from the pressure to ‘hold the party line’,

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<sup>329</sup> Interview L4, Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, Vilnius, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

<sup>330</sup> This article is an example of the context in which the term ‘traditional party’ is used in Lithuania: Lithuania Tribune, 26<sup>th</sup> April 2013, ‘Opinion: Who Needs Social Democrats and Conservatives?’ <http://www.lithuaniatribune.com/35527/opinion-who-needs-social-democrats-and-conservatives-201335527/>

<sup>331</sup> Interview L2, Gedimino Pr, Vilnius, 3rd July 2012.

<sup>332</sup> Interview L3, Gedimino Pr, Vilnius, 3rd July 2012.

and can help to rebuild trust in politics by acknowledging past mistakes and freely discussing the party's strengths and weaknesses in an honest and open manner.<sup>333</sup>

LSDP interviewees were particularly eager to use 'ambassadors' to counteract the caricature presented by the media (and their opponents) that they were 'communist' and 'pro-Russian'. "There are very many clichés that people still have about us," said a Social Democrat councillor. "People say 'they are communists, they are bad, they work for Russia'." <sup>334</sup> An LSDP MP added, "We have difficulty with the mass media. A large number of newspapers are in the hands of oligarchs and they create a public opinion that says 'you all are businessmen'."<sup>335</sup>

As a result, LSDP survey respondents had lower levels of trust in the media and higher levels of support for members as 'ambassadors' than their TS-LKD counterparts (Table 5.1, p166). 67.9% of LSDP respondents thought that the role of members in spreading the party's message to friends, family and neighbours was 'very effective', compared with 34.1% of TS-LKD respondents. While almost a quarter of TS-LKD survey respondents thought that spreading the party's message was the single most important function of party members (table 5.2, p172), the figure was double for LSDP respondents. This is likely explained by the fact that, with the exception of a couple of sympathetic newspapers, LSDP perceived that the media is very biased against them. As explained further in section 5.6, they see individual voter contacting as a means of over-riding negative stereotypes portrayed in the media.

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<sup>333</sup> Interview L5, LSDP Headquarters, Vilnius, 20<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

<sup>334</sup> Interview L6, Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, Vilnius, 25<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

<sup>335</sup> Interview L4, Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, Vilnius, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

Table 5.1: What is the most effective way of spreading your party's message?

	Very effective		Moderately Effective		Somewhat Effective		Not Effective	
	TS-LKD	LSDP	TS-LKD	LSDP	TS-LKD	LSDP	TS-LKD	LSDP
TS-LKD n=42 LSDP n=28								
National TV and Radio	35.9%	25.0%	28.2%	35.7%	23.1%	35.7%	12.8%	3.6%
Local TV and Radio	21.6%	37.0%	21.6%	25.9%	29.7%	25.9%	27.0%	11.1%
Print Media	26.8%	39.3%	41.5%	39.3%	31.7%	21.4%	0%	0%
Social Media	7.5%	10.7%	40.0%	42.9%	27.5%	39.3%	25.0%	7,1%
Discussions with friends, family and neighbours	34.1%	67.9%	39%	28.6%	26.8%	0%	0%	0%

It is interesting to consider why TS-LKD respondents were much less likely than LSDP respondents to see discussions with friends, family and neighbours as 'very effective' (although adding the 'very effective' and 'moderately effective' categories together, this was still seen as the most effective means of communication). Interviewees often referred to disagreements between members and the party elite on policy issues, a matter that is discussed more fully in section 5.4 below. The party's membership base is elderly, and heavily influence by former deportees and Catholics. In particular, members had expressed their discontent about certain policies during TS-LKD's most recent period in government (which was coming to its end at the time of the interviews). Most controversial were cuts to the state pension during the financial crisis (badly affecting an elderly membership base) and the decision not to take a position on the 'paedophilia scandal' that was raging in Lithuanian politics in the summer of 2012.

However, both parties ultimately had reservations about the effectiveness of ‘electoral-professional’ campaigning compared with face-to-face contact. It was pointed out that the private media’s primary aim is to sell newspapers or television advertising by keeping people entertained. Quality national newspapers are expensive, with low circulations. They are read mostly by public sector workers, “who had already decided how to vote”. The tabloids carried a lot of content that “made people more stupid”, in the words of a Social Democrat councillor. She elaborated:

“I think that the problem is that most of our media at the moment is so-called ‘yellow’ [tabloid]. They write about criminals and scandals, like the Sun in the UK. Sometimes they try to be serious, but mostly they just try to attract readers.”<sup>336</sup>

Despite the LSDP’s perception that the media favoured the centre-right parties, TS-LKD shared their scepticism about the mass media, at least to some extent. A TS-LKD MP said:

“The most trusted media is national public radio, which is thought to be more dependable. Television is used more for advertising, so we’re not relying on it being a trustworthy media. Probably the worst of all is the national dailies, which will not get any advertising revenues from us in this election.”<sup>337</sup>

Both parties also organise training sessions for members, where they teach their members “to be activists in social media”.<sup>338</sup> The primary aim of campaigning via

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<sup>336</sup> Interview L6, Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, Vilnius, 25<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

<sup>337</sup> Interview L1, Gedimino Pr, Vilnius, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2012.

<sup>338</sup> Interview L2, Gedimino Pr, Vilnius, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2012.

social media is, as in many countries, to engage young people. A TS-LKD MP summed up the uses of social media as follows:

“Facebook, is used extensively, though both our party and our leader boast very modest followings. But those sites are not the primary channels. The primary channels are the tens of hundreds of young people who share. So Facebook is very important, both for viral campaigning, and for negative campaigning which, according to Lithuanian conventions, cannot be done in the name of the party.”<sup>339</sup>

However, frequent internet use remains the preserve of young people living in urban areas, whereas older people in rural areas are much more likely to vote. Therefore, its usefulness is restricted. One LSDP councillor said:

“It is problematic because the internet is a very specific tool. People who use the internet are mostly young and they are mostly quite intelligent. The internet is the main news media for them. But in single member districts and local elections, most of those people are not using the internet. We have quite low participation in elections, about fifty percent, and most of those who are going to vote are old people. Eighty percent of old people vote. That’s why we must deal with the older electorates.”<sup>340</sup>

TS-LKD interviewees concurred that the age profile of their voters meant that “the main locations for campaigning are still the traditional ones – newspapers, magazines,

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<sup>339</sup> Interview L3, Gedimino Pr, Vilnius, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2012.

<sup>340</sup> Interview L6, Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, Vilnius, 25<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

TV, door-to-door campaigning”.<sup>341</sup> Therefore, the impact of social media on Lithuanian politics is so far limited. As the survey data confirms, conversations between members and their friends, family and neighbours were seen as more important, particularly by the LSDP.

### 5.3 LOYAL AND RELIABLE VOTERS

In many western democracies, political campaigning is permitted up to and including polling day, and it is common for political parties to carry out operations to ‘get out the vote’. ‘Silence periods’, however, are common in new democracies in order to minimise opportunities for voter coercion. Even by post-communist standards, Lithuania has a particularly long ‘silence period’. Campaigning must cease altogether 72 hours before the polls open. With very limited exceptions, Lithuanian voters must cast their ballots at their allocated polling station on the scheduled election day.<sup>342</sup> This means that there is very little opportunity for parties to conduct operations to ‘get the vote out’ in a partisan fashion, although parties are permitted to engage in activities aimed at boosting the general turnout. Therefore, it was hypothesised in Chapter Three that Lithuanian political parties would particularly value members as loyal and reliable voters.

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<sup>341</sup> Interview L2, Gedimino Pr, Vilnius, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2012.

<sup>342</sup> Pre-polling is only if unable to get to a polling district on polling day, organised in advance by arrangement with the municipal electoral committee, and only from 12 – 8pm on the Wednesday and Thursday preceding polling day. There is no internet voting, and proxy voting is not permitted. Postal votes are only available to those who cannot attend polling stations as a result of incapacitation (e.g. hospitals, care homes or prisons) or those carrying out mandatory military service abroad. Article 64(2) and 57(1).

In a country where electoral turnout often fails to reach 50%, where the party system is highly fragmented, and where long-term party loyalties are only just beginning to develop, the importance of members as a source of loyal support cannot be overstated, particularly in single member districts where one vote can make the difference between winning and losing. Both parties hoped that members would not just vote themselves, but also to influence the votes of their social contacts. As one TS-LKD advisor said:

“During every election, we can count on our party members. They are the ones who are most motivated to go and vote for us. And they usually do this with their family and their neighbours and the people who know them, so they are not only reliable supporters but they are, well, actually the silent campaigners for the party. Those are the people we can count on, and who we can say in advance that we know for certain that person will be voting for us.”<sup>343</sup>

One LSDP MP pointed out that each party was now beginning to establish a more loyal core of voters. He observed that, in all parties’ cases, the number of stable voters was roughly ten times the number of party members. He explained:

“Membership of the party and stable party voters, they relate to each other. If you have about 20,000 members, you have their family, their friends, and they discuss with each other. They collect some votes from wider society. It’s our

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<sup>343</sup> Interview L3, Gedimino Pr, Vilnius, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2012.

resource. We get better results if we have bigger membership because it is real votes and, of course, a real influence on our voters.”<sup>344</sup>

In circumstances of high electoral volatility and low voter turnout, it is hardly surprising that political parties value members as a source of reliable and loyal support. This becomes crucial where the country’s institutional design forbids any other form of campaigning in the crucial final days of the campaign.

#### 5.4 FUNDRAISING

In Chapter Three, it was hypothesised that fundraising would not be a key function of party members. However, tightening business funding regulations might encourage parties to look to members as a source of free labour and/or funds in the future. As expected, fundraising has not traditionally been a function of members in Lithuanian political parties. As Table 5.2 (p163) shows, not a single survey respondent thought that participating in fundraising was the most important function of party members. While the situation varies from branch to branch, members do not usually organise small-scale fundraising events. Even membership fees are not strictly obligatory, with one TS-LKD campaign strategist commenting that, “Obviously there are many elderly people in our party, so we cannot tell them ‘you must pay or you must leave’.”<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>344</sup> Interview L4, Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, Vilnius, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

<sup>345</sup> Interview L2, Gedimino Pr, Vilnius, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2012. Individual branches decide whether to remove someone from the list if they do not pay their membership dues. The general consensus is that if an individual makes a non-financial contribution to the party, for example by attending meetings or participating in campaigning, or they haven’t paid because they are ill or too poor, then they can remain members. However, interviewees were anxious to stress that these are not ‘ghost members’. Parties must provide lists of their members to the electoral commission annually, and these must be genuine.

Table 5.2: Perceptions of the most important role of members

Question: What is the most important function of members in your party? (choose only one answer)		
TS-TKD n=28 LSDP n=28	<b>TS-LKD</b>	<b>LSDP</b>
To contribute money	0%	0%
To spread the party's message	21.4%	46.4%
To help develop policies	21.4%	7.1%
To demonstrate that the party has the support of the people, not just the elite	35.7%	35.7%
To help with election campaigns	10.7%	7.1%
To provide candidates for local and national elections	10.7%	3.6%

Although the fundraising role of party members in Lithuania is currently minimal, interviewees from both parties talked of plans to develop membership fundraising in the future. Business donations had recently been banned. Levels of state funding of political parties had been increased, alongside new incentives to encourage small private donations. Upon filling out a simple form, 1% of an individual's tax bill can be allocated to a political party of their choice. Parties also have the opportunity to raise small amounts of money (up to 40 litas, approximately €12) by SMS. Of the new rules, a TS-LKD MP said, "We don't have a tradition of giving to political parties, and I think we will see very modest results, but I think it's a good start. We have to plant this culture and nurture it."<sup>346</sup>

The LSDP shared their rivals' enthusiasm for the new laws. An MP commented:

"Today we have good possibilities for our members to give one percent of their income tax to party campaigns. It won't be a massive amount of money because most of our people are not rich. But it is a good opportunity. It will

<sup>346</sup> Interview L1, Gedimino Pr, Vilnius, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2012.

be about 50 litas or 100 litas for wealthier people, and for poor people maybe 20 litas.”<sup>347</sup>

The main purpose of the new law was to reduce the importance of business influence in politics. In the words of a TS-LKD MP, “Some areas of corporate finance were getting too close for comfort. You could see this party is acting for this conglomerate, that party’s acting for that conglomerate. That’s now officially over.”<sup>348</sup> Both parties hoped that the new laws would be rigorously enforced, since they were worried about ‘unilateral disarmament’ if they followed the rules and their opponents (particularly the Labour Party) did not. An LSDP councillor said, “We had such a bad experience when the so-called Labour Party came. They are so greedy, very rich and so on, and Uspaskich used a lot of money. Everyone was very afraid of that.”<sup>349</sup>

Although the Electoral Commission intended to enforce the new rules robustly, there was an awareness of their limitations. A TS-LKD MP pointed out that:

“There will be ‘underwater’ injections from corporate finance, which I think our Electoral Commission is ill-equipped to identify and deal with. There isn’t really any monitoring of internet advertising. It is very hard to monitor the work of creative agencies. There is the possibility to put a lot of money under the carpet in that area.”<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> 50 litas = approx 15 euros. Interview L4, Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, Vilnius, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

<sup>348</sup> Interview L1, Gedimino Pr, Vilnius, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2012.

<sup>349</sup> Interview L6, Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, Vilnius, 25<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

<sup>350</sup> Interview L1, Gedimino Pr, Vilnius, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2012.

Whether or not a new era has dawned in Lithuanian party financing, it is too early to say. Major violations during the October 2012 election were prosecuted, indicating that the free-for-all is over.<sup>351</sup> State funding of political parties has not impacted party membership in the past; the sums involved were dwarfed by business contributions. Although state subsidies have been increased, they will not replace the money lost from business funds, and parties must find ways of either reducing the cost of campaigning, or raising money from an increasingly limited number of legitimate sources. It is unlikely that the new ban on business funding will always be followed to the letter, but parties must now be cautious. Bearing in mind the new incentives for payroll giving, an increased role for membership funding of Lithuanian political parties looks likely in the future.

## 5.5 POLICY IDEAS AND ‘LINKAGE’

In Chapter Three, it was hypothesised that policies would be formulated primarily by party elites. In theory, parties are supposed to be reluctant to involve members in policy-making in case they impose vote-losing commitments, or hinder elites’ ability to respond to the 24-hour media, or manoeuvre as Downsian vote maximisers. However, somewhat counter-intuitively, TS-LKD and LSDP elites were more worried about their members’ ‘populist’ tendencies. In the eyes of the ‘traditional’ parties, it is crucial to maintain a full range of policies based on a consistent ideology. This leads to a somewhat paternalistic attitude towards membership involvement in policy, since members often propose ideas that deviate from ‘traditional’ ideological frameworks.

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<sup>351</sup> Lithuania Tribune, 18<sup>th</sup> November 2012, ‘Six Suspects in the Investigation About The Buying of Convict Votes’, <http://www.lithuaniantribune.com/18905/six-suspects-in-the-investigation-about-the-buying-of-convict-votes-201218905/>.

Lithuania's two main parties viewed their populist rivals (especially the Labour Party and Order and Justice) as an existential threat to democracy in Lithuania. Therefore, they felt duty-bound to maintain an unusual level of ideological rigidity. A TS-LKD strategist described the charismatic-populist Labour Party in the following terms:

“When we analyse their discourse and policies, they are not thinking about fiscal policies, foreign relations, etcetera. They are thinking only about redistribution, raising pensions, giving money for the people. Traditional parties are thinking of a bigger and more combined view of our future.”<sup>352</sup>

At the time of the interviews, in advance of the October 2012 election, the ‘traditional’ parties were very concerned about a new political movement, known as Way of Courage (*Drąsos Kėliąs*), which mobilised on the single issue of a paedophilia scandal. This party has since gained representation in the *seimas*. One LSDP MP, himself a former anti-communist dissident and signatory to the 1990 Act of the Re-Establishment of the State of Lithuania, said of Way of Courage, “I can’t understand how to explain this phenomenon. What is this party’s ideology, values, economical positions, taxation positions, their views on the rule of law?”<sup>353</sup> Therefore, rather than being ‘catch-all’ parties, Lithuania’s two main parties make a virtue of strict ideological consistency. They refuse point-blank to respond to populist fads like the paedophilia scandal, even if their members feel strongly that a position should be taken.

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<sup>352</sup> Interview L2, Gedimino Pr, Vilnius, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2012.

<sup>353</sup> Interview L4, Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, Vilnius, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

TS-LKD policies are mostly made by the Presidium (*Prezidiumas*), which meets at least once a month and usually once a week. It is responsible for policy implementation and operational issues, and it brings together members of the party's monitoring and policy committees with representatives from the *seimas* and municipalities, and also representatives elected by Congress (*Suvažiavimas*). The Presidium organises elections and party programmes, prepares draft candidate lists for submission to the Council (*Taryba*), considers the party's policies and submits draft resolutions to the Council.

TS-LKD has an in-house think tank, the Political Academy (*Politinė Akademeija*), which aims to 're-discover the Lithuanian tradition of conservative thinking' and teach practical subjects like 'how to run an election campaign'. In advance of the October 2012 election, the Political Academy aimed to 'deepen knowledge, improve skills and undertake political work to build the foundations of the TS-LKD party.'<sup>354</sup> The Academy is based in Vilnius, but runs events across the country. However, the emphasis is on disseminating conservative thinking, rather than encouraging members to contribute their own ideas.

The main way in which TS-LKD members contribute to policy making is through participation in closed primaries for candidate selection and myriad internal elections. Seeking to move away from this 'plebiscitary' approach, the TS-LDK has actively considered new ways of involving its members in policy initiation and discussion. Prior to the 2012 election, the party convened committees on various policy fields, and this was deemed a 'moderate success', particularly during the manifesto writing process. However, with no forthcoming election to concentrate the minds of

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<sup>354</sup> [http://www.tsajunga.lt/index.php/politine\\_akademija/9907](http://www.tsajunga.lt/index.php/politine_akademija/9907) (accessed 22nd June 2012).

discussants, the process apparently deteriorated into “people exchanging grievances and gossip”.<sup>355</sup> Others agreed that “these committees are mainly active before the election and after the election they are not active.”<sup>356</sup>

The LSDP’s organisational structure is more traditionally hierarchical. Like the TS-LKD, it has a Congress (*Suvažiavimas*), Council (*Taryba*) and Presidium (*Prezidiumas*) and assorted regulatory committees. LSDP does not currently have an associated think tank, although this has been mooted as a possible future development.<sup>357</sup> Like TS-LKD, LSDP’s members are offered the chance to participate in candidate selection at both municipality and parliamentary level, and also in a wide array of leadership elections.

The LSDP’s policy-making is also supported by committees, which consider specific policy areas as follows: environment; budget and finance; employment, family and social affairs; energy; Europe, foreign affairs and emigration; information and communications; national security; culture; sport and youth; transport; health; education and science; ethnic communities; justice; business and innovation; internal affairs; agriculture and rural affairs. An LSDP MP commented that:

“It’s just our active members that get involved in this. [...] Many of our members are not *politically* active. They are active like friends, but do they not have the correct background to discuss taxation policies, social policies. That requires a minimum level of background knowledge.”

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<sup>355</sup> Interview L1, Gedimino Pr, Vilnius, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2012.

<sup>356</sup> Interview L3, Gedimino Pr, Vilnius, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2012.

<sup>357</sup> Interview L4, Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, Vilnius, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

In addition to committees organised by the central party, local LSDP branches also have discussion clubs. Common themes of discussion include youth unemployment (standing at 33% in Lithuania prior to the 2012 election) and proposals to introduce a progressive income tax.<sup>358</sup> The LSDP youth party also has an independent policy making process, which is constituted as a think tank. In addition to raising matters specific to young people, a youth leader commented that this branch of the party was better able to resist the forces of populism:

“As our party’s young politicians, we have the right to air strong views and to say unpopular things. So, for example, in our political programme we have a very strong chapter on the human rights, gender issues and other questions also that are not touched on in the main party’s programme.”

Given the commitment of both parties’ political elites to avoiding populism, it is interesting to ponder the extent to which members can perform a ‘linkage’ function with the rest of Lithuanian society. Interviewees seemed to accept the importance of this function in principle, although both parties valued members more as ‘legitimisers’ or ‘ambassadors in the community’ (table 5.2, p172). However, they hoped to recruit active members as candidates and grassroots campaigners, and therefore recognised the need to provide ‘purposive benefits’. 92.9% of TS-LKD and 96% of LSDP respondents either ‘strongly agreed’ or ‘agreed’ that involving members in the policy-making process would attract new members (Table 5.3, p179). However, interviews revealed that the bulk of national policy is currently made at parliamentary party or

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<sup>358</sup> Interview L6, Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, Vilnius, 25<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

presidium level, and the extent to which grassroots members make a genuine contribution is open to question.

*Table 5.3: If your party wants to recruit more members, it should...*

	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	TS-LKD	LSDP	TS-LKD	LSDP	TS-LKD	LSDP	TS-LKD	LSDP
TS-LKD n=42 LSDP n=25								
Organise more social events	36.6%	40.0%	58.5%	52.0%	2.4%	8.0%	2.4%	0%
Create more career opportunities	36.6%	28.0%	48.8%	52.0%	14.6%	20.0%	0%	0%
Appoint a more charismatic leader	45.2%	60.0%	42.9%	20.0%	11.9%	20.0%	0%	0%
Give members more say in candidate selection	43.9%	32.0%	51.2%	44.0%	4.9%	24%	0%	0%
Offer members more opportunities to shape policies	35.7%	48%	57.1%	48%	7.1%	4.0%	0%	0%

The tension between elites' aspirations to maintain ideological consistency and the 'populist' impulses of members was most visible at the single member district level of parliamentary elections. Local constituency members choose these candidates. TS-LKD interviewees were alarmed by the selection of candidates who had the strong views on the paedophilia scandal,<sup>359</sup> while LSDP interviewees were worried that candidates had been selected who did not support a progressive definition of 'family'.<sup>360</sup> Concerns were raised about the influence of church groups on single member district campaigns, particularly by the (secular) LSDP. An MP said:

<sup>359</sup> Interview L2, Gedimino Pr, Vilnius, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2012 - "Our official view is that this case must be solved in court, not in the parliament, not in the elections, just in the court, because it is about criminal actions. But many members have a different opinion."

<sup>360</sup> As a party of the 'progressive left', the LSDP vehemently opposed moves by the conservatives to redefine 'family' as consisting of a husband, a wife and children. Interviewees expressed alarm that some of SMD candidates expressed more conservative views.

“The church has a very big influence, and those party members going for elections in constituencies are very linked with the church. Not that they are very big believers, but simply that they depend a little bit because if the priests say that they are a bad candidate it might work against them.”<sup>361</sup>

The competing incentives of Lithuania’s unlinked mixed electoral system pull the ‘traditional’ parties in two different directions. While party elites interviewed were anxious to maintain purist positions on policy, worrying that any hint of populism would be a slippery slope, such ideological niches are a luxury only afforded under large district proportional systems. This works well for the list section of the Lithuanian ballot, where 20% of the votes translate into 20% of the seats. However, under the single member district section of the ballot, where candidates must attract broad support over two electoral rounds, candidates from the secular LSDP seek the approval of priests, and TS-LKD candidates defy the central party’s pleas not to make populist statements on the paedophilia scandal. District party members have selected these candidates, and party elites can do little to enforce the official view. One advisor noted, with resignation in his voice, that:

“We have our party manifesto with its main thesis, and each party in his or her constituency talks about local problems and has local programmes for local constituencies. Usually people who are candidates in local constituencies decide for themselves which things they would like to emphasise.”<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>361</sup> Interview L4, Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, Vilnius, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

<sup>362</sup> Interview L2, Gedimino Pr, Vilnius, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2012.

This leaves party members in a contradictory position regarding the policy-making process. Elites try to involve members in policy-making as a purposive benefit, but they are reluctant to give members too much influence. However, members' involvement in candidate nomination processes gives them real power. The influence of these single member district MPs within their parliamentary parties, and the effect on broader party discipline in the *seimas*, would make an interesting study in itself, but is unfortunately beyond the scope of this thesis. The disconnect between party elites and members in the policy-making process might go some way to explaining why Rohrschneider and Whitefield's found that that members in central and east European political parties do not help parties to achieve policy 'congruence' with either partisan or independent voters.<sup>363</sup>

## 5.6 A RECRUITING POOL FOR CANDIDATES

At both the national and local government levels, Lithuanian political parties have a monopoly on candidate nomination. It has already been posited by Hermann Smith-Sivertsen that the ban on independent candidates led to Lithuania's relatively high levels of membership at the end of the 1990s.<sup>364</sup> Since both parties already had a nationwide organisation at the beginning of the 2000s, it was hypothesised in Chapter Three that parties would not invest significant resources in membership recruitment with a view to increasing their recruiting pool for candidates, since there was little need to expand purely for this purpose. Instead, Lithuanian parties were more likely

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<sup>363</sup> Robert Rohrschneider and Stephen Whitefield (2012) *The Strain of Representation: How Parties Represent Diverse Voters in Western and Eastern Europe*, Oxford University Press (Oxford), p131.

<sup>364</sup> Hermann Smith-Sivertsen (2004), 'Why Bigger Party Membership Organisations in Lithuania than in Latvia, 1995-2000', *East-European Quarterly*, 38(2): 215-259.

to increase the prior affiliation demanded of candidates in order to ensure that elites are socialised into party values before they take up party positions.<sup>365</sup>

Party membership can provide both a recruiting pool and a socialisation mechanism for the next generation of the party elite. As expected, both parties recruit most of their candidates from their membership base (Table 5.4, p183) for both municipal and *seimas* elections. At least half of the respondents from both parties believed that potential *seimas* candidates should first be members of the party for at least three years. This belief is reinforced by a system where party members are responsible for selecting candidates at both the national and municipal levels. Naturally, party members favour established faces rather than newcomers. In the words of one TS-LKD advisor:

“If we speak about the members choosing people who would then be candidates for the party, it is pretty important that they are long-term members because they are well known. Compared to those who are unknown, this is a clear advantage. There are some instances where new guys are bright and well-known even from the start of their membership, but that is usually when we attract people who are well known to the public.”<sup>366</sup>

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<sup>365</sup> E Spencer Wellhofer (1972), ‘Dimensions of Party Development: A Study in Organizational Dynamics’, *The Journal of Politics*, 34(1): 153-182.

<sup>366</sup> Interview L3, Gedimino Pr, Vilnius, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2012.

Table 5.4: Length of Prior Affiliation

Q: How long do potential candidates need to be members before standing for election on your party's list?

	Local Elections		National Elections	
	TS-LKD	LSDP	TS-LKD	LSDP
TS-LKD n=30 LSDP n=25				
Suitable candidates do not need to be party members	28%	26.7%	16.7%	12.0%
Candidates need to join the party before standing on the party ticket	4%	6.7%	6.7%	4.0%
Candidates need to have been members for several months before becoming candidates	12%	13.3%	3.3%	0%
Candidates should be members for a year before becoming candidates	52%	30%	23.3%	24.0%
Candidates should be members for three years before becoming candidates	4%	23.3%	50.0%	60.0%

An LSDP MP expressed similar sentiments:

“All our party members vote on all of our lists, but the results are rarely a surprise. Everyone knows each other and communicates by phone and email. We have known each other for twenty years, which creates some pre-conditions.”

Far from struggling to find candidates, interviewees from both parties commented that the emphasis on long-term membership made it very difficult to bring in fresh blood. One young TS-LKD interviewee complained that, “The older generation do not leave their positions, even though some of them are getting quite frail and are not healthy.”<sup>367</sup> Meanwhile, a veteran LSDP MP pointed to similar intergenerational tensions within his party. He said:

<sup>367</sup> Interview L3, Gedimino Pr, Vilnius, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2012.

“Of course, it creates tensions between old members and members who have been with us for four or five years. [...] We need the younger generation. But, you know, political experience is very important so people don’t make big mistakes. Experience is one of the most important factors.”<sup>368</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the length of prior affiliation expected of *seimas* candidates is longer than that expected of municipal candidates. In addition, ideological loyalty is also more important for *seimas* candidates, since municipal councillors tend to focus on local matters rather than contentious ideological issues (tables 5.5, below, and 5.6, p185). Leadership skills were also important, reflecting the reality that, at both municipal and SMD levels, candidates often run their own campaigns. Similarly, at both national and municipal levels, the most important quality for both parties was that candidates were ‘well known’. The LSDP was much more likely than TS-LKD to value charisma highly at both the national and municipal levels, but otherwise their demands were similar.

*Table 5.5: What qualities are important when choosing a candidate for municipal elections?*

	Very important		Somewhat important		Not very important		Not important at all	
	TS-LKD	LSDP	TS-LKD	LSDP	TS-LKD	LSDP	TS-LKD	LSDP
TS-LKD n=41 SDE n=25								
Ability to contribute financially	2.5%	0%	22.5%	16.7%	47.5%	52.4%	27.5%	29.2%
Well-known in the local community	87.8%	96%	12.2%	4%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Ideologically loyal	34.1%	40%	53.7%	56%	9.8%	4%	2.4%	0%
Strong leadership	50.0%	64%	47.6%	32%	2.4%	4%	0%	0%
Works hard for local people	61.9%	72%	28.6%	24%	9.5%	4%	0%	0%
Charismatic	33.3%	60%	50.0%	36%	14.3%	4%	2.4%	0%

<sup>368</sup> Interview L4, Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, Vilnius, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

Table 5.6: What qualities are important when choosing a candidate for *seimas* elections?

	Very important		Somewhat important		Not very important		Not important at all	
	TS-LKD	LSDP	TS-LKD	LSDP	TS-LKD	LSDP	TS-LKD	LSDP
TS-LKD n=41 SDE n=25								
Ability to contribute financially	5.1%	0%	25.6%	30.4%	30.8%	43.5%	38.5%	26.1%
Well-known in the local community	73.2%	72%	24.4%	28%	2.4%	0%	0%	0%
Ideologically loyal	53.7%	56%	36.6%	40%	7.3%	4%	2.4%	0%
Strong leadership	68.3%	80%	31.7%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Works hard for local people	46.3%	64%	34.1%	24%	19.5%	12%	0%	0%
Charismatic	48.8%	79.2%	46.3%	20.8%	4.9%	0%	0%	0%

Neither party prioritised the candidate's ability to make a personal financial contribution, although around 30% of respondents thought this was 'very important' or 'somewhat important' at the *seimas* level. This is a further indication that state funding has never been sufficient to cover parties' campaigning needs, and that single member district candidates are often responsible for financing their own campaigns.

Despite the current dominance of the older generation, younger members of both parties are planning ahead for the generational shift that will take place over the next decade. A young TS-LKD strategist stated that one of the most important functions of a party membership is 'raising new candidates, good young people',<sup>369</sup> while a LSDP youth leader emphasised how important it was to train the next generation of candidates. He said:

“It's not only a person that agrees to be a candidate, you have to invest into him, you have to educate him, you must raise his competencies to be a very

<sup>369</sup> Interview L2, Gedimino Pr, Vilnius, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2012.

*good* candidate, and to know what it means to be a candidate and what it means when you are elected.”<sup>370</sup>

Therefore, Lithuania’s two main parties have reached a degree of stability where they are able to make long term plans. Neither party has an urgent need to recruit new members in order to field a full slate of candidates at either the national or the municipal level. The relatively large electoral districts (compared to, for example, Estonia) make it easier to find candidates in each municipality, and the ban on independent candidates means that Lithuania’s parties have had two decades to build up nationwide organisations. With a reasonably large and stable membership and good organisational penetration, they are able to demand that candidates are socialised into party values. Therefore, both national and municipal candidates are recruited primarily from existing party members, and neither party has an urgent incentive to recruit *more* members for this purpose. This suggests that parties are now more likely to expend resources training existing members than recruiting new candidates from outside the party.

## 5.7 MEMBERS AS A GRASSROOTS CAMPAIGNING RESOURCE

It was hypothesised in Chapter Three that Lithuania’s mixed electoral system would encourage parties to contact individual voters through grassroots mobilisation at the single member district level. Although ‘electoral’ mobilisation dominated in the immediate post-transition years, grass-roots campaigning has increased in importance for both TS-LKD and LSDP in recent years. Interviews revealed a perception that

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<sup>370</sup> Interview L5, LSDP Headquarters, Vilnius, 20<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

the mass media approach became more expensive and less effective, while grass-roots strategies, although labour-intensive, were found to be cheap and effective. In addition, parties became frustrated with the limitations of the mass media and internet for communicating at the single member district level.

Typical forms of grass-roots campaigning in Lithuania include going door-to-door, setting up stalls in market squares, organising and attending meetings, distributing leaflets door-to-door and driving around in a car with a message hailing from a loudspeaker. One LSDP MP, representing a single member district on the outskirts of Vilnius, said:

“We have an action plan. I go from door to door, I discuss with people, I talk about ideas and we deliver leaflets. Like always, I need better coordination with ordinary people. I have my ‘fan club’. It’s not so big, about 70 people, and of course I have supporters in each apartment block. These supporters also collect votes and they can organise meetings where they invite me to discuss, they distribute my programmes.”<sup>371</sup>

TS-LKD only started investing in grass-roots campaigning relatively recently. Their change in strategy was inspired by the return to Lithuania of a parliamentary candidate who had spent a period living in England. He had observed localised methods of campaigning under the UK’s first-past-the-post system, including targeting strategies. Now an MP, he attributes his surprise victory in the 2008 election to his assiduous grass-roots strategy. He described his original campaign:

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<sup>371</sup> Interview L4, Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, Vilnius, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

“It was consistent, person-to-person, knocking at each door, talking to people, leaving some leaflets, something like that. I was running against the current Mayor of Vilnius, then the former Mayor of Vilnius, in his home constituency. And I won. So, yes, it [grass-roots campaigning] was very effective. I was nowhere near the favourite, my party was in third place before the election. So now, out of 71 constituencies, we are using this technique in 15 to 20 constituencies.”<sup>372</sup>

*Table 5.7 Participation of Members in Grassroots Activities (National Elections)*

	Often		Sometimes		Rarely		Never	
	TS-LKD	LSDP	TS-LKD	LSDP	TS-LKD	LSDP	TS-LKD	LSDP
TS-LKD n=27 LSDP n=28								
Contact voters by telephone	0%	7.1%	25.9%	64.3%	44.4%	14.3%	29.6%	14.3%
Contact voters door-to-door	14.8%	25.0%	29.6%	53.6%	33.3%	17.9%	22.2%	3.6%
Distribute handbills door-to-door	63.0%	66.7%	25.9%	29.6%	3.7%	3.7%	7.4%	0%
Hand out leaflets in the street	33.3%	67.9%	33.3%	28.6%	22.2%	3.6%	11.1%	0%
Organise and attend meetings	37.0%	66.7%	55.6%	33.3%	7.4%	0%	3.7%	0%
Participate in rallies and events	33.3%	50.0%	37.0%	35.7%	29.6%	10.7%	3.7%	3.6%
Persuade friends, family and neighbours to vote for the party	59.3%	75.0%	37.0%	25.0%	0%	0%	3.7%	0%
Promote the party through social media	50.0%	46.4%	19.2%	46.4%	23.1%	7.1%	7.7%	0%

Despite these recent innovations, LSDP members remain more likely than TS-LKD members to be involved frequently in grass-roots activities (Table 5.7, p188). Three-quarters of LSDP respondents said that members ‘often’ or ‘sometimes’ knocked on doors. Less than half of TS-LKD respondents said members were ‘often’ or

<sup>372</sup> Interview L1, Gedimino Pr, Vilnius, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2012.

‘sometimes’ involved in such activities. This suggests that parties weigh up their options (friendly or hostile media) and the resources available (money, young and energetic members) and formulate the communications strategies according to the geographic dispersal of the voters they seek to contact.

There are three reasons why LSDP members might be more active in grass-roots campaigning than TS-LKD members. Firstly, TS-LKD’s membership base is more elderly than LSDP’s.<sup>373</sup> Both parties agreed that young people, who are physically fitter and feel less inhibited about contacting strangers, carry out the bulk of this work.<sup>374</sup> Secondly, the LSDP perceives a strong need to balance a hostile media. One youth leader commented that, “Overall the public discourse is more favourable to the centre-right than the centre-left, so going door-to-door is one way to over-ride the media bias.”<sup>375</sup> Thirdly, and possibly related to their historically sympathetic media coverage, TS-LKD came to grassroots campaigning only relatively recently. One strategist described the recent change in tactics:

“Seven years ago we had this myth in our party that our party won’t do door-to-door campaigning. [...] But after the 2008 elections we started to do this, and I think it will be a very useful tool in this election because most of our candidates will do door-to-door campaigning.”<sup>376</sup>

TS-LKD now tailors its message to individual single member districts, even downplaying its brand in areas where it is less popular. “We are trying to show our

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<sup>373</sup> Many of TS-LKD’s members are former deportees.

<sup>374</sup> Interview L6, Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, Vilnius, 25<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

<sup>375</sup> Interview L5, LSDP Headquarters, Vilnius, 20<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

<sup>376</sup> Interview L2, Gedimino Pr, Vilnius, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2012.

candidates' personalities and their political issues," said one strategist.<sup>377</sup> The party even organised teams of students to travel to rural constituencies to help out with delivering leaflets and going door-to-door.

"They are on vacation because they are students. [...] In two weeks time, they will go to a district in the northern part of Lithuania and they will walk with one of our candidates and they will live in this city for one week because it is easier. And one of the reasons for this type of campaigning is that in rural areas in small cities we have no young members because there are no young people in some parts of Lithuania. It is problematic to campaign in these areas."<sup>378</sup>

Therefore, although TS-LKD came to grassroots campaigning late, they have now embraced it with gusto. They are even pioneering a form of voter identification, which is extremely laborious in Lithuania because strict data protection laws prevent parties from storing information about named individuals. Parties are not permitted to utilise general marketing data, and they cannot even store voter identification alongside the resident's name and surname. "What we do," said a TS-LKD MP, "is that we store the data without names and surnames. For example, this apartment is lived in by Poles, in this apartment is a young family of Lithuanian Catholics who are sympathetic to us."<sup>379</sup>

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<sup>377</sup> Interview L2, Gedimino Pr, Vilnius, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2012.

<sup>378</sup> Interview L2, Gedimino Pr, Vilnius, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2012.

<sup>379</sup> Interview L1, Gedimino Pr, Vilnius, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2012.

Table 5.8 Participation of Members in Grassroots Activities (Municipal Elections)

	Often		Sometimes		Rarely		Never	
	TS-LKD	LSDP	TS-LKD	LSDP	TS-LKD	LSDP	TS-LKD	LSDP
TS-LKD n=42 LSDP n=28								
Contact voters by telephone	0%	10.7%	35.7%	50.0%	38.1%	21.4%	26.2%	17.9%
Contact voters door-to-door	9.8%	28.6%	31.7%	57.1%	39.0%	10.7%	22.0%	3.6%
Distribute handbills door-to-door	69.0%	67.9%	21.4%	32.1%	4.8%	0%	4.8%	0%
Hand out leaflets in the street	29.3%	60.7%	39.0%	39.3%	19.5%	0%	12.2%	0%
Organise and attend meetings	42.9%	78.6%	42.5%	21.4%	9.5%	0%	2.4%	0%
Participate in rallies and events	34.1%	42.9%	39.0%	42.9%	19.5%	10.7%	7.3%	3.6%
Persuade friends, family and neighbours to vote for the party	54.8%	78.6%	40.5%	21.4%	0.0%	3.6%	4.8%	0%
Promote the party through social networks	40.5%	40.7%	19.0%	33.3%	28.6%	29.6%	11.9%	0%

While parties discovered individual voter contacting to be more useful over the years, they also perceived electoral-professional campaigning to be less and less effective. An LSDP youth leader commented that, in the past, “... the winning candidate was the one who had the most beautiful advertising. Now it doesn’t work like that. You can buy the whole page of the national newspaper and pay 10,000 euros to reach 20,000 people and it will not have any effect. It’s a waste of money.”<sup>380</sup> In a situation where the two main ‘traditional’ parties were looking to reduce the cost of political campaigns with a view to cutting out business funding, investment in grassroots campaigning has also appealed as a way to save money, particularly at the single member district level, where budgets are often limited.<sup>381</sup>

<sup>380</sup> Interview L5, LSDP Headquarters, Vilnius, 20<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

<sup>381</sup> Interview L2, Gedimino Pr, Vilnius, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2012.

It is noteworthy, however, that the survey data shows only minimal difference between campaign strategies in local and national elections (Tables 5.7, p188 and 5.8, p191). Although there is more variation in municipal district size than single member district size, the average number of voters is similar (except in Vilnius, where the municipal district has 550,000 voters; however, the majority of survey respondents were from the regions). Modern mass media is poorly suited for communication about local issues, whether for single member district or municipal campaigns. A TS-LKD strategist commented on the situation in Vilnius, where the most localised media operates at the citywide level:

“If one of the candidates is standing in the single seats in Vilnius, he has very little opportunity to use media – TV, radio, etcetera. In Vilnius we have eleven constituencies. That’s why it’s not effective to use radio or local papers etc. That’s why they are walking with booklets, leaflets, posters etc.”<sup>382</sup>

Therefore, while LSDP has long organised campaigns at the grass-roots level as well as communicating through the mass media, TS-LKD is now joining the ‘ground war’, and is adapting traditional campaigning techniques commonly used in the UK and the USA to the Lithuanian circumstances. This is a rational adaptation to the country’s mixed electoral system, where single member districts are keenly fought.<sup>383</sup> As Zittel and Gshwend found in Germany, parties operating in a mixed system often combine modern media campaigns at the national level with traditional grassroots

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<sup>382</sup> Interview L2, Gedimino Pr, Vilnius, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2012.

<sup>383</sup> In the 2008 election, TS-LKD won 38% of the SMD seats (27 out of 71) with 19.6% of the overall vote, a success that was partially attributed to the adoption of campaign techniques tried and tested in long established majoritarian electoral environments. In 2012, after governing through a difficult period of economic crisis and harsh austerity, their grassroots presence served them well, and they were once again able to outperform their national average in the single member districts.

campaigning at the local level.<sup>384</sup> Single member district campaigns focus on local issues, and use a personalised, face-to-face approach. Indeed, the rewards for successful single member district campaigns are greater in Lithuania than in Germany because the proportional and single member district sections of the ballot are unlinked. In Germany, winning an extra single member district seat might come at the expense of a list seat. However, in Lithuania an extra single member district is a pure gain.

## 5.8 LEGITIMACY BENEFITS

Katz and Mair argued that one of the only reasons that Western European parties maintained a membership bases was to 'legitimise' parties by showing that they are not simply elite-based affairs.<sup>385</sup> 'Legitimacy benefits' are difficult to define, and the existing scholarship does not yield any testable hypotheses that might relate to central and east Europe. However, it is worth noting that both TS-LKD and LSDP were highly sensitive to these concerns. As table 5.2 (p172) shows, more than one third of survey respondents (35.7% in each party) thought that the most important function of party members was to 'demonstrate that the party has the support of the people, not just the elite'.

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<sup>384</sup> Thomas Zittel and Thomas Gschwend (2008), 'Individualised Constituency Campaigns in Mixed-Member Electoral Systems: Candidates in the 2005 German Elections', *West European Politics*, 31(5): 978-1003.

<sup>385</sup> Peter Mair and Richard S. Katz (1997), 'Party Organization, Party Democracy and the Emergence of the Cartel Party', in Peter Mair (Ed), *Party System Change: Approaches and Interpretations*, Clarendon Press, Oxford; Peter Mair and Ingrid van Biezen (2001), 'Party Membership in Twenty European Democracies', *Party Politics*, 7(1): 5-21.

However, parties did not believe that cynical voters would be fooled if parties maintained large numbers of members purely as window dressing. In the words of an LSDP youth leader, the legitimising role of members was part of a wider need to build trust, which:

“...is not automatic from building membership, but building membership in terms of hearing people and putting people into the decision-making process of political parties. Quantity is not important. You can have 100,000 members and it won't make a difference.”<sup>386</sup>

Party membership numbers are rarely discussed in the media. If anything, the public underestimates how many members each party has at any given time. The idea that party membership levels are very low has been used as a basis for challenging the ban on independent candidates. As one interviewee explained:

“I think the perception is that there are very few members in all the parties, so they do not deserve to have a monopoly over the political system. That leads to the idea that, in municipal elections, independent candidates will now be allowed to stand. They [the public and media] say only 1% of the population is a party member, and that is too small to rule. They say, ‘Why do they rule over us when they have so few members,’ and so on.”<sup>387</sup>

Parties did pay attention to how their membership numbers compared to those of their competitors, with the ‘traditional’ parties feeling a greater need to compete against the ‘populist parties’ rather than against each other. At the time of the

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<sup>386</sup> Interview L5, LSDP Headquarters, Vilnius, 20<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

<sup>387</sup> Interview L5, LSDP Headquarters, Vilnius, 20<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

interviews, the Labour Party's membership numbers were catching up with those of TS-LKD and LSDP. This is likely to spur further membership recruitment amongst the two main 'traditional' parties.<sup>388</sup> One MP admitted:

“Our supporters are very worried that the Labour Party is very close. It is important from my point of view to compete not against the conservatives and liberals, but against the Labour Party and Order and Justice, because they collect our voters using populist ideas.”<sup>389</sup>

## 5.9 DISCUSSION

Interviewees from both parties predicted that their membership levels would expand in the near future. While active members were favoured, inactive members would also be welcome. LSDP had already begun the process of lowering barriers to entry, with the youth organisation scrapping the system of recommendations in favour of a simple on-line form. One TS-LKD ministerial adviser looked to the future, pointing out that the party would soon be in opposition after a tiring four years in government. He said, “We have been thinking for the past year or two, considering our plans for expansion and attracting more people, especially those who might be active members, people from urban areas with higher incomes.”<sup>390</sup>

As Lithuania's democracy continues to mature, the conflicting incentives provided by the unlinked mixed electoral system become apparent. In attitudes towards policy-

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<sup>388</sup> In May 2013 the Labour Party merged with another smaller party, and now has 20,000 members, the largest in Lithuania. ‘The Labour Party No Longer Exists’, Lithuania Tribune, 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2012, <http://www.lithuaniatribune.com/38906/the-labour-party-no-longer-exists-201338906/>

<sup>389</sup> Interview L4, Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, Vilnius, 10<sup>th</sup> July 2012.

<sup>390</sup> Interview L3, Gedimino Pr, Vilnius, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2012.

making, parties focus tightly on an ideological niche at the national level, while doing whatever it takes to build an electoral majority at the single member district level. When it comes to practical campaigning, parties use the mass media and internet, but invest in individual voter contacting strategies at the single member district level. Old-fashioned campaign techniques, including going door-to-door, are common.

With all campaigning banned for 72 hours before polling day, parties placed much importance on members as loyal and reliable voters. They needed not just the votes of members themselves, but also hoped that members would persuade their friends and family to vote as well. Furthermore, recent changes in party funding laws, which banned business donations altogether, meant that parties were beginning to think about raising money from their members. Significantly, this was happening in parallel with increased state funding of political parties, indicating that parties do not believe that the state can (or should) fully replace the banned business funding. Membership fundraising is likely to increase in the future.

There was a general consensus that the Lithuanian political system ‘is not yet mature’, and that party members will become more, not less, important in the future. As one young TS-LKD campaign manager said:

“It is hard to say if social media will be important in the future. I would say grass-roots campaigning is going to be important. We are just in the beginning of something, the initial phase of grass-roots campaigning. We are just starting to use this otherwise very known technique in the West.”<sup>391</sup>

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<sup>391</sup> Interview L3, Gedimino Pr, Vilnius, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2012.

While the move towards membership-intensive campaign techniques has been driven primarily by the dynamics of competition at the single member district level, it will be interesting to see whether the policy-making functions of party members change over time. Although members are invited to take part in policy-related events, party elites currently take a somewhat paternalistic view of themselves as the keepers of 'consistency' and 'ideological tradition'. The next generation of party activists may begin to demand more genuine policy-making involvement in exchange for their toils.

# 6

## Slovakia

Following the finalisation of its ‘velvet divorce’ from the Czech Republic in January 1993, the newly independent Slovakia took an authoritarian turn under Vladimir Mečiar’s HZDS. By the late 1990s, HZDS had more than 70,000 members,<sup>392</sup> but the party’s dominance came to an abrupt end following its 1998 electoral defeat by united opposition forces. Following this ‘second transition’,<sup>393</sup> Slovakia established a competitive multi-party system. However, party membership levels plummeted from 6.9% of the population in 2000 to 1.7% in 2008.<sup>394</sup> This can largely be explained by the decline of HZDS which, after a decade of slow decline, failed to cross the five percent threshold in 2010. However, it has also been argued that the adoption of a pure proportional electoral system encouraged the centralisation of party organisational and campaigning structures. Marek Rybař posits that the list-based PR system with a single electoral district has helped to concentrate power in the hands of a small circle of party leaders, reducing the need for an extensive territorial organisation.<sup>395</sup>

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<sup>392</sup> Tim Haughton (2001), ‘HZDS: The Ideology, Organisation and Support Base of Slovakia’s Most Successful Party’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 53(3): 759.

<sup>393</sup> Kevin Deegan Krause, ‘Slovakia’s Second Transition’, *Journal of Democracy*, 14 (2) 2003 pp 65-79.

<sup>394</sup> These figures are from the European Social Survey, and are corroborated by party-level data. See Chapter 2.

<sup>395</sup> Marek Rybař (2006), ‘Old Parties and New: Changing Patterns of Party Politics in Slovakia’, in Susanne Jungerstam-Mulders (Ed), *Post-Communist EU Member States: Parties and Party Systems*, Ashgate, p172.

This chapter investigates the current role of Slovak party members, exploring how party elites' membership recruitment decisions are influenced by the country's current institutional design. Information about the role of members was gathered from surveys and interviews with party activists, staff, councillors and MPs, with added corroboration from party statutes and media reports. The micro-hypotheses presented in chapter three are tested. As hypothesised, and previously noted by Rybař, Slovakia's electoral system encourages an 'electoral professional' style of campaigning, where the role of members is minimal. Members are more involved at the municipal level, but the gap between the highly centralised National Council in Bratislava and the country's tiny municipalities is too great to bridge in remote areas, and most parties do not even aspire to nationwide coverage.

## 6.1 THE SLOVAK POLITICAL SYSTEM

Every four years, 150 members are elected to the *Národná Rada* (National Council) elected, using proportional representation in a single electoral district. Although party lists are theoretically 'open' (voters may indicate a preference for up to four candidates on each list), a candidate needs to be chosen by 3% of the total votes to 'skip' above their colleagues. Although this does happen,<sup>396</sup> electoral lists are primarily ordered by internal party processes.

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<sup>396</sup> In the 2010 Slovak election, 11/150 MPs were elected thanks to preference votes.

To gain representation, parties must win at least five percent of the national vote.<sup>397</sup> At each election, new parties gain entry to the party system, while others fail to gain re-election. ‘Wasted’ votes remain a feature of Slovak politics. In the March 2012 election, 19% of ballots were cast for parties that failed to cross the threshold.<sup>398</sup> Only political parties can nominate candidates for the *Národná Rada*; private citizens are not permitted to stand in parliamentary elections. Two citizens attempted to register themselves as independent candidates for the 2010 election, but the Central Election Commission rejected their applications.<sup>399</sup> In order to gain the right to submit lists, parties must gather 10,000 signatures. However, there is no lower limit for members.

As described in Chapter Three, we would expect such a centralised electoral system to lead to a reliance on ‘electoral professional’ campaigning, with communication primarily taking place through traditional mass and social media. The selection of candidates is also likely to be highly centralised at the national level, with only indirect input from the regions. We might also expect to find that the selection process favours those based in Bratislava, since a high position on the party lists depends more on currying favour with the party’s top officials than making links with ordinary members in the regions. This means that some regions will be under-represented, potentially resulting in an absence of grassroots communication in some areas during national election campaigns. As a consequence, a gulf may be created between national and municipal politics in Slovakia’s more remote regions.

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<sup>397</sup> In order to lodge a list with the electoral commission, parties must pay a deposit of €30,000. This deposit is returned if parties win at least 2% of the vote, and parties can access state funding if they win 3% of the national vote.

<sup>398</sup> Coalitions are permitted, but the threshold is higher: two or three parties in coalition must win seven percent of the vote, while coalitions of four or more parties must win ten percent of the popular vote between them before being admitted to parliament.

<sup>399</sup> CEC decisions of 22 March 2010 (Mr Krajnak) and 20 May 2010 (Mr Adamec).

For the purposes of local political administration, the Slovak Republic is divided into eight regions, seventy-nine districts and 2871 municipalities. Municipalities are typically very small; two-thirds have fewer than 1,000 inhabitants, and they each have their own directly elected Mayor or Lord Mayor. The Slovak capital, Bratislava, with a population of 460,000 is divided into five districts and seventeen city sections, each with their own municipal council. Municipal elections are held every four years. Political parties and coalitions submit lists of candidates for election, but independent candidates may also nominate themselves.<sup>400</sup> Traditionally, party political representation dominates in large cities, while independent candidates are more common in rural areas.<sup>401</sup> However, ‘independent’ mayors (often with some vague party backing) have become increasingly common in recent years, as discussed in section 6.6 below. In 2012, six out of Slovakia’s ten biggest cities had ‘independent’ mayors, as did seven of Bratislava’s seventeen districts. This reflects the failure of Slovakia’s parties to ‘close out’ the political system.

Parliamentary campaigns are largely unregulated. There is no official start date, and the only real restriction is that paid political advertisements cannot be broadcast until twenty-one days prior to the election. The 48-hour ‘silence period’ before polling day was removed prior to the 2010 election.<sup>402</sup> This means that, unusually for a post-communist democracy, Slovak parties can now explicitly conduct campaigns to ‘get

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<sup>400</sup> Any citizen aged eighteen or over and permanently resident in the municipality has the right to vote unless they are: a judge, a prosecutor, a member of the armed security corps, a member of municipal council staff, or a mayor.

<sup>401</sup> Andrew Coulson and Adrian Campbell (2008) *Local Government in Central and Eastern Europe: The Rebirth of Local Democracy*, Routledge (London), p315.

<sup>402</sup> It remains forbidden to publish opinion polls and exit polls on election day.

their vote out' on polling day.<sup>403</sup> Party funding is also largely unregulated. Provided their headquarters are in the Slovak Republic, companies are free to donate to political parties, although anonymous donations are banned.<sup>404</sup> There is no limit to the value of donations. In theory, there are limits on the amount that political parties can spend, although this law does not appear to be enforced and has not been updated since it was introduced in 1994.<sup>405</sup>

In August 2003, a proposed law to limit election campaign financing to SK12 million (€286,000) was defeated, despite objections from the head of the anti-corruption unit.<sup>406</sup> Slovakia has been criticised by OSCE for the extensive influence of business financing; a major corruption scandal, known as 'Gorila', overshadowed the March 2012 election, with most parties implicated.<sup>407</sup> State funding exists, but is unlikely to be a major source of income for established political parties. With such a permissive funding environment, members are unlikely to be of much assistance in either fundraising or as a source of free labour.

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<sup>403</sup> Slovak parliamentary campaigns are aggressively fought. Even in recent years, OSCE election monitors have raised concerns about 'inflammatory and offensive language using ethnic stereotypes', 'potential misuse of public resources for campaign purposes', and the lack of enforcement mechanisms for campaign financing. Moreover, repeated concerns have been raised about vote-buying in Roma villages, where political parties or their agents have been seen by election monitors to offer money, food or beverages in exchange for unused ballot papers on polling day. (OSCE report, Slovak Parliamentary Elections, 12 June 2010, <http://www.osce.org/odihr/71246>)

<sup>404</sup> GRECO (2008) Evaluation Report on the Slovak Republic, Transparency of Political Party Funding (Theme II), <http://www.idea.int/political-finance/sources.cfm#country-SK> (accessed 13<sup>th</sup> August 2012).

<sup>405</sup> Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, 18th August 1994.

<sup>406</sup> The Slovak Spectator, 'Ministers Agree to Unlimited Campaign Financing', 28<sup>th</sup> August 2003. <http://spectator.sme.sk/articles/view/13704/10/> (last accessed 13<sup>th</sup> August 2012)

<sup>407</sup> Tom Nicholson (2012), 'Gorila', *Vydavateľstvo Dixit*.

## *The Parties*

Between six and eight parties typically secure enough votes to gain representation in the Národná Rada. Although the political 'left' has largely consolidated around a single party, Smer-Social Direction (*SMER-SD, Sociálna demokracia*), the right wing is fragmented, with support shared between the Christian Democrats (KDH), SDKU-DS, a party representing the Hungarian minority (*Most-Híd*) and a revolving door of 'third generation' parties campaigning on platforms of anti-corruption and economic efficiency. This chapter will focus on the current governing party, SMER-SD, and SDKU-DS. The latter has typically led centre-right coalitions over the past decade.

*SMER- Sociálna demokracia* (Direction – Social Democracy) was founded as *SMER* (direction) in 1999 by Robert Fico as a breakaway from the Party of the Democratic Left (SDL), Slovakia's communist successor party. After swiftly establishing itself as Slovakia's most popular left-wing party, it changed its name in 2003 to *SMER (tretia cesta)* (Direction-Third Way), emphasising the kind of modern, pro-market version of social democracy popularised by Clinton, Blair and Schroeder in the 1990s.<sup>408</sup> In 2005, *SMER (tretia cesta)* merged with SDL, the former communist party from which it had previously broken away, and absorbed several other centre-left parties.<sup>409</sup> At this point, the party changed its name to *SMER - Sociálna demokracia* (Direction- Social Democracy, *SMER-SD*).

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<sup>408</sup> <http://www.strana-smer.sk/67/profil-strany>

<sup>409</sup> Social Democratic Alternative and Social Democratic Party of Slovakia

Although no official merger has ever taken place with HZDS, anecdotal evidence suggests that there has been a gradual drift of personnel from HZDS to SMER-SD. The latter party was temporarily expelled from the Party of European Socialists after forming a coalition with the Slovak National Party (*SNS, Slovenská národná strana*), a right-wing populist nationalist party, but was readmitted in 2008. In the March 2012 election, *SMER-SD* won 83 out of 150 seats with 44.41% of the vote.<sup>410</sup> At the time of research (July 2012-June 2013), it governed with an outright majority.

The party's structure and membership rules are governed by the Statutes of Political Party SMER – Social Democracy, which were originally adopted in 1999.<sup>411</sup> The boundaries of the regional and district parties are usually contiguous with the administrative boundaries of the Slovak Republic (Article 18). Therefore, there are eight regional branches. District organisations do not cover every administrative district of Slovakia, but can be founded if the district has at least 40 members. Individual districts prepare policies for their local municipalities. 'Clubs' are established in each district to 'bring together members, party activists and sympathisers' in order to implement the party's policies and programmes (Article 18(9)).

Article 5 lays down the membership application process, which is unusually onerous, suggesting the party is not necessarily keen to recruit 'outsiders'. In addition to the standard minimum conditions (applicants must be at least 18 years old, Slovak citizens, agree with the party's objectives and statutes, and refrain from joining

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<sup>410</sup> The number of 'wasted' votes was the main source of the disproportionality.

<sup>411</sup> First registered with the Ministry of the Interior on 8<sup>th</sup> November 1999, and amended in 2000, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2006 and 2010.

another party), members must complete a written application giving full details of their education, employment and concerns. The application asks members to describe any professional competence or knowledge that could contribute to the activities of the programme. The application is then discussed by the appropriate county organisation and actively approved or rejected.

Despite being a centre-left party taking in remnants of Slovakia's communist successor party, the structures of SMER-SD bear a striking resemblance to the stereotype of Duverger's cadre party. The central structures of SMER-SD are minimal. There are no standing policy committees, no structure other than the Congress for bringing together regional interests, and no remnants of parties that merged into SMER-SD with specific rights of representation. Branch structures are highly devolved. In asking potential members to specify what they can contribute to the activities of the party, it is clear that quality of members is valued over quantity.

SDKU-DS was founded by Mikuláš Dzurinda in 2000. Dzurinda, the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic from 1998 to 2006, was originally elected through the KDH, but formed SDKU-DS as the Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK) began to disintegrate. The 2002-2006 government was reformist, pushing forward privatisations that Slovakia's neighbours had pursued in the 1990s. These reforms were predictably unpopular, and allegations of corruption during the privatisation processes came back to haunt SKDU-DS during the March 2012 election campaign.<sup>412</sup> The Party moved into opposition in 2006, and in January 2008 Juraj

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<sup>412</sup> Martin Ehl, *Gorilla on the Loose in Slovakia*, Transitions Online: Regional Intelligence, 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2012, <http://www.tol.org/client/article/22915-slovakia-corruption-dzurinda.html> (last accessed 12<sup>th</sup> September 2012).

Liška, the Deputy Leader, openly asked Dzurinda to resign as leader due to poor polling figures and an allegedly autocratic leadership style. This rebellion was quashed, and party leaders who objected were expelled.

In early 2010, the popular sociologist and former SDKU-DS presidential candidate, Iveta Radičová, was selected to lead SDKU-DS into the June 2010 elections. As Prime Minister, Radičová formed a coalition with three other centre-right parties. However Dzurinda, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, remained the party leader. Anecdote suggests that he continued to drive from the back seat. The coalition collapsed in the autumn of 2011 after the governing parties failed to reach agreement on the euro-zone bailout fund. Dzurinda led SKDU-DS into the election of March 2012, but stood down when the party received less than 6% of the vote.

SDKU-DS traditionally follows a liberal conservative ideology. During both its periods in government, it introduced pro-market reforms. It also introduced flat rate taxation in 2004. However, at the time of this research, SKDU-DS was engaged in soul searching about its future. For the first time, the party had a leader other than Dzurinda (Pavol Frešo took over as leader following a vote at the May 2012 Congress), and the party was conducting a root and branch assessment of its policies and organisational structure. Frešo aims to define the new post-Dzurinda organisation by reconnecting with ‘ordinary Slovaks’ and moving away from being ‘a party centred on elites’.<sup>413</sup> As a result, the party’s programme now focuses on more populist centre-right

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<sup>413</sup> ‘Slovakia’s SKDÚ seeks fresh start’, The Prague Post, May 9<sup>th</sup> 2012, <http://www.praguepost.com/news/13058-slovakias-sdku-seeks-fresh-start.html>; ‘Frešo: Vinu za neúspech SDKÚ nesie aj Žitňanská’ (‘Frešo: The Blame for the Failure of the SDKÚ lies with Žitňanská’), Paul Fresne, sme.sk, 11<sup>th</sup> May 2012, <http://www.sme.sk/c/6372855/freso-vinu-za-neuspech-sdku-nesie-aj-zitnanska.html#ixzz26H8DIWzR> (last accessed 12<sup>th</sup> September 2012).

themes, including employment, law and order, support for families and Christian values. The party has only 7,000 members, scarcely sufficient to compete at all levels of government across Slovakia.

### **THE ROLE OF MEMBERS IN SLOVAK POLITICAL PARTIES**

Party activists, councillors, MPs and staff were surveyed and interviewed for this research between August and October 2012. Copies of the survey can be found in both English and Slovak in appendix 2. Combined with party statutes and press reports, the results of the surveys and interviews are used to test the hypotheses developed in Chapter Three. It should be noted, however, that SMER-SD was reluctant to participate in this research, and that the number of respondents and interviewees was much lower than for the other five political parties examined in this thesis.<sup>414</sup> The results, which have been interpreted with this methodological limitation in mind, are presented below.

#### **6.2 AMBASSADORS IN THE COMMUNITY**

Political parties in western democracies traditionally valued members as ‘ambassadors in the community’, people who talk positively of the party’s policies, and vouch for the integrity of candidates, to their friends, family and neighbours. In Chapter Three, however, a link was hypothesised between attempts to build individual bonds of trust and low district magnitude electoral systems, particularly where candidates compete

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<sup>414</sup> After considerable cajoling, one SMER-SD MP gave an oral interview while a press officer gave a written response to questions. Ten party branch officials responded to surveys.

against their co-partisans. Previous research has shown that campaigns in small districts seek to mobilise individual voters, while campaigns in large districts seek to mobilise organised groups of voters. Furthermore, centralised electoral systems, such as Slovakia's, encourage individual candidates to focus on building the party's reputation as a whole, rather than seeking to convince individual voters of their integrity. The mechanics of communicating personally with over four million voters are highly impractical.

Unsurprisingly, neither SMER-SD nor SKDU-DS thought that members' communications through friends, family and neighbours were the most effective means of spreading the party's message. Instead, mass and social media were preferred. As Table 6.1 (p209) demonstrates, 56.6% of SMER-SD respondents answered that communication through national TV and radio was 'very effective', suggesting a reliance on electoral-professional modes of communication (30% thought that discussions with friends, family or neighbours were 'very effective'). Only 15.8% of SKDU-DS respondents thought that communication through friends, family and neighbours was 'very effective', with the most faith placed in social media (31.6% of respondents thought this means of communication was 'very effective'). SKDU-DS's assessment of members as 'ambassadors' was significantly lower than SMER-SD's, which was likely explained by the fact that, after the major setback of the February 2012 election, "the motivation of party members is falling"<sup>415</sup> in SKDU-DS.

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<sup>415</sup> Interview S2a, Národná Rada, Bratislava, 13th September 2012.

Table 6.1 What is the most effective way of spreading your party's message?

	Very effective		Moderately Effective		Somewhat Effective		Not Effective	
	SDKU	SMER	SDKU	SMER	SDKU	SMER	SDKU	SMER
SDKU-DS n=19 SMER-SD n=10								
National TV and Radio	15.8%	56.6%	47.4%	11.1%	21.1%	11.1%	15.8%	22.2%
Local TV and Radio	15.8%	11.1%	10.5%	11.1%	21.1%	22.2%	52.6%	55.6%
Print Media	22.2%	50.0%	50.0%	20.0%	22.2%	10.0%	5.6%	20.0%
Social Media	31.6%	22.2%	31.6%	33.3%	26.3%	22.2%	10.5%	22.2%
Discussions with friends, family and neighbours	15.8%	30.0%	36.8%	40.0%	31.6%	20.0%	15.8%	10.0%

Interviews corroborated the survey results that mass and social media were the primary means of communication with the electorate. However, as in Estonia and Lithuania, perceptions of the usefulness of traditional mass media varied widely depending on recent experience. Having suffered a bruising defeat in the 2012 parliamentary election (during which the ‘Gorila Scandal’ focussed attention on the allegedly corrupt privatisations of the second Dzurinda government)<sup>416</sup>, SDKU-DS perceived itself to be at a disadvantage in the mass media game. To them, the charismatic Robert Fico appeared inexplicably impervious to scandal, while their own new leader, Pavol Frešo, had yet to prove himself as a media performer in the league of Fico.<sup>417</sup> This speaks to the leader-centric nature of the mass media, which is congruent with the highly centralised electoral system. We are also reminded, once

<sup>416</sup> Kristina Mikulova, ‘Scandal in Slovakia: The Multi-Million Euro Gorilla’ (2012, January 27<sup>th</sup>), The Economist, Retrieved from <http://www.economist.com/blogs/easternapproaches/2012/01/scandal-slovakia>.

<sup>417</sup> Interview S4, Zilinska 3, Bratislava, 13th September 2012.

again, that the ‘electoral-professional’ approach is not a panacea for every political party.

The main difference between the two parties was which *type* of mass media they chose to focus on. Although pessimistic about most forms of communication, SKDU-DS respondents placed most emphasis on social media, while SMER-SD focused on traditional mass media (Table 6.1, p209). The difference in emphasis was partly a result of the demographics to which the parties appealed: SMER-SD has strong support amongst elderly and rural voters, while SKDU-DS appeals largely to young urban professionals.<sup>418</sup> Furthermore, as noted above, SKDU-DS was at a disadvantage in terms of leadership charisma, and interviewees also spoke of SMER-SD’s advantage in terms of ‘spin doctor’ resources.<sup>419</sup> As well as appealing to their target demographic, social media also gave SKDU-DS an opportunity to control their message.

It is notable, however, that both parties chose a method of mass communication, rather than individual communication, as the best means of spreading their party’s message. Interviewees were not entirely dismissive of the idea of members as ambassadors. A SMER-SD strategist stated that members act as ‘multipliers’, distributing the message ‘in space’,<sup>420</sup> while SKDU-SD interviewees acknowledged that members could build trust and explain some of the party’s more complicated

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<sup>418</sup> Interview S4, Zilinska 3, Bratislava, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

<sup>419</sup> Interview S4, Zilinska 3, Bratislava, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

<sup>420</sup> Interview S6, by email, 5<sup>th</sup> December 2012.

policies.<sup>421</sup> However, the use of party members as ‘ambassadors’ was not a priority for either party. This supports the hypothesis that mass communication is favoured over individual communication where electoral districts are large.

### 6.3 LOYAL AND RELIABLE VOTERS

Neither party identified with the idea of members and loyal and reliable voters. This fits in with the micro-hypotheses in Chapter Three, which predicted that a combination of permitted campaigning on polling day, and a large district electoral system, would give parties no institutional incentive to seek members as loyal voters. Indeed, no party’s membership is sizeable enough to make a substantial difference in an electoral district of over four million voters. For example, one SMER-SD MP commented:

“A lot of people sympathise. They are not members of our party, but they support us in the election. We have 17,000 members. I think that is only, I don’t know, one or two percent, but we get forty-five percent in the elections. The support of citizens is much greater.”<sup>422</sup>

In a single member district, a single vote can make the difference between winning and losing, and there is no prize for second place. However, in a proportional electoral district of over four million voters, the benefit of working for every single vote is more diffuse. In addition, unusually for central and east Europe, Slovak

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<sup>421</sup> Interview S1, *Národná Rada*, Bratislava, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012; Interview S2a, *Národná Rada*, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

<sup>422</sup> Interview S5, *Národná Rada*, Bratislava, 16<sup>th</sup> October 2012.

political parties can campaign legally on polling day. Therefore, Slovak interviewees did not see increasing the number of loyal and reliable voters as a convincing reason to invest in membership recruitment.

## 6.4 FUNDRAISING

The Slovak government provides parties with moderate levels of government funding. Parties that win more than three percent of the national vote receive a small fixed amount (approximately €5) for each vote. They receive further funds for each seat won in the *Národná Rada*. This money is sufficient to maintain a basic organisation. However, the lack of enforcement of rules governing party fundraising and campaigning puts inevitable upwards pressure on campaign costs. In Chapter Three, it was hypothesised that the likely prevalence of business funding in Slovakia would leave little role for members in either fundraising or as a source of free labour.

As expected, party members' involvement in fundraising is minimal. They must pay their membership fees (€10 a year). This is obligatory in both parties, and members who do not pay are deleted from both parties' membership lists after one year.<sup>423</sup> Other than paying their membership fee, members play no fundraising role. As one SDKU-DS MP said, "It is not a tradition in Slovakia to raise money in this way. Fundraising is rather to be done via entrepreneurs. There is no tradition of public fundraising."<sup>424</sup> As table 6.2 (p213) shows, none of the survey respondents thought that fundraising was an important function of party members. In SKDU-DS,

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<sup>423</sup> Interview S4, Zilinska 3, Bratislava, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012; Article 7(g) of SMER-SD statutes.

<sup>424</sup> Interview S1, *Národná Rada*, Bratislava, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

however, those who had been elected to well-paid posts, for example MPs and MEPs, were required to pay an extra fee to the party.<sup>425</sup>

*Table 6.2 Perceptions of the most important function of members*

Question: What is the most important function of members in your party? (choose only one answer)		
SDKU-DS n=17 SMER n=9	SDKU-DS	SMER-SD
To contribute financially	0%	0%
To spread the party's message	23.5%	11.1%
To develop help develop policies	47.1%	44.4%
To demonstrate that the party has the support of the people, not just the elite	23.5%	33.3%
To help with election campaigns	0%	0%
To provide candidates for local and national elections	5.9%	11.1%

Most interviewees agreed that the primary source of funding, for established parties at least, came from the private sector. Private donations are legal in Slovakia, subject to reporting requirements. However, there was widespread agreement that, despite the permissive regulations, party funding in Slovakia operates “like a black market”.<sup>426</sup>

One SKDU-DS MP described the system as follows:

“We have to publish all the supporters and the funding by law and it is done.

But during election campaigns, particularly at the local level, the *reality* is

<sup>425</sup> Interview S4, Zilinska 3, Bratislava, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

<sup>426</sup> Interview S4, Zilinska 3, Bratislava, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

quite...an experience...nowadays. Yes, candidates are able to get the money, but very often people who fund this campaign don't want their names published so they give money directly or pay for the campaign newspaper."<sup>427</sup>

In advance of the February 2012 election, a corruption scandal, known as 'Gorila', tore through Slovak politics. Although the allegations cast doubt on the probity of politicians of all stripes, SKDU-DS was particularly badly hit because of the focus on alleged corruption during the privatisations of the second Dzurinda government (2002-2006). There was also a perception that centre-right parties were held to a higher standard than SMER-SD, since their voters had higher expectations that they would fight corruption. This is likely connected to assessments of the communist past, with centre-right voters demanding that free-market policies be used to achieve efficiency and stamp out corruption. One SKDU-DS councillor noted that, "Right wing voters are much more sensitive to the problems of corruption. Fico, he has something like immunity. Everyone knows what he is like, but they don't care about it. It's strange, but that's the way it is."<sup>428</sup>

SKDU-DS interviewees expressed a strong desire to clean up politics, but felt trapped in the current situation. Despite the 'Gorila Scandal', there were no institutions deemed capable of enforcing funding regulations, even though the rules themselves were hardly restrictive. Furthermore, with support hovering just above the 5% threshold, SKDU-DS could not see 'unilateral disarmament' as a realistic possibility. SMER-SD interviewees, on the other hand, were reluctant to be drawn on questions

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<sup>427</sup> Interview S1, *Národná Rada*, Bratislava, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

<sup>428</sup> Interview S4, *Zilinska 3*, Bratislava, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

of party funding. When asked about the source of the party's funds, one SMER-SD MP said,

“Um... ah ... we use mostly money from the state. I think it is very important that we are absolutely independent from business and very rich people. They sometimes come and say, ‘OK, I can give you money for the campaign,’ and we can say, ‘We don’t need it’. I think that’s very good.”<sup>429</sup>

Although it is not possible to assess these claims and counter-claims without a detailed investigation, it should be noted that the open and reflective stance adopted by the SKDU-DS interviewees chimes with reports by outside bodies, including the OSCE and Transparency International, and also with reports in the Slovak media.<sup>430</sup> In order to gain a more rounded view of the situation from a party political standpoint, an interviewee from a third party, Freedom and Solidarity (SaS) was asked to comment. When asked what measures Slovak politicians would have to do to regain the public's trust, the MP, elected on an anti-corruption platform, responded:

“Start to behave. Politicians have been stealing so much money in Slovakia that unless somebody goes to prison people just won’t believe that somebody is acting for the good of them. Your expenses scandals [in Britain] are nothing compared to what has happened here.”<sup>431</sup>

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<sup>429</sup> Interview S5, *Národná Rada*, Bratislava, 16th October 2012.

<sup>430</sup> OSCE report, Slovak Parliamentary Elections, 12 June 2010, <http://www.osce.org/odihr/71246>; Closing the Door on Graft’ The Slovak Spectator, 24th September 2012. [http://spectator.sme.sk/articles/view/47656/11/closing\\_the\\_door\\_on\\_graft.html](http://spectator.sme.sk/articles/view/47656/11/closing_the_door_on_graft.html) (last accessed 17 August 2013); Transparency International, ‘Party financing is a common problem in the Visegrad countries’, [http://www.transparency.org/news/pressrelease/20120726\\_post\\_communist\\_institutions\\_failing\\_to\\_stop\\_corruption](http://www.transparency.org/news/pressrelease/20120726_post_communist_institutions_failing_to_stop_corruption)

<sup>431</sup> Interview S3, *Národná Rada*, Bratislava, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

If business financing in Slovak politics is restricted in the future, it was perceived that appeals to members for money and free labour would be more likely. One SKDU-DS MP commented that: “Maybe we will need to do this in the future because we need to support local candidates, and it is our objective also to support transparent financing.”<sup>432</sup> There was a general perception that membership labour could, in most cases, be directly substituted by the work of electoral-professionals. An SDKU-DS councillor commented that:

“It’s very good to have volunteers, it’s good for the campaign, and it’s just good because you save money. Also they speak positively, they write blogs about you. But generally if you have money you don’t need volunteers. Volunteers, they save you money because they are on the street and so on. But generally, if you have money, it’s not important.”<sup>433</sup>

This was in marked contrast to the small district electoral systems of Estonia and Lithuania, where party elites believed that some of the individual voter contacting tasks performed by members could *not* be substituted satisfactorily by paid professionals. The reliance on ‘electoral professional’ campaign methods in Slovakia, and the lack of enforced restrictions on party spending and fundraising, mean that the cost of doing politics almost certainly exceeds the funds that can be provided by the state. SDKU-DS interviewees were very worried about the reputational damage caused by the current dominance of business funding. They acknowledged the current problem, and supported the *objective* of transparent financing, while being

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<sup>432</sup> Interview S1, *Národná Rada*, Bratislava, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

<sup>433</sup> Interview S4, *Zilinska 3*, Bratislava, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

pessimistic about the likelihood of change in the short to medium term. In doing so, they noted the potential of membership fundraising and labour if the party funding environment changed in the future.

## 6.5 POLICY IDEAS AND ‘LINKAGE’

According to theories of ‘electoral-professional’ parties and ‘catch-all’ parties, the role of members in the policy-making process should be minimal in modern political parties. In a world where politicians must react to the twenty-four hour news cycle, the process of involving members in the policy-making process is too time consuming, and only serves to constrain the best judgement of party elites. Given that Slovak parties must communicate in a very large electoral district, making electoral-professional campaigns efficient, we would not expect that they face great pressure to offer members ‘purposive’ benefits in order to spur membership recruitment. We would also expect parties operating in a large electoral district to communicate primarily with ‘organised interests’ rather than individual voters. Therefore, it was hypothesised in Chapter Three that policy-making in Slovak political parties would be elite driven.

The findings regarding membership involvement in policy-making were contradictory. Survey data indicated that parties valued members’ input. Almost half the survey respondents from both parties thought that the single most important function of members was to ‘help formulate policies that would resonate with voters’ (table 6.2, p202). Both parties thought that, besides giving members more say in candidate selection, increasing membership involvement in the policy-making would be a good

way to incentivise more people to join the parties (table 6.3, below). However, parties' official structures provided ordinary members very little formal involvement in policy-making, and informal opportunities were not extensive either.

Table 6.3: *If your party wants to recruit more members, it should...*

	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	SDKU	SMER	SDKU	SMER	SDKU	SMER	SDKU	SMER
SDKU n=16 SMER n=9								
Organise more social events	0%	11.1%	31.5%	33.3%	62.5%	55.6%	0%	0%
Create more career opportunities	6.3%	22.2%	68.8%	44.4%	25.0%	22.2%	0%	11.1%
Appoint a more charismatic leader	18.8%	33.3%	50.0%	33.3%	31.3%	33.3%	0%	6.3%
Give members more say in candidate selection	40.0%	44.4%	46.7%	44.4%	13.3%	11.1%	0%	0%
Offer members more opportunities to shape policies	37.5%	44.4%	50.0%	55.6%	12.5%	0%	0%	0%

Yet interviews suggested that most members were not interested in policy-making. One SDKU-DS MP said that, “In normal circumstances the members expect that the leaders will do the work, not them.”<sup>434</sup> A councillor from the same party added that, “Policy is important, but just for a few people.”<sup>435</sup> There was acknowledgement that perhaps up to ten percent of members were interested in policy-making, and sporadic attempts were made to involve them. However, until recently, the input of members in national policy-making was very top-down, reflecting SDKU-DS's status as a classic ‘internally-created’ party, having been formed in 2000 by the sitting Prime Minister,

<sup>434</sup> Interview S2a, *Národná Rada*, Bratislava, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

<sup>435</sup> Interview S4, Zilinska 3, Bratislava, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

and governing for most of the time since then. In the words of an SDKU-DS ministerial adviser:

“We were established in 2000, but the first elections we ran in were in 2002. Inside the party, there were some mechanisms by which the party members could participate in formulating public policy of the party. We called these programmatic sections. Everybody who wanted could enrol to be a member [of these sections]. Then the high level of the political party decided who, out of all those people, would be involved. And also they ask people from outside the party to participate in the work.”<sup>436</sup>

Furthermore, policy-making procedures varied considerably according to whether the party was in government or in opposition. In government, it was “mostly the ministries and the ministries’ staff and the people who are working with them, those are the people that are formulating the policy, not just of the government but of the party.” In opposition, “The sections that are making the policies are much more active.”<sup>437</sup>

SDKU-DS suffered a serious electoral setback in 2012, and has just completed its first transfer of leadership. Responding to these changes, SDKU-DS has been reassessing the way that it operates, including its policy-making processes. One of the party’s new Vice-Chairmen said:

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<sup>436</sup> Interview S2b, *Národná Rada*, Bratislava, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

<sup>437</sup> Interview S2b, *Národná Rada*, Bratislava, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

“We travel every week. Despite our parliamentary meetings we organise meetings with our electors in different regions. We organise so called open sessions with our members, which are open also to our voters. We discuss, for example, our new agenda and our new programme for our political party. It’s also a good way to approach voters, asking for new ideas and input into the programme.”<sup>438</sup>

Therefore, during this current period of reinvention, input into the policy-making process is not a benefit that accrues only to SDKU-DS members. Aware that their party membership is low, there was concern that members’ views were not representative of the wider public. One SDKU-DS councillor pointed out that, “The problem for the right oriented parties is that we are very far from the typical Slovak, far too intellectual.”<sup>439</sup> Put in political science terminology, SKDU-DS is wary of being caught out by the ‘law of curvilinear disparity’ where members are not representative of society, and impose vote-losing commitments on the party as a result.

SMER-SD’s policy making process is concentrated within its central ‘council’, although the party invites input from various sources, including ‘forums’ to include “people from organisations, trades unions, people who are influential like non-governmental organisations.”<sup>440</sup> It is very typical for a party operating under a large

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<sup>438</sup> Interview S1, *Národná Rada*, Bratislava, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

<sup>439</sup> Interview S4, *Zilinska 3*, Bratislava, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

<sup>440</sup> Interview S5, *Národná Rada*, Bratislava, 16<sup>th</sup> October 2012.

district electoral system to communicate primarily with organised groups rather than seeking the views of individual voters.<sup>441</sup>

SMER-SD's affiliated youth organisation, Young Social Democrats (MSD), and also its seniors' wing were also entitled to contribute policy ideas. A SMER-SD MP added, "They want a lot of things, to change legislation, to talk about problems, and we try to make these changes."<sup>442</sup> However, he noted that members at local party meetings often sought his help to resolve a personal problem, or offered suggestions to improve their neighbourhood at the municipal level. They were less interested in big ideological issues. He noted that:

"Sometimes our members come to me [...] They want a new street, or new lights on the street, or a new park or something. We are speaking about problems with children, with school, but this is not in my competence. This is in the competence of the city. OK, I speak with the mayor of the city, but it is another level of government."<sup>443</sup>

Ultimately, policymaking in SMER-SD is a top-down process. A central office staff member summarised the involvement of members as being "during district organisation meetings, through electronic communication, and through being addressed by party spokespeople, especially members of the NRSR [MPs]." She added that the "assumptions underlying the policy and programme, and the practical

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<sup>441</sup> Kathleen Bawn and Michael F Thies (2003) 'A comparative theory of electoral incentives - Representing the unorganized under PR, plurality and mixed-member electoral systems,' *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 15(1), p. 5-32.

<sup>442</sup> Interview S5, *Národná Rada*, Bratislava, 16<sup>th</sup> October 2012.

<sup>443</sup> Interview S5, *Národná Rada*, Bratislava, 16<sup>th</sup> October 2012.

political decisions, are made by the [Party] President and those close to the party leadership.”<sup>444</sup>

Because policy-making in both parties is highly centralised, party members’ ability to affect policy at the national level also varies greatly according to their geographical location. Because MPs do not represent a specific district, they spend most of their time in Bratislava, where the National Council is located and the media is based. Some MPs make efforts to gather information from around the country, but the programmatic sections meet in Bratislava. One SDKU-DS ministerial adviser said:

“Now we are talking about how to make the policy-making process much more efficient. We have 6 to 7,000 members all over the country. The section meets mostly in the capital, but people who live 500 km away are not going to travel just to talk to the section.”<sup>445</sup>

A Bratislava councillor commented that ability to influence policy depends primarily on informal factors, for example their position and their connections. Location was also crucial He added that, “If you are from a small village it’s more problematic; in Bratislava you will know lots of top politicians so it’s easier.”<sup>446</sup>

At the municipal level, policy-making is devolved. Candidates and councillors are expected to take the broad principles of the party and apply that thinking to local problems. As an SDKU-DS ministerial advisor noted that:

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<sup>444</sup> Interview S6, by email, 5<sup>th</sup> December 2012.

<sup>445</sup> Interview S2b, *Národná Rada*, Bratislava, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

<sup>446</sup> Interview S4, Zilinska 3, Bratislava, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

“It may happen that in Bratislava and in Košice people have different views on the same thing. And when it is a municipality and the self-governing principle applies, then the head of the party is not saying ‘you have to be for this and you have to be against that’.”<sup>447</sup>

Both parties thought it was important to recruit members who were closely aligned to their party’s pre-existing ideology, and would seek to avoid recruiting members who might wish to influence the party’s policy in a different direction. SMER-SD, in particular, has high barriers to entry, requiring potential members to complete a detailed application form and wait to be accepted or rejected. As a SMER-SD MP said:

“In party SMER, are looking for people that have the same view about the political situation. We need and we are searching for Social Democrats because we are a social democratic party.”<sup>448</sup>

In conclusion, policy-making in both parties is ultimately a top-down process, although both parties claim to value input from members and have channels where members are consulted, and can feed in ideas. However, interesting party-level differences are driven by the current electoral fortunes of the two parties. SMER-SD currently adopts the standard approach expected of parties operating in large district electoral systems: communication with large groups representing the interests of

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<sup>447</sup> Interview S2b, *Národná Rada*, Bratislava, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

<sup>448</sup> Interview S5, *Národná Rada*, Bratislava, 16<sup>th</sup> October 2012.

specific demographics. SKDU-DS, meanwhile, has found itself backed into a corner, and is reaching out to ordinary voters through public meetings and other events.

The case of SDKU-DS is interesting because the party's elite is currently considering how best to re-organise following a catastrophic electoral setback. Policy development is a pressing issue because the party faces fierce competition from new 'liberal populist' rivals, which offer similar policies but fresh faces. Having identified a tendency to intellectualise as one of their weaknesses, SKDU-DS is attempting to look beyond the usual organised interest groups (business leaders and academics, in their case) for ideas, and has opened up a dialogue with 'unorganised' voters. This demonstrates that, when their backs are against the wall, parties are sometimes willing to reach beyond their usual comfort zone and depart from the theoretically efficient approach.

## 6.6 A RECRUITING POOL FOR CANDIDATES

If they are to compete at all levels of government, and nationwide, Slovak political parties must find and recruit a veritable army of candidates. Organising candidates to compete for the 150 national seats is a relatively simple task, and there are only eight regions. However, the country is then divided into 2,871 municipalities. Bratislava and Košice, Slovakia's two largest cities, have an additional layer of government, the 'city parliament'. It was hypothesised in Chapter Three that the demand for municipal candidates was potentially very large. However, political parties have found three main ways of bypassing a nationwide competition at every level of government.

First, they form alliances with other parties. These vary locally, but the most common alignments are SDKU-DS, KDH, SaS and MKP/Most-Hid on the centre-right, and cooperation between SMER-SD and the rump HZDS and SNS on the centre-left. In addition to reducing the number of candidates required, this increases each individual partisan's chances of election under the small district multi member wards with open lists. As one SDKU-DS councillor explained how the tactic works:

“Say there are four parties in a coalition and fifteen places. We have to negotiate how many candidates there will be for each party. In this way we fill up all fifteen candidates for the coalition. We don't compete for every single place. [...] If you have five candidates, you are more likely to get five candidates elected than if you put forward fifteen candidates.”<sup>449</sup>

Secondly, independent candidates are common (perhaps even dominant in some regions) and political parties work with this system rather than against it. As one SDKU-DS councillor commented, “Of 2,800 municipalities most of the mayors are independent. They've been the mayors for twenty years and nobody cares about it.”

<sup>450</sup> More surprisingly, however, political parties were willing to work with independent candidates even in circumstances where one of their own members sought to stand for election. An SKDU-DS MP noted that:

“Most mayors – roughly two thirds – are independent. Most of them are independent because it gives them a free hand to be in touch with every government and every political party. They consider that it is much better. So

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<sup>449</sup> Interview S4, Zilinska 3, Bratislava, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

<sup>450</sup> Interview S4, Zilinska 3, Bratislava, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

even sometimes we support an independent candidate rather than our members if they have a better chance to succeed. So it is not unusual that we support independent candidates.”<sup>451</sup>

Thirdly, a distinct feature of Slovak politics is the number of elected representatives that simultaneously occupy several positions. It is not unusual to find a member of the *Národná Rada* who is also a chairman of a self-governing region and a district councillor, thus carrying out three roles at the same time. This partially reflects the challenge of finding sufficient good candidates. However, it may have the effect of deterring would-be candidates by adding to the appearance of a ‘closed shop’. It is hard for newcomers to compete at the municipal level if their opponent is also an MP with an established media profile.<sup>452</sup> One SMER-SD MP commented:

“If I am a member of parliament we don’t have a lot of work because the plenary session is 100 days a year, it’s not so much, and I can be a local member of the city or village. But if I am a chairman of the self-governing region, or mayor of a big town, they need you every day, every month, all year. It is a full time job. But in Slovakia, and also in the National Council, there are a lot of MPs who have three or four or five functions.”<sup>453</sup>

With distrust in political parties rife, and suitable candidates often preferring to stand as ‘independents’, both parties found it hard to find candidates of the necessary

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<sup>451</sup> Interview S1, *Národná Rada*, Bratislava, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

<sup>452</sup> Interview S5, *Národná Rada*, Bratislava, 16<sup>th</sup> October 2012.

<sup>453</sup> Interview S5, *Národná Rada*, Bratislava, 16<sup>th</sup> October 2012.

calibre. With more than twice as many members as their centre-right rivals, SMER-SD were in a better position to demand a long period of party affiliation prior to candidacy for both national and municipal elections. SDKU-DS, with its relatively low membership, clearly struggled to find candidates, particularly at the municipal level. As seen in Table 6.4 (p228), 47.1% of survey respondents believed that, even for the *Národná Rada* elections, the right candidate need not even be a party member. This figure rose to 58.8% for municipal elections.

The difference in ideological emphasis between the two parties, and SDKU-DS's willingness to work with independent candidates, reflects the latter party's lack of institutionalisation. However, there was also recognition of the fact that the party had just experienced a game-changing electoral setback, and needed to adapt or die. One of the SKDU-DS vice-chairman said:

“For the next election we need to bring new blood into this team. It would be good if at least one third of candidates [at the next election] are fresh faces.”

Table 6.4: Length of Prior Affiliation

Q: How long should potential candidates be members before standing for election on your party's list?

	Local Elections		National Elections	
	SDKU-DS	SMER-SD	SDKU-DS	SMER
SDKU n=17 SMER n=9				
Suitable candidates do not need to be party members	58.8%	44.4%	47.1%	12.5%
Candidates need to join the party before standing on the party ticket	11.8%	0%	11.8%	0%
Candidates need to have been members for several months before becoming candidates	5.9%	0%	0%	0%
Candidates should be members for a year before becoming candidates	5.9%	22.2%	23.5%	37.5%
Candidates should be members for three years before becoming candidates	17.6%	33.3%	17.6%	50.0%

SMER-SD, the more institutionalised of the two parties, placed a higher emphasis on ideological loyalty. Only 12.5% of survey respondents believed that candidates for the *Národná Rada* did not have to be a party member, with the remainder insisting that candidates should be a member for at least a year before standing (table 6.4). 44.4% though that municipal candidates did not need to be party members. Regarding the *Národná Rada*, a SMER-SD staffer noted that: “In addition to the statutory prerequisites such as communication skills and knowledge of local conditions, we also evaluate the philosophical orientation candidates, particularly their proximity to party’s political philosophy and program.”<sup>454</sup> SMER-SD survey respondents were more likely than their SDKU-DS counterparts to list ideological loyalty as being ‘very important’ (55.6% SMER-SD, 41.2% SKDU-DS) (tables 6.5 and 6.6, p229).

<sup>454</sup> Interview S6, by email, 5<sup>th</sup> December 2012.

Unusually, SMER’s insistence on ideological loyalty did not diminish at the municipal level. Likely they would rather back an independent candidate ‘behind the scenes’ than risk bringing a cuckoo into their own nest.

*Table 6.5: What qualities are important when choosing candidates for the National Council?*

	Very important		Somewhat important		Not very important		Not important at all	
	SDKU	SMER	SDKU	SMER	SDKU	SMER	SDKU	SMER
SDKU-DS n=16 SMER n=9								
Ability to contribute financially	11.8%	0%	23.5%	11.1%	41.2%	55.6%	23.5%	33.3%
Well-known in the local community	52.9%	55.6%	41.2%	33.3%	5.9%	11.1%	0%	0%
Ideologically loyal	41.2%	55.6%	52.9%	44.4%	5.9%	0%	0%	0%
Strong leadership	47.1%	33.3%	47.1%	44.4%	5.9%	22.2%	0%	0%
Works hard for local people	70.6%	66.7%	23.5%	33.3%	5.9%	0%	0%	0%
Charismatic	58.8%	44.4%	41.2%	44.4%	5.9%	11.1%	0%	0%

*Table 6.6: What Qualities are Important when Choosing Candidates for Municipal Elections?*

	Very important		Somewhat important		Not very important		Not important at all	
	SDKU	SMER	SDKU	SMER	SDKU	SMER	SDKU	SMER
SDKU-DS n=16 SMER n=9								
Ability to contribute financially	29.4%	11.1%	41.2%	44.4%	33.3%	55.6%	11.1%	33.3%
Well-known in the local community	100%	55.6%	0%	33.3%	0%	11.1%	0%	0%
Ideologically loyal	33.3%	55.6%	62.5%	66.7%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Strong leadership	41.2%	33.3%	47.1%	44.4%	11.8%	22.2%	0%	0%
Works hard for local people	81.3%	77.8%	18.8%	22.2%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Charismatic	76.5%	44.4%	17.6%	44.4%	0%	0%	5.9%	0%

The relatively low priority given by SKDU-DS to ideological loyalty is very interesting considering that Fico’s SMER-SD is considered to be a charismatic ‘catch all’ party while SKDU-DS traditionally appealed to a niche. The most likely explanation is that SKDU-DS is looking to start afresh, while SMER-SD seeks to protect its dominant

position. Given SKDU-DS's current plight, it is perhaps rational that they seek a short-term electoral boost by recruiting hard-working candidates with name recognition and charisma (Tables 6.5 and 6.6, p229). As discussed previously, SKDU-DS interviewees thought they may have taken their ideological dogma too far in previous years, and now sought to reinterpret their policies for 'ordinary Slovaks'.

In a centralised list electoral system, however, the fight for the top spots is fierce and ambitious new members can be perceived as a threat. A Bratislava councillor noted that:

“It's strange, but in Slovakia political parties generally aren't interested in new members. A few new members are no problem but, you know, old politicians are afraid because if you have more new members you are not sure of your position. So political parties are open, but it's not like there are ever really campaigns for new members.”<sup>455</sup>

In order to pave the way for new faces on the national party list, the SDKU-DS leadership was considering scrapping the system of internal primaries (“a very unusual mechanism in Slovak conditions”),<sup>456</sup> whereby party members vote to order the central list. This system preserves a clear bias in favour of established figures, with no guarantee that they will meet with public approval. However, it is unclear how this situation will be resolved, since the list was ordered by the party elites prior to the snap February 2012 election and the results were no more representative of the

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<sup>455</sup> Interview S4, Zilinska 3, Bratislava, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

<sup>456</sup> Interview S2a, *Národná Rada*, Bratislava, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

public's wishes. One MP commented that, "It may happen that when you are popular inside the party, it doesn't actually mean that you are popular for the voters."<sup>457</sup>

Despite having a much larger recruiting pool for members, SMER-SD also admitted to difficulties finding sufficient good candidates, particularly at the regional and municipal levels. A SMER-SD MP commented that:

"We have a problem with the quality of candidates. Sometimes people want to stand, but their quality is not so good for the party or the region. And the quality people, who have a lot of skills and good jobs, they don't want to be a candidate. I think this is a crisis in all of Europe. [...] It's difficult because in Slovakia a lot of people don't like politics, even at the local level."<sup>458</sup>

With both parties having problems fielding sufficient quality candidates at the regional and municipal levels, it appears that hard-working, charismatic, ideologically loyal candidates are the one thing that money cannot buy for the modern 'electoral professional' party. Both parties muddle through by forming alliances with other parties and nominating the same individuals for several positions. Parties would not have this option if candidates were banned from holding more than one elected office, or if an institutional impetus were given to partisan competition at the municipal level.

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<sup>457</sup> Interview S2a, *Národná Rada*, Bratislava, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

<sup>458</sup> Interview S5, *Národná Rada*, Bratislava, 16<sup>th</sup> October 2012.

## 6.7 MEMBERS AS A GRASSROOTS CAMPAIGNING RESOURCE

At the parliamentary level, the Slovak Republic's 4.3 million registered voters form a single electoral district. Drawing on theories of political communication developed in Western Europe, Chapter Three of this thesis hypothesised that parties would focus on communication through the mass media and organised groups, since attempts to contact individual voters would be inefficient under the current electoral rules. Slovak political parties would therefore be unlikely to invest their limited resources attempting to win over voters on the micro level, for example through door-to-door campaigning, at least at during national campaigns.

The distribution of handbills door-to-door was a very common activity for members from both parties. Table 6.8 (p233) suggests that 76.5% of SKDU-DS members distribute handbills 'often' during national campaigns, while 55.5% of SMER-DS members do the same. According to the interviews, these data are slightly misleading: SMER-SD make greater use of printed material, but SKDU-DS activists are more likely to deliver leaflets. This is because, "In municipal politics, people from SMER are using printed newspapers all through the four year period. It's like a local SMER newspaper. They make their own newspaper and have it commercially delivered."<sup>459</sup> Unable to finance such an activity, SKDU-DS relies primarily on electronic communications which, in any case, suits the different demographics of their voters.

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<sup>459</sup> Interview S4, Zilinska 3, Bratislava, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

However, on the occasions they need to deliver a leaflet door-to-door, this will be achieved by volunteer labour.

*Table 6.7: Participation of Members in Grassroots Activities (local elections)*

	Often		Sometimes		Rarely		Never	
	SDKU	SMER	SDKU	SMER	SDKU	SMER	SDKU	SMER
SDKU n=17 SMER n=9								
Contact voters by telephone	17.6%	11.1%	29.4%	22.2%	35.3%	44.4%	17.6%	22.2%
Contact voters door-to-door	23.5%	0%	23.5%	33.3%	35.3%	22.2%	17.6%	44.4%
Distribute handbills door-to-door	70.6%	66.7%	29.4%	22.2%	0%	11.1%	0%	0%
Organise and attend meetings	58.8%	44.4%	35.3%	55.6%	5.9%	0%	0%	0%
Participate in rallies and events	58.8%	33.3%	23.5%	33.3%	17.6%	33.3%	0%	0%
Persuade friends, family and neighbours to vote for the party	70.6%	44.4%	29.4%	44.4%	5.9%	11.1%	0%	0%
Promote the party via social media	41.2%	33.3%	41.2%	22.2%	11.8%	44.4%	5.9%	0%

*Table 6.8 Participation of members in grassroots activities (national elections)*

	Often		Sometimes		Rarely		Never	
	SDKU	SMER	SDKU	SMER	SDKU	SMER	SDKU	SMER
SDKU n=17 SMER n=9								
Contact voters by telephone	23.5%	11.1%	35.3%	22.2%	17.6%	33.3%	23.5%	33.3%
Contact voters door-to-door	11.8%	0%	29.4%	33.3%	35.3%	22.2%	23.5%	44.4%
Distribute handbills door-to-door	76.5%	55.6%	17.6%	33.3%	0%	11.1%	5.9%	0%
Organise and attend meetings	64.7%	55.6%	29.4%	33.3%	5.9%	11.1%	0%	0%
Participate in rallies and events	70.6%	44.4%	11.8%	22.2%	17.6%	33.3%	0%	0%
Persuade friends, family and neighbours to vote for the party	58.8%	55.6%	41.2%	22.2%	0%	22.2%	0%	0%
Promote the party via social media	58.8%	33.3%	17.6%	44.4%	17.6%	22.2%	5.9%	0%

Surveys and interviews showed that, while the primary focus was on large-scale events like meetings and rallies, particularly at the national level (tables 6.7 and 6.8 p233), parties were reluctant to abandon face-to-face contact entirely, although going door-to-door was rare. One interviewee pointed out that such intrusions would not normally be welcomed by Slovak voters. He said, “I don’t think Slovakia is the country where you would want to knock on somebody’s door. It’s just...people had so much of politics already that they would just kick you out of the door if you’re not invited.” SMER-SD respondents did not go door-to-door at all, either during national or municipal elections (tables 6.7 and 6.8).

Some SKDU-DS activists did go door-to-door, however, especially at during the municipal elections where the districts are smaller (Tables 6.7 and 6.8 p233). Once again, this is indicative of a party maximising its options during times of crisis, and also of the party’s relatively weak access to organised interests. It should be noted that there was a discrepancy between SDKU-DS interviewees (who thought that door-to-door campaigning was rare, especially during national elections) and survey respondents, 40% of whom thought activists went door-to-door ‘often’ or ‘sometimes’ during national elections. It may be the case that door-to-door campaigning is rare in Bratislava, where most of the interviewees were based, but more common in the regions (the majority of survey respondents were regional branch chairs).

Despite its ‘inefficiency’ under the Slovak electoral system, both parties considered face-to-face voter contacting as a potentially productive means of building trust. A SMER-SD press officer noted that, “Face-to-face communication is the most intense, leaving the strongest track, but ‘more work’.” A SMER-SD MP added that going

door-to-door and contacting people on an individual basis is “something new from the Western countries. In the last five or ten years it has started, but it doesn’t have a long tradition in Slovakia.” It will be interesting to see if face-to-face voter contacting becomes more common in Slovakia in the future if parties decide to overcome the current crisis of trust by building relations with society. As one SKDU-DS MP noted:

“[individual voter contact] can be much less substituted than social media. These are mostly little activities – the leaflets and persuading people. Maybe it is different when a party member is talking to a voter. It is authentic, different from when you are paying somebody to do it.”

At the current time, however, the most common tactic for candidates is to turn up to events where large numbers of people are already gathered. Conscious of public suspicion of politics and politicians, and of the sheer number of people that they needed to contact, representatives of both parties assiduously attended non-political events. An SKDU-DS vice-chairman said:

“We travel around the country and we try to visit all the important events. If there is a music festival or a movie festival, we are there just in order to be in touch with people. [...] We want to find informal ways to interact with the voters. Sports events, for example. I will run this weekend in the very popular competition, the so-called Bratislava Night Run. Three and half thousand runners will be there, our chairman will start the event, and a couple of us will run as well. It is also my hobby, of course, but it is also the way to be in touch with voters. We are trying to attend all the events where people gather.”<sup>460</sup>

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<sup>460</sup> Interview S1, *Národná Rada*, Bratislava, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

SMER-SD candidates also focussed on places where people typically gathered, but focussed on community groups like sports centres and seniors' organisations. This represented the different demographics of their likely voters, and the organisations where they expected to find a warm welcome. A senior SDKU-DS MP said, "It is true that we have to cope with a situation where the whole country is a single constituency. I was one of the leaders of the party, and therefore I could go to universities, high schools and public discussions. And other people can go in villages, in the bars and cafes in such communities."<sup>461</sup>

Resources also play a role in determining the strategies of parties. Due to their organisational legacy and dominant position, SMER-SD has a much greater geographical reach than any of the centre-right parties. Their opponents accused them of cultivating clientelist links, which gives them access to workplaces that are unavailable to their opponents. As one interviewee said:

"SMER is very strong in the local communities. What they did very successfully was they took the model from the communist times and the system of government and just re-modelled it, and they're using it very successfully to be everywhere. Their nominations, their contacts in the judiciary system, everywhere, you can't find a relevant place without someone from SMER in it."<sup>462</sup>

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<sup>461</sup> Interview S2a, *Národná Rada*, Bratislava, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

<sup>462</sup> Interview S3, *Národná Rada*, Bratislava, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

Municipal campaigns are very different from the National Council campaigns. They were highly decentralised, with each candidate working with a small number of fellow candidates and local activists. It was deemed important to be out in the community talking to people face-to-face. One SKDU-DS councillor assessed the differing practicalities of local and national campaigns:

“For local campaigns, at the municipality, it’s useful to be on the street and communicating with people. Maybe you meet 20 or 30 or 50 people a day. And it’s very useful because you have more information about problems in the village or in the city, and these people are communicating the message that they met the candidate on the street. So maybe you meet 50 people but 500 know that you were on the street because they tell their family members and so on. If you are a candidate for the National Council, you definitely need to have strong internet background because you need to communicate with thousands of people and it’s not possible personally. And you have to be in the mass media because if people don’t know you it’s impossible. And you have to have lots of money for the campaign.”<sup>463</sup>

In conclusion, parties seeking to win votes in the National Council elections prioritise links with organised interests and community groups, where large numbers of people gather at the same time. They also make extensive use of mass media communications (SMER-SD) and social media (SDKU-DS). These tactics are typical under a full PR electoral system, and are not membership intensive.

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<sup>463</sup> Interview S4, Zilinska 3, Bratislava, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

Although face-to-face contact is considered important to build trust, Tables 6.7 and 6.8 (p233) show that SMER-SD almost never goes door-to-door in search of individual votes. This is a relatively inefficient use of time under large district electoral systems, and SMER-SD candidates have no shortage of options, since they have strong networks across Slovakia which their opponents consider to be clientelist. SKDU-DS activists were, however, relatively likely to go door-to-door and engage in other methods of voter contacting, a surprising finding that was explained by their need to maximise their options for voter communication.

## 6.8 LEGITIMACY BENEFITS

Slovak political parties believe that having members improves a party's image in the eyes of voters. Table 6.2 (p228) shows that 23.5% of SKDU-DS respondents and 33.3% of SMER-SD respondents believed that the single most important role of members was to 'demonstrate that the party has the support of the people, not just the elite'. This, to some degree, ties in with ideas that 'electoral' parties will continue to value members for the legitimacy benefits that they bring. However, their support for the idea of members as legitimisers was not unqualified.

While apparently adopting the normative position that membership parties are good for the legitimacy of the party system as a whole, some interviewees blamed the legacy of communism for the reluctance of citizens to join political parties. This echoes Ingrid van Biezen's theory, which argued that the communist legacy would cast a long shadow over party development in the post-communist period. Furthermore, some parties from the immediate post-communist era, particularly HZDS and SNS, had

large memberships, but had not been seen as acting in a way that legitimised democracy. An SKDU-DS councillor pointed out that, across the board, party membership was lower than it had been a decade ago. He said:

“Before, in the nineties, lots of parties had lots of members. KDH had 40,000 members. Mečiar had more than 80,000 members. If you count SNS, KDH there were close to 200,000 members in Slovakia. Right now it’s close to 50,000.”

Of the three countries analysed in this thesis, Slovakia is the only country where no minimum number of members is required to register a political party. Therefore, while being aware that membership of their party might be seen as low, it was pointed out that the memberships of SMER-SD and SKDU-DS are far from skeletal compared to some of their competitors. This appears to put downwards pressure on membership numbers by legitimising *low* party membership. An SDKU-DS MP pointed out that

“... we have experienced two elections, 2010 and 2012, where parties did well without having almost any members. Freedom and Solidarity, they have about 200 members, and the Movement of Ordinary People and Independent Personalities, they have *four* members.”<sup>464</sup>

Even the largest party, SMER-SD, knew they could not derive legitimacy from their membership numbers, since the general public was unlikely to be impressed. One of their MPs said: “17,000 members of the party is a nice number, but I am from a city

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<sup>464</sup> Interview S2a, *Národná Rada*, Bratislava, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

that has 70,000 people. What is 17,000 for the whole country?”<sup>465</sup> All interviewees agreed political parties were held in such low regard that membership recruitment would be an uphill battle at the current time. There was no indication that parties would attempt to recruit members in order to gain ‘legitimacy benefits’

## 6.9 DISCUSSION

As would be expected under a proportional electoral system, campaigning primarily takes an electoral-professional form in Slovakia. Voters are largely contacted in groups rather than as individuals. Party funding mostly comes from businesses, and even the lax rules that exist are not enforced. The lack of silence period and the very large national electoral district size both mean that members are little valued as loyal voters. Even the need to recruit candidates for municipal and regional elections is reduced by the parties’ willingness to cooperate with independent candidates and rules that allow one individual to occupy several elected offices simultaneously. Unlike in Estonia and Lithuania, party members are not even required to register a political party.

After the emergence of ‘internet’ parties, most notably Freedom and Solidarity (SaS) in 2010, it is understandable that interviewees wondered aloud whether parties needed members, and whether politically ambitious people needed parties. The immediate answer, for SKDU-DS at least, is that members are important for stability and longevity. Kevin Deegan-Krause and Tim Haughton coined the term ‘hardy perennials’, political parties whose membership bases enable them to withstand the

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<sup>465</sup> Interview S5, *Národná Rada*, Bratislava, 16<sup>th</sup> October 2012.

inevitable electoral setbacks of democratic life, at least for an electoral cycle or two. While not massive, SDKU-DS's membership base is big enough to buy it time. Will it dig its roots deeper into society in the hope of gaining basic sustenance until external factors improve? Or will it hope that its current shallow roots are enough to see it through? The surveys and interviews suggest that the SKDU-DS leadership hopes to adopt the former tactic, although they face low morale within their current membership.

The clear disparity in resources between SMER-SD and their competitors inspires considerable fear. Although Slovakia's institutional design favours electoral-professional campaigning, SKDU-DS know that they can scarcely compete in this sphere. One interviewee said of SMER-SD's 2012 election campaign:

“I believe that the way [Fico] used public opinion in a very structured, analytical and professional way is two leagues above anyone else in Slovakia. We are all just intuitive players and he is a professional. I mean, SMER has the money...and the support and stuff to play the game in the way it's played in the United States. He has American staff, an agency, I'm not sure if they are still here now or if they trained staff to do it here. [...] And there is no one else in Slovakia who has that.”<sup>466</sup>

This points to the importance of competitive dynamics when party elites choose campaign tactics. While electoral systems make certain forms of communication more 'efficient' than others, and therefore more predominant, politics is fundamentally a competitive affair. If they are able to buy time, parties will usually

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<sup>466</sup> Interview S4, Zilinska 3, Bratislava, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

seek to innovate when in difficulty. Thus we find SMER-SD relaxed in its current dominant position, relying on the theoretically efficient approach of communicating through the mass media and organised interest groups. Meanwhile, SKDU-DS, hitherto also an ‘electoral professional’ party, but currently in a perilous position, has started to invest in face-to-face voter contacting as a means of building trust, strengthening bonds with the core voters and connecting with ‘ordinary Slovaks’.

# 7

## Cross-Country Comparison

Membership recruitment is a time consuming and arduous long-term project. The three case studies presented in Chapters Four, Five and Six demonstrate that parties respond to an array of institutional incentives when considering whether the advantages of members outweigh the disadvantages. As in western democracies, small electoral districts encourage individual voter contacting to complement electoral-professional approaches, while large electoral districts favour communication through the mass media and organised interest groups. Physical proximity between voters and party elites creates an expectation of personal contact, and makes individual voter contact a worthwhile endeavour for political parties. The mass media approach is not necessarily effective in small districts, and candidates standing in districts far from the national capital have an incentive to build their own base, rather than relying entirely on electoral-professionals in 'head office'. Therefore, members are more likely to play a practical role in party campaigns where electoral districts are small.

Although institutions influence the value of members, parties within individual countries do not always make identical choices. Party elites' attitudes towards members are shaped not only by institutional incentives, but also by strategic factors,

including the overall resources at their disposal and the tactics of other parties. For example, not every party has equal access to state funds or the mass media. Normative beliefs about how parties *should* look also play a role. These are shaped by the underlying political culture, ideals of specific ‘party families’, and also the nature of competitor parties. By taking these factors into account, it is possible to gain a fuller picture of how parties arrive at decisions about whether to recruit members, and for what purpose. This chapter first compares the effect of institutions across the three countries examined, and then considers the impact of culture, ideology and strategy.

## 7.1 ELECTORAL INSTITUTIONS AND PARTY MEMBERS

Over the course of several electoral cycles, the parties that achieved long-term success and longevity in central and east Europe have responded in observable ways to the incentives provided by electoral institutions. The case studies in this thesis confirm that political elites weigh up the options for communicating with voters, carefully considering the resources at their disposal, and how these are best deployed to achieve electoral success. Parties’ tactics are tailored to the institutional context in which they compete.

### *Electoral Systems*

The following statements, taken from interviews, encapsulate how the practicalities of political marketing are affected by electoral district size.

Lithuania (Mixed electoral system with small single member districts): “In Vilnius, if one of the candidates is standing in the single seats in Vilnius, he has very few opportunities to use media – TV, radio etc. In Vilnius we have eleven constituencies. That’s why it’s not effective to use radio or local papers. That’s why they are walking with booklets, leaflets, posters etc.”<sup>467</sup>

Slovakia (pure PR, large electoral district): “If you are a candidate for the National Council, you definitely need to have strong internet background because you need to communicate with thousands of people and it’s not possible personally. And you have to be in the mass media because if people don’t know you it’s impossible. And you have to have lots of money for the campaign.”<sup>468</sup>

Therefore, in Lithuania, where electoral districts are small, national media campaigns cannot transmit a message that is sufficiently nuanced for single member district contests. As a result, parties increasingly utilise ‘old fashioned’ campaigning techniques. In Slovakia, however, candidates are required to communicate with several million voters at the same time. As a result, the most useful resources are money and media profile. The latter is clearly more hospitable to ‘electoralist’ campaigning.

Examining the functions of members, the three case studies suggested that their roles as ambassadors in the community, grassroots campaigning, and candidate

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<sup>467</sup> Interview L2, Gedimino Pr, Vilnius, 3rd July 2012.

<sup>468</sup> Interview S4, Zilinska 3, Bratislava, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2012.

recruitment, are particularly influenced by electoral systems. These will now be considered in more detail.

### Electoral Systems and Ambassadors in the Community

Small district open list electoral systems pit candidates against their co-partisans.<sup>469</sup>

This encourages individual candidates to build personal networks, since open competition between co-partisans is undignified and usually avoided. As hypothesised, the case studies revealed notable cross-country differences in parties' attitudes towards members as 'ambassadors in the community'. Estonian parties, competing in small districts with open lists, were extremely enthusiastic about members as 'ambassadors', but Slovak parties had much less faith in this means of communication.

More than seventy percent of Estonian survey respondents from both ER and SDE believed that the private conversations of members with friends, family, colleagues and neighbours were a 'very effective' means of communicating the parties' policies. Estonian interviewees provided detailed descriptions of the ways in which members played an ambassadorial role. One young MP spoke of running a 'network campaign', where members were asked to make a list of their social contacts and lobby them on his behalf.<sup>470</sup> The MP spoke of how this process yielded 900 names, a significant proportion of the 5,000 voters in his constituency. As a young candidate

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<sup>469</sup> Matthew S Shugart (2001), 'Electoral "Efficiency" and the Move to Mixed Member Systems', *Electoral Studies*, 20(2): 184.

<sup>470</sup> Interview E2, Eesti Riigikogu, Tallinn, 7<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

starting his career in his home region, he believed that this tactic was pivotal to the success of his campaign.

However, 'network campaigning' becomes less effective as electoral district size increases. Nine hundred voters can make the difference between success and failure in a constituency of five thousand voters, but will barely make an impact in an electoral district of five million. As a result, less than one-third of respondents from both Slovak parties thought that the ambassadorial role of members was a 'very effective' means of communication.<sup>471</sup> Traditional mass media was favoured by SMER-SD, while social media was an important tool for SKDU-DS. Slovak parties are not indifferent to the notion of members as 'ambassadors' in the community: individual voter contacting is seen as a potentially useful way of building trust. However, Slovak parties did not view contacting voters one-by-one as an efficient means of political marketing. This is hardly surprising given the scale of the contest.

The ideological preferences of the mass media also influence the usefulness of members as 'ambassadors in the community'. Media bias, which exists to a greater or lesser extent in every country, speaks to an inherent limitation of 'electoralist' theories of party organisation. Media outlets are not impartial outlets, ready and waiting to circulate press releases developed by electoral professionals. They are (usually) private businesses, often reflecting the biases of their owners, and competing for readers' attention in an increasingly crowded and competitive market. As such, they are often more interested in reporting scandal than policy debates, and politicians must choose their words carefully in case a frank answer is reported as a 'gaffe'. Therefore, rather

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<sup>471</sup> Table 6.1 p 209.

than the media being an ideal conduit through which electoral-professionals can communicate their political masters' messages, relationships between politicians and the media are often marked by mutual suspicion.

Some parties have better access to the mass media than others. Where parties struggle to achieve positive media coverage, either because their political capital is exhausted, or they are permanently out of favour, they may turn to members as 'ambassadors in the community'. The most positive assessments of mainstream TV and radio media came from SMER-SD in Slovakia and SDE in Estonia, both parties doing well in the polls and receiving broadly favourable coverage at the current time. The most negative assessments of the traditional mass media came from LSDP in Lithuania, the Reform Party in Estonia and SKDU-DS in Slovakia, all of which perceive themselves to be out of favour, either permanently or temporarily, with the mainstream media.

In Lithuania, where the mass media tends to be sympathetic towards centre-right parties, interviews revealed that the centre-left LSDP valued individual voter contact, including members as 'ambassadors', as a means of overcoming hostility from the mass media. However, this approach is most effective where electoral districts are small. Where electoral districts are large, individual voter contacting will never be an efficient means of political marketing, and parties are more likely to switch their focus from mass media to social media, as exemplified by Slovakia's SKDU-DS.

Therefore, the 'ambassadorial' role of members is strongest in small, open list multi-member districts of Estonia, and weakest in the very large electoral district of Slovakia. This is unsurprising given that, as already established by the extant

literature on electoral systems, candidates need to distinguish themselves from their co-partisans on the local level when competing in small district open lists. Where there is no need to compete against co-partisans, the ‘ambassadorial’ role of members can still be useful to build trust and overcome media hostility. However, as electoral district size rises, the utility of the ‘ambassadorial’ role declines.

*Electoral systems, members and grassroots campaigning*

In Estonia and Lithuania, small electoral districts spur parties to use traditional grass-roots campaigning techniques, including going door-to-door, setting up street stalls and contacting voters by telephone. Contacting voters door-to-door is perhaps the most intense form of membership activity, since it usually involves knocking on voters’ doors uninvited. This was most common in Lithuania where electoral districts are, on average, smallest. In small majoritarian districts ‘winner takes all’, every vote counts.

While central and east European political parties were not expected to adopt such ‘pre-modern’ grass-roots campaign techniques, one interviewee, an MP from the centre-right Lithuanian party, TS-LKD, described how he had revolutionised the party’s approach to single member district campaigns by ‘importing’ campaigning methods observed during a period living in the UK.<sup>472</sup> Prior to the 2008 election, the party relied on the electoral professional approach. However, individual voter contacting had been remarkably effective in the 2008 election, and the party decided to direct more resources to grass-roots campaigning in the 2012 election. Thus, we can see a clear movement *away* from electoral professional approaches and *towards* pre-

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<sup>472</sup> Interview L1, Gedimino Pr, Vilnius, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2012.

modern grassroots techniques. This paid dividends for TS-LKD: despite falling support in the list section of the ballot, they performed well in the single member districts.

TS-LKD's opponents concurred that media advertising had become more expensive and less effective over time, tipping the balance in favour of grassroots campaigns.<sup>473</sup> The Lithuanian Social Democrats utilised door-to-door campaigning since the transition, and had a strong core of activists who were prepared to go door-to-door at both local and municipal elections. Therefore, three quarters of LSDP survey respondents said that members went door-to-door 'often' or 'sometimes'.

Interviews revealed that Lithuanian political parties were extremely tactical about the distribution of their campaigning resources during national elections, 'targeting' individual constituencies and working them as hard as possible. For example, enthusiastic young TS-LKD activists travelled from the cities to rural areas, helping out where the party's electoral prospects were good, but members were too elderly to go door-to-door. This kind of electoral system effect, where specific districts become 'battlegrounds' and resources are allocated accordingly, has long been noted in the extant literature on majoritarian electoral systems. Therefore, as the Lithuanian party system consolidates, the two main parties increasingly use 'traditional' campaigning techniques, many of which create a useful role for members.

Estonian political parties have a strong tradition of organising street stalls where leaflets are handed out. In their view, this fulfils three objectives: direct voter contact,

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<sup>473</sup>Interview L5, LSDP Headquarters, Vilnius, 20th July 2012.

the distribution of promotional materials, and visibility in the community. As discussed in Chapter Four, during national elections, 42.4% of ER and 50% of SDE respondents reported that activists distributed leaflets through street stalls ‘often’. Street stalls are usually staffed by local members. In Slovakia, however, candidates were more likely to communicate with voters through organised groups: visits to universities, sports clubs and other places where people would be gathered in organised groups. This creates less demand for members.

Once again, these findings describe predictable responses to institutional incentives. As the extant literature has established, small electoral districts make face-to-face campaigning more effective, and single member districts encourage parties to focus resources on specific ‘target’ seats. Where electoral districts are large, attempts to win votes one-by-one are inefficient, and therefore used sparingly. In such circumstances, parties are more likely to contact voters through organised institutions of interest groups. This is seen in Slovakia, where the favoured means of voter contacting is to attend events where large numbers of people are already gathered, for example at universities, social clubs or interest groups.

Even in Slovakia, where the electoral district is extremely large, individual voter contacting is not entirely absent. Parties are more likely to deviate from the theoretically ‘efficient’ electoral-professional approach when they begin to hit obstacles. SMER-SD, being something of a ‘dominant’ party, particularly since the February 2012 election, has excellent access to government and municipal workplaces, sports centres and other organised groups. Their opponents are at a disadvantage in this respect, and therefore were more likely to go door-to-door. However, interviews

and surveys suggested that SKDU-DS activists were more likely to use door-to-door campaigning at the municipal level (where electoral districts are small) than the national level.

Therefore, we find that some grassroots campaigning takes place in all three countries, supplementing the modern 'electoral professional' campaign. As expected, door-to-door campaigning is most widely used in the Lithuanian single member districts. Street stalls, which also create a role for members, are favoured in Estonia. In Slovakia, the emphasis is on communication through organised groups. Parties will, of course, weigh up their current position, the resources available to them, and the strategies of their competitors before deciding how best to distribute their resources. Electoral systems, however, are a key factor in these decisions, since they define the geographical scope of the competition, and hence whether parties will focus on quality or quantity in terms of voter contact.

#### *Local Elections, Members and Candidate Recruitment*

It was hypothesised that small municipal electoral districts would create an additional demand for candidates, but the case studies demonstrated that parties did not necessarily seek to compete nationwide at the municipal level where electoral districts were small. Evidence from the Estonia, Lithuania and Slovakia suggests that political parties have two options: invest in building branch structures nationwide; or accept that there are geographical limits beyond which investment in local government campaigning is not an efficient use of resources.

Nationwide penetration is more likely where municipal electoral rules encourage partisan competition. In Lithuania, where independent municipal candidates are banned and municipal districts are comparatively large (with only 60 across the whole country), the major parties had already achieved nationwide penetration by the end of the 1990s. Lithuania's two main parties now maintain significant organisational structures across the country. Rather than seeking to recruit new candidates, they now invest resources in training designed to improve the professionalism of their candidates. Lithuanian parties were more likely than their Estonian or Slovak counterparts to demand a lengthy period of prior affiliation from their municipal candidates.

On the contrary, municipal competition in Estonia was dominated by independent candidates in the 1990s, but became increasingly partisan from 2002 onwards, when proposals to ban independent candidates were first debated. By the time the Supreme Court declared this law unconstitutional, parties had already begun the process of adjusting to the new rules by improving their ability to compete at the municipal level. The politicisation of local government is an on-going process. Both Estonian parties interviewed hoped to field candidates nationwide in the 2013 municipal elections. SDE, the smallest of Estonia's parliamentary parties, was investing considerable resources in achieving this aim. Municipal competition has been one of the major driving forces behind Estonia's rapid membership recruitment in the last decade.

In Slovakia, however, no institutional impetus has encouraged parties to compete at the municipal level, and partisan competition does not extend to small, rural municipalities nationwide. Even the largest party with the most comprehensive

nationwide organisation, SMER-SD, does not attempt to field partisan candidates in all 2,871 municipalities, and it has no ambitions to do so. Parties adopt a number of strategies to reduce the number of municipal candidates required. First, they form electoral alliances, with the centre-right/ Hungarian parties typically competing as a bloc against the centre-left/Slovak nationalist parties. Second, it is common for Slovak parties to nominate the same candidate to multiple positions, and individuals occupy several elected offices at different levels of government simultaneously. Third, parties make informal pacts with friendly independent candidates, prioritising good relations with the likely winner over the ambitions of their own members. By using these techniques, parties reduce the number of individual candidates required, avoiding the need to invest resources in nationwide candidate recruitment without opening up space for their competitors.

Competitive dynamics also influence the extent to which parties invest in municipal and regional competition. If two or more parties are locked in close competition, they may see a strong municipal performance as providing a welcome boost at the national level. In Estonia, competition is fierce ahead of the 2013 municipal elections and no party is resting on their laurels. It is notable that SDE has responded to a bounce in the national opinion polls by seeking to build their municipal base. The competitive dynamics of the Slovak party system, on the other hand, are currently skewed.<sup>474</sup> SMER-SD currently enjoys considerable, possibly even dominant, influence, while SKDU-DS and other centre-right parties focus on survival. The latter is in no position to make ambitious plans, while the former has no incentive to invest additional energies in expanding its reach at the municipal level.

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<sup>474</sup> In February 2012 parliamentary election, SMER-SD won 44.4% of the vote, while its five nearest competitors each won between 5% and 9% of the vote.

Thus, we can see that the size of the ‘recruiting pool’ for municipal candidates depends on institutional rules, the dynamics of party competition, and the ambitions of each party. Estonian and Lithuanian parties appear to be moving through the traditional sequence of party organisational development and socialisation proposed by E Spencer Wellhofer,<sup>475</sup> first focussing on territorial expansion, and slowly increasing the length of prior affiliation demanded of candidates. However, this process was prompted by institutional rules encouraging partisan competition at the municipal level. In Slovakia, on the other hand, permissive electoral rules make it possible for parties to minimise investment in building nationwide organisations. While the party elites interviewed reflected that this arrangement had drawbacks, including reducing opportunities for newcomers to enter politics, it is convenient for party elites in the short term.

In general, the demands of municipal competition deserve much greater attention than they have hitherto received in comparative analyses of central and east European political parties. The local dimension of party competition is often glossed over in the wider scholarship about the changing nature of party organisations. For example, Steven Wolinetz argues that the ‘classic Downsian’ vote-seeking party is organised to compete to win office at all or almost all levels of government, but is ‘likely to maintain only the minimum degree of organisation required to do so’.<sup>476</sup> In fact, the ‘vote seeking’ parties of central and east Europe face a dilemma. If they have no

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<sup>475</sup> E Spencer Wellhofer (1972), ‘Dimensions of Party Development: A Study in Organizational Dynamics’, *The Journal of Politics*, 34 (1): 153-182.

<sup>476</sup> Steven B Wolinetz (2002) ‘Beyond the Catch-All Party: Approaches to the Study of Parties and Party Organization in Contemporary Democracies’, in Gunther, R., et al. eds., *Political Parties: Old Concepts and New Challenges*, Oxford: OUP, p151

organisational heritage, even achieving a semblance of nationwide coverage at the municipal level will require significant investment for an extended period.

The effect of municipal elections on the organisational development of political parties requires further research. This may be one of the primary factors determining whether parties remain elite-based and rely on 'electoralist' mobilisation, or seek to institutionalise, building branch structures and recruiting members in the regions. Although it is arduous and time consuming to build an organisation capable of competing in local elections nationwide, parties often decide to make the effort. In new democracies, this will usually spur membership recruitment.

### ***Summary***

Electoral systems influence the role of members in three ways: they define the minimum number of candidates required to compete at all levels of government; they determine the effectiveness of electoral-professional mass communications versus traditional grassroots communications (the latter of which is more membership intensive); and they dictate whether candidates have personal incentives to build their own reputations locally, which often drives membership recruitment at the district level. As in western democracies, 'old fashioned' campaigning techniques are found to be very effective where electoral districts are small, but less so where electoral districts are large. Electoral rules also define the number of candidates required to compete in municipal elections, should parties decide to compete nationwide, and influence whether or not municipal competition will take place on a primarily partisan basis.

Taken together, there is scope for considerable variation in the role and value of members, according to the institutional rules under which parties compete.

## 7.2 FUNDING REGULATIONS AND PARTY MEMBERS

Since the mid-1990s, the state funding of political parties has been viewed with concern by the dominant scholarship on central and east European political parties. State subsidies were thought to comprise a large percentage of parties' overall income, thus skewing parties' priorities towards the state and away from society.<sup>477</sup> However, the influence of state funding has likely been overstated. Much scholarship has focussed on the official declarations by political parties. However, all six parties analysed in this thesis almost certainly receive the bulk of their funding from business donations, which are often undeclared.

Where electoral laws place strict limits on business donations, parties must be discreet. In Estonia and Lithuania, where business donations are banned, assistance often comes 'in-kind': free advertising, free boxes of leaflets, or PR advice given off the books. As one Lithuanian MP pointed out, even the most vigilant electoral commission finds it impossible to keep track of all party spending. The work of creative agencies is difficult to quantify, and internet advertising is very challenging to monitor.<sup>478</sup> However, while 'under the table' donations in-kind will inevitably continue in Lithuania and Estonia, even minor violations of the ban on business funding are taken very seriously by both the media and the prosecutorial services.

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<sup>477</sup> Petr Kopecký (2007), *Political Parties and the State*, p3.

<sup>478</sup> Interview L1, Gedimino Pr, Vilnius, 2nd July 2012.

Estonian and Lithuanian parties have responded to the tightening environment by looking to members as a free source of labour and, to a lesser extent, a potential means of raising funds.

On the contrary, Slovakia's relatively lax party funding laws only ask that donations are reported. Even then, reporting requirements are not enforced. Donors often prefer to give money anonymously, and parties accept this as the current reality of Slovak politics.<sup>479</sup> In such circumstances, it is likely that declared business donations wildly underestimate the amount received, although scandals often surface in the media, further reducing public faith in the political system. The Slovak political parties interviewed for this thesis were convinced that launching a membership recruitment campaign at the current time would be pointless; citizens were simply too alienated after a string of corruption scandals.

Since existing scholarship on central and east European politics, relying on official reports, often overestimates the proportion of their income that parties receive from the state, it is unsurprising that this thesis found little relationship between state funding and party behaviour. Overall, an unhealthy relationship between business and politics likely remains more of a problem in post-communist democracies than the purported *étatisation* of political parties as a result of state funding. Taking into account the bitterness still felt by many ordinary citizens over privatisation processes, the reputational damage caused by cosy relationships between political parties and oligarchs can be enormous.

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<sup>479</sup> Interview S1, Národná Rada, Bratislava, 13th September 2012; Interview S4, Zilinska 3, Bratislava, 13th September 2012.

In Estonia and Lithuania, the tightening business funding environment is prominent in party elites' thinking about the value of members. Members can save parties money by performing functions hitherto purchased commercially, and they are increasingly appreciated for this function by Estonian and Lithuanian parties. Although parties are reluctant to ask their members for money directly, since this has not hitherto been part of the political culture in either Estonia or Lithuania, parties are considering ways to increase the money received from members in the future. A new law in Lithuania allows citizens to donate 1% of their annual tax to a political party or 2% to an NGO of their choice, and they can also make small donations to charities, NGOs and political parties via SMS. This initiative aims to encourage party funding through small individual donations, reducing reliance on the state and business.

Competitive dynamics are also important. State funding is awarded on the basis of past election results, and therefore favours the status quo. The cartel party theory assumes that parties will be comfortable maintaining their existing position in the party system's pecking order, rather than aiming to out-gun their rivals. Unsurprisingly, some small parties have greater ambitions, and seek to raise money from members in order to overcome a relative disadvantage in state or business funding. This was evident in the strategy of SDE, the poorest of Estonia's four main parties, which was poised for a major electoral breakthrough and actively considering ways to persuade party members to donate more money.

Therefore, the relationship between members and money is influenced by a variety of institutional and non-institutional factors. When business donations are unregulated,

state funding is largely irrelevant, since the money provided by business will soon swamp anything that can be provided by the state. Public funding can, however, prove beneficial to the development of membership parties if tied to enforced regulations on business funding. This thesis found evidence that a tightening business funding encourages parties to look to members as a source of money and/or free labour. Other institutional changes, for example the introduction of Lithuania's payroll giving scheme, may ultimately succeed in their objective of financing parties via multiple small donations from members and supporters, rather than large donations from either business or the state. Finally, competitive dynamics, particularly relative poverty combined with big ambitions, may also prompt individual parties to look to members as a source of money and free labour.

### 7.3 OTHER ELECTORAL INSTITUTIONS

Electoral systems and business funding regulations influence the value of members to political parties by dictating the geographical scope of competition and the financial resources available to parties. These can affect whether political parties invest time and energy in membership recruitment and retention. However, the three case studies highlighted some other less obvious institutions that appear to have a subtle influence on party behaviour. These include pre-election 'silence periods' and party registration requirements.

*Pre-election 'Silence Periods'*

In order to reduce opportunities for electoral irregularities, many central and east European countries ban partisan voter contacting on polling day, and sometimes for longer. In Lithuania, parties are banned from campaigning for 72 hours before polling day, a rule that increases the value of members as loyal and reliable voters. With voter turnout often struggling to reach 50%, and no opportunity to carry out a polling day 'get out the vote' campaign, Lithuanian parties place great importance on building a membership base that will not only vote themselves, but also cajole their family and friends to the polling station.

Lithuanian interviewees insisted that members acted as 'vote multipliers', even positing a direct correlation between the number of members and the number of voters. One LSDP MP wrote down a rough estimate of the number of members relative to the number of voters: 'LSDP – 180,000 voters/20,000 members; TS-LKD – 170,000 voters/17,000 members; Labour - 150,000 voters/18,000 members; Order and Justice – 90,000 voters/14,000 members; Liberals (all) – 75–80,000 voters/10,000 members.'<sup>480</sup> Thus, he estimated that each member was worth ten votes by making a trip to the polling station a social event. TS-LKD interviewees concurred, describing members as 'silent campaigners' on polling day.<sup>481</sup>

Where explicit campaigning is forbidden in the all-important final days before the poll, parties have a strong incentive to maximise the use of this resource. In Slovakia,

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<sup>480</sup> Interview L4, Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, Vilnius, 10th July 2012.

<sup>481</sup> Interview L3, Gedimino Pr, Vilnius, 3rd July 2012.

however, where campaigning is permitted on polling day, interviewees from both parties viewed membership levels as being too low to influence the outcome. This is likely also a function of the large district electoral system. In Estonia, where campaigning is banned on polling day but there are extensive opportunities for pre-polling, parties regard members as a welcome source of stable support, but do not expect members to drag their entire social group to the polling station.

Therefore, silence periods influence the role of members when they are lengthy and strictly enforced. In these circumstances, members' informal 'get out the vote' operations cannot be replaced by other campaigning methods. Attempts to boost differential turnout are particularly critical in 'winner takes all' single member districts, since one vote makes the difference between winning and losing in a close contest.

### *Party Registration Requirements*

Party elites are very aware of their rival parties' membership numbers. It has not escaped the notice of the more established Slovak parties that some of their new opponents have done well with barely any members at all. One of the current parliamentary parties in Slovakia, OLaNO, is said to have four members.<sup>482</sup> This caused interviewees to consider whether membership parties were effective in the modern Slovak environment. Conversely, in Lithuania (minimum party membership 400) and Estonia (minimum party membership 1,000), it was taken for granted that even new movements first needed members. In Estonia, no new party has gained

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<sup>482</sup> Interview S2a, Národná Rada, Bratislava, 13th September 2012

entry to the *Riigikogu* since *Res Publica* in 2003, and it was already a well-established right wing debating club. In Lithuania, new entrants are more common, but they often involve recycling familiar faces, and tend to be short-lived unless they manage to build an organisation.

In general, barriers to entry are lowest for new political parties in Slovakia. This begins with minimal party registration requirements, and is followed up by a permissive electoral system. While party registration requirements are only the beginning of the story, the ability of new parties to succeed with virtually no members creates doubts about the value of members amongst other Slovak political parties, an ambivalence that is not observed in Estonia or Lithuania.

#### 7.4 'TOP DOGS' AND 'UNDERDOGS': THE IMPORTANCE OF STRATEGIC FACTORS

Electoral institutions dictate the ways in which parties can spend and raise money, the geographic boundaries of political competition, and the basic organisational form that parties must take. As such, they offer powerful incentives to parties. However, while electoral systems may influence which style of campaigning is the most theoretically efficient under any given set of rules, it is unlikely that every party in a party system will follow exactly the same strategy. Some parties are richer than others. Some parties have better opportunities to use the mass media than others, depending on their levels of political capital and the ideological preferences of media owners.

The most counter-intuitive finding of the thesis was the recent emphasis on individual voter contacting by SKDU-DS in Slovakia. This was surprising because Slovakia has a highly centralised electoral system, and SKDU-DS has hitherto operated as an ‘electoral’ party with a relatively small membership base. ‘Electoral mobilisation’ is undoubtedly the most theoretically efficient means of communication under a large district proportional electoral system. However, what choices do party elites face when they are dangerously low on political capital, and competing against an opponent that is richer, more charismatic, armed with the best ‘electoral professionals’ in the country, and with unrivalled access to administrative resources? In these circumstances, SKDU-DS party elites can either sit tight and hope for the best (a risky tactic in the crowded Slovak centre-right), or they can attempt to improve their linkages with society in the hope of building a more stable base.

The importance of electoral dynamics can also be seen in the behaviour Estonia’s traditional ‘underdog’ party, SDE. Although its political capital is currently very high, SDE struggled for a very long time to find an audience for its leftist ideology in post-communist Estonia. As a result, it remains poorer and less organisationally developed than its rivals. While extant theories predict that central and east European political parties will not look to members as a source of money where they have access to state funding, SDE is in no way content to rely on the limited amount of money that it receives from the state, a tactic that would leave it limited in its ability to capitalise on its bounce in the polls. Thus, SDE is looking to its members as a source of free labour, and is even hoping to boost the financial contributions of members.

The above examples remind us that politics is fundamentally a competitive affair. Party elites may tend to the theoretically efficient approach when times are good and the party's position is stable. However, faced with a situation where current resources do not fit the challenge ahead, party elites will often innovate.

## 7.5 MEMBERS, PURPOSIVE BENEFITS AND POLICY-MAKING

The extant literature posits that political parties in new democracies, focussing on 'electoral' mobilisation, will have low policy coherence and minimal structures for policy making. They would not be expected to have associated think tanks, and certainly not complex standing committees for detailed discussion of specific policy areas. In reality, however, most of the six parties examined in this thesis sought to chart a middle ground between retaining the final say on policy for the party elite, while offering members the chance to feed ideas up the chain. This was particularly evident in Estonia and Lithuania, where parties valued members as ambassadors, campaigners and candidates, and therefore offered members involvement policy-making as a 'purposive benefit'.

Only Slovakia's SMER-SD fits the ideologically nimble 'catch-all' stereotype, with most policy-making decisions made by a small circle surrounding the leader. SKDU-DS was, at the time of research, conducting a root and branch review of its policies and policy-making processes. They sought to involve members informally. However,

they were worried that the party's membership was small and intellectual.<sup>483</sup> As a result, they sought to involve the general public in an attempt to broaden their appeal.

*Table 7.1 Policy Making Processes of Estonian, Lithuanian and Slovak Political Parties*

	Estonia		Lithuania		Slovakia	
	ER	SDE	TS-LKD	LSDP	SDKU-DS	SMER-SD
In-house think tank(s)	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
Policy-specific standing committees	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗
Membership involvement in manifesto-writing process	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Policy-making confined to leadership or policy committee	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓

Policy making processes in the four Estonia and Lithuanian parties facilitated input from party members. The precise method by which members were involved varied between the centre-left and the centre-right parties (Table 7.1). The centre-left parties, SDE and LSDP, had a complex range of standing committees, which met year-round to discuss policies on specific topics. The centre-right parties, ER and TS-LKD, sought members' opinions in advance of the manifesto-writing process, organised sociable discussion groups between elections, and ran in-house think tanks. The approach of the centre-right parties - discussion groups and think tanks - is ultimately elite-led. However, the fact that parties make conspicuous efforts to give members a feeling of involvement suggests that party elites value members and take the time to seek their opinions. The centre-left parties' policy-making structures are

<sup>483</sup> Interview S1, Národná Rada, Bratislava, 13th September 2012; Interview S4, Zilinska 3, Bratislava, 13th September 2012

hierarchical, giving committee members the opportunity to make a contribution to policy-making through official structures, at least on paper. These are inspired by the structures of their social democratic ‘sister’ parties, particularly in Scandinavian countries. However, more research would be required to discover how much real influence is enjoyed by those lower in the hierarchy. Interviews suggested that final decisions about party policies lie in the hands of party elites in all six parties that participated in this research.

Estonian and Lithuanian elites’ motivations for involving members in policy-making are two-fold: firstly, they recognise the importance of ‘purposive benefits’.<sup>484</sup> Secondly, other than a small amount of time and effort, there are no real costs involved in organising events where policies are discussed. Ideas can be adopted if they are useful, and ignored if they do not fit with the party elites’ vision. Ironically, far from worrying that members might impose vote-losing commitments, party elites were sometimes more concerned about their members’ ‘populist’ tendencies.

Members can also influence policy-making through the candidate selection process, particularly in the Lithuanian single member districts. In Lithuania there was a tension between the policy position adopted for the national list campaign (which favours adherence to a niche, at least in Lithuania’s crowded electoral market), and the attitudes of members in the single member districts, where the majoritarian element of the ballot encourages wide-based appeals to the median voter. This is a foreseeable consequence of mixed electoral systems, although further research would

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<sup>484</sup> This was also confirmed by the surveys, which showed broad agreement that more involvement in the policy making process would be one of the most effective ways to attract new members.

be required to reach more general conclusions about the effect of electoral systems on party policy-making in central and east Europe.

Contrary to theories that parties in new democracies will seek to maximise ideological nimbleness, the Estonian and Lithuanian parties examined in this thesis displayed a strong interest in ideology. Thatcherite and Reaganite ideologies heavily influenced the centre-right parties in all three countries, while the centre-left parties often looked to Scandinavian style social democracy, particular in the two Baltic countries. Only the Slovak centre-left party SMER-SD took a Downsian vote-maximising approach. Their centre-right rivals, SDKU-DS, were finding their vote squeezed in the Slovak party system's crowded centre-right, and were reviewing their policies with a view to increasing their share of the vote. However, it is unlikely that their free-market ideology will alter significantly.

This thesis was only able to examine two parties in each of three party systems, and the methodology of choosing the main centre-left and centre-right parties in each party system biased the analysis towards programmatic parties with membership bases. Each party system also hosts parties with populist and/ or clientelist orientations. Some take a 'catch all' approach and some appeal to a niche, but most have only rudimentary policy-making structures. However, the examples of the four Estonian and Lithuanian parties described by this thesis are revealing because they show that central and east European political parties are not necessarily ideologically nimble with minimal policy-making structures. Some parties, particularly social democratic parties in Estonia and Lithuania, have complex hierarchical policy-making

structures. Others involve members in policy-making, if only to gather ideas and offer purposive benefits.

## 7.6 CULTURE, IDEOLOGY AND THE 'LEGITIMISING' FUNCTION OF MEMBERS

The cartel party theory argues that one of the few reasons why parties continue to maintain membership bases, other than out of habit, is that they provide 'legitimacy benefits'. While the concept of 'legitimacy' is vague and difficult to operationalize, this thesis found that parties' concepts of membership were often shaped by normative values and a competitive instinct to out-recruit their competitors. There was no evidence that universal post-communist effects made central and east European voters permanently cynical and withdrawn from the political process. Rather, much depended on the behaviour of party elites in the post-communist period.

Of the three countries examined in this thesis, only Slovak parties thought that negative perceptions of parties undermined membership recruitment prospects. This problem stemmed not only from communist legacies, but also from the behaviour of parties in the post-communist period, including the anti-democratic nature of HZDS in the 1990s, which had high membership levels but low legitimacy. The constant allegations of corruption throughout the 2000s, culminating in the 'Gorila Scandal' of 2011, left many voters cynical and disaffected. One MP said that the public will not trust political parties until they 'start to behave'.<sup>485</sup> Political developments in Slovakia

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<sup>485</sup> Interview S3, Národná Rada, Bratislava, 13th September 2012.

can be viewed as a consequence of ‘path dependency’, but the patterns of membership recruitment in Estonia and Lithuania are quite different.

For Lithuanian and Estonian parties, members were seen as an important way to overcome voter cynicism by building trust in political parties. Interviewees were keen to point out that increased trust would not automatically result from a numerically larger membership base. In order to convince cynical voters, the relationship between members and the party must be authentic. If this can be achieved, members act as living, breathing proof that the party connects with ordinary people. From this point of view, the notion of trust and legitimacy is closely linked to the idea of ‘ambassadors in the community’.

Only one party, Estonia’s Reform Party, cited the traditional western idea of legitimacy benefits (i.e. the idea that members demonstrate that the party is in touch with ordinary people, not just the elite) as contributing to decisions about membership recruitment. Its initial decision to begin actively recruiting members in the late 1990s was inspired by a desire to move beyond the image of being a party of bankers. More than a decade later, the Reform Party views high membership as an important marker of success and popularity. Having boasted loudly about recently overtaking the Centre Party as the ‘biggest’ party in Estonia, expectations are raised that this position will be maintained, which may place further upward pressure in membership numbers. The Estonian and Lithuanian social democrat parties, on the other hand, expressed strong opinions about how parties *should* look, inspired by traditional west European models of mass socialist parties. They also spoke of the importance of members for building the legitimacy of the party system as a whole.

Therefore, while much of the literature on the effect of communist legacies focuses on cynicism amongst central and east European parties and voters as a result of communist legacies, idealism is not entirely absent. In some cases, the long struggle for democracy still leaves a belief that the stakes are high, and that politicians have a duty to look beyond short-term instrumental goals. One Lithuanian interviewee, now a senior LSDP MP, was born in a Gulag camp and spent much of the seventies and eighties imprisoned for dissident activities. Those who were willing to sacrifice their liberty for their political ideals during the communist period are unlikely to take the quick and easy option when it comes to party-building. It is likely that the extent to which more idealistic voices can be heard depends on both the dynamics of the transition and the personalities of those who manage to succeed in post-communist politics.

Membership recruitment is often influenced by competitive dynamics. Parties are very aware of how their own membership levels compare to those of rival parties. However, somewhat counter-intuitively, programmatic parties in Estonia and Lithuania were often more interested in out-numbering their 'populist' rivals than their ideological opposites. Thus, the Estonian Reform Party sought to beat the populist Centre Party, while the Lithuanian Social Democrats wished to stay one step ahead of the Labour Party because they 'collect our voters using populist ideas.'<sup>486</sup> There were two motivations for this phenomenon: firstly, they viewed their programmatic rivals as worthy opponents; and secondly, in a multi-party system, ideological opposites are not viewed as a direct threat.

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<sup>486</sup> Interview L4, Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, Vilnius, 10th July 2012.

Therefore, central and east European parties' perceptions of the 'legitimising' function of members are shaped by a variety of cultural, normative and strategic factors. The idea of members as 'window dressing', as implied by the cartel party theory, does not have much purchase in central and east Europe, where cynical voters would not be fooled by 'ghost members'. However, if the connection between members and parties is authentic, members can play an important role in trust-building.

#### 7.6 POST-COMMUNIST LEGACIES AND PARTY MEMBERSHIP

The effects of post-communism cannot be neatly categorised, at the party system level, into the patrimonial, bureaucratic-authoritarian and national-accommodative ideal-types suggested by Kitschelt. In Slovakia, legacies of bureaucratic-authoritarian communism were visible when Bratislavans preferred to comment anonymously on political blog posts rather than expressing their opinions face-to-face. Meanwhile politics in the agrarian east of the country seems better fitted to the patrimonial category. In Lithuania, clear battle lines are drawn between 'traditional' (programmatic) parties and 'populist' (clientelist) parties, reflecting the clash between national-accommodative and patrimonial legacies within a single party system. In both countries, a clear urban-rural divide was observed. Post-communist legacies are less visible in Estonia at the parliamentary level, where young, market-oriented politicians dominated the transition, and have had the upper hand in national politics since. Patrimonial legacies can be seen, however, in the behaviour of the Centre Party, which currently runs Tallinn City Council.

All three countries contained a major party that was accused by their rivals of mobilising voters using clientelist, populist and/or charismatic appeals. The tactics of SMER-SD (Slovakia), the Labour Party (Lithuania) and the Centre Party (Estonia) will now be considered briefly. All three of these parties have high party memberships by the standards of their respective countries. SMER-SD's members were not heavily involved in campaigning tasks.<sup>487</sup> The party's opponents claimed that they had bottomless financial resources, paying commercially for services that their opponents carried out using volunteers. SMER-SD was also said to use its extensive contacts and administrative resources to gain access to public sector workplaces for campaigning purposes.<sup>488</sup> Therefore, clientelist style campaigning does take place in Slovakia, but SMER-SD's members appear to be largely passive in this process.

In Lithuania, the 'populist' Labour Party, led and founded by a charismatic oligarch, Viktor Uspaskich, also took advantage of its relative wealth. The Labour Party's opponents accused the party of paying its members small sums to attend meetings. One LSDP councillor expressed frustration that, "It works especially in small towns, because then somebody says, 'See! There were a lot of people at the meeting when Uspaskich came to speak!'"<sup>489</sup> The Labour Party was also accused of paying activists to perform other small campaigning tasks, including sitting outside polling stations. According to the LSDP, this sometimes created tensions because "after some time, when activists from other parties are getting money, our members also want some

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<sup>487</sup> Interview S6, by email, 5th December 2012.

<sup>488</sup> Interview S3, Národná Rada, Bratislava, 13th September 2012.

<sup>489</sup> Interview L6, Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, Vilnius, 25th July 2012.

money.”<sup>490</sup> To contain this problem, the ‘traditional’ Lithuanian parties cooperated to introduce stringent new party financing laws. Furthermore, following the October 2012 parliamentary elections, prosecutions were brought against the Labour Party for vote buying in prisons. This suggests an environment increasingly hostile to clientelist mobilisation in Lithuania.

In Estonia, accusations of clientelism were mostly associated with abuse of Tallinn City Council’s administrative resources. One Reform Party interviewee commented that:

“A friend works for the Council and says her employers make her perform tasks for the Centre Party. For example, after a television debate between the party leaders, she is instructed to use her council telephone to SMS several times in support of the Centre Party.”<sup>491</sup>

For senior employees of Tallinn City Council, Centre Party membership and participation in party campaigns is said to be an informal addition to the job description. In March 2013, the newspaper *Postimees* reported that senior council workers had been sacked for failing to pay their party dues. The Centre Party leader (and Tallinn Mayor), Edgar Savisaar, was unrepentant. He said, “We need all people who run Tallinn and are Centre Party members to pay the party’s levy. [...] Our election coffer has to be filled.”<sup>492</sup> Notwithstanding the problems at Tallinn City

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<sup>490</sup> Interview L6, Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, Vilnius, 25th July 2012.

<sup>491</sup> Interview E3, Südalinn, Tallinn, 10th May 2012.

<sup>492</sup> ‘Savisaar: Officials Need to Pay Party Fees’, ERR News 13<sup>th</sup> March 2013, <http://news.err.ee/politics/40f251a3-09d8-4187-ae45-713c87590d51>

Council, few serious instances of clientelist style politics were described at the national level of Estonian politics.

Thus, clientelist campaigning exists in all three countries, but takes different forms and is more dominant in some countries than others. As pointed out by Michael Pinto-Duschinsky, clientelist mobilisation is usually more resource-intensive than electoral-professional mobilisation.<sup>493</sup> The extent to which clientelist parties use members in their campaigns is influenced by a combination of cultural norms, structural factors, access to administrative resources, and also the practicalities created by electoral systems. Notwithstanding their use of patron-client relationships, clientelist parties often use similar communication strategies to their programmatic rivals. For example, the Slovak SMER-SD contacts voters primarily in organised groups such as social clubs and workplaces, while the Lithuanian Labour Party pays its members to carry out 'pre-modern' campaigning tasks. However, both parties use administrative resources, paid 'activists' and other forms of patronage to complement the voluntary labour provided by members.

Although all three parties have charismatic leaders, there was no absolute reliance on modern 'electoral' campaigns. Like their programmatic counterparts, clientelist parties make extensive use of the mass media, but are wary of over-reliance on this medium. Clientelist parties often have relatively large membership bases, and competition against clientelist parties often drives membership recruitment in programmatic parties. Further research would be required to clarify the differences in campaigning styles between clientelist and programmatic parties. However,

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<sup>493</sup> Michael Pinto-Duschinsky (2002), 'Financing Politics: A Global View', *Journal of Democracy*, 13 (4): 69-86.

predictions that communist legacies would lead to universally low levels of membership have not come to fruition. Like programmatic parties, clientelist parties find members useful for political marketing, particularly where electoral districts are small.

### 7.8 THE PURPOSE OF MEMBERS IN NEW DEMOCRACIES

Many central and east European political parties that have achieved stability and longevity over the medium to long term have invested in membership recruitment. Far from being a 'vestigial' function of Western European parties that would be bypassed in new democracies, members have the potential to perform a variety of functions. They can act as 'ambassadors in the community', explaining parties' policies and vouching for the integrity of parties and candidates. They can form a recruiting pool for candidates, something that becomes increasingly important if the party wishes to participate in all levels of government nationwide. They can act as grassroots campaigners, going door-to-door, standing on street stalls and delivering leaflets. Perhaps most surprisingly of all, they are often valued for their own sake, as an integral part of a well-functioning democracy.

Central and east European political parties' attitudes towards members are influenced by a complex interaction of institutional, cultural and strategic factors. There is no universal post-communist effect. However, as party systems consolidate and major parties institutionalise, electoral institutions have a visible effect on the ways that parties communicate with voters and, thus, the tasks that members perform. As in

western democracies, the parties competing in Lithuania's single member districts use traditional methods of individual voter contacting, many of which are considered by political scientists to be 'pre-modern'. This is because mass media is an inefficient tool for spreading localised messages.

As in western democracies, small district multi-member wards encourages a focus on members as 'ambassadors in the community', since this facilitated individual candidates' needs to cultivate their own reputations while avoiding public conflict with their own co-partisans. And as in western democracies, very large electoral districts encourage parties to focus on mass media campaigns and direct contact with voters through organised groups. Therefore, where electoral districts are large, members are less useful for grassroots campaigning. This is a natural response to variation in the geographic scope of competition. Large electoral districts encourage parties to target certain demographics, while small electoral districts require parties to communicate localised messages, and individual candidates to build their own personal reputations.

Other institutions also influence the value of members. Small municipal districts increase the number of candidates required by parties, but only where local elections are politicised nationwide. Where electoral rules and conventions permit independent candidates, parties can by-pass the process of regional party building. However, where municipal competition is politicised, the demand for candidates (and local activists to support their campaigns) is likely to be greater across the country. This is likely to be a major factor influencing whether parties compete as organisationally nimble 'electoralist' parties, or begin to expand into the regions, becoming more organisationally complex in the process.

Contrary to concerns expressed in the extant literature about the impact of state funding on political party development in central and east Europe, there was no evidence that state subsidies encouraged a complacent attitude towards organisation building. It was found that the effect of state funding has likely been overstated, since all six parties almost certainly receive significant business donations that are never reported in official returns. In Estonia and Lithuania, where bans on business funding are now strictly enforced, there is some evidence that parties are beginning to value their members as a source of free labour. It is likely that their contribution to fundraising will also increase in the future.

Not every party has equal access to state funding, business funding and sympathetic media coverage. Electoral-professional campaigns are expensive, and using volunteer labour can help parties to stretch their budget further. Furthermore, parties in Estonia and Lithuania are beginning to find that the cost of advertising continues to escalate, while its effectiveness has declined over the years. Media coverage is largely dependent on the ideological preferences of the magnates who own newspapers and TV channels (media ownership has become highly concentrated over the years) and some parties will inevitably be out of favour, either permanently or temporarily, at any given time. Especially where electoral districts are small, members can help parties to overcome media hostility by spreading the party's message through grass-roots campaigning.

Overall, the prediction that central and east European parties would have no use for members has not come to fruition. While parties with very small memberships can

still be found in the region, the parties that persist over several electoral cycles have mostly grown in size and organisational complexity, building branch structures capable of competing in local elections, and recruiting members to perform campaign tasks large and small. The functions that members perform vary across different institutional environments, and also vary between different parties according to strategic, cultural and ideological circumstances.

# 8

## Conclusion

This thesis has sought to explain why political parties in some post-communist democracies recruit and retain members, while others invest the minimum possible efforts in maintaining a membership base. Party membership data from eleven central and east European democracies was presented, followed by a detailed analysis of surveys, interviews and party statutes from three countries. Varying explanations, drawn from both the general comparative politics literature and theories developed by area specialists, were tested. In the process of investigating the hypotheses, empirical evidence revealing the role of members in central and east European democracies was presented. The overall findings reveal a picture of party membership in central and east Europe that is much more varied and complex than often assumed.

Scholarship about the changing nature of party organisations in western democracies emphasises declining membership numbers, and posits that members now bring more disadvantages than advantages to political parties. As a result, political parties in the new democracies of central and east Europe were expected to maintain universally low membership levels. However, the introductory chapter of this thesis posed a question: if party members serve no purpose in modern democracies, how can we explain the fact that some central and east European political parties have grown

significantly in recent years? The analysis in Chapter Two found that factors thought to deter membership recruitment (including state subsidies and directly elected presidencies) had no impact on party membership levels. However, in most countries where party membership was relatively high, parties competed in small electoral districts.

Rather than a universal trend towards post-communist political parties enjoying ‘the advantages of backwardness’, the findings of this thesis suggest a degree of organisational convergence between parties in western and eastern European democracies. Research in Western European democracies has established that electoral systems affect how parties communicate with voters. The low membership electoral-professional strategy is best suited to large electoral districts, such as the Netherlands, while ‘pre-modern’ individual voter contacting persists in small electoral districts, such as the German single member districts. These differing campaign strategies are rooted in the practicalities of political marketing: small, decentralised electoral districts lead to campaigning on localised issues, which are ill suited to campaigning through the national media.

In order to take the analysis forward, the roles of party members in three central and east European democracies were analysed. Chapter Three presented a set of micro-hypotheses, developed from the extant literature, about how electoral systems affect the role of members. These were tested in three countries with different electoral systems, Estonia, Lithuania and Slovakia. The case studies found that electoral systems influenced the role of members in ways that were observable. As expected, parties operating in small electoral districts valued members as grassroots

campaigners, ‘ambassadors in the community’ and as municipal candidates. In large electoral districts, parties engaged in relatively little individual voter contacting, instead focussing on electoral-professional strategies. Where face-to-face contact took place, it happened almost entirely through large, organised groups. This was exactly as hypothesised.

The reasons why decentralised electoral systems create a demand for members are clear. As Shugart and Carey pointed out, decentralised electoral systems provide incentives for individual candidates to build their own personal reputations.<sup>494</sup> With only a relatively small number of voters to appeal to, they will seek to distinguish themselves by showing concern for local interests specific to the constituency. And, as Shugart predicted, in small multi-member wards, candidates seek to distinguish themselves from their own co-partisans through individual voter contacting. These tasks are well served by electoral professional modes of campaigning.<sup>495</sup>

During the course of the interviews, there were numerous examples of candidates adjusting their tactics to electoral systems. In Estonia, one MP told of a ‘network campaign’ that he organised, where local party members contacted all of their friends and relatives on his behalf. This is a typical tactic in a small district multi-member ward. As that particular MP pointed out, members are needed because Estonia is small, but not so small that you can go everywhere yourself. In Lithuania, the difference between campaign styles at the two levels of the mixed electoral system

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<sup>494</sup> Matthew S Shugart and John M Carey (1995), ‘Incentives to Cultivate a Personal Vote: A Rank Order of Electoral Formulas’, *Electoral Studies*, 14(4): 417-439.

<sup>495</sup> Matthew S Shugart (2001), ‘Electoral “Efficiency” and the Move to Mixed Member Systems’, *Electoral Studies*, 20(2): 184.

were visible, with individual voter contacting prevailing at the single member district level and electoral professional media campaigning dominating the national list element of the elections.

Under large district centralised electoral systems, such as Slovakia, there is less incentive for individual candidates to build individual contacts with voters, since their success is determined by their party's overall result and their position on the pre-determined party list. Thus, candidates tend to focus on building the reputation of the party as a whole by appearing on national media discussing broad issues. Parties appeal to specific nationwide demographics (for example, students and entrepreneurs for SKDU-DS; pensioners and blue collar workers for SMER-SD). Campaigning on localised issues makes less sense when elected representatives are not tied to specific geographic areas, and target demographics are also geographically dispersed. This reduces the effectiveness of door-to-door campaigning and other localised campaign techniques. Although parties do still conduct street-level campaigning in areas where their target demographics are concentrated, it is more common for candidates to attend pre-arranged meetings where large groups of their target demographic are already gathered. This reduced the need for members.

Electoral rules at the municipal level also affect the extent to which parties invest in membership recruitment. It is simply not possible for elite-based 'electoral' parties to make serious inroads into municipal government without expanding into the regions. At this point, party organisations begin to grow in complexity. If parties wish to compete at the municipal level nationwide, they will need to recruit a large number of candidates across the country, but this is no easy process. For new political parties, the

process of expanding into the regions can take decades. Many political parties in central and east Europe never build an organisation capable of contesting municipal elections nationwide, but those that do are likely to reap the benefits in terms of stability and longevity, as suggested by Deegan-Krause and Haughton's analogy of 'hardy perennials'.<sup>496</sup>

The effect of municipal competition on central and east European parties is an area that requires further research. The decision of party elites to begin building an organisation capable of contesting municipal elections nationwide is likely a critical juncture in the party's development, since the organisational complexity required to make serious inroads at the municipal level moves parties beyond the highly centralised 'electoralist' model. This thesis finds that institutions influence parties' demand for candidates in municipal elections. The number of candidates required will rise as the number of electoral districts grows, but only if local elections are dominated by partisan competition. If independent candidates dominate municipal elections, parties may choose to focus their energies on the national competition. It appears from the Estonian and Lithuanian cases that partisan competition at the local level is encouraged if electoral rules place restrictions on independent candidates.

If the effect of electoral systems on party organisation was found to be strong, the influence of state subsidies did not appear to be a major factor influencing party organisation. The explanation for this finding, which is at odds with the dominant literature, was simple: the proportion of party funds provided by the state is much

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<sup>496</sup> Kevin Deegan-Krause and Tim Haughton (2012), 'The 2010 parliamentary elections in Slovakia', *Electoral Studies*, 31(1).

smaller than publicly declared. When scholars, most notably Ingrid van Biezen and Petr Kopecný, have noted the high proportion of party funding provided by the state, and made predictions about *étatisation*, they have relied on official returns. However, under conditions of anonymity, party elites interviewed for this thesis confirmed that, in almost all cases, official returns are virtually meaningless, since they over-estimate the proportion of money provided by the state, and tell us little about the *real* source of party funds.

In the best-case scenario, the provision of state subsidies can ease the passage of regulations restricting business funding. If these laws are enforced, parties' budgets are squeezed and they begin to look to members as a source of free labour. This thesis found evidence that members were slowly developing a small fundraising role in Estonia and Lithuania, particularly in the case of Estonia's SDE, which has traditionally been a small party, and therefore receives much less state funding than its rivals. However, state funding is quickly dwarfed where business funding regulations are lax, as in Slovakia.

While state funding has been blamed for many ills afflicting the relationship between parties and society in central and east Europe, it is likely that the real 'culprit' in terms of low party membership is more likely to be large amounts of undeclared business funding. In Chapter Two it was noted that the only country in central and east Europe with no state funding, Latvia, was also the country with the lowest party membership. Latvia has recently introduced the state funding of political parties in an attempt to curb the relationship between politics and big business. Where political

parties are perceived as little more than vehicles for oligarchs, the prospects for membership recruitment are low.

While electoral institutions influence the choices made by party elites, strategic and ideological factors may explain party level variation. Broadly speaking, there appeared to be considerable organisational convergence between centre-left and centre-right parties. However, their attitudes to members were not identical. The Estonian and Lithuanian social democrat parties spoke of their aim to emulate the traditional mass parties of Scandinavia, while centre-right parties emphasised practicality over ideology. Individual interviewees' attitudes to members were often shaped by their personal experiences. Unsurprisingly, former anti-communist dissidents tended to be idealistic in their views about how parties should be organised.

Attitudes to members are also influenced by the resources available to parties. Some parties have difficult relationships with the mass media, either because their political capital has expired or the media is dominated by their ideological opponents. In these circumstances, they may seek ways of communicating their message directly to voters. Some small parties hope to make big strides, but are disadvantaged by their relatively meagre share of state funding and their lack of access to business funding. Membership recruitment may be time consuming and arduous, but can help parties overcome these obstacles.

Contrary to current dominant theories, there was no universal post-communist effect. Although clientelist politics existed in all three countries to a greater or lesser degree, only Slovak parties believed that the idea of membership parties had been largely

discredited in the eyes of the general population. Furthermore, the Slovak centre-right is currently highly fractured, with four parties hovering just above the 5% threshold in the February 2012 election, and further splits taking place in the aftermath. This situation does not create the pre-conditions for the long-term planning necessary for membership recruitment and retention.

This thesis has offered a rare glimpse into the motivations behind party elites' decisions at membership recruitment. During the interviews, it was possible to probe the relationship between party members and electoral institutions. However, the methodology of this thesis is also subject to limitations. It was only possible to carry out a limited number of surveys and interviews. It is notoriously difficult to gain access to closed environments like political parties, and time was limited. As a result, only six parties could be examined. The selection of parties that had achieved relative longevity, and the focus on the main centre-left and centre-right party in each country, led to a 'selection bias' in favour of programmatic parties with relatively high levels of membership. While this offers a useful corrective to the dominant theories of 'electoral' mobilisation, it is important to remember that different results would probably have been found if this research had focussed on 'new' parties that had less than two electoral cycles to mature and institutionalise.

Of course, political parties in central and east Europe come in many shapes and sizes. An emerging body of research indicates that membership parties are more likely to succeed in the long-term, due to both superior campaigning capacity and an ability to withstand electoral setbacks. This thesis has contributed to this growing understanding by providing empirical evidence of the ways in which parties adjust

their campaign tactics to the institutional environment, and how the role of members changes as a result. Future research can build on these findings by testing whether the institutional hypotheses hold in other central and east European democracies, by examining how the six parties that participated in this research change over time, and by investigating more closely the circumstances in which new political parties begin the process of building regional organisations capable of supporting municipal elections.

After twenty years of party system development, inter-party competition in central and east Europe remains active. New parties, albeit often containing familiar faces, regularly appear. Although party system volatility varies across the region, none of the party systems are closed to newcomers. Vigorous competition exists over policy; in addition to the growing salience of ‘traditional’ cleavages, polarisation continues regarding the legacies of the communist era. Thus, conditions are not currently favourable for inter-party cooperation and collusion of the kind suggested by the ‘cartel party’ theory. Party elites must consider how best to compete within the context of their own party system, taking into account institutional rules, available resources, elite preferences and the strategies of opponents.

One of the big questions asked by scholars of central and east European politics is whether political parties in the region will move through ‘stages of development’, as often ascribed to Western European parties. Of course, even in Western European democracies, parties have utilised a variety of mobilisation strategies depending on their aims, their ideology and their institutional environment. Furthermore, the primacy of ‘electoral’ mobilisation in western democracies may itself have been a

phase that peaked in the 1990s, after which the public, tired of spin and the mass media, became increasingly resistant to manipulation by electoral professionals. Established parties in western democracies must now respond to increasing voter distrust and the emergence of new competitors. Having never been able to take stability for granted, some political elites in central and east Europe now look to members to improve their linkages with society, and to help with a variety of campaigning tasks. Particularly where electoral districts are small and money is tight, 'old fashioned' tasks like knocking on doors, leafleting and organising street stalls are very much part of the modern campaign.

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E2	07 May 2012	Riigikogu, Tallinn	ER	MP
E3	10 May 2012	Südalinn, Tallinn	ER	Council Candidate
E4	10 May 2012	SDE HQ, Tallinn	SDE	Party staff
E5	10 May 2012	SDE HQ, Tallinn	SDE	Party staff
E6	15 May 2012	Riigikogu, Tallinn	SDE	MP
E7	17 May 2012	Tallinn Council HQ	SDE	Councillor

#### Interviews (Lithuania)

Ref	Date	Location	Party	Position Held
L1	2 July 2012	Gedimino Pr, Vilnius	TS-LKD	MP
L2	3 July 2012	Gedimino Pr, Vilnius	TS-LKD	Party strategist
L3	3 July 2012	Gedimino Pr, Vilnius	TS-LKD	Ministerial adviser
L4	10 July	Seimas, Vilnius	LSDP	MP
L5	20 July 2012	LSDP HQ, Vilnius	LSDP	Youth president
L6	25 July 2012	Seimas, Vilnius	LSDP	Councillor

#### Interviews (Slovakia)

Ref	Date	Location	Party	Position Held
S1	13 Sep 2012	Národná Rada, Bratislava	SKDU-DS	MP
2a	13 Sep 2012	Národná Rada, Bratislava	SKDU-DS.	MP
2b	13 Sep 2012	Národná Rada, Bratislava	SKDU-DS	MP
S3	13 Sep 2012	Národná Rada, Bratislava	SaS	MP
S4	13 Sep 2012	Zilinska 3, Bratislava	SKDU-DS	Councillor
S5	16 Oct 2012	Národná Rada, Bratislava	SMER-SD	MP
S6	5 Dec 2012	By email	SMER-SD	Press officer

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## Appendix One

### Three Country Comparison of Survey Results

*What is the most effective means of communicating your party's message?*

	Estonia		Lithuania		Slovakia	
	ER	SDE	TS-LKD	LSDP	SDKU	SMER
National TV and Radio	15.2%	53%	35.9%	25.0%	15.8%	56.6%
Local TV and Radio	6.3%	21.9%	21.6%	37.0%	15.8%	11.1%
Print Media	6.3%	28.1%	26.8%	39.3%	22.2%	50.0%
Social Media	18.8%	25%	7.5%	10.7%	31.6%	22.2%
Discussions with friends, family and neighbours	78.1%	71.8%	34.1%	67.9%	15.8%	30.0%

*How long should people be members of your party before standing in national elections?*

	Estonia		Lithuania		Slovakia	
	ER	SDE	TS-LKD	LSDP	SDKU-DS	SMER-SD
Suitable candidates do not need to be party members	9.4%	21.9%	16.7%	12.0%	47.1%	12.5%
Candidates need to join the party before standing on the party ticket	50%	53.1%	6.7%	4.0%	11.8%	0%
Candidates must be members for several months	6.3%	12.5%	3.3%	0%	0%	0%
Candidates should be members for a year.	18.8%	12.5%	23.3%	24.0%	23.5%	37.5%
Candidates should be members for three years	15.6%	0%	50.0%	60.0%	17.6%	50.0%

*How long should people be members of your party before standing in municipal elections?*

	Estonia		Lithuania		Slovakia	
	ER	SDE	TS-LKD	LSDP	SDKU-DS	SMER-SD
Suitable candidates do not need to be party members	56.3%	87.5%	28%	26.7%	58.8%	44.4%
Candidates need to join the party before standing on the party ticket	28.1%	9.3%	4%	6.7%	11.8%	0%
Candidates must be members for several months	3.1%	3.1%	12%	13.3%	5.9%	0%
Candidates should be members for a year.	12.5%	0%	52%	30%	5.9%	22.2%
Candidates should be members for three years	0%	0%	4%	23.3%	17.6%	33.3%

*How often do members get involved in the following activities during national elections?*

	Estonia		Lithuania		Slovakia	
	ER	SDE	TS-LKD	LSDP	SDKU-DS	SMER-SD
Contact voters by telephone	25%	9.3%	0%	7.1%	23.5%	11.1%
Contact voters door-to-door	15.6%	6.2%	14.8%	25.0%	11.8%	0%
Distribute handbills door-to-door	21.2%	21.7%	63.0%	66.7%	76.5%	55.6%
Organise and attend meetings	43.8%	46.9%	37.0%	66.7%	64.7%	55.6%
Participate in rallies and events	46.7%	56.3%	33.3%	50.0%	70.6%	44.4%
Persuade friends, family and neighbours to vote for the party	77.4%	59.4%	59.3%	75.0%	58.8%	55.6%

*How often do members get involved in the following activities during municipal elections?*

	Estonia		Lithuania		Slovakia	
	ER	SDE	TS-LKD	LSDP	SDKU-DS	SMER-SD
Contact voters by telephone	27.3%	3.1%	0%	10.7%	17.6%	11.1%
Contact voters door-to-door	25.0%	6.2%	9.8%	28.6%	23.5%	0%
Distribute handbills door-to-door	18.2%	21.9%	69.0%	67.9%	70.6%	66.7%
Organise and attend meetings	59.4%	59.4%	42.9%	78.6%	58.8%	44.4%
Participate in rallies and events	65.6%	56.3%	34.1%	42.9%	58.8%	33.3%
Persuade friends, family and neighbours to vote for the party	78.1%	65.6%	54.8%	78.6%	70.6%	44.4%

*What is the most important function of members in your party (choose only one answer)?*

	ER	SDE	TS-LKD	LSDP	SDKU-DS	SMER-SD
To contribute money	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
To spread the party's message	33.3%	28.1%	21.4%	46.4%	23.5%	11.1%
To help develop policies	42.4%	53.1%	21.4%	7.1%	47.1%	44.4%
To demonstrate that the party has the support of the people, not just the elite	18.2%	9.4%	35.7%	35.7%	23.5%	33.3%
To help with election campaigns	3%	9.4%	10.7%	7.1%	0%	0%
To provide candidates for local and national elections	0%	3.1%	10.7%	3.6%	5.9%	11.1%