

Emigration, democratic norms, and the political economy of democracies in Central and Eastern Europe



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Abstract

Starting in 2004, the accession of eleven Central and Eastern European countries to the European Union led to a new major wave of emigration on the continent. This thesis examines the impact of this wave of emigration on politics in countries of origin. It focuses on the effects of emigration on attitudes and behaviour in countries of origin – primarily support for democracy, political participation, and preferences for redistribution – and investigates the ultimate impact of these effects on political dynamics in the region. Previous evidence from other regions of the world suggested that emigration may have led to a process of democratic diffusion through political remittances by increasing support for democratic principles and participation, and may have led to a decline in demand for redistribution and constrained the development of welfare states through the impact of financial remittances. However, I show that these mechanisms do not adequately describe the political impact of emigration in Central and Eastern Europe. Through the constituent papers of this thesis, I ask three main questions: (1) What is the extent of democratic diffusion through political remittances in the region? (2) How has emigration affected support for redistribution among people living in origin countries? and (3) Do left-wing governments increase public spending in the region relative to other cabinets? – with the third question aimed at establishing the mechanisms that may connect changes in preferences driven by emigration to policy changes at an aggregate level. I find that emigration has only led to a very limited degree of democratic diffusion through political remittances in the region, driving an increase in non-electoral participation but also a decrease in electoral turnout among returnees, while leaving support for democracy and political interest largely unchanged. I show that emigration has led to higher demand for redistribution among people living in areas that experienced significant outflows, an effect concentrated among high earners and explained as the result of local consequences of emigration increasing expected returns from redistribution. Finally, I provide evidence that partisan spending effects persist in the region, with left-wing governments increasing public spending conditional on high levels of economic growth. On the whole, emigration has exacerbated existing vulnerabilities in the region's democracies, which may have fuelled anti-establishment sentiment and the rise of the populist radical right. However, my findings also highlight that origin countries in the region have the potential to adapt to some of the challenges posed by emigration.

List of acronyms and abbreviations

- AKP:** Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party, Turkey)
- AUR:** Alianța pentru Unirea Românilor (Alliance for the Union of Romanians, Romania)
- CEE:** Central and Eastern Europe
- ESS:** European Social Survey
- EU:** European Union
- EVS:** European Values Survey
- Fidesz:** Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége (Alliance of Young Democrats, Hungary)
- GDR:** German Democratic Republic
- IMF:** International Monetary Fund
- LITS:** Life in Transition Survey
- MSZP:** Magyar Szocialista Párt (Hungarian Socialist Party)
- PiS:** Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice Party, Poland)
- POLPAN:** Polish Panel Survey
- PSD:** Partidul Social Democrat (Social Democratic Party, Romania)
- SDL:** Strana demokratickej ľavice (Party of the Democratic Left, Slovakia)
- SLD:** Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej (Alliance of the Democratic Left, Poland)
- Smer-SD:** Smer – sociálna demokracia (Direction – Social Democracy, Slovakia)
- TSCS:** Time-series cross-sectional
- UN:** United Nations
- WVS:** World Values Survey

Chapter 1. Introduction

After 2004, eleven post-Communist states – referred to throughout this thesis as Central and Eastern European¹ (CEE) countries – joined the European Union, leading to a new major wave of East-West emigration on the continent. Millions of their citizens moved to Western Europe in search of a better life, taking advantage of newly extended rights to free movement. The phenomenon was remarkable in both scale and speed. Romania – the most affected state in the region – lost more of its population to emigration than any other country in the world in the decade after 2004, with the exception of war-torn Syria (UN, 2015). By 2018, one in four of its working-age citizens was living in another member state. Several other countries in the region lost almost a tenth of their population to migration, including Bulgaria, Lithuania, and Latvia (Eurostat, 2018). Such large outflows of population have inevitably led to major economic, social, and political consequences.

This thesis examines the post-2004 wave of emigration from Central and Eastern Europe, using it as an invaluable opportunity to advance our understanding of how emigration affects politics in countries of origin. The region is a particularly useful case for such purposes because of three characteristics of its recent wave of emigration, all of which can be traced back to the unique context of free movement within the EU – speed, scale, and direction. Emigration from the region happened in a relatively short interval of time, it was remarkably widespread both geographically and across sectors of society, and it saw the vast majority of people move to rather similar established democracies in Western Europe (Black et al., 2010; Atoyán et al., 2016; Okolski, 2021). These three factors should magnify any political effects of emigration on countries of origin, make these effects easier to isolate and observe than in other cases, and offer scholars the empirical leverage to both test existing theories and develop new ones.

In recent years, a small but growing literature has emerged to study the political effects of recent emigration from Central and Eastern Europe. Emigration has been tied to a decrease

¹ The term Central and Eastern Europe is used in the literature to refer to different groups of mostly post-Communist states in the region. In the present work, I use the term in a narrow sense, to refer to the eleven post-communist states that are members of the European Union – Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia – and hence share similar histories and recent patterns of economic and political development.

in turnout in origin countries (Kostelka, 2017), increased redistribution (Petrova and Sznajder-Lee, 2024), changes in the distribution of vote preferences in the electorate in favour of the right (Giesing and Schikora, 2023), and increases in support for the populist radical right (Lim, 2022) – the latter partly because emigration led to the departure of many people who are more liberal, and more likely to participate in politics and oppose radical right actors with autocratic tendencies (Kelemen, 2020). A range of qualitative studies have shown how recent emigration has led to the transmission of some new norms and practices to origin countries in the region through social remittances, including improved perceptions of minorities or novel campaign methods like canvassing (Grabowska, 2017; White and Grabowska, 2019). Widespread emigration has also meant that diasporas from the region have become an increasingly important voting constituency (Ahmadov and Sasse, 2015). In the most extreme cases – such as the Romanian presidential election of 2009 – the diaspora even decided the outcome of the election by overturning the winner of the contest within the country (Burean, 2011). CEE diaspora voters have generally supported more liberal and economically right-wing candidates (Szulecki et al., 2023), though recently there has been an increase in support for the populist far-right among the diaspora, most notably but not limited to the case of Romania (Stan and Zaharia, 2025) – which may be connected to the efforts of political parties, particularly some on the radical right, to better mobilise the diaspora and build infrastructure abroad (Ulceluse, 2020; Borz, 2020). Diasporas have played a growing role in CEE politics even beyond elections, as central actors in several anti-governmental protest movements across the region (Gubernat and Rammelt, 2021; Rone and Junes, 2021). The literature has also increasingly examined return migration to the region, particularly the factors driving return (Gherghina et al., 2020; Klimaviciute et al., 2020) and people’s experiences after arriving back in their countries of origin (Grabowska et al., 2025; Melke, 2024).

My work builds on and complements some of this emerging literature but focuses on a comparatively narrow and relatively underexplored matter – how emigration has affected the political attitudes and behaviour of people living in the region, and what the ultimate impact of these effects has been on broader political dynamics in CEE democracies. Specifically, I focus on democratic attitudes and behaviour – identified here as a combination of support for democracy, political interest and participation – as well as preferences for redistribution. The impact of emigration on these aspects is particularly interesting in Central and Eastern Europe. As a result of the shared history of their countries, post-Communist citizens still hold

distinct preferences and behave differently from their Western counterparts – they are less supportive of democracy and less likely to participate (Kostelka, 2014; Pop-Eleches and Tucker, 2017), while also being less tolerant of inequality and more supportive of redistribution (Alesina and Fuchs-Schundeln, 2007; Auspurg et al., 2019). These differences endure even three decades after the start of the transition (Fuchs-Schundeln and Schundeln, 2020).

Existing work suggests that emigration may have led to a narrowing of these persistent differences between the East and West of Europe. First, a process of democratic diffusion through political remittances may have helped bridge the post-Communist democratic deficit, driving increases in participation and support for democratic principles (Perez-Armendariz and Crow, 2010; Careja and Emmenegger, 2012). Second, emigration may have reduced demand for redistribution in the region, primarily through the impact of financial remittances on their recipients (Doyle, 2015). However, there is no clear evidence on whether the post-accession wave of emigration from Central and Eastern Europe has indeed led to such changes.

This is important in itself but also because it speaks to broader political dynamics in Central and Eastern Europe. On one hand, knowing whether emigration has led to the diffusion of democratic norms and principles will allow us to properly evaluate the overall impact of the phenomenon on democracies in origin countries. Previous work has already shown the existence of negative effects of emigration on democracies in the region. By leading to the departure of more liberal and politically engaged individuals, emigration has weakened opposition to authoritarian leaders and led to an increase in support for the populist radical right (Kelemen, 2020; Lim, 2022). In addition, the diaspora has become an important constituency of support for the radical right, as recently demonstrated by the popularity of such actors among Romanian voters from abroad (Stan and Zaharia, 2025). Although slightly counterintuitive at first sight, these effects are not mutually exclusive since only a small minority of emigrants turn out to vote, and radical right parties may have been particularly adept at building infrastructure abroad and mobilising the diaspora (Kostelka, 2017; Ulceluse, 2020). Such developments make it essential to determine if emigration has also had some positive countervailing effects through political remittances. The question is indeed particularly relevant here, since democracies in the region have long been identified as relatively weak (Greskovits, 2015) and have recently suffered significant episodes of

backsliding – most notably in Hungary and Poland but also more temporarily in places like Romania or Czechia (Waldner and Lust, 2018; Cianetti et al., 2018).

On the other hand, determining the effects of emigration on redistribution preferences in the region will allow us to better understand how the phenomenon affects the development of public spending and welfare states in Central and Eastern Europe. Evidence from other parts of the world suggests that emigration constrains welfare state development and lowers redistribution as lower public demand weakens support for the left (Doyle, 2015). However, recent work from Central and Eastern Europe indicates that emigration was in fact connected to an increase in redistribution and public spending (Petrova and Sznajder-Lee, 2024). It remains unclear which mechanisms drive such aggregate effects of emigration. The literature is yet to examine the impact of emigration on redistribution preferences in the region. In addition, it is not known if individual preferences could lead to changes in redistribution and public spending through their impact on vote choice and government composition, as shown elsewhere – the evidence on the presence of partisan spending effects in Central and Eastern Europe is both outdated and mixed (Tavits and Letki, 2009; Careja and Emmenegger, 2009). Understanding the ultimate impact of emigration on redistribution and public spending in the region is particularly important because for decades there has been an enduring tension between high demand for social protection among the public, and welfare states that are much smaller than those in Western Europe (Alesina and Fuchs-Schundeln, 2007; Kuitto, 2016). This unfulfilled demand may have further contributed to the rise of radical right parties in the region, which are known to combine conservative cultural appeals with redistributive economic platforms (Savage, 2022).

To address these gaps in our understanding of how the recent wave of emigration has affected political dynamics in Central and Eastern Europe, this thesis and its constituent papers focus on three key questions. One, what is the extent of democratic diffusion through political remittances in the region? Two, how has emigration affected support for redistribution among people living in the region? And three, do left-wing governments increase public spending in the region, compared to other cabinets? In line with the discussion above, the first two questions directly address the effect of emigration on individual attitudes and behaviour, and thus inform our understanding of its impact on broader political dynamics in CEE democracies. The third question may not be directly focused on emigration, though the ultimate reason for answering it in this study is to better

understand the mechanisms through which the phenomenon affects welfare states in the region. As previously discussed, vote choice and government composition have been suggested as the potential mechanisms connecting any of my findings on preferences with existing results about the aggregate impact of emigration on redistribution and spending. Evidence on the existence of partisan spending effects is thus necessary to determine whether such mechanisms are feasible in the regional context, as well as contributing to the broader literature on the political economy of Central and Eastern Europe.

In answering these three questions, this thesis first and foremost makes important empirical contributions related to the impact of emigration on the politics of origin countries in Central and Eastern Europe. I find that political remittances have led to only a very limited degree of democratic diffusion in the region – leading to higher non-electoral participation among individuals but also lower turnout among returnees, while leaving political interest and support for democracy largely unchanged. Then, I show that emigration has led to a rise in demand for redistribution among individuals in origin countries – I argue this occurs as a result of labour market shortages and a decline in local services increasing expected returns from redistribution, while other mechanisms like financial remittances and compositional changes play an insignificant role. Finally, I prove that left-wing governments increase public spending across different areas – an effect that is conditional on relatively high levels of economic growth and thus disappears in periods of economic turmoil. The lack of meaningful democratic diffusion, coupled with previous evidence of negative effects, means that emigration is more likely to have hampered rather than supported democracies in the region. The positive effect of emigration on demand for redistribution complements existing aggregate evidence and confirms that the phenomenon has encouraged rather than constrained the expansion of welfare states in the region. The existence of partisan spending effects in the region shows that, in theory, changes in voting and cabinet composition driven by the impact of emigration on preferences could lead to changes in redistribution and spending. However, given the positive impact of emigration on demand for redistribution and the existing evidence that emigration has weakened support for the left (Giesing and Schikora, 2023), the mechanisms for the overall effect of emigration on welfare states in the region must lie elsewhere.

At least as important, though, my findings leverage the case of Central and Eastern Europe to advance our broader theoretical understanding of the political effects of emigration on

countries of origin. Against expectations from the existing literature, emigration has contributed to a further widening of East-West differences in European preferences rather than to their convergence – both in terms of democratic support and participation, and redistribution preferences. As I explain further below, this highlights limitations in existing theoretical frameworks. I show how barriers to resocialisation and value transmission can limit the democratic diffusion through political remittances, contrary to the overly optimistic expectations of some past work. My findings also suggest that, at least in some contexts, the negative effects of emigration on democracy in countries of origin are likely to predominate. I further show how emigration can affect preferences for redistribution in countries of origin through more than one channel, leading to effects that are opposite to those theorised and observed in other regions of the world. Coupled with existing evidence, this reveals that emigration can not just constrain but also encourage the expansion of welfare states in origin countries. My findings also point towards the need to further investigate which mechanisms connect the effects of emigration on redistribution at the individual and aggregate level – while voting and government composition can matter, they cannot explain the overall dynamics observed in the case of Central and Eastern Europe. In addition to its contributions to the study of emigration and its political effects, my work contributes to the wider political economy literature by revealing how high levels of economic growth can enable the persistence of partisan spending effects in a post-industrial environment.

The rest of this Introduction offers a brief overview of the theoretical frameworks and methodology used in this thesis. Chapter 2 offers a broad literature review of several topics that are central to my overall arguments in the thesis, or to one of the constituent papers. I discuss the evolution of emigration in the CEE region and the general evidence on the political effects of emigration on countries of origin. I then turn to discussions of social remittances, democratic attitudes and behaviour in the post-Communist space, individual preferences for redistribution, welfare preferences and arrangements in CEE democracies, and previous work on partisan spending effects. Chapters 3 to 5 then comprise the constituent papers of this study, as briefly explained above and further detailed in the two following sections. Finally, Chapter 6 of the thesis discusses my results and concludes, looking at their implications for the literature on emigration and political dynamics in the region.

Theoretical arguments

Each of the constituent papers within this thesis uses different theoretical frameworks adapted to their object of study. My work builds on the existing literature while, in each case, attempting to improve and expand upon existing frameworks, including by drawing on related bodies of work in political sociology and political economy.

The first paper centres on the theory of social and political remittances. This posits that migration can drive the transmission of norms and practices across borders – most importantly for the purposes of this study, though not exclusively, from destination to origin countries. As migrants move abroad and spend time in destination societies, they gradually adapt their values and behaviours to more closely resemble those prevalent among their hosts, which leads to them transmitting new norms and practices back to their countries of origin – either directly after engaging in return migration, or indirectly by communicating with and visiting their friends and family who stayed behind (Levitt, 1998; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, 2011). Such remittances can influence a broad variety of social issues, though a growing literature has focused explicitly on their political dimension – making it useful to refer more narrowly to political remittances (Krawatzek and Müller-Funk, 2020). Some of these studies argue that – as long as migrants move to established democracies and there is a gap in prevalent values and behavioural patterns between origin and destination – emigration can lead to a process of democratic diffusion through political remittances, for example by increasing support for democratic principles and political participation (Perez-Armendariz and Crow, 2010; Careja and Emmenegger, 2012).

I take this argument as my starting point in the first standalone paper, aiming to investigate the extent of such democratic diffusion in the context of Central and Eastern Europe. I argue that previous literature has often failed to fully explore the remitting process, leading to overly optimistic expectations about their potential for democratic diffusion. In fact, successful democratic diffusion presupposes the relatively rapid and meaningful political resocialisation of migrants at destination (White et al., 2008). Yet a broad literature on socialisation shows that many important political attitudes and behavioural patterns are shaped in early life and become quite resistant to change afterwards (Jennings and Niemi, 1981; Dinas, 2013; Neundorf and Smets, 2017). While resocialisation is possible, it requires strong and prolonged exposure to new norms and practices in destination societies. For many CEE

migrants, such exposure will not occur and hence resocialisation will be minimal. Migrants face significant barriers to their socio-economic integration, have very limited political engagement at destination, and often spent insufficient amounts of time abroad (Engbersen et al., 2013; Montanari, 2025). They may also face a range of negative experiences at destination such as discrimination, which may make them more resistant to new values and behaviours they associate with their new environment. In addition, even if a meaningful degree of resocialisation at destination occurs, it remains rather difficult for migrants to transmit democratic norms and practices back to their origin countries – migrants who return tend to be exactly those least likely to have successfully integrated at destination and hence underwent meaningful resocialisation (Engbersen et al., 2013; Gherghina et al., 2020), friends and family who stayed behind are only indirectly exposed to new norms through cross-border visits and communication, and there is likely to be a certain degree of resistance in origin countries to new values and practices imported from abroad (Nevinskaite, 2016). Together, I argue that these factors have severely limited the extent of democratic diffusion through political remittances in Central and Eastern Europe.

In the second paper, I look at the various ways in which emigration can affect demand for redistribution in countries of origin. The existing literature has focused on the role of financial remittances and their effect on the preferences of recipients – as such, remittances recipients may have lower demand for social protection from the state because income from abroad acts as a form of alternative insurance (Doyle, 2015). However, recent work on remittances argues that their effect is more ambiguous than initially thought, and this negative effect on demand for redistribution depends on remittance flows being constant or increasing (Meseguer et al., 2016; Acevedo, 2020). I examine this hypothesis, arguing that the effect of remittances in CEE countries of origins is likely to have been minimal, owing to limited flows and enduring high expectation of government protection in the post-Communist region. I also briefly discuss the potential of the compositional effects of emigration to have affected demand for redistribution in the region.

The focus of my analysis, however, is on a third contextual mechanism for the effect of emigration on redistribution preferences, one that had not previously been considered by the literature. I argue that emigration comes with two key consequences – a decline in local public and private services, and labour market shortages (Chivu et al., 2020; Dancygier et al., 2024) – that raise the expected returns from redistribution among people living in areas

that experienced high outflows, leading to higher demand for redistribution. I hence build on previous studies in the political economy literature which highlight the non-pocketbook effects of redistribution and the associated motivations for people to support state intervention (Rueda and Stegmueller, 2016). In line with such work, I argue that the contextual effects of emigration on preferences for redistribution should be most visible among the wealthy, who place higher weight on non-pocketbook effects that become apparent over longer periods of time.

The third and final paper of this thesis is focused on partisan spending effects – the longstanding idea that left-wing governments increase public spending relative to their counterparts on the right. There is widespread evidence that such partisan spending effects were particularly strong in Western democracies during the post-war era, and played a key role in the development of their welfare states (Korpi, 1983; Hicks and Swank, 1992; Allan and Scruggs, 2004). However, these effects narrowed and largely disappeared after the 1990s (Pierson, 1996; Huber and Stephens, 2001; Kwon and Pontusson, 2010). The literature explains this disappearance of partisan spending effects as a combination of two broad factors – the convergence of mainstream party platforms due to structural changes in post-industrial democracies that led to a decline of the traditional working class (Best, 2011; Gingrich and Hausermann, 2015; Berman and Snegovaya, 2019), and tighter fiscal constraints that emerged as a result of globalisation, aging population, and a slowdown in economic growth, all of which prevented parties from implementing their desired policies while in office (Garrett and Lange, 1991; Pierson, 1996; Clements et al., 2015).

I argue that, despite their disappearance in the West, partisan spending effects persist in Central and Eastern Europe, for two reasons – political parties continue to put forward distinctive policy platforms on welfare and the economy (Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2012), and fast economic growth over the last three decades has created sufficient discretionary fiscal space for governments to implement their desired policies (Pierson, 1996; Siren, 2021). In fact, fast growth has enabled the persistence of left-right spending differences even in the presence of other fiscal constraints such as extensive globalisation and rapid demographic aging. However, I argue that partisan spending effects remain conditional on high growth and have hence disappeared when CEE democracies experienced periods of economic turmoil, such as in the 1990s or in the aftermath of the global financial crisis. In this way, my arguments connect both with previous studies on how

the unique context of the transition may have created the conditions for reversed partisan spending effects (Tavits and Letki, 2009), and with a wider body of work on partisan responses to economic and financial crises (Pontusson and Raess, 2012; Raess, 2021).

Methodology

As stated earlier, this thesis focuses on the eleven post-Communist states that joined the European Union beginning in 2004 – Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia – together referred to throughout this study as Central and Eastern Europe. I analyse the political impact of the most recent wave of emigration from these countries, which started in 2004 (although I do occasionally include some slightly earlier data in my analyses where necessary to maximise context and sample sizes). The case selection is justified by two key reasons. On one hand, the recent wave of emigration from Central and Eastern Europe is particularly well suited to the study of the political effects of the phenomenon because of its speed, scale, and direction – all of which should maximise the impact of emigration and make it easier to isolate and observe, particularly given the shared history and characteristics of democracies in the region. On the other hand, the question of the political effects of emigration is particularly relevant to CEE democracies, particularly when it comes to the impact on individual attitudes and behaviour that is analysed in this study. Existing work on emigration from other parts of the world suggests that emigration may have helped narrow long-standing East-West differences stemming from the legacies of Communism in support for democracy, political participation, and demand for redistribution. This matters both because of the need to better understand the evolution of democracies in the region, but also because of more recent political dynamics in the region. Multiple CEE countries have experienced rising support for the populist radical right and repeated episodes of democratic backsliding, which emigration and the underlying weakness of democratic norms among the public may have encouraged. At the same time, there has been a longstanding tension in the region between remarkably high demand for social protection and welfare arrangements which are significantly less generous than those in the West, which may have further played into the rise of radical right parties that combine conservative cultural appeals with redistributive economic platforms.

The constituent papers of this thesis use a variety of different quantitative sources of data and methods to test their respective hypotheses. In the first paper, focused on political

remittances, I use a broad range of both individual-level cross-sectional and longitudinal data – 2004 to 2021 European Social Survey data from across CEE countries, as well as a couple of two-wave panels from Romania (WVS/EVS between 2012 and 2018) and Poland (POLPAN between 2003 and 2013). This has a key advantage over previous studies of the phenomenon, which have tended to rely on single cross-sectional data sets – by also looking at changes in attitudes and behaviour within single individuals over time, I am able to better isolate the impact of political remittances, control for non-observable confounding factors like self-selection into emigration, and thus improve the internal validity of my findings. Using a combination of linear, logistic, and Poisson regression models, I test for the effect of the two channels of impact of political remittances – past migration experience among return migrants, and the presence of networks abroad among those who stayed behind – on four key variables: support for democracy, political interest, electoral turnout, and non-electoral participation. To avoid the Incidental Parameter Problem (Neyman and Scott, 1948) when estimating logistic regression models for binary outcome variables with my longitudinal data, I follow the solution proposed by Chamberlain (1980) and instead use conditional logit models. I also use inverse probability weighting in my longitudinal models to account for the potential bias introduced by attrition between survey waves (Wooldridge, 2002). Throughout the analysis, I address missing values using multiple imputation implemented through the Amelia II algorithm in R (Honaker et al., 2011).

In the second paper, I first use data from the EBRD's Life in Transition Survey (2006-16) to test for the effect of financial remittances on preferences for redistribution among individuals in CEE countries, as well as for any potential compositional effects of emigration by examining the connection between demand for redistribution and emigration intentions in the region. Then, in the main part of the analysis, I use data from the European Social Survey between 2002 and 2020 covering over 100,000 respondents in 10 CEE countries. I combine this with regional-level data on emigration for permanent residence obtained from national statistical offices at the lowest available NUTS 3 level (with the exception of Poland, where data were only available at the higher NUTS 2 level). After merging these data, I test for the effect of regional emigration rates on individual preferences for redistribution using a multi-level regression model where respondents are nested within regions that are themselves nested within countries. I control for a range of individual and regional confounders, while also including year and regional fixed effects in the full models. To investigate whether the effect of emigration varies with household income as theorised, I use cross-level interaction

models and show average predicted probabilities based on these models. Throughout the analysis, I once again use multiple imputation to address missing values.

In the third and final paper, I use government spending data from Eurostat for eleven CEE countries between 1995 and 2019. I look at total public spending as a percentage of GDP as well as expenditure on education, health, and social protection. I measure government ideology using a dichotomous variable which captures whether the cabinet was dominated by left-wing parties in any given country-year. I use a party family approach to ensure comparability over time and more directly examine the spending practices of parties officially and rhetorically aligned with the left, rather than the translation of pre-election promises into actual policy. I compare left-wing parties against all others, both to maximise the leverage of the available data and because of the lack of clear theoretical expectations about different spending behaviour among non-left parties (although I distinguish between other parties in some further analyses). To test for the effect of government ideology on spending, I use TSCS regression models – I difference the dependent variable to examine changes in spending rather than its levels, and also control for a range of possible confounders, country fixed effects, and the lag of the dependent variable. I use panel-corrected standard errors throughout the analysis to correct for potential serial correlation and heteroskedasticity (Beck and Katz, 1995). As a robustness check, I also run my analysis using error-correction models that have been used elsewhere in the literature. Alongside the main models, I also use interaction models to test whether the effect of government ideology varies with economic growth. Finally, I examine whether the effect of government ideology varies over time through a moving-window analysis (Kwon and Pontusson, 2010), estimating a series of otherwise identical TSCS models over consecutive 6-year sub-periods of my data.

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Chapter 2. Literature Review

This study and its constituent articles touch upon several topics that are central to the political economy and sociology of post-communist states in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as issues related to migration in the region and its impact on origin countries. This chapter offers a broad review of the literatures related to these topics, and is divided into seven different sections — providing an overview of migration and its effects on countries of origin, as well as the different mechanisms and outcomes that the three standalone papers of this study focus on in more detail.

1. Migration in Central and Eastern Europe

Central and Eastern Europe has a long history of migration towards the West, although the latest wave — started in the 2000s — has been quite extraordinary in both historical and global terms. This section offers an overview of migration patterns in the region and discusses recent outflows in depth, including regional differences.

The region has been shaped by a long history of underdevelopment when compared to the rest of the continent, leading to a pervasive narrative of economic backwardness (Chirot, 1991). This had a defining effect on patterns of migration, leading to repeated, albeit episodic waves of East-West population movements. The first such wave started in the 19th century, alongside transatlantic migration from Europe to the New World. Western industrialisation, the emergence of more liberal political systems there, and the rise of violent nationalism in the East pushed people to move West in search of more stable lives. A second wave followed in the aftermath of World War Two, marked by volatility and uncertainty as millions of Eastern Europeans were displaced by the war and affected by repatriations and German expulsions (Fassman and Munz, 1994). This came to a halt with the fall of the Iron Curtain. Borders were closed and very tight migration regimes put in place, leading to decades of very limited or non-existent transnational mobility (Okolski, 1998). Only isolated outbursts of emigration for settlement to the West were allowed, as exceptions were made either following major political crises — 1956 in Hungary and 1968 in Czechoslovakia — or, more commonly, for minorities like German and Jewish ethnics (Okolski, 1998; Fassman and Munz, 1994).

This pause in migration was only temporary, though, and actually helped generate its own counter-reaction. With the collapse of Communism in 1989, emigration pressures built up over decades of restrictions were released, generating a massive potential for emigration (Okolski, 2007). Coupled with the precarious economic situation in the region during transition, this kickstarted a third wave of East-West migration. Accurate numbers are hard to come by, but one estimate put CEE migration to Western countries at over 850,000 a year in the first years of the transition, more than doubling in size compared to previous years (Okolski, 1998; Frejka, 1996). Such outflows continued into the next decade - in 2004, OECD countries recorded an inflow of 750,000 migrants from post-Communist countries, including Russia (Okolski, 2007). Yet Western labour markets were kept largely closed to would-be Eastern European migrants, leading to somewhat of a fall in movements to the West after the initial burst (Okolski, 1998). By the early 2000s, significant but limited numbers of documented CEE migrants could be found in EU countries (Okolski, 2007). Those who did migrate West were often illegal migrants stuck in irregular work - many of which were gradually integrated into official structures through regularisation programmes carried out by countries like Greece, Spain, Italy and Portugal between 1997 and 2004 (OECD, 2006). Such irregular forms of 'incomplete migration' became a key feature of CEE migration in the transition years (Okolski, 2001). While these patterns of outflows were visible in countries across Central and Eastern Europe, there were also important differences within the region. In addition to emigration to the West, there were also flows of intra-regional migration from poorer states towards comparatively more developed countries, particularly urban centres like Prague and Budapest (Drbohlav and Sykora, 1997). In addition, there were limited inflows of Asian workers to Czechia and Hungary. A complex picture of regional migration was thus already taking shape around the turn of the century as one could distinguish between low-outflow/high-inflow states like Czechia, high-outflow/high-inflow countries like Poland, and high-outflow/low-inflow states like Romania (Okolski, 1998). Yet, while the third wave of migration led to sizeable East-West movements, the scale of the phenomenon remained limited when compared to what followed (Okolski, 2007).

With the largest expansion in the history of the European Union, 2004 marked the beginning of a new era in Central and Eastern European migration – launching the fourth and largest of East-West migration waves. Poland, Hungary, Czechia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were the first to join the EU, followed by Romania and Bulgaria in 2007

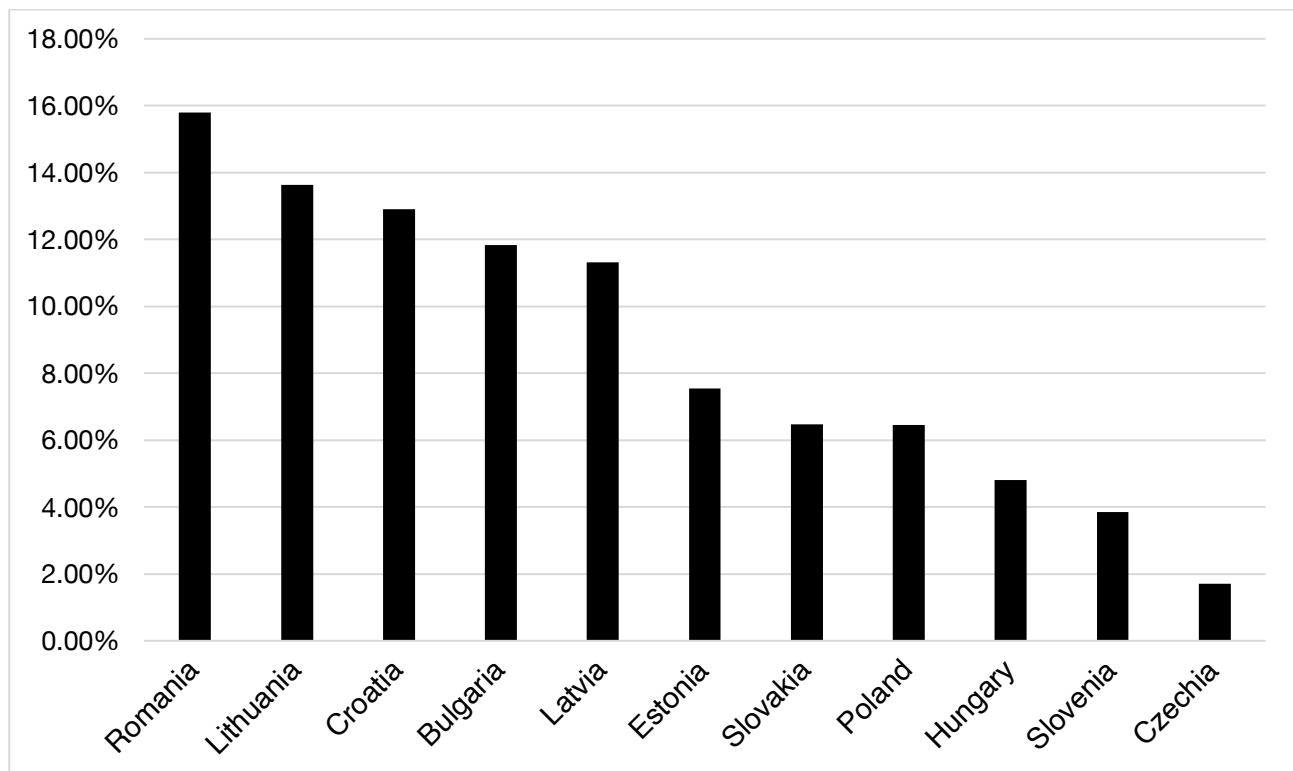
and, most recently, Croatia in 2013. Accession to the EU meant that Eastern European citizens were extended all rights of European citizenship, including the one to free movement across the continent. It is true that this right was often only gradually extended to citizens of new Member States. European treaties allow for a transitional period of 7 years after accession during which restrictions can be imposed on the labour market access of workers from new members, and all but three Western countries — the UK, Ireland, and Sweden — chose to restrict inflows from the 2004 accession countries (Organisciak-Krzykowska, 2017). Such temporary restrictions did little to stem unprecedented outflows from the region.

By 2020, more than 9.5 million nationals of the 11 Central and Eastern European member states – equivalent to almost 9% of their total population – were living in another EU country, according to official data from the Eurostat (Eurostat, 2020; this includes the UK, where free movement was applicable until the end of the Brexit transition period at the end of 2020). Most of these outflows had occurred after the first wave of accessions in 2004 (Roos, 2023). However, these figures significantly understate the extent of East-West European mobility during this fourth wave of migration – both because official numbers inevitably underestimate migration in a context of open borders, and because of the prevalence of temporary and circular forms of migration during the period (Organisciak-Krzykowska, 2017; Black et al., 2010).

There are important similarities as well as differences between CEE countries when it comes to their experience during the region's fourth wave of migration. The shared policy context of free movement meant they all experienced a notable surge in outflows after accession that was visible across sectors of society, and that the vast majority of their emigrants headed towards older member states in Western as well as Southern Europe (Black et al., 2010). The most important differences, however, are with regards to the scale of emigration (Grabowska, 2021). Figure 2.1 below shows, for each of the eleven nationalities under consideration, the share of their citizens within the European Union that lived in another member state in 2020 (Eurostat, 2020). This highlights a large degree of variation that largely reflects emigration patterns previously established during the region's third wave of migration. Romania was by far the most affected state. The data show that almost 16% of Romanian nationals were living in another member state in 2020. Previous reports found that the country lost more than three million citizens only after accession. Strikingly, among all countries in the world between 2000 and 2015, only war-torn Syria lost more of its

population to emigration (UN, 2015). Croatia also had a very high share of citizens living in another member state, although this was shaped not only by significant outflows after accession but also its past history of migration after the violent break-up of Yugoslavia in the late 1990s. Three other countries in the region also saw massive outflows of population after accession – Bulgaria, Latvia, and Lithuania – with more than a tenth of their nationals living outside the country. Emigration was also significant but comparatively more muted relative to population in Estonia, Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary. In contrast, Slovenia and Czechia only experienced relatively minimal levels of emigration, owing to their higher levels of development and more privileged geographical position (Organisciak-Krzykowska, 2017). On the whole, however, it becomes clear that the fourth wave of European East-West migration brought about a massive displacement of population as post-Communist citizens moved West.

Figure 2.1. Share of citizens living in another EU member state, by nationality, 2020



During this fourth wave of CEE migration, an increasing diversity of individual migration strategies could be observed. In the 20th century, European migration was shaped by colonial and guestworker migration, with clear and predictable flows of people, as well as a focus on integration in destination societies (Massey et al., 1993). The third wave of East-West migration, starting in 1989, marked an increase in short-term, circular and irregular

patterns of migration from Central and Eastern Europe (Okolski, 1998). These patterns have accentuated since the fourth wave started in 2004. The opening of European borders, coupled with technological advances over the past decades, have led to the creation of a European transnational space (Portes, 1996; Favell, 2008). This implies considerably less focus on the integration of migrants in destination societies. In recent decades, few CEE migrants moved abroad with a clear intention to settle there for the long term. Instead, many embrace a strategy of 'intentional unpredictability' — migration without clear goals or timeframes, that often involves moving back and forth between multiple countries in a way that is neither wholly temporary nor wholly permanent, with individuals inhabiting social spaces that transcend borders (Engbersen, 2018). The literature has approached this phenomenon in multiple different ways. For example, Engbersen et al. (2013) describe it as 'liquid migration', Vertovec (2007) discusses the 'super-diversity' of contemporary East-West migration, while Okolski (1997, 2001) earlier focused on what he termed 'incomplete migration'. The essential common thread is that CEE migrants often have complex migration trajectories, with important elements of both integration and transnationalism.

While the fourth wave of East-West European emigration continued into the 2020s, towards the second half of the 2010s there were increasing signs of an incipient 'migration transition' in several CEE countries (Okolski, 2021). First, outflows — while remaining considerable, particularly in countries like Romania and Bulgaria — began to diminish significantly in several previously top countries of emigration like Poland (Fihel and Kaczmarczyk, 2023). Second, an increasing number of emigrants from the region have returned home or begun considering the possibility of return (Ambrosini et al., 2015; Gherghina and Plopeanu, 2020; Grabowska et al., 2025). That said, there has been no clear evidence of a process of mass returns among CEE emigrants, even after the COVID-19 pandemic or in the wake of critical events in major countries of destinations such as Brexit (Klimaviciute et al., 2020; Grabowska and Ryan, 2024). Return migrants in the region face significant social and economic barriers to their reintegration, and a significant number consider the possibility of 'double return' abroad after a period of time spent in origin countries (White, 2014; Melke, 2024; Morosanu and Serban, 2025). Third, CEE countries have increasingly become countries of destination for immigrants from outside the EU. This includes immigration into some countries in the region that had already experienced limited inflows in the past — such as Poland, which received large numbers of Ukrainians even before the Russian invasion of 2022 — but also the arrival of notable numbers of immigrants from Asia into countries with

no previous experience of immigration like Romania (Okolski, 2021). Together, these trends have meant that some CEE states have become countries of net immigration after a long history as countries of emigration. By the early 2020s, the region as a whole had begun slowly transitioning towards a new stage in its history of migration – though many trends and directions remained uncertain.

2. Political effects of migration on origin countries

Despite the growing scale of international migration around the world, most research has focused on either the determinants of migrants' decision to leave, or on the impact of immigration on receiving societies. This has left us with a rather limited understanding of how migration impacts political developments in origin countries. This section offers an overview of this general literature, looking at several different transmission channels and levels of analysis. It also discusses recent work on the political effects of emigration in Central and Eastern Europe.

One way of looking at the political effects of migration on origin countries is to distinguish between four different channels of impact (Kapur, 2014) – (1) the *prospective channel* (how the potential for future emigration affects countries of origin in the present); (2) the *absence channel* (how the absence of already departed migrants alters political dynamics at origin); (3) the *diaspora channel* (how migrants abroad affect developments at origin); and (4) the *return channel* (the impact of migrants returning to the country of origin). The most important effects operate at the aggregate and individual levels, though emigration can also affect origin countries at the meso level – through its impact on civil society organisations, the opposition, or political parties – as well as at the level of elites.

First, the potential of future migration can shape political developments in countries of origin before it even occurs, through a so-called prospective channel. Job opportunities abroad increase the expected return on certain skills for individuals, which can incentivise them to increase their investment in human capital formation. The resulting higher levels of education and training in origin countries can then have a positive aggregate effect on the quality of their political institutions (Docquier et al., 2016). At the same time, the prevalence of emigration as a life strategy can lead individuals to detach themselves from the formal political process in their countries of origin since they see their life chances as increasingly

independent from economic and political developments at home. This has been argued to lower participation in high-emigration areas, though it is difficult to disentangle this prospective effect from the wider aggregate impact of emigration on such areas (Goodman and Hiskey, 2008). The prospect of future migration can also affect the behaviour of political elites. In countries like China, some have moved assets abroad and encouraged their children to pursue studies outside the country, to insure their families against political and economic risks at the origin. This may weaken elites' incentives to push for reform or increase public investment in key social programmes including education (Kapur, 2014).

Second, the absence channel captures the direct impact of migrants' departure from their origin countries. A direct mechanical effect means that emigration leads to a decrease in electoral turnout in origin countries – despite the expansion of voting rights and infrastructure for diaspora communities, emigrants remain much less likely to vote from abroad than their counterparts in countries of origin (Kostelka, 2017; Gherghina and Basaraba, 2024). The main effects of emigration through the absence channel, however, happen through two key mechanisms. On one hand, emigration has compositional effects since it affects the composition of the population and the electorate that remain in origin countries. Emigrants are not a random section of the population of their countries – they tend to be younger, more educated, individualistic, or cosmopolitan than the average citizen, be better embedded in migration networks, or have particular skills (Ambrosini et al., 2012). This has given rise to a longstanding line of thinking in political science which argues that emigration can delay political reform in origin countries and hurts their prospects of democracy. This is because it leads to a political brain drain that depresses levels of political discussion, participation and activism (Hirschman, 1990, 1993). If we apply Hirschman's (1978) seminal exit-voice-loyalty framework to the context of the state, exit – here, conceptualised as migration to a different country – is seen as a substitute for political voice among those unhappy with their socio-economic situation. All things equal, an increase in exit should be associated with a decrease in voice, and a considerable number of studies identify such an effect across time and contexts (Hirschman, 1993 for East Germany; Colomer, 2000 for Cuba in the late 20th century; Anelli and Peri, 2017 for post-crisis Italy; Kelemen, 2020 for Hungary in the 2010s). The effects of a political brain drain are not limited to a decrease in political participation and pressure at the mass level, though. Similar depletion effects can operate at the meso level, affecting recruitment and the networks of civil society organisations and political parties, as well as the elite level, since countries lose potential reformers to emigration and exiled

dissidents see their public influence severely diminished. In a similar but more general vein, other studies have highlighted how the compositional effects of migration can simply alter the distribution of preferences in the electorate and hence favour one side of the political spectrum or another (Giesing and Schikora, 2023).

On the other hand, migration has contextual effects through the ways in which it affects areas that experience high outflows and hence the preferences and behaviour of people living in them. Emigration has been found to lead to a significant decline in the availability and quality of local services, both public and private (Dancygier et al., 2024). Such changes in the local economic environment can affect the attitudes and behaviour of people living in high emigration areas — often referred to as the contextual effects of migration. That leads to some important political consequences — emigration has been shown to depress participation and increase support for illiberal populism, which has been attributed to the elements of local economic decline described above (Lim, 2022; Dancygier et al., 2024).

Third, the diaspora channel — migrants can continue to have an important influence on political developments in their countries of origin even from abroad. Technological advances and the diversification of migration strategies mean that many contemporary migrants do not completely cease to be a part of their origin societies when moving abroad, but instead inhabit transnational social spaces and continue to have a certain degree of voice. One way to achieve this is through direct political action from abroad, mostly in terms of diaspora voting and transnational activism. In recent decades, governments have increasingly tried to engage with their diaspora by organising and enfranchising them (Jaulin, 2016). The result have been increasingly widespread patterns of ‘voice after exit’ (Burgess, 2012). This is most evident in the electoral arena, where emigrants have become an increasingly important voting bloc (Ahmadov and Sasse, 2015). In the most extreme cases — such as Romania in 2009 — diaspora votes have even decided the results of elections, overturning the winner among voters in countries of origin (Burean, 2011). Political activism from emigrants, such as participation in protests, has also become increasingly widespread and influential in some countries of origin (Ostergaard-Nielsen, 2003; Biletska and Gherghina, 2025). The effects of direct political action from abroad can mostly be seen in the aggregate, although are also visible at the meso level — several parties have adapted their organisation

and mobilisation strategies to respond to a growing political role for their respective diasporas (Ulceluse, 2020; Bezirgan-Tanis, 2022).

Apart from their direct impact from abroad, migrants can also affect political attitudes and behaviour in origin countries indirectly, through social remittances. Migrants can absorb new norms and practices from their host societies, essentially undergoing a process of political resocialisation. They can then remit these back to origin by way of cross-border visits and communication with friends and family — the networks channel of social remittances — or subsequent return migration, the return channel (Levitt, 1998; Perez-Armendariz and Crow, 2010). Besides altering attitudes and behaviours at the individual level, social remittances can also drive changes at the meso and elite levels — supporting the development of civil society organisations or the circulation of new ideas among elites (Levitt, 2001; Kapur, 2014). Of course, the specific destinations that migrants choose determine the specific ideas that circulate — while emigration to established democracies should lead to the diffusion of liberal democratic norms (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, 2011), flows directed towards autocracies such as Russia should result in the spread of more authoritarian or traditional values (Barsbai et al., 2017). However, where migration is directed towards established democracies, social remittances offer a potential avenue for the diffusion of democratic norms at the mass level, which has led to claims of a positive overall impact of migration on home country democracies and institutions, despite the associated political brain drain (Spilimbergo, 2009; Docquier et al., 2016). It is important to note, however, that while positive experiences and integration in host societies can lead migrants to acquire the values prevalent at destination, their reverse — negative experiences and lack of socio-economic integration — has been repeatedly shown to foster the rise of long-distance nationalism among diaspora groups. This can then shape both nationalist ideas at home and the political mobilisation of migrants by political parties (Gellner, 1983; Kapur, 2014).

Beyond the exchange of ideas, migration also generates a significant flow of financial remittances that travel between destination and origin countries, as migrants send part of their income home to support their relatives. These flows can also have significant political effects in countries of origin. At the aggregate level, remittances can bolster authoritarian regimes by allowing them to increase spending on patronage goods as opposed to public goods (Ahmed, 2012). At the same time, remittances generate resources that can support the activities and development of opposition groups, as well as increase participation

(Pfutze, 2012; Escriba-Folch et al., 2015) – this has been shown to improve chances of democratisation in some states (Escriba-Folch et al., 2022). These effects of remittances are hence visible across levels of analysis. Furthermore, remittances can alter attitudes, preferences, and behaviour among the people who receive them. Inflows have been shown to alter citizens' evaluations of economic and government performance, which can undermine essential accountability mechanisms (Tertychnaya et al., 2018). Changes in the flow of remittances can also alter people's perceptions of corruption, as well as the extent to which they are reliant on government provision of public services (De Vries et al., 2024). In addition, remittances can have an effect on individuals' demand for government redistribution and welfare spending – since they raise recipients' income and reduce risk, remittances can lower demand for social protection in some contexts. This can make individuals less likely to support left-wing parties and in turn drives down public spending (Doyle, 2015). However, this effect depends on stable remittance flows – if flows decrease, recipients can instead become more likely to demand protection from the government than the rest of the population, even after remittances recovered (Acevedo, 2020).

Fourth and finally, the political effects of emigration can also occur through the return channel, when migrants return to their origin countries after a period of time abroad. To a large extent, this adds to the effect of social remittances through the diaspora. New norms absorbed at destination, and previously remitted through the networks channel, can also be brought back more directly, as migrants themselves return home (Levitt, 1998). However, it is important to consider that return migrants may be negatively selected, with those who are least integrated at destination and had less positive experiences abroad more likely to subsequently return (Lang and Nadler, 2014). This may minimise the impact of social remittances through the return channel, and mean that it is not theoretically clear which of the two transmission channels is most likely to drive attitudinal and behavioural changes in origin countries. In a similar way, ideas developed abroad can be brought back and spread not only among the general public, but also among elites. Nationalist ideas developed among the diaspora have been particularly prominent in some cases – many post-colonial and even intensely authoritarian leaders from Pol Pot to Kim Jong Un had spent considerable time living and studying in the West prior to returning home (Kapur, 2014). That said, return migration is unlikely to reverse other effects of emigration – returns tend to

Table 1 - Overview of the political effects of migration on origin countries

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| Prospective Channel | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aggregate level: better political institutions as emigration drives an increase in human capital formation (Docquier et al., 2016) • Individual level: disengagement from formal political system among people living in high-emigration localities (Goodman and Hiskey, 2008) • Meso level: lower elite incentives to push for reform and public investment as children or assets move abroad (Kapur, 2015) |
| Absence Channel | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aggregate level: lower turnout as migrants are much less likely to vote from abroad (Kostelka, 2017) • Compositional effects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aggregate and meso levels: political brain drain leading to the departure of individuals most likely to participate, support democratic principles, or oppose the populist radical right (Hirschman, 1990; Kelemen, 2020) • Aggregate level: changing distribution of preferences in the electorate (Giesing and Schikora, 2023) • Contextual effects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual level: lower participation and higher support for populist actors as a result of the impact of emigration on their local areas – decline in local public and private services (Dancygier et al., 2024) |
| Diaspora Channel | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct effects of emigrants from abroad: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aggregate level: diaspora voting and activism (Ahmadov and Sasse, 2016) • Meso level: changes in party organisations and mobilisation strategies (Bezirgan-Tanis, 2022) • Effects of social remittances: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual and meso levels: the transmission of (democratic) norms and practices from abroad to friends and relatives of emigrants (Levitt, 1998) but also the development of long-distance nationalism (Kapur, 2014) • Aggregate level: improved political institutions as a result of changing norms among the public and elite (Docquier et al., 2016) • Effects of financial remittances: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aggregate level: bolster authoritarian regimes by allowing them to increase spending on patronage rather than • Aggregate meso, and individual levels: increased resources for participation and political opposition, which can drive democratisation (Escriba-Folch et al., 2022) • Individual level: changes in attitudes among remittance recipients – demand for redistribution, compromised accountability mechanisms, altered perceptions of corruption (Doyle, 2015; De Vries et al., 2024) |
| Return Channel | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effects of social remittances: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual and meso levels: the transmission of (democratic) norms and practices from abroad to friends and relatives of emigrants (Levitt, 1998) but also the development of long-distance nationalism (Kapur, 2014) • Aggregate level: improved political institutions as a result of changing norms among the public and elite (Docquier et al., 2016) |

be much smaller than the initial outflows, meaning the effects of other channels like absence are likely to predominate.

It becomes clear, then, that migration can affect the political development of origin countries in a myriad ways and across multiple levels. A broad overview of the different potential effects described in this section is provided in Table 1 above.

As Central and Eastern European countries experienced rapid and widespread emigration, a significant number of the potential transformations described in the literature are likely to have affected them. Our understanding of the political effects of migration in the region remains somewhat limited, although a growing body of work has been focused on the issue.

Much existing research on emigration in the region has been focused on its political impact through the absence channel. One study shows that emigration has led to a decline in turnout in the region, with the phenomenon explaining roughly one-tenth of the fall in turnout in regional democracies since the 1990s (Kostelka, 2017). This occurs because emigrants living abroad are considerably less likely to vote than people who remain in their countries of origin, a mechanism confirmed by both aggregate and individual-level studies of emigrant voting behaviour (Gherghina and Basaraba, 2024).

Beyond this mechanical effect driven by emigrants' absence from their home countries, there is also evidence that emigration led to compositional changes in CEE countries' electorates, hence driving a kind of political brain drain from the region similar to that identified for other regions by the literature. Emigrants from the region were found to be more educated, more supportive of democracy, and more likely to participate in politics than their counterparts who never left (Lim, 2022). This may have decreased opposition to illiberal populist actors among the public. One study argues that free movement within the EU incentivised opposition supporters and activists in Hungary to leave the country, reducing pressure on Viktor Orbán's increasingly authoritarian government (Kelemen, 2020). Similarly, the compositional effects of emigration led to a shift in the distribution of voting preferences in origin country electorates – a study focused on Poland found that emigration there led to an increase in voting for right-wing parties as left-leaning voters were more likely to leave the country (Giesing and Schikora, 2023). Another study, looking at the CEE region more broadly, found that emigration drove an increase in voting for radical right populist

parties at the same time as reducing turnout (Lim, 2022). Most of this effect was likely to have been driven by compositional effects – on average, radical right voters being less likely to emigrate – although the study also finds evidence of a contextual effect, with voters more likely to shift towards the populist right in areas with high emigration.

There is also some evidence that emigration led to an aggregate increase in redistribution in the region, and drove an increase in some areas of public spending like health and social protection (Atoyán et al., 2016; Petrova and Sznajder-Lee, 2024). This indicates that the effect of migration may have supported rather than constrained the development of CEE welfare states – contrary to evidence from other areas that experienced high emigration such as Latin America (Doyle, 2015). However, the exact mechanisms – and channel of impact – for these aggregate effects found in the literature remain somewhat unclear, although the demographic changes brought about by emigration are likely to have played a role.

Other studies have examined the impact of emigration through the diaspora channel in the region. There is evidence of significant direct effects of diasporas on the politics of origin countries – mostly through external voting, the facilities and rights for which have been expanded significantly over the two decades since accession. One aspect highlighted by the literature is the major impact that external votes can have on origin country elections in the presence of a large diaspora – perhaps the most extreme and obvious example is the case of the 2009 Romanian presidential election, when voters from the diaspora decided the results, overturning the winner of voting within the country itself (Burean, 2011). That said, diaspora voting blocs have been essential in multiple electoral contests in the region since then, both in Romania and beyond. Several recent studies have examined the determinants of turnout among emigrants from the region. While emigrants tend to be, as mentioned above, much less likely to vote than their co-nationals still living in origin countries, the factors influencing their turnout are often similar, including involvement in communities and political interest. Both origin and destination country factors matter, though the former are significantly more important – emigrants who maintain close ties to origin countries, visit more often, or send remittances home are more likely to vote in elections (Ciornei and Ostergaard-Nielsen, 2020; Gherghina and Basaraba, 2024). In terms of vote choice, evidence shows that CEE emigrants have distinct preferences from the electorate in home countries – in line with earlier arguments about compositional changes, they tend to vote for

more liberal and economically right-wing parties than those who never left (Szulecki et al., 2023). However, in recent years there has been some evidence of growing numbers of emigrants supporting the populist radical-right – particularly in Romania, where such actors and parties emerged as the favoured choice of the diaspora in 2024-5 in both parliamentary and presidential contests (Stan and Zaharia, 2025). In a way, this seems to go against established evidence that emigration drives the departure of voters more likely to oppose the populist radical right, and that hence its compositional effects increase support for such actors. These findings are broadly in line with some of the literature from other regions has long identified emigration as encouraging the development of long-distance nationalism among certain communities (Kapur, 2014). However, since a relatively small proportions of emigrants turn out to vote on election day, electoral support for the populist radical right in the diaspora does not contradict an overall compositional effect of emigration in the opposite direction, if the average emigrant who would have opposed such parties is simply less likely to be mobilised while abroad. It is possible that some emerging radical right parties have developed better organisations and mobilisation strategies abroad – in fact, Romania’s radical right populist party AUR was first founded in the diaspora (Ulceluse, 2020). The literature highlights the growing role of the diaspora in driving the strategy and mobilisation of parties from the region as they try to court this constituency (Ostergaard-Nielsen and Ciornei, 2019; Borz, 2020). In addition to the electoral impact of diaspora votes, CEE emigrants have also increasingly influenced the politics of their origin countries through transnational activism and participation in protests and other political actions – once again, the most illustrative case is that of Romania, where members of the diaspora have played central roles in several waves of anti-governmental protests such as in 2018 (Gubernat and Rammelt, 2021). That said, emigrant participation in protests is a phenomenon visible across the CEE region, including in Bulgaria or Poland (Rone and Junes, 2020).

Moving to the impact of financial remittances, relatively little is known about their impact on the region, particularly when it comes to the CEE countries at the centre of this study. A couple of closely related studies showed that remittances, and more specifically changes in their flow, can lead to changes in political attitudes – altering evaluations of government and economic performance, perceptions of corruption, and reliance on state welfare support (Tertychnaya et al., 2018; De Vries et al., 2024). This can compromise basic accountability mechanisms in origin countries. Yet the studies primarily focused on post-Soviet regimes in Central Asia, where remittances play a different and much larger role compared to CEE

countries that are members of the European Union (Atoyan et al., 2016). When it comes to the effect of remittances on preferences for redistribution in the region, there is a complete lack of empirical evidence. This is a significant gap, given that the literature does find significant aggregate effects of migration on welfare and spending patterns in the region.

Finally, there is evidence that migration led to the diffusion of some new norms and practices in the region through social remittances — which falls under both the diaspora and return channels, depending on the transmission mechanisms. Several qualitative studies found that new patterns of activism, work ethic, and entrepreneurship were transmitted back to the origin by CEE migrants (Pralong, 2010; Grabowska, 2017; White et al., 2018; White and Grabowska, 2019). The question of whether democratic diffusion through social remittances has occurred in the region remains open. One study found that migrants were more likely to participate in politics after their return (Careja and Emmenegger, 2012). However, this was based on data from a single cross-sectional survey from before the latest migration wave started in 2004, and found a pattern of both successful and successful transmission. The broad question of the overall effect of migration on democracies in the region thus also remains open — while we have some solid evidence of a negative impact through a political brain drain, it is unclear if this may have been counterbalanced by a degree of democratic diffusion through social remittances. The impact of emigration through the return channel may become more relevant in the region over the coming years as more emigrants return to their origin countries — returns have increased even though it remains somewhat muted compared to previous outflows (Ambrosini et al., 2015; Grabowska et al., 2024). A growing number of studies have examined the drivers of CEE emigrants' return intentions, highlighting the role of belonging, integration in destination societies, and continuing ties with family and communities at home (Apsite-Berina et al., 2020; Gherghina and Plopeanu, 2020; Gherghina et al., 2020). However, this literature also highlights reasons for which the ultimate impact of return migration on origin country politics may remain somewhat limited because of significant barriers to re-integration, which also push some former CEE emigration to engage in 'double return' and go abroad again (White, 2014; Kilmaviciute et al., 2020; Grabowska and Ryan, 2024; Melke, 2024; Morosanu and Serban, 2025).

3. Social Remittances

One of the key mechanisms examined in this study, and the focus of Chapter 3, is the cross-border transmission of norms and practices through social remittances. This section reviews the growing literature on social remittances, looking at empirical evidence for the mechanism from qualitative, macro-quantitative, and micro-quantitative perspectives. It also briefly discusses the related literature on the absorption of values by migrants in destination societies.

Social remittances, as first defined by Levitt (1998), are a “local-level, migration-driven form of cultural diffusion”, comprised of the ideas, behaviours, identities and social capital that flow from receiving to sending countries. The mechanisms behind this flow are, at least on the surface, rather straightforward. Migrants go abroad and, through their interaction with host societies, pick up some of the values, ideas and behaviours prevalent at destination, and accumulate new forms of social capital. Such new norms and resources are then transmitted back to origin societies through one of two channels, either return migration or cross-border networks, as migrants interact with friends and family who stayed behind (Levitt, 2001; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, 2011). Levitt’s concept, while a useful starting point, is much broader than any of its implications for politics or democracy. Inspired by it, an incredibly diverse range of issues has been examined, from gender roles to health knowledge (Fargues, 2006; Beine et al., 2013; Holdaway et al., 2015).

To narrow the concept of social remittances and focus on its political dimension, it is useful to refer explicitly to political remittances. Krawatzek and Müller-Funk (2020), in particular, define these as “the act of transferring political principles, vocabulary and practices between two or more places, which migrants and their descendants share a connection with”. Not all transfers are supportive of democracy, of course. Some, like specific vocabulary or campaign practices, have little direct bearing on such issues. Others can be outright hurtful to democratic systems, as in the case of migrants to autocratic countries (Barsbai et al., 2017). Yet, if the destination country is an established democracy, it is claimed that political remittances can turn both migrants and stayers into better democratic citizens, driving the diffusion of democratic norms and practices.

A growing literature has been documenting instances of such migration-driven democratic diffusion, with regard to a wide variety of regions, topics and levels of aggregation. On one hand, a growing number of qualitative studies centred on in-depth migrant interviews prove

that migrants remit aspects of political attitudes and behaviour from their host countries across contexts. In Latin America, Levitt and her collaborators (Levitt, 1998; 2001; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, 2011) have conducted a long-term study of transnational communities in the Dominican Republic and the United States. Norms of civic responsibility, notions of transparency and accountability, and even electoral practices have been transmitted back to the Caribbean island by US migrants. In Eastern Europe, elements of work ethic, civic activism and grassroots entrepreneurship were transmitted by migrants from the West (Pralong, 2010; Grabowska et al., 2017; White et al., 2018). Such studies have established that the remitting of political norms and behaviours is a reality, and they allow us to more explicitly trace the mechanisms and conditions for it to happen in specific contexts (White and Grabowska, 2019). That said, they cannot evaluate or measure the overall impact of such remittances, and hence leave open the question of whether meaningful democratic diffusion can occur through migrants.

Quantitative analyses of social remittances have been harder to come by due to significant data limitations surrounding migration, though several recent studies go some way towards addressing the gap (Kapur, 2014). From a cross-country perspective, Docquier et al. (2016) find a link between openness to emigration and domestic institutional quality, as measured by standard indices of democracy and economic freedom. Li et al. (2017) similarly find that high-skill migration outflows have a positive impact on political institutions, albeit a negative one on economic ones. Spilimbergo (2009) shows that foreign-educated students promote democracy at home, as long as their education is acquired in democratic countries. At the sub-national level, Barsbai et al. (2017) exploit a quasi-experiment in Moldova to show that municipalities with higher levels of emigration to the West exhibit lower vote shares for the Communist Party, especially when compared to municipalities where emigration is directed towards Russia and the East. In the same vein, Pfitze (2012) applies an instrumental variable approach to identify a causal effect of international migration on electoral competitiveness in Mexican local elections. He finds that a 1% increase in the proportion of migrant households in a municipality increases the probability of an opposition party victory by more than half a percentage point. Finally, Batista and Vicente (2011) ran an experiment measuring demand for transparency in Cape Verde, proving that this increases with a higher prevalence of migration to the US at the local level. Yet despite some strong results pointing in the right direction, such studies lack solid micro-mechanisms, making it impossible to identify the channel through which socio-political change occurs - despite some claims to

the contrary, there is no way of telling if these effects capture democratic diffusion through social remittances, as opposed to the effects or artefacts of any other impact channel of migration.

Micro-level studies have been trying to pinpoint the effect of migratory experiences and migrant networks on political beliefs and behaviour at home. Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow (2010) use survey data from Mexico to look at the impact of both direct and indirect migration experience on political attitudes and behaviour. They find that returnees have different attitudes (more tolerant, more critical of the government on human rights issues) but little changed behaviour, while stayers with contacts abroad have little changed attitudes but different behaviour (more political participation, more civic engagement). This variation may at least in part be explained by the self-selection into return migration of those least integrated at destination. Paarlberg (2017) focuses exclusively on the networks channel, showing that having close relatives living in the US fosters political interest among Latin Americans, as well as driving higher party identification and political campaigning - though not also more voting. In other words, networks abroad don't turn disengaged stayers into engaged ones, but they make engaged ones even more so. Careja and Emmenegger (2012) use 2002 data from CEE states to show that while migration experience has no effect on institutional trust, voting patterns, political interest or participation in political discussions, it does lead to more positive evaluations of democracy, more trust in the European Union, as well as an increased likelihood of individuals trying to politically influence their friends and relatives. Vari-Lavoisier (2016) shows that, in the 2012 Senegalese election, not only were migrants a significant electoral force themselves, but they also influenced the vote choices of their networks back home, particularly if backed up by a dynamic of economic dependency. In Latin America, Meseguer et al. (2016) show that social remittances drove more positive and expansive views of the role of the state, pointing towards a potential policy impact. Yet significant issues remain despite this growing body of evidence — the micro-level studies adequately focus on the mechanisms but remain exposed to a high potential for spuriousness, relying on single cross-sectional datasets for their findings. They also discover a range of mixed or even negative findings. Significant disagreements remain, for example, on the impact of migration experience on participation (Perez-Armendariz and Crow, 2010; Careja and Emmenegger, 2012), or on the potential of remittances to drive increases in political interest (Paarlberg, 2017; Careja and Emmenegger, 2012).

One important obstacle to the diffusion of democratic norms through social remittances is the extent to which migrants absorb such values and behavioural patterns from their hosts. Work on social remittances tends to assume a relatively straightforward process of migrant re-socialisation through an exposure mechanism (White et al., 2008). However, many political orientations form early on in life, prior to migration, and tend to be rather resistant to change afterwards (Green and Palmquist, 1990; Sears and Funk, 1999). Indeed, the literature shows that while migrants absorb prevailing norms from their destination societies, the process is likely to take a long time and only be partial.

Dinesen (2012) uses data from the European Social Survey (ESS) to identify migrants to Northern European countries and employs a matching technique to compare them to stayers in origin societies, showing that moving to a society with higher levels of generalised trust increases the trust of migrants. Voicu and Comsa (2014) employ cross-classified multi-level models to estimate the competing effects of voting cultures at origin and destination, finding a strong and significant effect of the destination culture on the turnout of immigrants to that country. Similar studies reveal that immigrants to countries with a culture of higher civic participation tend to participate more themselves (Voicu, 2014; Aleksynska, 2011). While such work brings evidence in favour of exposure-driven resocialisation, there is also a significant body of scholarship showing the persistence of pre-migration socialisation in determining the values and behaviour of migrants. Bilodeau and collaborators look at migrants from authoritarian countries to Australia and Canada and find that, while their headline support for democracy is very high, they are also significantly more likely than natives to express support for alternatives to democracy like technocratic rule or having a strongman leader (Bilodeau et al., 2010; Bilodeau, 2014; Bilodeau and Nevitte, 2007). Comparing Jewish settlers in Israel that came from America and the USSR, Gitelman (1982) found that the latter were, again, significantly more likely to express authoritarian attitudes. Analysing ethnic groups in the United States, Rice and Feldman (1997) discover a strong correlation between their values and those prevalent in their origin countries, even among second or third generation immigrants. Overall, the pattern seems to be one of partial integration, with migrants' values and behavioural patterns sitting somewhere in between those at origin and destination; indeed, full assimilation seems to only occur as a long-term intergenerational process (Norris and Inglehart, 2012). Underlying such overall patterns is wide-ranging heterogeneity in integration both within and between migrant groups (Portes and Zhou, 1993), with the exact mechanisms driving variation rather unclear - two of the

factors a priori most likely to affect the extent of value absorption, length of stay at destination and age at migration, have often been found to have no clear effects (Bilodeau et al., 2010; Bilodeau, 2014; Voicu and Comsa, 2014; Gitelman, 1982; although also see diverging findings in White et al., 2008; Aleksynska, 2011).

4. Democratic values and behaviour in CEE democracies

The political context of Central and Eastern Europe makes the potential of democratic diffusion through social remittances — the focus of Chapter 3 — especially relevant, due to a longstanding post-Communist democratic deficit in support for democracy and participation levels. This section reviews the literature on democratic values and behaviour in the region, documenting the East-West gap, as well as the theories that have been brought forward to explain it. In line with my approach in Chapter 3, I focus here on two key aspects — attitudes and support for democracy, and political participation, both electoral and non-electoral.

Central and Eastern European countries have long been afflicted by a post-Communist ‘democratic deficit’ when compared to their Western counterparts. Citizens in the region have long exhibited lukewarm support for and muddled conceptions of democracy, widespread illiberal norms, limited interest in politics, and a lack of broad-based political participation, both electoral and non-electoral (Pop-Eleches and Tucker, 2017; Pop-Eleches, 2014; Bernhard and Karakoc, 2007; Dawson and Hanley, 2016; Letki, 2004; Kostadinova, 2003; Kostelka, 2014).

First of all, post-Communist citizens remain less supportive of democratic ideals and more likely to express support for illiberal alternatives than their counterparts in Western Europe, even more than three decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall (Pop-Eleches and Tucker, 2017; Fuchs-Schundeln and Schundeln, 2020). The difference in support for democratic principles is robust to the inclusion of economic, social, and pre-Communist characteristics as controls, as well as consistent in important sub-samples, including among former East German citizens. Not only are people in the region less supportive of democracy as an ideal type, but they also tend to have an understanding of democracy that is different from the rights-based, procedural one more prevalent in the West (Dahl, 1971). Instead of emphasising liberal aspects like the rule of law or minority rights, many people in Central

and Eastern Europe associate democracy with social aspects like access to education, the fulfilment of basic necessities, and individuals' right to work. These differences all hold even among people from the former GDR, more than 25 years after German reunification (Sack, 2016). Post-Communist citizens' attitudes toward democracy are further complicated by a widespread lack of knowledge about democratic concepts and principles (Gerber and Chapman, 2018; Carnaghan, 2011; Hale, 2011).

Second, the East-West gap in democratic orientations also extends to citizens' participation in electoral and non-electoral political processes. On one hand, looking at electoral turnout, initial worries about the civic abilities of post-Communist citizens gave way to a 'honeymoon period' of mass protests and turnout that in many countries exceeded 80% until the mid-1990s (Jowitt, 1992; Letki, 2004). However, the tide quickly shifted in subsequent years as participation in elections declined sharply (Kostadinova, 2003). By 2010, voter turnout in the parliamentary elections of CEE democracies was, on average, below 60%, compared to over 75% in many established European democracies (Kostelka, 2014). Turnout rates in CEE democracies were not only considerably lower than those of Western democracies but also notably lower than those of third-wave democracies in other areas of the world (Kostadinova and Power, 2007; Kostelka, 2017). More recent studies have highlighted that CEE democracies continued to have notably lower rates of turnout than their Western counterparts even thirty years after the start of the transition (Zagorski, 2021; Kostelka et al., 2025).

On the other hand, East-West differences in participation are also evident in the non-electoral arena, when it comes to key aspects such as protest behaviour. As with turnout, an initial period of high participation at the start of their transition to democracy gave way to a sharp decline in non-electoral activities in post-Communist states (Inglehart and Cattenberg, 2002). Several studies in the 2000s emphasised the weakness of civil society and associational life in CEE democracies, coupled with low levels of social capital (Letki, 2004; Howard, 2011; Pop-Eleches and Tucker, 2013). In line with such findings, the proportion of CEE citizens who had recently engaged in non-electoral participation like protesting and signing petitions was found to be roughly half of that in Western societies (Kostelka, 2014). This participation gap was repeatedly confirmed by the literature and found to be highly persistent over time (Bernhagen and Marsh, 2007; Kostelka and Rovny, 2019). However, while these gaps in participation at the individual level have persisted, it is also

important to note that since the 2010s there has also been a notable increase in protests and civil society activity in many CEE democracies (Gherghina et al., 2023) – this included both repeated waves of anti-corruption and anti-governmental protests like those experienced by Romania and Bulgaria (Gubernat and Rammelt, 2021; Dimitrova, 2022) but also notable action from organisations tied to some government regimes, particularly in Hungary (Greskovits, 2020; Bernhard, 2020).

The literature dedicated to explaining the persistent CEE democratic deficit has focused on two main lines of argument. On one hand, some have argued that the deficit is the direct consequence of lacklustre regime performance, economic and political alike, particularly the painful transition from authoritarian politics and command economies to a combination of liberal democracy and free-market capitalism (Przeworski, 1991; Kitschelt, 1992). The initial enthusiasm of 1989 quickly dissipated in the face of widespread job losses and the disappearance of socialist safety nets, compounded by an inexperienced leadership beset by scandals and corruption. In a series of surveys conducted at the height of the transition, Evans and Whitefield (1995) found that low democratic support among post-Communist citizens can to a large extent be attributed to poor evaluations of how their political systems have been operating in practice. In the following decades, while the economic situation has improved markedly, standards of living have remained significantly lower than in the West and inequality has risen dramatically (Loveless and Whitefield, 2011). Most importantly, though, CEE democracies have failed to address their traditions of poor governance, clientelism, and rampant corruption, which are bound to depress democratic support and participation through poor performance evaluations (Sanholtz and Taagepera, 2005; Kostadinova, 2009; Rose and Mishler, 2010; Hooghe and Quintelier, 2014; Klingemann, 2014; Kostelka et al., 2025).

However, the underlying stability of values and behaviour observed in the literature, along with some relatively weak empirical results with regard to the effects of economic experiences and evaluations point toward an important role for more structural factors (Whitefield, 2009). This represents the other main approach seen in the literature, as scholars focus on the role of Communist legacies in driving current attitudes and behavioural patterns, including the democratic deficit. While Communist regimes left behind societies that were highly industrialised, relatively educated and remarkably equal, the peculiarities of development and education before 1989 had a major impact on subsequent democratic

orientations. Reliance on heavy industry on a massive scale tied workers to their enterprise through highly specific skills and patronage-based networks of benefit provision — entrenching clientelism and depressing electoral quality as such networks were often taken over by newly enriched oligarchs and former local bureaucrats (Lankina and Libman, 2019). In addition, the combination of technical focus and ideological indoctrination created a pattern of what Pop-Eleches (2014) calls ‘demobilising education’ — those with technical vocational training were much less likely to participate in politics, while the positive effect of higher education on participation remained much lower than in other contexts. Indeed, the post-Communist democratic deficit seems to be the result of a mix of individual exposure to Communism and the contextual effects of living in a post-Communist society, with the former explaining about half of the gap (Pop-Eleches and Tucker, 2017).

The pervasive weakness of support for democracy and mass participation in the region means that CEE states were born as ‘hollow democracies’, which they remain to this day (Bohle and Greskovits, 2012; Greskovits, 2015) — formal institutions and procedural rules are long established but they have no strong base of support in society, while the processes of popular involvement, mobilisation and accountability characteristic of a consolidated democracy remain somewhat absent (Linz and Stepan, 1996). This is a major weakness in itself — even if democratic stability is unaffected, which has not been the case, such hollow democracies are bound to fare quite poorly in terms of what we can call democratic quality (Munck, 2016). In addition, the lack of strong (liberal) democratic commitments among citizens may have created a political opportunity structure amenable to the rise of illiberal leaders and the dismantling of key institutions. Even if we cannot directly attribute the sort of democratic backsliding observed in Hungary and Poland to the lack of a democratic political culture (Waldner and Lust, 2018; Krastev, 2016; Dawson and Hanley, 2016), its absence can mean that citizens are unlikely to act as enforcers against democratic defection by elites.

5. Preferences for redistribution at the individual level

Preferences for redistribution are shaped by a wide variety of factors and are the focus of a large and growing literature. This section provides a brief overview of the factors that influence preferences for redistribution, dividing them into three broad groups — material pocketbook, material non-pocketbook, and other-regarding concerns.

First, much of the political economy literature sees material self-interest as central to the formation of preferences for redistribution — in the most general sense, people support redistribution if they expect its benefits to outweigh its costs. Pocketbook effects describe the direct impact of tax-and-transfer policies on household income. Such effects sit at the heart of traditional models of redistribution, including the seminal Romer-Meltzer-Richards model. This shows that if we assume lump sum taxation with no distortionary costs, rational individuals will support redistribution if its expected effect on income is positive, which occurs when their income is below the national mean. If their income is above average, individuals will oppose redistribution since they expect to incur a net loss from it (Romer, 1975; Meltzer and Richard, 1981). A lot of scholarly debate has focused on the macro-level implications of this model, that the level of redistribution increases with income inequality since it will be determined by the preferences of the median voter. Empirical evidence for this link has been at best mixed (Lindert, 2004; Alesina and Glaeser, 2004; Iversen and Soskice, 2009; Schmidt-Catran, 2016; Lupu and Pontusson, 2023). Yet the key prediction of the basic model is well supported by evidence at the micro-level — direct pocketbook considerations matter, as support for redistribution declines with income across contexts (Finseraas, 2009; Beramendi and Rehm, 2016; Rueda, 2018).

Pocketbook effects go beyond the direct impact of taxes and transfers on current income. Indeed, rational individuals maximise utility over their lifecycle rather than a single period, meaning that preferences take into account the expected effect of redistribution on future income as well as contemporary earnings (Alesina and Giuliano, 2011; Rueda and Stegmueller, 2019). In this way, longer-term considerations about future income and the prospect of social mobility also influence redistribution preferences (Benabou and Oak, 2001). Similarly, uncertainty about the future can lead individuals to seek redistribution as a form of social insurance against risks like unemployment (Moene and Wallerstein, 2001; Rehm et al., 2012; Rehm, 2016).

Second, material self-interest is not limited to pocketbook effects. Non-pocketbook effects relate to the indirect impact of redistribution on individuals, independent of present and future income (Rueda and Stegmueller, 2016). Experienced utility is a function of income but other factors are also important, particularly in the long run. If redistribution influences these other factors, it can generate benefits even for richer individuals who are net contributors to any

transfer schemes. As Alesina and Fuchs-Schündeln (2007) put it in a broad sense, “even a rich person living in a poor region may favour state intervention and redistribution because he or she benefits from public goods provided in this region”. Two specific examples found in the literature are related to crime and education, and the non-pocketbook benefits of redistribution related to these issues. On one hand, income inequality has often been linked to negative externalities such as increased crime, which affect the well-being and consumption of individuals irrespective of their income. Redistribution can mitigate such consequences and hence, all else equal, lead to increases in welfare across individuals. Individuals recognise these potential indirect gains and take them into account when forming their preferences for redistribution — one study found that fear of crime made wealthy individuals more likely to support redistribution in high-inequality regions of Western Europe (Rueda and Stegmueller, 2016). On the other hand, redistribution can alter patterns of human capital formation, leading to indirect benefits for individuals across the income spectrum. By relaxing credit constraints and lowering opportunity costs, redistribution increases investment in education and skills. Higher levels of human capital lead to higher aggregate productivity and faster economic growth, which deliver material benefits to individuals by increasing productivity and returns on investment (Galor and Zeira, 1993; Perotti, 1996; Galor, 2011).

A key feature of the non-pocketbook effects of redistribution is that, unlike pocketbook effects, they only become apparent in the longer run. This implies that, when it comes to the formation of preferences for redistribution, non-pocketbook considerations are considerably more important for wealthier individuals than for those with lower incomes. Poor individuals tend to have shorter time horizons than their rich counterparts, in part due to the existence of strong credit constraints. In addition, the relative stakes of redistribution are considerably higher for the former, placing further weight on short-term considerations (Dynan et al., 2004; Rueda and Stegmueller, 2016). In short, individuals with low incomes tend to support redistribution because of its short-term pocketbook benefits, with relatively little consideration of its longer-run effects. Richer individuals, on the other hand, tend to incur pocketbook costs from redistribution across periods but are more likely to weigh these costs against the potential indirect benefits of redistribution in the long run.

Third, many scholars argue that preferences for redistribution are influenced by factors beyond material self-interest. If individuals care about the utility of other people, then

altruistic or other-regarding concerns can also play a role (Alesina and Giuliano, 2011; Dimick et al., 2018). There is significant evidence from the lab that people indeed care about the welfare of others in experimental settings, and that they tend to intrinsically dislike very unequal distributions of outcomes (Charness and Rabin, 2002; Tricomi et al., 2010). These other-regarding preferences can be explained and modelled in several different ways. People may care about overall social welfare, as well as their own — since the poor have a higher marginal utility of income than the rich, redistribution can increase social welfare, meaning that support for redistribution will increase with the level of inequality in society (Dimick et al., 2017). Similar predictions emerge if individuals want to minimise differences in income, and are driven by a combination of altruism and envy (Fehr and Schmidt, 1999). Preferences can also be shaped by purely normative concerns, beyond the maximisation of welfare — if so, demand for redistribution will be determined by what individuals think the income distribution should be, and the distance between that and the existing distribution. Perceptions about the fairness of markets and the importance of effort versus luck may also play a role (Alesina and Angeletos, 2005; Finley, 2017).

An important aspect of concerns about others, or altruism, is that for most people it is unlikely to be universal. Several studies have pointed out that it depends on the identity of individuals, as well as that of potential welfare recipients. Other-regarding concerns are likely to be bounded by ethnic, religious, or racial lines — leading to what has been called ‘parochial altruism’ (Habyarimana et al., 2007). In short, perceiving welfare recipients as different can detract from any potential altruism. These arguments have most often been applied to issues of immigration and ethnic diversity — these have been connected to lower support for redistribution and an expansive welfare state in both Europe and the United States (Alesina and Glaeser, 2004; Lupu and Pontusson, 2011; Rueda, 2018).

In addition to these three main types of factors, the literature has also shown that there are feedback effects between individual preferences and existing welfare policies, with the latter shaping the former to a significant degree. On one hand, welfare programmes can alter individual incentives and create important constituencies of support among their beneficiaries (Pierson, 1996; Korpi and Palme, 1998; Gingrich and Ansell, 2012). On the other hand, being socialised into a certain welfare regime can shape preferences for redistribution and the role of the state over the long term (Alesina and Fuchs-Schundeln,

2007). The following section provides more details about this last mechanism in the context of the post-communist space.

6. Demand for redistribution and Central and Eastern European welfare states

The evolution of welfare states and attitudes towards redistribution in Central and Eastern Europe — central elements in the papers outlined in Chapters 4 and 5 — have been influenced by the unique history of the region. This section first discusses support for redistribution in the post-communist space and the continuing impact of historical legacies. It then provides a brief overview of CEE welfare states and their evolution since the 1990s.

Central and Eastern European welfare states have been shaped by the interaction of several key factors on the demand and supply side alike. On the demand side, multiple studies over the years have established that citizens in post-Communist countries have distinct preferences when compared to their counterparts in Western Europe — they are less willing to tolerate inequality, have higher expectations of government protection, and are more supportive of redistribution and public spending (Evans, 1998; Suhrcke, 2001; Lipsmeyer and Nordstrom, 2003). This has most often been attributed to the role of historical legacies, since equality was one of the core features of communist ideology. Before 1989, people living under these regimes became accustomed to extensive state provision of welfare and comparatively low levels of inequality, with lasting effects on their outlook. The experience of being socialised under communism continued to shape people's preferences regarding welfare and the role of the state more than a quarter of a century after the start of the transition (Pop-Eleches and Tucker, 2017; Auspurg et al., 2019; Fuchs-Schundeln and Schundeln, 2020). This can be observed throughout the post-communist region, though the most important evidence comes from Germany. There, the East-West separation and subsequent reunification provided a natural experiment that isolated the effect of communist socialisation in increasing people's demand for social protection (Alesina and Fuchs-Schundeln, 2007; Svallfors, 2010; Auspurg et al., 2019). While the impact of these legacies may wane over time due to generational replacement and the growing influence of new market structures, it is unlikely to soon entirely disappear. At least in part, distinct welfare preferences in the post-communist space have also been transmitted to new generations through the influence of parental socialisation (Pop-Eleches and Tucker, 2017; Libman and Popova, 2022).

There is little evidence that aggregate demand for social protection has declined over time across post-communist countries, even as free markets and liberal democracy became more entrenched (Fuchs-Schundeln and Schundeln, 2020). Yet historical legacies are only one factor shaping preferences and driving this lack of convergence. As elsewhere, material self-interest has become increasingly central to the formation of redistribution preferences in CEE countries (Lipsmeyer and Nordstrom, 2003; Finley, 2017). Perceptions of markets and their fairness have also played an important role (Vogt, 2005) — periods of macroeconomic turmoil during the 1990s and the global financial crisis seem to have increased demand for government protection, in part through altering perceptions of fairness (Finley, 2017).

Higher demand for redistribution and social protection among the public, however, has not resulted in Central and Eastern European welfare states that are larger than their Western equivalents. While they are larger than those of other countries at similar levels of development, CEE welfare states remain considerably smaller than those in Western Europe, both in terms of overall spending and with regard to the generosity and coverage of specific benefits (Haggard and Kaufman, 2008; Inglot, 2008; Kuitto, 2016). The existence of a well-defined post-communist welfare state model has been the subject of considerable debate in the literature. On one hand, welfare arrangements across the region were shaped by a common set of key factors — relatively similar communist regimes before 1989, the shared experience of the transition during the 1990s, and the significant influence of international actors like the EU, the World Bank, and the IMF. On the other hand, there are notable differences between countries in the region in terms of their economic models, their distinct pre-communist historical legacies, and their partisan configurations of power in recent decades. The result has been that although CEE welfare states share important characteristics, it is difficult to speak of a single post-communist model. They are best seen as a relatively heterogeneous set of hybrid models (Inglot, 2008; Cerami and Vanhuyse, 2009; Hacker, 2009), instead of the kind of ideal types built on coherent socioeconomic models described by past theorists of Western welfare states (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Hall and Soskice, 2001).

Welfare institutions in the region are ever evolving patchworks of pre-communist legacies, communist history, and post-communist influences, often shaped by periods of crisis and

immediate public need (Cerami, 2006). They share important elements of Bismarckian insurance — which were central to incipient welfare provision in the pre-war era and mean that a higher share of social spending is funded by contributions rather than general taxation — as well as certain aspects of universalism and corporatism maintained from communist times (Inglot, 2008; Kuitto, 2016). The influence of international actors associated with the Washington Consensus meant that neoliberal policies such as pension privatisation and flat taxes were introduced in many CEE countries in the late 1990s and 2000s (Orenstein, 2008; Aidukaite, 2019). Yet important differences in spending patterns and institutions persist within the region — between the Visegrad Group and the Baltics, Romania and Bulgaria and the rest, and even within these subgroups (Aidukaite, 2009; Kuitto, 2016). At the same time, policy changes were more often piecemeal measures driven by urgent social needs and periods of macroeconomic instability, rather than reform plans with a clear direction — for example, the economic shock of the transition forced governments to rapidly introduce unemployment insurance and social assistance programmes in the early 1990s, and the fiscal stress of the global financial crisis imposed a period of welfare retrenchment (Elster et al., 1998; Cook, 2007; Inglot, 2008; Aslund, 2012; Blum et al., 2014). The importance of these short-term pressures means that welfare states in the region went through several cycles of expansion and retrenchment. Many key decisions, such as pension privatisation in Hungary or the introduction of a flat tax in Lithuania, were subsequently reversed by their governments (Domonkos, 2016; Domonkos and Simonovits, 2017).

Despite the high demand for social protection from their citizens, a generalised expansion of CEE welfare states has been constrained by structural factors. Perhaps the most important constraint has been the neoliberal economic model adopted by countries in the region to different degrees (Bohle and Greskovits, 2012). Their economies are tightly integrated into European supply chains and are defined by a structural dependence on foreign capital (Nolke and Vliegenthart, 2009). This has meant that tax rates, particularly for companies, remain much lower than in Western Europe — governments repeatedly introduced measures to make their economies more attractive to foreign capital and appease financial markets, which compounded aforementioned pressures from international organisations (Appel and Orenstein, 2016). In addition, the ability of governments to provide welfare and redistribute income effectively has been limited by a lack of administrative capacity and the prevalence of corruption in public institutions (Petrova, 2021).

That said, less redistribution and smaller welfare states have not necessarily resulted in higher levels of disposable income inequality in Central and Eastern Europe when compared to the West. To a certain extent, these factors are counterbalanced by a more equal distribution of earnings before taxes and transfers, even after considering the significant increases in inequality that happened during the early years of the transition (Milanovic, 1999; Fuchs-Schundeln and Schundeln, 2020). Yet there are important variations in inequality trends within the region. Some post-communist countries, such as Bulgaria and Lithuania, are among the most unequal in the EU. Others, most notably Slovakia and Czechia, have some of the most equal incomes among member states (Medgyesi and Toth, 2022; Dorjnyambuu, 2024).

7. Partisan spending effects

An essential mechanism of democratic political economies, one that played a key role in the development of modern welfare states, is that of partisan spending effects — that left-wing governments increase public spending on welfare and other areas while in office. Such effects have also been identified as a key mechanism behind the overall effects of emigration on public spending. According to some previous work, emigration drives changes in attitudes that then translate into policy changes through the effects of attitudes on votes and the impact of government ideology on spending (Doyle, 2015). I thus examine the existence of partisan spending effects in Central and Eastern Europe with two main goals in mind – to contribute to the respective political economy literature, but also investigate whether such effects can operate as an important mechanism behind the impact of emigration on the region. This section thus reviews the literature on partisan spending effects, tracking its development in the Western context, the factors that might influence these effects, and its application to the Central and Eastern European context.

The origin of the concept of partisan spending effects lies in the power-resource theories of the 1980s (Stephens, 1979; Korpi, 1983). According to them, the key driving force behind the development of the welfare state was the political strength of left-wing parties. Because of their distinct social base, these parties increased public spending when in government, particularly on welfare. Workers — broadly understood as wage-earners with limited economic resources — are the main beneficiaries of social welfare policies. These provide insurance against labour market risks (Rehm, 2011), reduce workers' dependence on

employers (Esping-Andersen, 1990), and redistribute income to those in need (Kenworthy and Pontusson, 2005). Other social groups, such as employers and managers, are more likely to pay the cost for such policies than benefit from them, which reduces their support for expanding the welfare state. Since parties of the left traditionally act as the political representatives of workers and trade unions, they increase public spending upon gaining power in accordance with their base's preferences, hence driving the development of the welfare state (Korpi, 2006). Recent research nuances this narrative, showing that other actors have also played key roles in the rise of the welfare state, notably Christian Democratic parties (Huber and Stephens, 2001a) and private firms (Swenson, 1991; Hall and Soskice, 2001). Yet the strength of the left nevertheless remains an important factor, with partisan spending effects as a core mechanism. A large number of studies confirm that there were strong links between left government, increased spending, and more generous social transfers during the post-war era (Korpi, 1989; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Hicks and Swank, 1992; Blais et al., 1993; Cusack, 1997; Korpi and Palme, 2003; Allan and Scruggs, 2004).

However, starting in the 1990s, scholars argued these previously strong partisan effects narrowed and then largely disappeared (Pierson, 1996, 2001; Huber and Stephens, 2001). These non-findings have been repeatedly confirmed by contemporary studies. In recent decades, left-wing governments no longer spent more than their right-wing counterparts on social protection (Potrafke, 2009; Kwon and Pontusson, 2010; Herwartz and Theilen, 2014), healthcare (Potrafke, 2010) or in total (Herwartz and Theilen, 2017). Any partisan differences have been relegated to the margins, involving reallocations of spending from one category to the other (Herwartz and Theilen, 2021). Leftist parties, for example, may remain more likely to safeguard the generosity of core benefits (Korpi and Palme, 2003; Allan and Scruggs, 2004) but that is likely to come at the expense of cuts in other transfers (Hubscher, 2017) in a way that accentuates divisions between labour market insiders and outsiders (Rueda, 2005). Two broad explanations have been put forward for the disappearance of partisan spending effects in the West — the convergence of mainstream party platforms due to structural changes in society, and/or tighter fiscal constraints preventing parties from implementing their desired policies.

The former explanation stems from the transformation of industrial societies into postindustrial ones, which drove significant changes in the social base of political parties.

Deindustrialisation diminished the size and organisational strength of the working class, eroding the left's traditional partisan base (Best, 2011). To maintain electoral relevance, leftist parties increasingly focused on attracting more middle-class voters, establishing a new base of support among sociocultural professionals (Gingrich and Hausermann, 2015; Oesch and Renwald, 2018). Since these voters are less economically vulnerable and less likely to benefit from welfare programmes than blue-collar workers, left-wing party platforms moved away from tax-and-spend redistributive politics. The decline of trade unions further weakened the influence of workers on leftist politicians (Garrett, 1998; Kwon and Pontusson, 2010). The result was a convergence of policy platforms between the left and right (Berman and Snegovaya, 2019) — in turn, this would prevent significant partisan spending differences from emerging once such parties entered government.

Other explanations focus on the role of fiscal constraints, which can prevent governments from implementing their preferred policies while in office. Globalisation is perhaps the most discussed factor imposing tighter fiscal constraints — economic interdependence and capital mobility have increased rapidly since the 1980s, which may have reduced governments' policy space and restricted their decisions on tax and spending (Garrett and Lange, 1991; Strange, 1995). However, the effect of globalisation is unclear. Research provides little evidence of a convergence in tax rates or a narrowing of policy spaces in normal economic times (Oatley, 1999; Plümper et al., 2009). Multiple studies found pronounced partisan effects occurring during a period of accelerated globalisation in the 1980s (Potrafke, 2009; Kwon and Pontusson, 2010). Additionally, the economic risks created by globalisation can increase demand for social protection and investment, leading to a compensation effect that may allow for enduring partisan differences (Cameron, 1978; Rodrik, 1997; Garrett and Mitchell, 2001; Walter, 2010; Busemeyer and Garritzman, 2019).

The literature shows several other factors are more likely to have created tight fiscal constraints for governments. One, the existence of already large welfare states — this can strengthen fiscal constraints through ceiling effects, in effect leaving less room for further tax rises and spending increases. At the same time, existing programmes create large constituencies of support among their beneficiaries (Pierson, 1996; Gingrich and Ansell, 2012). This is likely to prevent governments from implementing cuts for fear of an electoral backlash, regardless of their policy preferences or ideology. Two, rapidly ageing populations — this generates significant budgetary pressures by driving long-term and permanent

increases in public spending on healthcare and pensions while narrowing the tax base at the same time (Clements et al., 2015). Three, a slowdown in economic growth since the postwar era — low growth is said to have created a condition of permanent austerity which prevented further expansions of the welfare state (Pierson, 1996). Partisan spending differences may have nonetheless endured if right-wing parties retained an incentive to cut spending and left-wing ones to maintain it (Kwon and Pontusson, 2010). Yet advocating the dismantling of welfare institutions is very different from opposing their creation in the first place. As mentioned earlier, outright benefit cuts tend to be politically unfeasible, meaning that retrenchment of spending relative to the overall economy can only realistically occur as spending is eroded by growth or inflation. If both remain low, spending is unlikely to vary much between governments of different partisan orientations.

The essential role of fiscal constraints in determining the extent of partisan spending effects is also highlighted by a different strand of the literature, on partisan responses to economic crises. This shows how partisan spending effects are prevented and can even flip during a crisis, due to a combination of fiscal strain and external pressure from financial markets. In a recession, one would expect left-wing governments to behave counter-cyclically, increasing social protection by more than the right to shield an economically vulnerable base (Cusack, 1999). Yet they are unlikely to be able to do that — a shrinking economy lowers revenues and automatically increases spending at the same time, as automatic stabilisers like unemployment insurance kick in. This leaves discretionary fiscal responses dependent on extra borrowing at a time of fiscal strain. Such financing is unlikely to be available, as financial markets are sceptical of government stimulus and left-wing policy agendas (McMenamin et al., 2015, Raess, 2021). The dynamic is exacerbated if financial markets are distressed, leaving them particularly apprehensive about additional lending (Chang and Leblond, 2015). The case of the 2008 crisis and its aftermath perfectly illustrates this, as governments converged on a relatively uniform response involving limited expansionary policies, with ideology playing little to no role (Ansell, 2012; Armingeon, 2012; Pontusson and Raess, 2012). Markets sometimes actively prevented a stronger response — for example, when the UK's Labour government planned to introduce an additional stimulus package in early 2009, it was forced to backtrack after a failed gilts auction (Mandelkern, 2015). Similar dynamics were at play in a series of other downturns since the late 1980s (Raess and Pontusson, 2015). One study takes the argument further, arguing that asymmetrical market pressures — caused by an anti-left bias among investors and their

scepticism for government stimulus — can force left-wing governments to pursue more contractionary fiscal policies than the right (Raess, 2021). External pressure from the markets can be further compounded by international organisations like the IMF, which often attach tight spending conditionalities to their support programmes (Rickard and Caraway, 2019).

The literature on partisan spending effects in Central and Eastern Europe is considerably more limited. One particularly influential study argued that partisan spending effects in the region were reversed, using data from 1989 to 2004 to show that left-wing governments were more likely to cut spending than the right (Tavits and Letki, 2009). The authors explained this as a result of the unique political and economic circumstances of their post-communist transition, which gave left-wing governments in the region the incentives and opportunities to contain spending more aggressively than the right. All governments faced enormous fiscal pressures during the transition. Financial markets were apprehensive about lending in an unstable environment and international organisations like the IMF were heavily promoting neoliberal policies of limited welfare. At the same time, left-wing parties need to legitimise their role in their new system due to their association with their communist predecessors. Aiming to demonstrate commitment to liberalisation, many spearheaded vast reform packages and cut spending while in government. They were better positioned to do so than the right, since higher voter loyalty and better organisational structures — often inherited from former ruling parties — allowed them to take unpopular measures without fearing immediate electoral collapse. In contrast, many right-wing parties struggled with electoral fragmentation, limited resources, and organisational turnover.

Other studies disagree with these conclusions. A direct response to Tavits and Letki argued that partisan effects were absent in the region and the effects they discovered were driven by bias in their manifesto-based ideology measure (Coman, 2019). A third study found significant partisan spending effects in the traditional direction, showing that left-wing governments increased spending on social protection between 1993 and 2002 (Careja and Emmenegger, 2009).

Existing work therefore paints a mixed and contradictory picture of partisan spending effects in Central and Eastern Europe. In addition, none of the available studies examines the issue using data beyond 2004 — a major gap, given the major economic and political changes

experienced by the region in the last two decades. This empirical gap in the literature is a key motivation for my investigation of partisan spending effects in Chapter 5. However, as I further explain there, there is also further theoretical value in evaluating the extent of partisan spending effects in Central and Eastern Europe. In many ways, the region is a least likely case to observe such effects – multiple factors brought up to explain the decline of partisan spending differences in the West, such as globalisation and demographic change, are equally relevant in the region. In addition, many studies have highlighted a tendency of left-wing parties in the region to implement restrictive spending packages, as previously argued by Tavits and Letki (2009). Discovering that partisan spending effects persist in the region would point to the role of other factors – mainly economic growth – in determining whether such effects continue to exist in different contexts, as well as further informing the longstanding debate on the reason for their decline in the West.

In conclusion, this chapter examined several areas of the literature that are key to the papers included in this study. It placed the recent wave of migration from Central and Eastern Europe in a historical perspective, discussing its causes and consequences. It also provided a general overview of how migration affects the politics of origin countries, outlining four main channels of impact and showing how the mechanisms analysed in the rest of the study fit within a broader understanding of the phenomenon. In addition, this chapter looked at the available evidence regarding the central focus of each of the three standalone papers – social remittances, demand for redistribution, and partisan spending effects – highlighting the specific gaps my work aims to address and the theoretical arguments I build upon in the rest of this work. Another two sections provided additional context on how the outcomes analysed in the three papers – democratic attitudes and participation, preferences for redistribution, and welfare spending – have evolved over time in the region, thus helping to frame the contributions of this study to the wider field.

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Chapter 3. Does migration make better democrats? Democratic diffusion and the limits of political remittances in Central and Eastern Europe

Abstract. Countries in Central and Eastern Europe have experienced unprecedented emigration in recent decades, yet its political consequences remain somewhat unclear. Some claim that it hurts democracies by leading to a political brain drain, while others argue that migration drives the diffusion of democratic norms through political remittances. Exposure to established democracies can make migrants undergo a process of resocialisation, absorbing new values and behaviours that they then transmit back to origin societies. In this paper, I investigate the extent of democratic diffusion through political remittances in the region. I argue that this is limited by several barriers to the process, particularly the absence of significant resocialisation at destination. I use a combination of cross-sectional and longitudinal data, focusing on four dimensions: democratic support, political interest, turnout, and non-electoral participation. My results show that political remittances lead to an increase in non-electoral participation among return migrants as well as those with close contacts abroad. However, I find no positive impact on the other dimensions. In fact, migrants become less likely to vote in elections after returning home. In CEE countries, the impact of political remittances is limited — democratic diffusion is narrow and comes with unexpected tradeoffs between different forms of participation.

1. Introduction

Young democracies in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) have experienced an unprecedented wave of emigration since their accession to the European Union in the mid-2000s. Millions of their citizens took advantage of free movement rights, moving to Western European countries in search of a better life and leading to large outflows of population (Okolski, 2007; Black et al., 2010; Organisciak-Krzykowska, 2017). The phenomenon was remarkable in both scale and speed — by 2018, almost a quarter of working-age Romanians were living and working in a different member state, and more than a tenth of Bulgarians, Poles, Lithuanians, and Latvians (Eurostat, 2021).

Although international migration has received increasing amounts of scholarly attention in recent years, most work has focused on destination societies in the West, where immigration has been linked to rising tensions and a populist backlash (Norris and Inglehart, 2019; Alesina and Tabellini, 2021). A comparative lack of research means that we have a much more limited understanding of how the corresponding emigration affects countries of origin. A rapid loss of population such as that experienced by CEE democracies is bound to come with serious consequences. Over the last decade, discussions of linked social and demographic crises have moved up the agenda in the region – right-wing governments have raised alarms about depopulation and labour market shortages have been a significant constraint on economic growth (Kaminska and Kahancova, 2011; Madroane, 2016; Chivu et al., 2020; Krastev, 2020). In response, a growing literature has begun to examine the political effects of emigration in the region – demonstrating, for instance, how it has contributed to declines in turnout across the region (Kostelka, 2017) or shifts in the distribution of voting preferences within the electorate (Giesing and Schikora, 2023).

Existing scholarship is divided as to the effects of widespread emigration on democracy in origin countries. On one hand, emigration can be detrimental to democracy. In large part, this is because it leads to the departure of some of the citizens who are most likely to participate and hold liberal democratic principles, and thus drives a kind of political brain drain (Hirschman, 1978; Anelli and Peri, 2017). The result is an electorate with a changed composition, leading to lower levels of participation in the aggregate and reduced opposition to authoritarian leaders or executive overreach (Hirschman, 1990; Colomer, 2000; Kelemen, 2020). Emigration can also have negative contextual effects in the most affected areas. By

creating anxieties about the sustainability of local communities, it can turn individuals against the political establishment and increase support for populist actors (Dancygier et al., 2024). Recent findings have shown that both of these mechanisms have had a significant effect in CEE countries, raising concerns about the overall impact of migration on political dynamics in the region (Lim, 2022).

On the other hand, another part of the literature is more optimistic about the political effects of migration, arguing that it can drive the diffusion of democratic norms and practices to origin countries through political remittances (Levitt, 1998; Careja and Emmenegger, 2012; Krawatzek and Müller-Funk, 2020). According to this view, migrants to established democracies absorb new values and behaviours from their hosts, which they then remit back to origin countries through either return migration or cross-border exchanges, resulting in more political engagement and support for democratic principles (Levitt, 2001; Perez-Armendariz and Crow, 2010). The process can be further reinforced by the flow of financial remittances from migrants to their relatives, which enhance transmission and can provide the resources for increased political participation (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, 2011; Escribà-Folch et al., 2022).

In what follows, I investigate whether political remittances drive democratic diffusion in Central and Eastern Europe. The region is in many ways an excellent context to observe this phenomenon — emigration is widespread, most migrants move to established democracies in Western Europe, and there is a gap in prevalent values between origin and destination due to a longstanding post-Communist democratic deficit (Pop-Eleches and Tucker, 2017). However, I argue that the extent of democratic diffusion through migration is likely to be very limited in this case. This is because of a number of theoretically under-explored factors which pose significant barriers to the remitting process. Most importantly, the absorption and subsequent transmission of democratic norms and practices requires migrants to undergo a relatively rapid process of political resocialisation through exposure to their new environment (White et al., 2008). Because political values and behaviours are resistant to change, meaningful resocialisation depends on this exposure being both strong and prolonged, as well as migrants having overall positive experiences at destination, to enable their receptivity to new norms associated with their hosts. For most CEE migrants, this is unlikely to be the case — they face significant linguistic and socioeconomic barriers to integration, often move abroad for short periods of time or without a clear intention to

settle there, and lack political rights at destination. In addition, issues like the selective return migrants who were least integrated at destination and a resistance to change among those left behind can further hamper the remitting process (Nevinskaite, 2016).

Using a combination of cross-sectional and longitudinal data, I focus on four key attitudes and behaviours — support for democracy, political interest, electoral turnout, and non-electoral participation. The evidence reveals that political remittances drive an increase in non-electoral participation, which can be observed among both return migrants and those with close contacts living abroad. However, there is little to no evidence of a positive effect of remittances on democratic attitudes, interest, or turnout. What is more, contrary to the diffusion thesis, experience of migration makes people less likely to vote after returning to origin countries, thus undermining overall levels of electoral participation. It follows that while some democratic diffusion to CEE origin countries does occur, it is narrow and limited to some participatory practices. Democratic attitudes remain unaffected and the overall impact on participation is in fact mixed, with an increase in activities like protests and petitions coming at the cost of lower turnout in national elections among former migrants. Migration, then, has done little to bridge the region's longstanding democratic deficit or drive a broad process of democratic consolidation among its public. When we consider previous findings of a political brain drain, it seems more likely that emigration has hampered than supported democracies in Central and Eastern Europe.

The main contributions of this study are three-fold. It first and foremost addresses an important empirical gap in the literature by examining the extent of democratic diffusion through political remittances in CEE countries. This mechanism has been understudied, particularly with regard to the recent wave of post-accession emigration from the region. Second, this study also advances our theoretical understanding of how political remittances work by exploring the process of resocialisation that underpins them. In doing so, it highlights significant barriers to the diffusion of democratic norms through migration and the rather optimistic assumptions implicitly made by some previous work on the topic. In addition, this study contains what is, to the best of my knowledge, the first use of longitudinal data to examine political remittances at the individual level. This allows me to isolate changes in attitudes and behaviour within individuals, and hence significantly strengthens the internal validity of my findings compared to past work that was exclusively based on cross-sectional comparisons between different individuals.

The next section of the paper briefly reviews the literature on social and political remittances, highlighting existing results and their limitations. The third section outlines my theoretical framework, explaining how exposure to established democratic societies can drive the political resocialisation of migrants, why this resocialisation is likely to be limited in the regional context, as well as other barriers to the cross-border transmission of democratic norms and practices. In section four, I describe the three sources of data used in my analysis and the methodological approach I take to testing two key hypotheses described by previous literature. The results of these tests and my empirical analysis are presented in the fifth section. The final section discusses the results and concludes, offering potential avenues for further research.

2. Political remittances in the literature

Social remittances were first defined by Levitt (1998) as a “local-level, migration-driven form of cultural diffusion”, comprised of the ideas, behaviours, identities and social capital that flow from receiving to sending countries. The mechanisms behind this flow are, at least on the surface, rather straightforward. Migrants go abroad and, through their interaction with host societies, pick up some of the values and behaviours prevalent at destination, and accumulate new forms of social capital. Such new norms and resources are then transmitted back to origin societies through one of two channels, either return migration or cross-border networks, as migrants interact with friends and family who stay behind (Levitt, 2001; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, 2011). Levitt’s concept, while a useful starting point, is much broader than any of its implications for politics or democracy. Inspired by it, an incredibly diverse range of issues has been examined, from gender roles and fertility norms (Fargues, 2007; Beine et al., 2013) to health knowledge (Holdaway et al., 2015) or aspects of work ethic (Pralong, 2010).

In order to narrow the concept of social remittances and focus on its political dimension, it is useful to refer explicitly to political remittances. Krawatzek and Müller-Funk (2020) define these as “the act of transferring political principles, vocabulary and practices between two or more places, which migrants and their descendants share a connection with”. Not all such transfers are supportive of democracy, of course. Some, like specific aspects of vocabulary,

will have little bearing on it. Others, in the case of migrants to autocratic countries, can be outright hurtful to democratic systems (Barsbai et al., 2017). Yet, if the destination country is an established democracy, it is claimed that political remittances can turn both migrants and stayers into better democratic citizens by driving the diffusion of democratic norms and practices.

A growing literature has documented instances of such migration-driven democratic diffusion with regard to a wide variety of regions, topics and levels of aggregation. A number of qualitative studies established that individual migrants remit certain political attitudes and behaviours from their more democratic hosts. Norms of civic responsibility, patterns of activism, notions of transparency, demands for accountability, as well as specific electoral practices were found to be transferred to origin countries in the Caribbean and Central and Eastern Europe (Levitt, 2001; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, 2011; Grabowska, 2017; White et al., 2018).

Quantitative studies have been historically hampered by a lack of data availability but have been making increasing progress in recent years (Kapur, 2014). At the aggregate level, emigration has been linked to better political institutions (Docquier et al., 2016; Li et al., 2017), higher competitiveness in local elections (Pfütze, 2012), increased demands for transparency (Batista and Vicente, 2011), and lower vote shares for the Communist Party (Barsbai et al., 2017). At the individual level, former migrants have been found to be more tolerant, more critical of the government (Perez-Armendariz and Crow, 2010), and more positive about democracy in their country (Careja and Emmenegger, 2012). Likewise, those with friends or family abroad seem to participate more (Perez-Armendariz and Crow, 2010) and be more interested in politics (Paarlberg, 2017), while also being more likely to vote against an incumbent with authoritarian tendencies (Vari-Lavoisier, 2016).

Yet significant issues remain despite this growing body of evidence. Theoretically, the mechanisms underlying political remittances often remain unspecified. As I discuss below, this obscures the extent to which the successful democratic diffusion through migration relies on overly optimistic assumptions about the resocialisation of migrants at destination and the transmission of norms across borders. Empirically, different gaps are present across the literature. Qualitative studies identify mechanisms well, yet remain local in scope and limited in their ability to evaluate the overall impact of political remittances on origin

countries. Aggregate findings are based on solid identification strategies but fail to trace out micro mechanisms and establish that the effects of emigration are in fact driven by the transmission of norms across borders. Finally, studies of individual attitudes and behaviour focus on the transmission mechanisms but are, without exception, based on cross-sectional data from a single moment in time. This leaves their results exposed to a significant risk of self-selection bias and severely weakens confidence in their conclusions of democratic diffusion. This work also reveals a range of mixed findings across contexts, with significant disagreements about the effect of migration experience on participation (Perez-Armendariz and Crow, 2010; Careja and Emmenegger, 2012), or the potential of remittances to drive increases in political interest (Paarlberg, 2017; Careja and Emmenegger, 2012). The present work seeks to address the most important theoretical and methodological gaps in the study of political remittances at the individual level, and better understand how the phenomenon works in the CEE context.

3. Political remittances and democratic diffusion in Central and Eastern Europe

Before moving further, it is essential to be more precise about the kind of political remittances this analysis focuses on. Even within the narrower definition of political remittances, many different norms and behavioural patterns can be transmitted by migrants across borders. Among others, the literature discusses institutional quality, campaign practices, tolerance, participation, vote choice, political interest, demand for transparency, government evaluations, and support for democracy. Some of these potential remittances, such as specific campaign practices, hold little sway in terms of strengthening democracy in origin countries. For others, like government evaluations or vote choice, it is often unclear what a more “democratic” option looks like. Individuals can be critical of governments without necessarily weakening their normative commitment to democracy (Norris, 2011). Similarly, voting against an incumbent may be considered the democratic option in an autocracy, though this is not necessarily the case in relatively democratic systems like those in Central and Eastern Europe. Migrants’ potential to remit basic aspects of democracy, like demand for transparency and uncensored information, also becomes much less relevant in such systems compared to autocracies.

The key question is whether political remittances can strengthen democracy in origin countries, diffusing more deeply rooted democratic norms and practices and thereby

affecting their political culture. In that light, I focus on three attitudes and behaviours essential for democracies (Almond and Verba, 1963) – support for a democratic regime, political interest, and participation. Other political remittances may, of course, occur beyond these factors. However, it is difficult to see how a claim of meaningful democratic diffusion can be made if remittances fail to lead citizens to be more committed to democracy, more interested in politics, or more likely to engage with it in some form. On the other hand, these key aspects have repeatedly been proven to be important to democracies – support for democracy and opposition to its alternatives can increase the likelihood of democratic emergence and survival (Claassen, 2020); political interest is strongly linked to a range of outcomes conducive to democracy, including political knowledge, sophistication, and engagement (Prior, 2019); electoral participation is the main responsibility of democratic citizens and ensures representation, accountability and legitimacy (Kostelka and Blais, 2021); non-electoral participation further enhances representation and can serve as a check on executive overreach, thereby protecting democratic institutions (Escriba-Folch et al., 2022).

When looking at these dimensions, there is ample opportunity for democratic diffusion in the context of Central and Eastern Europe. This is due to the region's longstanding democratic deficit – post-communist citizens have repeatedly been shown to be less supportive of democracy, less interested in politics and less likely to participate than their counterparts in Western Europe (Kostadinova, 2003; Bernhard and Karakoc, 2007; Pop-Eleches, 2014; Kostelka, 2014; Dawson and Hanley, 2016). It is true that recent changes in Western societies – the rise of right-wing populist parties with authoritarian tendencies and the related erosion of liberal social norms (Valentim, 2021; Aktas, 2024) – have diminished their status as bastions of popular support for liberal democracy. However, the democratic deficit of CEE countries continues to be significant despite these trends. Recent work has shown that differences in attitudes and participation persisted in the region even three decades after the start of the transition (Pop-Eleches and Tucker, 2017; Fuchs-Schundeln and Schundeln, 2020). This enduring East-West gap in values and behaviour creates the necessary conditions for the transmission of democratic norms across borders through migration. It also makes the potential effect of political remittances in the region particularly relevant, since these may help bridge the democratic deficit.

In many ways, Central and Eastern Europe is an excellent context for observing democratic diffusion through political remittances — international migration is widespread, the vast majority of migrants move to established democracies in the West, and there is a gap in prevalent norms and practices between origin and destination. However, I argue that the extent of democratic diffusion is likely to be limited in the region, on account of several reasons, most notably a lack of political resocialisation at destination. In the remainder of this section, I discuss how resocialisation can create democratic political remittances, the limits facing this process, and a range of other barriers to the transmission of norms across borders.

3.1. The political resocialisation of migrants at destination

An essential precondition of democratic diffusion through political remittances is the absorption of new norms and practices by migrants at destination. This starting point of the process, whereby remittances are created, has often been under-theorised in the literature. So why and how should we expect migrants to become more supportive of democratic values, more interested in politics, or more likely to participate after a period of time spent in established democracies?

Implicitly or not, most work on social remittances adopts a mechanism of resocialisation through exposure — as migrants arrive in their host countries, they are gradually exposed to its social, economic, and political life (White et al., 2008). Conceptually, it is useful to think of this exposure as broadly happening at three different levels. First, migrants are exposed to destination societies simply by virtue of living in their new environment, as passive observers of the social and political life around them. They make observations about the cities and villages they live in, the quality of life of people around them, and key aspects such as safety and crime. They also inevitably encounter specific socio-political events even when not participating in them directly — for example, public demonstrations in their local area, strike action in sectors like public transport, or grassroots political activities like canvassing during campaigns or periods of political turmoil. Migrants can also be exposed to aspects of life in host societies beyond their immediate surrounding through the consumption of different forms of local media.

Second, migrants actively interact with key institutions in the host country, such as its labour market, its bureaucracy, and its public services. A key part of this exposure happens through jobs — migrants encounter a variety of people inside and outside of their organisations as well as new ways of doing things in terms of procedures, incentives, and hierarchies. They also discover how state institutions work in their host country when they seek recognition of their documents and qualifications, pay their taxes, or claim benefits. Many migrants also interact with key services provided by the government of their host country like healthcare and education, if they need medical attention or have young children that joined them abroad.

Third, migrants develop social ties with both natives and other foreigners while living in destination societies. As their networks expand with more acquaintances and friends, migrants are exposed to how the individuals around them think, the values they hold, and the behaviours that they engage in. This exposure happens naturally through observation and time spent together, though it can be actively reinforced by discussions and debates with their contacts. Sustained interaction with locals puts migrants in direct contact with the norms and practices prevalent in their host society. At the same time, interactions between migrants can spread information and different perspectives on their new environment, broadening exposure and shaping the way they navigate shared experiences.

These different forms of exposure often overlap and reinforce each other, evolve over time, and can vary significantly from one person to another. Yet together they can gradually drive a process of resocialisation among migrants. Some of this process happens automatically, through psychological mechanisms like social learning and imitation — as migrants are repeatedly exposed to new practices and norms over a sustained period of time, they gradually become more likely to adopt them themselves. To a large extent, though, resocialisation works through what the literature calls a bifocal perspective (White et al., 2018) — exposure to the new environment leads migrants to comparisons between origin and destination societies, as they repeatedly contrast new values and behaviours with the ones they already hold. Whether or not migrants choose to adopt new norms largely depends on these comparisons, and essentially on how migrants perceive their overall experience in host countries. If the experience was largely negative, migrants are likely to look more positively and nostalgically at their life back in origin countries, and in turn reject most of what they were exposed to in their new environment.

However, if their experience was positive — they found that the overall quality of life was better, their social or financial status had improved, institutions worked better, their effort was fairly rewarded, the bureaucracy was more efficient and responsive, or public services were significantly improved — migrants will gradually adapt their pre-existing values and behaviour, leading to hybrid forms that are closer to those prevalent in destination countries. For example, migrants who are initially sceptical of democracy may become more supportive of it after repeated interactions with a functioning bureaucracy and well-run public services (or at least ones that work notably better than in their origin countries). This will be reinforced by the influence of social contacts that are themselves more supportive of democracy, as well as people's tendency to associate their improved outcomes abroad with the way host countries are organised and governed. Likewise, migrants will become more likely to participate in politics themselves after repeated exposure to broader and more varied forms of engagement in their new environment. This is especially the case if they more or less consciously draw a link between these higher levels of engagement and the more positive social outcomes they observe and experience. In addition, migrants to established democracies are exposed to broader norms of individual responsibility and initiative, including in their jobs, which may contribute to their absorption of participatory norms.

It follows that a combination of consistent exposure to an established democracy and a positive overall experience while living abroad can lead migrants to absorb more democratic norms and behaviours. These can then be remitted back to origin countries through one of two channels — either directly as migrants return home, or indirectly through networks as they engage in repeated cross-border visits and conversations with friends and relatives that stayed back. However, the success of this diffusion process depends on both absorption and transmission working as theorised, leading to meaningful attitudinal and behavioural changes. In fact, it is far from certain this is the case, particularly in the context of Central and Eastern Europe — there are in fact significant barriers to both resocialisation and cross-border transmission.

3.2. Limits to political resocialisation abroad

Political resocialisation can occur as a consequence of exposure to established democratic societies but the process is likely to be difficult. Two conditions need to be fulfilled —

exposure needs to be strong and prolonged to overcome resistance to change and the impact of pre-migration socialisation, and migrants' experience at destination needs to be positive in order to enable their receptivity to new norms and practices.

Political attitudes and behavioural patterns tend to be rather resistant to change — to a significant extent, many of them form in the impressionable years of childhood and early adulthood and remain relatively stable thereafter. There is a vast literature showing that core political orientations are shaped by early socialisation and become significantly harder to alter after this formative period (Campbell et al., 1960; Jennings and Niemi, 1981; Zaller, 1992; Dinas, 2013; Bartels and Jackman, 2014; Neundorf and Smets, 2017). To different degrees, this also applies to the variables considered in this analysis. Political interest remains relatively constant over the lifecycle after developing in one's early years (Neundorf et al., 2013; Prior, 2019). Voting is often seen by the literature as a habit first developed in early adulthood, with past turnout being by far the best predictor of future participation (Franklin et al., 2004; Dinas, 2012; Smets and van Ham, 2013). Early socialisation also has a lasting influence on the likelihood of participating in non-electoral activities like protests, with clear differences visible between generations (Grasso et al., 2019). Furthermore, attitudes towards different regime types are enduringly shaped during the impressionable years — for example, Germans socialised under the GDR still held distinctive attitudes more than twenty years after reunification (Sack, 2016). Indeed, the very existence of a post-communist democratic deficit demonstrates the persistence of political attitudes and behaviours that are acquired early (Pop-Eleches and Tucker, 2017).

This does not mean that political attitudes and behaviour never change — people maintain a certain degree of lifelong openness to change, even if it is highly path-dependent (Fiorina, 1981; Alwin and Krosnick, 1991; Haegel, 2021). Exposure to new events, environments, and socialising agents — such as that experienced by migrants in destination societies — can reshape attitudes and behaviour (White et al., 2008; Wasbrun and Covert, 2017). Yet this exposure needs to be sufficiently strong and prolonged to overcome resistance to change.

For many CEE migrants, achieving the kind of exposure required for meaningful resocialisation is unlikely. Strong exposure to new norms, institutions, and networks requires

a relatively deep level of integration in host societies. Migrants face multiple economic, social, and linguistic barriers to integration, meaning that the process is slow and gradual (Portes and Zhou, 1993). For instance, a large proportion of CEE migrants move abroad without speaking the language of their host country — this severely limits exposure to the host society and their ability to integrate until they learn the language, which can take a significant amount of time. One study of Polish, Romanian, and Bulgarian migrants in the Netherlands found that more than half of the sample had little to no proficiency in Dutch (Engbersen et al., 2013). Language acquisition can take time even in the most favourable contexts — one report from the OECD (2019) highlighted that two-thirds of Romanian migrants in Italy spoke no Italian upon their arrival (though linguistic proximity allowed them to improve their skills over time). In addition, many migrants from CEE countries face socioeconomic marginality and challenges to their integration into the labour market. Multiple studies show they tend to have significantly lower earnings than native workers and be concentrated in more unstable lower skilled jobs in sectors like construction or agriculture (Pajnik, 2016; Cantalini et al., 2023). A particularly widespread issue for migrants from the region is underemployment, as many skilled workers take up lower skilled and lower paying jobs in host countries (Fernandez-Reino and Brindle, 2024; Montanari, 2025).

Even if overall integration is relatively successful, the political dimension of migrants' exposure to host societies often remains somewhat limited, particularly when compared to other aspects of social life. Without comprehensive political rights or robust mobilisation, migrants may find it challenging to engage with the civic life of their new communities, especially if they plan to eventually return home — indeed, CEE migrants have been found to lack a significant degree of political integration in destination societies, in part because many had no clear intention to settle there long term (Fanning et al., 2021). While some social norms are salient and to a certain extent enforced in everyday life, this does not always easily extend to the political sphere. Other forms of political exposure, such as through media, can easily be avoided by those without a pre-existing inclination towards such issues (Prior, 2013).

Beyond the intensity of exposure, the duration of many CEE migrants' engagement with destination societies also often proves insufficient. A limited amount of time spent in host countries will prevent significant resocialisation and also preclude high levels of integration. This is a particular issue for CEE migrants, only few of which move abroad with a clear

intention to settle there long-term (Engbersen et al., 2013). Many embrace a form of “intentional unpredictability” - migration without clear goals or timeframes that often involves moving back and forth between multiple countries in a way that is neither wholly temporary nor wholly permanent (Engbersen, 2018). Others engage in repeated patterns of short-term, circular, and seasonal migration (Okolski, 2007; Favell, 2008). Even migrants who stay in a destination country for multiple years are unlikely to have done so with a clear commitment to living there, which can undermine their incentives to integrate. In a world of online media and low-cost flights, migrants can choose to focus on maintaining links with those at home and remain relatively isolated from host societies.

Finally, some migrants will have negative experiences abroad, which are likely to lead to unfavourable comparisons between origin and destination and hence a greater resistance to adopting new norms and practices associated with the latter. On one hand, this can reflect genuine disappointment with life in host countries. Migrants are likely to have relatively high expectations of life in the West, particularly those coming from post-communist societies shaped by longstanding narratives of relative backwardness and a desire to catch up with the rest of Europe. Yet these expectations will not always be fulfilled — many established democracies have struggled in recent years with declining public services, inequality, high living costs, inefficient bureaucracies, and sociopolitical tensions. Indeed, satisfaction with democracy among the Western public is at an all-time low after years of decline (Foa et al., 2020). If migrants pick up on these frustrations, a countervailing process to that discussed earlier may emerge. Observing shortcomings in democracy at their destination can make migrants more resistant to certain democratic or participatory principles, which may reinforce their attachment to their pre-existing norms.

On the other hand, migrants can have negative experiences even if destination societies function well. This is the result of the unique challenges they face abroad — barriers to integration can make migrants struggle to adapt to their new environment and suffer from socioeconomic exclusion. This will be exacerbated by the existence of widespread discrimination against migrants — people from Eastern Europe, in particular, have been the target of negative attitudes and stereotypes across Western Europe, as their role in discourses surrounding the Brexit referendum clearly illustrates (Lewicki, 2023).

So, although exposure to established democratic societies can drive political resocialisation, the extent to which this has happened among CEE migrants is likely to be limited, at best. While these arguments go against expectations of easy absorption of new norms at destination, they are supported by the wider literature on migrant integration. Studies have repeatedly shown that while migrants do adapt to their new environment by adopting new norms and practices (Aleksynska, 2011; Dinesen, 2012; Voicu and Comsa, 2014; Dinesen and Andersen, 2022), they do so only gradually and to a limited extent. The influence of pre-migration socialisation persists even after a generation or two (Gitelman, 1982; Bilodeau et al., 2010; Bilodeau, 2014), and full assimilation remains a long-term intergenerational process (Norris and Inglehart, 2012).

3.3. Further obstacles to political remittances

In addition to the problem of limited resocialisation at destination, there are several other barriers to the successful diffusion of democratic norms through political remittances.

First, even if migrants absorb democratic norms from their hosts, their transmission back to origin countries is not guaranteed. This applies to both potential transmission channels, though the constraints are different. For the return channel, the main problem is selective return. The migrants who are most likely to return home are those who were least integrated in host societies and least attached to their host country (Engbersen et al., 2013). A strong connection between intentions to return and a lack of socio-cultural integration at destination is prevalent among CEE emigrants (Gherghina and Basaraba, 2024). Negative experiences abroad are likely to play a role in some migrants' decision not to remain there permanently. In turn, such migrants are those who are least likely to have adopted new democratic values while abroad. For the networks channel, the key barrier to transmission is insufficient exposure. This is because the friends and relatives of migrants who remain in origin countries are only exposed to new norms and practices indirectly, through repeated cross-border interactions with their contacts. While stayers encounter a curated and concentrated version of the experiences migrants have, and the latter will often actively try to transmit some of their newly acquired values, this indirect exposure may be limited in its ability to drive meaningful resocialisation. It is important to note, though, that it is not in any way obvious that one of the channels should be more likely to drive the diffusion of democratic norms than the other (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves, 2011). Exposure through the networks

channel is indirect, but migrants can have significant influence in such dynamics, and the mechanism enables those who are well integrated and may have spent long periods of time abroad to drive change despite not returning themselves. Furthermore, transmission through both channels may be limited by an incompatibility between imported norms and the sociopolitical context of origin countries. Return migrants may decide that their new norms have little applicability at home (Erdal et al., 2022) – particularly if they face significant barriers to their economic and social reintegration in origin countries, as many CEE return migrants have experienced (Melke, 2024; Grabowska et al., 2025). At the same time, the friends and relatives of emigrants who stayed behind may prove resistant to foreign values, particularly if they hold relatively traditional views (Nevinskaite, 2016).

On the other hand, the experience of migration itself has other consequences beyond just exposure to a new environment – this could affect migrants' attitudes and behaviour and thus interfere with processes of resocialisation and remitting. For instance, migrants are removed from the social networks they were embedded in at home, and mostly isolated from the media attention and campaigning efforts that surround key political events in origin countries. This could encourage demobilisation, and thus interfere with their exposure to host societies with higher levels of participation by pressing in the opposite direction. While political parties have increasingly tried to engage with diasporas, most migrants do not vote from abroad even when they have the right and conditions to do so (Jaulin, 2016; Ahmadov and Sasse, 2015; Kostelka, 2017; van Haute and Kernalegenn, 2021).

The extent of democratic diffusion through political remittances is thus likely to be limited in the region. Political attitudes and behaviours are resistant to change. For many CEE migrants, exposure will be insufficiently strong and prolonged to overcome this, or negative experiences will make them resistant to new norms and practices. Barriers to the cross-border transmission of values and other factors incidental to migration present further obstacles to democratic diffusion. In order to put these claims to an empirical test, I focus on two key hypotheses that reflect past studies of political remittances. I ask whether migration experience or the presence of friends and relatives in established democracies lead to an increase in support for democracy and political engagement, reflecting the two potential transmission mechanisms for cross-border democratic diffusion:

H1: Migration experience in established democracies has a positive effect on individuals' democratic attitudes and behaviours.

H2: Networks abroad in established democracies have a positive effect on individuals' democratic attitudes and behaviours.

4. Data and Methods

To test my hypotheses, I use a combination of three sources of data — (1) waves 2 to 10 of the European Social Survey (ESS), fielded between 2004 and 2021; (2) the 2003 and 2013 waves of the Polish household panel survey, POLPAN; and (3) the 2012 and 2018 waves of the WVS and EVS in Romania, which contained a panel component along with a country-specific module with questions related to migration.

The choice of data was motivated by two goals. First, to maximise the amount of data and leverage all available sources — data on political remittances and previous experiences of migration unfortunately remains very limited and this is a particular constraint in the CEE context. To the best of my knowledge, these three surveys remain the only ones in the region that contain variables that allow us to test for an effect of political remittances. Second, it was essential to identify — for the first time in the literature — panel data from the region which would enable a longitudinal analysis of the effect of political remittances on individual attitudes and behaviour. Previous quantitative studies of the phenomenon have been exclusively based on cross-sectional evidence, which leaves findings exposed to a significant risk of endogeneity — it has been established that migrants can hold political attitudes that are distinct from the rest of the population, and we know that people in the same social networks tend to share similar values and behavioural patterns (Huber and Malhotra, 2017; Lim, 2022). Longitudinal data is better suited to studies of attitudinal and behavioural change over time, since it allows me to account for patterns of self-selection into migration (Kapur, 2014). The choice of Poland and Romania is primarily driven by data availability rather than theoretical considerations, though the two are the largest countries in the region and offer variation in a key regard — Romania is the country in the region most affected by emigration and thus a more extreme case where effects should be maximised, whereas Poland is more representative of the regional average. When combined with cross-

national data from the ESS, my analysis should thus offer a comprehensive image of the impact of political remittances in the region.

The ESS data covers 126,873 respondents across the eleven CEE states that are members of the European Union. Coverage is uneven — while some states are included in every one of the survey waves, others are only included in some (or, in the case of Romania, a single wave). Starting with the second wave of the ESS, respondents were asked if they ever worked abroad for a period of at least six months. I found that 7,999 individuals in this sample — or 7% of those who answered the question — had previous work experience abroad. While there is no information on where these individuals spent time abroad, patterns of intra-European migration mean the vast majority of them will have gone to an established democracy in Western Europe, and I proceed by assuming this is the case for all return migrants. As expected, the percentage of return migrants in the population has increased over time and varies significantly by country, from a high of over 12% in Lithuania to a low of under 3% in Slovenia in some years (see Table A.1 in the Appendix). Unfortunately, no measure of networks abroad was ever included in the ESS, meaning that the analysis here is limited to **H1** and the corresponding return channel of political remittances.

I test for an effect of migration experience on the four variables of interest I have highlighted earlier — support for democratic norms, political interest, non-electoral participation, and turnout in national elections (full details of variable operationalisation are available in the Appendix). While questions on interest, turnout, and participation were asked across all waves, data on support for democracy is limited to the latest tenth wave of the ESS, which included relevant questions for the first time.

I use a combination of linear (for support for democracy), logistic (for interest and turnout), and Poisson (for non-electoral participation) regression models. Results are adjusted using the provided post-stratification weights. I include controls for age, gender, years of education, place of residence, church attendance, and social class (on an eight-point Oesch scale). I also control for household income, transforming the income bands included in the ESS into measures of income that are comparable across countries and waves, expressed in 2010 PPP-adjusted international dollars (see Appendix for a full explanation of how this was constructed). Fixed effects for country and survey wave were also included in all models. Across specifications, I address missing values in the data through multiple

imputation — this was implemented in R using the Amelia II program (Honaker et al., 2011). Five complete datasets were imputed using the variables included in the analysis and the results combined to account for the additional uncertainty using the rules first put forward by Rubin (1987).

The Polish data comes from the 2003 and 2013 waves of the long-running national household survey, POLPAN. The latter uniquely included questions on both migration experience and networks abroad. Respondents were asked if they went abroad to work or study in the past ten years, which I use to construct a dummy variable for migration experience. Of all 2,780 respondents in 2013, 308 had acquired migration experience since 2004 (around 14% of the total, excluding non-responses). Another question looked at whether respondents had friends, close acquaintances, or friends who had been living abroad for a long time. I create a networks abroad indicator based on this, which shows that 871 respondents had such contacts in another country (40% of those answering). While there is no information on the location of these experiences and networks, the vast majority of Polish migrants moved West within the European Union after its accession in 2004. This makes it reasonable to assume that the vast majority of networks and experiences identified in the data were acquired in established Western European democracies.

I construct a similar set of four dependent variables as the ones above, taking into account the particularities of each survey (see Appendix). I test for the effect of migration experience and networks abroad simultaneously² in the cross-section, using a combination of logistic and Poisson regression models. I control for age, gender, level of education, household income, place of residence, and church attendance, again addressing missing values using multiple imputation. Results are adjusted for representativeness using the provided weights.

The panel component of the POLPAN also allows me to test my hypotheses in a longitudinal framework, examining whether acquiring migration experience or networks abroad leads to changes in attitudes or behaviour in the same individuals over time. Of the 1699 individuals who were interviewed in 2003, 1030 were reinterviewed ten years later. While no questions

² Testing for both mechanisms simultaneously increases confidence in the findings, since there is a positive correlation between having migration experience and networks abroad. However, results are unchanged if the effect of the two channels is tested separately. This also suggests that findings in the ESS are unlikely to be driven by confounding between the two remittance channels.

regarding migration experience and networks abroad were asked in the first wave, I assume these were absent and any subsequent links to other countries were acquired between the waves, as Polish emigration only really took off after the country joined the EU in 2004. Of all respondents, 71 acquired migration experience between the two waves and 297 acquired networks abroad by 2013.

At around 40% after a decade, the attrition rate is relatively low when compared to similar international studies (for example, attrition in the ANES reached 47% in just two years between 2008 and 2010, see Si et al., 2015). However, some respondents are more likely to drop out of the survey than others, and this attrition bias can influence the resulting analysis, especially if individuals' likelihood of remaining in the sample is related to the migration process and its potential impact. To address this bias, I use inverse probability weighting (Wooldridge, 2002) — using the full first wave of the survey, I regress an attrition dummy on a range of socio-economic variables including age, gender, education, household income, place of residence and church attendance, as well as the political variables of interest — support for democracy, political interest, and electoral turnout (questions on non-electoral participation were not asked before 2013, and this variable is hence excluded from the longitudinal analysis). I then create weights for each individual based on the inverse of their predicted probability of dropping out of the sample, which I use in the longitudinal analysis.

I use individual fixed effects models to test for the effect of migration experience and networks abroad on the three attitudes and behaviours of interest. Fixed effects allow me to account for confounding variables that are time invariant, and hence any patterns of self-selection into migration by respondents or their close friends or relatives. Running such models is relatively straightforward in the linear case, where the variables can be demeaned using the within transformation. However, the process does not easily translate to non-linear contexts because of the use of link functions in estimating these models (Stamman et al., 2016). An obvious alternative is the use of dummy variables, with one included in the models for each individual in the sample. Yet this introduces another potential threat to inference, the incidental parameters problem first highlighted by Neyman and Scott (1948). Research shows that, when introducing a large number of non-structural parameters in a panel analysis with a small and fixed number of time periods — here, just two — both the estimated coefficients and their standard errors can become biased (Lancaster, 2000). Linear and

Poisson models are spared from the IPP (Wooldridge, 1999; Fernandez-Val and Weidner, 2016). However, the IPP is a serious issue for binary outcome models like logistic regression (Greene, 2015). In these cases — which in the case of POLPAN includes all three variables analysed — I follow the solution first put forward by Chamberlain (1980) and estimate models using conditional logit. I control for household income across the waves to account for the possibility that any observed effects are driven by changes in the material situation of households. I also include controls for education, place of residence, and church attendance to account for any variation — however, since fixed effects models produce estimates based on within-individual changes and these changes will be minimal or non-existent for most respondents, estimates for these are highly unreliable and on occasion cannot be produced. I also include a dummy variable for the second wave to account for time effects.

The third source of data I use to test my hypotheses is the Romanian EVS/WVS waves conducted in 2012 and 2018³. Two aspects make these data uniquely suited to this investigation. One, both waves included a country-specific module of questions related to migration, including detailed information on respondents' migration experiences and the presence of any friends or relatives in other countries. Individuals were asked if they ever lived abroad for reasons except tourism or medical care, which I use to create a migration experience indicator. Unlike the previous two datasets, there is also information on the countries that returnees previously lived in, meaning I only count individuals whose migration experience was acquired in older, established democracies⁴. Of 2871 respondents in the 2018, I find that 278 had past migration experience in an established democracy. Similarly, I create a networks abroad dummy based on respondents' answer to being asked if, among the friends and relatives they talk to, there are any who live or have lived abroad for at least a month. Again, I only include those with friends or relatives in an established democracy, which leaves 1185 respondents with networks abroad.

Two, the WVS survey contained a panel component, whereby 561 of the 1257 respondents from the 2012 wave were reinterviewed after six years. Of these, 29 acquired migration

³ The 2012 wave refers only to the WVS. In 2018, Romania conducted both the WVS and EVS as separate surveys with very similar questionnaires. I pool both of these to create the 2018 wave for the cross-sectional analysis.

⁴ I include the 15 original Member States of the EU, along with Switzerland, Iceland, Norway, the US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

experience in an established democracy between the waves and 88 acquired networks abroad. Attrition, which stood at 55%, is again addressed using inverse propensity weighting, as described for the Polish data.

In both the cross-section and the panel, I test for the effect of migration experience and networks abroad on the four key variables of interest. Unfortunately, there is no explicit measure of past turnout in the EVS/WVS — individuals are instead asked if they generally, sometimes, or never take part in national elections. I dichotomise this to create an indicator for those saying they always vote (see Appendix). However, this measure of turnout is flawed and likely to aggravate the social desirability bias associated with self-reports of turnout (Holbrook and Krosnick, 2010). Additional measurement bias is introduced, which may obscure the effects of other variables on turnout.

I use a combination of linear, logistic, and Poisson regression models in the cross-sectional analysis, controlling for age, gender, education, place of residence, and church attendance. In the absence of income data, I control for life satisfaction as a proxy of experienced utility, as well as respondents' satisfaction with their household financial situation. The longitudinal analysis uses the same covariates and includes individual fixed effects to account for time-invariant factors. As explained above, I use a combination of linear, Poisson, and conditional logit models in order to avoid bias related to the IPP. Multiple imputation is used to address missing values as for the other datasets.

5. Results

The results of the cross-sectional analysis of ESS data are shown in Table 1 below. The controls behave largely as expected, though their explanatory power is limited with regard to political interest. Gender, age, education, and income all have strong and significant effects. Women are less supportive of democracy and less likely to participate in politics than men. Older respondents are more likely to be interested in politics and vote in national elections, though they are less likely to engage in non-electoral forms of participation. People with more years of education are more supportive of democracy and more likely to participate, both electorally and non-electorally. The same applies to people with higher household incomes. The additional effects of class are relatively muted. Where people live also influences their attitudes and behaviour, with those outside large cities being less

supportive of democracy but more likely to vote. Finally, regular church attendance increases political interest and participation, while those born abroad are less likely to participate in politics.

Table 1. Effect of migration experience on democratic attitudes and political participation, European Social Survey, 2006-21

| | Support for democracy | Political Interest | Non-electoral participation | Turnout |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| Migration Experience | 0.019 (0.078) | 0.011 (0.605) | 0.12*** (0.026) | -0.376*** (0.029) |
| Age | 0.004*** (0.001) | 0.001 (0.359) | -0.002*** (0.001) | 0.031*** (0.001) |
| Gender (female) | -0.151*** (0.041) | 0.012 (0.864) | -0.182*** (0.015) | -0.101*** (0.017) |
| Years of education | 0.063*** (0.007) | 0.001 (0.326) | 0.092*** (0.002) | 0.111*** (0.003) |
| Household income (log) | 0.292*** (0.034) | 0.002 (0.801) | 0.138*** (0.013) | 0.229*** (0.013) |
| Class: small business owner | -0.013 (0.14) | -0.004 (0.423) | -0.053 (0.046) | -0.068 (0.085) |
| Class: tehcnical (semi-)professional | -0.035 (0.141) | 0.036 (0.825) | -0.179*** (0.051) | -0.015 (0.088) |
| Class: production worker | -0.311* (0.124) | 0.004 (0.437) | -0.399*** (0.046) | -0.277** (0.088) |
| Class: manager | 0.065 (0.131) | -0.024 (0.665) | -0.047 (0.041) | 0.183 (0.097) |
| Class: clerk | -0.027 (0.135) | -0.011 (0.415) | -0.168*** (0.05) | -0.01 (0.088) |
| Class: socio-cultural professional | -0.056 (0.141) | -0.039 (0.864) | -0.068 (0.044) | 0.024 (0.101) |
| Class: service worker | -0.198 (0.126) | 0.003 (0.433) | -0.25*** (0.048) | -0.172 (0.09) |
| Residence: suburbs/outskirts | -0.176 (0.093) | -0.015 (0.493) | 0.115*** (0.027) | 0.18*** (0.037) |
| Residence: town/small city | -0.228*** (0.05) | -0.03 (1.693) | -0.043* (0.017) | 0.103*** (0.02) |
| Residence: village | -0.279*** (0.052) | -0.031 (1.714) | -0.14*** (0.019) | 0.242*** (0.021) |
| Residence: farm/countryside | -0.504*** (0.146) | -0.073 (1.661) | -0.017 (0.047) | 0.145** (0.05) |
| Church Attendance (regularly) | -0.166** (0.058) | 0.017 (0.858) | 0.102*** (0.023) | 0.429*** (0.024) |
| Born abroad | 0.05 (0.099) | 0.04 (1.357) | -0.167*** (0.034) | -0.556*** (0.035) |
| Intercept | -0.549 (0.307) | -0.716 (6.888) | -3.039*** (0.124) | -3.17*** (0.126) |
| N | 17,594 | 126,873 | 126,873 | 126,873 |
| Model | Linear | Binomial | Poisson | Binomial |

Note: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

The effects of migration experience are mixed. On one hand, the attitudes of return migrants in Central and Eastern European countries are indistinguishable from the rest of the population, with no meaningful differences in terms of support for democracy or political interest. On the other hand, previous experience of working abroad does seem to affect individuals' levels of political participation, albeit in a more nuanced way than that predicted by the diffusion thesis. While migration experience increases levels of non-electoral participation, return migrants are less likely to turn out to vote in national elections compared to their counterparts who never left. The effects are not only highly statistically significant

but also meaningful in absolute size. My models estimate that, all else equal, someone with migration experience has 27% lower odds of turning out to vote and an expected count of non-electoral participation forms that is 11% higher.

These findings are robust to the exclusion of specific covariates from the models and do not depend on the inclusion of particular countries or survey waves in the analysis. That said, as discussed above, they are exposed to potential endogeneity. Previous research has established that those who move abroad can hold political attitudes that are different from the rest of the population, and have different participation patterns, and these differences may not be fully accounted by the socio-economic controls included in the regressions. The use of longitudinal data and individual fixed effects models in the Polish and Romanian data below helps address these concerns and can validate the initial cross-sectional findings from the ESS.

Table 2. Effect of migration experience and networks abroad on democratic attitudes and political participation, Poland, POLPAN 2003-13

| | Turnout | | Support for democracy | | Political interest | | Non-electoral participation |
|-----------------------------|-----------|---------|-----------------------|-----------|--------------------|---------|-----------------------------|
| | Cross | Panel | Cross | Panel | Cross | Panel | Cross |
| Migration Experience | -0.355* | -0.238* | -0.028 | 0.284 | -0.324 | -0.066 | 0.03 |
| | (0.151) | (0.119) | (0.13) | (0.165) | (0.203) | (0.293) | (0.13) |
| Networks Abroad | 0.135 | 0.032 | 0.105 | -0.122 | 0.214 | 0.052 | 0.387*** |
| | (0.123) | (0.064) | (0.089) | (0.085) | (0.147) | (0.171) | (0.088) |
| Age | 0.023*** | | -0.004 | | 0.038*** | | -0.002 |
| | (0.003) | | (0.004) | | (0.004) | | (0.003) |
| Gender (female) | -0.42*** | | -0.167 | | -1.15*** | | -0.15 |
| | (0.102) | | (0.09) | | (0.135) | | (0.089) |
| Education (mid) | 0.639*** | 1.09 | 0.435*** | 14.188 | 0.526** | -0.467 | 0.663*** |
| | (0.111) | (0.713) | (0.11) | (734.979) | (0.172) | (0.322) | (0.135) |
| Education (high) | 1.449*** | 1.208 | 0.967*** | 14.327 | 1.184*** | | 1.192*** |
| | (0.17) | (0.732) | (0.133) | (734.979) | (0.205) | | (0.146) |
| Residence (mid) | 0.253* | -0.037 | 0.23* | 0.06 | 0.168 | -0.856* | 0.04 |
| | (0.12) | (0.165) | (0.108) | (0.194) | (0.156) | (0.354) | (0.117) |
| Residence (high) | 0.294* | -0.229 | 0.123 | 0.063 | 0.202 | -0.625 | 0.269* |
| | (0.142) | (0.228) | (0.13) | (0.264) | (0.165) | (0.395) | (0.122) |
| Church Attendance (monthly) | 0.401* | 0.009 | 0.138 | -0.088 | -0.137 | -0.337 | -0.441** |
| | (0.17) | (0.109) | (0.146) | (0.143) | (0.198) | (0.255) | (0.139) |
| Church Attendance (weekly) | 1.064*** | 0.058 | 0.264 | 0.121 | -0.248 | -0.259 | -0.342** |
| | (0.194) | (0.113) | (0.147) | (0.168) | (0.215) | (0.259) | (0.127) |
| Household Income | 0.331*** | 0.045 | 0.413*** | 0.044 | 0.515*** | 0.024 | 0.244** |
| | (0.079) | (0.048) | (0.088) | (0.067) | (0.123) | (0.111) | (0.09) |
| Year (2013) | | -0.085* | | 0.005 | | -0.09 | |
| | | (0.043) | | (0.076) | | (0.099) | |
| Intercept | -3.418*** | | -3.822*** | | -6.941*** | | -3.914*** |
| | (0.687) | | (0.76) | | (1.07) | | (0.798) |
| N | 2,780 | 1,030 | 2,780 | 1,030 | 2,780 | 1,030 | 2,780 |

Note: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Data from the 2003-13 Polish sample largely confirms findings from the ESS when it comes to the effects of migration experience, as well as those of the socio-economic controls⁵. As in the cross-national analysis, I find no effect of migration experience on support for democracy or political interest. The Polish panel data also confirms that return migrants become less likely to vote in national elections after living abroad. Not only are individuals with migration experience less likely to vote than those who never left, but the same individuals become less likely to vote in the ten years between 2003 and 2013 if they spent a period of time living in another country. However, the earlier finding of a positive link between migration experience and non-electoral participation is not replicated in the POLPAN cross-section for 2013 (questions on non-electoral participation were not asked in 2003, preventing a longitudinal test here).

There is some evidence that social remittances drive an increase in non-electoral participation in Poland, though here it is through the networks channel rather than the return one — in the cross-sectional data for 2013, networks abroad have a positive and significant effect on non-electoral participation. Yet there is little evidence of democratic diffusion through the networks channel beyond this effect. Poles with friends or relatives in other countries are not any different from the rest of the population when it comes to electoral turnout, support for democracy, or political interest. Indeed, the negative effect on voting seems to be limited to those with direct previous experience of migration and not extend to those with friends or relatives abroad — which may indicate that the effect is driven by factors specific to migrants rather than the diffusion of any norms or practices across borders.

The last set of results, from the Romanian data for 2012-18, also reveals mixed patterns. Looking at the effects of migration experience, the data confirm that the attitudes of return migrants are similar to the rest of the population, with no effects on support for democracy or political interest. I do find a positive effect on non-electoral participation, though this is only visible in the panel and not the cross-section. However, contrary to the other sources of data, I find no effect on turnout. While this may indicate the substantive lack of a negative effect in the Romanian case — for reasons that relate to specific political or migratory

⁵ Note that the estimates for demographic controls are uninformative when it comes to the fixed effects longitudinal models, since the models only estimate effects based on within-individual changes, which are minimal for key variables like education; these are nonetheless included to account for any changes.

Table 3. Effect of migration experience and networks abroad on democratic attitudes and political participation, Romania, WVS/EVS 2012-18

| | Turnout | | Support for democracy | | Political interest | | Non-electoral participation | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|
| | Cross | Panel | Cross | Panel | Cross | Panel | Cross | Panel |
| Migration Experience | -0.02 (0.121) | -0.162 (0.274) | 0.025 (0.156) | 0.434 (0.607) | 0.042 (0.128) | 0.225 (0.335) | 0.019 (0.101) | 0.845* (0.429) |
| Networks Abroad | 0.056 (0.09) | -0.052 (0.094) | 0.529*** (0.107) | 0.183 (0.225) | 0.388*** (0.092) | 0.117 (0.129) | 0.404*** (0.075) | 0.428* (0.193) |
| Age | 0.031*** (0.003) | 0.022 (0.033) | 0.019*** (0.003) | -0.01 (0.058) | 0.018*** (0.003) | -0.016 (0.032) | -0.006** (0.002) | -0.63 (0.347) |
| Gender (female) | 0.032 (0.083) | | -0.165 (0.105) | | -0.727*** (0.087) | | -0.119 (0.073) | |
| Education (mid) | 0.067 (0.095) | 0.003 (0.144) | 0.776*** (0.119) | 0.536 (0.35) | 0.537*** (0.1) | 0.396 (0.219) | 0.389*** (0.089) | 0.128 (0.414) |
| Education (high) | 0.367** (0.125) | 0.003 (0.241) | 1.571*** (0.155) | 0.43 (0.57) | 0.671*** (0.133) | 0.313 (0.364) | 0.819*** (0.099) | 0.446 (0.54) |
| Rural | 0.239** (0.084) | | -0.381*** (0.106) | 0.216 (2.404) | 0.246** (0.09) | | -0.219** (0.077) | 8.5 (4.725) |
| Church Attendance (monthly) | 0.345** (0.109) | -0.011 (0.119) | 0.194 (0.138) | 0.653* (0.284) | 0.141 (0.118) | 0.052 (0.171) | -0.139 (0.089) | 0.615** (0.238) |
| Church Attendance (weekly) | 0.182 (0.119) | 0.086 (0.131) | -0.335* (0.156) | 0.761* (0.327) | 0.251 (0.129) | -0.046 (0.188) | -0.164 (0.106) | 0.837** (0.303) |
| Life Satisfaction | 0.066* (0.029) | 0.003 (0.022) | 0.012 (0.031) | -0.026 (0.06) | 0.04 (0.031) | 0.022 (0.032) | 0.031 (0.028) | -0.056 (0.055) |
| Financial Satisfaction | 0.026 (0.032) | 0.011 (0.02) | 0.025 (0.035) | -0.035 (0.053) | -0.07 (0.036) | 0.004 (0.031) | 0.022 (0.034) | 0.176*** (0.043) |
| Year (2018) | | -0.244 (0.187) | | -0.533 (0.331) | | -0.167 (0.184) | | 2.737 (1.744) |
| Survey (EVS) | -0.254** (0.083) | | 0.071 (0.103) | | 0.166 (0.089) | | 0.063 (0.073) | |
| Intercept | -2.396*** (0.32) | | 0.924* (0.389) | 2.797 (4.447) | -1.571*** (0.336) | | -1.337*** (0.291) | 21.151 (12.952) |
| N | 2,871 | 561 | 2,871 | 561 | 2,871 | 561 | 2,871 | 561 |

Note: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

dynamics in the country — it is likely that the way turnout is measured in this survey played a significant role. The EVS/WVS is unique in that it does not ask respondents about their participation in the last round of national elections but instead poses a more abstract question about their general voting patterns — whether they always, sometimes, or never vote in national elections. This question is likely to aggravate the social desirability bias associated with self-reports of turnout, and create significant measurement error. In effect, these results reveal that migration experience has no impact on individuals' likelihood to say they generally always vote in national elections, and say little about their actual behaviour at the time of the last election.

The Romanian analysis confirms that having networks abroad in an established democracy leads to an increase in non-electoral participation, as indicated by the Polish cross-section. I find a positive and statistically significant effect of networks abroad on participation in both the cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses, which shows that individuals with contacts abroad are more likely to participate in activities like public demonstrations and that those

who acquired networks abroad between 2012 and 2018 subsequently became more likely to participate. Beyond increasing non-electoral participation, there is very mixed evidence for democratic diffusion through the networks channel here. As before, I find no changes in terms of electoral turnout, with those with friends and family abroad no more or less likely to vote than the rest of the population. I do find, however, that Romanians with friends and relatives abroad are, on average, more supportive of democracy and more interested in politics than other citizens, with a positive and significant effects of networks abroad on these two variables in the cross-sections. The effects fail to achieve statistical significance in the panel analysis, though the estimates remain positive. This may indicate that the effects found in the cross-section are at least partly driven by endogeneity rather than any cross-border transmission of democratic norms. Yet it is also possible that value transmission occurs, as indicated by the cross-section, but is relatively small and/or takes a relatively long time to take hold, making it difficult to observe significant effects in the six year period that elapsed between the two waves of the survey.

Several conclusions come out of the empirical analysis. First, there is solid evidence that political remittances led to an increase in non-electoral participation in Central and Eastern European origin countries. This is particularly the case for the networks channel, where all the available evidence — the Polish cross-section, as well as the Romanian panel and cross-section — points to a positive and highly significant effect. There is also evidence of an increase in non-electoral participation through the return channel, indicated by the ESS cross-sections as well as the Romanian panel. That said, I found no significant effects of migration experience in either the Romanian or the Polish cross-sections. It is unclear what drives these mixed results. Looking at the Romanian case in particular, the data suggest that return migrants become more likely to participate after spending time abroad, yet they are on average not any more likely to participate than the rest of the population — which may suggest a combination of relatively small effect sizes, and complex patterns of self-selection into both migration and subsequent return.

Second, contrary to predictions of democratic diffusion, migration experience leads to a decrease in electoral turnout among returnees. The effect is confirmed by the cross-national and Polish data, including the longitudinal analysis for the latter. While this is not replicated in the Romanian data, this is likely due to differences in operationalisation and measurement

issues, rather than indicative of an inconsistent effect across countries. I found no evidence of an effect of networks abroad on turnout in either direction.

Third and finally, there is very limited evidence that political remittances drive attitudinal changes in democratic values or political interest. I found no effect of migration experience in any of the data I analysed. The results for networks abroad were more mixed. Although no effects were found in the Polish data or the Romanian panel, I did find some positive effects of networks abroad in the Romanian cross-section. This may indicate that a certain degree of value transmission is occurring, yet the effects are highly uncertain. Even if they are substantive, they are likely to be quite small and/or take a long time to make themselves felt, as indicated by a lack of change between the two waves of the panel.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Two main questions remain when interpreting the results above. First, why do political remittances drive an increase in non-electoral participation, but fail to positively affect the other dimensions considered in the analysis? More data is needed to definitively answer this, though my theoretical framework suggests a combination of two factors. One is stronger exposure. As described earlier, exposure to host societies occurs at different levels — during everyday life, through interactions with host society institutions, and as a result of social connections that migrants develop abroad. Exposure to certain new norms and practices will vary across these levels, and is likely to be easier to acquire for some than others. In the case of non-electoral participation, migrants may be more likely to observe such practices in the course of their everyday life. For instance, it is hard to avoid noticing significant local events such as public demonstrations and strikes, even for migrants who are not meaningfully integrated in host societies. People can also encounter transferrable principles of grassroots initiative and participation in their jobs. This is not the case for the other norms analysed here. Attitudes towards democracy, political interest, and electoral behaviour are more explicitly political in nature — meaning migrants may be less likely to encounter related norms in their everyday lives. Qualitative studies of CEE migrants have already shown that relatively few integrate politically in destination countries (Fanning et al., 2021). Exposure to political norms and practices will be very limited for migrants who only have minimal contact with government institutions, public services, or native citizens, particularly if they spend only limited amounts of time at destination. Migrants without any

preexisting affinity to politics may fail to register developments and avoid discussing them — which is more difficult for some highly salient forms of non-electoral participation. The second factor is easier resocialisation. While the variables included in this analysis are all resistant to change, some are likely less so than others. Attitudes like political interest have been shown to be relatively stable over the life course, and are very difficult to change in adulthood (Prior, 2019). In contrast, non-electoral participation is more responsive to political events and external influences, despite being still influenced by early socialisation over the long term (Schussman and Soule, 2005). This means that less exposure to host societies is likely to be required for migrants to change their own behaviour — making a degree of resocialisation more likely to occur. A combination of more exposure and easier resocialisation is thus likely to explain why political remittances drive an increase in non-electoral participation but not in any of the other variables under consideration.

Second, why do return migrants become less likely to vote after living abroad? The lack of a positive effect is fairly easy to explain through a lack of exposure and resocialisation. Migrants generally do not have the right to vote at destination, and are hence mostly excluded from the political discussions and mobilisation efforts that surround elections. Yet the effects of migration experience are significant in the opposite direction. My theoretical framework again indicates a possible explanation, though more granular data on migrants will be needed to definitively establish mechanisms. As I point out above, the experience of being a migrant can influence attitudes and behaviours beyond just the effect of exposure to a new environment. Other factors incidental to migration are likely to play a role, with a degree of demobilisation among them. Migrants are disconnected from much of their social networks in origin countries, and removed from the national campaign and information efforts of parties and other organisations, which may have lasting effects. CEE political parties have increasingly developed infrastructure and mobilisation strategies aimed at diaspora voters (Ostergaard-Nielsen and Ciornei, 2019; Borz, 2020), though these remain much more limited than similar efforts in countries of origin. Although CEE countries now tend to allow migrants to vote from abroad and make it relatively easy to do so, very few migrants actually turn out (Kostelka, 2017; Szulecki et al., 2023). The literature often sees voting as a self-reinforcing habit where past behaviour is the best predictor of future participation (Franklin et al., 2004; Smets and van Ham, 2013). Missing one or more elections while abroad can thus become a cycle that continues to influence migrants even after they return home.

My overall conclusions about the extent of democratic diffusion in Central and Eastern Europe are two-fold. On one hand, my findings offer some of the most solid evidence available that a certain degree of diffusion does occur — political remittances drive an increase in non-electoral participation in origin countries. This is an important result, and somewhat encouraging for democracies that experience significant emigration. Participation in protests and other forms of non-electoral participation play an essential role in democratic systems — they safeguard government accountability, and research has shown that they can contribute to the collapse of autocratic regimes as well as serve as a check on executive overreach and potential institutional backsliding (Escribà-Folch et al., 2022; Blackington et al., 2024). In fact, the CEE region offers several recent examples of how protest movements in which former migrants and the diaspora played a key role can push back against executive aggrandisement — perhaps most notably in Romania during a wave of anti-governmental protests in 2017-18 (Gubernat and Rammelt, 2021) but also in Bulgaria and beyond (Rone and Junes, 2021).

On the other hand, my findings reveal that the extent of democratic diffusion through political remittances has been narrow and limited in the CEE region. There is little to no evidence that migration has significantly contributed to the consolidation of democracy at the mass level in Central and Eastern Europe, or helped bridge the region's longstanding democratic deficit. This partly contradicts, and may be somewhat counterintuitive from the perspective of some previous studies on political remittances (e.g. Careja and Emmenegger, 2012). However, my findings are in line with much of the broader literature on migration from the region and beyond. Studies looking at the socio-political and attitudinal integration of migrants in destination societies have repeatedly emphasised that there are significant barriers to integration and resocialisation, and that full acculturation can take a very long period of time (Norris and Inglehart, 2012; Engbersen et al., 2013; Fanning et al., 2021). A growing literature on return migration to CEE countries has also emphasised how returnees tend to be negatively selected among those least integrated at destination (Gherghina and Basaraba, 2024), and how they face major barriers to their reintegration in origin countries which can limit their ability to transfer new norms and practices (White, 2014; Melke, 2024; Grabowska et al., 2025).

A lack of meaningful democratic diffusion means that political remittances are unable to inoculate citizens against the attraction of populist elites with autocratic tendencies. Since remittances do not increase levels of support for democracy or political interest, they also cannot help address an overall disengagement of citizens from their political system. Perhaps more concerning, migration can actually contribute to disengagement from politics by leading to a decrease in voting among returnees. This raises issues of democratic legitimacy and representation. It also severely constrains the positive impact of higher non-electoral participation — the extent to which citizens can act as a check against abuses of power from outside the system and without participating in elections is limited at best. People cannot meaningfully shape the direction of their state and support democratic actors in acquiring and maintaining power without electoral engagement.

Coming back to the overall effect of emigration on democracies in Central and Eastern Europe, my conclusions are somewhat pessimistic. The positive effects claimed by the democratic diffusion thesis are small and come with unexpected tradeoffs between different forms of participation. An increase in non-electoral participation is welcome but unlikely to outweigh and counteract the other negative effects of migration — the decrease in turnout identified here, but also the political brain drain, rising anxieties and growing populist support that have been highlighted by previous studies (Lim, 2022). On the whole and despite some important nuance, migration seems more likely to have hampered rather than supported young democracies in the region.

My findings also have important implications for the literature on democratic diffusion and political remittances. One, the process is very complex and faces multiple barriers that have received insufficient attention. The lack of significant diffusion in my results — in what was in many ways an ideal context to observe it — indicates that the previous literature may have been overly optimistic about the potential for cross-border transmission of norms. Studies need to better consider the political resocialisation process that underpins remittances, and the extent to which exposure to host societies can overcome resistance to change. Two, there is wide variation between different attitudes and behaviours with regard to their potential for cross-border transmission through political remittances. Though I discovered a significant increase in non-electoral participation, this did not extend to the other variables in the analysis — a pattern of mixed results that mostly parallels previous studies. More work is needed to unpack the black box of exposure to host societies, and

how this exposure interacts with processes of political (re)socialisation. Three, other factors related to migration also influence the attitudes and behaviour of migrants, and hence what is transmitted across borders. The decrease in turnout among returnees in my results suggests that demobilisation and a breaking of voting habits play an important role. Analyses of political remittances need to better account for these and other factors, and seek to advance our understanding of how they interact with the exposure of migrants to host societies.

My work points to several directions for future research. By far the biggest constraint on quantitative studies of political remittances remains the availability of better and more granular data. More information is needed to understand the mechanisms behind remitting, which barriers to democratic diffusion are most significant, what the content of migrants' exposure to host societies is, and how their experiences at destination interact with their attitudes and behaviours. To build on the findings in this paper and answer the questions it has raised — including the two discussed in this section — new data are needed that track the experiences of migrants, ideally over time and while they remain abroad. In addition, scholars should seek to understand the extent to which my findings generalise outside the CEE context. Many of the factors preventing democratic diffusion here — limited resocialisation, insufficient exposure, negative experiences abroad — are universally applicable and hence likely to apply to migrants from other parts of the world. Yet it remains possible that the context of European free movement may have also played a role, since it offers individuals limited incentives to move permanently or integrate deeply into host societies. More longitudinal data are required to reevaluate results from other sending regions and increase confidence in such findings relative to the ones offered in this paper. Ideally, comparative data would allow us to contrast the experiences and attitudes of migrants from different areas of the world at the same time. Finally, studies should further develop our understanding of the effects of migration on countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Many important questions remain unanswered, including on how migration has shaped electoral competition at different levels or how it has influenced the political economy of the region. Building on this growing literature should enable us, in time, to have a comprehensive view of how a wide range of mechanisms related to migration have shaped origin countries in the region and their development. The political effects of migration are complicated and often more nuanced than they initially seem, and more evidence is needed to fully illuminate them.

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8. Appendix

Description of how the household income variable was created for the ESS

Following Rueda (2018), I build a comparable measure of household income based on the following question: “Using this card, if you add up the income from all sources, which letter describes your household’s total net income?”. In the first three waves of the ESS, respondents were shown a card with 12 income categories of different ranges. Later surveys showed respondents 10 different income categories corresponding to the deciles of each country’s income distribution. Such information cannot be directly used in the analysis, since the income bands cover very different ranges across countries and years. To address this, I first transform the ESS monthly income bands into their midpoints. For example, an income in the ‘less than 4,500 Kč’ band becomes 2,250 Kč, and one in the ‘1,801€ to 2,400€ band becomes 2,100€. To code the top income bands, which inherently lack an upper limit, I use the formula first suggested by Hout (2004), and extrapolate from the next-to-last category’s midpoint using the frequencies of the last two income categories. Different countries use different currencies and even regardless of that the purchasing power of a certain income varies across contexts. I therefore convert Euros and other national currencies into 2010 PPP-adjusted international dollars.

Table A.1. Share of respondents who worked abroad for at least 6 months, ESS

| | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|-----------|------|-------|------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Bulgaria | - | 4.5% | 4.7% | 5.5% | 5.8% | - | - | 4% | 8.3% |
| Czechia | 5.7% | - | 6.6% | 5.6% | 5.3% | 5.8% | 6% | 8.9% | 6.1% |
| Estonia | 6.9% | 9.5% | 8.3% | 8.5% | 7.2% | 8.6% | 10% | 10.5% | 9.5% |
| Croatia | - | - | 6.3% | 4.3% | - | - | - | 7.3% | 6.2% |
| Hungary | 2.5% | 2.8% | 4.8% | 5.3% | 5.4% | 4.1% | 4.6% | 6% | 5.6% |
| Lithuania | - | - | - | 6.5% | 7.2% | 11.5% | 12.5% | 12.2% | 11.2% |
| Latvia | - | - | 6% | - | - | - | - | 9.5% | 9.1% |
| Poland | 6.8% | 6.1% | 6.8% | 8.7% | 9.5% | 8.4% | 8.8% | 10.3% | 9.3% |
| Romania | - | - | 5.3% | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Slovenia | 4% | 4.2% | 3.6% | 2.6% | 2.6% | 3.5% | 5.6% | 5.9% | 5.6% |
| Slovakia | 6.5% | 10.8% | 8.1% | 7% | 11% | - | - | 9.8% | 9.9% |

Table A.2. Dependent variable operationalisation

| | ESS | WVS/EVS | POLPAN |
|-----------------------------|---|---|--|
| Support for democracy | Index from -5 to 5, made up of two questions which are subtracted from each other, with the result divided by 2: “How important is it for you to live in a country that is governed democratically?” and “How acceptable would it be for [country] to have a leader who is above the law?”. Both are measured on a 0-10 scale. Only available in wave 10. | Index from -6 to 6, based on four questions: how important is living in a democracy, how good would it be for [country] to have a democratic political system, to have a leader who does not have to bother with parliament and election, and to have a military regime”. All four items are standardised on a 0 to 3 scale. The sum of the last two is subtracted from the sum of the first two. | Binary indicator. Based on the question “For people like you (1) democracy is always the best form of government, (2) non-democratic government is sometimes better, or (3) there is no difference between the two?”. Only the first response is coded as 1. |
| Political Interest | Binary indicator. Based on the question “How interested would you say you are in politics?”. This is measured on a 4-point Likert scale. “Quite interested” and “Very interested” are recorded as 1. | Binary indicator. Based on the question “How interested would you say you are in politics?”. This is measured on a 4-point Likert scale. “Somewhat interested” and “Very interested” are recorded as 1. | Binary indicator. Based on the question “To what extent are you interested in politics?”. This is measured on a 5-point Likert scale. “To a very high extent” and “To a high extent” are recorded as 1. |
| Non-electoral Participation | Count variable from 0 to 5, measuring how many activities respondent has engaged in over the past 12 months. These included participating in a lawful demonstration, signing a petition, contacting a politician or government official, wearing or displaying a campaign badge, and boycotting certain products. | Count variable from 0 to 4, measuring how many activities respondents have ever engaged in. These included participating in lawful demonstrations, boycotts, or strikes, and signing a petition. | Count variable from 0 to 3, measuring how many of three activities respondents had engaged in over the last 12 months - participating in a public demonstration, signing any petitions or open letter, been in other way active in public or social affairs. Only included in 2013 wave. |
| Turnout | Binary indicator. Based on the question asking if respondents voted in the country’s last national election. | Binary indicator. Based on the question asking respondents if they always, usually, or never take part in national elections. Only the ‘always’ answer is recorded as a 1. | Binary indicator. Based on the question asking if respondents voted in the most recent Polish parliamentary election. |

Chapter 4. Emigration and redistribution in Central and Eastern Europe: a micro-level perspective

Abstract. How does emigration affect redistribution preferences in countries of origin, and thus their wider political economy? Looking at Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries that experienced wide-scale emigration in recent decades, this paper argues that it increases demand for redistribution among individuals, particularly those with higher incomes. Emigration leads to a decline in local services and skill shortages in the labour market. These consequences increase the non-pocketbook material benefits from redistribution — those unrelated to the direct effect of taxes and transfers — that individuals expect and make them more likely to express support for such policies. The effect is concentrated among higher-earning individuals, who are more responsive to non-pocketbook concerns in the medium and long run. Using European Social Survey data on over 100,000 respondents from 10 CEE countries between 2002 and 2020, I find strong support for my hypotheses. Regional emigration rates have a strong and highly significant positive effect on individual support for redistribution. This effect is mediated by income and concentrated among high earners.

1. Introduction

How does migration affect preferences for redistribution in countries of origin, and thus the wider political economy of such states? The case of Central and Eastern Europe is particularly interesting. On one hand, countries in the region have experienced an unprecedented wave of emigration in the last two decades, particularly after their accession to the European Union. Millions of their citizens — up to a quarter of the working-age population, in the most extreme case of Romania — took advantage of free movement rights in order to move abroad (Okolski, 2007; Atoyan et al., 2016). On the other hand, people in the region still hold distinct attitudes, even three decades after the fall of communism (Fuchs-Schundeln and Schundeln, 2020). The egalitarian legacy of previous regimes means they remain significantly more supportive of redistribution and state intervention than their Western counterparts (Alesina and Fuchs-Schundeln, 2007; Auspurg et al., 2019). The potential impact of migration could thus be particularly relevant, helping narrow these longstanding differences in attitudes or pushing them further apart.

Much of the literature points towards the former effect. Such arguments focus on the role of remittances — migration leads to flows of money from migrants to their relatives back home, which increase their income and act as insurance against economic shocks, thus reducing demand for government intervention. This can then influence electoral choices and thereby policy decisions, leading to lower levels of social spending and redistribution (Doyle, 2015). Migration is generally seen as constraining the growth of welfare states in countries of origin (Ahmed, 2012).

Yet it is not clear that these mechanisms accurately describe the impact of recent migration from CEE states. A recent study showed that higher emigration was associated with more redistribution and spending in the region, not less — though it remains unclear what may be driving these overall effects (Petrova and Sznajder Lee, 2024). The impact of remittances may also be more ambiguous than previously described (Meseguer et al., 2016). It is likely to depend on economic context, particularly the historical stability of money flows (Acevedo, 2020). Several characteristics of the CEE region may also affect how remittances, and migration more generally, influence preferences — its states are more developed and democratic than many other countries of origin, they share relatively advanced welfare systems and legacies about the role of the state, and the recent wave of

emigration they experienced has been unusually rapid and widespread (Haggard and Kaufman, 2008; Engbersen et al., 2013; Kuitto, 2016; Pop-Eleches and Tucker, 2017).

This paper thus aims to fill some these gaps in our knowledge, examining the effect of emigration on preferences for redistribution in Central and Eastern Europe. I argue that emigration leads to more demand for redistribution in origin countries by increasing the expected benefits from redistributive policies. Areas that experience high emigration suffer two highly visible consequences — a decline of local services, both public and private, and significant skill shortages in the labour market (Kaminska and Kahancova, 2011; Dancygier et al., 2024). In turn, these consequences affect the way rational individuals living in these areas form their preferences, altering the balance of expected costs and benefits from redistribution. This is because, along with the direct pocketbook effects of tax-and-transfer policies, redistribution also influences the experienced utility of individuals in more indirect ways.

More specifically, redistribution can improve the quality of local services and ease skill shortages in the medium to long run — both directly, through increased investment in government-run programmes like healthcare and education, and indirectly, by increasing disposable income and relaxing credit constraints among the less well-off (Galor and Zeira, 1993; Galor, 2011). In doing so, redistribution increases welfare and delivers non-pocketbook material gains across the population. However, these expected gains from redistribution are non-linear and depend on the local context — where services and local labour markets function well, improvements driven by redistribution will be relatively small and at the margins; where services are poor and skills are scarce, the potential impact of redistribution will be considerably larger. Therefore, by leading to skills shortages and a decline in the quality and availability of local services, emigration increases the expected welfare gains from redistribution, increasing individual support for such measures. This effect of emigration on redistribution preferences will be concentrated among high income individuals, who tend to have longer time horizons and are more responsive to non-pocketbook considerations (Dyner et al., 2004; Rueda and Stegmueller, 2016).

This study makes several contributions to the literature. First, it fills an important empirical gap. By looking at how emigration has affected individual preferences for redistribution in Central and Eastern Europe for the first time, it adds to a growing body of work

documenting the impact of emigration on attitudes and behaviour in the region. Second, it contributes to current debates about the connection between emigration and the political economy of origin countries. While emigration has often been seen as a constraint on spending and redistribution, recent evidence points to the contrary in the region. My arguments offer the missing empirical and theoretical underpinnings of such an effect. Third, it advances our understanding of redistribution preferences. There are different ways these can be influenced by emigration, and non-pocketbook considerations play a key role in shaping this link — an aspect ignored by past work centred on remittances and direct income effects.

The next section outlines my theoretical argument, discussing how rational individuals form redistribution preferences by weighing costs and benefits, how such benefits come in both pocketbook and non-pocketbook forms, and how local changes driven by emigration influence individuals' expectations of these benefits. The third section of the paper examines two alternative mechanisms that connect emigration and preferences for redistribution — the flow of financial remittances and the compositional changes engendered by migration — arguing that they are likely to be of limited relevance in the context of Central and Eastern Europe. The fourth section provides an empirical test of my claims, testing two key hypotheses using European Social Survey data from 10 CEE countries between 2002 and 2020. I find clear support for both of my hypotheses, showing that local-level emigration rates have a positive effect on individual-level support for redistribution and that this effect is mediated by income, being concentrated among higher-earning individuals. The fifth section discusses the results and concludes.

2. Theoretical framework

In line with much of the political economy literature, I argue that material self-interest is central to the formation of preferences for redistribution. In large part, individuals are rational actors that maximise expected utility over the lifecycle, which determines their preferred levels of redistribution. In the most general terms, people support redistribution if they expect its overall benefits to outweigh its costs.

However, the costs and benefits of redistribution come in two forms — pocketbook effects related to the direct impact of tax-and-transfer policies on household income, and non-

pocketbook effects related to the indirect impact of redistribution on individuals' welfare (and hence experienced utility). Pocketbook effects sit at the heart of traditional models of redistribution, including the seminal Romer-Meltzer-Richards model — this shows that if we assume lump sum taxation with no distortionary costs, rational individuals will support redistribution if its expected effect on income is positive, which occurs when their income is below the national mean. If their income is above average, individuals will oppose redistribution since they expect to incur a net loss from it (Romer, 1975; Meltzer and Richard, 1981). Scholarly debate has mostly focused on the macro-level implications of this model, that the level of redistribution will be determined by the preferences of the median voter and hence increase with income inequality. Empirical evidence for this link has been at best mixed (Lindert, 2004; Alesina and Glaeser, 2004; Iversen and Soskice, 2009; Schmidt-Catran, 2016; Lupu and Pontusson, 2023). Yet a key prediction of the basic model is well supported by evidence at the micro-level — direct pocketbook considerations matter, as support for redistribution declines with income across countries and contexts (Finseraas, 2009; Beramendi and Rehm, 2014; Rueda, 2018).

Pocketbook effects are not limited to the impact of taxes and transfers on current income. Indeed, rational individuals maximise utility over their lifecycle rather than a single period — meaning that preferences take into account the expected effect of redistribution on future income as well as contemporary earnings (Alesina and Giuliano, 2011; Rueda and Stegmueller, 2019). In this way, longer-term considerations about future income and the prospect of social mobility also influence redistribution preferences (Benabou and Oak, 2001). Similarly, uncertainty about the future can lead individuals to seek redistribution as a form of social insurance against risks like unemployment (Moene and Wallerstein, 2001; Iversen and Soskice, 2001; Rehm, 2011, 2016).

Non-pocketbook effects relate to the indirect impact of redistribution on individuals, independent of present and future income (Rueda and Stegmueller, 2016). While experienced utility is a function of income, other factors are also important, particularly in the long run. If redistribution influences such other factors, it can generate benefits even for richer individuals who are net contributors to any transfer schemes. Two examples of this found in the literature are crime and education. First, income inequality has often been linked to negative externalities such as increased crime, which affect the well-being and consumption of individuals irrespective of their household income. Redistribution can

mitigate such consequences and hence — all else equal — lead to increases in experienced utility among all individuals. Individuals seem to recognise these potential indirect gains and take them into account when forming their preferences for redistribution — one study found that fear of crime made wealthy individuals more likely to support redistribution in high-inequality regions of Western Europe (Rueda and Stegmueller, 2016). Second, redistribution can alter patterns of human capital formation, which can lead to indirect benefits for individuals across the income spectrum. By relaxing credit constraints and lowering opportunity costs, redistribution increases investment in education and skills. Higher levels of human capital lead to higher aggregate productivity and faster economic growth, which deliver material benefits to individuals by increasing incomes and returns on investment (Galor and Zeira, 1993; Perotti, 1996; Galor, 2011).

One key aspect of the non-pocketbook effects of redistribution is that, unlike pocketbook effects, they only become apparent in the longer run. This implies that, when it comes to the formation of preferences for redistribution, non-pocketbook considerations are considerably more important for wealthier individuals than for those with lower incomes. Poorer individuals tend to have shorter time horizons than their rich counterparts, in part due to the existence of sharp credit constraints; in addition, the relative stakes of redistribution are considerably higher for the former, placing further weight on short-term considerations (Dynan et al., 2004; Rueda and Stegmueller, 2016). In short, individuals with low incomes tend to support redistribution because of its short-term pocketbook benefits, with relatively little consideration of its longer-run effects. Richer individuals, on the other hand, tend to incur pocketbook costs from redistribution across periods but are more likely to weigh these costs against the potential indirect benefits of redistribution in the long run.

Given this broad theoretical framework, how does emigration affect preferences for redistribution? The general economic effects of emigration are well documented, including in the case of Central and Eastern Europe — these include higher wages and lower unemployment but also depressed levels of investment, lower productivity, and slower growth (Atoyan et al., 2016). As such, emigration can affect preferences for redistribution through its impact on the local macroeconomic environment. Separate from that, however, I argue that emigration comes with two more specific consequences that are highly salient for individuals living in areas affected by migration — a decline in public and private services, and a shortage of skills in the labour market (Kaminska and Kahancova, 2011;

Dancygier et al., 2024). Because these changes increase the expected benefits from redistribution policies, they make such policies comparatively more attractive and hence increase support for redistribution, particularly among the wealthy.

First, emigration drives a decline in the quality and availability of local services, both public and private. This stems from the departure of a significant number of relatively young and educated adults — had they stayed, they would have supported the local economy by sustaining aggregate demand and contributing to local budgets, and established families and social networks in the area. In their absence, local services are strained by a lack of funding and demand — emigration can lead to school and business closures, and strain the viability of public transport and healthcare systems. Second, emigration leads to significant skill shortages in areas that experienced outflows of population, across a broad range of sectors from construction workers to healthcare professionals (Okolski, 2006; Kaminska and Kahancova, 2011; Krastev, 2020).

The experience of many Central and Eastern European countries clearly illustrates these dynamics. One particularly salient example is the case of public healthcare provision — the emigration of a large number of doctors and nurses, and a lack of public funds at the local level contributed to the poor availability of medical services and infrastructure in many parts of CEE states that experienced high emigration, particularly rural regions such as those in Eastern Romania or Northwestern Bulgaria (Dimova et al., 2018; Zuk et al., 2019). Regions such as Lubelskie in Eastern Poland experienced rapid depopulation, partly as a result of emigration — leading to the closure of various forms of social infrastructure including health centres but also schools and kindergartens (Wesolowska, 2023). Over the last two decades, a wave of school closures in rural areas of Romania and Hungary led to a higher share of the population living in a settlement without education facilities (Kassai and Farkas, 2016). Similarly, research has highlighted the connection between emigration and the degradation of local environments — with regard to both private infrastructure like housing and public services like transport — in parts of the Baltics, particularly areas of Latvia and Lithuania (Lang et al., 2022; Laksevics et al., 2025). In addition, the period after accession saw the development of severe regional imbalances in the labour markets of countries like Romania and Poland, particularly a lack of specific skills in depopulating areas constraining growth and investment (Fihel et al., 2007; Chivu et al., 2020; Astrov et al., 2021).

Labour shortages and the falling availability of local services have received significant attention in public debate. These raise visible concerns for those who continue living in high-emigration areas and can affect the everyday lives of individuals from across the social spectrum – from relatively poor individuals dealing with a lack of clinics and doctors to wealthy business owners facing a lack of workers with the skills they require. Even people who can afford to seek alternatives elsewhere will nonetheless experience lower welfare if they live in an area where relatively basic infrastructure and amenities like high-speed internet are absent, or where reliable emergency medical services are unavailable. Research has elsewhere established a link between migration, the decline of local services, and a rise in voting for the populist far-right due to the resulting grievances (Lim, 2022; Dancygier et al., 2024).

However, redistribution preferences will also be affected. As discussed above, redistribution generates non-pocketbook benefits in the longer run, which can help address the consequences of emigration. Redistribution indirectly leads to a rise in consumer spending and aggregate demand. Low-income groups have a higher marginal propensity to spend, and increases in disposable income can relax credit constraints and enable more spending on transport, education, or healthcare. Redistribution also directly supports the provision of public services such as schools and hospitals. In the context of modern welfare states, redistribution is achieved not just through traditional tax-and-transfer cash policies, but also through a wide range of government programmes that provide benefits in kind, such as public education, healthcare, childcare, or retraining (Hemerijck, 2018; Garrizman et al., 2023). These wider dimensions of redistribution not only exist in practice but are also actively recognised by individuals, who take them into account in the formation of their headline preferences (Margalit and Raviv, 2024). Redistribution can therefore improve the quality and availability of local services by increasing demand and leading to more spending on government programmes. It can also help mitigate skill shortages – enabling more investment in public education and active labour market policies, as well as additional investments in human capital by low-income households.

The expected benefits from redistribution, however, depend on the local situation. Where services are well-developed and functioning, their impact will be limited to the margins, making them unlikely to significantly influence people's preferences. The potential impact is much larger, however, in an area that suffers from serious gaps in the provision of local

services. For example, the welfare of local residents will improve significantly if additional government spending enables an emergency ward to remain open, but change relatively little if redistribution would only lead to marginal improvements in staff numbers and training. Similarly, if redistribution lessens skill shortages in the medium and long term, the potential welfare gains may be rather small if local labour markets function well. However, they become considerably larger if severe skill shortages are already a significant concern, as they are areas that experience high emigration. By driving a decline in local services and shortages in the labour market, emigration increases the expected gains from redistribution, in a way that raises highly visible concerns. All things equal, people living in a high-emigration area stand more to gain from the impact of redistribution on local services and skills, increasing their likelihood of supporting such measures.

In short, I argue that two highly visible consequences of emigration — a decline in local services and skills shortages in the labour market — increase the expected benefits of redistribution for individuals living in areas that have been affected by outflows. In the medium and long run, redistribution mitigates such consequences and can thus deliver widespread welfare gains, which become more significant as the changes driven by emigration worsen. Since the expected benefits of redistribution increase, while its costs remain unchanged, it follows that emigration leads to more demand for redistribution among people living in areas that have been affected by it. This effect of emigration will be concentrated among individuals with higher incomes — they have repeatedly been shown to have longer time horizons when making decisions, and hence place more weight on non-pocketbook motivations for redistribution (Dynan et al., 2004; Rueda and Stegmuller, 2016). My theoretical framework thus results in two key hypotheses that will put to the test in the empirical analysis:

H1: There is a positive effect of regional-level emigration rates on support for redistribution at the individual level.

H2: The effect of regional emigration rates on demand for redistribution increases with household income.

Two observations are required before turning to an empirical examination of my claims. One, while my arguments remain within a traditional framework of material self-interest,

other scholars have emphasised the role of other-regarding preferences in shaping demand for redistribution — including concerns about social justice, normative ideals of equality, and perceptions of fairness (Dimick et al., 2018; Fehr et al., 2022). It is possible that emigration also influences some of these factors, say by highlighting patterns of injustice in a context where some people are forced to choose between providing for their family by working abroad and remaining in the same country as their loved ones. Such mechanisms could therefore strengthen the positive effects of emigration on preferences for redistribution. However, they do not alter any of the key implications of my arguments, and remain difficult if not impossible to disentangle from material motivations.

Two, my theoretical framework is centred on the contextual effects of emigration on the redistribution preferences of individuals living in areas affected by migration. However, two other mechanisms might connect emigration and demand for redistribution, thus potentially obscuring my analysis — the impact of financial remittances on those who receive them, and the compositional effects of emigration on aggregate preferences. The following section discusses these alternative mechanisms, showing they are of limited relevance in the context of Central and Eastern Europe.

3. Alternative mechanisms connecting emigration and redistribution

In theory, two other mechanisms may connect emigration and preferences for redistribution in origin countries. First, emigration leads to significant flows of financial remittances, which improve the socio-economic standing of those who receive them and can thus alter their preferences for redistribution (Doyle, 2015). Second, emigration has compositional effects alongside contextual ones — emigrants differ in some ways from the rest of the population, meaning that emigration alters the composition of the remaining electorate and thus potentially aggregates preferences (Lim, 2022). I discuss these mechanisms in turn, arguing that their impact on CEE countries is limited.

Remittances and support for redistribution

Most of the literature discussing emigration and redistribution has focused on the issue of remittances. According to some studies, remittances reduce demand for redistribution among those who receive them and, through subsequent effects on vote choice, the

amount of redistribution that occurs in a country (Doyle, 2015). This is because remittances are a stable source of external income that insures people against socio-economic shocks, and therefore substitute for forms of social insurance run by the state (Ahmed, 2012). Simply put, people can spend remittances to acquire education, access private healthcare, and smooth their consumption patterns, which makes them less reliant on the government to provide similar benefits.

However, recent evidence shows that the connection between remittances and demand for redistribution can be more varied (Meseguer et al., 2016). Most importantly, the idea of remittances as alternative insurance assumes that remittance flows are stable or increase in perpetuity, which allows them to smooth out shocks among recipients. This assumption rarely holds in practice. Economic downturns in destination countries can lead to a decline in remittances and hence a negative income shock among recipients. Indeed, this seems to have occurred in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis — Acevedo (2020) found that remittance recipients in several Latin American countries were more supportive of redistribution than non-recipients after transfers declined, and some differences persisted even after remittances recovered. The ultimate effect of remittances on preferences for redistribution is therefore unclear, and likely to depend on the political and economic context.

There are other reasons to doubt the existence of a clear and significant link between remittances and support for redistribution, which are more specific to CEE democracies. First, the overall scale of remittances in the region has been quite limited, especially compared to remittance-dependent economies in other parts of the world. In some countries, remittance inflows make up more than a third of GDP, and more than a fifth of households receive them (Doyle, 2015; Tertychnaya et al., 2018). Widespread emigration has led to considerably more muted remittance flows in CEE states — even at their peak, these made up less than 8% of GDP across the eleven countries included in this analysis. Larger economies in the region, such as Poland, only ever received 1-2% of GDP in remittances (see Table A.1. in the Appendix).

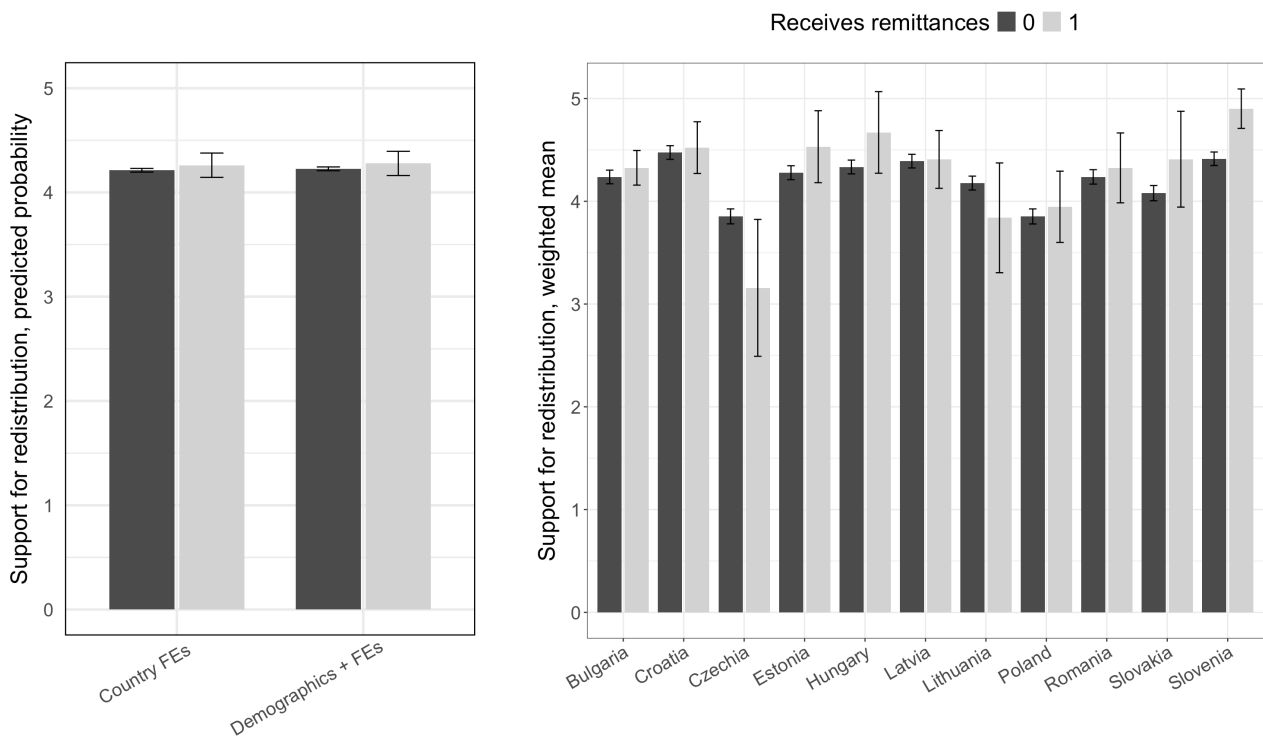
Second, the socio-economic context of CEE democracies may make it less likely that remittances lower demand for redistribution. As mentioned in the Introduction, historical legacies mean that individuals in the post-communist space maintain high expectations

about the role of the state when it comes to ensuring a degree of social equality and the provision of welfare (Lipsmeyer and Nordstrom, 2003; Alesina and Fuchs-Schundeln, 2007; Sack, 2016; Basna, 2023). Partly as a result, welfare states in the region tend to be considerably more advanced than those in other countries at similar levels of economic development (Haggard and Kaufman, 2008; Inglot, 2008; Kuitto, 2016). Compared to recipients in other parts of the world, people in the region may therefore be less likely to see remittances as a private substitute for social programmes run by the government, and less likely to favour a reduced role for the state.

These reasons — the mixed empirical evidence for a connection between remittances and preferences, the small scale of inflows in the region, and the legacy of a large government role in welfare provision — together mean that remittances are unlikely to influence redistribution preferences in Central and Eastern Europe in a clear and significant direction.

To provide some *prima facie* empirical evidence for this claim, I examined data from the first wave of the EBRD's Life in Transition Survey (LiTS), run in 2006. Unfortunately, and partly as a result of the relatively small role remittances have played in the region, little data are available on remittance recipients in CEE countries. To the best of my knowledge, the

Figure 1. Remittances and support for redistribution, LiTS 2006



2006 LiTS is the only large cross-national survey containing such information, and the remittance question was not repeated in subsequent waves. As expected, relatively few people in CEE countries received remittances at the time, between 4.2% in Bulgaria and 0.7% in Slovenia (see Figure A.1. in the Appendix).

In Figure 1, I compare support for redistribution between people who receive remittances and those who do not. There is no indication that remittances affect redistribution preferences in a consistent direction in the region. In some countries, average support for redistribution is higher among remittance recipients than the rest of the population, contrary to the expectations of the insurance hypothesis. In others, it is lower. Except for Slovenia — where the remittance phenomenon is in any case very marginal — these differences are not statistically significant. Indeed, when using a simple regression model to account for differences between countries as well as basic demographics like age, gender, and education, I find that predicted support for redistribution is virtually unchanged by remittances. This is especially relevant since 2006 provides close to an ideal context to observe the potential effects of remittances — destination countries were experiencing an economic boom and inflows reached their highest recorded levels relative to GDP. Remittances thus seem to have little to no impact on individuals' support for redistribution in CEE countries.

Compositional effects of emigration and support for redistribution

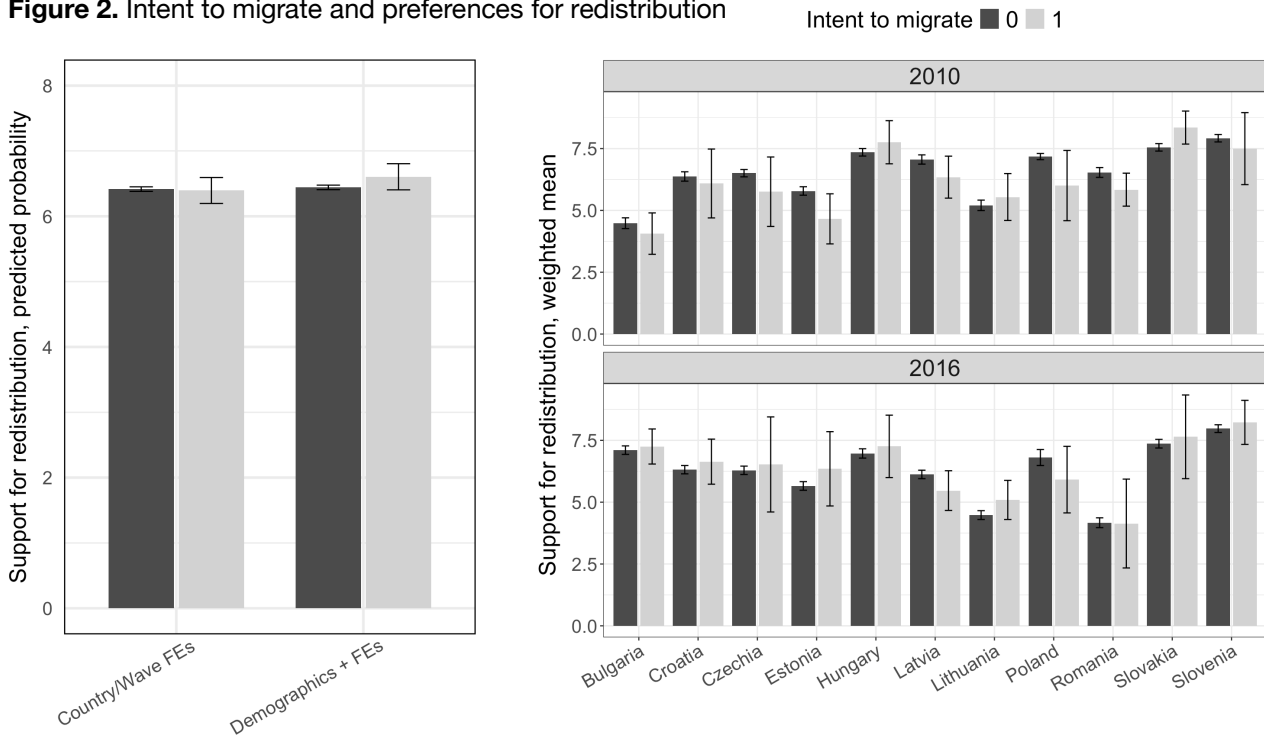
Another way emigration can affect redistribution preferences in origin countries is through its compositional effects. Emigration alters the composition of the population in areas of departure — simply put, people who move abroad are in some ways different from those who stay behind. For example, research has shown that emigrants tend to be younger, more educated, and more cosmopolitan than non-migrants (Lim, 2022; Roos, 2023). Some of these characteristics, particularly age and education, are also known to influence people's support for redistribution (Busemeyer et al., 2009; Witko and Moldogaziev, 2023). It is therefore plausible that emigration, by leading to the departure of younger and more highly educated individuals who are less supportive of redistribution, increases aggregate support for redistribution in origin countries.

Yet it is unclear that emigrants from CEE countries are less supportive of redistribution than the rest of the population. One of the most remarkable aspects of emigration in this region since the early 2000s has been its incredibly varied and broad nature (Okolski, 2007; Engbersen et al., 2013). Partly due to the ease of migration in the borderless context of the EU, people from across the social spectrum emigrated — from highly educated professionals looking for opportunities abroad at the top of their sectors to older manual workers who had been affected by industrial decline during the transition. While some of these people may be less supportive of redistribution because of their socio-economic characteristics, others will have had life experiences that made them more likely to support redistribution.

The question of emigrants' preferences for redistribution is ultimately an empirical one. Ideally, we would be able to compare the attitudes of emigrants with those of non-migrants at the time of departure, which would reveal any compositional effects. Yet such data are not available. Comparing emigrants who are already abroad with their counterparts in origin countries is also unworkable, since migration itself may have altered people's attitudes and socio-economic position. In any case, cross-national surveys only ask about support for redistribution policies in one's country of residence, making it impossible to accurately compare answers across borders. An alternative is to use data on prospective migrants, comparing people who declare an intent to emigrate in the near future with those who intend to remain in their countries of origin. While some people will not follow through on their declared intent to emigrate, these data offer the best available indication of potential compositional effects.

I use data from the 2010 and 2016 waves of the LiTS. Respondents were asked if they intended to move abroad in the next 12 months — this information was not collected in any other cross-national surveys in the region. A significant proportion of individuals in CEE countries declared an intent to emigrate in the immediate future, up to a high of 6.5% of respondents in Romania in 2010 (see Figure A.2. in the Appendix).

As shown in Figure 2, there is no clear association between intent to migrate and individuals' support for redistribution. In some countries, average support for redistribution is slightly lower among potential migrants than non-migrants. Yet the reverse is true for other countries, and even for the same country in different years. None of the differences

Figure 2. Intent to migrate and preferences for redistribution

in mean levels of support for redistribution are statistically significant. When I use a simple regression model to adjust for differences between countries and years as well as basic demographics, the predicted probability of support for redistribution is virtually identical regardless of one's migration intentions. There is no significant difference between potential migrants and non-migrants in terms of their preferences for redistribution. It is therefore highly unlikely that emigration has had any meaningful compositional effects on support for redistribution in CEE countries.

The two alternative mechanisms examined in this section therefore seem to have limited relevance in the CEE context — the literature offers mixed answers and theoretical expectations, while the available data suggest neither remittance recipients nor prospective migrants are different from the rest of the population in terms of their support for redistribution. A third potential mechanism remains — that of contextual effects of emigration in areas that experienced significant outflows. The following section offers an in-depth empirical examination of it, along with my main theoretical claims.

4. Empirical analysis

I proceed to an empirical examination of my two key hypotheses in this section. First, if emigration indeed increases demand for redistribution among those who stay behind, we

should observe a positive effect of regional-level emigration rates on individual-level support for redistribution (**H1**). Second, long-term concerns should be more influential in driving support for redistribution among the rich than the poor since shorter-term pocketbook considerations are considerably more important among the latter — meaning that the effect of regional emigration rates on individual-level support should interact and increase with household income (**H2**).

To test these, I use data from the first 10 rounds of the European Social Survey (ESS), covering the period between 2002 and 2022. Excluding country-years for which regional identifiers were not available, the dataset covers 112,212 respondents in 10 Central and Eastern European countries⁶ that are also members of the European Union. The respondents are nested in 142 regions. To better identify the local-level effects of emigration, I use the smallest comparable regional units available, which are NUTS3 regions. These are the lowest levels of the EU's regional administrative classification, roughly equivalent to counties, and range in population from 150,000 to about 800,000 inhabitants. The exception is Poland, where data were only available at the higher NUTS2 level of aggregation (up to 4.2 million inhabitants).

The dependent variable is support for redistribution at the individual level, measured in a similar way to other work using ESS data (e.g. Rehm, 2009; Rueda and Stegmueller, 2016). Respondents are asked whether they strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statement — “The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels”. I dichotomise this variable and only consider the first two responses as an explicit expression of support for redistribution. The results of my analysis remain unchanged if the original ordinal variable is used instead.

Another key variable included in the analysis is household income. This is a key control when analysing the overall effects of emigration, and the variable that moderates such effects according to my framework. Standard political economy models all include income as a central measure of material self-interest — the poor support policies they expect to benefit from and the rich are more likely to oppose measures their taxes would pay for

⁶ Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Not all countries were available in all waves. Data for Romania were only available for a single wave, without regional identifiers, and hence not included in the analysis.

(Romer, 1975; Meltzer and Richards, 1981). To account for these dynamics, I follow Rueda (2018) in building a measure of relative income that captures the distance between the income of respondents and the mean income in their country at the time of each survey. I construct this measure using respondents' answers to the following question — “Using this card, if you add up the income from all sources, which letter describes your household's total net income?”. In the first three waves of the survey, respondents were shown a card with 12 income categories of different ranges. Later surveys showed respondents 10 different income categories corresponding to the deciles of each country's income distribution. Such information cannot be directly used in the analysis, since the income bands cover very different ranges across countries and years. In addition, the Romer-Meltzer-Richards arguments about the role of income imply that what matters is not income per se, but the difference between individuals' income and the mean income in the country.

To address this, I first transform the ESS monthly income bands into their midpoints. For example, an income in the ‘less than 4,500 Kč’ band becomes 2,250 Kč, and one in the ‘1,801€ to 2,400€ band becomes 2,100€. To code the top income bands, which inherently lack an upper limit, I use the formula first suggested by Hout (2004), and extrapolate from the next-to-last category's midpoint using the frequencies of the last two income categories. A final issue is that different countries use different currencies, and even regardless of that the purchasing power of a certain income will vary across contexts — an income that is 2000€ above the mean is different in Bulgaria in 2008 compared to Estonia in 2019. I therefore convert Euros and other national currencies into 2010 PPP-adjusted international dollars. After this transformation, I obtain my measure of relative income distance by subtracting the mean level of income in each country-year from the household income of each individual.

Another problem that needs attention is that surveys like the ESS suffer from significant missing data issues, particularly for the sensitive yet essential household income variable. In some country-years, up to a third of all respondents failed to provide information on their household income. I address this in a multiple imputation framework using the Amelia II algorithm (Honaker et al., 2011; King et al., 2001) — each analysis is run on five fully imputed datasets of individual-level data, with the results combined to obtain conservative standard errors using the rules first developed by Rubin (1987).

The key independent variable is the emigration rate at the regional level. For each country in the analysis, I obtained regional data on emigration to another country for permanent residence from their respective statistical offices (see Appendix). Such numbers on permanent or long-term emigration offer the best measure that is comparable across both places and time, even though they fail to capture the full breadth of the emigration phenomenon in Central and Eastern Europe (which includes different varieties of shorter-term movements and people who do not register their moves with the authorities). For each country-year, I calculate the regional emigration rate as the sum of emigration in the two years preceding the survey, divided by the population of the region in the year of the survey, and multiplied by 100. I consider movements in the two years preceding the survey to better capture regional dynamics in the medium-term, rather than more transitory spikes in migration. However, the results remain virtually unchanged if only emigration in the year before the survey is used in the calculation, or indeed if the sum of emigration in the preceding five years is used.

In most of my regression models, I include several key controls at the regional level, which can influence the connection between emigration and preferences for redistribution. One is the immigration rate, which takes into account immigration for permanent residence in each region and is calculated in the same way described above for emigration. Immigration can lower support for redistribution by undermining social ties and homogeneity (Alesina and Glaeser, 2004; Rueda, 2018; Alesina et al., 2021). Another is the Gini coefficient, which captures levels of income inequality in each region. This has repeatedly been argued to influence support for redistribution despite some mixed empirical evidence (Moene and Wallerstein, 2001; Iversen and Soskice, 2009; Finseraas, 2009). Since comprehensive data on income inequality at the subnational level were not available, I calculate regional Gini measures using the full sample of imputed individual-level survey data (Rueda and Stegmüller, 2016). Estimates are corrected for small-sample bias and non-random sampling, using weights that account for each household's probability of inclusion in the sample (Deltas, 2003; Cowell, 2011). I further include variables for the regional unemployment rate and PPP-adjusted GDP per capita, to capture the regional economic situation in each year of the survey.

Besides relative income distance, I control for several other individual-level factors that have been shown to affect people's support for redistribution. These are age, gender, years

of education, union membership, regular attendance at religious services, and social class. The latter is measured using the 8-class scheme first developed by Oesch (2008). I also include dummies in my models for any previous experience of working abroad — migration can affect people's economic status as well as their socio-political values (Levitt, 1998) — and being born in another country, since migrants may hold distinct preferences about redistribution (Bergh and Fink, 2009).

The results of my main analysis are shown in Table 1. All four models are multilevel binomial regression models, with respondents nested within countries and regions, and the results adjusted using the provided post-stratification weights. Year fixed effects are also included. The first model looks at the link between regional emigration rates and individual-level support for redistribution, without accounting for any individual or regional covariates. The second model adds the full suite of individual-level controls. Regional-level controls are added in the third model. The fourth and final model adds fixed effects for each region, which account for any remaining unobserved time-invariant differences between regions.

The results are clear and in full accordance with the expectations set out in **H1** — a positive and highly statistically significant effect of regional emigration on individual-level support for redistribution is found across all models. The estimated effects vary remarkably little as individual and regional covariates are added and are only strengthened by the addition of regional fixed effects in the last model. This is essential. Not only is living in a high-emigration region associated with a higher demand for redistribution but so is living in the same region at a time at which it has experienced increased emigration.

The controls included in the analysis behave largely as expected, and show that preferences for redistribution in Central and Eastern Europe are adequately described by traditional political economy models originally developed for the West. Relative income distance is a highly significant predictor of support for redistribution — the rich are much less likely to express support than those who earn less. So are respondents with more years of education. Being older, female, or regularly attending religious services are all associated with increased demand for redistribution. As expected, union members are also more supportive of redistribution. So are migrants, defined here as individuals born in a different country. Significant differences remain between social classes even after we

Table 1: Emigration and preferences for redistribution, CEE (2002-20)

| | Support for redistribution | | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
| ----- | | | | |
| Regional-level variables | | | | |
| ----- | | | | |
| Emigration | 0.099*** (0.022) | 0.084*** (0.022) | 0.09*** (0.023) | 0.154*** (0.031) |
| Immigration | | | -0.128*** (0.021) | -0.145*** (0.023) |
| GDP per capita (logged) | | | -0.138 (0.083) | -0.352* (0.167) |
| Unemployment | | | 0.01* (0.005) | 0.011* (0.005) |
| Gini | | | -0.473 (0.333) | -0.505 (0.35) |
| ----- | | | | |
| Individual-level variables | | | | |
| ----- | | | | |
| Income distance | | -0.201*** (0.008) | -0.202*** (0.009) | -0.202*** (0.009) |
| Age | | 0.009*** (0.001) | 0.009*** (0.001) | 0.009*** (0.001) |
| Gender | | 0.158*** (0.017) | 0.159*** (0.017) | 0.159*** (0.017) |
| Years of education | | -0.054*** (0.003) | -0.053*** (0.003) | -0.053*** (0.003) |
| Class: small business owner | | 0.383*** (0.069) | 0.373*** (0.065) | 0.373*** (0.065) |
| Class: technical (semi)professional | | 0.417*** (0.064) | 0.414*** (0.062) | 0.416*** (0.062) |
| Class: production worker | | 0.804*** (0.072) | 0.796*** (0.069) | 0.797*** (0.069) |
| Class: manager | | 0.387*** (0.065) | 0.373*** (0.062) | 0.373*** (0.062) |
| Class: clerk | | 0.609*** (0.069) | 0.602*** (0.068) | 0.604*** (0.068) |
| Class: socio-cultural professional | | 0.652*** (0.068) | 0.644*** (0.065) | 0.644*** (0.065) |
| Class: service worker | | 0.79*** (0.075) | 0.782*** (0.07) | 0.784*** (0.069) |
| Attends religious services | | 0.082*** (0.025) | 0.088*** (0.025) | 0.088*** (0.025) |
| Born abroad | | 0.114** (0.04) | 0.111** (0.041) | 0.113** (0.041) |
| Worked abroad | | -0.024 (0.031) | -0.018 (0.031) | -0.018 (0.031) |
| Union member | | 0.158*** (0.034) | 0.155*** (0.035) | 0.154*** (0.035) |
| Constant | 1.604*** (0.17) | 0.94*** (0.187) | 2.317** (0.804) | 4.863*** (1.439) |
| ----- | | | | |
| Observations | 104,636 | 104,636 | 101,664 | 101,664 |
| Regions | 142 | 142 | 142 | 142 |
| Countries | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| Year FE | X | X | X | X |
| Regional FE | | | | X |

Note: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

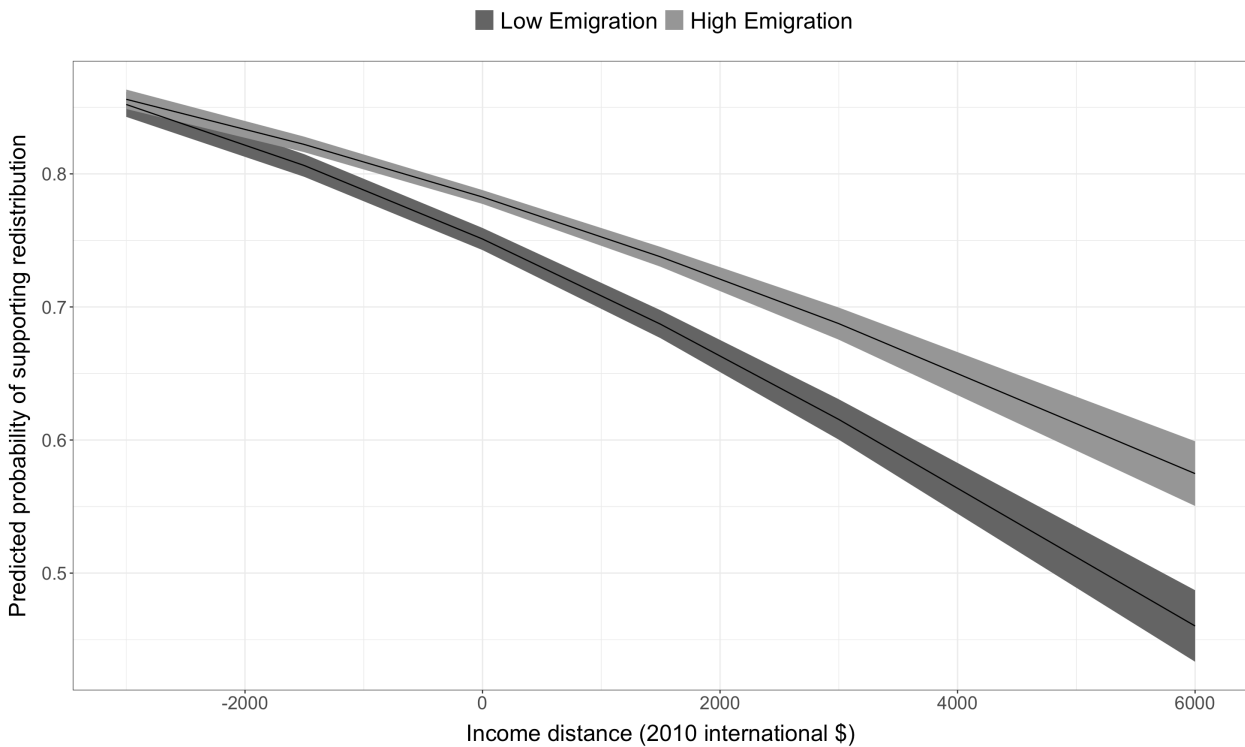
account for income and education, with production and service workers most likely to support redistribution. No effects are found for previous experience of working abroad.

At the regional level, there is a negative and statistically significant effect of immigration alongside the positive effect of emigration. This indicates that increased immigration may lower support for redistribution in a similar way to that observed by the literature for Western European democracies. I also find some evidence that the regional economic situation influences individuals' support for redistribution, which increases with the regional unemployment rate. Once fixed effects are accounted for, an increase in regional GDP per capita is also associated with lower demand for redistribution. However, no significant empirical link is found between income inequality at the regional level and individuals' support for redistribution.

The results are robust to the exclusion of any particular covariate from the analysis, and do not depend on the inclusion of any particular country or survey year in the sample. As mentioned earlier, using different measures of the key migration variables — calculating them using a single lag or the sum of the past five lags instead of two lags — reveals virtually identical results. So does keeping the dependent variable as a 5-point ordinal variable instead of dichotomising it, and correspondingly using linear or ordinal logistic regression models in the analysis. Furthermore, while undertaking the analysis at a disaggregated subnational level allows us to much better trace the local effects of emigration, it is worthwhile to note that identical conclusions emerge from an otherwise identical analysis conducted at the national level — in the same sample, respondents living in high-emigration countries are more likely to support redistribution, even after accounting for other individual and national differences (results are available on request).

Having established that, as hypothesised in **H1**, there is an overall positive effect of regional-level emigration on individual-level support for redistribution, I turn to an empirical test of **H2** using interaction regression models. If the effect of emigration is indeed driven by longer-term non-pocketbook concerns among the well-off, it should be empirically moderated by relative income distance, with the effect minimal among the poor and larger among the rich. To test this, I use otherwise identical multilevel logistic regression models to those described above but include a cross-level interaction term between regional emigration rates and individuals' relative income distance.

Figure 3. Average predicted probabilities, cross-level interaction between emigration and income



Since interaction models can be relatively difficult to interpret, I show average predicted probabilities in Figure 3, based on the complete model specification that includes regional fixed effects. These compare how support for redistribution varies with income in two types of areas - a low emigration region and a high emigration one. I choose the first and third quartiles of the emigration rate variable to illustrate the contrast. The full results of the underlying interaction regression model are shown in the Appendix, along with the three other models that gradually exclude regional fixed effects, regional covariates, and individual-level controls. Across all four, I find that the cross-level interaction term between relative income distance and the regional emigration rate is highly statistically significant — as theorised, the positive effect of emigration is mediated by income.

Indeed, the results in Figure 3 agree with the expectations set out in **H2**. The effect of emigration increases sharply with income. Among people at the bottom of the income distribution, there is no significant difference between those in high and low emigration areas. The poor are highly supportive of redistribution regardless of the type of area they live in. As expected, the predicted probability of supporting redistribution decreases with income — across areas, the rich are less likely to support redistribution than those who earn less. However, predicted support for redistribution falls more slowly with income in

high-emigration regions. The rich in high-emigration regions are much more likely to support redistribution than the rich in low-emigration regions — if we take the example of an individual whose monthly household income is \$4000 above the national mean, their predicted probability of supporting redistribution is almost 10% higher in a high-emigration region than a low-emigration one. This contrasts with a difference of just 3% among people with income close to the mean, and no difference at all for those with incomes that are \$2000 below the mean. In short, the overall positive effect of regional emigration on individuals' support for redistribution does not affect everyone equally and is mostly driven by the much larger effects I observe among rich individuals.

The results of my empirical analysis, then, support the key theoretical expectations set out in **H1** and **H2**. I found a strong and highly significant positive effect of regional emigration rates on individual-level support for redistribution — meaning that emigration raises demand for redistribution among individuals living in regions that experienced significant outflows. The results are robust to several different model specifications and ways of operationalising key variables. I further found that the effect of emigration is mediated by relative income distance, and concentrated among high earners. While the poor are highly supportive of redistribution regardless of where they live, the rich are much more likely to support redistribution if they live in a high-emigration region. The next section discusses these results, contextualises them, and concludes.

5. Discussion and conclusion

To answer the question posed at the outset of this investigation, emigration increases demand for redistribution in Central and Eastern Europe, and is thus likely to contribute to increased transfers and social protection in countries of origin.

My arguments started from the simple idea that individuals support redistribution if its expected material benefits outweigh its costs. Emigration drives two consequences, a decline in local services and skill shortages in the labour market — both of them highly salient in many parts of Central and Eastern Europe. These consequences raise the expected benefits from redistribution and hence increase support for such policies. That is because redistribution can help address these consequences both directly and indirectly, and hence deliver non-pocketbook material benefits to individuals across the income

spectrum. Yet these benefits depend on local context – they are significantly greater in areas affected by significant emigration like Southeastern Poland or Eastern Romania, which struggle with poor services and severe skill shortages. Because lower-income individuals have shorter time horizons and place a greater weight on pocketbook considerations, this effect of emigration on support for redistribution is concentrated among people with higher incomes.

I found strong empirical support for my theory using European Social Survey data from 2002 to 2020. First, there is a strong and highly significant positive effect of regional emigration rates on individual support for redistribution – people living in high emigration areas are more supportive of government intervention, accounting for a wide range of individual and regional covariates. This also applies to people living in the same region over time, with support for redistribution increasing in periods of high emigration. Second, the positive effect of emigration rates is mediated by relative income – while individuals with low incomes are highly supportive of redistribution across areas, those with higher incomes are considerably more likely to support redistribution in high emigration regions. These results are robust to changes in model specification, variable operationalisation, and case selection.

I also discussed two alternative mechanisms that can connect emigration and preferences for redistribution – financial remittances and compositional changes. I argued these are of limited relevance in CEE countries and thus unlikely to obscure my analysis of contextual effects, which is supported by the available data. There is little to no difference in terms of redistribution preferences between those who receive remittances and those who do not, or between those who intend to move abroad in the near future and those who do not.

My results have several important implications for the literature. First, they add to an emerging body of work documenting the effects of emigration in Central and Eastern Europe. Scholars have previously discussed how emigration constrains growth and productivity (Atoyán et al., 2016), contributes to social change by diffusing values across borders (White and Grabowska, 2019), creates political grievances and increases support for populist far-right parties (Lim, 2022), or enhances the survival of autocratic regimes by leading to the departure of democratic voices (Kelemen, 2020). My findings show that the effects of emigration in the region extend to shaping redistribution preferences, and thus

fundamental aspects of the political economy of these countries. This is particularly interesting since attitudes in the post-communist region continue to be influenced by historical legacies, with people significantly more supportive of redistribution and state intervention than those in the West (Alesina and Fuchs-Schundeln, 2007; Fuchs-Schundeln and Schundeln, 2020). Migration did not help bridge these longstanding differences but instead contributed to further enhancing them, showing how modern developments can uphold older phenomena and interact with them.

Second, this paper advances debates about the effects of migration on redistribution in origin countries. There is evidence that emigration reduced redistribution and constrained the growth of welfare states in other parts of the world, primarily through the impact of remittances (Ahmed, 2012; Doyle, 2015). The opposite has occurred in Central and Eastern Europe, with past research revealing that emigration increased redistribution in the region (Petrova and Sznajder-Lee, 2024). My work elaborates on what is likely to be a key mechanism behind this aggregate effect, building theoretical and empirical micro foundations that were previously missing. It also highlights how migration interacts with redistribution preferences through several different channels that may push in different directions — meaning that its overall impact on origin countries is complex and likely to differ across contexts depending on the relative strength of those multiple channels.

Third, my findings emphasise the importance of non-pocketbook considerations in shaping redistribution preferences and the way migration affects them. Though most previous work has focused on income and tax-and-transfer policies, scholars have also shown that redistribution can deliver non-pocketbook material benefits to people, such as lower crime or increased human capital (Galor, 2011; Rueda and Stegmueller, 2016). My arguments build on such work. I discuss how redistribution affects individual welfare through its effects on local services and labour markets, how emigration can alter the expected non-pocketbook benefits from redistribution, and how this leads to increased support for redistribution in the most affected areas. Redistribution has multiple complex implications even within a traditional framework of material self-interest, which also shape its connections to migration. Both immigration and emigration have been linked to changes in support for redistribution, though in different ways and through different mechanisms. While immigration has generally been associated with lower support for redistribution through an identity mechanism (Rueda, 2018; Alesina et al, 2021), emigration seems to

have a more ambiguous effect that operates through different dimensions of material self-interest.

My results also point to a number of important avenues for future research. Better data are needed to further investigate the mechanisms behind the effect of emigration on redistribution preferences. While I discuss contextual effects as well as alternative mechanisms and separately examine them, a lack of data prevented me from a comprehensive analysis that includes all relevant factors. This leaves it unclear if and how they interact with each other. Future work should also further probe the specific links between concerns about local services and skills shortages, on one hand, and preferences for redistribution, on the other. In addition, scholars should seek to better connect findings about preferences at the micro level, like those developed in this paper, with those related to policy outcomes at the macro level. While we know that emigration increases demand for redistribution among the public and that higher levels of emigration are associated with more redistribution in practice, it remains unclear exactly how these demands are translated into policy, particularly in CEE countries. Future research should examine the electoral implications of the mechanisms described here, as well as the kind of government policies that lead to higher redistribution in high-emigration countries. Furthermore, the extent to which my results generalise beyond the Central and Eastern Europe remains an open question. Further studies are required to establish if the contextual mechanisms described here also operate in other regions of the world, and how the overall impact of emigration changes when countervailing mechanisms like remittances are considerably stronger. Migration — especially at the scale seen in Central and Eastern Europe — can shape the political economy of sending countries in many important ways, and our understanding of them is just starting to develop.

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7. Appendix

Figure A.1. Percentage of respondents who report receiving remittances, LiTS 2006

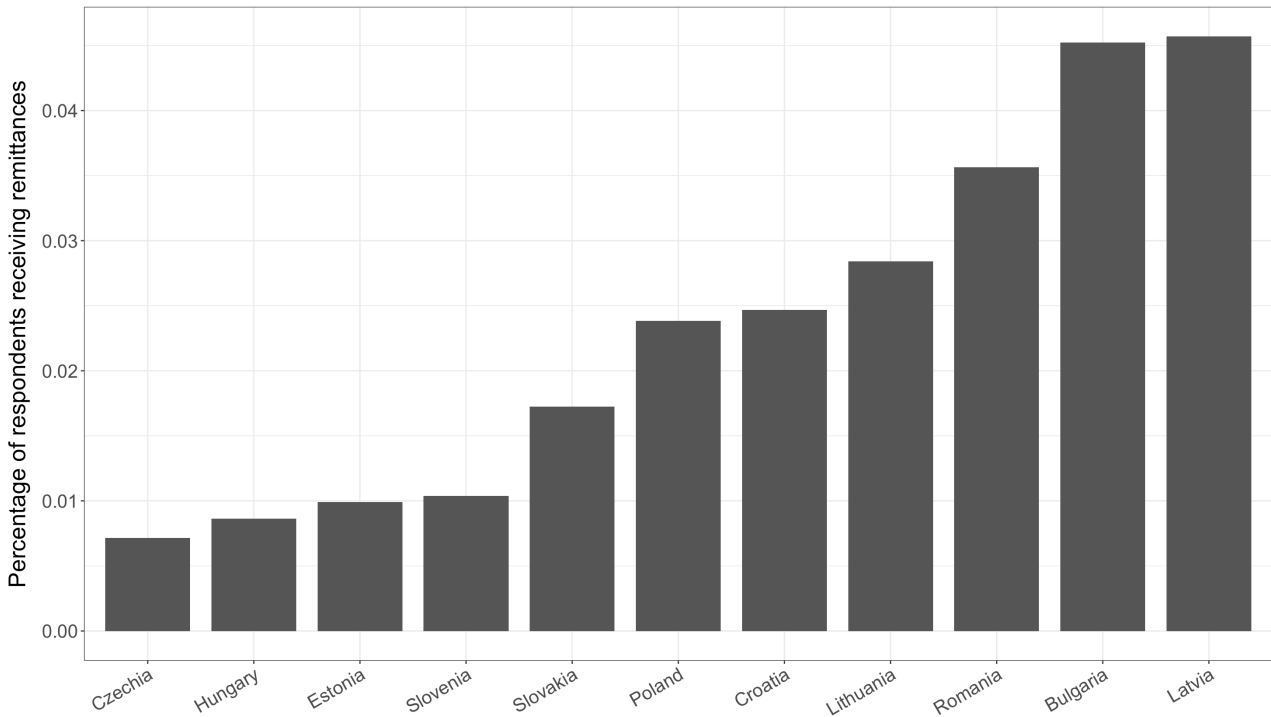


Figure A.2. Percentage of respondents declaring an intent to migrate within the next 12 months, LiTS 2010/16

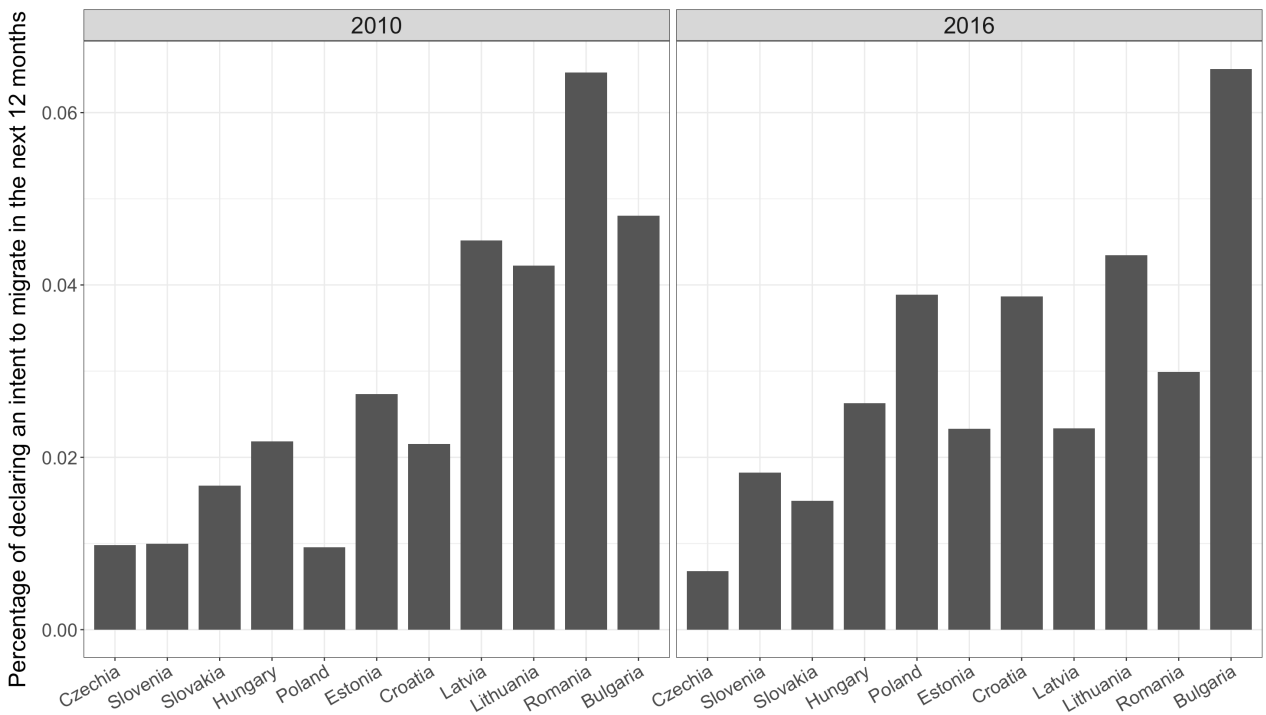


Table A.1. Remittances received as % of GDP, 2001-20 (World Bank)

| | '01 | '02 | '03 | '04 | '05 | '06 | '07 | '08 | '09 | '10 | '11 | '12 | '13 | '14 | '15 | '16 | '17 | '18 | '19 | '20 |
|-----------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| BG | 5.8 | 7.2 | 8.1 | 6.6 | 5.4 | 5.0 | 3.8 | 3.5 | 3.1 | 2.6 | 2.6 | 2.7 | 3.0 | 3.0 | 3.0 | 3.0 | 3.5 | 3.2 | 3.1 | 2.8 |
| HR | 4.0 | 4.1 | 3.7 | 3.7 | 4.2 | 3.9 | 3.8 | 3.7 | 3.6 | 3.9 | 4.0 | 3.6 | 4.6 | 4.7 | 5.2 | 6.1 | 6.5 | 6.5 | 7.0 | 7.2 |
| CZ | 0.4 | 0.4 | 0.5 | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 | 0.5 | 0.6 | 0.6 | 0.6 | 0.7 | 0.8 | 1.2 | 1.4 | 1.6 | 1.6 | 1.6 | 1.5 | 1.7 |
| EE | 0.2 | 0.3 | 0.5 | 1.4 | 1.8 | 2.3 | 1.7 | 1.7 | 1.7 | 1.8 | 1.9 | 2.0 | 2.2 | 2.0 | 2.0 | 2.0 | 1.8 | 1.8 | 1.7 | 1.6 |
| HU | 0.7 | 0.7 | 0.5 | 0.6 | 0.6 | 0.7 | 0.7 | 0.8 | 1.2 | 1.3 | 1.6 | 2.4 | 3.0 | 3.0 | 3.1 | 3.2 | 2.9 | 2.7 | 3.0 | 2.5 |
| LV | 3.3 | 1.2 | 1.4 | 1.6 | 2.3 | 2.3 | 1.9 | 5.6 | 6.2 | 5.4 | 5.7 | 5.5 | 5.5 | 5.1 | 5.1 | 4.6 | 4.3 | 3.7 | 3.5 | 3.3 |
| LT | 0.6 | 0.8 | 0.6 | 2.5 | 2.9 | 3.3 | 3.6 | 3.3 | 3.3 | 4.6 | 4.5 | 3.5 | 4.4 | 4.4 | 3.3 | 3.0 | 2.7 | 2.6 | 2.4 | 1.4 |
| PL | 0.8 | 0.8 | 1.0 | 1.8 | 2.4 | 2.8 | 2.8 | 2.3 | 2.3 | 1.6 | 1.5 | 1.4 | 1.4 | 1.4 | 1.4 | 1.4 | 1.4 | 1.3 | 1.2 | 1.2 |
| RO | 0.3 | 0.3 | 0.2 | 0.2 | 1.0 | 1.0 | 0.9 | 0.8 | 0.4 | 0.4 | 0.4 | 0.4 | 2.5 | 2.5 | 3.0 | 3.2 | 3.1 | 2.9 | 3.2 | 3.0 |
| SK | 0.1 | 0.1 | 0.9 | 1.2 | 1.9 | 1.9 | 1.9 | 2.0 | 1.9 | 1.7 | 1.8 | 2.0 | 2.4 | 2.4 | 2.3 | 2.4 | 2.7 | 2.7 | 2.4 | 2.3 |
| SI | 1.0 | 0.9 | 0.8 | 0.8 | 0.7 | 0.7 | 0.7 | 0.7 | 0.3 | 0.3 | 0.4 | 0.5 | 0.7 | 0.8 | 0.9 | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.2 | 1.2 | 1.4 |

Table A.2. Sources of regional emigration data

| | Dataset | Time period | Source | Observations |
|------------------|---|--------------------|---|--|
| Bulgaria | International migration by year and district | 2007-2023 | National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria (https://www.nsi.bg/en) | Data available on request only |
| Croatia | Immigrant/Emigrant population by towns/municipalities | 2011-2022 | Croatian Bureau of Statistics (https://podaci.dzs.hr/en/) | Data available online: https://web.dzs.hr/PxWeb/pxweb/en/Stanovništvo/Stano vništvo_Migracije/SM31.px/ |
| Czechia | Migration - territorial comparison | 2011-2023 | Czech Statistical Office (https://csu.gov.cz/home) | Data available online: https://vdb.czso.cz/vdbvo2/faces/en/index.jsf?page=statistiky&katalog=33155 |
| Estonia | Migration by Administrative unit/Type of settlement region, Sex, Indicator, Type of migration and Year - Tables RVR01 and RVR02 | 2000-2022 | Statistics Estonia (https://www.stat.ee/en) | Data available online: https://andmed.stat.ee/en/stat/Lepetatud_tabelid_Rahvastik.Arhiiv_Rahvastikusundmused.Arhiiv/RVR01 |
| Hungary | Migration of foreign/Hungarian citizens | 2010-2023 | Hungarian Central Statistical Office (https://www.ksh.hu/?lang=en) | Data available on request only |
| Latvia | International long-term migration of population in regions, cities and municipalities – Territorial unit, Time period and Indicator | 2011-2023 | Official Statistics of Latvia (https://stat.gov.lv/en) | Data available online: https://stat.gov.lv/en/statistics-themes/population/migration/tables/ibe081-international-long-term-migration-population |
| Lithuania | International Migration - Emigrants and Immigrants | 2001-2023 | Official Statistics Portal (https://osp.stat.gov.lt) | Data available online: https://osp.stat.gov.lt/statistiniu-rodikliu-analize?hash=e0fc8ffc-9367-46b1-980f-3e5f0824c79f#/ |
| Poland | Registrations for permanent residence (from abroad), Registrations of departure to abroad | 1995-2023 | Statistics Poland (https://stat.gov.pl/en/) | Data available online: https://bdl.stat.gov.pl/bdl/dane/podgrup/wymiary |
| Romania | Permanent emigrants/immigrants, by age groups, regions, and counties | 1992-2022 | National Institute of Statistics (https://insse.ro/cms/en) | Data available online: http://statistici.insse.ro:8077/tempo-online/#/pages/tables/insse-table |
| Slovakia | Emigrants/Immigrants for permanent residence | 1996-2022 | Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (https://slovak.statistics.sk/) | Data available online: https://datacube.statistics.sk/#!/view/en/vbd_dem/om7021rr/v_om7021rr_00_00_00_e_n |
| Slovenia | International Migration by statistical region, year, migrations, and citizenship | 2000-2022 | Republic of Slovenia Statistical Office (https://www.stat.si/statweb/en) | Data available online: https://pxweb.stat.si/SiStatData/pxweb/en/Data/-/05N1042S.px |

Table A.3. Cross-level interaction models, full results

| | Support for redistribution | | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
| ----- | | | | |
| Regional-level variables | | | | |
| ----- | | | | |
| Emigration | 0.092*** (0.022) | 0.083*** (0.022) | 0.091*** (0.023) | 0.154*** (0.031) |
| Immigration | | | -0.132*** (0.021) | -0.149*** (0.023) |
| GDP per capita (logged) | | | -0.136 (0.083) | -0.338* (0.167) |
| Unemployment | | | 0.01* (0.005) | 0.011* (0.005) |
| Gini | | | -0.456 (0.336) | -0.491 (0.352) |
| ----- | | | | |
| Individual-level variables | | | | |
| ----- | | | | |
| Income distance | -0.357*** (0.011) | -0.234*** (0.013) | -0.237*** (0.013) | -0.237*** (0.013) |
| Age | | 0.009*** (0.001) | 0.009*** (0.001) | 0.009*** (0.001) |
| Gender | | 0.158*** (0.017) | 0.159*** (0.017) | 0.159*** (0.017) |
| Years of education | | -0.054*** (0.003) | -0.053*** (0.003) | -0.053*** (0.003) |
| Class: small business owner | | 0.381*** (0.069) | 0.371*** (0.065) | 0.371*** (0.065) |
| Class: technical (semi)professional | | 0.415*** (0.064) | 0.412*** (0.063) | 0.413*** (0.062) |
| Class: production worker | | 0.803*** (0.072) | 0.795*** (0.069) | 0.796*** (0.069) |
| Class: manager | | 0.384*** (0.066) | 0.37*** (0.063) | 0.37*** (0.062) |
| Class: clerk | | 0.608*** (0.069) | 0.601*** (0.068) | 0.603*** (0.068) |
| Class: socio-cultural professional | | 0.651*** (0.068) | 0.642*** (0.066) | 0.642*** (0.065) |
| Class: service worker | | 0.79*** (0.075) | 0.781*** (0.07) | 0.783*** (0.069) |
| Attends religious services | | 0.081** (0.025) | 0.087*** (0.025) | 0.087*** (0.025) |
| Born abroad | | 0.121** (0.04) | 0.118** (0.041) | 0.12** (0.041) |
| Worked abroad | | -0.024 (0.031) | -0.019 (0.031) | -0.019 (0.031) |
| Union member | | 0.158*** (0.034) | 0.155*** (0.035) | 0.154*** (0.035) |
| ----- | | | | |
| Emigration * Income Distance | 0.034*** (0.009) | 0.039*** (0.009) | 0.041*** (0.009) | 0.04*** (0.009) |
| ----- | | | | |
| Regional FE | | | | X |
| Year FE | X | X | X | X |
| Observations | 104,636 (0.171) | 104,636 (0.187) | 101,664 (0.803) | 101,664 (1.439) |
| Constant | 1.632*** | 0.945*** | 2.299** | 4.751*** |

Note: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Chapter 5. When left is still left: the persistence of partisan spending effects in Central and Eastern Europe

Abstract. Do left-wing governments increase public spending? While such partisan spending effects have disappeared in the West, I argue they persist in Central and Eastern Europe. Parties continue to put forward distinctive policy positions on welfare, which can then translate into left-right spending differences because of fast economic growth. Growth significantly eases fiscal constraints, allowing governments to implement their preferred policies. Using 1995-2019 data from eleven Central and Eastern European states, I find significant and robust effects of cabinet ideology on public spending. Left-wing governments spend more on education, health, and social protection, as well as in total. This effect, however, is conditional on high levels of growth. It accordingly disappeared and even reversed during periods of economic upheaval in the mid-1990s and the late 2000s, though swiftly reappeared in both cases. The results highlight the key role of growth and fiscal constraints in determining whether partisan spending effects can emerge.

1. Introduction

Do left-wing governments increase public spending? In the West, partisan spending effects have narrowed and then completely disappeared since the 1980s (Potrafke, 2009; Herwartz and Theilen, 2014). Several factors are argued to have played a role in their decline — globalisation, extensive welfare states, ageing populations, and the decline of traditional working classes (Garrett and Lange, 1991; Huber and Stephens, 2001; Gingrich and Hausermann, 2015). Yet a key reason may have been a lack of economic growth. Slow growth constrains fiscal decisions and is likely to prevent partisan effects from emerging, particularly if spending cuts or higher borrowing are both politically unfeasible (Pierson, 1996). Conversely, fast growth creates discretionary fiscal space for governments — which should allow left-right differences in spending to emerge even when other constraints are in place.

Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) offers an excellent opportunity to test this claim. The region has experienced fast economic growth in the past decades — per capita incomes nearly tripled in the twenty years to 2019, compared to a rise of less than 50% in Western Europe (Dauderstädt, 2021). At the same time, its countries share many similarities with their Western counterparts — highly globalised economies, rapidly ageing populations, and relatively small left-right differences in preferences among voters (Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2012; Krastev, 2020; Petrova and Sznajder-Lee, 2022). The literature is unclear about the existence of partisan spending effects in the region. Some scholars — focusing on the unique context of the transition — have argued that these effects are in fact reversed here, with leftist governments spending less than the right (Tavits and Letki, 2009). However, the empirical evidence is rather mixed (Careja and Emmenegger, 2009; Coman, 2019). It is also outdated, with all findings based on data from more than two decades ago — meaning a reexamination is in order.

Many left-wing parties in the region remain associated with liberalising reforms, budget cuts, and policies of minimal welfare. In Hungary, the MSZP's time in government was marked by the infamous Bokros package of 1995 as well as the austerity measures imposed after the crash of 2008. Similar trajectories were followed by the SDL in Slovakia and the SLD in Poland, with such policies eventually contributing to electoral decline (Snegovaya, 2022). However, a closer look shows that left-wing CEE parties often behave

as traditionally expected to. Having lost the 1998 election following their liberalising push in government, the MSZP campaigned on a platform of increased welfare in 2002. They followed through on the promise once in office, then won re-election with a commitment to keep spending high (Berman and Snegovaya, 2019). In Slovakia, the SDL collapsed due to their role in implementing budget cuts, only to be replaced on the left by Smer — a more redistributive and populist party that subsequently spent multiple years in government. In Romania, a similar strategy of combining leftist and populist appeals has kept the Social Democrats dominant. After winning the 2012 election, for instance, their government rolled back many of the austerity measures imposed during the financial crisis (Kim and Borbath, 2022). In fact, political dynamics in the region mostly follow traditional left-right patterns historically seen in the West. Parties built social bases along key cleavages like class and ethnicity relatively quickly, despite some initial predictions to the contrary (Whitefield, 2002; Evans, 2006). These translate into meaningful programmatic differences, including on economic matters. Debates about welfare remain the key issue in most elections, and parties on the left and right put forward distinctive platforms in the expected way (Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2009, 2012).

In this paper, I argue that partisan spending effects persist in Central and Eastern Europe, conditional on high levels of economic growth. Distinctive left-right positions on welfare and the economy lead to partisan spending differences once parties are in office, subject to the existence of fiscal constraints. The high growth experienced by the region in recent decades relaxed these, allowing partisan differences to emerge even in the presence of other constraints. When growth is high, a right-wing government can marginally increase spending — to keep up with demography and avoid politically sensitive cuts — while still reducing the overall size of the state. A left-wing one can increase spending by significantly more and still avoid the need for higher taxes or borrowing. When growth is low, fiscal constraints tighten and partisan differences disappear — fearing a backlash from either voters or investors, right-wing governments avoid cutting benefits and left-wing ones struggle to raise taxes or deficits. Fast overall growth allowed partisan spending effects to persist in the region, though the effects remain conditional on growth. This implies that they varied over time, disappearing in periods of economic upheaval such as the 1990s and the late 2000s.

The contributions of my work are therefore both theoretical and empirical. Empirically, I establish the existence of partisan spending effects in Central and Eastern Europe, which addresses an important gap in the literature. I also show how these effects vary over time, being conditional on high economic growth and disappearing in periods of economic turmoil, which updates and contextualises previous findings. On a theoretical level, I show how economic growth plays a key role in allowing left-right differences in welfare policy to transform into partisan spending effects, building on past work emphasising the importance of fiscal constraints and market pressures (Pierson, 1996; Siren, 2021; Raess, 2021). In doing so, my work speaks to the broader literature on the evolution of partisan spending effects across time and contexts, as well as the evolution of welfare states in the post-communist space.

In the next section, I review the literature on partisan spending effects, drawing key insights from their development and evolution in Western democracies. I discuss how partisan spending effects have disappeared in recent decades despite their previous strength, how their decline is explained by a combination of programmatic convergence between mainstream parties and a tightening of fiscal constraints, and how the role of constraints is also revealed by works on partisan responses to economic crises. In the third section, I develop my theoretical framework, arguing that enduring left-right policy differences and faster economic growth have allowed partisan spending effects to persist in the region. I show that parties continue to put forward distinctive platforms, and discuss how the transformation of these platforms into spending differences is influenced by processes of coalition formation and fiscal constraints. I proceed to an empirical examination of my claims in the fourth section, using data from eleven CEE democracies between 1995 and 2019 to test three key hypotheses. The results provide strong support for my arguments and are robust to multiple different specifications and modelling approaches. The final section discusses the results and concludes.

2. Literature review

Theories of partisan spending effects can be traced back to earlier power-resource approaches, which saw welfare state development in Western democracies as driven by the political strength of left-wing parties (Stephens, 1979; Korpi, 1983). In this view, partisan spending effects arise because left-wing parties act as the political representatives of the

working class, increasing public spending and expanding welfare programmes while in government (Korpi, 2006). These policies benefit workers by reducing their dependence on employers, redistributing income to those in need, and providing insurance against labour market risks (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Kenworthy and Pontusson, 2005; Rehm, 2011). In contrast, right-wing parties tend to oppose the expansion of welfare, representing their middle-class constituents, who are more likely to pay for such policies through higher taxes than benefit from them. A large number of empirical studies confirmed the existence of strong partisan spending effects during the post-war era — left-wing governments spent significantly more than their right-wing counterparts across domains, increasing the generosity and coverage of benefits and social transfers (Hicks and Swank, 1992; Blais et al., 1993; Cusack, 1997; Korpi and Palme, 2003; Allan and Scruggs, 2004).

However, starting in the 1990s, scholars argued these previously strong partisan effects narrowed and then largely disappeared (Scharpf, 1991; Pierson, 1999; Huber and Stephens, 2001). These non-findings have been repeatedly confirmed by recent studies. In recent decades, left-wing governments have not spent more than their right-wing counterparts on social protection (Potrafke, 2009; Kwon and Pontusson, 2010; Herwartz and Theilen, 2014), healthcare (Potrafke, 2010) or overall (Herwartz and Theilen, 2017). Any partisan differences have been relegated to the margins, involving reallocations of spending from one category to the other (Herwartz and Theilen, 2021). Leftist parties, for example, may remain more likely to safeguard the generosity of core benefits (Korpi and Palme, 2003; Allan and Scruggs, 2004) but that is likely to come at the expense of cuts in other transfers (Hubscher, 2017) in a way that accentuates divisions between labour market insiders and outsiders (Rueda, 2005).

Two broad types of explanations have been put forward for the disappearance of partisan spending effects in the West — the convergence of mainstream party platforms due to structural changes in society, and/or tighter fiscal constraints preventing parties from implementing their desired policies.

The former explanation stems from the transformation of industrial societies into postindustrial ones, which drove significant changes in the social base of political parties. Deindustrialisation diminished the size and organisational strength of the working class, eroding the left's traditional partisan base (Best, 2011). To maintain electoral relevance,

leftist parties increasingly focused on attracting more middle-class voters, establishing a new base of support among sociocultural professionals (Gingrich and Hausermann, 2015; Oesch and Renwald, 2018). Since these voters are less economically vulnerable and less likely to benefit from welfare programmes than blue-collar workers, left-wing party platforms moved away from tax-and-spend redistributive politics. The decline of trade unions further weakened the influence of workers on leftist politicians (Garrett, 1998; Kwon and Pontusson, 2010). The result was a convergence of policy platforms between the left and right (Berman and Snegovaya, 2019) — in turn, this would prevent significant partisan spending differences from emerging once such parties entered government.

Other explanations focus on the role of fiscal constraints, which can prevent governments from implementing their preferred policies while in office. Globalisation is perhaps the most discussed factor imposing tighter fiscal constraints — economic interdependence and capital mobility have increased rapidly since the 1980s, which may have reduced governments' policy space and restricted their decisions on tax and spending (Garrett and Lange, 1991; Strange, 1995). However, the effect of globalisation is unclear. Research provides little evidence of a convergence in tax rates or a narrowing of policy spaces in normal economic times (Oatley, 1999; Plümper et al., 2009). Multiple studies found pronounced partisan effects occurring during a period of accelerated globalisation in the 1980s (Potrafke, 2009; Kwon and Pontusson, 2010). Additionally, economic risks created by globalisation can increase demand for social protection and investment, leading to a compensation effect that may allow for enduring partisan differences (Cameron, 1978; Rodrik, 1997; Garrett and Mitchell, 2001; Walter, 2010; Busemeyer and Garritzman, 2019).

The literature shows several other factors are more likely to have created tight fiscal constraints for governments. One, the existence of already large welfare states — this can strengthen fiscal constraints through ceiling effects, in effect leaving less room for further tax rises and spending increases. At the same time, existing programmes create large constituencies of support among their beneficiaries (Gingrich and Ansell, 2012). This is likely to prevent governments from implementing cuts for fear of an electoral backlash, regardless of their policy preferences or ideology. Two, rapidly ageing populations — this generates significant budgetary pressures by driving long-term and permanent increases in public spending on healthcare and pensions while narrowing the tax base at the same time (Clements et al., 2015). Three, slow economic growth after the postwar era — low

growth is said to have created a condition of permanent austerity which prevented further expansions of the welfare state (Pierson, 1996). Partisan spending differences may have nonetheless endured if right-wing parties retained an incentive to cut spending and left-wing ones to maintain it (Kwon and Pontusson, 2010). Yet advocating the dismantling of welfare institutions is very different from opposing their creation in the first place. As mentioned earlier, outright benefit cuts tend to be politically unfeasible, meaning that retrenchment of spending relative to the overall economy can only realistically occur as spending is eroded by growth or inflation. If both remain low, spending is unlikely to vary much between governments of different partisan orientations.

The key role of fiscal constraints in determining the extent of partisan spending effects is also highlighted by a different strand of the literature, on partisan responses to economic crises. This shows how partisan spending effects are prevented and can even flip during a crisis, due to a combination of fiscal strain and external pressure from financial markets. In a recession, one would expect left-wing governments to behave counter-cyclically, increasing social protection by more than the right to shield an economically vulnerable base (Cusack, 1999). Yet they are unlikely to be able to do that — a shrinking economy lowers revenues and automatically increases spending at the same time, as automatic stabilisers like unemployment insurance kick in. This leaves discretionary fiscal responses dependent on extra borrowing at a time of fiscal strain. Such financing is unlikely to be available, as financial markets are sceptical of government stimulus and left-wing policy agendas (McMenamin et al., 2015, Raess, 2021). The dynamic is exacerbated if financial markets are distressed, leaving them particularly apprehensive about additional lending (Chang and Leblond, 2015). The case of the 2008 crisis and its aftermath perfectly illustrates this, as governments converged on a relatively uniform response involving limited expansionary policies, with ideology playing little to no role (Ansell, 2012; Armingeon, 2012; Pontusson and Raess, 2012). Markets sometimes actively prevented a stronger response — for example, when the UK's Labour government planned to introduce an additional stimulus package in early 2009, it was forced to backtrack after a failed gilts auction (Mandelkern, 2015). Similar dynamics were at play in a series of other downturns since the late 1980s (Raess and Pontusson, 2015). One study takes the argument further, arguing that asymmetrical market pressures — caused by an anti-left bias among investors and their scepticism for government stimulus — can force left-wing governments to pursue more contractionary fiscal policies than the right (Raess, 2021). External pressure from the

markets can be further compounded by international organisations like the IMF, which often attach tight spending conditionalities to their support programmes (Rickard and Caraway, 2018).

The literature on partisan spending effects in Central and Eastern Europe is considerably more limited. One influential study argued that partisan spending effects in the region were reversed, using data from 1989 to 2004 to show that left-wing governments were more likely to cut spending than the right (Tavits and Letki, 2009). The authors explained this as a result of the unique political and economic circumstances of their post-communist transition, which gave left-wing governments in the region the incentives and opportunities to contain spending more aggressively than the right. All governments faced enormous fiscal pressures during the transition. Financial markets were apprehensive about lending in an unstable environment and international organisations like the IMF were heavily promoting neoliberal policies of limited welfare. At the same time, left-wing parties need to legitimise their role in their new system due to their association with their communist predecessors. Aiming to demonstrate commitment to liberalisation, many spearheaded vast reform packages and cut spending while in government. They were better positioned to do so than the right, since higher voter loyalty and better organisational structures — often inherited from former ruling parties — allowed them to take unpopular measures without fearing immediate electoral collapse. In contrast, many right-wing parties struggled with electoral fragmentation, limited resources, and organisational turnover.

Other studies disagree with their conclusion. A direct response to Tavits and Letki argued that partisan effects were absent in the region and the effects they discovered were driven by bias in their manifesto-based ideology measure (Coman, 2019). A third study found significant partisan spending effects in the traditional direction, showing that left-wing governments increased spending on social protection between 1993 and 2002 (Careja and Emmenegger, 2009). Existing work therefore paints a mixed and contradictory picture of partisan spending effects in Central and Eastern Europe. In addition, none of the available studies examines the issue using data beyond 2004 — a major gap, given the major changes experienced by the region in the last two decades.

3. Theoretical argument

I argue that partisan spending effects persist in Central and Eastern Europe for two key reasons. First, political parties in CEE countries put forward distinctive left-right policy positions on welfare and the economy, responding to the preferences of their social base and to electoral pressures to attract voters. Second, these distinct positions lead to different spending patterns in government due to high economic growth, which relaxes fiscal constraints and allows cabinets to implement their desired plans. When left-wing parties dominate cabinets and growth is high — as it has been across the region over the past two decades — partisan spending effects emerge. However, these effects vary over time and disappear in times of low growth or economic turmoil.

Enduring policy differences between parties in Central and Eastern Europe

A precondition of partisan spending effects is that left-wing parties put forward distinctive policy platforms on welfare, redistribution, and the economy — which they then aim to implement while in government. I argue that this continues to be the case in Central and Eastern Europe.

It is essential to be clear about the meaning of ‘left’ and ‘right’ in the context of this analysis. A broad literature shows that the ideological positioning of parties in the region tends to be different from their Western European counterparts. In a multidimensional policy space where a sociocultural axis cuts across the traditional economic left-right dimension, CEE parties often defy easy categorisation – for instance, by combining right-wing economic policies with liberal positions on social issues, or left-wing welfare agendas with strongly conservative positions on topics like immigration and minority rights (Kitschelt, 1992; Marks et al., 2006). In addition, some parties in the region lack clear ideological positions, being centred on charismatic political entrepreneurs and relying on competence and anti-corruption appeals, like ANO in Czechia (Kopecek, 2016).

While I acknowledge this complexity, the focus of this study on partisan spending effects means that I conceptualise parties in the region as clustering into three broad ideological groups – (1) the ‘left’, referring to parties from the socialist and social-democratic families which traditionally and nominally identify themselves as being on the left of the economic axis; (2) the ‘populist-nationalist right’, comprised of parties that combine left-wing economic appeals with strongly conservative positions on social issues; and (3) ‘the centre-

right', a more heterogeneous group that includes traditional liberal and conservative parties as well as newer entrepreneurial or populist outfits that align with them on core economic policies. This understanding of left and right is used for both theoretical and empirical reasons. Theoretically, it creates a clear test of the classic partisan hypotheses that contrast the spending decisions of traditional left-wing parties against those of others. Empirically, this choice is guided by the data, as both previous literature and the analysis in this section demonstrate – the three groups hold distinct and coherent positions on the economic left-right axis that separate them from each other.

Party platforms can be seen as the result of what Rohrschneider and Whitefield (2012) called the 'strain of representation' – a tension between competing goals of representing the preferences of their partisan supporters and those of independents with views closer to the median voter. On one hand, parties channel the preferences of their social base, as described by classic partisan representation models associated with the work of Lipset and Rokkan (1967). On the other hand, parties need to attract voters beyond their partisan base to win elections – which gives them an incentive to moderate their position towards the centre in order to attract more independents (Downs, 1957). The way parties balance these competing considerations determines the policy positions they put forward to the electorate.

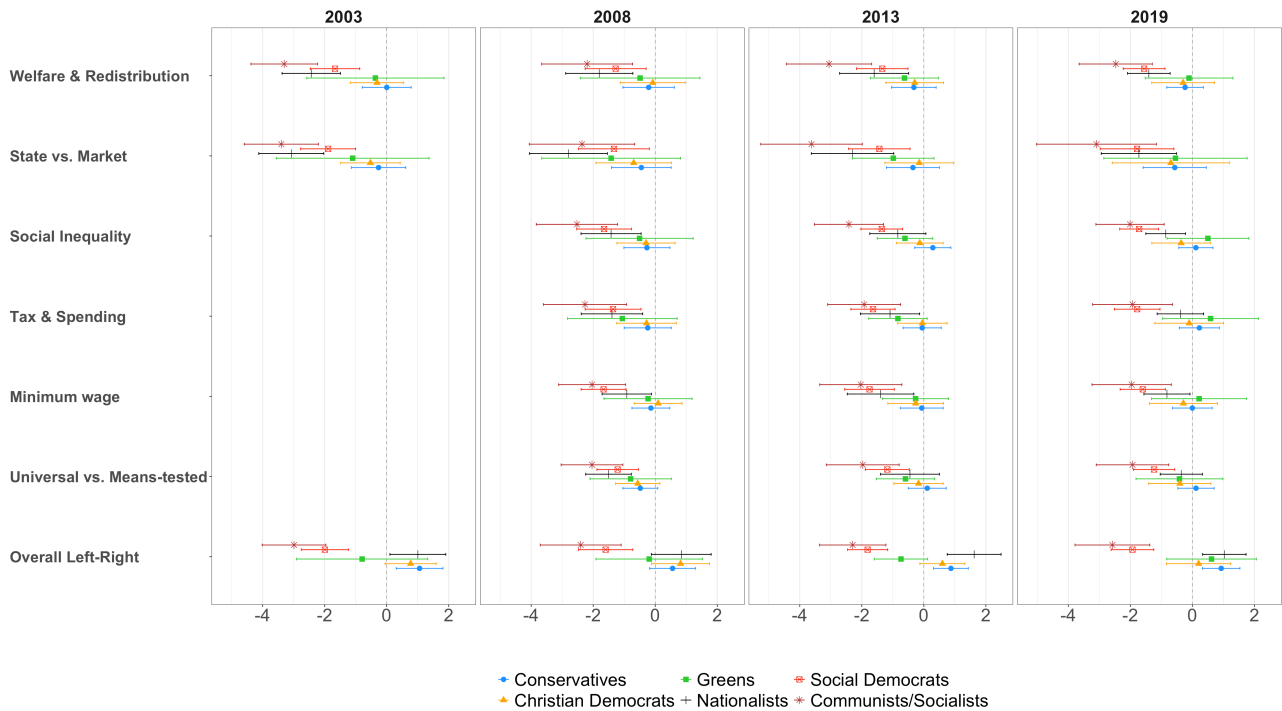
Several structural changes in post-industrial societies have affected this balance. These include deindustrialisation and the decline of the traditional working class (Best, 2011; Oesch and Renwald, 2018), a process of partisan dealignment (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2002; Fieldhouse et al., 2019), and the decline of mass party organisations and trade unions (Katz and Mair, 1995; Kwon and Pontusson, 2010). By diminishing the size and influence of traditional partisan groups, these factors strengthened incentives to appeal to the median voter and are thus claimed to have driven a convergence of policy platforms between mainstream parties (Berman and Snegovaya, 2019).

However, convergence remains incomplete in the context of Central and Eastern Europe. This is for three reasons. First, traditional cleavages like class continue to shape political dynamics in the region. Despite early expectations to the contrary, parties developed social bases along these divides in a way similar to that observed in the West (Evans and Whitefield, 1993; Whitefield, 2002; Evans, 2006; Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2009).

Second, deindustrialisation has been more limited in the region. This means that countries maintain relatively large traditional working classes and parties — particularly those on the left — continue to have significant incentives to represent their views. Third, electoral competition pushes parties to continue offering distinct platforms. While moderating their positions can attract more centrist voters, parties also need to ensure the continuing loyalty of their partisan supporters. Moving too far to the centre can alienate the base, creating an opening for other parties to attract previously loyal voters. This loss of support then pushes parties to offer renewed policy alternatives (Bremer, 2018; Bandau, 2022; Snegovaya, 2022; Savage, 2022).

These factors mean that CEE parties put forward distinctive policy platforms, with the left considerably more supportive of redistribution and welfare than the centre-right. Drawing on an updated version⁷ of the expert surveys conducted by Rohrschneider and Whitefield (2012) and building on their previous conclusions, I find significant differences in policy positions between party families in CEE countries when looking at multiple dimensions — overall left-right positions, stances on broad issues of redistribution and state intervention, as well as specific policy areas including social inequality, taxes and spending, support for minimum wage legislation, and preference for universal over means-tested welfare benefits. Figure 1 shows the effect of party family on policy positions between 2003 and 2019. Liberal parties are the reference group, positions are measured on a 1-7 scale from left to right, and country fixed effects are included in the underlying models. Across issues and time, left-wing parties — including both Communist/Socialist and Social Democratic ones — sit to the left of their centre-right competitors, with the differences statistically significant. There are no significant differences in economic platforms between Liberal, Christian Democratic, Conservative, or Green parties. As documented by other studies, populist-nationalist parties in Central and Eastern Europe combine left-wing economic positions with right-wing cultural appeals, competing with the left for some of the same voters on similar programmatic appeals — though, as explained above, this is likely to provide further incentives for leftist parties to offer distinct policy alternatives (Snegovaya, 2022; though in Hungary Fidesz implemented significant cuts to benefits and social spending during its time in government, see Orenstein and Bugarcic, 2022).

⁷ I am grateful to the authors for providing access to an updated version of their dataset, which includes a 2019 wave on top of the original data for 2003, 2008, and 2013.

Figure 1. Effect of party family on positions in CEE countries, 2003-19

The empirical evidence confirms that parties in CEE countries continue to offer distinctive policy positions, with left-wing parties considerably more supportive of welfare programmes and spending than the centre-right. These differences can result in significant spending differences while in office, subject to a couple of conditions.

From distinct policy positions to partisan spending effects

While distinct policy positions on economic matters are a precondition of partisan spending effects, the former do not automatically result in the latter. Two steps shape the transformation of party preferences into government spending decisions, and hence determine whether partisan spending effects occur.

First is the translation of party preferences into government preferences. This is straightforward when cabinets are formed of a single party but otherwise shaped by the process of coalition formation. Ideologically distinct government preferences — including on spending — will only emerge if coalitions are dominated by parties of a similar ideology (Potrafke, 2017). There are two main perspectives on how coalitions influence government

preferences. One is focused on the dominant role of government ministers, which exercise control over their portfolios and can shape policies in line with their own priorities⁸ (Laver and Shepsle, 1996). The other builds on veto player theory, arguing that government preferences are the result of a negotiated compromise that all parties need to agree to (Tsebelis, 2002; Tsebelis and Chang, 2004; Goodhart, 2013). According to recent evidence, which of the two perspectives is more accurate depends on the institutional context (Martin and Vanberg, 2020). Where legislative oversight is strong and agreements can be monitored and enforced, policies are shaped by consensual bargains and coalitions will have a moderating effect. Where legislative guardrails are weak, ministerial discretion is much greater and cabinet preferences are largely shaped by the main parties which control key portfolios. For the translation of partisan spending preferences into those of the government, though, what matters in either of these contexts is relative power within the coalition. Ideologically distinct preferences are only likely to emerge when parties with similar preferences dominate the coalition — either to shape a moderated bargain closer to their preferred position, or to push for their preferred policies from key cabinet positions.

The second step is the transformation of government preferences into spending decisions. This is shaped by the existence of fiscal constraints — for example, a left-wing government may want to increase spending but be prevented from doing so by a lack of funding in a fiscal crunch. As discussed before, several factors determine the extent of these constraints — the existence of large welfare states, ageing populations, globalisation, the actions of financial markets and international organisations, and the pace of economic growth. While these all matter, I argue that the extent of fiscal constraints is most importantly a function of growth. If economic growth is slow, governments will have a limited ability to make discretionary spending choices regardless of their ideology. However, if growth is high, governments will be able to implement some of their desired spending plans even if other constraints are in place (Pierson, 1996; Siren, 2021). To illustrate this, consider a hypothetical scenario not unlike that facing some Western democracies, where higher taxes or deficits are unfeasible, yearly growth is around 2%, and public spending needs to rise by approximately 2% to keep up with demographic

⁸ A related issue emerges if ministerial discretion is high, the common-pool problem. This leads to increased spending under coalitions regardless of ideology — ministers with competing priorities push for more spending in their departments and the treasury struggles to resist their demands (Persson and Tabellini, 2003; Bawn and Rosenbluth, 2006). I control for the number of governing parties in my analysis to account for this potential effect. However, recent evidence on this is mixed (see Blais et al., 2010).

pressures. A right-wing government will follow the latter option, minimising spending increases but avoiding electorally costly cuts to benefits. A left-wing cabinet may want to increase spending but cannot afford it without borrowing more or raising taxes. The result is likely to be indistinguishable partisan spending patterns. However, if growth is closer to 3-4% in an otherwise identical scenario, partisan spending patterns can emerge. A right-wing government can contain spending increases to 2% — reducing spending relative to the economy without any outright cuts — while a leftist one can increase spending by more than 3% without raising taxes or deficits.

In Central and Eastern Europe, more relaxed fiscal constraints have enabled the persistence of partisan spending effects. Most importantly, the region experienced fast economic growth — between 1995 and 2019, its economies grew at an average pace of 3.4% a year, much higher than the roughly 2% seen in most Western European countries (Eurostat, 2024). Higher growth created the necessary fiscal space for governments to implement their preferred spending plans, leading to the emergence of overall partisan effects across policy domains.

That said, the persistence of partisan spending effects remains conditional on high growth. In times of slowing growth or economic crisis, partisan differences will narrow and disappear. Two such periods stand out in the recent history of CEE democracies⁹ - the years of the transition in the early-to-mid-1990s, and the aftermath of the global financial crisis of 2008. On both occasions, significant recessions left little to no fiscal space for governments to make discretionary spending decisions. Partisan effects may have even flipped, particularly during the transition. Markets tend to exhibit a degree of anti-left bias, which can force left-wing governments to cut spending in a crisis due to higher borrowing costs (Raess, 2021). In addition, as discussed above, the unique context of the transition created incentives and opportunities for left-wing governments to aggressively cut spending (Tavits and Letki, 2009). While I argue for the persistence of traditional partisan effects in the region over the last decades as a whole, I agree with Tavits and Letki that the circumstances of the transition may have led to a reversal of these effects. However, these

⁹ The post-pandemic period since 2020 could easily be considered a third, given lockdown recessions, booming inflation, and the energy crisis stemming from the war in Ukraine. However, the situation was still developing at the time of writing and data from this period remained limited, meaning these years are left outside the scope of this study.

asymmetrical pressures leading to that were short-lived, disappearing in the late 1990s as party systems consolidated and the unique pressures of the transition eased.

I therefore expect that partisan spending effects persisted in Central and Eastern Europe over the past decades, with governments dominated by left-wing parties spending more than others across areas. Such parties put forward distinctive policy positions on economic issues, which translated to government preferences for more spending if they entered government alone or dominated coalitions. In turn, these preferences drove partisan differences in spending, as high economic growth eased fiscal constraints and offered governments the necessary space to implement desired policies. However, partisan effects remained conditional on high growth and disappeared in periods of economic turmoil. My framework thus leads to three key hypotheses that I proceed to test in the following section:

H1: Left-wing government has a positive effect on public spending in CEE democracies.

H2: The effect of left-wing government on public spending in CEE democracies is conditional on high levels of economic growth.

H3: The effect of left-wing government on public spending in CEE democracies varies with time. It disappeared during periods of economic turmoil in the mid-1990s and the late 2000s and was positive outside these periods.

It's important to note beforehand that although I argue for the persistence of partisan spending effects in the region, none of this is to claim that these dynamics bear much resemblance to the era of welfare state expansion described by power-resource theorists in the West. Left-wing CEE parties have not been working towards a generalised expansion of the welfare state, let alone the creation of coherent cradle-to-grave programmes. Post-Communist welfare states remain a somewhat patchwork combination of historical legacies, ad-hoc solutions, and neoliberal influences (Inglot, 2008; Orenstein, 2008; Kuitto, 2016). Instead, left-wing governments simply extended some programmes, raised transfers, or resisted deeper cuts — tinkering at the margins while avoiding a broader rejection of the region's neoliberal consensus.

4. Empirical analysis

My analysis uses government spending data from eleven Central and Eastern European democracies that are also members of the EU. The data was obtained from Eurostat and covers the 1995-2019 period. Comparable data from earlier on in the transition was unfortunately unavailable. I look at overall public expenditures along with government spending on education, health, and social protection, all measured as a percentage of GDP.

To measure government ideology, I use a dummy variable which captures whether the government was dominated by left-wing parties in any given year. As explained in the theoretical section above, I operationalise ideology using a party family approach that is invariant over time, rather than one that tracks changes in party positions over time. Empirically, this avoids the limitations of measures based on expert surveys, which are not readily available for years before the early 2000s, or election manifestos, which are exposed to potential bias and a lack of comparability over time (Coman, 2019). It is also preferable theoretically since it allows us to examine the spending behaviour of parties that officially and traditionally associate themselves with the left, rather than the translation of pre-election rhetoric, announcements, and promises into government policy (Kwon and Pontusson, 2010). I dichotomise this ideology variable, distinguishing between left-wing parties — including socialist and social-democratic ones — and all others. This provides better analytical and theoretical clarity, highlighting the distinct effect of left-wing governments in increasing spending, for which there are clear theoretical expectations. Further distinguishing between non-left governments comes with significant issues. It is not immediately clear how a centrist reference category should be constructed — there are no meaningful ideological differences between non-left, non-nationalist parties on welfare issues and the artificial creation of a mixed category that contains all cabinets that are not dominated by a particular ideological grouping creates very uncertain theoretical expectations. The one additional category that bears theoretical interest, that of governments dominated by populist-nationalist parties, is difficult to analyse because of limited data — there are only two clear examples in the region, FIDESZ and PiS during the 2010s, and even their previous stints in government during the 2000s are difficult to categorise since both parties were seen as relatively mainstream conservative parties in previous periods. A binary operationalisation of ideology also allows me to better leverage the relatively limited sample of spending data, particularly in the case of interaction models

and subsample analysis, where multiple ideology categories may quickly become hard to estimate. To move from party to cabinet ideology, I consider a cabinet left-wing if more than two-thirds of its seats are held by left-wing parties — this is preferred over a continuous measure of seat share because I do not expect the effect to increase linearly but instead, as discussed above, only expect the effect of ideology to become relevant if an ideological grouping dominates the government coalition. Finally, I consider a year as one with a left-wing government if one was in power for more than six months.

Several important economic, social and political factors beyond ideology drive government spending and need to be accounted for in the analysis. I include a control in my models for the number of governing parties to account for any potential common pool problems (Persson et al., 2007). I also control for election years¹⁰ since governments may use public spending to increase their popularity before an election (Franzese, 2000; Persson and Tabellini, 2000). Additionally, I include a range of socio-economic controls in all my models - growth, inflation, unemployment, public debt, and working-age dependency ratio, along with measures of trade openness and foreign direct investment as proxies for globalisation.

I employ TSCS models in the analysis, all sharing a few key features and largely paralleling the analysis of Tavits and Letki (2009). First, to address non-stationarity in the data, I difference the dependent variable and hence examine changes in public spending rather than its levels. Second, since the magnitude of change may depend on previous levels of spending, I control for the lag of the dependent variable. Third, I include country fixed effects to remove any omitted variable bias. The inclusion of year dummies does not affect the results so, in accordance with the results of a Hausman test, they were left out of the models. Finally, panel-corrected standard errors are used throughout the analysis in order to correct for serial correlation and heteroskedasticity (Beck and Katz, 1995).

I use two types of models, one for each of the two hypotheses under consideration. The first is aimed at a direct test of overall effects, and hence **H1**. $Y_{i,t}$ stands for spending in

¹⁰ I define the election year variable as $Election_{i,t} = [(M - 1 + d/D)]/12$ if t is an election year, where M is the month of the election, d is its day, and D is the number of days in the month of the election. It is then defined as 1 minus this quantity in the year preceding an election and zero in all other years.

country i in year t , $\Delta Y_{i,t}$ its first difference, $X_{i,t}$ is a vector of lagged socio-economic controls, γ_i a vector of country dummies, and $\epsilon_{i,t}$ is the error term:

$$\Delta Y_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Y_{i,t-1} + \beta_2 \text{Left}_{i,t} + \beta_3 \text{Parties}_{i,t} + \beta_4 \text{Election}_{i,t} + \beta_5 X_{i,t} + \beta_6 \gamma_i + \epsilon_{i,t}$$

To test for **H2**, an interaction model is used, as shown below. Since interaction models can be hard to interpret, I choose to show average marginal effect charts in the main text, which more clearly reveal how the effect of left government varies with economic growth. The full regression table is shown in the Appendix, along with a series of otherwise identical models in which the growth variable is dichotomised, leading to a dummy variable for years with high economic growth (over 2%¹¹). These also clearly show how the effect of left government varies at high levels of growth compared to periods of low growth.

$$\Delta Y_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Y_{i,t-1} + \beta_2 \text{Left}_{i,t} + \beta_3 \text{Growth}_{i,t} + \beta_4 \text{Left}_{i,t} * \text{Growth}_{i,t} + \beta_5 \text{Parties}_{i,t} + \beta_6 \text{Election}_{i,t} + \beta_7 X_{i,t} + \beta_8 \gamma_i + \epsilon_{i,t}$$

In order to examine how the effect of left government varies over time (**H3**), a standard approach would be to use a periodisation strategy, splitting up the sample into different periods and either analysing the subsamples separately or employing an interaction with a period factor, similar to the model above. While I show the results of this latter approach in the Appendix¹², choosing specific cut-offs between periods can be rather arbitrary, particularly as partisan spending effects should return very gradually with growth. A better solution, one that is completely atheoretical, is to engage in a moving window analysis (Kwon and Pontusson, 2010). Essentially, this means estimating a series of identical models over consecutive sub-periods of the dataset. Since more recent observations gradually replace older ones in the sample, estimates from these models can be used to identify temporal variation in the effect of government ideology on spending. To provide the best balance between sample size and nuance, I choose to employ a 6-year moving window, although the broad patterns remain unchanged when using longer windows of 8 or 10 years.

¹¹ These results are robust to using different values as the high growth threshold (1.5 - 2.5%)

¹² There, I examine four different periods corresponding to the expectations in H3: 1995-1999 (late transition), 2000-2007 (boom years), 2008-12 (crisis period), 2013-19 (post-crisis).

Table 1. Effect of left government on changes in public spending, CEE, 1995-2019

| | <i>Dependent variable:</i> | | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | Total (1) | Education (2) | Health (3) | Social (4) |
| Lagged DV | -0.557*** (0.044) | -0.447*** (0.061) | -0.447*** (0.053) | -0.365*** (0.041) |
| Left government | 0.765*** (0.291) | 0.166*** (0.058) | 0.107** (0.052) | 0.269** (0.118) |
| Growth | -0.287*** (0.031) | -0.024*** (0.006) | -0.030*** (0.006) | -0.166*** (0.009) |
| Debt | 0.009 (0.010) | -0.004** (0.002) | 0.001 (0.002) | -0.011*** (0.004) |
| Inflation | -0.015 (0.010) | -0.004 (0.003) | -0.009*** (0.002) | -0.012*** (0.004) |
| Unemployment | 0.038 (0.042) | -0.0002 (0.007) | -0.019** (0.008) | 0.019 (0.019) |
| Trade openness | -0.026*** (0.006) | -0.003* (0.001) | -0.002 (0.001) | -0.002 (0.002) |
| Dependency ratio | 0.068* (0.039) | -0.005 (0.007) | -0.00005 (0.009) | 0.030*** (0.011) |
| FDI inflows | -0.005 (0.011) | -0.003 (0.002) | -0.004* (0.002) | 0.001 (0.005) |
| Election year | 0.221 (0.332) | 0.058 (0.060) | -0.020 (0.067) | -0.041 (0.122) |
| Governing parties | 0.141 (0.128) | -0.003 (0.024) | 0.0003 (0.027) | 0.064 (0.050) |
| Constant | 20.119*** (2.224) | 2.457*** (0.453) | 2.583*** (0.519) | 3.697*** (0.631) |
| Observations | 248 | 248 | 248 | 248 |
| R ² | 0.468 | 0.338 | 0.388 | 0.620 |
| Adjusted R ² | 0.419 | 0.277 | 0.331 | 0.584 |
| F Statistic (df = 21; 226) | 9.470*** | 5.503*** | 6.814*** | 17.527*** |

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

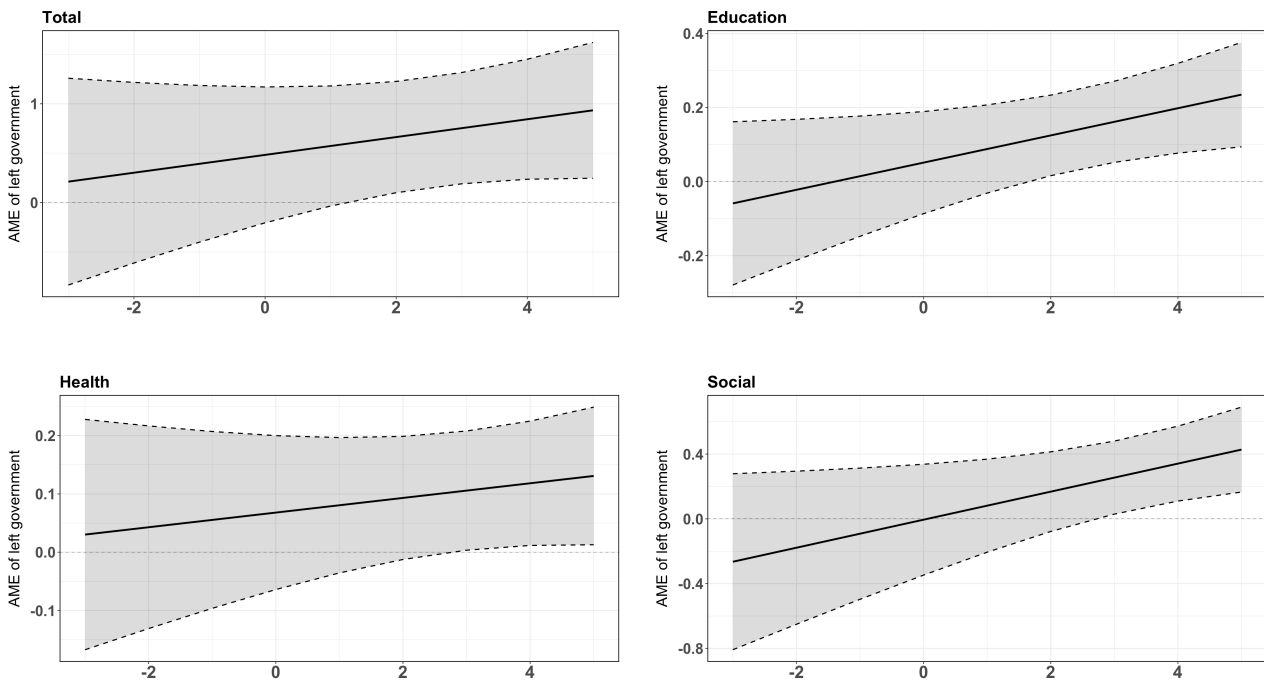
The main results of my analysis are presented in Table 1 for each of the four spending categories of interest (total, education, health, and social protection). The controls largely behave as expected. Lagged dependent variables have a large and significant effect in all four models, meaning that higher levels of spending dampen its growth. Economic growth,

through a base effect, leads to slower growth in spending. Higher dependency ratios increase social spending. Higher public debt, trade openness, unemployment, and inflation seem to have a negative effect, although the evidence is very mixed across categories. In terms of the political variables, I find no evidence of a political business cycle; larger coalitions likewise don't affect spending in the region.

Results are remarkably clear when it comes to the effect of left-wing governments on spending, indicating strong support for **H1**. Between 1995 and 2019, partisan spending effects were indeed present in the region, with left-wing governments spending significantly more than other cabinets across sectors. Ideology has a positive and highly significant effect on all four categories of spending analysed - total, education, health, and social. The effects are also meaningful in size - all things equal, the models predict a leftist government increases overall spending by over 0.7% of GDP, social spending by over 0.25%, and health and education expenditures by more than 0.1%.

As hypothesised in **H2**, these positive effects of ideology are conditional on high levels of economic growth. Figure 2 shows the average marginal effects of left-wing government on the different categories of spending as they vary with economic growth. The size of the effects tends to increase with growth. More importantly, partisan spending differences only become statistically significant at relatively high levels of growth. The effect of left government most readily achieves significance for total spending, around 1.5% growth. It is most difficult to observe for health and social spending, where the models indicate levels of growth at or above 3% a year are needed for a statistically significant effect of cabinet ideology. As growth falls below zero, estimates of the effect become minimal and, in the case of education and social spending, even turn negative, though they fail to reach significance. The hypothesis that partisan spending effects are conditional on high levels of growth is further supported by the results of models interacting ideology with a binary indicator of high growth (see Appendix) — across the four spending categories, they reveal no significant effects in years of low growth, and large positive effects in periods of high growth.

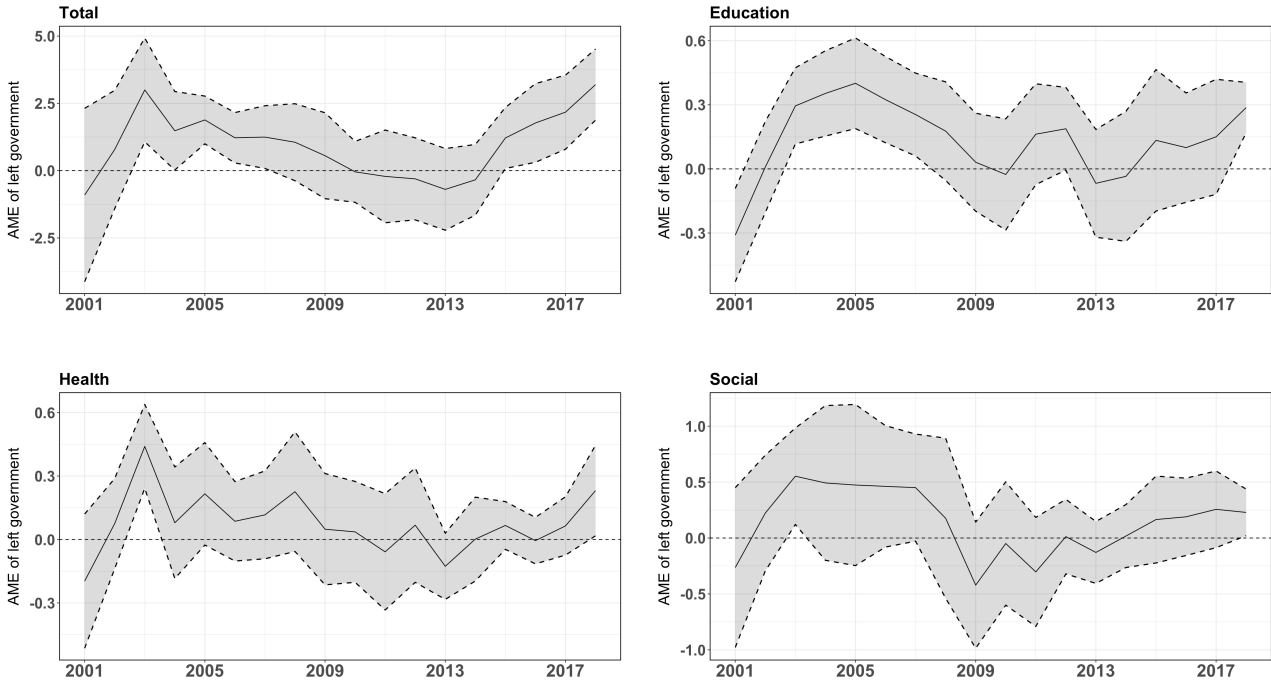
Figure 2. Average marginal effect of left government on public spending, by level of economic growth



Next, Figure 3 presents the results of a moving window analysis, which shows how the effect of left government on spending varies over time in CEE democracies. Here, the effect for a particular year represents the estimate obtained from the sample of 6 years leading up to, and including it. While confidence intervals are inevitably widened by the estimation method (which reduces the sample from 248 complete observations to just 59 at a time), the expectations set out in **H3** are largely supported. I find negative effects of government ideology at the start of the period, covering the second half of the 1990s, although they only reach significance in the case of education spending. These rapidly change as observations from the early 2000s replace the earlier years. By the middle of the decade, the data shows positive and significant effects of left-wing governments across the four spending categories. As expected, partisan effects fall and then rapidly disappear around the time of the Great Recession. The estimates become negative, most notably for total and social expenditure, although the drop is smaller than in the earlier period and in no sector reach statistical significance. After the crisis, though, partisan effects re-emerge - by the end of the period in 2019, the effect of government ideology is once again positive and statistically significant for all categories of spending. The findings are also confirmed when using a periodisation strategy and interacting cabinet ideology with a series of period dummies — these models show small negative effects in the baseline 1995-1999 period,

which are significant in the case of social spending, followed by large and significant increases for the 2000-07 and 2013-19 time periods (see Appendix).

Figure 3. Average marginal effect of left government on public spending, moving window analysis



My results are robust across estimation methods and different operationalisations of the key independent variable. While I choose to employ TSCS models, mainly for their easier interpretation, a number of scholars in the literature prefer to analyse partisan spending effects using error-correction models (Kwon and Pontusson, 2010; Herwartz and Theilen, 2017). Such models assume a long-run equilibrium relationship between the variables and allow us to distinguish between temporary shocks and longer-term effects. The results of an otherwise identical ECM analysis of my data, available in the Appendix, strongly confirms my initial findings, showing significant effects of left-wing governments on spending. Additionally, the findings are robust to different operationalisations of the key ideology variable. I continue to find significant positive effects of left-wing governments on spending when using 33% or 50% thresholds for cabinet dominance instead of the 66% used in the main models, though the effects are expectedly somewhat weaker. My overall findings are also robust to using a non-binary ideology indicator which distinguishes between four types of governments — left-wing, centre-right, populist-nationalist, and mixed. Such models again show left-wing governments spending more than centre-right ones across the four analysed areas. The results also show some evidence of mixed

governments spend more than the right on social protection, while nationalists spend more than the right in total but less on education with no other differences (see Appendix but note limitations discussed above). Alternative models also confirm my main findings when including an interaction with growth or when looking at periodisation (results are available on request). My results are all also robust to the exclusion of any particular country from the sample.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

As argued, left-wing parties in Central and Eastern Europe put forward distinctive policy positions on welfare, and these positions translate into partisan spending effects in the region, conditional on high levels of economic growth. The empirical analysis offered strong support for my hypotheses, with three main conclusions.

One, partisan spending effects endure in Central and Eastern Europe despite their disappearance in Western democracies. Between 1995 and 2019, left-wing governments in the region spent more than others on health, education, and social protection, as well as overall. My analysis provides statistical evidence that reflects the experience of several left-wing cabinets in the region, as originally discussed in the Introduction – for instance, the MSZP in Hungary after winning the 2002 election, Smer in Slovakia after entering government in 2006 and replacing the SDL on the left, or the PSD in Romania upon their return to office in 2012, following the global financial crisis. The effects of government ideology are larger for total and social spending, and somewhat weaker for expenditures on health - likely reflecting the priorities of leftist parties as well as the particular pressure on healthcare spending that comes with ageing populations.

Two, these partisan spending effects are conditional on relatively high levels of economic growth, which ease fiscal constraints and allow governments to implement their preferred policies. In its absence, right-wing governments avoid outright cuts and left-wing ones are often unable to raise either taxes or deficits, suppressing left-right differences. While the exact threshold for significance varies across categories, annual growth above 1.5% to 2.5% seems necessary to allow partisan spending patterns to emerge in CEE states.

Three, partisan spending effects vary with time in the region. To a significant extent, this is a direct consequence of their conditionality on growth - the effects are bound to disappear in times of economic turmoil like the transition years of the 1990s and the global financial crisis and its aftermath. Indeed, I find that the effects of left government on spending fall and then disappear in both of these periods, although they quickly return each time with growth. Multiple examples of this pattern can be seen in the region, although the case of the Hungarian MSZP is perhaps the most illustrative – cabinets led by the party cut spending sharply during the 1990s, increased outlays on welfare when they returned to office during the economic boom of the 2000s, only to be forced to implement austerity measures again in the wake of the global financial crisis.

There is some more mixed evidence that the effect of left-wing cabinets on spending turned negative in these periods, particularly in the mid-to-late 1990s. This seems to confirm previous findings on the negative effect of left government during the unique context of the post-Communist transition, which created both the incentives and the opportunities for left-wing parties to aggressively contain spending. This is particularly notable since some negative effects appear despite the data not including the first half of the 1990s, when such pressures were significantly stronger. Tavits and Letki (2009), despite arguing against my overall conclusion, are likely to have been right. Their arguments, however, have little applicability beyond the immediate transition period. After the 2008 crisis, partisan spending effects seem to have fallen by comparatively less than in the 1990s. I find little to no evidence that bias in financial markets pushed left-wing governments to cut spending by more than the right in the region (Raess, 2021). This points to the importance of legitimisation pressures during the transition in creating the conditions for reversed partisan effects.

My results also have implications for the broader literature on partisan spending effects, including their disappearance in Western democracies in recent decades. Several factors that have been brought about to explain the narrowing of partisan effects there, including advanced globalisation and relatively weaker partisan attachments compared to the postwar era, do not seem to prevent the emergence of left-right spending differences in Central and Eastern Europe. Other relevant processes like ageing populations and deindustrialisation are also present in the region, though they are notably less advanced than in the West. My findings highlight the potentially central role of fiscal constraints and

most notably slow economic growth in explaining the decline. If similar mechanisms apply across Europe, then recent levels of economic growth seem to have been insufficient to allow partisan spending effects to emerge in Western Europe — average growth in the 25 years to 2019 was around 2%, at or below the levels at which the effects start to emerge in CEE countries. On a broader level, my findings also confirm that partisan spending effects remain, at least in some areas, an important part of modern political economies and are still relevant to the development and evolution of welfare states, not just a historical artefact of a postwar era characterised by stable partisan attachment and mass party organisations.

The paper opens up several promising avenues for future research. Now that the existence of partisan spending effects in Central and Eastern Europe has been established, more work is needed to illuminate its precise mechanisms. It remains unclear how partisan effects vary within the region, how they interact with electoral dynamics from one cycle to another, or how they affect specific programmes and transfers. My results also show that the literature should pay more attention to the existence or absence of partisan spending effects outside Western democracies. If they persist in one region, they may also do so in other areas such as Latin America, East Asia, or Africa. Whatever the results, the issue can provide key insights into the political economy of democracies, as well as electoral competition within them. Finally, my findings indicate that scholars should seek to better isolate the role of slow growth in driving the decline of partisan effects in the West — it is uncertain how much of the decline is explained by this factor as opposed to other types of fiscal constraints, and how these constraints have interacted with changing social structures and patterns of electoral competition.

The conclusions of my study paint a relatively optimistic picture of Central and Eastern European politics. Young democracies in the region have matured considerably and developed many of the same mechanisms that have long been observed in the West. Despite some expectations at the outset of the transition and in line with previous research, I find evidence of meaningful programmatic competition in CEE democracies. Political parties do a reasonable job of representing the diverging views and needs of their voters, including while in office, with key implications for the region's political economy and its patterns of electoral competition.

6. References

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7. Appendix

Table A1. Interaction models of left government with economic growth

| | <i>Dependent variable:</i> | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | Total | | Education | | Health | | Social | |
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) | (8) |
| Lagged DV | -0.558*** (0.044) | -0.561*** (0.047) | -0.452*** (0.061) | -0.446*** (0.062) | -0.447*** (0.053) | -0.430*** (0.053) | -0.352*** (0.040) | -0.352*** (0.052) |
| Left government | 0.482 (0.351) | -0.268 (0.492) | 0.051 (0.070) | -0.009 (0.084) | 0.068 (0.067) | -0.033 (0.083) | -0.005 (0.175) | -0.255 (0.236) |
| Growth | -0.294*** (0.032) | | -0.027*** (0.006) | | -0.031*** (0.006) | | -0.172*** (0.009) | |
| High growth (>2%) | | -2.444*** (0.304) | | -0.169*** (0.054) | | -0.231*** (0.054) | | -1.103*** (0.126) |
| Debt | 0.010 (0.010) | 0.023** (0.010) | -0.004** (0.002) | -0.003 (0.002) | 0.001 (0.002) | 0.003 (0.002) | -0.010*** (0.003) | -0.001 (0.004) |
| Inflation | -0.015 (0.010) | -0.013 (0.009) | -0.004 (0.003) | -0.003 (0.002) | -0.009*** (0.002) | -0.009*** (0.002) | -0.012*** (0.004) | -0.009** (0.004) |
| Unemployment | 0.039 (0.042) | 0.019 (0.049) | 0.0002 (0.007) | -0.001 (0.008) | -0.018** (0.008) | -0.020** (0.008) | 0.016 (0.018) | 0.009 (0.022) |
| Trade openness | -0.027*** (0.006) | -0.031*** (0.007) | -0.003** (0.001) | -0.003** (0.001) | -0.002 (0.001) | -0.002 (0.001) | -0.002 (0.002) | -0.005** (0.002) |
| Dependency ratio | 0.068* (0.040) | 0.111** (0.044) | -0.005 (0.007) | -0.003 (0.008) | -0.0001 (0.009) | 0.004 (0.010) | 0.028** (0.012) | 0.045*** (0.015) |
| FDI inflows | -0.005 (0.010) | -0.006 (0.010) | -0.003 (0.002) | -0.003 (0.002) | -0.004* (0.002) | -0.004* (0.002) | 0.002 (0.005) | -0.0004 (0.005) |
| Election year | 0.199 (0.330) | 0.205 (0.327) | 0.049 (0.059) | 0.045 (0.061) | -0.024 (0.066) | -0.029 (0.064) | -0.064 (0.121) | -0.094 (0.126) |
| Governing parties | 0.141 (0.128) | 0.181 (0.131) | -0.003 (0.024) | -0.002 (0.024) | 0.0003 (0.027) | 0.003 (0.027) | 0.062 (0.050) | 0.086 (0.056) |
| Left gov. x Growth | 0.090 (0.082) | | 0.037** (0.018) | | 0.013 (0.015) | | 0.087** (0.040) | |
| Left gov. x High growth | | 1.515** (0.591) | | 0.243** (0.103) | | 0.194** (0.097) | | 0.730*** (0.272) |
| Constant | 20.139*** (2.237) | 19.269*** (2.508) | 2.483*** (0.450) | 2.383*** (0.488) | 2.585*** (0.521) | 2.414*** (0.547) | 3.708*** (0.622) | 3.186*** (0.836) |
| Observations | 248 | 248 | 248 | 248 | 248 | 248 | 248 | 248 |
| R ² | 0.469 | 0.429 | 0.351 | 0.309 | 0.389 | 0.364 | 0.630 | 0.387 |
| Adjusted R ² | 0.417 | 0.374 | 0.287 | 0.242 | 0.329 | 0.301 | 0.593 | 0.327 |
| F Statistic (df = 22; 225) | 9.045*** | 7.696*** | 5.524*** | 4.580*** | 6.501*** | 5.844*** | 17.392*** | 6.449*** |

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A2. Effect of left government on public spending, period interactions

| | <i>Dependent variable:</i> | | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | Total (1) | Education (2) | Health (3) | Social (4) |
| Lagged DV | -0.595*** (0.043) | -0.491*** (0.063) | -0.449*** (0.055) | -0.372*** (0.042) |
| Left government | -1.214 (0.808) | -0.099 (0.146) | -0.114 (0.134) | -0.702** (0.278) |
| Period: 2000-07 | -0.598 (0.408) | 0.038 (0.080) | -0.056 (0.085) | -0.439*** (0.111) |
| Period: 2008-12 | -0.092 (0.502) | -0.062 (0.113) | 0.052 (0.103) | -0.276 (0.176) |
| Period: 2013-19 | -1.851*** (0.607) | -0.206 (0.131) | -0.093 (0.122) | -0.413* (0.212) |
| Growth | -0.277*** (0.037) | -0.031*** (0.008) | -0.025*** (0.007) | -0.161*** (0.012) |
| Debt | 0.021* (0.011) | -0.002 (0.002) | 0.001 (0.003) | -0.009** (0.004) |
| Inflation | -0.018 (0.012) | -0.004 (0.003) | -0.009*** (0.002) | -0.014*** (0.004) |
| Unemployment | -0.010 (0.041) | -0.008 (0.008) | -0.022*** (0.008) | 0.010 (0.020) |
| Trade openness | -0.022*** (0.008) | -0.001 (0.002) | -0.002 (0.002) | -0.001 (0.003) |
| Dependency ratio | 0.166*** (0.055) | 0.007 (0.009) | 0.007 (0.010) | 0.028* (0.015) |
| FDI inflows | -0.004 (0.010) | -0.004 (0.002) | -0.004* (0.002) | 0.001 (0.005) |
| Election year | 0.295 (0.326) | 0.072 (0.060) | -0.017 (0.065) | 0.002 (0.116) |
| Governing parties | 0.093 (0.135) | -0.015 (0.025) | -0.004 (0.027) | 0.062 (0.050) |
| Left govt. x Period: 2000-07 | 2.625*** (0.866) | 0.381** (0.158) | 0.256* (0.133) | 1.317*** (0.307) |
| Left govt. x Period: 2008-12 | 0.109 (0.973) | 0.043 (0.194) | 0.190 (0.188) | 0.829* (0.459) |
| Left govt. x Period: 2013-19 | 3.481*** (0.899) | 0.314* (0.179) | 0.389*** (0.149) | 1.041*** (0.381) |
| Constant | 17.120*** (2.879) | 2.037*** (0.527) | 2.364*** (0.585) | 4.191*** (0.728) |
| Observations | 248 | 248 | 248 | 248 |
| R ² | 0.506 | 0.381 | 0.402 | 0.656 |
| Adjusted R ² | 0.445 | 0.305 | 0.329 | 0.614 |
| F Statistic (df = 27; 220) | 8.337*** | 5.022*** | 5.482*** | 15.545*** |

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A3. Effect of left government on public spending, ECM models

| | <i>Dependent variable:</i> | | | |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | Total (1) | Education (2) | Health (3) | Social (4) |
| Lagged DV | -0.602*** (0.049) | -0.415*** (0.065) | -0.456*** (0.065) | -0.317*** (0.050) |
| Left government (lag) | 0.674** (0.331) | 0.165** (0.067) | 0.108 (0.070) | 0.298** (0.126) |
| GDP growth (lag) | -0.102* (0.054) | -0.008 (0.011) | -0.026** (0.011) | -0.110*** (0.019) |
| Inflation (lag) | -0.002 (0.012) | -0.001 (0.003) | -0.008*** (0.003) | -0.007 (0.005) |
| Unemployment (lag) | 0.015 (0.048) | 0.006 (0.009) | -0.019** (0.009) | 0.006 (0.020) |
| Debt (lag) | 0.022** (0.010) | -0.003 (0.002) | 0.002 (0.002) | -0.008* (0.004) |
| Trade openness (lag) | -0.027*** (0.009) | -0.001 (0.002) | -0.003 (0.002) | 0.002 (0.003) |
| Dependency ratio (lag) | 0.086* (0.044) | -0.003 (0.008) | -0.001 (0.010) | 0.026** (0.013) |
| FDI inflows (lag) | -0.0002 (0.018) | -0.002 (0.004) | -0.006 (0.004) | 0.009 (0.008) |
| Election year (lag) | 0.113 (0.580) | 0.025 (0.096) | -0.067 (0.109) | 0.111 (0.183) |
| Governing parties (lag) | 0.136 (0.146) | 0.018 (0.028) | -0.002 (0.030) | 0.112** (0.056) |
| Left government (fd) | -0.070 (0.395) | 0.146* (0.080) | 0.061 (0.075) | -0.007 (0.168) |
| Constant | 20.593*** (2.711) | 1.821*** (0.482) | 2.773*** (0.698) | 2.625*** (0.699) |
| Observations | 243 | 243 | 243 | 243 |
| R ² | 0.522 | 0.398 | 0.416 | 0.675 |
| Adjusted R ² | 0.452 | 0.309 | 0.331 | 0.627 |
| Residual Std. Error (df = 211) | 2.039 | 0.297 | 0.357 | 0.561 |
| F Statistic (df = 31; 211) | 7.430*** | 4.493*** | 4.855*** | 14.125*** |

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A4. Effect of left government on public spending, alternative seat share thresholds

| | <i>Dependent variable:</i> | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | Total | | Education | | Health | | Social | |
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) | (8) |
| Lagged DV | -0.557*** (0.044) | -0.555*** (0.044) | -0.476*** (0.063) | -0.463*** (0.063) | -0.438*** (0.052) | -0.436*** (0.052) | -0.366*** (0.042) | -0.364*** (0.042) |
| Left government (50%) | 0.469* (0.267) | | 0.188*** (0.048) | | 0.024 (0.047) | | 0.239** (0.103) | |
| Left government (33%) | | 0.394* (0.220) | | 0.110** (0.046) | | 0.009 (0.043) | | 0.230*** (0.087) |
| Growth | -0.284*** (0.031) | -0.282*** (0.031) | -0.024*** (0.006) | -0.023*** (0.006) | -0.029*** (0.006) | -0.029*** (0.006) | -0.165*** (0.009) | -0.164*** (0.009) |
| Debt | 0.009 (0.010) | 0.010 (0.010) | -0.004** (0.002) | -0.004** (0.002) | 0.001 (0.002) | 0.001 (0.002) | -0.011*** (0.004) | -0.011*** (0.004) |
| Inflation | -0.015 (0.010) | -0.016 (0.010) | -0.003 (0.003) | -0.004 (0.003) | -0.009*** (0.002) | -0.009*** (0.002) | -0.012*** (0.004) | -0.012*** (0.004) |
| Unemployment | 0.049 (0.041) | 0.055 (0.040) | 0.003 (0.007) | 0.005 (0.007) | -0.016** (0.007) | -0.016** (0.007) | 0.022 (0.019) | 0.025 (0.019) |
| Trade openness | -0.027*** (0.006) | -0.027*** (0.006) | -0.003* (0.001) | -0.003** (0.001) | -0.002 (0.001) | -0.002 (0.001) | -0.002 (0.002) | -0.002 (0.002) |
| Dependency ratio | 0.065* (0.039) | 0.065* (0.039) | -0.005 (0.007) | -0.005 (0.007) | -0.001 (0.009) | -0.001 (0.009) | 0.031*** (0.012) | 0.031*** (0.011) |
| FDI inflows | -0.004 (0.011) | -0.005 (0.011) | -0.003 (0.002) | -0.003 (0.003) | -0.004 (0.003) | -0.004 (0.003) | 0.002 (0.006) | 0.001 (0.006) |
| Election year | 0.213 (0.337) | 0.198 (0.333) | 0.051 (0.060) | 0.051 (0.060) | -0.020 (0.068) | -0.020 (0.069) | -0.047 (0.125) | -0.057 (0.122) |
| Governing parties | 0.130 (0.129) | 0.099 (0.132) | -0.001 (0.024) | -0.013 (0.025) | -0.003 (0.027) | -0.005 (0.028) | 0.064 (0.051) | 0.048 (0.050) |
| Constant | 20.108*** (2.205) | 20.059*** (2.198) | 2.530*** (0.453) | 2.507*** (0.471) | 2.570*** (0.518) | 2.568*** (0.515) | 3.649*** (0.634) | 3.617*** (0.621) |
| Observations | 248 | 248 | 248 | 248 | 248 | 248 | 248 | 248 |
| R ² | 0.464 | 0.463 | 0.354 | 0.331 | 0.382 | 0.381 | 0.620 | 0.621 |
| Adjusted R ² | 0.414 | 0.413 | 0.294 | 0.269 | 0.324 | 0.324 | 0.585 | 0.586 |
| F Statistic (df = 21; 226) | 9.314*** | 9.290*** | 5.908*** | 5.324*** | 6.644*** | 6.634*** | 17.574*** | 17.665*** |

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A5. Effect of government ideology on public spending, multiple categories

| | <i>Dependent variable:</i> | | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | Total (1) | Education (2) | Health (3) | Social (4) |
| Lagged DV | -0.561*** (0.043) | -0.468*** (0.064) | -0.448*** (0.053) | -0.362*** (0.040) |
| Left govt | 1.079*** (0.343) | 0.138** (0.061) | 0.098* (0.057) | 0.296** (0.137) |
| Nationalist govt | 1.101** (0.468) | -0.153** (0.076) | -0.014 (0.093) | -0.004 (0.190) |
| Mixed govt | 0.369 (0.253) | 0.027 (0.048) | -0.037 (0.061) | 0.157* (0.092) |
| Growth | -0.288*** (0.031) | -0.023*** (0.006) | -0.030*** (0.006) | -0.165*** (0.009) |
| High growth (>2%) | 0.008 (0.010) | -0.005*** (0.002) | 0.001 (0.002) | -0.011*** (0.003) |
| Debt | -0.016 (0.011) | -0.004 (0.003) | -0.009*** (0.002) | -0.013*** (0.004) |
| Inflation | 0.046 (0.041) | 0.001 (0.007) | -0.019** (0.008) | 0.021 (0.018) |
| Unemployment | -0.028*** (0.006) | -0.003* (0.001) | -0.002 (0.001) | -0.002 (0.002) |
| Trade openness | 0.055 (0.039) | -0.004 (0.007) | 0.0002 (0.009) | 0.029*** (0.011) |
| Dependency ratio | -0.004 (0.012) | -0.003 (0.002) | -0.004* (0.003) | 0.001 (0.005) |
| FDI inflows | 0.200 (0.336) | 0.053 (0.060) | -0.017 (0.067) | -0.056 (0.121) |
| Election year | 0.153 (0.130) | -0.012 (0.025) | 0.003 (0.027) | 0.050 (0.052) |
| Governing parties | 20.776*** (2.198) | 2.478*** (0.455) | 2.576*** (0.513) | 3.709*** (0.613) |
| Observations | 248 | 248 | 248 | 248 |
| R ² | 0.475 | 0.347 | 0.389 | 0.624 |
| Adjusted R ² | 0.421 | 0.279 | 0.326 | 0.585 |
| F Statistic (df = 23; 224) | 8.817*** | 5.165*** | 6.190*** | 16.132*** |

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Chapter 6. Conclusion

This thesis set out to achieve three main goals – (1) investigate the effects of emigration on individuals' democratic attitudes, political participation, and demand for redistribution in Central and Eastern Europe; (2) determine how these effects of emigration influenced broader political dynamics in the region; and (3) use such findings to advance our general understanding of how emigration can affect politics in countries of origin.

The empirical answers are rather clear, though they go against some of the expectations found in previous literature. I found that emigration has only led to a very limited degree of democratic diffusion through political remittances in the region – driving an increase in non-electoral participation but no meaningful rises in support for democracy or political interest, while also driving lower electoral turnout among return migrants. I also found that emigration has led to an increase in demand for redistribution among people living in areas that experienced significant outflows – a contextual effect that is concentrated among higher earning individuals. In addition, I found that partisan spending effects have persisted in Central and Eastern Europe over the last two decades – left-wing governments increase public spending while in office, an effect that is conditional on high levels of economic growth and hence varies over time.

What do these findings mean for political dynamics in Central and Eastern Europe? There are two broad ways to interpret them in the context of other existing work. On one hand, one can look at emigration as having exacerbated democratic vulnerabilities in the region, fuelling anti-establishment sentiment and the rise of populist radical right actors. Existing work on the recent wave of emigration had previously shown how it led to a kind of political brain drain – driving the departure of liberal minded voters who were more likely to participate and oppose leaders with authoritarian tendencies (Kelemen, 2020), depressing participation (Kostelka, 2017), and increasing support for radical right parties (Lim, 2022). Evidence has further shown that voters in the diaspora have in recent years increasingly supported the radical right as well (Stan and Zaharia, 2025), and that emigrants have played a key role in several waves of anti-governmental protests in the region (Gubernat and Rammelt, 2021). My findings of very limited democratic diffusion through political

remittances complement the previous literature, showing that any countervailing positive effects of emigration on democracy in origin countries cannot outweigh all of its other negative effects. While I do find an increase in non-electoral participation as a result of political remittances, this is combined with a decrease in voting among returnees and hence can be seen as further encouraging disengagement from the formal electoral process in favour of non-institutionalised forms of participation that often have an anti-establishment tendency. On the whole, emigration seems to have driven an overall process of democratic depletion in the region, undermining participation and support for democratic principles, and hence further widening a longstanding post-Communist democratic deficit. This is particularly worrying given widespread episodes of democratic backsliding in the region over the past decade (Dawson and Hanley, 2016; Cianetti et al., 2018) – a lack of participation and commitment to democracy can contribute to the rise of populist radical right actors, and make backsliding both more likely to occur and harder to reverse. Higher demand for redistribution among CEE voters as a result of emigration may have also helped create more favourable conditions for the populist radical right, which tends to combine conservative cultural appeals with a redistributive economic agenda (Savage, 2022). This is especially the case since there is a longstanding tension in the region between remarkably high levels of demand for social protection from the state (Alesina and Fuchs-Schündeln, 2007), and the lack of any convergence of welfare states in the region to the higher levels of generosity available to citizens in Western Europe (Kuitto, 2016). The decline of traditional left-wing parties in the region (Snegovaya, 2022) – which as revealed by my findings in the third paper could have indeed driven some expansion of social protection to help address this underlying tension – may mean that radical right parties are the best positioned to take advantage of high demand for redistribution among voters in the region.

On the other hand, there is a somewhat more optimistic interpretation of my findings that emphasises that democracies in the region have matured significantly in recent decades, developed a meaningful degree of institutional responsiveness, and may have the potential to adapt to some of the challenges created by emigration. My findings on partisan spending effects add to a growing literature that shows meaningful programmatic competition has emerged in the region despite some previous negative expectations – political competition has developed along traditional social cleavages like class, issues like welfare and the economy dominate the debate surrounding elections, political parties put forward distinctive platforms in the expected way, and these platforms have meaningful policy consequences

once parties enter government (Whitefield, 2002; Evans, 2006; Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2012). My study also demonstrates that CEE democracies have in fact the ability to respond to some of the challenges associated with emigration – I show that emigration has driven an increase in public demand for redistribution, while previous work has already established an aggregate connection between emigration and actual increases in redistribution and public spending (Petrova and Sznajder-Lee, 2024). Even when it comes to democratic norms and political participation – where it is clear there has been an overall negative impact of emigration – the increase in non-electoral participation driven by emigration may help insulate democracies in the region from the worst effects of the rise of the populist radical right, acting as a final barrier against democratic defection by elites and potential episodes of backsliding. Of course, both of these interpretations are valid and are in fact not mutually exclusive. Instead, they paint a complex picture of Central and Eastern European politics. Democracy faces important challenges and some of these have been exacerbated by the recent wave of emigration – yet the overall effects of the phenomenon have been somewhat mixed, and political institutions in the region have developed at least some of mechanisms needed to respond to these challenges.

In the Introduction, I claimed the case of Central and Eastern Europe offered an invaluable opportunity to advance our understanding of the political effects of migration on origin countries. The constituent papers of this thesis have made several important contributions towards this goal. Yet there are also some more general conclusions to be drawn about this when looking at the study as a whole.

First, the effects of emigration on countries of origin are more complicated than initially thought. A couple of mechanisms identified as central by the previous literature – the diffusion of democratic norms and practices through political remittances, and a reduction in demand for redistribution as a result of financial remittances – proved to have relatively limited relevance in the CEE context. In fact, when we consider the overall impact of emigration, it seems to have mostly had the opposite effects here – a depletion of such norms and practices driven by a political brain drain with little countervailing diffusion, and an increase in support for redistribution as a result of the contextual effects of emigration on citizens living in the most affected regions. Different mechanisms can often push in different directions, and the overall impact will depend on their relative strength. Conclusions derived

from one context might not describe the impact of emigration in other areas or time periods adequately, even when conditions seem favourable.

Second, the effect of emigration on origin countries occurs through a wide variety of different channels and mechanisms, and not all of them have been fully explored. In the case of redistribution preferences, a focus on financial remittances and their direct effect on incomes meant that contextual effects and their influence on non-pocketbook motivations to support state intervention were previously ignored. In the case of political remittances, the attention given to the potential absorption of values from host societies by migrants obscured the influence of other elements which shape their experience at destination and eventually the norms and practices they transmit across borders. It is likely that other underexplored mechanisms exist across issues and levels of analysis. A thorough understanding of the phenomenon requires us to uncover these mechanisms and examine the different ways they interact with each other.

Third, studies of migration and its political effects need to be better connected to related areas of the literature. For example, overly optimistic expectations for the potential of democratic diffusion through political remittances rested on assumptions of rapid resocialisation among migrants at destination. These are easily tempered when we consider more explicitly what previous work on political socialisation and migrant integration has shown. Similarly, my arguments about the contextual effects of migration on demand for redistribution built on the recent literature on such preferences, which proves they are shaped by many different factors beyond the direct influence of income. These kinds of insights can help us avoid pitfalls, better understand which mechanisms are most important in what contexts, and guide our exploration of new channels of impact.

In addition to addressing its main goals, this thesis has also made a number of important contributions to related areas of political science and political economy. When it comes to the literature on social and political remittances, I show that studies need to better consider the numerous barriers to the process – the lack of resocialisation among emigrants living abroad, their limited socioeconomic integration and negative experiences, and the barriers to transmission such as selective return. My discovery of a negative effect on turnout among returnees also proves that what is transmitted through political remittances is influenced by the whole of emigrants' experience at destination. Exposure to the prevalent norms and

practices in these societies is just one part of that experience, and the other factors shaping it need to be further investigated.

With respect to the literature on preferences for redistribution, my findings emphasise the role of non-pocketbook material factors and add to our understanding of how these interact with local environments. Previous work had shown how redistribution can deliver material benefits by reducing crime, increasing human capital, or improving public services. Building on such insights, I show how transformations in local environments generated by emigration can alter the expected benefits from redistribution and hence affect demand for it. Better awareness of such interactions could lead to important insights into how preferences for redistribution have evolved across different contexts in recent decades. My work also has implications for the literature on the development of welfare states in Central and Eastern Europe – showing how emigration has encouraged rather than constrained their development, and how the lack of a more generalised expansion in recent decades is likely to be explained by other factors such as a structural dependence on foreign capital.

In terms of the literature on partisan spending effects, my study underlines the importance of fiscal constraints and particularly economic growth in their emergence. Scholars have long argued that low growth can make partisan spending differences disappear (Pierson, 1996). My findings indicate that the reverse also seems to be true – as long as growth is sufficiently high, partisan spending effects will appear even in the presence of other constraints such as globalisation or demographic aging. With respect to the debate on the disappearance of partisan effects in the West, this also implies that some of these other constraints may have played a smaller role than previously thought. Furthermore, my findings add important nuance to the existing literature on the decline of social democratic parties in Central and Eastern Europe (Berman and Snegovaya, 2019) – while overly centrist positions and policies may have still played a role in this decline, I show that left-right convergence was more limited than previously thought and that left-wing parties did in fact increase public spending while in office. The role of other factors in the decline of the left in the region – including corruption scandals and the rising salience of cultural issues – may need to be emphasised and partly reexamined.

While these contributions are valuable, my study does have several notable limitations. First, while I show that there has been only very limited democratic diffusion through political

remittances and identify a negative effect of migration experience on turnout among returnees, I have been unable to fully investigate the mechanisms behind these findings. I offer several plausible theoretical explanations for my results that include limited resocialisation, lacking integration, and the breaking of established voting patterns among emigrants living abroad. However, more data are needed to adequately establish which of these factors matter most and what mechanisms explain the (lack of) effects of political remittances – ideally unpacking the current ‘black box’ of exposure to destination societies and experiences abroad. Second, while I establish that emigration is connected to higher demand for redistribution among people living in affected regions and indirectly test the implications of non-pocketbook motivations by showing effects are concentrated among high earners, I am unable to fully trace the precise mechanisms driving the impact of emigration on individual attitudes – to achieve this, more data will be needed that allows scholars to trace the effects of emigration on local areas in terms of services and labour market shortages, ideally coupled with more granular emigration data which can identify effects not only at a relatively small regional level but also at the level of localities that individuals interact with on a daily basis. Third, a main reason to examine partisan spending effects within this study was to establish which mechanisms connect the effects of emigration on redistribution at the individual and aggregate levels, and hence fully understand the impact of the phenomenon on welfare states in Central and Eastern Europe. Past work had established that emigration led to an increase in redistribution and spending (Petrova and Sznajder-Lee, 2024), while my findings reveal that emigration has led to an increase in demand for redistribution among the public. In theory, the existence of partisan spending effects shows that changes in vote choice and the partisan composition of governments could offer a way for the effects of emigration on preferences to drive actual changes in policy. However, we know that emigration has led to a decline in vote shares for left-wing parties in the region (Szulecki et al., 2023), rather than an increase which could explain why redistribution and spending grew along with emigration. It follows that other mechanisms are needed to explain how changes in preferences led to an increase in redistribution in the region, ones that further work will need to uncover. One plausible explanation centres on the role of populist radical right parties and their growing popularity, though there are still relatively few instances of them entering and dominating governments in the region, and in any case the evidence on such parties’ effects on redistribution is decidedly mixed (e.g. Orenstein and Bugaric, 2022 on Fidesz’ welfare policy in Hungary).

More likely, emigration and the resulting higher public demand for redistribution may have affected the welfare policies of governments in ways that don't fully overlap with ideology.

I conclude by pointing to several directions for future research. Despite the progress made in this study, many important questions about the political effects of emigration on countries of origin require further investigation. The biggest barrier to advancing our understanding, at least as far as quantitative scholars are concerned, is the availability of higher quality and more granular data. Improving this should be a central focus of future work. Many key questions raised by my findings and discussed above — which barriers play the most important role in preventing the absorption of democratic norms by migrants, what aspects of their experiences abroad most influence their attitudes and behaviour, or how financial remittances interact with contextual and other effects of emigration — can only be definitively answered with better data. This can be achieved by including more questions about emigration in existing surveys, investing in studies that focus on emigrants while they are abroad and ideally tracking them over time, or developing improved methods to track emigration flows at the national but especially local level. In addition — and again somewhat related to a general lack of comparable data — we need more comparative studies to understand how the effects of emigration vary across different time periods and areas of the world. It remains unclear to what extent my results generalise outside the Central and Eastern European context. Would more careful analyses reveal that democratic diffusion through political remittances is similarly limited and ridden with tradeoffs in other countries that experienced significant emigration, such as Latin American ones? Or is this result driven by the particular context of the European Union, where emigrants are free to easily move between different countries and have less of an incentive to integrate? Similarly, is the contextual effect of emigration on preferences for redistribution a general phenomenon that we can observe elsewhere, or is it somehow shaped by the particular expectations about the role of the state that are prevalent in this region? Separate analyses of other contexts can partly answer these questions, though comparative studies that include several different cases would be best placed to reveal which differences are most significant and what factors shape them. Furthermore, more empirical and theoretical work is needed to put together the pieces of empirical evidence provided here and in the rest of the literature — particularly when it comes to combining different levels of analysis into a more holistic view of how emigration affects origin countries. A clear example discussed in these pages is the connection between the effects of emigration on preferences for redistribution, and the

aggregate impact it has on redistribution and spending, where the precise mechanisms remain unclear despite some progress. Yet there are many other such avenues to explore, such as better linking work on individual attitudes and electoral choices, or examining how transformations among the public interact with those we see at the level of political parties and other political organisations. Migration is likely to continue being a widespread and increasingly important phenomenon across the world in the coming years and decades. It is imperative that we better understand its consequences for our political systems — not just in the countries that receive migrants, but also in those places they leave behind.

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