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**Beyond Economy:  
Determinants of Electoral Accountability  
in Central and Eastern Europe  
(1993-2015)**

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## **Abstract**

This PhD thesis analyses patterns of electoral accountability in eleven Central and Eastern European countries between 1993 and 2015. Four research questions drove it: How to conceptualize and measure electoral accountability? What are the dynamics that explain variation in the extent to which citizens in Central and Eastern Europe are able to hold politicians accountable at elections? What are the consequences of variation in the systemic characteristics for the degree to which elections generate government accountability? What is the role of electoral integrity in shaping electoral accountability in these young democracies? Chapter 1 presents the theoretical framework and a review of the literature on the quality of democracy and electoral accountability, proposing a conceptualization of the dependent variable as grounded in the literature. The chapter ends presenting the research questions that guide the thesis. Chapter 2 furnishes a first attempt to study variation in electoral accountability across countries and, above all, to explain why the cost of governing in the region is so heavy in terms of electoral punishment. This preliminary analysis is conducted through the presentation of descriptive statistics and some brief descriptive case studies in the attempt to give some useful insights for the empirical analysis conducted in the following chapters. In Chapter 3 the traditional assumptions of economic voting theory and the influence of political contexts – i.e. government clarity of responsibility, party system fragmentation, nature of the electoral system and media freedom – on electoral accountability are tested. We also test the different intensity of these effects before and after accession to the European Union and the onset of the economic crisis in 2008. Chapter 4 represents the core of the thesis where we try to bridge two field of research, i.e. electoral accountability and electoral integrity. For this reason, the consequences of electoral integrity are analysed as: the influence of election quality on economic performance voting; its direct effect on incumbent vote; the conditional effect of the contextual variables already included in

Chapter 3. The statistical analysis shows that even though economy still represents the main dimension of government performance affecting electoral accountability, the quality of electoral procedures has a significant effect as well. As for economic voting, electoral integrity performance voting turns to be not at all independent by specific aspects of the political context such as government clarity, media freedom and, in addition, party system fragmentation. Finally, Chapter 5 collects and discusses possible implications of the findings in the previous chapters by inquiring to what degree and how electoral accountability works in Central and Eastern Europe and concludes with limitations of the study and suggestions for improving further research.

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# Introduction

*‘Modern political democracy is a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens, acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives.’*

(Schmitter and Karl, 1991: 103)

More than a quarter of a century has passed since the events of 1989, when the revolutionary wave started to hit the Communist Bloc in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE)<sup>1</sup>. One after the other, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia spread the independence feeling – the so-called Colour Revolution – across the region, leading to the end of the Communist rule and the following dissolution of the Soviet Union. Hence, even though it already started in 1989, “from 1996 to 2005 a wave of democratization through *electoral revolutions* swept through east-central Europe” (Bunce and Wolchik, 2006: 283), with a result of constantly increasing the number of fully free countries in this region (Freedom House, 2015). A model of political regime built on a procedural conception of democracy (Schumpeter, 1975; Dahl, 1971) – in which the accent is pointed on the ‘procedures’ that allow citizens to select their representatives in a competitive process – was implemented in the region, allowing these countries a successful transition to a full democracy.

The relevance of elections as an element able to foster democratic consolidation is widely recognized. Because of their peculiar characteristics such as temporal limitation and

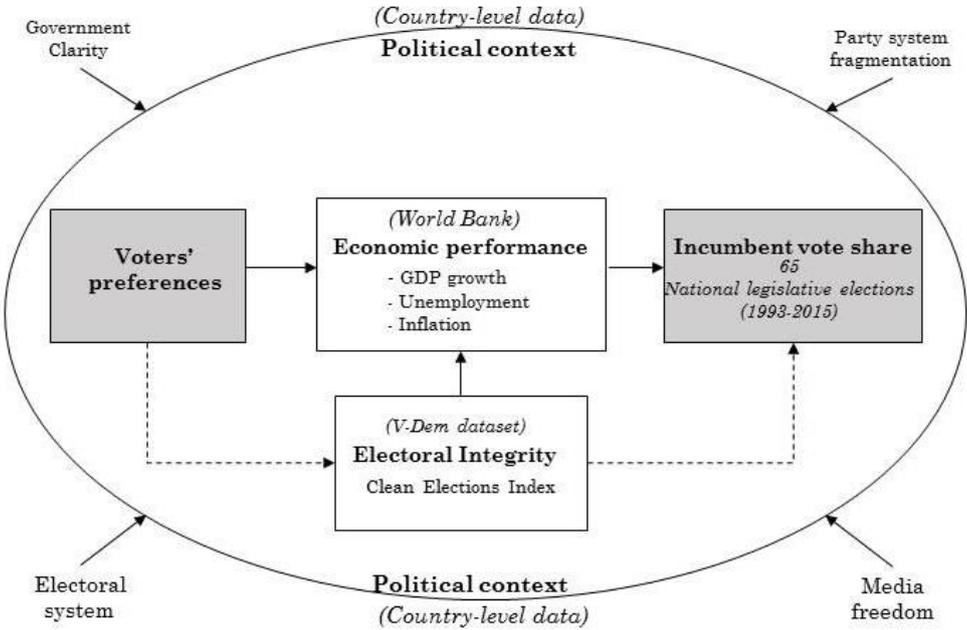
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<sup>1</sup> Though the definition Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) is usually adopted to label a broader group of countries, including Eastern bloc countries, the independent states in former Yugoslavia, and the three Baltic states that chose not to join the Commonwealth of Independent States with the other former Republics of the USSR. In this dissertation, instead, this definition is used to indicate a group of eleven countries that are currently EU Member States: Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. For more details concerning case selection see the paragraph “Research Design” below.

competitive nature, elections are able to forge cooperation among opposition groups, allow voter registration, pressure the government for reforms in electoral commissions, using the media as ‘watchdogs’ and ‘public squares’ to provide voters with the information during the campaign (Tarrow, 2005). They have the power, in other words, to heightened media attention and international scrutiny, providing a window of opportunity for regime change even in contexts of limited respect for civil liberties and the rule of law (Lindberg, 2009). As it will be extensively described in Chapter 2, the electoral ‘revolutions’ in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia between the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, represent a good example of these dynamics. On the one hand, elections provide citizens with a possibility to express their dissatisfaction about the government in office through democratic channels rather than through violent actions, thereby contributing to the stability of the country (Birch, 2011). On the other hand, they may confer legitimacy on the government in the eyes of citizens and parties, strengthening their satisfaction with the democratic regime (Morlino, 2009).

Why are elections so important for the study of democracy? Because they represent the ‘engine’ that drives the process. G. Bingham Powell (2000; 2004) defines *chain of responsiveness*. It is a process made up of linkages connecting citizens’ preferences and policy outcomes and that gives voters the power to choose their representatives basically on the basis of their (past) performance. As it will be widely discussed in Chapter 1, electoral accountability represents the essence of this mechanism conceived – oversimplifying – as the possibility for citizens to influence government formation, i.e. the extent to which government performance affects the possibility of incumbents to be re-elected or, at least, to suffer a loss in their vote share. However, as it will be showed in the next chapter, defining the internal structure of electoral accountability means to deal with a quite confuse concept, often conceived as ‘multidimensional’ (Schedler, 1999). The concept of electoral accountability is of paramount relevance to any scholarly discussion about political representation and quality of democracy, which is attested by the vastness of the body of research on this topic in the political science literature (see Chapter 5, Figure 5.1).

However, there are some necessary conceptual and methodological considerations whose impact on the estimated effects of electoral accountability needs to be questioned. Even though it will be done throughout the course of the dissertation<sup>2</sup>, a very quick hint is due in this section. Despite the considerable amount of literature on electoral accountability – traditionally studied through the lens of the economic voting theory (Key, 1966; Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, 2007) – there is no broad consensus regarding the expected size of the retrospective performance voting on incumbent electoral fortunes across countries. A number of scholars (Paldam, 1991; Powell and Whitten, 1993; Anderson, 2000; van der Brug et al., 2007; Bellucci and Lewis-Beck, 2011; Hobolt et al., 2013) have recognized that the accountability mechanism is contingent upon factors encompassing several levels of observation and several ‘contexts’ (Anderson, 2007a; 2007b). According to this idea – which also consistently drives the present thesis – the degree to which electoral accountability works is likely to depend on specific characteristics of the political context, usually identified with government or institutional characteristics, including party system format as well as the nature of the electoral system.



**Figure A1.** *Theoretical framework and research design*

<sup>2</sup> See the paragraph “Outline of the Thesis” below for a resume of the thesis.

As Figure A1 above shows, this first part of the research (that will be extensively examined in Chapter 3) considers several political contexts – including the mass media, i.e. the extent to which a free and plural system of information might influence the possibility of voters to assign responsibility and sanction governments on the basis of their performance. This thesis, in fact, pursues the aim of identifying the ‘non-economic’ determinants of electoral accountability in Central and Eastern Europe, adopting a ‘tailored’ strategy of research with variables more adapted to analyse this topic.

Assuming that accountability represents the power of voters to assign responsibility and sanction/reward governments on the basis of their past performance, the effectiveness of this power is strictly connected with the clearness of the electoral procedures. Thus, we employ another independent variable, i.e. a measure of ‘electoral integrity’ to integrate our research design and to deepen the analysis of electoral accountability. Here the main aim of the thesis – i.e. understanding the role of the context of electoral integrity in influencing the levels of electoral accountability in new democracies – finds its foundation: holding competitive and recurrent multiparty elections is considered a necessary condition for democratic accountability (Norris, 2015), because of their recognized function to connect voters and political institutions, empowering citizens to “throw the rascals out” after a retrospective judgment of the incumbent’s performance (Thomassen, 2014). Moreover, as voters assign responsibility to various government outcomes, there is no reason to believe that electoral accountability should be restricted to economic issues (Singer, 2011). This is the reason why in this thesis we add electoral integrity as further dimension to be inserted in the research agenda on electoral accountability and retrospective performance voting. This choice is also supported by recent findings of the literature according to which “while the state of the economy is still a major benchmark that allows voters to evaluate incumbent parties it is not the only yardstick they use to reward or punish incumbents” (Ecker et al., 2016: 334). The intimate connection between accountability and the context of electoral integrity, is also given by its aforementioned role in shaping political trust and responsiveness, that encourages us to include this variable in the present analysis. This element might be also useful to explain why – as it will be extensively shown in Chapter 2 – in the last two decades the “cost of governing” in Central and Eastern Europe has been particularly high, even in comparison with the electoral performance of Western European

governments (Roberts, 2010). Experiences under Communism and during the transition, in fact, favoured the spread of protest voting among CEE voters as main strategy to express their discontent towards political elites, their economic and, broadly, political performance (Greskovits, 1998; Roberts, 2008).

## Research Design

**Case Selection.** The quantitative analysis conducted in the present dissertation focuses on eleven Central and Eastern European democracies that joined the European Union between 2004 and 2013. A first group of countries such as Slovenia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia, accessed the Union at the beginning of the century, whilst Bulgaria and Romania had to wait until 2009 to meet the economic criteria required by Brussels. Finally, Croatia became the 28<sup>th</sup> EU member State on 1 July 2013. The first reason for selecting these countries derives from the evidence that they are the only ones in the region that have remained consistently democratic during the transition (Roberts, 2010). All of them, in fact, has had several accountability elections conducted while rated “free” by Freedom House (2015). The ‘freedom criterion’ is particularly relevant because where elections are not free, incumbents will almost certainly perform better than actual conditions warrant with the chain of accountability resulting irremediably broken. The second reason for choosing these cases lies in the fact that Central and Eastern European countries form a group of homogeneous democracies since all of them experienced the imposition of the Communist rule for almost fifty years with very large internal similarities before 1989. After that, they also faced a communal process of democratic consolidation to join the European Union, indirectly started – at about the same time – with the transition to democracy and continued with a constant ‘democratic trend’ maintained all along the consolidation process. Even though diversity characterized their pre-Communist and Communist experiences, their profound similarities probably makes them more alike than any other group of countries in the world (Frye, 2002; Roberts, 2010). These characteristics allow us to apply a *most-similar systems design*. According to Lijphart (1975), in fact, cases for comparative studies should be selected in such a way as to maximize the variance of the independent variables but

minimize the variance of the control variables. Using this kind of research design let us to assume that elements common to our eleven countries are irrelevant in explaining some observed differences, focusing instead on the variables that are different (Della Porta and Keating, 2008). Since the aim of this thesis is to understand the role of the non-economic determinants of electoral accountability – that is the role of electoral integrity and the ‘contextual’ variables – adopting this research strategy helps us to reduce the variance of other control variables that might ‘interfere’ in the process under investigation.

**Data.** The analysis will be conducted using a dataset of 65 national parliamentary elections held in eleven countries of Central and Eastern Europe that accessed the European Union in the last decade. The first elections collected in the dataset are those held in Poland in 1993 whilst the most recent are those held in Croatia, Estonia and Poland in 2015. Thus, the timeframe of the thesis is the period elapsed since the fall of the Communism to 2015. The choice of this starting point is straightforward: it represents the moment in which political pluralism – particularly in terms of party competition and political information – became once again effective in the sample countries. The choice of the endpoint is motivated not only by the need to have as more as possible ‘points’, i.e. elections, for the time-series cross-section regression model (TSCS), but also to conclude the data collection in due time. The dataset consists of vote shares at each pair of elections for all of the parties represented in parliament in these countries. Because of several and recurrent party splits or mergers as well as name changes characterizing party systems of the region, a number of difficulties arose with calculating pairs of vote shares across elections. In order to give continuity and consistency to the data in the time-series I followed the recommendations proposed by Roberts (2008: 536). In the case of mergers between two parties represented in the parliament, their vote shares at the previous election are added together. Conversely, in case of a party split in two between two elections, he suggests to identify the main successor and only count the vote share of this successor which “presumably carried the burden of accountability”. The macro-data measuring specific aspects of the political context – government clarity, party system fragmentation, type of electoral system and freedom of the media – as well as macroeconomic data and measures of electoral integrity come from different sources, such as international organizations and academic projects. Detailed descriptions of such data

and their sources are provided in Chapters 3 and 4 when the empirical analysis is presented.

**Methods.** The analysis of the data is conducted using a series of Ordinary Least Square (OLS) regression models with random effects as method of estimation. More specifically, to formally test the theoretical hypotheses presented in Chapters 3 and 4, we estimate several variants of a time-series cross-section regression model (TSCS). Several statistical challenges, such as heteroskedasticity (that the modelling errors are uncorrelated and uniform), autocorrelation (correlation between values at different times), or spatial autocorrelation (that could affect more values at the same time), are encountered using this kind of methodology. However, in our analysis we controlled for these effects with specific statistical tests described in the methodological section of each of our empirical chapter. Yet, TSCS analysis increases the number of observation. It gives the researcher the ability to model time and space, which again increases his ability to show causation. Using time series or cross-sectional analysis separately might usually suffer for a limited number of spatial units and available data over time implying several risks in terms of reliability of the analysis. Since TSCS design, instead, uses several observations for each country and year can overcome these methodological problems.

## **Outline of the Thesis**

The present dissertation aims at understanding what are the non-economic determinants of, and what is their effect on electoral accountability in Central and Eastern European democracies. In other words, the purpose of the thesis is to analyse whether or not the “contexts” in which “citizens form [their] opinions and acts” and that “mediate the effects of individual-level factors on citizen behaviour” (Anderson, 2007b) might provide incentives and disincentives for the functioning of these dynamics and to what extent the integrity of the electoral cycle matters as explanatory variable.

The thesis proceeds as follows. Chapter 1 presents the theoretical framework in which the concept of electoral accountability and its measurement find their basis. Starting from

the assumptions of the democratic theory and the concept of democratic quality we move towards the different conceptualizations of accountability proposed by the literature. The ‘tripartite’ concept of accountability elaborated by Andreas Schedler (1999) represents the core of our theoretical framework. The chapter then investigates how the concept has been studied in the literature. It presents a detailed review of the literature on economic voting and the academic debate between the Downsian ‘prospective’ voting and the ‘retrospective’ voting theorized by O.V. Key (1966), as well as the endogeneity problem related to the use of specific macroeconomic variables. After that, the review of the literature considers possible approaches to integrate and enrich the study of economic voting for electoral accountability. Theories on the role of political contexts as developed in the early 1990s by Powell and Whitten (1993) and, later, by Anderson (2000) as well as the growing literature on electoral integrity and their possible connection with the study of electoral accountability are presented. After a quick review of previous studies on electoral accountability conducted in Central and Eastern Europe, the chapter ends with the formulation of the four research questions guiding the thesis. In Chapter 2 after a brief historical introduction useful to place the process of democratic transition of these countries, a necessary theoretical premise is devoted to the link between elections and democratic consolidation or, using Powell’s (2000) words, to elections as “instruments of democracy”. Whereas causal explanations regarding electoral accountability are statistically tested in Chapter 3 and 4, this chapter continues presenting descriptive statistics with the aim of identifying patterns of development of electoral accountability over time within countries. This section aims at identifying and (preliminary) explaining the existence of a “cost of governing” – in terms of electoral performance of both incumbent governments and opposition parties – in Central and Eastern European democracies from the early 1990s until 2015.

The empirical part is reported in the following two chapters (Chapter 3 and Chapter 4), which actually represent the core of the thesis. Chapter 3 aims at testing the possible influence of the political context on retrospective performance voting in the eleven CEE countries. After an introduction that provides an overview of the theoretical framework through which developing and presenting the hypotheses, the data the chapter is based on, their sources as well as the methodology that is used, are described in more details.

TSCS regression models are employed to test the main and conditional effect of each of our independent variable on incumbent vote share. Hence, results and discussion of the statistical analysis represent the core of this section, with an open conclusion that connects the chapter to the following one. Chapter 4, in fact, is conceived as a sort of ‘continuation’ and extension of the previous chapter. Starting from results presented in Chapter 3, the aim of this section is to introduce electoral integrity as further explanatory variable testing its effect in interaction with macroeconomic variables and as ‘valence issue’ able to shape incumbent voting. It basically follows the same format as the previous section. An introduction tries to link the concept of electoral integrity to electoral accountability. The hypotheses regarding direct and conditional effects of the variables are presented and discussed. Then the data employed, including our measure of electoral integrity, i.e. the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) clean elections index (Coppedge et al., 2016) and the methods of analysis are presented in details. The presentation of results and their discussion conclude the chapter.

Finally, Chapter 5 represents the epilogue of the thesis. It concludes the dissertation summarizing and discussing the possible implications of the empirical findings, with the aim to contribute to the current debate on electoral accountability in Central and Eastern European democracies and to the broader political science literature. In this section, we address the possible criticisms of our approach and analysis, suggesting improvements for future research.



# Chapter 1

## Electoral Accountability: Concepts and Theories

*“The exchanges of information, justification, and judgment that make up the ordinary cycle of accountability are less obtrusive than the “big bang” of “throwing the rascals out,” but no less real and significant for all that.”*

(Schmitter, 2004: 49)

Since ancient times, the search for a ‘good democracy’ – considered as the best possible form of government – represented an ‘obsession’ not only for political elites and citizens, but also for intellectuals such as philosophers and, most recently, for social scientists. According to a broad and comprehensive definition by Leonardo Morlino (2011: 195) a *good democracy* presents a “stable institutional structure that realizes the liberty and equality of citizens through the legitimate and correct functioning of its institutions and mechanisms”.

Before going forward, it seems necessary to set a clear distinction between the concepts of ‘democracy’ and ‘quality of democracy’. Democracy has been defined in several ways using numerous definitions (Gallie, 1964). According to the vast literature linked to New Institutionalism, it does consist of a unique “set of institutions” creating incentives that constrain, enable and shape individuals’ actions (Thelen, 1999). However, we could elaborate several types of democracy, each of which implies diverse practices that produce, in turn, different effects. Schmitter and Karl (1991: 103) define democracy as follows:

“Modern political democracy is a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens, acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives”.

According to this conception, shared norms and institutions are necessary for competition and collaboration among individuals and groups in democratic regimes. Universal suffrage, free, recurrent and competitive elections, civil rights that makes voters able to obtain the information they need to participate effectively in these elections, are considered the acceptable normative basis that allows us to talk about democracy. In sum, popular control and political equality represent key features of democracy (Huntington, 1991; Beetham, 2004). Hence, it is evident that the set of shared norms and institutions represents a distinctive element of this definition. They allow political systems to guarantee that democratic principles, such as representation, accountability and legitimacy are “achieved through a competitive electoral process” (Gwiazda, 2015). If we consider these principles as essential for the existence of a democratic regime, it means that we are dealing with a *procedural conception of democracy*.

Procedural democracy is a theoretical approach elaborated by Joseph Schumpeter (1975) and developed in the second part of the twentieth century by Robert Dahl (1971). The Austrian economist defines democracy as that institutional arrangement that allows people to arrive at political decisions for the “common good” through the election of individuals who “are to assemble in order to carry out its will” (Schumpeter 1975: 250). This approach points the accent on the *procedures* that allow citizens to select their representatives in a competitive process. However, the democratic process does not consist just of competition, defined by Schumpeter as the “struggle” for the people’s vote. Enriching this approach, Dahl (1971) proposes the relevance of the “inclusive citizenship”, considered as a necessary condition for the accountability process. Together with the original definition of procedural democracy – roughly identifiable with an “electoral democracy” – the American political scientist includes the necessity to provide citizens with substantial tools such as civil liberties, constitutional guarantees and control on the exercise of the executive power. These elements encompass democratic principles such as participation, political pluralism and accountability, making the conceptualization of democracy the most complete possible.

The decision to adopt for this study a procedural conception of democracy as refined by Robert Dahl, derives from both theoretical and practical reasons.

First, it lies on Sartori's lesson on concept formation and his "ladder of abstraction". In fact, Sartori (1970) conceives as desirable a medium-level categorization for concept formation, because it allows the right balance between extension (denotation) and intension (connotation) of the category. In other words, "the medium-level categorization falls short of universality and thus can be said to obtain general classes: at this level not all differentiations are sacrificed to extensional requirements". Nonetheless, medium-level concepts are intended to stress similarities at the expense of uniqueness, for at this level of abstraction we are typically dealing with generalizations. The procedural definition of democracy adopted here seems to match these requirements, because it may carry perfectly the balance between extension and intension, so being the most appropriate for empirical analysis of democracy. On the one hand, the Schumpeter's definition seems to have a too much high extension leading to a 'fuzzy' conceptualization of democracy: electoral competition, the element on which this conception is built, risks to be insufficient and misleading because it can be a necessary but not sufficient condition that allows us to speak about democracy (see O' Donnell, 1998). On the other hand, the substantive definition of democracy (see Mair, 2008) seems to pay an excessive intension (or connotation) reducing the chances to find empirical examples, but also hindering discussions about the consequences of democracy (Gwiazda 2015). All these considerations lead us to assume Dahl's definition as landmark for this dissertation.

The second reason for adopting a procedural conception of democracy relates to the study of democratic quality. According to this definition, democracy is conceived as a 'set of institutions', which allows us to ask "how it does and should work" (Roberts, 2010: 23). This point is particularly important because it underlines the important distinction between *democracy* and *democratic quality*. It has been already described by several authors (e.g. Munck, 2001; Goerz, 2006; Roberts, 2010) because it has been suffering of a lack in conceptualization. They have concluded that analysing democratic quality should go further the simple description of the procedures intrinsic to democratic regimes. It implies to analyse and/or measure if these institutions are working in the way they are proposed to do. In sum, democracy consists of the 'static element' while democratic quality represents the 'dynamic element' through which assessing democratic institutions that should make citizens able to control government.

The aim of this dissertation is to look at the ‘quality’ of political systems that we assume to be, with different intensity, democratic. It places itself in the field of empirical theory of democracy and, in particular, in its branch whose aim is to analyse the necessary functional preconditions of democratic systems and measure the performance of such systems (Buchstein and Jörke, 2011). This approach originates from the sociological theory of modernization as developed in the 1950s, which argues how the development of modern societies follows a series of predictable stages through which they become increasingly complex, connecting narrowly economic development with political system (Lipset, 1959). According to this theoretical approach, studying democracy means looking at the preconditions considered vital to its function and evaluating how they perform in every single context taken into consideration.

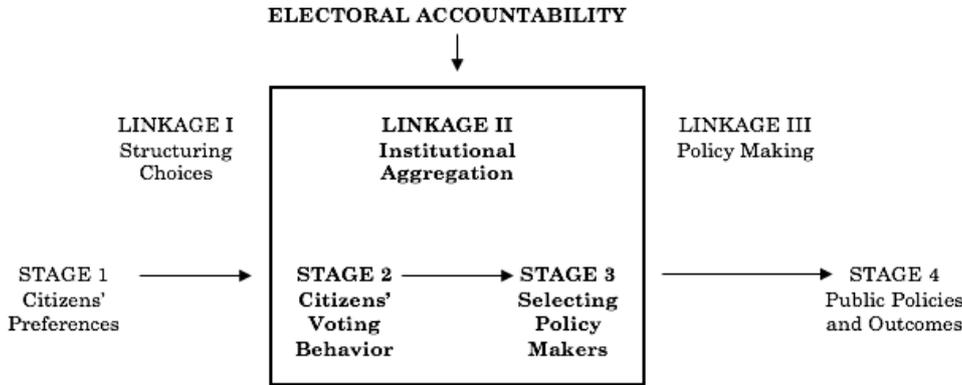
### **1.1. Electoral Accountability: Defining the Concept**

However, the present dissertation will not analyse democracy as a whole, but it will focus on one of its dimensions, the one concerning the linkage between citizens as voters and their representatives elected in public institutions: the electoral accountability. Following the approach of the empirical theory of democracy, the broad aim of this work will be to analyse the functional preconditions subtended to the accountability mechanism in the selected democratic countries and measure how these dynamics work in such contexts.

“Electoral accountability, expressed through the act of free and fair elections and the contribution of political parties to the electoral process, is innate in the representative democracy” (Morlino, 2011; Diamond and Gunther, 2001). It is universally recognized, in fact, that every conceptualization of representative democracy could not leave aside participatory and contested elections as the main legitimate instrument to translate the will of the people into executives and, consequently, political acts. Through elections, citizens can make demands on their leaders which in turn implies the obligation that elected political leaders have to be responsive to the voters for their political acts (Morlino 2011; Graham, 2014).

Electoral accountability – also known as ‘vertical accountability’ because of its linking function between citizens and representatives – is a concept closely related to the one of ‘quality of democracy’ and that assumes a relevant role for its analysis. In fact, it is the main tool through which every single voter – but also organized groups belonging to the so-called *civil society* – are able to control institutions and their representatives. As Diamond and Morlino (2005) stated, in a political regime that we could consider a “good democracy”, electoral accountability mitigates the “limits to control” which could characterize the transition from direct democracy to representative democracy typical of the modern liberal countries. Nevertheless, because of its relative novelty, accountability has been an underexplored and, to some extent, a confused concept for a long time.

First of all, we should clarify the conceptual distinction between *electoral accountability* and *responsiveness*. Since both are interrelated parts of a broader system of democratic representation, their relation is often elusive, leading scholars to be confused both in the stage of designing and in the moment of interpreting empirical research. A clarification of what electoral accountability – and, consequently, what responsiveness – deals with, has been indirectly suggested by G. Bingham Powell (2004) who designed the *chain of responsiveness* as a ‘four-stage process’ in which accountability represents its core linkage. The relevance of electoral accountability – conceived as the possibility for voters to reward or punish politicians for governmental conduct in periodic elections (Maloy, 2014) – seems to be self-evident looking at Figure 1.1.



**Figure 1.1.** *The chain of responsiveness: electoral accountability. Adaptation from Powell (2004)*

In fact, it is not only decisive to connect citizens’ preferences to policy outcomes, but also to make possible that these acts by policy makers represent what voters want. The concept

of responsiveness, in other words, is the correspondence of citizens' desires in terms of policies and the acts that their representatives adopt in the course of the mandate. In order to avoid that these correspondence is just a coincidence and fruit of advantageous circumstances, it implies the existence of institutionalized arrangements and above all fair elections that reliably connect citizens to policy outcomes. This is, in the end, the aim of the electoral accountability, whose 'sub-chain' starts with periodic elections supposed to lead to effective sanctions, which are in turn supposed to lead to responsive government<sup>1</sup>. Once we have traced the conceptual boundaries of electoral accountability, a further step will be to examine in depth the concept itself. In other words, it seems necessary to clarify what are the functional elements of the accountability mechanism that allow the formation and the aggregation of citizens' electoral preferences and the selection of policy-makers in the ballot box.

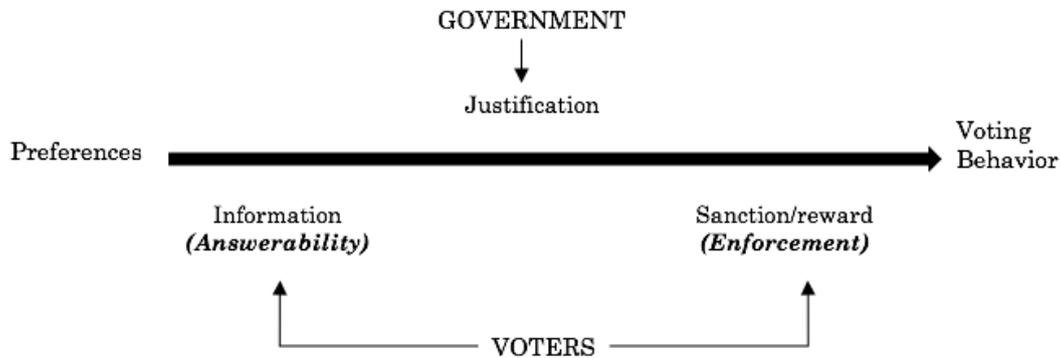
Once again, defining the internal structure of electoral accountability means to deal with a quite confuse concept, whose meaning remains still evasive. One of the best known attempt to define what accountability is, belongs to Andreas Schedler (1999: 14-15; 23). He elaborates a two-dimensional concept composed of *answerability* and *enforcement*. 'Answerability' refers to the obligation of governments to provide information on a political act or series of acts and the reasons furnished by the incumbents for their actions and decisions. 'Enforcement' – considered in terms of 'sanction' – is the consequence the voter draws after an evaluation of the information, justifications, and other aspects and interests behind the political act. Through these two elements, in representative democracies citizens hold judgment over their representatives through periodic elections<sup>2</sup>. The right functioning of this process makes possible the correspondence between citizens' policy preferences and policy outcomes as described above. In fact, in the absence of

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<sup>1</sup> Roberts (2010: 33) defines *mandate responsiveness* as "citizens' power to select new officials whose policy views or personal characteristics they prefer", whilst he indicates as *policy responsiveness* citizens' power to determine policy-making. In this way, mandate and policy responsiveness both measure the direct effect of citizens on politicians. Electoral accountability, by contrast, "measures both a direct effect – the removal of bad politicians and the retention of good ones – and an indirect effect – the incentive that such actions give politicians to perform well".

<sup>2</sup> On the other side, O'Donnell (1998: 112-113) states the 'limited' role exerted by 'free and fair recurrent elections' for vertical accountability. In fact, underlining the importance of freedom of speech, press and association to pursue both answerability and enforcement he affirms that "elections occur only periodically, and their effectiveness at securing vertical accountability is unclear, especially given the inchoate party systems, high voter and party volatility, poorly defined issues, and sudden policy reversals that prevail in newest polyarchies".

answerability, power holders are free to act as they choose, without any checks and balances. In the absence of enforcement, i.e. of consequences for failing to provide a satisfactory account, the accountability mechanism is inevitably undermined.



**Figure 1.2.** Schematic representation of Schedler's conceptualization of accountability

Here, the distinction between electoral accountability and responsiveness results rather clear, because it is considered again as an outcome of a wider process (see Figure 1.2.). Accountability – the ‘vertical’ linkage between voters and representatives – refers to the extent to which citizens are able to hold governments responsible for their actions and the extent to which government provides a public account of their decisions and actions. In this way, citizens establish with government a relation ‘principal-agent’, in which the principal is the voter that gives a mandate whilst the agent is the incumbent government that seeks for re-election and will be judged for its conduct at the polls.

We can also define electoral accountability as the main tool through which every single voter – but also organized group – can control directly their representatives (Przeworski *et al.* 1999). It needs two pre-conditions. On the one hand, the existence of periodical and competitive elections produces ‘alternation’, improving electors’ power to sanction (or reward) the incumbent and putting a sort of embankment to his prerogatives (Kramer 1971; Manin 1997). On the other hand, citizens’ participation as both individual and associations – e.g. pressure groups or, above all, political parties – allows a deeper involvement in political dynamics, so as subjecting institutional actors to a daily monitoring and, then, to express their judgment in the ballot box (Powell 2000).

Of course, also if this relation seems to be quite linear, with its vertical connection between principal and agent, the literature in the field of political science has tried to understand which ‘variables’ intervene influencing this relation and filtering the opportunities for voters to hold governments to account for their actions. Several theoretical approaches developed in the last decades focused first of all on the relevance of the retrospective economic evaluation for rewarding or punishing the incumbent governments (e.g. see Monroe 1979), and then became gradually aware of the role of other ‘non-economic’ variables in shaping electoral accountability in representative democracies (e.g. see Powell and Whitten 1993).

Before going on with the research itself, it seems necessary to proceed with a review of the literature concerning electoral accountability. It will help to define the theoretical framework in which the present research is situated and to clarify the extent to which this thesis proposes to be innovative in relation to the existing scientific debate. In fact, even though there are important contributions in economic voting literature in established democracies – that have traced the existence of a well-clear connection between economic evaluation and voting behaviour – the existence and strength of this relation and the influence of other contextual ‘political’ variables in new democracies is still unclear and, to some extent, controversial.

## **1.2. Economic Voting Theory in Explaining Electoral Accountability**

### **1.2.1. A Matter of Perspective? Retrospective vs. Prospective Voting**

Literature has generally studied electoral accountability through the lens of economic voting, i.e. the way in which government economic performance affects voting behaviour. The number of works in this field is now “around 400 by one count” (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, 2007: 520). In this way, substantial part of political scientists has devoted its energies in the search for evidence of it, concluding that “voters are economic, rewarding the government for good times and punishing it for bad” (Dassonneville and Lewis-Beck 2014: 372). According to a further development of this approach, voters tend to reward

incumbents when the economy improves and are inclined to punish them when economic conditions get worse (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, 2000; van der Brug et al., 2007; Duch and Stevenson, 2008; Singer and Carlin, 2013). In this perspective, incumbent government would be judged ‘retrospectively’, i.e. looking at their economic policy outcomes, often measured using macroeconomic indicators such as inflation, unemployment, growth, or value of national currency (Dorussen and Taylor, 2002). It represents the organizing idea of the whole theory. These statements constitute the theoretical premise through which electoral accountability has been largely studied. Principal exponent of this ‘retrospective’ approach is V.O. Key, whose conception of electoral accountability can be summarized as follows:

“The patterns of flow of the major streams of shifting voters graphically reflect the electorate in its great, and perhaps principal, role as an appraiser of past events, past performance, and past actions. It judges retrospectively” (Key, 1966: 61).

In this perspective, re-election to the office in a given period  $t$  would be based on economic performance in period  $t - 1$  (Ferejohn, 1986). According to Fiorina (1978: 430) such a model “presumes that the citizen looks at results rather than the policies and events which produce them”, i.e. they just consider whether the national economic condition<sup>3</sup> improved – usually measured as change in GDP growth, unemployment and inflation rate, but also through survey *sociotropic* items – in order to cast their vote. Moreover, Key’s main argument is that voters “are not fools”, i.e. they are rational as well as the political institutions that they have developed. He depicts the electorate as “a rational god of vengeance and reward” (Key, 1966: 63). Through this mechanism of reward/punishment governments in democratic regimes are held accountable for the outcomes of their actions and policies. This principle represents the essence of the retrospective economic voting theory. However, ‘retrospective gaze’ is not the unique approach through which political science has been studying economic voting. Key’s theory and the following studies on retrospective economic voting have been confronted with another fortunate approach as

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<sup>3</sup> Another question characterizing the economic voting literature is what “economic conditions” voters look at when they decide in the polls. According to a common belief, voters vote according to their pocketbook, i.e. when personal or household financial conditions deteriorate, voters punish the incumbent. Otherwise, they will reward the incumbent. Nevertheless, a majoritarian literature has demonstrated that instead of their personal economic condition, voters are much more likely to be considering the national economic performance when voting for the incumbent government (Lewis Beck and Stegmaier, 2000).

proposed by Anthony Downs in the mid of 1950s and known as ‘prospective’ economic voting. The source of conflict between these approaches lies in the way in which voters cast their vote looking at economy. Do they consider the past economic performance or do they look to the future? According to the *Downsian* approach in fact, citizens tend to vote for a politician rather than another one looking to the future:

“When a man votes, he is helping to select the government which will govern him during the coming election period [...] He makes his decision by comparing future performances he expects from the competing parties” (Downs, 1957: 39).

From this perspective, it is licit to think that other factors – for instance partisanship or other decision-making shortcuts, i.e. heuristics (Riker and Ordeshook, 1968; Lau and Redlawsk, 2001) – could influence voting behaviour in the polls. Voters carefully calculate the gains and losses likely to occur with each potential government, and votes to maximize the outcome. In this way, citizens use the past only to evaluate what a party will do in the future; retrospective voting is merely a cost-cutting variant of prospective voting (Fiorina, 1981). Even though there have been several studies published in the last decades that have tried to offer an empirical test of the prospective economic voting hypothesis, the results of these studies are far from consistent (Harper, 2000; Michelitch et al., 2012). In many cases, researchers find that support for prospective voting is much weaker than retrospective voting (Wlezien et al. 1997; Harper, 2000; Duch, 2001; Goodman and Murray, 2007). The reason could be found not only in a lack in the theoretical framework adopted, but also as a product of measurement error since it is usually analysed adopting the standard survey question used to measure individuals’ beliefs about the future state of the economy. This question brings us to deal with the methodological debate about different measurements of economic voting as adopted in the literature.

### **1.2.2. ‘Measuring’ the Economy: Macro vs. Micro Level of Analysis**

The existence (or lack) of an economic voting coefficient says a lot about democratic accountability (Nadeau et al., 2012). If the economy–elections link is found to be trivial, then the ability of the voters to hold the government accountable for its economic performance is called into question. It follows that politicians are free to follow whatever

policies they choose, without regard for how they benefit the people. The necessity to effectively analyse it raises of importance, since detecting limits and malfunctioning of a democracy allows political analysts to suggest leaders what kind of remedies undertaking to improve system's performance, in particular on the side of electoral accountability.

Political scientists have employed a number of modelling techniques in the search for the impact of the economy on voting behaviour. According to Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier (2000), there are two different dimension of analysis, identified according to the level at which the dependent and the independent variables are collected for the model. Analysis of economic voting, in fact, can be conducted either at a *macro level* – using aggregate measures such as vote share in the elections and macroeconomic indicators – or at a *micro level*, using individual survey data such as vote intentions or economic perceptions. In the first case, the object of inquiry is the direct relationship between real economic conditions – such as the traditional indicators for unemployment, inflation or economic growth – and aggregate electoral results. Cross-sectional micro studies, on the other hand, “cannot observe a direct relationship between real economic conditions and voting decisions at individual level, as macroeconomic variables are, by definition, constant across all individuals” (Doyle, 2010). Thus, different approaches that wish to analyse the impact of the economic evaluations on voting behaviour have constantly developed along the dichotomy between aggregate versus individual-level data.

It is rather clear that the idea that national economic conditions affect election outcomes is firmly embedded in the tradition of electoral studies. In other words, economic voting is *sociotropic*, i.e. “voters respond to their beliefs about the state of the overall economy rather than to their personal pocketbooks” (Erikson, 2004). But how can we study economic voting efficiently? Should we look at the macro level of analysis or taking individual survey respondents into consideration?

Research conducted at the individual level presents a not insignificant limit concerning the measurement of the economic independent variables. Literature on economic voting has generally employed survey data for individual countries, i.e. measures of economic perceptions rather than of economic conditions, preferring subjective evaluations of how well the economy is performing for objective measures (van der Brug et al., 2007).

Someone could justify this approach advancing the evidence that individual voters hold government parties accountable for their performance to the extent that they have some awareness of economic conditions, in which case that awareness will manifest itself in terms of perceptions. But the logic could not be satisfactory enough from a methodological point of view. Assuming that all respondents/voters live in the same reality, the state of the economy should be the same, so leading to the same responses. Instead, what is reflected by different responses? For instance, it could be given by the fact that people respond differently to the question because they look at different aspects of the economy when they judge government's performance. Some may think of unemployment, others may think of inflation, and it is also given by historical events that have affected their life (Roberts, 2008; Coffey, 2013). This is the main argument that leads to be suspicious of using this kind of data. If this were the case, the responses would not be comparable, thus rendering their content validity highly dubious. After all, in these case, differences in responses would not reflect different economic circumstances – which the measures should reflect if we want to estimate the effect of economic conditions on the vote – but rather different interpretations of the survey question. This is the principle addressed by Kramer (1983) and known as *micrological fallacy*. In this perspective the researcher makes the mistake of inferring the whole from the part, for example, inferring an aggregate economic–election connection from individual patterns of economic voting.

On the other hand, heterogeneity between responses may derive from incorrect assessments of the economic conditions. This misrepresentation would be given by a process of ‘contamination’ of voters’ economic perceptions due to the action of social-political elements such as party identification, with voters perceiving the economy as doing well because their parties sits in governing and badly if the government is composed of parties they oppose (Wlezien et al., 1997; Achen and Bartels, 2002; Duch and Palmer, 2002; van der Eijk and Franklin, 2004; van der Brug et al., 2007). This element discourages further attempt to use subjective economic evaluations as independent variables in a model of economic voting.

There is also another reason that makes economic perceptions unsuitable for this kind of research. It attains to the theoretical framework in which economic voting lays. It is

strictly related to the concept of democratic accountability, according to which, incumbents are held accountable for the results of their decisions (Fiorina, 1981). Thus, the ‘reward/punishment’ logic at the root of the economic voting theory fosters democratic accountability. But in order that this mechanism works, the benchmark for voters should be based on *actual* economic conditions rather than subjective, idiosyncratic, or incorrect views of economic conditions. In fact, this might help to explain voting behaviour in a given context or period, but the resulting votes could not properly be regarded as economic voting in the same sense as those words are used in the aggregate-level economic voting literature (van der Brug et al., 2007).

Replacing macroeconomic indicators with individual economic perceptions arises different problems. In fact, doing so is only possible when there is variation in economic conditions, but it is difficult for two reasons. First, there is a small number of elections for which we have enough survey data (this is a recurrent problem for recent or emerging democracies such as Central Eastern Europe, Latin America, and so on). The small number of different survey contexts makes it problematic to employ more than a very few independent variables defining those contexts. Moreover, when aiming at an analysis that has wider relevance than a single national context, there are several contextual factors that should be controlled for in a properly specified model. Consequently, the models actually adopted to test the effects of economic performance that are based on such databases risk to be particularly underspecified.

The second way in which measures of the real economy could be employed in individual-level studies would be by combining surveys from different countries. That approach is only possible, however, when the countries’ party systems are somehow made comparable. In past research, this has been accomplished by simplifying the choice options in a government–opposition dichotomy, so that differences between party systems do not have to be accommodated. However, that strategy involves problems already stressed (van der Brug et al., 2007).

Existing comparative research suggests that the measurement error at the individual-level “does not exercise significant effects, once instrumental variable controls are imposed” (Dassonneville and Lewis-Beck, 2014; Nadeau et al., 2012). But other

measurement errors could intervene. Several survey researches are based on indirect measures of the vote, such as party vote intention. It is easy to imagine that we could not superimpose this variable with actual party vote share. Moreover, it would be well correlate with the independent variable measuring economic perceptions, but this correlation risks to be biased. Further, incumbent vote intention as collected in these datasets usually represents a “cross-sectional response in a slice-in-time survey” (Dassonneville and Lewis-Beck, 2014). Therefore, it makes impossible any correlation between vote intention and a real change in the state of the national economy, as economic voting theory implies.

### **1.3. Not Only Economy: The Relevance of the Systemic Characteristics**

Although the literature on vote and popularity functions in western democracies seems to have enjoyed a discrete fortune, for long time it had the limit of having neglected the role of the political contexts in the assignment of credit and blame to incumbent governments (Anderson, 2000). In other words, it has lacked to analyse how governments, political parties, electoral systems and mass media influence the accountability mechanism. Instead, it has usually examined the relations among economic perceptions and government vote or popularity, with a limited use of comparative cross-national studies. Even though a general evidence for economic effects on voting behaviour has been found (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, 2000), it has not always been significant across countries. These contradictory results constitute what Paldam (1991) defines *instability dilemma*. A large amount of literature (Powell and Whitten, 1993; Anderson, 2000a; Bengtsson, 2004; Duch and Stevenson, 2008; Bellucci and Lewis-Beck, 2011; Fraile and Lewis-Beck, 2014) has tried to explain (and solve) it not only in terms of case selection but also reconsidering explanatory variables and measurement techniques. Bellucci and Lewis-Beck (2011: 205) conclude that this instability would be induced by “faulty measurement of the economic and political components”, together with the problems of “small, country-specific samples”.

The economy, as a predictor of institutional support, varies across countries and along time, that is, it seems to be sensitive towards a change in systemic conditions (Anderson 2000). Political scientists have mostly considered it as the fruit of an imperfect collection of data. In a second time, they have gradually come to the point that the *economic effect* as such is not sufficient to explain voters' assignment of responsibility, but it is stronger in relation with other systemic characteristics (Powell and Whitten, 1993; Powell, 2000; Bengtsson, 2004; van der Brug et al., 2007; Hobolt et al., 2013). The advantage for the research in this field is clear. It permits the inclusion of multiple contextual indicators – although their use has not been common in such studies – which would be desirable according to our conceptualization of electoral accountability, composed of answerability and enforcement.

Thus, several recent studies show that the economic effect varies across countries and across time in systematic ways, and that this variability should be accounted enriching their models with theories that incorporate differences in political contexts across countries. Already in the 1980s, researchers stressed the relevance of institutional variations for attributing 'economic responsibility' (see Eulau and Lewis-Beck, 1985). These studies paid attention to the relevance of contextual variation – conceived mainly as institutional variation – as an explanatory variable in the study of economic voting. However, for a comprehensive analysis of the relation between economic performance and political context, we have to wait till the early 1990s, when political scientists started using systemically contextual variables into economic voting models. In their landmark study, Powell and Whitten (1993) offer a persuasive explanation to Paldam's 'instability paradox' by demonstrating that economic voting is conditioned by the *clarity of responsibility* of political institutions. They argue that complex institutional set-ups make it harder for voters to assign responsibility to the government for economic performance: "The greater the perceived unified control of policymaking by the incumbent, the more likely is the citizen to assign responsibility for economic and policy outcomes to the incumbents" (Powell and Whitten, 1993: 398). Even though it is of indisputable importance, this study and several following works present the limit of analysing almost exclusively stable, industrialized democracies, or adapting the same variables in the analysis of new democracies. It is thus not clear to what extent economic voting would occur in new

democracies without traditions of holding governments accountable such as the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries. These studies, also giving important theoretical and methodological contributions, leave open some questions, in particular regarding what contextual features we should look at for the analysis of accountability in so many different democracies. Also Anderson (2007b: 590) stresses the importance of the political context, arguing that “the effects of a bad economy are indirect” and “the impact of voters’ motivations to reward or punish, in turn, is contingent on political structures”. He makes it in a broader sense, including *contextual* variables, not only the institutional design of a given country, but also the *political environment* in which “citizens form opinions and act mediate the effects of individual-level factors on citizen behaviour”. This broader conceptualization of ‘political environment’ also seems to include other systemic features such as characteristics of the incumbent government, the composition of the party system, the ‘rules of the game’ (i.e. the electoral system) and, not less important, the degree of freedom and pluralism of the mass media. In fact, all these elements contribute to create a well-functioning mechanism of accountability, guaranteeing both information on the political acts promoted by the incumbent and the possibility for voters to identify and potentially sanction it. In this way we are able to analyse empirically the accountability mechanism as discussed earlier.

<b>GOVERNMENT</b>	Economic performance	Justification	<b>ELECTORAL ACCOUNTABILITY</b>
<b>VOTERS</b>	Mass Media	Information	
	Government Clarity	Sanction	
	Number of available alternatives		
	Electoral System		

FIGURE 1.3. Features and systemic components of the accountability mechanism

The present dissertation, in fact, aims at including also the media system among the determinants of electoral accountability. Scholars have not usually included this variable in their models, although there is growing recognition amongst specialists of the role that they can play. The media have “the potential to create opportunities for, and facilitate more effective engagement with, accountability mechanisms for other actors, such as civil

society” (BBC, 2012). Moreover, it is supported by empirical evidence that politicians have been shown to be more responsive to citizens’ needs if citizens have access to information on political decisions (Besley et al., 2002). This element results to be essential to strengthen the whole chain of responsiveness and – narrowly – the accountability mechanism. In fact, if we look at the definition of accountability proposed by Schedler (1999), the media have the power to (indirectly) influence answerability and enforcement, empowering citizens to play an effective role in holding government to account. The ability and confidence of individuals to take part in demanding answers from power holders (and enforcing sanctions) could be achieved by creating opportunities or structures for them to do this (or both). For these reasons, including also this component among the *systemic* variables seems to be necessary.

The choice to give a set of economic and ‘contextual’ variables complete as much as possible – including also the extent of pluralism of the mass media – is also confirmed by Guillermo O’Donnell:

“Through the means of reasonably fair and free elections, citizens can punish or reward incumbents by voting for or against them, or the candidate they endorse, in the next elections. Also by definition, *the freedom of opinion and of association*, as well as *access to reasonably varied sources of information*, permit articulating demands to, and eventually denouncing wrongful acts of, public authorities. This is helped by the existence of *reasonably free media, demanded by the definition of poliarchy*” (O’Donnell, 1998: 29).

In other words, given the relevance of the ‘context’ to this field of research, the necessity to identify the variables that would perform better on this ground is particularly demanding for political scientists. The historical peculiarity (in both the economy and political system) of Central Eastern European countries – deeply influenced by the Communist heritage – requires to design a research methodology able to highlight the specific variables which might influence electoral accountability in its ‘triple’ component, i.e. information, justification and sanction. In the last decade more and more studies have tried to adopt both new economic and ‘systemic’ variables in order to better capture the strength and the intensity of the influence on the dependent variable (Bengtsson, 2004; Coffey, 2013; Foucault *et al.*, 2013; Hobolt *et al.*, 2013). However, these contributions seem to lack to design a set of variables able to fit the sample cases.

## 1.4. Assessing the Quality of Elections: The Concept of Electoral Integrity

“Elections are the *sine qua non* of modern representative democracy” (Mattes 2014: 211). By and large, literature considers elections as a *necessary* element of democracy. Among this majoritarian stream of political research, the procedural conception of democracy adopted in this thesis sees elections as a *sufficient* condition to generate a range of democratic externalities beyond the electoral arena such as increased freedom of speech, association, and news media, as well as greater accountability and responsiveness (Schumpeter, 1975). In this perspective the mechanism of electoral accountability as part of the broader ‘chain of responsiveness’ (Powell, 2004) finds its theoretical foundation. A government, whose political acts – in terms of public policies – are subjected to the electorate’s power of judgment, is more likely to consider the opinions and preferences of voters in the policy-making process. Finally, the most optimistic vision of elections as a mean to promote democracy, defines democracy itself as a competitive process that gives an edge to those who can rationalize their commitment to it, and an even greater edge to those sincerely who believe in it (Rustow, 1970).

On the other hand, an equally influential part of the literature has warned against an overemphasis on competitive elections, considered as a ‘necessary but not sufficient condition’ to consider a regime as fully democratic. It is the case of *hybrid regimes*, theorized at first by Finer (1970) and developed in the last thirty years after the end of the Third Wave. According to Morlino (2011: 48), these regimes are countries that moved away from authoritarianism but “are not yet minimally democratic and have institutions that are recurrent in a democracy – such as constitutional charter and elections – but where the former is not actually implemented and the latter are largely constrained”. In this vein also Schedler (2006) as well as Levitsky and Way (2010) affirm that elections allow “semi-authoritarian” or “competitive authoritarian” regimes – who have no intention of moving toward genuine democracy – to placate domestic opponents and the international community. It represents the counterargument to Rustow’s theory: recurring elections – in and of themselves – would not be able to generate positive externalities for the larger democratic process.

The discordance among researchers and approaches seems also driven by the fact that “the *integrity* of elections varies strongly, ranging from *free and fair* elections with open competition to *façade* elections tarnished by manipulation and fraud” (Van Ham, 2015). As Norris (2014) states, “problems may arise at every stage of the electoral cycle”, i.e. during the pre-election period, the campaign, polling day, even once polls are closed. Failed elections undermine political trust and confidence in representative institutions, discouraging political participation, and undermine regime stability. If we consider elections essential for democracy, the high quality of their procedures is necessary to ensure political legitimacy. For this reason, a conceptualization of *electoral integrity* is needed as is useful to show its intimate connection with our main argument, that is, the functioning of the accountability mechanism in the CEE democracies.

Even though there is still an intense debate regarding the different ways in which conceptualizing electoral integrity, this research adopts and integrates its notion as gradually developed by Kelley and Kiril (2010), Schedler (2013) and, finally, by Norris (2014). Norris, in particular, proposes a multifaceted ‘positive’ concept that has foundation in international conventions and global norms, universally applied to all countries worldwide throughout the phases of the electoral cycle presented in Figure 1.4. below. This conceptualization seems to fit better than others the notion of electoral integrity because it has gradually combined process- and concept-based approach to its theoretical and empirical analysis. (Van Ham, 2015). Thus, how do we conceptualize electoral integrity according to this approach?

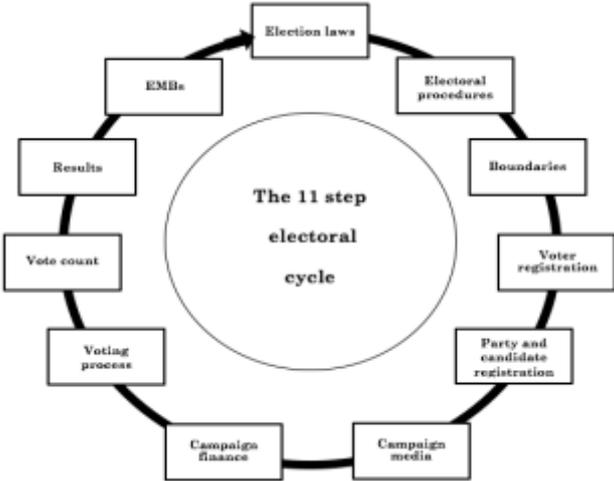


FIGURE 1.4. The eleven phases of the electoral cycle. Adaptation from Norris (2013: 568)

The starting point to analyse the concept is the 'positive' foundation of the electoral integrity. It is, first of all, a concept laying on the presence of shared criteria or international, global norms that should be met for elections to have high integrity. It means that governance issues must encompass issues related to the conduct of elections, through constitutional provisions, ordinary legislation and administrative regulation. This approach, in fact, requires inclusive elections, that is, the right to vote should be exerted by citizens in the electoral process. Second, the cleanness of the electoral process should be granted in the polls, avoiding electoral fraud such as misreporting voters' preferences. Third, the electoral competition among political actors (parties and individuals) should be ensured by the constitutional provisions, offering the electorate an unbiased choice among alternatives. Finally, the main public offices "must be accessed through periodic elections, and the results expressed through the citizens' votes must not be reversed" (Munck, 2009: 88). In this perspective positive definition of electoral integrity focus on defining norms, starting from the formulation of global norms shared at the international level that needs to be implemented through national and international legislation. As Norris (2013: 566) observes, the "abstract language in international human rights conventions also allows considerable room for interpretation about the more specific mechanisms which are most effective for implementing electoral integrity. Many issues, such as regulation of campaign finance, remain contested". For this reason, international organizations and national governments are asked to introduce practical standards and regulatory guidelines for ensuring the integrity of the electoral processes at national and local levels.

In order to analyse the second component of the concept of electoral integrity, we consider as starting point the concept of electoral cycle. Elections are complex systems, made up of sequential steps taken before, during, and after election day. Taking this 'process' into account helps researchers to ensure that all relevant aspects are taken into account. However, the process-based approach *per se* is not enough. As Van Ham (2015: 719) stresses, it "runs the risk of generating vast 'checklists' of indicators by which to judge elections", posing not only practical difficulties in terms of data collection but also "questions about how to evaluate the relative importance of irregularities". What do we need is a theoretical framework to analyse step-by-step the entire process and evaluate its quality. For these reasons a combination of process- and concept-based approach is

needed. We need theoretical criteria of evaluation while ensuring that the scope of the entire electoral process is taken into account, improving both validity and reliability of measurement. In this way, a definition of electoral integrity can count on solid foundations based on the theory together with a set of indicators that measures its quality throughout its phases.

Issues related to the quality of the electoral process have also been found to have significant consequences for political participation and electoral accountability. Electoral malpractices, in fact, inevitably undermine the accountability of elected representatives and governments to the electorate and the whole circuit of responsiveness may fail to operate. “In this context, corrupt politicians can be expected to get away with blatant vote-buying, fraudulent ballot stuffing, or intimidation of opponents without facing any electoral sanctions” (Norris 2014: 172). In this way, the perception of ‘quality elections’ is expected to “shape public confidence in electoral institutions and satisfaction with the performance of democracy, patterns of voting turnout and protest politics, the range of party and policy choices available to citizens, and the accountability and responsiveness of elected representatives” (Norris, 2013: 570).

In this framework the concept of electoral accountability is strictly linked with the concept of *political legitimacy*. Assuming that electoral accountability represents the power of voters to assign responsibility and sanction (or reward) governments on the basis of their performance (Hobolt et al., 2013), the effectiveness of this power is strictly connected with the clearness of the electoral procedures. Holding competitive and recurrent multiparty elections are the “bedrock foundation for democratic accountability” (Norris 2015), because they have the tremendous function to connect voters and political institutions, empowering citizens to “throw the rascals out” (Thomassen, 2014) after a retrospective judgment of the incumbent’s performance. When contentious elections are even ‘only’ flawed, however, the mechanism of electoral accountability linking citizens and representatives results irremediably broken. Thus, in connection with the recent literature on the quality of democracy, we can affirm that the several cases of flawed contests taking place even in contexts of consolidated democracies corroborate the evidence that elections alone are not the *sufficient* condition for democratic governance, in particular when the

institutions of horizontal accountability are weak, but they remain the *necessary* foundation. When elections respond to international, global standards of quality – or, better, ‘integrity’ – they strengthen voters’ feelings of political legitimacy implying, in turn, more confidence in political parties and institutions translated into higher turnout rates. Thus, the existence of citizens more involved in the public sphere means not only higher rates of political participation, but also more possibility to exert public control on incumbents’ action.

Strengthening the transparency of procedures in order to consider elections as ‘free and fair’, also means to improve the opportunities of voters to hold incumbent governments accountable for their performance and, in turn, underpinning the stability of democratic regimes. The intimate connection between the main object of this thesis – electoral accountability – and the context of electoral integrity, and its undeniable role in shaping political trust and responsiveness, encourages us to include this variable in the present analysis. Including electoral integrity into a research on electoral accountability in Central and Eastern Europe is quite innovative and particularly interesting: we deal with recent democracies whose process of consolidation – in some cases – was only recently accomplished (Tomini, 2015) and understanding to what extent quality elections may have contributed to it represents a meaningful contribution to the existing literature.

## **1.5. Previous Research on Electoral Accountability in Central Eastern Europe**

The fall of the Berlin wall on November 9th, 1989, has been one of the most meaningful events not only for historians but also for numerous political scientists committed to democracy and democratization studies. It meant not only the beginning of the reunification process between two parts of the same country (the “two Germanys”), but also the gradual break-up of the Soviet Union and its Eastern Bloc. In fact, the CEE members of the Warsaw Pact started to escape USSR’s domination, with opposition parties gradually admitted to contest free elections. The first economic reforms followed first in Poland and Hungary ratified the passage towards a new political era. From the

perspective of political scientists, historians and common observers, the period 1989-1990 represented the peak of the process known as “third wave of democratization” (Huntington 1991).

The present dissertation, starting from the existing literature on electoral accountability, aims at addressing the question whether, and under what conditions, incumbents in CEE democracies are held accountable for their performance. However, what kind of performance do political scientists usually look at? Also in this case, most research has focused on economy, because it seems to be one of the most consistently salient issues for voters, given its impact on human welfare (see Duch and Stevenson, 2008). For this reason, electoral accountability in the region has been almost totally studied from the point of view of the economic voting theory lacking in a cross-national study.

Why did occurrences of retrospective economic voting in Central and Eastern Europe deeply affect political research in the last twenty years? The reasons driving this decision are various and concern some peculiarities of the region.

First of all, the necessity to address adequately an empirical phenomenon such as the performance of new democracies. After two decades, these democracies emerged from the Third Wave, deserve to be studied no more in the framework of the democratization theory, but as democratic systems in their own right. Obviously, one should not lose sight of the fact that, the further process consolidation is still in progress in some of the countries in Central and Eastern Europe. However, this attitude means that political scientists are now aware of the necessity to study the ‘quality’ of these political systems no more classifiable as transitional democracies.

Second, because of the peculiar characteristics of CEE citizens in terms of political participation and social capital (Fidrmuc and Gërkhani, 2005). Evidence shows as post-communist society is “distinctively weak, characterized by low levels of organizational membership and participation by ordinary citizens” than their counterparts in Western Europe and other new democracies (Howard, 2002: 1). It could represent an element of limitation for the well-functioning of the accountability mechanism in the region. In fact, voters may not possess the information necessary to practice economic voting or the

motivation to act on it (Roberts 2008: 534). It represents also a further element that discourages the use of individual level survey data such as respondents' perception of the national economic condition.

Nevertheless, only a little part of the research addressing this question looks at outcomes at the national level and objective performance indicators where accountability matters most. The vast majority of this research focuses on individual level survey data. A dependent variable dichotomizing responses into government versus opposition vote is usually employed, together with subjective perceptions of economic performance. The consequence is that this literature is driven by the main question whether citizen's vote intentions are affected by their perceptions of the economy. Duch and Stevenson (2008) show that to a large extent when citizens perceive bad economic performance by the government, they tend to vote for the opposition.

Third, after fifteen years later the fall of the Communism in Europe and the accession of these countries to the European Union, it is interesting to analyse diachronically the evolution of the accountability dynamics from the end of the dictatorship till now. In fact, during the transition citizens face uncertainty in choosing whom to vote for due to the large number, brief histories, and short half-lives of parties (Bunce and Csanadi, 1993; Rose and Munro, 2003; Birch, 2003). The overall realignment of the party system, together with the fading away of traditional parties often linked to the old regime make difficult for voters to identify incumbents.

This uncertainty affects also the possibility for voters to assess correctly economic performance because of the large number of major economic reforms and their unpredictable consequences (Roberts 2008). The effect of the international environment – both at the beginning of the transition and in this phase of consolidation with the role exerted by the European Union – makes unclear whether economic performance is a result of policies under the control of incumbents or conditions outside their control like communist legacies or international factors. The presence of exogenous intervening variables blurs the lines of responsibility and make it more difficult for voters to assign responsibility and sanction governments on the basis of their economic performance.

Studies on economic voting conducted in Central and Eastern Europe present a mixed picture. Employing individual level data, they show that economic performance affected evaluations of the governments. Three relevant (and pioneering) studies by Pacek (1994), Duch (1995) and Przeworski (1996) conducted among a limited number of former communist countries – Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland; Poland, USSR, Hungary, Czechoslovakia; Poland, respectively – show a correlation between government popularity and economic performance, that is economic difficulties reduce support for the incumbent government. Anderson et al. (2003) and Stegmaier and Lewis-Beck (2009) found clear evidence of economic voting in Hungary in the last twenty years.

A large number of studies have found that the relation between economic conditions and voting is mediated by perceptions of party type in government. In a well-known study, Tucker (2006) found that voters in five CEE countries look mainly at whether a party is connected with the new or old regime rather than its responsibility for current economic performance. Linking his work to what Powell and Whitten (1993) found in Western Europe, he argues that economic voting “is conditional on the type of party, i.e. some types of parties should do better and others worse when the economy is growing”. These effects will differ across parties and circumstances in a dynamic able to condition economic voting. This is because new regime parties are held more responsible for the changes involved during the transition process.

This attitude toward old and new regime parties, could produce some problems for economic voting. Stokes (2001) states that the economic perceptions during the transition may blur the lines of responsibility, with voters blaming the outgoing authoritarian regime, not the current incumbent, for the economic troubles they experience. This element represents another limit in the use of individual level data. However, the effect is expected to decrease as the process of transition goes on and the when the old regime can't be more blamed for any difficulties. When citizens build up enough information about politics and faith that policies are responsive to voters will they punish incumbents for economic performance (Duch, 2001; Roberts, 2008).

Other works usually employ national or subnational survey data, finding both correlation economic performance and voting behaviour and evidence of the influence

exerted by party type on voters' choice. However, because of limited scope (one or at least five countries), it is not clear how this dynamic would operate at a cross-national level. As noted above, this attitude is dictated by a methodological choice as well as the scarce amount of individual level data given by the recent democratic tradition of the CEE countries.

With the exception of a limited number of comprehensive works (Hellwig and Samuels, 2007; Hobolt et al. 2013; Thomassen 2014) that include CEE countries in wider samples, little has been found about the influence of the clarity of responsibility on economic voting. Roberts (2006) discourage the conduction of such a study in CEE because of the limited variation in institutional design across the region which presents recurrently multiparty and parliamentary systems with little separation of powers. However, the limit of these studies lays in the fact that they look mainly at the institutional arrangement, rather than focusing of the cohesion of the particular incumbent government of the day. This element, instead, would present a higher degree of variation rather than the formal dispersion of power between the executive and the legislature.

## **1.6. Where to Go from Here?**

Taking into account that voters operate in “various political environments” (Anderson 2007b) and, consequently “behave in various ways” (Bengtsson, 2004), we assume economy as one of several factors that influence what Powell (2004) comprehensively defines as the *chain of responsiveness*. In turn, a relevant part of this chain is represented by electoral accountability (Maloy, 2014); in other words, responsiveness may be considered the *end*, whilst electoral accountability the *means* of elections. Even though research on democracy has provided important insights about factors driving its performance in CEE countries, the causal dynamics underlying electoral accountability are less well understood. A better understanding of what drives electoral accountability could suggest important insights for academics as well as for policymakers and practitioners working in international democratic performance assistance and monitoring missions.

Assuming the relevance of the systemic components – such as government cohesion and stability, fragmentation of the party system, electoral system, the pluralism of the mass media– for the study of electoral accountability, the aim of this research will be also to enrich the clarity of responsibility approach, as developed by literature, finding *what* contexts are of importance. Moreover, despite often-heard claims about the positive consequences of electoral process for the quality of democracy and citizens’ satisfaction with the political system, very little empirical evidence exists to support these claims in CEE countries, whilst the available evidence – deriving mostly from studies on Western or ‘industrialized’ countries – suggests that potential positive consequences for the accountability mechanism and for the political system as a whole, tend to occur if electoral process is of high quality. The thesis is set-up according to the research questions shown below.

*1. How to conceptualize and measure electoral accountability?*

Since much research has been done on conceptualization and measurement of electoral accountability in recent years, the purpose of this question is to provide, first of all, an overview on and a discussion of existing conceptualizations in order to present the one adopted in this study. Of course, the aim of this thesis is also to critically discuss different approaches derived from different conceptualizations or measurements as well as to propose an improved method of analysis of electoral accountability in the field of comparative research.

*2. What are the dynamics that explain variation in the extent to which citizens in the new European democracies are able to hold politicians accountable at elections?*

Of course, the final goal of the thesis will be twofold. First, we would like to answer efficiently to the question whether citizens in the new European democracies are able to hold politicians accountable at elections. To do so, we first need to understand whether economic voting theory is valid to explain CEE citizens’ behaviour towards incumbents, or accountability does require other conditions on the part of the political system in which elections take place. On these questions, the entire sense of the research lays in: taking for granted that Western Europe has reached – with different intensity – an acceptable level of democratic quality, it is particularly interesting to look at the process of democratic

consolidation that Central Eastern Europe is going through in its first decades of democratic life.

This question addresses dynamics of electoral accountability, considering explanatory factors for variation between countries as well as variation within countries over time (1990-2015). Here we first look at the literature on economic voting to derive plausible explanatory factors for electoral accountability in Central Eastern Europe. The literature, in fact, considers economic voting an essential component of democratic accountability, since most of the possibilities for voters to punish/reward the incumbent derive from the perception they have regarding his/her performance. According to Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier (2000: 183) “the citizen votes for the government if the economy is doing all right; otherwise, the vote is against”. Using the suggestions given by previous research, the question will ask what economic variables could affect the electoral success of incumbents. This choice is not only dictated by the historical experience of these countries, but also by the evidence coming from previous research that also demonstrates that the strength of the link *economy/vote-choice* varies considerably across countries (Paldam, 1991; Anderson, 2000b; Anderson, 2007a-2007b; Bellucci and Lewis-Beck, 2011).

### *3. What are the consequences of variation in the systemic characteristics for the degree to which elections generate government accountability?*

Following an approach developed by literature on consolidated democracies, the further aim of the article is to go beyond economic voting theory, analysing the importance of the systemic characteristics for electoral accountability in CEE. According to Anderson (2007b: 590) seems to exist an *intimate* connection between electoral behaviour and context:

“In a very basic way, then, context and behaviour are intimately connected, and this connection is at the heart of political life in at least two fundamental ways: first, *formal and informal rules affect people’s political behaviour*, and people’s preferences, attitudes, and behaviour affect the establishment and functioning of such rules. Second, *citizens are exposed to variable social, political, and economic environments* that they are called upon to understand and interpret and that *they may seek to shape based on these understandings and interpretations*”.

Anderson's statement suggests to take into account several aspects of democratic governance, from executive institutions to the role of the media, from the nature of party system to voting behaviour. The main aim of this work, in other words, is to understand what *contextual variables* deeply affect the possibility of holding incumbents accountable in these young European democracies. In this framework the media acquire further relevance for ensuring electoral accountability, providing a compensative check on manipulative politicians and institutions with low levels of independence from the political power (Birch, 2011; Van Ham and Lindberg, 2015). In other words, a free media system makes voters aware of incumbent's performance, working as 'Fourth Estate' able to surveil government and identifying problems. This action has frequently lead the media to emphasize mostly negative information (Sokora, 2006), enhancing what literature has typically identified with 'retrospective economic voting'. In other words, the electorates would vote against policies and incumbents to a greater degree than they vote for new policies and candidates (Kernell, 1977; Besley et al., 2002).

*4. What is the role of the context of electoral integrity in influencing the levels of electoral accountability voters have at their disposal in new democracies?*

The last research question asks whether the integrity of the electoral process indeed generates accountable and responsive governments, as the literature on elections as 'instruments of democracy' suggests (Powell, 2000). Finally, the aim of this research is also to show the relevance of quality elections in shaping voting behaviour and strengthen electoral accountability in the region.

Keeping in mind the contribution of economic and systemic variables to explain accountability process, this research wants to go beyond analysing how much relevant electoral integrity is in combination with them in the context of the CEE democracies. As noticed above, at the beginning of the transition – and, partially, today – citizens have faced uncertainty in finding targets for accountability because of the high fragmentation or brief histories of parties (Birch, 2003). Party splits, mergers, and name changes made difficult to identify incumbents. Moreover, citizens in post-communist countries are far less likely to participate in politics than those belonging to Western Europe or other new democracies (Howard, 2002; Karp and Milazzo, 2015).

Low levels of political interest together with low levels of institutional and party system stability risk to undermine electoral accountability in the area. Moreover, survey data suggest that citizens' perceptions of electoral malpractices erode trust and confidence in elected authorities, discourage voter turnout and generate protests, undermining regime stability (Norris, 2013). Does electoral integrity structure attitudes about electoral accountability in substantial ways, particularly in terms of confidence in electoral institutions? It undoubtedly is a pivotal point, since electoral legitimacy constitutes – along with electoral accountability – a fundamental element that concurs to define what a quality-democracy is (Morlino, 2009). In fact, a democratic regime is, first of all, defined by the rules, i.e. the procedures among which electoral accountability belongs (O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986; Munck, 1996).

Answering these questions means not only to make a contribution to the academic literature but also furnish a useful tool to international organizations and bodies (United Nations, OSCE, European Commission for instance) and individual governments of established democracies investing substantial resources to promoting democratic governance in third wave regimes (Van Ham, 2012). Because of the importance attributed, in particular, to electoral assistance and election observation missions, generating better understanding of the causes and consequences of variation in electoral accountability represents a key point for the academic research.

Unfortunately, as recently remarked by important intergovernmental organizations, a vast majority of such studies still focus on established democracies, and it appears difficult to know whether these findings apply to emerging democracies (IDEA, 2015). This thesis, instead, aims at extending this literature, looking at new democracies in which not only economic perceptions, but also the political context – government, parties, media along with the electoral procedures – seem to play a relevant role in the field of politics and, specifically, of electoral accountability.

## Chapter 2

# Patterns of Electoral Accountability in Central and Eastern Europe

*'By distributing rewards to governments that performed above average and punishments to those that performed below average, voters give governments an incentive to seek above-average performance. Such incentives would disappear if punishment was automatic or punishment and rewards were not correlated with performance.'*

(Roberts, 2010: 57)

In the summer of 1989, something exceptional happened: revolutionary movements spread across Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia leading gradually to the collapse of the Communist system in the vast territory of Central and Eastern Europe, and to the end of the Soviet Union's control. The Iron Curtain, descended across Europe "from Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic" for nearly fifty years, was demolished, fostering the process of democratic transition and consolidation in the countries of the former Soviet Bloc.

The historical experience of the CEE countries presents several peculiarities, though it occurs bearing in mind the sub-regional differences relating to economic and social standards, history and culture among the former member states of the Warsaw Pact and the Western Balkan countries such as Croatia. As Visegrady (1992) found, between and after the two world wars, the role of politics was so pervasive to penetrate into other spheres of the society politicizing them and, consequently, influencing the development of the political system and political culture. In particular, the period following World War II – destined to last almost fifty years – represented for the region a sort of point of no-return since these societies developed according to an external model, which was the social and economic model imposed by the USSR Communist Party led by Joseph Stalin. In all of

these nations – excepting for Croatia, at that time part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) ruled by the Marshal Josip Broz Tito – the historical and social conditions, both internal and external, of ‘building a new society’ increased the predominance of politics in several aspects – such as the education system – and the problematic phenomena which corresponded with it.

History has shown the limits inherent in the Socialist system, in particular its capacity to ensure its own political legitimacy for a long time, not even in a reformed version created by the Gorbachev’s policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* passed in the 1980s. Only a few years before the fall of the Berlin Wall, Samuel Huntington (1984) stated that the likelihood of democratization was less in Eastern Europe than elsewhere in the world (Bandelj and Radu, 2006). Thus, during the second half of the twentieth century, several political changes occurred in the CEE countries – such as the Hungarian revolution in 1956 – and several reformatory movements gained in popularity – such as those in Prague in 1968 and those in Poland (the most important was the Polish *Solidarnosc*, i.e. Solidarity) – at the beginning of the 1980s.

In the following years, the claim for a change in the political system, with the aim of giving room to other political competitors not linked with the regime, became more and more urgent. As said above, these feelings found a fertile ground in the foreign policy of the Soviet Premier Gorbachev that ensured a favourable international climate which enabled other Central and Eastern European countries to detach gradually themselves from the influence of the Soviet Union and the socialist economic system. Little by little, the socialist authoritarianisms started to collapse in Central and Eastern European countries. Pro-democratic political parties and civic movements emerged in the newly democratized countries, reported on by a newly free media. Because of the characteristics of this process, its slow proceedings and almost total absence of trauma – excepting for the violent conclusion of Ceausescu’s regime in Romania – these changes of regime in 1989 to the 1990s have been usually labelled as ‘constitutional’ and ‘velvety’ revolutions. (Kukral, 1997).

Poland and Hungary, in fact, experienced a ‘negotiated’ transition conducted between the communist governments and the oppositionist forces and culminated in the first free

elections held, respectively, in 1989 and 1990. Czechoslovak and Bulgarian transitions were characterized by nonviolent, mass mobilization. In Czechoslovakia, in particular, it is remarkable the fact that the Civic Forum – a political movement established during the Velvet Revolution – won the first free elections held in 1990. Romania, as said above, experienced a violent revolution that spread out from Timisoara throughout the country leading to the deposition, trial and execution of President Ceausescu as well as the end of forty years of Communist rule. Probably this traumatic epilogue contributed to slow down the transition – and consequently the consolidation – process of the country undertaken in the following years. The Yugoslav transition(s) to democracy is perhaps the most complex of all the Central Eastern European cases. The Communist regime in Yugoslavia, in fact, was considered relatively liberal, while there was a local, vital civil society and the country “was not overly tied to either Western or Eastern influence” (Ritter, 2012). In Slovenia the situation resembled that of Hungary, leading to a quick transition to democracy, while in Croatia this process took longer involving also the intervention of Western Europe until the elections held in 2000 that ratified – together with the overcoming of the dramatic consequences of the civil war – the beginning of the democratic era. Since independence in 1991, the three Baltic republics – Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania – speeded up their democratic transition holding three national elections which helped them to achieve a successful alternation in power without an overthrow of the system, while the political actors – political parties and politicians as well – openly accepted the democratic rules of the game. Summarizing, Central and Eastern European democracies characterize themselves for a rapid implementation of democratic reforms that allowed them – above all, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Estonia to complete “a successful ‘transition’ to democracy and capitalism” (Kubicek, 2015). However, other countries, such as Romania, Bulgaria, and Croatia, undertook reforms slowly, although by the 2000s they have registered substantial progresses. According to Bunce (2003) but also Bandelj and Radu (2006: 15), the most successful transitions in the post-communist countries involved a “sharp break with the old order”. The literature on democratic transition in Central and Eastern Europe shows as post-transition reformist governments, not tied at all with the former communist elite facilitated the democratic consolidation in their countries.

After this brief historical digression, in the next chapter some considerations about the existing link between elections – and electoral accountability in particular – and democratic consolidation are provided. The aim is to understand whether or not we could consider elections – using Powell’s definition – “an instrument of democracy”.

## **2.1. Electoral Accountability and Democratic Consolidation**

Several expert surveys conducted in the last years by distinguished international research centres committed with the study of democratic quality (above all, Freedom House and Polity IV) show that the most Central and Eastern European countries are considered today to be consolidated democracies although some of them, such as Estonia, Poland and Slovenia, are more committed than others, such as Romania and Bulgaria, that usually score lower performances. However, how do these experts evaluate these countries? What is the relevance of the democratic procedures in these assessments?

After the end of the Cold War certainty that competitive elections - considered a structural prerequisite for democratization - should have become an integral part of the transition process, extensively spread among political scientists and policy makers. This awareness is perfectly expressed by the words of Thomas Carothers (2002: 8):

*“Elections will serve to broaden and deepen political participation and the democratic accountability of the state to its citizens ... it has been assumed that in attempted transitions to democracy, elections will be not just a foundation stone, but a key generator over time of further democratic reforms”.*

Nevertheless, even though the wind of democratic transition started to blow on the countries protagonist of the Third Wave of democratization, observers recognized that some countries apparently transitioned to democracy did not “get elections right at all” (Van Ham, 2012: 7). In some cases, elections were characterized by heavy malpractices, such as intimidations, problems in voter registration and procedures, vote-buying or ballot box stuffing (Calingaert, 2006). Often, these deficiencies were hidden behind the appearance of an integrated ‘Western model’ of periodic multi-party elections, even though some limits still existed to the possibility for citizens to freely choose and judge their governments.

In the first chapter we defined the concept of electoral accountability, describing its intimate connection with the quality of a democratic regime. Now we should clarify the assertion by Powell (2000) according to which the quality of the “electoral regime” refers to a “more functional conception of elections as *instruments of democracy*”. Consistent with this conceptualization, in fact, elections function as a linkage between citizens and representatives that could be analysed from a double perspective. On the one hand, elections should give citizens the possibility to choose future governments and to signal their policy preferences to those governments (prospective voting). On the other hand, choosing a future government also implies that citizens can evaluate the incumbent government and hold it accountable for its past performance (retrospective voting). In this way elections represents not only an instrument to choose (prospectively) future governments, but also to signal their policy preferences to those governments. It means that citizens evaluate (retrospectively) the incumbent government and hold it accountable for its past performance. Summarizing, elections are opportunities for citizens to exercise their judgment on the past performance of the incumbent but also signal guidelines for future government actions (Van der Eijk and Franklin, 2009). They work as instruments of democracy to the extent to which they strengthen accountability and the chain of responsiveness as a whole.

However, these considerations concern the functioning of the electoral process and its consequences in regimes we assume to be democratic, i.e. we look at those countries that have already transitioned to democracy and where the measurement of their ‘quality’ – and of the electoral accountability, in particular – is possible. This is the case of our eleven CEE countries. Nevertheless, since we assume a diachronic perspective of analysis, that covers their history from the early 1990s onwards, it could be interesting to clarify how elections can contribute to the consolidation of a democratic regime. A fundamental contribution to the consolidation literature is the theoretical framework proposed by Linz and Stepan (1996: 6) that focused on the processes of regime stabilization, distinguishing between *behavioural*, *attitudinal* and *institutional* consolidation:

“Behaviourally, a democratic regime in a territory is consolidated when no significant national, social, economic, political, or institutional actors spend significant resources attempting to achieve their objectives by creating a non-democratic regime or turning to

violence or foreign intervention to secede from the state; Attitudinally, a democratic regime is consolidated when a strong majority of public opinion holds the belief that democratic procedures and institutions are the most appropriate way to govern collective life in a society such as theirs and when the support for anti-system alternatives is quite small or more or less isolated from the pro-democratic forces; Constitutionally, a democratic regime is consolidated when governmental and nongovernmental forces alike, throughout the territory of the state, become subjected to and habituated to the resolution of conflict within the specific laws, procedures, and institutions sanctioned by the new democratic process”.

However, political scientists have usually difficulties to work out a satisfactory conceptualization of democratic consolidation because of its ‘soft’ boundaries. In other words, evidences have shown that the passage from a non-democratic to a democratic regime is not a linear and it is usually undefinable. For this reason, part of the literature analyses the ‘quality’ of these regimes, through the empirical measurement of dimensions considered vital for the functioning of a democratic country (Diamond and Morlino, 2005; Morlino, 2011). Among these dimensions, electoral accountability – one of the ‘procedural’ dimensions employed in these analyses – plays a fundamental role in shaping the democratic quality of any country. Also for this reason, most of the literature heavily focuses on elections as a key component of democracy, with the aim to quantify and measure the development of democracy around the world. Nevertheless, because of the growing difficulties that new democracies encountered in its process of consolidation, many authors have begun to reconsidered the role of the elections *per se* in shaping democracy (Diamond, 1999; Morlino, 2011). Thus they gradually moved the focus of its enquiry towards the electoral process, i.e. how elections are conducted in order to understand to what extent the accountability mechanism is effective to improve the quality of a democracy. Political scientists have become aware that accounting for the quality of the democracy – as well as one single dimension such as electoral accountability – implies to consider elections not just as the only independent variable, but considering it in association with other features that concur together to influence our dependent variable. Elections represent an essential element of democracy, but there is more than just elections. In fact, they take place also in non-democratic countries, autocracies or hybrid regimes (Lindberg, 2009; Norris, 2014) while democratic elections imply the

institutionalization of political, civil rights and freedom but also a certain degree of respect for the rule of law (O'Donnell 2001; Merkel, 2004; Morlino, 2011).

Lipset (2000), as well, observes that competitive elections are “necessary but not sufficient condition” for democratization, because we should consider also the extent to which a party system is institutionalized. The *institutionalization* of the party system is, in fact, one of the elements that makes incumbents to be accountable as well as elected, because it permits voters to vote for or against the governing party/coalition or the opposition party/coalition. It represents the essence of the accountability mechanism, that is put in danger by the continuing entry and exit of parties, together with the weakness of civil society institutions, as in the new CEE democracies (Rose and Munro, 2009).

Thus we agree on the fact that elections, even though representing the main tool that citizens have to hold incumbents accountable, should be considered mostly as one of the components of political regimes. Following Schmitter (1992: 427) we may consider elections as “partial regimes” that represent one component of “a composite of partial regimes” together shaping a political regime. For this reason, it is also important considering the quality of the electoral process, that we already defined in Chapter 1 as the quality of the entire electoral process, i.e. the process that encompasses all those phases from pre-election campaigning, to election-day voting and vote tabulation, to post-election day adjudication of electoral disputes (Norris, 2014). Why is it important for the study of electoral accountability and as instrument to improve the democratic quality? We should refer to the concept of *chain of responsiveness* proposed by Powell (2000; 2004) and already described in the previous chapter. According to the American scholar, elections function as a process made up of linkages connecting citizens' preferences and policy outcomes, giving citizens the power to choose their representatives basically on the basis of their performance. This mechanism represents the core concept of electoral accountability, i.e. the possibility for citizens to influence government formation and the extent to which bad government performance affects the possibility of incumbents to be re-elected or, to suffer a loss in their vote share.

Furthermore, in the wider perspective of Powell, the possibility of voters to influence policy outcomes is defined as responsiveness, that is the extent to which new governments

implement policies that are compatible with the preferences of voters. As already clarified, in this thesis, we will not analyse the concept of responsiveness, focusing rather exclusively on the dynamics subtended to the accountability mechanism. Thus, these two elements represent the core concept of elections as instruments of democracy, that are such if they generate accountability and responsiveness. The degree to which electoral accountability works, is likely to depend on the contextual features (such as government characteristics, party system format and the pluralism of the media system), and the economic situation in which elections take place. Along with these elements, the integrity of the electoral process is also likely to be a fundamental factor, since committing electoral manipulation and fraud might be “an effective strategy for governments that seek to avoid being held accountable for their past actions” (Van Ham, 2012). While Powell and other exponents of the theory of representation define elections as instruments capable to generate accountability and responsiveness, more recently a part of the literature on democratization have point the attention on the ‘spill-over effect’ elections may have on other components of the political regime, thereby triggering broader processes of transition to and consolidation of democracy (Lindberg, 2009). Elections might be able to heightened media attention and international scrutiny, providing a window of opportunity for regime change even in contexts of limited respect for civil liberties and the rule of law. The electoral ‘revolutions’ in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s represent a good example of this dynamics. Moreover, as Greskovits (1998) and Roberts (2008) show, elections in CEE countries during the dictatorship provided space for action to opposition parties, movements and other members of the civil society. In fact, under communism voting against the incumbent or not voting were the only tolerated expression of protest, while during the transition protest voting represented the only instrument to express dissatisfaction.

Thus, electoral procedures might also act as a factor to foster democratic consolidation. On the one hand, they provide citizens with a possibility to express their dissatisfaction about the government in office through democratic channels rather than through violent actions, thereby contributing to the stability of the country (Birch, 2011). On the other hand, elections may also confer legitimacy to the government in the eyes of citizens and parties, strengthening their satisfaction with the democratic regime (Morlino, 2009). This

effect might trigger a sort of ‘virtuous circle’ of democratization, where the full acceptance of the democratic values by citizens creates expectations that leaders should conform to (Lindberg, 2006). Despite the importance of the enjoyment of the political rights by all, the guarantee of the human rights in the constitution, the existence of regular free and fair elections, and the respect of the rule of law, democratic consolidation is benchmarked also on issues of service delivery, government responsiveness and accountability and changes in the material well-being of the people. Basically, consolidation implies the institutionalization of democratic procedures and the acceptance of the democratic culture. It implies that political institutions develop the capacity to govern, that procedures for selecting the government are efficient and perceived by citizens as being fair and legitimate. However, Van Ham (2012) has observed that problems of ‘endogeneity’ might rise in the empirical analysis since the quality of elections – and, consequently, of the accountability mechanism – is also an indicator of democratization, and it might lead to circular causal reasoning.

Given that also analyses considering the relation between election quality and the quality of democracy might suffer from the same problem of endogeneity, it could be useful to assume the electoral accountability of the incumbent government as a spill-over effects of one regime component on other regime components. Before testing causal explanations of cross-country and over-time variation in electoral accountability statistically, the next paragraph presents descriptive statistics and try to identify patterns of development of electoral accountability over time within countries.

## **2.2. The Burdens of Governing in Central and Eastern Europe (1993-2015)**

In Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 we will conduct the quantitative analysis on our sample countries testing causal explanations of cross-national variation of electoral accountability in the region, attempting to understand its causal dynamics and, finally, analysing the consequences of such variation for these young democracies. This chapter, instead, is

descriptive<sup>1</sup> and aims at identifying patterns of development of electoral accountability – considered as losses in terms of incumbent vote share – over time in 11 countries in Central and Eastern Europe from 1993 to 2015.

Thus, the statistical analysis focuses on 11 Central and Eastern European emerging democracies that have become EU Member States between 2004 and 2013, i.e. Slovenia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Croatia. The rationale guiding case selection lays in the fact that these countries all experienced huge internal similarities before 1989, transitioned to democracy at about the same time and maintained a ‘democratic trend’ along the consolidation process. In fact, because of the imposition of the economic and social model by the USSR, and the communal process of democratic consolidation to join the European Union at the beginning of the century, they are probably more alike than any other group of countries in the world (Fish, 1998; Frye, 2002; Roberts, 2010). Lastly, we selected these countries because each of them held several accountability elections rated “Free” by Freedom House (2015) permitting to assess changes in accountability over time<sup>2</sup>. The *freedom criterion* is particularly relevant because where elections are not free, incumbents will almost certainly perform better than actual conditions warrant (Roberts, 2008). These similarities also provide a way of excluding a number of potentially important causal variables from the analysis, that represents a recommended strategy given the limited number of cases.

We have created a dataset of 65 parliamentary elections held in 11 Central and Eastern European countries from 1993 – corresponding to the second Polish democratic elections – to 2015 with the latest electoral data collected in Estonia, Croatia and Poland. Following a consolidated literature, we did not include the first ‘free’ elections in the sample because they might be biased by the incumbency status of the Communist parties that in the

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<sup>1</sup> The descriptive statistics presented in this chapter has been calculated using the software R (version 3.2.3) with its integrated development environment R-Studio (version 0.99.879). Graphs in Figure 2.2 and 2.3 realized using the software STATA version 13.

<sup>2</sup> In its annual report Freedom House enlists “the minimal criteria” a regime needs to be classified as “electoral democracy”. These criteria are: “(1) A competitive, multiparty political system; (2) Universal adult suffrage for all citizens (with exceptions for restrictions that states may legitimately place on citizens as sanctions for criminal offenses); (3) Regularly contested elections conducted in conditions of ballot secrecy, reasonable ballot security, and in the absence of massive voter fraud, and that yield results that are representative of the public will; (4) Significant public access of major political parties to the electorate through the media and through generally open political campaigning”.

previous election got about 90% of the vote. As Cholova (2011) observes, in fact, the first democratic elections after the fall of communism were probably interpreted by voters as a referendum on regime change rather than a competition among opposing parties structured around "real" political programs. All the elections and governments<sup>3</sup> included in the analysis are listed in detail in Table 2.1. below.

**TABLE 2.1.** *Sample countries, elections, coalitions and change in vote share*

Country	Year	Incumbent government party/coalition	Vote difference	Average
<b>Bulgaria</b>	1997	<b>DL/BSP</b>	-21.4	
	2001	<b>ODS</b>	-34.1	
	2005	<b>NDS + DPS</b>	-17.4	
	2009	<b>BSP/KzB + NDS + DPS</b>	-29	- 19.8 %
	2013	<b>GERB</b>	-9.2	
	2014	<b>BSP/KzB + DSP <sup>(1)</sup></b>	-7.7	
<b>Croatia</b>	2000	<b>HDZ</b>	-18.3	
	2003	<b>SPH + HSS + HNS + LS</b>	-3.3	
	2007	<b>HDZ</b>	<b>+2.7</b>	- 6.9 %
	2011	<b>HDZ + HSS + SDSS</b>	-9.3	
	2015	<b>SPH + HNS + IDS</b>	-6.1	
<b>Czech Republic</b>	1996	<b>ODS + KDU/CSL + ODA</b>	<b>+2.2</b>	
	1998	<b>ODS + KDU/CSL + ODA</b>	-7.4	
	2002	<b>CSSD</b>	-2.1	
	2006	<b>CSSD + KDU/CSL + US/DU</b>	-4.7	- 10.3 %
	2010	<b>ODS + KDU/CSL + SZ</b>	-21.9	
2013	<b>ODS + TOP09 + VV</b>	-28.1		
<b>Estonia</b>	1995	<b>RKI + ESDP/EMK + ERSP</b>	-26.6	
	1999	<b>EKK</b>	-24.6	
	2003	<b>I + Ere</b>	<b>+3.8</b>	
	2007	<b>EK + Ere* + Era</b>	<b>+4.9</b>	- 6.7 %
	2011	<b>Ere + IRL + SDE</b>	<b>+9.9</b>	
2015	<b>Ere + IRL</b>	-7.7		
<b>Hungary</b>	1994	<b>MDF + FKgP + KDNP</b>	-15.4	
	1998	<b>MSZP + SZDSZ</b>	-12.6	
	2002	<b>FIDESZ + FKgP + MDF</b>	-3.2	
	2006	<b>MSZP + SZDSZ</b>	<b>+2</b>	- 11.3 %
	2010	<b>MSZP + SZDSZ</b>	-30.2	
	2014	<b>FIDESZ + KDNP</b>	-8.2	
<b>Latvia</b>	1995	<b>LC + TPA</b>	-17.7	
	1998	<b>DPS + LC + TB/LNNK + LVP + LZS + LZP <sup>(2)</sup></b>	-3.5	
	2002	<b>TP + LC* + TB/LNNK + JP</b>	-34.4	
	2006	<b>JL + TP* + ZZS + LPP</b>	<b>+1.8</b>	- 11.7 %
	2010	<b>TP + ZZS + JL* + TB/LNNK</b>	<b>+7.6</b>	
	2011	<b>V + ZZS</b>	-21.0	
2014	<b>V + ZRP + NA</b>	-15.0		

<sup>3</sup> As suggested by the literature (see Dassonneville and Lewis-Beck, 2014), in order to determine what splinter parties or new parties are to be considered incumbents, we rely not only on official data but also on the country-specific information found in election reports.

<b>Lithuania</b>	1996	<b>LDDP</b>	-34.0	
	2000	<b>TS/LK + LKDP + LCS</b>	-35.8	
	2004	<b>NS + LSDP*</b>	-30.0	- 26.9 %
	2008	<b>LSDP + LiCS + LVLS + PDP</b>	-14.7	
	2012	<b>TS-LKD + LiCS-TPP + LRLS</b>	-20.0	
<b>Poland</b>	1993	<b>UD + PSL + KLD + PL + PCD</b>	-6.0	
	1997	<b>SLD + PSL*</b>	-1.4	
	2001	<b>AWS + UW</b>	-38.5	
	2005	<b>SDL + PSL</b>	-31.7	- 15.7 %
	2007	<b>PiS + SRP + LPR</b>	-11.5	
	2011	<b>PO + PSL</b>	-2.8	
<b>Romania</b>	2015	<b>PO + PSL</b>	-18.3	
	1996	<b>PDSR + PUNR</b>	-5.9	
	2000	<b>PNT-CD + PD + UDMR + PSDR</b>	-30.9	
	2004	<b>PDSR + PSDR + PUR</b>	<b>±0</b>	- 13.3 %
	2008	<b>PNL + PD + UDMR</b>	-12.7	
<b>Slovakia</b>	2012	<b>PSD + PNL + PC</b>	-17	
	1994	<b>HZDS + SNS</b>	-4.8	
	1998	<b>HZDS + ZRS + SNS</b>	-10.3	
	2002	<b>SDK + SDL + SMK + MKP + SOP</b>	-30.5	- 11.7 %
	2006	<b>SDKU + SMK + KDH + ANO</b>	-2.8	
<b>Slovenia</b>	2010	<b>Smer + SNS + LS + HZDS</b>	-5.4	
	2012	<b>SDKU-DS + SaS + KDH + MH</b>	-16.4	
	1996	<b>LDS + SKD + ZLSD</b>	-6.0	
	2000	<b>SLS + LDS + DeSUS</b>	<b>+0.3</b>	
	2004	<b>LDS + ZLSD + SLS + DeSUS</b>	-19.3	- 16 %
	2008	<b>SDS + NSI + SLS + DeSUS</b>	-3.7	
	2011	<b>SD + Zares + DeSUS + LDS</b>	-32.8	
	2014	<b>PS + SD + DL + DeSUS</b>	-34.6	

**Note:** Largest coalition party in bold type. If not coinciding, PM's party is signalled with star (\*).

(1) (2) No party affiliation for PM

Table 2.1. collects all the elections the present thesis aims at analysing, i.e. every democratic parliamentary election held in the 11 CEE countries in almost the last 20 years. We code as ‘government parties’ all those parties that were part of the government at the time of the elections. If the ‘electoral’ government was in office less than two years, we consider as incumbent government the one which governed for the majority of the legislature. All the other parties – including the ‘leaver’ parties – that have a share of vote above 2% are coded as opposition parties. Moreover, we consider only legislative elections – for the lower house of parliament – because of the uniformity of the political systems across the region. In fact, they are all parliamentary democracies with prime ministers as heads of the government and it implies that citizens hold government accountable for the economic performance, since it is directly appointed by the parliamentary majority elected by voters. In Figure 2.1. below, we present the frequency distribution of our dependent

variable. As we can observe, the graph shows quite clearly how considerably incumbent vote share in our dataset ( $n = 65$ ) varies, and roughly follows the normal distribution (skewness= 0.45). Given an average vote share  $m = 32.8\%$  (SD = 13.3; SE = 1.6;  $n = 65$ ) we calculate the confidence interval at 95% of confidence using the t-test ( $t = 19.92$ ). The result confirms the null hypothesis ( $m \neq 0$ ), giving us also the confidence interval for the dependent variable as included between 29.50 and 36.08.

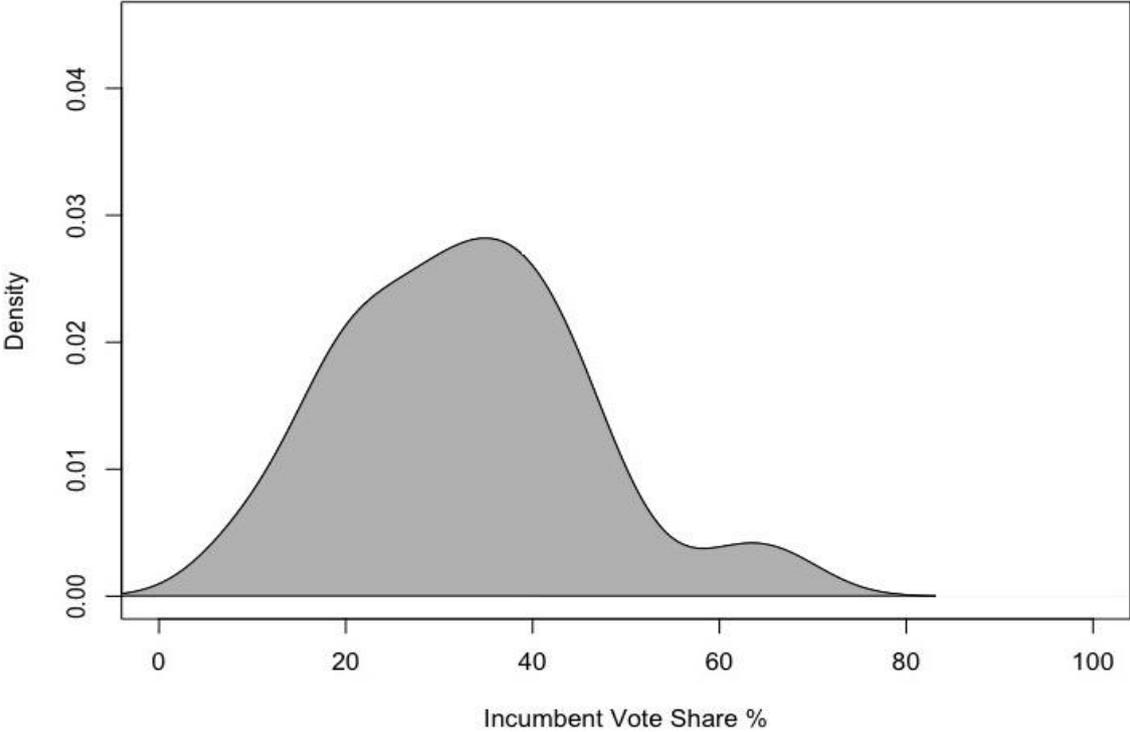


FIGURE 2.1. Kernel distribution of incumbent vote shares ( $n= 65$ ; skewness= 0.45)

The result is not particularly impressive, keeping in mind that this is the vote share for government coalitions usually composed by three or more parties according to the rules of parliamentary systems and whose votes are converted in seats by the effect of almost proportional electoral systems<sup>4</sup>. What does it mean? The most intuitive evidence is that these countries seem to suffer at each election a high rate of party fragmentation, which could prevent any government coalition from obtaining more than one third of the vote. It implies that also government stability is often threatened, because parties leave the coalition after the elections or in the middle of the term. Both government instability and

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<sup>4</sup> There are only four partial exceptions to the uniformity in the use of the proportional formula: Bulgaria (in 2009 elections), Hungary, Lithuania and Romania (in 2008 and 2012 elections). Features regarding electoral systems are discussed in details in Chapter 3.

the high party fragmentation represent two elements that may blur the lines of responsibility, preventing the voters to hold their representatives accountable for their performance.

### 2.2.1. The Cost of Governing: Government Patterns

Leaving aside more precise causal dynamics, to which we will turn in the following chapters, in terms of regional and time variation we would expect electoral accountability – measured as the degree to which voters sanction governments for poor performance the day of the elections – to be particularly high in comparison with established democracies (Paldam, 1991; Nannestad and Paldam, 2002; Roberts, 2010). It is more likely to happen in later elections, when the governments have the legitimacy of a – formally at least – democratic election. Figure 2.2 shows trends in incumbent vote share and, in particular, gains and losses of each government in the CEE countries for each of the 65 elections we consider in this thesis. Looking at the ‘aggregate’ level, that is the overall electoral performance of the CEE governments along more than 20 years, we can see that the cost of governing is particularly high across the region. The total *average vote loss* is –13.6% (SD = 12.7; SE = 1.6;  $n = 65$ ), with Lithuania scoring the most ‘punitive’ rate ( $m = -26.9\%$ ; SD = 9.2;  $n = 5$ ) while Croatia the most ‘benevolent’ one ( $m = -6.9\%$ ; SD = 7.6;  $n = 5$ ). In other words, excepting for Croatia and Estonia, data confirm the evidence that governing in CEE is particularly costly in terms of consensus, with incumbent governments losing five times more votes in comparison with established democracies. However, other results from the literature seem to be not completely confirmed: the cost of governing is particular high in early elections, but it seems not possible to find a common trend along time. Among these cases, 12 governments ( $f = 18,2\%$ ) lose more than 30% of their previous vote share ( $m = -33.1\%$ ) with Lithuania characterizing itself for the highest number of occurrences (3 out of 5 elections) and Poland for the highest score ( $m = -38.5\%$ ) as registered in 2001 elections, when Solidarity Election Action (AWS) – the ‘political arm’ of the most important protagonist of the democratic (and peaceful) transition – collapsed losing all its parliamentary seats and dissolved not long after. The *debacle* of the party led by Jerzy Buzek meant not only the capacity of voters to ‘punish’ and replace the incumbent government with another one, but also the consolidation of the principle of

alternation among political actors that represents one of the cornerstone of any democratic country.

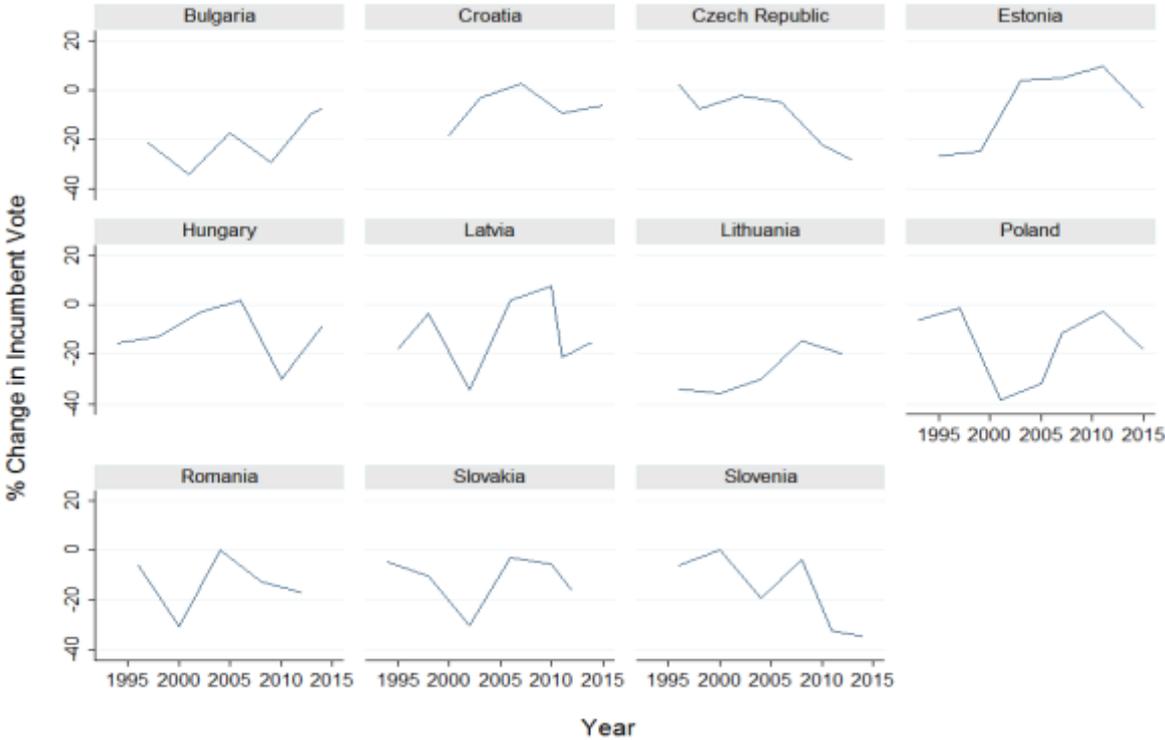


FIGURE 2.2. Change in incumbent vote share in the 65 parliamentary elections (1993-2015)

The data presented above also show the other side of the coin, i.e. the case in which incumbents manage to gain votes at the elections. In this case, we have only 10 cases out of 65 ( $f = 15.4\%$ ) in which incumbents gain votes ( $m = +3.5\%$ ), with Estonia showing again the best performance with three occurrences in 2003, 2007 and 2011 parliamentary elections, all of them held after – or close to – the positive outcome of the popular referendum for the accession to the European Union. The difference among gains and losses in incumbent vote share is particularly evident also in this preliminary analysis. Consequently, the question about why almost no governments were rewarded inevitably arises. The several economic reforms undertaken in the CEE countries at the beginning of the 1990s even though relevant for the dynamics connected to the accountability mechanism, are not enough to give a satisfactory explanation. Answering this question probably implies to conduct qualitative study or a case study for each of our country, but is not the object of this thesis. Part of the literature tries to explain this trend advancing cultural reasons and organizational factors such as the importance of protest voting in

these countries along with the weakness of trade unions and interest groups (Greskovits, 1998; Howard, 2002; Roberts, 2008). In the next chapters we will try to find causal relations among dependent and independent variables and explain such dynamics. In this section, instead, we focus on the time and country trends in the costs of governing, i.e. we look at the trend followed by the incumbent vote share across the eleven countries from the early 1990s to 2015. In other words, we aim at answering the following question: are there any trends along time across the CEE countries? Even though we are in context of general electoral punishment, it is possible to detect some trends across the countries and over time. As shown in Table 2.2. below, average vote losses across the eleven countries seems not following a particular time trend, but we can provide some evidence looking at the data. Government losses grow up slowly – in total 1.3% more – in the first three accountability elections, before collapsing suddenly in occasion of the fourth election (6.3 % points gained). However, in the fifth (-12.4% ( $\Delta = -4.7$ ); n= 11), in the sixth (-15.8% ( $\Delta = -3.4$ ); n= 8) and in the seventh (-16.6% ( $\Delta = -0.8$ ); n= 2) the ascending trend appears again, this time characterized by higher intensity.

**TABLE 2.2.** *Average government vote losses in each accountability election*

Election sequence	Period	Countries	Losses	Diff.	N
1 <sup>st</sup> election	1993 – 00	Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia	- 14 %	-	11
2 <sup>nd</sup> election	1997 – 03	Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia	- 14.9 %	- 0.9 %	11
3 <sup>rd</sup> election	2001 – 07	Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia	- 15.3 %	- 0.4 %	11
4 <sup>th</sup> election	2005 – 11	Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia	- 9 %	+ 6.3 %	11
5 <sup>th</sup> election	2007 – 15	Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia	- 12.4 %	- 4.7 %	11
6 <sup>th</sup> election	2011 – 15	Bulgaria, Czech, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia	- 15.8 %	- 3.4 %	8
7 <sup>th</sup> election	2014 – 15	Poland, Latvia	- 16.6 %	- 0.8 %	2

In summary, whereas in the first three elections we can see a stable trend with an almost negligible growth in the government losses followed by a consistent fall corresponding to the fourth election, from the fifth to the last election we can see an

evident ‘punitive’ trend for the incumbents, with losses three–four times higher than before. Of course the number of elections in the dataset is not sufficient to provide reliable long-term trends – in particular for the seventh election consisting of just two countries – but we can make some preliminary comments on the trend in relation with the recent economic crisis. From the second to the fourth election government losses are reduced by almost two-third, whilst in the fifth election ( $n = 11$ ) the loss percentage raises again as well as in the following consultation, that is the span of time corresponding to the peak of the economic crisis that has lashed the continent in the last years. Are these data a result of the recent economic crisis or are they just a confirmation of the already mentioned statements of Nannestad and Paldam? The almost ‘parabolic’ trend of the government losses, its stability and decrease until the fourth election and its following high increase, seems to instil doubt that behind this result there is something else than a simple punishment. The next chapter provides causal insights on this argument. For the moment we can rearrange these data according to a division pre/post economic crisis, grouping in the first category all the elections held until 2007 and in the second category all the elections held from 2008 to 2015. In these way we count 40 pre-crisis elections and 25 post-crisis consultations and for each group we can calculate the incumbent average losses<sup>5</sup>. We reproduce the previous graph in Figure 2.3. below, this time adding a red line corresponding to year 2008 that splits our elections according to the pre/post crisis cleavage.

In this case the difference is clear: between the two periods the average vote loss increases of 3.5%, from -10.7% in the first period (until 2007;  $n = 40$ ) to -14.2% (between 2008 and 2015;  $n = 25$ ), drawing our attention on the possible role exerted by the economic crisis on the accountability mechanism in Central and Eastern Europe. Moreover, considering Figure 2.3. in which we added a ‘crisis line’ in order to divide the two group of elections it is evident how only in 3 cases out of 11, i.e. Estonia, Latvia and Poland, the incumbent government improves its performance in comparison with the previous election, even though only the Estonian and Latvian governments effectively gained votes.

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<sup>5</sup> This division is particularly useful because of the possible distortion given by the division made according the number of elections. In fact, in some cases elections held also six years later than others are grouped together, with these ‘outliers’ misrepresenting the data on the possible effects of the economic crisis on government vote share.

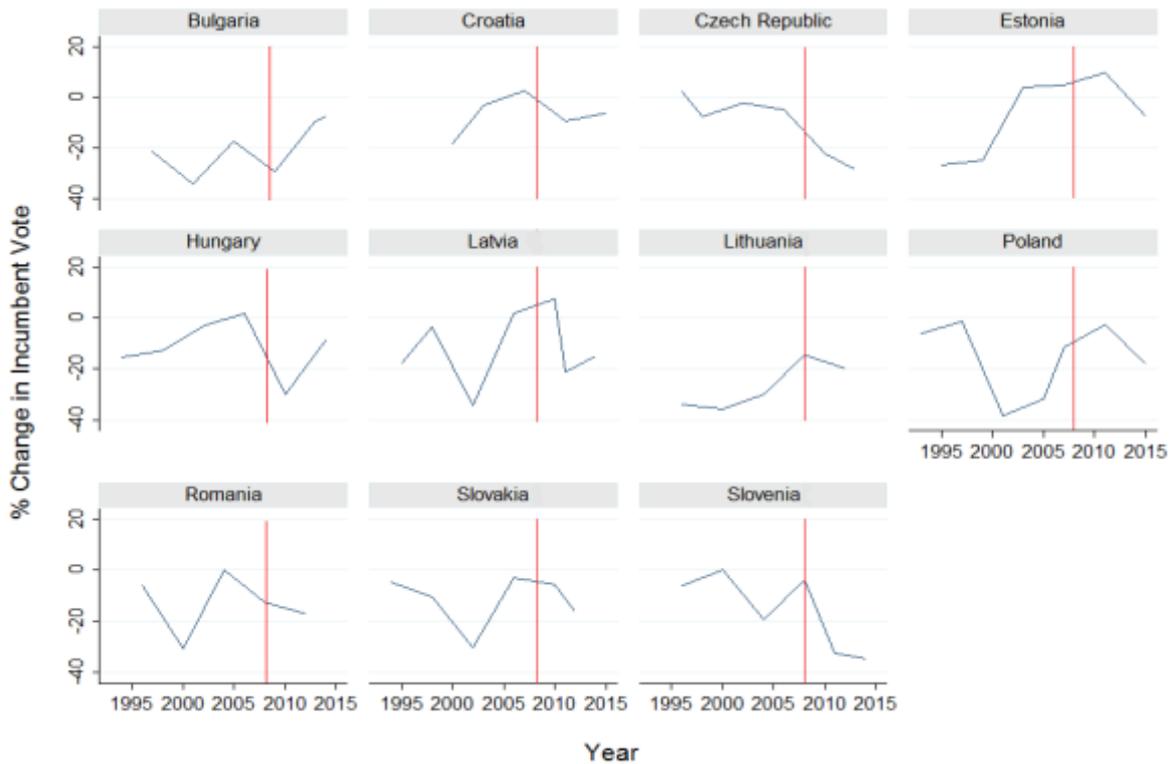


FIGURE 2.3. Change in incumbent vote share before and after the onset of the 2008 economic crisis

As the recent literature on economic crisis and voting behaviour shows, in this phase of recession national governments come under great stress, being ‘between the devil and the deep blue sea’. In fact, they are usually forced to implement harsh financial measures imposed by the European Union while trying to “absorb the backlash coming from their electorates” (Bellucci et al., 2012: 469). This ‘dilemma’ is originated by the evidence that in this context it is likely that voters more critically evaluate governments’ performance and that retrospective voting acquires more importance. This theoretical statement seems to be partially confirmed by our descriptive presentation of the data, even though the statistical analysis conducted in the next chapter can furnish more precise potential confirmations about these dynamics.

### 2.2.2. The Cost of Governing: Governing vs. Opposition Parties

Moving to a lower level and looking individually at parties who sat in government at election time, we can see how in this case the average vote loss goes down at  $m = -3.7\%$  ( $SD = 10.3$ ;  $n = 159$ ), even though only 54 parties ( $f = 34.6\%$ ) gained votes in comparison with the previous election. However, although there is a widespread bent for ‘consistent

punishment’ across the region, some electorates seem to be more ‘benevolent’ or ‘severe’ than others when they judge the performance of the governing parties at the polls (see Figure 2.4. below). Looking individually at our sample countries, in Lithuania and Poland the cost of governing seems to be particularly high for government parties. In the Baltic republic only once (out of nine cases,  $f = 11.1\%$ ) an incumbent party gains votes when it seeks re-election, whilst the Polish electorate rewards almost only one governing party each ten ( $f = 12.5\%$ ).

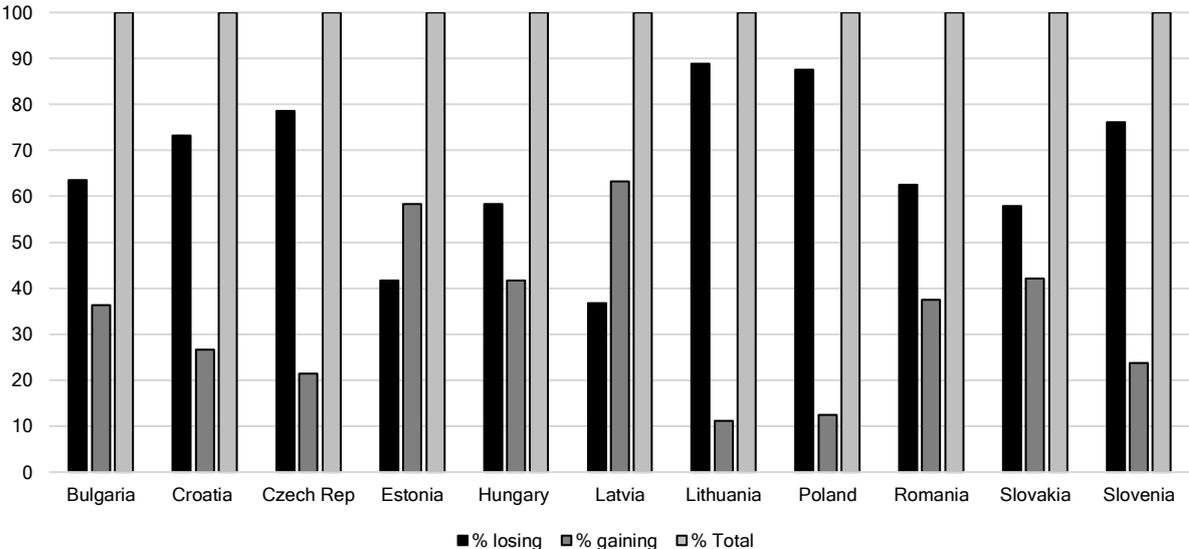


FIGURE 2.4. Relative frequency of losing and gaining government parties (1993-2015)

In fact, only two parties within ten years manage to gain votes: the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) in 1997 that, although defeated by AWS was able to gain 6.7% of votes, and Law and Justice (PiS) that in 2007 elections lost elections gaining more than 5% of votes although the involvement of a minor coalition partner in a corruption scandal that had led to the dissolution of the Parliament after just two years. In particular, the positive performance of PiS – that in the recent 2015 elections has gained for the first time the absolute majority in the Sejm – might also be explained by the main features of its political program basically consisting of a radical critique of post-1989 Poland as “corrupt and requiring far-reaching moral and political reform including *de-communization* and a fight against crime and corruption” (Gwiadza, 2015: 63).

The constant presence of corruption scandals involving almost the entire political elite, in fact, might explain not only the lower turnout in the parliamentary elections, but also

the constant and 'transversal' punishment towards the government parties in almost twenty years. A deep sense of corruption permeates Polish society, with voters probably using the pacific and democratic instrument of the protesting vote to punish those politicians they consider inadequate. In the last decade, in fact, several cases of corruption occurred: in 2001 a scandal hit AWS, leading to its electoral defeat and following dissolution; corruption scandals before the 2005 elections forced the then Prime Minister Leszek Miller to resign; the dismissal of the deputy PM Andrzej Lepper in 2007, following suspicions of corruption, was at the basis of the call for new elections; in 2009 PM Donald Tusk's Civic Platform (PO) was implicated in a scandal regarding fiscal legislation towards the gambling industry; in 2013 a recording of a conversation between exponents of the Cabinet and the Governor of the National Bank deteriorated the image of Tusk and his successor, Ewa Kopacz that lost elections held in October 2015. It results quite clear how corruption has affected intimately citizens' perception of political elite suggesting a possible reason that has constantly led them to punish incumbent governments at the polls. The link between perceptions of government corruption and electoral protest, in fact, is an indirect but important one, as these perceptions risk to undermine public trust in government and threaten the functioning of the accountability mechanism itself (Beissinger and Sasse, 2014).

On the other hand, two Baltic countries, Estonia and Latvia can be considered a 'promised land' for incumbent parties, as they lose votes only five times out of twelve ( $f = 41.7\%$ ) and seven times out of nineteen ( $f = 36.8\%$ ), respectively. Looking at the data, we can see as Estonia, in particular, represents an 'outlier' among the CEE countries in terms of government punishment. In spite of very high unemployment during the Great Recession, prime ministers' parties were hardly punished at all (Kriesi, 2014). How can we preliminary explain voters' behaviour and the low cost of governing that seems to characterize this country? Maybe considering both the peaceful transition to democracy at the end of the 1980s and the high quality of its formal and informal institutions. These institutions favoured not only the peaceful transition of the country after the fall of the Communist regime but also the successful accession to the EU thanks to balanced budgets and a budget surplus since 2002, so contributing to structure a higher level of public trust in comparison with other countries in the region (Kuokstis and Vilpisauskas, 2010).

Moreover, as mentioned in the previous section, the process of accession to the European Union – started in 2003 with the referendum and concluded on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011 with the adoption of Euro as national currency, the year of its first post-crisis election – contributed to spread among the political elite and citizens a sense of satisfaction with the economic performance of the government and the political system as a whole, even during the recent economic crisis. This evidence is corroborated by Eurobarometer data that show how Estonia has ever scored the highest rates of satisfaction with national economic performance since the first months of its accession to the European Union.

After a quick focus on two particular and contrasting cases, we move again to the cross-national level to make some preliminary conclusions on the cost of governing in the region. The literature on electoral accountability in Central and Eastern Europe, in fact, suggests that it may be possible that this persistent punishment at the polls could also be something other than the negative judgment of government performance. With reference to the scarce *institutionalization* of party systems across the region (Rose and Munro, 2009), a number of studies have usually questioned the real meaning of such a voting behaviour, as voters may have “punished all parliamentary parties and given their votes to brand new parties not previously represented in parliament” (Roberts, 2010: 60).

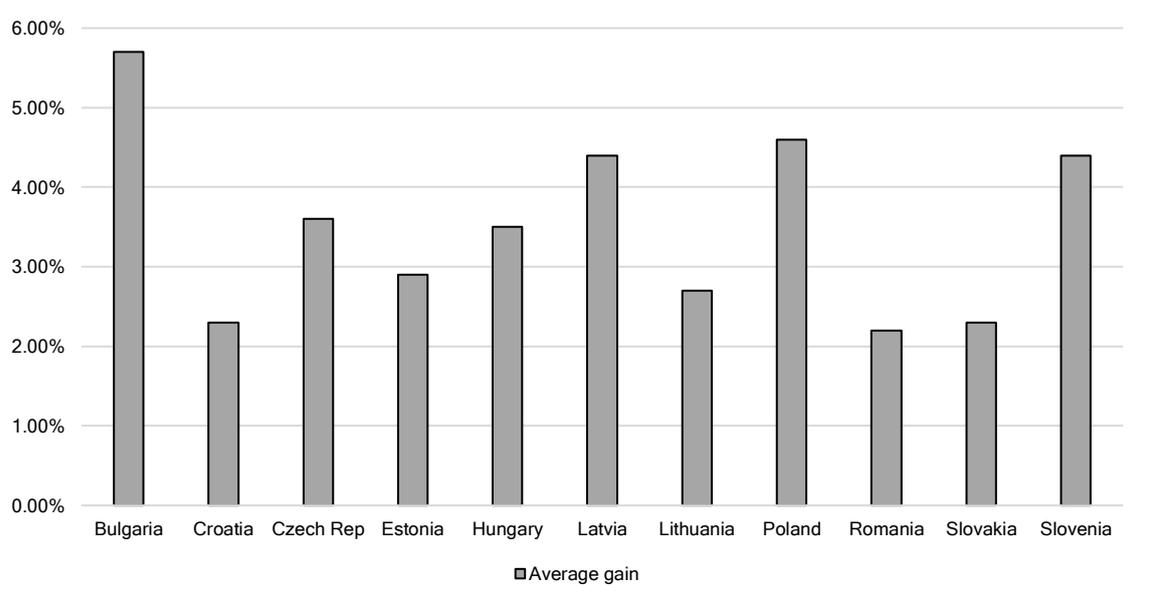


FIGURE 2.5. Average opposition party gains in percentage (1993-2015)

Are the votes lost by incumbent parties drained by parties other than those belonging to the opposition? Looking at Figure 2.5. above, we can look that the average opposition party

gains 3.6% of votes ( $SD = 8.9$ ;  $n = 281$ ), with Bulgaria that proves to be particularly favourable to opposition parties at the polls ( $m = +5.7$ ;  $SD = 12.7$ ;  $n = 26$ ). This element supports the thesis that voters are able to distinguish between opposition and government parties and vote on the basis of their judgments. As data show, in most cases they punish incumbents: -3.7% for the average incumbent party and +3.6% for the average opposition party. It means that there is an almost perfect correspondence between average incumbent losses and average opposition gains.

This effect could be also driven by the rise in the last decade of new and populist parties that have been able to gain votes breaking the traditional pattern of the political discourse with their maverick style. These parties are usually characterized by an *exploit* that provokes a shock in the party system. Among them we find, for instance, Boyko Borisov's GERB (i.e. "Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria") that debuted in the Bulgarian 2009 elections gaining 39.7% of votes, but also the Czech ANO 2011 able to gain 18.7% of votes in the 2013 elections, or the Polish anti-party Kukiz '15 that gained 40 seats in the Sejm on its debut in the recent Polish elections held last October. These are just three examples of a number of populist parties born recently in the region. Sometimes they have been able to become permanently part of the party system – such as Kaczynski's PiS in Poland – other times they survive for a legislature before merging, splitting or dissolving in the following consultations. In any case, these data seem to confirm that a cost of governing seems to exist and to be particularly high in Central and Eastern Europe, where incumbents are regularly and severely judged for their performance while opposition parties are usually able to intercept the protest vote of the citizens.

### **2.3. Conclusion**

Summarizing the overview of regional and temporal trends in electoral accountability presented in this chapter, it seems rather clear that in the last two decades the cost of governing in Central and Eastern Europe has been particularly high, even in comparison with the electoral performance of incumbent governments in Western Europe. Thus, the overall rate of punishment turns out to be particularly high in each of the 11 countries analysed in this thesis. However, a closer look to the data reveals how – at the country

level – Croatia and Estonia register substantially lower rates of electoral punishment in comparison with Lithuania and Poland where almost no governments are rewarded. This could be at least partly due to peculiar and specific conditions characterizing the single societies and political systems, which we have tried to highlight preliminarily and quickly presenting two specific and different cases such as Estonia and Poland. In fact, even when a number of governments in the region – in particular Poland – score impressive economic performances<sup>6</sup> they are almost never rewarded. This preliminary evidence encourages us to go into the research in more depth and analyse the dynamics of electoral accountability including systemic features others than the standard macroeconomic variables. This is, in fact, the aim of the quantitative analysis we will conduct in Chapter 3.

However, apart from time and the resulting accumulation of experience with organizing ‘free and fair’ elections, past experiences and political events also influence the level of electoral accountability. As already mentioned above in the chapter, it seems that experiences under Communism and during the transition have favoured among CEE voters the spread of protest voting as favoured strategy to express their discontent towards the political elite, their economic and, broadly, political performance. But it might not be enough to explain such a ‘punitive’ pattern and its diffusion across the region. Recent studies propose the diffusion of corruption among political officials as one of the most important elements to consider, because they have the power to limit the accountable function of the electoral process. For this reason, in the Chapter 4 we add to the analysis a variable measuring the ‘integrity’ of the electoral process, including also any act or attempt of corruption conducted from pre-election campaigning, to election-day voting, to post-election day.

Given that incumbent electoral punishment occurs as such a common trend across countries, and that it might depend on several factors of various kinds – economic, political, institutional and social – we consider this trend somewhat more in-depth. Thus, given the variety of insights coming from the descriptive analysis presented in these pages, in the next chapters we will present the multivariate analyses of electoral

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<sup>6</sup> In this chapter economic data are not presented. They are described in details and included in the analysis in the next chapter.

accountability to disentangle these different causal factors and attempt to explain the regional differences and temporal trends observed in this section.

## Chapter 3

# The Relevance of the Political Context for Electoral Accountability

*'Attribution of responsibility emerges as a key condition in joining economic grievance to political preferences [...] Still, we can count on certain differences across nations, simply because of institutional variations.'*  
(Eulau and Lewis-Beck, 1985: 4)

In this chapter we to analyse to what extent various aspects of the political context influence the functioning of elections as 'instruments of democracy' (Powell, 2000). To what extent systemic differences among democratic regimes are able to affect the power of voters to hold governments accountable for their past performance? What are the consequences of variation in the systemic characteristics for the degree to which elections generate government responsiveness and, above all, accountability? Addressing these questions requires a brief introduction on the literature about electoral accountability and political context, connecting it to our theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 1. We then attempt to highlight causal dynamics of the variation in electoral accountability in Central and Eastern European democracies, analysing the consequences of such variation in the last twenty years.

### 3.1. Economic and Systemic Determinants of Electoral Accountability

As stated in Chapter 1, research on electoral accountability has been usually focused on retrospective economic voting, i.e. the way in which voters reward or punish incumbent governments evaluating economic conditions of the country. According to this approach, voters, in fact, look at the state of economy – traditionally measured as economic growth,

unemployment and inflation – when they judge the past performance of the incumbent (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, 2000; Van der Brug et al., 2007). These indicators, in fact, showed to have a relevant impact on accountability dynamics, precisely because of their importance for human welfare. Since economic conditions matter to them, voters should reward governments that best achieve these outcomes and should punish those that do not (Roberts, 2010). In conclusion, incumbents are judged ‘retrospectively’, i.e. voters mostly evaluate their economic policy outcomes.

As well as for Western democracies, research conducted on electoral accountability in Central and Eastern Europe presents a certain degree of variability. Several studies using public opinion data found strong and consistent effects of economic performance on evaluation of incumbents (Przeworski, 1996; Duch, 2001; Anderson et al., 2003; Stegmaier and Lewis-Beck, 2009). Other studies – mostly based on sub-national data - found smaller or conditional effects of national economic conditions on voting behaviour, for instance, mediated by perceptions of party type more than government performance. (Pop-Eleches and Tucker, 2011; Powers and Cox, 1997; Harper, 2000).

The presence of an ‘instability dilemma’ (Paldam, 1991) exemplified by this variety of results, has led scholars to more careful reconsideration of factors that might affect electoral accountability. In particular, research conducted at aggregate level of analysis has gradually come to the point that the *economic effect* as such is not sufficient to explain voters’ assignment of responsibility, but it is strongly affected by political and institutional context. Electoral accountability, in fact, turns out to be more likely in democratic regimes characterized by higher ‘clarity of responsibility’ on the side of the government (Powell and Whitten, 1993; Hellwig and Samuels, 2008; Hobolt et al., 2013), party systems with identifiable governing alternatives (Anderson, 2000), electoral rules that favour ‘incumbent replacement’ (Van der Eijk and Franklin, 2009), free and plural media able to provide free flow of information to voters and to act as ‘public arena’ for political forces (Norris, 2013).

Starting from assumptions of the economic voting theory, we would expect national economic performance to affect government's electoral support<sup>1</sup>. To occur, electoral accountability needs that elections effectively work as a mechanism able to reward or punish the incumbent government for its economic performance. However, it has been proven to be mediated through several aspects of the political context, deeply affecting the institutional aggregation of voters' preferences for policy makers' selection (Powell, 2004).

First of all, a number of studies showed how electoral accountability is conditioned by the clarity of responsibility of political institutions and, in particular, of the government (Powell and Whitten, 1993; Hobolt et al. 2013). Complex institutional set-ups make it harder for voters to assign responsibility to the government for economic performance, so that aspects such as stability and division of power assume importance for voters in order to identify a government's responsibility for policy outcomes. In this vein, the existence of one-party, majority governments able to 'survive' in office for an entire length of the legislature enhance undoubtedly the accountability linkage.

However, the link 'responsibility identification-punishment' could work only in presence of governing alternatives to the incumbent. This is the second factor influencing accountability: the existence of 'credible', available alternatives to the current government (Anderson, 2000; Bengtsson, 2004) seems to matter for the effects of economic performance on government support because less fragmented party systems – on the side of the opposition parties – should lead citizens to express more easily dissatisfaction with government's performance.

Third, the literature (Powell, 2000; Hobolt and Klemmensen, 2008; Van der Eijk and Franklin, 2009) shows how the 'rules of the game' affect electoral accountability, i.e. the extent to which the electoral system favour or impede accountability at the elections. According to this approach, majoritarian systems provide more accountable systems for two reasons, one related to its 'mechanic' functioning and another one more linked to the

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<sup>1</sup> In this thesis we assume 'incumbent vote share' as measure of electoral accountability. However, we are aware that a government could not be punished (or even replaced) for bad performance or it could be punished even if it performed well during its office and that it is particularly true for Central and Eastern European countries (Roberts, 2008). This consideration leads to the question regarding the influence of other determinants on voters' evaluation of government's performance. This aspect will be object of our analysis in Chapter 4.

democratic theory. On one hand, these voting systems often imply that incumbent vote losses correspond to a decisive turnover replacement, while under proportional formulas government's punishment tends to be less direct. In addition, because of the single-member constituency system characterizing majoritarian systems, voters hold more power to reward or punish directly incumbents at the elections. On the other hand, proportional systems are often based on party-list, blocked list or wide-nation list that could impede the direct voters' assignment of responsibility at the polls.

Finally, the pluralism of the media seems to be the fourth factor able to influence voters' capacity to hold incumbents accountable for their performance. To make accurate judgments about government performance, in fact, citizens need to be informed about problems, such as bad economic situation of the country. Independent media, in particular during electoral campaign, might strengthen accountability with a variety of functions, working as a 'Fourth Estate' able to surveil government and reporting on its performance (Van der Brug et al. 2007; Birch, 2011; Norris, 2013).

However, international factors – such as globalization and political or economic interdependence among groups of States – might influence the accountability linkage between citizens and elected officials. The existence of supranational institutions – such as the European Union – that in the last decades have acquired a growing pervasive role in influencing national political economies, complicates the study of accountability at the national level. Governments tend to blame the EU to justify harsh economic manoeuvres that usually involve cut of public spending and rise of taxes. This attitude seems to be magnified in this phase of recession started in 2008. National governments are now in a tight grip between the necessity to “implement harsh financial measures imposed by Brussels and the dissatisfaction bred in the electorates” (Bellucci et al., 2012; Le Duc and Pammett, 2013). This ‘dilemma’ is originated by the evidence that in this context voters are more likely to evaluate critically governments' performance, while retrospective voting acquires more importance. For these reasons, the role of the European Union on the accountability mechanism along with the influence of the economic crisis in our eleven CEE countries will be tested in the analysis presented in this chapter.

## 3.2. Hypotheses, Data and Methods

In this paragraph hypotheses along with measures and method of analysis used to test our theoretical propositions are presented and discussed.

### 3.2.1. Hypotheses

Hypotheses are schematically presented in Table 3.1 below. The aim of the analysis is to test the direct influence of our key independent variables measuring national economic performance on incumbent electoral fortune as influenced by the political context. Electoral accountability is measured as incumbent vote share in the election at time  $t$ . According to the extensive literature on economic voting, we expect to find a general positive association between good economic performance and incumbent electoral fortunes, i.e. we expect to find that higher level of GDP growth, lower levels of inflation and unemployment lead to higher share of votes for the incumbent government. All other variables included in the analysis represent macro-level controls that are expected to influence in different ways electoral accountability in the sample countries.

**TABLE 3.1.** *Hypotheses and Variables. Direct and conditional effects.*

Independent Variables	Hypotheses	
<i>Direct Effect</i>	<i>Expected effect on incumbent vote share</i>	
<b>Economic performance</b>		
GDP growth	Positive	
Inflation	Negative	
Unemployment	Negative	
<i>Conditional Effects</i>		
<b>Political context</b>	GDP growth	Unemployment
Government Clarity <i>Clarity Index (0-3)</i>	Positive	Negative
Presence of Available Alternatives <i>Effective Number of Electoral Parties (ENEP)</i>	Negative	Positive
Electoral System <i>Proportional/Mixed (0-1)</i>	Positive	Negative
Mass Media Freedom <i>Freedom of the Press Index (0-100)</i>	Positive	Negative

The first control variable is government clarity. Assuming clarity of responsibility as a set of factors such as stability, parliamentary support and division of power, we expect to find a positive interaction of this variable on performance voting. In other words, in contexts characterized by higher ‘identifiability’ of policy-making responsibility, voters can more easily exert retrospective economic voting. Regarding the availability of credible alternatives to the incumbent government, we expect that in contexts characterized by a lower number of effective parties – in particular on the side of the opposition – the accountability mechanism is stronger. In this case, we expect to find a negative interaction, given that a fragmented party system prevents voters to vote for a less credible opposition. Our third variable that is supposed to condition the relation between economic performance and incumbent vote share is the type of electoral system. According to the literature, we expect to find a ‘weakening effect’ on accountability when elections are held using proportional systems since it is less likely that voters are able to punish incumbents for unsatisfactory performances. Finally, possibility for voters to receive free and objective information on the state of economy from plural and independent media should strengthen electoral accountability in the region. For this reason, we expect to find a positive conditional effect of this fourth variable on the relation between performance and incumbent vote share.

### **3.2.2. Data and methods**

The data employed for this chapter have been collected in a comprehensive dataset made up of macroeconomic indicators, electoral results, electoral indicators and data concerning the freedom of the press. Data for elections held in our eleven Central and Eastern European countries from 1993 to 2015 have been collected from the ParlGov Database (Döring and Manow, 2016). Data for macroeconomic variables have been collected from the World Bank Database, while data concerning media freedom have been gathered from the annual report ‘Freedom of the Press’ (Freedom House, 1993-2016). Data for the Effective Number of Parties have been collected using the database of Gallagher (2015) while data for which no calculations were available have been calculated by the author. Data for electoral systems have been collected from Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) Parline Database. Finally, an index for government clarity has been created by the author. The descriptive statistics of the dependent and independent variables are reported in Table 3.2 below.

**TABLE 3.2.** *Descriptive statistics and operationalization of variables used in the analysis*

Variable	Description/Operationalization	N	Code	Mean	SD	Min	Max
<b>Dependent Variable</b>							
in_share	% of votes for the incumbent government in election at time $t$ . Sources: Election and Referendum European Database (EED) and the ParlGov Database	65	0-100	32.79	13.27	7.6	67.6
<b>Independent Variable</b>							
in_prev	% of votes for the incumbent government in election at time $t-1$ . Sources: ParlGov Database	65	0-100	46.40	7.91	27.7	63.7
gdp	% change in GDP between election at time $t-1$ and election at time $t$ . Source: The World Bank	65	-	3.51	3.56	-6.6	12.2
inflation	% change in the consumer prices between election at time $t-1$ and election at time $t$ . Source: The World Bank	65	-	9.38	17.65	-1.6	123.0
unemp	% change in the unemployment rate between election at time $t-1$ and election at time $t$ . Source: The World Bank	65	-	10.48	3.96	4.0	18.8
clarity	Additive government clarity of responsibility index measuring: stability (0-1), division of power (0-1), parliamentary support (0-1).	65	0-3	1.58	0.83	0	3
elesys	Kind of electoral system (proportional vs. mixed). Source: IPU Parline Database.	65	0-1	0.22	0.41	0	1
enep	Effective number of electoral parties. Source: Laakso and Taagepera, 1979)	65	-	5.73	1.90	2.8	13.8
freepress	(Reversed) Freedom of the Press index. Source: Freedom House.	65	0-100	72.46	9.61	45	84

As dependent variable we employ incumbent government vote share at all those parliamentary elections rated free by Freedom House from the early 1990s<sup>2</sup>. The variable is constructed considering the electoral performance of those parties who were in government at the time of elections<sup>3</sup>. Thus, we obtain a variable composed of 65 observations (elections) held in eleven countries between 1993 and 2015. Economic performance is measured employing traditional macroeconomic indicators used in the literature: GDP growth, unemployment and inflation. GDP growth is measured as the ‘annual percentage growth rate of GDP at market prices based on constant local currency’, and it is gathered by the World Development Indicators (World Bank 2015). Unemployment is measured as the percentage of people who are currently not working,

<sup>2</sup> As already mentioned in Chapter 2, we excluded the first free election because of the biased measurement given by the natural collapse of the former Communist parties (see Table 2.1).

<sup>3</sup> If there was a caretaker government at the time of elections, we consider the nearest partisan government. If a government was in office for a reasonable part of the legislature (more than two years) and was replaced before the elections by another partisan government, we assume the first one as the incumbent.

but are willing and able to work for pay, currently available to work, and have actively searched for work. These data have been collected by the World Development Indicators (World Bank 2015). Finally, inflation is measured as a percentage of average consumer prices, year-on-year changes, and comes from the World Development Indicators (World Bank 2015). If elections are held in the second part of the year (July-December), we considered indicators for the corresponding year. If elections are held in the first semester of the year (January-June), we used data gathered for the previous year. Regarding our systemic variables, a measure for government clarity has been constructed according to an alternative measure proposed by Bengtsson (2004) to analyse twenty-one industrialized democracies. This indicator measures three relevant aspects of government status: ‘parliamentary support for the government’, ‘diversion of power’ and ‘government stability’. One point is assigned to each feature considered clear. Consequently, countries are coded as having values between zero and three<sup>4</sup>. The level of fragmentation of the party system – considered in terms of availability of governing alternatives (Anderson 2000) – has been measured using Laakso and Taagepera’s (1979) Effective number of electoral parties (ENEP) at each election<sup>5</sup>.

To test the conditional effect of the electoral system we use a dummy variable (0-1) that classifies the different electoral systems. Given the limited variety of the voting systems in the region, we distinguish only between proportional (zero) and mixed systems (one)<sup>6</sup>. Freedom in the flow of information is measured using the Freedom of the Press Index published annually by Freedom House (2016). This index ranks each country on a scale from 0 to 100. We inverted the original index so higher values correspond to higher levels of media freedom. This is an index built using survey data that encompass the three main fields that may influence the system of mass media, i.e. legal, political and economic environment<sup>7</sup>.

For the statistical analysis, I use OLS regressions with random effects model as method of estimation. More specifically, I formally test my hypotheses estimating

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<sup>4</sup> Government clarity indices for different elections and countries are collected in Appendix C, Table C2.

<sup>5</sup> Effective numbers of parties (ENEP) for different elections and countries are collected in Appendix C, Table C2.

<sup>6</sup> Electoral systems for different elections and countries are collected in Appendix C, Table C3.

<sup>7</sup> Freedom of the Press indices for different elections and countries are collected in Appendix C, Table C4.

several variants of a time-series cross-section regression model (TSCS)<sup>8</sup> as represented by the general equation:

$$y_{(i,t)} = \beta_0 + \sum_{k=1}^K \beta_k x_{k(i,t)} + \varepsilon_{(i,t)}$$

where  $i = 1, 2, \dots, N$  refers to a country;  $t = 1, 2, \dots, T$  denotes a year;  $k$  denotes a specific control variable.  $Y_{(i,t)}$  and  $x_{(i,t)}$  refers respectively to an observation on a dependent, independent and control variable;  $x_k$  can contain observable variables that change across  $t$  but not  $i$ , variables that change across  $i$  but not  $t$ , and variables that change across  $i$  and  $t$ ;  $\varepsilon$  stands for a random error;  $\beta_0$  and  $\beta_j$  refers, respectively to the intercept and the slope parameters.

In addition to unobserved effect, there are many other names given to  $c_i$  in applications: unobserved component, latent variable, and unobserved heterogeneity are common. Estimating this kind of model and some of its variants, solves many problems of traditional methods of the comparative research. This technique, in fact, allows us to test the impact of a large number of predictors of the level and change in the dependent variable within the framework of a multivariate analysis without violating basic assumption of standard statistical analysis (Hicks, 1994; Schmidt, 1997; Bell and Jones, 2015). Time series and cross-sectional analysis usually suffer for the limited number of spatial units and the limited number of available data over time so that the total number of the potential explanatory variables exceeds the degree of freedom required to model the relationship between the dependent and independent variables (Podestà, 2002). TSCS design, instead, presenting cases “country-year” ( $N * T$ ) – i.e. several observations for each country and year – helps to overcome these methodological problems.

### 3.3. Results

The analysis starts testing traditional assumptions of the economic voting theory in our eleven CEE countries between 1993 and 2015. We want to understand, first of all, if these assumptions are also valid for these countries and which dynamics are behind them. We

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<sup>8</sup> The analyses reported below are carried out using R-studio version 0.99.87 for R version 3.2.3 and the `plm` function to fit linear models for TSCS-panel data with a random effect (Croissant and Millo, 2008).

also test the intensity of these relations in two different phases: before/after their admission to the European Union (between 2004 and 2013) and before/after the onset of the economic crisis in 2008.

**TABLE 3.3.** *Economic voting in Central and Eastern EU member States. Basic model*

	<b>Model 1</b>
Incumbent Vote (E-1)	0.5858** (0.1942)
GDP growth	1.1857** (0.4052)
Inflation	-0.0829 (0.0842)
Unemployment	-0.6432 (0.4051)
Intercept	9.2760 (10.1392)
N: countries	11
N: elections	65
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.24

**Note:** Dependent variable is incumbent vote share. Standard errors in parentheses.  
**Coefficients:** \* $p \leq 0.1$ ; \*\* $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p \leq 0.01$ ; \*\*\*\* $p \leq 0.001$

As Table 3.3 above shows, the effect of the ‘pure’ economic performance is different for our three indicators and deserves attention. Model 1, in fact, shows that GDP growth has a strong and highly significant effect on election results. Greater growth rates for the country increase incumbent vote share. In particular, a GDP growth rate of +1% leads incumbents to increase their vote share in the elections by more than 1%. On the other hand, although the coefficients for the inflation and unemployment variables both point in the expected direction – high inflation penalizes governments as well as high unemployment rates hurts them – they are not statistically significant.

Table 3.4 presents four models in which the effect of two international (political and economic) factors, i.e. the European Union and the global economic crisis, are tested. To

test the first effect on our countries we split the sample according to the date of accession of each country to the EU<sup>9</sup>, obtaining two almost equal samples.

**TABLE 3.4.** *Economic Voting in Central and Eastern Europe. Supranational constraints*

	Model 1A	Model 1B	Model 1C	Model 1D
	Pre-EU	Post-EU	Pre-crisis	Post-crisis
Incumbent Vote (E-1)	0.1551 (0.2285)	0.9970** (0.3155)	0.1573 (0.1724)	0.9707** (0.3320)
GDP growth	2.2614** (0.6545)	1.0250+ (0.5366)	2.8391*** (0.4872)	0.8256 (0.6687)
Inflation	0.0286 (0.0859)	0.3023 (0.9003)	0.0610 (0.0751)	0.1546 (0.9124)
Unemployment	-0.8413 (0.5126)	0.2214 (0.6267)	-1.0252* (0.4091)	-1.2808* (0.5904)
Intercept	23.3944 (11.2329)	-18.9384 (18.3094)	22.3277* (9.2142)	-27.8391 (17.6693)
N: countries	11	11	11	11
N: elections	32	33	40	25
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.33	0.26	0.56	0.44

**Note:** Dependent variable is incumbent vote share. Standard errors in parentheses.

**Coefficients:** +p ≤ 0.1; \*p ≤ 0.05; \*\*p ≤ 0.01; \*\*\*p ≤ 0.001

As Model 1A shows, GDP growth remains the only significant indicator in both cases. However, in the pre-EU sample it shows a highly statistically significant effect, indicating that before joining the EU performance voting in Central and Eastern Europe was largely based on variations in GDP growth. In this period, in fact, an increase by one unit in the annual percentage growth rate of GDP could lead to a positive variation (+2.2%) of the incumbent vote share at the elections. On the other hand, Model 1B shows more moderate effect in terms of economic performance voting, with the electorate less inclined to vote – at least exclusively – on the basis of the national economic situation. In this case, GDP is still significant but at 90 percent, while also in this model neither unemployment nor inflation show significant coefficients.

<sup>9</sup> Eight countries - Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia - joined on 1 May 2004. Romania and Bulgaria followed on 1 January 2007. Finally, Croatia was the 28th EU member, joining on 1 July 2013.

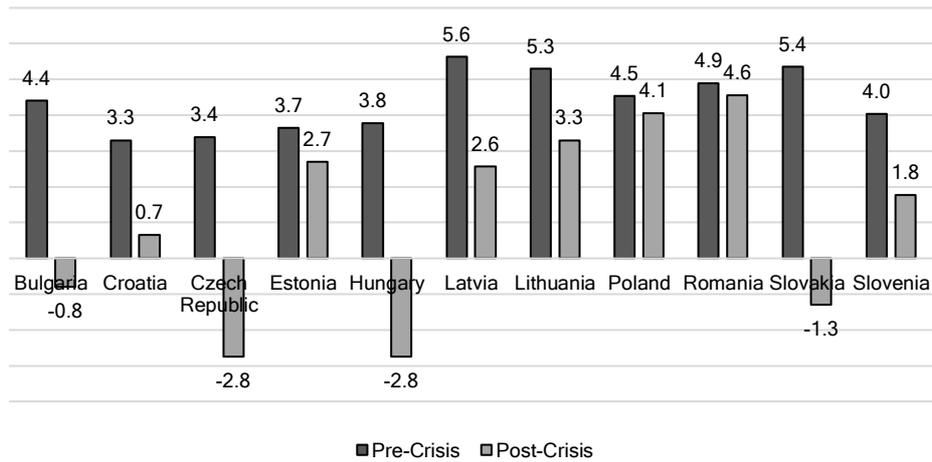
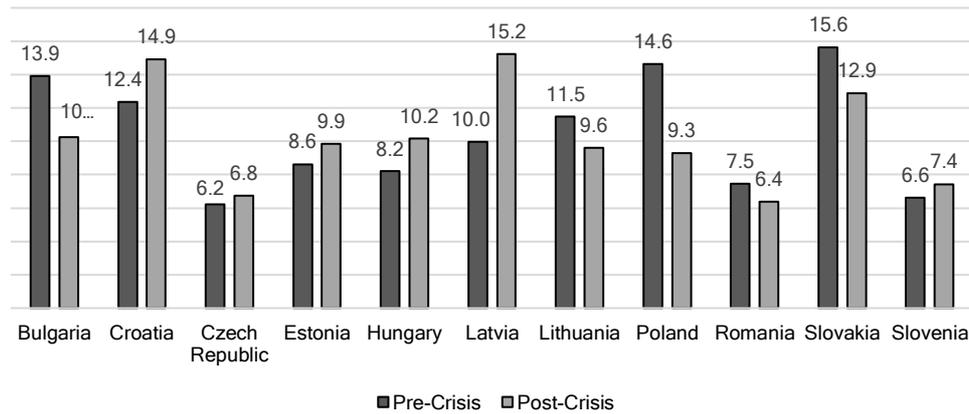


FIGURE 3.1. Average values for GDP growth rates before and during/after 2008 economic crisis

Effects of the economic recession on the accountability mechanism are presented in Models 1C and 1D also in this case results are quite interesting. In elections held before 2008 (Model 1C), voters used to cast their vote according to their economic situation. Coefficients for GDP growth rate and unemployment are statistically significant – at 99 percent and 95 percent, respectively – and in the expected direction: an increase in GDP rate as well as a decrease in unemployment rate lead to a positive variation in terms of vote for the incumbent. After 2008, the situation partially changes. As Model 1D shows, variation in GDP growth lost its significance for incumbent vote share with unemployment maintaining its significant effect. It seems that, with the spread of the economic crisis, governments are punished or rewarded at the polls mostly on the basis of their employment policies rather than other economic indicators. These preliminary results concerning patterns of economic voting in CEE countries in the last twenty years give us interesting insights about electoral accountability in the region. Voters seem to be less inclined to vote according to incumbents' economic performance once their country joined the European Union, probably because of a – perhaps perceived – shift of responsibility on economic policy from national governments to supranational authorities. Results in Model 1B suggest, in fact, that for elections held in the eleven countries after their accession to the EU, the tendency to punish/reward the incumbent for its macroeconomic performance (especially in terms of GDP growth) reduces its strength.



**FIGURE 3.2.** Average values for unemployment before and during/after 2008 economic crisis

Regarding the role exerted by the economic crisis, we found a surprising and interesting result. As Model 1D shows, for elections held after the onset of the economic crisis governments have become ‘less accountable’ for their performance in terms of GDP growth rates, even if voters continue to hold governments heavily accountable for national unemployment, i.e. in this second period voters seem to link governments’ fortune to their capacity to deal with unemployment rate. The negative coefficient and its statistical significance suggests that when unemployment increase governments are more likely to suffer electoral losses, although lower unemployment rates will affect favourably incumbent vote share in the following elections<sup>10</sup>.

Table 3.5.1 collects results for TSCS models testing the conditional effect of our four systemic variables on performance voting as mediated by GDP growth. This time, because of its constant lack of significance in the previous analysis, we dropped inflation from the group of macroeconomic variables included in the models. First of all, we tested the impact of government clarity on GDP growth in CEE countries. Model 2A shows the results. We hypothesized (see Table 3.1 above) that political systems in which government responsibility for decision-making is clearer should make easier for voters to sanction the incumbent for its performance. The covariate has a moderate direct effect with the negative coefficient pointing that regardless of economic performance, in contexts in which

<sup>10</sup> To check the robustness of this assumption we also used the entire dataset and interacts a dummy variable for ‘post-crisis elections’ with the main economic variables. Also in these models (results not shown) CEE governments seem to suffer greater punishment for higher unemployment and lower growth, while the coefficient on the interaction term with unemployment turns out to be highly significant ( $p \leq 0.01$ ) Unemployment itself remains highly significant in this model (at 99 percent).

government's responsibility is clearer voters are more likely to punish incumbents at the polls.

**TABLE 3.5.1** *Political contexts and electoral accountability: economic growth*

	<b>Model 2A</b>	<b>Model 2B</b>	<b>Model 2C</b>	<b>Model 2D</b>
	<b>Government clarity</b>	<b>Party system</b>	<b>Electoral system</b>	<b>Media freedom</b>
Incumbent Vote (E-1)	0.58** (0.21)	0.64** (0.19)	0.64** (0.18)	0.61** (0.20)
<b>Economic variables</b>				
GDP growth	1.42* (0.69)	1.22** (0.39)	0.87* (0.39)	1.22** (0.40)
<b>Systemic variables</b>				
Government clarity	-0.76+ (0.57)			
Party system		3.30 (2.52)		
Electoral system			-6.31+ (4.93)	
Media freedom				-0.12+ (0.09)
<b>Interaction terms</b>				
Clarity * GDP	0.54* (0.22)			
ENEP * GDP		-0.09 (0.24)		
Electoral system * GDP			-0.82 (0.94)	
Media * GDP				0.22* (0.10)
Intercept	0.85 (9.34)	1.23 (2.44)	0.93 (1.12)	0.89 (5.56)
N: countries	11	11	11	11
N: elections	65	65	65	65
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.30	0.31	0.31	0.32

**Note:** Dependent variable is incumbent vote share. Standard errors in parentheses.

**Coefficients:** +p ≤ 0.1; \*p ≤ 0.05; \*\*p ≤ 0.01; \*\*\*p ≤ 0.001

Interaction term shows even more stronger effects. In systems characterized by stable, majority and small-size government, economic growth has a strong and significant effect on incumbent vote share. Model 2B collects results concerning the effect of party system fragmentation – considered in terms of availability of alternatives to the incumbent government – on the dependent variable and its moderating effect on performance voting. In this case both the main and interaction coefficients are in the expected directions even though not significant at all. The positive coefficient for the main term indicates that grater fragmentation on the side of the opposition risks to push citizens to vote ‘strategically’ for the incumbent government. Though the interaction term fails to reach statistical significance, the negative coefficient suggests that fragmented party systems weaken the accountability linkage between economic performance and incumbent vote

share, confirming the assumption that citizens need credible alternatives to the incumbent government for elections to produce accountability. In Model 2C main and conditional effects of electoral system on economic performance voting are tested. In this case we hypothesized mixed systems to result in more decisive incumbent vote loss, strengthening the performance-vote link. Non-proportional voting systems – majoritarian and, as in this case, mixed systems – usually offer voters a clear-cut between two major parties at the national level, strengthening the punishment effect for the losers. This formula, in other words, is more effective to punish – or reward – governments for their bad (or good) performance. Even though the main effect is statistically significant and in the expected direction with a negative coefficient – it has been proven, in fact, that proportional systems usually reduce incumbent vote losses – interaction term is not significant and in the opposite direction, leading to the rejection of our hypothesis concerning electoral systems and accountability. Our final hypothesis concerns the conditional effect of the mass media on electoral accountability. Evidence from the literature persuaded to hypothesize that the accountability mechanism should be strengthened by the possibility of voters to acquire information about incumbent's past performance. It means that citizens need information – as much as free and plural possible – about the situation of the economy to make informed choices in the ballot box. Model 2D shows the result. The main effect turns out to be statistically significant (at 90 percent) and in the expected direction, pointing that lower levels of incumbent vote share correspond to higher independence of the media. In this case interaction term is highly statistically significant and in the expected direction. The positive coefficient indicates that a greater availability of information for voters tends to strengthen their possibility to vote on the basis of the economic situation of the country, in this case with regard to economic growth. Hence, in this case data support our theoretical propositions, leading us to accept the last hypothesis.

We also tested the conditional effect of our contextual variables on economic performance voting with reference to unemployment rate. TSCS models are modelled according to those employed for economic voting as mediated by economic growth. Results are collected in Table 3.5.2 below.

**TABLE 3.5.2** *Political contexts and electoral accountability: unemployment*

	<b>Model 3A</b>	<b>Model 3B</b>	<b>Model 3C</b>	<b>Model 3D</b>
	<b>Government clarity</b>	<b>Party system</b>	<b>Electoral system</b>	<b>Media freedom</b>
Incumbent Vote (E-1)	0.62** (0.20)	0.65** (0.21)	0.64** (0.18)	0.61** (0.20)
<b>Economic variables</b>				
Unemployment	-0.90 (0.85)	-2.56* (0.89)	-0.57 (0.44)	-1.15** (0.38)
<b>Systemic variables</b>				
Government clarity	-1.16+ (0.89)			
Party system		1.30 (1.92)		
Electoral system			-0.19 (0.33)	
Media freedom				-0.91+ (0.65)
<b>Interaction terms</b>				
Clarity * Unemployment	-0.69* (0.22)			
ENEP * Unemployment		-0.35+ (0.18)		
El.syst. * Unemployment			0.79 (1.07)	
Media * Unemployment				-0.26* (0.08)
Intercept	-3.15 (2.64)	5.23 (4.94)	9.19 (8.12)	4.29 (3.16)
N: countries	11	11	11	11
N: elections	65	65	65	65
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.33	0.30	0.31	0.34

**Note:** Dependent variable is incumbent vote share. Standard errors in parentheses.

**Coefficients:** +p < 0.1; \*p < 0.05; \*\*p < 0.01; \*\*\*p < 0.001

As for GDP, government clarity shows a moderate conditional effect on the extent to which variations in unemployment rates condition voting behaviour (Model 3A). Also in this case the contextual variable shows a statistically significant conditional effect in the 95 percent of the cases. It represents a further confirmation of our theoretical statements: in contexts in which it is easier for voters identifying who is responsible for GDP growth and unemployment rate, the accountability link is considerably strengthened. Model 3B tests the conditional effect of party system fragmentation on ‘unemployment-performance’ voting. Unlike GDP, the number of governing alternatives seems to matter when voters look retrospectively at unemployment to reward or punish incumbent governments. In this case, the positive coefficient – significant at 90 percent – suggests that in compact party systems, where the ‘political offer’ is less dispersed among – especially opposition – parties and there are identifiable alternatives to the incumbent government, voters are more likely to assign responsibility for higher unemployment rates. It confirms our initial hypothesis. While in Model 3C we did not find any conditional effect of the electoral

system on electoral accountability, in the last model (Model 3D) our variable measuring media freedom reveals a significant moderating effect on electoral accountability. As for GDP growth, the coefficient is statistically significant at 95 percent and in the expected direction. The negative relation confirms the strengthening effect exerted by free and plural sources of information on performance voting. In contexts where citizens rely on impartial media systems, incumbents' electoral fortunes are more and more dependent on their performance in terms of national economy, in particular economic growth and level of unemployment.

Leaving aside for the moment any more comprehensive conclusion about our findings – that will be discussed more extensively in the next paragraph – we can preliminary conclude that these results are quite interesting for several connected to electoral accountability. First of all, among the three traditional economic indicators employed, voters show to be sensitive only to two of them - GDP growth and unemployment - when they cast their vote (see Table 3.3). Moreover, this effect shows some degree of variation in performance voting according to particular supranational constraint such as the European Union and the 2008 economic crisis (Table 3.4). However, we moved one step further the traditional assumptions of the economic voting theory, looking at what aspects of the political context are potentially able to influence these dynamics. Four aspects of the political context have been considered: government clarity of responsibility, party system fragmentation, nature of the electoral system and pluralism of the media. Two out four of these variables, i.e. government clarity and freedom of the media, turned out to have strong effect on electoral accountability, while the structure of the party system and the voting formula showed lower or not significant effects on performance voting (see Table 3.5.1 and Table 3.5.2).

Nevertheless, taking into consideration our findings indicating the different nature of performance voting in CEE countries before and after EU accession as well as before and after the onset of the economic crisis in 2008, we also expect to find some interesting results also with regard to the conditional effect of our systemic variables. For this reason, we split the original sample into two for each of our two 'international constraints'; in this way it might be clearer if there is some conditional effect before or after and how much

different and strong it is in our eleven CEE countries. Results for these tests are collected in the Tables below. We start with the influence of international constraints on the conditional effect of clarity of responsibility. Table 3.6 and Table 3.7 below collect the results.

**TABLE 3.6.** *Government clarity and electoral accountability. European Union*

	Pre-EU		Post-EU	
	Model 4A	Model 4B	Model 4C	Model 4D
Incumbent Vote (E-1)	-0.00 (0.26)	0.76* (0.28)	0.86* (0.32)	1.07** (0.36)
GDP growth	1.99** (0.32)		2.06 (1.61)	
Unemployment		-3.05** (1.04)		1.80 (1.82)
Gov. Clarity	-0.39 (2.12)	-14.65* (6.28)	-3.09 (4.01)	7.07 (10.93)
Clarity* GDP	0.43* (0.14)		-0.53 (0.89)	
Clarity * Unempl.		-0.95* (0.48)		-0.94 (1.02)
Intercept	23.02+ (13.16)	46.11** (16.07)	-4.60 (18.92)	-16.86 (30.10)
N: countries	11	11	11	11
N: elections	32	32	33	33
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.32	0.35	0.28	0.29

**Note:** Dependent variable is incumbent vote share. Standard errors in parentheses.

**Coefficients:** +p ≤ 0.1; \*p ≤ 0.05; \*\*p ≤ 0.01; \*\*\*p ≤ 0.001

If we look at the strength of the conditional effect of government clarity before and after the accession to the European Union, we can find some interesting evidence. Even though the main effect of government clarity is rarely significant – it is statistically significant at 95 percent only in Model 4B – the situation is quite different for the interaction terms. In two cases – in Model 4A for GDP growth and Model 4B for unemployment – the difference is rather clear: the influence of government clarity on performance voting is evident before these countries joined the European Union between 2004 and 2013. After their accession to the EU not only the ‘pure’ economic voting has less effect, but also the characteristics of the incumbent government do not impact at all with the accountability link.

Table 3.7 below reports tests conducted on the two sub-samples split according to the first year of the economic crisis.

**TABLE 3.7.** *Government clarity and electoral accountability. 2008 economic crisis*

	Pre-Crisis		Post-Crisis	
	Model 4E	Model 4F	Model 4G	Model 4H
Incumbent Vote (E-1)	0.06 (0.20)	0.57* (0.24)	1.03* (0.41)	0.78 (0.40)
GDP growth	1.29 (1.16)		2.02 (1.91)	
Unemployment		-1.95** (1.06)		-2.10 (1.80)
Gov. Clarity	-2.51 (2.25)	-10.35 (6.60)	-2.75 (4.22)	-0.18 (0.86)
Clarity * GDP	0.87 (0.61)		0.06 (0.96)	
Clarity * Unempl.		1.05 (0.63)		0.52* (0.27)
Intercept	21.03* (10.58)	26.09+ (13.47)	-16.71 (23.22)	-22.32 (33.10)
N: countries	11	11	11	11
N: elections	40	40	25	25
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.56	0.55	0.41	0.42

**Note:** Dependent variable is incumbent vote share. Standard errors in parentheses.

**Coefficients:** \* $p \leq 0.1$ ; \* $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\* $p \leq 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p \leq 0.001$

In this case our results are quite different, showing the different impact of government clarity on performance voting for the ‘pre’ and ‘post’ crisis periods. Coefficients of main and conditional effects in almost all the models are hardly significant. Only Model 4H shows a quite significant interaction (at 95 percent) between government clarity and unemployment. The negative coefficient, in fact, indicates that after the onset of the economic crisis in 2008, ‘clearer’ contexts play a relevant role in strengthening patterns of performance voting, with particular reference to unemployment. However, the difference between the effect exerted by the EU and the economic crisis is rather evident. The first one concerns mostly the institutional context and, in particular, the policy-making context: joining the EU has meant a transfer of sovereignty – in particular regarding economic policy – from national executives to supranational bodies such as the European Council or the European Commission. This process has had inevitable consequences on the decision-making process, with European institutions frequently blamed for economic decisions taken by national executives.

Table 3.8 below collects OLS results about the influence of party system fragmentation on performance voting in pre and post EU contexts. Also in this case, the difference between the two periods turns out to be substantive, but this time with some differences.

**TABLE 3.8.** *Effective number of parties and electoral accountability. European Union*

	Pre-EU		Post-EU	
	Model 5A	Model 5B	Model 5C	Model 5D
Incumbent Vote (E-1)	0.21 (0.19)	0.24 (0.21)	0.93** (0.33)	1.02** (0.31)
GDP growth	1.88 (1.80)		3.06 <sup>+</sup> (1.77)	
Unemployment		-2.32* (1.27)		-3.77 <sup>+</sup> (2.14)
ENEP	0.39 (0.38)	1.57 (2.74)	1.62 (2.00)	8.39 <sup>+</sup> (4.78)
ENEP * GDP	-0.64* (0.28)		-0.39 (0.32)	
ENEP * Unemp.		0.22 (0.18)		-0.50 (0.37)
Intercept	25.57* (12.19)	21.33 (19.09)	-23.09 (20.12)	25.05 (28.75)
N: countries	11	11	11	11
N: elections	32	32	33	33
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.45	0.40	0.25	0.29

**Note:** Dependent variable is incumbent vote share. Standard errors in parentheses.

**Coefficients:** <sup>+</sup>p ≤ 0.1; \*p ≤ 0.05; \*\*p ≤ 0.01; \*\*\*p ≤ 0.001

In the ‘pre-EU’ period, our systemic variable shows some influence on voters’ choices for economic growth. Model 5A, in fact, tests the moderating effect of party fragmentation on GDP growth rates in CEE countries before their accession to the European Union. As for the clarity of responsibility, the number of available alternatives to the government seems to influence voters’ assignment of responsibility for lower GDP growth. Contexts with small-size party systems allow voters to identify possible governing alternatives to the incumbent and sanction it for bad performance in terms of national economic growth. The negative coefficient and its statistical significance (at 95 percent) confirm our assumptions. Models 5C and 5D show the conditional effect of party system fragmentation on retrospective voting in the post-EU accession period. Though coefficients are still in the correct direction, in this case our contextual variable loses its moderating power, with no interaction terms showing significant effects.

**TABLE 3.9.** *Effective number of parties and electoral accountability. 2008 economic crisis*

	Pre-Crisis		Post-Crisis	
	Model 5E	Model 5F	Model 5G	Model 5H
Incumbent Vote (E-1)	0.25 (0.16)	0.26 (0.16)	0.96* (0.36)	0.78* (0.40)
GDP growth	1.16 (1.12)		3.48 (2.21)	
Unemployment		-2.74**(0.89)		-0.97 (2.80)
ENEP	0.41 (1.12)	1.59 (1.90)	0.22 (1.74)	-4.89 (5.97)
ENEP * GDP	0.41 (0.34)		-0.61 (0.48)	
ENEP * Unemp.		0.22 (0.18)		0.39 (0.49)
Intercept	22.83 <sup>+</sup> (11.42)	21.33 (19.09)	-28.86 (19.64)	-3.08 (36.92)
N: countries	11	11	11	11
N: elections	40	40	25	25
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.45	0.49	0.35	0.25

**Note:** Dependent variable is incumbent vote share. Standard errors in parentheses.

**Coefficients:** <sup>+</sup>p ≤ 0.1; \*p ≤ 0.05; \*\*p ≤ 0.01; \*\*\*p ≤ 0.001

Table 3.9 reports conditional effects of party system fragmentation on performance voting for elections held before and after 2008. In this case evidence is rather clear: neither before nor after the onset of the economic and financial crisis the size of the party system seems to affect economic voting in our eleven Central and Eastern European countries. Coefficients for interactions terms are not significant at all and, in some cases, they even change directions, contradicting previous results. These results suggest that the conditional effect of party system fragmentation does not change if we look at pre and post crisis elections. Because of its relation with the institutional context, this variable turns out to be particularly significant when we compare contexts in which the European Union exerts its undeniable pervasive role on policy making and contexts in which the policy-making process is entirely in the hands of national governments (see Table 3.8 above).

Turning to the conditional effect of the electoral system, Table 3.10 collects OLS results for economic performance voting before and after accession to the European Union.

**TABLE 3.10.** *Electoral system and electoral accountability. European Union*

	Pre-EU		Post-EU	
	Model 6A	Model 6B	Model 6C	Model 6D
Incumbent Vote (E-1)	0.33 (0.24)	0.29 (0.26)	1.02** (0.34)	0.98** (0.32)
GDP growth	1.94* (0.71)		0.63 (0.69)	
Unemployment		-1.08+(0.54)		0.12 (0.67)
Electoral system	29.86 (22.41)	-3.99 (14.50)	-9.46 (6.80)	0.78 (18.29)
El. Syst. * GDP	-9.71 (5.71)		0.60 (1.18)	
El. Syst. * Unemp.		-0.32 (1.33)		-0.97 (1.88)
Intercept	25.12* (10.87)	24.62* (11.54)	-16.19 (19.71)	-15.37 (19.53)
N: countries	11	11	11	11
N: elections	32	32	33	33
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.23	0.21	0.21	0.21

**Note:** Dependent variable is incumbent vote share. Standard errors in parentheses.

**Coefficients:** +p ≤ 0.1; \*p ≤ 0.05; \*\*p ≤ 0.01; \*\*\*p ≤ 0.001

The first sub-sample – including only ‘pre-EU’ elections – does not show any significant effects for our systemic variable. In other words, for all the elections held before the accession of the eleven sample countries to the European Union, the characteristics of the voting formula does not affect patterns of retrospective economic voting in the region, i.e. it is not able to strengthen nor weaken voters’ possibility to hold politicians accountable to their performance. The situation does not change looking at the second sub-sample (Models 6C and 6D) that includes elections held after the accession to the European Union. Also in this case, none of the interaction coefficients shows statistical significance, leading to reject our initial hypothesis. Moreover, the inclusion of this interaction term to the models makes our economic variables not significant leading, in some cases, to assume an incorrect direction. Hence, we can preliminarily conclude that the electoral system does not make difference in relation to the specific periodization considered, i.e. it shows to have no influence on electoral accountability neither before nor after the accession of the Central and Eastern European countries to the European Union.

**TABLE 3.11.** *Electoral system and electoral accountability. 2008 Economic crisis*

	Pre-Crisis		Post-Crisis	
	Model 6E	Model 6F	Model 6G	Model 6H
Incumbent Vote (E-1)	0.35 <sup>+</sup> (0.19)	0.35 <sup>+</sup> (0.20)	1.16* (0.40)	1.02* (0.38)
GDP growth	2.18*** (0.60)		-0.01 (1.03)	
Unemployment		-1.21** (0.38)		1.17 (0.76)
Electoral system	24.44 (11.96)	9.33 (12.24)	-7.51(6.33)	2.73 (19.24)
El. Syst. * GDP	-6.92* (2.61)		1.43 (1.46)	
El. Syst. * Unemp.		-1.58 (1.20)		-0.93 (1.94)
Intercept	23.60* (9.18)	22.70* (9.95)	-34.02 (18.92)	-28.52 (20.85)
N: countries	11	11	11	11
N: elections	40	40	25	25
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.49	0.44	0.31	0.30

**Note:** Dependent variable is incumbent vote share. Standard errors in parentheses.

**Coefficients:** <sup>+</sup>p ≤ 0.1; \*p ≤ 0.05; \*\*p ≤ 0.01; \*\*\*p ≤ 0.001

What about the differences between elections held before or after the beginning of the economic crisis? Also in this case we split the sample by two, assuming 2008 as point of reference. Table 3.11 above reports the results and they are almost superimposable to those collected in Table 3.10 for the EU effect. In fact, there is no difference for elections held before the 2008 economic recession and those held after. None of the interaction term is statistically significant, showing how the electoral system does not exert any influence on performance voting and that this assumption is valid for any election, without distinction if they were taken before or after the onset of the sovereign debt crisis that hit Europe in the last decade. These results confirm those already described and collected in Tables 3.5.1 and 3.5.2, where our contextual variable did not affect neither directly nor indirectly electoral accountability in the eleven countries we take under investigation. These findings contrast with our theoretical assumptions, leading us to reject the correspondent hypothesis.

Finally, the last two tables below show the results for the freedom of the press covariate in each pair of sub-samples. In the previous analysis conducted on the whole sample we

found that the degree of freedom of the media matters for retrospective performance voting. Is there any difference between elections held before the accession of these countries to the European Union? Do the media weaken or strengthen electoral accountability in contexts characterized by economic recession?

**TABLE 3.12.** *Media freedom and electoral accountability. European Union*

	Pre-EU		Post-EU	
	Model 7A	Model 7B	Model 7C	Model 7D
Incumbent Vote (E-1)	0.10 (0.25)	0.20 (0.23)	0.96* (0.39)	1.02** (0.35)
GDP growth	1.53* (0.68)		-0.01 (1.03)	
Unemployment		-2.72 (2.38)		1.17 (0.76)
Media freedom	-0.55+ (0.29)	-0.76+ (0.68)	-0.07 (0.43)	-1.05+ (0.79)
Media * GDP	0.63* (0.35)		0.15+ (0.08)	
Media * Unemp.		-0.19* (0.07)		-0.13* (0.07)
Intercept	13.47+ (8.14)	-25.49 (17.45)	-21.99 (22.22)	-38.62 (39.84)
N: countries	11	11	11	11
N: elections	32	32	33	33
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.43	0.41	0.31	0.29

**Note:** Dependent variable is incumbent vote share. Standard errors in parentheses.

**Coefficients:** +p ≤ 0.1; \*p ≤ 0.05; \*\*p ≤ 0.01; \*\*\*p ≤ 0.001

As Table 3.12 shows, the direct effect of free media on incumbent vote share is quite limited for elections held both before and after accession to the EU, even if coefficients are in the correct direction. In fact, the negative sign correctly means that the higher the freedom and pluralism of the media, the lower the share of vote for the incumbent government. These results confirm our previous findings presented in the full model. However, looking at the interaction terms we find more interesting evidence: in fact, the moderating effect exerted by the degree of freedom of the media proves to be stronger in the period before the accession of our countries to the European Union. This is visible in Model 7A and 7B for economic growth and unemployment rate, where the coefficients are statistically significant at 95 percent. The coefficients maintain, in part, their significance in the following period: in the ‘post-EU’ sample, in fact, they are still

significant at 95 percent (Models 7D). However, the degree freedom of the mass media turns out to be more significant for the extent to which unemployment conditions performance voting, losing its conditional effect on economic growth. Turning to the analysis of electoral accountability before and after the onset of the economic crisis in our countries, the four models in Table 3.13 above show interesting results as well.

**TABLE 3.13.** *Media freedom and electoral accountability. 2008 Economic crisis*

	Pre-Crisis		Post-Crisis	
	Model 7E	Model 7F	Model 7G	Model 7H
Incumbent Vote (E-1)	0.06 (0.19)	0.12 (0.18)	0.97* (0.42)	1.00* (0.44)
GDP growth	1.03* (0.68)		2.20** (1.00)	
Unemployment		-3.54* (1.63)		-2.61* (1.01)
Media freedom	-0.27+ (0.25)	-0.86 (0.61)	-0.11+ (0.07)	-0.26+ (0.14)
Media * GDP	0.23+ (0.18)		0.19* (0.07)	
Media * Unemp.		-0.12+ (0.08)		-0.16* (0.07)
Intercept	12.23+ (9.02)	-23.89 (16.23)	-20.69 (21.22)	-18.63 (12.39)
N: countries	11	11	11	11
N: elections	40	40	25	25
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.49	0.47	0.35	0.38

**Note:** Dependent variable is incumbent vote share. Standard errors in parentheses.

**Coefficients:** + $p \leq 0.1$ ; \* $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\* $p \leq 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p \leq 0.001$

In the TSCS models presented here, only the interaction terms with GDP growth and unemployment are in the correct direction and are statistically significant. However, in contrast with the results in Table 3.11, these coefficients gain in significance in the second period under investigation, i.e. in which elections held between 2008 and 2015 are collected. Models 7E and 7F confirm that until 2007, the media exert a moderating effect in favouring retrospective performance voting even though with a limited strength (statistically significant at 90 percent). Conversely, with the onset of the economic crisis, the existence of a free and plural media system shows undeniable merits in strengthening the accountability mechanism in the CEE countries, as confirmed by the positive and highly statistically significant interaction coefficients in Models 7G and 7H.

### 3.4. Conclusion

The present chapter aimed at identifying what are the systemic determinants of electoral accountability in Central and Eastern Europe between 1993 and 2015. Going beyond the traditional assumptions of the economic voting theory, in fact, is one of the goals driving the present research. In order to answer our first research question, that is whether citizens vote according to retrospective economic evaluations, we tested these assumptions (see Table 3.3), with results confirming the existence of such pattern behind voters' behaviour. Moreover, we found that these attitudes occur more frequently in elections held before the accession of these countries to the European Union and after the onset of the economic crisis, even if for different aspects of the economic performance (see Table 3.4).

The main aim of the chapter, however, was also to answer our second research questions, that is to analyse the influence of the system characteristics on electoral accountability. Effectively answer this question required to take into consideration several aspects of the political system: the clarity of responsibility of the incumbent government; the number of viable alternatives to the government; the formula of the electoral system; the degree of freedom and pluralism of the media. Results presented in the 'full models' (see Table 3.5.1 and 3.5.2) gave us a preliminary picture of how the political system influences electoral accountability in CEE democracies. In fact, the interaction of two variables out of four – clarity of government responsibility and freedom of the media – turns out to be highly statistically significant, indicating the relevance 'contextual' aspects assume for the functioning of the accountability mechanism in the region. Thus, our theoretical expectations have been – partially – confirmed. It is quite interesting to see that the presence of credible governing alternatives is only partially significant – only in interaction with unemployment at 90 percent – while the nature of the electoral system does not impact at all on retrospective performance voting. However, regarding the party system fragmentation, our results indicate some sort of interaction with performance voting, i.e. in contexts characterized by less 'fragmented' oppositions, voters are more likely to punish the incumbent for higher levels of unemployment.

As for the ‘pure’ model testing the economic voting, we also tried to go in depth with the analysis of the effects of the systemic variables. We looked at potential effects caused by two main ‘supranational’ constraints: the accession to the European Union and the onset of the economic crisis in 2008. We obtained thirty-two models (see Tables 3.6 – 3.13). While we found a strong effect for government clarity on performance voting before the accession to the EU, we also found that the degree of freedom of the mass media plays a role in these countries, in particular after the beginning of the economic crisis. These results suggest that in the first case the absence of a supranational institution shifted responsibility for economic performance towards national executives while, in the second case, the economic crisis seems to have strengthened the ‘watchdog’ role and ‘negative’ effect of the media, making the cost of governing heavier in CEE countries since 2008. On the other hand, the effect of electoral system and party system fragmentation, even if in the expected direction, revealed a limited significance for the analysis.

In conclusion, we found evidence regarding the conditional effect of specific contextual (or systemic) factors on electoral accountability in Central and Eastern Europe, such as government clarity of responsibility and the degree of freedom of the media. We also showed that this effect varies according to the existence of international constraints, with governments suffering greater punishment for higher unemployment and lower growth depending on the existence of a supranational institution such as the European Union or a shocking event for the international economy such as the Great Recession of 2008. Economy shows to have important consequences for electoral accountability in the region, but our results also show the relevance of the political system in which these dynamics take place. However, even though this chapter gave useful insights about the functioning of electoral accountability in Central and Eastern European Member States, we aim at going further. The degree to which elections work as ‘instruments of democracy’ is likely to depend, not only on voters’ retrospective judgments, but also on the quality of the electoral process through which these judgments are transformed into votes. Hence, to clarify other factors we expect to be important in generating

accountability, in the next chapter we will analyse in depth the existing relation between electoral accountability and electoral integrity.

## Chapter 4

# The Role of Electoral Integrity in Shaping Electoral Accountability

*‘Competitive multiparty elections are the bedrock foundation for democratic accountability [...]. Where contentious elections are seriously flawed, or even failed, however, this mechanism is far from sufficient to rid the world of corrupt, venal, or incompetent rulers.’*

(Norris, 2015: 4)

*‘Democracy requires elections, but not just any kind of elections.’*

(Schedler, 2002: 37)

Last chapter ended with an ‘open conclusion’, arguing that the degree to which elections work as ‘instruments of democracy’ is likely to depend, not only on voters’ capacity of making retrospective judgments on incumbent’s performance, but also on the ‘quality’ of the electoral process through which these judgments are transformed into votes. We suggested that electoral integrity could allow voters to hold governments accountable for their past performance and, conversely, that electoral malpractices allow incumbents to avoid voters’ control in the polls. Moreover, citizens – and particularly in new democracies – tend to define and measure regime performance by focusing on the quality of elections (Bunce and Wolchik, 2011). Given that the quality of democratic procedures matters to citizens, they often express dissatisfaction with corrupt electoral practices sanctioning incumbent governments in the ballot box. In this way, the integrity of the electoral process plays a decisive role for the accountability mechanism. Hence, the aim of the present chapter is to answer to our fourth – and last – research question: What is the role of electoral integrity in shaping electoral accountability in new democracies? Does the integrity of the electoral process indeed contribute to generate accountable governments?

This chapter has two goals. The first one is to discuss the main approaches that have been used to understand how important is electoral integrity not only for promoting and consolidating democracy, but also for assuring a well-functioning accountability mechanism. The second one is to provide an empirical test of such approaches, not only integrating the analysis conducted in the last chapter, but also to test the effect of electoral integrity on incumbent voting. The following section tries to link theories on election quality and electoral accountability, in order to formulate hypotheses to be tested in the empirical analysis.

#### **4.1. A Step Further: Electoral Integrity as a Determinant of Electoral Accountability**

As already extensively stated in this dissertation, electoral accountability is typically defined as the ‘mechanism’ through which voters reward or punish incumbents at the elections judging their performance - particularly in terms of economic welfare. According to a consistent literature developed for the study of public policy issues, this mechanism implies a vertical relation “principal-agent”, in which voters (the principals) delegate tasks to their representatives (the agents) with the first using negative incentives of “correction and punishment” such as firing the agent for bad performance (Finer, 1941). This linkage, however, is far from being linear and presents several critical point concerning not only the nature of the political system – that could be presidential or parliamentary – but also the way in which elections take place, from the campaign to its final results. A number of scholars, in fact, point to principal-agent problems in running elections (Mozaffar and Schedler, 2002; Alvarez and Hall, 2006; Clark, 2016) highlighting the necessity for election administrators to balance the existing tension between administrative efficiency, political neutrality and accountability.

The economy, together with specific characteristics of the political system gave evidence to be relevant for the accountability process, but it might not be enough. As Stokes (1992: 147) argues:

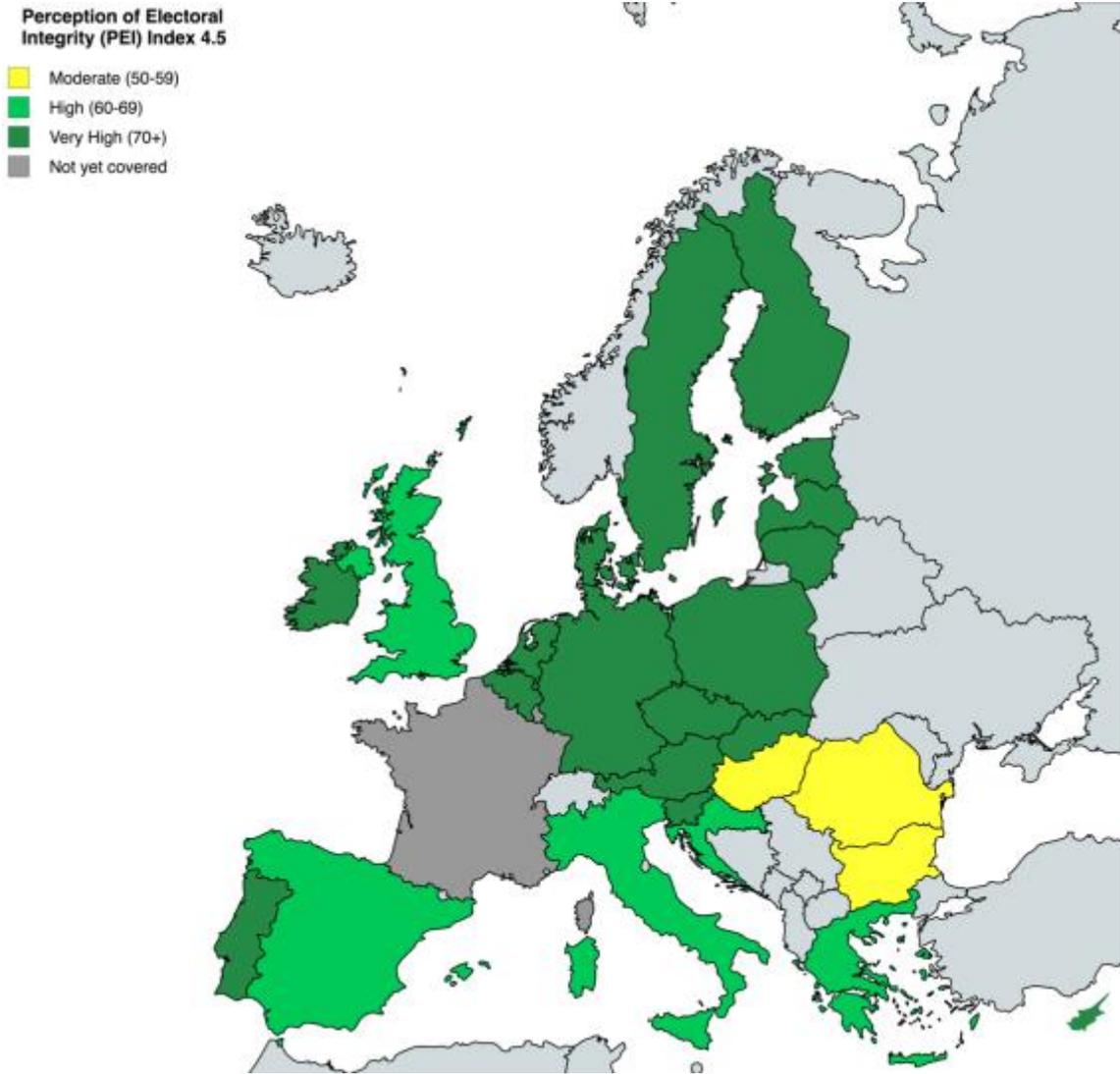
“The classic illustration [for a valence issue] is good economic times and bad. But the parties and leaders are at times linked to peace and war, internal order and crime, and many other conditions that are positively or negatively valued. Although their bonding to economic conditions goes back to the early nineteenth century, the conditions that provide the symbolic content of valence politics have progressively expanded with the scope of government in the twentieth century”.

For this reason, the question about the influence of electoral integrity on the principal-agent relation and its capacity to generate accountable and responsive governments, inevitably arises. The key point here is twofold. On the one hand, we need to analyse how the way in which elections are managed is able to influence citizens’ evaluation of incumbents’ economic performance. On the other hand, we want to test the role of electoral integrity in shaping voters’ preferences as a non-economic determinant of electoral accountability. Media bias, vote-buying, electoral commissions controlled by the government, violence and riots during and/or after the election represent all possible flaws and failures throughout the electoral cycle (see Figure 1.4). Assuming that the existence of competitive and recurrent multiparty elections represents the “bedrock foundation for democratic accountability” (Norris, 2015: 4), when contentious elections are even ‘only’ flawed the accountability mechanism linking citizens and representatives results irremediably broken.

The necessity to turn our attention to this issue pours from the idea that limiting the study of electoral accountability to the economy and the conditional effect of the contextual variables on economic voting might not be sufficient to explain the recurrent ‘punitive’ pattern towards incumbents and its diffusion across the region described in Chapter 2. Survey data suggest, in fact, that citizens’ perception of electoral malpractices erodes trust and confidence in elected authorities, discourages voter turnout and generates protests, undermining the stability of the democratic regime as a whole (Norris, 2013).

Figure 4.1 below reports data on electoral integrity in the European Union gathered by the Electoral Integrity Project between 2012 and 2015 (Norris et al., 2016). The project, based at the University of Sydney built a Perception of Electoral Integrity (PEI) index based on expert surveys that runs from 0 to 100, with 0 indicating absence of electoral

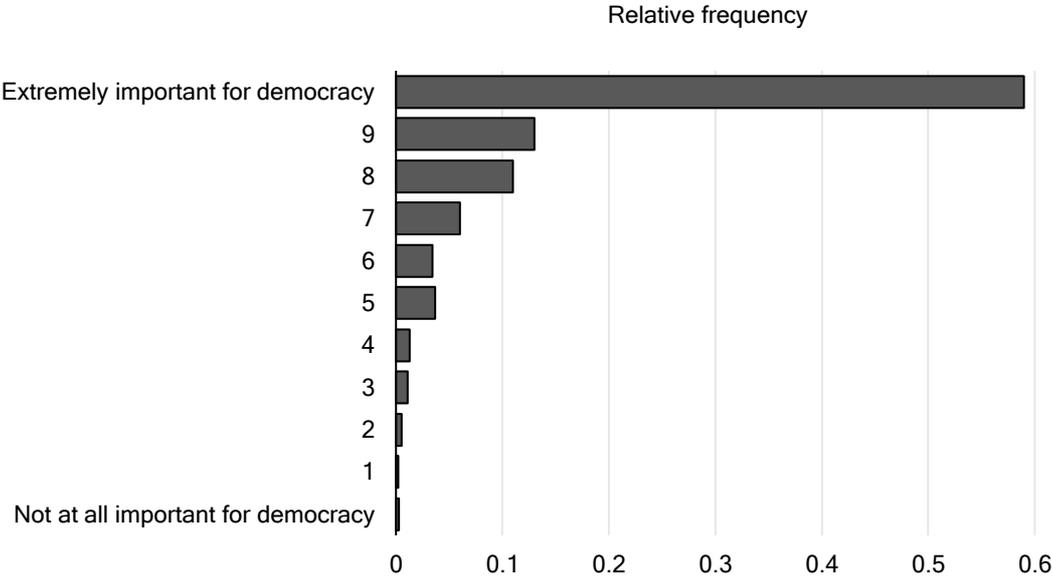
integrity and 100 full quality elections. As we can see, the EU-28 Member States and, among them, our eleven CEE countries register very different performances, with Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania scoring the lowest values in terms of electoral integrity. Given the diversity of results among our sample countries, analysing this aspect in relation with electoral accountability turns out to be particularly interesting<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, recent studies propose the diffusion of corruption among political officials as one of the most important elements to be considered, because of their power to limit the accountable function of the electoral process.



**Figure 4.1.** *Perceptions of Electoral Integrity in the European Union (2012-2015)*  
**Source:** Author’s elaboration on data gathered by the Electoral Integrity Project;  
[www.electoralintegrityproject.com](http://www.electoralintegrityproject.com)

<sup>1</sup> Because of its limited temporal coverage (2012-2015), we don’t use the PEI index for the analysis. As described in paragraph 4.2.2, we employ the V-Dem Clean Elections Index gathered by the Varieties of Democracies Project. This index, however, shows a good correlation with PEI index, with the Pearson coefficient resulting statistically significant (\*\*) at the 0.01 level (2-tailed test).

The present chapter aims at including in the analysis of electoral accountability a further explanatory variable able to capture the ‘integrity’ of electoral procedures in our eleven countries and its broader influence on the accountability process in the region. This is, undoubtedly, a pivotal point since electoral legitimacy constitutes – along with vertical accountability – a fundamental element that concurs to define what a quality-democracy is (Morlino, 2009). Particularly in new democracies, such as those of Central and Eastern Europe, citizens tend to define democracy and measure regime performance by focusing on the quality of elections (Bratton and Chang, 2006; Bunce and Wolchik, 2011). Post-communist countries, in fact, share a long experience with elections in general. A number of studies show that elections held under the Communist rule involved considerable mass mobilization. Although results were pre-determined by the ruling elite, citizens used to consider the election process as an instrument to measure regime legitimacy, using it also for making demands for specific changes in public policy (Bunce and Wolchik, 2006: 8). Hence, because the quality of democratic procedures still matters today to citizens in Central and Eastern Europe, they might express dissatisfaction with corrupt electoral practices sanctioning incumbent governments in the ballot box.

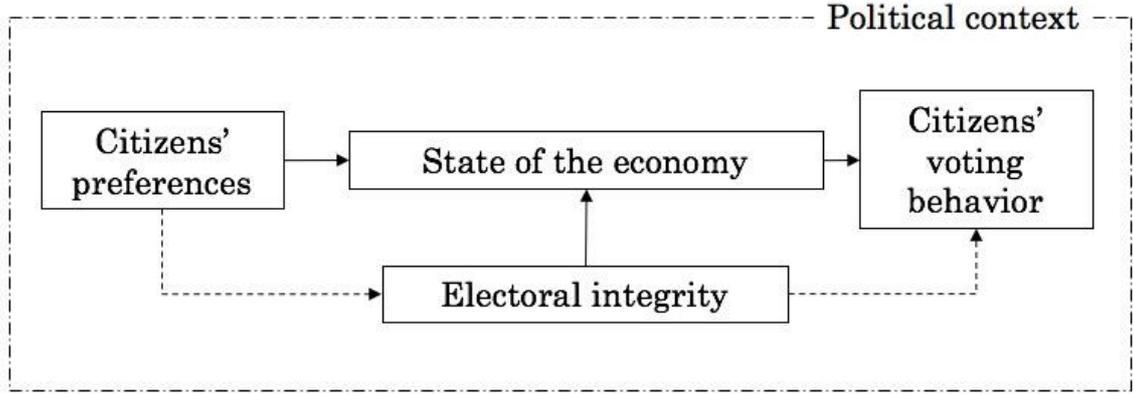


**Figure 4.2.** *Understanding of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe*

**Note:** The question was as follows: “Using this card, please tell me how important you think it is for democracy in general... that national elections are free and fair?”. (Respondents = 15,303; Countries = 8).  
**Source:** Author’s elaboration on 2012 European Social Survey (ESS) data - Round 6

Figure 4.2 above confirms that for Central and Eastern European voters the integrity of the electoral cycle proves to be a very salient issue and that could be decisive for the

correct functioning of the accountability link. Hence, reported problems in electoral integrity – concerning electoral system, media coverage, campaign finance, vote count, or gerrymandering for instance – could trigger widespread discontent among citizens and influence, in turn, accountability. The recent democratic history of the post-communist EU member States has been not unfrequently tarnished by a series of political scandals<sup>2</sup>. It has been showed, in fact, that in contexts where these problems are regarded as sufficiently salient to influence vote choice, they could be able to strengthen electoral accountability and constitute a decisive determinant of voters’ judgments upon the incumbent’s past performance (Beaulieu, 2014). These circumstances could trigger public dissatisfaction towards the governing elite that could be translated into consistent losses or, more drastically, electoral turnover for the incumbent coalition/party, and into electoral reward for the opposition in the ballot box (Bunce and Wolchik, 2011).

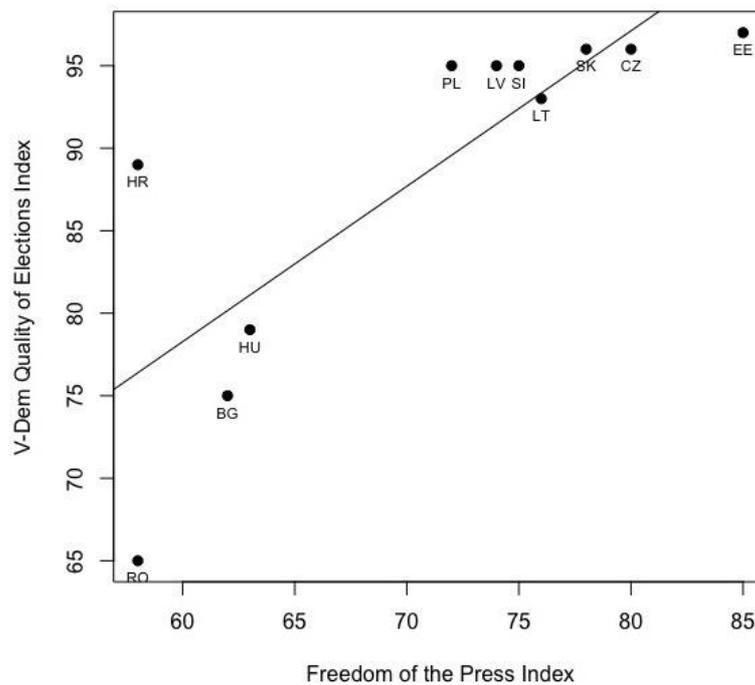


**Figure 4.3.** Schematic representation of direct and conditional effect of electoral integrity

What is the role exerted by the political context, particularly in connection with electoral integrity? It seems to be still decisive, in particular with regard to the degree of freedom of the mass media. Voters need to be informed about corruption scandals and problems connected to electoral management in general to make accurate evaluations of the incumbent in the ballot box. The media have a decisive role in strengthening the accountability linkage between citizens and representatives providing a compensative check on manipulative politicians and institutions with low levels of independence from the political power (Norris, 2010; Birch, 2011). This action is carried out mostly through

<sup>2</sup> See the case of Poland as described in Chapter 2.

specific effects such as the agenda setting, framing and priming that shape individual perceptions, in particular about political reality.



**Figure 4.4.** *Press Freedom and Electoral Integrity in the last elections ( $r = 0.81$ )*

Another systemic feature that seems to be critical for the functioning of electoral accountability is the government clarity of responsibility that, following the assumptions from the economic voting literature, should make voters more likely at identifying those actors responsible for electoral malpractices as well as bad economic performance (Winters and Weitz-Shapiro, 2013; Xezonakis et al., 2016). Moreover, electoral commissions are usually linked to the executive power because of the direct control exerted by a specific department or because of the specific process of appointment. This element makes governments particularly sensitive to possible corruption scandals arising during the electoral cycle. A third factor conditioning electoral integrity performance voting seems to be the structure of the party system. As hypothesized in the case of economic voting, fragmented party systems should make it more difficult for voters to identify a clear alternative to the incumbent government, leading them to less readily express content/discontent for its performance (Lewis-Beck, 1988; Anderson, 2000; Bengtsson, 2004). A greater number of effective parties, in fact, would lead to a rift in the accountability chain: in countries in which there is greater uncertainty about an

alternative future government, voters will not turn out the incumbent government even in presence of bad performance, for instance election fraud allegations. Finally, as already done in Chapter 3, we test if the ‘rules of the game’, i.e. the electoral system affects ‘electoral integrity’ performance voting at the elections (Powell, 2000; Hobolt and Klemmensen, 2008). An extensive literature shows how proportional systems strengthen electoral integrity with the argument that inclusive power-sharing arrangements, maximizing the number of ‘winners’, build feelings of political trust, social tolerance, and legitimacy, often considered the foundations for a civic culture and stable democratic states (Almond and Verba, 1963; Norris, 2016). However, in this case we look at its conditional effect on electoral accountability. In this way, majoritarian systems are seen as an element able to maximize voters’ ability to reward or punish directly incumbents at the elections for electoral malpractices or corruption scandals. On the other hand, proportional system risk to thin the accountability effect of the electoral system since party-list, blocked list or wide-nation list could impede the direct voters’ assignment of responsibility at the polls (Van der Eijk and Franklin, 2009). Testing the direct and conditional effect of these variables aims at furnishing a more complete and detailed analysis of the factors shaping electoral accountability in Central and Eastern Europe.

Finally, as for Chapter 3, we aim at testing the effect of time on electoral accountability. Several works suggest that economic voting tends to structure over time, being weaker early in the transition and stronger with the progressive consolidation of the democratic regime (Stokes, 2001; Roberts, 2012). As for economic voting, we want to test how electoral integrity performance voting structures citizens’ preferences in two different phases of CEE countries’ democratic life, i.e. if there is any development pattern during the transition and consolidation process and after its completion. Considering the role exerted by the European Union in ensuring the success of this process (Linde, 2009; Tomini, 2015), we will test these assumptions setting the relative year of accession as an indicator of the completion of the phase of democratic consolidation.

## **4.2. Hypotheses, Data and Methods**

In this paragraph hypotheses, along with measures and method of analysis used to test

our theoretical propositions, are presented and discussed.

### 4.2.1. Hypotheses

Hypotheses are schematically presented in Table 4.1 below. The aim of this chapter is, first of all, to go one step further the analysis conducted in Chapter 3. In this section, however, we will test not only the conditional effect of electoral integrity on retrospective economic voting but also its direct effect as independent variable on incumbent vote share in Central and Eastern Europe. Electoral accountability is measured as incumbent vote share in the election at time  $t$ . According to the extensive literature on electoral accountability and election quality, we expect to find a direct and positive effect of electoral integrity on accountability and a twofold effect for the macroeconomic indicators, i.e. at higher levels of election quality, the relation between economic performance and incumbent vote share will be stronger (see Table 4.1).

**TABLE 4.1.** *Hypotheses and Variables. Direct and conditional effects.*

Independent Variables	Hypotheses	
<i>Direct Effect</i>	<i>Expected effect on incumbent vote share</i>	
<b>Economic performance</b>		
GDP growth		Positive
Unemployment		Negative
<b>Electoral Integrity</b>		
V-Dem clean elections index		Positive
<i>Conditional Effects</i>	<i>Expected effect on Economic performance voting</i>	<i>Expected effect on Electoral integrity performance voting</i>
<b>Electoral Integrity</b>		
V-Dem clean elections index	Positive (GDP growth)	Negative (Unemployment)
<b>Government Clarity</b>		
Clarity Index (0-3)	-	Positive
<b>Presence of Available Alternatives</b>		
Effective Number of Electoral Parties (ENEP)	-	Negative
<b>Electoral System</b>		
Proportional/Mixed (0-1)	-	Positive
<b>Mass Media Freedom</b>		
Freedom of the Press Index (0-100)	-	Positive

All other variables included in the analysis represent macro-level controls that are expected to influence in different ways the accountability mechanism in the sample

countries.

The first contextual variable is represented by the clarity of responsibility. Considering government clarity as a set of factors such as stability, parliamentary support and division of power, we expect to find a positive interaction of this variable on performance voting. In other words, in contexts characterized by higher ‘identifiability’ of policy-making responsibility, voters can exert more easily retrospective economic voting. We expect to find the same conditional dynamic for ‘electoral integrity’ performance voting. Regarding the availability of credible alternatives to the incumbent government, we expect that in context characterized by a lower number of effective parties – in particular on the side of the opposition – the accountability mechanism is stronger, since voters could more readily express content or discontent with high/low levels of electoral integrity. In this case we expect to find a negative interaction, given that a fragmented party system prevents voters to vote for a less credible opposition. Our third variable that is supposed to interact in the relation between economic performance and incumbent vote share is the type of electoral system. According to the literature, we expect to find a ‘weakening effect’ for the accountability process when elections are held using proportional systems since it is less likely that voters are able to punish incumbents for unsatisfactory performances. Finally, possibility for voters to receive free and objective information on the state of economy from plural and independent media should strengthen electoral accountability in the region. For this reason, we expect to find a positive conditional effect of this fourth variable on the relation between performance and incumbent vote share.

#### **4.2.2. Data and methods**

The data employed for this chapter have been collected by the author in a comprehensive dataset made up of macroeconomic indicators, electoral results, electoral indicators and data concerning the freedom of the press. Data for elections held in our eleven Central and Eastern European countries from 1993 to 2015 have been collected from the ParlGov Database (Döring and Manow, 2016). Data for macroeconomic variables have been collected from the World Bank Database, while data concerning media independence have been gathered from the annual report ‘Freedom of the Press’ (Freedom House, 1993-2016).

Data for the Effective Number of Parties have been collected using the database of Gallagher (2015) while data for which no calculations were available have been calculated by the author. Data for electoral systems have been collected from Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) Parline Database. Finally, an index for government clarity has been created by the author. The descriptive statistics of the dependent and independent variables are reported in Table 4.2.

**TABLE 4.2.** *Descriptive statistics and operationalization of variables used in the analysis*

Variable	Description/Operationalization	N	Code	Mean	SD	Min	Max
<b>Dependent Variable</b>							
in_share	% of votes for the incumbent government in election at time $t$ . Sources: Election and Referendum European Database (EED) and the ParlGov Database	65	0-100	32.79	13.27	7.60	67.60
<b>Independent Variables</b>							
in_prev	% of votes for the incumbent government in election at time $t-1$ . Sources: ParlGov Database	65	0-100	46.40	7.91	27.70	63.70
gdp	% change in GDP between election at time $t-1$ and election at time $t$ . Source: The World Bank	65	-	3.12	3.50	-6.60	12.20
unemp	% change in the unemployment rate between election at time $t-1$ and election at time $t$ . Source: The World Bank	65	-	10.49	3.93	4.00	18.80
vdem	Rescaled V-Dem index of electoral integrity.	65	0-100	89.77	10.10	59.00	98.00
clarity	Additive government clarity of responsibility index measuring: stability (0-1), division of power (0-1), parliamentary support (0-1).	65	0-3	1.38	0.80	0.00	3.00
elesys	Kind of electoral system (proportional vs. mixed). Source: IPU Parline Database.	65	0-1	0.22	0.41	0.00	1.00
enep	Effective number of electoral parties. Source: Laakso and Taagepera, 1979)	65	-	5.73	1.90	2.80	13.80
freepress	(Reversed) Freedom of the Press index. Source: Freedom House.	65	0-100	72.46	9.61	45.00	84.00

As dependent variable we employ incumbent government vote share at all those parliamentary elections rated free by Freedom House from the early 1990s<sup>3</sup>. The variable is constructed considering the electoral performance of those parties who were in government at the time of elections<sup>4</sup>. Thus, we obtain a variable composed of 65 observations (elections) held in eleven countries between 1993 and 2015.

<sup>3</sup> As already mentioned in Chapter 2, we excluded the first free election because of the biased measurement given by the natural collapse of the ruling Communist parties (see Table 2.1).

<sup>4</sup> If there was a caretaker government at the time of elections, we consider the nearest partisan government. If a government was in office for a reasonable part of the legislature (more than two years) and was replaced before the elections by another partisan government, we assume the first one as the incumbent.

Economic performance is measured employing traditional macroeconomic indicators used in the literature: GDP growth and unemployment<sup>5</sup>. GDP growth is measured as the ‘annual percentage growth rate of GDP at market prices based on constant local currency’, and it is gathered by the World Development Indicators (World Bank, 2015). Unemployment is measured as the percentage of people who are currently not working, but are willing and able to work for pay, currently available to work, and have actively searched for work. These data have been collected by the World Development Indicators (World Bank, 2015). If elections are held in the second part of the year (July-December), we considered indicators for the corresponding year. If elections are held in the first semester of the year (January-June), we used data gathered for the previous year.

Electoral integrity is measured employing data from the Clean Elections Index gathered by the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project (Coppedge et al., 2016). The decision to use this measure lies in the fact that it belongs to one of the most comprehensive and multidimensional datasets – in terms of time and countries coverage – monitoring, among other dimensions of democracy – the quality of elections (legislative and presidential) held from 1900 to 2015 in 173 countries all around the world. The V-Dem project, through the use of 2,500 expert surveys, codes multiple components of democratic regime (Gallie, 1964; Held, 2006; Shapiro, 2003) and it also focuses upon measures of electoral competition. In particular, we employ the Clean Elections Index that is formed by taking the point estimates from a Bayesian factor analysis model of the indicators for EMB autonomy, EMB capacity, voter registry, vote buying, other voting irregularities, government intimidation, other electoral violence, and free and fair elections. In this way, we rely on a comprehensive index able to capture every stage of the electoral cycle and that makes us able to effectively measure the direct and moderating impact of electoral integrity on the accountability dynamics in Central and Eastern Europe. The original V-Dem index runs from 0 to 1. We recoded it as having values between 0 and 100.

Regarding our systemic variables, a measure for government clarity has been constructed according to an alternative measure proposed by Bengtsson (2004) to analyse twenty-one industrialized democracies. This indicator measures three relevant aspects of

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<sup>5</sup> In this Chapter we exclude inflation because of the non-significant results obtained in Chapter 3 (see paragraph 3.3 - Results).

government status: ‘parliamentary support for the government’, ‘diversion of power’ and ‘government stability’. One point is assigned to each feature considered clear. Consequently, countries are coded as having values between 0 and 3. The level of fragmentation of the party system – considered in terms of availability of governing alternatives (Anderson, 2000) – has been measured using Laakso and Taagepera’s (1979) Effective number of electoral parties (ENEP) at each election. To test the conditional effect of the electoral system we use a dummy variable (0-1) that classifies the different electoral systems. Given the limited variety of the voting systems in the region, we distinguish only between proportional (zero) and mixed systems (one). Freedom in the flow of information is measured using the Freedom of the Press Index published annually by Freedom House (2016). This index ranks each country on a scale of 0 to 100. We inverted the original index so higher values indicate higher levels of media freedom. This is an index built using survey data that encompass the three main fields that may influence the system of mass media, i.e. legal, political and economic environment.

For the statistical analysis, I use OLS regressions with random effects model as method of estimation. More specifically, I formally test my hypotheses estimating several variants of a time-series cross-section regression model (TSCS)<sup>6</sup> as represented by the general equation:

$$y_{(i,t)} = \beta_0 + \sum_{k=1}^K \beta_k x_{k(i,t)} + \varepsilon_{(i,t)}$$

where  $i = 1, 2, \dots, N$  refers to a country;  $t = 1, 2, \dots, T$  denotes a year;  $k$  denotes a specific control variable.  $Y_{(i,t)}$  and  $x_{(i,t)}$  refers respectively to an observation on a dependent, independent and control variable;  $x_k$  can contain observable variables that change across  $t$  but not  $i$ , variables that change across  $i$  but not  $t$ , and variables that change across  $i$  and  $t$ ;  $\varepsilon$  stands for a random error;  $\beta_0$  and  $\beta_j$  refers, respectively to the intercept and the slope parameters.

In addition to unobserved effect, there are many other names given to  $c_i$  in applications: unobserved component, latent variable, and unobserved heterogeneity are common. Estimating this kind of model and some of its variants, solves many problems of traditional methods of the comparative research. This technique, in fact, allows us to test

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<sup>6</sup> The analyses reported below are carried out using R-studio version 0.99.87 for R version 3.2.3 and the `plm` function to fit linear models for TSCS-panel data with a random effect (Croissant and Millo, 2008).

the impact of a large number of predictors of the level and change in the dependent variable within the framework of a multivariate analysis without violating basic assumption of standard statistical analysis (Hicks, 1994; Schmidt, 1997; Bell and Jones, 2015). Time series and cross-sectional analysis usually suffer for the limited number of spatial units and the limited number of available data over time so that the total number of the potential explanatory variables exceeds the degree of freedom required to model the relationship between the dependent and independent variables (Podestà, 2002). TSCS design, instead, presenting cases “country-year” ( $N * T$ ) – i.e. several observations for each country and year – helps to overcome these methodological problems.

### 4.3. Results

The tables below show the result of the quantitative analysis employing incumbent vote shares as the dependent variable<sup>7</sup>. The previous chapter showed how voters tend to punish governments for bad economic performance and that this effect is mediated by specific characteristics of the political context. In this section we aim at analysing the effect of election quality as another aspect of performance that matters. Moreover, in each model, we include main and conditional effects of the contextual variables to test their role in weakening or strengthening the impact of incumbent’s past performance on its vote share. First of all, we test our first hypothesis, i.e. if electoral integrity works as a performance dimension that CEE citizens consider when they cast their vote. Model 1 in Table 4.3. below shows the results. As hypothesized in the previous section, the main effect of electoral integrity on incumbent vote share turns out to be positive and statistically significant. This result confirms our theoretical propositions and encourage to accept the first hypothesis. The coefficient shows that the quality of electoral procedures – even though it is not comparable in strength to the effect of economic indicators such as GDP growth and unemployment – strongly affects incumbent’s electoral fate. These findings encourage to adopt electoral integrity as key explanatory variable in the study of electoral

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<sup>7</sup> Given that the observations are not so many (65) for this method of analysis, whilst the number of explanatory variables is not particularly low, tests on multicollinearity, heteroscedasticity and on the presence of deviant cases are carried out. However, no multicollinearity problems arise performing VIF tests, as well as the Breush-Pagan test for heteroscedasticity gave no significant results.

accountability in Central and Eastern Europe.

**TABLE 4.3.** *Electoral integrity performance voting. Basic model*

	<b>Model 1</b>
Electoral Integrity	0.32** (0.15)
Incumbent Vote (E-1)	0.56*** (0.20)
Intercept	-5.01 (6.48)
N: countries	11
N: elections	65
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.39

**Note:** Dependent variable is incumbent vote share. Standard errors in parentheses.

**Coefficients:** \* $p \leq 0.1$ ; \*\* $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p \leq 0.01$

After this necessary ‘empirical’ premise aimed at proving the direct effect of electoral integrity on incumbent vote share and its possible implications to explain the contradictory results from the perspective of the economic voting theory, we aim to go one step further. First of all, we aim at concluding the discourse concerning the determinants of economic voting in Central and Eastern Europe. Do elections function as “instruments of democracy”, i.e. does electoral integrity strengthen the accountability linkage between voters and incumbents’ economic performance? In other words, we want to test if election quality has a conditional effect on the way in which the state of the national economy influences voting behaviour in the region. In order to do so, Table 4.4 below presents the results of ordinary least squares (OLS) estimates about the conditional effect of electoral integrity on our three macroeconomic variables.

As the results presented in Model 2a and Model 2b show, the quality of elections has a significant conditional effect on economic performance voting: the more the integrity of the electoral process, the stronger the economic voting in the region. In particular, in Model 2a, the positive coefficient suggests that the higher the quality of elections, the stronger the linkage between GDP growth and incumbent vote share. At the same time, the negative interaction coefficient in Model 2b means that the moderating impact of electoral integrity strengthen the accountability link between unemployment and incumbent electoral performance. Though the statistical significance is not particularly high ( $p \leq 0.1$ ),

the quality of elections as conditional factor of economic performance voting seems to matter, confirming the theoretical statements formulated in the previous section. The almost equal moderating effect for GDP growth and unemployment, confirms rather clearly the uniform influence of electoral integrity on economic voting in Central and Eastern Europe in the reference period.

**TABLE 4.4.** *Electoral integrity and economic voting. Conditional effect.*

	<b>Model 2a</b> <b>GDP growth</b>	<b>Model 2b</b> <b>Unemployment</b>
Electoral integrity	0.35 (0.34)	0.49 (0.45)
GDP growth	0.67* (0.42)	
Unemployment		-0.60* (0.47)
El. Integrity * GDP	1.14*(0.81)	
El. Integrity * Unemployment		-0.90* (0.73)
Incumbent Vote (E-1)	0.54*** (0.20)	0.59*** (0.20)
Intercept	-0.97 (1.79)	-1.86 (1.77)
N: countries	11	11
N: elections	65	65
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.41	0.40

**Note:** Dependent variable is incumbent vote share. Standard errors in parentheses.

**Coefficients:** \* $p \leq 0.1$ ; \*\* $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p \leq 0.01$

After having tested the conditional effect of electoral integrity on economic voting, we focus on the core of the chapter, analysing the quality of the electoral process as a valence issue (Stokes, 1963; 1992). If citizens, in fact, care about monitoring their representatives, they might also condition their voting behaviour on dimensions of good governance other than the state of national economy. If so, citizens should reward government parties for good electoral management and punish them for officeholders' mismanagement. Thus, as for the macroeconomic indicators employed in the analysis conducted in Chapter 3 we hypothesized that 'electoral integrity performance voting' varies with different configurations of the political context, i.e. government clarity, availability of governing alternatives, nature of the electoral system and freedom of the media. We control for previous vote share at time (E-1). Results are presented in Table 4.5 below. First, I expected system with greater clarity of government responsibility to result in more decisive incumbent vote share and hence strengthen the accountability mechanism in the

sample countries. Hence, a conditional effect strengthening electoral integrity performance voting should be indicated by a positive interaction coefficient. As Model 3 shows, the clarity of government responsibility seems to strengthen electoral integrity performance voting as indicated by the positive coefficient. This result is in line with our expectations, with the statistically significant coefficient ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) indicating that the clarity of responsibility has a substantive impact on how the quality of the electoral process affects support for the government.

As our third hypothesis suggested, contexts characterized by stable, majority and ‘small-size’ governments – such as, for instance, Lithuania in 1996, Bulgaria in 1997, Croatia in 2000 – make voters easier to assign responsibility for electoral malpractices or corruption scandals arising during the electoral cycle described in Chapter 1. Conversely, in countries in which the assignment of responsibility is blurred by instability, lack of parliamentary majority or wide coalition governments – such as Romania in 1996, Czech Republic in 1998 or Slovakia in 2012 – a sanctioning vote is less likely to punish the actual responsible for electoral malpractices<sup>8</sup>. Turning to Model 4, we expected a limited number of governing alternatives to result in more limited vote losses for the incumbent, because of the difficulty for citizens to express discontent with low levels of electoral integrity. The coefficient is in line with our expectations and significant at 90 percent ( $p \leq 0.1$ ). The positive coefficient suggests that, unlike the economic voting, a higher number of parties in the system – in particular on the side of opposition – tends to strengthen the accountability link in relation to electoral integrity. The coefficient is in line with our expectations and significant at 90 percent ( $p \leq 0.1$ ). The positive coefficient suggests that, unlike the economic voting, a higher number of parties in the system – in particular on the side of opposition – tends to strengthen the accountability link in relation to electoral integrity. On the one hand, contexts characterized by the presence of several governing alternatives – such as Poland in 1993, Slovakia in 2006 and Lithuania in 2012 – the presence of corruption cases or media biases will be heavily punished by voters in the ballot box.

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<sup>8</sup> A complete list of the government clarity index for different elections and countries is collected in Appendix C, Table C1.

TABLE 4.5. *Political contexts and electoral integrity performance voting. Conditional effects.*

	<b>Model 3</b> <b>Government Clarity</b>	<b>Model 4</b> <b>ENEP</b>	<b>Model 5</b> <b>Electoral System</b>	<b>Model 6</b> <b>Media Freedom</b>
Electoral Integrity	-0.15 (0.26)	0.27* (0.20)	0.17 (0.16)	0.52* (0.41)
<b><i>Contextual variables</i></b>				
Government Clarity	-13.92 (10.16)			
ENEP		0.17 (0.16)		
Electoral System			9.08 (6.33)	
Media Freedom				-2.66* (2.01)
<b><i>Conditional effects</i></b>				
Electoral Integrity × Government Clarity	0.35** (0.17)			
Electoral Integrity × ENEP		0.17* (0.11)		
Electoral Integrity × Electoral System			-0.31 (0.35)	
Electoral Integrity × Media freedom				0.37** (0.16)
Incumbent Vote (E-1)	0.59 (0.22)	0.62*** (0.21)	0.58*** (0.20)	0.64*** (0.21)
Intercept	7.16 (5.64)	-4.16 (4.22)	-8.36 (7.58)	13.20 (14.65)
N: countries	11	11	11	11
N: elections	65	65	65	65
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.45	0.39	0.35	0.47

**Note:** Dependent variable is incumbent vote share. Standard errors in parentheses.

**Coefficients:** \*p ≤ 0.1; \*\*p ≤ 0.05; \*\*\*p ≤ 0.01

On the other hand, polities with compact party systems – i.e. in which the number of “incumbent alternatives for dissent” (Lewis-Beck, 1988) is considerably lower – make it more difficult for voters to punish (or reward) the incumbent government for their performance with reference to the management of elections. Indicative examples of this dynamic could be represented by elections in Bulgaria in 2001, Hungary in 2010 or Romania in 2012<sup>9</sup>. Given these results, we accept our fourth hypothesis, but some clarification will follow in the next section.

Model 5 collects results for the conditional effect of the type of electoral system on electoral integrity performance voting. According to our hypotheses, we expected electoral accountability to be weaker in contexts adopting proportional voting system and stronger in political systems using mixed-member electoral systems. However, both the main and the conditional effect fail to reach the statistical significance. The results confirm the findings in Chapter 3, i.e. the nature of the electoral system does not impact the extent to which citizens are able to vote according to their performance evaluations. However, this result could be also influenced by the limited variation in electoral systems across the region, with most countries – nine political systems out of eleven<sup>10</sup> – presenting proportional representation formula as method to elect the members of national parliaments (MPs). Given the lack of statistical significance of the interaction term we have to reject our fifth hypothesis concerning the influence of electoral system on electoral accountability.

Turning to the last hypothesis, Model 6 reports the results with regard to the moderating effect of the media freedom of the electoral integrity performance voting. Given the well-described relation between media freedom and electoral integrity, we expected to find that increased levels of media freedom result in a strengthened accountability link. OLS coefficients in Table 4.5 seem to confirm our theoretical expectations. In line with the results presented in Chapter 3, political systems in which citizens have access to free and plural information about government’s performance (with regard to electoral

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<sup>9</sup> Effective numbers of parties (ENEP) for different elections and countries are collected in Appendix C, Table C2.

<sup>10</sup> Romania adopted a mixed-member formula in the last two elections (2008 and 2012) while Bulgaria employed this system only for 2009 parliamentary elections. See Appendix C, Table C3.

management) tend to experience stronger patterns of performance voting. It could be the case of Estonia in 2015 or Czech elections in 2006 that registered higher levels of media freedom according to the Freedom House annual reports<sup>11</sup>. In countries with a lower degree of media freedom – such as Slovakia in 1994, Romania in 1996 or Croatia in 2000 – incumbent governments seem to be less sensitive to performance voting with regard to electoral integrity. In conclusion, the statistically significant positive coefficient ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) confirms our sixth hypothesis, i.e. the higher the level of media freedom in a country, the stronger the accountability link between electoral integrity and incumbent vote share.

In order to conclude the analysis on the role of electoral integrity as a valence issue able to structure voters' preferences about the incumbent government, we are also interested in looking at the possible evolution of accountability dynamics according to different contexts in which elections take place. In particular, in the last part of this chapter we look at the different effect of electoral integrity performance voting during and after the consolidation process. We assumed accession to the EU as point of reference as it has been considered a reliable indicator of the completion of democratic consolidation process in these countries (Vachudova, 2005; Cameron, 2007; Linde, 2009). As already done in the previous chapter – in which we split the sample according to the dichotomies “pre/post EU accession” and “pre/post 2008 economic crisis” – we divide observations in two sub-samples according to the relative year of accession to the European Union. In this way, we obtain two groups of 32 elections held before the ‘Eastern enlargements’ of the EU (2004, 2009 and 2013) and 33 elections held after having joined the Union. Table 4.6 below presents the results of the electoral integrity performance voting model for each of the two time periods.

Contrary to the evidence provide by the literature on economic voting, the quality of elections as a valence issue does not show substantive difference between the phase of democratic consolidation and the period following the accession to the European Union.

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<sup>11</sup> The Freedom of the Press index for different elections and countries is collected in Appendix C, Table C4.

**TABLE 4.6.** *Electoral integrity performance voting before and after democratic consolidation*

	<b>Model 7A</b>	<b>Model 7B</b>
	<b>Pre-EU</b>	<b>Post-EU</b>
Incumbent Vote (E-1)	0.57** (0.28)	0.29* (0.25)
Electoral Integrity	0.31** (0.16)	0.39** (0.17)
Intercept	16.97 (16.36)	34.12* (25.71)
N: countries	11	11
N: elections	32	33
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.32	0.41

**Note:** Dependent variable is incumbent vote share. Standard errors in parentheses.

**Coefficients:** \* $p \leq 0.1$ ; \*\* $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p \leq 0.01$

As Model 7a and 7b show, the influence of electoral integrity on incumbent vote share maintains the same statistically significant effect in the first as well as in the second time period. Regarding the magnitude of the findings, however, the size of the coefficient for electoral integrity turns to be larger in the second period (post-EU accession). These results, however, suggest that the quality of elections represent an important element for the accountability link that has constantly affected – from 1993 to 2015 – incumbents’ fate at the elections in Central and Eastern Europe.

#### 4.4. Conclusion

This chapter aimed at following a recent approach on the study of performance voting more focused on the non-economic determinants of electoral accountability (e.g. Singer, 2011; Ecker et al. 2016). In particular, we aimed at understanding the role of electoral integrity in shaping incumbent vote share in Central and Eastern Europe from the democratic transition until today. Moreover, unlike this emerging literature, we used aggregate data from 65 elections to test our theoretical assumptions. We analysed not only the direct impact of the quality of elections on voters’ preferences presenting the basic performance voting model (Table 4.3), but also how this effect is moderated by specific configurations of the political context (Table 4.5)<sup>12</sup>. The TSCS models presented in the

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<sup>12</sup> We also looked at its possible moderating effect on economic voting, as presented in Table 4.4.

previous section provided interesting evidence about the study of electoral accountability. First, even if economy remains (one of) the most important issue voters consider when they judge government performance (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, 2007; Duch and Stevenson, 2008), we found the existence of a direct and positive effect of our key independent variable. Voters care about the integrity of the electoral procedures and hold politicians accountable for the management of elections, showing a rather constant behaviour from the early 1990s to the last elections collected for the analysis. Such accountability pattern should represent an incentive for politicians to avoid power abuse, corruption scandals or any other problem with the conduct of the elections.

Then, following a more consolidated approach for the study of electoral accountability, we focused on the moderating effect of political context on performance voting (Anderson, 2000; Van der Brug, 2007; Hobolt et al., 2013). As already found in Chapter 3 for economic voting, we confirmed the moderating effect of clarity of responsibility on performance voting in relation to electoral integrity. Cohesive and stable incumbent governments make voters able to identify who is responsible for problems that might arise along the electoral process. This effect is probably dictated by the fact that usually national electoral commission are appointed by the government, establishing a kind of link between the quality of the electoral management and government responsibility.

Regarding the conditional effect of party system fragmentation on performance voting (Anderson, 2000; Tavits, 2007), we find evidence that wider party systems favour electoral integrity performance voting. While the main effect of party system fragmentation on incumbent vote share is positive, it also showed a positive conditional effect on electoral accountability. How can we explain this result? First, a variegated literature – covering topics such as party politics, democracy and election quality – shows how fragmented party systems may foster competition among parties and how it may be positively linked to the promotion of several aspects of democracy (Van de Walle, 2003). However, these results could be also related to contingent and peculiar characteristics of the CEE countries. In these polities citizens tend to perceive corruption – also in its electoral configuration – as a relevant issue, so that governing parties are usually blamed for it, favouring the rising of a number of ‘anti-system parties’ able to pick up dissent towards

incumbent and, in general, mainstream parties. In the last years the region saw the rise of several, mostly right-wing, new parties able to intercept the growing electoral volatility: among them, the well-known Jobbik in 2010 Hungarian parliamentary elections; ANO 2011 in 2013 Czech legislative elections; Kukiz'15 in 2015 Polish parliamentary elections. Our findings, for these reasons, seem to find a good empirical support in the current phase of generalized party system realignment – that is also investing Western Europe – in which new and usually populist parties gain wide support riding the wave of popular protest in countries with increasing corruption, reshaping the traditional structure of party competition (Engler, 2015; Hanley and Sikk, 2016).

Finally, while as for the analysis on economic voting we did not find any significant conditional effect of the electoral system on electoral accountability, in this chapter we confirmed that electoral accountability, as shaped by electoral integrity, seems to be not independent from the freedom, availability and plurality of information about incumbent performance. As already stated throughout the thesis, the mass media have, among other important functions, a powerful watchdog role that informs the public and strengthens the transparency of the electoral process, revealing any potential problem arising (Chang et al., 2010; Costas-Perez et al., 2012). Results presented in the chapter confirmed this evidence: polities characterized by higher pluralism of information have a significant and positive influence on the accountability link between electoral integrity and vote share. The existence of effective ‘information watchdogs’ guarantees voters a constant amount of information about several aspects of government performance, such as electoral management. More information, in turn, contributes to create a ‘virtuous circle’ able to strengthen the quality of democracy as a whole.

In conclusion, the analysis conducted in this chapter – together with the one presented in Chapter 3 – seems to provide interesting perspectives to the study of electoral accountability. On the one hand, while this thesis confirmed the relevance of economy as the most important vector of voters’ behaviour, this chapter contributes to the literature by enlarging the perspective of performance voting to a non-economic determinant such as electoral integrity. We showed, in fact, the efficacy of another factor in influencing electoral accountability in Central and Eastern Europe. Electoral integrity revealed a

constant influence on electoral accountability in the region, with our results confirming its constant significance from the beginning of the transition until today when the consolidation process is almost unanimously considered accomplished. Moreover, specific characteristics of the political system – such as government clarity, party fragmentation and media freedom – reveal to have a clear conditional effect on this kind of accountability link. These aspects, in fact, contribute – with different intensity – to mediate the link between electoral integrity and incumbent’s electoral performance. These results encourage future comparative research on electoral accountability to investigate further non-economic dimensions able to influence the power of voters to reward or punish retrospectively incumbent governments.

## Chapter 5

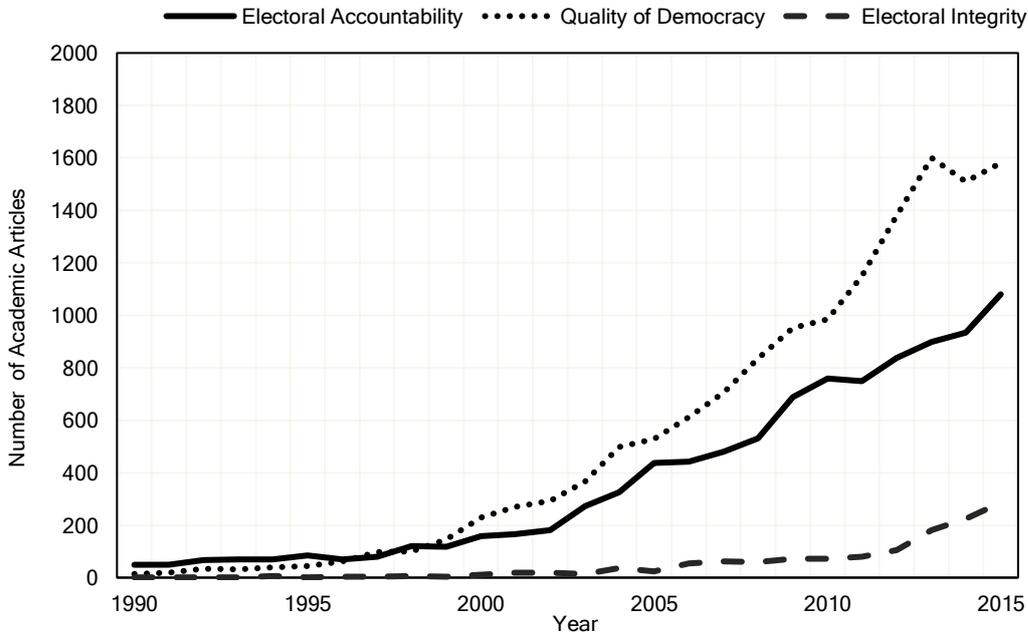
### Epilogue: Assessing Electoral Accountability in Central and Eastern Europe

*'To err on the side of forgiveness would leave voters vulnerable to tricky explanations and rationalizations, but to err on the draconian side would only spur politicians on to greater energy and imagination in problem solving.'*  
(Page, 1978: 222)

The present dissertation investigated the economic and political – or, better, ‘non-economic’ – determinants of electoral accountability in Central and Eastern Europe between 1990 and 2015. To this end, the effect of a range of variables on incumbent vote share was measured: government clarity of responsibility, party system fragmentation, electoral system, freedom of the media and, finally, electoral integrity. We tried to combine different approaches developed by the literature to understand how aspects of national economy impact the possibility to vote for the incumbent, what is the role exerted by specific ‘contextual’ characteristics – using, for instance, a tailored index measuring government clarity and a measure capturing media freedom – and how the quality of elections could impact the link principal-voters/agent-representatives. In this work, in fact, we also tried to go beyond the traditional “economic prerogative in performance voting” (Ecker et al., 2016: 335) with the aim of contributing to the existing literature on electoral accountability and electoral integrity with a specific focus on eleven EU member States.

Electoral accountability is, beyond any doubt, an important feature of contemporary democracies and a relevant subject for political science. This mechanism, that links citizens to their representatives, allows the former to ‘put pressure’ on incumbent governments and influence their behaviour, especially in terms of public policies. This is,

synthetically, the core of the broader concept known as ‘chain of responsiveness’ (Powell, 2000) in which elections are conceived as ‘instruments of democracy’. Thus, electoral accountability represents an essential dimension through which evaluating the democratic quality of political regimes (Roberts, 2010; Morlino, 2011) and that acquires particular relevance in times of economic crisis and widespread dissatisfaction towards national political elites (Bellucci et al., 2012; LeDuc and Pammett, 2013). Its relevance for citizens and policy-makers has been widely recognized, pushing political scientists to advance research in the field. For long time the literature analysing such a topic had the limit to consider almost exclusively the so-called ‘advanced industrial democracies’, i.e. Western European countries, the United States, Japan, New Zealand and Australia (Powell and Whitten, 1993; Anderson, 2000; Bengtsson, 2004). Recent years, instead, have brought increased research on electoral accountability in Third Wave regimes as well (Zielinski et al., 2005; Tucker, 2006; Duch and Stevenson, 2008; Roberts, 2010). The mounting attention devoted by scholars at studying these dynamics in Central and Eastern European democracies also meant an increase in the number of academic articles mentioning “electoral accountability” since 1990 to 2015. These data are presented in Figure 5.1 below.



**Figure 5.1.** Scholarly articles mentioning “electoral accountability”, “quality of democracy” and “electoral integrity” from 1990 to 2015.

Source: Google Scholar: <http://scholar.google.com/> (accessed on 23 July 2016).

This outpouring of works on the quality of democracy and electoral accountability at the beginning of the twentieth century suggests that scholars have identified the existence of a real empirical phenomenon which has progressively involved political scientists. The (almost) total accomplishment of the democratization process in several Third Wave regimes – such as our CEE countries – pushed scholars to study these political systems through the lens of democratic quality rather than democratization studies (Roberts, 2010). In this period, the amount of scientific articles on the quality of democracy and electoral accountability grew almost simultaneously with a relative majority of broader studies focused on the first one. These data are easily justifiable by the evidence that electoral accountability represents only one of the procedural dimensions through which democratic quality is traditionally analysed. However, the ‘rising lines’ in Figure 5.1 indicate that the attention and the interest for these topics have also grown, following the constant spread of democratization followed to the Third Wave begun in 1974. Therefore, this thesis aimed at contributing to this literature.

Electoral integrity, instead, deserves a separate discourse. We can notice, in fact, that while this topic has always represented an argument of increasing interest for policymakers and practitioners, scholars begin to study in depth election quality only the last five years, devoting several interesting works to it (Birch, 2011; Norris 2014; 2015; Van Ham, 2015). This is dramatically important today. Even if holding recurrent elections is today broadly accepted among the majority of the countries, the quality of these elections strongly differs “ranging from free and fair elections with genuine contestation between parties or candidates to façade elections that are marred by manipulation and fraud” (Van Ham, 2012: 227). As this thesis tried to show, the functioning of the accountability mechanism cannot leave aside elections held according to international standards and global norms. Moreover, the existence of frauds – such as corruption, vote buying, or media biased – during the electoral process, have usually turned out to be decisive for incumbent governments’ electoral fate. Also in this case, however, the increasing number of scholarly articles in this field is encouraging. It suggests the rising importance of this topic not only for the narrower debate on election quality but also the necessity to link it to the broader literature on democratic quality and, in particular, on its procedural dimensions, such as electoral accountability.

In an attempt to contribute to the literature, this thesis tried to combine several approaches to study the multifaceted concept of electoral accountability. To do this, the present work has addressed the following research questions<sup>1</sup>:

1. How to conceptualize and measure electoral accountability?
2. What are the dynamics that explain variation in the extent to which citizens in the new European democracies are able to hold politicians accountable at elections?
3. What are the consequences of variation in the systemic characteristics for the degree to which elections generate government accountability?
4. What is the role of the context of electoral integrity in influencing the levels of electoral accountability voters have at their disposal in new democracies?

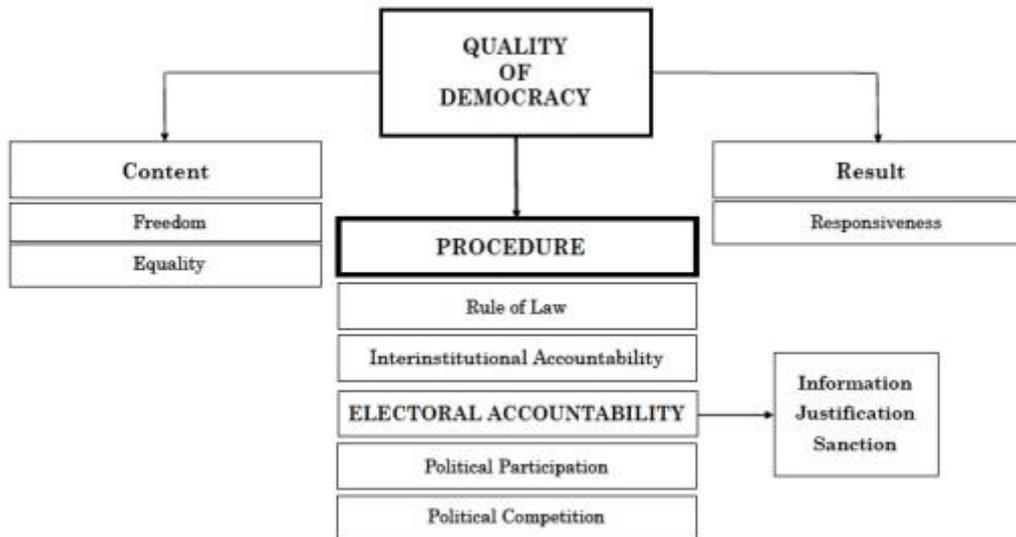
The findings that address these research questions are summarized in the following paragraph, in the order in which they unfolded in the dissertation.

## 5.1. Summary of Findings

**Conceptualization and Operationalization.** Concepts and categories developed in the literature on democracy, quality of democracy, economic voting and further developments were used in this thesis, adapting them to the argument illustrated here. Electoral accountability finds its conceptual foundation in the traditional theory of democracy and, specifically, in the ‘procedural’ conception of democracy as developed by Schumpeter (1942; 1975) and Dahl (1971). According to this approach, a competitive electoral process is a ‘necessary’ and ‘sufficient’ condition to guarantee democratic principles such as representation, accountability and legitimacy. Then, we pose our research in the framework of the studies on democratic quality (Lijphart, 1999; O’Donnell, 2004; Morlino, 2011). Analyzing the quality of a democratic regime, in fact, means going beyond the simple description of the procedures intrinsic to democratic regimes. It implies to analyse and/or measure if these institutions are working in the way they are proposed to do. For this reason, the third step consisted in clarifying the internal structure of electoral accountability.

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<sup>1</sup> For a complete presentation and discussion of the research questions, see Chapter 1, paragraph 1.6.

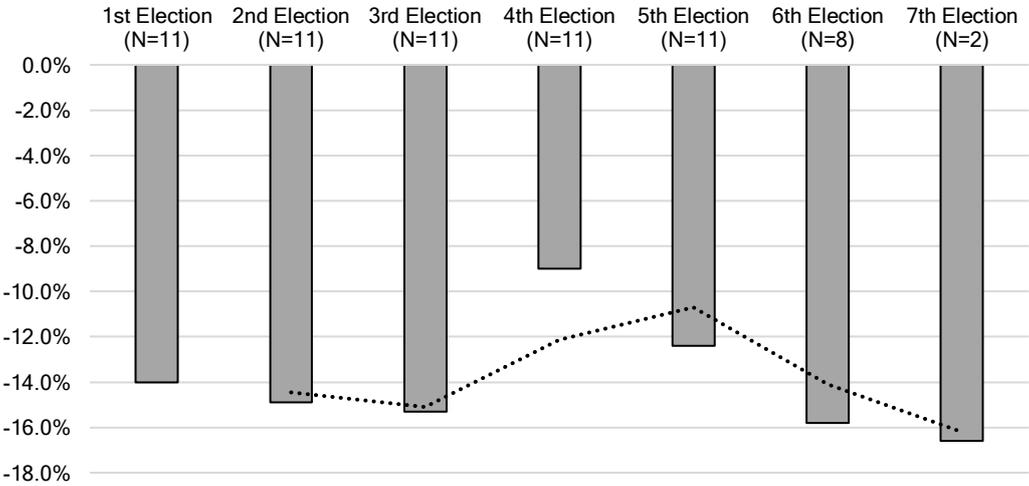


**Figure 5.2.** *From Quality of Democracy to Electoral Accountability: A Conceptual Map (Morlino, 2011; Schedler, 1999)*

Drawing on the literature on this topic, we adopted the conceptualization of accountability proposed by Schedler (1999: 17) who schematically describes this mechanism as the link connecting principal (the voter) and agent (the incumbent): “A is accountable to B when A is obliged to inform B about A’s (past or future) actions and decisions, to justify them, and to suffer punishment in the case of eventual misconduct”. We choose this conceptualization because of its completeness. It captures, in fact, three essential facets of electoral accountability that also constitute the core of this thesis: information, justification and sanction, with the latter representing not only the ultimate step of the mechanism but also the dependent variable employed in the empirical analysis presented in Chapter 3 and 4. The decision to choose this conceptualization and operationalization of electoral accountability – rather than incumbent’s survival in office – is also supported by Schmitter’s words according to which “the exchanges of information, justification, and judgment that make up the ordinary cycle of accountability are less obtrusive than the ‘big bang’ of ‘throwing the rascals out’, but no less real and significant for all that” (Schmitter, 2004: 49). Finally, since the aim of the thesis was to analyse a specific dimension through which the quality of democracy is usually studied, we considered eleven CEE countries that held recognizably free elections and upheld basic civil rights since the early 1990s. The final sample of elections covers a total of 65 elections

contested in 11 democracies in Central and Eastern Europe between 1993 and 2015. For each of these elections, data was collected by us and partly come from existing datasets<sup>2</sup>.

**Patterns of Accountability.** Based on the conceptualization and measurement of electoral accountability, the thesis subsequently addressed the question on how electoral accountability, measured as incumbent vote share at each pair of elections, is distributed and has developed over time in the eleven sample countries from the early 1990s until 2015 (see Chapter 2). According to the data collected for the dependent variable, only ten elections out of sixty-five don't see a loss for the incumbent party/coalition. It means that in about twenty-five years of democratic elections, 84.6% of incumbent governments did pay their 'cost of governing' with consistent average vote losses ( $m = -13.6\%$ ). However, even though at the cross-national level the cost of governing was undoubtedly high, we found differences among the countries. Croatia and Estonia – in fact, registered substantially lower rates of electoral punishment ( $m_{Croatia} = -6.9\%$ ) whilst Lithuania and Poland scored the most punitive rate ( $m_{Lithuania} = -26.9\%$ ) with almost no governments rewarded.



**Figure 5.3.** Average government vote losses in each accountability election (1993-2015)

In Chapter 2 we also tried to give some preliminary explanation to this diffuse pattern. We provided, in fact, brief descriptive case studies for Poland and Estonia that gave useful insights about the role exerted by specific conditions characterizing the single societies and political systems, such as a diffuse sense of corruption among members of the national

<sup>2</sup> Detailed descriptions of such data and their sources are provided in the Introduction (see section “Research Design - Data”) and Chapters 3 and 4 where the empirical analysis is presented.

government, extreme party system fragmentation or international factors such as the European Union that have undeniable effects on national economies and decision-making process. We also tried to find trends along time across our CEE countries. Dividing elections according to their sequence, i.e. from the first to the last accountability contestation, we found that governments were systematically punished until the fourth election when they gain, on average, 6.3% of the vote. However, our data showed that from the fifth election the ascending ‘punitive trend’ reappeared and with a higher intensity. In order to get more insights from these data we rearrange them according the ‘cleavage’ pre-post 2008 economic crisis finding, this time, a rather clear difference: between the two periods the average vote loss increased by 3.5% (from -10.7% to -14.2%). Also in this case in a smaller portion of countries – Estonia, Latvia and Poland – incumbent governments improved their performance in comparison with the previous election, even though only Estonian and Latvian governments effectively gained votes. Hence, given that incumbent electoral punishment occurs as such a common trend across countries, and that it might depend on several factors – economic, political, institutional, cultural or social – the question that remains is why in some countries this pattern seems to be such recurrent, while in other polities incumbent governments more limited electoral losses from one election to another?

**The Role of the Context.** Chapter 3 aimed at answering the third question by studying the influence of system characteristics on electoral accountability in Central and Eastern Europe. Following the research stream developed in the early 1990s by Powell and Whitten and enriched by the following studies conducted in the last decade, we did not stop to a traditional analysis of the economic voting, but we went beyond by focusing on the conditional effect exerted by specific contextual characteristics on retrospective performance voting. The idea was of analysing the role of different “contexts” for electoral accountability in Central and Eastern Europe, in order to enrich the literature about this topic. Three ‘contextual’ variables out of four are those traditionally employed in research on electoral accountability in established democracies, i.e. government clarity of responsibility (Bengtsson, 2004), availability of governing alternatives (Anderson, 2000) and the type of electoral system (Powell, 2000). In addition, we employed a measure for capturing the degree of freedom of the media, a variable that is usually not considered in

this kind of studies (see Appendix C for details and time series of the indices). However, we first tested traditional economic voting to see what economic variables were significant for CEE voters. The results showed that voters in these countries are more sensitive to variations in GDP growth and unemployment rate – rather than inflation – when they cast a vote in national parliamentary elections. Hence, we tested the direct and conditional effect of the systemic characteristics on our sample<sup>3</sup>. Not all of these variables showed significant conditional effects. In contexts characterized by higher government clarity of responsibility, accountability is enhanced, confirming results found in previous research on established democracies: clear lines of responsibility on the side of government usually means a strengthening of the accountability mechanism in Central and Eastern Europe. the existence of available governing alternatives showed a limited conditional effect on the accountability link, the conditional effect of the media turned out to be relevant in the region: in contexts characterized by availability of independent media the relation between national economic performance of economic policy and incumbent vote share was significantly strengthened. Finally, the type of electoral system – in our case limited to ‘mixed’ and ‘proportional’ systems – appeared to be scarcely significant in our sample.

A further aim of the chapter was to test the pattern described in Chapter 2 regarding the role of two international factors, such as the European Union and the 2008 economic recession, on electoral accountability. To do this, we split elections in two samples according to the year in which they were held, i.e. before/after the accession of the country to the EU and before/after the 2008, year in which the economic crisis started to hit the continent<sup>4</sup>. Again, two systemic elements turned out to be relevant for our analysis, even if for different supranational constraints. In elections held before their accession to the EU, higher clarity of government responsibility affected performance voting in Central and Eastern European democracies, while the degree of freedom of the media showed a very significant conditional effect in those elections held after the onset of the economic crisis. On the one hand, the absence of a (invasive) supranational institution such as the European Union made voters likely to consider national governments as the only responsible actors for economic performance. On the other hand, economic crisis seems to

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<sup>3</sup> See Chapter 3, Table 3.5.

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 3, Tables 3.6 – 3.13

have enhanced the role of the media as ‘watchdog’ that leads televisions and newspapers to emphasize negative information about national economy. It increases, in turn, the perceived incompetence and unpopularity of governments in Central and Eastern EU member States. However, these findings represent only a preliminary conclusion and might be useful to suggest some directions for future research.

**Electoral Integrity and Accountability.** Turning to the second aim of this thesis, we also argued that two fields of research – electoral integrity and electoral accountability – could be bridged, as they provide relevant insights for one other. For this reason, the consequences of electoral integrity were analysed as: the influence of election quality on economic performance voting; its direct effect on incumbent vote; the conditional effect of the contextual variables already included in the analysis (see Chapter 4). According to democratic theory, in fact, elections should generate governments that can be held accountable to voters (Powell, 2000; Van Ham, 2012; Norris, 2014). In this framework, electoral integrity acquires relevance for two reasons. On the one hand, severe malpractices may arise at every stage of the electoral cycle, representing a very effective instrument for incumbent governments to escape from ‘popular control’ for their past performance and bypass the accountability mechanism, with the consequent risk of undermining the legitimacy of the political system as a whole. On the other hand, in new democracies – such as our eleven CEE countries – citizens tend to define democracy and measure regime performance by focusing on the quality of elections (Bratton and Chang, 2006; Bunce and Wolchik, 2011). In this way, voters might express dissatisfaction with corrupt electoral practices sanctioning incumbent governments in the ballot box. For these reasons we considered electoral integrity to play a decisive role for the accountability mechanism, including it in the analysis. Building on this argument, this thesis went beyond traditional approaches to the study of electoral accountability – mostly focused on the economic effect – including electoral integrity in its framework. First of all, we accomplished our analysis of electoral accountability as economic performance voting testing the conditional effect of the quality of elections on the link national economy-incumbent vote<sup>5</sup>. We found some evidence about the conditional effect of this variable on the accountability mechanism, even though the statistical significance was quite limited.

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<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 4, Table 4.4.

However, the results suggested the existence of a pattern that seems to confirm our expectations: clean elections strengthen the accountability mechanism, i.e. the absence of problems during the electoral cycle make voters more likely to punish incumbents for bad economic performance and reward them for good one.

Hence we moved towards the core of the chapter and we tested the direct effect of electoral integrity on our dependent variable. We found evidence of a positive and significant effect on incumbent vote share: voters in Central and Eastern Europe look at the way in which procedures – from electoral campaign to post-elections – are managed, and cast their vote according to government's performance<sup>6</sup>. Our findings show that voters consider electoral integrity as a 'valence issue' (Stokes, 1992), i.e. voters evaluate governing parties according to their ability to achieve a generally desired policy goal: citizens in Central and Eastern Europe will reward incumbents for high levels of electoral integrity and punish them for low levels. As for economic voting in the previous chapter, in Chapter 4 we also looked at the interaction effect of the political contexts on what we have defined 'electoral integrity performance voting', i.e. the accountability link between electoral management performance and incumbent vote<sup>7</sup>. Not all the variables showed significant effects. We found that the relation between electoral integrity and incumbent vote is stronger in contexts characterized by higher government clarity of responsibility, confirming the pattern found for economic voting. Also the degree of freedom of the media showed to be significant in conditioning electoral integrity performance voting: where the media are less conditioned by the influence of political power, voters are more likely to use the quality of the elections as a measure of performance to be considered when they cast their vote for the national government. While we did not find any significant conditional effect related to the type of electoral system, we found significant results for party system fragmentation. Contrary to what we found for the economic voting, the presence of several 'governing alternatives' seems to strengthen the accountability link electoral integrity-incumbent vote. To support our findings, we suggested that the presence of several actors has two effects. More generally, it could enhance participation and competition and, consequently, the quality of democracy in the region. On the other hand, the presence of

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<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 4, Table 4.3.

<sup>7</sup> See Chapter 4, Table 4.5.

several actors also facilitates a drainage of votes from the mainstream parties to the new, usually populist and anti-establishment, parties. This is particularly true in the current phase of general reshaping investing European party systems nowadays, where new parties can intercept discontent towards mainstream or governing parties, especially due to corruption scandals. This evidence seems to be also supported by the rise of electoral volatility all around Europe and, in particular, in the Central and Eastern European democracies (Engler, 2016).

Chapter 4 ends testing the existence of a pattern related to time<sup>8</sup>. In other words, we tested the assumptions of the economic voting theory according to which patterns of accountability related to economy tend to develop over time, being weaker early in the transition and stronger when democratic consolidation is completed (Stokes, 2001; Roberts, 2010). We split elections in two subsamples according to the year of accession to the European Union, conventionally considered the end point of the consolidation process (Tomini, 2015). However, this time we did not find any specific pattern. Electoral integrity revealed to be significant between the two periods, constituting an important element for the accountability link that constantly – from 1993 to 2015 – affected incumbents' fate at the elections in Central and Eastern Europe.

## **5.2. Concluding Remarks**

The present dissertation tried to broaden the study of electoral accountability, proposing alternative approaches to its analysis. Citizens in Central and Eastern Europe still consider the economy – in particular GDP growth and unemployment – as the main benchmark through which judging government's performance at the elections. However, the link economy-vote is mediated by specific aspects of the political system, in particular the structure of the government and the degree of freedom of the media. In both cases, systems that make it easier for voters to assign responsibility for economic decisions strengthen (positively or negatively) the accountability link. Nevertheless, the state of the economy is not the only aspect of government performance that voters consider when they cast their vote. Electoral integrity also proved to be a relevant determinant for government

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<sup>8</sup> See Chapter 4, Table 4.6.

accountability not only as conditional factor on economic voting but also as independent measure of government's performance. This element represents the core of the thesis, suggesting a dynamic able to account for the consistent punishment suffered by governments in Central and Eastern Europe even in presence of positive economic performance (Greskovits, 1998; Stokes, 1999; Roberts, 2010). Such literature encouraged us to look at other possible determinants of electoral accountability and our findings presented in Chapter 4 encourage this choice.

In sum, this thesis tried to raise some questions and to propose a different look at electoral accountability in the eleven Central and Eastern European member States. First, it explored how specific contexts might be important for this democratic mechanism, attempting to search for possible direct and conditional effects. Further investigation on this topic concerns the inclusion of the individual level in an empirical model of electoral accountability, to capture voters' evaluations of incumbent's performance and perceptions of electoral integrity and studying how they interact with the contexts at the macro-level. Unfortunately, data limitations prevented this thesis to adopt this approach here. Data available in comparative survey projects have the limit of not covering these countries for enough time to allow us to rely on acceptable time-series. Moreover, since they are collected for different purposes, they usually do not contain all the items we would need for this kind of research.

Concluding, this thesis suggests an alternative perspective to the study of electoral accountability in Central and Eastern Europe, that starts from the traditional assumption of economic voting to enlarge the scope not only to the study of (specific) political contexts, but also to an original non-economic policy domain such as electoral integrity. It has proven important insights into, and shed light on, the non-economic determinants of electoral accountability. However, more research is still needed to improve this approach and to contribute to a much deeper understanding of the determinants of electoral accountability in the region. Several important questions remain to be addressed in future research. First of all, more specific measure for electoral integrity is needed. Even though the V-Dem clean elections index spans our eleven countries along the entire period of interest (1993-2015) and has proven to be reliable (see Chapter 4 for details), it seems to uncover specific and decisive aspects of the electoral process as other datasets, such as the

Perception of Electoral Integrity Index (Norris et al., 2016), do. The PEI dataset, built on post-election expert survey, covers in details each stage of the electoral process, from the electoral campaign to the declaration of the results. However, it has the shortcoming to cover only a limited period of time (2012-2016), but it could be particularly useful for analyses of cross-sectional data. Secondly, this thesis has the limit of not taking all possible contexts, i.e. system characteristics, into account. Future research on Central and Eastern Europe (and not only) should go further, identifying additional and specific contextual characteristics that may account for the cross-national variation in electoral accountability and, of course, improving their measurements. The present work tried to improve analysis including the European Union and the economic crisis as further elements to be considered in such studies, but it represents only one of the first attempts. Finally, future research on retrospective performance voting should consider systematically what non-economic policy domains affects this process, using peculiar variables for specific regimes by seeking to disentangle causal links between different regimes and better understand over-time changes in electoral accountability. This thesis sought to do this by considering electoral integrity along with important contextual characteristics, given the role historically exerted by elections in CEE countries not only under the Communist dictatorship (see Chapter 2) but also, and above all, during the process of transition to and consolidation of democracy started at the beginning of the 1990s and concluded with the accession to the European Union between 2004 and 2013.



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# Appendix A

## List of Parties Included in the Dataset

### Bulgaria

1. Reformist Bloc (ODS)<sup>1</sup>
2. Coalition for Bulgaria (DL/BSP/KzB)<sup>2</sup>
3. Movement for Rights and Freedom (DPS)
4. Bulgarian Euro-Left (BEL)
5. Bulgarian Business Bloc (BBB)
6. National Movement for Stability and Progress (NDS)<sup>3</sup>
7. National Union Attack/ Attack
8. Bulgarian People's Union (BNS)
9. Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB)
10. Order, Law and Justice (RZS)
11. Bulgaria Without Censorship
12. Alternative for Bulgarian Revival (ABV)
13. Patriotic Front

### Croatia

1. Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ)
2. Social Democratic Party (SDP)
3. Croatian Party of Rights (HSP)
4. Christian Social Liberal Party (HSLs)
5. Croatian Peasant Party (HSS)

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<sup>1</sup> Until 2001 contested elections as United Democratic Forces. In 2005 and 2013 split into Union of Democratic Forces and Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria (DSB). In 2009 contested elections as Blue Coalition.

<sup>2</sup> In 1997 it contested legislative elections as Democratic Left.

<sup>3</sup> It contested 2001 and 2005 elections under the name of National Movement Simeon II

6. Croatian People's Party (HNS)
7. Croatian Pensioners' Party (HSU)
8. Liberal Party (LS)
9. Istrian Democratic Assembly (IDS)
10. Democratic Serb Party (SDSS)
11. Most

## **Czech Republic**

1. Civic Democratic Party (ODS)
2. Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD)
3. Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM)
4. Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU–ČSL),  
Freedom Union – Democratic Union (US-DEU)<sup>4</sup>
5. Republicans of Miroslav Sládek
6. Civic Democratic Alliance (ODA)
7. Green Party (SZ)
8. TOP 09
9. Public Affairs (VV)
10. Action of Dissatisfied Citizens (ANO 2011)
11. Dawn of Direct Democracy

## **Estonia**

1. Estonian Reform Party (ERe)
2. Estonian Center Party (EK)
3. Pro Patria and Res Publica Union (RKI/EKK/I/IRL)<sup>5</sup>
4. Social Democratic Party (M/SDE)<sup>6</sup>
5. Estonian Greens
6. Conservative People's Party of Estonia (Era/EKRE)<sup>7</sup>
7. Estonian United People's Party (EUR)

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<sup>4</sup> They contested 2002 elections as a joint list. In 1998 and 2006 they participate separately.

<sup>5</sup> For 1995, 1999 and 2003 elections Pro Patria Union and Res Publica Party vote shares are added together.

<sup>6</sup> Until 2003 it contested elections as Moderate People's Party

<sup>7</sup> From 1995 to 1999 it contested elections as Estonian Country People's Union. From 2003 to 2011 it contested elections as People's Union of Estonia (ER).

8. Estonian Coalition Party
9. The Right Wingers
10. Estonian Free Party

## **Hungary**

1. Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP)<sup>8</sup>
2. Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Union
3. Jobbik
4. Politics Can Be Different (LMP)
5. Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ)
6. Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF)
7. Independent Smallholders, Agrarian Workers and Civic Party (FKgP)
8. Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP)
9. Agrarian Alliance – National Agrarian Party (ASZ)

## **Latvia**

1. Democratic Party "Saimnieks" (DPS)
2. People's Movement for Latvia
3. People's Party (TP), Latvian Way (LC), Latvian First Party (LPP)<sup>9</sup>
4. For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK (TB/LNNK), National Alliance (NA)<sup>10</sup>
5. Harmony Center (SC)<sup>11</sup>
6. New Era Party (JP/JL)/ Unity (V)/ Reform Party (ZRP)
7. Social Democratic Alliance
8. Latvian Farmers' Union (LZS)/ Union of Greens and Farmers (ZZS/LZP)
9. Latvian Unity Party (LVP)
10. For Latvia from the Heart
11. Latvian Association of Regions

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<sup>8</sup> For 2014 elections, votes for Unity coalition are reported. The coalition, in fact, involved the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), Together 2014 (E14), Democratic Coalition (DK), Dialogue for Hungary (PM) and Hungarian Liberal Party (MLP).

<sup>9</sup> In 1995 elections were contested only by Latvian Way. From 1998 to 2010 votes for Latvian Way, People's Party and Latvian First Party are counted together. In 2011 LC and LPP contested elections as a joint list.

<sup>10</sup> For 1998 elections voted are added to those gained by New Party (JP). From 2011 to 2014 in a joint list (NA) with All For Latvia!

<sup>11</sup> In 1995 it contested elections with Socialist Party of Latvia. From 2006 to 2014 it contested elections as SC.

## 12. Political Union of Economists (TPA)

## Lithuania

1. Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS-LKD)
2. Social Democratic Party (LSDP)/ Democratic Labour Party (LDDP)<sup>12</sup>
3. Labour Party (DP)
4. Order and Justice (TT)
5. Liberal Movement
6. Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania (LRRRA)
7. The Way of Courage
8. Lithuanian Peasants Party (LVP/LVLS)/ Lithuanian Peasant and Greens Union (LVZS)
9. New Union – Social Liberals (NS)
10. Liberal and Center Union (LiCS)<sup>13</sup>
11. Lithuanian Christian Democratic Party, Christian Democratic Union (LKDP)
12. Christian Conservative Social Union (KKSS)
13. Lithuanian Liberty Union (LLS)
14. Young Lithuania

## Poland

1. Democratic Left Alliance (SLD)/ United Left (ZL)
2. Polish People's Party (PSL)
3. Democratic Union (UD)/ Freedom Union (UW)
4. Labour United (UP)<sup>14</sup>
5. Confederation of Independent Poland (KPN)
6. Nonpartisan Bloc for Support of Reforms (BBWR)
7. German Minority
8. Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS)
9. Civic Platform (PO)
10. Law and Justice (PiS)

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<sup>12</sup> For 1996 and 2000 elections Social Democratic Party (LSDP) and Democratic Labour Party (LDDP) shares are counted together.

<sup>13</sup> For 1996 and 2000 elections Liberal Union (LLiS) and Center Union (LCS) vote shares are counted together. For 2008 elections National Resurrection Party votes are added since they merged in 2011.

<sup>14</sup> It contested 2005 elections in coalition with Democratic Left Alliance (SLD). In 2015 contested elections with SLD, Your Movement (TR), Polish Socialist Party (PPS) and the Greens (PZ) as United Left (ZL)

11. League of Polish Families (LPR)
12. Self-Defence of the Republic of Poland (SRP)
13. Palikot's Movement (RP)
14. Liberal Democratic Congress (KLD)
15. Peasant Alliance (PL)
16. Christian Democrats (PC)
17. Kukiz'15
18. Modern (N)

## **Romania**

1. Romanian Democratic Convention (CDR)/National Liberal Party (PNL)
2. Social Democratic Party (PSD), Social Liberal Union (USL)<sup>15</sup>
3. Democratic Liberal Party (PDL), Right Romania Alliance (ARD)<sup>16</sup>
4. Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR)
5. Greater Romania Party (PRM)
6. Romanian National Unity Party (PUNR)
7. People's Party – Dan Diaconescu (PP-DD)

## **Slovakia**

1. People's Party – Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS)
2. Party of the Democratic Left (SDL), Direction – Social Democracy (Smer-SD)<sup>17</sup>
3. Party of the Hungarian Community (SMK-MKP)
4. Christian Democratic Movement (KDH)<sup>18</sup>
5. Union of the Workers of Slovakia (ZRS)
6. Slovak National Party (SNS)
7. Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKU-DS)<sup>19</sup>
8. Party of Civic Understanding (SOP)

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<sup>15</sup> Until 2001 it contested elections as Party of Social Democracy in Romania (PDSR), before merging with Romanian Social Democratic Party (PSDR) and changing its name in PSD. Until 2008 elections votes for PSD are counted. In 2012 elections PSD contested elections in a joint list (USL) with, among other minor parties, PNL.

<sup>16</sup> Until 2007 PDL contested elections as Democratic Party (PD). In 2012 it contested elections as part of an alliance with other right-wing minor parties.

<sup>17</sup> SDL contested 1998 elections as major partner of the electoral coalition Common Choice. In 2005 SDL and Smer-SD merged.

<sup>18</sup> For 1998 elections votes gained by Slovak Democratic Union (SDK) are counted.

<sup>19</sup> In 1994 it contested elections as Democratic Union.

9. Alliance of the New Citizen (ANO)/ IDEA
10. Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS)
11. Most–Híd (MH)
12. Freedom and Solidarity (SaS)
13. Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OL'aNO)

## **Slovenia**

1. Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS)
2. Slovenian People's Party (SLS)
3. Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS)<sup>20</sup>
4. Slovene Christian Democrats (SKD)
5. Social Democrats (ZLSD/SD)
6. Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (DeSUS)
7. Slovenian National Party (SNS)
8. New Slovenia – Christian Democrats (NSi)
9. Zares – Social Liberals
10. Zoran Janković's List – Positive Slovenia/ Positive Slovenia (PS)
11. Civic List (DL)
12. Party of Modern Center (SMC)
13. United Left
14. Alliance of Alenka Bratušek (ZaAB)

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<sup>20</sup> It contested 1996 and 2000 elections as Social Democratic Party of Slovenia.

## **Appendix B**

### **Summary Election Results for 11 CEE democracies (1993-2015)**

The tables contained in this section present vote and seat totals for all parties that won seats and/or at least 2 per cent of the valid vote in the PR quota. For this study, in fact, we also included votes for parties that participated in a government, or did not but excluding those below the 2 percent threshold. There were several difficulties with calculating pairs of vote shares in our sample countries, given the ‘fluidity’ of their party systems. Many parties frequently changed their names between elections, because of party mergers and/or splits. If two parties merged from one election to another, we added their totals together in order to obtain their vote share at the previous election. In case of party split between two elections, only the vote share of the main successor was counted. For more details about the way in which parties have been considered in each election, see the list of political parties in Central and Eastern Europe collected in Appendix A.

**Table B1. Bulgaria (1997-2014)**

Party	1997		2001		2005		2009		2013		2014	
	Vote	Seats										
Reformist Bloc	52.3%	137	18.2%	51	14.1%	37	6.8%	15	4.3%	0	8.9%	23
Coalition for Bulgaria	22.1%	58	17.1%	48	31.0%	82	17.7%	40	26.6%	84	15.4%	39
Movement for Right and Freedom	7.6%	19	7.4%	21	12.8%	34	14.0%	37	11.3%	36	14.8%	38
Bulgarian Euro-Left	5.5%	14										
Bulgarian Business Bloc	4.9%	12										
National Movement for Stability and Progress			42.7%	120	19.9%	53	3.0%	0				
National Union Attack/Attack					8.1%	21	9.4%	21	7.3%	23	4.5%	11
Bulgarian People's Union					5.2%	13						
Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria							39.7%	117	30.5%	97	32.7%	84
Order, Law and Justice							4.1%	10	1.7%	0		
Patriotic Front									3.7%	0	7.3%	19
Bulgaria Without Censorship											5.7%	15
Alternative for Bulgarian Revival											4.1%	11
Other	7.6%	0	14.6%	0	8.9%	0	5.3%	0	14.6%	0	6.6%	0
All	100%	240	100%	240	100%	240	100%	240	100%	240	100%	240

**Table B2.** Croatia (2000-2015)

Party	2000		2003		2007		2011		2015	
	Vote	Seats								
Croatian Democratic Union	24.4%	46	33.2%	66	35.9%	66	23.5%	41	20.6%	50
Social Democratic Party	40.8%	44	23.3%	34	30.8%	56	41.1%	61	17.9%	42
Croatian Party of Rights	5.3%	5	6.5%	8	3.4%	1	0.6%	1	0.5%	3
Christian Social Liberal Party		24				2			0.3%	2
Croatian Peasant Party	15.6%	17	7.3%	10	6.4%	6	0.6%	1	1.6%	1
Croatian People's Party	1.4%	0	8.3%	10	6.7%	7		13	3.7%	9
Croatian Pensioners' Party	1.9%	0			4.0%	1		3	0.5%	2
Liberal Party		2		2						
Croatian Labour Party							5.1%	6		3
Istrian Democratic Assembly		4		4		3		3		3
Democratic Serb Party				3		3		3		2
Most									13.4%	19
Other	10.6%	9	21.4%	14	12.8%	8	29.1%	19	41.5%	15
All	100%	151	100%	151	100%	153	100%	151	100%	151

**Table B3.** Czech Republic (1996-2013)

Party	1996		1998		2002		2006		2010		2013	
	Vote	Seats										
Civic Democratic Party	29.6%	68	27.7%	63	24.5%	58	35.4%	81	20.2%	53	7.7%	16
Czech Social Democratic Party	26.4%	61	32.3%	74	30.2%	70	32.3%	74	22.1%	56	20.5%	50
Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia	10.3%	22	11.0%	24	18.5%	41	12.8%	26	4.4%	26	14.9%	33
Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party / Freedom Union – Democratic Union	8.1%	18	17.6%	20	14.3%	31	7.2%	13	4.4%		6.8%	14
Republicans of Miroslav Sládek	8.0%	18	3.9%	0								
Civic Democratic Alliance	6.4%	13										
Green Party (SZ)							6.3%	6	2.4%			
TOP09									16.7%	41	12.0%	26
Public Affairs									10.9%	24		
ANO 2011											18.7%	47
Dawn of Direct Democracy											6.9%	14
Other	11.2%	0	7.5%	0	12.5%	0	12.6%	0	18.9%	0	20.6%	0
All	100%	200	100%	200	100%	200	100%	200	100%	200	100%	200

**Table B4. Estonia (1995-2015)**

Party	1995		1999		2003		2007		2011		2015	
	Vote	Seats	Votes	Seats								
Estonian Reform Party	16.2%	19	15.9%	18	17.7%	19	27.8%	31	28.6%	33	27.7%	30
Estonian Center Party	14.2%	16	23.4%	28	25.4%	28	26.1%	29	23.3%	26	24.8%	27
Pro Patria and Res Publica Union	7.9%	8	16.1%	18	31.9%	35	17.9%	19	20.5%	23	13.7%	14
Moderates People's Party/ Social Democratic Party	6.0%	6	15.2%	17	7.0%	6	10.6%	10	17.1%	19	15.2%	15
Estonian Greens							7.1%	6	3.8%	0		
Conservative People's Party of Estonia	32.2%	41	7.3%	7	13.0%	13	7.1%	6	2.1%	0	8.1%	7
Estonian United People's Party	5.9%	6	6.1%	6	2.2%	0						
Estonian Coalition Party			7.6%	7						-		
The Right Wingers	5.0%	5										
Estonian Free Party											8.7%	8
Other	12.6%	0	8.4%	0	2.8%	0	3.4%	0	4.6%	0	1.8%	0
All	100%	101	100%	101	100%	101	100%	101	100%	101	100%	101

**Table B5.** Hungary (1994-2014)

Party	1994		1998		2002		2006		2010		2014	
	Vote	Seats	Votes	Seats								
Hungarian Socialist Party/Unity	33.0%	209	32.2%	134	42.1%	178	43.2%	164	19.3%	59	25.6%	38
Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Union	7.0%	20	28.2%	162	41.4%	189	42.0%	186	52.7%	263	44.9%	133
Jobbik							2.2%	0	16.7%	47	20.2%	23
Politics Can Be Different									7.5%	16	5.3%	5
Alliance of Free Democrats	19.7%	69	7.9%	24	5.6%	19	6.5%	18				
Hungarian Democratic Forum	11.7%	38	3.1%	17	0%	0	5%	11				
Independent Smallholders, Agrarian Workers and Civic Party	8.8%	26	13.8%	48	0.8%	0						
Christian Democratic People's Party	7%	22										
Agrarian Alliance – National Agrarian Party	0.6%	1										
Other	12.2%	1	14.8%	0	10.1%	0	1.1%	7	3.8%	1	4.0%	0
All	100%	386	100%	386	100%	386	100%	386	100%	386	100%	199

**Table B6.** Latvia (1995-2014)

Party	1995		1998		2002		2006		2010		2011		2014	
	Vote	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats								
Democratic Party "Saimnieks"	15.2%	18	1.6%	0										
People's Movement for Latvia	15.0%	16	1.7%	0										
People's Party/ Latvian Way/ Latvian First Party	14.7%	17	39.4%	45	31.2%	30	28.3%	33	7.8%	8	2.4%	0		
For Fatherland and Freedom-LNNK/ National Alliance	12.0%	14	22.0%	25	5.4%	7	7.0%	8	7.8%	8	13.9%	14	16.6%	17
Harmony Center	11.2%	11	14.2%	16	19.1%	25	14.5%	17	26.6%	29	28.4%	31	23.0%	24
New Era Party/ Unity/ Reform Party					24.0%	26	16.5%	18	31.9%	33	40.0%	42	21.9%	23
Social Democratic Alliance			12.9%	14	4.0%	0								
Latvian Farmers' Union/ Union of Greens and Farmers	18.7%	16	2.5%	0	9.5%	12	16.8%	18	20.1%	22	12.2%	13	19.5%	21
Latvian Unity Party	7.2%	8	0.5%	0										
For Latvia from the Heart													6.8%	7
Latvian Association of Regions													6.7%	8
Political Union of Economists	1.5%	0												
Other	4.5%	0	5.3%	0	6.8%	0	16.9%	6	5.8%	0	3.1%	0	5.5%	0
All	100%	100	100%	100	100%	100	100%	100	100%	100	100%	100	100%	100

**Table B7. Lithuania (1996-2012)**

Party	1996		2000		2004		2008		2012	
	Vote	Seats								
Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats	31.3%	70	8.6%	9	14.8%	25	19.7%	45	15.0%	33
Social Democratic Party/ Democratic Labour Party	16.9%	24	31.1%	51	20.7%	31	11.7%	25	18.3%	38
Labour Party					28.4%	39	8.9%	10	19.8%	29
Order and Justice					11.3%	10	12.7%	15	7.3%	11
Liberal Movement							5.7%	11	8.6%	10
Electoral Action of Poles	3.1%	1	1.9%	2	3.8%	2	4.8%	3	5.8%	8
The Way of Courage									7.9%	7
Lithuanian Peasants Party/ Peasant and Greens Union	1.7%	1	4.1%	4	6.6%	10	3.7%	3	3.9%	1
New Union – Social Liberals			19.6%	29			3.6%	1		
Liberal and Center Union	10.6%	14	20.1%	36	9.2%	18	20.4%	24	2.1%	
Lithuanian Christian Democratic Party/ Christian Democratic Union	13.0%	16	7.3%	3	1.4%	0				
Union of Moderate/ Christian Conservative Social Union			2.0%	1	1.9%	0				
Lithuanian Liberty Union			1.3%	1	0.3%	0				
Young Lithuania	4.0%	1	1.1%	1	0.2%	0				
Other	19.9%	14	3.0%	4	1.4%	6	8.8%	4	11.3%	4
All	100%	141	100%	141	100%	141	100%	141	100%	141

**Table B8.** Poland (1993-2015)

Party	1993		1997		2001		2005		2007		2011		2015	
	Vote	Seats	Votes	Seats	Votes	Seats								
Democratic Left Alliance/ Left and Democrats/ United Left	20.4%	171	27.1%	164	41.0%	216	11.3%	55	13.2%	53	8.2%	27	7.5%	0
Polish People's Party	15.4%	132	7.3%	27	9.0%	42	7.0%	25	8.9%	31	8.4%	28	5.1%	16
Democratic Union/ Freedom Union	10.6%	74	13.4%	60	3.1%	0								
Labour United	7.3%	41	4.7%	0										
Confederation of Independent Poland	5.8%	22												
Nonpartisan Bloc for Support of Reforms	5.4%	16												
German Minority	0.7%	4	0.4%	2	0.4%	2	0.4%	2	0.3%	1	0.2%	1	0.2%	1
Solidarity Electoral Action			33.8%	201	5.6%	0								
Civic Platform					12.7%	65	24.1%	133	41.5%	209	39.2%	207	15.1%	138
Law and Justice					9.5%	44	27.0%	155	32.1%	166	29.9%	157	37.6%	235
League of Polish Families					7.9%	38	8.0%	34	1.3%	0				
Self-Defence of the Republic of Poland			0.1%	0	10.2%	53	11.4%	56	1.5%	0				
Palikot's Movement											10.0%	40		

**Table B8. (Continued)**

Liberal Democratic Congress	4.0%	0												
Peasant Alliance	2.4%	0												
Center Agreement	4.4%	0												
Kukiz'15												8.8%	42	
Modern												7.6%	28	
Other	23.6%	0	13.2%	6	0.6%	0	10.8%	0	1.2%	0	4.1%	0	18.1%	0
All	100%	460	100%	460	100%	460	100%	460	100%	460	100%	460	100%	460

**Table B9.** Romania (1996-2012)

Party	1996		2000		2004		2008		2012	
	Vote	Seats								
Romanian Democratic Convention/ National Liberal Party	30.2%	122	11.9%	30			18.6%	65		
Social Democratic Party/ Social Liberal Union	21.5%	91	36.6%	155	36.6%	132	33.1%	114	58.6%	273
Democratic Liberal Party/ Right Romania Alliance	12.9%	53	7.0%	31	31.3%	112	32.4%	115	16.5%	56
Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania	6.6%	25	6.8%	27	6.2%	22	6.2%	22	5.1%	18
Greater Romania Party	4.5%	19	19.5%	84	12.9%	48	3.2%	0		
Romanian National Unity Party	4.4%	18	1.4%	0						
People's Party – Dan Diaconescu									13.9%	47
Other	19.9%	15	16.8%	18	13%	18	6.5%	18	5.9%	18
All	100%	343	100%	345	100%	332	100%	334	100%	412

**Table B10.** Slovakia (1994-2012)

Party	1994		1998		2002		2006		2010		2012	
	Vote	Seats	Votes	Seats								
People's Party – Movement for a Democratic Slovakia	35.0%	61	27.0%	43	19.5%	36	8.8%	15	4.3%	0	0.9%	0
Party of the Democratic Left (SDL), Direction – Social Democracy	10.4%	18	14.7%	23	13.5%	25	29.1%	50	34.8%	62	44.4%	83
Party of the Hungarian Community/ Coalition	10.2%	17	9.1%	15	11.2%	20	11.7%	20	4.3%	0	4.3%	0
Christian Democratic Movement	10.1%	17	26.3%	42	8.3%	15	8.3%	14	8.5%	15	8.8%	16
Union of the Workers of Slovakia	7.3%	13	1.3%	0								
Slovak National Party	5.4%	9	9.1%	14	3.3%	0	11.7%	20	5.1%	9	4.5%	0
Slovak Democratic and Christian Union	8.6%	15			15.1%	28	18.4%	31	15.4%	28	6.1%	11
Party of Civic Understanding			8.0%	13	1.4%	0						
Alliance of the New Citizen/ IDEA					8.0%	15	1.4%	0				
Communist Party of Slovakia			2.8%	0	6.3%	11	3.9%	0				
Most–Híd									8.1%	14	6.9%	13
Freedom and Solidarity									12.1%	22	5.9%	11
Ordinary People and Independent Personalities											8.5%	16
Other	13.0%	0	1.7%	0	13.4%	0	6.7%	0	7.4%	0	9.7%	0
All	100%	150	100%	150	100%	150	100%	150	100%	150	100%	150

**Table B11.** Slovenia (1996-2014)

Party	1996		2000		2004		2008		2011		2014	
	Vote	Seats	Votes	Seats								
Liberal Democracy of Slovenia	27.0%	25	36.3%	34	22.8%	23	5.2%	5	1.5%	0		
Slovenian People's Party	19.4%	19	18.2%	17	6.8%	7	5.2%	5	6.8%	6	3.9%	0
Slovenian Democratic Party	16.1%	16	15.8%	14	29.1%	29	29.3%	28	26.2%	26	20.7%	21
Slovene Christian Democrats	9.6%	10										
Social Democrats	9.0%	9	12.1%	11	10.2%	10	30.4%	29	10.5%	10	5.9%	6
Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia	4.3%	5	5.2%	4	4.0%	4	7.4%	7	6.9%	6	10.2%	10
Slovenian National Party	3.2%	4	4.4%	4	6.3%	6	5.4%	5				
New Slovenia – Christian Democrats					9.1%	9	3.4%	0	4.9%	4	5.6%	5
Zares – Social Liberals							9.4%	9	0.6%	0		
Zoran Janković's List – Positive Slovenia/ Positive Slovenia									28.5%	28	2.9%	
Civic List (DL)									8.4%	8	0.6%	
Party of Modern Center (SMC)											34.4%	36
United Left											5.9%	6
Alliance of Alenka Bratušek											4.4%	4
Other	11.4%	2	8.0%	6	12.2%	2	4.3%	2	5.9%	2	5.5%	2
All	100%	90	100%	90	100%	90	100%	90	100%	90	100%	90



## **Appendix C**

### **Indices for Clarity of Responsibility, Effective Number of Parties, Electoral Systems and Freedom of the Press (1993-2015)**

Four ‘contextual’ variables are collected. In order to measure government clarity of responsibility (*clarity*), an index is built, taking into consideration three important features of government status: parliamentary support, division of power, and stability, assigning one point for each aspect considered to be “clear”. Hence elections were coded as having values between 0 and 3. The effective number of electoral parties (*enep*) is used to calculate the relative strength and parliamentary viability of parties into account, particularly in terms of availability of governing alternatives. A third, dummy variable (0-1) is used to classify electoral systems (*ele\_sys*), dividing them between mixed (one) and proportional (zero) system. Finally, the variable measuring freedom of the press (*freepress*), is used to measure the degree of freedom in the “flow of information” in each country, ranking them in a scale of 0 to 100.

**Table C1.** Clarity of Responsibility Index in Central and Eastern Europe (1993-2015)

Country	Year	Parliamentary Support	Diversion of Power	Stability	Total Score
<b>Bulgaria</b>	1997	1	1	1	3
	2001	1	0	1	2
	2005	1	0	1	2
	2009	1	0	1	2
	2013	0	1	1	2
	2014	0	0	0	0
<b>Croatia</b>	2000	1	1	1	3
	2003	0	0	0	0
	2007	0	1	0	1
	2011	0	0	0	0
	2015	1	0	1	2
<b>Czech Rep.</b>	1996	1	0	1	2
	1998	0	0	0	0
	2002	0	1	1	2
	2006	1	0	1	2
	2010	0	0	1	1
	2013	1	0	1	2
<b>Estonia</b>	1995	1	0	1	2
	1999	0	0	0	0
	2003	1	0	1	2
	2007	1	0	0	1
	2011	1	0	1	2
	2015	1	0	1	2
<b>Hungary</b>	1994	1	0	1	2
	1998	1	0	1	2
	2002	1	0	1	2
	2006	1	0	1	2
	2010	0	1	0	1
	2014	1	0	1	2
<b>Latvia</b>	1995	0	0	0	0
	1998	1	0	0	1
	2002	1	0	1	2
	2006	1	0	0	1
	2010	1	0	0	1
	2011	1	0	0	1
<b>Lithuania</b>	2014	0	0	1	1
	1996	1	1	1	3
	2000	1	0	1	2
	2004	0	0	1	1
	2008	0	0	1	1
	2012	1	0	1	2
<b>Poland</b>	1993	1	0	0	1
	1997	1	0	0	1
	2001	1	0	1	2
	2005	1	0	0	1
	2007	1	0	0	1
	2011	1	0	1	2
<b>Romania</b>	2015	1	0	1	2
	1996	0	0	0	0
	2000	1	0	0	1
	2004	0	0	1	1
	2008	0	0	0	0
	2012	0	0	0	0
<b>Slovakia</b>	1994	1	0	0	1
	1998	1	0	1	2
	2002	1	0	1	2
	2006	1	0	1	2
	2010	1	0	1	2
	2012	0	0	0	0
<b>Slovenia</b>	1996	1	0	0	1
	2000	1	0	1	2
	2004	1	0	1	2
	2008	1	0	1	2
	2011	1	0	1	2
	2014	1	0	0	1

**Table C2.** Effective Number of Parties (ENEP) in Central and Eastern Europe (1993-2015)

Country	Year	ENEP
<b>Bulgaria</b>	1997	3.8
	2001	3.0
	2005	3.9
	2009	5.8
	2013	4.4
	2014	5.3
<b>Croatia</b>	2000	4.0
	2003	5.5
	2007	5.9
	2011	4.2
	2015	4.4
<b>Czech Republic</b>	1996	7.3
	1998	5.3
	2002	4.7
	2006	4.8
	2010	3.9
<b>Estonia</b>	2003	6.9
	2007	5.4
	2011	5.0
	2015	4.8
	1994	7.0
	1998	5.7
<b>Hungary</b>	2002	5.2
	2006	2.9
	2010	2.8
	2014	2.8
	1995	6.2
<b>Latvia</b>	1998	9.6
	2002	6.9
	2006	6.8
	2010	7.5
	2011	4.4
	2014	5.1
<b>Lithuania</b>	1996	4.6
	2000	7.5
	2004	7.2
	2008	5.8
	2012	8.9
<b>Poland</b>	1993	13.8
	1997	9.8
	2001	4.6
	2005	4.5
	2007	5.9
	2011	3.3
<b>Romania</b>	2015	4.6
	1996	7.0
	2000	6.1
	2004	5.2
	2008	3.9
<b>Slovakia</b>	2012	3.9
	1994	5.4
	1998	5.8
	2002	5.3
	2006	8.9
	2010	6.1
<b>Slovenia</b>	2012	5.5
	1996	8.4
	2000	6.3
	2004	5.1
	2008	6.0
	2011	4.9
	2014	5.6

**Table C3.** Type of Electoral System in Central and Eastern Europe (1993-2015)

Country	Year	Electoral System
<b>Bulgaria</b>	1997	Proportional
	2001	Proportional
	2005	Proportional
	2009	Mixed
	2013	Proportional
	2014	Proportional
<b>Croatia</b>	2000	Proportional
	2003	Proportional
	2007	Proportional
	2011	Proportional
	2015	Proportional
<b>Czech Republic</b>	1996	Proportional
	1998	Proportional
	2002	Proportional
	2006	Proportional
	2010	Proportional
	2013	Proportional
<b>Estonia</b>	1995	Proportional
	1999	Proportional
	2003	Proportional
	2007	Proportional
	2011	Proportional
	2015	Proportional
<b>Hungary</b>	1994	Mixed
	1998	Mixed
	2002	Mixed
	2006	Mixed
	2010	Mixed
	2014	Mixed
<b>Latvia</b>	1995	Proportional
	1998	Proportional
	2002	Proportional
	2006	Proportional
	2010	Proportional
	2011	Proportional
<b>Lithuania</b>	2014	Proportional
	1996	Mixed
	2000	Mixed
	2004	Mixed
	2008	Mixed
	2012	Mixed
<b>Poland</b>	1993	Proportional
	1997	Proportional
	2001	Proportional
	2005	Proportional
	2007	Proportional
	2011	Proportional
<b>Romania</b>	2015	Proportional
	1996	Proportional
	2000	Proportional
	2004	Proportional
	2008	Mixed
	2012	Mixed
<b>Slovakia</b>	1994	Proportional
	1998	Proportional
	2002	Proportional
	2006	Proportional
	2010	Proportional
	2012	Proportional
<b>Slovenia</b>	1996	Proportional
	2000	Proportional
	2004	Proportional
	2008	Proportional
	2011	Proportional
	2014	Proportional

**Table C4.** Freedom of the Press Index in Central and Eastern Europe (1993-2015)

<b>Country</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Freedom of the Press</b>
	1997	<b>64</b>
	2001	<b>71</b>
<b>Bulgaria</b>	2005	<b>66</b>
	2009	<b>66</b>
	2013	<b>61</b>
	2014	<b>62</b>
	2000	<b>50</b>
	2003	<b>63</b>
<b>Croatia</b>	2007	<b>64</b>
	2011	<b>59</b>
	2015	<b>60</b>
	1996	<b>81</b>
	1998	<b>80</b>
<b>Czech Republic</b>	2002	<b>77</b>
	2006	<b>82</b>
	2010	<b>81</b>
	2013	<b>80</b>
	1995	<b>76</b>
	1999	<b>80</b>
<b>Estonia</b>	2003	<b>83</b>
	2007	<b>84</b>
	2011	<b>82</b>
	2015	<b>84</b>
	1994	<b>62</b>
	1998	<b>72</b>
<b>Hungary</b>	2002	<b>77</b>
	2006	<b>79</b>
	2010	<b>70</b>
	2014	<b>63</b>
	1995	<b>79</b>
	1998	<b>79</b>
	2002	<b>82</b>
<b>Latvia</b>	2006	<b>81</b>
	2010	<b>74</b>
	2011	<b>74</b>
	2014	<b>72</b>
	1996	<b>80</b>
	2000	<b>80</b>
<b>Lithuania</b>	2004	<b>82</b>
	2008	<b>82</b>
	2012	<b>76</b>
	1993	<b>70</b>
	1997	<b>75</b>
<b>Poland</b>	2001	<b>81</b>
	2005	<b>79</b>
	2007	<b>76</b>
	2011	<b>75</b>
	2015	<b>74</b>
	1996	<b>53</b>
	2000	<b>56</b>
<b>Romania</b>	2004	<b>53</b>
	2008	<b>56</b>
	2012	<b>58</b>
	1994	<b>45</b>
	1998	<b>70</b>
<b>Slovakia</b>	2002	<b>79</b>
	2006	<b>80</b>
	2010	<b>78</b>
	2012	<b>78</b>
	1996	<b>72</b>
	2000	<b>79</b>
<b>Slovenia</b>	2004	<b>81</b>
	2008	<b>76</b>
	2011	<b>75</b>
	2014	<b>75</b>

