

Political systems and party systems in Central Europe

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Political systems

- Republic vs. Monarchy :-)
- Parliamentary vs. Presidential (Semi-presidential) systems
- Constitution written or not
- Legal system: continental vs. Anglo-Saxon

Basics: Political system of Poland

- Parliamentary democracy
- Sejm (460 deputies); proportional representation (4years).
- Senate (100); First-past-the-post voting method, one senator per one constituency (4 years).
- President elected by popular vote (5years).
- Government: Council of Ministers, led by a prime minister.



Basics: Political system of the Czech republic

- Parliamentary democracy
- Chamber of Deputies (200 deputies); proportional representation (4years)
- Senate (81); two-round runoff election, one senator per one district (6 years).
- President elected by a popular vote (5years).
- Government: ministers led by a prime minister



Basics: Political system of Slovakia

- Parliamentary democracy
- National Council of the Slovak Republic (150 deputies; unicameral); proportional representation (4years).
- President elected by popular vote (5years).
- Government: ministers led by a prime minister.



Basics: Political system of Hungary

- Parliamentary democracy
- National Assembly (199); first-past-the-post election with a single round (4years).
- President elected by National Assembly (5years).
- Government: ministers led by a prime minister.



Summary

	Poland	Czech Rep.	Slovakia	Hungary
Parliament	Bicameral	Bicameral	Unicameral	Unicameral
Parliamentary Elections	Proportional	Proportional	Proportional	Majoritarian
President elected	Popular vote	Popular vote	Popular vote	Parliament
Form	Parliamentary democracy	Parliamentary democracy	Parliamentary democracy	Parliamentary democracy

Parliamentary vs. Semi-presidential systems

- Direct election of presidents create a problem for executive branch.
- Presidents can obstruct governmental politics.
- Example: President Zeman (CR) and his personal attitude to Foreign Policy (Russia; China).
- Due to shortcomings in constitution president can play his own 'power game'
 - E.g.: formulation in constitution: 'president appoints prime minister' – no further obligations

Party politics in Poland I.

- Multi-party system
- First semi-free election in 1989 (65% for CP; 35% for opposition); domination of Solidarity Movement.
- 1990: conflict between leaders of Solidarity about 'thick line after communism' (Mazowiecki YES Vs. Walesa NO). Split of Solidarity (more than 20 post-solidarity subjects)



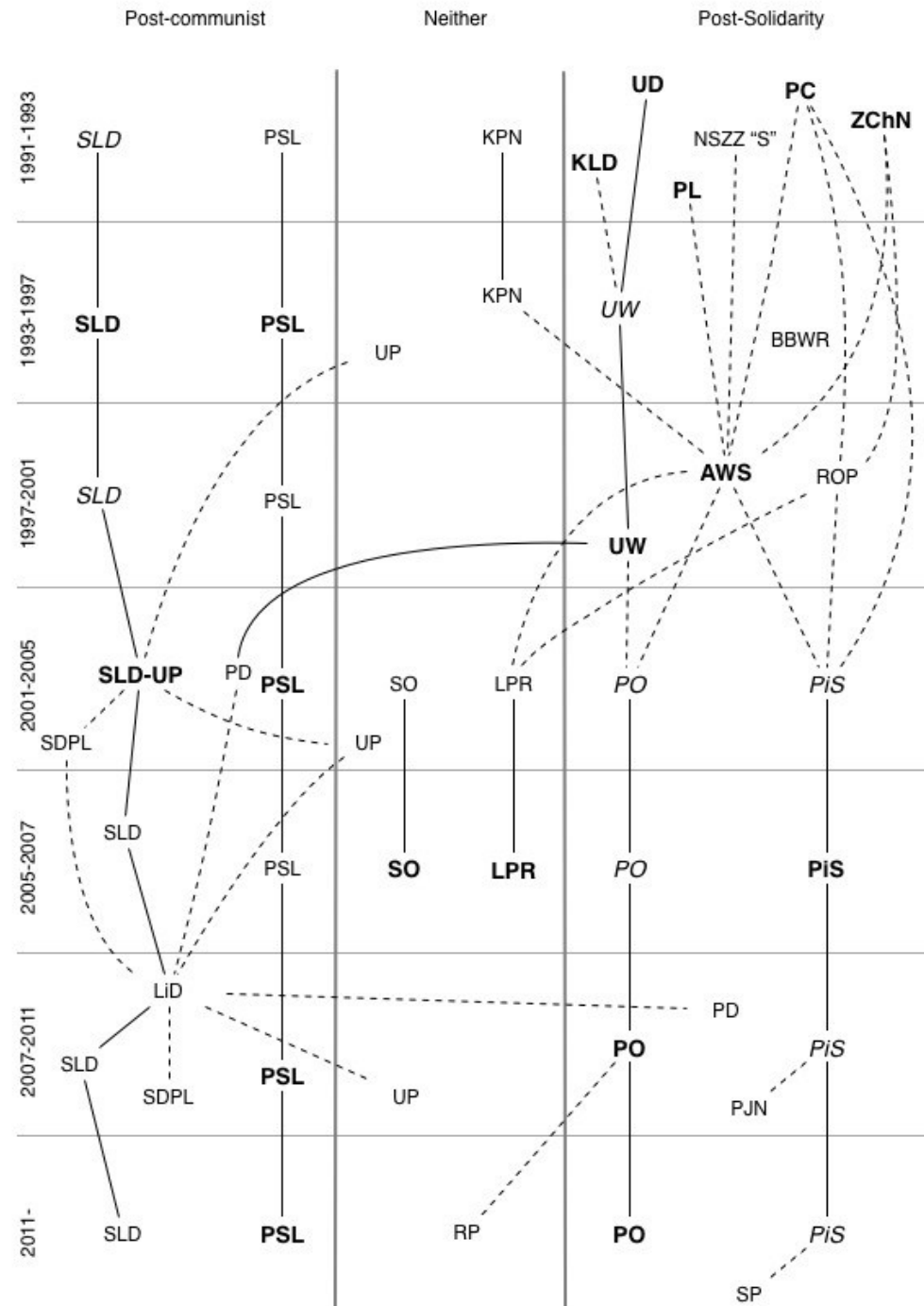
Party politics in Poland II.

- Communist party transformed to Social democratic party (still ostracized).
- First presidential elections in 1990; 2nd round: Walesa Vs. Tyminski (first signs of populism).
- Early 1990s: extreme fractionalization.
 - Example: 1991 election – 29 parties in the parliament
- Due to extreme fractionalization, the governments were extremely weak.
- Permanent conflict between president, parliament and government (PM).

Party politics in Poland III.

- 1990s: situation starts to calm down (temporarily); moderate tendencies; consolidation of two main political parties (SLD and AWS) and two smaller alternatives (PSL and UW) (left↔right).
- 2000s: new wave of fragmentation and polarization; rise of populism; old parties lost their support; new political subjects – the most successful Law and Justice.
- Strong position of catholic church as conservative power.
- Party system is not fully consolidated.

Party system of Poland 1990-2010



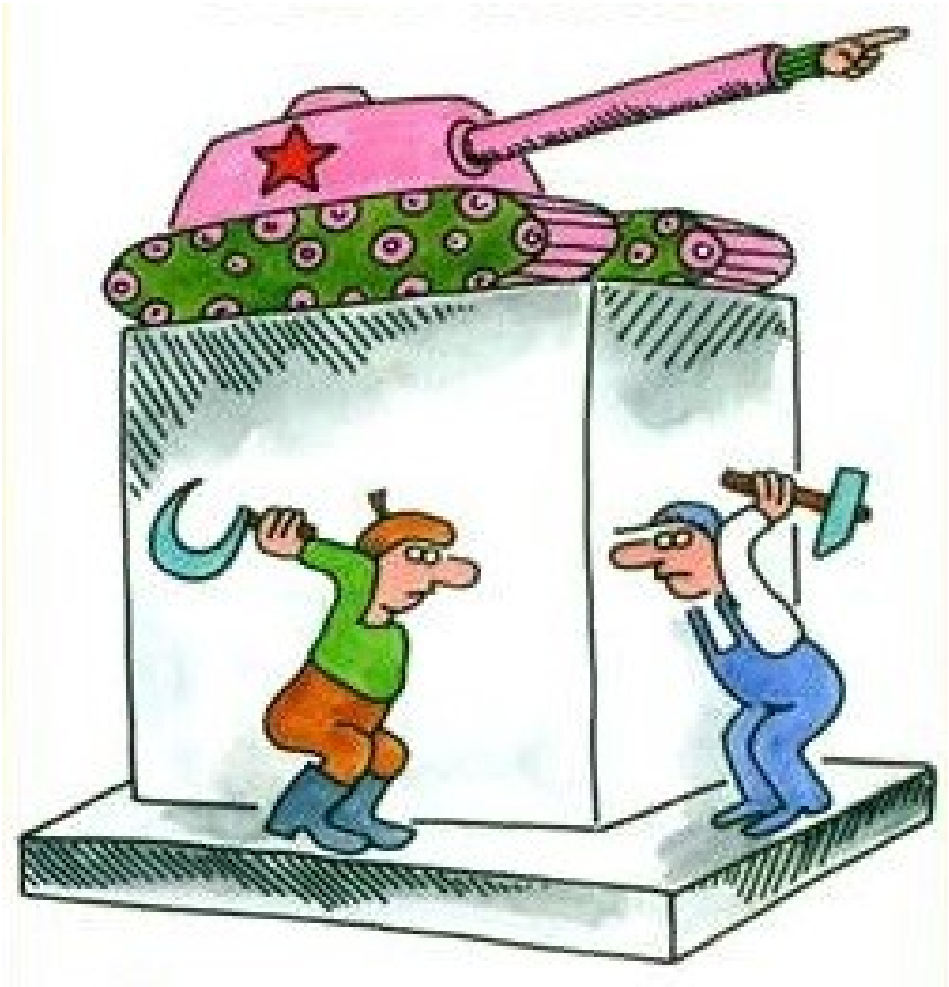
Party politics in the Czech Republic I.

- Post-revolutionary period affected by dissolution of Civic Forum (CDF, CM).
- Communist party refused to reform.
- Political subjects that renewed their tradition from the period of the First Republic (social democrats; national socialists).
- Formation of party system that lasted more than a decade.
 - Two main parties (CDF, CPSD); few smaller (CDU-CSPP; RP; CDA)

Party politics in the Czech Republic II.

- 1990s: problematic position of Communist Party. No space for cooperation. Stable support and mandates in the parliament → problem (parliamentary math).
- Coalitions often weak (problem with majorities) with strong position of small parties.
- Big parties wanted change (not necessarily fair).
 - Coalition agreement
 - Reform of electoral system (unsuccessful)
- System stabilized and consolidated

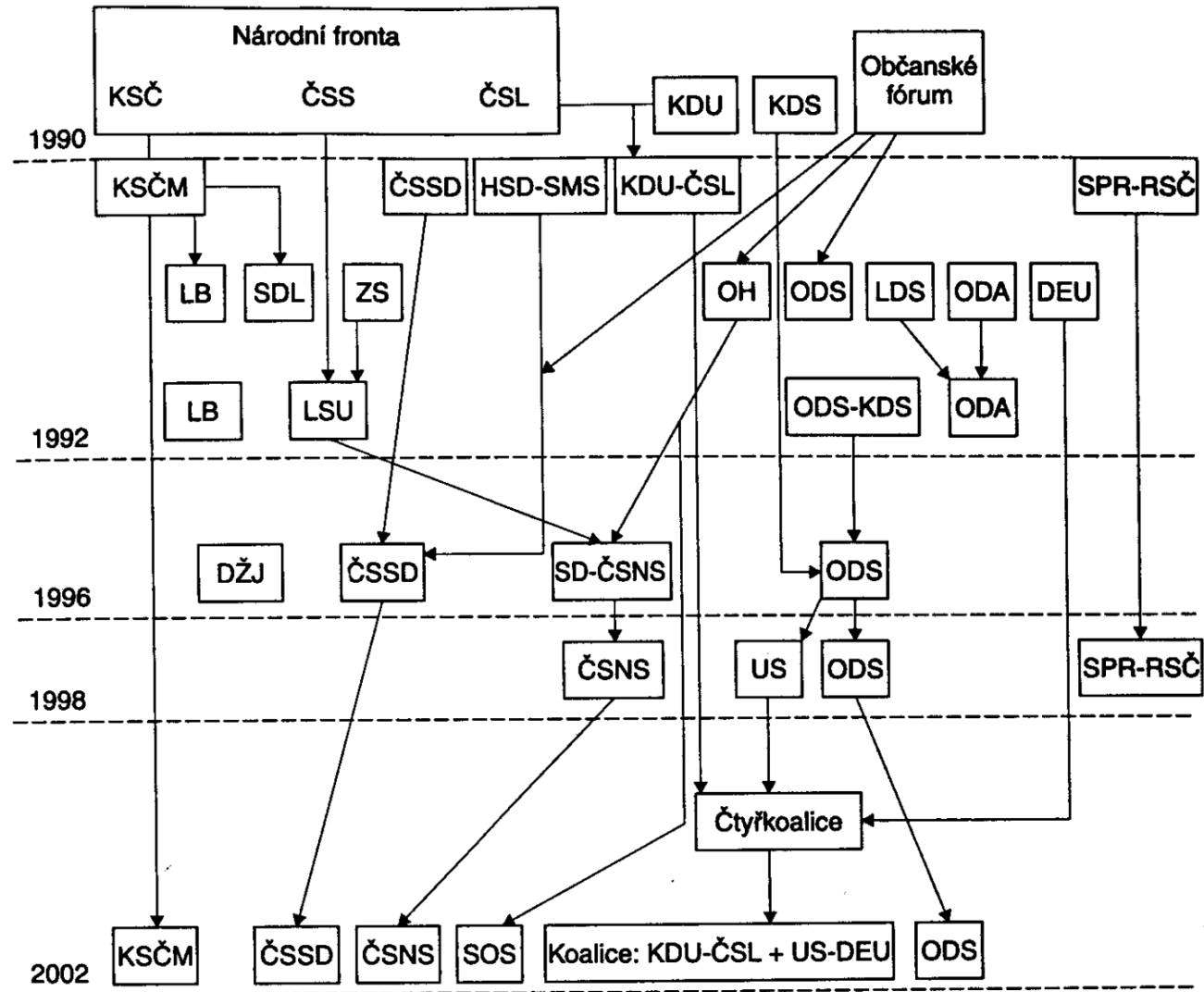
What is your opinion: Is orthodox communist party a threat to democratic regime?



Party politics in the Czech Republic III.

- 2000s: party system starts to deteriorate; corruption scandals and political crisis.
- Old parties has started lost their position.
- New populist parties on the stage
- The process continues today.
 - The main political party in 1990s – CDP is in opposition with significant lost in support. The strongest party (Social democrats) lost big share of its support.
 - Main topics of new subjects: anti-corruption agenda, modern approaches, criticism of old elites.
- Party system is opened again; we cannot talk about consolidation today.

Party System of the Czech Republic 1990-2002



Party politics in Slovakia I.

- Consolidation of party system more turbulent.
- Similarly to Civic Forum, Public Against Violence (umbrella movement) split.
- New political parties organized around issue of Slovak position in the federation or its independence.
- Strong position of Vladimir Meciar and his Movement for democratic Slovakia.
- Communist party started to reform and later disappear (swallowed by Social democrats).

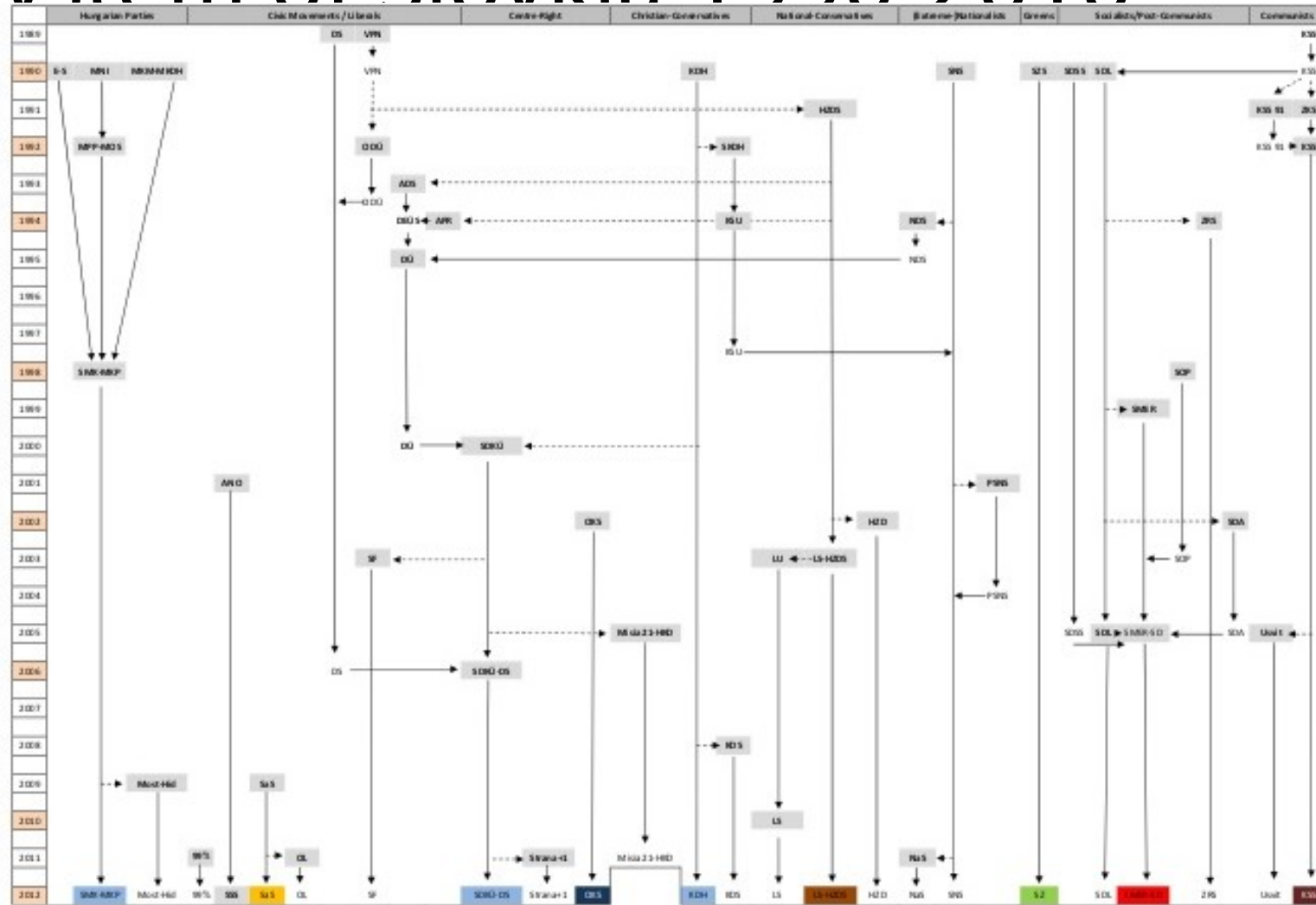
Party politics in Slovakia II.

- 1990s: dominance of Vladimir Meciar; MDS created illiberal regime. Governments led by nationalistic and populist agenda.
- Opposition parties oppressed (in parliament as well as outside).
- Change in 1998 when Meciar won elections but could not form government. All opposition parties joined together in order to overthrow the Meciar (reformed communist, Christian party, leftist party, liberal party)

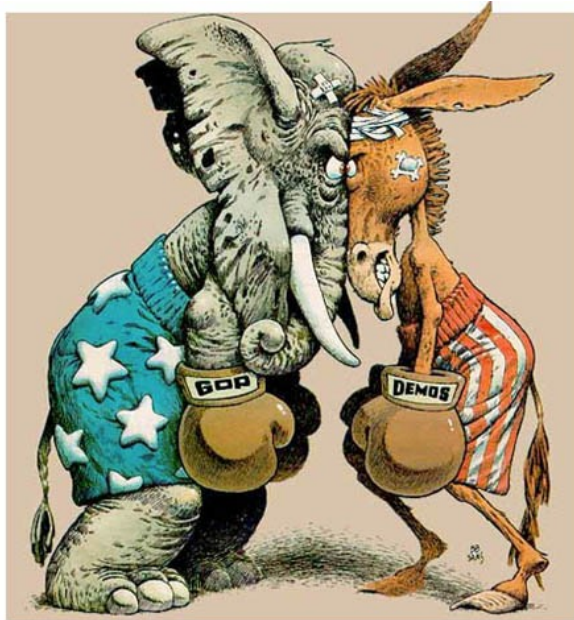
Party politics in Slovakia III

- Early 2000s: party system started to consolidate but not without problems.
- Number of new political subjects due to splits in established political parties.
- Dominant cleavage: left-right; secondary: conservative – liberal
- Late 2000s: SMER (*Direction*) – Social democracy dominates the party system.
- Since 2012: Single-party government.

Party system of Slovakia 1990-2010



Is it better to have strong political parties (1-3) or smaller parties that better represent the nature of pluralistic society?



VS



Party politics in Hungary I.

- After the communist breakdown, number of historical parties re-emerged (e.g. agrarian party).
- Communist party started to reform → socialist party.
- First election won by Hungarian democratic forum (conservatives).
- Relatively smooth adaptation on party politics, however high volatility of voters.

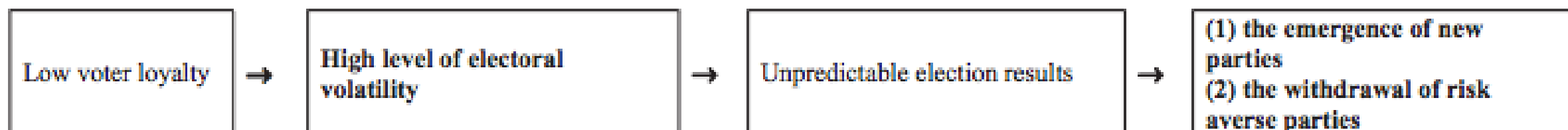
Party politics in Hungary II.

- Early 1990s: cultural-territorial cleavage (nationalism). Socio-economic conflict less relevant.
- Late 1990s: party system starts to incline to bi-polar organization. Socio-economic issues more relevant.
- Strong nationalism; revision of Treaty of Trianon. Idea of Great Hungary.

Party politics in Hungary III.

- 2000s: corruption and scandals; rise of nationalism and populism.
- Voters' frustration with economic performance
- Dominance of Fidesz since 2010
- Autoritarization of Hungarian politics
- PM Orbán: building illiberal democracy; Russia and Turkey as models for future development.

Electoral volatility as the *cause*



Electoral volatility as the *effect*

