

10. Conclusions

This chapter summarises the empirical findings on government formation with radical right parties in Central and Eastern Europe, paying particular attention to the comparison of explanatory patterns in the two periods under investigation. It discusses the implications of these findings for future research on radical right parties and government formation in European democracies, but not exclusively in the eastern EU member states. The concluding remarks also relate the findings to the role of radical right parties in the development of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe.

This study has argued that there is a fundamental functional equivalence between the patterns of party competition, and the role of radical right parties, in Central and Eastern and Western Europe. Furthermore, there are context-specific features that account for different patterns of government formation in the two regions. Thus, the central argument of the study holds that, similar to Western Europe, ideological preferences of Central and Eastern European radical right parties and their competitors, the electoral fortunes of the radical right, and the configuration of the party systems in which they operate, explain why radical right parties enter government or remain in opposition. However, the specific features of the Central and Eastern European context should result in differences between the two regions of Europe. The importance of the socio-economic transformation, the salience and specific nature of nationalism in the region, the regime divide, and the fluidity of party systems should lead to different patterns of government formation in Central and Eastern Europe, particularly in the first decade after the fall of the Iron Curtain.

Comparative results

In the period before the first third-generation elections, the explanations for radical right parties' inclusion in, and exclusion from, government were relatively similar across Central and Eastern Europe, indicating the post-Communist transformation's impact on the entire region. The transformational decade was characterised by fragmented party systems and small radical right parties in parliament. Due to high levels of fragmentation, majority coalitions usually comprised a relatively large number of parties, which increased the chances of small parties entering govern-

ment. Thus, the lack of parliamentary strength did not create a decisive disadvantage for the radical right. However, because almost all empirical cases in this period included small radical right parties in fragmented party systems, ideological factors ultimately made the critical difference. Simultaneous proximity on the socio-economic and socio-cultural dimensions was a necessary condition for the radical right to enter government in this period. The absence of socio-economic and socio-cultural proximity, in turn, constituted a necessary condition for the exclusion of radical right parties from government. Thus, whether the small radical right parties entered government or remained in opposition during the first post-Communist decade ultimately depended on the presence or absence of ideological proximity to the formateur on both dimensions.

The regime divide generated some variation within this explanatory pattern. In some countries, it produced a bipolar opposition in the party system that ran so deep, parties from competing camps found it impossible to cooperate with one another when forming a government. Here, the position of radical right parties in the same, or oppositional, camps reinforced their ideological proximity, or distance, when forming coalition governments. In others, the regime divide did not result in a clear-cut bipolar opposition in the party system. Often, however, it still affected government formation indirectly, because it was a vital source for parties' ideological positions. Slovakia is the only country in this study where the regime divide played a subordinate role in determining coalition participation.

The patterns of government formation with radical right parties in Central and Eastern Europe change considerably, and become more diverse, in the consolidating decades. For example, no individual explanatory factor qualifies as a necessary condition for radical right parties' inclusion in, or exclusion from, government. In this period, the explanations for the participation of radical right parties in government differ primarily with regard to the presence or absence of bipolar opposition in the party system. If no bipolar opposition exists, to enter government, radical right parties must control a large seat share in parliament and be ideologically proximate to the formateur on the socio-economic and the socio-cultural dimensions. In the vast majority of cases, however, party systems featured a deep bipolar opposition, and the government participation of radical right parties was facilitated by being in the same camp as the formateur. This condition alone, however, was not sufficient for explaining their inclusion in government. The additional factors needed to explain why radical right parties enter government depended on the nature of the bipolar opposition. If this opposition resulted from affective polarisation between the largest parties in a country rather than ideological divides, radical right parties needed to share similar socio-cultural positions with the formateur. Thus, GALTAN positions, related to the nativist ideological core of the radical right, played a crucial role even if party competition was strongly affective. If a specific socio-cultural conflict, such as the ethno-linguistic divide in Latvia, split the party system into two

competing camps, ideological proximity on the broader GALTAN dimension played a subordinate role in government formation. In this context, radical right parties needed to control a large seat share in parliament and be socio-economically proximate to the formateur to be included in government.

Despite these differences, fundamentally similar socio-cultural positions of radical right parties and formateurs are a part of all explanatory patterns of government participation in the consolidating decades. These similar positions can take the form of ideological proximity on the GALTAN dimension or a position on the same side of a bipolar opposition in the party system that originates from a socio-cultural divide. When calibrating a new condition that is true if at least one of these forms of similar socio-cultural positions is present, this condition is a necessary condition for government participation.

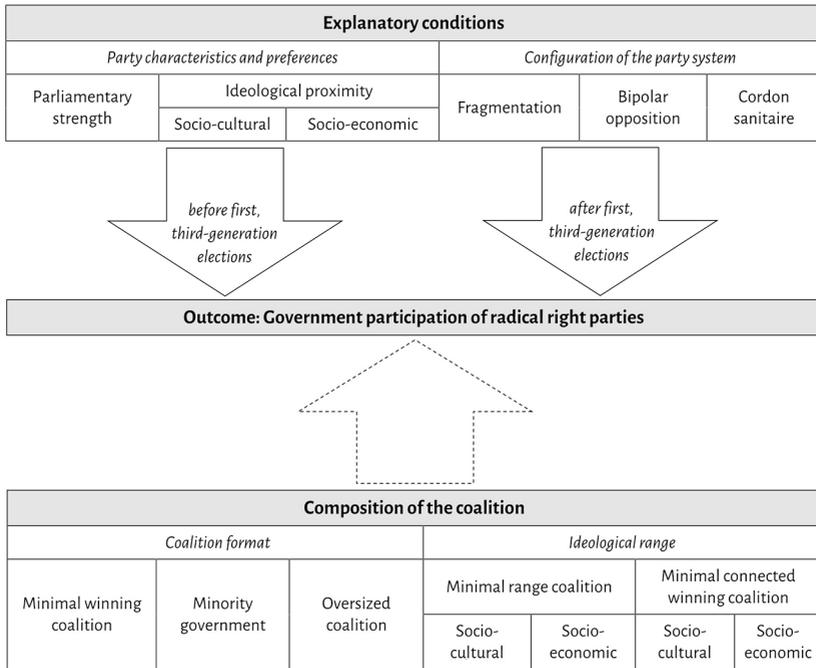
There were also multiple explanations for the exclusion of radical right parties from government in the consolidating decades. Again, these explanations differed depending on the presence or absence of bipolar opposition. Radical right parties remained in opposition, for instance, if bipolar opposition existed and they were not in the same camp as the formateur, although this condition alone was not sufficient to produce this outcome. Some radical right parties did not enter government, even though they were in the same camp as the formateur. This was the case if they were too small and too radical, or, more precisely, if the other more moderate parties in the formateur's camp could form a parliamentary majority without the seats of the radical right. If the party system was not structured by bipolar opposition, then cordons sanitaires often prevented radical right parties from entering government, sometimes despite otherwise very favourable conditions. If government formation was neither constrained by a cordon sanitaire nor by bipolar opposition, then radical right parties remained in opposition when they controlled only a small share of seats in parliament and lacked ideological proximity to the formateur on the socio-cultural dimension.

These results show that the explanatory patterns clearly differed in the periods before and after the first third-generation elections. However, there were also commonalities across all three decades. For instance, in order to govern together, radical right parties and formateurs needed to share similar socio-cultural positions. In fact, the higher-order condition that entails both forms of socio-cultural similarity qualifies as a necessary condition for government participation of Central and Eastern European radical right parties over the entire 30-year period covered by this study. The socio-economic dimension was also relevant for explaining government formation with radical parties in all three decades. Of course, the socio-economic proximity of radical right parties to formateurs was more vital during the transformational decade. However, in several countries, particularly those where the socio-economic dimension was highly salient, this factor featured prominently in the explanations for government participation also after the turn of the millennium.

Moreover, the fragmentation in many Central and Eastern European party systems remained so high that low seat shares did not necessarily constitute a decisive disadvantage for radical right parties in the early phase of the transformation as well as the consolidating decades. Another similarity throughout the 30 years covered by this study concerns the format of governments with radical right parties. These parties entered government either as junior partners in minimal winning coalitions, support parties of minority governments or, in rare cases, as junior partners in minority coalitions, but they were never involved in oversized coalitions.

These empirical findings show that the analytical model developed in this study goes a long way in explaining why Central and Eastern European radical right parties enter government or remain in opposition. Moreover, the case-based configurational approach reveals crucial insights into the complex interplay of the individual explanatory factors. However, the empirical analysis determines that the existence of a *cordon sanitaire* has a greater impact on the exclusion of radical right parties from government than initially expected, and therefore, it should be added to the analytical model. Hence, the analysis suggests a minor modification of the initial model of government formation with radical right parties in Central and Eastern Europe (see Figure 10.1).

Figure 10.1: Modified model of government formation with radical right parties in Central and Eastern Europe



Source: Own composition.

Implications for studying radical right parties and party competition in European democracies

The present study corroborates existing knowledge about government formation with radical right parties, which stems mostly from research on Western European democracies. Similar to the works of Bale (2003), de Lange (2008, 2012), and Fagerholm (2021), it shows that ideological proximity between radical right parties and the formateur on the socio-cultural dimension, as well as party system polarisation, are crucial for explaining why radical right parties enter government or remain in opposition. Overall, the importance of shared socio-cultural positions is the most striking similarity across European democracies. The study also finds that radical right parties' socio-economic proximity to the formateur impacts their participation in government. This factor is essential in the early transformational period but it remains important even after the turn of the millennium, particularly in party systems with salient socio-economic divides. Whether this is a distinct feature of the Central and Eastern European context, or it applies to the rest of the continent as

well, requires further research since the existing literature does not address socio-economic issues in post-electoral party competition with Western European radical right parties.

These findings provide clear empirical support for the existence of policy-based party competition in Central and Eastern Europe. Government formation in the region is not only a matter of parties' pursuit of public office, it also depends on their ideological preferences (Savage 2014; see also Fagerholm 2021). Despite the widespread absence of detailed party programmes in the early phase of the post-Communist transformation, even in that period parties held core ideological positions that provided guideposts for voters and competing parties (Hloušek and Kopeček 2010, 9–10). In order to arrive at this conclusion, it is necessary to conceptualise the policy space with measures other than classic left-right dimension (Savage 2014, 550). The present study applies a two-dimensional concept using a socio-economic and a socio-cultural dimension. This is not the only viable approach, but in contrast to developing a country-specific left-right dimension (Savage 2014) or focusing solely on socio-cultural issues (Fagerholm 2021), the two-dimensional approach helps to better capture the different elements of a party's ideology, as well as their interaction (see also Spies and Franzmann 2011). The two-dimensional concept of the policy space also provides a promising approach for pan-European research on government formation and party competition. It accounts for the "specificity of the East European context where left-right ideological differences are often blurred" (Minkenberg et al. 2021, 664) and, in contrast to a country-specific left-right dimension (Savage 2014), it applies the same categories to all countries.

With regard to the impact of electoral success on radical right parties' participation in government, the results of this study diverge from the existing literature. While previous studies suggested a linear effect (de Lange 2008), or an advantage for medium-sized radical right parties (Fagerholm 2021), this study demonstrates that party system fragmentation mitigates the impact of parliamentary strength. In the fragmented party systems of Central and Eastern Europe, radical right parties often enter government despite meagre electoral results, particularly in the first post-Communist decade. This finding should be of interest to scholars of radical right parties and party competition across Europe because party system fragmentation in Western Europe is on the rise (Enyedi and Casal Bértoa 2018, 440). Thus, increasingly complicated bargaining situations due to the introduction of many new parliamentary parties could soon help radical right parties to join coalitions in this part of the continent, where parliamentary strength has been a key explanatory factor for their participation in government (de Lange 2008; see also Bale 2003; de Lange 2012).

The most important conceptual contribution of this study stems from the temporal distinction. The analysis shows that the patterns of government formation with radical right parties differ substantially in the two periods analysed. In the early transformational phase, the explanations for why radical right parties enter

government or remain in opposition, respectively, are fairly similar across Central and Eastern Europe. This result indicates that the challenges of the triple transition affected party competition in the entire region in comparable ways, despite all of the idiosyncratic regime changes and particular post-Communist adaptations observed in the individual countries (von Beyme 1996; Linz and Stepan 1996; Kitschelt et al. 1999). In this period, government formation with radical right parties had some traits in common with Western Europe, such as the importance of socio-cultural positions, but it followed a clear Central and Eastern European, or transformational, pattern. This pattern includes electorally weak radical right parties in highly fragmented party systems and the influential impact of both socio-economic and socio-cultural positions on government participation. Since these characteristics are a result of the triple transition, similar patterns are likely to be observed in other areas of politics and party competition in Central and Eastern Europe during the 1990s as well.

In the consolidating decades, the explanations for government participation became more similar to those in Western Europe, even though the regime change and the transformational legacies still informed the ideological platforms of parties in the region to a certain degree. Moreover, the development of party competition in Central and Eastern Europe has not followed a universal or linear trajectory. While party systems show increasing closure in some countries (Enyedi and Casal Bértoa 2018), others witness massive changes, such as the rise of new populist anti-establishment parties in the post-transformational phase (Hanley and Sikk 2016; Engler, Pytlas, and Deegan-Krause 2019). Despite these differences, however, the crucial importance of radical right parties' socio-cultural proximity to formateurs and the impact of bipolar oppositions in the party system resembles the explanatory patterns of government formation in Western Europe. This is not merely a result of Central and Eastern Europe "catching up" with the West, however. Both parts of the continent are converging and they are facing similar challenges. While there is currently no Western European country where radical right and authoritarian governments endanger liberal democracy and the rule of law to the same degree as in Hungary and Poland, the coalition of the conservative Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and the radical right Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) that governed Austria from December 2018 to May 2019 demonstrated that illiberal tendencies are not foreign to Western Europe either (Wodak 2019)—not to mention established democracies in other Western democracies, such as the US under the presidency of Donald Trump. Moreover, radical right parties remain strong in Western Europe, and the rise of new parties has also caused increasing fragmentation and more complex bargaining situation in this part of the continent (Bolleyer 2013; Emanuele, Chiaramonte, and Soare 2020). In the 2022 French parliamentary elections, for instance, Marine Le Pen's *Rassemblement National* won 89 of the possible 577 seats and became the largest individual opposition party facing Emmanuel Macron's *La République En Marche*. Due to the

electoral gains of the radical right the re-elected president fell short of a majority in a fragmented parliament with strong oppositional forces on the right and left. While such a complex bargaining situation is uncommon in France, it resembles many of the negotiations analysed in this study. Since the functional equivalence of party competition in Western and Central and Eastern Europe works in both directions, researchers and politicians can benefit from the insights provided here related to government formation in Central and Eastern Europe when evaluating bargaining situations in the established Western democracies (see also Grotz and Weber 2016).

Overall, it is important to note that the periodisation in this study served as a proxy for the development of party competition and the consolidation of the procedural rules of democracy in the region. Current developments in Hungary and Poland clearly show that democratic consolidation does not have to be a linear process and that illiberal turns which lead to a deterioration of democratic norms and institutions are possible, even after two or three decades (Buščíková and Guasti 2017; Vachudova 2020; see also Cianetti, Dawson, and Hanley 2018). These systems might also present new distinct patterns of government formation, such as a tendency towards one-party majority governments as an expression of the uneven playing field for the incumbent and the opposition parties (Levitsky and Way 2010). Moreover, the established Western European democracies have also seen several fundamental changes in the context of party competition over the past decades, such as the post-materialist value change since the late 1960s, the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989/90 or the economic crisis in the late noughties (Inglehart 1977; Ignazi 1992; Hernández and Kriesi 2016). Comparative research on coalition formation, however, has not yet systematically taken the impact of these changes into account, neither in Western Europe nor in Central and Eastern Europe.

Finally, from a research design perspective, this study demonstrates that it is possible to combine a configurational case-oriented approach with a rather extensive empirical design (Müller, Bergman, and Strøm 2008, 33–35). QCA has shown its potential as a method and a research strategy for identifying country- and case-specific explanations for the government participation of radical right parties, while still being able to identify cross-national patterns. This method also enabled the study to incorporate the temporal and spatial context (Ekiert and Hanson 2003b) into the comparative analysis of government formation, thus addressing issues that are often overlooked in medium-to-large-N comparative research in the field (Müller, Bergman, and Strøm 2008, 19–20). Hence, QCA-based research designs offer a promising path for analysing government formation, in particular for projects that focus on specific aspects of coalition politics, such as government formation in a specific region, participation of a specific party family in government, or the formation of minority governments (Keudel-Kaiser 2014; see also Fagerholm 2021).

Closing remarks

When present in parliament, Central and Eastern European radical right parties entered government almost half of the time. In contrast to Western Europe, there was never a period of normalisation leading up to the point when the political mainstream accepted them as viable coalition partners (de Lange 2008, 2012). In several Central and Eastern European countries, radical right parties entered government almost immediately after the fall of Communism, even without being particularly successful at the polls or inducing rightward shifts in the policy positions of their competitors. Yet, the frequency of the radical right's government participation in Central and Eastern Europe has increased during the last decade. Hence, their inclusion in government is not simply the result of party system fluidity and transformational politics immediately after 1989. When including the Fidesz governments in Hungary since 2010, the Czech Republic is the only one of all eight countries covered by this study where radical right parties have not (yet) gained executive power at the national level, and even there, the long-standing cordon sanitaire against the radical right is deteriorating.

These observations underline that radical right parties, in general, and their participation in government, in particular, are not exceptional to Central and Eastern European politics. Rather, radical right parties constitute a pathological normalcy in European democracies (Mudde 2010; see also Pytlas 2018). Research demonstrates that they use the access to power for implementing their illiberal policies (Minkenberg et al. 2021; Wierenga and Petsinis 2021) and for injecting their ideology into the political mainstream (Pytlas and Kossack 2015; Pirro 2016; Pytlas 2016; Minkenberg et al. 2021). Thus, they shrink the ideological distance between themselves and their mainstream competitors, which, in turn, improves their chances to enter government in the future. The direct and indirect impact of radical right parties results from both the agency of radical right parties themselves and the positive engagement of mainstream parties with them, both in electoral and post-electoral party competition (Bale 2003; de Lange 2008, 2012; Pytlas 2016; Minkenberg et al. 2021).

Conceptualising radical right parties and their ideology as a pathological normalcy presumes that they will never disappear completely. How much influence they gain, however, depends to a large extent on the strategic choices of the mainstream parties (Pytlas 2016, 224). In post-electoral party competition, mainstream parties are confronted with the choice of whether or not to form a government with the radical right in order to achieve their political goals or to gain access to political power. If they do, they choose not to contain the influence of radical right parties and their politics, and thus, these mainstream parties inadvertently contribute to an erosion of liberal democracy and its underlying values.

