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Research Statement

I study party politics after democratic transition, focusing on political mobilization around ethnic identities and examining different ways that ethnic mobilization impacts democratic politics in diverse societies. In my current central project, I draw on theories from comparative politics and international relations to demonstrate the varying impact of ethnic heterogeneity on the dimensions of political competition in post-communist Europe. I shed light on whether and why parties representing ethnic minority groups are asked to join governing coalitions. I show that these parties are, surprisingly, more durable and attractive coalition partners than other mainstream parties, in part because they enjoy a ‘captive’ electorate that eschews punishing them for incumbency in the same way as voters of mainstream parties. This has opened up future research projects on rent-seeking and the quality of democratic governance in Europe’s new democracies. I also research minority rights legislation, and when and why states adopt it in its various forms. My research agenda contributes to our understanding of how diversity affects domestic politics in nation-states.

Ethnic Heterogeneity and Party Politics in Eastern Europe

My current book project, which is based on my dissertation, seeks to better understand the impact that the presence of ethnic minorities has had on party politics in the post-communist world. For some ethnic minority groups, the decision was made to represent themselves through democratically elected political parties. This has led to the enduring presence of these parties in the parliaments of the countries in which they exist. Clearly, the initial mobilization along ethnic lines has created a durable political identity among members of ethnic minority groups. How does this impact our understanding of democratic politics in the region?

The first section examines how ethnicity structures the dimensions on which political parties compete. Among the post-communist states that joined the EU in 2004 and 2007, ethnic minority parties are not present in all. In some cases, there are no politically salient ethnic minority groups and in others, ethnic minorities join political parties that are closely tied to an ideological position. Given this variety, I examine ethnicity as a third dimension of political competition, alongside economic and cultural. I identify three distinct sets of cases, depending on whether an ethnic minority group is present, and if so, whether they were tied to a federal center during the communist period. For examples, Russians in Latvia were tied to the federal center, but Turks in Bulgaria were not. I show that in these three sets of cases, the structure of competition is very different. For the rest of the project, I focus on the set of cases with politically salient minority groups that were not tied to a

federal center. In these cases, ethnic minority groups have formed political parties that take strong and highly salient positions on ethnic minority rights, but eschew strong stances on economic and cultural issues.

The second section looks into why we so often see ethnic minority parties in governing coalitions in these countries, when ethnicity continues to be a highly salient societal cleavage. Parties trying to form a coalition (*formateurs*) are seeking the “cheapest” potential coalition partner. The cheapest partner is the party who is willing to align with either side on class-based issues, has a specific agenda to support, and has the least amount of accountability to the electorate. I argue that in countries where they are present, ethnic minority parties are the “cheapest” option. I show that ethnic minority parties are indeed more likely to join governing parties over others parties, controlling for ideological proximity to the *formateur* and ideological proximity to the median party, both of which have been previously found to increase the probability of a party joining a coalition in post-communist Europe. Additionally, ethnic minority parties that are ideologically proximate to the *formateur* and ideologically proximate to the median are more likely to join governing coalitions than mainstream parties that are ideologically proximate.

I next turn to examining how these ethnic minority parties are evaluated after serving in government. Post-communist Europe has been a region noted for party system instability and low voter loyalty. Incumbent parties almost always lose votes with the degree of punishment at the ballot box determined by economic performance. In this section, I determine whether or not ethnic minority parties are held accountable for economic performance for their time spent in government in the same way that other parties are. I argue that because ethnic minority parties enjoy a ‘captive’ electorate that has been mobilized around ethnic identity to support the community, ethnic minority parties on average increase their vote share while serving in government, even when controlling for economic factors. I show that this is indeed the case, using original national and subnational level datasets.

This book project shows that ethnicity, long argued to be an important cleavage in post-communist politics, continues to structure how parties compete with one another in many party systems across the region. The findings in this book have interesting implications for our understanding of democratic stability in the post-communist world. At the time of transition, it was expected that countries with ethnic minorities would have the hardest time making the transition. And indeed, the countries in the first group were largely the initial laggards in the European Union accession process (Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria - the latter two’s accession was ultimately delayed). Yet, in recent years, it has been the homogeneous countries (Hungary, Poland, and to some extent the Czech Republic) that have been making headlines as they slide away from liberal democracy. My findings show that although there are no domestic politically salient ethnic minority groups in these countries, politicians seeking to secure power still compete on ethnic issues, finding other groups that can be used as a scapegoat, like Muslim refugees. This has opened new directions for research that I plan to explore, discussed below.

An article from this project on the accountability of ethnic minority parties has been accepted for publication at *Party Politics*. An article on coalition formation is under review.

Democracy and Diversity

As mentioned above, in the early 1990s, it was expected that the ethnically diverse countries in the post-communist world would have the hardest time succeeding in the transition to democracy. While this was initially true, it has recently been the homogeneous countries that have been turning decisively away from liberal democracy and the values of the European Union. In this co-authored project, we posit a number of competing hypotheses to explain variation in democratic stability in the region, which will be evaluated using qualitative case studies comparing the trajectories of the six former Soviet satellite states.

Transitional Justice and Minority Rights

In this project, my co-author and I investigate why some states construct robust minority rights protection regimes while others do not. In particular, we look at states' transitional justice histories, arguing that the role of transitional justice should be considered when examining the development of minority rights regimes. Transitional justice is designed to increase respect for human rights, and so we expect that states that implement transitional justice will also implement more long-term minority rights protection measures than states that eschew transitional justice. Our article tests this hypothesis by analyzing quantitative data on transitional justice mechanisms and minority rights in Europe and Latin America between 1970 and 2007. By linking transitional justice and respect for minority rights, we deepen our understanding of how minority rights regimes develop and offer the first quantitative assessment of how well transitional justice performs in its goal of safeguarding minority rights.

Future Research Agenda

The finding in my dissertation that ethnic minority parties can be attractive coalition partners and thus important players in post-communist governments opens up many exciting new avenues for further research. My second book project will examine political corruption in the post-communist world, paying particular attention to the impact of diversity and ethnic minority political parties. With ethnic minority parties holding weak ideological positions and avoiding retrospective evaluation by their voters, how does this impact their opportunities for rent-seeking, and does it affect the ability of other parties to engage in similar behavior? Is rent-seeking in these ethnically diverse countries similar to that in their more homogeneous neighbors? These questions will be evaluated through both qualitative and quantitative methods.

In addition, I will expand and use the subnational level dataset I built for my current book project to answer important questions about party competition in the post-communist world. This dataset currently includes electoral and economic data at the county-level in Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia; it will be expanded to include Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Poland. I plan to examine radical right party success in East-Central Europe, answering questions about how support for these parties varies both across the region and within countries. In particular, I am interested in whether patterns of radical right support at the local level in ethnically diverse countries differs from patterns of support in more ethnically homogeneous countries.