Contentious Politics in New Democracies: East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, 1989-93
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CONTENTIOUS POLITICS IN NEW DEMOCRACIES
East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, 1989–93
By GRZEGORZ EKIERT and JAN KUBIK*

I. PROTEST AND POSTCOMMUNIST DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION

In the aftermath of the collapse of state socialism, East Central European states are now well on their way toward establishing working democracies; and with the exception of Slovakia, they can all boast a solid record in the area of political liberties and human rights. These newly democratized regimes are not in any immediate danger of reverting to authoritarian rule. At the same time, the progress of political and economic transformations has been uneven and their chances of achieving full democratic consolidation are still uncertain. Consequently, the study of various aspects and limits of democratic consolidation in postcommunist states has emerged as one of the most intriguing and challenging areas of comparative politics.

This paper explores the question of democratic consolidation from a specific analytical and empirical angle—the comparative study of collective protest in the former East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. By doing so, we attempt to accomplish three goals: (1) to correct a proelite bias in the literature on democratic transitions by studying the behavior of nonelite actors; (2) to determine which factors account for different magnitudes and specific repertoires of protest; and

* The project was funded by the Program for the Study of Germany and Europe at the Center of European Studies, Harvard University; the National Council for Soviet and East European Research; the American Council of Learned Societies; and the Elfriede Drager Memorial Foundation. We would like to thank Sidney Tarrow for his generous help and encouragement. For their indispensable assistance and advice, our special gratitude goes to Mark Beissinger, Nancy Bermeo, Valérie Bunce, Ellen Comisso, Ela Ekiert, Krzysztof Gorlach, Bela Greskovits, Anna Grzymala-Busse, Samuel Huntington, Kazimierz Kloc, Janos Kornai, Michael D. Kennedy, Martha Kubik, Christiane Lemke, Juan Linz, Darina Malova, Alexander Motyl, Maryjane Osa, Susan Pharr, Dieter Rucht, Anna Seleny, Mate Szabo, Charles Tilly, and Mayer N. Zald.


World Politics 50 (July 1998), 547–81
(3) to consider the proposition that protest endangers democratic consolidation.

All countries of Central Europe are in the throes of difficult economic adjustments and structural changes that have engendered major dislocations and exacted considerable social costs. It has often been argued that such a situation poses a great danger to these new democracies; the high social costs of transitions can easily provoke widespread protests leading to the collapse or serious weakening of democratic institutions. We ask whether and how the economic policies of the new regimes were actively contested. Did some countries experience more protest than others? What factors determine variation in protest magnitudes and protest repertoires—the type of transformation strategy adopted, the political and social legacies of the communist rule, the level of social cost and hardship produced by the reforms, new institutional architecture of the post-1989 polity, or the organizational resources and capabilities of various collective actors? For example, with Poland the only country in our sample that had a strong and recent tradition of political conflict and protest, a high level of protest could have been expected. Its magnitude in the former GDR is surprising, however; since 1989 East Germany has been similarly contentious, despite the absence of any considerable protest traditions before 1989. Are the high levels of protest in East Germany explained by the same conjunction of factors that operated in Poland?

Moreover, the fall of state socialism opened the way for political participation and contentious collective action, as is always the case when state institutions undergo a significant transformation and abandon repressive political practices. Thus although one would expect a high level of political mobilization and protest activities in such transitory polities, a preliminary overview of protest politics does not bear that out: the number of protest events in the four countries under study is not higher than in consolidated West European democracies, and in two cases it is distinctly lower. Why is that so?

Comparative studies of collective protest offer four theories for explaining the incidence of contentious collective action, as well as its

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2 Gray, for example, argued that “the human and social costs of transition to a market economy are for most of the post-Communist states so great that it is foolish to suppose that the transition can be conducted under liberal democratic institutions.” John Gray, “From Postcommunism to Civil Society: The Reemergence of History and the Decline of the Western Model,” in Ellen Frankel Paul, Fred D. Miller, and Jeffrey Paul, eds., Liberalism and the Economic Order (London: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 44.

forms and magnitude. Variation in protest characteristics can be explained by underscoring (1) discontents and grievances that can be translated into protest through psychological mechanisms of relative deprivation; (2) changes in the structure of political opportunities and actors’ calculated responses to them; (3) the prior existence of traditions, repertoires of collective action, and mobilizing collective action frames; and (4) the availability of resources (material and organizational) as main determinants of protest activities. We will consider the explanatory power of these four theories in our analysis. It should be noted, however, that we do not aim to verify them, nor are we in a position to determine which of them explains more variance. The nature of our data is not suited to such tasks. Moreover, we adopt here the comparative strategy more indebted to the case-oriented comparative method than to the variable-oriented approach. We also assume that we are dealing with multiple and conjunctural types of causation. From this point of view, the four theories (or analytical perspectives) are not mutually exclusive; rather, they help to identify a set of explanatory variables that may or may not codetermine the outcome in any given case. It may also turn out that each of the four theories explains a specific dimension of collective protest and is more useful for understanding one set of cases than for understanding others.

Our analysis of contentious politics is founded on an assumption that democratic consolidation is a highly contingent and complex process taking place in several spheres of the sociopolitical organization of society. Developments within each sphere and the relationship between them often produce confusing outcomes and increase uncertainty. Moreover, as democratic regimes take different paths toward consolidation, so too do the degrees of contentious political participation and stability of their institutional arrangements vary.

4 For the most recent assessment of these theories and their mutual relationships, see Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer Zald, eds., Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). The nature of our data (events) is such that we need to use macrotheories (historical-sociological), rather than microtheories (game-theoretic), of collective action. For the discussion of the significance of both perspectives, see Marc Lichbach, The Rebel’s Dilemma (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), esp. chap. 10.

5 These ideas are developed by Ragan. The concept of conjunctural causation serves to indicate that in the social world causes work in interaction with each other and their effects on the dependent/explained variable are not merely additive. The concept of multiple causation indicates that there may be several combinations of independent variables (conditions or factors) that produce the same outcome (dependent variable). See Charles Ragin, The Comparative Method: Moving beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

6 For the elaboration of this point, see Grzegorz Ekiert and Jan Kubik, Collective Protest and Democratic Consolidation in Poland, 1989–1993, Pew Papers on Central Eastern European Reform and Regionalism, no. 3 (Princeton: Center of International Studies, Princeton University, 1997).
Earlier studies of democratization and democratic consolidation focused on structural preconditions of these processes. More recently many researchers abandoned structural approaches and adopted the elite-centered perspective. O'Donnell, Schmitter, and their collaborators argue that “elite pacts” are essential to the successful transition from authoritarian rule.7 Similarly, Diamond and Linz claimed that “the skills, values, strategies, and choices of political leaders figure prominently in our explanation of the enormously varied experiences with democracy in Latin America.”8 Higley and Gunther contended that “in independent states with long records of political instability and authoritarian rule, distinctive elite transformations, carried out by the elites themselves, constitute the main and possibly the only route to democratic consolidation.”9 This almost exclusive focus on elites creates a theoretical weakness in the existing studies of regime change and consolidation. Moreover, a methodological emphasis on rational choice explanations and on modeling political processes as games10 further reinforces the already dominant elite-centered focus of research on democratic transition. Additionally, the greater availability of elite data favors the elite-centered perspective. Party programs, public speeches and interviews of leaders, reports on electoral campaigns, election results, journalistic commentaries, and so on are all readily accessible in the public domain. Such data sources enable one to reconstruct the political positions of elite actors and the bargaining processes among them and then to trace their compromises, coalitions, and policy choices. By contrast, data on the political activities of nonelite actors are not readily available; public-opinion polls have been routinely used as the sole source of empirical knowledge on the politics of the populace at large.

We also find that the existing literature has accorded more prominence to certain dimensions of consolidation and neglected others: institutional choices of governmental structures and electoral institutions, as well as the formation of party systems, are usually viewed as the most important elements in the stabilization and consolidation of democracy. The importance of institutional choices is emphasized by Lijphart

8 Larry Diamond and Juan Linz, “Introduction: Politics Society and Democracy in Latin America,” in Larry Diamond, Juan Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset, eds., Democracy in Developing Countries: Latin America (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1989), 14.
and Waisman, who argue that “in all cases the transition involves... similar ‘tasks’: in the polity the design or reestablishment of govern-
mental institutions and electoral systems. In the economy the estab-
lishment... of the institutional infrastructure of a market economy.”

Haggard and Kaufman underscore the importance of political parties, arguing that “the capacity to organize stable political rule—whether au-
thoritarian or democratic—in the modern context of broad social mo-
bilization and complex economic system ultimately rests on organized
systems of accountability, and these in turn rest on political parties.”

In addition, works on Eastern Europe tend to focus on the complex in-
teractions between economic and political reforms. This problem has
come to be known as the “dilemma of simultaneity” or the “transitional
incompatibility thesis.”

The preoccupation with (1) elites, (2) institutional choices concern-
ing governmental and electoral systems, (3) party systems, and (4) the
relationship between political and economic changes is responsible for
a considerable gap in the democratization literature. We know very lit-
tle about the activities of nonelite actors and how these activities shape
the processes of democratization. Some students of democratic transi-
tions have begun, however, studying the importance of the “resurrection
of civil society” and its political role both during the decomposition of
authoritarian rule and in its aftermath. It is often noted that the great-


ci
cal Parties and Democratic Consolidation in Southern Europe (London: Routledge, 1990); Juan J. Linz, “Change and Continuity in the Nature of Contemporary Democracies,” in Gary Marks and Larry


15 For the most recent examples of this growing interest in the role of civil society in democratiza-
tion, see Sidney Tarrow, “Mass Mobilization and Regime Change: Pacts, Reform, and Popular Power in Italy (1918–1922) and Spain (1975–1978),” in Richard Gunther, Nikiforos Diamandouros, and Hans-Jurgen Puhle, eds., The Politics of Democratic Consolidation: Southern Europe in Comparative Per-
spective (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Victor Perez-Dias, The Return of Civil Society (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Nancy Bermeo, “Myths of Moderation: Con-
frontation and Conflict during Democratic Transitions,” Comparative Politics 29 (April 1997);
est challenge to the policies of the newly democratized states may come from various organizations of civil society (for example, labor unions, interest groups, and popular movements). Tilly in his work on collective action in France and Britain convincingly demonstrates that over the last two centuries organizations of civil society were the typical vehicles of protest. Yet the development of such organizations and their political role have not been systematically documented and analyzed.

The study of the role of citizens in democratic transitions has often been reduced to an examination of political attitudes, conducted on representative samples of the population. The third wave of democratization allows, that is, for the administration of unconstrained public-opinion polls—often for the first time in the history of a given society. Understandably, many scholars have seized the opportunity to study public attitudes and their changes during the transition process. But while such studies expand our knowledge of public reactions to regime change, they tell us little about the actual political behavior of nonelite actors. As Tarrow emphasizes, “Unless we trace the forms of activity people use, how these reflect their demands, and their interaction with opponents and elites, we cannot understand either the magnitude or the dynamics of change in politics and society.”

Our research project was based on the assumption that event analysis and, in particular, the systematic collection of data on collective action from newspapers can shed new light on the political behavior of nonelite actors during democratic consolidation. Following the pioneering work of Charles Tilly and his associates, event analysis became an accepted and often indispensable research method in the study of collective action, protest, and social movements. Despite its limitations, acknowledged by those who use it, the event analysis is uniquely capa-


17 See, for example, an impressive series of studies produced by the Center for the Study of Public Policy, University of Strathclyde, and coordinated by Richard Rose; Peter McDonough, Samuel H. Barnes, and A. Lopez Pina, “The Growth of Democratic Legitimacy in Spain,” American Political Science Review 80, no. 3 (1986); Krzysztof Zagorski, “Hope Factor, Inequality, and Legitimacy of Systemic Transformations: The Case of Poland,” Communist and Post-Communist Studies 27, no. 4 (1994).

II. INCIDENCE AND MAGNITUDE OF COLLECTIVE PROTEST IN POST-1989 EAST CENTRAL EUROPE

In our research project we sought to construct a detailed database of all forms and incidents of collective protest in the former East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, for the years 1989–94. We adopted a broad definition of protest event to cover all types of noninstitutional and unconventional political actions, and we used identical coding protocols in the four countries. Our research teams scanned two daily newspapers and four weeklies in each country for the entire period under study and recorded all available information concerning reported protest actions. The number of protest events recorded in each country is presented in Table 1. The table reveals striking differences in the number of protest events in the various countries. Poland and the former GDR had a high number of protest events during the analyzed period with relatively small differences between years. Hungary and Slovakia had a much lower incidence of protests. This situation calls for close examination, given the fact that all countries have been undergoing a turbulent political transformation and implemented comprehensive economic adjustment programs involving a substantial level of disruption and social cost. In Slovakia the low number of protest activities and the predominance of nondisruptive methods, such as protest letters, is especially surprising. One might expect a country breaking away from a long-standing federation and building an independent state to experience a high level of popular mobilization.


20 We define the protest event as collective action by at least three people who set out to articulate specific demands. Our database includes also extreme, politically motivated acts such as self-immolation, hunger strikes, or acts of terror carried out by individuals. In order to qualify as a protest event, such action cannot be the routine or legally prescribed behavior of a social or political organization. Strikes, rallies, or demonstrations are considered to be protest events for the purpose of our analysis because of their radical and disruptive nature. For various definitions of events used in event analysis, see Olzak (fn. 19), 124–27. From 1989 to 1994 none of the four countries experienced the sort of governmental censorship that would systematically distort information on protest activities.
The numbers presented in Table 1 are not weighted by the size of the population. Also, given our definition of protest event, the set of protest events recorded by our coders included both small, brief street gatherings and strike campaigns of several months' duration. Hence, in order to grasp the magnitude of protest in a given unit of time we had to construct a synthetic index of magnitude. Inspired by Tilly's idea of gauging simultaneously several dimensions of protest, we attempted to construct such an index, by multiplying three variables of our data protocol: duration, number of participants, and scope.\textsuperscript{21} Unfortunately "number of participants" proved to be the variable with the highest frequency of missing values.\textsuperscript{22} Two attempts to estimate missing values, relying on different assumptions, produced very different results; thus the validity of our composite index of magnitude proved to be dubious. We settled for a simpler index based solely on the "duration" variable, for which we have an almost perfect record.\textsuperscript{23} To create this index, the duration of each protest event was expressed as the number of twenty-four-hour periods it was composed of. For example, a seven-day strike was assigned a value of seven protest days. Next, we summarized the values of this new variable for all protest events in a given calendar year. That gave us an approximation of the protest magnitude for each year in all four countries. Additionally, we calculated means of protest magnitude for each country for the entire period under study. This number was then divided by the number of adults (individuals aged fifteen to sixty-four) in order to arrive at the \textit{weighted index of magnitude} for each country. The results of these calculations are reported in Table 2 and

\textsuperscript{22} More than 50 percent of the values are missing in our Polish, Slovak, and Hungarian databases for several calendar years.
\textsuperscript{23} The validity of a synthetic construct or category can be improved by increasing the number of independent measures on which it is based and finding such measures as strongly correlate with each other; see Robert Philip Weber, \textit{Basic Content Analysis} (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1990), 18–21. Since our index of magnitude is based on only one measure (duration), its validity is weak. But we traded validity for higher accuracy.
Table 2
General Measures of Protest Activities
(1989–93)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Poland</th>
<th>Slovakia</th>
<th>Hungary</th>
<th>GDR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population (15–64) in millions</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protest events</td>
<td>1,476</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>699</td>
<td>1,254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protest days</td>
<td>14,881</td>
<td>2,206</td>
<td>2,574</td>
<td>5,349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protest/year</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protest days/year</td>
<td>2,976</td>
<td>441</td>
<td>515</td>
<td>1,070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protest days/million population (15–64)</td>
<td>119.4</td>
<td>110.3</td>
<td>73.6</td>
<td>97.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strikes</td>
<td>432</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrations</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>244</td>
<td>607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratio: demonstrations/strikes</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strikes/year/million population (15–64)</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>1.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrations/ year/million population (15–64)</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>5.45</td>
<td>6.97</td>
<td>11.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

illustrated in Figure 1. As the figure clearly demonstrates, each country had its own specific dynamic of protest during the period studied.24 In Poland the magnitude of protest decreased in 1990 but then increased every year thereafter. This increasing magnitude of protest in Poland is the most unexpected finding of our study. We assumed that the regime transition, the transfer of political power, and the introduction of dramatic economic reforms would produce a higher level of popular mobilization and contentious politics at the beginning of the analyzed period. In Hungary the magnitude of protest was highest in 1989, declined in the following two years, and increased again at the end of the analyzed period. In Slovakia protest intensified until 1992 and declined afterward. In the former East Germany the magnitude of protest peaked in 1992 and declined in 1993.

The order of weighted indexes of magnitude produces a somewhat surprising ranking of the four countries. Poland turns out to have been the most contentious state during the early phase of democratic consolidation. Given Poland's traditions of contentious politics, this is not a surprise; but Slovakia's second-place ranking is. The latter country did not have as much protest as other states and protest actions were mostly nondisruptive (protest letters, statements), but on the per capita basis its population proved to be quite contentious. The biggest surprise is Hungary coming in last, since by all accounts Hungarians are more

24 Another index of magnitude, based partially on the "numbers of participants" variable (whose missing values were estimated), produced almost identical approximations of protest dynamics between 1989 and 1993.
dissatisfied with the post-1989 changes than are Poles or East Germans; one would expect them to be more contentious. In the fourth section we offer several explanations for both the differential patterns of protest dynamic and each country's standing in our protest ranking.

III. SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF PROTEST POLITICS

The countries analyzed in this paper differ not only in terms of incidence and magnitude of protest but also in terms of other protest characteristics (even though the repertoire of contention closely mirrored standard strategies used by protesting groups in contemporary politics). Protest actions in Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia were decidedly non-violent. In Poland disruptive strategies such as street demonstrations and strikes were most common; in Hungary and Slovakia nearly 70 percent of the strategies used by protesting groups were nondisruptive.
In contrast to these three countries, the number of violent protests in the former GDR was significantly higher, and disruptive strategies dominated the repertoire of collective action. See Table 3.

Our database did not record any important shifts in protest strategies used by challenging groups. Dominant types of strategies remained consistent throughout the entire period under study. Nor did we register any significant innovations in protest activities that were later diffused from one category of protestors to another or among various groups and organizations. Thus the repertoires of contention in each country remained relatively stable over time. This may indicate that we are not dealing with the type of protest cycle that Tarrow says is characterized among other things by expanding repertoires of contention.25

Although the general strategies of protest (violent, disruptive, and nonviolent) did not vary significantly from country to country, there were nevertheless specific forms of protest that tended to dominate in each country. In all four countries disruptive strategies including demonstrations, marches, and street blockades were frequently used by protesting groups and were most common in the former East Germany. In Poland strikes and strike alerts were used regularly, with the number of strikes there being at least three times higher than in any of the other countries. If we combine strikes and strike alerts, this form of protest constitutes 36.4 percent—that is, the plurality—of protest strategies in the Polish repertoire. The number of strikes was significantly smaller in the other three countries. In Hungary and Slovakia protest letters and statements were the most frequent strategy used to

express grievances and convey demands. The most frequently used strategies recorded in our database are presented in Table 4.

Not all social groups and categories were active in contentious politics; those who seem to have been hardest hit by the market reforms were often absent from the protest scene. Relatively few protest actions were organized by marginalized social groups such as the homeless and the unemployed or by minorities. Rather, it was mainstream social and professional groups that were most often involved in protest actions. In Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia public sector employees (excluding workers in state-owned enterprises) constituted the most protest-prone social category. In Poland workers and farmers were more prominent in protest activities than they were in the other three countries. Youth were more frequently involved in protest actions in the former GDR and Poland than in the other two countries. This finding, however, has to be carefully interpreted; we were unable to determine the category of participants in the majority of demonstrations, because we are missing a substantial amount of data on the social and professional profile of protesters. This amount is lower for Poland, because it is easier to identify participants in strikes, which were the dominant strategy in that country. The data on sociovocational categories of protest participants are presented in Table 5. The main cleavage of postcommunist politics

### Table 4

**Specific Protest Strategies (number and percentage of total)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Protest Strategies</th>
<th>Poland</th>
<th>Slovakia</th>
<th>Hungary</th>
<th>GDR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strike</td>
<td>432</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation of public buildings</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>.6%</td>
<td>.8%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstration/march/ blockade</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>792</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>36.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strike alert/threat to undertake</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>protest action</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent action</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open letters/statements</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>639</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=number of strategies</td>
<td>2,311</td>
<td>1,248</td>
<td>455</td>
<td>2,165</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Due to rounding, not all percentages total 100.
revealed by our research is between the state and its own employees. This contention is supported by the data regarding protest organizers and targets.

Our data on protest organizers are more reliable. We falsified our initial hypothesis that the incidence of spontaneous protests is going to be high during the early stages of regime transition. Protest events in all countries were usually organized by well-established organizations. Each country’s protest politics was dominated by a different set of organizations, but the range of organizations sponsoring protest actions was similar to those sponsoring protest activities in other European countries. They included labor unions, political parties, interests groups, and social movements. The only contrast with West European experiences was the much smaller role of social movements in sponsoring protest activities and the relatively larger role of traditional organizations such as political parties, trade unions, or professional associations.26 In Poland trade unions were the most active organizers of protest activities. In Hungary and Slovakia political parties were the most frequent organizers of protests. In the former East Germany social movements were dominant, followed by political parties. The data on protest organizers are presented in Table 6.

26 New social movements organized 36.1 percent or protests in France, 73.2 percent in Germany, 65.4 percent in the Netherlands, and 61.0 percent in Switzerland. See Jan Willem Duyvendak and Hanspeter Kriesi, “National Cleavage Structures,” in Hanspeter Kriesi et al., New Social Movements in Western Europe (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 20.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Poland</th>
<th>Slovakia</th>
<th>Hungary</th>
<th>GDR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political parties</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>25.8%</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
<td>20.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor unions</td>
<td>709</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>49.1%</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peasant/farmer organizations</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>.6%</td>
<td>.7%</td>
<td>.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest groups</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social/political movements</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>553</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>33.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N = number of organizations</td>
<td>1,444</td>
<td>1,021</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>1,664</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Due to rounding, not all percentages total 100.

Initially, we expected that the demands of the protesting groups would be concerned primarily with political issues. We accepted the notion common in the literature on East European transitions that in the wake of the collapse of state socialism, people have difficulty articulating their economic interests, mostly because they cannot easily locate themselves within the amorphous class structure inherited from state socialism. Yet our data show that the demands pressed by protesting groups were predominantly concrete expressions of everyday economic concerns. And when they were political, their tenor was mainly reformist, with antisystemic proclamations a rarity. It turns out that regime transitions and the establishment of democracy after decades of authoritarian rule did not create a highly politicized environment characterized by the predominance of symbolic politics. Thus, even in the language of contention one finds evidence of broad support for democracy and the market economy.

The particular cluster of demands in each of the four countries re-

reflects the concerns of the dominant organizers. In Poland, where trade unions played the most active role in organizing protest, economic demands predominated, while in Hungary and Slovakia political parties organized more protests than other groups and political demands were most common. In the former East Germany political demands only slightly outnumbered economic demands. The data on types of demands are presented in Table 7. Despite the variation in protest strategies, demands, and protest-sponsoring organizations, protest actions were uniformly directed against the state and demands were addressed to state authorities. There was an evident similarity in the targets of protest actions in all countries. (Targets are understood to be the authorities to which the demands were addressed and who were expected to respond to them.) The governments, followed by parliaments and other national-level state agencies, were by far the most frequent targets of protest actions. Only in the former East Germany do we see a significant number of demands addressed to local and regional authorities due to the federal structure of the state. A surprisingly low number of demands were addressed to the management of enterprises and domestic or foreign owners. It seems that regardless of the issue at stake, protesting groups look to the state and central authorities for solutions. Table 8 presents the distribution of targets of protest in all countries.

In sum, even the cursory look at various features of protest actions presented in this section reveals considerable contrasts alongside unexpected similarities among the four postcommunist countries. Such variations in magnitude, scope, and forms of protest actions, as well as in
### Table 8
**Targets of Protest Actions**
*(number and percentage of total)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ultimate Targets</th>
<th>Poland</th>
<th>Slovakia</th>
<th>Hungary</th>
<th>GDR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliament</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government/</td>
<td>989</td>
<td>449</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ministries, central agencies</td>
<td>51.3%</td>
<td>45.6%</td>
<td>50.4%</td>
<td>34.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local government</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic and foreign owners</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>347</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| N = number of targets             | 1,929  | 984      | 474     | 1,878|

* Due to rounding, not all percentages total 100.

Types of protest organizers and groups prone to participate in collective action, raise a number of interesting questions. In order to account for such differences, we will briefly examine several possible explanatory leads suggested by the following set of theories, which are derived from the arsenal of theories of social protest.

1. **Relative deprivation** links variation in protest activities to the changing perceptions and assessments of people's (particularly economic) situation.

2. **Instrumental institutionalism** is founded on the concept of political opportunity structure, which focuses on institutional constraints and opportunities available to protesters, including those that are linked to the transformation processes taking place in the region.

3. **Historical-cultural institutionalism** emphasizes interactions between institutionalization and cultural learning and turns our attention toward historically shaped "traditions" of contentious action.

4. **Resource mobilization theory** emphasizes resources available to challenging groups.

An examination of the fit between these theories and our data should allow us to determine which factors are primarily responsible for people's protest behavior. This, in turn, should shed new light on the politics of postcommunist consolidation.
IV. EXPLAINING THE PATTERNS OF PROTEST POLITICS IN EAST CENTRAL EUROPE

Conventional wisdom among observers of East Central European transformations initially held that building new democratic state institutions could be accomplished with relative ease. Also, the introduction of competitive elections and the formation of party systems was seen as a straightforward, uncomplicated task. The re-creation of civil society, however, was predicted to be a lengthy and difficult process, spanning a generation or two.28 After the experiences of the early years of the transition, however, these claims are ready to be revised. During the first five years of consolidation, the rebirth and/or expansion of civil society occurred with unexpected speed and intensity in every country. The state, however, was not so much reformed as weakened. The development of political parties was often slow, tedious, and unpredictable. Moreover, these processes differed from country to country. East Germany experienced the swift establishment of a new political and legal framework as a result of the unification, and the new state administration has been stronger and more efficient than in any other postcommunist regime. Similarly, the party system crystallized and stabilized much faster, with the West German parties extending their organizational reach to the five new Länder.29 In the other three countries the states and party systems have been in flux; relative to Poland and Slovakia, however, Hungary has been the most successful in developing a relatively stable and clearly articulated party system.30

The four countries included in the project represent distinct types of postcommunist transformations and have experienced contrasting political and economic developments since 1989. The major differences among them stem from the type and sequence of economic policies and from the nature and extent of the state transformation. These differences are summarized in Table 9. The first dimension represents the extent of changes experienced by the bureaucratic structures of the

29 In the words of Gissendanner and Wielgohs:

The transformation of east Germany differed from the post-socialist norm because of three particular circumstances: (1) east Germany received a well-balanced and proven institutional system with unification; (2) the east German transformation was dominated by external (west German) actors who were empowered by their experience with this institutional system; (3) eastern Germans benefited from massive financial transfers which compensated for the social costs of economic reforms and which financed infrastructure investment.

postcommunist state. In all countries a classical party state was rapidly dismantled. The Communist Party was eliminated, basic state institutions were redesigned, constitutions were amended, and parliaments and governments were given supreme authority and reestablished under democratic control. The office of president, albeit with different prerogatives, was created in all four countries.

In Poland and Hungary there has been a notable continuity in the institutional organization and personnel of the state. This continuity is a result of two factors: first, in the final years of communist rule these countries introduced a number of institutional reforms compatible with the requirements of a market economy and democracy; second, both countries exited state socialism on the basis of intraelite negotiations and pacts, which assured a significant degree of continuity of state institutions. In contrast to these two countries, the former GDR and Slovakia experienced a more profound change in the state organization. In October 1990 the German Democratic Republic was unified with West Germany and the five new Länder were incorporated into the federal framework of the West German Republic. At the same time all institutions of the East German state were dismantled and replaced by institutions and laws transferred from the West. State employees were screened and purged. Slovakia became an independent state on January 1, 1993, following failed efforts to renegotiate the Czechoslovak federation. Many institutions of the Slovak Republic existing under the federal arrangement of the Czechoslovak state simply became Slovak national institutions; however, new segments of the state administration had to be organized almost from scratch. Moreover, the rapid and contentious departure from state socialism in these countries contributed to institutional discontinuity with the old regime.

The newly emerged democratic states inherited different economic legacies and pursued contrasting economic policies. East Germany and Poland implemented rapid and radical economic transformations. The Balcerowicz Plan, introduced in January 1990 in response to the dramatic deterioration of the Polish economy and the threat of hyperinfla-
tion, imposed harsh macroeconomic stabilization measures. This adjustment program instantly reshaped Poland's economic system, arresting an escalating economic crisis and imposing new, market-friendly rules. It opened the way for comprehensive structural economic reforms combined with privatization and welfare reforms.\footnote{See Jeffrey Sachs, \textit{Poland's Jump to the Market Economy} (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993); Ben Slay, \textit{The Polish Economy: Crisis, Reform, and Transformation} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); and Kazimierz Poznanski, \textit{Poland's Protracted Transition} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).} In the former East Germany the economic transformation was designed to unify economic institutions, fiscal and monetary policies, and economic conditions between two parts of the country. The change affected the entire institutional structure of the economy. Stabilization policies were combined with structural reforms, comprehensive privatization, and a thorough transformation of welfare institutions. The dismantling of all legacies of state socialism was faster and more radical than in any other post-communist country. It included the massive and swift privatization of all economic assets previously controlled by the communist state. This immense institutional change was cushioned by an unprecedented transfer of capital, bureaucratic know-how, and assistance from the West to the East. In contrast to Poland and East Germany, Hungary and Slovakia chose a more gradual pace for economic transformations, in terms of both macroeconomic and privatization policies.

This analysis does not reveal any clear patterns: there is no correlation between the nature of power transfer, the extent of state continuity, and the type of economic reforms, on the one hand, and the magnitude of protest, on the other. However, if one puts aside Slovakia and East Germany, two countries where a significant amount of protest resulted from the dramatic redefinition of the polity, and focuses on Poland and Hungary, one may conclude that the factor which seems to explain the varied magnitude of collective protest is the type and sequencing of economic reforms introduced by the postcommunist regime: rapid reforms resulted in more protests than did gradual reforms. This is what the critics of the shock therapy programs have often argued. Such arguments build, although usually implicitly, on the logic of some "deprivation theory." We will demonstrate that such views cannot withstand a more systematic scrutiny.

The reasoning goes as follows: (1) rapid economic reforms produce higher social costs and more dissatisfaction among the populace than slower, more gradual reforms. In turn, (2) the heightened level of dissatisfaction with the reforms and the elites that designed and imple-
Table 10

Selected Rankings of the Central European States\textsuperscript{a}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1,2,3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(-12.2)</td>
<td>(72.0)</td>
<td>(30)</td>
<td>(2.92)</td>
<td>(6.57)</td>
<td>(+17)</td>
<td>(+19)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,2,3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1,5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(-27.4)</td>
<td>(73.3)</td>
<td>(19.5)</td>
<td>(2.4)</td>
<td>(2.89)</td>
<td>(+2)</td>
<td>(-10)</td>
<td>(Czecho-slovakia)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDR</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1,2,3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(-16.8)</td>
<td>(85)</td>
<td>(23)</td>
<td>(3.6)</td>
<td>(3.31)</td>
<td>(-6)</td>
<td>(-10)</td>
<td>(Czecho-slovakia)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Data for columns 2 and 5: World Development Report: From Plan to Market (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 69, 173; and Michael Wyzan, “Increased Inequality, Poverty Accompany Economic Transition,” Transition 4 (October 1996), 24–27. Column 3 is based on Jeffrey Sachs and Andrew M. Warner, Achieving Rapid Growth in the Transition Economies of Central Europe, Development Discussion Papers, Harvard Institute for International Development, no. 544 (Cambridge: Harvard University, July 1996). Column 4: Janos Kornai, “Paying Bill for Goulash-Communism.” The figure for 1990 refers only to the category of workers and employees and excludes workers in agricultural cooperatives; from 1991 on the data include these categories. Column 6: Jan Rutkowski, Becoming Less Equal: Wage Effects of Economic Transition in Poland, Pew Papers on Central Eastern European Reform and Regionalism (Princeton: Center of International Studies, Princeton University, 1996). Column 7: Ferge (fn. 37). Columns 8, 9, see fn. 35; column 10, see fn. 36; column 11, see fn. 37 (heads of households evaluate the regime change). For columns 8 and 9 the numbers were obtained by subtracting the percentage of the respondents who approved of the regime in winter 1993–94 (New Democracies Barometer III) from the percentage of those who approved the regime in fall 1991 (NDB-I). It should be also emphasized that Poles disapproved of the communist regime and the socialist economic system much more decisively than either the Slovaks or the Hungarians.

\textsuperscript{a} The rankings in columns 1, 5, 6, 7, and 10 are from the highest to the lowest values of the indexes; in columns 8, 9, 11, and 12 they are from the lowest to the highest.
mented them results in the increased protest magnitude. Finally, (3) intense protest brings about the downfall of the reforming, neoliberal elites. As we will demonstrate in the next section, the second link in this reasoning—which is at the heart of deprivation theory—is not confirmed by our empirical data. We do not intend to engage in refuting deprivation theory; its weaknesses are well established. Our goal is to assess its plausibility in the context of studies on democratic consolidation.

The evidence pertaining to the first link of the reasoning sketched above is ambiguous; depending on which variables one uses, one can either refute or confirm the proposition that the deeper the economic decline (measured by “objective” indicators), the more dissatisfied the population. Between 1989 and 1993 Slovakia suffered the steepest decline in GDP: −27.4 percent. Slovaks also saw their real wages drop by 27 percent (Table 10, column 4). Hungary’s decline on both counts was much less dramatic. Yet Hungarians were more dissatisfied with the post-1989 changes than were Slovaks (Table 10, columns 8–12), perhaps because postcommunist Hungarian society became less egalitarian than Slovak society (Table 10, columns 5–7).

It should be noted here that variations in protest magnitude and protest repertoire are not systematically related to the variations in the so-called objective economic indicators, as is clearly evidenced by the comparison of data reported in Table 10, columns 1–3. According to the analysis by Sachs and Warner, Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia have almost identical scores on the composite Reform Index; moreover their scores are the highest for the entire postcommunist world. Yet the patterns of protest activities in these three countries were widely divergent. Moreover, the country where the accumulative decline of GDP during the 1989–93 period was the smallest and the country that was first in overcoming the “transitory recession”—that is, Poland—experienced the highest intensifying magnitude of protest.

**Protest as an Expression of Deprivation or Grievances**

Let us now turn to the examination of the relationship between the level of people’s discontent and the magnitude and other features of protest. As already noted, this relationship is frequently, if only implicitly, theorized with the help of some simplified version of the relative deprivation theory. It is impossible to summarize the classical variant of this theory, as proposed, for example, by Ted Gurr in his *Why Men Rebel*; it is a nonparsimonious and intricate theoretical system, founded

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on the concept of "relative deprivation." However, the main thrust of the argument—at least in its most popular and influential version—is simple and easily falsifiable. In general, various relative deprivation approaches assume that

an increase in extent or intensity of grievances or deprivation and the development of ideology occur prior to the emergence of social movement phenomena. Each of these perspectives holds that discontent produced by some combination of structural conditions is a necessary if not sufficient condition to an account of the rise of any specific social movement [or protest—G.E. and J.K.] phenomenon.34

In this rendition of the theory, proposed by McCarthy and Zald, the concept of "deprivation" replaces "relative deprivation," which considerably changes the nature of the argument. We will follow McCarthy and Zald, mostly because we know of no comparative study of relative deprivation in the four East Central European states, whereas we found several comparative studies dealing with various aspects (indicators) of political and economic "deprivation" or "intensity of grievances."

We will test a simple hypothesis: the higher the level of discontent with the post-1989 economic and political changes or the higher the intensity of grievances or the sense of deprivation, the higher the magnitude of protest. To test this hypothesis, we rank the four countries according to the results of several comparative studies that measured various aspects of people’s discontent and then compare the results of these rankings with the ranking based on the magnitude of protest.

The studies we have chosen for this exercise were conducted in at least three countries we are interested in during the 1989–93 period. The surveys asked the same set of questions in all countries, thereby producing comparable results. These studies include

1. The New Democracies Barometer IV: A 10-Nation Survey35
2. Mason’s study on attitudes toward the market and the state in postcommunist Europe36
3. Ferge's study on the satisfaction with the post-1989 reforms37

33 Relative deprivation is "a perceived discrepancy between men's value expectations and their value capabilities. Value expectations are the goods and conditions of life to which people believe they are rightfully entitled. Value capabilities are goods and conditions they think they are capable of attaining or maintaining, given the social means available to them." Gurr, Why Men Rebel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 13.


36 David Mason, "Attitudes towards the Market and the State in Postcommunist Europe" (Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, 1992), 14. The index of alienation, reported by Mason, is the mean response (for a sample of respondents from
Table 10 presents the results of our analyses. The hypothesis is not confirmed: Hungarians are clearly most dissatisfied with the post-1989 changes, and yet the magnitude of protest there is lower than elsewhere. The contrast with Poland is particularly striking: Hungarians are more dissatisfied than Poles, yet Poland has a higher magnitude of protest. Another anomaly from the point of view of the regularity suggested by our hypothesis emerges from a comparison of Hungary with former East Germany. The situation in the latter country is dramatically different from that in other postcommunist states, given the financial transfers between the Western and Eastern areas of the country and the efforts of the German government to equalize their standards of living. As a result of this massive assistance, the economy of the five new German Länder grew between 7 and 10 percent a year between 1992 and 1994, and as Kopstein points out, "Purely in terms of living standards, East Germans are the clear winners of communism's collapse." \(^{38}\) And yet East Germans engage in protest activities with a higher frequency and more zeal than Hungarians, who are far less satisfied with the results of the collapse of communism.

A comparison of the pattern of changes during the studied period produces mixed results. As Figure 2 illustrates, the Slovak and Hungarian data conform to the predictions of the deprivation theory: the fluctuations of protest magnitude in these countries follow the pattern of the fluctuations in people's approval of economic and political systems. However, the theory fails dismally for Poland. As people's approval of the political and economic systems increases systematically, so does the magnitude of protest!

Given the data reported in Table 10, it is possible to falsify the deprivation hypothesis in many different ways. For example, given the data in column 4 (Kornai's estimates of the real wages decline), this hypothesis would predict that Poland and Slovakia should have a similar magnitude of strikes, one that would be higher than in Hungary, whose wage earners experienced a much smaller decline in their incomes. Also, Polish and Slovak protesters should issue economic demands (for each country) on four five-point scaled questions. Hungary's index was the highest in the whole sample: 3.61. Poland's was the fourth highest (3.27); East Germany's, ninth (2.94); Czechoslovakia's, tenth (2.91). The study was conducted in the spring and summer of 1991.


\(^{38}\) Jeffrey Kopstein, "Weak Foundations under East German Reconstruction," *Transition* 26 (January 1996), 64. Cumulative transfer of funds into the former East Germany reached $494,039,000 by 1995, while Hungary received $10,634,000 of foreign investment, Poland $6,459,000, and Slovakia $483,000.
higher wages) with greater frequency than their Hungarian counterparts do. The first expectation is not confirmed by the data presented in Tables 2 and 4: Poles organized far more strikes than either Hungarians or Slovaks. The second expectation fails in light of data presented in Table 7: Poles concentrated their demands on economic issues far more often than did the Hungarians—as expected—but also more often than the Slovaks.

One could of course argue that Poles, on the one hand, and Hungarians and Slovaks, on the other, expressed their economic deprivation through different idioms and organizational strategies. But this is precisely the kind of argument that the deprivation approach is ill equipped to field. Changes in various measures of protest—magnitude,
strategies, mobilizational efficacy, success, and so on—do not reflect the fluctuations in people's sense of deprivation (dissatisfaction).

In light of our empirical evidence, the reasoning behind a popular thesis attributing the downfall of the neoliberal elites to protests by increasingly dissatisfied populations is faulty on two counts. First, for an average year of the period under study, Poland had a higher magnitude of protest than Slovakia and Hungary, although its economy performed better than the economies of the other two countries and although Poles were far more satisfied than were Slovaks and Hungarians with the results of the postcommunist economic reforms.39 Second, as the performance of the Polish economy improved and Poles' satisfaction with the reforms increased, so did the magnitude of protest. Clearly, the deprivation theory does not explain fluctuating magnitudes and patterns of protest in the four countries. One must therefore turn elsewhere for an explanation. We hypothesize that the many differences in the magnitude and characteristics of protest actions in the four countries under study are related both to the post-1989 processes of the reconstitution and institutionalization of democratic politics and to the institutional legacies of state socialism.

**INSTRUMENTAL INSTITUTIONALISM**

If the institutional structure of the state is a critical variable in explaining the incidence and magnitude of collective protest,40 transitory polities where all stable characteristics of the political opportunity structure are in flux should have been an arena of constant collective struggles. Since they are not and since the magnitude of protest varies from state to state, the concept of political opportunity structure has to be carefully reconsidered in order to apply it to cases of regime change.

We argue that there is a need to distinguish between the **structure of political opportunity** (characteristic for stable polities) and **unstructured opportunity** (a feature of transitory, "open" polities).41 A change in some

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39 Only in 1990 and 1989 did the Polish economy have a lower GDP growth rate than the Hungarian and Slovak economies, and it was only minimally lower. Moreover, its economy began growing already in 1992, while the other two economies kept declining (negative growth rates) throughout the entire period under study. See Jan Svejnar, "Economic Transformation in Central and East Europe: The Task Still Ahead" (Paper presented at the meeting of the Pet Jacobsson Foundation, Washington, D.C., October 8, 1995); and World Development Report: From Plan to Market (New York; Oxford University Press, 1996), 173.


41 The most salient changes in opportunity structure are four: the opening up of access to participation, shifts in ruling alignments, the availability of influential allies, and cleavages within and among elites; Sidney Tarrow, Power in Movement (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 86.
dimensions of the opportunity structure in stable countries will be immediately treated as an incentive to act by all those collective actors who have been prepared to press their claims against the state. When the "initiator" groups or organizations are successful in pressing their demands, others may follow, expanding the range of issues and institutional arenas of contentious politics. Thus one could argue that in stable but gradually changing polities, alterations of the political opportunity structures provide incentives for contentious action.

By contrast, in countries undergoing rapid political and economic transition, the four elements of the political opportunity structure specified by Tarrow are in flux. Opportunities for collective action are wide open and constraints are uncertain. Such a situation may either have demobilizing effects or simply encourage mobilization without limits. For organized collective actors, issues that were important in the past may no longer be relevant and new issue-areas may be unclear or not yet established. Moreover, agendas for contentious politics in more stable polities are built on the assumption that it is relatively clear who is friend and who is foe and who bears responsibility for specific policies and problems. The distinction between them and us serves as a guidepost for the struggle. But in transitory polities this underlying cultural matrix of allies and foes takes on an ambiguous character: former oppositional activists take over the state apparatus and it is no longer clear who is us and who is them.

Such conditions, which we will call unstructured opportunity, offer protesters considerable freedom of action: there are few established organizational boundaries that should be abolished; there are no predefined agendas whose expansion may be demanded; ruling alignments change often; there are potentially many available allies; and cleavages within and among elites are fluid and poorly identified. The state manages to maintain order within the public domain, but it offers little resistance to nonviolent protest actions and it seems to ignore protesters. Additionally, state functionaries do not know how to deal with protesters, as formal and informal procedures through which protesters are either marginalized or included in the policy-making processes are poorly developed. It is therefore difficult to analyze changing features of protest as responses to changing opportunities: opportunities, defined as general characteristics of the political system, simply do not change much.

42 See debates on cycles of protest and especially Doug McAdam, "'Initiator' and 'Spin-off' Movements: Diffusion Processes in Protest Cycles," in Mark Traugott (fn. 25).
43 For an analysis of the significance of such mechanisms, see Kriesi (fn. 40), 173–79.
In East Central Europe, where such an unchanging and poorly structured opportunity emerged after 1989, the magnitude of protest is by and large lower than in more established democracies. We suspect that this is a result of the demobilizing effect of the opportunity structure’s “excessive” openness⁴⁴ and the weakness of institutional support structures for protest activities (including the availability of organizational, material, and symbolic resources), in comparison with West European democracies.

At the same time, the protest magnitude in all countries fluctuated although the openness of the system (its political opportunity structure) did not. And protest strategies and demands also varied from country to country, although their political systems seem to have been equally open. Since neither deprivation theory nor the macrolevel opportunity structure theory explains this variation, we need to specify other mechanisms. We observe that despite the lack of openings in the political opportunity structure (in Tarrow’s sense), collective action is patterned by several old and new institutional constraints. The situation is fluid and unstructured; that is, protesters’ demands and strategies cannot be carefully crafted as responses to partial openings here or there in the preestablished institutional network of the polity (as in Western democracies). Such a network simply does not exist. But singular institutional points of reference do exist: they can be found among the institutionalized legacies of past conflicts and among the emerging institutions of the new political domain. Both these legacies and the emerging institutions offer concrete incentives for collective actions.

This new, unstructured political opportunity can be examined with the use of the available institutional modes of analysis. For example, we realized that the relatively high magnitude of protest in Poland can be explained through a comparative study of distinct, though mutually reinforcing, institutional mechanisms suggested by the two institutional theories listed in Section III, cultural–historical and instrumental, as well as by the resource mobilization theory. Since we have more variables (and their values) than cases, we cannot conduct a rigorous test that would allow us to pinpoint the best explanation. We can, however, determine whether the patterns existing in our data conform to the expectations suggested by major institutional arguments.

In the field of protest studies there are two major arguments concerning the link between protest magnitude and characteristics and other institutional features of the political system:

⁴⁴ This constitutes a corroboration of Eisinger’s thesis, which posits that protest is most likely “in systems characterized by a mix of open and closed factors.” See Tarrow (fn. 41), 86.
—Protesting can be construed as a rational, calculated response to the lack of access to policy-making through other channels (for example, the lack of corporatist inclusion). The more restricted the access to other channels, the higher the probability of protest.

—Protesting can best be seen as a useful strategy in interorganizational competition. When there are several competing unions (or union federations), for example, they tend to engage in protest in order to demonstrate their credentials as champions of the working people and to outbid each other in wooing potential supporters.45 Thus, the more fragmented and politically divided the labor movement, the higher the probability of protest.

Following the logic of the first explanation, we expect fewer strikes and labor-related demonstrations in states that institutionalized the interaction between labor unions, employers, and the relevant state agencies. As Schmitter, Nollert, and Wallace and Jenkins noted, the institutionalization of neocorporatist bargaining diminishes the likelihood of protest.46 Countries with a strong social democratic party (Hungary) and a centralized labor sector (Hungary, former East Germany, Slovakia) are expected to have fewer industrial conflicts and strikes than would a more pluralistic country with several unions that do not have "direct" access to the political process (Poland).47

These expected regularities are indeed confirmed by our data. One of the most prominent features of Hungarian, Slovak, and East German transitory politics was the early institution of top-level corporatist arrangements. Hungary established the Council for Interest Reconciliation already in 1988, Slovakia's Council of Economic and Social Agreement was established in 1990, and in Germany neocorporatist institutions expanded to the new Länder in 1990, during the early stages of unification.48 And as expected, Poland, where a tripartite mechanism was only established in February 1994, had by far the high-

45 This explanation draws on the logic of historical institutionalism, as defined by Hall and Taylor. Historical institutionalists, while searching for explanations of group conflict, began paying "greater attention to the way in which institutions structure political interactions" and "began to argue that other [than state] social and political institutions could also contribute to political outcomes by structuring conflict among individuals or groups over scarce resources." Peter A. Hall and Rosemary C. R. Taylor, "Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms," Political Studies 44, no. 3 (1996).
47 Wallace and Jenkins (fn. 46), 134.
est incidence and magnitude of strikes, organized predominantly by trade unions.

The second institutional explanation, emphasizing interunion competition, is also confirmed by our data. The Polish trade union sector was much more diversified, politically divided, and decentralized than its Hungarian, Slovak, and German counterparts. As expected, Poland had the higher magnitude of strikes, which often set outcompeting with rival trade unions as one of their goals. Thus, instrumental institutionalism gives a greater understanding of protest magnitude (pluralist polities with competing organizations will have more protest) and specifies the major groups likely to engage in protest activities; it is particularly helpful in explaining the variation in protest organizers.

**HISTORICAL–CULTURAL INSTITUTIONAL EXPLANATION**

Strong evidence points to traditions and previous experiences of protest as a good indicator of future protest actions. Collective action is predicated here on learning experience as well as the availability of resources inherited from previous struggles. The comparison of our countries clearly shows that the high magnitude of protest in Poland can be linked to the existing tradition of protest. Poland was the only country in the former Soviet bloc that experienced five major political crises that culminated in the “self-limiting revolution” of 1980–81. During the Solidarity period millions of Poles participated in collective protests and learned the skills of contentious politics. This argument is additionally supported by the fact that Solidarity had earlier on developed the most common forms of protest (strikes) as its core strategy of contention.

Hungary, by contrast, has a well-established tradition of street demonstrations and struggles (1956 in particular), which played a significant role during the power transfer of 1988–90. The unions and other protest organizers in former East Germany should be influenced by the dominant action repertoire brought over by West German unions and other social movement organizations, which organize most of the protest actions there. As Koopmans and Kriesi report, demonstrative strategy dominated the German protest repertoire. Moreover,

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East European Democracies: Theoretical Coordinates and Empirical Assessment” (Berlin: Max-Planck-Gesellschaft, Humboldt Universität, 1995).


the 1989 oppositional movement in East Germany relied heavily on street demonstrations as its main protest strategy. Finally, in Slovakia, protest traditions are almost nonexistent, though it should be noted that Czechoslovak dissidents employed letter writing as their main form of protest. Given these historical traditions in the four countries, Poland should have the highest magnitude of protest. The Polish ratio of street demonstrations to strikes should be considerably lower than in Hungary or Germany; Slovakia should experience few strikes or demonstrations.

The empirical data used to verify these hypotheses are summarized in Table 2. The hypotheses are strongly confirmed. Poland has the highest magnitude of protest. Hungarian protesters participated in street demonstrations four times more often than they went on strike; German protesters demonstrated six times more often than they went on strike. Poland had the highest magnitude of strikes, and Poles were almost equally prone to strike as to demonstrate. This is an expected result given Poland's relatively long tradition of political conflicts disguised as industrial conflicts. In Slovakia letter writing was the most frequently used protest strategy (see Table 4).

In summary, historical-cultural institutionalism contributes to the explanation of the overall magnitude of protest; it is however most useful in explaining the variation in protest repertoires among countries.

Resource Mobilization Theory

Both institutional arguments (instrumental and historical-cultural) specify factors that are the key determinants of variation among the four countries in (1) protest organizers and participants and (2) repertoires of contention (for example, various ratios of strikes to demonstrations). They do not provide a complete explanation of the observed variation in protest magnitude, however. For example, the magnitude of protest was unexpectedly high in the five Länder of the former East Germany, but one would be hard pressed to argue that East Germans inherited a long-standing and elaborate domestic tradition of protest, particularly street demonstrations. Additionally, East Germany shared with Hungary a similar institutional framework; both had tripartite commissions and a relatively unified trade-union sector. Yet Hungary had a much lower magnitude of protest.

To explain this variation in protest magnitude, we turn to the resource mobilization approach, which suggests that number, size, and

51 However, a very recent tradition of demonstrations developed in some locations. See, for example, Susanne Lohmann, "Dynamics of Informational Cascades: The Monday Demonstrations in Leipzig, East Germany, 1989-91," World Politics 47 (October 1994).
duration of protest events depend on the availability of material and organizational resources to the challenging groups. Accordingly, countries where protest organizers have easier access to resources will have higher levels of contention. Such resources may be developed internally within a given society (Polish Solidarity) or may be transferred from resource-rich to resource-poor countries and regions (as in the case of GDR). While international links and diffusion are relatively common, it is rare to find wholesale transfers of organizational structures, activists, and resources—as occurred after the reunification of Germany. One can argue therefore that the high magnitude of collective protest in East Germany reflects the external transfer of resources for collective action. Poland, another resource-rich country, also had a high level of protest. In Hungary, with a relatively low supply of protest-facilitating resources, the magnitude of protest was the lowest. Slovakia constitutes an anomaly: limited resources, an early-established tripartite council, and minimal intraunion competition coexisted with a relatively high magnitude of protest per capita. It needs to be emphasized, however, that the Slovak repertoire of protest was the least disruptive and bothersome for the authorities; it was dominated by such strategies as open letters and public statements. The nondisruptive character of these protests can be explained at least partly by the lack of material, organizational, and symbolic resources.

Protest and Democratic Consolidation

Perhaps the most important challenge facing the architects of post-communist transformations comes from the tensions generated by the necessity of implementing political (democratization) and economic (marketization) reforms simultaneously. In particular, it has often been argued that the high short-term social costs of neoliberal reforms will anger the public, which will utilize the newly acquired freedoms and newly established democratic procedures to block economic transformations and depose the reforming elites. Moreover, the logic of collective action advanced by Mancur Olson and his followers suggests that the losers should be much easier to mobilize than the beneficiaries of the reforms; the latter are scattered throughout the society while the former are concentrated in such easily mobilizable sectors as large enterprises of heavy industry. In fact, as various analyses of Latin American cases amply demonstrate, the public reaction to neoliberal

reforms, particularly in the “losing” sectors, is likely to take the form of mass protest, which may turn violent and exact casualties.53

In turn, protest is often deemed to be detrimental to democratic consolidation.54 For example, Bresser Pereira, Maravall, and Przeworski conclude that for the successful consolidation of democracy “all groups must channel their demands through the democratic institutions and abjure other tactics.”55 The database on protest in the four Central European countries allows us to test this reasoning.

First, we found out that in contrast to Latin America, the four Central European countries we studied experienced no massive and violent rebellions against the economic reforms, despite the deep economic recession, rapidly growing unemployment, and declining standards of living during the initial stages of the reform process. Also, despite the political turbulence and expanding opportunities for collective action, the magnitude of protest in Central Europe was lower than in the established democracies of Western Europe. Throughout the period under study these countries did not experience escalating protest activity that would constitute a significant threat to their newly established political institutions. While the employees of “losing” industries or sectors were often at the forefront of protest activities, as the Olsonian argument would predict, their organizations and leaders rarely challenged the legitimacy of the new sociopolitical order or the necessity of economic restructuring.56 Thus, we conclude that in East Central Europe protest became one of the routine modes of interaction between the state and the society, a regular feature of many democratic regimes at the end of the twentieth century.

Hence our second major conclusion: protest need not be a threat to a budding democracy. In fact, under certain conditions it may facilitate democratic consolidation. This happens when


55 Bresser Pereira, Maravall, and Przeworski (fn. 13), 4.

—protest is employed as a means of bringing forward demands for reforms and not challenging the legitimacy of the regime
—its methods are recognized as legitimate by a large sector of the populace
—it is channeled through well-known strategies and coordinated by established organizations.

Our research shows that these are the predominant characteristics of protest in the postcommunist countries of Central Europe.

The Polish case illustrates this best. What transpired there during the early postcommunist years was a different kind of institutionalization or consolidation of democracy from the one Bresser Pereira, Maravall, and Przeworski had in mind. Increasingly institutionalized protest became a “democratic institution,” which functioned as part and parcel of the democratizing polity. Although Poles were often dissatisfied with the existing conventional channels of interest articulation (such as parties and the Parliament) and therefore turned to protest as a way of signaling their concerns and influencing policy decisions, they were nonetheless increasingly satisfied with democracy itself.

Our research confirms that the way people’s grievances are translated into political action is determined by the institutional context within which collective actors (and, most importantly, their leaders) find themselves. Under certain circumstances, activists will choose protest as the preferred strategy. For example, in a country like Poland with a developed tradition of striking, the lack of inclusionary neocorporatist institutions, a divided and competitive labor sector, and the ready availability of protest-facilitating resources, the magnitude of protest should be (and was) high. This means that in some postcommunist countries, democratic consolidation may take a specific direction: a democracy with a heightened level of contentious politics may emerge.

In more general terms, the patterns we detect in our data suggest that there is no correlation between the magnitude or type of protest and the quality of democratic consolidation. Among the four Central European countries we studied, Poland had the highest magnitude of protest, Hungary the lowest. Slovakia and former East Germany were in the middle. At the same time, for most observers, the progress of democratic consolidation in Hungary, Poland, and the former East

57 Eckstein and Gurr observe that “the risk of chronic low-level conflict is one of the prices democrats should expect to pay for freedom from regimentation by the state—or by authorities in other social units, whether industrial establishments, trade unions, schools, universities, or families.” Harry Eckstein and Ted Robert Gurr, Patterns of Authority: A Structural Basis for Political Inquiry (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1975), 452.

Germany passed the point of no return; an authoritarian reversal in these states is unlikely. By contrast, Slovakia, the country with the least disruptive repertoire of protest and a low level of strike activity, is believed to be the least consolidated democracy of the four.59

VI. SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

In the first section of this paper we established a need to study the bottom-up mechanisms of democratic consolidation and we proposed, further, that this largely neglected area can be fruitfully studied through event analysis of protest behavior. The second and third sections presented selected results from our four-country study of the postcommunist protest politics. The fourth section offered explanations of the observed phenomena derived from the four established research traditions. This exercise leads us to a number of general conclusions.

First, modes of breakdown of communist regimes had no noticeable impact on the magnitude of protest. Thus, countries that experienced “pacted transitions” (Poland and Hungary) have as much variation between themselves as do countries where “popular upsurge” forced the removal of the communist elites from power (Slovakia and the former GDR).

Second, variations in the magnitude, repertoires, and strategies of protest politics cannot be explained by reference to a configuration of “objective” economic (or political) factors. Balcerowicz is right to argue that “the scale of protests must have been determined mainly by factors other than the type of economic strategy."60

Third, neither can these variations be explained by invoking people’s perceptions and assessments of their situation, as the “deprivation” approach suggests: the states with more discontent do not necessarily have more protest activities than the states with less discontent. Therefore, all analyses of the post-1989 reforms in East Central Europe that explain political changes (for example, electoral successes of the post-communist parties) by simply relating them to people’s growing discontent may be erroneous. For example, it has been suggested that Poland, which instituted the most radical economic reforms (shock therapy), would also experience the highest magnitude of protest. This expectation is indeed confirmed by our analyses. Yet the causes of such

59 According to the Freedom House Survey, for 1992–93 Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia were on the same level in terms of “political rights” and “civil liberties”: all scored 2 in both categories. In 1993–94 there was a serious disparity: while both Poland and Hungary scored 1 in “political rights” and 2 in “civil liberties,” Slovakia scored 3 and 4, respectively. See Freedom House (fn. 1).

60 Leszek Balcerowicz, Wielosca I rozwoj (Kraków: Znak, 1995), 372.
high magnitude and the *specific features* of protest in Poland cannot be explained by linking them to a general sense of deprivation felt by the populace, as is usually, though often implicitly, practiced. As we demonstrated, the magnitude of protest in Poland kept increasing even as popular approval of the postcommunist economic and political order also grew. Our comparative analysis of four cases confirmed a thesis commonly accepted by the students of protest politics, that protest activities are driven by much subtler mechanisms, summarized in our next conclusion.

Fourth, no single theory of collective action explains all of the observed variation in protest characteristics we discovered. The best fit between theory and empirical results is achieved when propositions derived from several theories are combined. Our argument is that collective protest in new democracies is best explained from an institutional perspective that *combines* the concept of *resources* in a broad sense—that is, including traditions, symbols, and discourses alongside material and organizational elements—with the concept of *institutional opportunities*, which are produced by emerging organizational patterns of the new polity. The resource segment of such a syncretic explanation helps to account for the variance in protest magnitude. The institutional component also contributes to the explanation of protest magnitude, but it is particularly useful in explaining other features of protest. More specifically, historical-cultural institutionalism helps to account for the differences in protest repertoires, while instrumental institutionalism is particularly suitable for explaining variation in magnitudes and organizers.

And finally, protest does not necessarily constitute a threat to democratic consolidation; indeed, under certain conditions it facilitates this process. There exists therefore a type of democratic consolidation with a heightened level of contentious collective action. The best example is Poland during the first five years of its consolidation. Slovakia, by contrast, had less protest—and protest of a type much more benign than in the other three countries—and yet five years after the collapse of state socialism its democracy was weaker than in Poland.