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Nikolenyi, Csaba. *Institutional Design and Party Government in Post-Communist Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, x + 218pp., £50.00 h/b.

Coalition Governments in East European (CEE) democracies, yet in contrast to their West European counterparts they have received comparatively little attention in the literature. Taking this lack of scholarship on coalition governance in post-communist Europe as the starting point, Csaba Nikolenyi's book presents a focussed and insightful comparative study of electoral, parliamentary and executive coalitions in the region. Nikolenyi's central argument is that patterns in the formation, size and endurance of such coalitions can systematically be explained by differences in institutional arrangements. More specifically, institutions which favour a higher concentration of political power create incentives for long-term coalition-building before and after elections; dispersion of political power, however, has the opposite effect.

The book is divided into six chapters framed by a brief introduction and conclusion and supplemented by a comprehensive four-part appendix. In the first content chapter, Nikolenyi provides a concise systematic review of the institutional arrangement in CEE and develops the abovementioned argument. Furthermore, he identifies three distinct groups of countries with different levels of potential for power concentration in electoral, parliamentary and executive institutions: firstly, Estonia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Slovenia (having the most favourable conditions for power concentration/coalition formation); secondly, Latvia, Slovakia (with mixed conditions); and thirdly, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Czech Republic (with the least favourable conditions). The subsequent chapters are then dedicated to testing this assumption as well as sets of more detailed hypotheses on the effect of institutional factors on the formation of electoral coalitions, their influence on coalition formation (demonstrated by an in-depth study of Hungary), the occurrence of minority governments, government duration and coalitions' ability to elect a president in parliament.

The institutionalist argument made by Nikolenyi is compelling not only due to its simplicity but also because it condenses conventional theoretical wisdom and case knowledge into a parsimonious framework which is able to explain overall patterns of coalition politics in the region. Variations in the likelihood of electoral coalitions, minority government and cabinet duration cluster as predicted around the previously identified groups of countries (notwithstanding institutional differences within them) and corroborate Nikolenyi's central claim. The book's approach means that the level of analysis in the main text—except for the chapters on Hungary and indirect presidential elections—remains rather general. Nevertheless, relevant events and developments in individual countries are still discussed in the appendices (which make up almost 25% of the book's contents). The latter as well as the general patterns in coalition governance identified in the analysis provide a promising framework for more in-depth studies focussing on minor variations left unexplained by Nikolenyi's argument. The prevalent chapter structure—consisting of literature review, application of the book's argument and empirical test—thereby means that chapters are self-contained and can be read and understood on their own, increasing the usefulness of the book both as a piece of academic scholarship and as a reference volume. The comparative in-depth analysis of indirect presidential elections in the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia and Hungary is a particularly noteworthy part of this book. Presidential elections in parliament have so far received little if any explicit attention in the literature, despite being an important indicator of political cohesion in parliamentary and executive coalitions. Nikolenyi's analysis, which shows that election of a coalition candidate is more likely if rules for president and prime minister selection converge, thus provides a valuable contribution to the literature.

The book clearly succeeds in fulfilling its aim of providing a convincing general analysis of variations in electoral, parliamentary and executive coalitions as well as a convincing causal narrative that links them to differences in institutional design. Irrespective of the scholarly

contributions and overall quality of the volume, two drawbacks need to be mentioned. First, although the statistical models and their results tend to have face validity, a more in-depth discussion of model choice and potential independent variables (in addition to those included in the central argument) is missing from the main text and from the otherwise very detailed appendices. This is particularly striking in the case of two multivariate regression models. In the model predicting the vote share of FIDESZ–MDF candidates in single-member districts in the 1998 Hungarian parliamentary election (p. 74) some standard control variables—such as incumbency and party/candidate vote share in the preceding election—are not included. It is also not clear why Nikolenyi chooses an OLS-regression to analyse government duration (p. 114); given the censoring of the dependent variable (government duration in days) more sophisticated event-history models have long become the standard in this type of analysis. Another limitation refers to the in-depth discussion of the electoral origins of Hungarian governments. Neither the level of detail nor the analysis itself can be faulted, but the chapter—which draws on an earlier publication by the author—only covers the period of 1990–2002. While Nikolenyi argues that the logic of two opposing political camps during this period was ‘repeatedly played out in its essence in the next two polls of 2006 and 2010’ (p. 62), an update would have significantly increased the usefulness of the chapter—not least because the remainder of the book covers the time period up to the most recent election.

In summary, the book provides a worthwhile contribution to the study of party politics in CEE as well as to the literature on coalition government and the effects of political institutions more generally. Its main strengths lie in the author’s ability to present and analyse political developments in ten different countries over a 25-year period in a focussed and insightful manner. Furthermore, the comprehensive appendices allow for a main text that is unobscured by an overly detailed narrative as well as for making the book a useful reference volume for

academics and students interested in the politics of parliamentary and semi-presidential systems in CEE from a comparative perspective.

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