
Re-stating Party Development in Central and Eastern Europe?

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After the collapse of state socialism, the potentially harmful influence of unreconstructed communist-era bureaucracies was recognised in general terms. But reform of the state was widely seen as a second-order issue, largely reducible to the rolling back of old institutions, which would more or less automatically flow from the wider success of liberal economic and political reforms. Two new studies, Conor O'Dwyer's *Runaway State-building* (henceforth *RSB*) and Anna Grzymała-Busse's *Rebuilding Leviathan* (henceforth *RL*), argue that in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) reform of the state has been a far more protracted, complex and uneven process than might have been expected given the region's success in democratisation and marketisation compared to other post-communist and transitional states. Indeed, although employment levels and spending in the public sector in CEE have often declined since 1989, the personnel and expenditure of central government bureaucracies across the region have expanded, often at alarming rates, with little real gain in efficiency or capacity – a phenomenon O'Dwyer graphically terms 'runaway state-building'.

This essay surveys the crosscutting and overlapping arguments of the two books, including their conceptualisation of the problems of state politicisation, definitions and measurement of the state administration and its effectiveness, concepts of 'robust competition' and empirical findings. It argues that while the two books significantly advance knowledge on state transformation and party-state relationships in democratising states, their sometimes contradictory findings and heavy reliance on 'robust competition' as an explanatory variable suggest that there is considerable scope for the refinement of comparative research in this area.

'Runaway state-building' versus 'opportunistic state reconstruction'

Both books under review adopt essentially 'small N' comparative strategies using a mix of quantitative and qualitative techniques. O'Dwyer focuses on the experience of Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia between 1990 and (approximate-

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ly) 2002 before testing his argument against the experience of new democracies across post-communist Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia. Grzymała-Busse undertakes a nine-country comparison of CEE states from 1990 to 2004, which takes in O'Dwyer's three cases, as well as Hungary, Bulgaria, Slovenia and the Baltic states.

O'Dwyer sees the experience of post-communist CEE as an episode of patronage-based state development, akin to that of Southern Europe, Latin America or US urban politics of the early-mid 20th century and the contemporary politics of many developing countries (RSB: 3–4, 7, 171–191). Shefter [1994] argued that the ability of parties to pursue patronage-based strategies depended upon the relative timing of the democratisation and bureaucratisation of the state. Where, as in Italy, the advent of mass democracy *preceded* the formation of a modern state apparatus, incumbent parties were able to use posts in the state administration as a patronage resource. When, as in the British or German cases, a professionalised state apparatus with norms of bureaucratic independence emerged before mass democracy, the state administration was unavailable as a partisan resource. At a structural level, O'Dwyer argues, post-1989 CEE democracies are similarly predisposed to patronage politics because of their demobilised, atomised societies and delegitimised states, and because democratisation in 1989 came before the establishment of an autonomous, politically neutral state administration (RSB: 19–23). Drawing on Shefter's classic definition of patronage as the allocation of divisible benefits to voters, supporters and members by parties in exchange for political support (RSB: 221) [Shefter 1994: 221 n. 3], he hypothesises that the key patronage resource exchanged in the post-1989 CEE context are positions in the state administration (RSB: 221 n. 4), which were relatively well paid in relation to other public sector employment.

Analogies with historic cases of democratic patronage politics are, however, not straightforward. As Grzymała-Busse notes, the weakness of post-communist civil society and the marked disinclination of Central and East Europeans to join membership organisations of any kind effectively ruled out the creation of mass organisations and extended client-patron networks characteristic of party clientelism in Southern Europe or Latin America. Moreover, the organisationally weak parties and volatile electorates of post-1989 CEE blocked other key elements of the traditional mass clientelist model such as high levels of elite collusion and party system cartelisation (RL: 186–187). The politicisation of the appointments of state officials and their subsequent decision-making in post-1989 CEE, she argues, seem to be less the classic clientelistic 'exchange' suggested by O'Dwyer, than parties' straightforward securing of political *control* over state resources. The relationship between parties and the state in the region, Grzymała-Busse argues, must therefore be described in new conceptual terms as one of 'opportunistic state reconstruction' (RL: 3) or 'state exploitation'.

As evidenced by the oft-quoted remark of Solidarity Election Action leader Marian Krzaklewski during Poland's 1997 election campaign that he would find

jobs in the state administration for four thousand party supporters (*RSB*: 65), many CEE parties certainly had strong inclinations towards classic patronage strategies. Grzymała-Busse accepts that the practices of some dominant parties such as Vladimír Mečiar's Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) and niche groupings such as the Polish Peasant Party (PSL) approximated classic patronage politics (*RL*: 151). Grzymała-Busse also makes a further significant distinction. Partisan exploitation of the state in post-communist CEE, she stresses, is a facet of post-communist transformation, which feeds off and distorts the politics of liberal reform. Central to her conception, therefore, is the way in which incumbent parties manipulate or delay the creation of a neutral, professional state administration and related oversight institutions, while remaining outwardly committed to liberal norms of public administration (*RL*: 40–42)

Measuring the size and effectiveness of the state administration

Both authors seek to measure both the size and effectiveness of the state administration in CEE states. They define state administration in very similar terms as the administrative bureaucracy of central government and the agencies directed by it.¹ Both thus exclude wider employment in the public sector, where, they believe, stricter requirements for professional qualifications made politicised discretionary hiring by parties more difficult, and where lower salary levels made posts less attractive to potential political appointees. Also excluded are the administrations of autonomous elected local and regional governments, whose varying structures and competences make systematic cross-national comparison problematic (*RL*: 233; *RSB*: 14–15). Size is measured by both authors mainly in terms of employment and expenditure. O'Dwyer works with data obtained from national statistical offices, which he reworks for maximum comparability. Grzymała-Busse presents a range of statistical data from a variety of national and international sources, but mainly focuses on labour force surveys carried out using standardised EU categories. She also tracks the growth of extra budgetary funds and parastatal agencies, which she sees as a particularly significant indicator of politicised administrative expansion (*RL*: 159–166).

Effectiveness proves a more difficult concept to operationalise. Grzymała-Busse assesses it by tracking the development of independent formal institutions of oversight and monitoring likely to constrain corrupt and partisan exploita-

¹ Grzymała-Busse defines state administration as the 'central and territorial offices of the national state: employees of the ministries, regulatory and fiscal agencies, social security and labor office administration and their territorial branches' (*RL*: 233), O'Dwyer defines it as the 'set of positions most directly linked to the policies of national government' (*RSB*: 13). He also introduces an additional concept, 'national-level state administration' (*RSB*: 207). However, as defined, this too seems to overlap quite closely with the concept of 'state administration' used by Grzymała-Busse.

tion of the state, such as ombudsmen, national auditing offices, securities and exchange commissions, and legislation defining and protecting the status, job security and career structure of civil servants (*RL*: 25–28). Even when weak and unembedded, she argues, such new oversight institutions and laws exercise a constraining or deterrent effect on party abuse of the state (*RL*: 151–154). She also undertakes public opinion surveys in the Czech Republic, Latvia, Bulgaria and Poland, seeking to assess state effectiveness by gauging the (perceived) importance of party political influence in the eyes of the public in the hiring of staff and making administrative decisions on everyday matters, such as the granting of building permits (*RL*: 144, 242–246).

O'Dwyer, by contrast, sees configurations of formal institutions and party funding regimes as broadly similar across his three cases. Moreover, he claims, even when established more quickly or more extensively, formal oversight institutions are sufficiently unproven and subject to political manipulation as to be a poor indicator of effective governance and administration (*RSB*: 17). Instead, he tracks state effectiveness, through the development (or absence) of Weberian norms in both existing and new state institutions, specifically: the predictability of civil servants' career paths; the development of an ethic of professionalism; the emergence of clearly understood (and consistently enforced) boundaries between public and private interests; and the bureaucratic autonomy and independence from party political influence of officials (*RSB*: 5). He seeks to access these processes by conducting semi-structured interviews with state administrators in his three case study countries, asking how secure they feel from party political pressure, and soliciting their views about the size, effectiveness, levels of professionalism and nature of career paths in their respective state administrations. In addition, O'Dwyer triangulates by carrying out parallel interviews with politicians, NGO activists and journalists. However, the statistically small numbers of officials (52 respondents in the Czech Republic, 43 in Slovakia, 70 in Poland) and the snowballing technique O'Dwyer uses to make contact with interviewees undermines the presentation of his findings as survey data enabling generalisations about the different national state administrations (*RSB*: 82–83). The very broad anonymity that he grants interviewees, which in most cases even extends to the institutions they work in, also makes it more difficult to gauge how widespread the trends he highlights are.² The battery of direct questions he uses also lacks the sophistication of Grzymała-Busse's survey, which deploys hypothetical 'vignettes' to probe beyond initial unreflected or self-serving responses by interview subjects.

Both authors additionally discuss policy areas which they see as particularly significant or indicative for the study of partisan abuse of the state. Grzymała-Busse examines party funding regimes and privatisation processes, both of which

² O'Dwyer does, however, give a breakdown of interviewees into general categories (elected/appointed, central/regional/local government) (*RSB*: 215) and includes one brief case study of specific institutions, which discusses recruitment and staffing patterns of foreign ministries (*RSB*: 93–97).

she sees as potentially facilitating state exploitation. Public funding of parties is an obvious means for political parties, including the incumbent parties central to Grzymała-Busse's concept of 'state exploitation', to obtain resources from the state. Lax or poorly enforced regulatory regimes in turn offer an important conduit for both overtly corrupt payments and improper (if sometimes legal) donations to incumbents from state-owned companies, which are notionally private entities. Privatisation, she suggests, can create an 'informal funding regime' offering a rich source of kickbacks for incumbent parties (*RL*: 201–221). O'Dwyer seeks to examine the operation of patronage-driven 'runaway state-building' in the transformation of communist welfare states, focusing on health and pension reforms (*RSB*: 141–169). The gap between universal welfare, health and pension entitlements and those actually received by the public, he suggests, can be seen as an additional indicator of state performance. The elimination of communist-era practices of health and welfare professionals receiving informal payments from the public, he thinks, is a particularly important subsidiary indicator of such 'phoney universalism' and hence of state (in)effectiveness.

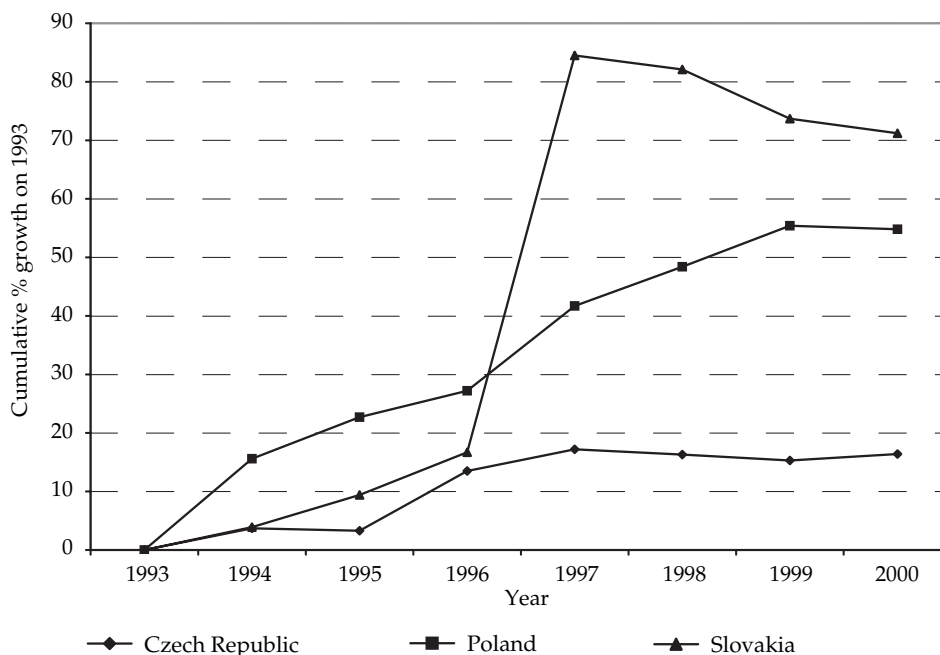
Divergent findings

Both authors find that numbers of state administrators have generally increased across CEE since the collapse of communism, both absolutely and relative to other parts of the public sector. However, O'Dwyer's estimates of personnel numbers are consistently and considerably lower than Grzymała-Busse's preferred measure. Employment levels in CEE state administrations given in the other sources cited by Grzymała-Busse also vary markedly. For example, while O'Dwyer's calculations indicate that the Czech state administration employed 38 667 people in 1993, the sectoral labour force survey favoured by Grzymała-Busse gives a figure of 132 700 (*RSB*: 209; *RL*: 239). As Figures 1 and 2 illustrate, even where and when the two books' case selections and timescales do overlap, it is still difficult, to say the least, to find common trends in the patterns of growth.

Overall *RL* and *RSB* do agree broadly as to where and when 'runaway' growth has occurred. Both authors find that Slovakia experienced comparatively high levels of ineffective state growth. Citing World Bank governance indicators, O'Dwyer also agrees with Grzymała-Busse that apparatuses in Hungary, Estonia and Slovenia underwent little administrative bloating, while Latvia and Bulgaria, like Slovakia, had highly exploited and over-expanded states. *RL* and *RSB* also both judge Poland to be an intermediate case.³ However, the two authors differ sharply in their assessment of the Czech Republic. For Grzymała-Busse the Czech

³ Grzymała-Busse dichotomises her findings into a high growth, high exploitation cluster of states and a low growth, low exploitation clusters, classifying Poland as one of the better performing low growth states. O'Dwyer ranks Poland second of his three cases of 'runaway state-building'.

Figure 1. Cumulative growth in state administration employment 1993–2000 (O’Dwyer)

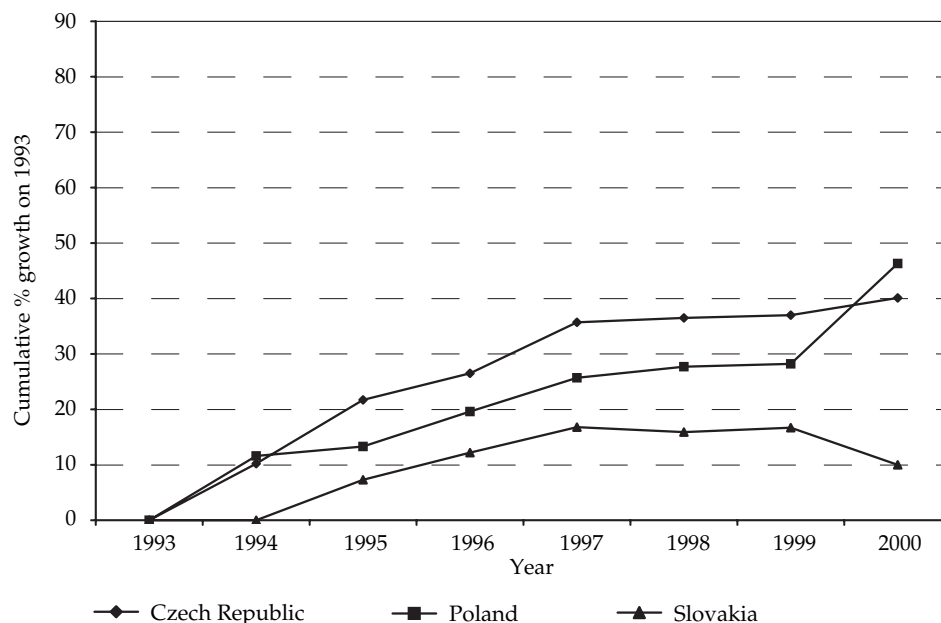


Source: Calculated from data in *Runaway State-building*, 209.

state ranks firmly with Slovakia and Latvia in the cluster of highly exploited states (RL: 4–5), while for O’Dwyer it has the lowest levels of ‘runaway state-building’. Grzymała-Busse finds that over the period 1990–2004 employment in the Czech state administration more than doubled and that, at 5.7%, the average annual growth rate in the number of employees in the Czech state administration was among the highest in the region. Moreover, key countervailing and monitoring institutions in the Czech Republic such as regional government, a national audit office, an ombudsman or a securities and exchange commission were set up belatedly or in emasculated form. Indeed, in some instances, such as that of the Czech Supreme Audit Office, the independence and power of existing oversight institutions was reduced.

O’Dwyer, by contrast, using a different timeframe, calculates a mere 16% increase in the number of employees in the Czech state administration between 1993 and 2000, while for Poland and Slovakia over the same period he finds increases of 55% and 71% respectively (see Figure 1). He also finds that Czech state officials report little party political interference and are developing a growing ethos of professionalism and bureaucratic independence, although he stresses

Figure 2. Cumulative growth in state administration employment 1993–2000 (Grzymała-Busse)



Source: Calculated from data in *Rebuilding Leviathan*, 237–241.

that such bureaucratisation should be seen as a process, not a consolidated outcome or inevitable trend. In his two higher growth cases, Polish and Slovak interviewees detect no such trends. In Slovakia civil service careers are bounded by ‘purge mechanisms’, with officials supportive or opposed to Vladimír Mečiar’s Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) departing *en masse* as the party’s fortunes waxed and waned. In Poland, he finds a more confused situation: the Polish state administration is politicised, unprofessional and unstable because officials appointed by different parties at different times co-exist awkwardly. Many Polish officials also try to hedge their bets by establishing contacts across several party networks.

Explaining ineffective state growth

Both authors then seek to explain the politicised and inefficient growth in CEE state administrations. Their initial reasoning largely coincides. They agree that, to some extent, the increased inefficiency is explicable by the new demands placed on the state for new forms of regulation and administration generated by more

complex, pluralistic market societies. However, they conclude that, given the similar social changes across CEE, growth in the state administration is simply too variable to be explained in purely functional or historical terms. Such variation, both writers agree, cannot be explained by the provision of additional public goods, given an obvious mismatch with rates of economic growth (RL: 44–45). Nor can it be explained as a by-product of state-building in newly independent nations such as Slovakia or the Baltic states. As Grzymała-Busse notes, between 1990 and 2004 the number of employees in Estonia's state administration grew little, while in neighbouring Latvia the number of state administrators more than quadrupled (RL: 4). Moreover, in Slovakia the number of employees in the state administration grew more rapidly not in the immediate aftermath of independence in 1993, but in the mid-1990s, at a time of intense political conflict between the government of Vladimir Mečiar and its political opponents (RL: 45). Although the pattern of democratisation preceding state reform found in CEE confirms Shefter's classic insight, as both authors rightly note, it does little to explain the pronounced patterns of national variation in the growth and effectiveness of state administration.

Legacies and the role of the EU

As Grzymała-Busse observes, state reconstruction in transitional societies is a process of 'bricolage' involving renovating and reconfiguring existing institutions as much as designing new institutions from scratch. However, although she notes the more technocratic composition of state administrators in more liberal communist regimes of 'national accommodation' such as Hungary and Poland, she dismisses communist regime legacies as an influence on state exploitation, arguing that while rates of elite turnover in Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland were similar, levels of partisan state exploitation varied (RL: 46). She therefore concludes that in this case '[h]istorical legacies of state development mattered less than the immediate competitive context' (RL: 21). O'Dwyer explores the possible role of historically national administrative traditions more thoroughly. Kitschelt's notion of Czech communism as a 'bureaucratic authoritarian' regime drawing on a pre-communist modernity and Austrian bureaucratic traditions [Kitschelt 1995; Kitschelt et al. 1999], he accepts, does *prima facie* offer an alternative explanation for the superior performance of the Czech state administration. However, he reasons that if national administrative culture exercised greater influence than party competition, we would expect to find constrained growth in the Czech state administration at the local as well as the national level, despite the different institutional structures and the weakness of party organisation in Czech local politics. However, he finds 'runaway' growth levels in personnel numbers in Czech local administration. Like Grzymała-Busse, he therefore rules out any causal impact of distinct national political-cultural legacies.

Both authors also downplay influences from the European Union. O'Dwyer draws on work on regionalisation in CEE accession states to argue that the tough-

ness and tightness of EU conditionalities were exaggerated, and in practice CEE political elites were easily able to instrumentalise and exploit the Union's vaguely framed requirements. Grzymała-Busse adopts a similar line of argument, but allows that the EU did exercise some leverage over 'laggard' states, prompting them belatedly to create a host of formal oversight institutions in the period 2002–2004 (RL: 86–91). Indeed, in her case study analysis she suggests that 'EU pressure' was the key reason why the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Latvia created any such institutions at all (RL: 104, 130, 157–158, 163).

Party competition and state reform

Having eliminated alternative explanations, both authors then argue that the key explanatory factor is to be found in patterns of party competition. Both Grzymała-Busse and O'Dwyer argue that 'robust competition' can check structurally embedded tendencies towards partisan exploitation of the state (RL: 14–15). However, each understands 'robust competition' and its effects differently. For Grzymała-Busse its defining feature is a distinct, clearly identifiable opposition party or bloc that continuously and effectively criticises governing parties, rather than colluding or allowing itself to be co-opted, and thus represents a plausible alternative government. She rejects conventional measures of party competition such as party system openness, fragmentation, party turnover, electoral volatility or ideological polarisation. Such conventional measures, she argues, do not indicate whether incumbent parties faced a credible threat of replacement and may simply highlight the rise of uncoalitionable extreme groups or protest parties (RL: 51–58). Instead, Grzymała-Busse presents her own tripartite index of robust party competition based on: 1) the extent of regeneration of the former ruling communist party into a moderate centre-left bloc; 2) the average number of critical parliamentary questions asked by opposition deputies; and 3) the average seat share of plausible parties in a national parliament since 1989 (RL: 14). The nature of such 'plausibility' is left somewhat vague, but seems essentially to consist in programmatic coherency, moderation, and elite competence in the eyes of both voters and potential coalition partners.

Grzymała-Busse's polling confirms significant, but varying, levels of corruption by officials. However, with the partial exception of Slovakia, there is little evidence of traditional mass party patronage extending to the lower levels of the state administration. However, comparing clusters of state exploitation and patterns of party competition, she finds that, while conventional indices of party system competitiveness have little explanatory power,⁴ there is a close correlation between robust party competition, as she conceptualizes it, and levels of parti-

⁴ Grzymała-Busse allows that some composite indices such as O'Dwyer's may co-vary with state exploitation, but objects that authors using them do not provide a clear account of *how* inter-party competition constrains state exploitation (RL: 57).

san abuse of the state (RL: 50–57). In Bulgaria, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Latvia, where for long periods dominant parties of left, right or centre faced no effective opposition, there were higher levels of state exploitation. In all cases, she believes, the lack of robust early party competition was rooted in the weakness of the anti-communist opposition or the failure of communist successor parties to regenerate themselves promptly into a credible moderate centre-left bloc. The reverse, she finds, was true in Hungary, Slovenia, Estonia, Lithuania, and, to a more limited extent, Poland.

O'Dwyer agrees that to prevent runaway state-building 'the only effective constraint is a credible opposition party or parties, which voters can use to punish parties that push patronage too far' (RSB: 13). However, O'Dwyer's conception of robust party competition stresses an important precondition largely missing (or at best implicit) in Grzymała-Busse's account: that robustly competing parties need not only be critical and credible, but must also be *institutionalised*, in order to offer voters a meaningful choice based on a 'manageable number of stable parties with familiar coalition-building preferences' (RSB: 7). Drawing implicitly on a long-running debate in US political science about the optimum forms of party competition and party-society linkage, which dates back to the seminal APSA report of 1950 [David 1992; Pierce 1999]; Epstein 2000], he terms this a 'responsible' party system and defines it in terms of low levels of fractionalisation and electoral volatility, limited party turnover, a relatively high degree of 'closure' to new entrants, and in most cases bi-polar competition (RSB: 27–28).

Of his three case study countries, only the Czech Republic, he judges, has a responsible party system. Party systems with generalised party fragmentation, high party turnover and high electoral volatility, such as that of Poland, he argues, represent a 'weak governance model', with little vertical accountability of parties to voters, high levels of party patronage and significant 'runaway state-building'. In weak governance models, O'Dwyer argues, the use of the state administration for patronage is the necessary glue for binding unstable, ideologically unwieldy coalitions and is politically less costly for parties in confused unstable systems as the lines of voter-party accountability become blurred. The inability of weak unstable governing parties to take full control of the state apparatus and to purge their predecessors' appointees in such systems also leads them to sponsor the creation of new state agencies, exacerbating tendencies towards 'runaway state-building' (RSB: 25–26).

Finally, O'Dwyer notes the existence of a 'dominant party system' model, exemplified by the case of Slovakia, wherein a powerful, well institutionalised incumbent party, such as Vladimír Mečiar's Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS), or elsewhere Franjo Tuđman's Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), faces a fragmented unstable, ideologically diverse opposition, which has difficulty offering a united or coherent alternative to voters (RSB: 26–27). The consequence of this, argues O'Dwyer, is the relentless politicisation of appointments in the state administration in favour of the ruling party. When such dominant parties are

toppled in elections by opposition coalitions, O'Dwyer suggests, a second variant of the dominant party model ensues: disparate and divided new governing coalitions struggle either to turn the 'purge mechanism' against well entrenched supporters of the dominant party in the state administration or to introduce reforms constraining partisan abuse of the state. The result is a deadlocked situation which preserves the status quo of a politicised, ineffective and oversized state administration. The relationship between the four variants of party competition he identifies and the levels of 'runaway state-building' is also confirmed by his regression analyses testing his hypotheses against a larger pool of some fifty new democracies in post-communist Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia (RSB: 170–191). The extent to which welfare and health entitlements go unmet and informal practices persist, O'Dwyer finds, matches the patterns of 'runaway state-building' he identifies in state administration and, he believes, are explicable in the same terms as a consequence of different patterns of party competition.

How does robust competition inhibit partisan abuse of the state? In both accounts 'robust competition' is seen as having a constraining effect because it enables effective monitoring of incumbents by opposition parties. However, beyond this, the two authors see robust party competition as working through different mechanisms. For Grzymała-Busse the key constraining mechanism inhibiting party abuse of the state is the anticipation of electoral defeat by incumbents. Fear of ultimate electoral defeat, she argues, leads them to the pre-emptive establishment of institutions of monitoring oversight and control. Such institutions are a self-interested insurance policy by incumbents to ensure that, when defeated, they are not permanently excluded from the political game by opponents able to mobilise state assets against them (RL: 15–17). For O'Dwyer, whose concept of state effectiveness stresses Weberian bureaucratisation *within* institutions rather than the development of new ones, robust competition leads to the *absence* of major party-inspired institution building. In his view, where new institutions are created because of pressures exerted by party competition, their formation is usually a politicised process leading to the foundation of flabby and inefficient structures.

Conceptual advances and methodological challenges

Runaway State-building and *Rebuilding Leviathan* are outstanding pieces of comparative analysis, which, taken together, succeed in establishing plausible links between patterns of party competition and the development of post-communist state administration, and each makes important conceptual contributions. Grzymała-Busse is innovative in rethinking 'state exploitation' as a category distinct from traditional patronage, while O'Dwyer offers theoretically richer accounts of sub-optimal types of party competition and the relationship of state officials and parties. Despite some divergence in methods and findings, their overlapping assessments do enable us to identify two clear sub-groups of CEE

states, one where post-communist state administration has emerged as relatively effective and unpoliticised (Hungary, Estonia, Slovenia), and another where the outcome is clearly the reverse (Slovakia, Latvia). The two books' sometimes diverging judgments also highlight important unresolved issues concerning the operationalisation and measurement of the size and effectiveness of the state administration in CEE, forms of 'robust competition', and the nature of party political encroachment on the state.

The authors' divergent assessments of the evolving size of CEE state administrations raise important issues about the extent to which current levels of state performance can be regarded as consolidated (or consolidating) outcomes. Both authors identify leaders and laggards in CEE by comparing the state on the eve of EU accession with the situation in 1989–1990. But such snapshots can be misleading. If we measure outcomes at different time points – or across different time periods – rankings can appear quite different. For example, recalculating Grzymała-Busse's figures of growth in state administrative employment for the pre-accession period of 1990–1998 – when domestic party competition should have played a more clear-cut role, given the absence of explicit EU conditionalities – we find a much *less* clear-cut pattern of clustering into high and low exploitation cases. Hungary and Estonia are again confirmed as having low levels of growth in the size of the state administration, while Latvia again appears as a laggard with numbers tripling. All other states, however, including Bulgaria, appear as essentially intermediate cases with growth in the range of 50–90%. Indeed, measured across the 1990–1998 period, Bulgaria ranks as an intermediate case with growth in state administrative employment only slightly below that of Poland. None of this necessarily invalidates Grzymała-Busse's argument. One can credibly argue that there was an *ongoing* process of differentiation among CEE state administrations. However, this perhaps suggests that comparative state development in the region is a more dynamic, fluid and ambiguous process than either book allows.

A related methodological issue is that of the baseline against which the state development and the unfolding party-state relationships of CEE should be measured. Grzymała-Busse's labour force survey data allow her to use 1990 as a baseline, while O'Dwyer, who was unable to obtain satisfactory separate data for the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic before the break-up of Czechoslovakia, uses 1993 as a starting point. Although they do not fully explain them, such different baselines have significant consequences for both the comparative levels of state expansion found and the explanations that might plausibly account for it. For example, much of the expansion – and the high mean annual growth rate in – the Czech and Slovak state administrations detected by Grzymała-Busse over the 1990–2004 period can actually be explained by a spike in employment that occurred in 1991–1992. Over these two years, Grzymała-Busse's figures record, there was an increase of 24% in the number of employees in the state administration in the Czech Republic and of no less than 48% in the Slovak Republic, from 56 531 to 83 767 – a gain of 27 236 employees, which represents the bulk of the overall increase in the period 1990–2004. After 1993, as Figure 1 illustrates, ac-

According to Grzymała-Busse's figures, the year-on-year increases for Slovakia were relatively modest, although, consistent with her analysis, the growth rates in the size of the state administration in the Czech Republic were quite high in the early years of the Klaus government.

It is unclear whether the 1991–1992 spike that Grzymała-Busse records reflected a genuine expansion in employment, administrative re-organisation connected with the re-structuring of the federal Czechoslovak state, or merely a change in statistical methodology. If it is more than a statistical artefact, it is also unclear whether such growth can be explained by the accounts of party competition that Grzymała-Busse provides, given the fluid and emergent state of both the Czech and Slovak party systems in 1991–1992. Although such questions *may* be answerable within a party system perspective of the kind that both authors favour, these unresolved measurement-related issues undermine their comparative findings and give them a somewhat provisional feel.

The books' other divergent findings regarding party competition can simply be explained by the different yardsticks the two authors use, allowing their arguments to some extent to be synthesised. There is, in principle, no reason to suppose that the growing trend towards bureaucratic professionalism that O'Dwyer finds in the Czech state administration cannot co-exist with Grzymała-Busse's finding that the Czech state lacks effective or extensive oversight institutions. When combined, these findings raise the intriguing prospects that formal oversight institutions may not be the only route to state effectiveness or, more worryingly, that increasingly professionalised state administrations can work in symbiosis with party political abuse of the state.

Similarly, Czech party competition can be viewed as robust in O'Dwyer's sense, in that it has relatively stable, well institutionalised, programmatic parties, but as lacking robustness in Grzymała-Busse's meaning, because its mechanisms for alternating between left and right are inadequate owing to the presence of a strong anti-system party, the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM). At bottom, for Grzymała-Busse 'robust competition' is a mechanism of horizontal accountability, in which parties keep each other in check, while for O'Dwyer party systems are more a classic channel of *vertical* accountability, allowing voters to punish unsuccessful or miscreant politicians. There is no reason to suppose that vertical and horizontal mechanisms of constraint could not operate *simultaneously*, suggesting that the Czech party system is perhaps more intermediate in its effects than either author allows.

Visegrád and beyond

A further criticism that can be levelled is the books' overdependence on the experience of the four Central European Visegrád states (V4) to derive key analytical propositions. Grzymała-Busse defends this approach on the grounds that the

Baltic states, Slovenia and Bulgaria are 'difficult cases where standard measures of party competition would lead us to expect opposite outcomes' (RL: 24). Leaving aside pragmatic considerations, such as the availability of secondary literature or the Central and Eastern European languages most commonly spoken by Western researchers, there seems no strong reason to consider such cases more complex than the V4. Indeed, methodologically, it might be equally valid to develop an analysis based on Baltic or South East European cases and test it on the Visegrád states. In general terms, the non-V4 cases bear out Grzymała-Busse's broad arguments. However, they also point to a need to refine or qualify her model. Slovenia's low levels of state exploitation and well structured competitive party system, for example, confirm the importance of the early social democratisation of communist successor parties for the establishment of robust party competition. However, the long-time lack of alternation in the Slovenian party system suggests that O'Dwyer's notion of robust competition as expressed in institutionalised divisions between programmatic parties may be a more valid perspective on Slovenia.

Estonia ranks second only to Hungary in minimising the ineffective politicised growth of the state administration. However, its party system lacked any clear left-right demarcation based on the regime-opposition divide, had no significant communist successor party, reformed or otherwise, and until 1996 had no state funding for parties, suggesting that, as in the Latvian case, 'informal funding regimes' should have burgeoned. Grzymała-Busse argues that Estonia avoided the Latvian experience because of its strict state regulation of political parties (RL: 192), because of the multiplicity of coalition combinations that its relatively fragmented party system afforded, especially given the weakness of the (potentially uncoalitionable) Russian minority parties, and because Edgar Savisaar's social liberal Estonian Centre Party (EK), in opposition for most of the 1990s, played a role equivalent to that of reformed communist successor parties elsewhere in CEE as 'the most vehement critic of successive governments' (RL: 72). Here Grzymała-Busse's book provokes many questions that might enrich her account (RL: 192). What kind of party consolidation mechanisms substituted for the regime-opposition divide in Estonia? Did strong national minority parties in highly exploited states, such as Slovakia, Latvia and Bulgaria, affect the range of credible coalition alternatives? Was Estonia's policy of building its own embryonic state institutions and state personnel *de novo* in the late 1980s in any way significant?

O'Dwyer's ambitious extension of his Visegrád-derived model to new democracies across Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America provides broad aggregate support for his general propositions. However, it seems problematic in its coding and its assumption that a fourfold typology of party systems developed on the basis of three CEE cases can safely capture patterns of party competition across four continents without concept stretching. Indeed, even his codings of party systems within the wider post-communist region highlight some of the limitations of his typology.

Table 1. O'Dwyer's categorisation of post-communist party systems

<i>Party system type</i>	<i>Electoral differential main governing party > 20%</i>	<i>Electoral volatility</i>	<i>Level of institution- alisation</i>
Dominant party system (variant 1) Albania 1996–2002 Croatia 1996, 1998 Russia 2000, 2002 Slovakia 1996, 1998 Serbia 1996–2000	Yes – over two elections		
Dominant party system (variant 2) Croatia 2000, 2002 Russia 1996, 1998 Serbia 2002 Slovakia 2002, 2002 Ukraine 1996–2000	Yes – one election only		
Weak governance system Bulgaria 1996–2002 Estonia 1996, 1998 Latvia 1996–2002 Lithuania 1996–2002 Macedonia 1996–2002 Moldova 1996–2002 Romania 1996–2002 Slovenia 1996–2002	No\	High	Low
Responsible party system Czech Republic 1996–2000 Estonia 2000, 2002 Hungary 1996–2000	No	Low	High

O'Dwyer categorises party systems in terms of a fourfold typology of party competition using a two-step procedure. First, he assesses the degree of dominance of the main incumbent party by measuring whether its electoral support exceeds that of its nearest rival by a margin of more than 20% over successive elections. Then, for party systems without any pattern of dominance, he examines levels of electoral volatility and the extent of party system institutionalisation using indices and expert judgments in the secondary literature to determine whether they fall in the 'low governance' or 'responsible party' category (*RSB*: 171–175). Each national party system is examined at four points, in 1996, 1998, 2000 and 2002, allowing party system change to be captured. O'Dwyer's operationalisation of his party system typology and categorisation of party systems are summarised in Table 1.

However, as O'Dwyer is aware (*RSB*: 179), his categorisation of post-communist party systems generates some obvious incongruities. The 'weak governance' category groups a large and disparate group of states, ranging from Slovenia – one of the best performing nations for administrative effectiveness – to intermediate cases such as Poland, to countries with highly politicised, low quality state administrations like Bulgaria and Romania – and even post-Soviet states such as Moldova and Ukraine, considered by some analysts to be neo-patrimonial states on a par with contemporary Africa [van Zon 2001]. O'Dwyer does not provide precise details of his calculations or the indices used to measure party system institutionalisation, noting only that he does his own assessment of institutionalisation for East European cases using the criteria in the main text (*RSB*: 247 n. 8). He seems to dichotomise cases outside post-communist Europe into high and low institutionalisation systems using scorings from several secondary sources. However, this is not explicitly stated. The author only comments that the scales used in composite indices of institutionalisation in secondary sources vary, but that 'the methodologies are broadly consistent'. It is also unclear where scores for electoral volatility are obtained or how these are calculated, although O'Dwyer does mention that some of the composite indexes of institutionalisation he drew on incorporated measurements of volatility (*RSB*: 173).

It is also unclear precisely why Slovenia's party system has been categorised as an under-institutionalised 'weak governance' system (*RSB*: 218–219). Although more fragmented and multi-polar, it has many of the characteristics of the stable, programmatic 'responsible party' model developed on the basis of the Czech experience [Hloušek 2001]. A possible over-reliance on fragmentation and conventional measures of volatility, which fail to distinguish shifts in support *between* established parties from more fundamental changes in party system format, may have led to an incongruous categorisation here. Similarly, the dynamics of Romanian (and to some extent Bulgarian) party politics appear to have more in common with the second variant of the 'dominant party' model.⁵ Despite their

⁵ The categorisation of Russia as a 'dominant party' system on the grounds that the Presidency is, in effect, a surrogate party also stretches the concept, particularly as presidentialism is included as a control variable in regression models (*RSB*: 247 n. 10).

periodic electoral victories over the post-communist forces which had initially dominated early post-transition politics, liberal opposition blocs quickly faltered in government when faced with vested interests and internal tensions.

Revising O'Dwyer's categorisation along these lines tends, paradoxically, to confirm his argument about the relationship between types of party competition and the quality of the state administration. However, it also points to some of the conceptual shortcomings in his analysis and lends weight to Grzymała-Busse's call for the formulation of new concepts of political competition better tailored to the realities of CEE and a more thorough thinking through of the nature of party 'dominance' in the region (RL: 57 n. 102).

Both authors also tend to underestimate the complexity and dynamism of party systems even in the V4 states, often concertina-ing them into their respective typologies. Thus, O'Dwyer's depiction of a robustly competitive Czech party system (RSB: 58–63) glosses over the period of dominance of the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) in the early-mid 1990s, when centre-left forces in the Czech Republic were as inchoate and divided as anywhere in CEE. Grzymała-Busse in turn downplays the effectiveness of the opposition of the resurgent Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD) after 1995, rather implausibly suggesting that Klaus's ODS still seemed 'invincible' after the 1996 parliamentary elections, when its vote remained static and the centre-right coalition it led lost its parliamentary majority (RL: 212). Her comment regarding ČSSD that 'until the late 1990s it had less than 6% of the vote' (RL: 74) is also indicative. ČSSD polled 26.44% in the 1996 parliamentary elections, not the 'late 1990s', and its vote in the 1992 Czech and Czechoslovak elections was, in fact, somewhat above 6%. Similarly, as Grzymała-Busse hints (RL: 51, 102), O'Dwyer's characterisation of the Polish party system as anarchic and lacking ideological coherence is overstated. Polish parties and party blocs have often proved short-lived and fissiparous. However, ideological camps in Polish politics have shown greater continuity [Tworzecki 2003]. This weakens O'Dwyer's interpretation of patronage as a substitute for ideological affinity.

Partisan abuse, privatisation and the welfare state

Arguably, neither author is wholly successful in extending their argument beyond their main focus, the size and character of the central state bureaucracy. Grzymała-Busse finds evidence of laxer party funding regulations in less competitive systems, but there seems little support for her suggestions that incumbent parties used state funding to gain significant financial advantage over parliamentary opponents. The most significant effect of party funding regimes seems to have been to favour large parliamentary parties and weaken new and extra-parliamentary challengers, rather than shore up incumbents. It is also unclear how directly or reliably privatisation per se offered an illicit income stream for parties. Even in high exploitation cases such as the Czech Republic, illicit or concealed payments to parties seem often to have taken the looser form of interest groups

buying generalised political influence and access [Myant 2003: 123; see also Reed 1996]. The key objection Grzymała-Busse raises in relation to the applicability of traditional models of party clientelism in CEE – that classic clientelist exchange is unworkable in an unstable and unpredictable transitional environment – seems to apply *a fortiori* to party corruption in privatisation. As Martin Myant [2003: 123] observes of the Czech case, the complexity of privatisation processes and the kaleidoscope of conflicting individual, institutional and party interests made corrupt exchanges an uncertain proposition. Corruption in Czech privatisation, Myant concludes, was thus

...not a case of simple “cronyism” in which firms are blatantly sold off to friends and allies of those in power. The process was less reliable, more secretive and more obscure, partly because with competing parties in a coalition government, there was not a single, controlling political elite. (...). A wise prospective buyer might have made donations to all the coalition partners and possibly the opposition parties too.

O'Dwyer's extension of his 'runaway state-building' perspective to post-communist welfare states in CEE is also problematic. Although certainly linked to broader administrative effectiveness, welfare state performance – and especially that of welfare states in transition – is arguably too complex to be reduced to a simple party system perspective. As O'Dwyer himself notes, many of the problems of Slovak and Polish health care in the 1990s stemmed from fiscal problems, not party competition. Similarly, as Vanhuyse [2006] has argued, the buying off of potentially disruptive groups in Poland through generous early retirement schemes seems to reflect 'strategic social policies' and the key role of trade unions in both the main Polish centre-right and centre-left blocs, not the dynamics of a weak governance system. Very similar early retirement policies were followed in Hungary, a state which both authors see as having a relatively effective, compact state administration and a robustly competitive party system.

O'Dwyer's characterisation of reform outcomes in health and welfare across his three cases also seems somewhat incomplete. Czech 'success' is predicated too much on the early introduction of notionally private health insurance funds, public opinion and levels of spending, while Poland's early reform of its pension system is largely overlooked. Moreover, Slovakia has since leapfrogged both the Czech Republic and Poland by implementing radical reforms of the welfare, health-care and pension systems. Indeed, O'Dwyer's own recent work argues that 'second stage' neo-liberal reforms in Slovakia after 2002 were facilitated precisely by its weakly institutionalised, fragmented party system, which empowered pro-market technocrats [O'Dwyer and Kovalčík 2007]. Why similar dynamics did not apply to welfare reform in fragmented CEE party systems during the 1990s is unclear.

Communism, democracy and the state in contemporary CEE

Like much work on the comparative politics of CEE after 1989, both studies rest upon broad-brush assumptions about the nature of communist rule, which are very largely substantiated using comparisons of the present, rather than historical research. Such comparative strategies are not always wholly convincing. O'Dwyer's national-local control comparison of party competition and growth in state administration, for example, arguably overlooks important aspects of the evolving relationship between the central and the local interests. Owing to decentralisation after 1989, growth in local state administration could be expected for purely functional reasons. In fact, the evidence presented suggests that it was localism not party patronage strategies that exerted the greatest pressure for fragmented and administratively irrational growth in local and government (*RSB*: 117, 136–137). Highly centralised communist regimes had often deliberately disregarded historic boundaries and local identities when fixing territorial-administrative units. After 1989 the legacies of such centralism, the weakness of grass-roots party structures, and the overlapping nature of local elites [Vajdová 2003] often combined to create a strong form of localism which centred on demands for the break-up of communist-era units and the creation of new communes and municipalities. This resulted in an explosive growth in the number of communes and municipalities in Poland, the Czech and Slovak Republic.

Finer-grained, historically grounded studies examining the relationship of parties, bureaucrats and society further upset generalised assumptions about communism as a system of one party rule decaying into patronage and patrimonialism. For instance, Horak's recent [2007] study of urban governance in Prague suggests that administrators in some sectors such as transport already had a distinct ethos of professionalism and considerable stability and bureaucratic autonomy under state socialism and were, in consequence, highly resistant to political interventions both from the ruling Communist Party before 1989 and from democratic politicians after 1989. This undermines the conventional framing of the debate about the influence of the communist past (found in both *RL* and *RSB*) as a question of distinguishing distinct national regime legacies from generic legacies of communism, suggesting that in some cases sectoral divisions between ministries and policy areas appear equally important. More significantly in the context of this essay, it also calls into question O'Dwyer's stress on the development of classic bureaucratic structures as a path to democratic consolidation. Horak's work suggests that the problem after 1989 was not bureaucrats' lack of Weberian professionalism but their hostility to public consultation and the participation of civil society organisations in policy-making.

O'Dwyer explicitly defends the need for the (re-)establishment of classic forms of hierarchical bureaucracy, rather than more networked forms of 'new governance', as a necessary first step for new post-transitional democracies. However, both authors shy away from any assessment of the future of the party-state and party-society relations in CEE or the wider debate about parties and the state

in contemporary democracies in Western Europe and North America and beyond [Mair, 1994; Kopecký and van Biezen 2007]. This is problematic. While the CEE of the 1990s can (and should) be studied as a democratising region, it seems increasingly anachronistic to contrast the region to 'the advanced, industrialised West' (RSB: 205). In the context of an enlarged EU it seems unlikely that CEE states can or will develop along classic Weberian lines. Here, further exploration of the relationship of parties, state administration and the delivery of public services, prefigured in O'Dwyer's book, may prove especially revealing.

The broader question the two books implicitly raise is that of what *kind* of democracy CEE states could (and should) develop [Roberts 2006]. Like previous authors [Orenstein 2001; Vachudova 2005], both Grzymała-Busse and O'Dwyer see adversarial two-party (or two-bloc) competition as a guarantee of reform and social progress, substituting for absence of strong civil societies and an effective rule of law. Indeed, O'Dwyer explicitly argues (RL: 203–205) that the instability and weak democratic norms of the region's parties make them untrustworthy custodians of the state, rendering consensus-based or corporatist models of democracy inappropriate and even dangerous. Such a constrained view of the region's democratic possibilities is characteristic of much literature of the reform politics of CEE.

The books' stress on overcoming the communist past through the development of a liberal state with checks and balances and a classic Weberian bureaucracy has also to some extent been overtaken by recent debates about the rise of illiberal populism in CEE. Both conclude their accounts on the eve of the EU accession in 2002–2004, largely missing the rise to office of parties such as Poland's Law and Justice Party (PiS) or Slovakia's Direction Social Democracy party (*Smer*), as well as the increased influence of more radical parties drawing on the anger and alienation of 'transition losers' [Krastev 2007]. The experiences of the Baltic states and Bulgaria also highlight the somewhat different phenomenon of 'centrist populism' [Učeň 2007], exemplified in the rise and fall of parties such as Estonia's *Res Publica* or Bulgaria's National Movement of Simeon II (NDSV). The latter parties' promises to govern more cleanly and reform more energetically appeal to broader public appetites for 'newness as a project' [Sikk 2006], rather than the simple economic grievances of transition 'losers'. If, as Ivan Krastev [2007] has suggested, we must increasingly accommodate such electoral insurgencies as part and parcel of the democratic process, we may need to think beyond a 'responsible party' model centring on the bi-polar alternation in office of well institutionalised, 'plausible' parties of left and the right.

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