Challenging the "democratic disenchantment" thesis: collective activism and political discontent in Central-Eastern Europe, 1989-2010

Abstract: Many studies use a theory of democratic disenchantment to account for deteriorating trends in the quality of new democratic regimes, such as declining voter turnout, the withdrawal of voluntary organizations' members, growing political discontent and apathy, and the political mobilization of radicals. The disenchantment theory attributes these developments to a mismatch between new regimes' original high expectations and subsequent bad political and economic performance. Although it is broadly assumed to be true, the disenchantment theory has only been tested to a limited extent. This paper provides a more robust test of the theory by focusing on the over-time development of collective political activism. It uses time-series data on collective events from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary (the most likely cases to which the theory should apply) from 1989 to 2010, supplemented by data on political discontent. The results are unsupportive for the disenchantment theory.

The path from democratic transition to a well-functioning democracy has generally appeared to be much more difficult than expected. Many political science contributions imagined democratization as a teleological process consisting of logical steps that culminated in the democratic consolidation of Western-style, full-fledged democracies. However, even the most promising cases (like Poland or Czechoslovakia in East-Central Europe, Chile and Brazil in Latin America, or Taiwan and South Korea in East Asia) did not follow the expected trajectory. Although these countries appeared to perform well during the initial stages of democratization, they later experienced a deterioration in a number of parameters usually attributed to a well-functioning democracy: support for politicians rapidly declined and people largely withdrew from civic and political life, and populist or radical forces mobilized and became stronger in some cases.

As a result, the narrative of democratic disenchantment replaced the discourse of democratic consolidation in the academic literature and political commentary. Democratic disenchantment captures political skepticism, apathy, and people's withdrawal from political life resulting from a disillusion with democracy and a mismatch between originally high expectations of democracy and the subsequent poor political and economic performance of new democratic regimes (Catterberg and Moreno 2006; Munck 1993; Pacek, Pop-Eleches, and Tucker 2009). Although this disenchantment narrative has not been formulated as a coherent theory and has not received more systematic empirical support, it is used in a number of area studies and country-specific contributions. This paper describes the theory, specifies its observable implications and subjects it to a more robust test than it has been thus far.

Specifically, it examines collective political activism in new democracies, which provides a unique opportunity to subject the theory to a strong test. We use process-tracing (strong hoop test) as well as time-series analyses of collective activism in the Visegrad Group countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia). These countries represent the most likely cases for which the disenchantment theory should hold; yet they differ in a number of other important ways. We

rely on a unique dataset of all collective political events that took place in the four countries between 1989 and 2010, which is supplemented by quarterly time-series data on political discontent and other controls.

In contrast to most of the available literature that answers Rupnik's (1996, 365) question "Is this disenchantment part and parcel of any revolution?" positively, this study suggests a negative answer. The results show no support for the disenchantment theory, which is understood as a process of over-time democratic disillusion resulting in general malaise and political apathy. This finding has several important implications. Democratic disillusion does not result in serious and long-lasting damaging effects, as suggested by the disenchantment theory. Nor does it seem to be an inevitable natural process that all new democracies have to go through, as some proponents of the disenchantment theory imply. Therefore the perceived problems in new democracies must have their origins somewhere else than in disenchanted populations.

Democratic Disenchantment

The conventional wisdom in the academic literature and political commentary is that the declining citizen involvement in politics, deteriorating political trust and growing radicalism reported in new democracies in Eastern Europe, Latin America and South Asia are a product of citizen disenchantment with democracy (Andorka 1994; Braun 2002; Catterberg and Moreno 2006; Geremek 1996; Herman 2015; Inglehart and Catterberg 2002; Kostadinova 2003; Kostadinova and Power 2007; Linek 2010; Mishler and Rose 1997; Munck 1993; Rueschemeyer, Rueschemeyer, and Wittrock 1998; Rupnik 1996; Rupnik 2007; Tismaneanu 2009). Using different labels, such as "post-honeymoon disillusionment" (Catterberg and Moreno 2006; Inglehart and Catterberg 2002), "disenchantment" (Munck 1993; Pacek, Pop-Eleches, and Tucker 2009), and the post-communist "letdown" (Geremek 1996) or "disappointment" (Howard 2003), the studies describe a similar process.

The authors explain that, because of their lack of experience with democratic regimes, people's initial expectations of a new democratic regime are unrealistically high. For instance, Howard shows how people in East Germany and Russia hoped that democracy would improve their economic situation and general life satisfaction (Howard 2003, 137–144; also Dalton 1994; Mishler and Rose 1996). Some even describe the original enthusiasm and ideals as naïve, irrational or unrealistic (Howard 2003, 137; Rueschemeyer, Rueschemeyer, and Wittrock 1998, 101), and see it as almost inevitable that "an over-inflated democratic dream was bound to collapse" (Munck 1993, 10).

According to the disenchantment theory, the very first stage of democratic transition is often characterized by idealized and overstated expectations. Such enthusiasm is widely shared in the populations of democratizing societies and is manifested in an enormous level of public involvement in politics and people's support for democratization and new political elites. However, in the subsequent phase, this original democratic enthusiasm is in sharp contrast to the actual bad political and economic performance of the new institutions. During the transition, many new democracies have experienced economic problems resulting in the growth of unemployment and faced large political scandals and corruption, which produced disenchantment, disillusion and frustration among citizens. According to the theory, democratic disenchantment makes people withdraw from participation in public life; leads to political disinterest, apathy and the erosion of confidence in established democratic actors; and triggers a growth in support for populist and radical forces.

Surprisingly, although the disenchantment explanation is widely accepted, its more rigorous empirical examination has not been conducted (but see Pacek, Pop-Eleches, and Tucker 2009). It is mostly used in case studies that use the disenchantment process as a post hoc explanation of what they classify as an overall deterioration of new democracies, but they do not test the theory in more detail (Munck 1993; Tismaneanu 2009). Few available variable-oriented

studies mostly present evidence based either on massive drops in the originally high levels of voter turnout, civic activism and political trust or on significant negative effects of time periods (Catterberg and Moreno 2006; Kostadinova 2003; Kostadinova and Power 2007; Linek 2010). However, although the detection of declining trends after the heydays of transition is undoubtedly in line with disenchantment theory, it does not really support the disenchantment hypothesis because there might be alternative explanations for the deterioration in indicators of a good-quality democracy. Moreover, as declining voter turnouts, decreases in political trust and dampening organizational membership have also been documented in established democracies, it is very likely that other factors might be the cause.[1] Indeed, this has been supported by Pacek and his colleagues (2009), who show that voter turnout in post-communist countries is not driven by disenchantment due to economic deterioration but by factors derived from the general voter turnout literature such as people's evaluations of what is at stake (also Northmore-Ball 2012).

This article seeks to conduct a new (and more robust) test of the disenchantment theory. Although the narrative of democratic disenchantment is widely popular, it has not been developed as a formal theory. Hence the following section describes its implications in more detail and formulates predictions to be tested by the analysis. Then the research design and dataset are introduced. The results are then reported and further discussed in the conclusion.

Implications of the Disenchantment Theory

Our test of the disenchantment theory involves an over-time analysis of collective political activism in new democracies. Although some use the disenchantment theory to explain the differences between old and new democracies or across citizens in new democracies (Howard 2003), it is most often used to describe the over-time political development in transitional countries. Therefore, a test of the disenchantment theory should focus on within-country, over-time dynamics. Moreover, the democratic disappointment experienced in new democracies is

maintained as a legacy that is expected to influence how people in new democracies relate to politics in the future. The implication is that democratic disillusion is not a short-term effect, after which public attitudes go back to "normal" levels.

This test focuses on collective political activism. There are three reasons why we believe that the examination of this type of activism – such as civic meetings, rallies, demonstrations and petitions – provides a very good test. First, citizens' rapid and massive withdrawal from originally high levels of involvement in citizen initiatives and movements during the heyday of democratic transitions, resulting in passivity and apathy, lies at the core of the disenchantment theory. Many see "the disappearance of 'civil society' and the 'citizen movements' initiatives" as the biggest "puzzle of the 'catch-up revolutions' of 1989-1990 in Eastern Europe" (Ely 1994, 132; Lomax 1997; Smolar 1996).

Second, paradoxically, this crucial piece of evidence on disenchantment theory is missing, since most available data on the development of collective political activism in new democracies is rather insufficient. Studies use World Value Survey (WVS) or European Values Study (EVS) data to show that there was a drop of around 20 percent in how often citizens sign petitions or attend demonstrations in the first decades of new democratic regimes in both Latin America and post-communist Europe (Barnes 2006; Bernhagen and Marsh 2007; Inglehart and Catterberg 2002; Munck 1993). However, the results are based only on measurements at two or three time points in the 20-year time span, which is (given the huge over-time variation in non-electoral participation) insufficient to provide a valid picture of the over-time change. More importantly, the WVS/EVS survey question on political participation cannot detect periodic changes in activism, because the answer category "have ever done" does not specify a time period.[2]

Third, the development of collective political activism in new democracies seems to be a good case with which to test the disenchantment theory, since it is able to provide a relatively strong version of the hoop test (Mahoney 2012). Over-time decline in collective political activism,

as predicted by the disenchantment theory, is an unusual phenomenon in contemporary established democracies. The extant literature generally agrees that political activism beyond electoral politics has largely expanded in established democracies in recent decades (Inglehart and Catterberg 2002; Meyer and Tarrow 1998; Norris 2002). Since the condition necessary for the hypothesis to pass (i.e., decline in collective political activism) is rather rare, passing such a test is relatively difficult; hence even the hoop test might provide some confirming support of the disenchantment theory (Mahoney 2012).

We specify four implications of the disenchantment theory for collective activism: 1) decline in conventional collective activism, 2) growth of radical collective activism, 3) political dissatisfaction decreases conventional collective activism and 4) political dissatisfaction increases radical collective activism.

Decline of conventional activism

As the disenchantment theory was developed to account for the decrease in originally excessive levels of political activism in new democracies (Ely 1994; Lomax 1997; Munck 1993; Smolar 1996), a dramatic decline in people's activism should be evident right after the initial transitional period in order for this theory to hold. Many observers interpreted the defeat of communist regimes as people's revolutions (Lomax 1997). Some democratic transitions were accompanied by extensive mobilization in the form of citizens' assemblies, public meetings, rallies, demonstrations and general strikes (Glenn 2003). Prominent dissenters and commentators often portrayed democratic transitions as the "victory of civil society" (Ely 1994; Smolar 1996, 27). Proponents of the disenchantment theory also interpret uprisings at the beginning of democratic transitions as involving abnormal levels of engagement, euphoria and enthusiasm (Inglehart and Catterberg 2002, 304; Rueschemeyer, Rueschemeyer, and Wittrock 1998, 267; Rupnik 1996).

What followed in many democratic transitions was, according to many, a dramatic demobilization and withdrawal of ordinary citizens from public life in general, and from non-electoral collective activism in particular. According to the proponents of the disenchantment theory, the people's revolutions did not develop into democracies based on civic activism and citizen initiatives. In contrast, public involvement supposedly dropped to very low levels – usually labeled as passivity, resignation, apathy or malaise (Howard 2003, 144–145; Lomax 1997). Importantly, according to the disenchantment theory, such low levels of activism should prevail in the new democratic regimes. As explained above, the legacy of democratic disenchantment should determine future political activism. According to the theory, although the numerous political scandals, corruption and economic problems of new democracies offer many reasons for citizens to get involved in protests, demonstrations and petitions, they withdraw from political life rather than participate. Thus, disenchantment theory predicts a rapid decline in conventional collective activism in new democracies that had extremely high levels of activism in the early years (1989-1992), followed by a mass decline in activism that should remain at low levels in the future.

The rise of radical activism

According to some authors, democratic disenchantment not only results in people's withdrawal from politics (i.e., an exit strategy); it can also facilitate the rise of social strains that are potentially threatening to new democracies such as populist, nationalistic movements and anti-democratic radical forces (Andorka 1994; Geremek 1996; Hirschman 1970; Rose, Shin, and Munro 1999; Rupnik 1996; Rupnik 2007; Tismaneanu 2009). For instance, Andorka worried that "a relatively large number of citizens, and most of all the many losers of the transition who are dissatisfied and potentially strongly disenchanted with the changes in the system, might have been relatively easily mobilized by a right- wing or left-wing extremist movement" (Andorka 1994, 236). From this

perspective, apathy/withdrawal and non-democratic violent radicalism are two sides of the same coin originating from the same process of disenchantment, "as many citizens become so frustrated that they abandon democratic ideals and give elites an opportunity to void the fledging democratic regimes" (Rose, Shin, and Munro 1999, 149; also Tismaneanu 2009). Hence, the disenchantment theory implies an inverse development of conventional and radical political activism. The disenchantment theory predicts low levels of radical activism in the first years of new democracies (1989-1991), followed by a rapid mass increase in radical activism fluctuating at these higher levels in later years.

Political discontent leading to the deterioration of collective activism

According to the disenchantment theory, political discontent should produce a decline in conventional collective activism. From this perspective, the decrease in public activism in new democracies does not indicate people's satisfaction with the new regime, nor is it a natural decline after revolutionary turbulences, when life returns to normal. Due to the betrayal of the democratic dream, political discontent in new democracies should be manifested as political skepticism and frustration (Catterberg and Moreno 2006). In other words, political discontent is expected to have a lasting demobilizing effect on political activism (Catterberg and Moreno 2006; Howard 2003). While high levels of satisfaction with politics should be accompanied by high levels of conventional activism, the disenchantment theory predicts that over-time increases in political dissatisfaction should result in declining political activism. Since democratic disillusion should be a lasting legacy that permanently affects citizen politics, this dampening effect of political discontent should be maintained during the whole observed period (Howard 2003, 10, 144–145).

A parallel argument can be developed to explain the dynamics between over-time changes in political discontent and radical activism. Disenchantment should decrease conventional collective activism, while simultaneously encouraging non-democratic, radical or anti-system

activism, as people feel alienated from the political elites and channels of democratic politics that proved unable to improve their plight (Andorka 1994; Geremek 1996; Rose, Shin, and Munro 1999; Rupnik 1996; Rupnik 2007; Tismaneanu 2009). Thus, the disenchantment theory expects periods characterized by high levels of political discontent to be followed by increases in radical activism.

Methods and Data

To test the disenchantment theory, we examine the Visegrad countries (Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland) because they represent the most likely cases to which this theory should apply. This region has been, together with some Latin American democracies, considered a textbook example of democratic disillusion. On the one hand, all four countries were seen as successful cases of democratization: their transitions from non-democratic regimes were fast and non-violent, free elections were organized and democratic constitutions adopted, and all four countries later entered international organizations like NATO and the European Union. On the other hand, all four countries sooner (Slovakia) or later (Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic) experienced a democratic backlash, as a number of democratic indicators appeared to have deteriorated over time: decline in public involvement, decrease in political trust, growth of radicalism, etc.

Simultaneously, the sampling of countries in this region follows the most-different system logic, as they differ in a number of aspects that might condition the process of disenchantment. This design allows us to examine the nature and consequences of disenchantment theory in very diverse contexts. First, the four countries differ in the level of original optimism about their democratic futures. At the beginning of the transition period (Mishler and Rose 1996), Czechoslovakia (which divided in 1993) displayed the highest expectations about its future democratic regime (51 points), Hungarians showed the second lowest (34 points) and Poles the very lowest optimism about the future of their democracy (25 points). Second, the four countries

also widely differ in factors believed to affect democratic consolidation: economic development, political legacies, state building, and socio-cultural and ethnic conditions (Carothers 2002). Specifically, while Slovakia and Poland have been more affected by economic hardships during democratic consolidation, the Czech Republic and Hungary have experienced less severe economic problems (Bohle and Greskovits 2012). The countries also have different political pre-democratic legacies. While Czechoslovakia experienced the so-called bureaucratic-authoritarian type of communism, Hungary and Poland characterized its national-accommodative type (Kitschelt et al. 1999, 385–388). Similarly, the transition process varied across the four countries. Czechoslovakia's transition was an "implosion of the old order" characterized by higher mobilization, while Poland and Hungary experienced transition via negotiation between communist hardliners and reformers (Kitschelt et al. 1999, 28–31).

As explained in the theory section, the comparative framework of the disenchantment theory lies in its within-country, over-time dynamic. For this reason, the analysis focuses on over-time developments within the four countries rather than cross-section comparisons across countries. Both tests of the disenchantment theory (over-time trends in collective activism and the effect of political discontent) use the same quarterly level of analysis (with the exception of data on the effect of discontent on activism in Slovakia, which was only available biannually). The replication of the analyses using monthly, biannual and yearly data shows substantively the same results as presented in the paper. Descriptive statistics for all variables used are shown in Table A1 and Figure A2 in the Appendix.

Political activism

We use protest event analysis (PEA) to measure over-time variation in citizens' collective political activism. PEA is a type of content analysis of public records on political activism (e.g., newspaper articles) that has been extensively used in social movement studies (Koopmans and Rucht 2002;

Hutter 2014) to effectively capture over-time aggregate developments in political activism. Unlike surveys, for instance, PEA allows researchers to go back in time and cover developments that are representative of all time points during the selected time period. This approach can only capture publicly visible activism, such as public collective events such as demonstrations, meetings, rallies and even petitions.

We gathered our data from the archives of national news agencies in the four studied countries: Czech News Agency, News Agency of the Slovak Republic, MTI Hungarian News Agency Corporation and Polish Press Agency. The news agency archives include information on all important events that have taken place in these countries since the fall of communism. These archives represent a more important source of event data than individual newspapers, because they lack an explicit political bias towards particular events or actors.

Collective political events are defined here as either (1) a gathering of at least three people who convened in a public space to make claims that bear on the interests of an institution/collective actor or (2) a petition addressed to an institution/collective actor (Tilly 1995). We created a list of a large number of potential keywords that might indicate collective political events[3] and used them to search the news archives between the beginning of their available electronic coverage (Czech Republic and Slovakia from 1988, Hungary 1989, Poland 1991) and December 2010. All news matching our definition was manually selected from the sample retrieved on the basis of the keyword search. On average, only 10 percent of the keyword sample indicated actual collective action events. The Czech dataset includes 6,234 protest events, Hungarian 4,942 events, Polish 8,925 events, and Slovak 3,440 events. Since this data set covers the whole time period without any sampling of years or days, we can be sure that it contains all the relevant collective action that has taken place. This allows us to examine the over-time changes in the amount of collective activism.

Various variables relevant to collective action studies were manually coded for each event.[4] The analysis uses four dependent variables from this dataset: the number of events of conventional and radical activism and the number of participants taking part in these two types of events. Radical activism includes all events that were: (1) organized by the radical left or radical right-wing organizations (extremist organizations, parties, or informal gatherings labeled by the news article as extremist or radical or belonging to the list of such organizations based on the literature and expert knowledge) or (2) events that used radical strategies (illegal events or events where participants used violence). Conventional collective activism is comprised of all other events that took place in the country that do not meet any of these criteria. The number of participants in the two types of events is indicated by the number of participants mentioned in the news report. If the report did not mention an exact number and instead reported several individuals, or several hundred participants, these were substituted by 3, 30, 300, etc.

Political discontent

Political discontent expresses a lack of political support based on peoples' evaluations of the political environment and regime performance (Dalton 2004; Gunther and Montero 2013). We use distrust in government as our measure of political discontent. Previous studies have shown that trust in government not only indicates an evaluation of the popularity of parties in power, but also taps into more general satisfaction with the regime's political performance, including in new democracies (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2001; Klingemann 1999; Rose and Mishler 2011). Distrust in government has thus been used as the main indicator of democratic disenchantment in new democracies (Catterberg and Moreno 2006; Klingemann 1999). Political discontent includes categories indicating the active expression of a lack of trust in government – i.e. we collapse the categories strongly or completely agree/distrust and disagree/distrust versus all other categories (the procedure is different for Hungary, see below).

This measure is also suitable due to its availability and comparability. Unlike the vast majority of other studies that use only a few time points to indicate the long-term declining trend in political satisfaction in new democracies, our data on trust in government construct quarterly/biannual time series. Moreover, the time series for three countries use the same indicator of political discontent for the whole period studied (the same survey question asked by a single survey house). Specifically, the Czech Republic data come from the Public Opinion Research Center, which has organized monthly surveys (excluding two months of summer holidays) since 1990.[5] The Hungarian data come from the regular surveys conducted by Medián Opinion and Market Research Institute on a monthly basis (with very few exceptions) since the second half of 1994.[6] In Poland, the CBOS Public Opinion Research Center has organized monthly surveys since 1993.[7] For all three countries we use quarterly averages. Although monthly and quarterly data are not available for Slovakia, we constructed a biannual time series of trust in government on the basis of reports published yearly by IVO (Slovakia 1996-2010. A Global Report on the State of Society).[8]

Controls

We include a number of controls that are usually seen as predictors of over-time variation in collective action. According to the social movement literature, short-term fluctuations in citizen activism should be primarily affected by opportunities in the form of political institutions and elites and their particular configurations, which shape the incentives for potential participants and mobilizing actors (Kriesi 2004; Tarrow 1998). Drawing on Tarrow (1998, 76–80), we include two measures: (1) elections that indicate an increasing opportunity to access the political system (Meyer and Minkoff 2004; Rosenstone and Hansen 2003, 35) and (2) "close result," which indicates uncertain political outcomes as individual political actors do not have a strong or clearly majoritarian position. This "narrow victory" is measured as the difference in the number of seats

held by the government and the opposition in the lower chamber of parliament (Meyer and Minkoff 2004; Rosenstone and Hansen 2003, 35; Tarrow 1998). The political opportunity structure data come from the Parliament and Government Composition Database (ParlGov) for the selected period. The second type of control draws on the grievance theory and covers the development of the country's economic situation (Buechler 2004). Specifically, we follow Kriesi's (2014) grievance index, which is the quarterly unemployment rate subtracted from the monthly GDP growth rate.[9]

Models

To estimate models testing the effect of political discontent on activism, we apply the ARPOIS Poisson regression allowing for overdispersion and autocorrelation (as the lagged dependent variable in standard Poisson models implies a growth rate, not an autocorrelation coefficient) developed for STATA (Schwartz et al. 1996). The analysis of the residuals of the final models detected no serial correlation. We performed a Portmanteau (Q) test for white noise and examined autocorrelation coefficients and partial correlation coefficients (AC/PAC) to determine autocorrelation in the time series and decide on the potential lagged value of the dependent variable that is included in the models as an independent variable. The results showed that most of the variables either follow an autoregressive process of order one or show no autocorrelation. All time series are stationary, as shown by the Augmented Dickey-Fuller unit-root test. To determine the lag length of independent variables, we relied on Schwarz's Bayesian information criterion (SBIC) that is recommended for quarterly data, including for smaller sample sizes than ours (Ivanov and Kilian 2005). In all models, a one-quarter lag of political discontent is used, as the disenchantment theory predicts that withdrawal from activism should follow the perceived deterioration of the political environment. We experimented with no (or longer) time lags for political discontent and control variables, and neither of these models showed support for the disenchantment theory.

Disenchantment and Collective Political Activism in Central-Eastern Europe

Figure 1 addresses the first prediction of the disenchantment theory, which suggests a large decline in conventional collective activism from its height during the heyday of transition (1989-1991) to steady low levels in later years. Figure 1 shows the standardized quarterly counts of the number of conventional events (solid lines) and the number of participants in those events (dashed lines) from 1989 to 2010 in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia, and from 1991 to 2010 in Poland. These data clearly do not support the disenchantment hypothesis, as neither indicator of conventional activism displays the expected declining pattern. An analysis of trends (not displayed) supports this interpretation: the eight time series of conventional activism show no significant declining (either linear or quadratic) trend, as would be consistent with the disenchantment theory.

- Figure 1 –

The conventional events in the Czech Republic even display the opposite pattern: a significant growing linear trend. Although in the Czech Republic conventional events declined in 1993, they slowly grew again afterwards, and reached the high levels from the early 1990s in 1999. The over-time development of the number of activists in conventional events appears to follow the disenchantment trend, as the two highest peaks are in the early stage of the democratic consolidation. However, the high levels in 1989 and 1992 are not the result of widespread grassroots activism during the transition period, as they represent episodic mobilizations. The 1989 peak captures the large mobilizations of hundreds of thousands during the Velvet Revolution, which lasted only the two last months of 1989. The 1992 peak is caused by one protest event in

which over two million people signed a petition to initiate a referendum on the separation of the Czechoslovak federation.

Nor is the post-honeymoon decline in conventional activism apparent in Hungary; neither of its time series indicating conventional collective activism displays any significant declining trends. Their path is relatively flat, with the exception of two peaks in the number of conventional events that (in contrast to the expectations of disenchantment theory) did not take place during democratic transition, but happened in 1997 and 2004 during the supposed disenchantment era. Both mobilization peaks signify large farmers' protests that involved hundreds of road blockades that lasted for weeks across the whole country. Although we only have data on the last year of the period of democratic euphoria in Poland (1991), the data suggest that a rapid decline in conventional activism did not take place in Poland either. The time series of conventional events shows a significant growing quadratic trend, as conventional activism grew sharply from relatively low levels in 1991 to its peak around 2000 and then began to slowly decline after 2006.

Similarly in Slovakia, conventional events display a significant growing quadratic trend – the opposite of what disenchantment theory would predict. During the period of democratic transition, conventional mobilization was lower; it started to grow after Slovakia's separation from Czechoslovakia in 1993 and reached its highest levels around 2000. The dramatic jump in conventional events in 1994 reflects the mobilized character of the 1994 election campaign, when a large number of political party meetings and rallies to support candidates, especially the prime minister's Movement for a Democratic Slovakia, took place.

These results contrast with most of the other literature on political activism in Central-Eastern Europe. First, the initial transition period does not seem to be characterized by grassroots activism and citizens' broad involvement, as Western commentators and dissidents thought. On the contrary, our results suggest that dissident movements were not based on a large bottom-up mobilization (Lomax 1997). For instance, Lomax (1997) shows that these movements were

comprised mostly of intellectual elites, who framed their activities in terms of civil society and citizen initiatives. Second, the "revolutionary" years do not appear to be followed by passivity, apathy or withdrawal from public activism, as the levels of political activism grew, remained steady or displayed short-term peaks that exceeded the 1989 mobilizations in all four countries.

- Figure 2 –

The second expectation derived from disenchantment theory predicts a mass increase in radical activism after the initial transition period, followed by persistently higher levels. Figure 2 seems to support this expectation; again, dashed lines indicate the number of events and solid lines indicate the number of participants in these events. At least one of the two time series of radical activism in each country shows either a linear or quadratic significant growing trend.

Radical events grew the most (significant quadratic growth) in the Czech Republic. The number of such events grew rapidly until 1992, and never returned to their pre-1992 low levels. Moreover, there were large waves of radical mobilization during the disenchantment period. The highest peak in 2000 was partly caused by the large protests of the Global Justice Movement during the International Monetary Fund and World Bank summit in Prague in September 2000, which mostly attracted participants from abroad (Welsh 2004). The Czech Republic did not experience a growth in the number of activists involved in radical actions. Radical activism in Poland also follows a significant growing quadratic trend, reaching its highest levels in 1999 and 2000 and then declining. However, the peaks are always followed by drops in the levels of radical activism similar to the transition period at the beginning of the 1990s. Hungary displays no growing trend in radical activism. However, there were two extreme peaks. The 2002 high levels originate in violent protests related to elections, such as the demonstration of around 1,000 people organized

by the radical organization Lelkiismeret'88 to challenge the election results (Uitz 2008, 55). In Slovakia, radical activism does not show any growing trend either.

Although the over-time development of radical activism in the Czech Republic and Poland appears to be in line with the disenchantment theory, several caveats need to be taken into account. Although radical activism grew over time, it is not widespread in any of the four countries studied. In fact, the average number of radical events per quarter is eight in the Czech Republic, six in Hungary, thirteen in Poland, and four in Slovakia. In total, the share of radical events in Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia is 11 percent. Only the Czech Republic displays a larger share of radical events (18 percent of all collective events). Also, in all countries the vast majority of radical events were generally rather small, involving 10-300 people. More importantly, it seems that the over-time dynamics of radical activism follow the general developments in conventional activism, as the time series of conventional activism strongly positively correlates with radical activism (r=0.4). This implies that there is no negative relationship between conventional and radical activism, as suggested by some studies in the literature (Kriesi et al., 1995). In contrast, both types of collective activism appear to follow a similar path.

The third expectation derived from the disenchantment theory focuses on the relationship between political discontent and collective activism. Specifically, the theory implies that periods characterized by deeper disillusion and dissatisfaction should lead to a reduction in conventional public engagement and, in contrast, increase radical activism. Table 1 shows the results of testing these expectations on quarterly data (biannual for Slovakia). The test proceeds in three steps. The first model in the first column presents the easiest test for the disenchantment theory to pass, as it only includes the effect of political discontent on activism, taking into account the potential autocorrelation of protest but no controls. Model 2 adds two controls (elections and close results) that are available for the whole period of the political discontent time series. Model 3 also includes

the grievance index to control for the effect of economic hardship on protest. This model has substantially fewer cases, as the grievance index is only available for later periods.

As Table 1 shows, in most of the models political discontent is related to neither conventional nor radical activism. Since political discontent is unlikely to decrease conventional activism and increase radicalism in East-Central Europe, this finding disproves the disenchantment theory. We experimented with various lags and aggregations of the data, and got the same results as displayed in Table 1.

- Table 1 –

The exceptions are the Czech Republic and Poland, where political discontent plays a role in civic activism. In the Czech Republic, the effect of political discontent on conventional collective activism is significantly positive. This means that – in contrast to the expectations of the disenchantment theory – political discontent does not produce passivity and withdrawal from politics, but stimulates Czechs into action. The more dissatisfied the Czech public is, the more collective activism we observe. This result contrasts with the disenchantment theory and corresponds to the expectations of the critical citizen perspective on recent developments in established democracies, suggesting that dissatisfaction facilitates "elite-challenging" types of activism. It supports the perspective of various authors (Dalton and Shin 2015; Haerpfer and Kizilova 2015; Klingemann 2015) who claim that political distrust in Eastern Europe is not an indicator of dysfunctional democracy, but an attribute of a mature democracy with self-expressive culture, in which critical citizens search for alternative venues of political expression outside the arena of party politics and elections. In a similar vein, Rose et al. (1999) show that the mismatch between democratic ideals and evaluation of the regime's performance in South Korea does not indicate alienation and apathy. We probably see a significant positive effect only in the Czech

Republic because this country scores by far the highest on the indicators of post-materialism/self-expressive culture. Studies have shown that higher levels of self-expressive culture amplify the mobilizing effect of self-expressive values on protest (Welzel and Deutsch 2012). In Poland, the two models explaining the number of participants in radical events show that political discontent has a significant negative effect, which is again in contrast to the expectations of disenchantment theory, which predicts a positive effect.

The only result that seems to be in agreement with disenchantment theory is the positive effect of political dissatisfaction on the number of radical action events in the Czech Republic (Model 1). The more the Czech public is dissatisfied with politics, the more they participate in radical collective events. However, by also taking into account the results of our analysis for non-radical conventional activism, we interpret it as an indication of the common general trajectory of all types of protest in the country. It seems that if there is higher dissatisfaction with how politics performs, then all types of action – including both radical and non-radical – increase as a result. Dissatisfaction funnels all types of activism in the Czech Republic; it does not translate into general politically passivity.

Conclusion and Discussion

Generally, the results do not support the disenchantment theory. Although the null finding does not necessarily disapprove the theory, and there is always a possibility that the research design might not be sensitive enough to detect the theory's implications, we believe our analysis provides solid evidence to challenge its assumptions. Examining the most likely cases where this theory should hold, the analysis showed that the publics of the four new democracies do not appear to be involved in collective activism less than in the heyday of their democratic transitions. Instead, conventional activism mostly grew in all four countries. Although radical activism increased as well, it appears to be part of the generally increasing trend of all types of collective activism. The

results also suggest that the expected over-time deterioration of collective activism (the decline of conventional activism and the growth of radical activism) is not driven by political discontent as the theory predicts. In contrast, collective activism increases in the Czech Republic as political discontent rises. Most studies show that individual-level political discontent increases non-electoral participation in general and participation in protest in particular in new democracies, thus disproving the disenchantment theory (Bernhagen and Marsh 2007; Hooghe and Quintelier 2014).

Our results imply neither that there are no problems in post-communist democracies nor that all parts of the disenchantment theory are invalid. We do not challenge, for instance, evidence that voter turnout substantially declined or that citizens of new democracies felt disappointed by the democratic developments in their countries. Instead, we suggest that the consequences of democratic disillusion were not as devastating to political participation as suggested in previous studies, and that the over-time developments in new democracies are not as gloomy as pictured by the proponents of the disenchantment theory. In fact, the recent developments of political activism in post-crisis Eastern Europe seem to suggest that there had indeed been a protest potential that was fully expressed after the overall socioeconomic situation deteriorated perceptibly and – during the transition years – repeatedly (Beissinger and Sasse 2014). In any case, the publics in Central-Eastern Europe do not seem to have transformed from a democratic super-citizenry into apathetic and politically alienated subjects. Indeed, political developments in new democracies are probably more complex than suggested by the disenchantment theory.

We do not claim that new democracies do not suffer from serious drawbacks. Widespread corruption, deficits in political and civic activism compared to established democracies, and the anti-liberal radicalization in institutional politics in Poland at the end of the 1990s, in Hungary 10 years later and recently again in Poland (Beissinger and Sasse 2014, 358–360) are problems that should be taken seriously. Our study shows that scholars and commentators should not automatically assume that the disenchantment theory accounts for all democratic failures they

observe. Ascribing all such drawbacks to "inevitable and natural" democratic disillusion obstructs the examination of alternative factors that, unlike the historical legacy of disappointment, can be actively addressed.

Specifically, our results on the development of collective activism seem to suggest that processes related to regime transition (democratic disillusion) did not have a long-lasting effect on the character of political activism in the distant future, as suggested by the disenchantment theory. All countries in our sample experienced higher levels of political mobilization later in the disenchantment stage than they did during the democratic transition. Therefore the regime change seems to be simply one event among many that happen over time, which does not necessarily have a stronger effect on activism than other important events that characterize democratic "business as usual."

By extension, the results challenge the need for a theory peculiar to new democracies to interpret a specific stage in their development. In our view, democratic revolutions affect political activism much like any other sudden opening of political opportunity structure that creates additional space for activism without necessarily affecting its future development. Similar effects can be attributed to a major reshuffling of electoral politics, external shocks, or economic and political crises.

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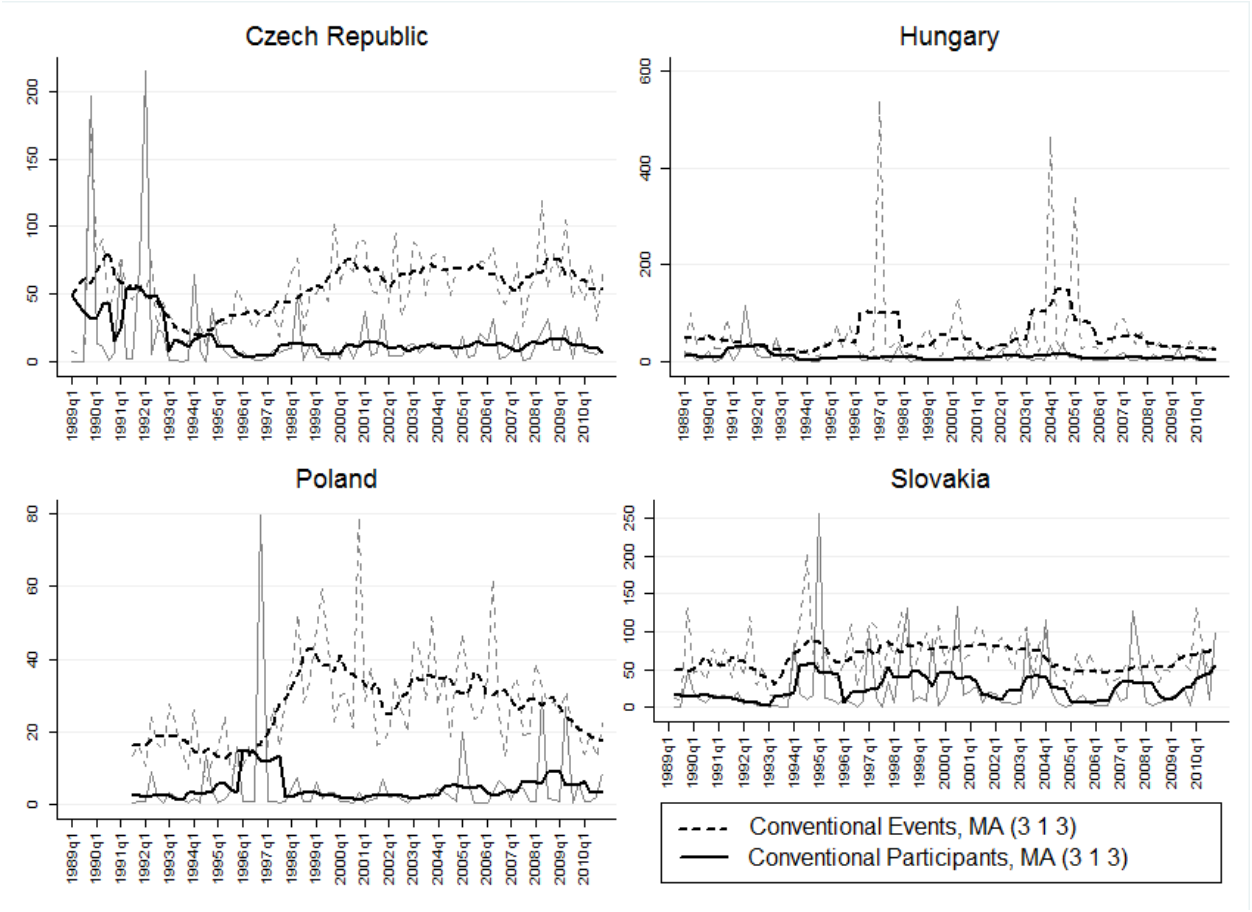
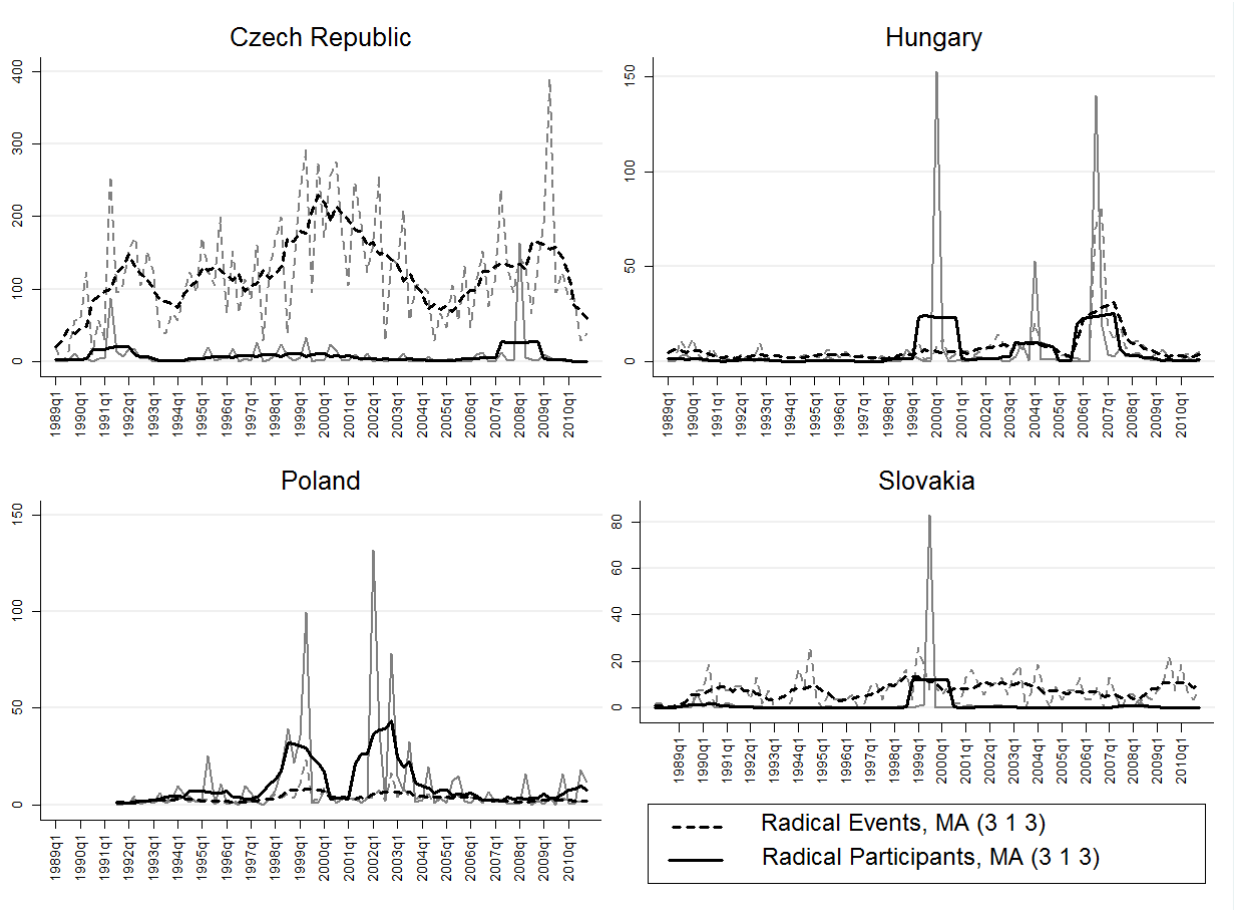
Figure 1: Conventional Collective Activism in the Visegrad Countries, 1989-2010



Note: The grey lines display quarterly counts. The black lines display smoothed trends (moving average, window 3 1 3). The number of events is standardized per 10,000,000 inhabitants; the number of participants is standardized per 1,000 inhabitants. Data for Poland available only from first quarter of 1991. Source: PEA V4.

Figure 2: Radical Collective Activism in the Visegrad Countries, 1989-2010



Note: The grey lines display quarterly counts. The black lines display smoothed trends (moving average, window 3 1 3). The number of events is standardized per 10,000,000 inhabitants; the number of participants is standardized per 10,000 inhabitants (for Poland per 100,000 inhabitants), for Slovakia per 1,000 inhabitants). Data for Poland available only from the first quarter of 1991. Source: PEA V4.

Table 1: Collective activism and political discontent in Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia (1993/1996-2010)

Independent Variables	**Political Discontent t-1**			**Political Discontent t-1**			**Political Discontent t-1**		
Controls	-			Elections, Close Result			Elections, Close Result, Grievance Index t-1		
Dependent Variables	B	SE	N	B	SE	N	B	SE	N
Czech Republic									
Conventional Events	0.015***	0.003	80	0.016***	0.003	80	0.017**	0.005	54
Conventional Participants	-0.014	0.013	84	-0.011	0.016	84	0.017	0.013	58
Radical Events	0.015**	0.005	80	0.009	0.006	80	0.014	0.009	54
Radical Participants	0.009	0.020	84	0.018	0.024	84	0.077†	0.043	58
Hungary									
Conventional Events	-0.005	0.021	76	-0.011	0.021	76	0.008	0.033	59
Conventional Participants	-0.008	0.016	76	-0.013	0.016	76	-0.002	0.023	59
Radical Events	-0.015	0.020	73	-0.014	0.020	73	0.013	0.033	56
Radical Participants	-0.017	0.050	76	-0.020	0.051	76	0.036	0.070	59
Poland									
Conventional Events	0.001	0.006	69	-0.003	0.005	69	-0.003	0.005	61
Conventional Participants	-0.027	0.027	70	-0.012	0.027	70	-0.017	0.027	62
Radical Events	0.003	0.011	70	0.003	0.012	70	0.001	0.013	62
Radical Participants	-0.055*	0.024	67	-0.046†	0.024	67	-0.051*	0.024	59
Slovakia									
Conventional Events	-0.001	0.004	28	0.008	0.005	28	0.008	0.007	28
Conventional Participants	-0.007	0.015	30	0.003	0.017	30	0.017	0.025	30
Radical Events	-0.003	0.009	30	0.004	0.010	30	-0.019	0.012	30
Radical Participants	-0.013	0.073	30	-0.014	0.049	30	-0.014	0.055	30

Note: Entries are estimates for political discontent from Poisson autocorrelation regression (arpois). For the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, quarterly data are used, while for Slovakia half year data are used. Full results are in Appendix in Tables A3, A4, A5, and A6.

Level of significance: † p≤.1, * p ≤ 0.05, ** p ≤ 0.01, *** p ≤ 0.001

[1] In other words, most available analyses present the so-called hoop test that can only eliminate hypotheses when the test fails; but passing this test does not confirm the hypothesis (Mahoney 2012; Van Evera 1997, 31–32). In addition, these hoop tests are rather trivial as they are relatively easy to pass (Mahoney 2012). The reason is that the condition necessary for the hypothesis to be valid – such as decline in voter turnout, decrease in political trust or dampening organizational membership – are common features that are not specific to new democracies (Blais 2010; Dalton 2004). Hence, there is a very high chance that the disenchantment theory will pass the hoop test even if it is not correct, because other factors not specific to new democracies might be the cause.

[2] The fact that such questions indicate a rapid over-time decline in new democracies is hence counterintuitive. The reason is that people performing and reporting participation in 1990 should also report this activity in 2000 even though they have not participated in any additional activities. For this measure of political activism to be valid, the declining trend in collective activism should originate only from a generational exchange, which is, however, very unlikely and not supported by the data (Hooghe and Quintelier 2014).

[3] List of keywords: barricade, blockade, boycott, demonstration, extremist, happening, hunger strike, confrontation, manifestation, meeting, resistance, performance, petition, march, protest, parade, assembly, chant, squat, strike, clash, attack.

[4] A group of four coders selected the events, and another group of four coders coded the variables. We performed six reliability checks equally spread during the time of coding on the sample of the Czech data. Krippendorff's Alpha allows us to test reliability between coders, at various levels of measurement, taking into account the sample size and variable distribution (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, and Bracken 2002). All variables used display an inter-coder reliability above 0.75.

[5] The question asked: “Say please, do you trust the national government?” “Strongly agree”, “Agree”, “Disagree”, “Strongly disagree”, “Don’t know”, missing data for 1994q1, 1994q2, 1994q4, 2006q3.

[6] The question asked: “How much trust do you have in the government?” “A great deal”, “quite a lot”, “not very much”, “not at all”, missing data for 1992q2, 1992q3, 1993q2, 1994q1, 1994q2. The data are available only in a version of monthly national averages on 0-100 scale (rescaled original 4-point scale). We used a reversed direction of the scale, 0 means a great deal and 100 not at all.

[7] The question asked: “How would you describe your attitude towards the current government of (name of the prime minister)?” “Supporter”, “Opponent”, “Indifferent”, “Don’t know/missing”

[8] The report summarizes data on trust in the government measured by four categories (“Strongly agree”, “Agree”, “Disagree”, “Strongly disagree”, “Don’t know”) from various sources.

[9] Although the disenchantment theory implies a prediction of the role of economic deterioration, we did not formulate this hypothesis in our theory, as this prediction does not disentangle the specific new-democracy disenchantment explanation from the general grievance theory, which is also applicable to established democracies.