An End to “Patience”? The Great Recession and Economic Protest in Eastern Europe

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Abstract

Based on an event analysis, this paper explores the dynamics of economic protest across 18 countries in Eastern Europe in the context of the Great Recession. While the initial period of post-communist transition in the 1990s has been characterized as one of ‘patience’ and quiescence, the recent economic crisis has called this pattern into question. It altered the level and nature of economic protest in the region, but there is considerable variation across the post-communist countries experiencing significant economic contraction. The countries that proved most vulnerable to high levels of economic protest were those that had been in the forefront of reform in the 1990s. They exhibited high levels of dependence on the global economy, and the transition and EU integration process had generated public expectations about improving living standards that were dashed during the crisis. A number of other factors shaped protest responses among those states that experienced economic contraction: 1) levels of public sector employment; 2) IMF rescue packages; 3) public trust in government in the run-up to the crisis; and 4) political party mobilization. This paper further illustrates the causal processes through paired comparisons of Latvia and Estonia on the one hand and Hungary and Ukraine on the other.
Introduction

This paper explores the dynamics of economic protest across post-communist Eastern Europe in the context of the Great Recession. According to the IMF, the post-communist countries were the worst-hit world region from the Great Recession, experiencing steeper economic declines than any other part of the world. Major economic contractions occurred in seven post-communist countries (Croatia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia, and Ukraine). By 2009 the GDP of Latvia was only 78 percent of what it had been in 2007, while that of Lithuania was only 86 percent of its 2007 level. From 2007 to 2009 unemployment rose in Hungary from 7.4 percent to 10 percent, in Estonia from 4.7 percent to 13.7 percent, in Lithuania from 4.3 percent to 13.7 percent, and in Latvia from 6.0 percent to 17.1 percent, and. At the same time, there was considerable variation in the effects of the recession on the region. Four countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Romania, and Russia) experienced economic stagnation rather than negative growth, while seven countries (Albania, Macedonia, Poland, Belarus, Moldova, Serbia, and Slovakia) actually continued to achieve positive growth throughout the years of the global recession.

The Great Recession was not the first time in recent memory that post-communist Europe went through a period of dramatic economic contraction. The 1990s witnessed much more severe economic downturns for most countries of the region, as these

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societies underwent the transition from socialist to capitalist forms of economy. Estonia and Latvia weathered the transition to capitalism with relatively less pain than many countries in the region; yet, by 1994 the GDP of Estonia and Latvia had dropped to 77 and 82 percent of their 1991 level respectively. Declines were much steeper in Russia (63 percent), Ukraine (45 percent), and Moldova (41 percent). Yet, as the literature on post-communist economic transitions emphasizes, for the most part the transition to capitalism, though wrenching, did not produce major waves of protest in many countries, as citizens displayed a surprising degree of “patience” (or at the very least, quiescence) in the midst of massive economic decline. There were, of course, exceptions. Major waves of strikes and labor protest occurred periodically in Russia in the 1990s, particularly over the issue of unpaid wages (Robertson, 2010). Poland has routinely been singled out as an exceptional case of labor mobilization under socialism and continued mobilization in the early post-communist period (Ekiert and Kubik, 1999; Seleny, 1999). But in general, and contrary to what many analysts had predicted, “patience”/quiescence is thought to have predominated over protest, particularly in comparison with other regions of the world that also experienced IMF-led structural adjustment programs, (Greskovits, 1998. See also Przeworski, 1991, Agh, 1991, Haggard and Kaufman, 1992, Offè, 1993, Ekiert, 1993, Walton and Seddon, 1994, Ost, 1995).

The reaction to the Great Recession in Eastern Europe, however, indicates that, at least in some parts of the region, this period of “patience”/quiescence in response to economic decline has come to an end. In 1992, at a time when the Latvian GDP contracted by 32 percent, only three known major demonstrations involving 3600
participants (and no mass violence) occurred in Latvia over economic conditions.\textsuperscript{2} By contrast, in 2009 in Latvia 13 major demonstrations involving over 50 thousand participants took place over economic conditions, including significant violence resulting in 43 injuries, major property damage, and over 250 arrests. Indeed, as we will see, the Latvian example is no aberration; in a number of the post-communist countries the protests touched off by the Great Recession were considerably greater than those that occurred in response to the economic downturn of the early 1990s.

In this essay we explore the factors that shaped patterns of economic protest across 18 European post-communist countries during the Great Recession. We seek to explain how the Great Recession altered the level and nature of economic protest in the region, as well as to explore the factors that explain the considerable variation in patterns of economic protest across post-communist Europe during this period. As we will show on the basis of an event analysis, contrary to what one might expect, protest overall in the region declined during the Great Recession. But this is not true of all forms of protest or of protest over all types of issues. Strikes, protest over ethnic and nationalist issues, and protests for greater economic benefits declined sharply during this period. By contrast, demonstrations assumed greater weight in protest repertoires, and protests against economic cutbacks rose sharply to become the dominant issue of protest within the region. In this respect, the Great Recession not only altered protest repertoires, but also altered the character of economic protest, transforming it from a proactive endeavor demanding salary and benefit increases to a more defensive one voicing discontent over austerity measures.

\textsuperscript{2}Data comes from Beissinger, 2002.
One might logically expect that those countries which experienced more economic pain would also be those that experienced greater economic protest, and indeed we show that countries that continued to grow exhibited lower levels of protest. But we also show that among those countries that underwent significant economic contractions, there was in fact considerable variation in the extent to which economic pain translated into economic protest. Ironically, those countries that were most vulnerable to high levels of economic protest in the late 2000s were those that had been in the forefront of economic reform in the 1990s and had been most eager to integrate with Europe. This was so, we argue, for two reasons: 1) they were more vulnerable than other countries of the region to a serious economic downturn in the context of global recession due to their high levels of dependence upon the global economy; and 2) integration into the EU and the factors that underlay it (as well as relatively successful patterns of economic growth associated with it in the late 1990s) generated expectations about an improving standard of living that were dashed in the context of the Great Recession. We also show that a number of other factors shaped protest responses among those states that experienced economic contractions: 1) levels of public sector employment; 2) IMF rescue packages; 3) public trust in government in the run-up to the crisis; and 4) political party mobilization. We illustrate these causal processes through paired comparisons of Latvia and Estonia on the one hand and Hungary and Ukraine on the other. All four countries experienced severe economic downturns in the context of the Great Recession (among the top seven countries experiencing economic contraction in our sample). But while Latvia and Hungary were among the countries exhibiting the highest levels of economic protest (in terms of number of protests, participation rates, and levels of violence) during
this period, Estonia and Ukraine remained relatively quiescent. We argue that these variations in outcomes resulted from countries’ differential reform trajectories and the ways in which they interacted with political trust in the government and the ability of political actors to instrumentalize and channel political polarization.

**Patterns of Economic Protest in the Post-Communist Region**

To analyze patterns of protest across European post-communist states during the global financial crisis, we constructed an event database of major protests and incidents of mass violence throughout the region for this time period. Electronic searches were conducted of five leading international newswires (Reuters, Associated Press, Agence France Presse, Deutsche Press Agentur, and Interfax) for the period January 2007 through December 2010. All articles that reported on demonstrations, strikes, or mass violent events in any of the eighteen European post-communist countries examined in this study were saved in monthly media files for subsequent review and coding (See Appendix 1 for more on coding procedures). The utility of using five different wire services is clear from the fact that no single wire service covered more than 43 percent of the 967 protest events recorded in this study. Reuters, which is often used in cross-national studies of protest events (as, for instance, in the *World Handbook of Political Indicators*), covered only 17 percent of the protest events in the data. Use of multiple sources on particular events also increased the quality of the coded information, filling in details about individual events that otherwise would have remained unknown had only a single source been available.

Of course, media studies of protest events are well known to have significant biases, and this is likely to be even more the case in a study based on international wire
services. Large numbers of protest events are ignored in international wire service reports (particularly, small events and events outside capital cities), and any media-based study of protest activity is unlikely to be a fully accurate reproduction of patterns of protest. It may, however, be a representative sample of a certain sort. Based on what we know about how the media report on protest events, one would expect that international wire services would tend to report primarily on politically salient events and on events involving violence or taking place in a country’s capital. These may actually be the most important events for understanding the impact of economic decline on patterns of protest in any case, since they are the events most likely to exercise an effect on politics. For purposes of obtaining a reasonably representative sample across 18 different countries, international wire services are probably the best sources available, since country-level sources have quite different policies on reporting about protest events. It is possible (even likely) that certain international wire services covered particular countries more thoroughly than others. The use of reports from five different international wire services can serve to mitigate this selection bias. The sample is right-censored in that both the Great Recession and economic protest in the post-communist countries continued beyond December 2010, when our sampling ended. But we began sampling in January 2007, well before the onset of the recession in late 2008, in order to be able to identify how the recession itself may have altered patterns of protest.

There is no scholarly consensus over how best to measure trends in protest action. A simple event count can be thought of as representing the frequency of attempts by movements to organize collective action. Often, this is weighted by the number of days in which a protest event endures, since a one-day protest represents a qualitatively different
protest effort than a prolonged, multi-week action (In the current sample, the duration of protest events varied from a portion of a day to a high of 134 days, with over 90 percent of events lasting for a day or less). But we are also interested in the resonance of particular attempts to mobilize—i.e., the number of people who actually participate in protest (This ranged in the sample from a minimum of a hundred to approximately 800 thousand, with a median of 738 participants). We assume that the factors shaping movement attempts to mount protests are likely to be different from those that shape the decision-making of large numbers of people over whether to participate in these actions, given the opportunity to do so (Beissinger, 2002).

We report all three measures (events, protest days, and protest participation) in Figure 1, which provides an overview of the evolution of protest events in the region over time by form of action, as captured by the five international wire services. As is evident from the figure, during the period of the Great Recession (and contrary to what one might expect) there actually was a general decline in protest activity in the post-communist region—irrespective of whether one measures protest by the number of events, protest days, or the number of participants. The decline began prior to the onset of the Great Recession, but continued to deepen in 2009 in the midst of the global financial crisis. In terms of protest repertoires, most acts of protest reported by the wire services during this period (90 percent) involved demonstrations, and only 11 percent involved strikes and 9 percent—mass violent events (Protest events in the sample could involve more than one action form). But while constituting a relatively small proportion of protest events overall, strikes accounted for 65 percent of all participants in protest actions during this period of time. Over the course of the global financial crisis the incidence of strikes
(both in terms of raw numbers and as a relative proportion of protest events each year) declined sharply, as strikes became a diminishing part (and demonstrations—a larger part) of protest repertoires. Such patterns are in accord with the findings of the scholarly literature on strikes, which has generally found that strikes tend to be more frequent when economies are expanding rather than contracting, since in tough times workers’ jobs are at the mercy of employers, and workers have greater difficulty withholding labor when their jobs are under threat (See, for instance, Tilly and Shorter, 1974; Hibbs, 1976).

[FIGURE 1 HERE]

As Figure 2 shows, much of the overall decline in protest activity in the region during the Great Recession was driven by a decline of protest over non-economic issues (in particular, ethnic and nationalist issues). This does not appear to have been connected with the recession. In both Russia and Hungary, for instance, 2007—the year before the onset of the recession—was an unusually high year of ethnic and nationalist protest mobilization: in Russia—due primarily to the conflict with Estonia over removal of a Soviet war memorial and activity by extremist right-wing groups; in Hungary—the result of the activization of Viktor Orban’s Fidesz party and protest by right-wing extremists against the socialist government of Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsany. The latter was linked to the domestic economic crisis experienced by Hungary prior to the onset of the global financial crisis and prepared the ground for ongoing mobilization once external economic constraints grew (see further details below). Economic protest actually remained at roughly the same level during the Great Recession as prior to the Great Recession, increasing as a proportion of all protests during this period. Yet, the duration of economic protests and the overall number of people who participated in them declined
sharply during this period. Even so, economic issues throughout the Great Recession resonated among protestors in ways that protest over other issues simply did not. Thus, while accounting for 47 percent of the number of protests and 55 percent of the number of protest days, economic protest accounted for 80 percent of the participants in protest during this period. Particularly in 2009 (immediately after the onset of the global financial crisis), the region experienced an increase in the number of economically-related acts of protest, accounting for 61 percent of all protests and 89 percent of all participants in protests during that year. Moreover, the Great Recession was associated with a sharp shift in the nature of the economic issues raised in protests. In 2007, before the onset of the economic crisis, three-fourths of all participants in protest acts in the region mobilized in support of obtaining new economic benefits (increased pay, improved working conditions, or improvements in services). By contrast, in the wake of the global financial crisis, protest aimed at obtaining new benefits fell precipitously (declining to only 14 percent of protest participants in 2009 and 2 percent in 2010), while protest against economic austerity measures (cuts in pay, benefits, or services) came to dominate protest agendas, with protests revolving around these demands mobilizing 71 percent of all protest participants in the region in 2009 and 80 percent in 2010. In short, the global recession fundamentally altered the character of protest politics in the region, transforming protest into a largely defensive set of actions in reaction to austerity measures that cut pay, benefits, and services rather than revolving around gaining new benefits, as had overwhelmingly been the case during more prosperous times.

[FIGURE 2 HERE]

These overall patterns hide considerable country-level variations, and it is at the
country level that one can identify some of the factors that differentially shaped protest responses across the region. Table 1 provides a general overview of patterns of protest across the eighteen European post-communist states examined in this study, weighted by their population size. As can be seen, not all countries experienced high rates of protest over economic issues during this period, and in some countries protest over other issues predominated in protest agendas (Belarus and Estonia, for example). In this study we focus on patterns of protest over economic issues rather than patterns of protest in general, since we are interested specifically in probing the differential protest responses to the Great Recession, and as we have seen, economic protest played the dominant role in the protest repertoires of the region during the Great Recession. It is of course possible that there is an economic component to protest over other types of issues (for instance, democratization or ethnic conflict) that we are bracketing by looking only at protest over economic issues. However, we expect that protest over these other issues is likely to be less directly connected with patterns of economic performance and more likely to be driven by other factors (ethnic stratification and diversity, government repression, etc.) that are not necessarily as relevant for understanding the impact of the recession on patterns of protest.

[TABLE 1 HERE]

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As is well known in the literature on cross-national patterns of protest, population size is normally related to the amount of protest in a society (See, for example, Hibbs, 1973: 25). This well-researched pattern accords with the assumptions of critical mass theory, which argues that the larger and more variegated a population, the more likely it is that groups will find a sufficient number of participants to overcome collective action problems (See Marwell and Oliver, 1993). Indeed, as we will show below, across the 18 post-communist countries examined here population size was systematically related both to the frequency of protest events and to levels of participation in them.
In Figure 3 we use the population-weighted figures on protest activity to examine the bivariate relationship between rates of economic growth and patterns of protest (the number of events and the number of participants) over economic issues, aggregated over the entire 2007-2010 period. In Figure 3c we focus on variation in mass violence over economic issues (as measured by an index produced from the number of people injured in mass violent events over economic issues and the level of property damage involved in them). In all three figures there is a negative relationship between economic growth and levels of economic protest, and the pattern of variation in all three bears certain similarities. In Figure 3a, for instance, those countries that experienced positive rates of economic growth during the Great Recession (Albania, Belarus, Poland, Moldova, Macedonia, Slovakia, Serbia, and Russia) also had lower numbers of economic protests per population. But among countries that experienced zero or negative growth (Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Ukraine, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Czech Republic, Romania, and Bulgaria) there was a great deal of heterogeneity in the extent to which they experienced protest over economic issues. Figure 3b on levels of participation shows a similar pattern, with a downward trend among those countries that experienced higher rates of growth, but with significant variation among countries that experienced zero or negative growth. Latvia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Croatia, Slovenia, Lithuania, and Romania exhibited the highest numbers of economic protests, while Bulgaria, Slovenia, Macedonia, Czech Republic, Romania, Hungary, Poland, and Latvia displayed the highest levels of

4Property damage was coded as follows: those events that involved no violence were coded as 0; those involving violence but no property damage—1; those involving minor property damage—2; those involving sporadic looting or arson—3; those involving widespread looting or arson—4; and those involving major property destruction—5.
participation in economic protests. In Figure 3c on levels of violence, the pattern again is sharply negative, with greater variance among countries that experienced zero or negative economic growth. Latvia, Bulgaria, Lithuania, and Hungary stood out for their relatively high levels of economically-related violence during this period.

[FIGURE 3 HERE]

Thus, we are left with a puzzle: economic growth may explain why those societies that continued to benefit from growth during the Great Recession did not experience high levels of economic protest, but it cannot explain why, among those societies that experienced significant economic downturns during the Great Recession, some exhibited high levels of economic protest while others did not. Countries experiencing similar amounts of economic pain exhibited significantly different degrees of protest over the consequences of economic contraction. We now turn to a multivariate analysis of patterns of economic protest and to two paired case studies to help explain this puzzle.

**Multivariate Analysis of Patterns of Protest**

In the analysis that follows we use country-years as the basic unit of analysis and implement a cross-sectional time-series design, focusing on four dependent variables of interest: the number of protests (weighted by their duration) over economic issues more generally; the number of participants in protests over economic issues more generally; the number of protests (weighted by duration) specifically against economic cutbacks; and
the number of participants in protests specifically against economic cutbacks. As we saw earlier, economic protest during the 2007-2010 period varied considerably in its goals. In the context of the Great Recession protest for new economic benefits receded as the predominant form of economic protest, with protest over economic cutbacks instead coming to dominate protest agendas. By exploring the factors shaping protest over economic issues more broadly and protest against economic cutbacks more specifically, we can gain a good sense of some of the key drivers of protest during the Great Recession.

For the event-count dependent variables we use a random effects negative binomial model. For the participation dependent variables we use a tobit model that addresses the issue of nonrandom selection where a variable is censored or truncated at a certain point. In this case, one cannot have participation in protest without first having a protest, so that a simple OLS model confounds the issue of how many people decide to participate in protest with the issue of whether or not a protest is organized in the first place. Participants in protest generally do not decide whether and when a protest event will occur, but only whether to participate in an event already organized by movements. By censoring those observations in which no protests occurred, we can estimate whether a particular independent variable increased or decreased protest participation, given the

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5We use event counts weighted by duration, as is common practice in event-count analyses, since this better reflects protest effort than simple event counts.

6Since this is a short panel (only four years), and some of the independent variables to be tested are time-invariant, a fixed effects model would not be appropriate. See Cameron and Trivedi, 1998: 287-292. For robustness checks, we tested these results against a pooled sample with standard errors adjusted for clustering by country.
availability of an opportunity for people to participate in protest.\(^7\)

We begin with a base model of the effects of population size and rates of economic growth on protest behavior. As reported in Model 1 in Table 2a, both variables have statistically significant relationships with the number of protests over economic issues in general. As one would expect, countries with larger populations experienced more economic protest, and economic growth was strongly related to a decline in economic protest. Thus, controlling for population size, each percentage point of increase in economic growth (relative to the base year of 2006) decreased the expected number of economic protests annually by 5.5 percent. As Model 1 in Table 2b indicates, population size and rates of economic growth also had strongly significant and highly substantive relationships with protest against economic cutbacks in the directions one would anticipate. Each percentage point of economic growth (relative to the base year of 2006) decreased the expected number of protests over economic cutbacks annually by almost 8 percent. Thus, in a country that experienced an economic decline of 14 percent below the 2006 level (as occurred, for instance, in Latvia in 2009), one would expect a 77 percent increase in the rate of economic protest in general and a 109 percent increase in the rate of protest over economic cutbacks, whereas in a country that experienced 14-percent economic growth compared to the 2006 level (as occurred, for example, in Poland in 2009), one would expect equivalent decreases in economic protest and protests against economic cutbacks. Model 1 in Table 3a shows that given the opportunity to participate in a protest over economic issues, population size had a marginally significant relationship with the number of people who participated, but economic growth did not.

\(^{7}\)On cross-sectional time-series tobit models, see Arellano and Honore (1998).
However, as Model 1 in Table 3b indicates, given the opportunity to participate in a demonstration against economic cutbacks, both population size and economic growth had statistically significant effects on the number of people who participated. Each percentage point of economic growth (relative to 2006) increased the annual number of participants in protests against economic cutbacks by about 9500 persons, so that an economic decline of 14 percent below the 2006 level (Latvia in 2009) would be associated with over 130 thousand more participants in protests against economic cutbacks, whereas a country with 14 percent growth above the 2006 level (Poland in 2009) would have had 130 thousand fewer participants in such protests. In short, the base models show that the effect of economic contraction on protest mainly occurred through encouraging movement activists to organize more frequent protests over economic issues (and over economic cutbacks in particular). But even taking this into account, the belt-tightening effects of the recession did encourage greater numbers to participate in protests against economic cutbacks in those countries that experienced contractions.  

8For all four models we tested for the presence of any lagged effects of economic growth on protest and found none.

[TABLES 2 AND 3 HERE]

In Models 2-4 we introduce two other independent variables that we hypothesize might affect levels of economic protest in the context of economic contraction: 1) a country’s Freedom House score (ranging from 2 to 14, with a score of 2 representing full democracy and a score of 14 representing full autocracy) for 2006, on the eve of the
Great Recession;\textsuperscript{9} and 2) the EBRD Economic Transition Index for 1998, measuring the extent to which a country had made the transition to capitalist forms of economy in the 1990s.\textsuperscript{10} One should expect a negative relationship between the Freedom House score and economic protest, as more authoritarian polities should be less tolerant of attempts to organize protests in general, and individuals living in more autocratic countries should be less willing to risk participation in the face of negative incentives.

There are also a number of reasons why one might expect prior patterns of economic transformation to affect economic protest in the context of the Great Recession. Those countries that were more progressive in terms of transforming their economies into market economies in the 1990s were the very countries that earlier had demonstrated “patience”/quiescence in the midst of economic contraction. This might have led one to expect similarly quiescent responses to the Great Recession. However, there are also some reasons to believe that the opposite would be true: that those countries that had been in the forefront of economic reform in the 1990s would experience higher levels of protest during the Great Recession. “Patience”/quiescence in the 1990s had been closely intertwined with the promise that rapid economic transition and the additional pain that countries underwent for the sake of integration with the European Union would

\textsuperscript{9}By using 2006 (the year prior to the onset of our measurements of protest), we seek to avoid potential issues of endogeneity, as protest itself (and reactions to it by regimes) could affect the measurement of democracy.

\textsuperscript{10} The EBRD Transition Index includes thirteen different measures of economic reform on issues of privatization, enterprise governance and restructuring, price liberalization, trade and foreign exchange, competition policy, banking reform, securities markets, and infrastructure reform, each ranging in score from 1 (little reform) to 4.33 (at the level typical of advanced industrial economies). The measure used here represents an average of the thirteen measures. Data for the Czech Republic is missing from the EBRD data.
eventually bring a higher standard of living.\textsuperscript{11} Indeed, the decade prior to the Great Recession had been one of remarkable economic growth throughout the region, reinforcing these expectations. But for many living in the region, the sharp economic decline of the Great Recession shattered those dreams, undermining the implicit economic contract between state and society on which European integration was built. It could also be that countries that had reformed themselves more thoroughly in the 1990s were more vulnerable to the effects of the Great Recession in the late 2000s because of the consequences of economic reform for their economies. Thus, there is a strong correlation ($r=.66$) between the EBRD Economic Transition Index and the proportion of a country’s GDP assumed by imports and exports, and between the Transitions Index and the role of foreign direct investment in a country’s economy—both factors that would likely make a country more vulnerable to global economic downturn. Nevertheless, these factors would not be expected to operate directly on protest, but indirectly through their effect on economic decline, so that we are in essence already controlling for their effects by controlling for the influence of economic growth on protest.

Still, in interpreting the effects of democratization and the transition to capitalism on economic protest during the Great Recession, we need to proceed with caution; as is well known, there was a close relationship between the two in the 1990s, and indeed the level of autocracy in a post-communist country in 2006 is strongly negatively correlated ($r = -.73$) with the extent to which a country engaged in economic reform in the 1990s. Therefore, in Models 2-4 we test for the effects of each of these two variables separately.

\textsuperscript{11}On the stereotypes about the West associated with EU accession among Hungarians, for instance, see Fölisz and Tőka, 2006.
and jointly, exploring which, if any, provides better explanatory power. Surprisingly, the findings show that, controlling for population size and economic growth, a country’s level of democracy had no independent effect on the frequency with which movements organized economic protests or protests against economic cutbacks. Levels of democratization did, however, have an independent effect on the willingness of people to participate in these protests assuming the availability of an opportunity to participate. Thus, each point increase toward autocracy on the Freedom House scale resulted in about 38 thousand fewer protestors per year over economic issues in general and about 24 thousand fewer protestors against economic cutbacks. Thus, a country like Russia, which is relatively high on the Freedom House scale (i.e., more autocratic) would be expected to have about 340 thousand fewer participants in economic protests in general during this period and 216 thousand fewer participants in protests against economic cutbacks than a country like Latvia, which is relatively low (i.e., more democratic) on the Freedom House scale.

By contrast, we found that the EBRD Economic Transition Index, while having no relationship with the frequency of economic protest in general or with participation in economic protests or in protests against economic cutbacks, was strongly associated with a significant increase in the frequency of protest against economic cutbacks (with each point on the EBRD index more than doubling the rate of protest on these issues, controlling for the effects of population size and economic growth). Thus, one would expect three times as many protests over economic cutbacks in a country like Hungary (on the cutting edge of economic reform in the 1990s) than in a country like Ukraine (a perennial laggard), even though the two countries experienced similar levels of economic
contraction during the Great Recession. In short, the very countries that had led the transition from socialism to the market in the 1990s with relatively little protest were on the forefront of protest over the effects of the Great Recession in the late 2000s.

Finally, we add two additional factors in Model 5 that we hypothesize might also be associated with economic protest in the midst of economic decline: 1) public sector employment as a percent of total employment; and 2) whether a country adopted an IMF Standby Arrangement in order to deal with the financial fallout from the recession. High levels of public employment could affect economic protest during recession in several ways. Countries with large public bureaucracies that had failed to contain public spending were highly exposed to the impact of the financial collapse at a time when funds no longer flowed as easily into public coffers. Public employees and their benefits are likely to be the first targets of cuts when governments are forced to rein in spending during difficult times. Moreover, public employees tend to be highly unionized and organized, and therefore relatively more easily mobilized in the face of threats to their standard of living. Highly visible and easily politicized as both domestic political failure and foreign interference in domestic affairs, IMF rescue arrangements have often served as the pretext for protest waves around the world, as they normally are accompanied by the adoption of austerity measures aimed at bringing the borrower’s economy back into balance as a condition of the loans. While the IMF played a major role in extending loans to post-communist countries during the transition from socialism without eliciting much protest reaction, we would expect that, were this period of “patience”/quiescence at an end, as we hypothesize, the effect of IMF rescue packages in post-communist East Europe would be no different than what one finds in the rest of the world, where they are
often associated with protest.

As Model 5 indicates, each percentage point of total employment that resided in the public sector increased the frequency of protest against economic cutbacks by about 5 percent, so that a country like Latvia (which had a proportion of public sector employment of almost 35 percent) would be expected to experience almost 50 percent more protests against economic cutbacks compared to Estonia (whose public sector employment was only 24.5 percent of total employment). The adoption of an IMF Standby Arrangement increased protest against economic cutbacks by 84 percent. Those post-communist countries that experienced the highest levels of economic protest and violence associated with the Great Recession were indeed those that relied upon IMF loans to prop them up and who were also early seekers of entrance into the EU (Hungary, Latvia, and Romania). By contrast, post-communist countries that borrowed heavily from the IMF during this period but were not EU members (Belarus and Ukraine) experienced little protest associated with their adoption of Standby Arrangements.¹² Neither public employment nor IMF loans had any independent effect on economic protest overall or on levels of protest participation.

These findings held up to a number of robustness checks.¹³ Below, we explore

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¹²Essentially, this factor is controlled for in the protest event models in Table 2 by the EBRD Economic Transition Index, which is highly correlated with EU membership.

¹³We tested the event models and the tobit models using a pooled sample with standard errors adjusted for clustering at the country level, with no major changes in the substantive results (The pooled model for economic protest in general, however, did indicate very weak statistical significance for the EBRD Transition Index and IMF Standby Arrangements). We also tested for the inclusion of a series of other independent variables to see if they changed the results in any way (with no effect): the degree of fractionalization of government parties in the legislature, the degree of fractionalization
them in more detail through two paired case studies (Estonia-Latvia and Hungary-Ukraine) that illustrate some of the causal mechanisms involved and identify a number of additional processes that are not easily placed within a quantitative framework.

**Paired Case Comparisons (I): Latvia and Estonia**

The contrast between Latvia’s high number of economic protests and participation rates with Estonia’s “patience”/quiescence against a backdrop of structural similarities (economic and political reform records, EU integration processes, sectoral breakdown of their economies, buoyant pre-crisis economic growth,$^{14}$ severe economic contractions in 2008, and sharp rises in unemployment in 2008-09) throws into sharper relief more fine-grained differences between the two countries that help to explain these different protest outcomes. Latvia’s higher level of public sector employment (34.7% in 2005, compared to 24.5% in Estonia)$^{15}$ and the IMF rescue package in Latvia are obvious differences, but other factors contributed to differential patterns of protest as well.

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$^{14}$In 2006 Latvia recorded the highest growth in the EU (12.2% GDP growth), with Estonia only narrowly behind (10.6); see World Bank.

$^{15}$Figures are computed from EBRD Structural and Institutional Change Indicators data, using the share of the private sector in total employment in order to estimate the share of public sector employment as a percent of total employment. The data are available at http://www.ebrd.com/pages/research/economics/data/macro.shtml.
One might have expected Latvia and Estonia to exhibit significant protest mobilizations in the early 1990s. Protest for independence in the late Soviet era had created a powerful precedent, the economic reform process was radical and incurred significant social costs, and the sizeable Russophone populations were initially politically disenfranchised and encountered persisting obstacles to full integration into the new state and society. While the absence of protests organized by ethnic Estonians and Latvians can be at least partly explained by the shared drive to build an independent state and “return to Europe,” the lack of significant mobilization among Russophones (apart from a small number of protests over language and education policies and the commemoration of historical events) is perhaps harder to explain. That Russophones are a diverse group with a shared language rather than clear social or ethnic markers, the opportunity to migrate to Russia or to work in Europe, the absence of organizational coherence among Russophone parties, and a political discourse firmly skewed to the center-right and right that tends to crowd out minority views go some way towards explaining this quiescence. In the absence of systematic data on the participation of ethnic Latvians vs. Russophones in economic protests during the Great Recession, we cannot address this cleavage in any systematic way. But very few economic protests in Estonia and Latvia during the Great Recession had a distinctive ethno-linguistic dimension to them, at least as reported in the media. Public sector employment is higher among ethnic Latvians, and out-migration (within the EU) has been higher among the Russophones, suggesting that ethnic Latvians might have accounted for a significant (if not the main) share of economic protesters during the crisis. In Estonia, neither Estonians nor Russophones mobilized over economic conditions during the Great Recession in significant numbers.
Although Estonia and Latvia tend to be discussed as variations of the same case in terms of economic and political reforms, a closer look reveals important differences that shaped the ways in which they experienced the boom and bust cycle of the 2000s and the strict austerity measures which both countries imposed on their populations. One crucial difference is that Estonia consistently pursued a balanced budget and generated a budget surplus since 2002, which it used to build up a Stabilization Reserve Fund precisely for emergency situations (Kraan et al., 2008: 10; Martin, 2010). By contrast, Latvia did not secure its reserves but instead spent its growth proceeds (Kraan et al., 2009: 190). As a result, Estonia’s austerity measures could concentrate on cutting other expenditures than social transfers, whereas Latvia’s IMF-overseen austerity programme introduced cuts across the board. Thus, not only could Estonia soften the blows of austerity cuts because of this, but a balanced budget and the existence of reserves also helped to shape public perceptions about relative government effectiveness.

Similarly, different degrees of corruption led to different levels of public trust in government in the two countries. Indeed, on a number of corruption measures Latvia has performed consistently worse than Estonia. Latvia entered the financial crisis with the issue of corruption high on the public agenda after a number of high-level corruption allegations against party and government officials and controversial government decisions aimed at restraining its Anti-Corruption Bureau, which had been investigating several prominent businessmen with political influence. Several demonstrations over

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16 According to Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), ranking over 200 countries worldwide, Latvia scored 4.8 (out of 10) in 2007 and came in 39th out of the countries included, compared to Estonia scoring 6.5 and being ranked 28th. See Transparency International, CPI (2007).
these issues had mobilized sections of society already prior to the onset of the Great Recession (in particular, a rally in October 2007, at which several thousand protesters called for the resignation of Prime Minister Aigars Kalvitis of the People’s Party over his decision to dismiss the head of the Anti-Corruption Bureau) and opened the way for a series of protests driven by economic demands once the implications of the crisis became more tangible. The prime minister in fact was forced to resign in early December 2007 after President Zatlers called for his resignation and after the resignations of several ministers. But corruption issues remained high on the political agenda, with the chief of the Anti-Corruption Bureau eventually dismissed in June 2008 in yet another controversial decision, leaving the Bureau without a new head until early 2009.

Estonia’s transition from communism has been less conflictual than Latvia’s, and the quality of formal and informal institutions has been higher (Pettai and Mölder, 2010; Kuokstis and Vilpisauskas, 2008). Ironically, when the Latvian Prime Minister Kalvitis resigned in late 2007 in the wake of the corruption scandals after three years in office, he had become the longest-serving prime minister in Latvian politics since 1991. The political volatility in Latvia (compared to government stability in Estonia) underpinned perceptions of a lack of government effectiveness. This volatility was only partially masked by a repeated pattern of keeping the government in place while replacing its members (a pattern that continued during the financial crisis).

The link between perceptions of government ineffectiveness/corruption and protest is an indirect but important one. These perceptions undermined public trust in government which, in turn, helped to politicize society in the context of a crisis situation. In Latvia public trust in the government was low (20% in spring 2007, and still only 13%
by spring 2010). By contrast, even in the midst of severe economic contraction it remained high in Estonia (66% in spring 2007, and 53% in spring 2010) – even significantly higher than the EU average of 41% for 2007 and 29% for 2010 (Eurobarometer 67, spring 2007; Eurobarometer 73, spring 2010). Moreover, on the eve of the Great Recession recognition of past economic progress and expectations of continued economic improvement were high in the Baltic. When asked in spring 2007 if their situation had changed in the last five years, 75% of Estonians said their situation had improved, 16% said it was unchanged, and only 8% thought their situation had worsened. Latvians were somewhat less positive but still well above the EU average at the time: 58% thought their situation had improved, 23% saw it as unchanged, and 18% said it had worsened (Eurobarometer 67, Spring 2007: 265). The outlook for the next five years was similarly optimistic: 66% of Estonians and 58% of Latvians expected their situation to improve in the next five years (well above the 43% average for the EU as a whole) (Eurobarometer 67, Spring 2007: 266). The impact of the crisis would have thus come as a shock to populations in both countries, but Estonia’s policy track record and its stable and trusted government provided it with a buffer that was lacking in Latvia.

Latvia’s large public sector also played an important role in spurring on protest in response to the economic crisis. In September 2008 health workers, teachers, and police demonstrated in Riga to demand higher salaries (Telegraf, September 19, 2010). Soon afterward, on October 30th, about a thousand doctors and nurses began a two-day strike while the Saeima (the Latvian legislature) was debating an austerity budget envisaging job and health expenditure cuts. In December the Latvian government agreed to an IMF rescue deal (involving the EU) of 7.5 billion Euros (of which 600 million Euros were
immediately disbursed), with further tranches earmarked for 2009-10. As a result, a range of austerity measures were put in place to bring the budget deficit under control, including job cuts and an average public salary cut of 25%. The IMF deal proved the crucial catalyst for mobilizing the public sector at large. On January 13, 2009 large-scale anti-government protests involving about 10,000 people turned violent when hundreds of youths (apparently a mixture of Russian-speakers and Latvians) overturned cars, looted shops, and threw cobble stones ripped from the streets of the old city into the windows of Saeima’s building (Reuters, January 13, 2009). This was the worst violence in Latvia since 1991, and it triggered a swift political response by President Zatlers, who openly criticized the coalition government for having lost touch with voters. Following the Trade Union Federation’s call for a constitutional referendum, he asked the Saeima to strengthen his constitutional powers to initiate new elections in the event of legislative gridlock and to give the public the right to seek early elections via a referendum. Zatlers also urged the government to facilitate a turnover in government posts and bring opposition parties into the cabinet (Reuters News, January 14, 2009). Prime Minister Godmanis survived a vote of no confidence in early February, but his position became untenable when two of his coalition partners left the government. In March 2009 Valdis Dombrovskis (New Era Party) took over as prime minister. Throughout 2009 – in the run up to and after the Saeima’s approval of further budget cuts to qualify for a tranche of the IMF package (AP, June 18, 2009) – smaller and medium-size anti-austerity protests, led by public sector workers, continued. Dombrovskis temporarily oversaw a minority government, but he won a narrowly contested election in October 2011 against the Harmony Center, the center-left party associated with the Russophone electorate. Early
parliamentary elections held in September 2011 after a referendum on the dissolution of parliament kept Dombrovskis in office as part of a coalition government, although his party had actually come in third, after Harmony Center and the new Reform Party set up by former President Zatlers.

Estonia’s government stability and relative quiescence in the midst of an analogous economic decline makes for a marked contrast. Prime Minister Andrus Ansip (Reform Party) was appointed in 2005 to replace Juhan Parts and managed to see out an entire elected term in office from 2007, surviving a vote of no-confidence over austerity measures in February 2009 and overseeing a minority government after his coalition partner, the Social Democrats, left in May 2009. He was re-elected (albeit narrowly) in March 2011, again as part of a coalition of center-right parties (with Pro Patria and Res Publica Union) (European Voice, February 24, 2011).

Estonia’s entrance into the Eurozone on January 1, 2011 also set Estonia apart from Latvia (although Latvia maintained its currency peg against the Euro). After EU membership in 2004 or 2007, the adoption of the Euro became the next big international test of new member states’ economic and financial credentials. In Estonia a policy choice to stay on target for Euro membership despite the financial crisis provided an external and domestic anchor and played a role in extending its image of policy coherence. As Estonia did not need to be bailed out with the help of an IMF loan, the government could present itself as strong, providing an additional societal buffer against protests in the midst of severe economic pain.

The comparison between Latvia and Estonia confirms that a large public sector hit particularly hard by austerity measures played an important role in evoking economic
protest, and that IMF rescue packages also acted as an important lightning rod for protest. The comparison also brings out the importance of domestic differences related to the public trust in transparent and effective government, the existence of financial reserves, and external reform anchors (such as the adoption of the Euro) for explaining differential protest responses to the economic disaster.

**Paired Case Comparisons (II): Hungary and Ukraine**

Hungary and Ukraine varied greatly in the type and comprehensiveness of their economic and political reforms in the 1990s, but in the mid- to late 2000s both countries experienced a deep financial and economic crisis that required the help of the IMF. In Hungary a severe domestic crisis after many years of expectations tied to the country’s reform success was reinforced by the global financial crisis; in Ukraine external shocks abruptly ended a short period of strong economic growth and plunged the country back into its long accustomed crisis. Hungary saw sustained large-scale protest mobilization, whereas Ukraine continued to experience only small-scale protests on a wide range of economic and political issues. These differing trajectories and Hungary’s larger public sector (31.5% in 2005 – compared to 21.6% in Ukraine) go some way towards explaining why protest activity was more significant in Hungary than in Ukraine. But the disparate political landscapes of these countries also provide some critical clues to the dynamics involved in producing different protest responses to the Great Recession. Indeed, they point to the fact that economic conditions, a sizeable public sector, and a catalyst like an

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17 Hungary had an EBRD economic reform index of 3.92 – significantly higher than Estonia and Latvia.
IMF loan and accompanying austerity programs need to be activated by social movements or political parties in order to translate into significant protest. Hungary and Ukraine share an extremely polarized political environment – arguably a conducive starting-point for protest. But they are polarized in different ways, and the nature of this polarization, combined with differing expectations within their respective publics about government, played important roles in producing contrasting protest outcomes. Hungary belonged to the frontrunners of reform in the region, and after more than two decades since the start of comprehensive economic reforms and several years into EU membership, a domestic financial crisis and the immediate austerity program hit society hard, further polarized it, and fed into party-led mobilization. Ukraine’s extremely drawn out political and economic reform process since 1991 and the disillusionment that enveloped Ukrainian society after the enormous mass mobilizations of the Orange Revolution in 2004 made the new financial and economic crisis less of a rallying point for political parties and for society at large.

In 2006 Hungary had the largest budget deficit in the EU. Austerity measures, including an envisaged 10% cut to the public sector, were introduced before the onset of the Great Recession in response to the country’s economic problems. The domestic economic crisis unfolded against an extreme and growing political polarization between the Socialist Party (MSZP) and the center-right party Fidesz under Viktor Orban. A leaked “secret speech” by Socialist Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsany in autumn 2006 in which he admitted that he had lied about the state of the economy before the elections provided the trigger for a long series of anti-government protests, culminating in Fidesz’s landslide victory in the April 2010 elections, when the political center-center-left was
practically obliterated and democratic checks and balances came unhinged.

From early 2007 there were repeated anti-government protests of varying magnitude (several hundred to several thousand) in Budapest and cities across Hungary demanding the prime minister’s resignation over the government’s plan to raise taxes, cut subsidies, and dismiss thousands of public sector employees (AP, January 20, 2007). In February anti-government protesters staged road closures in 100 locations across the country in protest against the austerity package. In addition, there were sector-specific protests and local issue-specific protests tied to the austerity measures.

During these first protests Fidesz still appeared “weak and divided” (The New York Times, March 11, 2007). However, Fidesz gradually stepped up the pressure on the coalition of Socialists and liberal Free Democrats (SZDSZ) by actively shaping public discourse and organizing protests (some deliberately coinciding with national holidays), using the social unrest over austerity measures to boost its own electoral support. Anti-government protests increasingly acquired nationalist overtones, as Fidesz faced growing competition from the extreme right in Jobbik, a right-wing youth movement transformed into a party in 2003 that was gradually increasing its support base. In September 2007 anti-government protests marked the first anniversary of the leaked prime minister’s speech, with mass protests against anti-austerity measures mobilizing an estimated 10,000 people.

In late October and early November train drivers staged warning strikes across the country against government plans to close various rail routes. This was followed by about half of Budapest’s bus drivers and about 4,000 bus drivers across Hungary, who struck in protest against planned layoffs. In March 2008 a Fidesz-initiated referendum,
approved by the Constitutional Court, put three questions to the public: on the introduction of doctors’ fees, hospital charges, and university tuition. Over 80% of those who participated voted against each of the proposals.

Hungary narrowly averted a financial crisis with the help of an International Monetary Fund-led $25.1 billion rescue package put in place in November 2008. It involved the EU and was tied to strict austerity measures aimed at controlling the budget deficit. Hungary’s currency fell to an all-time-low against the Euro, as investors fled amidst concerns over the country's high budget deficit, public sector debt, and heavy reliance on external financing (Reuters, November 29, 2008). Large-scale foreign borrowing had allowed the country to run a sizeable current account deficit (7.5% of GDP in 2006, and 6.4% in 2007) and a large fiscal deficit in 2006 (Cordero, 2009).

Access to cheap international credit saw the private sector and households exposed to high debts, often held in foreign currencies. When external capital inflows dried up in connection with the global financial crisis, the Hungarian economy imploded. The presence of the IMF mission further fuelled the ongoing protests. In late November 2008 protests built into large-scale anti-government protests against pay and pension cuts, with about 10,000 workers across Hungary going on strike at train stations, manufacturing plants, schools, pharmacies, and electricity plants. Several thousand public sector workers represented by 30 unions also protested outside the Hungarian National Assembly against pay cuts (Reuters, November 28, 2008). On December 15 the budget tabled by the prime minister, including a slight upward revision of the fiscal deficit targets that was sanctioned by the IMF, passed the National Assembly. Immediately, rail worker strikes started up again, and public sector unions announced a new series of strikes for early

The momentum of regular Sunday demonstrations against the government gradually picked up throughout the spring of 2009. In March 2009 Prime Minister Gyurcsany resigned in the hope of enabling the Socialist Party to catch up in the polls before the elections scheduled for early 2010. In mid-April Gordon Bajnai (MSZP) was sworn in as the new prime minister. In Hungary’s highly politicized setting, this internal turnover triggered further demonstrations, strikes, and clashes with the police. The extremist party Jobbik achieved a breakthrough in the European Parliament Elections in June 2009 (gaining three representatives) and continued to position itself in anticipation of the 2010 elections. Large-scale anti-austerity protests by public sector workers continued until the elections in April 2010, which saw Fidesz win a landslide victory and Viktor Orban become prime minister, commanding a two-thirds (constitutional) majority in the National Assembly without an effective opposition. Jobbik gained parliamentary representation (26 seats) as Hungary’s third strongest party. It had played an important role in the mobilization of sustained protest and affected a significant shift of Hungary’s party system to the right.

Compared to Hungary, Ukraine’s transition in the 1990s proved considerably more complex due to the country’s integration into the Soviet economy, the need to build a new independent state alongside fundamental political and economic reforms, and the existence of strong regional cleavages not only around language and identity issues, but that also include differences in economic structures and domestic and international political preferences (Sasse, 2010). In addition to the post-Soviet output collapse, soft budget constraints saw the country slide into hyperinflation by late 1993 and only
gradually recover through monetary stabilization in 1996. The privatization process was slow and only gathered speed in the late 1990s (D’Anieri et al, 1999: 166-205). And it was not until the early to mid-2000s that Ukraine began to experience significant positive economic growth. Presidential policy wavered continuously during these years to appease different regional constituencies, numerous governments collapsed, and the constitutional division of power between the president and the prime minister became politicized (and remains ambiguous even today).

The authoritarian drift of the scandal-ridden Kuchma regime ended abruptly with the Orange Revolution in late 2004, a moment of massive protest mobilizations (centered on Kyiv and the western regions) against electoral fraud in the presidential elections. The protests led to a re-run of the elections and brought to power a reform coalition of President Viktor Yushchenko and Prime Minister Yuliya Tymoshenko. After many years of economic crisis, corruption, and an uncertain foreign policy course, public expectations for domestic reform and Ukraine’s European integration were high, at least in western and central Ukraine. However, these expectations were soon dashed by the growing policy disagreements and personal rivalry between Yushchenko and Tymoshenko and by repeated government changes that saw the return of Yushchenko’s 2004 electoral rival Viktor Yanukovych as prime minister in 2006 (and eventually, in 2010, as president). Corruption levels remained high, further undermining societal trust in government.\textsuperscript{18} Opinion polls showed that throughout 2007 around 40\% of respondents did not support the activities of the government; this proportion rose throughout 2008,

\textsuperscript{18}According to Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) Ukraine scored 2.7 out of 10 in 2007 and ranked 118\textsuperscript{th} out of about 200 countries; see Transparency International, CPI (2007).
peaking in March 2009 at 63.7% (Razumkov Center, Opinion Polls, 2007-2009). Even after presidential elections in 2010 that were won by Yanukovych, 30% immediately disapproved of Yanukovych’s new government, and opposition to the Yanukovych government steadily rose to 45% by the end of 2010 and to 62.6% in 2011 (Razumkov Center, Opinion Polls, 2010-2011). In response to the question of whether Ukraine was developing in the right or wrong direction, there was only a brief period in early 2005, immediately after the Orange Revolution, when over 50% of Ukrainians responded positively, dropping to about 20% by the end of 2007, and even lower by 2009 (Razumkov Center, Public Opinion, 2004-2008). Such widespread disillusionment with Ukrainian politics that cut across the political spectrum and across country’s regional divide limited the ability of any political actor mobilize public support around a tangible political alternative. It would be misleading to characterize Ukrainian society as apolitical; there was persistent low-level protest mobilization (at times reaching up to several thousand protesters) in Kyiv and regional cities over a wide range of political issues, such as opposition to NATO membership, Crimean Tatar protest, protest over economic issues, and pre-election rallies orchestrated by the two main parties (Yanukovych’s Party of Regions and Tymoshenko’s Bloc). But these scattered protests have not jelled into larger campaigns or events. None of the dominant political actors had the credibility or vision to formulate a tangible political alternative that would tap into the alienation accompanying economic crisis, not even for parts of the country.

Ukraine’s brief period of impressive economic growth in the mid-2000s (GDP grew by more than 12% in 2004 and by more than 7% in 2006 and 2007) was driven by the steel sector benefiting from high global steel prices and was accompanied by property
and credit booms. But all this came to a halt as a result of the external shock of the global financial crisis. However, even the IMF rescue package of $16.4 billion, agreed upon in late October 2008, only sparked a few medium-size protests and no sustained protest campaigns. The last instalment of the IMF loan was frozen in late 2009 when the Ukrainian government raised minimum wages and pensions. The involvement of the IMF – against a backdrop of earlier IMF loans in the late 1990s – failed to act as a catalyst for large-scale protests like those in Latvia or Hungary. Ukraine’s biggest anti-austerity protests (up to 5000 protesters) occurred in December 2008; the implications of the IMF deal for jobs and social transfers were singled out by the protesters (mostly coal miners from state-run mines and pensioners) at the time (dpa, December 23, 2008). In February 2009 several thousand people protested against the austerity budget of the city of Kyiv – the protests brought together representatives of the Ukrainian Trade Union Federation, workers of state-run companies, public sector employees, and political activists from both Yanukovych’s and Tymoshenko’s parties (Ukraine General Newswire, February 12, 2009). The biggest protest since the legislative elections in 2007 took place in April 2009 – estimates vary between 20,000 and 50,000 participants – at a pre-election rally by Yanukovych supporters demanding the resignation of the president and prime minister for their failure to resolve the economic crisis (Reuters, April 3, 2009; dpa, April 3, 2009). This event occurred a week after the legislature passed two bills restoring the flow of IMF credits. In July 2010 a new IMF loan of $15.2bn was agreed upon, which was directly linked to a significant hike in household gas and utility prices. The period October-December 2010 also saw a series of medium-size protests (involving several thousand people) by small business owners and employees against the new tax code,
resulting in President Yanukovych vetoing the provisions on higher taxes for small businesses (AFP, November 30, 2010). While effective on their own terms, the interests represented were issue-specific and failed to mobilize a wider societal concern about the economic crisis.

For a country the size of Ukraine and with the depth of economic contraction that Ukraine experienced during the Great Recession, economic protest was decidedly small. The Ukrainian case illustrates that economic crisis, an IMF program, the precedent of recent massive mobilization, and a high level of political polarization need not translate into large-scale mass protest without parties mobilizing along this cleavage and without the public believing in the prospect of a credible alternative. In Ukraine’s post-revolutionary political landscape disillusionment with all the key actors prevails. A series of elections in close succession provided sufficient opportunities for the main political parties to mobilize around the fallout from the economic crisis; however, they chose instead to tap into familiar regional identity cleavages without extensively activating the issues of profound economic hurt that Ukraine has experienced as a result of the Great Recession. By contrast, in Hungary the political landscape was polarized between left- and right-wing parties. Given that the home-grown financial crisis prior to the Great Recession was associated with the Socialist Party, the combined effect of domestic and international crises provided the right-wing party Fidesz with an opportunity to stoke and channel public discontent into electoral support. Growing support for the extreme right party Jobbik moved Fidesz further to the right. Ukraine’s political scene is similarly polarized between two political parties and their leaders (Yanukoyvch and Tymoshenko), but they represent regional constituencies rather than clear ideological programs. Having
rotated in an out of office, both leaders failed to articulate a credible alternative amidst the widespread disillusionment of Ukrainians across regional and political affiliations.

Conclusion

It is hardly surprising to find that in the region of the world hit the hardest by the Great Recession, significant outbursts of protest occurred. However, the story of the end of “patience”/quiescence in Eastern Europe is not quite that simple. As we have seen, countries in the region weathered the economic crisis differentially, with some continuing to experience economic growth while others undergoing severe contraction. In Tolstoyan fashion, those “happy” countries that continued to experience economic growth in the midst of global crisis were all little affected by protest, while those “unhappy” countries that experienced significant economic contractions were all “unhappy” in their own ways, displaying quite varied protest responses to economic decline. We showed that those countries that were most vulnerable to high levels of economic protest during the Great Recession were precisely those that had been in the vanguard of economic and political reform in the 1990s, in part because they were more vulnerable to economic downturn due to their high levels of dependence upon the global economy, in part because they had generated huge expectations surrounding their track records of reform and EU integration that were dashed in the context of the Great Recession. But a number of other factors also shaped differential protest responses to economic crisis. Countries with high levels of public sector employment experienced greater protest, as austerity measures targeted public employees in particular, and public employee unions provided the mobilizing capacity for generating large and sustained protest campaigns. IMF rescue packages
provided both an opportunity and grievance for accelerating protest, both through the cutbacks that they mandated and in the ways they demonstrated government incapacity. Governments that, prior to the onset of the crisis, already lacked public trust or a reputation of effectiveness were more likely to see sustained and significant protest. But we also showed the importance of political context and the key role that political parties and public expectations play in politicizing the cleavages born out of economic crisis. If parties lack the credibility or desire to mobilize citizens around the issues of economic pain that they are experiencing, and if citizens are disillusioned and incapable of imagining that collective action might be an effective remedy to their plight, then even a severe economic contraction, IMF austerity program, and past history of mobilization will not produce significant or sustained waves of protest.

Thus, while the protest response to the Great Recession in post-communist East Europe shows that there is certainly a relationship between deprivation and protest, it also shows that this relationship is hardly a simple one and depends on the presence of particular facilitating structural conditions, opportunities, and mobilizing structures. The stark contrast between the relatively more “patient” or quiescent protest responses in Eastern Europe during the transition to capitalism in the 1990s and the more contentious protest responses to the Great Recession (even though they both involved deep economic pain) raises broader questions about the conditions under which individuals mobilize collectively against economic hardship. “Patience,” it seems, is much harder to sustain the second time around.
Appendix 1. Procedures for Coding of Event Data

For the purposes of this study, a demonstration was defined as an event that: 1) was a voluntary gathering of persons with the purpose of engaging in a public collective display of sentiment for or against public policies; 2) involved a minimum of 100 persons; and 3) the number of participants was not restricted by the organizers of the event (i.e., was not a conference, convention, or other restricted organized meeting). A strike was defined as a work stoppage with the aim of protesting the policies of government, enterprise management, or some other authority (with a minimal size limit of 100 participants). For both demonstrations and strikes, a minimum of 100 participants was required for an event to be included in the sample, since events with less than 100 participants are usually not reported in media sources. A mass violent event was defined as collective violence against people or property, with a minimum size of 15 participants. For ease of coding, any protest act that lasted for a portion of a day was counted as having lasted for an entire day.

Searches of Reuters were conducted using Factiva, while searches of AP, Agence France Presse, Deutsche Press Agentur, and Interfax were conducted using Lexis-Nexis. To ensure that the use of index terms and relevancy filters on searches undertaken in Lexis-Nexis did not bias the results, the list of article headlines returned using the narrow search criteria was systematically compared for a period of six months with the list of article headlines generated by an unfiltered, traditional subject search. No biases were found. As a further check on the coverage of the five international wire services, searches of national newswire services for seventeen of the eighteen countries were undertaken for a period of three months to see whether local coverage of protest events
differed systematically from international coverage. The results suggested that coverage of events in Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Lithuania by the international newswires likely underestimated the extent of politically salient protest in these countries. Between January 1 and March 31, 2009, national newswires reported on nine events in Hungary, eight events in the Czech Republic, and seven events in Lithuania that were not covered by the five international wire services. In all other cases, however, coverage of events was roughly identical. At the same time, the results suggested that national wire services had their own substantial lapses in coverage, as a number of the events captured by the international newswires went unreported by the national outlets examined.

Once the media reports were collected, they were examined in detail by one of three members of the coding team and coded using a common coding protocol and detailed set of instructions into a relational database in Microsoft Access. Information on 55 different fields was collected, including data on the location of the event, the type of event, the duration of the event, the number of participants, the specific demands made and the targets of protest, the types of participants and the organizers of protest, the police response and the number of arrested or injured, and the extent of civilian-led violence and the degree of damage it caused. All sources used to code each record were hyperlinked to the individual record, thereby allowing for the use of this rich body of reports on protest activity as part of the parallel qualitative analysis in the second half of this essay. In order to ensure inter-coder reliability, coders met on a weekly basis to resolve jointly (and with participation of the principal investigators) any questions that arose. A sample check on inter-coder reliability for a sixth of the coded cases revealed an inter-coder reliability of approximately 95 percent. The codings for all events were also
reviewed by the principal investigators to further ensure accuracy and consistency.
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Table 1: Country-level indicators of patterns of protest, 2007-2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Total protests</th>
<th>Protests per million pop</th>
<th>Protests raising economic demands</th>
<th>Economic protests per million pop</th>
<th>Protests against cutbacks</th>
<th>Protests against cutbacks per million pop</th>
<th>Protest participation</th>
<th>Protest participation per 1000 pop</th>
<th>Participation in economic protests</th>
<th>Participation in economic protests per 1000 pop</th>
<th>Participation in protests against economic cutbacks</th>
<th>Participation in protests against cutbacks per 1000 pop</th>
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*aCalculated as the natural log of the product of the number of people injured in mass violent events concerning economic issues * the score on a property damage index for these same events.
Table 2: Random effects negative binomial regression of yearly economic protest events (weighted by duration)

### Table 2a: All economic protest events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
<th>Model 5</th>
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<td>IRR z-score</td>
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### Table 2b: Protest events over economic cutbacks

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<td>IRR z-score</td>
<td>IRR z-score</td>
<td>IRR z-score</td>
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<td>1.969 5.68******</td>
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Table 3: Tobit regression of annual participation in economic protest events

3a: Participation in all economic protest events

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3b: Participation in protest events against economic cutbacks

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Figure 1: Protest activity by form and dimension of mobilization, 2007-2010

1a: Number of protests

1b: Number of protest-days

1c: Participation in protests
Figure 2: Protest activity by issue-area, 2007-2010

2a: Number of protests

2b: Number of protest-days

2c: Participation in protests

- Ethnic or nationalist issues
- Economic issues
- For new economic benefits
- Against economic cutbacks
Figure 3: Economic Growth and Economic Protest, 2007-2010

3a: Growth and the number of economic protests

3b: Growth and participation in economic protests

3c: Growth and economic violence