

Political Parties and the Institution of Membership in Ukraine, 1991–2014

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***Abstract:** Between 1991 and 2014, the majority of political parties in Ukraine largely failed to develop the institution of membership. Minimal legislative input on party organization combined with an unwillingness on the part of the party leadership to reform party operational structures, resulted in parties that lacked internal democracy, demonstrated low levels of representativeness, and were tied to oligarchic groups and business elites. The weak relationship between Ukrainian political parties and society due to a strong party–state linkage based on rent-seeking behavior, has led to non-accountability and a disinterest among parties to function as membership organizations. Consequently, apathetic attitudes towards partisanship developed in Ukrainian society.*

Introduction

Scholarship on post-communist political parties has found a clear set of features that tend to characterize political parties in Eastern Europe. In particular, the majority of parties in post-communist Europe display weak institutional structures and have failed to develop strong linkages with society (Spirova 2005). They have become professional in nature, have forged closer links with the state, and have generally eschewed the mass membership model (Golosov 1998; Toole 2003; van Biezen 2003; van Biezen and Poguntke 2014). The focus of many political parties in Eastern Europe has shifted from an organizational one (focused on building a party membership base) to an electoral one (focused on “catch-all” slogans aimed at any and every voter at the polls). Ukraine is no exception. Following the 2014 Euromaidan Revolution and the