The purpose of this article is to investigate factors influencing the dispersion of positions taken by political parties in the ideological space. It consists of a theoretical discussion of the concept of polarization and an overview of the determinants of programmatic competition in selected post-communist countries.

I use a two-dimensional conceptualization of the ideological space and a measurement method in order to perform broad international and longitudinal comparisons using the Comparative Manifesto Project data. The obtained results confirm that economic factors are significant for activity in the area of interest-based programmatic competition, and that the cultural divide is important for the polarization of worldviews. They also point to the considerable variability of the intensity of ideological polarization that occurs within the party system in post-communist countries.

**Keywords:** party systems, party system polarization, Comparative Manifesto Project, programmatic competition, social cleavages