

ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE COMMUNIST PAST IN FIVE CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

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Abstract: Almost fifteen years after the breakdown of the Iron Curtain, citizens in five of the best performing post-communist countries display willingness to return to the previous regime, share values convergent with communism, and high levels of dissatisfaction with democracy. Using a two-step statistical analysis, this article investigates at individual level whether citizens attach attitudinal and behavioral consistency to their opinions towards the past. The results indicate that people supporting communist policies are more likely to pursue the return to such a regime compared to their fellow nationals; citizens' regret for the previous regime is not based on the ideological or policy features; and dissatisfaction with democracy has little to do if anything with the nostalgia for the communist past.

Keywords: nostalgia, selective memories, New Europe Barometers

INTRODUCTION¹

Young people hammering the Berlin Wall, people on the streets of Warsaw, Prague, and Budapest, flags with holes in the middle (replacing the Communist coat of arms), and dead bodies on the streets of Timisoara and Bucharest are striking images characterizing 1989 in Europe and providing a clue of its significance in political and historical terms. The breakdown of Communism, characterized by a domino effect triggered by Gorbachev's reforms and the USSR's lack of reaction to street events in satellite countries² allowed the beginning of democratization in Central and Eastern Europe. That marked the beginning of various types of transitions.³ Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia held institutionalized negotiations for a power transfer between Communists

¹ The article is part of a project financed by the National Council for Scientific Research in Higher Education System from Romania (CNCSIS) within the Project Ideas (*idei proiect*) category, code: 2274/2008.

² Jon ELSTER, "When Communism Dissolves", in *London Review of Books*, vol. 12, no. 2, January 1990, p. 4.

³ Gerardo L. MUNCK, Carol SKALNIK LEFF, "Modes of Transition and Democratization: South America and Eastern Europe in Comparative Perspective", in *Comparative Politics*, April 1997, vol. 29, no. 3, p. 346.

and opposition⁴, Bulgaria agreed on loosening control and “competitive” elections⁵, whereas the power transfer in Romania was marked by violent riots, unknown number of deaths (including the former authoritarian president), and numerous casualties for more than a week in major cities of the country.⁶

The common feature of the journey to democratization and market economy in all of these countries is the bumpy road that had to be crossed. Starting with the initial dilemma of simultaneity (i.e. to prioritize the political or economic reforms) and the challenge of institution creation⁷, the process continued with numerous drawbacks in state politics, corruption, scandals, weak civil society, political instability, and intermittent rule of law.⁸ Such an agitated transition, which can be said to have characterised the first post-communist decade in Central and Eastern Europe, can create confusion within the body of citizens about the functioning of the new system of government and its implications thereby reducing confidence in institutions.⁹

Following such developments, the support for the previous regime comes as no surprise. Figures from the 1998 World Values Survey indicate that the level of positive opinions about communism cannot be ignored in the post-communist countries.¹⁰ The empirical puzzle that sets the bases for this

⁴ Laszlo BRUSZT, “1989: The Negotiated Revolution in Hungary”, in *Social Research*, 1990, vol. 57, no. 3, 1990; Helga WALSH, “Political Transition Processes in Central and Eastern Europe”, in *Comparative Politics*, July 1994, vol. 26, p. 385; Klaus VON BEYME, “Institutional Engineering and Transition to Democracy”, in Jan ZIELONKA (ed.), *Democratic Consolidation in Eastern Europe*, vol. I, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

⁵ Georgi KARASIMEONOV, *The 1990 Election to the Bulgarian Grand National Assembly and the 1991 Election to the Bulgarian National Assembly: Analyses, Documents and Data*, Berlin: Edition Sigma, 1997.

⁶ Juan J. LINZ, Alfred STEPAN, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation. Southern Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996; Leslie HOLMES, *Post-Communism. An Introduction*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1997; Mary KALDOR, Ivan VEJVODA, “Democratization in Central and East European Countries. An Overview”, in Mary KALDOR, Ivan VEJVODA (eds.), *Democratization in Central and Eastern Europe*, London–New York: Continuum, 2002; Peter SIANI-DAVIES, *The Romanian Revolution of December 1989*, New York: Cornell University Press, 2005.

⁷ Claus OFFE, “Designing Institutions for East European Transitions”, Public Lecture no. 9, Collegium Budapest, Institute for Advanced Study, 1992.

⁸ Jon ELSTER, Claus OFFE, Ulrich K. PREUSS, *Institutional Design in Post-Communist Societies. Rebuilding the Ship at Sea*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998; Ivana MARKOVÁ (ed.), *Trust and democratic transition in post-communist Europe*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004; Dieter FUCHS, Hans-Dieter KLINGEMANN, “Democratic communities in Europe. A comparison between East and West”, in Hans-Dieter KLINGEMANN, Dieter FUCHS, Jan ZIELONKA (eds.), *Democracy and Political Culture in Europe*, New York: Routledge, 2006, pp. 25–66.

⁹ William MISHLER, Richard ROSE, “Trust, Distrust and Skepticism: Popular Evaluations of Civil and Political Institutions in Post-Communist Societies”, in *Journal of Politics*, 1997, vol. 59, no. 2, pp. 418–451; William MISHLER, Richard ROSE, “Learning and re-learning regime support: The dynamics of postcommunist regimes”, in *European Journal of Political Research*, 2002, vol. 41, no. 1, pp. 5–36.

¹⁰ The figures can be consulted at the website of World Values Survey, www.worldvaluessurvey.org (accessed March 21, 2010). The descriptives are available in the Online Data Analysis

article is whether citizens attach attitudinal and behavioral consistencies to their opinions towards the past. In this respect, the article investigates the substantial meanings of the nostalgia for the past. By using data from the New Europe Barometer VII (2004-2005) from five post-communist countries (selected on the basis of their commonalities), this exploratory study answers two interconnected research questions: Do citizens wish the return to communism due to its policies? Does the dissatisfaction with democracy enhance the nostalgia for the past? This quest lies on an individual level (both bivariate and multivariate) analysis and targets explanations related to the way in which the rejection of the democratic system and the socialization to non-democratic values (e.g. collectivism and egalitarianism) is related to the willingness to restore the previous regime.

Such an endeavor is relevant for two reasons. From a theoretical standpoint, it complements the previous attempts to explain the persistence of nostalgia towards the communist past. The central argument is that after living for more than one decade under democratic governance, the citizens do not substantially see it as an alternative to the existing system of government. At empirical level, it provides cross-national evidence of economic and political attitudes, revealing comparable patterns. The results indicate that the high levels of dissatisfaction with democracy do not end up in choosing an authoritarian political system. At the same time, age is not a powerful predictor for the willingness to return to communism. Such evidence partially contradicts previous findings emphasizing the generation differences and output oriented nostalgia.¹¹ Moreover, it shows that there is only a weak relationship between the communist values exhibited by parts of the population and their preference for such a regime.

The first section outlines the theoretical perspectives of the analysis, summarizing the major underlining principles and emphasizing the empirical expectations. The second section deals with the research design, whereas the following includes some general results and discussion of contextual findings. The second last section analyzes the relationship between the main variables of the study, the conclusions delving into the implications and opening the floor for further research.

SOCIALIZATION AND PERCEPTIONS DURING TRANSITION

The evaluations of transitions' success and failures in post-Communist countries is often approached from an institutional perspective, considered an elite-driven process. Three identifiable phases of the transition process are discussed in these terms. First, the negotiations procedures that took the

section, by selecting the appropriate samples.

¹¹ See Joakim EKMAN, Jonas LINDE, "Communist Nostalgia and the Consolidation of Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe", *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, September 2005, vol. 21, no. 3, pp. 354-374.

shape of Round Table Talks in the non-Soviet states have involved decisions of the elites. These institutional settings solved the power transfer in conditions that vary from country to country according to the strength, experiences, and position of the negotiating elites.¹² Decisions of political and economic reforms were based on institutional arrangements of the previous regime.¹³ Furthermore, the literature emphasizes that the mode of transition from an authoritarian regime and how the new regimes emerge appear to be essential conditions for further development of the democratization process. However, these conditionalities are in terms of elites control and institutions replacement.

Second, the analyses of democratization considering political developments are accompanied by evaluations of economic progress, both seen as relevant components of the dilemma of simultaneity. Speaking about triple transition, Offe adds to these two elements the creation of the state, a specific necessity especially in the case of the former Soviet republics.¹⁴ In evaluating the speed and paces of marketization and democratization, most of the studies refer to formal institutional indicators that are appropriate to democracies. For example, when referring to the achievement in the transition process, research tackles the degree of institutionalization of formal procedures that characterize democracies¹⁵ or market economies¹⁶. Only a few conceptualizations involve dimensions separate from institutions. Linz and Stepan divide the concept of democratization into behavioral, attitudinal, and constitutional features. The first addresses the non-existence of a significant political group in the state which could overthrow the democratic regime, whereas the second assumes that even when facing severe crises, the vast majority of the people only consider solutions to emerge which fall within the democratic framework created. At constitutional level, the conflict has to be solved according to the norms and regulations already established, their violation being costly and inefficient.¹⁷

Although previous definitions refer exclusively to political systems, emphasizing that economy and social democracy should be separated from the government structure¹⁸, the citizens mix such components in forming their perceptions during transition.¹⁹ Competing explanations were provided for the reluctance of citizens to embrace democracy. On the one hand, the so-

¹² Geraldo MUNCK, Carol SKALNIK LEFF, *op. cit.*, p. 346.

¹³ Jon ELSTER, Claus OFFE, Ulrich K. PREUSS, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

¹⁴ Claus OFFE, "Designing Institutions for East European Transitions".

¹⁵ Mary KALDOR, Ivan VEJVODA, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

¹⁶ Leszek BALCEROWICZ, "Understanding Post-Communist Transitions", in Larry DIAMOND, Marc PLATTNER (eds.), *Economic Reform and Democracy*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.

¹⁷ Juan J. LINZ, Alfred STEPAN, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

¹⁸ Larry DIAMOND, Juan J. LINZ, Seymour Martin LIPSET, 1990, pp. 6–7.

¹⁹ Pippa NORRIS (ed.), *Critical Citizens. Global Support for Democratic Government*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

cialization and adherence to pre-democratic values makes difficult the rapid reorientation towards democratic environments.²⁰ Thus, the modification of beliefs is slow, usually slowed down by the failures of the new system. If citizens perceive that the goals of the democratic system contradict their prior beliefs, they oppose it and stick to their initial values.²¹ Moreover, the initial adherence to egalitarian, state oriented, and job security values are strengthened especially in the case of the transition losers.²² Consequently, I expect people favoring communist policies to be more willing to return to such a system compared with the rest of the citizens in society.

However, it is unrealistic to expect the value orientation to be the main determinant for the preference towards the previous regime. The socialization mechanism is quite effective as large parts of the Central and Eastern European societies faced the communist values for a few decades. A decade of democratic government, ignoring its faults and problems, brought numerous other issues on the agenda and shaded the dominance of those values in the life of the citizens. As a result, the nostalgia for the past cannot be rooted solely in the policies of the regime, but has other emotional components. In line with this argument, only some of the citizens striving for the communist regime will base their choice on the convergence with the policies promoted by that government.

On the other hand, the performances (and the derived benefits) of the democratic regime shape citizens' attitudes.²³ The absence of benefits ends up in dissatisfaction with democracy and citizens try to find alternatives. As the solution at hand is the return to a regime they know, the lack of satisfaction may be associated with such attitudes. This is the reason for which I expect the respondents in the analyzed countries to display a positive relationship between these two variables. In order to empirically test these propositions, the following section sheds light on the used research design.

²⁰ Ken JOWITT, *New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992; Harry ECKSTEIN, Frederic J. FLERON JR., Erik P. HOFFMAN, William M. REISINGER, *Can Democracy Take Root in Post-Soviet Russia?*, New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998.

²¹ Doh C. SHIN, Peter MCDONOUGH, "Nostalgia for Communism vs. Democratic Legitimation in Eastern and Central Europe", in *Central European Political Studies Review*, 2002, vol. 3, Summer 2002, pp. 20–47.

²² Elizabeth BRAINERD, "Winners and Losers in Russia's Economic Transition", in *American Economic Review*, December 1998, vol. 88, no. 5, pp. 1094–1116.

²³ Adam PRZEWORSKI, *Democracy and the Market*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991; Geoffrey EVANS, Stephen WHITEFIELD, "The Politics and Economics of Democratic Commitment: Support for Democracy in Transition Societies", in *British Journal of Political Science*, October 1995, vol. 25, no. 4, pp. 485–514; Hans-Dieter KLINGEMANN, Richard HOFFERBERT, "Remembering the Bad Old Days: Human Rights, Economic Conditions, and Democratic Performance in Transitional Regimes", *Center for the Study of Democracy, UC Irvine*, pp. 1–18.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The analyzed countries are chosen on the basis of their similarities in terms of former political regime, non-belonging to the Soviet Union, and paths towards democratization. As a result, this article includes five former Warsaw Pact countries: Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia. The case selection has both theoretical and methodological reasons. On the one hand, it finds the middle range between extensive single-case studies that can rarely be generalized and broad comparisons that include general explanations, leaving aside details and variables relevant for many observed countries. In doing so, it is possible to have a better investigation of the processes and developments in the selected countries, with a feasible potential for comparison. On the other hand, due to the different nature of variables, such a design allows the combination of statistical and narrative comparisons based on extensive information gathered.²⁴ Moreover, a mid-range comparison is suitable for both a longitudinal and cross-country research that provide rich information and increases the quality of comparisons.

I use the New Europe Barometers VII dataset²⁵ (2004–2005) as it has cross-national standardized questionnaires, probability sampling methods, and data collection. Consequently, it diminishes the bias that may occur in interviewing and coding procedures, allowing for comparisons. For this study, all the “do not know/do not answer” responses were eliminated, being considered missing values. The study combines bivariate (crosstabs) and multivariate (binary logistic regression) statistical analysis. Accordingly, all variables are dichotomous. The willingness to return to the communist past is operationalized as the answer of the respondents to the question whether the nation should return to communist rule. There were four response alternatives: “strongly agree”, “somewhat agree”, “somewhat disagree”, and “strongly disagree”. The first two categories were coded as willingness to return to the communist rule, whereas the latter two as the lack of willingness. The satisfaction with democracy is operationalized as the answer to the question “On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in our country?”. The answers implied a 1–4 scale where 1 corresponds to the “very satisfied” and 4 to “not at all satisfied”. I recoded the first two categories (very satisfied and satisfied) as satisfaction with democracy, whereas the rest of two were labeled as dissatisfaction with democracy.

The attitudes towards policies were recorded as agreement to four different statements: “Incomes should be made more equal, so there is no great

²⁴ James MAHONEY, “Nominal, Ordinal, and Narrative Appraisal in Macrocausal Analysis”, in *American Journal of Sociology*, January 1999, vol. 104, no. 4, pp. 1154–1196.

²⁵ Richard ROSE, William MISHLER, *New Europe Barometer VII, 2004–2005* [computer file]. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], July 2007. SN: 5243. I am grateful to the UK Data Archive, University of Essex, Colchester for providing this dataset. The original data creators, copyright holders, and the UK Data Archive bear no responsibility for the analysis or interpretation of these data.

difference OR Individual achievement should determine how much people are paid”, “Individuals should take responsibility for themselves and their livelihood OR The state should be responsible for everyone’s material security”, “State ownership is the best way to run an enterprise OR An enterprise is best run by private entrepreneurs”, and “A good job is one that is secure even if it does not pay very much OR A good job pays a lot of money, even if it is not so secure”. Respondents were asked to (definitely or somewhat) agree with one of the two parts included in a statement. I coded as orientation towards the equal income, state ownership, and job security the answers identifying the first part of those statements, and as orientation towards state responsibility for actions the respondents picking the second part of that specific statement. The profile of the respondent oriented towards such policies is an index computed from all the four items. It gets values on a 0-4 scale (the scores of the items are added), with extreme values indicating on the one side the lack of support for any policy and on the other side the convergence with all those policies.

The methodology includes a two-step approach that follows the descriptive statistics to be found in the following section. The first step is a multivariate analysis (binary logistic regression) meant to identify the differences between the respondents sharing communist values and the rest with respect to their desire to return to communism. The second step consists of bivariate analysis (cross-tabs) aiming to catch the relationship between the main variables.

GENERAL ATTITUDES

Fifteen years after the political transformation of 1989, the citizens of the analyzed countries display various degrees of willingness to return to the previous setup. Figure 1 includes the percentages of those favoring the return to communism, distinguishing between two groups of countries. On the one hand, there is a relatively high percentage (i.e. ranging between one quarter and one third) within the Bulgarian and Slovak societies favoring a return to the previous regime. At a glance, the histories and the democratic performances of these two countries do not converge often in the post-communist period. Whereas Bulgaria was, together with Romania, a delayed reformist, a state controlled by (neo-)communists until mid-1990s, and a late joiner to the EU, Slovakia succeeded in its attempts at fast marketization and democratization – despite some problems during the Meciar’s governments with respect to privatization and minority rights – and embarked on the European road in the wave preceding the Bulgarian accession. The only visible commonality of the two countries is the relatively late NATO membership (2002 compared with the 1997 early joiners – the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland). On the other hand, the other three countries included in this analysis have low percentages of their populations interested in returning to the communist regime. Among these countries, the Romanian citizens (15%) are more nostalgic towards the past compared to Hungarians (14%) and Czechs (12%).

Apart from these general discrepancies, the cases of the Czech Republic and Slovakia deserve a closer look. Although part of the same country until December 1992, the citizens of the two countries have different opinions regarding their past. Three out of ten Slovaks favor the return to communism, whereas only one in ten Czechs do so. The difference has three possible explanations. First, the separation was partly due to the different levels of wealth in the two countries, the Czech Republic being richer than Slovakia. Following the dissolution, the citizens of the former envisaged an era of economic growth as they would no longer have to support the less developed Slovakia. Such a trend was indeed visible in the years to follow. Meanwhile, Slovakia met several obstacles on its way to economic reform: the second wave of voucher privatization was cancelled (being replaced with government bonds) and the country eventually became labeled as “clientelistic”.²⁶ Second, in political terms, the Slovak governments were more often marked by internal dissent, deadlocks, and conflicts than their Czech counterparts in the first decade after the breakdown of communism. In such an environment, it is expected to have increasing levels of discontent towards the current situation and to desire a return to the previous setting. As percentages in figure 1 reveal, almost 70% of Slovaks were discontented with how democracy works in their country in 2004, a few years after several troubled governments. Finally, the authoritarian policies of the third Meciar government (1994–1998), heavily criticized at the international level, resembled those of the previous regime. Thus, the supporters of such policies may identify with the past. In the absence of empirical evidence to substantiate them, all these claim remain solely possible explanations for the different general attitudes encountered in these two countries once part of the same federation.

Once the willingness to return to communism has been identified, it is relevant to observe what sort of attitudes people display towards policies that characterize the communist regime. The second bar in figure 1 for each country represents the percentage of respondents oriented towards equal income, responsible state for individual actions, state ownership, and job security.²⁷ With one exception (Hungary), less citizens would embrace communist policies compared to those willing to return to such a regime, although the percentages are quite similar – again with one exception (Slovakia).²⁸ Regarding the latter, 28% of the respondents wish to return to communism, but only 19% share the beliefs of communist policies. The opposite situation is encountered in Hungary, where 24% of the respondents have consistent positive views of the communist policies, but only 14% are willing to restore the system. Most respondents with nostalgic attitudes are in Bulgaria, where slightly

²⁶ Karen HENDERSON, *Slovakia. The Escape from Invisibility*, London: Routledge, 2002, p. 45.

²⁷ The percentages are higher if we account for every individual policy, figure 1 includes those respondents favoring all four policies at the same time.

²⁸ For the moment, as we work with aggregated data, we cannot know if the percentages overlap. This aspect will be clarified in the following two sections.

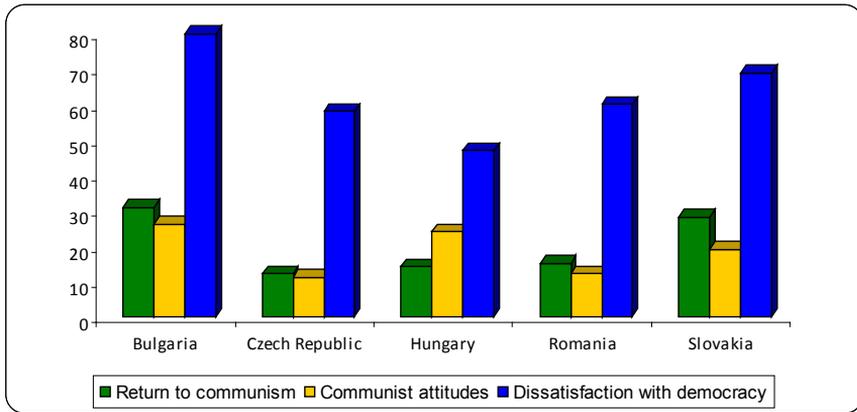


Figure 1: General Attitudes towards Communism, its Policies, and Democracy in Five CEE Countries

more than a quarter of the respondents (26%) favor equal wages, state owned property and responsibility for actions, and secure jobs.

The levels of dissatisfaction with democracy are somehow consistent with the previously emphasized attitudes. Thus, among the analyzed states, Bulgarians (80%) are the most discontent with the way in which democracy works in their country. Slovaks (70%) and Romanians (60%) are the following two countries, the same order as in the willingness to return to communism. The percentage of unsatisfied Czechs is very similar with that of Romanians, 58% of them mentioning that democracy does not work properly in their country. Hungarians are the least dissatisfied with the way in which democracy functions in their country (47%). At the same time, Hungary is the only country with a homogeneous dispersion of the attitudes towards the return to communism, attitudes towards policies, and democratic satisfaction. Such a situation indicates the particularity of the Hungarian case, which will also be revealed in the following section.

As these are aggregated data, no inference regarding the relationship between them can be tested. This is the reason for which I now turn to individual level analysis and examine the extent to which the attitudes towards policies and dissatisfaction with democracy lead to the nostalgia for the communist regime. Table 1 includes the results of the binary logistic regression in which the return to communism is the dependent variable. The reference categories for all the independent variables in the models are the negative attitudes regarding those labels. For example, the coefficient for the equal income reports the likelihood to return to communism of a respondent preferring equal income over another who does not want this type of income. The performance of the models is overall quite low (Nagelkerke R^2), with better performance for Bulgaria and the Czech Republic and quite poor for Hungary and Romania. Consequently, there are other factors at work in determining the willingness to return to communism. Such a conclusion is crucial for the goal of this article.

Looking at the attitudes towards policies, there is a general tendency of those respondents favoring any of them to wish a return to communism when

compared with the rest of the citizens. The respondents favoring equal income are approximately two times more likely to strive for a return to the communist regime compared to the rest. A partial exception in this case is Hungary where such a tendency is less visible: the respondents opting for equality are 1.39 times (without statistical significance) more likely than the rest to choose the previous regime when asked about their position. When it comes to the responsibility of the state, there are similar results in all the examined countries: respondents favoring an extensive role of the state are approximately 1.8 times more likely to opt for a communist regime compared to the rest of the citizens. The attitudes towards state ownership appear to produce the biggest discrepancy in the option for a communist regime.²⁹ In Bulgaria and Hungary, those respondents opting for state ownership are five times more likely to aim for a communist regime than the rest of the citizens. The Czech citizens follow closely (4.84), whereas for the Romanian and Slovak respondents the tendency is weaker, but robust (statistically significant). Job security plays a high role in the Czech Republic and Slovakia where respondents aiming for it are 2.59 and 2.15 more likely to opt for a return to communism than the rest. In Hungary, the likelihood is also high (2.25), but it lacks statistical significance. In Bulgaria and Romania the job security appears as a weak variable, the respondents favoring it being slightly more inclined toward communism than the rest (1.31 and 1.27, without statistical significance).

Table 1: Logistic Regression Results for the Willingness to Return to Communism³⁰

	Bulgaria	Czech Republic	Hungary	Romania	Slovakia
Equal income	2.32** (0.17)	2.25** (0.28)	1.39 (0.27)	1.76** (0.2)	2.07** (0.2)
Responsible state	1.78** (0.17)	1.82* (0.25)	2.07** (0.24)	1.97** (0.2)	1.83** (0.18)
State ownership	5.04** (0.22)	4.82** (0.31)	5.38** (0.35)	2.67** (0.23)	2.05** (0.21)
Job security	1.31 (0.22)	2.59** (0.28)	2.25 (0.49)	1.27 (0.24)	2.15** (0.2)
Democratic satisfaction	0.21** (0.28)	0.3** (0.33)	1.59* (0.24)	0.58** (0.21)	0.27** (0.25)
Nagelkerke	0.35	0.36	0.18	0.13	0.27
R ²					
N	1,013	770	678	955	819

Notes: Reported coefficients are odds-ratios (standard errors in brackets).

²⁹ The odds-ratios results are not comparable. The reference point is the likelihood to opt for the dependent variable when having the specified independent trait.

³⁰ The models included controls for age, gender, and education. The results were not meaningful cross-nationally, age being the best predictor among the three. However, its statistical coefficients and significance were quite low.

** statistically significant at 0.01.

* statistically significant at 0.05.

With respect to the satisfaction with democracy, in four out of the five countries there is a weak tendency of those dissatisfied with how democracy works at domestic level to favour a return to communism. The exceptional case is Hungary, where respondents satisfied with the democratic performance of their country are 1.59 times more likely (statistical significant at 0.05) than the rest to choose the communist restoration. Such a situation goes against the expectations as people satisfied with how democracy works should support it. Democracy is characterized by beliefs opposing communism and the satisfaction with a democratic system usually implies the existence of certain benefits. Hungary provides the counter-intuitive evidence in which despite their satisfaction with the current system, the nostalgia for the previous regime appears to be strong and thus leads to a desire to have it back.

These results indicate that the expectation according to which people sharing communist ideas prefer a return to such a regime is empirically substantiated. However, there is weak and mixed evidence regarding the role of attitudes towards democracy in shaping attitudes towards the communist past. In other words, there is no much difference between those satisfied and unsatisfied with the existing system in choosing the previous regime. At the same time, this statistical analysis indicated that the preference for a communist regime is not greatly explained by the existence of policy preferences and dissatisfaction with democracy. This is the element to be investigated in the next section where the central argument is that people opt for the return to communism for reasons other than pure ideology.

A COMPLEX PICTURE

The figures in table 2 reflect the association coefficients between the political and economic attitudes – converging with communism and dissatisfaction with democracy – and the willingness to return to communism. Despite the fact that all these coefficients are statistically significant, their values are quite small, indicating weak relationships between these variables. Starting with the attitudes towards egalitarian and state involvement policies, the positive signs indicate that the relationship goes in the expected direction. There is a direct association between the presence of such attitudes and the inclination to have a communist regime. However, it is a weak tendency (the highest value of the association coefficient is 0.39). In every country, the state ownership of production means is strongest associated with the preference for an authoritarian regime. Keeping the state responsible and striving for an equal income, appear to be equally important, with different weight in the countries. For example, in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, and Romania, the equal income carries a stronger association with the choice for a communist regime, whereas in Slovakia the two have equal association coefficients; in Hungary, the situation

is reversed: the responsible state is higher associated with the option for communism than the equal income (it is obvious in the following paragraphs why this is the case). Overall, the job security is the weakest correlated variable with the return to communism. This is mainly due to the fact that most respondents favour job security, irrespective of their willingness to return to communism.

In the case of the aggregated attitudes, the relationship becomes stronger. As expected, the respondents bearing all the attitudes towards a central planned economy and extensive involvement of the state are likely to strive for a regime supporting all those measures. The association coefficients range between 0.26 for Romania to 0.46 for Bulgaria, with Hungary being closer to the Romanian situation while the Czech Republic and Slovakia are more similar to the situation in Bulgaria. Despite an observable increase in the strength of the coefficients, their values are not very high, showing that there is room for other explanations. In other words, even the strong supporters of communist policies have doubts regarding the return to such a system.

Table 2: The Association between Political/Economic Attitudes and the Willingness to Return to Communism

	Bulgaria	Czech Republic	Hungary	Romania	Slovakia
Equal income	0.36	0.28	0.13	0.16	0.26
Responsible state	0.3	0.25	0.18	0.14	0.26
State ownership	0.39	0.37	0.23	0.19	0.31
Job security	0.23	0.24	0.1	0.1	0.28
Aggregate attitudes	0.46	0.44	0.28	0.26	0.4
Democratic dissatisfaction	0.26	0.26	-0.1	0.11	0.28

Note: Reported coefficients are Cramer's V, all statistically significant at 0.01.

The association coefficients for democratic dissatisfaction confirm the previous results. Except for Hungary, in the rest of the countries there is a weak positive association between the dissatisfaction with the democratic system and the willingness to return to communism. While the results in table 1 reflected a unidirectional relationship, the interpretation for table 2 is bi-directional: greater dissatisfaction can trigger nostalgia for the past, but at the same time discontent with the current working of the system does not always appear to increase the appeal of the previous regime. Hungary is the only country where dissatisfaction is negatively associated with the return to the past: the more people are dissatisfied, the more they refuse to go back. A possible explanation is that respondents continue to see democracy as the only game in town and are patient. Thus, although they are not content, a return to the old system is not a solution,

The coefficients in table 2 allow a closer look at the country similarities and differences. However, those figures do not shed light on what happens

with the individual preferences. This is the reason why table 3 includes the percentages resulting from the cross-tabulation of all those variables. I have selected only two countries for the simplicity of the discussion. The Czech Republic is randomly selected among the countries with similar patterns, whereas Hungary is the outlier in many instances. There are visible discrepancies between the countries for three variables. To start with, the equality of income differentiates between the Czech respondents: three quarters of those who wish to return to communism support the equal incomes, whereas in the category of those who oppose the return only one third agrees with this policy. In Hungary, the situation is blurrier; the majority of respondents supports the policy irrespective of their preference for the regime type, with a larger margin for those willing to restore communism (74% vs. 55%). Another variable that differentiates the respondents in the two countries is the job security. Hungarians, irrespective of their choice for the regime type, prefer a secure job (84 and 94%), whereas the Czechs cluster better according to their preferences for return to communism. Thus, within the nostalgic category 79% agree with such a policy, whereas in those unwilling to return to the past only 43% are in favor of secure jobs.

Table 3: Percentages of Respondents displaying certain Political/Economic Attitudes and their Willingness to Return to Communism

		Czech Republic		Hungary	
		Return to communism		Return to communism	
		Yes	No	Yes	No
Equal income	Yes	76	35	74	55
	No	24	65	26	45
Responsible state	Yes	56	23	65	40
	No	44	77	35	60
State ownership	Yes	84	31	88	56
	No	16	69	12	44
Job security	Yes	79	43	96	86
	No	21	57	4	14
Aggregate attitudes	No	1	34	1	5
	Very low	9	27	1	20
	Low	19	20	20	26
	High	35	12	30	30
	Very high	36	7	48	19
Democratic dissatisfaction	Yes	90	52	34	49
	No	10	48	66	51

Note: The percentages are calculated within the return to communism category.

The responsibility of the state and state ownership are the variables where the respondents in the two countries display similarities. The nostalgic

respondents favor these policies much more than the rest. For example, 84 and 88% of the Czechs and Hungarians choosing the return to communism are in favour of state ownership, whereas only 31 and 56% of the rest support this policy. In the Hungarian case, the preference for state involvement appears to be high for all categories. The aggregate attitudes reveal both similarities and differences between the respondents in the two countries. The Czechs cluster in a clearer manner, with people supporting all communist policies favoring a return to that regime, whereas the rest of respondents in the country (those saying NO to communism) usually share none or a few opinions on such policies). In Hungary, there are no large differences between those willing to return to communism and the rest. For example, an equal percentage (30%) has three out of four policies; moreover, those sharing only two policies (the low category) would rather reject than accept communism.

Finally, the insight into the distribution on the dissatisfaction with democracy dimension supports the previous argument. Within the category of those unwilling to return to communism there is a higher percentage of people dissatisfied with democracy than in the nostalgic category (49% compared to 31%). For the Czech respondents the situation is straightforward: the level of discontent among the nostalgic respondents is 90%, whereas in the other category it is slightly above half (52%).

CONCLUSIONS

Almost fifteen years after the breakdown of the Iron Curtain, five of the post-communist performers are characterized by relevant levels of willingness to return to the past, values converging with the communist regime, and high levels of dissatisfaction with democracy. Three conclusions can be directly derived from the empirical observations. First, people supporting communist policies are more likely to pursue the return to such a regime compared to their fellow nationals. Second, people's regret for the previous regime is not based on the ideological or policy features. Although the relationship cannot be ignored, it is quite weak (rarely medium in intensity) and leaves more room for explanations. Finally, dissatisfaction with democracy has little, if anything, to do with the nostalgia for the communist past. With some nuances, presented in the text, these conclusions are valid for all the analyzed countries.

Following these results, two major implications can be observed. On the one hand, the nostalgia for the past does not reside in the rationale of the adopted policies. There are numerous citizens willing to return to communism for other reasons. At the same time, some respondents share the communist values, but still do not want to live under that regime. Basically, the positive attitudes for the past are not directly linked with the merits of that system, but with factors that probably occurred or strengthened during transition. At this moment, this is only a possible explanation; further research can delve into that issue and illustrate the mechanism at work. Based on the results, we can assert that the theory of pre-democratic beliefs does not find

considerable support in the analyzed countries. At the same time, the theory of the democratic failures also finds little support. Despite quite high levels of discontent, citizens do not escape in the past. On the other hand, these results reflect cross-country similarities that are hard to detect at a glance. Their citizens have similar attitudes despite the various degrees of objective performances reached by these countries during their transition process.

This study sets the empirical bases for further research by opening at least three directions for investigation. First, there is a need for a thorough understanding of the relationships between these variables, possibly with a causal mechanism involved. The exploratory purpose of this analysis can be enriched by further inferences to reveal further similarities and differences of attitude. Second, other variables should be employed in the attempt to explain the orientation towards the past of significant parts of the population. This study showed that neither the pre-democratic beliefs nor the dissatisfaction with democracy (including also age, education, and gender) do not help a lot in this respect. Finally, the increase of the number of countries over a longer period of time (thus adding the longitudinal perspective) will definitely help in providing a clearer picture of how the citizens in post-communist countries evaluate the present and perceive their past.

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