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# Social Policy Determinants of Political Attitudes

A comparison of Four East Central European Societies

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**Abstract:** The paper is aimed at presenting - in a descriptive manner - some results of a comparative East-Central European research project focused on the political consequences of the changes in the social safety nets in the region. Social policy determinants of selected political attitudes - important for their impact on overall popular support and, consequently, stability of the new democratic regimes - seems to be important only for two phenomena: satisfaction with the political system and general visions of political prospects. This is true both for the region as a whole and for each of the four countries. Despite the fact that several causes of the described phenomena are quite similar throughout the region, certain peculiarities are obvious and interesting to interpret from cultural, social and strictly economic points of view.

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The transformation process that began in 1989 in Eastern Europe can hardly be compared to any other recent historical event, both in its scope and in the simultaneous multidimensional change taking place in almost all spheres of social life. Many authors have pointed out that the logic of radical economic change and democratic procedures are to a certain extent contradictory. Not to repeat the already numerous elaborations of this problem [Przeworski 1991; Offe 1991], let us merely point out here that despite great variance in evaluating detailed aspects of the particular paths of transformation in the East-Central European region, some general problems remain the same. One of them is that while rapid marketization and privatization is favoring a few, most citizens - 'cognitively' unprepared for the changes -- are losing a lot, especially in terms of social security broadly understood. A challenge for the new regimes, among many others, is thus the scope of popular support they can "expect" from their citizens. Social and political stability in these countries is a *sine qua non* for any further development towards an institutionalized democratic, market-oriented social order.

The vicious circle starting with political transformation and continuing with decisions on the implementation of radical economic reform has high social costs, which may or may not lead to social unrest but nevertheless exist as a threat for those who rule and may therefore slow down or de-radicalize economic reform. This may lead to poor economic performance and consequently to those regimes' loss of legitimacy. In this article a modest effort is made to present one dimension of this general problem, namely the links between selected political attitudes (some treated as behavioral dispositions or declarations of readiness to act politically in a

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certain manner) and a broad scope of factors describing the evaluation of social policy issues broadly understood. The presentation is based on quite extensive empirical data and the author will deliberately avoid an in-depth, "explanatory" interpretation of the comparative results.

### Data Description

The source we use here is the survey *Political Consequences of Dismantling Social Safety Net in East-Central Europe*, initiated and financed by the Institute for East-West Studies, Praha-New York which was carried out in Poland, Hungary, and the former Czechoslovakia and completed in 1991.

The main dependent variables are the above mentioned political attitudes. Of the many factors utilized in our survey describing the political profile of an East-Central European in 1991, we will focus our attention here on four factors which - even without describing the theoretical assumptions underlying them at this point - seem to be quite obvious indicators of political stability and system legitimacy, and seem to be in accordance with the common sense understanding of the latter term, quite an important condition in an empirical research:

- (1) The Propensity to Join Protests (REBEL) index consists of five items describing possible behavior in case of "strong disagreement" with governments' policy. It starts with a moderate form of protest, namely "signing leaflets..." and ends with more radical ones: "organizing a road blockade..." or "organizing hunger strikes..."
- (2) The Satisfaction with the Political System (POLSYSAC) index measures the general social mood towards the "way democracy functions in a particular country," the political system and the incumbent government (for a more detailed analysis, see [Toka 1992].) Irrespective of the particular item used to describe the level of satisfaction with the new regime, Poles and Hungarians in the fall of 1991 occupied an intermediate position between the highly dissatisfied Slovaks and the most satisfied Czechs.
- (3) The Political Involvement (POLINV) index, might well be called an index of "public affairs involvement," depending on the notions of politics and public affairs one uses. The empirical construct is comprised of "interest in politics" and "active participation at the local level" indicators. Both of these are highly correlated throughout East-Central Europe (significance  $> .01$ .) Other data - omitted in this paper - indicate that at the time of our survey, we noted very low or moderately low electoral participation in Poland and Hungary and high or very high in Slovakia and Bohemia/Moravia. However, as indicated by the results of the analysis of variance of the discussed item concerning participation in the solving of local problems, it is the two former Czechoslovak Republics' citizens (mostly Czechs) that reveal the lowest participation indicators at the community level ( $\eta^2 = .20$ ).
- (4) Finally, the last dependent variable, the Political Prospects (POLPROS) index, refers to the evaluation of the near political future, which taps the optimism/pessimism dimension.

An effort will be made here to identify the determinants of the above four political factors in each of the four countries. The notion of "determination" in this case means simply the possibility stepwise regression analysis gives for the interpretation of various influences between numerous variables, with the possibility of selecting their "direct" influences.

Among many possible "explanatory" factors treated as determinants of political attitudes, we concentrate on broadly understood social policy issues, partly including economic and socio-psychological issues (for details see the "Table of Indexes.") The relationship between social policy and political stability in East-Central Europe is full of contradictions. In practice, none of the region's governments were free to implement economic changes that would cause severe threats to its citizens. Being aware of the impact of social perceptions of new legislation concerning the social safety net, politicians have restricted their visions and wishes to the perceived "tolerance capacity" of the population.

Finally, we will broaden our interpretation by adding to these social policy factors some purely sociological "stratification" factors, that is: age, level of education, position, per capita household income and respondents' individual income. While the relationship between these stratification factors and political attitudes is very interesting in itself, here we will focus solely on their impact as additional factors intercorrelated with social policy factors. That is, we would like to control for socio-demographic influences in order to avoid interpretations of artefacts and reveal the latent links.

### **Background Description**

Before we turn to the relationship between social policy issues and political attitudes, let us glance over other important comparative data collected by our surveys. First of all, there are differences between individual East-Central European societies considering their opinions, attitudes and beliefs towards social policy issues. In general, one may say that:

- (1) Regarding economic expectations for the near future, Czechs were the most and Poles the least optimistic among our four nations in the fall of 1991. Hungarians and Slovaks were in this respect quite similar and did not differ much from the Polish average (for more details see [Toka 1992]).
- (2) Only a few items were devoted to the evaluation of the past socialist reality. The main result to be mentioned is that despite criticism of the current regimes, East-Central Europeans' attitudes towards them are more positive than towards the former ones: again the greatest acceptance of the current regime was found among the Czechs - almost 70% declared the present regime better than the Communist one. Poles and Slovaks shared the same view in slightly lower proportions, 51% and 43% respectively. The significant difference comes with the Hungarians, of whom only 31% would agree with the above assessment, whereas 39% would oppose it.
- (3) One of the main causes of dissatisfaction, anomie and withdrawal from public life in socialist societies was that perceptions of growing inequalities were hardly

explainable. In other words, the inequalities themselves did cause dissatisfaction, but only to a certain extent. Unclear "rules of the attainment game," the clique-like, ascriptive principles of getting ahead in life, were the real cause of the dissatisfaction. The question then is whether the perceptions of the determinants of getting ahead changed after the fall of the Communist regimes, in particular whether personal achievement and, more generally, meritocratic principles are perceived as the main ones for life success. The short answer is that inhabitants of Bohemia and Moravia tend to believe in more meritocracy in their new social life (.46 deviation from grand mean of variance analysis), and to some extent Slovaks and Hungarians as well (.07 and .06 respectively), whereas Poles occupy the opposite pole (-.70). (More details of this problem can be found in Matějů and Tuček [1992].)

(4) Strictly political factors, namely trust in the government and satisfaction with the political system, reveal quite large variance across the region. Again, almost 45% of Czechs declare trust ("complete" or "moderate") in their government, while the other three nations have only twenty to twenty-five percent confidence in their respective governments. With respect to satisfaction with the political system, inhabitants of the Czech lands were again definitely the most satisfied (31%), while 22% of Poles, 19% of Hungarians and only 12% of Slovaks were satisfied with their systems.

**Political Attitudes Interlinks**

Before we move to the determinants of political attitudes, we will devote some attention to their mutual relationships. Table 1 shows the simple correlations within the group of our main dependant variables.

Table 1. Correlations within the group of dependent variables

		POLSYSAC	POLINVOL	POLPROS
REBEL	PL	-.142**	.171**	-.139**
	CZ	-.135**	.147**	-.088*
	SL	-.196**	.227**	-.136**
	H	-.157**	.178**	-.07**
POLSYSAC	PL	.	.049*	.513**
	CZ	.	.050*	.526**
	SL	.	-.019	.507**
	H	.	.092**	.561**
POLINVOL	PL	.	.	.110**
	CZ	.	.	.158**
	SL	.	.	.002
	H	.	.	.137**

Explanations of signs:

- \*\* significance below .01
- \* significance between .01 and .05
- significance over .05

The common phenomena for East-Central Europeans is that those who are satisfied with the performance of the political system (POLSYSAC) and declare their acceptance of it at the same time positively foresee the future outcomes of the system (POLPROS) -- its justice, political stability and the strength of its democratic principles. Another similar feature for the whole region (though weaker in correlation) is that those parts of the population which show lower satisfaction with the political system (POLSYSAC) are to be found more frequently among groups ready to join more or less radical forms of protest in cases of disagreement with governmental policy (REBEL). At the same time, however, the propensity to join antigovernmental protest increases with individuals' political involvement (POLINVOL). This relationship holds true for the whole region, however it is slightly stronger in Slovakia than Hungary or Poland and definitely stronger than in the Czech lands. One should also note that Slovaks differed significantly, especially when compared to Poles and Hungarians, in respect of their much higher readiness to join strikes. Finally, except for Slovakia, we find a moderately positive link between satisfaction with the political system on the one hand and political involvement on the other. Generally speaking, one may say that throughout the region, relationships between the main dependent variables are in accordance with what we know from other parts of the world. The only unexpected result is in Slovakia: the lack of links between the above-mentioned factors and the lack of a significant correlation between political prospects and political involvement. On the other hand, in the Slovak case we observe a slightly stronger relationship between the propensity to join protests and both dissatisfaction with the political system and political involvement.

#### **Social Policy Determinants of the Propensity to Join Antigovernmental Protest**

Two indicators of the readiness to join protests (REBEL), namely the willingness to participate in (a) marches and demonstrations and (b) strikes, are significantly different throughout the region (contingency coefficients -.17 and .14, respectively). The following parts of the population in each country are ready to (a) demonstrate and (b) go on strike - Slovakia: 42% and 38%; Czech Republic: 40% and 34%; Poland 33% and 28%; and Hungary: 22% and 21%.

Let us now focus our attention on the main subject of our interest - the role of social policy issues in determining the propensity for participating in this kind of antigovernmental protest. Many different factors influence readiness to join protests in East-Central Europe, but none of them alone nor any of their combinations explain the major part of the phenomenon under consideration here. Social policy factors alone only explain 2.6% in Slovakia to 6.8% in the Czech Republic. It is worth pointing out that these determinants have quite different levels of importance in particular countries; only four factors appear to be important in more than one of them: 1) feeling of alienation (ALIEN); 2) negative evaluation of the state's social policy performance (STATSEC); 3) economically based pessimism concerning one's family prospects (ECADVFAM); and 4) attitudes favoring privatization (PRIVATIZ).

More factors are country-specific. In Poland the main factor contributing to the readiness to join protest is the "threat of welfare services cost increase" (THRSOCWE), explaining almost 3% of the dependent variable variance. This affective factor -- individuals' evaluation of their future capabilities for securing adequate health services, education, housing and the general needs of their dependents -- is practically the only meaningful one. The other three (see Table 2) add only .9 percent further "explanation." An attempt to describe the "joining protest" phenomenon in Poland by adding stratification factors helps moderately. It is only AGE that matters; the younger one is, the more ready one is to join antigovernmental forms of protest. The final total of social policy and stratification variables is an explanation of 6.8% of the propensity to join protests, which means that generally AGE adds about 2.9% variance explanation to the model and this factor reveals the only direct effect. This result, even in relative terms, is a poor one for a model.

Table 2. Social Policy Determinants of Propensity to Join Protest (REBEL) (multiple stepwise regression, last step results)

Label	PL		CZ		SL		H				
	( )	beta	part	( )	beta	part	( )	beta	part		
ALIEN	4	-.055	-.052					5	.064	.057	
BUYINEQ	3	.075	.071								
ECADV FAM				2	-.156	-.151	1	-.167	-.161		
EGALIT								4	-.072	-.062	
FAMCENSE				5	.065	.063					
FORCE				4	-.084	-.085					
ILLEG							2	.106	.105		
MERITJUS	2	-.077	-.071								
PATSTAT											
PRIVATIZ				3	.132	.131			2	.096	.093
PRIVWEL							3	.107	.104		
PROGMERI								3	-.084	-.079	
STATSEC				1	-.113	-.113			1	-.075	-.073
THRSOCWE	1	.151	.142								
UNDVAL											
WEPOO								6	-.053	-.050	
Variance explained		3.9%			6.8%				4.5%	3.5%	

Only variables which enter the equation at the .05 significance level are shown. Under the column marked "( )" the order of variable entrance steps is indicated.

In the Czech Republic the most important predicting factor seems to be distrust of "the state's social safety performance" (STATSEC), which means a perception of the ineffectiveness of state institutions in the spheres of education, health care and poverty relief. Alone, this factor predicts only 2.5% of the propensity to join protests (REBEL), however when another four variables enter the equation, the

relative importance of this factor decreases (the net effect diminishes), which means that it is partly explained by the latter.

The general conclusion is that readiness to join antigovernmental protests in Bohemia and Moravia is determined to a large extent by two additional factors: attitudes towards privatization and its effects and economically rooted perceptions of one's family's prospects. The latter factor influences readiness to join protests if the prospects for advancement in the future are perceived as poor (ECADVFAM). The way attitudes towards privatization affect the willingness to join protests is more complicated. A certain pro-privatization paternalism is apparent: favoring privatization and a welfare-like solution concerning the role of the amount of unemployment benefits (FORCE) is visible among Czechs. Finally, the vision of the family's role in securing the basic needs of the elderly, children and for those experiencing financial problems (FAMCENSE) influences -- only in the configuration revealed in table 2 -- the readiness to protest. In a way this kind of family-centered view increases the propensity of antigovernmental activity. Generally speaking, Czechs' protest capability is determined mainly by their evaluation of their family's for getting ahead and the family's role in "security" activities (see partial coefficients in Table 2).

The other question we intend to answer is whether and how the social position of an individual influences this kind of protest propensity. For Bohemia and Moravia the answer is moderately positive. It is -- as in the Polish case -- AGE and individual income (INCO) that significantly influence active antigovernmental behavior. The first alone explains almost 7.2% of the readiness to protest and it is, of course, the younger part of the population that declares its willingness to participate. On the other hand, although to a considerably smaller extent, it is determined by lower personal income. Together with stratification variables, this model explains 11.2% of our dependent phenomenon variance. The overall picture thus indicates that it is not only broader social concerns -- with the evaluation of family prospects and labor market problems connected with privatization -- but also the very individual trait (as one may suspect) of personal position in relation to "important others" that are influential (note that it is not household income that matters but that of the individual).

The Slovak case is quite simple as only three factors significantly (but very moderately) influence their protest capability. However, let us recall that the Slovaks are the ones that differ among the four nations in having the widest support for protest activities. The best predictors of their readiness to protest are: (a) a pessimistic evaluation of their family's prospects for getting ahead based on the current economic situation (ECADVFAM); (b) the conviction that individual affluence in the country is achieved mainly by illegal means (ILLEG); and (c) acceptance of social welfare services' "marketization" (MARKWEL). As with the former two nations, in this case as well it is AGE that really matters in determining the propensity to join antigovernmental protest; it alone predicts almost 4.5% of the variance. Let us note that at this stage of stepwise regression the net influence of the MARKWEL factor does not exist, which might mean that there is not a very substantial layer of young people favoring general privatization

and thus favoring marketization of welfare services as well. This is reinforced by the fact that "sensitivity" to health security or educational expenses becomes important only at a certain stage of the life-cycle and/or is a real concern only of a minor part of the population. Finally, one may say that in both parts of the former Czechoslovakia the determinants of potential antigovernmental behavior are quite similar, despite the fact that these models are still unreliable as predictors of this kind of behavior because of their low explanatory value.

Hungarian willingness to protest against unpopular governmental decisions is the most coherent as a model, although it too poor is as a predictor of behavior (3.5% explanatory potential.) Generally speaking, pro-privatization and anti-egalitarian attitudes, a moderate feeling of alienation and distrust of the state's social security performance, and a lack of confidence in meritocratic principles as the common rules for getting ahead in life is the Hungarian "multidimensional cause" of possible protest activities (see Table 2). When we make an effort to place this picture in the social structure, then age and individual income again reveal their influence; the first factor alone explains 9.4% of the entire dependent variable variance. After controlling for the influence of age, the direct effects of favoring privatization, the threat of state security ineffectiveness and the perception of the rule of meritocratic principles diminishes. On the other hand, the influence of feelings of alienation increases, which means that the former three factors are partly explained by age and the latter is a truly independent one, after controlling for the effect of age. The final model, including the two socio-demographic factors, indicates that it is low personal income that directly effects readiness to join protest. Its overall explanatory capacity amounts to 12.1%.

### **Partial Conclusions**

In all four societies social policy issues are (apart from certain deviations from this general rule) poor predictors of the propensity to join protests in cases of disagreement with government policy. Two socio-demographic factors exert considerable influence over protest readiness: age and individual income. In other words, it is the "position" in the life-cycle that determines protest activities. Let us emphasize at this point that young age as a good predictor of protest activities can be, at least partly, explained by the respondents' evaluations of and attitudes towards some of the social policy issues. Contrary to this, low individual income seems to be a quite independent factor, directly influencing the propensity to join anti-government protests. Thus, this phenomenon can be treated as determined to a certain extent by demography or generation, but a deeper search into youths' problems certainly reveals the real content of their higher readiness to protest. It is, generally speaking, both distrust of the state's effectiveness for securing the basic expectations of the population and the threat of the future situation. It concerns one's family as well as the principles ruling public life, namely the privatization process and its consequences, social justice concerning new affluence, and so on. On the other hand, it seems quite astonishing that the other analyzed socio-demographic factors (professional position, level of education, place of

residence and financial position of respondents' household) have no bearing in determining protest activities. This is true across the entire region.

### Social Policy Determinants of Satisfaction with the Political System

As indicated at the beginning of this article, the three indicators of the index of political satisfaction or, if you will, acceptance of the political system (POLSYSAC) are correlated significantly both throughout the region and in particular countries. Moreover, the inter-country differences are similarly irrespective of the factor under analysis. We have found the most optimistic figure for the evaluation of the political system to be "basically sound but needs some improvements" in the Czech Republic, which amounts to 46%, while the respective figures for Hungary, Poland and Slovakia are 42, 26 and 25 percent. As a final introductory remark, let us point out that acceptance of the political system, as expected, correlates significantly but negatively with the formerly discussed phenomenon of the propensity to join protests REBEL (for details see Table 1).

Table 3. Social Policy Determinants of Satisfaction with the Political System (POLSYSAC)  
(multiple stepwise regression, last step results)

Label	PL		CZ		SL		H					
	( )	beta	part	( )	beta	part	( )	beta	part			
ALIEN	3	-.155	-.163	3	-.181	-.203		2	-.217	-.218		
BUYINEQ												
ECADV FAM	2	.147	.152	4	.148	.164	1	.213	.255	1	.246	.259
EGALIT								6	-.065	-.066		
FAMCENSE	10	.046	.052									
FORCE	7	.071	.082									
ILLEG				7	-.075	-.083						
MERITJUS				5	.111	.121	6	.111	.112			
PATSTAT							7	.059	.066			
PRIVATIZ	6	.095	.107				5	.145	.159	7	.052	.059
PRIVWEL												
PROGMERI	1	.171	.179	2	.130	.134	2	.164	.171	3	.133	.145
STATSEC	5	.110	.126	6	.099	.122		.173	.194	5	.127	.141
THRSOCWE	4	-.113	-.111									
UNDV AL	9	-.061	-.063	1	-.263	-.278	3	-.169	-.186	4	-.117	-.128
WEPOO	8	-.054	-.057									
Variance explained		28.6%			37.2%			28.3%			30.3%	

Only variables which enter the equation at the .05 significance level are shown. Under the column marked "( )" the order of variable entrance steps is indicated.

Our concern here is with the way social policy issues determine this satisfaction. To start with a general remark, it is necessary to indicate that these issues are much better predictors of regime acceptance than of readiness to join protests. They

"explain" about 30% (in the Czech Republic even 37%) of the dependent variable variance.

The first general comment is that the importance of the following factors is common throughout the whole region:

- (a) a positive evaluation of one's family prospects (ECADV FAM), based on the "present economic situation;"
- (b) a perception of progress towards more meritocratic principles determining life chances (PROGMERI);
- (c) an assessment of states' social security performances as effective (STATSEC);
- (d) a conviction that the government does not undervalue the provision of social security to the population (UNDVAL).

In three of the four countries two additional factors are important in determining popular attitudes towards the new regimes, namely favoring privatization (PRIVATIZ) and the more psychological factor of lack of alienation traits (ALIEN). This picture contains "categorically" different factors, i.e. alienation on the one hand, and on the other the evaluation of the economy, which are perceived both from the position of the individual (family prospects) and from the macro-perspective, i.e. attitudes towards privatization. It is also important to note that all of the above-mentioned factors except alienation are descriptive and evaluative. Among the most common factors, normative expectations (declarations of "how it should be") and emotional statements (indicating fears and challenges) are missing. Together with the lack of alienation features, this indicates that regime acceptance is to some extent determined more by cognitive than affective factors, which if true sounds promising, especially in the case of these infant democracies.

Regime satisfaction has some specific determinants in each country. In Poland the mixture of factors indicates that regime acceptance is contingent upon the positive evaluation of ones' family affluence (WEPOO) and, consequently, lack of fears concerning future increases in the costs of welfare services (THRSOCWE). In addition, the family-oriented safety net index (FAMCENSE: in case of troubles, rely mainly on family assistance) helps us understand that, at least to a certain extent, satisfaction with the new regime is determined by, broadly understood, a satisfactory family life. Despite this peculiarity, the whole model for Poland includes 11 factors explaining 28.6% of political system satisfaction (see Table 3.) However, the first two -- progress towards more meritocratic principles (PROGMERI) and positive evaluation of family prospects (ECADV FAM) -- predict almost 19.4%, and the former alone 12.9%, of the dependent variable. Finally, the most influential direct impact is revealed by a positive attitude towards privatization (PRIVATIZ) and the acceptance of a radical, anti-welfare, activating unemployment policy (FORCE) on the one hand, and the combined effect of trust in the state's social safety performance (STATSEC) with a lack of alienation traits (ALIEN), on the other.

The most impressive explanation of regime acceptance is found among the Czechs. A mere seven factors predict 37.2% of this attitude. The only peculiar

influence -- a characteristic solely of Bohemia and Moravia -- is a rejection of the statement that effective enrichment is only possible in an illegal way (ILLEG), indicating that politically satisfied Czechs believe in the justice of the economic transformation practices. In this case, however, the important point is that all of the crucial factors shown in Table 3 exert a direct effect on regime satisfaction and, at the same time, are highly intercorrelated and overlap each others influences. One should note that the main factor, the positive assessment of the government's social security provisions to the population (UNDFVAL), alone explains more than 22% of the dependent variable (see Table 3.) The second factor entering the equation, progress towards meritocracy (PROGMERI), adds another 6% to the model, but then its relative influence systematically drops (see Table 3 beta coefficients.) This indicates that among Czechs the evaluation of meritocratic progress in public life can to a large extent be derived from the other factors constituting the presented model. The biggest drop in its influence occurs when the following two factors enter the regression equation: (1) acceptance of meritocratic justice concerning incomes (MERITJUS), which among others shows that the revealed dependence between POLSYSAC and PROGMERI is not accidental; and (2) lack of fears concerning a future increase in social welfare costs (THRSOCWE). Generally speaking, Czechs' regime acceptance seems to be determined mainly by the evaluation of the state's social policy performance and the scope of meritocratic principles' influence upon public life.

It is interesting to see how satisfaction with the political system is differentiated nationally within the same state - within the former Czechoslovakia. While the models for both parts of the former federation resemble one another, the differences are worth noting. First, in Slovakia feelings of alienation (ALIEN) and concern with unjust transformation practices (ILLEG) are completely absent as potential causes of regime dissatisfaction. Second, there are differences in the perception of the state as a paternalistic social warrant (PATSTAT) is an important factor. Third, as in the Czech lands, the direct effect of all factors included in the model is higher than their combination with the others. However, the main explanatory variable is the positive evaluation of family prospects based on the economic situation of the country (ECADVFAM), which alone contributes 12.7% to regime acceptance prediction. Fourth, in Slovakia regime acceptance is partly contingent upon the stratification traits of individuals; first of all age, then education and (to a certain extent) professional position, with the older, more educated and those occupying managerial positions being satisfied with the new political system. In this case, one may speak of the two-fold influence of age: first, that it has a partial independent effect of its own (after controlling for the other factors in the model, above all pro-privatization attitudes and higher education); and second, that the general influence of age (together with all other possible correlates of age) is a rather poor predictor of regime satisfaction (the "pure" correlation coefficient with POLSYSAC is only .08, the final step "partial" coefficient is .18.) The overall model explains 28.3 percent of Slovak regime support. The factors included in it reveal that the acceptance of the new system will depend mainly on its effectiveness in solving social problems, in safeguarding the

meritocratic rules for getting ahead in life and its efficiency in contributing to family well-being and prospects for the future. Emphasis should also be placed on the fact that the determinants of satisfaction with the political system in Slovakia are determined mainly by factors which are "evaluative descriptions" of reality and not affective or normative declarations.

The Hungarian model of the discussed political phenomena resembles the previous one particularly closely, with two exceptions. In Hungary the feeling of alienation (ALIEN) and the attitude towards egalitarian policies (EGALIT) contribute to the prediction of regime support. In the case of alienation, of course, the causal arrow flies the other way as well, nevertheless feelings of alienation alone explains almost 16% of our dependent variable. Half of this influence can be explained by the first and main factor, namely the evaluation of family prospects (ECADV FAM). The final model indicates that satisfaction with the new regime, which is lowest in this country, seems to be determined more than in the other countries of the region by individual normative visions of, and attitudes towards, macroeconomic changes and the evaluation of personal chances within this transformed economy (see Table 3.) On the other hand, the more descriptive evaluations of current social safety performance UNDV AL and STATSEC are of moderate importance, explaining relatively more after controlling for other factors. In the Hungarian case, adding the stratification variables to the equation improves the fitness of the model by some 3 percent, to 33.1%. Among these the most influential is older age, which has a direct effect on the residual variation of regime support separate from the influence of the other factors in the model. Additionally, the influences of age and alienation are, to a large extent, separate influences. In other words, it is an "inter-generational" alienation that can hardly be attributed to any age group that effects regime support in Hungary.

### **Partial conclusions**

In East Central Europe, attitudes and evaluations of social policy issues explains about one-third of the satisfaction with the new political system. As indicated above, there are both peculiar factors and common ones. The country-specific influences are not very strong if one analyses them from the "content" point of view. It is important to emphasize, however, that factors affecting satisfaction with the political system might differ in their ontological character, i.e. differ between those factors that describe and evaluate the current reality and those that reveal the normative visions of reality. This seems to be important.

The crucial question here is: "What other than social policy issues influences the discussed phenomenon?" The first group is a purely economic one: the problem of changes in individuals' wealth and income since democratization started. The data from the same study, presented elsewhere [Toka 1992], indicate that decrease in material wealth has by far the largest effect on political satisfaction after controlling for other influences. The experience of unemployment, whether one's own or that of a member of one's close family, determines a .14 point lower mean score on the index of political satisfaction, but its direct effect is rather poor. Comparing the subjective assessment of past and

future "economic" experiences and prospects, we should note that the latter are definitely more important. On the other hand, people in East-Central Europe also differ in their past political affiliations and more broadly in their evaluation of the socialist past. Generally speaking, the attitudes towards and assessments of the situation in these countries around 1975 show that people with positive, "sweet" memories of the past tend to be more critical and dissatisfied with the new political system. It should also be emphasized that former communist party membership did not have any significant effect on this. Taken together, attitudes toward the political past should be treated solely as a factor moderating satisfaction with the new democratic regimes.

### **Social Policy Determinants of Political Involvement**

The significance of involvement in politics is of the utmost importance in the new democracies both for the citizens themselves and for the overall legitimacy of the system. A detailed analysis of its determinants has been presented elsewhere [Markowski 1992], so here we will focus only on the most general traits of the picture. In all four countries social policy issues are poor determinants of this kind of involvement; they explain only from 2.0 to 8.5 percent of the dependent variable.

The description that follows will be a negative one, that is, it will depict political indifference. Among the factors under consideration, only egalitarian attitudes, feelings of alienation and (with the exception of Slovakia) perceptions of unjust practices for new enrichment decrease the readiness to participate in public affairs. The specific important factors for each country can be summarized as follows:

- (a) In Poland a negative assessment of family prospects, a lack of confidence in the state's social security performance, the threat of the marketization of social welfare service, and anti-privatization attitudes determine people's apathy towards political problems.
- (b) In the Czech lands the particular influences upon citizens' indifference are revealed by the rejection of what we call the "social inequalities in purchasing" (BUYINEQ) and the perception of progress towards greater meritocracy (PROGMERI) in the country. The impact of the latter taken by itself is almost nonexistent. Only after the removal of other factors' influences is some .01% added to the predictive value of the model.
- (c) The Slovak case need not be interpreted, as social policy issues do not explain political indifference at all.
- (d) In Hungary, two factors connected with the evaluation of one's financial capabilities (THRSOCWE and WEPOO) seem to be of relative importance, although their directions are different. The negative assessment of respondents' family wealth effects withdrawal from political involvement, while on the other hand the threat of an increase in the costs of social welfare services contributes to higher political involvement. We should add, however, that the latter dependency is true only within the variable configuration presented in Table 4. In

other cases people afraid of increases in welfare costs are more frequently to be found among the politically apathetic part of the population.

Table 4. Social Policy Determinants of Political Involvement (POLINV)  
(multiple stepwise regression, last step results)

Label	PL		CZ		SL		H					
	( )	beta	part	( )	beta	part	( )	beta	part			
ALIEN	4	-.079	-.074	2	-.122	-.116	3	-.077	-.076	2	-.115	-.103
BUYINEQ				3	.088	.084						
ECADV FAM	3	.066	.063									
EGALIT	1	-.139	-.125	1	-.122	-.111	1	-.085	-.084	1	-.190	-.170
FAMCENSE												
FORCE												
ILLEG	6	.062	.057	7	-.064	-.059				4	.061	.057
MERITJUS												
PATSTAT												
PRIVATIZ	5	.059	.056	6	.074	.072						
PRIVWEL	2	.084	.081							6	.049	.049
PROGMERI				4	-.111	-.100						
STATSEC	7	.055	.055									
THRSOCWE				5	-.103	-.094				5	.060	.057
UNVAL							2	.100	.098			
WEPOO												
Variance explained		4.9%			8.5%			2.0%			7.6%	

Only variables which enter the equation at the .05 significance level are shown. Under the column marked "( )" the order of variable entrance steps is indicated.

The phenomenon of political involvement is more strongly determined throughout the region by socio-demographic factors than was the case in the previously described political attitudes. More importantly it is purely "achieved status" factors (level of education and professional position) that predict a considerable portion of political involvement variation. Both factors are obviously highly correlated, so a vast part of their influence overlaps. Nevertheless, in all four societies it is the level of education that matters more than managerial position; taken alone the former factor explains from 4.5% in Slovakia, through almost 6% in Poland and the Czech Republic, up to 8.1% in Hungary. Of course, higher education's impact upon political involvement can also be explained by more detailed social factors, primarily by pro-privatization and anti-egalitarian attitudes.

#### Social Policy Determinants of Political Prospects

This index (POLPROS) consists of broadly understood indicators of politics (see Table of Indices.) It measures the general attitude toward the future of each society, not only its political subsystem. Such factors as perceptions of the near future (within two years, i.e. to the end of 1993) social justice, assessment of the

probability of mass eruptions of discontent and a weakening of democracy are all strong correlates of political stability and the previously described attitude of satisfaction with the political system (POLSYSAC). Let us recall that the correlation between these two indices was the highest (see Table 1) and considerably exceeded 0.5. In a case with such a high correlation the suspicion that both indexes measure the same phenomenon might be reasonable. In fact, many of the same factors are responsible for political regime acceptance as for optimistic political prospects. The most important in the region as a whole are:

- (a) a lack of alienation features;
- (b) a perception of progress towards meritocracy;
- (c) a positive assessment of family prospects;
- (d) a positive evaluation of the state's social security performance; and
- (e) a conviction that the incumbent government is caring for the population's social security provision.

Table 5. Social Policy Determinants of Political Prospects (POLPROS)  
(multiple stepwise regression, last step results)

Label	PL			CZ			SL			H			
	( )	beta	part										
ALIEN	2	-.157	-.165	3	-.154	-.174	5	-.118	-.132	1	-.215	-.216	
BUYINEQ										7	.058	.066	
ECADVFAM	5	.106	.113	5	.102	.112	6	.101	.106	2	.184	.193	
EGALIT										5	-.174	-.158	
FAMCENSE													
FORCE	10	.048	.056										
ILLEG	7	-.084	-.087										
MERITJUS				4	.086	.091	3	.137	.144	10	.053	.051	
PATSTAT	9	-.052	-.057										
PRIVATIZ				8	.049	.058							
PRIVWEL	8	.052	.058										
PROGMERI	3	.120	.122	7	.075	.082				4	.157	.171	
STATSEC	6	.104	.118	6	.093	.113	4	.121	.138	6	.078	.089	
THRSOCWE	1	-.173	-.171	2	-.215	-.225	1	-.230	-.232	3	-.156	-.170	
UNDFVAL	4	-.133	-.138	1	-.231	-.238	2	-.188	-.194	8	-.052	-.048	
WEPOO										9	-.045	-.051	
Variance explained		30.6%			37.3%			25.7%			33.4%		

Only variables which enter the equation at the .05 significance level are shown. Under the column marked "( )" the order of variable entrance steps is indicated.

If we now concentrate on differences between the groups of independent variables shown in Tables 3 and 5, we note the following items. First, except in Hungary the most important determinant of political prospects (POLPROS) seems to be anxiety about an increase in social welfare costs (THRSOCWE), which alone predicts from about 14 percent of the variance in Slovakia and Poland to 20% in

Bohemia and Moravia. It is important to recall at this point that this factor as a determinant of regime acceptance (POLSYSAC) is important only in Poland. Second, attitudes towards privatization did matter in the case of satisfaction with the political system, but do not (except in the Czech Republic) in the case of political prospects. Third, in all countries of the region, the evaluation of incumbent governments' care for social security provisions influences both political phenomena under consideration here, but among Czechs and Slovaks this factor affects the perception of the political future definitely more strongly than in the other two societies (alone they explain 22.8 and 11.6% of the variance, respectively).

Finally, if we focus on the peculiarities of the determinants of political prospects in each country, it seems that besides the points indicated above, emphasis should be placed on the following:

- (a) In Poland, unlike in the other three countries, the relatively important factors in constructing the explanatory model for optimistic political prospects are the lack of suspicion that enrichment in the country is possible mainly by illegal means (ILLEG), acceptance of the commercialization of social welfare services (PRIVWEL), confidence in the state as the main guarantor of social security (PATSTAT) and acceptance of a radical, anti-welfare, activating unemployment policy (FORCE). In other words, the more a person is market-oriented and confident in the state's role as guarantor of both basic social rights and a just micro-economic policy, the more likely he or she is to perceive an optimistic political future, and it is, of course, vice versa for the pessimistic vision.
- (b) Hungarian optimism concerning this matter was determined -- apart from the common important influences found elsewhere in the region -- mainly by anti-egalitarian attitudes (EGALIT), acceptance of the -- as we term it -- "social inequalities purchase" (BUYINEQ) and conviction of the relative affluence of one's own family (WEPOO).
- (c) Based on what we see in Table 5, there is nothing particularly peculiar to emphasize about the Czechs or Slovaks. In both cases, optimistic political prospects are explained by more or less the same group of factors that are important for the whole of East Central Europe and listed above.

Finally, one should note that, quite unexpectedly, the phenomenon that is ontologically located in the future -- prospects of a country's political development -- is not determined by normative descriptions (visions of how things should be), but mainly by the affective components of attitudes (anxieties, deeper mental dispositions like alienation) and to some extent by subjective descriptions of the current reality. As indicated in Table 5, the models for each country differ in their "explanatory capability," ranging from 25.7% in Slovakia to 37.3% in the Czech Republic. With the addition of socio-demographic factors the models do not improve significantly, except maybe for that of Hungary, where the age factor exerts a strong net effect (optimistic political prospects are revealed by older groups of the population) and improves the model by 2.2%. In the other three countries the direct effect of age is visible as well, however it is not as significant as

in Hungary. It is worthy of note that East-Central European youths are pessimistic about the near political future. In addition to the previously presented relations between younger age and readiness to join radical forms of protest and dissatisfaction with the new regimes, the political mood among the younger parts of the population can be described as potentially explosive.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Social policy factors can be treated as good predictors of two out of the four political phenomena analyzed here. Satisfaction with the political system and the general vision of political prospects are considerably determined by issues which are either pure social policy and welfare matters or are their close economic and socio-political correlates. On the other hand, one of the most crucial political problems of the new democracies, the scope of popular tolerance for the (more or less expected) failures of the incumbent governments, measured in our survey by the "propensity to join protest" index, can hardly be explained by our list of social policy issue factors. Relatively more is added to the understanding of protest activities when we look at its causes from a more structural perspective, but even in this case factors of "achieved status" (educational level, professional position, etc.) do not matter at all or only slightly. Only the selected "hidden correlates of young age" -- a lack of confidence in the state's role as a guarantor of social security and the effective agent of just principles of attainment in public life -- are significant.

Satisfaction with the political system is determined mainly by broadly understood economic factors and their social policy consequences, but the subjective assessment of the current economic processes matter more than the objective traits of an individual. The vision of an optimistic future concerning politics is strongly related to the current evaluation of politics and regime support. On the other hand, however, dissatisfaction with it does not necessarily increase the readiness to participate in protest activities. At least one can identify social policy factors as being equally responsible for both.

As a final, methodological remark it should be pointed out that many simple correlations of social policy issues and political attitudes are of a vague and spurious character. Especially in the case of "objective" socio-demographic factors, it is useful to look for their detailed "consciousness correlates;" in other words it is the specific features of young age, higher education and managerial position that directly influence political attitudes, not so much broad notions of generational experience or simply "better" knowledge legitimized by official diplomas.

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## **Table of Indices**

Label Content (and questionnaire items):

- ALIEN:** feeling of alienation in public life (V18 - power elites take advantage of people, V19 - ones' opinions do not count, V20 - individual is left alone).
- BUYINEQ:** acceptance of the right to "purchase social inequalities" (V36 - possibility to buy a better medical care, V41 - right to buy better education, V49 - one should live in a flat s/he can afford).
- ECADVFAM:** positive evaluation of family prospects (advancement) (V27 - present economic situation favorable for the family).
- EGALIT:** pro-egalitarian attitudes (V14 - reduce income differences, V21 - people can earn millions, V26 - differences in incomes and property only small, V47 - all pensions should be equal).
- FAMCENSE:** family centered security (warranting basic needs) (V44 - old people first of all cared by own family, V48 - child care without state assistance, V55 - family help first in case of financial troubles).
- FORCE:** acceptance of radical, anti-welfare, activating unemployment policy (V32 - unemployment benefits kept at low level to force people to look for a job).
- ILLEG:** effective individual enrichment mainly by illegal means (V25 - people get rich here mainly in an illegal way).
- MERITJUS:** acceptance of meritocratic justice (V21 - it is right that some people earn millions, V22 - people are responsible for their poverty, V24 - competent people should have the possibility to earn a lot of money).
- PATSTAT:** state as main security institution (warranting basic needs) (V45 - child allowances high enough to cover all expenses of children, V46 - state contribution to the costs of dwellings for the poor, V56 - state help first in case of financial troubles).
- PRIVATIZ:** pro-privatization attitudes (V8 - favoring privatization of different public institutions).
- PRIVWEL:** acceptance of social welfare services commercialization (V37 - medical treatment paid directly by patients, V38 - expectation of more paid medical services, V40 - students should pay tuition covering a great deal of their education costs).
- PROGMERI:** perception of progress towards more meritocracy (V16 - eight items indicating that meritocratic factors (education, ambition, hard work, willingness to take risks) are becoming more important).
- STATSEC:** positive assessment of state's social safety performance (V52 - state schools provide good education, V53 - sufficient medical treatment in present state institutions, V54 - poor people can rely on state assistance).
- THRSOCWE:** threat of an increase in the costs of social welfare services (V39 - fears of inability to secure means for necessary medical treatment, V43 - in future may be difficult to secure education, V50 - in future more difficult to

secure needs of children and elderly, V51 - deterioration of housing situation in the future).

UNVAL: (V58 - present government undervalues the provision of social security to the population).

WEPOO: (V28 - compared to others, own family perceived as poor).

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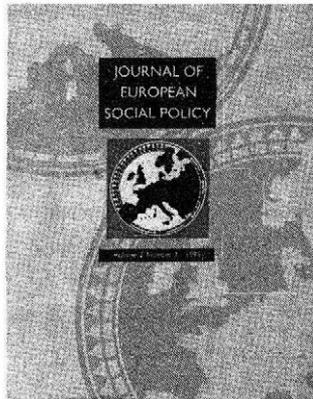
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