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Attitudes toward the Market and Political Participation in the Postcommunist States

David S. Mason

In the aftermath of the anti-communist revolutions of 1989–1991, the new governments in eastern Europe faced the herculean task of attempting simultaneously to build market economies and democratic political institutions. Though capitalism and democracy are often considered to be natural allies, in the cases of these new states they sometimes pull against each other. The costs of the economic transition, in terms of growing unemployment, inequality and inflation, may erode support for the new governments and lead to calls for a “strong” government or leadership to cope with economic dislocations. To a large extent, the success of economic transitions is dependent on the continuing popularity and legitimacy of the new governments. Democratic legitimacy and stability can probably be maintained only if the governments remain broadly responsive to and representative of the populations—or at least be perceived as such. In eastern Europe the new governments seem to have established their democratic credentials through their popular overthrow of the communist regimes and through widespread support for new parties and regimes in early rounds of parliamentary elections. However, a close look at the backgrounds and attitudes of the politically active in these countries raises some questions about how closely they represent the rest of the population, particularly in terms of their attitudes towards the market and towards socialist principles.

This study is part of the International Social Justice Project (ISJP), a collaborative international survey research effort, which was supported in whole or in part by each of the following organizations: the National Council for Soviet and East European Research; the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX); the National Science Foundation; the Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan; OTKA (National Scientific Research Fund; Hungary); the Economic and Social Research Council (UK); the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (Germany); Institute of Social Science, Chuo University (Japan); the Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs; the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences; the Grant Agency of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences; Saar Poll, Limited (Estonia); the Ministry of Science and Technology of the Republic of Slovenia; the State Committee for Scientific Research (Komitet Badań Naukowych, Poland); and the Russian Federation Ministry of Labor.

The principal investigators in the development of these data were as follows: Galin Gornev (Bulgaria), Petr Matějů (the Czech Republic), Andrus Saar (Estonia), Bernd Wegener (Germany), Gordon Marshall, Adam Swift and Carole Burgoyne (UK), György Csepeli, Antal Örkény, Tamás Kolosi and Mária Neményi (Hungary), Masaru Miyano and Akihiro Ishikawa (Japan), Wil Arts and Piet Hermkens (Holland), Bogdan Cichomski and Witold Morawski (Poland), Ludmila Khakhulina and Svetlana Sydorenko (Russia), Vojko Antončič (Slovenia), and Duane Alwin, James Kluegel and David Mason (USA).

Extensive analysis of the results of this survey are provided in James R. Kluegel, David S. Mason and Bernd Wegener, eds., *Social Justice and Political Change: Public Opinion in Capitalist and Post-Communist States* (Hawthorne: Aldine deGruyter Press, forthcoming).

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Participation and representativeness are important aspects of democratic politics in established democracies and probably even more so in fledgling ones. In his classic theoretical work on *Polyarchy*, Robert Dahl emphasizes that all full citizens must have unimpaired opportunities to "signify their preferences" through individual and collective action.¹ And empirical studies of both the US and other western democracies have stressed the importance for democracy of the availability of channels for political activity and the extent to which such channels are differentially available and used across social groups.² If democracy is to work properly, people from all socio-economic groups and all political orientations should have the *opportunity*, at least, to participate in the political process.

This paper will explore this issue in the postcommunist states by examining the level and sources of support for the market-oriented reforms in east central Europe and the former Soviet Union, and the relationship between these attitudes and the populations' political orientations and participation. Numerous recent studies have examined popular support for either democracy or the market in these states;³ most of these, however, have been single-country studies. With some exceptions (e.g. Rose; McIntosh *et al.*), none have compared such attitudes across countries and fewer still have compared attitudes in the postcommunist states with those in western countries. And few have attempted, as I shall, to link economic values with political participation.⁴

1. Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 2-3.

2. Samuel H. Barnes, Max Kaase et al., *Political Action: Mass Participation in Five Western Democracies* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1979); Sidney Verba, Norman H. Nie and Jaeson Kim, *Participation and Political Equality: A Seven-Nation Comparison* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 1-2.

3. For example, Robert D. Grey, Lauri A. Jennish and A.S. Tyler, "Soviet Public Opinion and the Gorbachev Reforms," *Slavic Review* 49, no. 2 (Summer 1990): 261-71; David Mason and Svetlana Sydorenko, "Perestroika, Social Justice, and Soviet Public Opinion," *Problems of Communism* 39, no. 6 (November-December 1990):34-43; Robert J. Shiller, Maxim Boycko and Vladimir Korobov, "Popular Attitudes Toward Free Markets: the Soviet Union and the United States Compared," *American Economic Review* 81 (1991): 385-400; Ada Finifter and Ellen Mickiewicz, "Redefining the Political System of the USSR: Mass Support for Political Change," *American Political Science Review* 86 (December 1992): 857-74; Lynn D. Nelson, Lilia V. Babaeva and Rufat O. Babaev, "Perspectives on Entrepreneurship and Privatization in Russia: Policy and Public Opinion," *Slavic Review* 51 (Summer 1992): 271-86; James L. Gibson, Raymond M. Duch and Kent L. Tedin, "Democratic Values and the Transformation of the Soviet Union," *The Journal of Politics* 54, no. 2 (May 1992): 329-71; Richard Rose and Christian Haerpfer, "Adapting to Transformation in Eastern Europe: New Democracies Barometer—II," *Studies in Public Policy*, no. 212 (University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, 1993); Richard Rose and William T.E. Mishler, "Reacting to Regime Change in Eastern Europe: Polarization or Leaders and Laggards," *Studies in Public Policy*, no. 210 (University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, 1993); Mary E. McIntosh, Martha Abele MacIver, Daniel G. Abele and Dina Smeltz, "Publics Meet Market Democracy in Central and East Europe, 1991-1993," *Slavic Review* 53 (Summer 1994): 483-512.

4. For some exceptions, see Shiller, Boycko and Korobov; James L. Gibson, "Political and Economic Markets: Connecting Attitudes toward Political Democracy and

The present analysis is based on data collected by the International Social Justice Project (ISJP), a large-scale, common public opinion survey on social, economic and political justice implemented in 1991 in twelve countries: Russia, Poland, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Estonia,⁵ Germany (former East and West), Holland, the UK, Japan and the US.⁶ The focus of this paper will be on the postcommunist states, though comparisons will be made between them and the capitalist democratic states. In all of these countries, the survey was conducted in mid-1991, which was a period of considerable political and economic flux, and even of turmoil, in the postcommunist states, with dramatic declines in GNP and industrial production, high rates of inflation and rapid increases in unemployment.

I shall begin by looking at popular attitudes in the postcommunist states towards the market and towards socialism, and towards particular elements of socialist ideology, since all of these are central issues in the transition processes and political arenas in these countries. I shall then consider the scope and determinants of political participation in the postcommunist states, and the relationship of pro- and anti-socialist values to political participation. Finally, I shall look at more recent evidence in Poland to explore possible trends, and as a potential explanation for the resurgence of the left in Poland and elsewhere in the second and third rounds of parliamentary elections in the region.

Attitudes towards Socialism and the Market

In the aftermath of the democratic revolutions of 1989, citizens in the postcommunist states demonstrated a remarkable ambivalence towards the theory and practice of socialism. Having just overturned the communist system, with its authoritarianism, centralization and inefficiencies, most people were hostile to the *idea*, at least, of socialism. When asked about their views on socialism, fewer than a quarter of respondents in each of eight postcommunist states expressed support for that path, while the overwhelming majority in each country agreed with the statement that "a free market economy is essential to our economic development" (see tables 1 and 2). Such substantial support for a new course in the economic sphere would seem to have boded

a Market Economy within the Mass Culture of the USSR," paper presented at the 1993 Annual Convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, Honolulu; Arthur H. Miller, Vicki L. Hesli and William M. Reisinger, "Comparing Citizen and Elite Attitudes towards a Market Economy in Russia, Ukraine and Lithuania," paper presented at the 1993 annual convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, Honolulu.

5. As Estonia joined the project late, the survey was fielded there in spring 1992.

6. In this project, national teams in each of the twelve countries were responsible for obtaining a probability sample of the adult population, the cross-validation of the measuring instrument and the implementation of a national survey with a target sample of 1500 respondents in each country. More detailed information can be found in Duane Alwin, David Klingel and Merilynn Dielman, *International Social Justice Project: Documentation and Codebook* (Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, 1993).

Table 1
Views about Socialism, by Country
 (% of respondents)

Country	Very much in favor	Somewhat in favor	Neither for nor against	Somewhat against	Totally against	N
Bulgaria	8.1	16.1	24.2	19.2	32.4	1286
Czechoslovakia	2.4	12.4	34.8	24.1	26.3	1119
East Germany	1.6	16.6	39.2	27.6	14.9	986
Estonia	2.3	18.5	26.1	18.2	35.0	875
Poland	1.8	9.2	43.2	20.2	25.7	1418
Russia	9.6	17.0	29.7	21.4	22.2	1385
Slovenia	4.8	16.2	46.0	15.5	17.5	1249

Question: People have different views about socialism. Based on your experience in (country name) of socialism, would you say that you are very much in favor, somewhat in favor, neither for nor against, somewhat against, or totally against socialism?

well for the transformational policies of the new governments in these countries.

Once one gets away from the ideologically loaded terms of "socialism" and "market," however, this seeming consensus begins to disappear. When respondents were asked more specific questions they tended to support important policies and values associated with the state socialist regimes they had left behind. This is perhaps most evident in widespread egalitarianism, support for a strong role for the government in the economy and deep skepticism about a distributive system based more on merit than on need.

The radical egalitarianism of early communism in the Soviet Union was soon replaced by a more meritocratic ideology and incentive system in the Stalin period, in both Russia and eastern Europe. Nevertheless, there remained a strong egalitarianism in the communist ide-

Table 2
Support for a Market Economy
 (% of respondents)

Country	Strongly agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither agree not disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	N
Bulgaria	44.0	24.7	14.1	10.7	6.6	1229
Czechoslovakia	51.8	31.1	11.9	4.0	1.3	1087
Estonia	40.9	32.1	18.8	5.0	3.1	897
Poland	26.5	46.0	15.3	8.0	4.1	1343
Russia	36.0	34.5	9.2	11.3	9.0	1283
Slovenia	73.7	20.7	4.3	1.0	0.3	1287

Question: Please tell me how much you agree or disagree with the following statement: A free market economy is essential to our economic development.

ology, and both wages and incomes were less highly differentiated in the communist countries than in western capitalist ones.⁷ Surveys conducted in east Europe, and especially in Poland, before 1989 showed a high degree of social and economic egalitarianism in the populations.⁸

As the east European countries move towards free enterprise and the market, economic inequality will grow sharply as the governments relax restrictions on wages and wealth, and abandon their commitment to full employment. A major task of the new governments is to convince their populations to accept greater economic inequality in their societies. This may be difficult, given the prevailing attitudes. When asked about the *differences* in incomes in their countries, the overwhelming majority in each of the east European states asserted that such differences are too large. *Preferred* income differences are much less in the postcommunist states than in the developed capitalist countries. Respondents in the survey were asked to postulate a "just and fair" income for the managing director of a large corporation and for an unskilled factory worker. In the eight postcommunist states (including the eastern part of Germany), the average ratios between these two salaries (the first divided by the second) were uniformly smaller than in capitalist states. The median postulated income differential in the capitalist states was 4.0 (the higher income should be 4 times larger than the smaller), compared to just 2.5 in the postcommunist ones.

While most people did not favor total income equality, many did. When asked about the fairest way of distributing wealth and income, 20–30 percent in each country (except Estonia) favored giving everyone equal shares. These figures may seem high for such a radically egalitarian position but the level of support for this position was similar to that of capitalist states. What postcommunist populations do favor is guaranteed jobs and, to a lesser extent, ceilings on income, imposed by government: a solution not too different than that which prevailed under the communist regimes. The preference for guaranteed jobs was overwhelming, with from 56 to 84 percent *strongly* agreeing that "the government should provide a job for everyone who wants one." Smaller but still sizeable percentages in each country agreed (strongly or somewhat) that "the government should place an upper limit on the amount of money any one person can make." As I shall show below, this reflects a strong preference in the east European states for governmental solutions to economic and social problems.

This strand of economic egalitarianism is linked to a popular conception of justice that calls for rewards to be distributed on the basis of need as much as (or more than) merit or desert. This seems to be at least partly a legacy of the communist period, when the state guar-

7. See, for example, Abram Bergson, *Planning and Performance in Socialist Economies: The USSR and Eastern Europe* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989).

8. For data on Poland, see David S. Mason, *Public Opinion and Political Change in Poland* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 62–66.

anteed jobs and provided a whole host of entitlements, including national minimum wages and retirement benefits, heavy subsidies of food, housing, utilities and vacations, generous maternity leaves and so on. While many east Europeans complained about shortages of consumer goods and a standard of living lower than that in the west, they also became accustomed to benefits provided by the state.

This concern about peoples' needs is indicated by substantial agreement with the proposition that "people [should] get what they need, even if this means allocating money from those who have earned more than they need." A majority or a plurality of respondents in all the east European countries (except Bulgaria) agreed (strongly or somewhat) with this proposition. People with lower incomes were somewhat more likely to agree with this statement but support for the principle remained substantial across income groups in most cases. In Poland, for example, 66 percent of respondents in the lowest income quartile agree, and so do 48 percent of those in the top quartile.

This emphasis on need over merit is also evident in another question on which factors should influence the level of pay for an employee. When asked about "the size of the family the employee supports," a clear majority of respondents in every postcommunist country (except Czechoslovakia) felt that this should have "a great deal" or "some" influence in determining salary. The average level of support for this proposition was 57 percent in the former communist countries, compared to 48 percent in the developed capitalist countries. The *highest* level of support for this proposition, however, came from western Germany (73%). As I shall show, attitudes and values in the east European countries often are closer to those in western Germany, with its "social market" system, than to the other capitalist states.⁹

With their revolutions, the east European countries left behind systems in which state and party dominated the economies and most other aspects of those societies. The state provided jobs and housing, set prices and wages, owned industries, schools and farms (in most countries), and subsidized basic necessities. The omnipresence and omnipotence of the state aggravated many people and contributed to revolutionary ferment. But many people also came to rely on the benefits provided by the state: under the communist systems, they may not have had freedom or affluence, but they did have basic economic security. The current reforms promise to deliver the former but threaten the latter.

Our survey asked three questions on the role of the government in the economy: whether the government should 1) guarantee everyone a minimum standard of living, 2) place upper limits on income and 3) provide a job for everyone who wants one. On all three questions, there was affirmative response in all of the postcommunist countries;

9. In another survey in which people in Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia were asked what sort of society they would like their country to emulate, the majority named Germany or Sweden. The US ranked third, with an average of 18% (Richard Rose, "Toward a Civil Economy," *Journal of Democracy* 3, no. 2 [April 1992]: 16).

Table 3
Support for a Strong Role for the Government in the Economy
 (% strongly or somewhat agreeing)

Country	Principle			Statism Index (Rank)*
	Minimum standard of living	Upper limits on money	Guaranteed Jobs	
Bulgaria	93	42	87	4
Eastern Germany	94	60	96	1
Hungary	90	58	87	2
Poland	87	47	88	5
Russia	88	34	96	6
Slovenia	92	60	88	3
Czechoslovakia	88	30	82	9
Estonia	94	32	76	8
Average for Post-communist States	91	45	88	
Western Germany	85	32	71	10
Japan	83	36	86	7
Holland	86	32	53	12
Great Britain	83	39	67	11
United States	56	17	50	13
Average for Capitalist States	79	31	65	

Questions: Five point agree/disagree scale on following statements: 1) the government should guarantee everyone a minimum standard of living; 2) the government should place an upper limit on the amount of money any one person may make; 3) the government should provide a job for everyone who wants one.

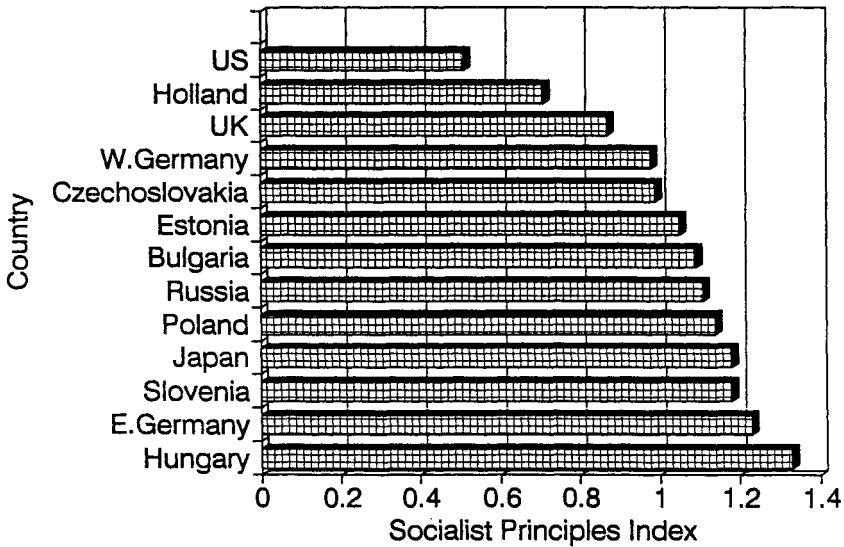
*The statism index is the mean score on these three questions, at the individual level, averaged by country. Countries are ranked by support for these statist principles.

and for the issues of guaranteed jobs and standard of living, it was almost universal (see table 3). As is evident from the table, there was substantial support for these principles from the capitalist countries as well. But respondents in the east European countries were, overall, much more supportive of this strong government role than were those in the western countries. Americans, it should be noted, were *much* less supportive of strong government than any other country in this sample.

On all three orientations, equality, need and role of the state, east central Europeans generally lean toward a more egalitarian and statist system than do those in west Europe, Japan or the US. To make more systematic cross-national comparisons and to allow a more systematic examination of the determinants of these attitudes, a single summary measure of pro-socialist orientations was derived from six attitudinal questions from the survey, including the questions discussed above.¹⁰

10. The variables in this index are listed in figure 2. The index was created by averaging the z scores of these six variables (since some of them used 5-point scales

Figure 1. Support for socialist principles by country.



Note: Highest numbers indicate strongest support for socialist principles. Index is based on the average of z-scores of responses on six questions tapping support for socialist principles (all 4- or 5-point Likert scales):

- level of pay for an employee should be based on “the size of the family the employee supports”
- “the government should guarantee everyone a minimum standard of living”
- “the government should place an upper limit on the amount of money any one person may make”
- “the government should provide a job for everyone who wants one”
- “the fairest way of distributing wealth and income would be to give everyone equal shares”
- “the most important thing is that people get what they need, even if this means allocating money from those who have earned more than they need”

Pairwise differences of .13 or more are significant at the .01 level (Scheffe criterion).

The average scores on this index, by country, are indicated in figure 1. The absolute value of this index is not in itself very meaningful. What is notable here is the ranking of the countries. As before, the postcommunist countries score higher in socialist orientations than do

and some of them 4-point) and then subtracting that number from 1 in order to make high numbers indicate positive support for socialist principles. The items on this scale were entered into a principle components factor analysis and all items were found to load on only one factor, providing evidence of a unidimensional scale. Using the SPSS “reliability” procedure, the items in the index produced a reliability coefficient (Cronbach’s Alpha) of .63.

It should be noted that this “socialist principles” index does *not* include variables tapping support for state ownership of property or industry, an important component of socialism. While such questions were originally included in pretest versions of our questionnaire and were asked in some of our countries, they were excluded from the common core of questions in the cross-national survey. Thus, this index taps sentiment toward important elements of socialism but does not include all dimensions of that concept.

the capitalist countries;¹¹ the only exception to this division is Japan, which is closer to the postcommunist states than to the western capitalist ones. On this scale, as on others mentioned above, the US is a distant outlier. Values and attitudes in the east European countries are much closer to those in west Europe (especially Germany) and Japan than they are to those in the US. In that case, the west European and Japanese models of economic and social development, involving a greater emphasis on community and government activism, might be more appropriate for postcommunist states than the more individualistic and laissez-faire approach in the US.¹²

So far I have discussed only national averages of attitudes towards issues relevant to economic reforms. But in assessing the likely success of market-oriented reforms in east central Europe, it is necessary to consider who it is that supports and opposes these reforms. It would be helpful for market-oriented governments, of course, if a majority of the population supported the kinds of policies they are implementing. As we have seen above, however, that is not likely to be the case: most people in the postcommunist states still have a basically egalitarian and statist orientation that works against the laissez-faire and decentralizing reforms being implemented in the region. But even in the absence of a consensus behind the reforms, the governments might be able to push through the reforms if the proponents of the reforms were to remain politically active and the opponents were not.

In all of the east European countries except Estonia, the strongest determinant by far of pro-socialist attitudes is education (see table 4). In most countries, income and sex are the next most important. Those with low education and incomes, and women are more supportive of socialist principles than others. Figure 2 shows a steady decline in support for socialist principles from those with low education to those with higher educations. Across all the east European countries, the correlation coefficient between the socialism index and educational level is $-.33$.

The strong negative relationship between education and support for socialism is not surprising and, in fact, prevails in the western countries as well ($r = -.19$). In the postcommunist countries, however, it is particularly strong and reflects a real and perplexing division within those societies. The governments there are pursuing non-egalitarian reforms and are supported in that effort by the more highly educated minority in those societies, who, as it happens, also have the

11. These differences are significant at the .01 level (Scheffe criterion) for most pairs of capitalist/postcommunist states. See the note to figure 1.

12. Similarly, James Gibson reports from a 1992 survey in the former Soviet Union that "the sort of market supported by most Soviet people is a far more benign and controlled market than is often thought of in the West (especially in the United States)" ("Political and Economic Markets: Connecting Attitudes toward Political Democracy and a Market Economy Within the Mass Culture of the USSR," paper presented at the 1993 annual convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, Honolulu, 40).

Table 4
Multiple Regression Analysis of Index of Socialist Values
(standardized regression coefficients—beta)

Country	Education	Income	Sex	Social Status	Age	R ²	Listwise N
Bulgaria	-.28***	-.10**	.12***	-.10***	.04	.16	1182
E. Germany	-.18***	-.07*	.05	-.06	.05	.07	950
Hungary	-.36***	-.08*	.06	-.09**	-.03	.20	935
Poland	-.35***	-.14***	.06**	-.08**	-.04	.21	1496
Russia	-.15***	-.12***	.12***	-.02	.06*	.09	1347
Slovenia	-.30***	-.13***	.09**	-.03	-.05	.15	1179
Czechoslovakia	-.31***	-.05	.11***	-.09**	.04	.16	1111
Estonia	-.10**	-.14***	.06	-.12**	.02	.08	794
Postcommunist States	-.27***	-.11***	.08***	.08***	.01	.14	9001
Capitalist States	-.12***	-.15***	.09***	-.12***	-.07***	.09	5734

Variables: Education (based on Casmin categories); income: family income in 20-tiles; social status—self-perceived; sex (male = 1; female = 2).

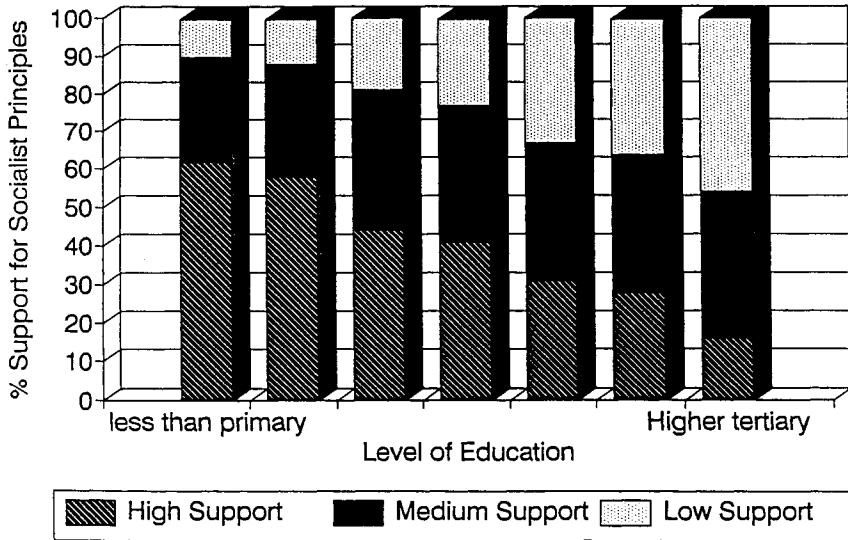
* p < .05

** p < .01

*** p < .001

R² is significant at .001 level for all countries.

Figure 2. Support for socialist principles by educational level.



Note: Data based on pooled sample from all of the postcommunist states in our sample.

most to gain from such reforms. Indeed, in many of these countries, the new governments are dominated by the highly educated, because the revolutions swept into power intellectuals who had previously opposed the communist system.

In the east European countries as elsewhere, education is related to income, so support for socialist principles is also related to income ($r = -.23$). In Poland, for example, 58 percent of those in the bottom quartile of family incomes score high in support for socialist principles, while among those in the upper quartile, only 24 percent do. Thus we see what could be a politically dangerous situation in the postcommunist countries: governments and relatively small educated elites favor implementation of market-based economies and more meritocratic societies, while most of the poor and less educated populations, who will most directly feel the bite of these reforms, remain supportive of many of the social and economic principles of the old regimes. While other studies have shown that most people in postcommunist countries are committed to the *democratic* aspects of the reform process, there are sharp divisions over the economic ones.¹³

Economic Values and Political Participation

It may seem paradoxical that there should be such divisions between leaders and led in societies that have just undergone paroxysms

13. In his 1992 survey in the former Soviet Union, Gibson also found stronger support for a democratic culture than for a market-based economic one (“Political And Economic Markets”). For evidence of support for democratic principles, see also Finifter and Mickiewicz; and Rose and Haerpfer.

of revolution, participation and democratization. In East Germany, Czechoslovakia and elsewhere, hundreds of thousands of people participated in demonstrations that brought down the communist governments and voter turnout was high in the first competitive elections in each of these countries. But on closer examination, it is clear that political activity in east European countries remained limited, even during the revolutionary ferment. Most people in all countries voted in the early elections but were not otherwise active politically in even a minimal way. Our survey asked respondents if they had *ever* participated in any of ten variants of political action, ranging from writing to a newspaper or signing a petition to joining a wildcat strike or blocking traffic (all questions used in the *Political Action* study).¹⁴ Table 5 shows wide variation across countries, with the incidence of protest high in those countries where the governments were brought down by people power (East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria) and low where

14. Samuel H. Barnes, Max Kaase, et al., *Political Action: Mass Participation in Five Western Democracies* (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1979). See the note to table 5 for the question wording and the ten forms of protest.

Table 5
Political Action by Country
(% in each country reporting protest activities)

Country	Number of Protest Activities			N
	None	1-3	4-10	
Eastern Germany	17	66	17	1019
Czechoslovakia	34	49	17	1181
Bulgaria	48	43	9	1405
Slovenia	66	29	5	1375
Russia	67	29	4	1734
Estonia	69	28	3	1000
Poland	72	23	5	1542
Hungary	84	15	1	1000
Average for Post-communist States	57	35	8	
Western Germany	31	52	18	1837
Holland	28	55	17	1783
United Kingdom	21	64	15	1319
United States	10	55	35	1414
Japan	40	53	7	777
Average for Capitalist States	26	56	18	

Questions: . . . have you ever done any of these things over an issue that was important to you: signed a petition; joined a boycott; attended a protest demonstration or rally; attended a public meeting; joined in an unofficial (wildcat) strike; blocked traffic; written to a newspaper; written to your (member of the national/federal legislature); refused to pay rent, rates or taxes; occupied a building or property in protest.

Note: all percentages are rounded.

the transition was more evolutionary (Poland) or managed by the political elite (Hungary). But what is remarkable here is the lack of political activity of any kind in most of these countries: in the pooled sample, 58 percent of those in the postcommunist states had participated in *none* of ten forms of political action, compared with just 25 percent reporting such low levels of political activity in the capitalist states.¹⁵ These questions asked about such activity over lifetimes, so it is apparent that these people were politically inactive both in the communist era, when the regimes encouraged formal political participation, and in the revolutionary era, when thousands of people took to the streets in demonstrations, protests and rallies. In all of the postcommunist states, most people (three quarters or more) voted in the first free or semi-free parliamentary elections in 1989–1991 but, apart from that, there was very little political activity.

In most of the postcommunist states, less than a third of the respondents expressed even minimal political interest through “sympathizing with a particular [political] party.” Only in eastern Germany, which had by this time been integrated into the fully formed political structure of the west, did a majority of respondents (53%) express such affiliation. In part, this reluctance to identify with political parties was due to the weak structure and development of party systems throughout the region. In both Poland and Hungary, for example, there were dozens of political parties and groups vying for parliamentary office, including the semi-serious Beer Lovers Party in Poland. This may have been bewildering to many potential voters, but the lack of effective party organizations effectively excluded much of the population from political participation and influence.

In the US and other western countries, socio-economic status, and especially education, is the most important determinant of voting and other forms of political participation.¹⁶ In the postcommunist states, our survey also showed a linear relationship between educational level and both voting and political activity. In the capitalist countries in our survey, regression analysis showed education to be by far the most important determinant of political action (see table 6). In the postcommunist states, education was also important but the *major* determinant of political action was past personal experience of political injustice.

The variable “experienced injustice for political beliefs” (table 6) is derived from a series of questions in our survey about injustice in people’s lives and asked respondents “how often have you personally experienced injustice because of the following factors,” including “your political beliefs.” Questions about injustice “in their lives” should have tapped past experiences (i.e., during the communist period) as well as present-day ones. In each of the postcommunist states, two thirds or

15. The *Political Action* study found similarly low levels of political inactivity in five western countries (Barnes and Kaase, 550).

16. Robert Erikson, Norman Luttbeg and Kent L. Tedin, *American Public Opinion: Its Origins, Content and Impact*, 4th ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 8–9.

Table 6
Determinants of Political Action in Capitalist and Postcommunist States
 (standardized regression coefficients—beta)

Independent Variable	Post-communist states	Capitalist
Experienced injustice for political beliefs	.21***	.09***
Education	.16***	.29***
Age	-.11***	-.02
Gender (1 = male; 2 = female)	-.07***	-.06***
Self-perceived social standing	.06***	.03*
Satisfaction with life overall	.05***	.04***
Overall experience of injustice ⁺	.09**	.12***
Satisfaction with income	-.03*	-.07***
Household income (in 20-tiles)	.02	.06***
R ²	.16***	.15***
Listwise N	8438	5562

* p < .05

** p < .01

*** p < .001

+ Overall experience of injustice is the mean score on a series of eight questions asking if respondents had ever experienced injustice because of their religious beliefs, sex, social background, age, lack of money, part of country they were from, political beliefs, or race or ethnic group.

more said they had “rarely” or “never” experienced political injustice. But as is evident from Table 6, such experience was an important determinant of political action in postcommunist states: overall almost two thirds of those who had experienced injustice were highly politically active, compared to about one third of those who had not experienced injustice.

This relationship worked in the other direction as well, in that the politically active were much more likely to have experienced injustice than the politically inactive (40% compared to 17%). Thus, the relatively small proportion of the population that felt *politically* persecuted were disproportionately active in politics. The vast majority of the populations in postcommunist states, on the other hand, were more concerned with economic issues and economic injustice than with politics, and were not so politically active.¹⁷

Political participation translates into political influence. Studies in the US and other western countries have shown that the economically advantaged groups in society tend to be more politically active and

17. In “Society Transformed? Rethinking the Social Roots of Perestroika,” Donna Bahry has shown that in the Brezhnev-era Soviet Union, “People with higher status and more material benefits ranked among the most discontented,” *Slavic Review* 52 (Fall 1993): 517.

that the well-off therefore “tend to benefit more from governmental policies because they have greater influence on such policies.”¹⁸ In the emerging democracies of eastern Europe, it is also the case that political participation is disproportionately exercised by those in higher socio-economic categories and by those who have experienced political injustice more than economic deprivation. Perhaps this is not surprising in that the revolutions of 1989 (like most revolutions) were led by intellectuals and other dissidents who were the main targets of political repression under communism. But if these are also the people who are leading the political and economic transitions in these societies, as seems to be the case, their interests, needs and political agendas are likely to be quite different from those of the populations as a whole. What Sidney Verba and his colleagues say about the US also has relevance in the emerging democracies of eastern Europe: “If those who take part and those who do not were similar on all politically relevant dimensions, then substantial inequalities in participation would pose no threat to the democratic principles of equal protection of interests. As our analysis has demonstrated, this is hardly the case.”¹⁹

While studies of the US by Verba and others have found significant *demographic* differences between those who are politically active and those who are not, they have usually found minimal differences in the political *attitudes* of the two groups. In the postcommunist states, on the other hand, the demographic differences are reinforced by significant attitudinal differences in areas important in the transitions. Those people who *were* more active, for example, tended to be less supportive of socialist principles. In every east European country, the level of support for socialist principles declined as the level of political activity increased (see figure 3) and, correspondingly, those high on our socialist principles index were much less likely (33%) to be politically active than those low on the index (54%).²⁰ This supports the evidence above that the more politically active and involved were more committed to market-oriented reforms than the less active, and less supportive of socialism and socialist principles.²¹

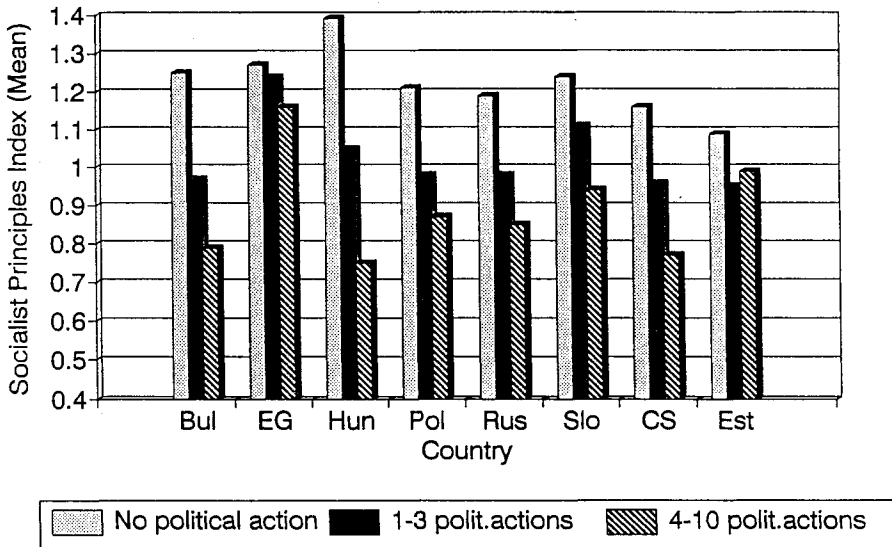
18. Sidney Verba, Norman H. Nie and Jae-on Kim, *Participation and Political Equality: A Seven Nation Comparison* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 5; and, for example, Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, Henry Brady and Norman H. Nie, “Citizen Activity: Who Participates? What Do They Say?” *American Political Science Review* 87, no. 2 (June 1993): 303–18.

19. Verba, Schlozman, Brady and Nie, 314.

20. The same relationship holds for the direct question on support for socialism, “based on your experience in [country name] of socialism.” The percentage of those somewhat or totally against socialism rises from 39% of those with no political activity to 51% of those with minimal activity to 62% of those reporting substantial activity (4 or more types of political action).

21. While the present study compares the values of the politically active with the politically inactive, Arthur Miller and his colleagues compared the values of political elites with those of the general population (in Russia, Ukraine and Lithuania) and found marked differences in the levels of support for the market between the two groups (“Comparing Citizen and Elite Attitudes”).

Figure 3. Support for socialist principles by level of political activity.



The political action measure used above refers to *all* past political behavior but may not necessarily reflect *current* political behavior in the more normal environment of democratic politics. The findings above, however, are confirmed when one looks at voting behavior in the early postcommunist elections. Our survey asked respondents if they had voted in the last national or parliamentary elections, most of which took place in 1990 or 1991. In the postcommunist states as a whole, the overwhelming majority (83%) did vote in those elections. But those who were low on our socialist principles index were significantly²² more likely to have voted (86%) than those who scored high on that index (80%).²³ Again, this attitudinal difference between voters and non-voters is different from patterns in the western countries: in our pooled sample of capitalist countries, there was virtually no difference in voting behavior between those high and low on the socialist principles index.

In some countries at least, the political withdrawal of pro-socialist voters seems to have grown after 1991. The Polish General Social Sur-

22. Chi square (2 degrees of freedom) = 23.8; $p < .001$.

23. Those identified as "high" on the socialist principles index were those in the top third of that index and those "low" were in the bottom third. Some postcommunist states had a significantly higher cleavage on this dimension than others. As indicated in the text, in the pooled sample of postcommunist states, the difference in voting behavior between those high and low on the index was 5.6 percentage points (86.1% - 80.5%). The individual country differences were as follows: Hungary, 6.9%; Poland, 6.2%; eastern Germany, 4.3%; Russia, 0.5%; Czechoslovakia, 0.2%. The countries with the higher figures are likely to experience more political divisions and instability.

Table 7
Socialist Views and Voting Behavior in Poland, 1989 and 1991
 (% voting by views on socialism)

% voting	Views on socialism					N
	Very much in favor	Somewhat in favor	Neither for nor against	Somewhat against	Totally against	
1989	76.0	76.9	75.2	79.8	80.7	1099
1991	52.5	52.4	49.8	59.4	69.1	1457

Sources: 1989 voting behavior from 1991 ISJP survey asking about vote in last parliamentary elections; 1991 data from 1992 Polish General Social Survey asking about vote in October 1991 parliamentary elections. Question on socialism is the same as that in table 1. Chi square (4) = 29.4; $p < .001$.

vey,²⁴ for example, asked respondents if they had voted in the parliamentary elections of October 1991 (which occurred after our survey). There was, of course, a dramatic decline in voter turnout from the 1989 elections. But there was a much steeper decline among those who declared themselves "in favor" of socialism, a question that was also asked in the 1991 survey. As is apparent from table 7, there was only a four percentage point differential in voting between those strongly in favor of socialism and those totally against socialism in 1991. In the 1992 survey, this difference had widened to almost 17 percentage points.

The political withdrawal of pro-socialist voters contained both good news and bad news for the reforming governments in eastern Europe. The good news was that the people opposed to or skeptical about market-oriented reforms were not likely to express this opposition in political action. There was a kind of "silent majority" in the postcommunist countries of people who were not committed to the reforms but would not speak out or vote against them, thus allowing the reformist governments to pursue the difficult transitional policies without substantial opposition. At first, there were few political parties or organizations in the east European countries which attempted to mobilize this potential opposition. In part this was due to lingering resentment of the communists and a popular suspicion that organized groups that opposed the liberalizing reforms must themselves be communists. Indeed, there were communist or proto-communist groups or parties in each of these countries in 1991, but these were quite small and were not always any more pro-socialist than the rest of the population. In all three countries (Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and Slovenia) where our survey asked about former communist party membership, support for

24. A national representative sample survey of 2000 households conducted in May and June 1992 as part of the Polish General Social Survey of 1992 (Bogdan Cichomski, Director and Principle Investigator) (*Polish General Social Survey, 1992: Codebook* [Warsaw: Institute for Social Studies, University of Warsaw, 1992]).

socialist principles was *lower* among those reporting such membership than among those who said they had never belonged to the communist parties. Here, as has been shown by other indicators, potential opposition to liberalizing reforms is much broader and deeper in the population than is support for hardline groups.

The bad news for the reforming governments was the possibility that opposition to reforms *might* become mobilized and politically active. Silent majorities could safely be ignored as long as they remained silent. But if the transitional period becomes too painful or too long, skepticism about the principles of reform will be reinforced by very real economic hardship. The combination of these circumstances could very well lead to popular upheaval (e.g. strikes or demonstrations) or simply to electoral defeat for the reforming governments and the accession to power of governments committed to reversing the tide of marketization or even of democratization. We have seen hints of this outcome already with the strong showing of newly revived postcommunist parties in Lithuania, Poland and Hungary, and of antidemocratic forces in Russia.

Reshaping Culture and Ideology

The evidence above points to some of the social and political obstacles to the transition to market democracies in east central Europe. It is unlikely that the governments of the region will be able to work against this political culture; either the governments or the culture will have to change. Given the overwhelming consensus among both the postcommunist political elites and western financial institutions that they should push ahead with reforms, the governments will not lightly change their market-oriented strategies. What they need to do, in that case, is to work on reshaping popular values and political culture. As Kent Jennings points out, "if we want to change perceptions of unfairness, one fundamental route is to change value systems first—no small task."²⁵ This is normally the task of the political socialization process, which often takes a generation or more to effect substantial changes in values or culture. But the political culture in eastern Europe seems particularly fluid and malleable in this transitional period, so perhaps these governments will be able to quickly bring the populations around to their point of view.²⁶

There are those who argue that changes in popular orientations are already beginning to take place and that a shift in favor of the market and capitalism will accelerate as the economic reforms begin to improve the economies and deliver jobs, wealth and consumer goods.

25. M. Kent Jennings, "Thinking about Social Injustice," *Political Psychology* 12, no. 2 (1991): 199.

26. An analysis of the Hungarian ISJP data finds Hungarians caught between the old "solidarity values" and the new "productivity ones" (György Csepeli, Tamás Kolosi, Mária Neményi and Antal Örkény, "Our Futureless Values: The Forms of Justice and Injustice Perception in Hungary in 1991," *Social Research* 60, no. 4 [Winter 1993]: 892).

Indeed, most of the postcommunist states show some shifts away from the radical egalitarianism and hostility to private enterprise that characterized the communist and early postcommunist period. As we have seen, however, in 1991, two years after the revolutions in most cases, attitudes remained much more egalitarian and statist than in the western countries. And in the few cases where questionnaire items from our 1991 survey have been replicated subsequently, there does not appear to be much overall change in attitudes on key economic and political issues.

In Poland, for example, a survey conducted in mid-1992 and again in mid-1993 included a number of questions asked in the 1991 survey.²⁷ This period was one in which industrial production was beginning to recover for the first time since the introduction of shock therapy in January 1990 and inflation was beginning to moderate—though unemployment was continuing to grow. In this context, one sees a surprising change in the response to our question (reported in table 1) about views about socialism (see table 8). One sees a slight increase both in those in favor of socialism and those “somewhat against” it. But there is a marked decline in those “totally against” socialism as well as an increase in the ambivalent responses of “neither for nor against” or “don’t know.” As noted in our discussion above, “socialism” is an ideologically loaded term that evokes hostility from many survivors of the communist years. But in Poland, at least, much of that visceral hostility (“totally against”) seems to have evaporated within a remarkably short period of time. In this respect, at least, capitalism seems not to have won over many adherents, even as it was starting to generate some successes.

27. *Polish General Social Surveys, 1992–1993: Cumulative Codebook* (Warsaw: Institute for Social Studies, University of Warsaw, 1993).

Table 8
Views about Socialism in Poland, 1991–1993
(percentages)

Response	1991	1992	1993
Very much in favor	1.6	2.7	1.8
Somewhat in favor	8.5	8.6	10.4
Neither for nor against	39.9	45.6	51.9
Somewhat against	18.7	18.7	15.9
Totally against	23.7	15.6	13.0
Don't know	7.6	8.8	7.0
N	1535	1643	1646

Source note: 1991 figures are from our ISJP data. They differ slightly from those in table 1 by including the “don’t know” category. 1992 and 1993 figures from *Polish General Social Surveys, 1992–1993: Cumulative Codebook* (Warsaw: Institute for Social Studies, University of Warsaw, 1993), 120.

On other questions, too, one sees growing concern with the effects of the economic reforms. One question asked in the 1991 survey and repeated in Poland in 1992 asked about "differences in people's incomes in Poland." In 1991 44 percent thought such differences were "much too large" and 17 percent thought they were somewhat or much too small. In 1992 these figures were 52 percent and 8 percent, respectively, showing substantial increases in those concerned about the growing gap between wealthy and poor in Poland. In the 1991 survey we had also asked respondents about the role of government in the economy, including whether the government should provide a job for everyone who wanted one. As seen in table 3, there was overwhelming support for this proposition throughout eastern Europe, including 88 percent of the respondents in Poland. In 1992 the level of overall support in Poland for this same proposition was almost identical (89%), though there was a substantial drop in those who *strongly* agreed with that statement (from 66% to 49%).²⁸

Poland was the first country in the region to introduce economic "shock therapy" and was the first to begin to recover from the traumas of the initial shock. In some ways, then, Poland is a harbinger of the course of the transition in many of the other postcommunist states. As we have seen, though, attitudes in the country remain egalitarian and statist, with much of the population concerned about, and affected by, the social and economic dislocations of economic transformation. By 1992, at least, there do not seem to have been major changes in the political culture that would indicate the population becoming more accepting of market-oriented changes than they had the previous year. The electoral victory of the left in September 1993 certainly reflects this continuing popular skepticism towards reforms. It also suggests that the "silent majority" on the left had begun to re-enter the political arena.

Favored Futures in East Central Europe

As one might expect from the above analysis, citizens of postcommunist states are divided on what kind of future they favor for their countries. In every country but Czechoslovakia, the largest number in 1991 favored "a more democratic type of socialism" than either the kind of socialism they had had before or a free-market economy (see table 9) but in no country did a majority favor any of the four choices presented. This is consistent with other surveys which have found that people in Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia favored emulating German or Swedish society more than the US;²⁹ it is also consistent with

28. There is a similar pattern in Hungary, with the 1992 ISSP survey showing three quarters of the population still agreeing with this proposition, but a much smaller percentage (50%, compared to 80% in 1991) *strongly* agreeing.

29. Richard Rose, "Toward a Civil Economy," *Journal of Democracy* 3 no. 2 (April 1992): 13-26.

Table 9
Favored Systems in East Central Europe, by Country
(percentages)

Country	Former type of socialism	Democratic socialism	Free Market	Specific national solution	N
Bulgaria	5.5	37.6	32.6	24.3	1185
Poland	2.8	38.3	35.4	23.5	1454
Russia	15.3	33.8	14.9	36.1	1265
Slovenia	4.0	46.4	34.6	15.0	1143
Czechoslovakia	2.8	35.5	35.6	26.1	1111
Estonia	2.3	37.0	17.4	43.3	868

Questionnaire item: There are many views about the future development of (country name, e.g. Polish) society. Which one of these alternatives comes closest to your own preference? 1) a socialist society along the lines of what we have already experienced in (country); 2) a more democratic type of socialism as found in some countries in the west; 3) a free-market economy which is essentially non-socialist as found in some other countries in the west; 4) a specific (country name, e.g. Polish) solution unique to the country.

many of our findings that attitudes toward the economy and the role of the state in east central Europe were closer to those in western Europe and Japan than to the US.

As we found earlier with the sources of support and opposition to socialist principles, the politically active segments of the population are much more supportive of a free-market future than the inactive. Across all of the postcommunist states, a free-market solution was favored by 43 percent of the most politically active (4 or more types of political action), compared to just 25 percent of the large majority of respondents reporting no political actions. In this latter group, by far the largest number (39%) favored a democratic socialist solution, followed by 28 percent favoring a uniquely national solution.

It is also clear from our survey that young people provide the primary source of support for a free-market solution across postcommunist states. Support for a free-market solution declines steadily from 36 percent of those under 27 years of age to just 21 percent of those over 65, and this pattern holds for each of the countries individually as well. It is understandable that young people, more risk-taking, individualistic and westernized, would be more attracted to a free-market system that promised wealth to the ambitious and prosperity to the nation. It is also understandable, however, that older people, more dependent on the state and more concerned about present-day economic security than future riches, would be more reluctant to abandon totally the system of guarantees and benefits provided by the state.

The age differences on these issues raises the possibility of conflict between the generations on the future of these countries, with older people favoring a commitment to some kind of socialism and the young

pressing for a more thoroughgoing market economy. On the other hand, it raises the possibility that, over time, an increasingly larger segment of the population will be brought over to the market alternative, as older generations are replaced by younger, both in the societies at large and in the leaderships. The fact that the current leadership in these countries is rather young and that the politically active are more committed to the market means that in the short run, at least, the market approach will predominate. The question is, will this predominance prevail as older segments of the population re-enter the political arena and as the toll of the market erodes support for capitalism even among the young.

In some countries, this turnaround seems to have begun already, with the electoral victories of postcommunist parties in Lithuania, Poland and Hungary, for example. In the September 1993 elections in Poland, the victory of the parties on the left was due in part to the return to the electorate of people who had not voted in earlier elections. Of those who had not voted before, some 47 percent cast their vote this time for parties on the left (22% for the SLD [Democratic Left Alliance], 15% for the PSL [Peasant Party] and 10% for the UP [Union of Labor]).³⁰ This seems to confirm my assumptions in this paper that 1) those on the left (i.e., supporters of socialist principles) have not heretofore been very active politically; and 2) that when they re-enter the political arena, it is likely to result in different political constellations that may slow the pace of marketization and privatization. In Poland, at least, the new governing alliance (of the SLD and PSL) promised to stay the course of economic reform, but the election results did send a signal of popular concern with the reform process that is bound to have an impact.

This may be bad news for reformers and particularly those who favor a rapid transition to the market. But it is good news for the development and maturation of democratic institutions and values in the postcommunist states. For, without the inclusion of all segments of east central European populations in the political process, including those who are skeptical about the market and about capitalism, democracy will not succeed.

30. "SLD zyskał u wszystkich," *Rzeczpospolita*, 21 September 1993.