

## **Post-Communist Solidarity and Attitudes towards Redistribution**

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Solidarity between the rich and the poor is a key element to legitimise European redistributive systems. Recently, increasing migration and globalisation have challenged positive attitudes towards redistribution. This paper investigates redistributive attitudes of people in European countries and in Russia with a special focus on post-communism. The analysis is based on 2008 data of the European Social Survey. Results indicate that attitudes are more related to the country of residence than to the post-communist background of individuals. Small differences in attitudes between people with and without a post-communist background are explained by egalitarian ideals. In Europe, evidence suggests that these small differences in attitudes linked to the post-communist background of individuals might be attenuated by cohort replacement. In Russia, where attitudes towards redistribution are already similar to Southern and Eastern Europe, the convergence towards European attitudes might be slowed down by the more pronounced fear for future unstable conditions.

### **Key questions**

We investigate the following research questions: a) Are there differences in preferences for redistribution between Russia and European countries/regions? If so, what are the characteristics of these differences? b) Are there differences in preferences for redistribution between people with and without a post-communism background? If so, can we talk about a post-communist heritage?

The 2008 financial crisis has led to the emergence of new social risks, such as increasing migration and new family arrangements, and has put all modern welfare states under pressure (Taylor-Gooby, 2005). The crisis has also changed the redistributive capacity of many welfare states and weakened the fundamentals of solidarity between many population groups, among which generations, genders, workers and unemployed, rich and poor, natives and migrants, and Europeans and non-Europeans (Armingeon & Ceka, 2014, Fábíán et al. 2014). Recently, the core principles of the welfare state, namely generosity, universalism and scope (Beck & Grande, 2007), are therefore no longer assured or regarded as sustainable. Thus, the core values of the European Union are at risk, while at the same time conflict with Russia is rising.

In such times, it is important to understand communalities and differences in the core values of society. Knowledge about public attitudes towards welfare attitudes and solidarity is therefore important for the understanding of future roads to welfare regimes and conflict resolution in Europe and Russia (Draxler & van Vliet, 2010). The empirical evidence about differences and similarities regarding specific forms of solidarity between Russia and Europe is still scarce. In this article, we investigate differences and similarities between Russia and Europe regarding solidarity between the rich and the poor by comparing attitudes towards redistribution in Europe and Russia.

### **Specific contribution**

Previous research that compares welfare regimes (Deacon, 2000; Fenger, 2007) or attitudes towards welfare policies across Eastern and/or Western Europe (Dallinger, 2010; Habibov, 2014; Guillaud, 2013) shows that people are more favourable to government interventions in Russia and in Eastern European countries. The same result is also found when Eastern and Western Germans are compared (Alesina & Fuchs-Schündeln, 2007; Corneo & Grüner, 2002, Svallfors 2010), and more in general when Eastern and Western Europeans are compared (Roosma, van Oorschot & Gelissen, 2014). This support for the welfare state in the East is often theorized to come from authoritarian egalitarianism sponsored during communism (see, e.g., Offe, 1991; Kallio & Niemelä, 2014). The hypothesis is that

attitudes are developed during socialisation, when individuals learn and internalise the elements of their culture through important experiences. Concerning the influence of communism on democratic values, Neundorf (2010) sees political socialisation starting from around age 16 as particularly important. Pop-Eleches & Tucker (2014) go even further and suggest the presence of an indoctrinating effect of communism on economic and political attitudes.

Research has shown that political and welfare attitudes are deeply rooted among individuals and are relatively stable over the life-course (Pierson, 1993; Svallfors, 2010). If changes of attitudes are observed, they happen mainly in the context of economic integration, cohort replacement and resocialization within a different culture (Gerhards, Lengfeld & Häuberer, 2015; Münch, 2010). With increasing migration, however, such shifts might have become more frequent as more people of different social backgrounds move between different welfare systems (Salt & Almeida, 2006). After the fall of communism, diasporas from Eastern European countries and other post-communist countries have been particularly intense (Koinova, 2009). In recent years, these significant external post-communist minorities are acquiring the right to vote in Western European countries (Łucka, 2017). There are therefore two possible scenarios regarding European attitudes towards redistribution. On the one hand, redistributive attitudes of these migrants might reflect the cultural heritage that they received in their birth country (Luttmer & Singhal, 2011); on the other hand, they might be more in line with the values of their destination country (Rudnev, 2014).

We add to the rich literature on attitudes towards welfare policies not only by updating the evidence about differences and similarities between Europe and Russia<sup>1</sup>, but also by investigating whether there exists such a thing as a post-communist heritage that influences preferences for redistribution in Europe. In order to reach this goal, we compare attitudes of people with and without a post-communist background in their country of origin or in their destination country.

## **Theoretical framework**

A long tradition distinguishes two factors that influence attitudes towards the welfare state: ideologies and self-interest (see Blekesaune & Quadagno, 2003; Chung & Meulemann, 2017; Hasenfeld & Rafferty, 1989; León, 2012; Reeskens & van Oorschot, 2015; Sears, Lau, Tyler & Allen, 1980; Taylor-Gooby, 1985; van Oorschot, Reeskens, & Meuleman, 2012).

Regarding ideologies, different types of ideals have been identified to shape people's preferences, among which ideals of equality (Rawls, 1971) are considered the most influential driving forces of attitudes towards redistribution. With respect to income inequality, empirical studies suggest that there is no strong correlation between people's normative positions regarding equality and self-interest or income (Fong, 2001; Ravazzini & Chávez-Juárez, 2017). In terms of socio-demographic characteristics, differences in ideologies can be found between genders (Svallfors, 1997; Arts and Gellisen, 2001), age groups and levels of education (Reeskens & van Oorschot, 2013; Gonthier, 2017). Ideologies do not depend only on individual characteristics, but they are also driven by values central to the (political) culture of the country and by nationally shared normative frameworks (Feldman & Zaller, 1992; Reeskens & van Oorschot, 2015). A particular case of different normative frameworks has been the dichotomy between capitalist and communist societies. Even though we could expect

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<sup>1</sup> Many analyses in the literature are based on specific databases for transition economies (Life-in-Transition, see Habibov 2013) or on international data (the International Social Survey Programme or on the World Value Survey), where Russia is either omitted or considered as one of the many non-European countries of the survey (Dallinger, 2010; Guillaud, 2013; VanHeuvelen, 2017; Wulfgramm & Starke, 2017). Studies based on the European Social Survey usually exclude Russia for comparability reasons (Roosma, van Oorschot & Gelissen, 2014; Reeskens & van Oorschot, 2013; Schöneck & Mau, 2015).

higher egalitarian ideologies in post-communist countries – and indeed support for welfare services is shown to be higher in post-communist countries (Dallinger, 2010; Deacon, 2000; Fenger, 2007; Guillaud, 2013) –, the literature has found that in Russia and in some post-soviet countries, people prefer values of self-enhancement (importance of power, wealth, and personal success) to values of self-transcendence (importance of social equality, concern for the welfare of others, and for the environment; see Magun & Rudnev, 2012). In these countries, positive attitudes towards the welfare state seem therefore to be driven by other values than egalitarian attitudes. Kulin & Meuleman (2015) have indeed found evidence for conservatism rather than self-transcendence among the drivers of positive attitudes towards the welfare state in Eastern Europe. Conservative values emphasize the preservation of social order, compliance with established rules and customs, and obedience to authority. In Eastern Europe, these values implied the continuity of the support for the welfare state. In addition to the political culture and to normative frameworks shared at the national level, public attitudes are also responsive to policy outcomes. In the “thermostatic model” proposed by Wlezien (1995), public preferences measure the “temperature” of public spending depending on the level of outcomes achieved by each policy. The mechanism works in the following way: if policymakers are too restrictive and the outcomes are lower than expected, attitudes become more positive (Kulin & Svallfors, 2013), on the contrary, if policymakers overshoot the preferred level of the policy and the outcomes are higher than expected (see the critical overload theory of Kumlin, 2007), attitudes become less positive or even negative (van Oorschot & Meuleman, 2012). In case of redistribution, the usual outcome used to measure the performance is the level of income inequality in the country (Blekesaune, 2013). We have seen that egalitarian ideals are important, but they are not the only ideals that matter for attitudes towards government interventions. In countries with high inequality, people might be against redistribution if they do not trust the government and tax authorities as reliable actors (Svallfors, 2013). It is therefore possible that ideals and national performances do not always go hand in hand. To a certain extent, the support for the welfare state in countries with high economic performances can thus be explained by strong egalitarian or interventionist ideals (Kulin & Meuleman, 2015), whereas low support for the welfare state in countries with high performances can be explained by mistrust in the government (Svallfors, 2013).

Regarding self-interest, it is argued that perceived utility shapes people’s preferences. The self-interest motive states that people who benefit the most from welfare redistribution are more likely to support it. In this sense, people at the bottom of the income distribution should have more positive attitudes towards redistribution than people at the top. From a structural perspective, it could be argued that preferences towards redistribution are dictated by risk exposure (Rehm, 2009; Reeskens & van Oorschot, 2013). Self-interest is influenced both by objective and by subjective risk exposure. Hence, people with objectively low incomes (and a high risk of poverty) should be more in favour of redistribution, whereas people with objectively high incomes (and a low risk of poverty) should oppose to redistribution. More in general, people whose main source of income is labour income should have a lower self-interest in redistribution than people who live on social benefits and pensions (d’Anjou et al., 1995).

The same logic applies to subjective self-interest: people who *feel* to be at risk of not having enough economic resources in the present and/or in the future are therefore expected to support redistribution more than people who feel relatively stable in economic terms (Blekesaune, 2014; Ravallion & Loskin, 2000). Self-interest could also take the form of collectivization as a defensive mechanism against the poor (De Swaan, 1988). According to this definition of self-interest, people with good circumstances should be in favour of a certain amount of redistribution to avoid the negative externalities that an increase in poverty produces on society (e.g. high crime rates and a strong feeling of insecurity). The relationship between self-interest expressed with personal income and attitudes towards redistribution is therefore not a priori linear.

### **Core variables, data and modelling**

We use data from the European Social Survey Round 4 (ESS4), fielded in autumn 2008 to spring 2009. We selected this specific round of the survey (ESS4) due to the module on attitudes towards the welfare state. The ESS4 was fielded in 31 countries including different geographical regions of Europe, many post-communist countries and countries from the ex-Soviet Union. The analysis includes 23 countries because of data incomparability on household income and because of the lack of relevant information for some countries.

The dependent variable of this study measures the level of agreement with the following statement: “The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels”. Answers are coded on a five-point scale. The scale has been inverted compared to its original form so that higher scores correspond to more positive attitudes towards redistribution, i.e. higher solidarity.

According to our conceptual framework, we include independent variables for ideology, objective and subjective self-interest, socio-demographic characteristics of individuals and country performances in terms of income inequality. Age groups are coded according to the political socialization during communism, discerning between persons socialized before communism (born before 1931), during communism (born between 1931 and 1974) and those socialized after the Cold War (born 1975 or later, see Neundorf, 2010).<sup>2</sup> Post-communist heritage is measured by identifying post-communist background of an individual using the country of birth. In Russia, in 2008, all respondents were born in a post-communist country.

Except for the variable about the countries’ performances regarding redistribution, i.e. income inequality, which is retrieved from the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) and Eurostat,<sup>3</sup> all other variables are taken from the ESS4.

The analysis consists of both descriptive analyses using simple differences in means and in empirical analyses through multivariate regressions including variables reflecting ideologies, self-interests, socio-demographic characteristics and indicators of macroeconomic performances. Multivariate regressions take the form of both multilevel models with individuals as first level units and countries as second level units and of linear regressions with country dummies and clustered standard errors. In the multilevel models, we use robust standard errors and we allow for random slopes to account for significantly different effects that appeared when looking at country-specific coefficients in preliminary analyses.

The design of the empirical analysis follows the research questions. The first research question aims at identifying the position of Russia and it consists of two parts. First, to identify the position of Russia, scatterplots of predicted values by country are constructed through multilevel models and compared to scatterplots of observed values. We use predictions of individual fixed effects and not of random effects. These predicted values illustrate how attitudes are explained by ideologies, self-interest and socio-demographic characteristics with fixed country effects. The effects of specific macro-economic conditions and of random slopes are not captured by the predictions. Through these predicted values, we identify the attitudes that Russians, and other Europeans, irrespective of their country of

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<sup>2</sup> To some degree, the definition of age groups is always arbitrary. We follow the theoretical conceptualisation of political socialisation suggested by Neundorf (2010). While the threshold for the young generation is rather straightforward, in this context, the threshold for the older generation could also be the age of retirement (as our research question focuses on income redistribution). Testing a threshold of 65 years, we found no changes in the interpretation of the coefficients.

<sup>3</sup> The data for the Gini index refer to LIS 2007 and to Eurostat 2008. Eurostat uses data from the Survey of Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), which asks for the income in the year before the survey. The Gini index for Austria refers to the year 2010 because fieldwork in this country was postponed to 2011.

residence. Second, to evaluate differences in ideals, self-interests, socio-demographic characteristics and macroeconomic conditions between Russia and European regions, regressions with country dummies and clustered standard errors are constructed and interpreted. This type of regressions is used when countries are too few to implement multilevel models (Bryan & Jenkins, 2015). Differences between models are further tested through an analysis of the intersection of the confidence intervals of each coefficient. Confidence intervals are estimated at least at the 90% confidence level.

The second research question is also composed of two parts. In the first part, bar charts are constructed to illustrate observed differences linked to a possible post-communist heritage. Like in the first research question, we also compute predicted values. Predicted values of individual fixed effects are estimated through multilevel models run separately on people with and without a post-communist background and then grouped into macro clusters that correspond to income quantiles and geographic regions of Europe. These clusters are compared to Russia through Cohen's *d* statistics (Cohen, 1992). In the second part, differences in ideals, self-interests, socio-demographic characteristics and macroeconomic conditions between people with and without a post-communist background are produced with the same multilevel models.

### **Preliminary results**

Without controlling for any factor, this paper shows that Russian attitudes towards redistribution are in the middle of the European distribution. The picture, however, changes when self-interests, ideologies, and socio-demographic characteristics are taken into account. In this case, Russia appears among the countries where attitudes towards redistribution are the highest. The fact that Russia diverges from average attitudes towards redistribution in Europe suggests that self-interests, ideologies, and socio-demographic characteristics do not produce the same effect in Russia than in other European countries. The fear for future unstable economic conditions encourages Russians to have positive attitudes towards redistribution. Even if our model is not able to capture all the variability, this effect entails a cultural component that already distinguishes Russia from other countries. Disaggregating the results by groups of European countries finds more positive attitudes towards redistribution in Southern and Eastern Europe than in Northern and Western Europe. Attitudes in Russia are therefore not only close to Eastern, but also to Southern Europe.

Despite the evidence of highly positive attitudes towards redistribution in Eastern Europe and Russia, people with a post-communist background do not always have more positive attitudes than other population groups. On the contrary, those who have a post-communist background and migrate to a country without a post-communist background express less positive attitudes towards redistribution than the rest of the population of the destination country. Among the most interesting factors related to attitudes, we found that preferences for equality among people with a post-communist background do not translate with the same intensity into attitudes towards redistribution. This result confirms previous evidence based on Eastern European countries (Kulin & Meuleman, 2015) and enlarges it to all individuals with a post-communist background. Age cohorts with different post-communist background are also important with respect to attitudes towards redistribution. Confirming previous literature (Neundorf, 2010), we find that a more direct experience of communism drives attitudes towards redistribution among older cohorts. Being born in a post-communist country is however not influential for younger cohorts. It is therefore likely that the difference between attitudes of people with and without a post-communist background in Europe will become smaller or even disappear over time. Although not based on longitudinal data, this relatively recent cross-sectional evidence contributes to the debate about the convergence (Verwiebe & Wegener, 2000; Alesina & Fuchs-Schündeln, 2007; Janmaat, 2013) or divergence (Gavin, 2017) of attitudes in post-communist countries with respect to Western Europe.