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Pro-democratic values in the post-communist world: Beyond Eastern Europe

Introduction

The consequences of the historical legacies of communism – cultural, institutional or socio-economic – have been extensively studied in the context of post-communist transformations, for instance with regard to its impact on democratic consolidation, economic privatization or social inequality. This unique simultaneous challenge of creating a new political and economic order while coming to terms with questions of nationality and statehood after the breakdown of communism has also been described as triple, even quadruple, transitions (Kuzio, 2001). Against the background of these fundamental changes, it is not surprising that these transitions and legacies were not only found to have a long-lasting impact on the civil society in these countries (see Howard (2003) on the weakness of civil society in Eastern Europe), but that the exposure to communist rule and the experience of multiple transitions also left an imprint on people's identity, their political orientations and behavior, or their economic attitudes (see for example Pop-Eleches and Tucker, 2014, 2017). This paper adds to this literature by examining the prevalence of pro-democratic values – more precisely: emancipative values – in post-communist countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Using data from the World Values Survey, the paper outlines differences in emancipative values between these countries, shows how these values have changed over time, and argues that emancipative values modify people's understanding of democracy in the post-communist world.

Communist rule, post-communist legacy and values

The breakdown of the communist regimes in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in late 1991 initiated political, economic and social transformations in Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Caucasus that can certainly be described as fundamental. The transitions from communism to post-communism could not have followed more diverging trajectories: Some countries developed into functioning democracies and market economies, accompanied by an institutional integration of the European Union and NATO, while others experienced serious challenges in consolidating democracy or never democratized. Research in this area shows that different historical legacies have a long-term impact on these diverging trajectories: For instance, the countries' religion (population is predominantly Western Christian vs. Muslim), (the lack of) membership in the prewar Soviet Union

as well as ethnic fragmentation (relative homogeneity) were found to effect the existence and quality of democratic institutions in the post-communist world (Pop-Eleches, 2007).

Before these transformations took place, societies in these regions had been exposed to decades of communist rule by a single party “that (i) restrict[ed] political leadership to those ideologically committed to promoting international communism/socialism and transforming preexisting class relations in one way or another, and (ii) pursu[ed] a program of economic development in which central planning overseen by communist party officials is privileged over market mechanisms and participation in the international capitalist economy” (Chen & Sil, 2007, p. 278).

Exposure to this communist rule for decades has shaped people’s value orientations, and “communism’s shadow” (Pop-Eleches & Tucker, 2017) lasts until today (Miller, White & Heywood, 1998; Halman & Voicu, 2010). For example, compared to people from non-communist European countries, people from post-communist countries show higher support for values of conservatism and hierarchy and lower support for values of egalitarianism, autonomy and mastery (Schwartz & Bardi, 1997), lower institutional and interpersonal trust (Badescu & Uslaner, 2003; Pop-Eleches & Tucker, 2011) and are more supportive of redistributive measures by the state (Pop-Eleches & Tucker, 2017).

These findings do not come as a surprise: During communist rule, many people developed a set of skills and values that allowed them to maneuver through the communist day-to-day practices, often shaped by measures of control and surveillance (for instance at the workplace, in schools or associations, etc.). The communist state expected conformity in all areas of people’s lives: Nonconformity, independent thinking, autonomy and critical mind were not encouraged – and when pursued, they could have had severe consequences for people’s freedoms and even physical security. Economically and socially, it advocated common ownership of the production means and extensive redistribution of wealth to achieve a classless society. As Schwartz and Bardi (1997) argue, there are two ways how values can be internalized in a communist context: Direct indoctrination, whose effectiveness is contested, and people’s adaptation to their life circumstances. “For most types of values, people form value priorities that are compatible with the reinforcement contingencies that their life circumstances afford. That is, they acclimate their values to their circumstances” (Schwartz & Bardi, 1997, p. 387). This reasoning is in line with Inglehart and Welzel’s argument of cultural fitness and the selective advantage of certain values: those values are adopted that are best suited to cope with life under given existential conditions (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005, p. 23). Along similar lines, Inglehart’s “socialization hypothesis” (Inglehart 1977) had argued already decades ago that people’s basic values reflect the conditions that prevailed during a person’s formative years and that such value priorities remain relatively stable as people age.

The communist legacy for people’s values has political consequences. In post-communist countries, the distinction between left and right is less meaningful, and, in contrast to Western societies, values fail to predict left-right self-placement (Jost et al., 2003; Piurku et al., 2011). The post-communist context also operates as a moderator: Barni, Vieno and Roccato (2016) find a positive relationship between conservative values and favoring economic redistribution – a relationship that does not exist in non-communist societies.

Inglehart and Welzel (2005) and Welzel (2013) found relatively low or mediocre levels of emancipative values (or: self-expression values) in post-communist societies. Emancipative values emphasize human self-expression, freedom of choice and equality of opportunities (Welzel, 2013, p.

47). They are closely linked to a stronger sense of agency, a stronger affinity to participate in elite-challenging political activism, a more critical assessment of democracy and a stronger desire to live in a 'true' democracy (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Welzel & Deutsch, 2012; Welzel & Moreno Alvarez, 2014). At the societal level, these values contribute to a better quality of political institutions. In a way, "democracy is the institutional reflection of the emancipative forces inherent in human development" (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005, p. 299).

What is the post-communist legacy in emancipative values? Before we turn to the empirical results, the next section briefly summarizes the data and the measurement of emancipative values.

Data and measures

Data for this study are taken from the World Values Survey (WVS) which is the largest collection of nationally representative surveys on human beliefs and values. Data have been collected in six waves in about 100 societies. The most recent wave finished in 2014 (a seventh wave commenced in 2017 and will finish in 2019) and includes 13 countries from post-communist Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union: Poland (fieldwork in 2012), Romania (2012), Russia (2011), Slovenia (2011), Ukraine (2011), Belarus (2011), Estonia (2011), Armenia (2011), Azerbaijan (2011), Georgia (2014), Kazakhstan (2011), Kyrgyzstan (2011), and Uzbekistan (2011).

The measure of emancipative values combines liberating and egalitarian orientations in four domains: choice, equality, voice and autonomy (Welzel, 2013, p. 67). Each domain includes three items that have been continuously included in the World Values Survey. Choice measures how much people value having freedom in lifestyle and reproductive choices, asking respondents how acceptable they think (a) divorce, (b) abortion and (c) homosexuality are. Equality refers to gender equality, asking respondents how much they agree with the statements that (a) "education is more important for a boy than a girl", (b) "when jobs are scarce, men should have priority over women to get a job", and (c) "men make better political leaders than women". People's voice includes three items that measure postmaterialist values (Inglehart, 1977), asking the respondents if they give first, second or no priority to (a) "protecting freedom of speech", (b) "giving people more say in important government decision", (c) "giving people more say about how things are done at their jobs and in their communities". Autonomy is measured by asking the respondents whether they consider (a) independence and (b) imagination as desirable qualities when raising a child but not (c) obedience. To combine the twenty items, they are first normalized between 0 and 1 (with fractions of 1 for intermediate positions) and then averaged into the four domain sub-indices. In a second step, the four sub-indices are averaged into the overall measure of emancipative values, providing a multi-point index between 0 and 1.¹

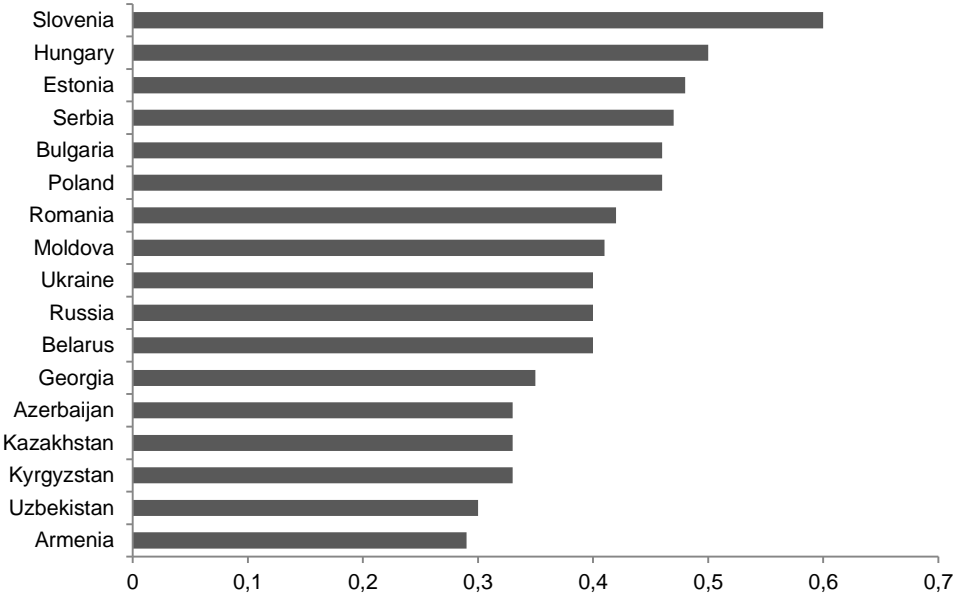
Empirical results

To examine the prevalence and role of pro-democratic values in post-communist societies, we take a first look at how widespread emancipative values are in countries from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Figure 1 documents the prevalence of emancipative values in 18 of these

¹ For the validity and reliability of the measurement of emancipative values, see chapter 2 in Welzel (2013) and the corresponding online appendix: www.cambridge.org/welzel.

societies for which data are available from the two most recent waves of the World Values Survey. The differences between the post-communist societies are pronounced: On a scale from 0 to 1, the most emancipative society is Slovenia (0.6), while Armenia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan show the least support for emancipative values (0.29 to 0.33). All Central Eastern European and non-Post-soviet societies make the top of the list, while the post-Soviet societies are ranked at the bottom. With the exception of Serbia, all post-communist countries that are members of the European Union can be found at the top of the country ranking.²

Figure 1: Emancipative values in post-communist Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Caucasus



Emancipative values are measured on a scale from 0 to 1. Data: World Values Survey (WVS), wave 5 (2005-09) and 6 (2010-14). Each country is included with the most recent available data. Data for Bulgaria (2006), Moldova (2006), Serbia (2006) and Hungary (2009) are from WVS wave 5, all others from WVS wave 6.

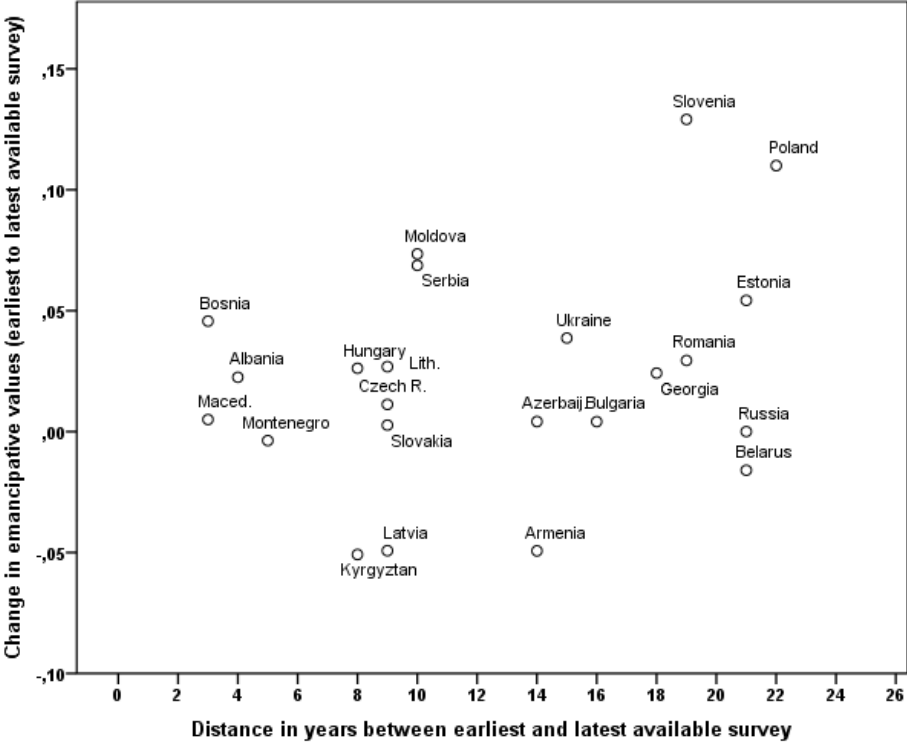
Have countries that score higher on emancipative values been subject to a value change, or did they simply start at a higher level of emancipative values after the breakdown of communism? To answer this question, we are turning to longitudinal data from multiple waves of the World Values Survey. Figure 2 shows the longitudinal change in emancipative values for each society that was surveyed at least twice, allowing us to follow change as a function of time from the earliest to the latest available survey. The change score can range between -1 and 1, a change score of 0 indicates that values did not change over time.

As Figure 2 shows, for most countries from Eastern Europe, emancipative values have increased over time. This is particularly true for those countries that ranked high in emancipative values in Figure 1. However, emancipative values do not increase only as a function of time: Belarus and Russia are among the post-communist societies for which there is the longest time series available (21 years), but they belong to a group of countries that has either been immune to value change (those societies that cluster around the zero score on the vertical axis) or have even witnessed a decrease of emancipative values. Among those are predominantly post-Soviet countries, in particular Kyrgyzstan,

² Note that the score for Serbia is not an outlier but consistent with results from previous WVS waves.

Armenia, Latvia and Belarus. Because all of these countries either never really democratized or slid back to authoritarianism, the absence of an emancipatory cultural shift might not come as a surprise and might even explain these countries' resistance to democracy.

Figure 2: Change in emancipative values in post-communist Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Caucasus



Data: World Values Survey (WVS). The surveys were conducted 1990-94 (wave 2), 1995-98 (wave 3), 1999-2004 (wave 4), 2005-09 (wave 5) and 2010-14 (wave 6). The figure only includes those societies where emancipative values have been surveyed at least twice and uses the longest time distance between the available surveys (distance in years between earliest and latest available survey).

Finally, we want to examine the post-communist legacy at the individual level. Table 1 shows a factor analysis, addressing the question how emancipative values shape people's understanding of democracy. The World Values Survey asks respondents which characteristics they consider as essential elements of democracy.

Among these characteristics, three items resemble a process-oriented understanding of democracy, while another three characteristics reflect an output-oriented understanding of democracy.³ This differentiation is not trivial as one's understanding of democracy creates expectations towards the democratic state and disappointment is inevitable if the state does not deliver.

³ Note that three other items (people obey, religious authorities interpret the law, the army takes over when government is incompetent) are omitted from the analysis as they measure an authoritarian (or anti-liberal) understanding of democracy.

Table 1: Factor Analysis. How Emancipative Values shape people’s understanding of democracy (WVS, 2010-14)

	Eastern European Countries				Post-Soviet Countries			
	Low emancipative values (lowest quartile)		High emancipative values (highest quartile)		Low emancipative values (lowest quartile)		High emancipative values (highest quartile)	
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 1	Factor 2
People choose their leaders in free elections.	.81	.10	.81	.07	.73		.84	.08
Civil rights protect people from state oppression.	.78	.16	.79	.17	.75		.79	.22
Women have the same rights as men.	.79	.14	.80	.10	.62		.77	.17
Governments tax the rich and subsidize the poor.	.10	.82	.07	.78	.59		.16	.80
People receive state aid for unemployment.	.58	.45	.36	.53	.74		.56	.52
The state makes people’s incomes equal.	.20	.80	.04	.81	.69		.13	.80
Eigenvalue	2.280	1.568	2.059	1.581	2.857		2.264	1.632
N	917		1.041		3.443		3.520	

Varimax rotation.

Source: WVS (2010-2014). “Many things may be desirable, but not all of them are essential characteristics of democracy. Please tell me for each of the following things how essential you think it is as a characteristic of democracy. Use this scale where 1 means “not at all an essential characteristic of democracy” and 10 means it definitely is “an essential characteristic of democracy”.”

Factor analyses were conducted separately for the lowest quartile (lowest 25 percent) and the highest quartile (highest 25 percent) of emancipative values for each country group. Countries included in analysis: Poland, Romania and Slovenia (Eastern European Countries); Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Ukraine and Uzbekistan (Post-Soviet Countries). All countries weighted equally.

To examine the impact of emancipative values on people's understanding of democracy, separate factor analyses have been conducted for two groups in Eastern European and Post-Soviet countries: those with low and those with high emancipative values (lowest vs. highest quartile of the distribution within the country group). Results show that emancipative values qualify people's understanding of democracy: With higher emancipative values, people keep the two notions of democracy more distinct, they are better able to separate procedural from output-oriented characteristic. This is especially the case for Post-Soviet countries, which show in general lower levels of emancipative values: Here we see a shift from a single-factor structure (for people with low emancipative values, all characteristics belong together) to a two-factor structure (for people with high emancipative values).

Conclusion

This paper gave a brief overview about differences in emancipative values in post-communist societies and showed that emancipative values modify people's understanding of democracy. The paper can be expanded into several directions. For one, we should look more systematically at variations within the post-communist world, for instance determined by people's exposure to particular forms of communism. Two, the impact of a communist legacy needs to be checked against other controls. Three, and related to the second point, research on post-communism has typically focused on Eastern Europe as a single geographic region, sometimes (as in this case) expanded to countries of the Caucasus or Central Asia – while ignoring that post-communist transitions also took place in other parts of the world, for instance in Asia (e.g. Vietnam) and Africa (e.g. Tanzania, Ethiopia). This is surprising because communism and post-communism should first and foremost be analytical, not geographical, categories. An expanded version of this paper could examine the prevalence of pro-democratic values in the post-communist world at large. By doing so, it would follow a suggestion in the political science literature of “stretching” the definition of post-communism (Chen & Sil, 2007) to allow for a more systematic analysis of comparable cases.

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