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Socialization for Participation? Trust, Membership, and Democratization in East-Central Europe

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Citizens' involvement in politics is essential for the credibility of institutions, as well as for the citizens' articulation of their demands and the holding of their representatives to account. As such, it is of primary importance in new post-Communist democracies. The weakness of political society and low levels of citizens' involvement in politics in East-Central Europe are usually linked to low levels of social capital (weak civil society and low levels of interpersonal trust) and the legacy of cooperation with Communism. Following the approach stressing the importance of participation in group networks as a school of democracy, this study tests the impact of interpersonal trust, membership in voluntary associations, and past Communist party membership on levels of political involvement in ten post-Communist countries in the mid-1990. This approach is complemented by the analysis of the impact of the change of political and economic structures on individual-level behavior.

Citizens' involvement in politics has been a central focus in research on political systems, liberal democracies in particular, since the 1960s (Almond and Verba 1963; Parry, Moyser, and Day 1992). It is the core element of all definitions of democracy (Dahl 1989). Thus the decline of voting turnout, and disengagement in political groups is interpreted as the main malady of a modern, democratic state: "where few take part in decisions there is little democracy" (Verba and Nie 1972: 1). Political engagement is essential for institutions' credibility, but also for citizens' ability to articulate their demands and hold their representatives to account: "individual and otherwise quiet voices multiply and are amplified" (Putnam 2000: 338). Therefore, many stress that in new democracies, such as these of East-Central Europe (ECE), development of a participatory, engaged approach to politics among ordinary citizens is as important a goal as GDP growth or reform of bureaucracy, as without it democracy cannot consolidate (Barnes and Simon 1998; Krishna 2002; Paxton 2002).¹

Active participation in public affairs is the main feature of the so-called civic community. Although Putnam (1993b: 88), quoting de Tocqueville (1969), stresses that "not all political activity deserves the label "virtuous" or contributes

to the commonweal," activities such as voting, discussing politics, or membership in various groups and parties deserve to be called 'civic' insofar as they are oriented towards shared benefits rather than self-interest. The decline of voting turnout and interest in and discussion of politics are considered to be the main indicators (next to membership in voluntary associations) of the collapse of civic community, as they represent the general decline of interest in and consideration for the common good and the ideals of democratic government (Putnam 2000).

As 1993-94, the period under consideration in our data analysis, was an early stage of transformation, the opportunity to influence political outcomes was a relative novelty for most citizens of ECE countries. Before 1989 only protest forms of participation directed against the state (strikes, protests, demonstrations) were available for expressing citizens' opinions, and even these were significantly limited under most of the ECE regimes. Many scholars dealing with ECE transformation feared the prevalence of apathy, lack of interest and low participation in politics among citizens of post-Communist countries (Miller 1992). Others were concerned that the patterns of political engagement created under Communism, such as protests and street demonstrations, may destabilize the fragile, new democracies (Foley and Edwards 1996). It seems that while the new democracies did face strong waves of unrests and social protests in the early phase of democratization (Ekiert and Kubik 1999; Inglehart 1990), in the long term the former concern—apathy and lack of interest—was much more relevant. The democratic movements ceased to play a leading role in politics. As Thomassen and van Deth (1998: 140) reported, "the prospects of the new regimes might be less sunny than people wanted to believe during the heydays of the glorious revolution."

While the first free elections in some of the post-Communist countries saw turnout as high as 80-90 percent and the number of political parties increasing dramatically,

¹ The developments of the presidential election in Serbia in December 2002, where an attempt to elect a president failed three times due to a very low turnout, are perhaps the best illustration of the salience of political participation for the development of democracy in the post-Communist states.

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researchers soon identified a “post-honeymoon effect”: electoral turnout declined and “party membership and other forms of institutionalized participation in the electoral process have also atrophied as democratic institutions have developed” (Dalton 2000a: 930; Inglehart and Catterberg 2002). This weakness of political society and low levels of citizens’ involvement in politics are often blamed on weak civil society and low levels of interpersonal trust, as well as the Communist experience of politics (Howard 2002; Inglehart and Catterberg 2002; Rychard 1998).

This article presents an important contribution to the existing debate. Firstly, it tests the relevance of civil society and interpersonal trust (that form a recently popular concept of social capital) for explaining political involvement in a context other than that of established Western democracies (see also Brown and Uslaner 2002; Dekker, Koopmans, and van den Broek 1997). By doing so, it fills a gap in the empirical research on the consequences of civil society as a school of democracy in the post-Communist states of ECE. Secondly, it complements the approach linking socialization for participation exclusively with democratic political culture by putting forward and testing hypotheses specific to the context of new post-Communist democracies: it looks at the influence of membership in a non-democratic political group, such as the Communist party, on involvement in democratic politics. Finally, it takes into account the context of political transformation and its impact on the development of participatory political behavior among the populations of post-Communist states.

WHY DO PEOPLE PARTICIPATE IN POLITICS?

A vast amount of literature exists to investigate the determinants of political participation. The most popular interpretations refer to individual’s resources and to socialization for participation by means of involvement in civic groups and initiatives. An additional explanation, applicable to new democracies, is that of a change of structural factors, that is, the transformation of political institutions and procedures influencing citizens’ attitudes and behavior. The first explanation assumes that those who have more resources, such as knowledge, money or time, are more likely to participate in politics (Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995). It has been tested in the context of post-Communist democracies, pointing to the lack of visible differences between them and established democracies (Barnes and Simon 1998). Therefore, it will not be of primary interest to us. The remaining two, socialization for participation and structural change, and their implications for research into political involvement in the new ECE democracies will be discussed below.

Civil Society and Interpersonal Trust: Social Capital

The political changes in ECE in the end of the 1980s revived academic and public discussion about the importance of civil society for the functioning of democracy. Civil

society has been defined in numerous ways, but the core of its definition is constituted by voluntary associations. The approach linking civil society with political participation (among other dimensions of democracy) points to the importance of education (Tocqueville 1969) or socialization for citizenship (Edwards and Foley 2001): “organizations teach citizens the civic virtues of trust, moderation, compromise, and reciprocity and the skill of democratic discussion and organization” (Newton 2001: 229). While the idea of the significance of associational membership for political involvement is not a new one, the most recent form of this argument has been articulated by Robert Putnam (1995: 73), for whom associational membership is closely linked with social trust: “social trust and civic engagement are strongly correlated; the greater the density of associational membership in a society, the more trusting its citizens. Trust and engagement are two facets of the same underlying factor—social capital.” Trust and membership are believed to be interrelated to such an extent that they are sometimes used individually as sufficient indicators of social capital.

The “lack of interpersonal trust that is essential to cooperative public activity” (DiFrancesco and Gitelman 1984: 610) has been identified as the main feature of Soviet politics. Fifty years of social (i.e., directed towards fellow citizens) and political (i.e., directed towards the state institutions) distrust fostered by Communist regimes is believed to have made post-Communist countries particularly prone to political instability, especially when faced with economic hardships (Putnam 1993a). At the same time, under the Communist regime independent voluntary organizations were outlawed. Therefore, overcoming the legacy of distrust and creating vibrant civil society seems as equally important an objective as increasing GDP or reforming bureaucracy, as these two elements are necessary to create a politically involved citizenry. Following social capital theory, we would therefore claim that without relatively high levels of social capital, consolidation of the ECE democracies is presented with the possibly insurmountable obstacles.

However, while the concept of social capital is certainly an interesting and potentially important one, it reveals certain caveats. First, when tested at the individual level, the relationship between trust and membership is ambiguous. Brehm and Rahn (1997) present evidence for the mutually interdependent relationship between social trust and membership, yet stress that the causation flows mainly from joining to trusting. Yet, there are also examples of either very weak or non-existent links between these two phenomena. In particular, Stolle (1998: 521), using comparative research from three established Western democracies, has shown a powerful self-selection effect: “people who join associations are significantly more trusting than people who do not join” (see also Stolle 2001; Uslaner 1999). She also demonstrates that the duration of membership has no impact on the levels of trust. Thus there is no agreement as to the flow of causality between the two components of social capital. In fact,

there is no agreement to whether they are indeed related to each other.²

Secondly, there exists strong evidence that not all organizations are alike, and thus their link with social trust—and political involvement—may differ as well (Eastis 2001; Stolle 2001; Stolle and Rochon 2001). Differences among organizations' objectives, internal structure, and membership rules are likely to be linked to a variety of attitudes, opinions, interests, and skills: "some organizations broaden social networks, participants in others develop strong values that may or may not be supportive of democratic institutions, still other organizations train individuals in civic skills, and of course, some associations do all or some combination of these" (Eastis 2001: 168). In Western Europe membership in political/societal organizations is connected with political involvement, while membership in welfare organizations has a negative impact on involvement (Stolle and Rochon 2001; van Deth 2000). Simply put, "some associations are more virtuous than others" (Stolle 2001: 234). We expect that differences of this sort exist in new democracies as well.

Thirdly, the model of social capital propagated by Putnam (1993a, 2000) implies that only trust that is related to interpersonal relations within voluntary associations will be functional for the "civicness" of a given community. However, in the context of post-Communist countries, social trust is unlikely to be linked strongly to voluntary associations, as in the mid-1990s they were a novelty in East-Central Europe. Moreover, although voluntary associations could not operate under the Communist regime, some forms of interpersonal trust must have existed in Communist states to assist citizens in situations of economic hardships and in the lack of accountability of political institutions (Letki and Evans n.d.; Rose 2001; Rose-Ackerman 2001). Existing research does suggest that while citizens of post-Communist countries use networks and interpersonal trust in everyday life, these resources are politically largely irrelevant (Gibson 2001).

These three caveats suggest that not only should we distinguish between various types of associations, but we should also keep trust and organizational membership separate, instead of creating a combined measure of some sort.³ Moreover, we should try to account for the difference between trust that is both related and unrelated to membership in voluntary associations. Only the former would fully represent Putnam's concept of social capital. Finally, when investigating the importance of associational activism on political involvement we should take into account the general weakness of civil society in post-Communist Europe

(Howard 2002). Rueschemeyer et al. (1998: 274-75) link this weakness and the low political relevance of new organizations to the fact that "new initiatives cannot count as much on the benefits of successful models, of supportive social norms, and of effective help from friendly associations and institutions." Thus, we should expect that their impact will be stronger where the political and economic situation has stabilized and where learning about the success of collective action and collective interest representation has occurred.⁴

Legacy of the Past or School of Participation? Communist Party Membership

The unique feature of the Communist system, in comparison with other authoritarian regimes, was the mass participation of ordinary citizens, especially in the form of Communist party membership (Linz and Stepan 1996). Values learned under the Communist system and so-called covert participation (DiFrancesco and Gitelman 1984) are not expected to be beneficial for participation nor support for a democracy: Communist party membership has been recognized as one of the components of a compliant activism in Communist politics, next to, for example, membership in people's militia (Bahry and Silver 1990). However, existing research points to the lack of any significant influence of Communist party membership on democratic values (Gibson, Duch, and Tedin 1992). Moreover, we might hypothesize that skills and civic resources learned under a non-democratic political system can well be used in a democracy: party membership is a type of conventional activism that socializes citizens to be interested and participate in politics. Bahry and Silver confirm this intuition with the Soviet Interview Project. They have found that "people who were more interested in politics, felt more influential . . . were more likely to be party activists" (1990: 838). Despite the fact that the Communist party was a non-democratic organization supporting a non-democratic political system, people who participated in it "fit the model of a conventional activist" in an established Western democracy (Bahry and Silver 1990: 840).⁵

Investigating the link between past involvement in a non-democratic political organization and participation in a new democracy not only helps us understand the complex nature of the Communist legacy. It also complements research into the impact of various aspects of social capital on political involvement. Does past Communist party membership

² As Jackman and Miller (1998: 58) point out: "superficially the argument might appear plausible: Societies with low levels of trust would have fewer groups than those with high levels of trust. But this fails to consider the incentives to which individuals may respond."

³ According to Newton (2001: 227), "[T]he chicken-and-egg problem is difficult enough without confusing possible causes and possible effects in the same definition."

⁴ While we agree that citizens in the new democracies may lack resources and skills to participate in the voluntary associations at the level known from the established Western democracies, we believe that the lack of faith in the success of collective action is not to be blamed: after all, it was the collective action of social and independence movements that resulted in the collapse of Communism in East-Central Europe.

⁵ However, as authors acknowledged, that survey was not thought to be representative of the Soviet population, nor did it represent behavior in the Communist ECE countries in general. Therefore, it is important to reanalyze their findings using representative samples of former Communist states.

hinder or complement the positive impact of civil society? On one hand, since party members were one of the main pillars of the Communist systems, we may expect them to be relatively reluctant to engage in the political process under a democratic system. On the other hand, membership in a Communist party could be recognized as a type of socialization for participation analogous to that provided by voluntary associations. Thus, the question we ask is: Is the fact that large numbers of ECE publics were involved in the previous regime hampering the development of political participation suitable for democratic polities? We can state, like Gibson, Duch and Tedin (1992: 357), that “our expectations . . . are ambiguous, if not contradictory.”

Political Learning: Democratization

The cultural approach assumes that political changes are dependent upon cultural factors (Almond and Verba 1963; Inglehart 1990, 1997). Civic, participatory culture is crucial for the consolidation of democracies, thus “it is often asserted that democratization will continue to face severe handicaps...in East Europe and Russia, given the strong legacy of authoritarianism in the recent past” (Jackman and Miller 1996: 633). However, an alternative explanation of the relationship between participatory culture and democracy has been put forward and tested empirically (Muller and Seligson 1994; Schmitter and Karl 1991, see also Jackman and Miller 1996). In this interpretation, the introduction and development of a democratic system leads to the development of civic attitudes and behavior.

Post-Communist states are a good example of democratic institutional structure created prior to the development of a democratic political culture. Despite the common perception of ECE “refolutions”⁶ as resulting directly from popular movements, the instillation of democracy in post-Communist countries happened largely as a result of elite bargaining, and its further development was strongly influenced by external actors, such as the EU or NATO (Letki 2002; Welsh 1994). The introduction of democracy created space for civic and political activism unknown under Communism. The political learning approach assumes that people’s attitudes and strategies can be modified under the influence of political events (Bermeo 1992). While this approach is usually applied to political elites, the process of democratization in ECE created the conditions for the political learning of masses of citizens: it transformed the forming of political preferences and strategies into a meaningful and practical process: “It is an interesting question how human attitudes, behavior patterns, values, and emotions interact with institutional transformation. The assumption is that after the first years of constitutional democracy and market economy, when the institutions were introduced by the elites, the society started to become acquainted with the new reality

through the learning process of use and misuse, evaluation and selection of new institutions” (Miszlivetz and Jensen 1998: 83).

Therefore, the question we may ask is: To what extent did the introduction of democratic institutions and procedures have a positive influence on citizens adopting strategies and behaviors, such as political involvement, suitable for a democratic system? Moreover, as explained above, the level of democratization is hypothesized to impact not only a dependent variable (political involvement), but also independent variables. High levels of democracy should strengthen social activism and reinforce its effect on political involvement.

Reprise

The sections above have outlined the general theoretical background of the research into political involvement in the new democracies of East-Central Europe. The main focus of this paper is on the factors that constitute broadly defined socialization for participation. Thus, we will be looking into the mechanisms influencing the formation of participatory political culture. Taking into account the approaches summarized above, the following main hypotheses may be put forward for testing. Firstly, there are the three main hypotheses related to the social capital theory: (1) membership in voluntary associations is an important school of democracy and as such—an important predictor of political involvement, yet types of groups vary in terms of their effect; (2) more trusting individuals are also more politically involved; (3) the combination of trust and membership makes individuals even more politically active. Secondly, there is a hypothesis related to the Communist legacy. Based on earlier research by other authors and our own theoretical considerations we pose that membership in the Communist party may potentially have been the school of participation, socializing its members into participatory culture. Thus, (4) former Communist party members will be more politically involved than the rest of the population. Finally, the process of democratization provides the context for the process of political learning, thus (5) the introduction and growth of democracy will have a positive impact on the levels of political involvement among the ECE populations.

Below the data and indicators used to test these hypotheses are introduced. Later, we briefly analyze levels of political involvement across ECE and present the multivariate analysis. Finally, we discuss the results and their implications.

DATA AND INDICATORS

The individual-level data used in this project are taken from a survey conducted in the ECE countries in the midst of transformation, as a part of the Economic and Social Research Council’s East-West Program, Phase 2: Grant no. Y 309 25 3025, “Emerging Forms of Political Representation and Participation in Eastern Europe,” Nuffield College,

⁶ The term ‘refolution’ was coined by Garton Ash to describe reform introduced from above in response to pressures for revolution from below (Garton Ash 1990).

Oxford. This study uses data from ten countries included in the database: Belarus, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovak Republic, and Ukraine. Surveys were carried out in the summer of 1993, with the exception of Czech and Slovak Republics and Hungary, where it took place in the spring of 1994. For details concerning sampling methods and response rate see Appendix B.⁷ Country-level variables were created on the basis of Polity IV Project "Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800-2002"⁸ and "World Development Indicators 2001" report.⁹

Dependent Variable: Political Involvement

We have three measures of political involvement based on self-reported participation: discussing politics, partisanship, and political party membership. *Political discussion* does not involve high political competence. In fact, talking about politics does not necessarily require more than passive interest in the subject. *Support for a political party* is a prerequisite of more demanding forms of participation, such as *party membership*.¹⁰ It also reinforces basic types of political behavior such as voting and is, at least implicitly, correlated with the discussion of politics. Therefore, political discussion and party membership are frequently present in research on political participation (Norris 2002; Parry, Moyser, and Day 1992; Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995),¹¹ and the shifts of political identification has been the focus of the attention of scholars dealing with political dealignment in Western democracies (Dalton 2000b; Evans and Norris, eds., 1999). Political discussion, party id, and membership belong to so-called conventional participation and, unfortunately, we do not have any measures of non-conventional activities, such as protests.¹²

While these three activities do not exhaust the possible repertoire of political behavior, the specific context of our study—early stage of transition from authoritarian to democratic systems—limits the number of indicators that can be used. For example, while voting is probably the most popu-

≡ TABLE 1
POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT IN ECE, 1993-94

Activity	Yes	Factor Loading
Discussion about Politics	60.1%	0.558
Partisanship	27.0%	0.759
Party Membership	3.1%	0.691
Eigenvalue		1.365
% of Variance Explained		45.5

lar indicator of political involvement,¹³ only seven out of ten countries included in our study had democratic parliamentary elections prior to the survey. Furthermore, contacting a public official, another dimension of participation popular in research focused on established democracies, would not be a practical indicator in the case of post-Communist states. Seeking personal contact with a public official would be likely to mirror particularistic or clientelist networks strongly present in the Communist as well as post-Communist context (Hayoz and Sergeyev 2003; Rose 2000).¹⁴

Therefore, our three indicators capture important dimensions of political involvement, from inexpensive and "equal" types, such as political talk, to activities involving more resources, such as partisanship or party membership. All are relevant for the quality of a democratic system, as they are correlated with mechanisms of political representation. They also provide a reliable and practical measure of political involvement enabling comparisons between post-Communist and established democracies.

So, are citizens of new post-Communist democracies politically disinterested and disengaged, as the literature suggests? Firstly, 60.1 percent of respondents talk with friends about politics (in Poland and Romania this figure is 42 percent, while in Belarus it is 71.6 percent). To compare, in six established democracies in the mid 1990s 70 percent engaged in political discussion on average, but this ranged from 57 percent in Spain to 87 percent in Norway.¹⁵ Secondly, the overall level of respondents with party identification in our sample is 27 percent, but ranges from 10.9 percent in Belarus to 45.8 percent in Bulgaria. This seems to be significantly lower than figures for the established Western democracies: in the mid-1990s, the proportion of respondents *without* party identification in a pooled sample of nine Western European nations was 60 percent (Dalton 2000b: 27), while in our ten countries it is 73 percent. Finally,

⁷ Information used in the Appendix B was prepared by Geoffrey Evans. See also G. Evans and S. Whitefield, nd.

⁸ Principal Investigators: Monty G. Marshall and Keith Jagers, Project Director: Monty G. Marshall, Founding Director: Ted Robert Gurr. See <http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/polity/>.

⁹ See <http://www.worldbank.org/data/>.

¹⁰ For certainty, we tested this intuitive association between membership in and support for a political party and found out that indeed, in all countries members were significantly stronger supporters than non-members.

¹¹ In some studies respondents are asked whether they have tried to convince someone to vote the same way they are planning to vote. We consider this as equivalent to the question about general discussion about politics.

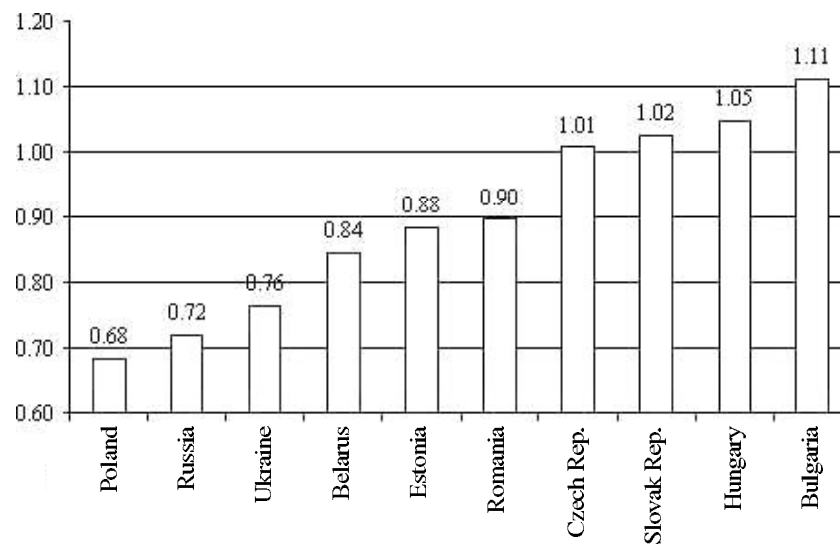
¹² Analysis of the link between social capital and non-conventional participation would be a valuable and relevant complement of the investigation of the determinants of political engagement in the context of East-Central Europe, as in mid-1990s protest activities were there extremely popular.

¹³ Voting often happens to be the only available indicator of participation. It is also considered to be the least demanding, thus the 'least unequal' form of participation (Lijphart 1997).

¹⁴ The usual distinction between a private and community related matter as a subject of a contact with an official would not be useful either: it has been a common practice in East-Central Europe to use particularistic networks in both cases.

¹⁵ Source: World Values Survey, countries: Britain, West Germany, Spain, USA, Norway, Sweden, Finland. See also Norris 2002: 197.

FIGURE 1
LEVELS OF POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT IN ECE, 1993-94



although the proportion of respondents who say that they are members of a political party is only 3.1 percent (and ranges from 0.8 percent in Estonia to 7.9 percent in Bulgaria), this number does not seem drastically different from levels of party membership in some established democracies. While in Austria and Japan self-reported party membership in 1990s was as high as, respectively, 15 percent and 18 percent, at the same time figures for the US or UK were as low as 3-4 percent (Scarrow 2000: 91).¹⁶ These comparisons show that (1) ECE states, similarly to established democracies, are highly differentiated in terms of their levels of political involvement; and (2) while in some respects (e.g., partisanship) new post-Communist democracies indeed score on average lower than established democracies, in others—such as political discussion or party membership—they are not radically different. Therefore, it seems that a number of ECE states are more similar to established democracies than to the remaining post-Communist democracies.

The three indicators of political activism, when subjected to principal component analysis, formed one dimension explaining 45.5 percent of variance. Therefore, they were used to create an additive index ranging from 0 to 3, where respondents reporting participation in all three acts were assigned 3. Figure 1 presents average scores on the index of political participation in the ten investigated countries.

¹⁶ Although we do not have information about voting participation, we can compare the turnout in ECE quoted by other authors with the figures in established democracies in the same period. According to Kostadinova (2003), voting turnout in parliamentary elections in five ECE countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Poland, Romania and Albania) between 1990 and 2000 ranged from 43.2 percent to 96.79 percent, with a mean of 72.99 percent. In the same time, the turnout in 19 established democracies ranged from 36.9 percent to 86.7 percent, with a mean of 70.1 percent (Wattenberg 2000). While both groups of countries have witnessed a decline in voter turnout during this time, the overall rates are extremely similar.

The total mean for the pooled sample is 0.90, equal to Romania's score. With the exception of two outliers, Poland and Bulgaria, the countries seem to cluster in a way predictable on the basis of cultural and historical characteristics, as well as advancement in political and economic transition. The Czech and Slovak Republics and Hungary form a cluster, with scores significantly higher than the average, followed by Romania and Estonia, and a cluster of Belarus, Ukraine and Russia.¹⁷

Independent Variables

Social Trust. Trust constitutes an attitudinal component of social capital. Our measure of social trust consists of four items combined to form an additive Likert-type scale. It therefore presents a significant improvement over measures used by other authors—usually a single binary item “Most people can be trusted” (Inglehart 1997; Putnam 1993a). Our empirical operationalization of social trust is based on four items that express individuals' beliefs about trust and norms of reciprocity, that (because they imply trust, faith in cooperation, and reflect a general vision of the norms and rules of social interactions) collectively constitute a relatively broad and comprehensive measure of interpersonal trust:

- (1) Most people can be trusted.
- (2) If someone is in serious trouble, no one else cares about it.
- (3) If you are not always on your guard other people will take advantage of you.
- (4) A person cooperates with other people only when he or she sees it is in his or her own interest.

¹⁷ Estonia's low position results from the political alienation and extremely low levels of activism among the Russian minority population (see Evans and Lipsmeyer 2001).

All of these items have an 'agree-disagree' format with five-point response scales. For item (1) "strongly disagree is coded 1 and "strongly agree" 5, while for (2), (3), and (4) the coding is reversed. "Don't know" responses are recoded to the mid-point. Principal component analysis detected one dimension explaining 46.6 percent of variance. The reliability test for the four items indicated that Cronbach's alpha is 0.61 (for the details, see Appendix A, Table 2).¹⁸

Membership. Engagement in voluntary associations constitutes the second, behavioral, component of social capital. Non-political engagement of this sort has proved to be relevant to political pluralism, civic competence, and a sense of civic efficacy: "membership in some associations, even if the individual does not consider the membership politically relevant and even if it does not involve his active participation, does lead to a more competent citizenry" (Almond and Verba 1963: 322; see also Parry, Moyser, and Day 1992; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). The list of associations used in this research includes business associations, professional associations, farmers' associations, church groups, local/community groups, sports or social clubs, ethnic organizations, and trade unions factory committees. Since these organizations present a very heterogeneous group, and we are aware of the fact that different types of organizations relate in a different way to political involvement (Stolle and Rochon 2001; van Deth 2000), instead of grouping associations according to some presumed criteria, we subjected them to the principal component analysis.

The result is three distinct dimensions: community organizations (farmer association, church group, local group, and ethnic organization), professional/lifestyle organizations (professional and business associations and sports club), and labor organizations (trade unions and factory committees). In total the three dimensions explain 39.8 percent of variance (for the details, see Appendix A, Table 3). While the first group, community organizations, seems to capture what is usually called "civil society," only 9.1 percent of the respondents belong to at least one organization in this group. The second one, professional/lifestyle organizations, seem to be comprised of professionals and businessmen who go to sports clubs (12 percent of the sample). Thus, it reflects respondents' social position and lifestyle. Finally, labor groups include workforce related organizations, such as trade unions and factory committees. This is definitely the largest group, as 37.1 percent of all respondents reported membership in one of them.

When investigating the impact participation in these types of groups has on political involvement, we will expect some variation. We will also investigate whether membership in them is linked to higher levels of trust, and whether

this effect has, in turn, an impact on individuals' involvement in politics.

Communist Party Membership. Information about Communist party membership is based on self-reported membership. Respondents who stated that in the past they were members of a Communist party registered at 17.3 percent. This number is higher than membership in either community or professional/lifestyle groups, yet lower than the levels of participation in labor organizations. As stated above, our expectations about the impact of involvement in a Communist party on political engagement in new democratic states are ambiguous. On the one hand, we may expect experience of membership in a non-democratic organization supporting an oppressive authoritarian regime to be a serious impediment to engagement in democratic politics. On the other hand, skills learned through membership in this group may turn out to be relevant for political engagement, in the way skills are learned in many other types of groups. If the latter is the case, high levels of past participation in the Communist party is not as bad news for emerging democracies of ECE as many authors have suggested.

Control Variables: Resources. Background characteristics are not of a major interest here: they are present in the analysis as controls more than representing the operationalization of an alternative explanation of political participation. We look at the effect of basic socioeconomic characteristics, such as education and income,¹⁹ as they represent the most basic resources: skills and money (Parry, Moyser, and Day 1992; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). We also look at gender and age, since they have been found to be important predictors of political activism (Schlozman et al. 1995). Existing research suggests, ironically, that "women's participation declined after the fall of the past regimes" (Rueschemeyer, Rueschemeyer, and Wittrock 1998: 277). We also include church service attendance. Churches and religious organizations provided space for civil society under the Communist regime (Barnes and Simon 1998), thus Church involvement may have some impact on political involvement in new democracies.

Country-Level Variables: Democracy and Economic Development. While individual-level factors are important predictors of system-related behavior such as political involvement, characteristics of the system itself provide context conditioning behavior as well. We hypothesized above concerning the influence the democratization process has on political involvement: introduction of democratic institutions

¹⁸ The reliability statistic is weight down by the first item, due to its wording being opposite to the remaining items. Nevertheless, we used all four items to balance the scale and avoid an acquiescence bias. The item-scale correlations range from 0.601 for item (1) to 0.721 for item (2), all significant at $p < 0.001$.

¹⁹ This is a household monthly income. Coding of income was different in particular countries; in most of them income was categorized, but the number of categories and their scope differed. To make the data on income comparable, we were forced to recode it into three broad categories: below average, average and above average. The lower and upper borders of the 'average' category were defined as mean - 0.5*SD and mean + 0.5*SD respectively.

≡ TABLE 2

REGRESSIONS OF POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT ON TRUST, ASSOCIATIONS, COMMUNIST PARTY MEMBERSHIP, SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUND,
AND DEMOCRACY, N1 = 13155, N2 = 10
(unstandardized coefficients, standard errors in parentheses)

Predictors:	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4	2.5
Constant	0.709*** (0.058)	0.104 (0.072)	0.020 (0.133)	-0.555** (0.195)	-0.567*** (0.162)
Individual Level:					
Sex (woman)	-0.220*** (0.013)	-0.184*** (0.013)	-0.184*** (0.013)	-0.184*** (0.013)	-0.184*** (0.013)
Age					
18-29					
30-44	0.138*** (0.018)	0.097*** (0.018)	0.096*** (0.018)	0.097*** (0.018)	0.097*** (0.018)
45-59	0.204*** (0.019)	0.144*** (0.019)	0.144*** (0.019)	0.144*** (0.019)	0.144*** (0.019)
60+	0.226*** (0.022)	0.218*** (0.022)	0.218*** (0.022)	0.218*** (0.022)	0.218*** (0.022)
Education					
1					
2	0.188*** (0.022)	0.162*** (0.021)	0.162*** (0.021)	0.162*** (0.021)	0.161*** (0.021)
3	0.267*** (0.023)	0.229*** (0.023)	0.229*** (0.023)	0.228*** (0.023)	0.227*** (0.023)
4	0.366*** (0.024)	0.315*** (0.023)	0.316*** (0.023)	0.316*** (0.023)	0.315*** (0.023)
5	0.475*** (0.024)	0.378*** (0.024)	0.378*** (0.024)	0.378*** (0.024)	0.378*** (0.024)
Income					
Below Average					
Average	0.110*** (0.016)	0.094*** (0.016)	0.094*** (0.016)	0.094*** (0.016)	0.094*** (0.016)
Above Average	0.236*** (0.021)	0.208*** (0.021)	0.207*** (0.021)	0.208*** (0.021)	0.207*** (0.021)
Church Service Attendance	0.004 (0.004)	0.001 (0.004)	0.001 (0.004)	0.001 (0.004)	0.001 (0.004)
Trust		0.031*** (0.008)	-0.019 (0.046)	0.031*** (0.008)	0.031*** (0.008)
Associations					
Community Associations		0.247*** (0.023)	0.142* (0.069)	0.247*** (0.023)	0.247*** (0.023)
Professional/Lifestyle Associations		0.151*** (0.020)	0.148* (0.064)	0.150*** (0.020)	0.150*** (0.020)
Labor Associations		0.112*** (0.015)	0.105* (0.043)	0.111*** (0.015)	0.113*** (0.015)
Communist Party Membership		0.224*** (0.018)	0.224*** (0.018)	0.224*** (0.018)	0.224*** (0.018)
Community & Trust Interaction			0.042 (0.026)		
Professional/Lifestyle & Trust Interaction			0.001 (0.023)		

(continued on next page)

TABLE 2 (continued)

Predictors:	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4	2.5
Labor & Trust Interaction			0.003 (0.016)		
Country Level:					
Democracy (Polity Score)				0.060* (0.024)	0.044* (0.021)
Economic Development (Average % GDP Growth)				0.003 (0.006)	0.006 (0.005)
Parliamentary Elections					0.174* (0.079)
Variance:					
Country Level Variance	0.023* (0.011)	0.024* (0.011)	0.024* (0.011)	0.015* (0.007)	0.010* (0.004)
Individual Level Variance	0.532*** (0.007)	0.515*** (0.006)	0.515*** (0.006)	0.515*** (0.006)	0.515*** (0.006)
-2*loglikelihood	28885.840	28463.200	28460.640	28458.420	28454.460

***p < 0.001 **p < 0.01 *p < 0.05

and procedures created the space for political activism unknown under the Communist regime. Thus, the citizens of new ECE democracies observed the emergence of a heterogeneity of political interests and their representation, but they were also free to abstain. In order to measure each country's level of democracy we refer to the measure from Polity IV Project "Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800-2002." We used the so-called combined polity score, which ranks political regimes on a scale from -10 (high autocracy) to 10 (high democracy). All countries included in the present study score 5 (Romania) or higher: Estonia, Russia and Ukraine score 6, Belarus and Slovak Republic 7, Bulgaria and Poland 8, and Hungary and the Czech Republic 10.

However, while Polity focuses on characteristics of a political regime such as competitiveness and openness of executive recruitment and constraint on the chief executive, or competitiveness of political participation, we are also interested in the process of political learning. Thus, we include an additional measure: a dummy variable separating countries that had experienced free democratic parliamentary elections prior to the survey from those who had not: the latter group is constituted by Belarus, Russia and Ukraine. In addition, we also control for the effect of economic development. Economic growth is measured by means of the average yearly change in the Gross Domestic Product (in percentage) between the first year of a given country as a democracy and the year prior to the survey.

EXPLAINING POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT: MULTILEVEL ANALYSIS

Now, we proceed with an analysis that should allow us to estimate the relevance of the components of social capital

and the impact of democratization on political involvement in ECE. We use a hierarchical model that allows us to simultaneously estimate the impact of individual and country level characteristics (Bryk and Raudenbush 1993). For this purpose we use MLWin, which is designed to fit multilevel models (or "random coefficient models") to data with hierarchical structure. Neglecting this hierarchical structure would lead to an underestimation of the standard errors of the coefficients, which might in turn lead to the inference that effects are significant when they are not (Woodhouse et al. 1996). Here we use a hierarchical model in which the respondents are nested within the ten countries in our sample.

The main difference between this type of model and the standard one-level model controlling for country effect by means of country dummy variables, is that the multilevel model estimates the significance of the higher level as a random effect rather than as a fixed effect. The model can be summarized by the following equation:

$$y_{ij} = \beta_{0ij}x_0 + \beta_1x_{1ij} \dots + \beta_mx_{mij} + \beta_nx_{nj}$$

Subscript ij means that a given variable varies between respondents and countries while subscript j means that a variable varies only between countries and is constant for all respondents within a given country. β_{0ij} is an intercept explained by the formula

$$\beta_{0ij} = \beta_0 + u_{0j} + e_{0ij},$$

where u_{0j} is a level 2 residual, the same for all respondents in a given country, while e_{0ij} is a level 1 residual, varying between persons and countries. u_{0j} and e_{0ij} are assumed to be uncorrelated.

We can therefore estimate the proportion of variance contributed by the country and individual-level differences.

Moreover, we are able to add interaction terms between individual and aggregate level indicators to the model in order to ascertain whether certain individual-level factors are more important in more democratized countries.

Table 2 presents the models testing the hypotheses outlined above. First, we regressed the index of political involvement on socioeconomic characteristics (2.1). The results show that, indeed, women participate less than men. The impact of age, education, and income is positive and highly statistically significant. At the same time, church service attendance does not have any influence on the dependent variable. Both the individual and country level variance is statistically significant, which means that levels of political involvement differ not only among individuals, but also across countries: individuals vary, on average, by 0.532, while countries vary, on average, by 0.023.

Model 2.2 brings in individual-level variables related to the social capital argument: interpersonal trust, membership in three groups of associations and past Communist party membership. Adding these variables only marginally decreases individual-level variance (by 3.2 percent),²⁰ while most of the effects of the socioeconomic characteristics remain largely unaffected. Two of the five new variables: community association membership and past Communist party membership, have a relatively large impact on political involvement, increasing the dependent variable by, respectively, 8.2 and 7.5 percent. Labor and professional/lifestyle associations seem much less relevant for political involvement, thus confirming observations from established democracies: associations are not alike, and they vary in terms of their relevance for political involvement.

Social trust is a statistically significant predictor, but its impact on political involvement is weak: a one-point increase on the scale of social trust (which is an equivalent to the one-point increase on all four components of the scale) increases the dependent variable by only 1 percent, while the difference in terms of political involvement between the least and most trusting respondents is only 5.2 percent.

Model 2.3 adds three interaction terms between social trust and membership in the three types of organizations. The interaction terms test whether social trust associated with group membership has a positive effect on political involvement. None of the interaction terms are statistically significant. Model 2.4 introduces two system-level variables: level of democracy and economic development. Including them in the analysis reduces country-level variance by 37.5 percent (0.015 in comparison to 0.024 in the previous model), but leaves individual-level variance and the coefficients of the individual-level predictors unaffected. The difference in the level of political involvement between the least and most democratic countries (Romania, and Hungary, and the Czech Republic, respectively) in this equation is 10 percent, while the effect of economic development is statistically insignificant. It seems, therefore, that it is the

political rather than economic context that explains country-level variance and influences political involvement.

Model 2.5 confirms the significance of political variables for explaining involvement. Adding a dummy variable controlling for whether a country had a free and democratic election reduces the variance by a further 20.8 percent. The strength of the impact of the Polity score is reduced (the difference in political involvement between the least and most democratic country is now 7.3 percent), but the variable referring to the elections increases the level of political involvement by 5.8 percent. To summarize, a citizen from the Czech Republic, who in the past had been a member of a Communist party and at the time of the survey was a member of one of the community associations, would score 27.4 percent (0.822) higher on the index of political involvement in comparison with the citizen of Russia, who has never been involved in the Communist Party or community associations. However, only around 40 percent of this difference can be attributed to the success of democratization. Thus, while the effect of the political context is statistically significant and non-negligible, it is still less important than the effect of the individual's experience.

Following the hypothesis about the relationship between the impact of membership in associations or social trust on the one hand, and the level of democratization on the other, we performed additional tests. We checked whether (1) the effects of associational membership, social trust and the relationship between them, vary across countries in their effect on political involvement, and (2) whether such variation could be attributed to the differences in the level of democracy.²¹ However, none of these effects was significant, and thus are not reported here. These results mean that the influence of membership and trust on political involvement is independent of the level of democracy and is thus unlikely to change as a result of the process of democratization.

CONCLUSIONS

Citizens' involvement in politics is crucial for the development of a strong, stable democracy, where the public's interests are well represented in politics and where officials can be easily held to account. Levels of political engagement in post-Communist countries in the mid-1990s are usually considered to be below those considered necessary for a new democracy to stabilize and consolidate. This lack of political activism in ECE after 1989 seemed in particular contrast with the mass movements seen in some countries before 1989 and citizens' widespread participation in the Communist party and system-related organizations. The major factors causing low levels of political engagement are believed to be part of the Communist heritage: low levels of social capital (interpersonal trust and membership in voluntary associations) and anti-democratic norms and attitudes

²⁰ 0.515 in Model 2.2 in comparison with 0.532 in model 2.1.

²¹ Analysis of variance showed that none of these effects varies significantly across countries. Also interaction term between particular effects and country level of democracy was statistically insignificant.

learned through participation in the non-democratic system. In turn, low levels of political involvement are likely to hamper the consolidation of new democracies in ECE.

However, when the overall levels of political involvement in the ten investigated countries are compared with the figures from established Western democracies in the same time period of time, it is clear that the group of post-Communist democracies is heterogeneous and that some of these countries are more similar to the established democracies than to the remaining post-Communist states. Thus, we found the general claims about the dramatically low levels of political involvement in East-Central Europe questionable.

The results of the analysis presented in this writing confirm some of the findings from established democracies, but show that others do not generalize to the context of post-Communist states equally well. Firstly, we have found strong support for the hypothesis linking membership in voluntary associations with socialization for political participation. However, types of voluntary associations vary in their impact: community associations are almost twice as important for increasing political involvement as professional or labor organizations, which is also consistent with findings from established democracies.

Secondly, we have found out that, unlike the non-democratic organizations in established democracies, participation in a non-democratic political organization under the conditions of an authoritarian regime did not generate “negative” social capital. Membership in a Communist party before 1989 is a very good—positive—predictor of political involvement in new ECE democracies. Although we suspected that the skills and general interest in politics learned under the non-democratic regime may be relevant for participation in a democracy, the finding that Communist party membership is one of the main predictors was relatively startling, especially given that past involvement in the Communist regime is often perceived to be the main element hampering the emergence of participatory political culture. We have demonstrated that membership in a non-democratic organization can be an efficient school of democracy, and thus at least this part of Communist legacy is not weakening but assisting the development of participatory political culture. The effect of past Communist party membership is nearly as high as the impact of present community organization involvement, and almost twice as high as the effect of membership in other types of associations.

Thirdly, we found interpersonal trust only weakly connected with political involvement. Although one might argue that our findings result from the specificity of East-Central Europe, conclusions about the weak relationship between political involvement and social trust, similar to ours, were reached by Dekker et al. (1997) who, despite

narrowing the definition of political participation to membership or volunteering in certain types of groups such as political parties, found that it is not related to generalized trust in most of the fourteen West European countries investigated by the authors. Furthermore, Gibson’s extensive analysis of the networks and various forms of trust in Russia show that “interpersonal trust actually has little to do with attitudes toward democratic institutions and processes” (Gibson 2001: 51).

Moreover, interpersonal trust associated with membership in any of the three types of associations, which we consider to be an indicator of Putnam’s concept of social capital, is not a significant predictor of political involvement. This means that respondents who are trusting and who are members are not more politically involved than the rest of the population. The significance of this effect does not differ across countries, which suggests that the impact of social capital is unlikely to develop as a result of the development of democracy. Therefore, we must argue for the limited usefulness of the concept of social capital in explaining levels and patterns of political activism in democratizing countries. The relevance of associational membership for political participatory activities was established long before the concept of social capital was introduced to political science, and the ECE patterns do not diverge significantly from those observed in Western democracies. Social trust has also been a part of a cultural explanation since 1960s, while the novelty of the social capital argument lies in the anticipated reciprocal connectedness of these two elements. However, as we demonstrated above, this core idea of social capital is irrelevant for explaining political involvement in ECE.

Finally, our analyses show that exposure to the democratic processes, and development of democratic institutions has an important positive influence on political involvement. Obviously, the lack of experience of free elections makes people less likely to have political preferences (Russia, Belarus, Ukraine) and the lack of civic rights to participate in the electoral process has a naturally similar result (the Estonian Russian minority). We have demonstrated that the introduction of democratic institutions and experience of how democracy works is important for citizens’ willingness to get involved in politics. Thus, the promotion of transparent and efficient democratic structures and the consolidation of democratic procedures are going to be important determinants of whether citizens of ECE states participate in politics or not. Skills and attitudes gained from participation in groups, such as community associations or the Communist party, and exposure to the democratic political processes are far more important for the “civiness” of a community than whether its members trust each other.

APPENDIX A

≡ TABLE A.1

POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT ACROSS ECE COUNTRIES

	Political Discussion	Partisanship	Party Membership
Belarus	71.6	10.9	2.0
Bulgaria	57.5	45.8	7.9
Czech Republic	66.7	28.5	5.5
Estonia	68.1	19.6	0.7
Hungary	62.9	40.1	1.6
Poland	42.1	24.0	2.2
Romania	42.6	43.7	3.3
Russia	58.5	12.5	1.1
Slovak Republic	69.8	27.3	5.2
Ukraine	59.2	16.4	0.8
Total	60.1	27.0	3.1

≡ TABLE A.2

INDICATORS OF SOCIAL TRUST

	Factor Loading
a. Most people can be trusted.	0.473
b. If someone is in serious trouble, no one else cares about it.	0.734
c. If you are not always on your guard other people will take advantage of you.	0.760
d. A person cooperates with other people only when he or she sees it is in his or her own interest.	0.722
Eigenvalue	1.862
Explained Variance	46.6%

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

≡ TABLE A.3

ASSOCIATION TYPES: FACTOR LOADINGS

	Community	Professional/ Lifestyle	Labor
Professional Association		0.675	
Trade Union			0.741
Farmer Association	0.521		
Church Group	0.589		
Local Group	0.520		
Sports Club		0.480	
Ethnic Organization	0.517		
Factory Committee			0.591
Business Association		0.702	
Eigenvalue	1.366	1.148	1.066
Explained Variance	15.2%	12.8%	11.8%
Members (% of Total)	9.1%	12.0%	37.1%

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

APPENDIX B

THE SURVEYS

The surveys used in this paper were undertaken in 1993-94 as part of an ESRC funded research program on Eastern Europe "Emerging forms of political representation and participation in Eastern Europe," part of stage II of the ESRC's East-West Program. The studies in each country were undertaken by researchers based usually at the respective academies of science employing established teams of interviewers and coders. The surveys were designed in and coordinated from Britain, but with important contributions from collaborators in many of the countries studied.

Table B.1 summarizes the main characteristics of the surveys. Each of the strategies reported in Table B.1 was considered to be the most effective approach within the countries in which it was adopted. As far as can be told, given the fallibilities of official data, non-response biases are predictably like those in the West. Compared to Census data non-respondents tend to be older and to have lower levels of education. Non-response resulted mainly from non-contacts and refusals.

≡ TABLE B.1
INFORMATION ON SAMPLING AND RESPONSE RATES FOR EACH SURVEY

	Sampling Frame	Sampling	Response Rate
Bulgaria Summer 1993	adult pop (18+) 1992 census of households	two-step cluster 1. 211 census districts (from 42000) 2. random: 12 households from each	names issued: 2532 non-contact: 517 refused: 83 achieved: 1932 Response rate: 0.76
Czech Republic Spring 1994	adult pop (18+) list of voters from 1992 in sampled localities	1. 8 regions 2. 182 sampling points (localities) from 13410 3. 2104 addresses, of which: 1681 random list sampling (electoral register): 423 random route + 111 quota	names issued: 2104 non-contact: 404 refused: 291 achieved: 1409+ 111 Response rate: 0.67
Estonia Summer 1993	adult pop (18+) 1989 census of households	1. 5 regions 2. 15 counties 3. 321 sampling points 4. random-route/household 5. Kish matrix/respondent	names issued: 2285 non-contact: 63 refused: 190 achieved: 2029 Response rate: 0.89
Hungary Spring 1994	adult pop (20+) Central Register of Population (1992)	1. 12 counties representing regions 2. 78 sampling points 3. random selection of individuals	names issued: 1703 non-contact: 200 refused: 189 achieved: 1314 Response rate: 0.77
Poland Summer 1993	adult pop (18+) Central Register of Individuals	1. 8 regions 2. 4 types of settlements	names issued: 2040 non-contact: 228 refused: 83 achieved: 1729 Response rate: 0.85
Romania Summer 1993	adult pop (18+) Electoral Records	1. 4 provinces 2. 4 types of settlements 3. electoral constituencies (126 from 51 settlements)	names issued: 2000 non-contact: 334 refused: 45 achieved: 1621 Response rate: 0.81
Russia Summer 1993	adult pop (18+) lists of 'privatization vouchers'	1. 10 regions 2. 56 settlements 3. indiv. from list of vouchers	names issued: 2420 non-contact: 264 refused: 126 achieved: 2030 Response rate: 0.84
Slovakia Spring 1994	adult pop (18+) list of voters from 1992 in sampled localities	1. 4 regions 2. 215 sampling points (localities) from 4191 3. 2014 addresses of which: 1100 first wave; 914 second wave. Random list sampling (electoral register) + 68 quota	names issued: 2014 non-contact: 338 refused: 233 achieved: 1443+ 68 Response rate: 0.75
Ukraine Summer 1993	adult pop (18+) Housing Offices' residence list of individuals	1. 70 urban + 50 rural settlements 2. 7 types (only urban)—selection proportional to size of pop. in each type	names issued: 2984 non-contact: 220 refused: 227 achieved: 2537 Response rate: 0.85

Response rate = achieved/names issued.

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