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# Membership in voluntary organizations and democratic performance: European post-Communist countries in comparative perspective

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## Abstract

The article challenges the hypothesis that there is cohabitation of civic engagement and democratic institutions and practices. While valid at a general level, the relationship is not confirmed once it is scrutinized thoroughly and heterogeneous categories are disaggregated. For the European post-Communist cases, the pattern of the relationship between the regime type and the propensity to associate closely resembles the one in Latin mature democracies and non-authoritarian countries, provided that voluntary associations are chosen as measurements of vitality of social capital and robustness of civil society. A possible consequence of this provocative finding would be re-evaluating the well-established concepts in social sciences.

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*Keywords:* Democracy; Civil society; Social capital; Associationalism; Civic engagement; Post-Communism; Voluntary organizations

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## Introduction

Since Alexis de Tocqueville, political scientists have been linking successful democratic performance with rich associational life, the latter being either the cause

or the consequence of the former. Thus, there is an expectation that vigorous civic engagement precedes, triggers, or follows democratization of an authoritarian political regime. Membership in and numbers of voluntary organizations have proven to be the best and the most extensively used empirical references for theoretical concepts such as “social capital” and “civil society”.<sup>1</sup> Established democracies on both sides of the Atlantic have been the prototypes for these influential hypotheses. They have, however, been explored in a wide range of countries and across most regions of the world, with some analysts stressing the connection between democratic and associational life and others being more skeptical about the correlation.

Recently, this finding has been put into question by the cases of the post-Communist countries. The fall of the Berlin wall irreversibly swept out most of the remaining authoritarian regimes in Europe and gradually started to replace them with democratic institutions and practices in everyday political life. Democracies appeared (or re-appeared) in Eastern and Central Europe, and democratic elections were conducted in Russia. Yet, contrary to the expectations of many, post-Communist states manifested less associational activity compared to mature democracies and even to newly democratized non-Communist states. The findings from the post-Communist countries seem, then, to raise a red flag about the robustness of the hypothesis of the simultaneous occurrence of democracy and strong civic engagement and such findings have provoked a body of literature from a range of skeptics. Nonetheless, they too have continued the tradition of working within one regional bloc or simply noting the weakness of certain correlations. No one has thus far re-examined the hypothesis for all regions, in light of the findings coming from the post-Communist cases.

This article does so by looking at the average membership in voluntary organizations and the correlations between civil participation and democratic performance, on the one hand, and electoral participation, on the other hand. It revisits the original hypothesis and offers a more detailed analysis by breaking down regional blocs. When this is done, the observed variations unequivocally suggest that, in terms of associationalism, post-Communist countries resemble closely subgroups of both the mature democracy group and the non-Communist non-authoritarian group. Some consolidated democracies have low participation in voluntary organizations. Post-Communist countries resemble them in this respect rather than falling far from their norms. This observation has theoretical implications, demonstrating that regimes committed to democracy do not necessarily and at all times manifest high voluntary activism. The Tocquevillian pattern is not universal.

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<sup>1</sup> “Social capital” and “civil society”, although similar, are not synonymous notions. Social capital is the propensity to associate in the name of a morally good, non-profit cause, while civil society is part of the public sphere, different from the state and the market. Since associational life is chosen very often as a measurement for both, it would be relevant to consider the findings for civil society valid for social capital as well. Social capital is in the center of works like Rose (2000) and Bartkowski (2003). Civil society is a focus in researches like Nemes (2001) and Petro (1995).

## The challenge of the post-Communist paradox

On a general level, the relationship between associational life and democracy has been at the center of a heated debate in the scholarly literature for the last two decades. The polar extremes could be termed respectively “optimistic” and “skeptical”, with some authors of the latter group explicitly doubting the accuracy of a quantitative approach.

According to the optimistic view, “membership in voluntary associations is strongly linked to stable democracy” (Inglehart, 1997, p. 189). Diamond (1999, p. 260) states: “the more active, resourceful civil society is, the more likely democracy will emerge and endure” and that social capital plays a “leading role” in transitions to democracy. The positive influence on democratic consolidation includes stimulating political participation and creating additional channels for representing interests. Trying to explain institutional success of regional government in Italy, Putnam (1993, p. 175) finds that “membership in horizontally ordered groups should be positively associated with good government”. According to him, since many of the formerly Communist societies had weak civic traditions, and totalitarian regimes destroyed even that limited stock, their prospects for democratization are bleak. Leaving aside the question of causation, Curtis et al. (2001) note that the level of voluntary association membership for 33 countries tends to be particularly high in countries that have continuous democratic experience, high economic development and religious pluralism. Paxton (2002) finds that relationship between social capital and democracy, tested quantitatively and cross-nationally, are reciprocal. Vibrant associational life contributes to the creation and maintenance of democracy, as well as the other way around, democracy can boost the stock of social capital.

However, skepticism about a positive link between associations and democracy was expressed almost half a century ago by Harry Eckstein (1966, p. 282) who noted that “if a society has a vigorous associational life, but if the associations themselves are highly undemocratic, then, upon my theory, democracy should not be stable”. Skeptical researchers often provide case studies that refute the initial hypothesis. For instance, Berman (1997, p. 424) demonstrates convincingly that despite the associational boom in Weimar Germany, “neo-Tocquevillean” predictions of a strong democracy were wrong and instead the country “succumbed to totalitarianism”. With the example of the anti-Masonic movement in 19th century America which led to political turbulence and distrust, Whittington (1998) suggests that social capital can well be a disruptive and antidemocratic force. Referring to what some scholars in the 1960s termed “demosclerosis”, Carothers (1999–2000) argues that proliferation of interest groups in mature democracies could choke the proper functioning of representative institutions. And, he provides examples of three consolidated democracies with relatively weak associational life – Japan (fewer feminist, environmental, and human rights organizations), France (very powerful state), and Spain. Drawing on the case of France, Mayer (2003) demonstrates that active membership might be rising, in spite of the decline of generalized trust. Thus reliance on the usual indicators will be misleading. For her part, Levi (1996, p. 46) doubts

that “membership in such groups as bird watching societies and soccer clubs leads to a high level of democratic politics”.

Problems with measurement also lead to skepticism. Marsh and Gvosdev (2002, p. 4) doubt that the total strength and efficacy of civil society can be gauged, because during periods without turmoil some of it “may lay dormant when the critical mass necessary to actualize its potential is lacking.” Kopecký (2003, p. 7) deplores the fact that organizational density cannot provide information about the actual involvement of members. He also indicates the existence of other possible forms of civic engagement, such as periodic mobilization on single issues. Similarly, Pérez-Díaz (2002) reminds us of uncounted patterns of association in Spain – what he terms the soft forms of sociability – found in peer groups, and occasional associations.

After 1989, the debate was joined by researchers focusing on the European post-Communist countries. These countries were making clear progress on the political regime dimension, yet the data about their civil and associational life showed meager levels, thereby contradicting the expectations of concurrent growth or correlation. Among authors who have tested the link between associational life and democracy in European post-Communist countries, the majority admits the presence of social capital in Eastern Europe, but they almost unanimously deplore its scarcity.<sup>2</sup> Kopecký (2003, p. 5) concludes that “the literature on associational life in post-Communist Europe conveys a rather pessimistic picture”. According to Field (2003) there is little evidence in post-Communist countries that social networks and civic engagement are correlated with democratization. When analyzing the Polish case and calling it “a stalemate”, Magner (2003) insists that Poland will remain a country of strong formal democracy, but weak associational life. He infers (p. 174) that “the strength or the weakness of civil society organizations has nothing to do with the state of democratic procedures”. Petrova and Tarrow (2007) suggest a more qualitative evaluation of the voluntary activity in post-Communist countries by looking at the potential and the actual magnitude of the participation, as well as the ties among non-state actors and institutions.

There are, of course, some authors who claim that democracy and associational life go hand in hand in post-Communist countries. They argue that the situation is similar to that of liberal democracies. The predominant position, however, is one that demonstrates that post-Communist scanty organizational life does not match its democratic performance. Since the difference between the two groups lies within the methodology, I will provide examples of both, including a brief reference to the respective choice of cases, time period, level of analysis and operationalization of democracy and associationalism.

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<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, some authors warned about misinterpreting the number of civil society organizations in Eastern Europe. Merkel (2001) warns about the different legal regulations and statistical rules for counting, doubting if organizations can be indicative of the strength and influence of civil society. He provides the example of Poland with the most vital civil society in the 1980s, which later lost considerably its organizational strength.

Several studies have been inspired by Putnam's hypothesis on the positive link between socio-cultural factors and democratic efficiency at a regional level, and scholars have replicated it in the post-Communist world, with some confirming the relationship. Two illustrative examples come from Russia and Romania. For Marsh (2000a,b) the units of analysis are the 89 political-administrative units of the Russian Federation during the period 1993–1996. His Civic Community Index is modeled after Putnam's – a sum of the z-scores of preference voting, referenda turnout, newspaper publishing, and clubs and cultural associations. His Index of Democratization resembles Tatu Vanhanen's (1997).<sup>3</sup> After obtaining a positive correlation coefficient he “confirms the hypothesis that higher levels of social capital associate with higher levels of democracy”. Ultimately, the author concludes that more civic regions in Russia tend to be more democratic, while those that are missing attributes of a civic community have less chance to score high on the Index of Democratization.

Stan (2003) also confirms Putnam's hypothesis at a regional level in Romania – she compares four county councils over the 1996–1999 period, in the Transylvanian counties of Arad and Mures and the Wallachian and Moldovan counties of Arges and Galati. According to the study, counties where citizens were more interested in politics had higher levels of civic engagement and would resort less to clientelism, while by contrast, counties where citizens were more disinterested in politics and more reluctant to get together in voluntary associations were also counties where local governments had difficulty in solving common problems.

More numerous, however, are authors who explicitly or implicitly contend that post-Communist countries couple democratic performance with low organizational density. Three examples follow. Using regression analysis, Howard (2002, 2003) posits that organizational membership is negatively linked with previous Communist experience. In his research civil society is operationalized as membership in voluntary organizations using the third wave (around 1995) of the World Values Survey (WVS), while democracy is measured by the scores of political rights and civil liberties assigned for each country by Freedom House. His 31 available cases include eight older democracies, 10 post-authoritarian countries and 13 post-Communist countries. Although he finds that on a general level the correlation between democracy and organizational belonging is significantly positive, he notes the combination of low organizational membership and high democratic performance of post-Communist countries in Europe: “Many countries with a prior communist experience score well on the Freedom House scores and are classified as ‘Western’, yet still have relatively low levels of organizational membership” (Howard, 2003, p. 85). Nevertheless, he does not take the next step that is to deduce that the general hypothesis of concurrence of rich democratic and associational life is ultimately refuted by the cases of post-Communist countries.

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<sup>3</sup> The Index of Democratization is based on two indicators. The first one – level of competition – is 100 reduced by the percentage of all votes, excluding the winner for presidential or parliamentary elections. The second one – extent of electoral participation – measures the turnout during national elections expressed as percentage of the total population. Both indicators have equal weight; hence they are multiplied and then divided by 100.

Letki and Evans (2005, p. 523) use a survey conducted in 11 post-Communist countries between 1993 and 1994. Assuming that social trust is one of the components of social capital, they construct an Index of Social Trust. Institutional performance is measured by Tatu Vanhanen's Index of Democracy. After performing regression analyses, the authors conclude that democratization in East Central Europe influenced negatively levels of trust in the region, while the latter was irrelevant for the success of the former. They continue further: "Thus despite the communist inheritance, levels of social trust in ECE in the mid-1990s were not particularly low and, moreover, they were higher in countries where the process of democratization was less advanced." A similar conclusion has been reached by Hutcheson and Korosteleva (2006). Noting that levels of political engagement in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus is lower than in their Western counterparts, the authors find surprisingly that Belarus has higher levels of participation and support for democracy than its counterparts, yet is arguably the least democratized country of the three.

Paldam and Svendsen (2001), referring to WVS data, argue that the Communist states – like all other dictatorships – destroyed social capital and the latter is as low in there as it is in the Latin American countries. While they do not address the problematic cohabitation of their low levels of social capital and rising democratic performance, they do make the important observation that "Western-Latin" countries are closer in social capital to the "old-Communist" countries than to the "Western-North" ones, dominated by British–German cultures.<sup>4</sup>

Since the literature review provides sufficient grounds to doubt the universal applicability of the close correlation between democratic and associational life, I decided to explore it further, by performing several independent tests. The next sections will present the experiments and their findings. I will begin with a test for the propensity to associate and then I will test the relation between that propensity and the type of the regime in two different ways.

### **Are European post-Communist countries the only "bad performers" in terms of associational life?**

Assuming that the most convincing and available measure of associational life remains participation in voluntary organizations, I use data from the World Values Survey (WVS) in order to perform a comparative analysis of the world stock of social capital. WVS is chosen because it is the most comprehensive and wide-ranging survey of values ever undertaken. It does not contain data for every country in the world during the respective time period, but no other study or a combination of studies can offer a more complete coverage allowing for temporal and historical

<sup>4</sup> Dowley and Silver (2002) obtain similar result by exploring the interplay among social capital, ethnicity and support for democracy in 20 post-Communist states by using Freedom House's and World Values Survey's rankings for 1990 and 1995. Because none of the bivariate correlations is statistically significant, the authors conclude that social capital is not correlated with democratization in these post-Communist countries. van Oorschot et al. (2006) also confirm that the 10 post-Communist countries, now members of EU, display lower levels of social capital.

comparisons. The survey started as the European Values Study in 1981. It was repeated 10 years later, as the second WVS wave and covered countries from all over the world. Further waves followed at intervals of approximately 5 years, each time including more countries. Currently a fifth wave is under way. Because the first WVS wave consists of a small number of countries and they cannot be grouped for comparison, I started with the second wave. The WVS questionnaires, administered to a representative sample of interviewees in each country, consist of several hundred questions that in turn result in as many variables.<sup>5</sup> For each WVS wave I will present the procedures as well as the reasons for the classification of the respective countries. The latter may vary as the timing and the circumstances for each country changes.

I deliberately disregarded data on membership in political parties or groups and in trade unions. Parties have clearly political ambitions and my goal here is to explore the relationship between a variable with a political nature and another one with no political relevance. Trade unions in Communist countries were allowed and were not only political organizations but also membership in them had a mandatory character. The high levels of union membership remained persistent in post-Communist countries — a fact well documented by Howard (2003).

Countries are assigned to one of the four categories: post-Communist countries, consolidated democracies, non-Communist non-authoritarian countries and non-democratic countries. Post-Communist are all those European countries which experienced Communist regimes in their past. Consolidated democracies are countries from all over the world that have always been rated as “free” by Freedom House and the chances of reverting to an authoritarian regime are considered practically zero. The only three exceptions are Greece, Portugal, and Spain, where processes of democratization took place in the 1970s. Nevertheless, after their successful European Union accession there was little doubt about their belonging to this category. Non-Communist non-authoritarian countries are countries that have gone through some kind of authoritarian rule, but not a Communist one. They are rated as “free” or “partly free” by FH, they often change categories, becoming even “not free” for some time. Typical for them is their constant state of instability, unconsolidated democratic experience and fairly good prospects of regime reversals. Non-democratic countries are the ones rated as “non-free”. Post-Communist countries that are not free also fall into this category, as is the case with Belarus, because the goal of the current analysis is to compare cases where some systemic changes have taken place. To summarize, the annual freedom ratings are matched with the respective year of the WVS survey, something that was not always been strictly observed in earlier research. Countries considered as consolidated democracies never alternate within the three-step classification of freedom, while post-Communist countries and non-Communist non-authoritarian countries may appear for one or more WVS waves in another category. No country, with the exception of Yugoslavia, changes the group or the subgroup.

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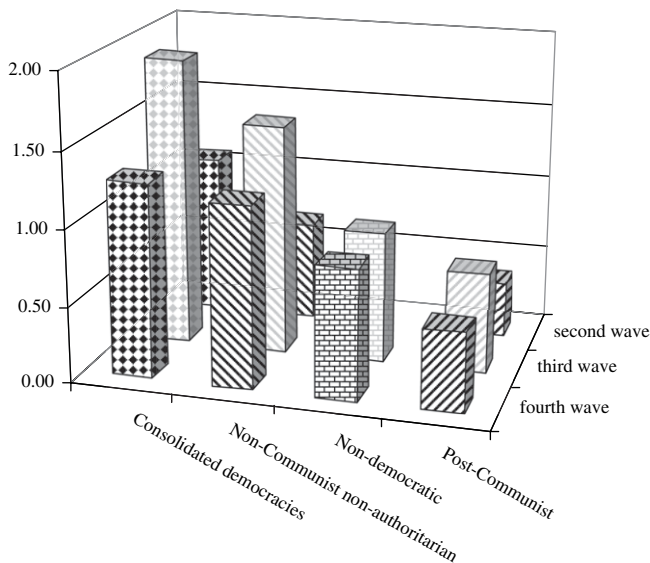
<sup>5</sup> For a more detailed description consult Inglehart et al. (1998) and the website: <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org>.

Three different scenarios are constructed and applied. The first one presents the cases during each of the three WVS waves. The second one gathers all the cases during the three waves together (140 cases), treating each data point as a separate case. The third one considers only the cases that appear in all WVS waves (15 in total) and there are no non-democratic countries in this test. Although the last one is the most limited it has the advantage of presenting cases of the same countries over time.

We start by looking at the average membership per person for each group of countries. The results from the first scenario are illustrated in [Graph 1](#). One can observe a persistent pattern. The values are highest for consolidated democracies, 1.07, 1.91 and 1.28 respectively for the second, third and fourth WVS waves. Also, they are always above the average of the total. Post-Communist countries during all waves are the lowest, with respectively 0.38, 0.67 and 0.52. Non-Communist non-authoritarian countries appear between consolidated democracies and post-Communist countries, but closer to the former, at: 0.67, 1.52 and 1.20. Even non-democratic countries (a group appearing in the third and fourth WVS waves) have values (0.87 and 0.86) higher than those of post-Communist countries.

The order is the same in the second scenario ([Table 1](#); first column): consolidated democracies have the highest values and above the average, post-Communist countries – the lowest. Non-Communist non-authoritarian countries are closer to the former, while non-democratic countries – closer to the latter.

The third scenario ([Table 1](#); second, third, and fourth columns) reiterates the same story, although without the group of non-democratic countries. During the three consecutive waves post-Communist countries are last and consolidated democracies are first with non-Communist non-authoritarian countries found in the



Graph 1. Average organizational membership for the four groups of countries – first scenario.

Table 1

Average organizational membership for the four groups of countries – second and third scenario.

Group of countries	140 cases – all waves	15 cases – 2nd wave	15 cases – 3rd wave	15 cases – 4th wave
All	1.04	0.76	1.33	0.93
Consolidated democracies	1.33	1.16	1.58	1.43
Non-Communist non-authoritarian countries	1.26	0.72	1.92	0.91
Non-democratic countries	0.85	–	–	–
Post-Communist countries	0.56	0.32	0.57	0.35

middle, except for the third wave where their level of associational life is actually higher than the one in consolidated democracies.

This first test leads, then, to an important observation: the ranking of the non-democratic countries above that of the post-Communist cases casts a first doubt on the hypothesis that democracy co-habits with vigorous civil society. A second observation relates to the consistently higher ranking of non-Communist non-authoritarian countries. It is not immediately obvious why those countries' move toward democratic institutions should occur in a context of high rates of associational life while that of the move from Communism to democracy does not. Both these observations cry out for further examination, and one step in that direction is to look more closely at these standard classifications. A way to do so is to look within the groups themselves.

A second test involves, therefore, the standard deviations of the groups. Standard deviation for each group speaks of its homogeneity or heterogeneity. It is the average difference between each value and the mean. In other words, the lower the value of the standard deviation, the more homogenous the group of countries. Homogeneity strongly indicates that the group could not be further divisible. Where heterogeneity exists, one might think it wise to break the group into subgroups that would be similar. Examination of the standard deviations (Table 2) reveals that consolidated democracies and non-Communist non-authoritarian countries have the highest standard deviations in all three waves and for all three scenarios, without exception. Such results mean that they are very heterogeneous in nature and a possible further breakdown within each group

Table 2

Standard deviation of organizational membership – first, second and third scenario.

Group of countries	2nd wave	3rd wave	4th wave	140 cases – all waves	15 cases – 2nd wave	15 cases – 3rd wave	15 cases – 4th wave
All	0.51	1.12	0.75	0.72	0.50	0.87	0.83
Consolidated democracies	0.53	0.63	0.78	0.72	0.43	0.90	1.07
Non-Communist non- authoritarian countries	0.35	0.67	0.83	0.75	0.42	0.68	0.35
Non-democratic countries	–	1.00	0.69	0.76	–	–	–
Post-Communist countries	0.16	0.38	0.36	0.35	0.08	0.35	0.26

would be a logical next step. Post-Communist countries, on the contrary, exhibit the smallest standard deviations, making them a very homogeneous grouping (Non-democratic countries cannot be broken down due to their small number in the sample).

Acting on these findings, a number of possible breakdowns can be explored. Culture is one reasonable factor of difference. Some authors have observed that Latin European countries, like Spain (Torcal and Montero, 1999) and France (Mayer, 2003), for example, generally have low social capital compared with other developed countries. Following this lead, consolidated democracies and non-Communist non-authoritarian countries can be divided into Latin and non-Latin according to their official languages. Political situation is also sometimes mentioned as a factor affecting social forms. Consolidated democracies are also divided into European and non-European ones according to their location. Historical experience is captured by geographical location. Post-Communist cases are grouped as EU candidates and non-EU candidates, according to their status regarding the institution at the time of the interviews. This reflects not only their preparedness to become members, but also the respective society's move toward European standards<sup>6</sup>.

Two such controls on the three main categories alter the picture (Table 1A). Latin consolidated democracies manifest lower average membership per person than the non-Latin ones. European consolidated democracies display lower values than the non-European ones. Similarly, in the group of non-Communist non-authoritarian countries, the Latin ones perform worse than the non-Latin ones. Within the group of post-Communist countries, candidates for the membership in the European Union possess less average membership per person in voluntary organizations than non-candidates. A final observation discloses that post-Communist cases are closer to the Latin non-Communist non-authoritarian countries and even closer to the Latin consolidated democracies.

Looking at the standard deviations of the subgroups (Table 2A) leads to the conclusion that Latin consolidated democracies, Latin non-Communist non-authoritarian countries and post-Communist countries – EU candidates not only possess less organizational membership, but they are much more homogenous than the respective non-Latin and non-candidate ones.

Briefly, the answer to the question of the current section is that post-Communist countries resemble very much the Latin countries worldwide; moreover, they are particularly close to the Latin European ones. In that way they are not the only free countries with low voluntary organizational membership. This inference leads to serious doubts about the concurrence of democratic performance and associational life, which will be put to test in the following section.

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<sup>6</sup> Romania and Moldova are the only post-Communist states that can be considered Latin. The second WVS wave provides no data for Moldova, since it has not declared independence at that time. For the other waves two countries cannot form a subgroup that can be tested against the other post-Communist countries.

Table 1A

Average organizational membership after the breakdown of the groups of countries – first and second scenario.

Subgroups of countries	Latin	Non-Latin
Consolidated democracies, 2nd wave	0.48	1.24
Consolidated democracies, 4th wave	0.50	1.49
Consolidated democracies, 140 cases	0.56	1.51
Non-Communist non-authoritarian, 2nd wave	0.57	–
Non-Communist non-authoritarian, 3rd wave	1.65	1.33
Non-Communist non-authoritarian, 4th wave	0.90	1.33
Non-Communist non-authoritarian, 140 cases	1.23	1.29
	European	Non-European
Consolidated democracies, 3rd wave	1.75	2.15
Consolidated democracies, 4th wave	1.18	1.79
Consolidated democracies, 140 cases	1.22	1.75
	EU candidates	Non-EU candidates
Post-Communist, 3rd wave	0.63	0.71
Post-Communist, 4th wave	0.46	0.60
Post-Communist, 140 cases	0.54	0.57

### Do democracy and civil society always go hand in hand? Correlations between the Index of associationalism and the Index of freedom

In the next experiment the coefficients of correlation between the level of democratic performance, as measured by the index of Freedom House, and the index of associationalism, as measured by the number of voluntary organizations per person (World Values Survey), in the respective countries are compared. A total of 19 coefficients were

Table 2A

Standard deviation of organizational membership after the breakdown of the groups of countries – first and second scenario.

Subgroups of countries	Latin	Non-Latin
Consolidated democracies, 2nd wave	0.12	0.47
Consolidated democracies, 4th wave	0.15	0.74
Consolidated democracies, 140 cases	0.26	0.67
Non-Communist non-authoritarian, 2nd wave	0.18	–
Non-Communist non-authoritarian, 3rd wave	0.63	0.74
Non-Communist non-authoritarian, 4th wave	0.30	0.97
Non-Communist non-authoritarian, 140 cases	0.67	0.84
	European	Non-European
Consolidated democracies, 3rd wave	0.29	0.96
Consolidated democracies, 4th wave	0.71	1.10
Consolidated democracies, 140 cases	0.62	0.93
	EU candidates	Non-EU candidates
Post-Communist, 3rd wave	0.27	0.49
Post-Communist, 4th wave	0.29	0.45
Post-Communist, 140 cases	0.28	0.41

analyzed. If the hypothesis about the simultaneous presence of rich democratic and associational life holds true, all correlation coefficients should be positive – democracies generate true civil societies while non-democracies do not. Unfortunately, this is not the case when we look at the reported results (Table 3). Only consolidated democracies demonstrate a persistent pattern of positive values at all times. Post-Communist countries' values are always negative, except for the first scenario, second wave. Despite being free or partly free they do not perform well in civic participation. The high values during the 1990s can be explained by simultaneous low performance on democracy and associationalism. Oddly enough, non-democratic countries raise another flag against the mainstream hypothesis. Their expressed negative values can be interpreted as concomitance between low democracy and richer associational life. The same evidence is found in the group of the non-Communist non-authoritarian countries, except for the first scenario, third wave.

Yet, at a global level, the hypothesis is confirmed by the positive correlation. Such findings call for an analysis at a less aggregate level, that is, the breakdown of the groups of consolidated democracies and non-Communist non-authoritarian countries into Latin and non-Latin ones by analogy with the first experiment. The coefficients for the Latin ones are at all times negative, while the non-Latin ones' – positive, except for the non-Communist non-authoritarian countries during the first scenario, fourth wave (Table 3A).

Such finding definitely demonstrates that the hypothesis is not universally valid even within the group of consolidated democracies and the free and partly free non-consolidated democratic regimes. To put it another way, the final conclusion is that democracy and civil society are happily married only on a global level and within the non-Latin consolidated democratic regimes; for the rest of the groups, which comprise the majority of the countries in the world, the positive correlation simply does not exist. This statement leads to the next logical question: even when democracy breeds civil society, is civicness necessarily linked to politics at all?

### **Is the civic volunteer always a political activist? Correlations between the Index of associationalism and the Index of electoral participation**

Electoral participation speaks eloquently to the quality of democracy. The last experiment involves measuring the co-occurrence of associational vitality and voting turnout in the European post-Communist countries, as well as in other regions in the world. Henry Milner (2002), in his 2002 book on civic literacy, was

Table 3  
Correlation coefficients between WVS and FH values – first and second scenario.

Group of countries	2nd wave	3rd wave	4th wave	140 cases
All	0.39	0.10	0.09	0.16
Consolidated democracies	0.32	0.75	0.52	0.44
Non-Communist, non-authoritarian countries	-0.23	0.31	-0.21	-0.08
Non-democratic countries	-	-0.67	-0.22	-0.41
Post-Communist countries	0.64	-0.18	-0.02	-0.06

Table 3A

Correlation coefficients between WVS and FH values after the breakdown of the groups of countries – first and second scenario.

Subgroups of countries	Latin	Non-Latin
Consolidated democracies, 2nd wave	–0.65	0.22
Consolidated democracies, 4th wave	–0.58	0.54
Consolidated democracies, 140 cases	–0.49	0.42
Non-Communist non-authoritarian, 2nd wave	–0.15	–
Non-Communist non-authoritarian, 3rd wave	–0.23	0.83
Non-Communist non-authoritarian, 4th wave	–0.77	–0.11
Non-Communist non-authoritarian, 140 cases	–0.30	0.02
	European	Non-European
Consolidated democracies, 3rd wave	–0.65	0.22
Consolidated democracies, 4th wave	–0.58	0.54
Consolidated democracies, 140 cases	–0.49	0.42
	EU candidates	Non-EU candidates
Post-Communist, 3rd wave	0.42	–0.47
Post-Communist, 4th wave	0.40	0.41
Post-Communist, 140 cases	0.33	–0.14

the first one to perform a similar experiment with 13 consolidated democracies in 1990. He found a correlation close to zero. Here, the relationship is tested by analyzing the correlation coefficients between two indices. The first one is represented by the average membership per person in the respective country compiled from the last three waves of the World Values Survey. Turnout data is taken from the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), a Stockholm-based international non-governmental organization. Their turnout result differs from the one officially reported by the respective government. While IDEA's is computed as a ratio between those who actually voted and the voting age population, the second one is a ratio between voters who cast their ballots and the ones who are registered on the electoral list. Evidently, the discrepancy might arise in cases when the list is not accurately updated and it may contain omissions or non-existent voters. Therefore, the IDEA turnout rate is considered more accurate<sup>7</sup>. The sample of countries was determined by the availability of data in the WVS, because IDEA has a more comprehensive list of cases. In addition, only parliamentary elections were taken into account, because not all countries elect a president.

Table 4 presents a summary of the correlation coefficients that provides enough material for deductions. At a general level, it can be confirmed that the correlation is almost insignificant and even negative. Consolidated democracies also display close to zero and negative values. Post-Communist countries astonishingly demonstrate at all times positive correlation and quite high values. It comes as no surprise that non-Communist non-authoritarian countries exhibit high negative values.

<sup>7</sup> Actually, as part of the control procedures, official turnout was used as well and similar results were obtained.

Table 4

Correlation coefficients between WVS and IDEA values – first and third scenario.

Group of countries	2nd wave	3rd wave	4th wave	15 cases –		
				2nd wave	3rd wave	4th wave
All	–0.08	–0.05	0.08	–0.27	–0.23	–0.22
Consolidated democracies	–0.12	0.06	–0.18	–0.52	–0.10	–0.40
Non-Communist non-authoritarian countries	–0.27	–0.02	–0.34	–0.12	–0.89	–0.53
Non-democratic countries	–	0.71	0.62	–	–	–
Post-Communist countries	0.58	0.23	0.79	0.41	0.88	0.56

Three inferences come to the mind. Firstly, post-Communist countries either have high turnout and high voluntary membership, or just the opposite – low turnout and fewer memberships. From previous findings it looks like the second inference is more plausible. Secondly, high organizational activity in non-Communist non-authoritarian countries is coupled with low electoral participation, hence, meager political interest. Thirdly, and most importantly, the results from the group of consolidated democracies indicate that high electoral participation and civic engagement are not *sine qua non* conditions for a democracy to thrive.

## Conclusion

Quite enthusiastic about their future at the end of last century, nowadays citizens of post-Communist countries display more apathy. Obviously, then, this group of countries shows that democratic conditions do not always co-exist with vigorous political activism and voluntary association. Low membership rates and astonishing passivity within the countries of post-Communist Europe should be understood as something which has its own internal logic and explanation. The origins lie in the nature of the societal transformations in the region. The dimension of these transformations could be compared with critical historical moments. For instance, one would not expect exceptional organizational expansion during the time of the American Civil War or the 100-year war in Europe. Although the current state of organizational life in Eastern Europe cannot be accepted as exemplary, it should be understood as having more complex reasons, which go way beyond the trivial excuse of the Communist legacy.

There might be other implications as well. Probably it is time to reevaluate some concepts and notions. Soon it will not be appropriate to call the ten Eastern European countries which are already members of the EU, post-Communist. Not only due to political correctness, but also because of historical exactitude and current commitments. Soon the world will be celebrating two decades since the fall of the Berlin Wall. By the same token, in the 1960s were Germany and Italy called post-fascist countries? Or could Spain, Portugal, and Greece be referred to as post-authoritarian countries today, having in mind that they brushed away their dictatorial past not very long before 1989? By irony of fate, the current research might turn out to be the last one of its kind. For the next WVS wave, after the recent EU enlargement, post-Communist countries will not be enough in number to form a separate category. Half of them will join the

ranks of consolidated democracies; the rest will be unstable free or authoritarian regimes. Alongside with that the pattern of low participation in voluntary organizations in established democracies will not be surprising at all.

Theory has to be considered with more precision as well. The type of regime is a political concept. Civic participation is as well, but it is not always linked to democratic performance. Therefore when associating it with democracy at all times, it is being transformed into democracy's permanent attribute. At this point all investigations for concomitance between them become redundant and futile. In David Collier's terms (Collier and Levitsky, 1997; Collier and Mahon, 1993), this would be climbing up Sartori's ladder of generality of the main concept and increasing its attributes at the same time, which is impossible.

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### **Appendix**

#### *Procedures for constructing the models*

The graph and the tables are constructed, using data from the following sources:

freedomhouse.org, consulted January 10, 2006;  
idea.int, consulted January 13, 2006;  
worldvaluessurvey.com, consulted January 15, 2006.

#### *Building the Index of associationalism*

The Index of associationalism is the average membership per person for each country. Some general procedures were applied for each WVS wave.

When cases represented the constituent parts of a country, their data were combined in order to form a new case by taking into account the respective weight of the population from the most recent census. Then the former cases were eliminated.

Czech Republic (1990) and Slovakia (1990) were replaced by Czechoslovakia (1990), the population weights being respectively 0.66 and 0.33, according to the 2001 Census.

Germany-West (1990 and 1997) and Germany-East (1990 and 1997) were replaced by Germany (1990 and 1997), the population weights being respectively 0.80 and 0.20, according to a 1990 estimate.

Great Britain (1990 and 1999) and Northern Ireland (1990 and 1999) were replaced by the United Kingdom (1990 and 1999), the population weights being respectively 0.97 and 0.03, according to the 2001 Census.

Serbia (1996 and 2001) and Montenegro (1996 and 2001) were replaced by Yugoslavia (1996 and 2001), the population weights being respectively 0.94 and 0.06, according to the 2002 Census for Serbia, the 2003 Census for Montenegro and a 2005 estimate for Kosovo.

Some cases were excluded, because they were not independent countries.

In 1990 Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were part of the Soviet Union.

Puerto Rico (1995 and 2001) was excluded, because it was a US possession.

For similar reasons, six cases from the 3rd WVS wave – the four Spanish provinces Andalusia, Basque country, Galicia, Valencia, as well as the Russian region of Tambov and the Bosnian Srpska Republic – were eliminated.

For each wave there were also specific procedures.

### *Second WVS wave*

The interviews during the second WVS wave were not conducted in the same year in all countries, but over the 5-year period between 1989 and 1993. The interviews for 26 out of the 32 countries (81%) were conducted, however, in 1990. Among other questions, respondents were asked to indicate if they belonged to 16 types of voluntary organizations, namely those related to: social welfare services for the elderly, handicapped, or deprived people; religion or church; educational, art, music, or cultural activities; syndicalist movements (trade unions); political engagement (parties or groups); local community action on issues like poverty, employment, housing, and racial equality; Third world development or human rights; conservation, environment, and ecology; profession; youth work (e.g. scouts guides, youth clubs, etc.); sports or recreation; women's rights; peace movement; animal rights; health; and others. The category "animal right organizations" was eliminated, because no data was available at the time of the consultation.

Five cases – Belarus, India, Nigeria, South Africa, and Turkey – were discarded, because they contained no data. Spain, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland were presented by two cases for each country, one for the WVS, the other for the EVS. The ones for the WVS were excluded, because they had missing data.

Thus from the initial 47 cases, the 32 remaining ones were classified in the following 3 categories:

*18 Consolidated democracies:* Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom and USA.

*7 Post-Communist countries:* Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Russia and Slovenia.

*6 Non-Communist, non-authoritarian countries:* Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Korea Republic, Malta and Mexico.

China, as a Communist and non-free country, did not fit into any category and could not form a category by itself.

Then the first and the third category were further broken down into:

4 Latin consolidated democracies: France, Italy, Portugal, Spain and the rest – 14 non-Latin consolidated democracies.

2 non-Latin, non-Communist, non-authoritarian countries: Korea Republic, Malta and the rest – 4 Latin, non-Communist, non-authoritarian countries.

### *Third WVS wave*

The interviews during the third WVS wave were not conducted in the same year in all countries but over the 6-year period between 1994 and 1999. From the 49 cases, the interviews for 24 cases (49%) were conducted in 1996 and the interviews for another 11 cases (22%) were conducted in 1995. The third WVS wave provides data on associations differently than the second one did. There are two values for each case. One is a count of active members and the second – inactive members. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they were active or inactive members in nine types of voluntary organizations: church, labor, sport, art, political, environmental, professional, charitable, and “other”.

Three countries, Poland, Great Britain, and Pakistan, were eliminated, because the first contained data only for two organizations – labor and political, while the second and the third had no data at all.

The case of Armenia was eliminated, because 96% of the interviewed were inactive members, while 3% of them were active members of voluntary organizations. Such a value would disproportionately distort the group values.

Thus from the initial 62 cases, the 49 remaining ones were classified in the following four categories:

*10 Consolidated democracies:* Australia, Finland, Germany, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and USA.

*17 Post-Communist countries:* Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine.

*17 Non-Communist, non-authoritarian countries:* Argentina, Bangladesh, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, India, Korea Republic, Mexico, Peru, Philippines, South Africa, Taiwan, Turkey, Uruguay and Venezuela.

*5 Non-democratic countries:* Azerbaijan, Belarus, China, Nigeria and Yugoslavia.

Then the first three categories were further broken down into:

4 non-European countries: Australia, Japan, New Zealand, USA and the rest – 6 European countries.

8 post-Communist countries, non-EU candidates: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Georgia, Macedonia, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine and the rest – 9 post-Communist countries, EU candidates.

7 non-Latin American, non-authoritarian countries: Bangladesh, India, Korea Republic, Philippines, South Africa, Taiwan, Turkey and the rest – 10 Latin American, non-authoritarian countries.

#### *Fourth WVS wave*

The interviews during the fourth WVS wave were conducted during the 5-year period between 1999 and 2003, although from the 59 cases in total, the interviews for 31 of them (53%) were conducted in 1999, the interviews for another 14 of them (24%) were conducted in 2001, and the interviews for other 7 cases (12%) were conducted in 2000. This wave returned back to the classification of 16 types of organizations like the second one with the only difference that animal right organizations were not a separate category, but were bundled with the conservation and environment organizations.

10 cases – Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Israel, Jordan and Morocco (2)-second sample, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Turkey – were eliminated, because they contained no data. Spain (1999) was excluded, since it was repeating.

Thus from the initial 73 cases, the 59 ones remaining were classified in the following four categories:

*19 Consolidated democracies:* Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom and USA.

*18 Post-Communist countries:* Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine and Yugoslavia.

*16 Non-Communist, non-authoritarian countries:* Argentina, Bangladesh, Chile, India, Korea Republic, Malta, Mexico, Morocco, Peru, Philippines, Singapore, South Africa, Tanzania, Turkey, Uganda and Venezuela.

*6 Non-democratic countries:* Algeria, Belarus, China, Kyrgyz Republic, Vietnam and Zimbabwe.

Then the first three categories were further broken down into:

4 Latin consolidated democracies: France, Italy, Portugal, Spain and the rest – 15 non-Latin consolidated democracies; also 3 non-European consolidated democracies: Canada, Japan, USA and the rest – 16 European consolidated democracies; finally the 13 non-Latin European consolidated democracies are: Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom and USA.

8 post-Communist countries, non-EU candidates; Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine, Yugoslavia and the rest – 10 post-Communist countries, EU candidates.

5 Latin American, non-Communist non-authoritarian countries: Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Peru, Venezuela and the rest – 11 non-Latin American, non-authoritarian countries.

The average membership per person for each country was calculated by dividing the sum of all memberships for all organizations by the number of the persons interviewed. Only for the Third WVS wave, where the number of interviewed differed for each organization, first I calculated the average membership for each organization in each country and then summed the results. It is also important to note that only for this wave the membership was estimated as the sum of the active and non-active members, since their numbers separately were ostensibly small.

#### *Correlations between the Index of associationalism and the Index of freedom*

The index of freedom is the sum of the Freedom House ratings for political rights and civil liberties for each country during the year of the respective interview for the WVS. Those ratings range from 1 to 7 (whole numbers only), the better performance being assigned a smaller number. For this reason the sign of the correlation coefficient has to be reversed. To be noted also that there is no relation between the correlation coefficient of a group of countries and the correlation coefficients of its respective subgroups.

#### *Correlations between the Index of associationalism and the Index of electoral participation*

The Index of electoral participation corresponded to the turnout rate, measured as a ratio between the number of persons that voted and the voting age population. Several preparatory steps were initiated. 5 cases – China (1990, 1995 and 2001) and Yugoslavia (1996, 2001) were eliminated, because they contained no data. Armenia was excluded for the same reasons as in the previous experiment. From the remaining 135 cases, less than 30% (38) corresponded exactly to the year of their respective WVS interview. In the case of the remaining 97, the choice fell on the election year that was closer to the year of their respective WVS interview. The year of the WVS interviews for the following four cases was between two equally distant years of elections: Brazil (1992), Moldova (1996), and USA (1995, 1999). The choice was made in favor of the later year. In the following 10 cases: Algeria (2002), Bangladesh (2002), Chile (2000), Macedonia (2001), Morocco (1) (2001), Singapore (2002), Slovakia (1999), Turkey (2001), Vietnam (2001), Zimbabwe (2001) – there was no data for the Voting Age Population (VAP). In those cases the registered vote (RV) served as a proxy.

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