

# The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe

MARC MORJÉ HOWARD



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## Introduction

This book explores the general theme of how people adapt to a new democratic system, concentrating on the citizens of post-communist Europe, who have lived through tremendous political and economic changes over the past two decades. It traces their life experiences and trajectories, from living in communist political and economic systems to adapting to the rapid and sweeping changes of post-communist democracy and market capitalism. In states where the Communist Party dominated for decades with its omnipresent ideology and mechanisms of social control, ordinary people developed strategies for getting by in an economy in which shortages were rampant, and in a political system in which laws and institutions rarely functioned as intended or promised. This book shows how, to what extent, and in what ways these adaptive strategies have persisted in the new post-communist era.

More specifically, this book focuses on civil society – conceived of as a crucial part of the public space between the state and the family, and embodied in voluntary organizations – and it seeks to explain why post-communist civil society is distinctively weak, characterized by low levels of organizational membership and participation by ordinary citizens. The assertion that civil society is weak throughout post-communist Europe demands evidence and explanation. A major task of this book is therefore to present a clear and detailed account of comparative levels of participation in voluntary organizations across a wide set of countries. This “empirical baseline,” which introduces original and recent sources of data, provides an empirical foundation to debates that are frequently marred by incomparable data, with conclusions often reduced to hunches and wishful thinking. While the establishment of a broad comparative baseline of organizational membership is essential to this book, its most important and challenging task is to provide a causal explanation to account for the particularly low levels of post-communist civic participation.

## POST-COMMUNIST EUROPE

Although the topic, data, theory, and methods of this book are of wider relevance for comparative politics, the specific project focuses on the region of post-communist Europe in order to explain a remarkable pattern of low, perhaps even declining, rates of participation in the voluntary organizations of civil society. These consistently low levels of organizational membership are especially surprising given the well-documented increases in the numbers of existing organizations in the region since the collapse of communism.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the book, I refer to “post-communist Europe” as a distinctive and coherent region. The very use of this phrase necessitates a definition of which types of countries are included and a discussion of how the region has been viewed and treated by other scholars. My use of “post-communist Europe” has both a geographic and a substantive component. Geographically, it includes only those countries that are located on the European continent, thereby leaving out non-European post-communist countries in the Caucasus and Central Asia, as well as non-Soviet countries such as China, North Korea, and Cuba. Although I believe that the similarities between European and non-European post-communist countries are probably far greater than most scholars recognize, to include the non-European nations in my analysis would go far beyond the scope of this book, as well as obfuscate its conceptual and thematic focus. Substantively, since I am primarily concerned with the role of civil society in countries that are in the process of democratization – indeed, I argue that civil society requires at least the minimum legal protection afforded it by democratic institutions – I am not referring to countries that were blatantly non-democratic at the time I conducted my research. This distinction is important because, unlike studies that focus on the entire universe of up to 28 post-communist countries in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union,<sup>2</sup> it narrows the realm of cases by approximately half, leaving those countries that are generally the most successful in both political and economic terms. In short, my use of the category “the region of post-communist Europe” is meant to encompass those

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Lester M. Salamon et al., *Global Civil Society: Dimensions of the Nonprofit Sector* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies, 1999); Civicus, *The New Civic Atlas: Profiles of Civil Society in 60 Countries* (Washington, DC: Civicus, 1997); Grzegorz Ekiert and Jan Kubik, *Rebellious Civil Society: Popular Protest and Democratic Consolidation in Poland, 1989–1993* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Valerie Bunce, “The Political Economy of Postsocialism,” in *Slavic Review*, Vol. 58, No. 4 (1999), pp. 756–793; M. Steven Fish, “Postcommunist Subversion: Social Science and Democratization in East Europe and Eurasia,” in *Slavic Review*, Vol. 58, No. 4 (1999), pp. 794–823; M. Steven Fish, “The Determinants of Economic Reform in the Post-Communist World,” in *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (1998), pp. 31–78; M. Steven Fish, “Democratization’s Requisites: The Postcommunist Experience,” in *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (1998), pp. 212–247.

post-communist countries on the European continent that have achieved at least a basic minimum of procedural democracy.<sup>3</sup>

Broadly speaking, scholars have looked at the countries of post-communist Europe in two different ways, emphasizing either the new opportunities of the post-communist present or the lasting effects of the communist past. The first approach, which was especially dominant in the early- to mid-1990s, either assumes or argues explicitly that contemporary political and economic attributes and policies are the most important factors for explaining and predicting cross-national variation. Scholars have emphasized a range of variables, including the “mode of transition,”<sup>4</sup> political “crafting,”<sup>5</sup> institutional design,<sup>6</sup> and economic policies and conditions.<sup>7</sup> By focusing on such generic factors, analysts have been able to include post-communist countries in a broader comparative framework, thus treating them as another set of “cases” to which they can extend the theories and arguments developed in studies of Latin American and South European countries.

The second approach, in contrast, accounts for current developments in post-communist countries by emphasizing causal variables that are particular *legacies* of the communist experience. Many advocates of this approach have criticized the “tabula rasa” element of the first, which they view as ignoring the crucial historical and cultural context of communism. The specific factors of the second approach that scholars choose to emphasize are quite varied; they include the nature and consequences of political opposition and crises,<sup>8</sup> the simultaneity of post-communist political, economic, and (in some cases) even national transitions,<sup>9</sup> the particular institutional design of communist systems,<sup>10</sup> and the attitudinal orientations and behavioral practices

<sup>3</sup> I explain and discuss my criteria for selecting countries in much greater detail in Chapter 4.

<sup>4</sup> Terry Lynn Karl and Philippe C. Schmitter, “Modes of Transition in Latin America, Southern and Eastern Europe,” in *International Social Science Journal*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (1991), pp. 269–284.

<sup>5</sup> Giuseppe Di Palma, *To Craft Democracies: An Essay on Democratic Transitions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

<sup>6</sup> Arend Lijphart and Carlos H. Waisman, eds. *Institutional Design in New Democracies: Eastern Europe and Latin America* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Stephan Haggard and Robert R. Kaufman, *The Political Economy of Democratic Transitions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> Grzegorz Ekiert, *The State against Society: Political Crises and Their Aftermath in East Central Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> Claus Offe, “Capitalism by Democratic Design? Democratic Theory Facing the Triple Transition in East Central Europe,” in *Social Research*, Vol. 58, No. 4 (1991), pp. 865–892.

<sup>10</sup> Valerie Bunce, *Subversive Institutions: The Design and the Destruction of Socialism and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Steven L. Solnick, *Stealing the State: Control and Collapse in Soviet Institutions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

that developed under communism.<sup>11</sup> But the historical emphasis and causal logic are similar, and the common argument is that without an understanding of the communist past, it is difficult to make sense of the post-communist present and future. Perhaps paradoxically, while one might expect the power of legacies to decrease over time, the scholarly attention paid to legacies has actually increased since the collapse of the state socialist system, providing a much-needed correction to the ahistorical approach just discussed.

Although these two contending approaches have been hotly debated,<sup>12</sup> many scholars are increasingly trying to incorporate elements from both.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, scholars from both approaches – whether they emphasize contemporary economic and political variables, or communist-era historical factors – often share the assumption, or reach the conclusion, that there are great *differences* within the region of post-communist Europe.<sup>14</sup> This new emphasis on post-communist difference is often a direct reaction to the earlier field of Sovietology, which is perceived to have overemphasized the similarities among communist countries.<sup>15</sup> In other words, even scholars who focus on the power of the communist legacy tend to stress that individual communist countries had very different historical experiences, and they generally seek to show how those diverse experiences have contributed to lasting differences in the present.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Ken Jowitt, *New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Piotr Sztompka, “Civilizational Incompetence: The Trap of Post-Communist Societies,” in *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (1993), pp. 85–95; Piotr Sztompka, “The Intangibles and Imponderables of the Transition to Democracy,” in *Studies in Comparative Communism*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (1991), pp. 295–311.

<sup>12</sup> See especially the pointed exchange between Valerie Bunce, on the one hand, and Philippe Schmitter and Terry Karl, on the other: Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl, “The Conceptual Travels of Transitologists and Consolodologists: How Far to the East Should They Attempt to Go?” in *Slavic Review*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (spring 1994), pp. 173–185; Valerie Bunce, “Should Transitologists Be Grounded?” in *Slavic Review*, Vol. 54, No. 1 (1995), pp. 111–127; Terry Lynn Karl and Philippe C. Schmitter, “From Iron Curtain to a Paper Curtain: Grounding Transitologists or Students of Postcommunism?” in *Slavic Review*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (1995), pp. 965–978.

<sup>13</sup> For recent books that combine aspects from both approaches, see, for example, Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Jon Elster, Claus Offe, and Ulrich K. Preuss, *Institutional Design in Post-Communist Societies: Rebuilding the Ship at Sea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); David Stark and László Bruszt, *Postsocialist Pathways: Transforming Politics and Property in East Central Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Jacques Rupnik, “The Postcommunist Divide,” in *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (1999), pp. 57–62; Fish, “Democratization’s Requisites.”

<sup>15</sup> See Ekiert, *The State against Society*, for an explicit articulation of the distinction to Sovietology.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Ekiert, *The State against Society*; Bunce, *Subversive Institutions*; Valerie Bunce, “Regional Differences in Democratization: The East versus the South,” in *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (1998), pp. 187–211; Bunce, “The Political Economy of Postsocialism.”

This study builds on the perspective and findings from the legacies approach, but it complements it in two crucial respects, and, overall, it suggests a theoretical reconsideration of the question of the relative similarities or differences between the countries of post-communist Europe. First, given the difficulty in compiling comparable data across countries and regions, the studies that stress the differences among post-communist countries often lack a concrete comparative reference point with which to evaluate and compare those differences to those between post-communist and *non-post-communist* countries.<sup>17</sup> Yet, without wider comparisons, it is difficult to specify *how* different a difference is. In contrast, this book incorporates new and wide-ranging sources of data to compare the membership patterns of post-communist citizens to those of people from other regions of the world. While there are of course differences among post-communist countries – that is, levels of organizational membership are certainly not identical across the region – these differences are relatively minor when seen from a larger comparative perspective.

Second, while the emphasis on the differences among post-communist countries may be appropriate for studies that focus on elites or institutions, the findings of this book point to important, but often overlooked, similarities on the “mass” or societal level. Although the sudden disappearance of communist institutions allowed domestic elites and foreign advisers to create rapidly new political and economic institutions that differed greatly from country to country, *societal* similarities have been much more resistant to change. In this sense, this study builds upon some of the findings from recent comparative survey research, which has found striking similarities among post-communist countries, particularly with regard to such themes as the importance of freedom from state control and a common mistrust of the organizations of civil society.<sup>18</sup>

In short, the focus on ordinary citizens, by means of widely comparative data, introduces a new perspective on the coherence of post-communist Europe as a region, and it thus complements and enhances the currently dominant emphasis on post-communist differences. This is not

<sup>17</sup> Several important exceptions include Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*; Bunce, “Regional Differences in Democratization”; and Béla Greskovits, *The Political Economy of Protest and Patience: East European and Latin American Transformations Compared* (New York: Central European University Press, 1998).

<sup>18</sup> See especially the many studies produced by Richard Rose and his colleagues, including Richard Rose, “Freedom as a Fundamental Value,” in *International Social Science Journal*, No. 145 (1995), pp. 454–471; William Mishler and Richard Rose, “Trust, Distrust and Skepticism: Popular Evaluations of Civil and Political Institutions in Post-Communist Societies,” in *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 59, No. 2 (1997), pp. 418–451; and Richard Rose, William Mishler, and Christian Haerpfer, *Democracy and Its Alternatives: Understanding Post-Communist Societies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

to deny the existence of many other differences among the countries and societies of the region, but in terms of levels of membership in voluntary organizations, this variation is more accurately viewed as “differences in degree” rather than as “differences in kind.” In other words, not only do post-communist citizens join organizations significantly less often than citizens from other countries and regions of the world, but there is also less variation *among* post-communist countries than there is *between* them and non-post-communist countries, whether “older democracies” or “post-authoritarian” countries, from other regions and continents.

I do not mean to suggest that the “degree” versus “kind” distinction applies to all, or even to most, aspects of post-communist transformation. Issues such as the extent, type, and pace of political and economic reforms, the development of political party systems, or the expansion of NATO or the EU are legitimate and important examples of “differences in kind,” where the empirical realities are such that it makes sense to stress the important differences within the region. In terms of the societal-level question of membership in voluntary organizations, however – and especially when viewed in a wide, cross-regional perspective – the findings and analysis of this book point to a striking similarity throughout the region of post-communist Europe.

#### CASE STUDIES

One way in which I demonstrate this similar pattern of relatively low levels of membership in voluntary organizations in post-communist Europe is by focusing on two case studies, Russia and Eastern Germany. These two cases differ greatly on most contemporary factors that would constitute alternative explanations of variation in levels of participation in voluntary organizations: economic levels are very high in Eastern Germany, but extremely low in Russia; political and legal institutions are very well developed in Eastern Germany, which inherited the well-developed West German system, while the Russian political and legal systems are still very weak and undeveloped; and both societies belong to different cultural and religious “civilizations.” The substantial variation between these two cases in these areas provides maximal analytic leverage for explaining the causes of the similarly low levels of civic participation across post-communist Europe.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> In other words, I am applying Mill’s “method of agreement,” or what Przeworski and Teune call the “most different systems” approach. This approach is the most appropriate for explaining the puzzle that is the focus of this project – where, within the universe of post-communist cases, a similar outcome (weak civil society) is best explained by similar factors (certain common communist and post-communist experiences), despite a wide array of contemporary variables (economic, political, civilizational) that show great differences between the two cases. One could contend that Soviet Russia and East Germany were not “most different” cases during the communist period – because of the relative similarity of their hard-line regimes, which were much more resistant to reform than regimes in Hungary and Poland,

In addition to these three factors – contemporary economic well-being, political institutions, and civilization – which can be tested systematically using available cross-national data, the dominant perspective on Russian and East German *societies* views them as being quite different from one another. Leaving aside national stereotypes, Russians are clearly living in a more uncertain environment, where they have to struggle immensely to survive economically, where the political system is characterized by arbitrary decrees and theatrical politics, and where there is still a great fear of the state and the police.<sup>20</sup> East Germans, in contrast, have fewer such direct fears, but they do have to contend with the very visible presence of the West, which they perceive as looking down on them, judging them, and even ridiculing them.<sup>21</sup> Both societies see themselves and their problems as being *unique*: the East Germans because of the West, since no other post-communist country has the respective advantages and disadvantages that come along with German unification, and the Russians because of a shared sense of their historical destiny, fate, and culture.<sup>22</sup> Even though during the communist period the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the Soviet Union were both cited as examples of hard-line communist regimes, most scholars viewed the two societies as being vastly different, particularly given the much higher standard of living in the GDR. A final difference between them involves geography: within the region of post-communist Europe, Eastern Germany and Russia are located at either extreme. Therefore, by comparing these two distant cases, we can also control for geographic placement, a factor that some scholars have identified as being

for example. But the term here refers to the contemporary post-communist period, where it is beyond dispute that Russia and Eastern Germany differ widely on the most commonly articulated alternative variables. On the method of agreement, see John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic: Ratiocinative and Inductive* (New York: Harper, 1846), Book III, Chapter 8, “Of the four methods of experimental inquiry”; on most different systems designs, see Adam Przeworski and Henry Teune, *The Logic of Comparative Social Inquiry* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1970), Chapter 2, “Research Designs.” For a balanced discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of Mill’s methods, see Stanley Lieberman, “Small N’s and Big Conclusions: An Examination of the Reasoning in Comparative Studies Based on a Small Number of Cases,” in Charles C Ragin and Howard S. Becker, eds., *What Is a Case? Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>20</sup> For an excellent account of the economic problems in contemporary Russia, see David M. Woodruff, *Money Unmade: Barter and the Fate of Russian Capitalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999). On the problems of developing an effective legal system in Russia, see Kathryn Hendley, “Legal Development in Post-Soviet Russia,” in *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (1997), pp. 231–256.

<sup>21</sup> For my own interpretation of the East-West German division, see Marc Howard, “An East German Ethnicity? Understanding the New Division of Unified Germany,” in *German Politics and Society*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (1995), pp. 49–70.

<sup>22</sup> See Nancy Ries, *Russian Talk: Culture and Conversation during Perestroika* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

crucial to any understanding of political and economic developments in the region.<sup>23</sup>

More specifically, the comparison is compelling in that it allows us to focus on two societies with great theoretical and empirical significance. The case study of Russia is central to any cross-national study of post-communist Europe. It provides an opportunity to examine the origins and the core of the state-socialist system, the country in which its effects were most pronounced, and also in which contemporary post-communist problems are particularly acute. Eastern Germany, in contrast, is the “critical case” to explain, because it is so counterintuitive; having benefited from West German wealth and institutions since unification, the expectation is that it *should* have a strong and vibrant civil society today. In fact, however, increasingly, many of the studies that compare Eastern and Western Germany have been concluding that the differences between East and West are far greater than initially expected (and hoped). The most striking indicator of this persistent social division is the intermarriage rate. In Berlin – which is, of course, the city with the most interaction between West and East, where people from both sides live and work in close proximity – the intermarriage rate between Easterners and Westerners in 1995 was just 3.4%, a paltry figure when compared to the rate of over 20% between either group and foreigners.<sup>24</sup> By 1998, rather than increasing over time, the intermarriage rate in Berlin actually dropped to under 2.4%.<sup>25</sup> In terms of participation in voluntary associations, most studies show that the gap between West and East remains very large as well.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> See Jeffrey S. Kopstein and David A. Reilly, “Geographic Diffusion and the Transformation of the Postcommunist World,” in *World Politics*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (2000), pp. 1–37.

<sup>24</sup> See Allgemeine Deutsche Nachrichtenagentur, “Die Ost-West Ehe bleibt auch weiter die Ausnahme,” in *Berliner Zeitung*, August 9, 1996.

<sup>25</sup> See Peter Neumann und Ulrich Paul, “Zehn Jahre nach der Grenzöffnung entsteht eine neue Berlin-Identität,” in *Berliner Zeitung*, November 9, 1999.

<sup>26</sup> See Stephen Padgett, *Organizing Democracy in Eastern Germany: Interest Groups in Post-Communist Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Wade Jacoby, *Imitation and Politics: Redesigning Modern Germany* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000); Bernhard Wessels, “Bürger und Organisationen in Ost- und Westdeutschland: Vereint und doch verschieden?” in Volker Eichener et al., eds., *Probleme der Einheit: Organisierte Interessen in Ostdeutschland* (Marburg: Metropolis-Verlag, 1992); Dieter Rucht, Barbara Blattert, and Dieter Rink, *Soziale Bewegungen auf dem Weg zur Institutionalisierung. Zum Strukturwandel “alternativer” Gruppen in beiden Teilen Deutschlands* (Frankfurt/M: Campus, 1997); Eckhard Priller, “Veränderungen in der politischen und sozialen Beteiligung in Ostdeutschland,” in Wolfgang Zapf and Roland Habich, eds. *Wohlfahrtsentwicklung im vereinten Deutschland. Sozialstruktur, sozialer Wandel und Lebensqualität* (Berlin: Edition Sigma, 1996); Helmut K. Anheier et al., eds., *Der Dritte Sektor in Deutschland: Organisationen zwischen Staat und Markt in gesellschaftlichen Wandel* (Berlin: Edition Sigma, 1998); Jürgen Baur, Uwe Koch, and Stephan Telschow, *Sportvereine im Übergang. Die Vereinslandschaft in Ostdeutschland* (Aachen: Meyer und Meyer, 1995).

Despite the wide structural differences between Eastern Germany and Russia today, the findings of this book point to striking social similarities, and this evidence provides strong support for arguments about the lasting impact of the communist experience. Both populations are undergoing similar societal processes in coping with the legacy of a long experience of living under a rigid communist system, while bitterly accepting the reality of a new political and economic order that many citizens already feel has let them down. And the fact that these two societies – which most people would assume are completely different today, over a decade since the collapse of communism – show such similarities gives strong support for the claim that, at least in terms of membership in voluntary organizations, the differences between post-communist countries are best characterized as differences in degree, not differences in kind. Although more detailed research and analysis still needs to be extended to other countries in post-communist Europe, particularly to those located between Russia and Eastern Germany – both geographically and in terms of competing political, economic, and “civilizational” variables – I argue that the same causal processes apply, in varying ways and to varying degrees, to the rest of the region as well.

#### THE ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

This book examines the theme of participation in voluntary organizations from a number of different perspectives. The sequence of the chapters follows a specific organizational logic. I start by developing the theoretical issues, concepts, and questions that are central to this project. Then I present the crucial empirical results that constitute the dependent variable, or the main puzzle to be explained. And finally, I provide a causal explanation that solves the puzzle, using two very different, but complementary, methodological approaches.

The following two chapters are primarily theoretical and conceptual. In Chapter 2, I present the theoretical framework that guides the rest of the book. After considering two alternative perspectives that emphasize the importance of the state and the economy, I develop an “experiential” approach to societal continuity and change. This theoretical approach focuses on individuals as agents who make choices, and it emphasizes real-life experiences, rather than general attitudes and orientations. I argue that for societal change to occur and to last, a confluence of three factors must take place: first, new institutions must be authoritative and binding; second, they should build upon existing traditions and culture; and third, several decades and generations are needed to change people’s habits and acculturation so that the societal change is decisive and enduring.

The communist institutions, established after 1917 in the Soviet Union and after World War II in Eastern Europe, managed to reconfigure and homogenize a diverse population, although certainly not as originally intended. The shortage economy and the Communist Party's ruthless control of the public sphere caused citizens throughout communist Europe to develop adaptive mechanisms of behavior, centered on private networks, that augmented the sharp distinction between the public and private spheres.<sup>27</sup> In contrast, post-communist institutions, in addition to being still quite new and unfamiliar, are based on neo-liberal ideas and institutions that are in many ways antithetical to people's prior experiences and practices and that involve the crucial concepts of individual initiative and self-motivation, which by definition are difficult to impose authoritatively. While, of course, some societal change has certainly taken place, it has not been nearly as overwhelming or decisive as many analysts had expected given the dramatic and rapid change in political and economic institutions after the collapse of communism.

In Chapter 2, I also introduce the three main individual-level causal factors that guide much of the empirical analysis in subsequent chapters: (1) most post-communist citizens still strongly mistrust and avoid organizations, even now that participation is voluntary; (2) many of the private and informal networks that developed under communism – because of the politicization and state control of the public sphere, as well as the shortage economy – still persist today in an altogether new institutional environment, and they serve as a disincentive for many people to join formal organizations; and (3) many post-communist citizens are extremely dissatisfied with the new political and economic system, which has not lived up to their hopes and ideals, and this disappointment has caused them to withdraw even further from public activities. I argue that these three factors, which all involve “experiential” reinterpretations of people's past experiences in light of new institutions and developments, have a strong and mutually reinforcing negative effect on membership and participation in voluntary organizations.

Chapter 3 is primarily a conceptual analysis of civil society, covering its meaning, the role it plays in the process of democratization, and how it can be studied empirically. After alluding to the recent explosion of studies of civil society, which often apply unclear or inconsistent conceptualizations, I start by placing civil society in the context of wider societal relations in a democratic system. Incorporating Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan's five “arenas” of democratization – civil society, political society, economic society, the rule of law, and state bureaucracy – I illustrate and explain the distinctions among them. I distinguish between the rule of law and state bureaucracy,

<sup>27</sup> See the general discussion in Bunce, *Subversive Institutions*, Chapters 2 and 3; Jowitt, *New World Disorder*, especially pp. 86–87, 287; Vladimir Shlapentokh, *Public and Private Life of the Soviet People: Changing Values in Post-Stalin Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

both of which are based on legal-rational institutions and organizing principles, and the three remaining arenas, which consist of organizations and groups of people. I contend that, whereas the groups of political society consist mainly of political elites who are concerned with office-seeking and individual power, and the organizations of economic society include economic elites who are primarily interested in material profit, civil society is the realm of ordinary citizens, who join and participate in organizations based on their own interests, needs, or desires, without directly seeking power or profit – even though they sometimes strive for political influence and often need financial support.

After explaining the main theoretical and analytic differences among political, economic, and civil society, I show that, in reality, they often overlap. For example, political parties include both political elites and mass membership, and labor unions consist of both economic elites and workers. However, despite much overlap, it is the specification of the general differences among civil, political, and economic society that helps us to understand better what civil society is, and what it is not. I continue in Chapter 3 with a discussion of the “virtues” of civil society, focusing on civil society’s ability to influence the state and to encourage people to broaden their circles of association, both of which create a more active, participatory, and responsive democracy. Finally, I argue that the most effective way to study civil society empirically, and especially comparatively across countries, is not to count the number of existing or nominally registered organizations, but to focus on the extent of organizational membership and participation by ordinary citizens, which can be measured reasonably accurately by representative surveys.

In Chapter 4, I present the empirical findings that constitute the crucial “baseline,” a comparative measure of participation in voluntary organizations across a wide set of countries. The countries are divided into three groups, classified by *prior regime type*, as either “older democracies,” “post-authoritarian,” or “post-communist.” The data come primarily from the 1995–97 World Values Survey (WVS). The question phrasings are all identical, asking whether or not respondents are members of each of a set of nine voluntary organizations: (1) church or religious organizations, (2) sports or recreational clubs, (3) educational, cultural, or artistic organizations, (4) labor unions, (5) political parties or movements, (6) environmental organizations, (7) professional associations, (8) charity organizations, and (9) any other voluntary organization.

The results show that, with the partial exception of labor unions, participation in voluntary organizations is much lower in post-communist countries than in the older democracies and the post-authoritarian countries. Compared to the two other groups, the post-communist countries are almost exclusively grouped at the lowest levels of organizational membership. Moreover, an analysis of the changes in country rankings from 1990–91 to 1995–97 suggests that levels of membership in post-communist countries

have declined significantly, especially when compared to those in the post-authoritarian countries. Finally, from 1995–97 to 1999, the levels of participation dropped in Eastern Germany and Russia, showing not only that organizational membership is very low in post-communist countries but also that it may be declining even further.

Using a measure from the WVS data on organizational membership as a dependent variable, I test several important hypotheses that emphasize economic, political-institutional, and civilizational factors, as well as a variable for prior regime type, along with several individual-level variables that are central to the literature on political participation and civil society. The results show very clearly that prior regime type – and in particular prior communist experience – is the most significant and powerful variable for explaining organizational membership. This finding indicates the need for more in-depth consideration of the specific elements of that prior communist experience, in order to explain *why* post-communist countries have relatively low levels of organizational membership in comparison to older democracies and post-authoritarian countries.

Whereas the purpose of Chapter 4 is to present, characterize, and explain levels of participation in voluntary organizations in a wide cross-regional perspective, the objective of Chapters 5 and 6 is to provide a causal explanation for the particularly low scores in the post-communist region. Chapter 5 incorporates an original representative survey, conducted in 1999 in Western Germany, Eastern Germany, and Russia, and called the Post-Communist Organizational Membership Study (PCOMS).<sup>28</sup> The chapter employs statistical analysis to test a series of different individual-level hypotheses, in two distinct ways. The first test uses individual-level survey data from all three societies, to estimate the significance of the socioeconomic status (SES) variables of income, education, age, and gender, as well as city size, along with an individual-level variable for the prior communist experience. The results show that, while the socioeconomic variables are sometimes statistically significant, prior communist experience is by far the most powerful variable, thus suggesting that other – specifically post-communist – factors that are missed by the standard SES model may be causally relevant.

The second statistical analysis in Chapter 5 examines the elements of the prior communist experience in greater detail, incorporating the three causal factors introduced in Chapter 2 to test their impact on organizational membership in the East German and Russian samples. I operationalize the concepts of mistrust of communist organizations, the persistence of friendship networks, and post-communist disappointment, and I test their causal impact on organizational membership. The results show that all three factors

<sup>28</sup> Several of the PCOMS questions were also addressed to a representative sample of West German respondents, thus allowing for some basic comparisons between East Germans and West Germans.

have explanatory power. Whether for a pooled sample of Russian and East German respondents or for each sample separately, the inclusion of these specifically post-communist variables greatly improves upon the percentage of variability explained by the socioeconomic factors alone. Overall, this analysis provides strong empirical support for the experiential approach, showing how people's past experiences, and their ongoing reinterpretations of those experiences, can best explain their current behavior.

Chapter 6 seeks to complement the statistical analysis from Chapter 5, by incorporating the findings from 60 in-depth interviews with ordinary East Germans and Russians. In this interpretive analysis, I develop and apply the three main post-communist factors in much greater detail than could be captured by the closed-ended survey questions used in Chapter 5. I show how each of the three factors relates to the life stories of my respondents, as described in their own words. I incorporate many quotations and stories, in order to illustrate the previously demonstrated causal connection between the explanatory factors and my respondents' membership and participation in voluntary organizations. In particular, I compare the responses of, and stories told by, my East German respondents with those of my Russian respondents, pointing out the underlying similarities but also several significant differences. Again, the common theoretical element of the causal factors is the way in which people interpret their prior experiences when making choices about their current behavior. Overall, Chapter 6 provides a much more complete and rich understanding of post-communist citizens and the range of experiences they have lived through, and it helps to explain more thoroughly the distinctively low levels of organizational membership in post-communist Europe today.

Finally, in Chapter 7, I conclude the book by discussing some of its wider implications. I start by evaluating the impact of this book's findings on conceptions of post-communist Europe as a distinctive and coherent region. I argue that scholars have been too quick to emphasize the elite and institutional differences, while dismissing the similarities of the communist experience and its lasting legacy – particularly on the societal level – among countries in the region. I suggest that the establishment of similarly low levels of participation across the region, bolstered by the finding of similar causal factors in two otherwise very different societies, should lead to a reconsideration of the relative similarities and differences among the countries of post-communist Europe.

I then discuss positive and negative interpretations of the effect that low levels of participation in voluntary organizations by post-communist citizens will have on post-communist democracy. I argue that the weakness of civil society is a distinctive and potentially precarious feature of post-communist democracy, but I suggest that – paradoxically – this disengagement may also impede the development of *anti*-democratic forces with widespread and organized citizen support, as a result of the same legacy of mistrust of all forms of public organization. Although the breakdown or survival of democracy

may not be at stake, the *quality* of post-communist democracy suffers as a result of the weakness of civil society, as post-communist citizens become increasingly alienated from the political process, while simultaneously lacking the institutional leverage that organizations might provide.

I go on to consider the more speculative issue of how the findings of this book might change over time. I focus on the potential effect that either generational change or institutional design could have on the current pattern of non-participation in post-communist societies, and I predict that, for the most part, little substantive change will occur in the near future. Finally, I conclude by addressing the daunting challenge of what can be done to improve the current situation. While current patterns are hardly encouraging, I emphasize the crucial role of the state as the cooperative partner of civil society, and I stress the need to move beyond a neo-liberal dogmatism about institutional “crafting” to a flexible and open-minded approach that is more sensitive and responsive to the history and personal experiences of post-communist citizens.

#### RESEARCH

This book is based on several different types and sources of data, and it employs multiple methods in an attempt to provide a causal explanation that is theoretically and empirically convincing. In addition to analysis of existing data and secondary literature, I incorporate the findings from my own empirical research, applying an inductive theoretical approach in conjunction with both quantitative and qualitative methods. The combination of closed-ended survey data and open-ended interviews allows for an examination of this study’s central puzzle using two distinct, but complementary, methods of gathering data, thus helping to corroborate and extend the book’s findings.

The statistical analysis involves the testing and ruling out of a series of alternative hypotheses, while demonstrating the explanatory power of the three main theoretical factors that I hypothesize will affect organizational membership. And the interpretive approach adds depth and flesh to the statistical findings; it contributes much more detailed, contextualized, and evocative descriptions of the argument’s causal logic.

The use and combination of these two different methodological approaches provides a more rigorous application and test of the book’s main theoretical argument about the causal effect of people’s prior experiences on their current social behavior. Moreover, this methodological complementarity answers the recent calls from comparativists of all different theoretical and methodological persuasions, who have been urging scholars to incorporate multiple methods in their empirical research.<sup>29</sup> Most importantly, the

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); David

fact that these two different approaches point to the same results, showing the same strong support for historical and experiential factors, gives even more credence to the argument and findings than could be achieved if only one method had been used.

Overall, this book seeks to provide a description and an appreciation of the complicated lives of communist and now post-communist citizens. Only by understanding how people lived under communism – how they adjusted to the imposing restrictions set by an intrusive state and a dysfunctional economy, and how their relations with friends and acquaintances played a central social role – as well as how people perceive and adapt to the new challenges of post-communism, will scholars and policy makers alike be able to make sense of societal-level developments in the region. This book shows that post-communist citizens are certainly not avid joiners of organizations, but nor are they atomized individuals, bereft of social relations. Rather, they are thoughtful actors who are struggling with the challenges of an extremely disorienting world. It is my hope that this book will help to bring about a more complete and discerning understanding of the past experiences and current behavior of the citizens of post-communist Europe.

D. Laitin, “Disciplining Political Science,” in *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 89, No. 2 (1995), pp. 454–456; and the chapters by Mark I. Lichbach and Alan S. Zuckerman, Margaret Levi, Marc Howard Ross, and Ira Katznelson in Lichbach and Zuckerman, eds., *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).