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Fatalistic political cultures revisited

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Three meanings of political culture

Making sense of the political post-communist transition has proved to be a difficult task. In comparison, the economic transition had a clear beginning – the command economy, and a clear target – the free market. In terms of political culture, even the word "transition" has little meaning, and the early observation that East European Studies as a discipline is still far away from forging a theory of change of political culture may still be accurate (von Beyme 1996: 349). First, do we actually know where East European political culture comes from? Does it have its roots in the pre-communist past, a time that adepts of cultural legacies theories depict as doomed to "etatism" and "collectivism" even before the advent of communism (Schoepflin 1978)? Are these historical sources of eastern European political culture so corrupt as to have even perverted communism itself (Jowitt 1993)? Or does the region's political culture derive from the less remote communist times, assuming the communist regime was successful in imposing its culture upon both elites and the community? And what were the features of the community political culture during communism? As all analysts point out, comparative research in eastern Europe suffers from a "*tabula rasa* problem," as the first partially reliable comparable data were collected only as late as 1990 (Plasser and Pribersky 1996: 5). Surveys prior to this date are suspected of pro-regime bias and therefore almost useless. Second, where are these societies headed for? Perhaps the answer is toward a universal type of liberal or Western democratic political culture? But does such an entity even exist? If so how do we account for the broad range of different liberal cultures, from the individualistic Anglo-Saxons to the more collectivistic Germans, from the "feminine" Scandinavians to the "masculine" Americans (Hofstede 1998)? Differences in institutional culture among West Europeans are a common complaint within the European Union, where a "Northern" and a "Mediterranean" culture are allegedly in tense cohabitation. Even assuming we know the two ends of this continuum, what lies in between? Is "transition" a mixture of competing residual beliefs with newly acquired

ones? And when does the moment arrive to decide which ones have acquired the upper hand for good?

Three distinct meanings of "political culture" have been used in connection to post-communist Europe so far. The first considers political culture to be a configuration arising out of salient patterns of public opinion with regard to politics, following the traditional approach of Almond and Verba (1963). By aggregating individual psychological data, this view creates the "national" on the basis of individual representations of politics shared by the majority of the population. Here, two distinct problems arise. First, majorities of public opinion shift constantly on a considerable number of issues. Second, many crucial political issues fall short of meeting the approval of clear majorities. There is an outstanding example of the former in eastern Europe, where the number of people saying in a survey interview that one-party systems are better than multi-party systems has decreased year after year since 1991, when a *Times Mirror* poll first asked the question. The latter often emerges in the headlines whenever polls report that public opinion is divided. On many political issues, from war to abortion, pollsters report that we face two "countries." We have two Americas, one in favor of gun control, the other in favor of unlimited freedom to buy a weapon, and two eastern Europes, one constantly voting for former communist parties, the other voting for former anti-communist parties. Majorities shift across time and across issues, making "national" political culture hard to grasp. If we believe Inglehart's (1997) ideas, then the whole post-communist world is only one "culture," where Catholics, Protestants, Orthodox and Confucians all prefer the earthly values of survival above the values of self-expression.

The second meaning of political culture refers to what the French call *mentalités*. *Mentalities* are more than attitudes toward politics, they are actual behaviors rooted in widespread norms about politics. Those go far beyond current issues of politics, and are only infrequently investigated. Putting one's dentist on the payroll of the European Commission as a consultant is more acceptable in some cultures than in others. Relying on majorities rather than building a broad consensus over an issue is, again, a common pattern in some countries, but not in others. *Mentalities* are better understood as "informal institutions," widespread societal norms and procedures, such as described by Douglas North. It was also North (1990) who remarked that informal institutions emerge out of habit. In times of political and economical change, they often reflect the formal institutions of the previous, rather than the current, regime. This observation may be of crucial importance in understanding post-communist societies. This approach to "political culture" is common especially in the policy literature. Studies on the legal or business culture of post-communist Europe have often taken this "institutionalist" perspective. It was even argued that any other approach than deciphering the logic of

informal institutions out of their specific historical context cannot but fail to explain post-communism (Gelman 2001).

Finally, there is a more "metaphysical" vision of political culture, shared by cultural theory to area studies and comparative politics. This follows the footsteps of nineteenth-century thought (represented, for instance, by German historian Leopold Ranke) that history is an expression of national "character" or culture, and has met the endorsement in the twentieth century by a string of famous authors, ranging from George F. Kennan to Samuel Huntington or Aaron Wildavsky. Insidiously, but persistently, it is this particular vision of political culture that more often than not colors the media stories on a specific country. Similarly, Carl Schmitt's distinction between politics and the concept of the political was rediscovered in recent decades by scholars seeking a more anthropological approach to highlight the "political" texture embedded within the general cultural tissue. As Geertz once put it, "Culture [. . .] is not cults and customs, but the structure of meaning through which men give shape to their experience, and politics is not coups and constitutions, but one of the principal arenas in which such structures publicly unfold" (Geertz 1973: 311–12).

Needless to say, the more difficult a political transition, and the less relevant public opinion proves to be in explaining actual regime performance, the more the need increases to turn to the third variant of political culture in the effort for explanation. It works for politicians, because it lays the blame on history and the people, diminishing elite agency. It is convenient for constituencies, because it justifies poor electoral choices, assuming that the political culture of elites, regardless of their ideology, is to blame, so one needs not pay attention to politics. And finally, it is convenient for the international community, because it reinforces whatever was their initial policy approach. A country is doing poorly not because it is neglected, but is neglected because its history carries the obvious germ of its own failure, suggesting investment in that particular country cannot change its fate and is therefore a waste.

As a rule, Romania, the prime subject of this chapter, was almost always analyzed through the use of this last conceptualization of political culture. Poor performance was the consequence of a historically grounded, long-term cultural development (Shafir 1985; Wildavsky 1987; Jowitt 1993; Janos 1993). On closer inspection, however, Romania's performance is anything but "poor" considering that, in 1989, it had the worst totalitarian regime of post-communist Europe, but managed to be invited at the 1999 Helsinki summit to join the European Union – a process which may prove long and strenuous, but is likely to end a mere 20 years after the 1989 revolution. Compared to the speedy integration of the Baltic countries, Romania has indeed performed worse – but its population is almost three times larger that of those states. Furthermore, Romania falls on the wrong side of the civilization border drawn by Samuel Huntington (1993) as it is

overwhelmingly Christian Orthodox and was a tributary to the Ottoman Empire from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century. It is also allegedly haunted by Robert Kaplan's Balkan "ghosts" of nationalism and anti-Semitism. However, despite having an important and politically self-assertive Hungarian minority in Transylvania (7 percent of the total population), Romania has not become the stage for yet another "typical" Balkan ethnic conflict. Instead, it has evolved into a power-sharing polity, with Hungarian parties associated with the government since 1996. A British nineteenth-century guide also characterized Bucharest briefly as "the most dissolute" city in Europe. As for Wildavsky, who sketches four types of political culture, the "fatalistic" variant is based entirely on Romania (1987). Its inspiration lies in the Romanian folk ballad, *Mioritza*. *Mioritza* is the story of a Romanian shepherd who reacts to the news that his envious fellow shepherds plan to kill him in order to steal his herd with total passivity, taking ritual steps to meet his death and a cosmic wedding with the universe. The ballad was interpreted in various ways. Michael Shafir, a scholar of Romanian political culture, has elaborated most of the argument Wildavsky draws upon when characterizing Romania (1985). Wildavsky cross-tabulates the strength of group boundaries with the nature of norms binding groups. When norms are strong and groups are weak – so that decisions are frequently made for them by external factors – the result is what he calls a "fatalistic" political culture. In such cultures, people are unable to fully exploit both freedom – being distrustful toward the utility of the exercise of free will – and power, as low mutual trust makes collective action difficult to achieve. Wildavsky's theory is thus able to point to what is indeed the strongest determinant of Romanian history, external intervention. However, he is perhaps overly deterministic in describing a trip from gloom to doom by eternalizing bad history through the emergence of "fatalism" as a *permanent* cultural trait. There is little doubt that "external factors" have historically played a more important role than domestic agency. This is the part of the world that Barrington Moore Jr. considered should not be included at all in discussions on political change, as "the decisive causes of their politics lie outside their own boundaries" (1966: xii).

The Romanian national state was indeed created by a *fait accompli* in 1859, despite the preferences of the Great Powers who did not approve of the unification of Romanian principalities. In 1940, the Hitler–Stalin pact deprived Romania of important territories inhabited by Romanian citizens, striking a mortal blow to the legitimacy of constitutional monarchy. The Romanian communism that followed was entirely Soviet sponsored, and on the scrap of paper Winston Churchill handed to Stalin (according to his own narrative and Anthony Eden's *Memoirs*) Romania was marked as the country of the least interest to the West of all eastern European states. The Soviet Union was accordingly given 90 percent influence, and the West claimed a mere 10 percent sphere of influence in the country. Even

the 1989 fall of Ceausescu, betrayed by the army and security apparatus, facing a yet manageable popular uprising, has also been attributed – on the basis of some evidence – to a plot led by Moscow. "Political culture" matters only when people are free to choose the form of government they prefer, and for Romanians this is a brand new experience. Only after 1989 has "political culture" started to matter more, as the whole world reached a degree of liberalization without precedent. But how much it did matter is still under dispute. On 25 December 1989, after the most violent popular uprising of all eastern European revolutions, dictator Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife were shot after a brief trial. Of the few people who assisted at the execution – quite unknown to the public at the time – some went on to play a major role in the history of post-communist Romania. Their presence at Ceaucescu's execution and the role they played in the years to come, especially in the violent repression of opposition by miners in June 1990, led several observers to conclude the popular uprising which led to the fall of Ceausescu was successful only because of a secret agreement between the army, security apparatus and some key politicians favored by Gorbachev such as Ion Iliescu. Iliescu, however, had popular appeal – he won three out of the four presidential elections in which he participated, helped by a special interpretation of the Constitution that allowed him three terms in office. It is difficult to separate decisions by formal institutions – such as this decision of the Constitutional Court – from informal institutions such as people's preference to vote for politicians who are identified with the state and related attitudes such as communism and collectivism. This suggests that any meaningful discussion of political culture must go beyond the examination of cross-sectional surveys of public opinion. In other words, if political culture is treated as an independent variable, the evidence is there to show that political culture matters little or not at all. Exogenous factors (the decision of the EU to enlarge to the Balkans) and structural constraints (the communist heritage), have such an overwhelming importance in explaining the trajectories of eastern European countries that little room is left for other explanations (Bunce 1999). If political culture is treated, however, as a dependent variable, and our concern is more to explain what triggers changes in political culture – for instance how political culture relates to political change in general – it will be worth the effort. Comparative surveys show little to no difference in legal culture, for instance. It seems that Romanians are no more willing than other eastern Europeans to cheat on taxes, travel without paying a fare on public transportation or infringe the law. Objective data, on the other hand, as monitored by the World Bank or the European Commission, point to the fact that law and order institutions in Romania show a performance that ranks lower than those of central European countries. Thus, we have to look at the relationship between formal institutions, informal institutions and public opinion to understand the complexity of political culture in times of dramatic

political and social change. In other words, we have to follow the horizontal causal links roughly suggested by the theoretical model of Figure 12.1 to capture the complexity of political change, placing public opinion in a broader context. This chapter looks at Romania from such a perspective and will therefore integrate subjective data with some objective indicators as well.

The 1995 World Values Survey (WVS) data for Romania were generated in 1993 by ICCV. They provide a general comparative framework to discuss the Romanian situation. Three more-recent surveys, two from the year 2000 (2000a and 2000b), and one from 2001, jointly sponsored by the Eurobarometer and the UNDP, all executed by CURS, allow an update of the state of affairs in Romanian political culture.[1]

Figure 12.1 illustrates the complex links between formal institutions, informal institutions and political culture, in terms of the Almond and Verba definition. It helps to put my analytic tools to proper use and to understand their limitations as well. In terms of legal culture, for instance, the formal institution consists of the organization and formal procedures of the justice system, from constitutional provisions to the organization of courts. The informal institution refers to people's habits, for instance, bribing of court clerks to shorten the length of trials (usually between three and four years). "Political culture" is made up of attitudes toward formal and informal institutional arrangements. Do people like to bribe? Do they perceive this state of affairs as normal? Is it the corruption of

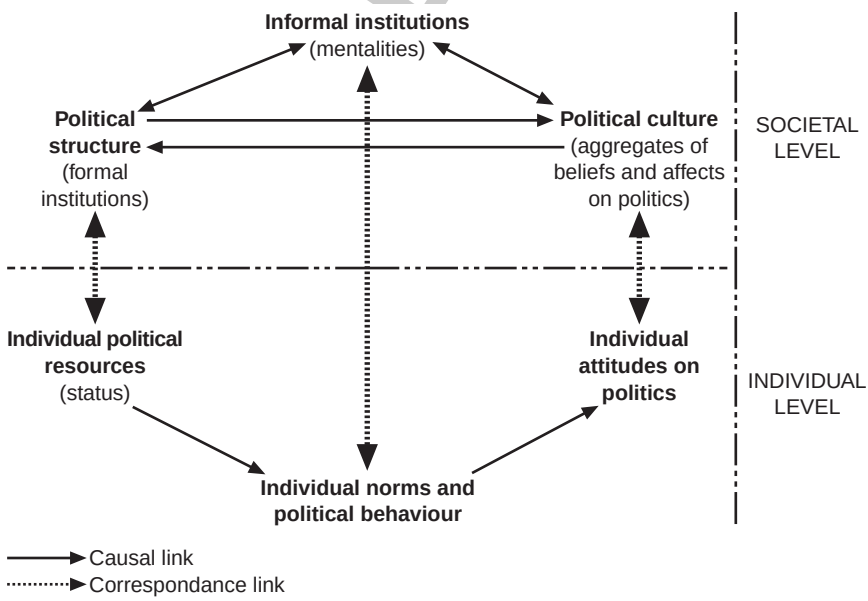

Figure 12.1 Integrating political culture into context. A theoretical model.

citizens that triggers the corruption of the judiciary, or are there institutional incentives and constraints that cause corruption with public reactions showing disapproval and discontent? Finally, we should not forget that we deal with self-reporting. Even if we find significant associations in our analysis, those will tell us something about individuals, not about countries. Figure 12.1 is a sort of mirror, separating the societal level from the individual level and tracing the correspondences between the two. Inferences from the individual level do tell us something about society as well, but the invisible border between real people and abstract aggregates should be kept in mind at all times.

The rest of this chapter will be divided in three sections and final conclusions. Each section will examine the evidence for the three major stories of Romanian political culture: the country's late and somehow incomplete separation from communism; its allegedly "peasant" character; and the country's problems of corruption and political trust. In each of these sections, I will look at the cause of the attitudes of the majority of the population, trying to separate "hard to change" legacies such as development (structural constraints, from now on) from "soft" legacies (e.g. socialization, from religion to reading newspapers). Finally, I will summarize the main results of this analysis of political culture change and democratization.

Authoritarians into democrats?

Romanian exceptionalism was often invoked in connection with the way its political transition was managed by elites close to the former communist party. The transition was the outcome of a popular uprising that produced more casualties than all other eastern European regimes changes put together. More than 1,000 people died in the confusing week of the "Romanian Revolution," slaughtered first by the army in the days prior to 22 December, then by unidentified snipers. Despite this heavy toll paid primarily by denizens of the largest cities, in the first free and fair elections after the fall of communism, when central Europeans voted for anti-communist parties, Romanians voted for a party which, although not a direct communist successor, openly defended important features of the communist heritage. The National Salvation Front (NSF) started as a grassroots movement, but agencies of the former regime, such as the army and the secret services, managed to gain ever more control. The extent to which the heritage of communist times was preserved is a crucial factor in explaining transitions, but it is, in turn, dependent on how the power struggle between the communist establishment and new political elite was resolved. Romania had one of the hardest of all communist regimes in eastern Europe, and shaking it off in 1989 was possible only due to the consent of Ceausescu's own army and Securitate (the secret political police). Their agreement to a change of regime was intended as a sort of

life insurance. Even before passing a new constitution in 1991, the first freely elected Romanian parliament adopted a law on national security sealing most of the communist archives indefinitely. Except for a few dignitaries who had been close to the Ceausescu family, nobody was tried for crimes during communist times. Attempts to finalize the trial of two generals who ordered the shooting of anti-Ceausescu protesters by the anti-communist government of 1996–2000 were hindered by the next government of Ion Iliescu, a former liberal apparatchik who had received power from the army in 1989. Protests against what intellectuals and the media saw as "neo-communists" at the beginning of the transition decreased considerably after the failure of anti-communists, in their turn, to deliver on their 1996 electoral promises, which caused subsequent defeat in the 2000 elections. The warning behind these protests remains real and the absence of de-communization may render reforms ineffective. The necessity of a more than symbolic fight against communism, but the elimination of the lasting effects of residual communism, was argued for by the post-1989 civil society movement in Romania. The government of Ion Iliescu, three times victor in presidential elections, in the name of national consensus and "putting the past behind," openly fought against this vision. Yet Iliescu's electoral victories indicate that the voters' choice and values must have played some role, despite voter manipulation by the state-owned media. It is due to this silent but firm endorsement of post-communism by the public that most authors see the Romanian political transition as different from most other central European experiences. For most of the transition the society was indeed divided between urban, higher-educated people voting for the center-right and rural inhabitants and workers in state-owned bankrupt industrial mega-enterprises voting for the post-communists. The former were in favor of reform and western integration, the latter were afraid of it. In 1990, polls indicated that a majority of respondents believed that more than one political party would not be desirable, that the state should be in charge of everything and that "although he went too far, a leader of the type of Ceausescu is what we need today" (Mungiu-Pippidi 1996). This strong cleavage persisted as late as 2000, to become more and more blurred in recent years, as the distinction between anti-communists and post-communists gradually lost relevance for the policy agenda dominated by the common project of European integration. Similarly, the number of people considering the multi-party system increased, and the number of those endorsing anti-democratic alternatives decreased, as citizens were re-socialized. Not all the new democrats have become consistent democrats. Table 12.1 reflects the overlapping of those who endorse representative democracy with those who barely disguise their antipathy for politics behind a preference for technocratic, not political government, and those who openly opt for a non-democratic alternative at the same time. The number of "inconsistent" democrats has decreased since the beginning of the transition:

Table 12.1 Democratic and autocratic orientations[1]

	Democracy best	*Strong leaders*	*Army rule*	*Experts*
Czech Republic	91	16	5	78
Slovakia	89	19	5	78
Poland	88	–	–	–
Hungary	85	19	5	78
Slovenia	88	25	6	80
Romania 1993	87	47	25	40
Romania 2001	79	30	13	81
Bulgaria	80	62	17	46

Source: WVS 1995, except Romania 2001 (2001).

Notes

1 Surveys included the World Values Surveys 1995–2000, polled by ICCV in Romania in 1993.

Surveys quoted by year (2000a, 2000b, 2001) were all executed by the Center for Urban Sociology (CURS). Surveys 2000a and 2001 were national surveys on samples of 1,100 each. 2000b was a special survey, designed to be representative for every region, with a sample of 37,400 respondents. 2001 was a joint survey by Eurobarometer and United Nations Development Program (UNDP). 2000a and 2001 were sponsored by Freedom House and UNDP and designed by the author.

Democracy best: "Democracy may have problems but it's better than any other form of government" (agree strongly, agree); Strong leaders: "Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections"; Army rule: "Having the army rule"; Experts: "Having experts, not government, make decisions according to what they think is best for the country" (very good, good).

47 percent of Romanians would have preferred a strong leader to representative democracy in 1993 (WVS) compared to only 30 percent in 2001 (Eurobarometer). Non-political governments, by experts and technocrats, have remained the most popular form of government, as Romanians grew more and more dissatisfied with their politicians while becoming more committed democrats in the same time.

Nevertheless, when considering the democracy–autocracy index, we find few strong democrats in Romania (26 percent). The "strong democrats" are the consistent citizens who embrace democracy and reject autocracy. The largest group is formed by "weak democrats" (51 percent) who gave an overall positive assessment of democracy, though less strong. Finally we have 11 percent undecided (who are mostly inconsistent) and then through to "autocrats," who make up 12 percent. Overall, compared with a western democracy, such as Germany, the Romanian public is placed at the autocratic end of this index. By 1995, consistent democrats in Romania and Bulgaria were clearly lower in numbers when compared to the Czech Republic or Hungary. However, the gap has narrowed considerably over the last decade.

Several factors can explain this finding. First and foremost, we must consider the communist heritage. Romania had four million communist party members, more than double the average of the region as a whole.

Widespread institutionalization of cooperation with the communist regime combined with the strongest repression in the region (these two factors cannot be separated) are likely to be accountable for a difficult democratization. Economic development is also an important variable. Roughly 40 percent of Romania's population is still employed in agriculture – Poland has less than half this figure; Hungary and the Czech Republic less than 10 percent and even Bulgaria has only around 26 percent thus employed. These legacies and "structural constraints" compete with cultural explanations, such as blaming the Christian Orthodox denomination for its lack of appetite for democracy, compared to Catholicism and Protestantism. Another range of explanations blame the difficult economic transition that regimes have had to undertake. If a regime produces only poverty and social inequality, citizens become disenchanted regardless whether or not free and fair elections are regularly held. It becomes obvious that any explanation accounting for anti-democratic attitudes must take all these factors into account. To test various possible explanations, democratic or autocratic attitudes were used as dependent variables repeatedly in multivariate linear regression models testing these competing explanations simultaneously. The first set uses only data from Romania, thereby comparing between Romanians, democratic and less democratic. The second set uses the WVS pooled sample for the whole region. Results for two complementary Romanian models are shown in Table 12.2, one with the dependent variable "preference for strong leaders" versus "elected parliament" (I, WVS data), the other using as dependent variable the attitude toward eventual closure of parliament (II, UNDP and Eurobarometer data). The latter survey was used because it includes a question on membership in the former communist party.

Both models show that the "structural constraints" variables influence democratic attitudes importantly. Rural inhabitants are likely to be less democratic than urban ones even when controlling for income, wealth and education. Former membership in the communist party, all other things being equal, predicts a weaker commitment to democracy (Table 12.2). The young and educated are more likely to be democrats. Romanians are overwhelmingly Orthodox (already determined by birth), but no difference can be found between those who attend religious services or believe in God and those who do not when it comes to attitudes toward democracy (Table 12.2). Being an Orthodox Christian does not make one less likely to be a democrat when Romania is compared with the other countries and Christian Orthodoxy with other denominations in the pooled WVS sample (Table 12.3), which confirms previous reports by Rose *et al.* (1998), and Miller *et al.* (1998). What discriminates between democrats and non-democrats is collectivism. The more an individual believes that incomes should be close and communism was a good idea poorly put into practice, the less likely it is that one would protest if

Table 12.2 Determinants of democracy – autocracy orientations in Romania

Independent variables	*Model I*	*Strong leader (1 for, 4 against); questions and scales*	*Model II*	*Parliament abolished (1 agree, 4 disagree); questions and scales*
Wealth	Ns	Subjective satisfaction with household situation, 1 not satisfied, 4 satisfied	Ns	Individual income the previous month in five categories
Education	Ns	1 primary; 2 elementary and vocational; 3 high-school; 4 college and higher	Ns	Same
Age	0.073**	Age recoded in four groups (18–35; 36–50; 51–65; over 65)	−0.078*	Same
Rural	0.089***	1 Localities below 20,000 inhabitants; 0 all other localities	–	Same
Male	Ns	Gender, 1 Male; 0 Female	Ns	Same
Religious	Ns	Scale, 1 does not attend religious service; 1 once a month or rarely; 2 a few times a month; 3 a few times a week; 4 daily or almost daily	–	
Communist member	–	–	0.061*	1 member of the former communist party; 0 other
Follows politics	−55	Discuss politics with friends, 1 frequently, 3 never	0.133***	Index constructed as the average of scores for "watch political news on TV," "read political news in the press," "discuss politics with friends"

Interested in politics	Ns	Self-reported interest in politics, 1 high, 4 low	–	
Left–right ideology scale	Ns	Scale, 1 left, 10 right	–	
Collectivism	0.054*	Scale, 1 low agreement that efforts should be made to equalize income, 10 high agreement	–	
Left–right ideology irrelevant	–	–	0.152***	Dichotomous variable, 1 = the right-left distinction is declared irrelevant for the respondent; 0 = the reverse
Transition frustrating	–	–	0.179***	Country headed in a good direction, 1 absolutely not, 4 absolutely yes
Communism good idea	–	–	0.110	"Communism good idea but badly put into practice," 1 fully disagree, 4 fully agree
Experts should run the country	0.489	"We should have experts running the country, instead of political governments," 1 fully agree, 4 fully disagree	–	"We should have experts running the country, instead of political governments," 1 fully agree, 4 fully disagree
Adj. R^2	0.233	0.169		

Source: I-WVS 1995; II-2001.

Notes
Figures are standardized regression coefficients (betas) ***significant at 0.000 level; **significant at 0.00 level; *significant at <0.05–0.00.; NS = non-significant.

Table 12.3 "Hard" versus "soft" explanations of democratic orientations

Determinants	*Model 1*	*Model 2*	*Scales used*
Wealth	0.090*	0.089*	Subjective evaluation of financial situation of household; 1 low; 10 high
Education	0.100*	0.097*	Age finished school, in years
Age in years	−0.086*	−0.083*	Years old
Size of town	0.090*	0.083*	1 village, 8 large city
Christian Orthodox	–	0.010	Dichotomous. 1 Orthodox, 0 other
Scale denomination	0.025	–	1 Muslim, 2 Orthodox, 3 Catholic, 4 Protestant, atheist and other 0
Religious	0.005	–	Dichotomous. 1 religious, 0 other
Collectivism b	0.085*	0.086*	State vs. citizen responsibility for one's own welfare 1 State, 10 Citizen
Constant (std. error)	2.15* (0.086)	2.26* (0.076)	
N	8,559	8,559	
Adjusted R^2	0.062	0.059	

Notes
OLS regression models with dependent variable "democracy may have problems but it's better than any other form of government" (1 disagree strongly, 4 agree strongly); year of field-work: 1993 for World Values Survey. Pooled database includes Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, Croatia, Slovenia, Slovakia and Bulgaria. Coefficients are standardized beta coefficients unless specified otherwise.
* Significant at 0.001 level.

parliament was abolished or one would prefer a strong leader to elections (Table 12.2).

Post-communist socialization seems to work. The young and those who are more exposed to information on politics are more democratic. Overall, it is the legacy of communism that burdens political transition, not other cultural factors, such as religion. And gradually, albeit slowly, this is making an impact. Learning is progressing, as Rose *et al.* (1998) have already remarked, and people grasp that elections are the most important way to assure accountability. Romanians are reluctant to give this right away – in 2002 over 90 percent defended their right to elect the president directly when a proposal was made to amend the 1991 Constitution to turn the country into a parliamentary democracy. Repeated surveys found that this issue, unlike many other political ones, was considered important by the people, that a majority of citizens was aware of the proposal and that most of them disliked it strongly.

Political scientists have long been concerned with defining core values among political values, and to establish which are most important for western civilization and liberal democracy (Conover and Feldman 1988).

Looking at models explaining support of democracy and models predicting voting behavior it becomes clear that the best discriminating question is the one asking respondents to choose between equality and freedom. These two values, the only political ones included in Milton Rokeach's values questionnaire, are indeed essential for understanding politics in post-communist countries. If one knows this choice, one can fairly predict in Romania if a person is a democrat or non-democrat, votes post-communist or anti-communist, is nationalistic or pro-European. Collectivism is associated with nationalism, ethnocentrism and voting for post-communist parties. It is eastern Europe's form of conservatism, a residual attitude grounded in communist socialization, but also in some institutional arrangements persisting from communist times. Those who are dependent on the state on practically every issue, from workers in the state industry to pensioners, and especially the poor and less educated, display considerably higher degrees of collectivism than the rest of the population. Collectivism is a "core" value because it helps to predict most political orientations, and it is the backbone of ideology, structuring internally consistent belief systems. Individuals who rate high on collectivism regret good old communist times, blame the difficult transition on the West or vote against anti-communist parties, and are socially envious. It is an ideology by default, since most of those who prefer equality to freedom do not place themselves on the left–right ideological scale, saying that ideology is irrelevant for their political choice. Materialist–post-materialist value orientations predict little to nothing in the post-communist world, mainly because most people prefer materialism and survival values. Indeed, this "survivalism," often associated with a "peasant" culture, is so dominant in Romania that it makes a story in itself.

Peasants into citizens?

Politics in poor societies and weak states may look spectacular if observed from within. It usually contains a fair amount of coups and aborted revolutions, grand reforms and brutal assassinations. If observed from afar, however, it generates an almost unbearable feeling of monotony. Coups change only the person of the dictator; assassinations prove sooner or later to have been needless. Cities always push ahead for reform, rural areas push back for stagnation. Who rules the rural, rules the country, as expressed by the famous Huntingtonian formula (1956: 292). Even the change of regimes does not modify the essential constraints under which every government – democratic or autocratic – will have to operate sooner or later. In the case of Romania, these constraints are summarized by Henry Roberts' brief formula that "problems of an agrarian society" have an adjacent ideology of their own: "survivalism." Indeed, Romanian intellectuals of the inter-war period defended this "survival society" as an *alternative* form of civilization, not the absence of it:

> A minor culture, born out of improvisation and spontaneity, as well as from a total lack of will for eternity stands a better chance to last for thousands of years in its stillness. . . . While a major culture, emerged from the thirst to defeat both space and time is, due to its dynamism, much more exposed to catastrophes and extinction . . .
>
> (Blaga 1943)

The democratic change of 1989 brought about the revival of this intellectual movement praising traditional village life and the political ideals embodied in it. Its perfect symbol is the transformation of the museum of the Communist Party into a Peasant Museum, considering that "peasant," "Romanian" and "Christian" are (or should be) synonyms. This ideology was remarkably salient in Romania throughout the twentieth century. It created a "paradox of the two villages," characterized by the contradiction between, on the one hand, an "ideal" village as imagined by intellectuals and seen as self-sufficient economically, culturally and politically. On the other hand, there was a "real" village, poor and underdeveloped. The latter has been, and still is, the main constituency of predatory elites who live on state capture, a model very similar to the one described by Huntington or Joel Migdal for Latin America. Vertical accountability stops short of the village, where regardless of electoral campaigns villagers vote invariably conservative, that is, for the communist successor parties and Ion Iliescu. As Romania has 47 percent inhabitants living in rural areas, and well over 35 percent of its economically active citizens *de facto* employed in agriculture, the "peasant" culture is an important political subculture and it needs detailed analysis.

Voting behavior in rural areas is indeed peculiar: 45 percent of the votes in rural areas were cast in the 2000 and 1996 elections for the main successor party of the communist party, the Romanian Social Democrat party (formerly the National Salvation Front, then Social Democratic Party) compared to 32 percent in urban areas. In the earlier elections of 1992 and 1990, the proportion of peasants voting with what they call "the state" was even greater, almost two times more than observed in the urban areas. This share of the vote was affected by successive splits in the dominant party, which created confusion among the electorate. In local elections, however, the post-communist party is supported almost everywhere in the rural areas. Residence in rural areas has remained the main predictor of the vote for Ion Iliescu since 1990 until 2000 even in the most complex models to explain voting behavior. Of course, not all rural areas are alike. Those rural areas that are poor and have few small city centers display the typical residual communist attitudes most prominently. In these areas, which had been fully collectivized until 1990, the vote is usually bargained between the central authority and the local leaders acting as a gatekeeper between the village and the rest of the world. The local authority controls access to every resource in the area, and is instru-

mental in making villagers vote uniformly with the one party. In poor villages the vote is therefore practically collective, not individual, and part of the voters' indifference toward the ideology of a candidate is explained by the fact that ideology does indeed matter little under these circumstances. Equally, the organization of political life in the countryside supports this style of politics, as anti-communist parties have barely any headquarters, while the communist successor party is based in the village hall or another building of communist times. Models including all status variables also highlight the rural as a consistent predictor of obedience ("Leaders should be followed even when wrong") but not of every other authoritarian attitude. When examining political cognition, we also find the rural considerably more ignorant than the urban (Table 12.4).

Is "authoritarianism" an intrinsic feature of a rural or peasant population, or can we trace it to other determinants as well? Comparison of social indicators of urban lifestyle and similar ones of rural Romania points to several other factors explaining the difference between the urban and the rural. Rural inhabitants make only about 60 percent of the personal income of urban residents; in addition, they are older and less educated (Table 12.5). As in the case of political cognition, not only the difference between the urban and the rural, but the low level in general is a matter for concern. Poverty and lack of political information in the rural areas are twice as bad compared to the urban areas. However, even the urban levels are far removed from the prosperity and access to information available in western Europe. As most of the "urban" is a more recent and incomplete communist creation, the "rural" element may be even more important than statistics show, going much beyond formal residence in the countryside.

What we witness in Romania's rural area is therefore a type of political culture that is typical for a modernization lag. A large amount of literature on Romania's failure to catch up in the twentieth century focuses on the lack of economic sustainability of small rural holdings, so-called subsistence farming (Mitranyi 1930; Roberts 1951). The dream of a prosperous peasantry similar to the western model was undermined by the large proportion of the population in the agricultural sector combined with a drop

Table 12.4 Urban–rural differences in political information

Questions	*Urban*	*Rural*
Follows electoral campaign daily in newspapers	23	14
One hour or more of electoral campaign watched on TV the previous day (2000)	32	16
Matters greatly if a candidate stands on the right or the left	9	5
Does not know if the left or the right stands for closer incomes	41	48
Does not know if the left or the right favors private property	39	47

Source: 2000b; see Table 12.1.

Table 12.5 Urban–rural differences of selected social indicators

Variables	*Urban mean (standard error)*	*Rural mean (standard error)*	*Total population mean (standard error)*
Age	44 (16)	49 (18)	46.34 (17.02)
Education	4.7 (1.4)	3.4 (1.3)	4.13 (1.50)
Personal income/month	40 Euro	21 Euro	30 Euro
Household income	65 Euro	42 Euro	54 Euro

Source: 2000b; see Table 12.1.

in productivity after the 1918–21 land reform, which destroyed all large property holdings. Nevertheless, a number of peasants managed to gain some economic autonomy, if not prosperity, by 1945 only to end up either in the Gulag or the collective farms after the Soviet army imposed communism. By 1989, except for mountainous regions, Romania was fully collectivized. A 1990 presidential decree and two land restitution acts, 1991 and 1997, have since tried to restore the 1945 property situation. So doing so, this had given rise to over 600,000 land-related law suits by 1998. While failing to reconstitute the pre-communist property, these acts managed to reconstitute the pre-communism problem of smallholdings leading to subsistence farming (Table 12.6). Furthermore, the distribution of property after 1990 empowered the local communist-era bureaucracy, who commanded both the property archives and the legal power to decide restitution matters, and turned it into a veritable predatory elite.

Other factors contributed to create a model of political dependency of the peasantry similar to that which existed before universal franchise. Among them are the persistence, even after decades of communist industrialization, of an significant population surplus in the countryside. Furthermore, the lack of productivity is evidenced by the fact that, in over 50 percent of farm holdings, most work is undertaken with horses, and the existence, for most of the transition, of a unique state agency with the legal right to buy the crops. All these variables are explanatory factors. So too are the poverty and parochialism which cuts the village from access to

Table 12.6 Size of rural property: a historical comparison

Size in hectares	*% 1918*	*% 1949*	*% 1999*
Under 5 (subsistence farming)	75	76.1	81.6
5–10	17.07	17.8	15.1
10–20	5.49	4.89	3.1
Over 20	2.54	1.2	0.2
Total land available	3,280,000	3,067,000	3,211,507

Sources: *Encyclopaedia of Romania*, Romanian Academy, Bucharest, 1939 and Romanian National Statistics Office (CNS).

political information. In other words, formal institutions, old and recent, contribute to the voting behavior of the peasantry as well as to their political attitudes. Attitudes of rural citizens, in turn, support these formal institutions by not rebelling against them. This vicious circle creates a black hole, so to speak, for Romanian politics, because rules applied in the more modern urban areas do not apply in the countryside. The towns vote by watching electoral campaigns, from the radical right to the radical left, but mostly for the center. The villages vote, in their own words, "for the state." The "party-state" was in opposition for four years, 1996–2000. However, this was not due to the voting behavior of the peasants, who supported Ion Iliescu in 1996 and 2000 alike, as they had already done in 1990 and 1992.

It is not surprising that Ion Iliescu was identified with the "state" in the countryside. He was the first leader to appear on television after the flight of Ceausescu and the one to hold the primetime during most of the transition. In focus groups, peasants attribute to him all the gains accomplished by the 1989 Revolution and portray him as a positive paternal figure, a strong, balanced, reliable and non-corrupt politician. Party politics is seen as the source of all evil and corruption: Electing a president directly who, in his turn, would appoint a non-political government is the ideal political system in the eyes of the peasants. When it became clear that Ion Iliescu would not enjoy a fourth term, local elites, from village hall clerks to priests, negotiated frenetically with possible successors, and polls in 2002–3 show formidable rates of "don't knows" when trying to determine political preferences in the rural areas. What is known is that whomsoever carries the support of the village elites will get the votes of the village.

Both rural and communist states shared a certain remoteness from the legal rational type of government found even in pre-modern societies that were on their way to capitalism. Both had unpredictable patterns of distributing social and legal rights from a rational point of view, but fairly predictable for whoever is acquainted with the patterns of authority which emanate from the unwritten rules of the game. The widespread political goal in such contexts is related to "survival," understood as the quest to belong to the right status group – that is, the group well connected with the source of power and privilege. This is because benefits are still centrally distributed, be they pensions or land. This model was labeled "neo-traditionalist" by Jowitt (1993). I prefer to call it "neo-dependency," as many factors cause political dependency, making the peasants a captive constituency. The communist state replaced the old-time feudal order as the main spoiler of the peasant. This formal arrangement, rendering the peasants landless, misers and poor again, after a brief interruption between the two World Wars, recreated the political dependence from times before the vote was franchised.

This model has not endured in the post-communist urban areas and

large villages to such a large extent, because of new market relationships with which it competes, even if it proved successful in slowing the market economy to become, in the words of the European Commission, "fully functional." In the simpler world of small villages, three times as many Romanians as Bulgarians or Poles live in areas where no market exists and peasants live on subsistence farming or state pensions. And this is how democratic politics still works – or, rather, does not work in Romania.

Predators into bureaucrats?

Figures on subjective perception of corruption (how widespread corruption of the public sector is) confirm the anthropological model sketched in the previous section, as most Romanians perceive that many groups are above the law. The same few people are winners regardless of the regime, and corruption is widespread. The last indicators do not single out Romania as the villain among the new members of the European Union (Table 12.7). Perception of corruptions is widespread everywhere in the region.

Romanians do not seem to differ from other transition countries greatly on any governance-related indicators of public opinion, though objective data show Romanian governments as more corrupt and ineffectual (Mungiu-Pippidi 2002). In a general regional picture of distrust, Romanians are insignificantly below the regional average in their distrust in fellow humans and political parties, have higher rates of participation in voluntary associations (although this is based on a high membership rate in unions inherited from communist times) and attend protest rallies more often than anybody else. In no way is Romania an exceptional culture where passivity reigns and structural distrust plagues collective action, so Wildavsky's argument does not find much support. True, differences of

Table 12.7 Social trust, confidence in political parties, political participation, membership in voluntary organizations and perceptions of corruption

	Interpersonal trust	*Confidence in political parties*	*Participation (attending lawful demonstrations)*	*Membership in civic organizations*	*Corruption perceived as widespread*
Czech Republic	27	15	11	30	62
Slovakia	26	22	12	28	61
Poland	17	13	10	2	69
Hungary	22	20	9	31	42
Slovenia	15	14	9	31	68
Romania	18	14	20	31	58
Bulgaria	24	30	11	10	68

Source: WVS 1995.

participation rates, social trust or membership in civic organizations are considerable compared to western European countries. However, they are fairly typical for the post-communist world. Therefore, it is likely that the influence of communist socialization, not some specific Romanian cultural traits, is accountable for current political attitudes. Regardless of affiliation with the Catholic or Orthodox churches, eastern European countries are struggling with widespread malfunction of their administrations. This is reflected in their incapacity to provide satisfactory service without a bribe. All these countries do not pay their civil servants adequately, public resources in short supply are subject to (over)regulation, and citizens who want to escape this situation by offering and accepting bribes are encouraged by the almost total absence of formal institutions to hold them accountable. There is something remarkable about Romania, however, as the index of Transparency International (also a subjective index, but made up of the perceptions of businessmen rather than ordinary people) reveal that the country's administration and politics are more corrupt than its central European neighbors. The Freedom House Nations in Transit index of corruption also points to the predatory elite hidden in the Romanian bureaucracy. This institutional "culture" is not met passively by consumers – only 34 percent of Romanians believe changing this state of affairs is beyond their powers – but proves resilient due to the absence of a policy to dismantle the formal institutions supporting it. Citizens pay an extra tax because it is simpler to solve matters than fight the system. But there is a cost to this: trust in the new formal institutions of democracy erodes constantly.

Not only do most Romanians (62 percent) report having been mistreated by a civil servant after the fall of communism, but, of those who grant a favorable judgment to civil servants, approval ratings for judges and politicians rank below one-third of the total if we average the figures of the past decade. The majority of Romanians have come to be democrats, but blame their difficult transition on their political class (Table 12.8). The recruitment method of politicians and bureaucrats may account for their low popularity. Representatives are elected on party lists, and the government appoints judges and civil servants who are inevitably a

Table 12.8 Dissatisfied democrats

Questions	*% agree*
If Parliament was closed down and parties abolished, would you protest against it?	19.4
A unity government with only the best people should replace government by elected politicians	59.2
There is conflict between political class and the rest of Romanians	51.0
Failure of transition blamed on incompetent government	62.0

Source: 2001.

mixture of the communist-era bureaucracy and new recruits. As a general rule there are no public announcements of job openings in the public sector, and one can obtain a job as a civil servant by informal connections only. Politicization of the administration runs deep. Political parties have a need to support their wide range of cronies.

Even if comparable with figures for the region as a whole, public trust remains very low in Romania. People distrust their state which is still perceived, as in communist times, as a parallel entity to society. Thus, institutional social capital is low. Citizens have not yet come to claim ownership of the state, from local government to the parliament, even if they participate regularly in elections. Once elected, these bodies seem to operate alongside society rather than with it. Trust depends on performance and improves with it – trust in urban local governments doubled in Romania between 1997 and 2000, as fiscal decentralization gradually empowered mayors, who are directly elected, to start satisfying their constituencies. It remains low for central government, law and order agencies, parliament and parties, which are further removed from the voters' reach, protected by the intricacies of a proportional electoral system based on party lists.

Measures of public trust in all its variants – trust in government, in specific public agencies and in the state in general – confirms this picture (see Table 12.9). Trust is lower in urban than in rural areas, the opposite of what we would expect if trust were a basic psychological orientation arising out of an environment of scarce resources. This finding is consistent in all surveys and runs contrary to classic social capital literature, such as Almond and Verba or Putnam. It makes sense, however, in that urbanites distrust more because they bribe more frequently. Peasants rarely bribe – being cashless, they just let themselves be abused, without either bribing or protesting.

An association between social trust and political trust – be it in the public sector or the state in general – does not show in the models we discuss below. Social trust does not determine political trust. On the contrary, performance items, such as the personal experiences of a citizen in dealing with the administration, influences the degree of public trust greatly. Residual communist attitudes also hinder the accumulation of institutional social capital. The more people are frustrated with the transition to democracy and regret the loss of communism, the less trust they grant to the institutions of the new regime. The young tend to be more confident and supportive than the old, and subjective welfare rather than objective differences in income boost social capital. Members in voluntary associations are not higher on social capital than non-members. And overall, those who had negative encounters with some civil servant have developed lower attitudes of public trust.

Mistreatment by civil servants or public officials is generally interpreted as a signal to deliver payment to the civil servant or public official.

Table 12.9 Determinants of public trust

Independent variables	*State*	*Govt*	*Public sector*	*Questions and scales*
Education	ns	ns	ns	1 primary; 2 elementary and vocational; 3 high school; 4 college and higher
Wealth	ns	ns	ns	Factor score of average household income and total number of household utilities (low, high)
Age	ns	−0.082*	−0.108**	Respondent's age in years
Size of town	−0.043*	−0.072*	−0.073*	1 village, 2 town under 30,000 inhabitants, 3 town 30,000–100,000 inhabitants, 4 town 100,000–200,000, 5 town 200,000 inhabitants and larger
Male	ns	ns	ns	Respondent's gender (1 male, 0 female)
Subjective welfare	0.105*	0.226*	0.18*	Satisfaction with life, −1 not satisfied, not satisfied at all, 0 no answer, 1 satisfied, very satisfied
Interpersonal trust	0.129***	0.037	−0.14**	"Most people can be trusted," 1 cannot be trusted, 4 can be trusted
Follows politics in the media	0.128*	0.062	0.066	Index constructed as an average of scores for "watch political news on TV"; "read political news in the press," "discuss politics with friends" (low, high)
Membership in voluntary organization	0.093	0.049	−0.056	1 member, 0 non-member
Communism good idea	−0.127*	−0.242*	0.066	"Communism good idea but badly put into practice," 1 fully disagree, 4 fully agree
Mistreated by a civil servant after 1989	−0.137*	−0.215*	−0.317**	Experience with mistreatment by public servants after 1989, 1 yes, 0 no
Adjusted R^2	0.137	0.193	0.102	

Source: 2000; see Table 12.1.

Notes

Coefficients are standardized regression coefficients. *** significant at 0.000 level; ** significant at 0.00 level; * significant at <0.05–0.00; ns non-significant. Dependent variables are trust in state (STATE), 1 little trust, 4 a lot of trust; trust in government (GOVT), factor score of evaluations of government, parliament and presidency; scale values for items range from 1, little trust, to 4, a lot of trust; trust in the public sector (PUBLIC SECTOR), factor score of evaluations for main public agencies (local governments, the courts, the prosecutors office, the post office, the police, the tax office) scale values for items range from 1, little trust, to 4, a lot of trust.

Reported bribery and reported mistreatment by the administration are correlated. As a general rule, people bribe because without this extra tax they would hardly get anything they need out of bureaucracy, and in Romania, dependency on the administration for an array of permits and licenses is far greater than in the West. Those belonging to the right network or having the right connections are excepted from this rule, a fact that can turn an impersonal relationship with the administration into a personal one. In Romania, roughly one-quarter of the respondents seem to enjoy this state of affairs. The probability that those with "connections" will get the service they require in a satisfactory manner is considerably higher than for those who do not have such contacts – even if they are in a position to pay the bribe.

The formal and informal institutions regulating administrative practice support ongoing corruption. Their origins lie in communist times. Despite its strongly modernizing rhetoric, the communist administration was just the opposite of a modern rational–legal administration. Arbitrary and discriminative, it could not have been further from the impartiality, impersonality and fairness characteristic of an ideal modern bureaucracy. The corruption of the Romanian civil service manifests itself not only in use of a public position to seek personal gain, but more broadly as the widespread infringement of the norm of impersonality and fairness that should characterize modern public service. Providing discriminatory public service as a general rule is not prompted by financial gain only, this being the norm rather than the exception in societies dominated by groups of uneven power status. These differences in power status are inherited from the recent past. According to public opinion surveys, all eastern Europeans seem discontented with the quality of their administration and political class. In practice, when we examine the situation more closely, there is a clear correlation between the degree of communization and the quality of administration, including corruption. The more intrusive the former communist regime, the greater was the arbitrary power of its agents, such as representatives of the administration. Correspondingly, their accountability to the citizenry was lower. Institutional reforms did not target this situation specifically and civil service reform acts prompted by the European Commission include practically no reward and punishment mechanism to promote a change in administrative culture. Thus such reforms are unlikely to solve the "hard" cases, such as Romania or Russia. How many years can the public function in the presence of predatory elites that no government wants or is powerful enough to shake off? The reform of public administration and of the state in general is the key to legitimating democracy and to the proper functioning of Romania in the enlarged European Union. The key group of post-communist politicians, such as Ion Iliescu, has gradually evolved from authoritarian socialists to pro-European social-democrats, but they dare not attack corruption, as the predatory elite is the most important part of their power base. This

essential step, however, has to be taken to complete Romania's democratic transformation and its accession to the European Union

Conclusions

The role of "hard" constraints

"Hard" constraints to the development of democracy are legacies that cannot be modified by human agency in the period of one generation alone. Two historical "structural" legacies were found to matter in this analysis:, namely, under-development (the rural/urban ratio) and the degree of penetration by the communist regime of Romanian society (one useful proxy indicator is party membership). There is a causal link between these two factors. Communism flourished more in poorer societies, where under-development provided the necessary alibi for strong state intervention. The extreme poverty of Romanian villages inspired Ceausescu's design to "systematize" or redesign them – a reform supposed to eliminate one-half of such villages, turn a further tenth into towns and rebuild the rest. To increase the proportion of the urban population and modernize Romania by such radical policies would have been inconceivable in a country such as the Czech Republic, but such policies seemed – at least in theory – to address a real need in Romania. To impose collective farming in a situation where many farms were obviously productive such as, for example, in Poland would have also been much more difficult than under the condition of bare subsistence farming that was the rule in Romania. The debates about how to change the situation produced radical proposals even before communism. And, naturally, this deep penetration by communist rule was reinforced by the disinterest of the West. As mentioned above, Winston Churchill claimed an insignificant 10 percent of western interest in Romania when he scribbled his preferences to Stalin on what he himself called "a nasty scrap of paper." Conservative peasants in the mountains resisted the communist regime for almost ten years until they were executed, arrested or deported in the aftermath of the failed Hungarian Revolution, when it became clear the West would not stop the Sovietization of Romania (Seton-Watson 1960). Over 80,000 peasants were arrested to achieve collectivization, as well as to avert peasant resistance which was crushed in blood. Only after their leaders were completely destroyed and their lands and arms were confiscated have Romanian peasants resorted to James C. Scott's "weapons of the weak," such as cheating the collective farm. And only after the young had deserted the villages and the old barely survived "systematization" was their political dependence complete. This dependency is now felt in post-communist times. Other useful proxies of depth of penetration by the regime are the extent of collectivization and the number of dissidents by 1989. That the destruction of almost every political alternative by a degree of repression which was

much greater in Romania than in other central European countries with a communist legacy also accounts for a post-communist transition with a dominant party and a dominant, father-like politician.

The role of "soft" constraints

"Soft constraints" are formal institutions that can be changed (such as a poor electoral law). Similarly factors are informal institutions and opinions that hinder the emergence of democratic norms. These may also be regarded "legacies," but they can change more easily and some have changed already. We need to examine them in connection with the tripartite model to identify possible windows of opportunity for policy intervention. If we would only examine public opinion, rural Romania and its voting behavior, as well as administrative corruption, would remain a mystery.

Nevertheless, the importance of soft constraints is also directly determined by the nature of the former communist regime. Informal institutions multiplied and took the upper hand in guiding collective behavior due to the absurdity of formal arrangements during communism. In 1989, all Romanians were culprits, as it was illegal to store more than one kilo of sugar in one's house, have a garden without producing wheat, drive one's car every weekend and so forth. The society only survived by breaking the law, and this has become a serious obstacle to the restoration of the rule of law, especially since corruption at the top remains high. Law enforcement collapsed with Ceausescu and the new legislation is often poor, failing to set incentives and control for law-abidingness.

With regard to electoral democracy, things are much simpler to understand. Post-communist socialization works, so even individuals with an average interest in politics have learned that elections are central to the game. The less liberal a communist regime, the more autocrats are found in the beginning of the transition. High levels of inconsistency of political beliefs show the competition between the old and the new political socialization, and this can be taken as an indicator of political culture change. The number of collectivists and authoritarians decreases year after year. Similarly, the number of those who believed Romanians and Hungarians have conflicting goals and cannot cooperate politically has gradually eroded. While a majority of Romanians held this view in 1990, the proportion fell below 40 percent in the year 2000. Political socialization under the condition of support for democracy as an ideal seems to push back and alter residual communist attitudes greatly, helped by an improving economic tableau. However, political socialization works both ways. Communist ideology lingers longer in countries that have experienced harsh communist regimes, such as Romania, Bulgaria or Russia. Thus, it is not surprising to still find sizeable groups of citizens in these countries that approve of one-party systems and foster social envy. The socialization tech-

nique used by the former regimes was state terror. In contrast to this type of coercive persuasion, the new rules allow even anti-democratic parties to compete in the electoral game and in the course of time more and more Romanians turn their back on them.

Cultural legacies or institutional reproduction?

A mixture of attitudes resulting from the "old" and the "new" political regime is characteristic of a political culture in transition. The same is true for the various political institutions and their functioning. The most important evidence of "cultural legacies" is found at the level of informal institutions and can be regarded as a heritage of communism. The pre-war bureaucracies of Romania and Bulgaria were almost completely destroyed by the communist regime, yet the regime in the late 1970s already showed the same patrimonial character as the pre-war bureaucracy. This induced some observers to believe that "cultural" characteristics have survived regime change, while in fact similar contexts (big governments with little or no accountability) tend to reproduce the same features, regardless of "culture." We can clearly identify the persistence or recreation of formal institutions, which reproduce the same informal ones, creating the false feeling of "continuity," as demonstrated by the example of rural property. Those who doubt that imports of institutions are possible, from inter-war Romanian fascist thinkers to European enlargement skeptics of today, should seek the causes of new institutions failing to take root in the poor implementation of polices due to "hard" and "structural" factors, rather than "culture." Governance matters, and no nation is doomed to perpetual poor governance.

If culture is reduced to public opinion, values and beliefs, it may change faster and easier than institutions do. However, the main problems for democratization in Romania remain under-development and political dependency in the poor rural areas, as well as the difficulty to create and consolidate political organizations. A transition dominated by predatory elites due to an ongoing power struggle between an old entrenched elite and an emerging new one was more in the logic of Ceausescu's repressive Romania than in that of the week of radical Revolution, which was aided from outside and carried out by a minority of the population. The dreams of 22 December 1989, when thousands of young people invaded Ceausescu's palace, have proved to be naive: Occasional mobilization cannot easily alter a country's past. But neither can the past of a country condemn it to a different path than the one of the whole region, although it may affect the pace of a country's transformation. Difficult history matters, but it is not inescapable.

Note

1 Surveys included the World Values Surveys 1995–2000, polled by ICCV in Romania in 1993. Surveys quoted by year (2000a, 2000b, 2001) were all executed by the Center for Urban Sociology (CURS). Surveys 2000a and 2001 were national surveys on samples of 1,100 each. 2000b was a special survey, designed to be representative for every region, with a sample of 37,400 respondents. 2001 was a joint survey by Eurobarometer and United Nations Development Program (UNDP). 2000a and 2001 were sponsored by Freedom House and UNDP and designed by the author.

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