

IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER? The Foundations of Subjective Human Rights Conditions in East-Central Europe

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Using cross-national survey data and information on government practices concerning human rights collected in 17 post-Communist states in Central and Eastern Europe, the authors examine the determinants of people's attitudes about their country's human rights situation. They find that not all people in countries that systematically violate human rights develop more negative opinions about their country's human rights situation. However, results show high levels of disregard for human rights strongly affect evaluations of human rights practices among individuals with higher levels of education. Thus better educated respondents were significantly more likely to say there was respect for human rights in their country if they lived in a country with fewer violations of the integrity of the person or that protected political and civil rights; conversely, they were less likely to say so if they lived in a more repressive country or a country where political and civil rights were frequently violated.

Keywords: human rights; repression; democracy; public opinion; attitudes

Among the most important and most widely studied aspects of democratic transitions is a country's respect for human rights. Perhaps surprisingly, however, understanding what can guarantee high levels of respect for human rights poses a particularly vexing challenge to scholars and policy makers alike because increases in levels of democracy on occasion have been

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associated with greater levels of repression (Cingranelli & Richards, 1999; Davenport, 1999). And although a rich and growing literature seeks to explain cross-national differences in human rights practices, few studies seek to systematically examine the determinants of people's attitudes about their country's human rights situation. Fewer still do so from a comparative perspective. This paucity of studies on the question of what and how the average citizen thinks about human rights is regrettable for theoretical and practical reasons. On a practical level, knowing what average citizens think about their country's human rights situation and what determines such beliefs is important because human rights violations potentially affect millions of people in the countries where rights are violated and in countries that may intervene in a conflict because of human rights abuses. On a theoretical level, knowing how people develop attitudes about their government's human rights practices contributes to understanding democratic transitions in several ways. First, it contributes to existing studies of public opinion in countries undergoing democratic transitions, which usually focus on questions of system support, government support, and attitudes toward market reform. Given that such studies are frequently driven by a concern with building and sustaining public support for democracy as a form of government, knowing how citizens in these countries feel about the treatment of human rights is an important but largely unexamined facet of how well countries perform on this dimension of democratic governance.

Second, understanding what drives perceptions of human rights conditions adds a mass behavior-based dimension to research on domestic conflict. Models of protest and rebellion often assume that potential dissenters and those they seek to mobilize are aware of repressive state behavior in order for them to respond strategically to state actions: "Rebels who see things similarly are more likely to rebel together" (Lichbach, 1996, p. 115; see also Moore, 1998). Thus understanding the fundamental drivers of people's perceptions of human rights conditions would be important for validating the

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plausibility of important assumptions underlying such models, in particular, whether there is in fact a relationship between government actions regarding fundamental rights and public opinion. This may be particularly true in countries undergoing democratic transitions where citizens for many years were not accustomed to having rights.

Below, we develop a model of human rights perceptions that examines the interactive effects of government practices and individual-level heterogeneity in people's perceptions of human rights conditions. We test this model with the help of individual-level survey data as well as data on governments' human rights practices collected in 1996 across 17 countries in Central and Eastern Europe, including a number of the successor states of the former Soviet Union. We argue that higher levels of human rights violations should lead to more negative evaluations of human rights conditions. However, we also contend that people form attitudes not only through their unique experiences but also through information they collect and interpret selectively. As a result, people with different motivations and opportunities to gather and decipher information about human rights practices form dissimilar assessments of the level of government respect for human rights.

PUBLIC OPINION AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Given that the field of systematic human rights studies is relatively young, it should not come as a surprise that the term *human rights* is used to denote a variety of different rights citizens may enjoy. Moreover, it is argued that the term's meaning is historically and culturally based and that it can change across time and region. Put simply, then, what *human rights* means is variable and frequently contested (see, e.g., Donnelly, 1998; Orend, 2002). Despite this, there is some agreement, however, that the term *human rights* extends to a variety of social, economic, and political rights. Consistent with these understandings, we define *human rights* as those "minimum social and political guarantees recognized by the international community as necessary for a life of dignity in the contemporary world" (Donnelly, 1998, p. 9).

Although the Universal Declaration of Human Rights offers a broad definition of these guarantees and the meaning of the term *human rights* (see Donnelly, 1998, for a summary), the empirical literature of human rights and their violations has come to employ a more narrow definition of *human rights* that is focused on the "integrity of the person" or "physical integrity" (Schmitz & Sikkink, 2002). Abuses that violate the integrity of the person include execution, torture, forced disappearance, and imprisonment of per-

sons either arbitrarily or for their political and/or religious beliefs (Poe & Tate, 1994). This rather narrow definition of *human rights* is consistent with treatments of the concept as a “high-priority claim, or authoritative entitlement, justified by sufficient reasons, to a set of objections that are owed to each human person as a matter of *minimally decent treatment* [italics added]” (Orend, 2002, p. 34). Thus

the term “human rights” indicates both their nature and their source: they are the rights one has simply because one is human. They are held by all human beings, irrespective of any rights or duties individuals may (or may not) have as citizens, members of families, workers, or parts of any public or private organization or association. (Donnelly, 1998, p. 18)

However, it is simply not known whether citizens follow such a minimalist definition of *human rights* when forming evaluations of their country’s human rights conditions. Although limiting the analysis to issues related to the integrity of the person might allow us to distinguish human rights from other aspects of political democracy, for example, such a strategy would also fail to hold out the possibility that people think of broader rights when considering questions about the country’s human rights situation. Instead of attempting to resolve this conceptual issue up front, we employ both a minimalist definition as well as a more expansive one for the purposes of our analysis to establish whether citizens think of human rights as the protection or violations of the integrity of the person or a more expansive set of political and civil rights.

The growing body of systematic research on human rights practices examines the relationships among countries’ human rights practices, political institutions and policy making, and policy and investment decisions (Poe, 2004). An integral part of such studies is an effort to conceptualize, operationalize, and measure a country’s human rights practices accurately. Most researchers have conceptualized violations of human rights in unidimensional terms and have focused on how much they occur (Poe & Tate, 1994). However, some have argued that it is important to consider both the types of violations as well as their amount (McCormick & Mitchell, 1997). More important perhaps, a number of writers have questioned whether universal human rights is a concept that can even be defined to apply in principle to all countries or whether its usefulness is constrained by cultural boundaries (Barsh, 1993).

However, because most of these analyses focus on national-level policies, institutions, cultures, and events, with the country as the primary unit of analysis, there has been little research on respect for human rights at the level of

individual citizens.¹ Despite the manifest importance of understanding how people perceive human rights conditions, this lack of attention is not necessarily surprising. In large part, it is due to the considerable challenges faced by comparative researchers interested in people's responses to questions about human rights. These challenges are particularly severe on an empirical level because data measuring people's evaluations of their country's human rights situation are usually not available to allow for reliable analyses. As a consequence, we know relatively little about the individual-level determinants of human rights perceptions across a variety of countries. This is a question we turn to below.

MODELING CITIZENS' EVALUATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS: CONTEXTUAL AND INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL DIFFERENCES

Our general model of people's evaluations of human rights conditions contains two elements: first, the political context in which citizens assess the level of respect for human rights; and second, individuals' predispositions to evaluate human rights conditions differently. Specifically, our model posits that these two factors interact, such that people with different predispositions will evaluate their country's human rights situation differently even when it is objectively similar.

CROSS-NATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN LEVELS OF RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

We argue that the political context matters. Specifically, we posit that people will evaluate human rights violations according to the real human rights situation in their country. There is some evidence to support this hypothesis. In the only cross-national study we are aware of to date that examines the relationship between indicators of human rights violations as coded by outside observers and people's perceptions of human rights conditions, Anderson, Regan, and Ostergard (2002) find a statistically significant relationship between evaluations of human rights conditions and levels of government repression at the aggregate (country) level.

1. Social psychologists only recently have begun to investigate attitudes about human rights by focusing on how to measure human rights attitudes (Diaz-Veizades, Widaman, Little, & Gibes, 1995) or how people judge the human rights conditions in other countries by relying on stereotype information (Staerklé, Clémence, & Doise, 1998).

Although the proposition that there is a direct relationship between government respect for human rights and people's perceptions of it seems straightforward and is supported by the limited evidence that exists, it is not uncontested for both empirical and theoretical reasons. For one, any aggregate-level correlation between levels of respect for human rights and evaluations of human rights conditions may hide important intracountry and cross-country variation that may render the relationship spurious once we account for individual-level determinants of human rights conditions (such as ethnic minority status, for example) or cross-national differences in freedoms other than those narrowly defined to pertain to the integrity of the person. Moreover, the aggregate-level analysis of Anderson et al. (2002) assumes that the effects of objective (that is, expert-based) indicators of repression on citizens' perceptions of repression are of equal magnitude across individuals. As Gibson (1993) points out, this assumption may be hazardous: "There is no necessary relationship between objective and subjective freedom. People may perceive themselves as free even in the most repressive conditions. . . . Alternatively, people may not perceive the freedom that is truly available to them" (p. 943). Another empirical challenge that can be leveled at the existing evidence comes from the few individual-level studies of repression that have examined the relationships between repressive public policy on one hand and elite and mass opinion on the other. A study of the impact of repressive legislation in the American states during the McCarthy era, for example, finds that mass opinion was unrelated to the incidences of repression of the era (Gibson, 1988).

A prime reason for why there may not be a strong link between objective and subjective levels of respect for human rights is culture. Cultural theorists assert that values are culturally determined and that prizing individual human rights is a hallmark of Western culture (Donnelly, 1989). This is not to say that only Western cultures value human rights but instead, that these values do not occupy a similar, primary place in all cultures. Furthermore, scholars subscribing to the cultural perspective argue that perceptions of human rights infractions are relative; that is, what constitutes respect for human rights or freedom in one context is not necessarily seen as such in another. The cultural theorists' perspective, thus, leads us to reason that it would be difficult to find evidence of a repression-opinion link if people across countries do not share the same interpretation of human rights (Barsh, 1993). Ultimately, how citizens view respect for human rights is an empirical question: If we find a correlation between government practices and citizens' evaluations of the country's human rights situation, this would validate the idea that individual human rights is a concept understood similarly by significant numbers of people in very different places and cultures.

**THE CONTINGENT EFFECTS OF RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS:
THE ROLE OF INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES**

Although we are thus open to the possibility that cross-national differences in political context may or may not affect human rights perceptions, we also posit that people have dissimilar motivations or resources for collecting and evaluating the actual state of the country's political situation. Simply put, individuals decide what sources of information to use, how much information to receive/consume, and what conclusions to draw from this information. Consequently, we expect human rights evaluations to vary with factors that influence the collection and subjective interpretation of information about the human rights situation in the country. In particular, we posit that at the individual level, a person's level of education is particularly important for understanding the link between human rights conditions and evaluations of them. At the micro level, modernization theorists have long argued that the link between development and democracy works through social mobilization and mass participation in politics, both of which are greatly facilitated by higher levels of education. Moreover and equally important, education fosters the development of cultural orientations that make people more open-minded and tolerant of opposing viewpoints (Hyman & Wright, 1979). Tolerance, in turn, is related to support for democratic values (Gibson, 2002).²

In addition to the formation of democratic values associated with higher levels of education, this variable may act as a mediator for the effect of levels of respect for human rights on evaluations of human rights conditions for instrumental reasons. In part, the educated may be more likely to want political expression because they are also more likely to benefit from political freedom. If this is the case, then it is not only values that drive evaluations of repressive government activities but also enlightened self-interest that makes educated citizens more responsive on these issues.

Aside from facilitating the development of values that interpret violations of human rights as negative, education also should strengthen the link between objective and subjective repression as a result of different levels of information that can be attributed to individuals with varying levels of education. To the extent that well-informed opinions differ from poorly informed ones, evaluations of the country's human rights situation should vary systematically with the extent to which individuals can be characterized as "informed"

2. Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer (1998), for example, argue that education should be a prime indicator for understanding attitudes toward the democratic regime in the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe. Research on political orientations in the former Soviet Union reports that higher levels of education undermined support for two Soviet "regime norms": state control of the economy and collective or social control at the expense of human rights (Silver, 1987).

about repressive government policies. Thus persons with greater access and incentive to obtain information about human rights conditions should have more accurate evaluations. Specifically, if level of education acts as a proxy for political sophistication, highly educated individuals in repressive countries should report more negative impressions of the country's human rights situation than less educated ones and hold more negative impressions than highly educated respondents in countries where human rights are protected.

DATA AND MEASURES

The survey data for our study come from Central and Eastern Eurobarometer Study No. 7. These data were collected in 17 post-Communist societies during October and November of 1996 and are based on random national samples of approximately 1,000 respondents in each country (see Cunningham, 1997, and Appendix A). The countries included in the survey and the analysis below are Armenia, Belarus, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and the Ukraine. This set of countries is suitable for our purposes on practical and theoretical grounds. They share important similarities with regard to the nature of the transitions they were undergoing. Specifically, all states included in our sample were experiencing so-called dual transitions from authoritarianism and a state-controlled economy. This dual transition had important implications for human rights conditions because it often presented political actors with a trade-off between securing human rights and advancing economic development. That is, the need to improve prison conditions as well as reforming the police and the judiciary to cope efficiently with ethnic violence, trafficking in women, or organized crime, for example, often competed with the need to allocate resources to address pressing economic problems. As a result, it is easy to imagine that in countries where the public underestimates human rights violations, politicians may well focus on economic issues rather than human rights problems, especially if they are confined to small and politically inactive social groups.

And although—broadly speaking—all countries in the sample were undergoing political and economic transitions during the period investigated here, they also exhibit significant variation with regard to the political context in which human rights are judged. For example, the sample of countries provides a useful mix of some highly democratized states and less democratic ones, with countries ranging from Belarus and Kazakhstan at the low end of democratic performance to countries such as the Czech Republic, Hungary,

and Poland at the high end. Although an exhaustive survey of events related to human rights in each country is beyond the scope of this article, a few examples of events near the time of our survey may be instructive. Although virtually all countries dealt with issues related to human rights, the most severe violations were reported in the former Soviet Republics of Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Russia, and the Ukraine. In these states, governments consistently violated human rights, whether in postelection crackdowns (Armenia) or routine violations in states such as Georgia, which witnessed numerous cases of arbitrary detention, appalling prison conditions, the arbitrary use of the death sentence, and the harassment of political dissidents. By far the most egregious and large-scale violations occurred in Russia during the course of the conflict in Chechnya, where civilians were the victims of indiscriminate and disproportionate armed fire in most areas of Chechnya, causing anywhere from 18,500 to 80,000 civilian deaths since the start of the war in December 1994 (Human Rights Watch, 1997). Although human rights violations in the former Soviet states were significantly more severe than in other states in our sample, at the time of our survey, virtually all countries experienced police brutality in the form of beatings and torture, the mistreatment of ethnic minorities, and various restrictions on personal freedoms (such as wiretapping and restrictions on movement). Taken together, the political environment in our sample of states, thus, provides variation in human rights practices as well as salient developments related to human rights conditions. Moreover, because of the argument that definitions of the term *human rights* are culturally bound, it is useful that these countries exhibit a mix of cultural orientations ranging from more collectivist in the former Soviet states to more individualist in some of the Central European countries (Bardi & Schwartz, 1996).

DEPENDENT VARIABLE

The dependent variable in our study—people's evaluations of human rights conditions—is measured at the individual level. It is based on the survey question "How much respect is there for individual human rights nowadays in your country? Do you feel there is a lot of respect, some respect, not much respect, or no respect at all?"³ The measure was coded from 1 = *no*

3. This measure has substantial face validity: It asks about an object that refers without doubt to human rights conditions, and it focuses on rights for individual persons rather than groups. Moreover, respondents are able to give different evaluations of the object by providing four response categories that allow respondents to evaluate the situation positively or negatively.

respect at all to 4 = *a lot of respect*.⁴ Thus lower scores on the scale indicate that people perceived there to be no or little respect for human rights. Initial examination of the data reveals significant variation within and across countries, with individuals' assessments of the human rights situation varying between 1 and 4 in every country included in the analysis (see Appendix B for descriptive statistics).⁵

Table 1 shows the distribution of responses to the question by answer category, as well as the average responses to this question across the countries included in this study and the sample as a whole. By and large, evaluations of the country's human rights situation were not particularly positive. Only about 4% of all respondents reported that they thought there was a lot of respect for human rights in their country; in contrast, about a quarter of all respondents thought there was no respect for human rights. Overall, the modal answer category was that there was *not much* respect for human rights, followed by the answer category of *some*.

However, these overall percentages mask some noteworthy cross-national differences. For example, half of the respondents in Russia and the Ukraine reported that there was no respect for human rights in their country, and another roughly 30% in these countries said that there was not much respect for them. In contrast, only slightly more than 10% of respondents in the Czech Republic, Estonia, Romania, and Slovenia indicated that there was no respect for human rights in their country. The answer *no respect* for human rights was the modal category in Armenia, Kazakhstan, Russia, and the Ukraine; *not much* was the modal category in Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia; and *some* was most commonly chosen by respondents in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, and Macedonia. In none of the countries did the answer category *a lot of respect* constitute the modal opinion. On average, evaluations on the

4. Although a single item indicator may be less reliable than a multi-item one, it is critical to distinguish between the use of less reliable indicators as dependent or independent variables. A less reliable dependent variable does not bias regression estimates but does make it harder to achieve statistical significance. Therefore if the analysis reveals statistical significance using a less reliable dependent variable, we may expect to achieve even greater statistical significance if the reliability of our measure could be improved.

5. Respondents answering "don't know" to this question were excluded from the analysis. To examine whether the exclusion of "don't knows" introduced bias into our estimations, we examined whether people in more repressive regimes were less willing to express any opinion about human rights. Only 4.1% of all respondents expressed no opinion on the human rights question. Moreover, there was no correlation between the percentage of people expressing no opinion and a country's level of repression: on the Political Terror Scale, $\beta = -.19, p = .47$; on the Freedom House Scales, $\beta = -.09, p = .72$.

Table 1
Frequencies of Perceptions of Respect for Human Rights in 17 Central and East European Countries in 1996 (in percentages)

Country	No Respect	Not Much	Some	A Lot	Average ^a
Armenia	41.8	30.0	26.9	1.4	1.88
Belarus	32.0	36.5	28.8	2.7	2.02
Bulgaria	21.1	34.8	36.6	7.6	2.31
Czech Republic	11.1	40.3	45.0	3.6	2.41
Estonia	10.2	39.4	43.6	6.8	2.47
Georgia	28.2	30.2	38.5	3.0	2.16
Hungary	14.4	29.6	48.8	7.1	2.49
Kazakhstan	34.9	32.8	28.1	4.3	2.02
Latvia	18.2	43.5	33.3	5.0	2.25
Lithuania	28.2	54.4	17.0	0.3	1.89
Macedonia	20.9	32.1	39.8	7.2	2.33
Poland	12.6	45.1	39.5	2.8	2.33
Romania	11.9	55.2	30.5	2.4	2.23
Russia	52.9	32.7	13.9	0.5	1.62
Slovakia	14.2	44.9	38.2	2.8	2.29
Slovenia	11.6	44.4	37.3	6.7	2.39
Ukraine	50.0	29.2	18.8	2.0	1.73
Total	24.4	38.7	33.0	3.9	2.17

Source: Central and Eastern Eurobarometer No. 7, 1996 (see Appendix A).

a. Measured on a 4-point scale, where 1 = *no respect*, 2 = *not much*, 3 = *some*, and 4 = *a lot*.

4-point scale ranged from very negative in countries such as Russia, Armenia, Lithuania, and the Ukraine at less than 1.9 to about 2.5 in countries such as the Czech Republic, Estonia, and Hungary. Overall, the most negative perceptions of the human rights situation were found in Russia at 1.62, whereas Hungarians expressed the most positive ratings of human rights conditions at 2.49.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Respect for Physical Integrity

To examine the relationship between citizens' evaluations of human rights and observed levels of respect for human rights requires that we match each country's survey with measures of political conditions in that country. Acknowledging that there are scholarly disagreements on the issue of which indicator has the most desirable properties, we obtained data on one of the

most widely used indicators of respect for people's physical integrity in countries around the world: the Political Terror Scale (see Appendix A). This measure also has the desirable property of being available for all countries and the time period covered in our study. Although other measures of human rights practices exist, they are not usually collected annually, they are not available for the countries for which we have survey data, and most important, they are not narrowly defined to capture respect for the integrity of the person.⁶

The Political Terror Scale measures violations of the integrity of persons on a scale that ranges from 1 to 5, with higher scores indicating more violations of individual integrity rights. In our sample of countries for the year 1996 (the date of our survey), the index scores ranged from 1 in countries such as the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovenia to 4 in Russia, with a mean of 1.83 and a standard deviation of .85. Based on our hypotheses, we expected a negative relationship between a country's rating on the Political Terror Scale and our dependent variable evaluations of human rights. That is, the more severe physical integrity rights violations are in a country, the less respect for human rights people should report.

Respect for Political and Civil Rights

To go beyond the narrow definition of personal integrity rights, we also measured political and civil rights broadly with the help of the well-known Freedom House indicator (see Appendix A). The political rights component of the indicator measures the extent to which citizens have regular and legally sanctioned opportunities to participate in the political process and express and obtain opinions and information about it. The civil rights component focuses most prominently on freedoms of expression, assembly, religion, and organization; equality under the law; and protection from political terror and from unjustified imprisonment, exile, or torture. It also includes economic rights, such as the right to own property. This indicator has been used by a number of researchers to measure human rights, broadly defined (Poe, 2004). It rates countries' levels of political and civil rights on a scale from 1 to 7. Countries that score high on the index are considered more democratic than those that score low (the Freedom House indicator was reversed for the purposes of this analysis, with high scores denoting a freer system). This indicator has been used extensively in research on democracy and human rights; researchers have found these indicators to be correlated with other

6. The Political Terror Scale data used here were collected and made available by Mark P. Gibney.

measures of human rights, such as physical integrity violations (cf. Poe & Tate, 1994).

In our sample of countries, the Pearson correlation between the Freedom House indicator and the Political Terror Scale is $-.6$ (Pearson's r), indicating that more democratic countries had fewer personal integrity violations. Although there is, thus, significant overlap between these broad and narrow indicators of human rights conditions, the two are clearly not synonymous empirically or conceptually (see also Milner, Poe, & Leblang, 1999). For the year 1996 (the date of our survey), the index scores ranged from 2.5 in Kazakhstan to 6.5 in countries such as the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, and Slovenia, with a mean of 5.12 and a standard deviation of 1.34. These Freedom House ratings were then merged with the individual-level survey data to match with the date of the surveys. Based on our hypotheses, we expected a positive relationship between a country's rating on the Freedom House Scale and our dependent variable positive evaluations of human rights. That is, the more protected a country's political and civil rights, the more respect for human rights people should report.

CONTINGENT EFFECTS OF HUMAN RIGHTS CONDITIONS

In addition to the direct effects of the human rights indicators, we hypothesized that the effects of respect for human rights on people's evaluations of their country's human rights situation would be variable. In particular, we argued that individuals with higher levels of education would be significantly more sensitive to levels of respect for human rights and more likely to interpret higher levels of respect positively. By itself, the coefficient for education should, thus, be in the direction of the actual human rights situation in the country and vary by country because human rights conditions vary across our sample of countries. Alternatively, if education is an indicator of social status, then more highly educated respondents may be less likely to personally experience human rights violations; in this case, the coefficient should be positive. However, when considered in the context of the concrete situation in these societies—that is, when interacted with the human rights indicator—better educated individuals in more repressive regimes should form more pessimistic assessments of the human rights situation in their country; similarly, more highly educated people living in countries with greater protection of political and civil rights should form more positive assessments of their country's human rights situation. To measure levels of education, respondents were asked to indicate the highest level of education they had received. Answer categories comprised four levels, ranging from *up to elementary* to *higher education* and the intermediate categories being *some secondary but*

not completed and *secondary graduated*. The education variable, thus, has four categories (coded 1 to 4), with the highest score (4) denoting the highest level of education.

CONTROL VARIABLES

We also included a number of control variables at the level of individuals and the level of countries. At the individual level, we controlled for membership in groups disadvantaged by the political and economic transitions (gender, ethnic minority status, and economic hardship), as well as important demographic factors such as respondents' age and type of residence (urban or rural).

Individual-Level Control Variables

First, people who have been disadvantaged during the course of the political and economic transition and those who are objectively at greater risk of having their rights violated should form more negative assessments of their country's human rights situation. Specifically, we expect three different kinds of "risk-group membership" to affect assessments of the human rights situation at the individual level: economic deprivation, gender, and ethnic minority status.

We identified individuals as experiencing economic difficulties if they reported that their personal economic situation had worsened during the 12 months prior to the time of the survey. Specifically, we used the following question: "Compared to 12 months ago, do you think that the financial situation of your household has: got a lot better, got a little better, stayed the same, got a little worse, or got a lot worse?" This 5-category scale was recoded into a dummy variable, such that people from the two negative categories were scored 1; all others received a score of 0. In addition, we expect more negative attitudes about the human rights situation among women than men because women have suffered notably during the dual transition to democracy and market economy through discrimination in the employment market and the erosion of social benefits provided by the state compared to the Soviet system. Gender was scored as a dummy variable (female = 1; male = 0). Finally, ethnic minorities can be expected to be more pessimistic about the human rights situation. For one, it is likely that ethnic minorities are objectively more threatened than they were under the Communist regime. Moreover, research suggests that perceptions of in-group/out-group differences lead members of different ethnic groups to detect and even exaggerate differences

between each other and develop greater distrust for other groups (Fearon & Laitin, 2000). As a result, we expect that ethnic minorities will form more negative assessments about their countries' human rights situation than members of the majority group (see also Evans & Lipsmeyer, 2001; Gibson, 1993). Ethnic minority status was measured with the help of a question that asked respondents to state what nationality or ethnic background they belonged to. This information was used to create a dummy variable that was coded 1 if a person belonged to an ethnic minority group in his or her country (0 otherwise). If the nationality or ethnic background reported was not the majority nationality in the country, respondents were classified as belonging to an ethnic minority.

To avoid possible spuriousness problems, we also control for people's allegiance to the existing political and economic regime because those favoring the current system will be less likely to criticize the government for its human rights record and, therefore, underestimate the level of human rights violations. To measure people's attitudes toward the current political order, we included a measure gauging people's level of satisfaction with the way democracy is developing in the country, as well as a more general question about people's sense of whether the country is going in the right direction. The survey asked people the following questions: "On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the way democracy is developing in our country?" The most positive response received a 4 ("very satisfied"), and the most negative response ("not at all satisfied") a 1, with the other two categories in the middle at 2 and 3. The question wording for measuring people's general feelings toward the political situation was: "In general, do you feel things in our country are going in the right or in the wrong direction?" Respondents who said "right direction" were coded 3, those who thought the country was headed in the wrong direction were coded 1, with the "don't know" in the middle (coded 2).

Country-Level Control Variables

Recognizing that country-level factors other than levels of respect for human rights may determine people's perceptions of their government's behavior, we also controlled for several other potentially important variables. For example, because people pay attention to agitators, levels of dissent may signal to the average citizen that protest occurs for a reason (Anderson et al., 2002). Our measure of dissent relies on data from the Minorities At Risk Project (see Appendix A; cf. Gurr & Moore, 1997). This variable is an additive index derived from one 5-point scale and one 7-point scale in the Minorities At Risk Project data—a Protest Scale and an Antiregime Rebellion Scale; the

combined index could range from 0 to 12, where 12 is the most severe form of dissent.⁷

We also included a measure of the level of development in the form of the country's level of GDP per capita. We expected that people would have less negative human rights perceptions in countries with higher levels of national prosperity. These data were taken from the United Nations (n.d.) *Monthly Bulletin of Statistics*. In addition, we hypothesized that people in ethnically heterogeneous societies would have more negative public perceptions of the human rights situation, given that any one person is more likely to have experienced social conflict and, thus, may be more likely to think that rights are not systematically ensured and protected (cf. Ellingsen, 2000). We therefore also included a measure of ethnic homogeneity in our model. This measure is calculated based on data taken from the *World Factbook* (1996) and constitutes the probability that any two people chosen at random will share the same ethnic background.⁸

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Our research design requires that we combine information at the level of respondents (micro level) and countries (macro level). This means that our data have a multilevel structure where one unit of analysis—individuals—is nested within the other—countries (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992). To estimate our models, we therefore relied on statistical techniques developed specifically for modeling multilevel data structures (Steenbergen & Jones, 2002).

7. This variable does not measure dissent over human rights conditions but instead, general political dissent. Thus it is possible for a country to have dissent without high levels of human rights violations. Note also that the Minorities At Risk Project data are generated only for at-risk groups based on cultural characteristics and, thus, do not include groups dissenting with regard to ideological issues. Finally, the protest and rebellion indicators are based on the highest single occurrence of rebellion for each year and nation. Because they are generated only for at-risk groups, this measure is correlated with the level of ethnic homogeneity in a country at Pearson's $r = -.41$.

8. This measure is based on the diversity index proposed by Lieberman (1969). This indicator of homogeneity represents the proportions of categories along which a randomly selected pair of individuals will correspond; therefore, these figures are interpretable in probabilistic terms. Ranging continuously from 0 to 1, complete ethnic homogeneity exists at 1, and a 0 indicates complete heterogeneity.

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE

We sought to determine, first, whether there was significant variation in system support at the individual and country levels. We therefore estimated an ANOVA model that decomposes the variance in the dependent variable into sources of cross-national variation, which cause particular countries to deviate from the grand mean, and sources of interindividual variation. The argument that both levels of analysis are important for understanding human rights perceptions is supported if both variance components are statistically significant (cf. Steenbergen & Jones, 2002). Results of the ANOVA model revealed that both variance components were statistically significant (country-level $\beta = .064$, $p < .05$; individual-level $\beta = .638$, $p < .001$), suggesting that there was significant variance in levels of subjective repression at both levels of analysis. Results of the ANOVA model also showed that country-level variance was proportionally much smaller than individual-level variance. Specifically, judging from the ratios of each variance component relative to the total variance in human rights perceptions, we can say that individual-level variance constituted 85.7% of the total variance in human rights perceptions. Given that the data were measured at the individual level, this is not surprising (Steenbergen & Jones, 2002, p. 231). At the same time, the results of the ANOVA model indicate clearly that there was significant variation in levels of human rights perceptions at both levels of analysis. Thus we now turn to the question of whether the model we have specified can account for this variance.

MULTIVARIATE MODEL RESULTS: DIRECT EFFECTS

Table 2 shows the results of random intercept multilevel maximum likelihood iterative generalized least squares models estimating the direct effects of the micro and macro variables on evaluations of human rights. Because physical integrity violations and respect for political and civil rights are correlated for the set of countries in our data set, we estimated multivariate models that include each of the human rights indicators separately as well as together.

The results from the simple additive model support our first main hypothesis, but only in part (Models 1 and 2, see Table 2). Although the coefficients for actual human right conditions are statistically significant and in the expected direction when each is included separately in the regression, the coefficients are not significantly different from 0 when both are included in the model (Model 3). Thus consistent with expectations, people in countries with

Table 2
Multilevel Models of Human Rights Perceptions in East-Central Europe, 1996

Independent Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	1.581*** (.287)	1.088*** (.267)	1.270*** (.343)
Repression (high = more violations)	-.156* (.072)		-.072 (.088)
Political and civil rights (high = more rights)		.112** (.044)	.082 (.056)
Gender (1 = female)	-.038** (.015)	-.038** (.015)	-.038** (.015)
Ethnic minority (1 = yes)	-.046* (.020)	-.046* (.020)	-.046* (.020)
Economic losers (1 = yes)	-.139*** (.020)	-.139*** (.020)	-.139*** (.020)
Democracy satisfaction (high = satisfied)	.370*** (.011)	.370*** (.011)	.370*** (.011)
Country's direction (high = right direction)	.294*** (.019)	.294*** (.019)	.294*** (.019)
Urban residence (1 = yes)	.063*** (.015)	.063*** (.015)	.063*** (.015)
Age	.000 (.000)	.000 (.001)	.000 (.000)
Level of education (high = highly educated)	.025*** (.009)	.025*** (.009)	.025*** (.009)
Level of dissent	.006 (.023)	-.021 (.018)	-.009 (.024)
Level of development	.000 (.000)	.000 (.000)	.000 (.000)
Ethnic heterogeneity	-.060 (.301)	-.351 (.321)	-.291 (.324)
Variance components			
Country level	.038** (.013)	.035** (.012)	.033** (.012)
Individual level	.512*** (.007)	.512*** (.007)	.512*** (.007)
Summary statistics			
<i>N</i>	9,510	9,510	9,510
-2 log likelihood	20679.14	20677.76	20677.10

Note: Estimates are maximum likelihood estimates (iterative generalized least squares); standard errors are in parentheses.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

higher levels of physical integrity violations reported lower levels of respect for human rights. Similarly, people in countries with higher levels of political and civil rights reported higher levels of respect for human rights. However, when we control for both, neither turns out to be a significant determinant of human rights perceptions. Simply put, we find evidence that levels of respect for human rights affect human rights perceptions, but this conclusion is tempered by the variables' inability to distinguish themselves vis-à-vis the other when both are included in the model. Our preliminary conclusion, therefore, is that the variables measuring actual human rights conditions in the country seem to capture similar phenomena in people's minds.

However, the results also show that other predictors of people's evaluations of human rights conditions appeared to matter and in the hypothesized

direction. Members of ethnic minority groups, women, and those who reported a decline in their material well-being, on average, expressed much less favorable evaluations of the human rights situation than ethnic majorities, those who were economically secure, and men. Although the coefficients for all three variables were statistically highly significant, their substantive impact was comparably small. Thus these results suggest that assessments of a country's human rights situation are not simply driven by the reality of respect for human rights in a country and that individual-level biases create some heterogeneity in how people perceive the human rights situation.

The other individual-level control variables achieved high levels of statistical significance. They show that those who were satisfied with the country's democratic development were much more likely to have positive evaluations of the country's human rights situation. Similarly, if respondents thought the country was on the wrong track, they were more likely to think that the country's human rights situation was lacking. Finally, citizens in more urban communities were more likely to indicate that human rights were respected.

Regarding the impact of the macro-level control variables, the results show that none of them affected subjective levels very strongly. Although the model did improve the overall variance explained at the macro level relative to the naïve ANOVA model—including the macro-level variables that reduced the variation to be explained by about 70%—individually, the macro-level predictors did not manage to achieve conventional levels of statistical significance.

Given that our Level 2 variables are measured at the level of countries and, thus, for a fairly small number of cases, we subsequently examined the robustness of these results, in particular those for levels of physical integrity violations and respect for human rights with the help of parametric and nonparametric bootstrap estimations. These estimations yielded results that were completely consistent with those reported in Table 2, and, thus, are not shown here (but are available from the authors). Thus systematic violations of physical integrity breed lower levels of perceived respect for human rights, whereas respect for political and civil rights does the opposite. However, jointly, these variables do not appear to be sufficiently distinct in people's minds to generate independent and separable effects.

INTERACTION MODELS: CONTINGENT EFFECTS

Previously, we hypothesized that persons with higher levels of education in countries with low levels of respect for human rights should form particularly negative evaluations of human rights. That is, those with higher levels of education should be particularly apt to interpret the world around them accu-

Table 3
Interactive Effects of Education and Repression on Human Rights Perceptions in 17 East-Central European Countries, 1996

Independent Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	1.049** (.351)	1.742*** (.360)	1.320*** (.386)
Repression (high = more violations)	.069 (.093)	-.070 (.090)	.037 (.096)
Political and civil rights (high = more rights)	.077 (.057)	-.010 (.060)	.036 (.062)
Level of education (high = highly educated)	.122*** (.020)	.146*** (.037)	.019 (.061)
Education × Repression	-.056*** (.010)		-.043*** (.013)
Education × Political and Civil Rights		.033*** (.007)	.015* (.009)
Gender (1 = female)	-.038** (.015)	-.038** (.015)	-.038** (.015)
Ethnic minority (1 = yes)	-.048* (.020)	-.046* (.020)	-.048*** (.020)
Economic losers (1 = yes)	-.138*** (.019)	-.139*** (.020)	-.138*** (.019)
Democracy satisfaction (high = satisfied)	.370*** (.011)	.370*** (.011)	.370*** (.011)
Country's direction (high = right direction)	.292*** (.019)	.292*** (.019)	.292*** (.019)
Urban residence (1 = yes)	.060*** (.015)	.061*** (.015)	.060*** (.015)
Age	.000 (.000)	.000 (.000)	.000 (.000)
Level of dissent	-.005 (.024)	-.010 (.024)	-.007 (.024)
Level of development	.000 (.000)	.000 (.000)	.000 (.000)
Ethnic heterogeneity	-.271 (.329)	-.263 (.332)	-.263 (.332)
Variance components			
Country level	.034** (.012)	.035** (.012)	.035** (.012)
Individual level	.510*** (.007)	.510*** (.007)	.510*** (.007)
Summary statistics			
<i>N</i>	9,510	9,510	9,510
-2 log likelihood	20646.52	20654.86	20643.42

Note: Estimates are maximum likelihood estimates (iterative generalized least squares) and bias corrected bootstrap estimates; standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

rately and to interpret violations of human rights particularly negatively. To test for this interaction effect, we estimated a set of models that included interaction terms between education and level of respect for human rights as measured by the Political Terror Scale and Freedom House Scales. These results are shown in Table 3.

As hypothesized, better educated individuals formed more negative assessments of human rights in the more repressive societies. Moreover, highly educated respondents formed more negative evaluations than less educated respondents as we move from free to more repressed countries. Thus it appears that the effect of human rights conditions on evaluations of

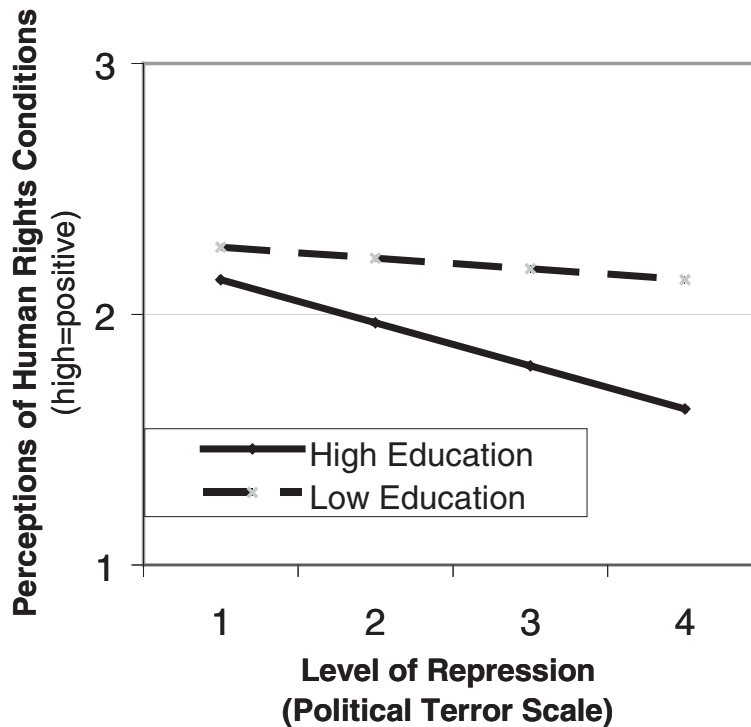


Figure 1. Effects of repression and education on evaluations of human rights.

human rights in a country is mediated by respondents' levels of education. That is, actual repression does drive levels of subjective repression, and it does so particularly strongly among the more educated citizens. As important, when we differentiate respondents with regard to different levels of education, we find that both indicators in fact have independent, that is, separable effects, on people's perceptions of human rights conditions.

Figures 1 and 2 show these interactive effects of education and respect for human rights on assessments of the human rights situation by graphing changes in human rights perceptions among the most and least educated respondents. They suggest that there are only small differences in levels of subjective repression among individuals of different levels of education in countries that are relatively free from repression. Moreover, they show that levels of respect for human rights have virtually no effect on the least educated respondents.

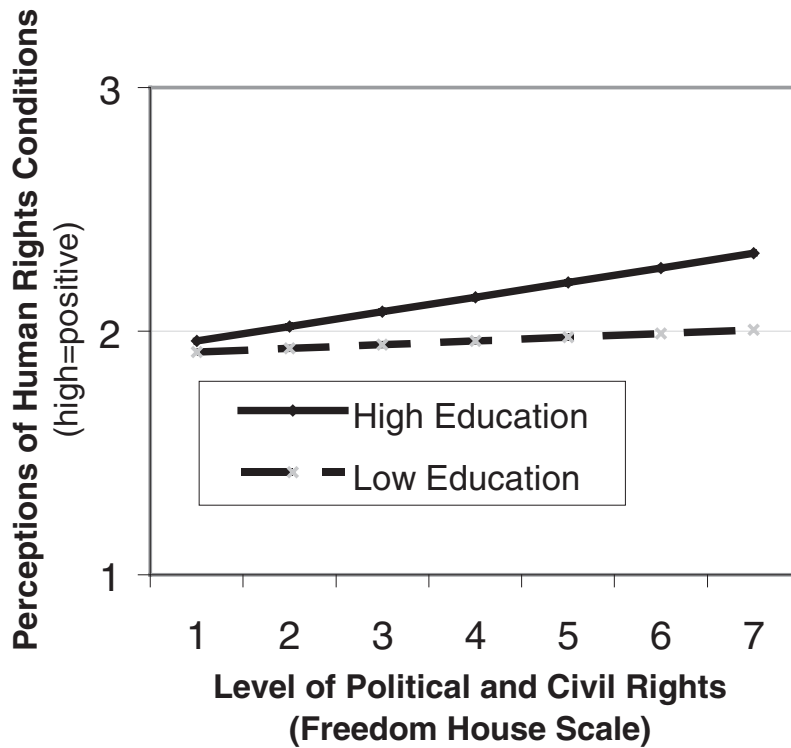


Figure 2. Effects of political/civil rights and education on evaluations of human rights.

A significant difference emerges once we move beyond the midrange of countries' levels of respect for human rights, however. According to these results, the more severe violations of physical integrity rights become (see Figure 1) and the less respect there is for people's political and civil liberties (see Figure 2), the less likely it becomes that highly educated individuals will evaluate the country's human rights conditions positively. In contrast, the least educated citizens exhibit very little sensitivity to differences in levels of respect for human rights, regardless of how they are measured. Taken together, then, these results indicate that different conceptions of human rights have independent and separable effects on people's evaluations of human rights conditions. However, these effects are largely confined to the highly educated respondents.

DISCUSSION

We set out to examine the cross-national and individual-level determinants of people's assessments of the human rights situation in their country. Based on cross-national survey data collected in 17 post-Communist states in Central and Eastern Europe, we found that not all people in countries that systematically violate human rights develop more negative opinions about their country's human rights situation. However, the results also show that high levels of disregard for human rights strongly affect evaluations of human rights practices among individuals with higher levels of education. Thus better educated respondents were significantly less likely to say that there was respect for human rights if they lived in a more repressive country or a country where political and civil rights were frequently violated.

This effect may stem from two, potentially overlapping, sources. For one, this result suggests that highly educated individuals were particularly adept at detecting and reporting their country's human rights conditions accurately. In contrast, the less well educated may report less accurate perceptions of the human rights situation in East-Central Europe because they have fewer resources to process political information and fewer opportunities to learn about human rights, a democratic concept relatively new to the post-Communist societies. In addition, we posit that this effect may be driven by dissimilar value structures among individuals with variable levels of formal education as well as differences in self-interest with regard to their ability to take advantage of a freer political order. Specifically, if higher levels of education encourage the formation of more enlightened, and possibly more tolerant (and more Western) values, then more educated individuals should be particularly sensitive to the existence of repressive government policies and, consequently, be more likely to view them as negative.

These results have important implications for the debate between cultural theorists and empirically minded students of human rights. On its face, the lack of a strong effect of levels of respect for human rights on evaluations of human rights conditions among the sample as a whole appears to favor the cultural view of human rights, which suggests that the concept of human rights as operationalized by Western researchers may not have uniform leverage in societies with histories of repressive governments or may have meaning only for particular segments of a population. At the same time, the fact that we find an indirect relationship between levels of objective and subjective human rights conditions that is mediated by levels of education suggests a more nuanced interpretation. Specifically, it indicates to us that in every population, there are segments that deem repressive government actions in

ways consistent with Western conceptualizations, as there are portions of society that fail to view human rights violations in this way.

These results also pose a challenge to the usefulness of expert-based measures of human rights violations for understanding individuals' motivations. Although they do not invalidate them, they do point to the need to be sensitive to the fact that individuals with lower levels of education are less likely to connect repressive government actions with their own assessments of the human rights situation. At the very least, the results point to the challenges potential dissenters encounter when attempting to convince citizens that repression is taking place or that levels of respect for human rights should inform people's evaluations of human rights conditions. Overcoming this hurdle may be important for mobilizing large segments of the population to engage in, or be sympathetic to, dissenters' actions against the governing regime.

Our results also show that although there are systematic individual-level differences that create heterogeneity in subjective levels of repression, the substantive impact of such differences is relatively small. Thus although the disadvantaged are indeed more likely to see the human rights situation negatively from those who are doing well—with members of ethnic minority groups, women, and those who have experienced economic difficulties significantly more likely to take a negative view of their country's human rights situation—such effects are far from overwhelming. We also wish to add a note of caution regarding these results. Because our survey data capture countries at different stages of transitional development, and given that the evolution of citizen attitudes in the post-Communist environment is likely to be time dependent, further research is needed to establish the robustness of our findings. At the same time, we would point out that the findings we report here are consistent with what we know in other areas of public opinion research, most prominently in the area of economic voting, which shows that economic reality and subjective perceptions of that reality do not always match or do not always match for all respondents in any given population (Anderson & O'Connor, 2000; Duch, Palmer, & Anderson, 2000).

Finding that different people interpret the same human rights conditions differently also has interesting political implications. In particular, identifying which groups of the population are particularly prone to view the country's human rights situation as lacking is important because political mobilization, be it to engage in conventional activities or unconventional action, requires individuals who perceive political problems. According to theories developed in established democracies, highly educated citizens are particu-

larly important targets for efforts at mobilization because they are likely to have the resources, such as the ability to process information or flexible work environments, to become engaged in political action. As our analysis shows, such individuals are also more likely to take a dim view of the current situation when it is bad. At the same time, however, recent studies of political participation in newly established democracies find that the disadvantaged are the most politically involved, especially in unconventional forms of participation such as protest behavior (Bahry & Lipsmeyer, 2001). The dual transition model explains this phenomenon with the high speed and depth of dislocation and the increasingly visible divide between rich and poor, producing public outrage in countries with high levels of absolute poverty. Taken together, such findings and the results reported here can be combined to infer that the highly educated may be more easily mobilized when human rights are not respected. Moreover, human rights conditions may be a less powerful motivating force for mobilizing the disadvantaged than may be other aspects of political or economic performance. In the end, further research is needed to understand the individual and cross-national differences in how citizens evaluate their country's human rights record. Especially in light of current political conflicts that involve different political cultures and value systems and ongoing scholarly debates about the role of culturally determined understandings of human rights, it would be crucially important to determine to what extent the findings reported here are generalizable beyond the Central and Eastern European context examined.

APPENDIX A

Data Sources and Information

Central and Eastern Eurobarometer Surveys

http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/archives/ceeb_en.htm

Political Terror Scale

<http://www.unca.edu/politicalscience/faculty-staff/gibney.html>

Freedom House Scales of Political Rights and Civil Liberties

<http://www.freedomhouse.org/ratings/index.htm>

Minorities At Risk Project

<http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/mar/>

APPENDIX B Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Perceptions of human rights	1	4	2.16	.84
Political Terror Scale	1	4	1.83	.85
Freedom House political and civil rights	2.5	6.5	5.12	1.34
Education	1	4	2.60	.94
Gender	0	1	.53	.50
Ethnic minority	0	1	.19	.40
Economically disadvantaged	0	1	.75	.43
Democracy satisfaction	1	4	2.08	.79
Country direction	0	1	.42	.49
Urban/Rural	0	1	.59	.49
Age	15	99	43.12	17.22
Political dissent	0	11	2.93	2.85
Ethnic homogeneity	.34	.95	.67	.17
GDP per capita	953.42	8728.64	3127.93	1876.58

Source: Central and Eastern Eurobarometer No. 7, 1996 (see Appendix A); Inter-University Consortium of Political and Social Research Study No. 2296 (Cunningham, 1997).

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