



Working Paper No. 2010/38

## **Civil Society, Institutional Change and the Politics of Reform**

The Great Transition

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May 2010

### **Abstract**

This paper examines the relationship between differences in civil society development under communism and the political, economic and institutional change and transformation after 1989. We collected a unique dataset on nature and intensity of dissident activities in 27 former communist countries during the years immediately preceding the collapse of communism. We use the resulting data to explain the subsequent political, economic and institutional developments in the post-communist countries. Both extent of political opposition and severity of government reaction help explain the choice of political regime after 1989, the concentration of power government and the nature and pace of economic reforms.

**Keywords:** civil society, institutions, economic reform, democratization

**JEL classification:** D02, E02, P26, P36

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This study has been prepared for the UNU-WIDER conference Reflections on Transition: Twenty Years after the Fall of the Berlin Wall, directed by Gérard Roland.

UNU-WIDER acknowledges the financial contribution to the conference by the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the continued support to the research programme by the governments of Denmark (Royal Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Finland (Ministry for Foreign Affairs), Sweden (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency—Sida) and the United Kingdom (Department for International Development).

ISSN 1798-7237

ISBN 978-92-9230-275-7

## Acknowledgements

We thank Daniel Berkowitz, Horst Feldmann, Dennis Mueller, Martin Paldam, Mark Schaeffer and seminar participants at the IMF, Columbia University, ECARES (Brussels), ASSA 2007 (Chicago), the First World Meeting of the Public Choice Society (Amsterdam) and the UNU-WIDER conference 'Reflections on Transition: Twenty Years after the Fall of the Berlin Wall' in Helsinki in September 2009 for valuable comments on previous drafts. Roman Horvath, Dana Popa and Aitalina Azarova provided excellent research assistance. This research was partly supported by a GDN grant 'Explaining the Dynamics of Institutional Change, Policy Choices and Economic Outcomes during Post-communist Transition'. Nauro Campos acknowledges financial support from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC, Grant RES-000-22-0550.). Jan Fidrmuc was a Marie Curie Fellow at ECARES, Université Libre de Bruxelles, when this research was initiated; the financial support of the European Commission is gratefully acknowledged. The usual disclaimer applies.

## Acronyms

CEE Central and Eastern Europe

FSU former Soviet Union

RFE Radio Free Europe

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Typescript prepared by Liisa Roponen at UNU-WIDER

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## 1 Introduction

Nearly two decades after the start of economic and political reforms in the former communist countries, the economic and political outcomes are very diverse. On the one hand, the countries of Central Europe and the Baltics were able, for the most part, to stabilize their economies after a few years of output fall and to recover their pre-1989 output levels. On the other hand, the former Soviet Union and former Yugoslavia (with the exception of Slovenia) experienced a much more severe and protracted output drop and, subsequently, also slower recovery (Figure 1). Furthermore, market reforms were faster and deeper in the former group of countries while the countries of the FSU lagged behind (EBRD 2007; Kaufmann, Kraay and Mastruzzi 2003). The progress with respect to political liberalization was similar. Some post-communist countries, again mostly those in Central Europe and the Baltics, quickly introduced free elections and political freedoms, and stabilized their democracies. In contrast, the former Yugoslavia went through a horrible war experience before any substantial democratization could be observed while most countries of the FSU underwent a period of limited democratization before drifting towards autocratic rule (Figure 2).

The widely diverging outcomes of the post-communist transition on the economic or political front gave rise to large literature on the determinants of transition success. There is by now a consensus that proximate causes such as the outcomes of the very first democratic elections, or differences in economic policies alone (speed and sequencing of reforms, type of privatization policies, conduct of stabilization policies, etc.), cannot fully explain the observed divergence, and that differences in the institutional setups provide a better explanation (see, among others, Johnson, McMillan and Woodruff 1999; Hellman 1998; Ekiert and Kubik 1998; Møller 2009). However, how do we explain the differences in the institutional evolution in different countries? Taking institutions as exogenous cannot be a satisfactory answer, as all transition countries have been undergoing rapid and profound institutional change after the end of communism.

Various explanations for the institutional divergence in CEE have been proposed, stressing geopolitical and accession effects (see Roland and Verdier 2003; Berglöf and Roland 1997), or highlighting the differences in economic, political or cultural legacies (Kitschelt 2003; Kitschelt and Malesky 2000; Møller 2009). Surprisingly, a potentially important causal channel has been neglected: differences in the development of civil society, and in the patterns of interaction between civil activists and the power-holders, prior to the fall of communism.

The analysis provided in this paper fills this gap. We construct an original dataset measuring the breadth and depth of the pre-transition civil society. We then proceed by to investigate the impact of civil society on subsequent institutional, economic and political developments. We expect the pre-transition civil society to have played an important role for a number of reasons. In countries where a more active civil society has exploited the political opportunity of communist collapse, the demand for implementing and consolidating institutional checks and balances and limits to executive powers was certainly stronger than in those countries where civil society developments were weaker. And in countries with a more vibrant civil society, incentives of the incumbents to introduce encompassing and sustainable economic reforms were different from those of incumbents who faced a silenced civil society.

Figure 1

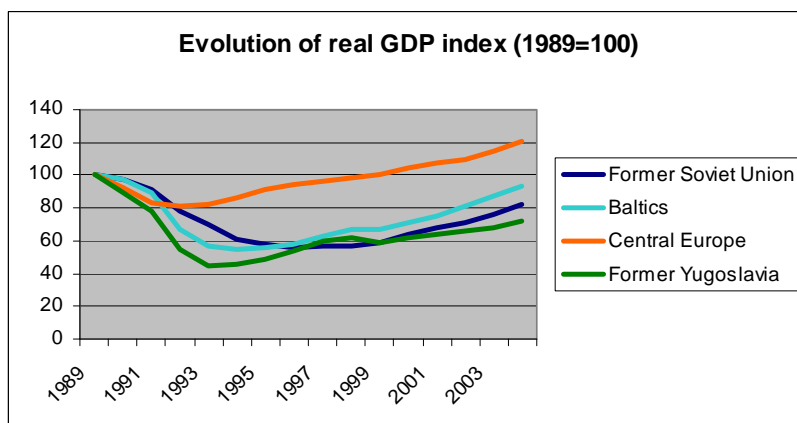
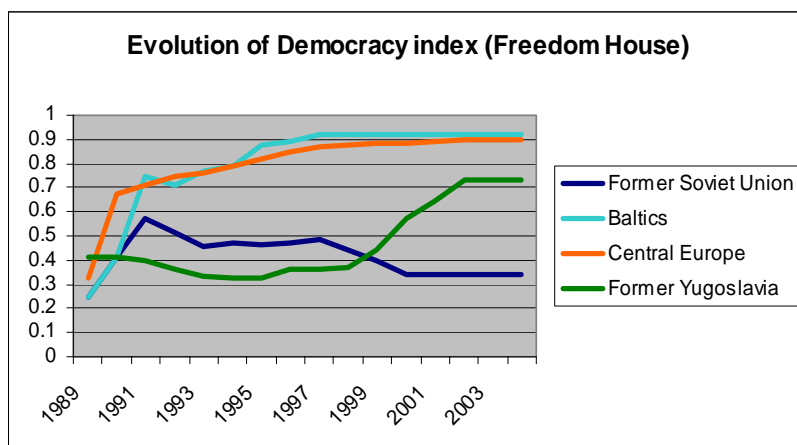


Figure 2



Note: The index represents the simple average of political rights and civil liberties indicators compiled by the Freedom House ([www.freedomhouse.org/](http://www.freedomhouse.org/)).

We use the political concept of civil society in the same manner as this notion is used in the ‘transitology’ literature to refer to the presence of organized actors who are independent of the state and are ready and capable to politicize issues of change (see O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986; Linz and Stepan 1996). Note that in this conceptualization, the stress is on contentious *action* and not on the representation of specific *values*. The concept encompasses contentious actors and actions that aim to advance the more general, universal values like democratization or extension of human rights. It also includes actions directed at advancing more particularistic issues like diverse economic goals or nationalistic values. During the downfall of the state-socialist regimes, civil societies differed not only with respect to their strengths or vibrancy but also with respect to the goals motivating civic action. From a dynamic and relational perspective, civil societies have also differed in their capacity to carve out autonomous space for contentious political action. In some of these countries, civil societies were in ascendancy at the start of regime change, while in others they were in retreat, weakened by growing state repression.

Our data cover the period between the start of Glasnost and the fall of communism (i.e., from 1985 to 1989) for the 27 former centrally planned economies of Central and

Eastern Europe and Central Asia. The data collected from the Open Society Archives in Budapest provide information on various aspects of political opposition events. These events were reported by Radio Free Europe and other news sources that specialized in reporting on dissident activities. Our database contains quantitative information—the number of events, dates and number of participants—as well as qualitative information on the types of events (strikes, demonstrations, etc.), motivation for the event, and whether and how severely the government reacted. While these data obviously only measure very partial civil society developments, they nevertheless have several advantages. First of all, they contain some of the most relevant facts relating to our specific interest, namely the level, form and content of dissident activity. Indeed, we expect a stronger level of dissident activity to be associated with greater citizen involvement in the shaping of new democratic institutions and thus with stronger checks and balances later on. On the other hand, while mobilization for human rights and political change might have positive effects on the characteristics of the new institutions, we do not expect the same from large-scale mobilization demanding for direct economic or nationalistic change.

A second advantage of our data is that we measure civil society by observing actual actions rather than organizational membership or the density of inter-organizational ties (the latter are assumed to determine the propensity to act for change). Our paper thus deviates from the neo-Tocquevillian approach that would define and measure civil society by the density of civic ties and participation in diverse non-political associations (e.g., Leonardi, Nanetti and Putnam 1993). Our concept and measure are closer to the way the social movement literature defines contentious action (della Porta, Kriesi and Rucht 1999; Tarrow 1989). We study political action in authoritarian state-socialist regimes that had no freedom of association and assembly, and no guaranteed political rights. In such regimes, any non-licensed gathering of people or non-authorized public speech could be construed as contentious, illegal action. As we will demonstrate, before the regime change, countries differed greatly in the propensity of their citizens to enter into any type of contentious action and engage in political confrontation.

The cross-country comparison could be biased if the data sources we used were biased towards reporting more activities from some countries than others (on the problems of data reliability in protest event analysis, see Koopmans and Rucht 1999). We have good reason to believe this is not the case. News agencies like Radio Free Europe (RFE) were closely related to the CIA and, given the context of the cold war, had no interest in reporting fewer dissident activities from specific countries. To overcome any problem of potential bias, RFE used numerous sources ranging from newspaper accounts or news smuggled through borders by dissident activists to reports by various human rights organizations. Dissident organizations also often had close contacts in the west so that their protest activities could be reported; it was this publicity that occasionally would give them some protection from harsher forms of repression. This incentive existed even for the dissident organizations—such as nationalist or religious extremist organizations—that did not necessarily share the western political values. We are thus quite confident that the data we put together allow for a meaningful comparison across countries.

We find that political opposition before 1989 was much more intense in Central Europe than in the Soviet republics. This is true even for a country like Czechoslovakia where the regime was much more repressive than in Poland or Hungary. Moreover, the lower level of dissident activity in the FSU was accompanied by greater repression: not only

was the probability of government reaction higher there, so was the probability that the government would resort to physical violence. Further, we note that differences in civil society development in the 1980s played an important role in explaining whether the country adopted a political regime based on distributed power with checks and balances or a political regime with high power concentration. Moreover, our findings support the claim that having a more vibrant and organized civil society at the start of economic reforms was an asset both for launching and implementing these reforms.

The paper is organized as follows. The next section provides a discussion of the construction of our dataset. Section 3 discusses the stylized facts revealed by the data. Section 4 presents our main econometric results on the link between civil society development and institutional change, and section 5 concludes.

## **2 Data collection and documentation**

Our analysis is based on the long tradition in history, political sociology and in the study of social movements of using event catalogues to trace the evolution of diverse forms of collective/contentious action and their effects (for an excellent overview, see Tilly 2002). Such event catalogues and datasets on multiple social and/or political interactions are used, in the first place, to describe more formally the characteristics of general phenomena such as the evolution of civil society or patterns of state-society interactions. These allow for the quantification of various properties of contentious actions (timing, frequency, size, forms, goals) as well as the immediate reactions of the repressive apparatus of the state (Koopmans and Rucht 1999). In addition to descriptions, event catalogues are also used to account for the causes and longer-term effects of the phenomena traced in this manner (see, among others, Tilly 2002.)

Although an extensive literature already exists on protest event analysis in the more established democracies (see, among others, Tarrow 1989; Tilly 2002; McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001; Rucht and Koopmans 1999; della Porta, Kriesi and Rucht 1999), there is only a handful of studies on the forms and effects of contentious civic action in the pre- or post-transition countries of Eastern and Central Europe. The most encompassing studies that deal with this part of the world discuss either a single country or compare some characteristically different cases. Ekiert and Kubik, pioneers in the comparative event analysis in the post-communist world, use data from just four Central European countries (Ekiert and Kubik 1998). Several other excellent studies focus on the evolution of contentious action in a single country (e.g., Szabo 1996; Ekiert and Kubik 1998). As yet, no one has undertaken a cross-country data collection as comprehensive as ours.<sup>1</sup>

Building on the concepts and methods of this research tradition, we focused our data collection on tracing different patterns of interactions between civil society and the socialist regime. We collected detailed data on various aspects of civil society action: their size, frequency, timing, type, form and content. We were interested, however, in more than just a comparison of the differences in the strength of the various civil

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<sup>1</sup> The by-now classic work of Beissinger (2002), using 150 different sources, provides the deepest event dataset on the former Soviet State. A recent contribution is the volume edited by Roberts and Garton Ash (2009).

societies and the patterns of civic activities across these countries. In addition to a comparison of civil societies, we also wanted to trace the evolution of the balance of power between states and civil societies in the period leading to regime change. Thus, in order to be able to compare countries from this perspective, we collected data on the frequency, form and content of the reaction of the state.

Data collection was based on the sources of the Open Society Archives, which were created by the Information Resources Department of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute (East European Archives). It collects comprehensive information on political, economic, religious, media, social and cultural issues occurring between 1945 and 1994 in the former socialist bloc countries. The Archive records include news agency releases (mostly from Reuters, AP, UPI, AFP, DPA and national agencies), excerpts from foreign and national press, transcripts of national radio broadcasts, abstracts of media reports about the countries and copies of articles from scientific publications. Importantly, they also contain the RFE's research reports (background and situation reports), which elaborate on a specific topic (village razing in Romania, for instance), with several references to news agency releases and their own research work, interviews, etc.

In order to capture political dissident activities, a selection was first made according to a list of archival boxes (container list), which listed all the available records in an alphabetical order (from 'agriculture' to 'youth', for example). Quite often the record 'dissident(s)' or 'opposition', etc. was not available as a distinct category. In such cases, we selected and processed boxes which could have contained events relevant to the researchers' interest (like parties, persecution and purges, ethnic minorities, terrorism, exile, resistance to and criticism of the regime, etc.). The container list is available on the internet at [www.osa.ceu.hu](http://www.osa.ceu.hu). English is the language of the processed materials. The selected countries include the following: Albania, Bulgaria, former Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, the fifteen Republics of the former Soviet Union and the by-now independent states of the former Yugoslavia. The time span for the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries covers the years 1985-89, and for the former Soviet Union (FSU) 1985-91. The period for the latter is longer in order to account for the fact that political and economic changes were initiated later in these countries. Importantly, in the case of former Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, the data were collected separately for the various constituent republics even before independence.

If a record was identified as *dissident activity* (or repression induced by the state against dissidents or dissident activity, see later), the following variables to help characterize this event were identified, collected and coded:

- Date of event: in most cases it was possible to identify the exact date of event (day/month/year). However, sometimes only the year or the month was available. In a few cases, we only had the date when the news of the event was published; in other instances, we had only the exact year in which the event took place.
- Source of information: the name of the news agency (or agencies as quite often more than one reported the event) or any other source (RFE's situation reports, Amnesty International, Helsinki Watch or the country's domestic and/or exile dissident source/samizdat/news agency). Furthermore, the person(s) who informed the agencies (or any other body), if available, was also recorded (this

however, was rather rare, as it was dangerous to publish the name of the informant).

- Actor(s): name (or ethnicity, in the case of minorities) of the persons involved (the profession of the person, if available, was recorded as well). At times, the name list was incomplete or names simply were not available, in which case at least their ‘party’ affiliation (their interest) was indicated (e.g., member of *Charter 77*). This information allows us to measure the density of associational activity, proxied by the number of distinct organizations observed for each country.
- Location of event: region/city/village or, if available, the street or square or the name of the owner of an apartment/house.
- The number of participants: If the number of persons involved in a certain activity (street demonstration, for instance) was unknown or if reports gave conflicting figures, a range (or an estimate) was used.
- Types of activity: (i) demonstrations or rallies, (ii) meetings, (iii) setting up of organizations, clubs, etc. (iv) mass disorders, disturbances, (v) strikes, (vi) hunger strikes, (vii) terrorist activities, (viii) emigration, (ix) dissident literature (publishing or distribution), (x) petitions (appeals, statements, open letters). Quite often a record contained several types of activities because a dissident gathering with the aim of establishing a protest organization involved various stages: meeting, setting up an organization, drafting of a petition or declaration for publication in a dissident newsletter. These were coded as an event with multiple aspects.
- Motivation: in order to clarify the reasons of a particular activity, motives were recorded if available. Recording the motivation made it possible to get a clearer picture about the intentions of dissident activity (religious, ethnic, cultural, ecological or human rights concerns). Some events had multiple motives, and this was recorded by our data as well.
- Reactions of the authorities: immediate and ultimate reactions were recorded (detention or prison sentences, for instance), including the severity of the response. It is worth mentioning that often ‘reaction’ was first publicized by foreign news agencies and only after days or months—if ever—was the ‘action’, or to be precise, the circumstances and details of the ‘action’ identified by the local news agencies.
- Counter-reaction: if the reaction of the state authorities generated a response from the side of the ‘punished’ (the dissidents).
- Separately, repression, induced by government authorities against dissidents, was also recorded by identifying the time, place, intensity, type and motives.

### **3 Depth and nature of civil society: what do the data say?**

There are stark differences between the three main groups of countries: Central Europe, former Yugoslavia and former Soviet Union (FSU). In some cases, data from the Baltic countries are different from the FSU countries in other important aspects as well. We present the main trends observed from our data for these different country groups, isolating the Baltic states from the other FSU countries, when relevant.



Figure 3

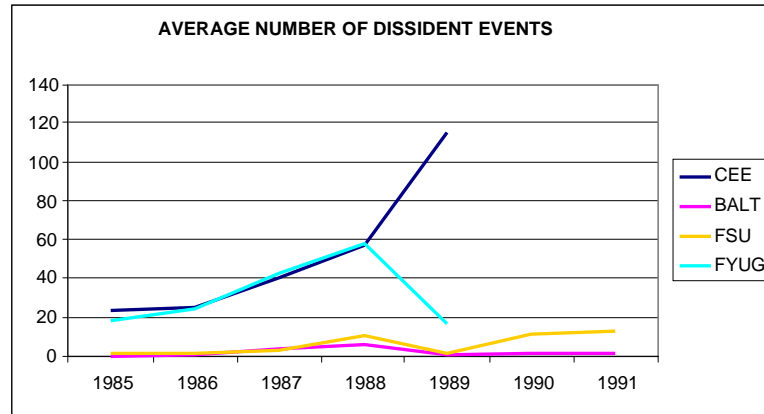
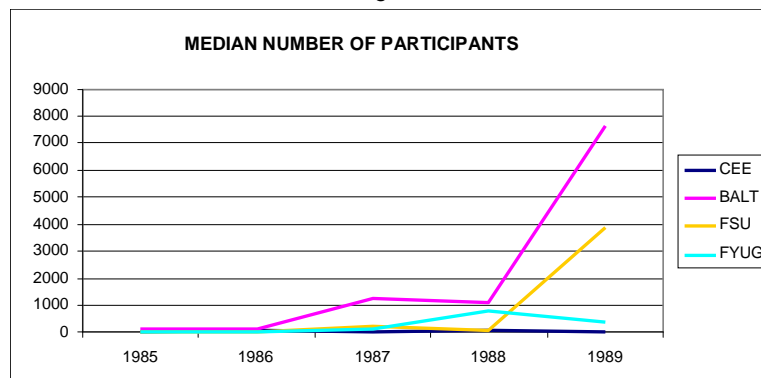


Figure 4



The average number of dissident events (Figure 3) shows these to be substantially higher in Central Europe and former Yugoslavia than in the FSU (including the Baltics). Only in 1988, at the height of the Glasnost period under Gorbachev, was there a slight increase in the number of events in the FSU. There is no reason to think that this could be due to a reporting bias in the archive sources. Most sources had a keen interest in reporting *any* dissident activity taking place in the Soviet Union. In contrast to the FSU, there is a very strong upward trend in dissident activities in the Baltics and former Yugoslavia. As can be seen from Figure 4, the median number of participants was higher in the Baltics and former Yugoslavia than in other countries. Median participation in the FSU spiked in 1988 but was lower for the other years than elsewhere.

Table 1 gives the composition of dissident activities in the different country-groups. Specifically, it shows the overall average number of dissident events per country over the 1985-89 period, revealing both the absolute number and relative importance of different types of activities. These in the former Soviet Union were mainly demonstrations, marches and rallies (on average accounting for 12 out of 19 events per country). Demonstrations constituted the second most common category in CEE, albeit in absolute numbers dwarfing the events (62 out of 256 incidents) recorded in the FSU. The most common type of dissent episode in CEE was the issuing of statements, declarations and petitions (82 incidents on average per country) and meetings (33 occurrences). Demonstrations, marches and rallies were foremost in the Baltic countries (on average accounting for 10 out of 11 episodes per country). Note that the Baltic Republics almost paralleled the FSU countries in this category despite the former's much smaller average size.

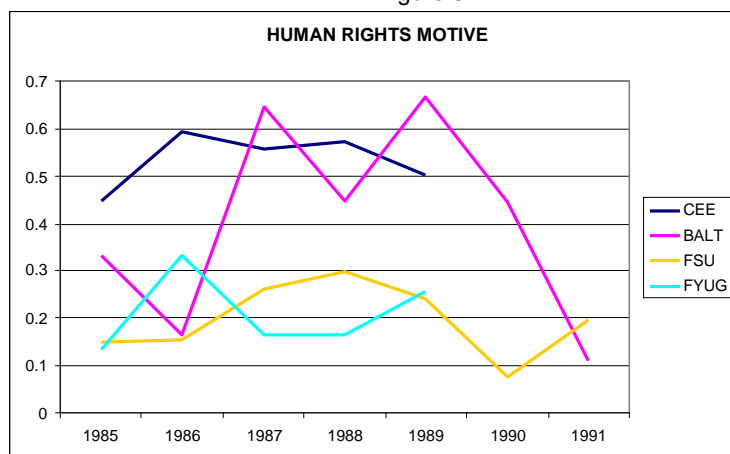
Table 1  
Summary statistics on pre-transition civil society

	CEE	Baltic States	FSU	Former Yugoslavia
Summary:				
Events per year	52.0	2.3	3.6	31.8
Participants per event, no.	20	2043	828	265
Government response, %	29.0	17	23	14
Government repression, %	5	15	9	2
Unique organizations	33.9	3	10.6	4
Motives, %				
Human rights	53	45	22	21
Political change	18	15	3	13
Economic	7	0	2	44
Environmental	3	9	2	1
Nationalistic	8	10	8	11
Religious	8	0	2	3
No. of events by type (overall, 1985-89)				
Demonstrations	62	10	12	43
Strikes	19	0	0	45
Hunger strikes	10	0	1	4
Petitions	82	1	1	29
Meetings	33	0	1	2
New organizations	18	0	1	3
Published dissident literature	17	0	2	10
Terrorism/sabotage	1	0	1	1
Granting interviews to press	9	0	0	0
Emigration	5	0	0	0

Finally, the most important category of dissident activities in the former Yugoslavia was strikes (45 out of 137 events per country), followed by demonstrations (43) and petitions (29). Central Europe had the more politicized form of protest, as is evident in the prevalence of its political declarations and meetings. In the former Yugoslavia, on the other hand, dissent was largely driven by labour-market disputes.

The motives for dissident activity varied considerably across the three regions as well, although human rights concerns were very important in all countries. Political change, furthermore, played an important role in CEE, the Baltic countries and the former Yugoslavia. These motives, however, displayed different dynamics. While the importance

Figure 5



of human rights tended to decline over time, the demand for political change increased. This suggests that as protests intensified, the concern for human rights was gradually replaced by direct demands for political change. In contrast, economic motivation was by far the strongest in the former Yugoslavia, especially towards the end of the 1980s. This is consistent with the prevalence of strikes as the main form of protest activity. Nationalist aspirations were the second most important motive in the former Yugoslavia; it was prominent also in the Baltics (where it took the form of pro-independence movements). In Central Europe, its importance was relatively minor.

Figure 6

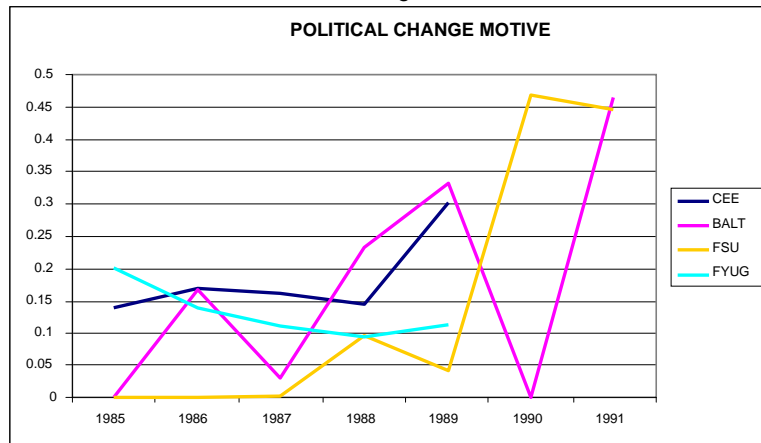


Figure 7

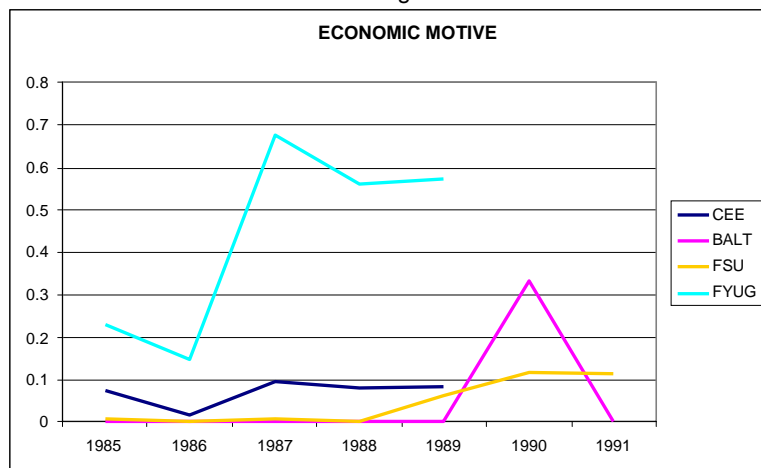


Figure 8

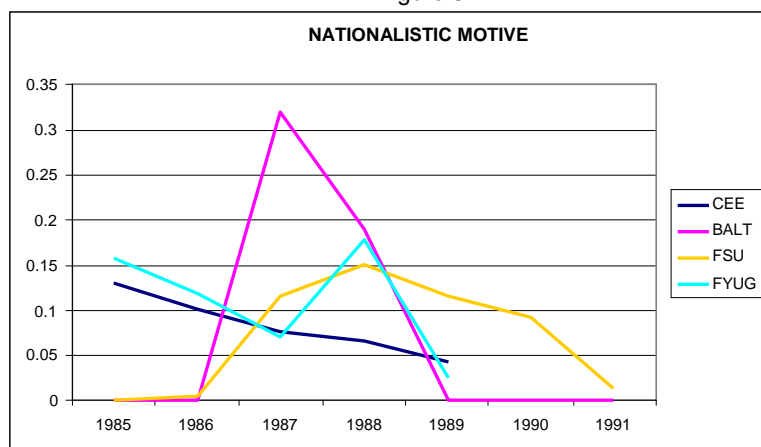
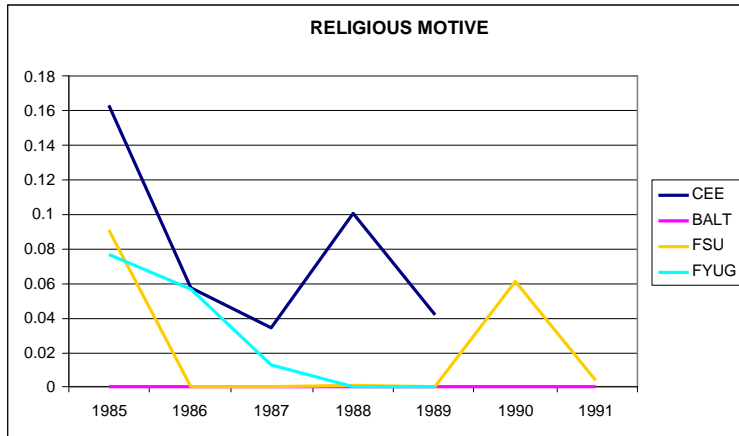


Figure 9



Government reaction to dissident incidents was not uniform either. Figure 10 shows the percentage of events that triggered government repression. One sees clearly that government reaction was low and diminishing in Central Europe, decreasing from around 40 per cent in 1985 to 20 per cent in 1989. In contrast, repression in the FSU (including the Baltics) showed an increasing trend for same period, although declining subsequently in 1990-91. Figure 11 shows the percentage of events that were met with violent government reaction. Again, repression was stronger in the FSU and Baltics than in Central Europe and the former Yugoslavia. Note in particular the dramatic increase in violent repression in the Baltics.

Figure 10

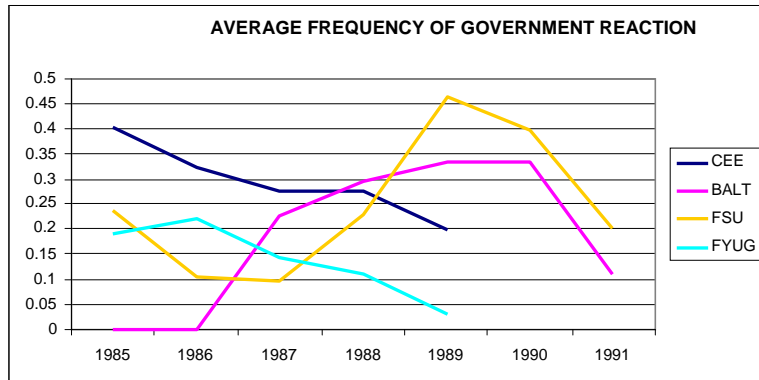
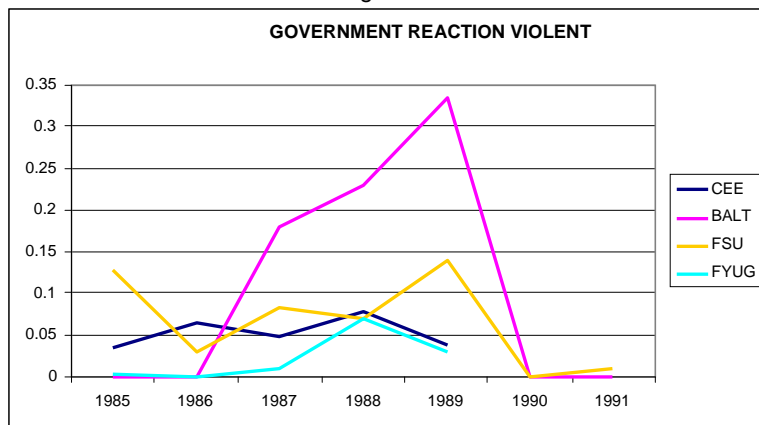


Figure 11



Not surprisingly, there seems to be a negative correlation between repression and dissident activity: the more repressive countries displayed less dissident activity. Figures 11a-d document this pattern for Poland, Czech Republic, Russia and Serbia and Montenegro. Note that despite the more repressive character of the Czechoslovak regime, the number of its dissident activities did not greatly surpass those of Poland. Note however that repression was still much stronger in Gorbachev's Russia than in Husak's Czechoslovakia.

A consistent picture emerges from these data. Central Europe exhibited a relatively high level of dissident activity and somewhat less repressive governments. Protest activity in Central Europe was more politicized, directly striving for political change. There was considerable dissent in the former Yugoslavia as well, and the country was also less repressive. Yet, protest was mostly in form of strikes with a clear economic motivation. Nationalism was also important. There were fewer dissident events and greater repression in the former Soviet Union, where protest manifested as demonstrations defending human rights. These became more politicized only later on. An exception is the Baltics where very strong and massive nationalist (pro-independence) activities were evident in the late 1980s. Given these differences, we expect civil society to have contributed to shaping the process and pace of institutional change.

Figure 11a: Patterns of interaction between dissident activity and government reaction, POLAND, 1985-89

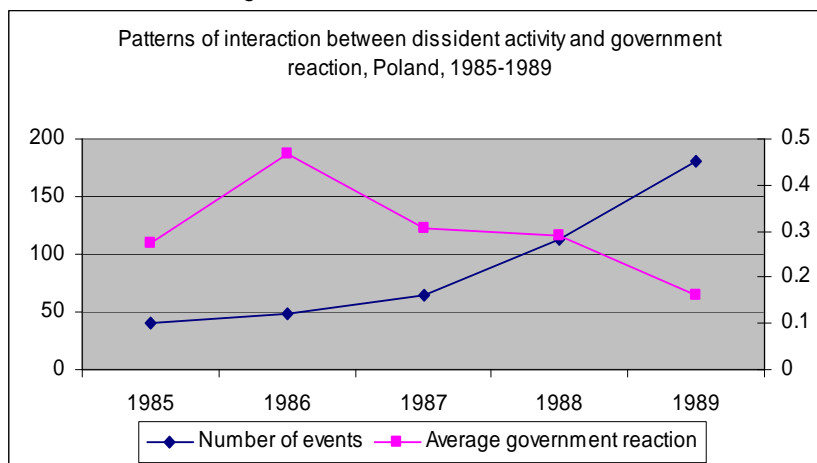


Figure 11b: Patterns of interaction between dissident activity and government reaction, CZECH REPUBLIC, 1985-89

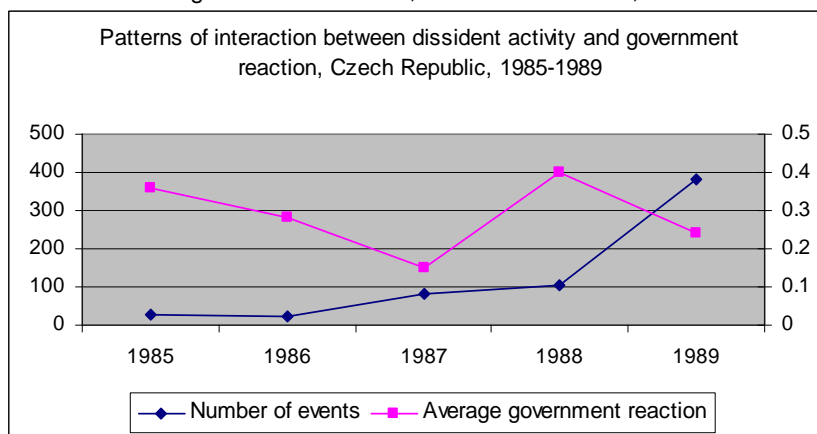


Figure 11c: Patterns of interaction between dissident activity and government reaction, RUSSIA, 1985-89

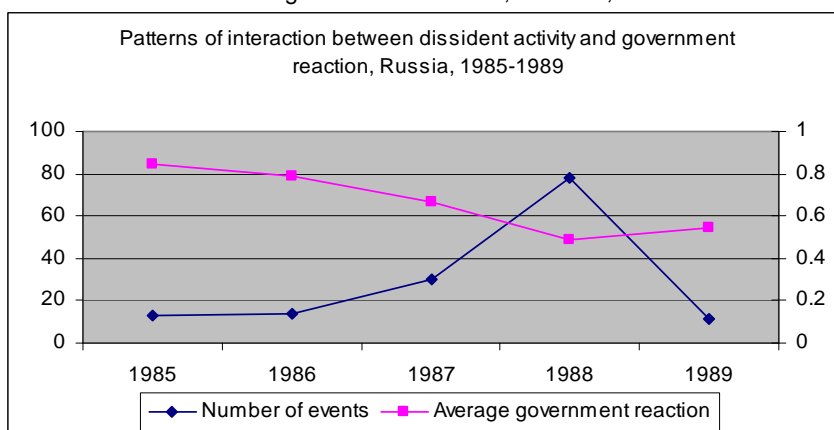
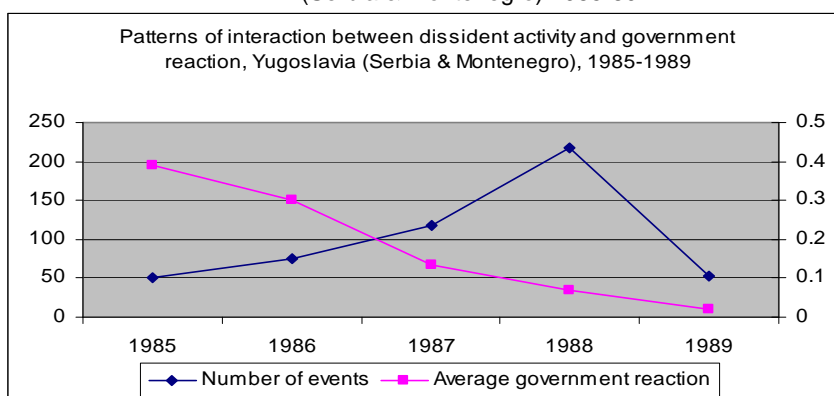


Figure 11d: Patterns of interaction between dissident activity and government reaction, YUGOSLAVIA (Serbia & Montenegro) 1985-89



Up to now, we have considered the pre-transition civil society to be more or less exogenously given. However, the different historical legacies and cultural factors characterizing these countries are likely to have played a role in shaping the nature and intensity of the civil society. Therefore, we regress in Table 2 the average number of dissident events on a number of plausible country-specific indicators. The analysis suggests that countries exposed to a shorter term of communist regime and those closer to western Europe experienced more dissident activity. More liberal political conditions before 1989 were also a factor. Interestingly enough, large countries did not necessarily report a greater number of dissident episodes than small countries. Moreover, favourable economic conditions, measured by indices of initial liberalization, did not play a robustly significant role.

Table 2  
Determinants of pre-transition civil society

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
GNP per capita, 1989	0.001 (0.003)	0.004 (0.003)								
Yrs under communism	-3.293 (1.328)*		-1.238 (0.447)*							
Distance from Vienna	0.011 (0.009)			-0.015 (0.005)*						
Avg. liberalization, 1989	-620.225 (216.64)*				149.966 (103.28)					
Avg. democracy, 1989	173.977 (34.91)**					63.488 (49.516)				
EBRD initial conditions index	7.427 (6.061)						7.854 (2.807)*			
Polity IV score, avg. over 1918-38	-2.251 (1.765)							3.046 (2.080)		
Independent state during 1918-38	-37.859 (27.986)								24.336 (13.688)	
Population, 1985 ths	0.001 (0.000)**									0 (0.000)
Constant	160.751 (83.843)	-3.133 (14.263)	88.757 (30.10)**	33.353 (11.00)**	15.326 (6.562)*	3.993 (14.992)	18.016 (5.151)**	32.457 (12.464)*	12.224 (7.24)	18.58 (6.872)*
Observations	24	24	25	25	27	27	25	27	27	27
R-squared	0.71	0.07	0.28	0.2	0.1	0.07	0.35	0.17	0.12	0.02

Notes: The dependent variable is the average number of events per country per year. Standard errors are in parentheses. Significance levels: \* significant at 5%; \*\* significant at 1%.

#### 4 Institutional and economic impact of pre-transition civil society

Next, we turn to the regression analysis of the impact of civil society on institutional and economic outcomes during transition. We assume that the nature and depth of the pre-transition dissident movement laid an important foundation for subsequent political and institutional changes as well as for policy choices. Table 3 considers the choice between presidential and parliamentary systems. Given that an electoral regime rarely changes, the analysis is carried out in cross-sectional framework. We see important differences in regime choices: all countries in Central Europe opted for a parliamentary regime whereas most of those in the FSU, apart from the Baltics, opted for a presidential regime. Presidential regimes can come in different guises and some feature a very good system of checks and balances. However, in the former Soviet Union presidential regimes tended to concentrate considerable power in the hands of the president and to have few checks and balances.

In Table 3 we see a clear and significant negative association between the number of dissident activities and the choice of a presidential regime (the number of events is significant at least at the 10 per cent level in all columns except in the last). The repression rate and the frequency of violent repression, in some specifications, also correlate positively with the dependent variable. The protest motive seems to have played a minor role: the only statistically significant variable is ‘economic motivation’ which carries a negative sign.

Table 3  
Determinants of presidential system

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
No. of events	-0.083 (0.064)	-0.124 (0.064)	-0.179 (0.087)*	-0.343 (0.181)§	-0.03 (0.040)
Frequency of government reaction		3.883 (3.087)	6.676 (4.145)	5.267 (3.964)	
Median no. of participants			0 0.000	-0.001 (0.001)	
Frequency of violent reaction				17.813 (13.634)	
Motives:					
Human rights					-0.437 (2.366)
Political change					-14.461 (9.801)
Economical					-9.141 (3.624)*
Nationalistic					2.412 (5.021)
Religious					-8.464 (7.695)
Constant	0.574 (0.530)	0.015 (0.734)	0.116 (0.706)	0.449 (0.830)	1.89 (1.139)§
Wald $\chi^2$ (p-value)	1.69 (0.19)	4.53 (0.10)	4.86 (0.18)	4.40 (0.35)	12.6 (0.05)
Observations	25	25	25	25	25

Notes: Estimated with logit. Standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable takes value of 1 if the country has a presidential system of government and 0 if parliamentary. Significance levels: § significant at 10%, \* significant at 5%; \*\* significant at 1%.



Table 4  
Determinants of political system

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
No. of events	-0.07 (0.032)*	-0.076 (0.029)**	-0.109 (0.037)**	-0.113 (0.044)**	-0.019 (0.017)
Frequency of government reaction		0.914 (2.664)	2.989 (2.791)	2.323 (3.572)	
Median no. of participants			0 0	-0.001 0	
Frequency of violent reaction				2.173 (5.710)	
Motives:					
Human rights					-3.861 (3.218)
Political change					-15.595 (6.934)*
Economical					-10.966 (4.266)*
Nationalistic					-4.446 (4.546)
Religious					11.036 (8.697)
Wald $\chi^2$ (p-value)	4.73 (0.03)	6.74 (0.03)	8.95 (0.03)	6.99 (0.14)	30.3 (0.00)
Observations	25	25	25	25	25

Notes: Estimated with ordered logit. Standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable takes value of 1 if the country has a parliamentary system of government, 2 in case of a mixed system, 3 for a weak presidential system and 4 for a strong presidential system. Significance levels: § significant at 10%, \* significant at 5%; \*\* significant at 1%.

A similar exercise is performed in Table 4, albeit with a more refined measure of the strength of the executive obtained from the Polity database. This ranges between 1 and 4, with higher values indicating a stronger executive or greater centralization of power in the hands of the president. Estimated as an ordered logit, the regression results are very similar: the number of events is negatively associated with a strong executive; government repression and violent repression increased the probability of having a strong executive (the last two effects are not significant, however).

Finally, Table 5 represents the determinants of presidential powers, based on Timothy Frye's index of presidential powers, which also reflects the degree of concentration of presidential powers. This index, identifying 29 executive powers that are maintained with the president or the legislature, ranges between 0 (very weak presidency) and 29 (strong presidential system with highly centralized power). The actual range represented in our data is between 3 (Slovenia) and 19 (Azerbaijan and, from 1996 onwards, Belarus). Since a few countries (Albania, Belarus, Croatia and Moldova) amended their constitution during the period covered by the analysis, we considered both the index value corresponding to the first post-communist constitution and its final value. The results are essentially the same and we therefore only report the former. Again, a familiar pattern emerges: countries with a greater number of events were less likely to adopt a strongly centralized political system whereas government repression increased the probability of adopting such a regime.

Table 5  
Determinants of presidential system (using Tim Frye's index of presidential powers)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
No. of events	-0.016 (0.008)*	-0.019 (0.008)*	-0.023 (0.009)**	-0.023 (0.009)**	0.002 (0.011)
Frequency of government reaction		2.63 (2.441)	3.48 (2.236)	4.331 (4.286)	
Median no. of participants			0 0	0 0	
Frequency of violent reaction				-2.299 (8.557)	
Human rights					-6.121 (4.227)
Political change					-2.3 (5.293)
Economic					-6.216 (5.804)
Nationalistic					2.421 (2.887)
Religious					10.946 (8.884)
Wald $\chi^2$ (p-value)	4.06 (0.04)	6.07 (0.05)	8.42 (0.04)	7.86 (0.10)	14.3 (0.03)
Observations	25	25	25	25	25

Notes: Estimated with ordered logit. Standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is increasing in the strengths of the president's authority. The possible range of the index is between 0 and 29. The regressions are estimated with the index reflecting the first post-communist constitution; results with the last post-communist constitution are very similar (the constitutionally mandated presidential powers have changed only in Albania, Belarus, Croatia and Moldova during the period we consider). Significance levels: § significant at 10%, \* significant at 5%; \*\* significant at 1%.

In summary, these results suggest that the countries with a broad, active civil society, and where governments engaged in relatively low levels of repression, were subsequently more likely to espouse broadly representative regimes. On the other hand, countries lacking pre-transition civil society or faced with a high level of repression tended to implement strongly centralized presidential regimes.

Next, to consider the impact of civil society on policy choices, we specifically looked at the progress of implementing market-oriented economic reform as well as political liberalization. We proxied economic reform by the eight progress-in-transition indicators compiled and published annually by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) for 27 post-communist countries. These indicators measure economic reform in the following areas: price liberalization, trade and foreign exchange, competition policy, small-scale privatization, large-scale privatization, governance and enterprise restructuring, banking reform and interest-rate liberalization, and securities markets and non-bank financial institutions. The indicators range between 1 (unreformed centrally-planned economy) and 4.33 (fully liberalized market economy). Our dependent variable is the average value of these indicators. We used the Freedom House indicators of political freedoms and civil liberties to measure political liberalization. These range from 1 (completely free) to 7 (not free). To make the interpretation easier and to facilitate the comparison with economic liberalization, these indicators are inverted so that higher values indicate greater freedom. We again use the average of these two sub-indicators as a composite index of democracy.

Unlike the political-regime variables used above, progress in economic and political liberalization varied from year to year, at times substantially. We can therefore carry out our analysis in a panel-data framework. However, by definition, our measures of pre-transition civil society are time-invariant. We therefore combined cross-sectional analysis with panel-data analysis, with the latter allowing for the time-varying effects of civil society. Specifically, we interacted civil society with time trend (including a quadratic time term in some regressions) defined so that 1989, the last year of the communist regime, is set as year 0. This effectively allowed for the effect of dissident activity to vary (to diminish or strengthen) over time, whereas the time-invariant impact of civil society, if any, is captured by the country fixed effects in these regressions.

The cross-section results are reported in Table 6: economic reform in columns (1-5) and democracy in columns (6-10). We regressed the level of each index on civil society at five-year intervals, 1990, 1995, 2000 and 2005 as well as for 2007 (the last year in our data). This allowed us to determine whether the pre-transition civil society has had an impact on the economic reform process and democratization at five discrete points spanning the entire transition period. Obtaining statistically significant results was necessarily an uphill struggle in this case as we had a multitude of civil-society indicators but altogether only 25 observations. Indeed, we found no statistically significant effect of the number of events, participation or government repression. Nevertheless, the motives for dissident activity appeared to be important. In particular, we observed that countries where dissident activity was motivated mainly by the desire for political change tended to progress further in terms of both economic and political liberalization (the effect on economic reform, however, was only significant for 1990 although it remained positive throughout). The effect of human rights and economic motivation is similar, albeit less consistently significant. Finally, the greater the number of distinct dissident organizations, the greater the level of reform implemented in 1990, although this effect ceased to be significant in subsequent years. Hence, it appears that it was not only the extent of the dissident activity and its motives but also the density of the pre-transition civil society (measured by the number of organizations) which mattered for subsequent policy choices.<sup>2</sup>

In Table 7, we present the results obtained in a panel framework. Here the initial effect of pre-transition civil society, along with other time-invariant factors, is captured by the country-specific fixed effect. Nevertheless, using the interaction effects described above, the regressions include the time-varying effects of civil society. In analysing the determinants of economic reform, we also included the democracy index in column (1); this is in line with Fidrmuc's (2003) finding that democratization fosters economic liberalization in post-communist countries. For comparison, however, column (2) presents the regression results obtained by omitting the democratization index; these two sets of results are very similar.

We find that countries with numerous dissident episodes tended to experience sustained economic liberalization and democratization: the interaction term between the number of events and time trend is positive (although only marginally significant). Hence, dissident activity appears to leave a legacy that is long lasting and becomes translated

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<sup>2</sup> This echoes with the argument put forward by Leonardi, Nanetti and Putnam (1993) on the importance of social capital for economic and political outcomes.

Table 6  
Determinants of progress in market-oriented reform and democratization, cross-section model

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
	Reform					Democracy				
	1990	1995	2000	2005	2007	1990	1995	2000	2005	2007
Events	-0.004 (0.004)	0 (0.007)	0.006 (0.008)	0.007 (0.010)	0.007 (0.010)	0.016 (0.012)	0.018 (0.022)	0.025 (0.023)	0.03 (0.021)	0.03 (0.024)
Participants	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Government reaction	-0.733 (0.796)	-0.987 (1.568)	0.023 (1.796)	-0.305 (2.028)	-0.189 (2.046)	0.73 (2.660)	-5.666 (4.648)	-1.539 (4.883)	-0.787 (4.442)	-0.932 (5.216)
Government repression	-1.001 (1.244)	-0.616 (2.449)	-1.008 (2.805)	0.51 (3.168)	0.558 (3.195)	-2.312 (4.154)	5.459 (7.260)	0.929 (7.627)	-1.57 (6.937)	-0.403 (8.146)
Motives:										
Human rights	-0.248 (0.275)	0.66 (0.542)	0.679 (0.621)	0.859 (0.701)	0.882 (0.707)	-1.523 (0.919)	5.384 (1.607)**	3.475 (1.688)	4.165 (1.535)*	4.57 (1.803)*
Political change	1.561 (0.631)*	1.894 (1.242)	2.695 (1.422)§	3.039 (1.606)§	3.011 (1.620)§	5.296 (2.106)*	6.144 (3.681)	9.686 (3.867)*	9.542 (3.517)*	10.803 (4.130)*
Economical	1.518 (0.346)**	0.901 (0.682)	0.601 (0.781)	0.323 (0.882)	0.384 (0.890)	-1.666 (1.157)	1.302 (2.022)	1.602 (2.124)	2.483 (1.932)	1.467 (2.268)
Environmental	0.539 (1.53)	3.789 (3.00)	3.224 (3.44)	2.042 (3.89)	2.132 (3.919)	1.76 (5.095)	-4.183 (8.904)	2.078 (9.355)	5.769 (8.508)	0.822 (9.992)
Nationalistic	0.297 (0.676)	-0.9 (1.331)	-0.019 (1.524)	0.91 (1.722)	0.974 (1.736)	1.016 (2.257)	5.75 (3.946)	3.761 (4.145)	2.942 (3.770)	3.989 (4.427)
Religious	-0.033 (1.441)	0.663 (2.838)	-0.627 (3.249)	-0.976 (3.670)	-1.080 (3.701)	-6.227 (4.812)	-4.392 (8.410)	-4.977 (8.835)	-4.662 (8.036)	-7.344 (9.437)
No. distinct dissident groups	0.014 (0.006)*	0.009 (0.013)	-0.004 (0.015)	-0.008 (0.016)	-0.009 (0.017)	0.013 (0.022)	-0.015 (0.038)	-0.036 (0.040)	-0.044 (0.036)	-0.052 (0.042)
Constant	1.044 (0.096)**	2.199 (0.188)**	2.382 (0.216)**	2.532 (0.244)**	2.556 (0.246)**	3.623 (0.319)**	2.598 (0.558)**	2.561 (0.586)**	2.445 (0.533)**	2.686 (0.626)**
Observations	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25
R-squared	0.81	0.68	0.65	0.61	0.61	0.75	0.73	0.73	0.81	0.75

Notes: Estimated with OLS. Standard errors in parentheses. Significance levels: § significant at 10%, \* significant at 5%; \*\* significant at 1%. The dependent variable are the average of EBRD progress-in-transition indicators (Reform) and the average of Freedom House indicators of political rights and civil liberties (Democracy), inverted so that higher values correspond to greater freedom.

Table 7  
Determinants of progress in market-oriented reform and democratization,  
panel fixed effects model with time-varying effects of civil society

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Reform		Democracy
Democracy (log)	0.128 (0.020)**		
Time	0.28 (0.015)**	0.266 (0.016)**	-0.113 (0.037)**
Time squared	-0.01 (0.001)**	-0.01 (0.001)**	0.003 (0.002)§
Events/1000	0.477 (0.335)	0.637 (0.351)	1.251 (0.842)§
Events squared/1000	-0.011 (0.015)	-0.011 (0.016)	0.000 (0.038)
Government reaction/1000	73.472 (63.895)	143.141 (66.111)*	544.726 (158.665)**
Government reaction squared/1000	-0.368 (2.699)	-2.623 (2.809)	-17.629 (6.742)**
Government repression/1000	48.668 (58.276)	13.656 (60.897)	-273.749 (146.152)
Participants/1000	-0.008 (0.003)**	-0.008 (0.003)**	-0.003 (0.008)
Human rights motive/1000	15.78 (13.053)	30.778 (13.484)*	117.262 (32.362)**
Political change motive/1000	14.037 (30.379)	63.007 (30.892)*	382.881 (74.141)**
Economic motive/1000	-72.525 (16.359)**	-55.962 (16.959)**	129.497 (40.702)**
Environmental motive/1000	5.555 (71.538)	50.544 (74.726)	351.758 (179.341)
Nationalistic motive/1000	79.187 (31.550)*	77.889 (33.109)*	-10.147 (79.461)
Religious motive/1000	-157.523 (67.289)*	-173.96 (70.567)*	-128.517 (169.359)
No. distinct dissident groups/1000	-0.817 (0.310)**	-1.291 (0.317)**	-3.7 (0.760)**
Constant	0.472 (0.088)**	0.993 (0.038)**	4.075 (0.090)**
Observations	450	450	450
No. of countries	25	25	25
R-squared	0.89	0.88	0.40

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. Significance levels: § significant at 10%, \* significant at 5%; \*\* significant at 1%. The dependent variable are the average of EBRD progress-in-transition indicators (Reform) and the average of Freedom House indicators of political rights and civil liberties (Democracy), rescaled so that higher values correspond to greater freedom. Civil society characteristics are interacted with time trend (and quadratic time trend, where indicated), to make them time-varying.

into policy gradually. Government response to such events reinforces this effect: the fraction of events that induced government reaction also had a positive effect on economic and political reforms (and this effect may be non-linear, levelling off with the passing of time). Violent repression of dissident activity had the opposite effect on democratization: the fraction of repressed dissident events makes political liberalization

decelerate over time (note that this effect is only marginally significant). Similarly, countries where dissident events were attended by large masses of people experience a slowing down of economic liberalization over time. Note, however, that this says nothing about the effects of these aspects of pre-transition civil society on the initial economic liberalization. In Table 6 none of the preceding indicators has a statistically significant effect on market oriented reforms.

The effect of the motives for dissident activity changed over time as well. Countries where protests were driven mainly by human-rights concerns and the desire for political change experienced sustained economic and political liberalization. Again, we can combine this result with our findings from the cross-section analysis above: human rights and political change concerns led to rapid initial liberalization followed by further improvements over time. Economic motives affected economic and political liberalization differently. Economic concerns were associated with extensive initial economic liberalization (with little effect on initial political change), subsequently followed by slower economic reform but faster democratization. The effect of nationalistic motives appeared positive only for economic reform while religious motives tended to suppress the pace of subsequent market-oriented reform. Finally, the associational density (reflected in the number of distinct dissident organizations) had a positive effect on the initial level of economic reform, but translated into slower pace of economic and political liberalization over time. Hence, while civil society density may help cement the initial consensus on the need for change, it may later make it more difficult to maintain sustained progress in reform.

In summary, we find strong evidence that the level and nature of civil society as measured by dissident activity during the late 1980s had an impact on institutional developments and policy choices, including the speed of economic and political reform, during transition.

## **5 Conclusions**

The demise of communism did not adhere to a uniform scenario all across the former Soviet block. In some countries, communism collapsed amidst wide-spread public protests and was replaced by broadly based dissident groups. Elsewhere, the former regimes ceased to pay lip service to the communist ideology but otherwise remained largely in place. In documenting the variations in the depth and breadth of the pre-transition civil society in the communist countries of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, we utilized these data to explain the diversity of outcomes in terms of institutional change as well as policy choices.

Our results suggest that the emergence of strong presidential regimes in the former Soviet Union—which subsequently proved to have a poorer record on human rights than the parliamentary and more genuinely democratic regimes in Central Europe and the Baltics—can be directly related to the lower frequency of political opposition in the pre-transition period, its nature, and to the nature of government repression. Similarly, we find that the pre-transition civil society also had an effect on the subsequent nature and pace of market-oriented reform and democratization.

These results suggest that the differences in civil society development and collective-action processes in societies before the beginning of the post-communist transition process have had a long-lasting and important legacy. The success or failure of institutional change, reform and political liberalization was strongly linked to the political events that unfolded during the last years of communism. Countries with a vibrant pre-transition civil society have embarked on a path towards sound political institutions, economic reforms and democratization. Countries that had little in a way of civil society and/or whose governments repressed it have, in turn, introduced more authoritarian regimes or, at best, dragged their feet on economic and political liberalization.

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