# Communist socialization and post-communist economic and political attitudes[☆]

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## ABSTRACT

We investigate the effect of individual exposure to communism on support for democracy and capitalism. We examine whether this effect varies across different types of communism, at different periods of people's lives, in different countries, and across different types of individuals. To do so, we propose a modified approach to solving the APC problem that relies on (a) survey data from multiple countries (b) historically defined cohorts and (c) variation in the time-periods related to these cohorts across countries. We provide a series of robustness tests for the method, and show that results are not very sensitive to panel structure. We conclude that generally communism had an indoctrinating effect, with more exposure to communism resulting in more opposition to democracy and capitalism.

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## 1. Introduction: substantive motivation

Does exposure to communism affect the political attitudes and behaviour of citizens in post-communist countries? Although intuitively we would expect the answer to this question to be affirmative, it raises a number of more difficult follow-up questions: How do we conceive of more or less communist exposure? How do we differentiate exposure to Stalinism from exposure to *perestroika*? Is exposure likely to have a homogenous effect across individuals? Despite a few recent contributions (Neundorf, 2010; Pop-Eleches and Tucker, 2011, 2012), the topic remains largely underexplored. Nevertheless, as more and more studies of post-communist politics reject the *tabula rasa* approach to post-communism and point to the importance of taking account of what was left behind by communism (Jowitt, 1992; Kitschelt et al., 1999; Grymala-

Busse, 2002; Ekiert and Hanson, 2003; Tucker, 2006; Wittenberg, 2006; Pop-Eleches, 2007), it becomes increasingly important that we be able to account for the role of communist legacies in affecting political attitudes and behaviour as well.

With this larger goal as motivation, here we investigate the more tractable question of the effect of individual exposure to communism on support for democracy and capitalism. We present two general ways of thinking about how exposure to communism might affect attitudes towards democracy and capitalism: *indoctrination,* whereby more exposure to communism would lead to more opposition to democracy and capitalism, and *resistance*, whereby more exposure to communism would lead to more support for democracy and capitalism.

To test these hypotheses, however, we need a way to measure "exposure" to communism. We begin by considering perhaps the bluntest measure of exposure: the number of years spent living under communist rule.[1] However,

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[1] In practice, we actually employ the number of years starting at age 6 that one lived under communist rule. From a pragmatic standpoint, our results would change little if we adjusted this starting point by a few years in either direction. See also Bartels and Jackman (2014) for another justification for beginning with age 6.

this measure relies on some strong assumptions: that one year of communism has the same impact regardless of the country in which one is living, the period of one's life in which that year occurs, or the type of communism (e.g., Stalinist vs. reformist) prevalent in one's country during that year, and that a year of communism has a homogenous effect on all individuals. Cognizant of the extent of these assumptions, we then adjust our analysis to relax each in turn.

Our contribution to a special volume on Age-Period-Cohort analysis stems from two features of our research question. First, while we clearly need to identify a cohort effect, *no data exist* that would allow us answer this question in a traditional APC approach, i.e., using a series of surveys that have been conducted a dozen times or more, drawing on the same population, and with the same question being asked year after year. Instead, as we explain in greater detail below, we use a survey that was conducted in fourteen countries, but with no more than two surveys in each country (see Appendix Table A1). However, our data also present us with an important resource for identifying our models: we have *a priori historically defined cohorts that exist in all of our countries*, but *not during identical time periods*. Thus we can leverage cross-country variation in exposure to communism, as well as within-country variation in exposure to communism. We therefore lay out a methodological approach that can be used by others who may want to study the effect of cross-national cohorts (e.g., exposure to authoritarian regimes in Latin America) in less data-rich environments.

In the following section, we lay out our methodological approach, including our identification strategy, as well as a series of robustness tests that one would want to conduct to ensure the method is working as expected. In Section 3, we elaborate on our theoretical argument, including both a more thorough justification of our exposure and resistance hypotheses, as well as more detail on the various methods by which we measure exposure to communism. In Section 4, we briefly describe the data and statistical models we employ to test our hypotheses before turning to our empirical findings in Section 5. In Section 6, we utilize data from Neundorf (2010) to provide an out-of-sample test of our methodological approach. In Section 7 we highlight the substantive and methodological conclusions of our analyses.

## 2. Studying cross-national cohorts with limited surveys

The challenge to assessing the effect of exposure to communism on any attitude in the post-communist era is disentangling these socialization effects from other variables, especially the age of the respondent but also the timing of the survey. This problem is known in the literature as the "Age-Period-Cohort" effect, whereby the challenge is to identify the "cohort" effect in a way which does not conflate this effect with simply being of a certain age ("age") at the time of the survey ("period") (Mason et al., 1973; Glenn, 2005; Neundorf, 2010).

To be clear, more survey data is always better than less survey data for estimating cohort effects. However, there are many questions that we might want to answer about cohorts in cases for which we do not have the ideal set of surveys for traditional forms of APC analysis. For example, what is the effect of living under a Latin American military regime on attitudes towards cooperation with the United States following democratization? Does living under a colonial regime lead to lower levels of trust in post-colonial institutions, and, if so, is the effect stronger for French or British colonialism? Or, as in our case, what is the effect of exposure to communism on attitudes towards democracy and the market in the post-communist era?[2]

To answer our question, we rely on: (a) having cohorts that can be defined *a priori* (e.g., in our case, exposure to communism); (b) the presence of comparable cohorts in different countries; and (c) at least some variation in the years of the cohort defining experience across countries. More specifically, we get identification of the cohort effect both from within-country temporal variation (e.g., if communism lasted for 45 years in country A, then both a 55-year old and a 75-year-old would have 45 years of exposure to communism in 1990) and from cross-country differences in when communism started and ended. All coefficients on cohorts, therefore, are estimated controlling for both age and the year of the survey. Moreover, these are not country-cohort estimates (e.g., what is the effect of living through 10 years of Polish communism) but rather general estimates of the effects of living through communism that draw upon the experiences of people from all 14 of the countries in our data set.

Of course, there are many other factors besides exposure to communism, the age of the respondent, and the year of the survey that might affect attitudes towards capitalism and democracy.[3] Thus the next step in applying the method is to control for appropriate individual *and* country level control variables.

Even beyond controlling for relevant country-level variables, we realize that to the extent that the intersection of age and exposure to communism is determined by one's country of residence (e.g., in Russia in 1995 all 20 year olds will be coded with the same number of years of exposure to communism), it is possible that results using our method can be driven by cross-country differences in the nature of either communist or post-communist experiences or institutions that are not sufficiently controlled for by the macro variables included in our regressions. To address these concerns, we take the following steps. First, we initially estimate all of our models with data pooled across countries and survey years simply controlling for age and a continuous indicator of survey year.[4] Second, to address concerns that the results produced by such an

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[2] The Eurobarometer survey, which was been carried out almost annually between 1990 and 2003 and is utilized in Neundorf (2010), queried respondents concerning satisfaction with democracy, but not about attitudes towards democracy generally or about attitudes towards the market; we do, however, make use of this survey as part of our robustness tests in Section 6.

[3] Although we seek to identify cohort effects independent of age, it is not *a priori* clear why, all else being equal, simply being older ought to make one more or less likely to support democracy or the market in the post-communist context.

[4] Note that since communism fell at roughly the same time in all the countries in our sample, survey year largely captures the length of post-communist exposure.