

## **The cultural roots of civic engagement**

A cross-national macro-analysis of 22 European countries

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### **Abstract**

The emerging tradition of civil society and social capital studies points at major weaknesses of contemporary communities and the way citizens, young people in particular, advance the common good. At the same time these studies have serious flaws themselves. Flaws that should be taken into account before drawing conclusions on declining civic virtues and civic engagement. An important issue is the uncritical use of American-based civic involvement theory and alarming US-notions on the decline of civil society in other Western, especially European nations. This paper argues that civil society studies should take variations in national cultural traditions into account. Building on survey data from the European Values Studies (EVS), gathered across in three waves (1981, 1990, and 1999/2000), the paper studies national cultural variations in Europe in classic forms of civic engagement, political involvement, and political action. It is observed that countries with diverging cultural profiles also diverge in the levels of social trust of its citizens and their willingness to engage in politics. A major conclusion is that engagement in political action and support for democracy are less popular in ex-communist countries. Cultural variations do make a difference in understanding declining civic virtues and civic engagement. Thus, the assumed decline of civil society clearly needs a cross-national and cross-cultural perspective.

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## 1 Introduction

Reflecting upon the social, cultural, historical, economic, and political dynamics affecting the erosion of community in American society has turned into a major topic on the agenda of mainstream US social science research. The debate on the waxing and waning of community feelings, the decline of civic life, the weakening of social bonds, the inflation of social capital, on what makes a good citizen, on what the good society stands for, is a core theme within contemporary US social sciences. Contributions vary from highly normative approaches, embodied in the morally pronounced writings by (new) communitarians (e.g. Etzioni, 1993, 1996, 2001), to more matter-of-fact quantitative approaches that study empirical trends in citizen involvement (e.g. Norris, 1999a; Putnam, 2002). We witness a significant growth of studies on trends in citizens' civic virtues, political participation, volunteering, and involvement in informal social networks, which recently accumulated in Robert Putnam's both much applauded and criticized book *Bowling alone. The collapse and revival of American community* (2000). Putnam's main message is that in the last quarter-century Americans have become increasingly disconnected from their families, friends, neighbors, communities, social institutions, and public life; in short: American communities are confronted with a serious and painful loss of social capital. Using a wide variety of, though rather conventional, indicators, Putnam shows that Americans are partaking less and less in the political game, are less involved in religious and secular social activities, their civic participation is declining, they attend fewer informal social gatherings, and their social connections have substantially thinned. Americans trust their fellow Americans less, feel that honesty and morality are weakening, and increasingly mistrust institutions and political authorities. "Our growing social capital deficit threatens educational performance, safe neighborhoods, equitable tax collection, democratic responsiveness, everyday honesty, and even our health and happiness" (Putnam, 2000: 368). The postwar boomers, he argues, have never been able to renew the social capital that was so vigorously accumulated by prewar generations. Putnam concludes that "[W]e desperately need an era of civic inventiveness to recreate a renewed set of institutions and channels for a reinvigorated civic life that will fit the way we have come to live" (Putnam o.c. 401). Many American social theorists have expressed deep concerns with the loss of civil society, i.e. the private commitment with the public cause through

collective participation in a wide array of voluntary associations. A commitment that, as Alexis de Tocqueville already observed in the mid-1830s, has always been a major feature of American society. Today's theorists put somewhat different emphases on accounting for this loss of commitment ranging from the prevailing dominance of the market calculus in the moral realm (Wolfe, 1989), the clash of opposing global forces (Barber, 1995), the severe malfunctioning of basic social institutions (Bellah *et al.*, 1995), the absence of shared core values (Etzioni, 2001), loose primary connections (Wuthnow, 1998), the decoupling of human behavior and norms of sociability (Fukuyama, 1995), the weakening of institutions (such as the family and the neighborhood) mediating between the private life of the individual and the megastructures of public life (Berger & Neuhaus, 1996), and the erosion of the moral fabric of family, community, and the nation (Sandel, 1996).<sup>1</sup>

Though these observers of the contemporary era point to different cultural, political, and institutional factors that have changed the relationships between the citizen, the state, the market, and the societal midfield, they all share the notion that a flourishing civil society and a vital democracy presupposes high levels of social trust, cohesion, and social participation. A vibrant democratic civil society is only believed to prosper if based on high levels of social trust accompanied by support for democracy and political involvement of its citizenry. Mutual social trust among citizens is assumed to establish strong community bonds, to positively affect the functioning of societal institutions, to generate a healthy social and cultural climate, to build social capital, and to generate tangible economic and governing revenues.

The vast bulk of studies on the assumed decline of civic engagement and the erosion of community bonding and bridging are conducted by American political scientists and sociologists surveying American society. And there is, of course, nothing wrong with that. But the lack of a cross-national perspective becomes pressing. Is the prevailing malaise with American civil society to be generalized to other advanced Western societies as well? Is the loss of commitment to the public cause a phenomenon that cuts across national cultural and political boundaries? Answering this fundamental question is not an easy one but a highly relevant one. Other Western societies differ in many respects from American society but also share much of the American societal order. They also have strong market economies, are also believed to have changed into mass consumer cultures on the

waves of globalization, their political arenas are also dominated by the prevalence of economic issues and special interest groups, and are thought to be also confronted by the weakening of the triad of the citizen, the community, and the state. But at the same time there are marked differences too. America has a very special tradition and quite unique history of voluntarism, is much less of a classic welfare state than most European societies, and has a public philosophy of the role of the state that is not that pronounced in Europe. Culturally too, the US and European societies differ substantially as do European societies as such (e.g. Hofstede, 2001). There is little reason to think that nations, American, European or other, share the same basic values. This mixture of similarities and dissimilarities calls for a cross-national analysis of civic engagement in Europe and the United States, a call that becomes louder and louder (Dekker, 1999; Norris, 1999). Are social ties also dissolving in Europe, is civic engagement equally declining in European society, is trust and are civic virtues also on the brink of decay, is politics a peripheral issue for Europeans as well, or is this not the case?

As indicated above, the core hypothesis underlying civil society discourse is the interconnectedness of trust, democratic support, and political participation. Trust fosters moral bonds, enables cooperation and pro-social behavior, and decreases transaction costs. Social trust reinforces spontaneous sociability, voluntary participation, and the advancement of common goals (Fukuyama, 1995). Trust is a prerequisite of social order, facilitates social integration and solidarity, secures cooperation, diminishes social dilemmas, stabilizes social interaction, is the touchstone of social capital and cultivates face-to-face relationships (Misztal, 1996). Social trust is believed to be strongly associated with civic engagement: "People who trust their fellow citizens volunteer more often, contribute more to charity, participate more often in politics and community organizations, serve more readily on juries, give blood more frequently, comply more fully with their tax obligations, are more tolerant of minority views, and display many other forms of civic virtue [...] People who trust others are all-round good citizens, and those more engaged in community life are more trusting and trustworthy" (Putnam, o.c., 136-137).<sup>2</sup> Although this basic notion of the interconnectedness of trust, democratic support, and political participation is at the very heart of the civil society debate, its empirical robustness is scarcely tested from a comparative point of view (Dekker & Van den Broek, 1998). Is it indeed true that participation in civil society organizations is

associated with high levels of social trust, democratic support, and political engagement? Are patterns cross-nationally stable or do they hold for some societies but not for others? Testing the assumed robustness of the interrelatedness of trust, democratic support, and political participation in European societies is the main topic of this paper.

The structure of this paper is as follows. We first explore civil society in the twenty European countries we want to investigate, and introduce the indicators for participation in civil society, social trust and democratic involvement that will be used for our analyses. We then look at the relationships between these indicators and their cultural backgrounds from a macro-perspective. These cultural backgrounds will be addressed by including Hofstede's (1980, 2001) basic cultural dimensions, postmodernization indices as forwarded by Inglehart (1990, 1997), and values universals as developed by Schwartz (1994). How strong are relationships between national levels of participation, trust and democratic involvement, and how important is participation as a cause of trust and involvement compared these cultural factors?

## **2 Measuring civil society, trust and democratic involvement**

The data that will be used to address the above mentioned questions derive from the international and longitudinal *European Values Study* (EVS). This study started in the early 1980s among a core group of European countries and North America (Canada and the USA). It builds on representative population surveys in a wide range of countries, mainly on issues of core value orientations in domains such as religion and morality, politics and society, family life and socialization, work and associational life. After the first wave of data collection in 1981, the study was repeated among a wider circle of European countries in 1990 (see Ester et al., 1993). In the years 1999-2000) the third wave of the study was conducted in almost all Western, Central and Eastern European countries (see Halman, 2002).

In terms of measurement instruments we will concentrate on a few specifics. There are many definitions of civil society in existence (see e.g. Seligman, 1995; Walzer, 1995; Ehrenberg, 1999; Deakin, 2001; Chambers & Kymlicka, 2002) but in this paper we simply choose for the non-state, non-market and non-private societal domain where voluntary association between citizens is dominant (cf. Dekker & Van den Broek 1998, Warren 2001). In the EVS-study, membership and participation in volunteer

associations are measured by asking respondents about their affiliation with and their participation in a great number of types of volunteer associations. Strictly speaking, membership is an inappropriate term, as many of these associations do not know formal membership. Therefore, the expression 'belonging to' was used in the EVS-questionnaire. For linguistic convenience, however, to belong to a voluntary association is referred to here as membership. In those cases in which persons indicated doing unpaid work in a voluntary association that they had not mentioned as an association they felt they belonged to, their volunteering is interpreted as sufficient proof of membership of that association. In the appendix we present an overview for all countries of membership and/or volunteer work in all the reference categories. Figure 1 allows for an impression of the differences between countries when the differentiation between membership and volunteer work is made (cf. Dekker & Van den Broek, 1998, for EVS 1989/'90 figures).

#### FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

It appears that membership of civil society organizations is particularly widespread in Scandinavia and the Netherlands, but the percentage of members that are active as volunteers is modest. Opposite of this pattern are the Southern European countries with smaller percentages of the population belonging to organizations but larger percentages of the members volunteering (however, because of the substantially lower membership rates, volunteers are a much smaller percentage of the population than in Northern Europe). Compared to the 'broad civil societies' of the North and the 'elitist civil societies' of the South, most other European countries, including the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe, combine modest membership rates with modest activity of the members. Opposite of these countries were in 1989/'90 (Dekker & Van den Broek, 1998) and again at the end of the 1990's (Hodginson 2003) the 'active civil societies' of North-America with many members and much volunteering of the members. Compared to 1989/'90 and findings in other research, the level of volunteering in Great Britain is implausibly high. One of the reasons for this peculiar outlier position is probably the strong underreporting of normal membership in sport clubs.<sup>3</sup>

In this paper we will not continue along the path of assessing the impact of an undifferentiated whole of involvement in civil society. Instead we want to

focus on the trust and political correlates of one particular kind of associational involvement. In the tradition of the studies of civic culture and civic community mentioned before, we prefer to focus on involvement in organizations that are not intrinsically political, and that probably still have a high rate of associational 'face-to-face' interaction (cf. Almond & Verba, 1963; Putnam, 2000). The present civil society debate is not about the political relevance of political parties but about the social and political *effects* of membership of a sports club, singing choirs etc., and almost all theories describe mechanisms causing these effects stemming from face-to-face contacts between members (see however Selle & Strømsnes, 2001). With these criteria in mind we came to our choice for 'leisure participation' as indicated in the last row of the appendix table: belonging to and/or volunteering for 'education, arts and music and cultural activities' and/or 'sports or recreation'. Involvement in leisure groups, it can be argued, is not intrinsically political and presupposes high levels of 'face-to-face' communication and thus is a fine example of non-political associational involvement in civic culture and civic community.

The appendix table shows the indicators for trust and democratic involvement as well. Trust is measured by the illustrious 'generalized social trust question'. One may doubt whether this is a good question to measure the kind of trust that is generated in social networks and that might indicate 'social capital' (Edwards *et al.*, 2001; Dekker, 2003), but as a measurement of civic culture and individual confidence and efficacy it is relevant for social and political participation, and has been used in numerous studies before. The measurement of democratic involvement is a more difficult topic: there is no agreed-upon simple indicator and the available EVS-data do not include exactly the kind of variables one is looking for. To measure political participation, the EVS-questionnaire only contains items that are biased towards political action.<sup>4</sup> Three to four indicators will be used in this paper, one based on a question about the frequency of *discussing politics* with friends, one based on questions about joining boycotts and lawful demonstrations to measure support for *political action*, one measuring support for the idea that *democracy* is the *best system*, and more or less as a backup, not available in all countries, a self-assessment of *political interest*. The original questions and indicators are listed in the appendix table.

As a starter for the next section, figure 2 shows the relationship of leisure participation with trust and three main political indicators at the level of national aggregates.

FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

The four scatter plots include least-squares regression curves that best fit the data points and include a squared term. The fits are better for political action and social trust than for discussing politics and the support of the idea that democracy is the best system. With the relative small number of countries we analyze, the results are quite sensitive for outliers. Analyses without the Netherlands or Sweden show very similar results; without both countries, we see, however, a substantial drop of explained variance for social trust ( $R^2 = .31$ ) and a very different curve (almost linear) for the opinion that democracy is the best system. These results confirm the sensibility of small number analyses, but on the other hand it must be stressed that our 22 cases are not a small sample of a large universe but cover most of Western and Central Europe. It is not a weakness of the analysis that results for Europe including the Netherlands and Sweden are different from Europe excluding these countries. They are a significant part of Western Europe and not just accidental statistical outliers. In this paper we do not analyze a sample of European countries to discover global patterns, but to get a better understanding of the importance of associational involvement for the European societies. In this perspective, the next section examines whether there are cultural factors that better explain the national differences in the alleged benefits of participation in civil society.

### **3 Comparing nations**

As argued, systematic empirical assessments of the association of macro-level diversity of European societies with the distinct levels of trust and democratic commitment in these societies are scarce and largely underdeveloped. In this section we aim to systematically assess the impact of different sets of cultural diversity characteristics in conjunction with and relative to various indicators for economic, political and religious features that sharply demarcate the various nations within this continent of



pluralism, especially when looking beyond the former 'iron curtain' and including the newly proposed EU-candidate countries into these analyses.

First of all, a wide range of cultural indicators from different social science disciplines are included, ranging from the four most important cultural dimensions discerned by Hofstede (1980; 2001), the modernization and postmodernization indices developed by Inglehart (1990; 1997), and the value universals outlined by Schwartz (1994).<sup>5</sup> It can be expected that many of these value-based cultural dimensions, such as power distance, postmaterialism, and hierarchy beliefs, are strongly related to trust and democratic engagement. However, an assessment of the relative impact of each of these dimensions has not yet been performed. Our analysis is the first to do so. Other pluralism features with an established impact on trust and democratic engagement are economic, political and religious. Economic indicators, such as the level of economic development and economic growth, are for instance known to relate to levels of trust (e.g. Fukuyama, 1995). Literature shows that political diversity, especially concerning political rights and civil liberties or concerning the recovery from communist rule, has a serious impact on the trust and democratic involvement.<sup>6</sup> Religious demarcations, particularly those between countries with a Catholic or a Protestant history, also seem highly relevant for various aspects of civil society, among which trust and democratic involvement.<sup>7</sup> We have included a large number of different indicators for economic, political, and religious European diversity in our analyses.<sup>8</sup> With a series of multiple regression analyses the effect of the renowned indicators for the cultural, economic, political and religious diversity of European societies was assessed.<sup>9</sup> We systematically present the main outcomes of these analyses in this section. Findings are presented in Table 1 and 2.

Low appreciation of uncertainty avoidance and high emphasis on postmodern or well-being values yield higher levels of *trust*. Cultures with a high tolerance for new and ambiguous situations and with a weak orientation towards rules that might restrict exploration and experiment (Hofstede, 2001), as well as cultures in which maximizing well-being and the pursuit for quality of life instead of maximizing economic growth and efforts to provide food, clothing, and shelter (Inglehart, 1997; Inglehart & Baker, 2000), are cultures in which people are more likely to trust other people. In the economic domain the level of economic development (expressed in GNP/per capita in 2000) has a similar effect. The perceived level of corruption in the year 1999 is in the political domain the only

variable contributing to the level of trust: in countries with high subjective levels of corruption trust is low. In the religious domain we find that in countries that are historically predominantly Protestant, people express more trust. In a final analysis the influential macro-level factors for trust are both cultural and religious: a high importance of well-being values and a Protestant tradition contribute positively and almost equally strong to the levels of trust in a society. Other indicators for cultural, economic, political or religious diversity do not seem to matter much. Nor does the fact that some societies have high levels of involvement in leisure (culture and sports) associations and others have not. Trust, in short, is chiefly an issue of culture and religious tradition.

*Discussing politics* with friends is hardly related to macro-level diversity features of European societies. In the cultural domain, Schwartz' value universal of harmony is negatively related to informal political debate. These more transcendent harmony values, such as 'a world of beauty', 'protecting the environment' and 'unity with nature', according to Schwartz (1994: 105-106) stand in clearest "opposition to enhancement value types that promote actively changing the world through self-assertion and exploitation of people and resources" (as is found in Schwartz' opposite mastery and hierarchy values). This might indicate that in countries in which harmony values prevail, informal political debate might well be seen as an act against the strive for transcendence and more as an expression of self-assertion and of prioritizing the vulgar immanent issue of the division of power to master the world rather than transcending individual or group interests to serve preservation and fitting into the social and material environment. In these cultures informal political debate is thus less likely to occur. Addressing the effects on political discussion among friends of all the indicators of diversity at once, only the Schwartz' harmony index remains part of the explanation; all other indicators lose their explanatory power in the analyses. At the level of nations, therefore, variance in informal political debates, is a predominantly cultural issue.

At first sight, explaining *political action* at the macro-level is a more promising exercise. Culturally, masculinity levels and proportions of postmaterialists seem to matter most. The more masculine cultures are, the more unequally gender roles are divided, the more at the macro-level this coincides with high emphases on recognition, ambitions, and confrontations rather than on empathy, caring, and compromise, and the less people in these cultures are likely to involve in (unconventional) political action. The

higher the proportion of postmaterialists, stressing efforts to improve quality of life and according to Inglehart (1997: 78) only one part of the more broader cultural shift away from survival values towards well-being values, the higher the level of political action. Of the economic indicators, GNP per capita also contributes positively. Among the political indicators negative effects on political action are related to corruption levels in the European transition years of 1988-1992 and the specific political history of being an ex-communist country or not. High perceived levels of corruption more than ten years ago and a communist past play down levels of political action at the turn of the millennium. Of the set of religious variables it is again a Protestant history that contributes positively. The overall analyses, including all indicators with a proven effect from the different domains in one summarizing regression analysis, show that only the ex-communist political history and the level of membership of leisure associations stand out. The political history of established communism negatively influences political action, high level involvement in leisure associations does so positively. Political action at the macro-level is not cultural, economic or religious. It is related to the great political-ideological divide of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as well as to an active civil society, even when located at the level of leisure.

#### TABLE 1 AND 2 ABOUT HERE

Our core theme of the evaluation of *democracy* as a preferable political system has several bases in the domains of culture, economics, politics, and civil society, as the separate domain-specific analyses show. The proportion of postmaterialist and the stress on mastery values (part of the value syndrome opposite to the harmony values mentioned above) both positively influence beliefs in democracy. These beliefs seem to relate to an individual *Macher's* mentality and to those who value the postmodern issues of well-being that lie beyond economic survival and societal stability. Economic development (in terms of GNP per capita) contributes positively, a communist history negatively to these beliefs. The preference for democracy according to the final overall analyses, however, loses all its cultural, economic, religious and civil society macro-level ties and is solely based on the difference between ex-communist and non-ex-communist societies with the former displaying significant lower beliefs in democracy than the latter.

From the cultural domain Hofstede's power distance dimension and Inglehart's traditional/secular-rational authority index influence *political interest*, the first one negatively and the second one positively. Power distance taps into the acceptance and dependence of and respect for hierarchies, social inequalities, status figures and authorities. The traditional/secular-rational authority index substantively aligns with the Hofstede dimension of power distance. Key words in the traditional authority pole of the index are obedience, respect for authority, respect for parents and a high valuation of the role of institutions such as religion and the family (e.g. Inglehart, 1997: 82). At the secular-rational pole of the index individual responsibility, personal achievement motivation, thrift and determination and the authority of political institutions are highly valued. High power distance cultures match with those situated at the traditional authority pole. The more one accentuates hierarchy and accepts power elites the less politics will be regarded as an interesting arena and vice versa the more one underlines personal responsibility regardless of traditional institutionalized authorities the more one is interested in politics, the separate analyses for the cultural domain show. The level of freedom in the 1989-1990 period affects political interest too, be it negatively. The higher this level of freedom in this period of European upheaval, the less people are politically interested. Looking closer, especially countries that were in a poor situation in terms of freedom in the early 1990s (e.g. Czech Republic, East Germany, Poland) the more interested their population ten years later are compared to countries where the populace experienced hardly any change in terms of the political and civil liberties. From the religious domain the historical background of Catholicism is a negative factor for political interest. Positive is the number of non-church members: the higher the proportion of people saying they do not belong to any church, the higher the level of political interest in a society. The final analyses of political interest show that the civil society factor is the one and only determinant that explains cross-national variation in political interest. Culture, political and religious history effects disappear in favor of the influence of civil society in the leisure domain. A strong involvement in this civil society is the best guarantee for high levels of political interest.

The macro-level analyses, in summary, show that trust and informal political debate have fundamentally *cultural* roots. Countries with contrasting cultural profiles vary in the levels of trust between people and

the incidence of political debate among people. The more emphasis in these cultures is put on postmodern well-being values, the more people *trust* one another. Protestant dominance in a country's history has the same positive effect on trust. Moreover, stress on transcendent harmony values tones down *political discussions* in the private realm. Political action and political interest are more than in culture, economics or religion rooted in civil society. Strong involvement in leisure, culture and sports associations boosts unconventional *political action* (boycotting and demonstrating) and *political interest*. Political action is hampered if a country was part of the communist block in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Views on democracy as a political system, finally, have a similar basis in political history. In countries that were part of the communist world, doubts on *democracy* as an ultimate political system are highest.

#### **4 Conclusions and discussion**

Civil society theorists share the notion that a vibrant civil society and a flourishing democracy assume high levels of social trust, cohesion, and social engagement of its citizenry. A vital democratic civil society will only thrive if rooted in widespread social trust accompanied by basic support for the democratic system and a socially and politically involved populace. Social trust, democratic support and citizen engagement foster social capital, strong communities, moral bonds, cooperation and pro-social behavior, political effectiveness and stability, and voluntary involvement in advancing the common good. Trust, democratic support, and civic engagement are assumed to be strongly interconnected and fundamental pillars of a healthy civil society that strongly advocates voluntary involvement. Civic engagement in voluntary associations is presupposed to have important social spillover effects: voluntariness creates a more competent citizenry (Almond & Verba, 1989). Social trust is believed to be strongly associated with civic engagement and, vice versa, civic engagement creates social trust. Though this fundamental assumption of the interconnectedness of trust, democratic support, and civic engagement as voluntary participation is at the very heart of the civil society debate, its empirical robustness is scarcely tested from a systematic cross-national point of view (Dekker & Van den Broek, 1998). Is it indeed a cross-nationally observable phenomenon that participation in voluntary organizations yields higher social trust, democratic support, and political

involvement? Are observable patterns stable across different societies, i.e. across Europe? These are important questions and this paper attempted to provide some answers using EVS-data from 22 countries. Core variables are: involvement in voluntary associations, social trust, and democratic involvement (political interest, discussing politics, support for democracy, and political action).

At the macro-level we observed that trust, democratic support, and political involvement have fundamental cultural roots. Countries with diverging cultural profiles also diverge in the levels of social trust of its citizens and their willingness to engage in politics. The more these cultural profiles emphasize postmodern well-being values, the more its citizens express basic feelings of social trust and the less they will ignore politics. Interestingly, high levels of social trust are particularly to be observed in predominantly Protestant societies. In turn, political action and political interest are clearly rooted in what makes a civil society. Strong involvement in leisure, cultural and sports associations was found to reinforce unconventional political action and political interest. Engagement in political action and supporting democracy are less popular in countries that were once suffering communist rule.

These intriguing findings of fundamental cultural (as well as religious) distinctions having impact on the basic traits of social trust and political discussion in the intimate domain, of the process of social involvement having a direct relationship with active political engagement and political interest, and the history of political systems affecting again active political engagement but also the beliefs in democracy, might point to a certain, perhaps even cumulative *structure* or *pattern* in civic engagement. The prerequisite for citizen involvement and the support for democracy, being social trust and a direct social circle or peer group to experiment and to exchange political ideas with, is closely related to a nation's longstanding cultural and religious history. When cultural and religious traditions promote trust as well as free political discussion among friends and peers, it is social involvement that allows for a truly active support for the *res publica* beyond the prime circles of peers. Being part of wider social circles, in other words, enforces interest and active engagement in issues of the public cause. A 20<sup>th</sup> century history of an authoritarian political system that repressed its citizenry to participate in the common good frustrates this relationship; it hampers active political action and even the belief in democracy as an alternative political system.

All in all, at the macro-level civic engagement seems to be a matter of tradition, of social connectedness and of political history. The latter effect, more or less an extended period effect, might be declining over time now that the European Union spreads out to many Central and Eastern European countries. Due to the European Union enlargement (growing from 15 to 25 members in 2004), countries from Central and Eastern Europe might politically and institutionally converge to the position of the 'older' EU countries. This convergence could, of course, reinforce the relative impact of cultural, religious and social diversity as regards civic engagement. This surely makes the case for taking account of variations in cultural contexts, institutional frameworks and political arrangements in future civil society studies aiming to understand and to explain trends in civic involvement.

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Cf. Eberly (2000) for an overview of classic civil society essays
  - <sup>2</sup> Formulated in the way of a positive relationship between social trust, support for democratic institutions, and political engagement is a reprise of the famous civic culture study by Almond and Verba (1963).
  - <sup>3</sup> See Appendix table. The unlikely low involvement in sports in Great Britain will cause more surprising findings, but as long as it remains unclear what the causes for eventual underreporting are, we feel it is better to keep it with a question mark in the analysis than just drop it because we do not like the results.
  - <sup>4</sup> The questions including the answers 'have done' and 'might do' about petitions, demonstrations, boycotts and occupations come from the 'political action'-research. We will use two of this series. A question about vote intention in case of elections turns out to be unusable for an electoral participation indicator.
  - <sup>5</sup> Country scores on Hofstede's dimensions of power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism, and masculinity are included (see esp. Hofstede, 2001: 500-502). From Inglehart (1997) we have included country scores for postmaterialism, the survival/well-being index and the traditional/secular-rational authority index, based on analyses of the 3<sup>rd</sup> wave EVS-dataset. From Schwartz (1994: 112-115) we have included country scores of all of his seven value universal indices: conservatism, hierarchy, mastery, affective autonomy, intellectual autonomy, egalitarian commitment, and harmony.
  - <sup>6</sup> See the analyses of Inglehart (1997) for a strong case on this relationship.
  - <sup>7</sup> See e.g. Putnam (2000: 65-79) for an overview.
  - <sup>8</sup> For the *economic* domain we have included GNP per capita of the year 2000, income inequality (a Gini index referring to various years) and economic

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growth in the 1990-1999 period (average annual % of growth of GDP) all from 2001 World Development Indicators database collected by The World Bank (<http://www.worldbank.org/data/databytopic/databytopic.html>). Political diversity indicators include scores for the perceived corruption levels in 1988-1992 period and in the year 1999 as well as for the change in these levels between both years derived of the Internet Centre for Corruption Research (<http://www.gwdg.de/~uwwv/icr.html>). Furthermore we included freedom or level of democracy indicators based on scores for political rights and civil liberties collected by Freedom House for the 1989-1990 and the 1999-2000 period as well as scores for the change in freedom between the two periods (<http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/freeworld/2001/tables.html>). An extra variable indicating which country belonged to the former pre-1990 communist world was included in the dataset (cf. Inglehart & Baker, 2000). A set of variables tapping into *religious* diversity was included. We discerned historically Roman Catholic from historically Protestant countries in the dataset (cf. Inglehart & Baker, 2000). Based on the 3<sup>rd</sup>-wave EVS dataset scores were included for church attendance (% of attendance of at least once a week; cf. Verweij, 1998), and for the proportions of people belonging to a Catholic and to a Protestant denomination and people who indicate not to be a member of any denomination at present.

- <sup>9</sup> The regression analyses with the dependent variables trust, discussing politics with friends, took place in two stages. In a first stage all variables of each domain (culture, economics, politics, religious history) were included in separate analyses per domain. The tolerance for multicollinearity was carefully checked in these analyses. Within each domain the different sets of variables (e.g. Hofstede's indicators, Inglehart's, and Schwartz' in the cultural domain) were entered in the analyses in blocks (method=stepwise; pin <.05; pout <.010) to help determine which of the indicators within one set affect the dependent variables. In the cultural domain analyses with the Schwartz' indicators was done separately from the ones with Hofstede's and Inglehart's due to a larger number of missing data on the Schwartz' indicators. The results of these analyses are reported in Table 1. In a second stage of the analyses all variables from the separate domain analyses were entered in one analysis (method=stepwise; pin <.05; pout <.010), again distinguishing the Hofstede and Inglehart indicators and Schwartz variables in two separate analyses for the above mentioned reason. At this stage the civil engagement indicator of belonging to leisure organizations was included. These analyses yielded the results reported in Table 2.



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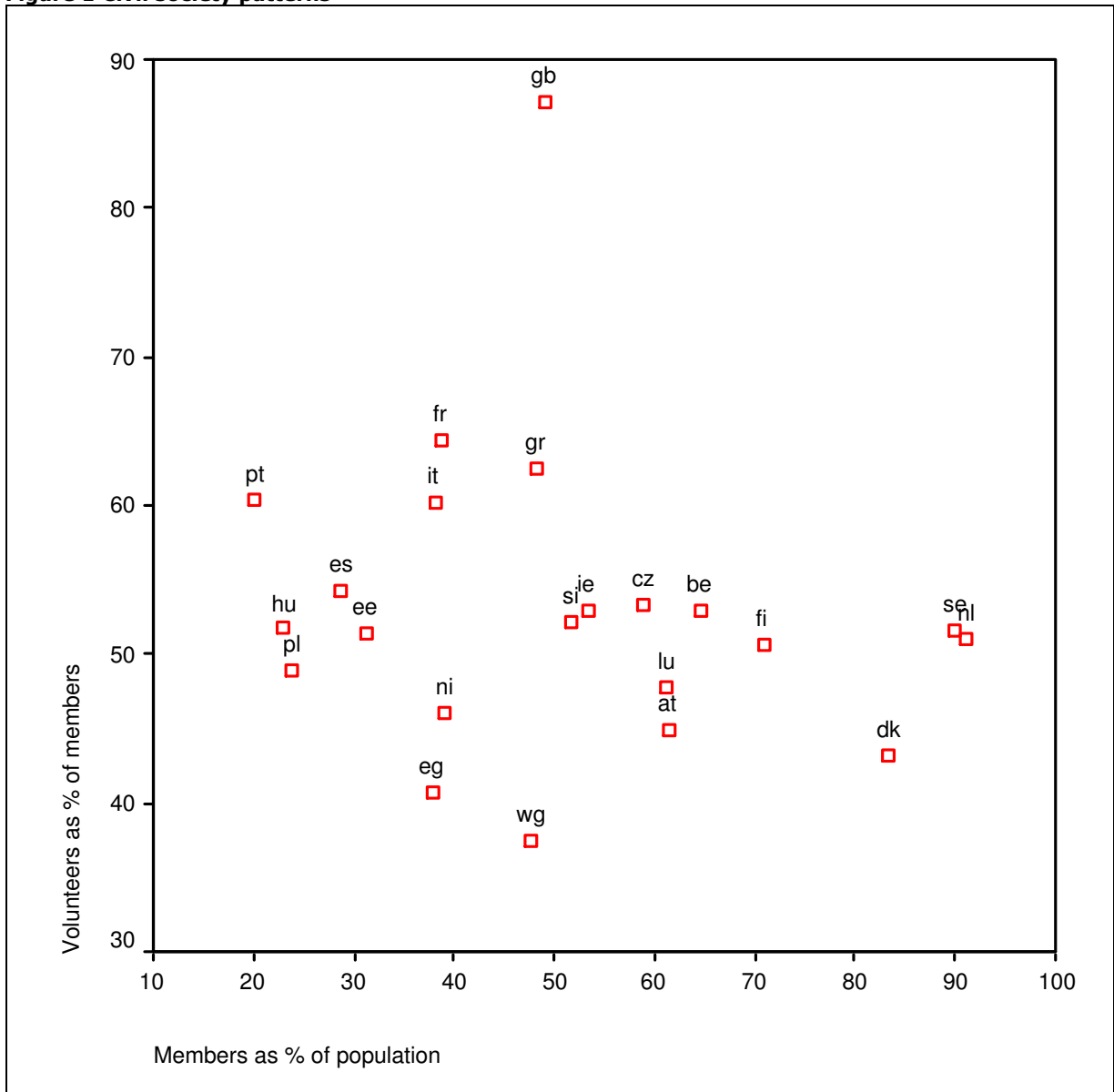
**Appendix: indicators (%) in 20 countries<sup>a</sup>**

	at	be	cz	de	dk	ee	es	fi	fr	gr	hu	ie	it	lu	nl	pl	pt	se	si	uk	
	eg		wg																gb	ni	
<p><sup>a</sup>Please look carefully at the following list of voluntary organizations and activities and say a) which, if any, do you belong to?; and b) which, if any, are you currently doing unpaid voluntary work for? yes to a) and or b):</p>																					
a1	social welfare services for elderly, handicapped or deprived people																				
a2	religious and church organizations																				
a3	education, arts and music and cultural activities																				
a4	trade unions																				
a5	political parties or groups																				
a6	Local community action on issues like poverty, employment, housing, racial equality																				
a7	third world development or human rights																				
a8	conservation, the environment, ecology, animal rights																				
a9	professional associations																				
a10	youth work (e.g. scouts, guides, youth clubs etc.)																				
a11	sports or recreation																				
a12	women's groups																				
a13	peace movement																				
a14	voluntary organizations concerned with health																				
a15	other groups																				
<p>Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?</p>																					
b1	most people can be trusted																				
b2	cannot be too careful																				
b3	don't know																				
<p>Frequency of discussing political matters 'when you get together with your friends'</p>																					
c1	frequently																				
c2	occasionally																				
c3	never																				
c4	don't know																				
<p>Position toward 'different forms of political action that people can take'</p>																					
<p>Joining in boycotts</p>																					
d1	have done																				

d2	might do	33	31	28	37	39	36	24	21	51	40	17	18	34	41	38	39	24	32	54	51	43	25
d3	would never do	54	53	56	51	43	37	63	59	30	41	78	76	53	44	49	38	71	60	12	36	37	58
d4	don't know	3	4	8	7	7	3	10	15	5	7	2	3	4	5	5	0	1	4	2	5	3	4
Attending lawful demonstrations																							
e1	have done	16	39	26	44	21	29	10	24	14	39	39	4	20	33	28	34	10	14	35	9	13	21
e2	might do	35	30	40	31	41	38	28	30	42	33	36	29	44	38	41	35	31	37	52	55	38	29
e3	would never do	47	30	29	20	32	31	53	36	40	26	25	65	33	25	28	31	58	44	12	31	46	45
e4	don't know	1	2	5	4	5	2	8	9	4	2	0	2	2	4	3		0	4	1	5	3	4
Opinion about 'Democracy may have problems but it's better than any other form of government'																							
f1	agree strongly	59	56	39	32	66	70	17	38	35	58	62	23	35	42	58	47	21	38	50	24	46	41
f2	agree	32	51	51	52	30	26	60	48	51	30	33	48	50	49	28	48	57	49	43	61	30	42
f3	disagree / disagree strongly	8	7	7	6	3	1	8	6	9	6	4	17	7	6	4	4	9	7	6	9	21	6
f4	don't know	4	3	3	10	2	3	16	8	4	6	1	12	8	4	10	2	13	7	2	6	3	11
Interest in politics:																							
g1	Very interested	21	10	20	21	18	17		5	5	9	12		9	7	12	16	6	6		5	8	9
g2	Somewhat interested	46	29	50	45	41	43		22	23	27	28		34	26	36	52	35	23		37	30	31
g3	Not very interested	23	31	21	25	29	30		31	49	31	40		32	42	31	25	33	32		33	27	36
g4	Not at all interested	10	30	9	8	11	9		42	22	33	20		25	26	21	7	25	39		24	35	24
g5	Don't know	0	0	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	1		0	0	0	0	0	0		0	1	0
g6	Not asked							100					100							100			
Leisure participation = a3 and/or a11																							
Social trust= b1																							
Discuss politics = c1 + c2																							
Political action = d1 or d2 and e1 or e2																							
Democracy best = f1																							
Political interest = g1 + g2																							

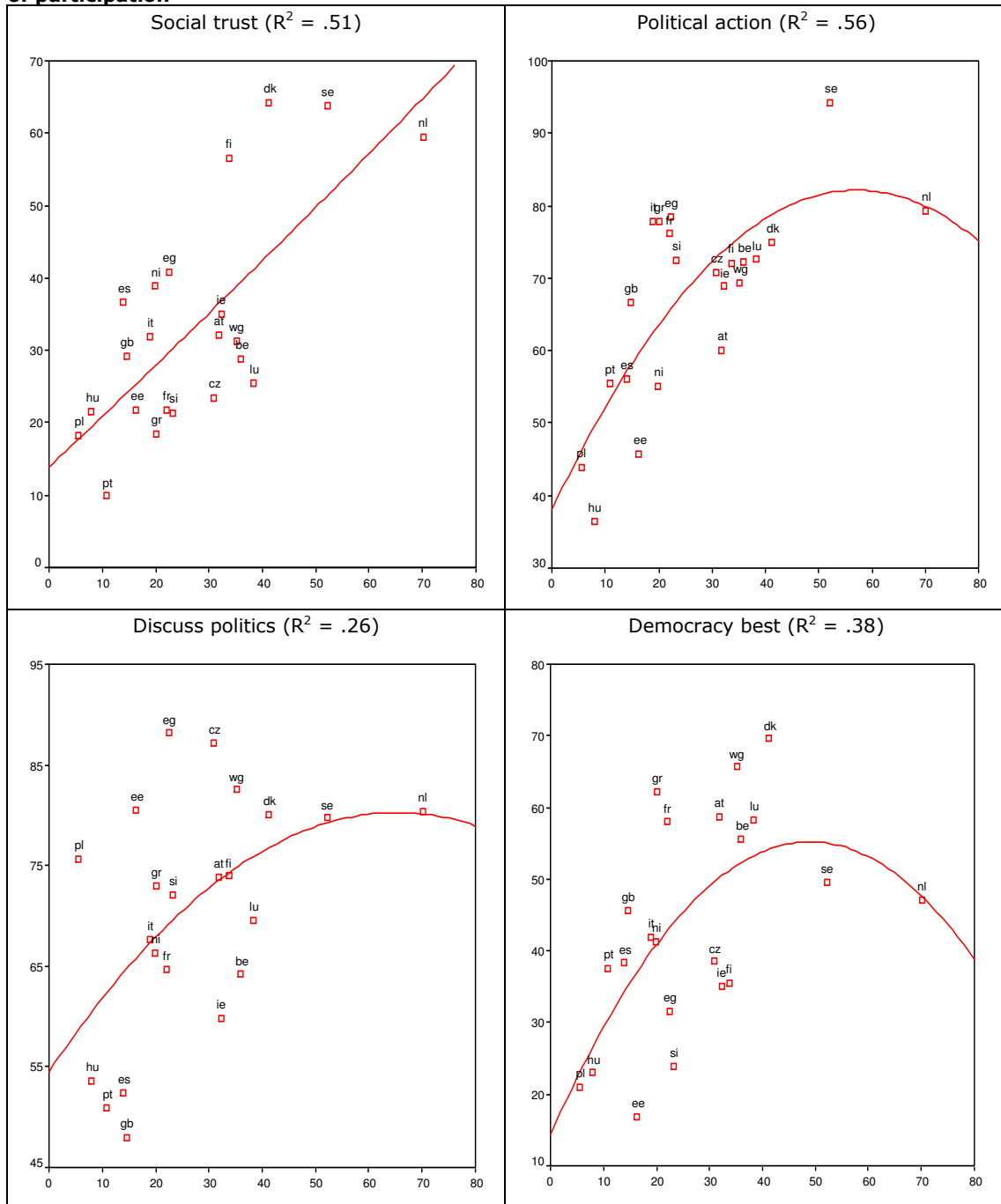
<sup>a</sup> at= Austria, be= Belgium, cz= Czechia, de= Germany (east (eg) and west (wg)), dk= Denmark, ee= Estonia, es= Spain, fi= Finland, fr= France, gr= Greece, hu= Hungary, ie= Ireland, it= Italy, lu= Luxembourg, nl= Netherlands, pl= Poland, pt= Portugal, se= Sweden, si= Slovenia, uk= United Kingdom (Great Britain (gb) and Northern Ireland (ni)).

**Figure 1 Civil society patterns<sup>a</sup>**



<sup>a</sup> See the appendix table for the meaning of the abbreviations. Members= belonging to at least of the organizations listed a1-a14 in the appendix with the exception of a2 (religion). Volunteers= doing voluntary work for at least one of these organizations (all volunteers are supposed to be members).

**Figure 2 Relationships between leisure participation (horizontal axis) and the alleged benefits of participation**



Figures 1 and 2 are spss-made. The data to reproduce them are as follows:

country	Figure 1		Figure 2				
	x= members	y= volunteers as % of members	x= leisure participation	y1= trust	y3= discuss politics	y4= democ best	y2= political action
at	61,45	27,57	31,82	32,08	73,90	58,76	60,00
be	64,53	34,21	35,95	28,78	64,16	55,59	72,25
cz	58,96	31,45	30,91	23,48	87,18	38,50	70,86
dk	83,19	35,87	41,28	64,25	80,04	69,56	74,98
ee	31,26	16,06	16,36	21,75	80,54	16,81	45,74
eg	37,94	15,45	22,40	40,78	88,12	31,52	78,40
es	28,75	15,58	14,00	36,61	52,46	38,28	56,10
fi	70,92	35,89	33,68	56,63	73,94	35,44	72,00
fr ,	38,80	25,01	22,12	21,71	64,70	57,97	76,11
gb	48,97	42,68	14,70	29,23	47,96	45,64	66,64
gr	48,37	30,25	20,22	18,36	72,95	62,20	77,85
hu	23,01	11,90	7,94	21,56	53,65	22,95	36,46
ie	53,34	28,28	32,31	35,10	59,82	35,03	68,84
it	38,05	22,90	18,95	31,94	67,59	41,91	77,82
lu	61,23	29,24	38,39	25,45	69,50	58,19	72,58
ni	39,07	18,01	19,89	38,84	66,30	41,29	55,14
nl	91,12	46,52	70,07	59,41	80,39	47,17	79,24
pl	23,80	11,66	5,57	18,30	75,66	20,93	43,92
pt	20,11	12,14	10,84	9,86	50,87	37,57	55,43
se	90,00	46,48	52,20	63,72	79,69	49,62	94,22
si	51,79	26,99	23,31	21,32	72,08	23,95	72,55
wg	47,69	17,87	35,17	31,32	82,51	65,62	69,41

**Table 1: Summary Multiple Regressions Analyses per Domain<sup>a</sup>**

	<b>Social trust</b>		<b>Discuss politics</b>		<b>Political action</b>		<b>Democracy best</b>		<b>Political interest</b>	
Domains	Variables	Effects	Variables	Effects	Variables	Effects	Variables	Effects	Variables	Effects
<b>Culture</b>	Hofstede's Uncertainty Avoidance	Negative			Hofstede's Masculinity	Negative			Hofstede's Power Distance	Negative
	Inglehart's Survival- Wellbeing	Positive			Inglehart's % Postmaterialists	Positive	Inglehart's % Postmaterialists	Positive	Inglehart's Traditional- Rational Authority	Positive
			Schwartz' Harmony	Negative			Schwartz' Mastery	Positive		
<b>Economy</b>	GNP / Capita 2000	Positive			GNP / Capita 2000	Positive	GNP / Capita 2000	Positive		
<b>Politics</b>	Corruption 1999	Negative			Corruption 1988- 1992	Negative				
					Ex-communist	Negative	Ex-communist	Negative	Freedom 1989-1990	Negative
<b>Religion</b>	Historically protestant	Positive			Historically protestant	Positive			Historically catholic	Negative
									% non-church members	Positive

<sup>a</sup> Multiple regression analyses method=stepwise (pin <.05, pout >.10), listwise deletion of missing cases; separate analyses for the dimension culture with 1. Hofstede's & Inglehart's dimensions (max N=19 missing data from East-Germany, Great Britain and Northern Ireland) and 2. these dimensions and Schwartz' dimensions (max N=14, missing data from Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Great Britain, Ireland, Luxemburg, Northern Ireland and Sweden); for the dimension economy GNP data and economic growth data are missing from East-Germany, income inequality data from East-Germany and Northern Ireland (max N=20); for the dimension politics corruption data are missing from East-Germany and Northern Ireland (max N=20); there are no missing data for the dimension religion (max N=22).



**Table 2: Final Multiple Regression Analyses<sup>a</sup>**

	Social trust			Discuss politics			Political action			Democracy best			Political interest		
	B	β	p	B	β	p	B	β	p	B	β	p	B	β	p
<b>Culture</b>															
Hofstede's Power Distance	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	Exit
Hofstede's Uncertainty Avoidance	Exit	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Hofstede's Masculinity	.	.	.	.	.	.	Exit	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Inglehart's Materialism-Postmaterialism	.	.	.	.	.	.	Exit	.	.	.	Exit	.	.	.	.
Inglehart's Survival-Wellbeing	66.4	.49	.002	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Inglehart's Traditional-Rational Authority	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	Exit
Schwartz' Mastery	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	Exit	.	.	.	.
Schwartz' Harmony	.	.	.	-16.9	-.64	.013	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
<b>Economy</b>															
GNP / Capita 2000	Exit	.	.	.	.	.	Exit	.	.	.	Exit	.	.	.	.
<b>Politics</b>															
Corruption 1988-1992	.	.	.	.	.	.	Exit	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Corruption 1999	Exit	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Freedom 1989-1990	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	Exit
Ex-communist	.	.	.	.	.	.	-14.6	-.43	.028	-13.2	-.82	.001	.	.	.
<b>Religion</b>															
Historically catholic	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	Exit
Historically protestant	18.6	.51	.002	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
% non-church members	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	Exit
<b>Leisure participation</b>															
Constant	7.2	.	.192	89.0	.	.005	56.6	.	.000	90.9	.	.000	25.8	.	.001
R <sup>2</sup> (Adjusted)	.	.81	.000	.	.36	.013	.	.61	.001	.	.64	.001	.	.54	.006

<sup>a</sup> Exit=removed from multiple regression analyses with method = stepwise (pin <.05, pout >.10); Listwise deletion of missing cases; GNP / Capita 2000 deleted from analyses for Political action due to low collinearity tolerance < ,200 (results similar).