# In the Search for a Post-Communist Syndrome: A Theoretical Framework and Empirical Assessment

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## ABSTRACT

A pattern of attitudes and behaviours in the recently freed, post-communist countries is hypothesized as a post-communist syndrome. This study describes the syndrome and its aetiology. The syndrome is viewed as a direct result of long-lasting, oppressive rule and suggests a host of individual and social disorders: learned helplessness, specific manifestations of immorality/incivility, lack of civic culture and civic virtues. Using Q-factor analysis of 'civic culture' in a sample of Czech, Hungarian and American students it was found that contrary to the hypothesis, the Czech respondents exhibited a robust civic culture. (© 1997 by John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.)

*Key words:* post-communist syndrome; totalitarian syndrome; civic culture; civility; schema; Q-factor analysis; democracy; learned helplessness; transition; cross-cultural comparisons

> The state is not endangered from outside, as has happened many times in the past, but from within. We are putting it at risk by our own lack of political culture, of democratic awareness, and of mutual understanding (Václav Havel, 1990).

## ETIOLOGY OF THE POST-COMMUNIST SYNDROME

*The development of the totalitarian syndrome*
In general, totalitarian societies produced a 'totalitarian syndrome', a specific pattern of cognitions, attitudes and behaviours developed in order to adapt to life under totalitarian circumstances (e.g. Havel, 1977; Kagan, 1992; Klicperová, 1994). Totalitarianism was based on political coercion and on the concentration of social and economic control in the hands of the communist party (Arendt, 1968; Aron,

1968; Gleason, 1995). Vacková (1990) pointed out that the system strove to keep its members in a state of immaturity so that they would fit into the models of an obedient and infantilized society. Strict child-rearing practices in families and at school and an oppressive atmosphere at work fostered conformity. The attempted 'oversocialization' (Nickolov and Grathoff, 1991) into groups (collectives) suppressed the individuality of the individual; the chronic negative feedback punished initiative on the part of the individual and attributed failures to his/her personality, thereby lowering an individual's self-esteem and debilitating his/her self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994). In contrast, certain social strata (workers) were flattered and idolized as a chosen vanguard class on the basis of their ascribed social origin.

The Soviet Union was depicted as a country of progress, prosperity and freedom in contrast to Western nations, which were portrayed as unjust, exploitative and imperialist. The communist regime fabricated images of a perfect socialist state, of society and of the virtues of the 'socialist and Soviet' man. Although this propaganda was not generally believed, it produced confusion and doubts about reality (Almond, 1983).

The double standard of truth and conflict between official ideology and the dismal reality led to hypocritical behaviour and a double standard of morality. One version of truth was practised in public, at work, and at school, and was strictly enforced. The other was practised in private. Moral duplicity of the 'divided self' (Šebek, 1990; Scheye, 1991), along with an 'inability of self-reflection' (Příhoda, 1990) distorted the processes of growing up and degraded the moral and psychological health of citizens. In order to survive, it was to one's advantage to lie and to deceive others.

It was repeatedly demonstrated that the totalitarian regime and its society could not be changed. A sense of inefficacy was already introduced to post-Munich Czechoslovakia. It recurred during the Communist coup of 1948 and was reinforced for the next generation by the Soviet invasion in 1968 and by the subsequent process of 'normalization'. This experience led to a state of collective learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975; Bandura, 1995) and to a defensive withdrawal into privacy (i.e. 'inner exile', family, friends, countryside) and to resignation and alienation in public life (Možný, 1991). During that period, society was infiltrated by the Communist Party activists and the secret police. The development of a spontaneous social life and of civil society was prevented. Finally, through forced conformity, powerlessness, and apathy, 'the general public . . . contributed, though subconsciously, to the maintenance of the social foundations of the regime' (Olshanskiy, 1989, p. 91).

State lawlessness, repression, and the capriciousness of the regime and of the nomenclature i.e. the designated individuals, were more likely to reward loyalty to the ideology of the Party than hard work and competence. Citizens developed practices of fraud. Shortages in material goods and administrative incompetence led to corruption (Šimečka, 1984).

Anxiety, caused by repeated purges by the secret police and a fear of being reported for some real or perceived misdeed, resulted in distrust and in widespread mutual suspicion. In combination with frustration arising from a scarcity of consumer goods, this suspicion further contributed to a general *decline in civility*. The regime also rewarded those who conformed, regardless of their

competence or their honesty, which, in turn, led to resentment and envy (Shipler, 1984).

National oppression and humiliation during the period of Soviet rule either increased the potential for *ethnic nationalism* and xenophobia (G. Smith, 1990) or, conversely, led to feelings akin to an inferiority complex. Official repression of formerly functional moral systems such as religion, local community networks and voluntary associations led to a further decline in morality. At the same time, the enforcement of collectivism, institutional child-rearing, and placing loyalty to the Party above loyalty to the family violated family ties (Bronfenbrenner, 1962). Disillusionment with politics led to pessimism and cynicism and to a lack of hope and of vision for the future. Hence liberation in 1989 came as a total surprise to most citizens living under communist regimes (Kuran, 1991).

### The Transition from Totalitarianism to Post-Totalitarianism

1. *Communist oppression and state welfarism.* The dictatorship of the communist party was complemented by the comprehensive care of the 'working man'. The state guaranteed the stability of the regime, an overall low rate of crime, economic security with full employment, and health and welfare benefits. Rewards included the distribution of mediocre comforts for minimal effort (Večerník, 1993). With the exception of the privileged nomenclature, the regime imposed collectivism and egalitarianism on the general population.

2. *The stage of liberation.* This was experienced in Central Europe during the *annus mirabilis* of 1989 and brought euphoria, high expectations for freedom and affluence and an illusory feeling that all restrictive rules and worries had been lifted.

3. *The post-communist stage.* The old system and most of its certainties were largely dismantled. Freedom implied not only opportunity but also responsibility and the taking of personal risks. While opportunities were easy to accommodate, the responsibilities and the risks of freedom constituted a burden (Dvořáková and Voráček, 1993). Social and economic hardships and uncertainties for many led to expressions of mass discomfort. Some presumed they had been betrayed or that the revolution had failed (Kabele, 1992). Others sought leaders who would propose quick, simple cures. Still others searched for scapegoats. The formation of new groups, often based on ethnicity, met the needs of others. Nationalism and tribalism filled the ideological vacuum (Hockenos, 1993; Kennedy, 1994; Hall, 1994).

Paradoxically, most of the old elites remained in influential positions. Matějů and Lim (1995, p. 117) describe how in the Czech Republic the former 'nomenclature cadres are able to maintain their advantageous positions in the income hierarchy, mainly because they possess "human capital" and can effectively convert "social capital", accumulated during the communist regime, into economic capital'. Rona-Tas (1994) and Mink and Szurek (1993) also illustrate the 'self-perpetuating "pink nomenclature"' (Podgorecki, 1994, p. 111).

4. *The transition to a stable democracy and a market economy.* This transition continues at present in countries which constituted the former Soviet empire. Successful transition may depend on the extent of the damage to society wrought by totalitarianism (Havel, 1991). The longer-lived and more robust the totalitarian

experience, the more arduous the transition. In this respect, the countries of Central Europe which experienced 40 years of communist rule have an advantage over the nations of the Soviet Union with 70 or more years of totalitarian rule.

*The Post-Communist Syndrome*
This is a specific pattern of cognitions, attitudes and behaviours developed during the totalitarian phase and persisting into the transitional period. It typically manifests itself in the following features (Goldfarb, 1991):

(1) *Learned helplessness*, i.e. low self-efficacy and the avoidance of initiative and responsibility (Bandura, 1994), hopelessness and pessimism (Korzeniowski, 1993). It is also evident in a fear of change, and in reverence for paternalism, collectivism and social security (Sztompka, 1993).
(2) *Aspects of immorality*, including normlessness, disregard for moral values and legal norms in the absence of sanctions. These behaviours are characterized by incivility, corruption, rudeness (G. Smith, 1990), aggression and violence (Hockenos, 1993; Ewald and Kuchařová, 1994).
(3) *The abuse of civic virtues*, such as public-mindedness. This tactic is all too evident in an anti-civic culture, political alienation and chauvinistic nationalism.

The post-communist syndrome surfaces, paradoxically, after the stage of liberation, i.e. after a period of ephemeral euphoria, moral commitment and civic elation. It emerged, for example, after the 'Velvet Revolution' in Prague (Hanzel, 1991; Klicperová *et al.*, 1995) and after the toppling of the Berlin Wall (*Berliner Illustrierte Sonderausgabe*, 1989).

Although originally developed as an adaptive, coping strategy against oppression, the post-communist syndrome has become maladaptive in modern liberal societies, where it has a regressive character that is manifest in: (a) passivity, withdrawal and depression, instead of problem solving; (b) naive responsiveness to superficial populist solutions, and to nationalistic and demagogic appeals; (c) obedient aggression (e.g. joining movements with aggressive programmes, often directed against scapegoats).

The post-communist syndrome prevents the individual from using and developing his/her capabilities (Reykowski and Smolenska, 1993). It disrupts the development of social normative systems, giving rise to anomie, lawlessness and alienation. It may be reinforced by organized crime (the post-communist mafias) and by the corrupt practices of the emergent networks of the old nomenclature i.e. of those in designated positions (Handelman, 1995). In the absence of countervailing forces, the post-communist syndrome does not spontaneously extinguish. On the contrary, it may even be strengthened by nostalgia and by illusory memories of the *ancien regime*. It is relatively easy to retrieve positive memories and to repress negative ones.

The post-totalitarian syndrome may facilitate a return to non-democratic or dictatorial regimes or introduce a modicum of social and political anarchy. Conversely, the post-communist syndrome may be countered by traditions of political democracy and of civic culture, as well as by institutionalized patterns of civil society and civility still revered in some countries and in some social strata, despite the legacy of totalitarianism (Alan, 1995). The ill-effects of the post-communist syndrome may also be reduced by political, economic and cultural leadership capable of providing constructive solutions to the problems that challenge

the nation during the difficult transition from totalitarianism and command socialism to liberal democracy and a market economy (Klaus, 1991; 1993).


## AN ASSESSMENT OF THE POST-TOTALITARIAN SYNDROME

### The compelling evidence

The disintegration of the former Soviet empire and of Yugoslavia was brought about by a flare-up in nationalism. This caused death, suffering and destruction to an extent unprecedented in Europe since the Nazi and Stalinist era (Rummel, 1994). Anomie and immoral behaviour are mirrored in corruption at all levels of society, as reported in the press, along with the violence of the criminal organizations. Corruption on a grand scale and in high places seems commonplace (Cinger, 1995).

Crime constitutes another index of anomie and alienation. The crime index has sky-rocketed in all of the post-totalitarian societies. Marešová and Scheinost (1994, p. 167) speak of a 'post-communist explosion of criminality'. They back up the generally accepted threefold rise in crime with statistics of victimization. An international victimization survey in 1992 showed that 25% of Czechs had experienced, either personally or as witnesses, crime which, in combination with a low level of reporting (about one-third of crimes are reported), represents a staggering increase when compared to the figures of the former totalitarian police state.

The electoral choice is often between living as a free and competent individual and living as a subject under a paternalistic regime. Most of the post-communist countries have manifested a curious paradox. Within a few years of overthrowing the ancient regimes, communist or neo-communist parties regained power. Even the arch anti-communist Polish electorate voted recently for a neo-communist (Wnuk-Lipinski, 1994; Karpinski, 1993). So did the Hungarian electorate. In Russia, the previously disbanded communists became the strongest single party, albeit receiving only a small percentage of the vote.

### The Civic Culture of Czech, Hungarian and American Students

Findings from a series of recent cross-cultural surveys by the present authors provide examples of the post-communist syndrome and amongst Czech and Hungarian students. The inclusion of American students constitutes a comparison group, since Americans have never been subjected to a totalitarian regime.

### Method

A schema provides a context for what is known already. It makes sense of current experiences (Conover and Feldman, 1984, pp. 96–97; Milburn, 1991). The study focused on the schemata of civic culture held by 298 students of the social sciences at The Charles University in the Czech Republic, The University of Debrecen in Hungary[1], and San Diego State University in the USA. There were 111 American students, 100 Hungarian students and 87 Czech students. The American students, on average, were 2 years older than their European counterparts; 75% of the

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[1]The authors acknowledge Professor Szabo Beres for administering the questionnaires to Hungarian students.

Americans, fewer than 2% of the Czechs and none of the Hungarians were members of a political party. Approximately 90% of the Americans, 80% of the Czechs, and 56% of the Hungarians reported voting during the previous 2 years; 35% of Americans, 46% of the Czechs and 30% of the Hungarians reported participating in a political march or in a demonstration during the previous 2 years.

Almond and Verba (1989) conceived of civic culture as a mixture of three quite disparate political cultures: a modern 'participant culture', an historically ancient 'parochial culture' of traditional societies and a 'subject culture' stemming from the dawn of modernity. Those belonging to a 'participant culture' are attentive citizens who are fully involved in the political process. Those belonging to a 'parochial culture' are indifferent; politics, to them, is irrelevant and they are unaware of it. Finally, those belonging to a 'subject culture' are aware of politics but they participate only as obedient, deferential, subjects of the sovereign. Model citizens of the 'civic culture', are involved in politics (the participant dimension). They are law-abiding, sometimes even to the detriment of their own interests (the subject dimension). They also trust politicians to work without undue interference (the parochial dimension). The opposite of the civic culture is the 'anti-civic culture' of alienation. Citizens express disdain and cynicism about the workings of democracy. 'Civic culture' is crucial to the stability of the democratic polity. The totalitarian syndrome presupposed the anti-civic culture of alienation (Feierabend *et al.*, 1993). The conceptualizations of civic and of anti-civic cultures, in our study, follow Almond and Verba's typology.

The statements representing each of the dimensions were written by the authors. Those representing anti-civic culture concerned the political system as a whole, the political self, and the inputs and outputs (laws and policies) of the political system. The statements followed the system analysis of political life (Easton, 1953; Deutsch, 1966). 'The political self' referred to the individual in his/her political role as an active/passive participant in the system. 'Input objects' referred to the input function of the political system, of which the most salient political structures were interest groups and political parties. 'Output objects' referred to the governmental function associated with the laws and policies of the system. This procedure resulted in 48 cells, each representing a distinct style of political culture (4 political cultures × 3 dimensions × 4 systems: (see Table 1, below)).

*Procedure*
The participants were asked to evaluate each of the 48 statements on a seven-point scale from 'strongly approve' to 'strongly disapprove'. The overall distribution of the evaluations was random rather than fixed, contrary to common practice used in Q-analysis. Item structures arising from the procedure are assumed to be relatively robust under both ipsative and non-ipsative approaches. The resulting data matrix was transposed and the data factored in a typical Q-analysis fashion (Kerlinger, 1972; Feierabend *et al.*, 1993) Q-factor analysis was used to identify groups of individuals with common ideological schemata on specific factors (in terms of high or low factor loadings).

Q-methodology typically involves several steps. First, the chosen statements are assumed to represent a theoretical construct, i.e. the civic culture typology. Second, subjects sort statements on the basis of their agreement–disagreement with each. Third, the data matrix of each subject's evaluations is transposed, so that subjects become variables and variables become subjects. Fourth, the resulting data matrix is

factor-analysed so that subjects with common profiles are clustered together in factors. The resulting factor structure is then interpreted so that factor loadings represent the clusters of persons who have similar profiles in all or in most items. Standardized factor scores represent items that contribute strongly to the definition of factors and are used to impute meaning to the factors.

Following these procedures, the empirical character of the civic culture schema was then interpreted using high and low factor scores associated with the items. We were especially interested in the degree to which the schemata would either confirm the symptoms of political alienation of the post-totalitarian syndrome, or confirm the 'civic culture' of the American sample.

*Results*
The four factors revealed striking similarities and differences between the civic/anti-civic schemata of the three national groups. The schema summarized according to the first factor clearly and unambiguously represented a robust civic culture. It was labelled as a 'highly participant allegiant civic culture'. One would expect to find this kind of culture in a mature, stable democracy. It was a dominant schema in terms of both variance explained (25.9%) and the number of students it characterized (138 of 298). Taking into consideration the factor loadings of 0.5 and higher, the schema characterized more than half of the Czech and American students (46 of 87, and 59 of 111, respectively) but only one-third of the Hungarian students (33 of 100). In other words, in this schema, the majority of Czechs and Americans represented prototypic democratic citizens. The 'participant' dimension was the most salient feature of this schema. All the items had positive scores and all but one (item 92) reached very high scores above the threshold value of 1.00. This finding was supported by a consistent rejection of parochialism. Only three items indicating antiparochialism scored above 1.00 (items 74, 86 and 98). The items are listed in Table 1.

The schema of the second factor (10.2% of variance) comprised almost exclusively Hungarians, and represented their largest grouping on any factor. Almost half the Hungarian respondents (45 of 100), compared to only one American and one Czech, were characterized by this schema. It is more difficult to interpret than the previous schema because of the heterogeneity of the items it incorporates. Ostensibly, 'parochialism' prevailed, since four items had scores of 1.00 and above (74, 98, 102, 110), indicating a lack of political knowledge. The respondents rejected two 'participant' items (high scores on 76, 92), thus indicating political passivity and denying participation to be a prerequisite of good citizenship. Also, in the more strident sense of the subject culture, they expressed 'hate (for) those activists who make trouble for the State' (high score on item 83). Yet, in their judgements of 'input objects', the respondents expressed sympathy towards the activities of political parties and interest groups. They endorsed several participant items and both approved and disapproved of alienation. These features suggest an ambiguous political culture. It is as if the students have not made up their minds about fundamental political questions. Hence, the schema falls short of the viable civic culture of Almond and Verba (see above). This impression is supported by their rejection of subject items requiring citizens to be obedient and to respect authority (items 111 and 115). Consequently, the schema was assigned to the 'quasi-democratic, passive–rebellious parochials'. This is an unclear schema on the borderline of civic culture.

Table 1.  48 Items of civic culture[a]

|  | Alienative | Parochial | Subject | Participant |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Self as an active participant* | | | | |
| Cognitive | Why bother with politics! Politicians couldn't care less about people like me.  73 | I know little about politics.  74 | I don't participate in politics; political issues are the concern of the state and government.  75 | I take an active role in politics especially if an issue is important or concerns me.  76 |
| Evaluative | If you participate in politics you just become part of a dishonest system and help corrupt politicians.  77 | There is no point in being interested in political issues; politics makes little difference in my life.  78 | People should mind their own business and let the state and government do their job.  79 | The more people there are who take an active stance on political issues and candidates, the better.  80 |
| Affective | I hate politics, it just brings out the worst in people and society.  81 | I can't understand what attracts people to politics.  82 | I hate those activists who make trouble for the state.  83 | It makes me feel good to take part in politics, even a peaceful political demonstration for something I believe in.  84 |
| *Input objects* | | | | |
| Cognitive | Political parties are the worst feature of the state.  85 | I don't know what political parties are all about.  86 | Political parties can't serve any reasonable function in the state.  87 | Political parties are necessary for running a state and government that represents the people's needs.  88 |
| Evaluative | A good, upright citizen should boycott political parties and their elections. There is not one honest party in the lot.  89 | Political parties or interest groups, they don't matter to me.  90 | Political parties are harmful to the good running of the state and government.  91 | A good citizen joins a political party and participates in activist interest groups.  92 |
| Affective | I hate parties, and their partisans are insufferable.  93 | I don't understand people who say they love this party or hate that party.  94 | A true patriot stays clear of membership in political parties.  95 | I like the political party I support and feel good about my association with it.  96 |

*Output objects*

| Cognitive | The laws and policies of the state and government have nothing to do with what the people want and need. 97 | I really do not know what the state and government does 98. | The duty of the state and government is to make decisions for the people and the duty of the people is to follow these decisions without question regardless of merits. 99 | The laws and policies of the state and government should be the result of the people participating in the political process. 100 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Evaluative | Policies of our state and government are a corrupt farce and an insult to our intelligence. 101 | I have a hard time telling what a good or bad law really is. 102 | A good state and government makes sure the citizens obey the laws regardless of their merits. 103 | Laws that are arrived at with the support of the majority of the people should be obeyed. 104 |
| Affective | He who respects the laws and believes in them is naive. 105 | How can the state and government help people? Only family and friends who love you can help you. 106 | Authorities who enforce the laws and policies of the state and government must be respected regardless of specific things they do. 107 | Laws and policies arrived at through a popular deliberative process deserve respect. 108 |

*System as a General Object*

| Cognitive | The state and government do not benefit people like myself. 109 | I don't understand how political systems work. 110 | Society works best when people obey laws without question. 111 | Freely elected governments are the most effective. 112 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Evaluative | If you trust the state, government, and politicians you must be out of your mind. 113 | I do not have a good idea of how to judge whether a political regime is good or bad. 114 | Good citizens should not try to change the state. 115 | The best state and government is that which works by the will of its citizens. 116 |
| Affective | Whenever I think of the state and government I get either angry, discouraged, or depressed. 117 | I have no positive or negative feelings towards the state. 118 | People should respect their state and government regardless of what it does. 119 | A citizen can be proud of his state and government to the extent that all people participate in it. 120 |

a With Dia Lautenschlager

The third factor (9.2% of variance) was a predominantly American schema with a very clear structure. Altogether, 30 Americans, 9 Hungarians and 5 Czechs constituted the group. Using a loading threshold of 0.5 and above, 19 Americans, 7 Hungarians and 1 Czech comprised this group. The schema represented a participant political culture. All 'participant' items (with one exception) were positive, reaching values higher than 1.00 (84, 92, 100, 116). The respondents decisively rejected the 'subject' dimension, shunning respectfulness to political authority, with eight items scoring over 1.00 (75, 79, 99, 103, 107, 111, 115, 119). 'Parochialism' was also rejected (high score on item 110). 'Alienation' prevailed over 'allegiance', with three items above the threshold value (101, 113, 117). Hence the schema was characterized as an 'activist, anti-civic culture'.

Given the criteria of Almond and Verba, this schema showed an acute sense of political alienation. It identified a substantial number of Americans, while including only a few Czech and Hungarian students. Since it was originally hypothesized that alienation would be found in the post-communist samples, it is interesting to find here a quarter of the American respondents. However, one should point out that a sense of alienation has been on the increase in the USA since the 1960s (Putnam, 1995).

The fourth factor (5.6% of variance) characterized a minor Czech schema (using loading 0.5 and above, 12 Czechs, 1 American and 3 Hungarians loaded on the factor; comparing the highest loadings for all the students, 16 Czechs, 3 Americans, and 4 Hungarians loaded on the factor). The 'parochial' dimension was represented by four items with high scores (78, 82, 90, 118). This parochialism, however, was quite different from the parochialism of the Hungarians on the second factor. They expressed indifference toward politics with high negative scores (76, 84, 96), but denied being politically ignorant. They approved of democracy in general (high scores on items 112 and 116) but expressed disdain for political parties and interest groups. Although some items suggested political allegiance (high scores on items 101 and 105), alienation (73) was not entirely absent and obedience to authority (items 99 or 115) was rejected by several. These characteristics were insufficient to label the schema as 'anti-civic', but these 'passive parochials of the quasi-democratic culture', none the less do not fit the models of civic culture given by Almond and Verba. It was concluded that the schema in factor four could be classified as a borderline civic culture. The remaining schemata were very minor, characterizing only a few respondents.

## DISCUSSION

Hungarian students partook in the robust civic culture as a sizable minority but they did not show an outright anti-civic culture. None the less, their majority grouping suggested an ambiguous political culture. The majority of Czech and American students participated in the robust civic culture of the dominant schema and the Czechs evidenced little, if any, alienation. Surprisingly, the American students, our supposed comparison group, showed their own strikingly anti-civic minor schema. It appeared, therefore, as if, amongst our respondents, alienation, the symptom of anti-civic culture, was largely absent. Whilst students may not be entirely representative, they are the future elites of the country and in the past, e.g. during the 'Velvet

Revolution' of 1989, Czech students played an important positive political role (Klicperová *et al.*, in press).

The civic culture of Czech students corresponds to the findings reported previously in various surveys. For example, *Eurobarometer* (March 1995, Figure 6) reports that 44% of Czechs have claimed that they were satisfied with the way democracy was developing in their country. This level of satisfaction is comparable to the level of satisfaction with democracy in the 12 countries of the European Union. There, the average level of satisfaction was 43% (*Eurobarometer* 41, July 1994, Figure 1.2). This is a higher proportion of the population than was obtained in any other post-communist country in Central Europe, where the regional average of claimed satisfaction was 26%. The countries of the former Soviet Union reported only 11% satisfaction.

The robust civic culture of the Czech students was also consistent with the findings of *Eurobarometer* survey data in support of democracy by the Czech population. Thus Czechs also believed, more than any other nation in the region, in the stability of democracy in their own country (e.g. *Eurobarometer* 1993, Figure 12). When asked 'How likely is it, if at all, that a non-democratic dictatorship will exist in (their) country within next 12 months?', only 10% expressed any chance of such an eventuality (the regional average was 26%). Moreover, since the 'Velvet Revolution', Czechs have reported a consistently high level of trust in their politicians. After the Revolution, more than 90% of Czechs claimed that their elected leaders were honest and sincere. Since then, the majority of the population has maintained trust in the President and in their mass media (see Table 2).

## CONCLUSION

The post-totalitarian syndrome is a useful theoretical framework for exploring the psychology of the post-communist condition. In the present research, it yielded various meaningful, distinct, and differentiated schemata of the civic culture within the three national samples of respondents. The findings did not support the postulated trait of the post-totalitarian syndrome (anti-civic culture) in the sample of Czech and Hungarian students. The most surprising finding, contrary to our expectations, was the robust democratic civic culture in the majority of the Czech students. The Hungarian, American and Czech respondents presented unique and near-exclusive political culture schemata. The Czech and American students were similar in partaking equally in the dominant civic culture schema. Paradoxically, a

Table 2. Percentage of respondents trusting mass media by medium and population[a]

| Medium/region | In the Czech Republic (%) | Regional average (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Trust in newspapers | 77 | 40 |
| Trust in magazines | 63 | 27 |
| Trust in radio | 82 | 54 |
| Trust in television | 83 | 53 |

[a]Trust in domestic media (data from *Eurobarometer*, 1993, Figures 20–26)

substantial minority of American respondents produced a schema of anti-civic culture. There was a disparity in the findings between the Czech and the Hungarian respondents. The majority of Czech respondents showed a strong sense of civic culture. The majority of the Hungarians presented a relatively weak civic culture. This finding implied interesting national differences.

While a number of phenomena in post-communist countries indicate the existence of a post-communist syndrome (corruption, ethnic nationalism, and war further east and south), the data in our student samples failed to support its existence. Perhaps our participants belonged to the strata that typically favoured transition and they may have been the least affected by the post-totalitarian syndrome (young, educated residents of large cities, high achievers and the future elites). The results of this study suggest that some strata of the populations may have been better able to withstand the impact of the totalitarian rule and to maintain some pre-communist cultural patterns. The Czech and Hungarian students may well belong to such a group. For the small group of Czech respondents the findings concerning civic culture are encouraging.

Students who never lived in a democracy prior to 1989 and who supposedly had been socialized by the communist regime, presented evidence of subscribing to a democratic civic culture. Political culture is a set of enduring attitudes rather than a set of ephemeral opinions. Future research should venture beyond our exploratory study and should focus on more diverse samples of respondents, who may exemplify the post-totalitarian syndrome, e.g. samples of older respondents, people from rural rather than urban areas, less well-educated respondents, and people from nations with longer experiences of communist domination.

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