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Exclusive Societies: Minority Ethnic Group Support for Democracy

Abstract

The link between minority ethnic identification and support for democracy has been little explored in previous research. In this study, statistical analysis discovers a positive relationship between simply being a member of a minority group and high levels of dissatisfaction with the institutions of democracy, as well as with the performance of the regime. Survey data also reveal a linkage between a minority group's level of marginalization and its level of support for democracy.

Exclusive Societies

Minority Ethnic Group Support for Democracy

Nicole Lalich

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The region of Eastern Europe has experienced wars and political conflicts that have changed the region's state borders and demographic make up over the years. The result is a region that is more ethnically mixed than ever. Problems arise when a majority ethnic group is closely tied to the state, allowing it to engage in psychological, political, and economic exclusion of minority groups within that state. The newly democratic states of Eastern Europe have been able to decide whether the state primarily identifies with the majority ethnicity or whether the state embraces all ethnic groups relatively equally. The survival of new democracies depends upon widespread public support and the "distribution of that support across significant societal subgroups" (Mishler and Rose, 1996). A study of the level of support minority groups have for new democracies in Eastern Europe is important, because if democracy is to continue in this post-communist era, new governments must have the support of the people — regardless of ethnic loyalties. Scholars often include aggregate-level ethnic variables in democratic support research, but no significant findings have been made on this topic alone, thus leaving a gap in the theory that will be addressed here.

Ethnopolitical Theory

Nations arise from a feeling of self-identification with a particular group, a feeling based on subjective qualities such as ethnicity, culture, and/or language, whereas a state can be more specifically identified as a geographical location ruled by a government (Brass, 1991; Lancaster, 1987). The key way a person is said to belong to a specific group is whether or not that person self-identifies as a member of that group (Brass, 1991; Calhoun, 1997; Connor, 1994).

Some states are multi-cultural, meaning that the presence of multiple ethnic groups is not seen as a threat, and the preservation of ethnic sub-cultures is actually encouraged. Other countries, however, are considered mono-cultural. Ethnic minorities and immigrants are expected to adopt the majority or state culture. If that expectation is not met, then members of the minority group may encounter prejudice, hostility, or exclusion from the state processes (Alcock, 1979; Massey *et al.*, 1999). People perceive the government as a protectorate of their rights, safety, and interests (Dahl, 1998). If some citizens experience psychological and cultural exclusion from the system, then they may not support the system.

More concretely, ethnic minorities can be left out of the democratic system when the exclusiveness of a dominant ethnicity prevents institutional diversity. A majority ethnic group can prevent parties from organizing on the basis of ethnicity; it can pass legislation that enforces the language of the dominant group; or it can act upon any number of purposely exclusive

strategies (Calhoun, 1997; Dahl, 1998). If those making decisions in government belong to the majority-ethnicity and create policies that benefit the majority ethnic group, then members of that group are the ones who see the most benefits from the system and are the most likely to support that system (Rothschild, 1981). The same exclusive regime will increase the minority group's tendency to lack support for democracy.

In Eastern Europe, certain ethnic groups are more marginalized than others. Minorities whose ethnicity is that of the majority in a neighboring state, for example ethnic Hungarians within Slovakia, are arguably less marginalized than groups in permanent diaspora like the Roma. This group has been historically persecuted and does not share any characteristics with other ethnic groups in the region. On the whole, Roma are generally more economically disadvantaged and more openly persecuted than any other group, all of which contribute to levels of minority dissatisfaction (Holmes, 1999; Rothschild and Wingfield, 2000). We would therefore expect Roma to be the most dissatisfied with state institutions that exclude them in both psychological and material terms. These issues are particularly salient in new democracies where the people in power must make decisions about ethnic issues within their borders and perceive different levels of inclusion among the citizenry.

Support for Democracy Theory

By analyzing newly democratic systems, scholars attempt to define whether the transition to democracy has been consolidated. Public opinion data provide a useful tool in that process. When scholars measure overall support for democracy, a distinction is made between support for the political construct of democracy and satisfaction with the current regime. Support for democracy is seen as support for the institutions and processes of democracy and should indicate citizens' level of commitment to these modes. Satisfaction, on the other hand, measures the perceived short-term performance of the regime towards providing benefits to the people. It taps whether people are satisfied with the results of government as compared to their expectations of what government should provide. The level of satisfaction is normally seen as linked to economic performance, in terms of perceived benefits (Evans & Whitefield, 1995; Ishiyama, 1998; Mishler & Rose, 1996; WaJdron-Moore, 1999). Usually, men who have attained higher levels of education and reside in urban areas are considered most likely to support democracy, because this group seems to appreciate the ideological reasons behind the institution. Those respondents who enjoy high levels of economic benefits also tend to be satisfied with the way democracy is running in their country, because they reap the benefits of the system materially (Mishler and Rose, 1996; Waldron-Moore, 1999).

The past decade has allowed citizens in Eastern Europe to form important opinions about the system in general and rate what the system has done for them. Support for democracy is an indicator of consolidation and success of the regime. In the Eastern European context, ethnic demographic factors should be most salient in nationalist or exclusive environments where we would expect members of minority groups to express the most dissatisfaction.

Expectations From Theory

The theoretical discussion leads to two distinct, testable hypotheses:

1. Members of minority ethnic groups express *less satisfaction with and less support for democracy* than do members of the majority ethnic group.

2. The extent of *dissatisfaction is greater* when minority group members experience a *large degree of psychological and/ or economic marginalization* in a particular society.

The following section provides information on how the hypotheses are tested.

Design and Strategy

Studying data gathered in the region of post-communist Eastern Europe provides a common historical and political context. The region shared the experience of Soviet-enforced single party rule and its related nationalities and policies. It has also shared the experience of dual transition, to democracy and market economies. This research scrutinizes differences in opinion toward democracy between majority group and minority group respondents. Appropriate data must come from countries that have experienced transition and also contain minority groups residing within their borders. The Central and Eastern Eurobarometer 8 (CEEB 8) survey provides such data. The original survey implementation took place in ten countries, but three of those countries contained fairly homogenous populations and were thus excluded from the following analysis (Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovenia, all with 3% or less of any one minority group).

The unit of analysis in the study is the individual respondent from the seven newly democratic countries of Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, and Slovakia. The revised survey sample contains an N of 7,343. Findings first analyze responses by group and country through the use of cross-tabular descriptive statistics. Then, the findings present bivariate correlation coefficients illustrating the breakdown of support levels by country and how minority and majority support for democracy compare overall. Finally, the analysis will move on to multivariate regression to control for the common demographic variables discussed in the literature: age, gender, urban/rural cleavage, education, and income.

Dependent Variables

The survey addresses the issue of democracy in the form of two questions. Each of the two questions tests slightly different attitudes about democracy. Including both questions from the survey thus settles the operationalization issue surrounding the distinction between support for and satisfaction with democracy. The questions and answers are as follows:

1. On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with *the way democracy is developing in* (Our Country)?
2. On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with *the way democracy works in* (Our Country)?

The questions differ because the first is geared toward assessing respondent attitudes concerning the institution of democracy, whereas the second question assesses attitudes concerning the performance of the current democratic regime. The authors of the CEEB 8 wrote these two questions into the survey in order to control whether they tapped the same attitude (Ulram, 1998). Half of the respondents in the original data set were given Question 1 while the remaining respondents were given Question 2. The dichotomy was evenly consistent across countries. Of the 7,343 individuals in this data, 3,610 individuals responded to Question 1 and 3,392 individuals responded to Question 2. Variations in responses to support and satisfaction justify the conceptual cleavage in attitude toward democracy. The possible responses have been

provided above. For greater ease in comparing the data, I combined the four possible responses into two simple categories of satisfied and not satisfied in the graphs to follow.

Independent Variables

The independent variables consist of demographic variables that could possibly have a role in explaining the dependent variable responses. The factors included are ethnic group, income, age, type of community, education level, gender, monthly net income level, and country of residence.

Ethnicity is labeled as 'group,' which is a dummy variable assigning respondents to the majority or minority group. The label assignment is based on the individual's ethnic self-identification response. Bulgaria provides a useful example. Bulgarian respondents who identified themselves as Bulgarian were labeled as belonging to the majority group (group= 1) while those who identified as Turkish or any ethnicity other than Bulgarian were labeled as belonging to the minority (group = 0).

The control variable that distinguishes between urban and rural is operationalized by the survey through questions asking if respondents live in the capital, a large city, a provincial small town, or a village consisting of many farms. The first two categories are labeled 'urban' and the last two are labeled 'rural.' Consistent with the literature on this region small towns are treated as 'rural.' They are places where the rural inhabitant can obtain basic goods, but in every other respect small towns in Eastern Europe are provincial.

Education is broken down into the following levels based on individual response: elementary, some secondary, secondary grad, or higher education. The responses are coded from 1 to 4, with the least amount of education corresponding to the lowest number.

Income is country specific, meaning the people who implemented the survey in each country created 16 categories corresponding to varying levels of monthly net income attainment. As income levels increase, the assigned number values increase as well. The function of the rankings is to identify where each respondent falls on the income strata in his particular country, thereby leveling the different economies of each country into one measurable system. Current evaluations of democratic development and performance are inexorably linked to evaluations of the past.

Thus, to analyze whether or not residing in a certain country makes a difference in the outcome responses, country dummy variables were developed for the bivariate correlation and linear regression models.

Finally, in order to test the hypothesis concerning marginalization of minority groups, individuals who identified themselves as Roma are separated out and their responses to the questions are analyzed. Included are frequency distributions on their demographic backgrounds. Being an ethnic Roma is not merely a label. The Roma have experienced psychological and economic exclusion from every majority state in which they reside. Based on income and education levels alone, the Roma are the most marginalized segment of society in Eastern Europe and do not have the same access to resources that the majority group, and other minority groups, enjoy. Responses are likely to reflect dissatisfaction with the society's general treatment of the group.

Conceptual Findings: Hypothesis 1

Figures I and 2 compare the support for and satisfaction with democracy attitudes of the majority and minority respondents. In the columns labeled 'not satisfied,' minority respondents answer up to 8% higher dissatisfaction than do members of the majority group. This finding supports the first hypothesis because members of minority groups do express dissatisfaction more intensely than do members of the majority.

Figure 1. Minority and Majority Respondent Support for Democracy

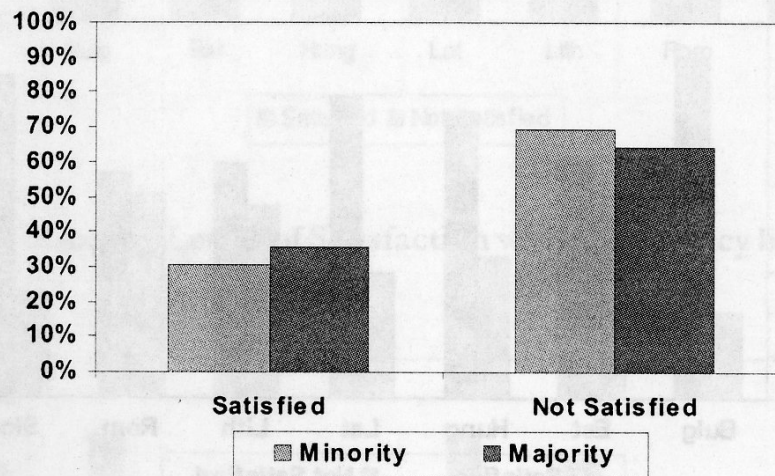
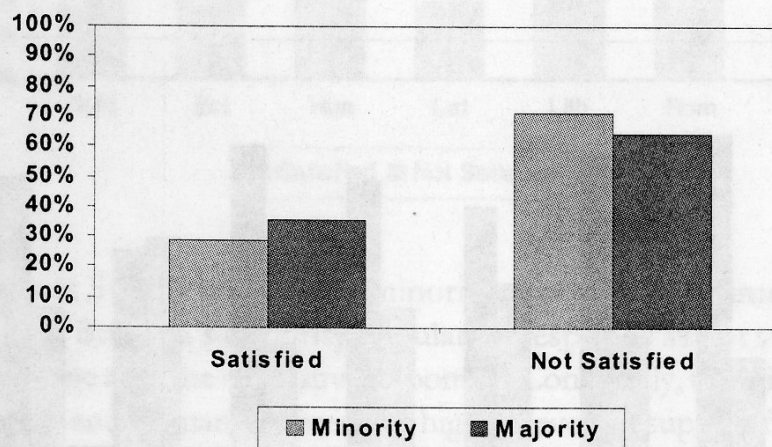


Figure 2. Minority and Majority Respondent Satisfaction with Democracy



Figures 3 and 4 illustrate overall responses to support for and satisfaction with democracy questions, respectively. Both figures follow the general pattern for post-communist satisfaction levels, with the exception of Estonia. Its respondents express almost twice the level of support

than satisfaction for democracy. As expected, the data for Romania shows high levels of support and satisfaction compared to other countries, most likely as a reaction to its authoritarian past. Both figures show that levels in the satisfied category are all at 20% or above. Bulgaria consistently displays the lowest levels of satisfaction and the highest levels of dissatisfaction. These responses provide a basis for comparison when analyzing the following data.

Figure 3. Levels of Support for Democracy by Country

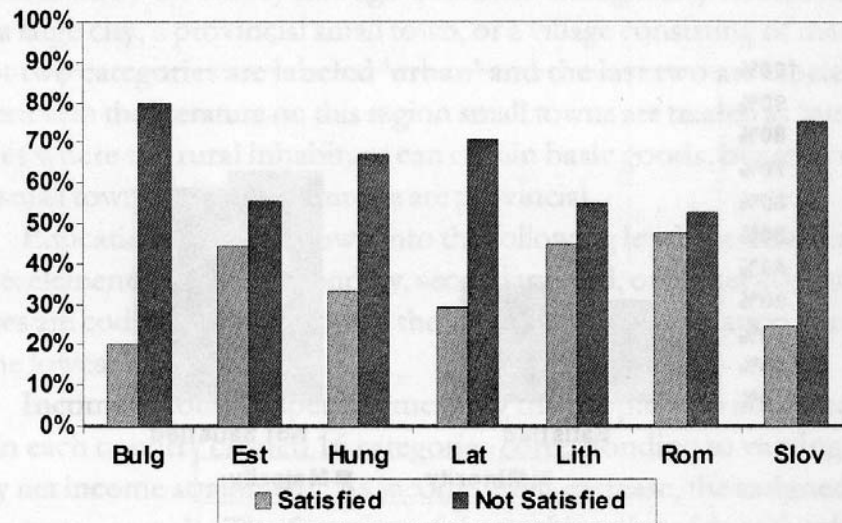


Figure 4. Levels of Satisfaction with Democracy by Country

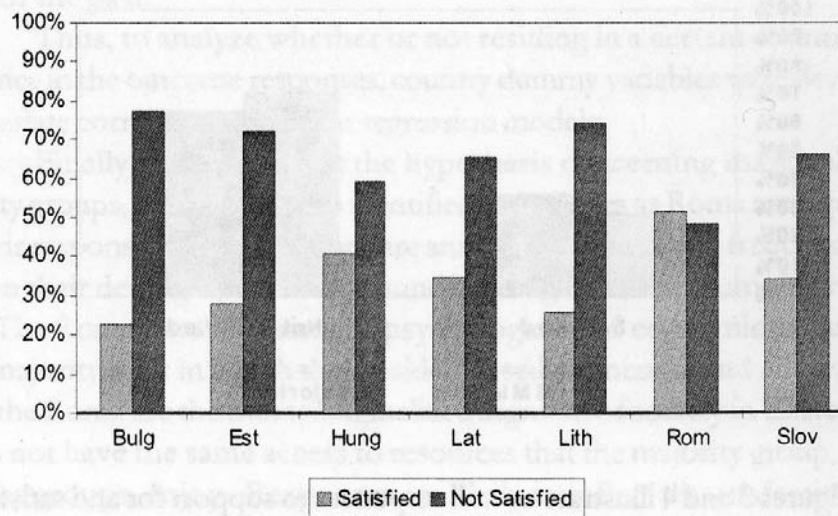


Figure 5. Minority Levels of Support for Democracy by Country

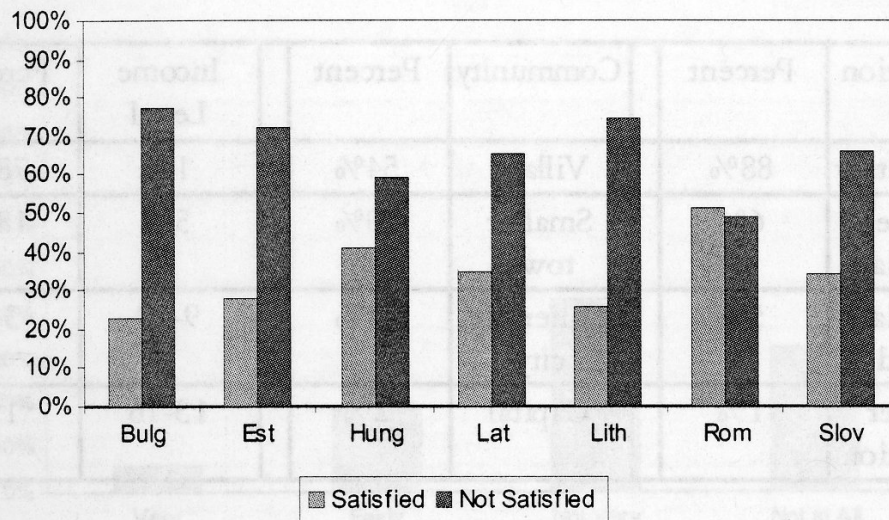
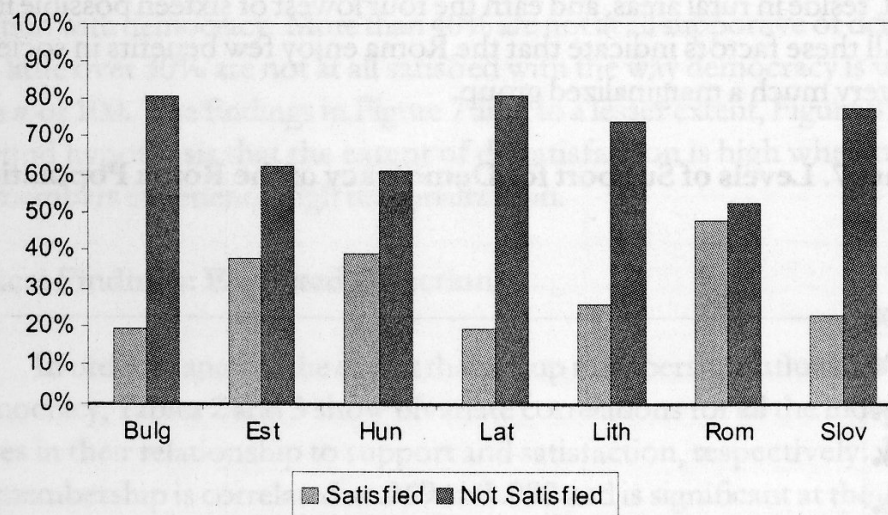


Figure 6. Minority Levels of Satisfaction with Democracy by Country



Figures 5 and 6 break down minority responses by country. Most notably, in Figure 5, Bulgaria's minority population responds as not supportive at a greater percentage than the alternative responses. Conversely, the minority population in Hungary and Romania express the highest levels of support for democracy. Figure 6 shows roughly equal dissatisfaction among minorities in Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovakia. The most satisfied minority respondents reside in Estonia, Hungary, and Romania. It is difficult to explain all the variation on historic factors alone. Many variables come into play, but the historical context begins to account for certain patterns seen here.

Conceptual Findings: Hypothesis 2

Table 1. Roma Demographic Characteristics

Education	Percent	Community	Percent	Income Level	Percent
Elementary	88%	Village	54%	1-4	78%
Some Secondary	6%	Smaller town	20%	5-8	18%
Secondary Grad	5%	Other big city	24%	9-12	3%
Higher Education	1%	Capital	2%	13-16	1%

Table 1 presents demographic frequency distributions for the most historically marginalized minority in Eastern Europe, the Roma (Rothschild and Wingfield, 2000). The table illustrates that out of 100 self-identified Roma respondents in the total sample, an overwhelming number of the group are poorly educated, reside in rural areas, and earn the four lowest of sixteen possible income levels. All these factors indicate that the Roma enjoy few benefits in society and thus are very much a marginalized group.

Figure 7. Levels of Support for Democracy of the Roma Population

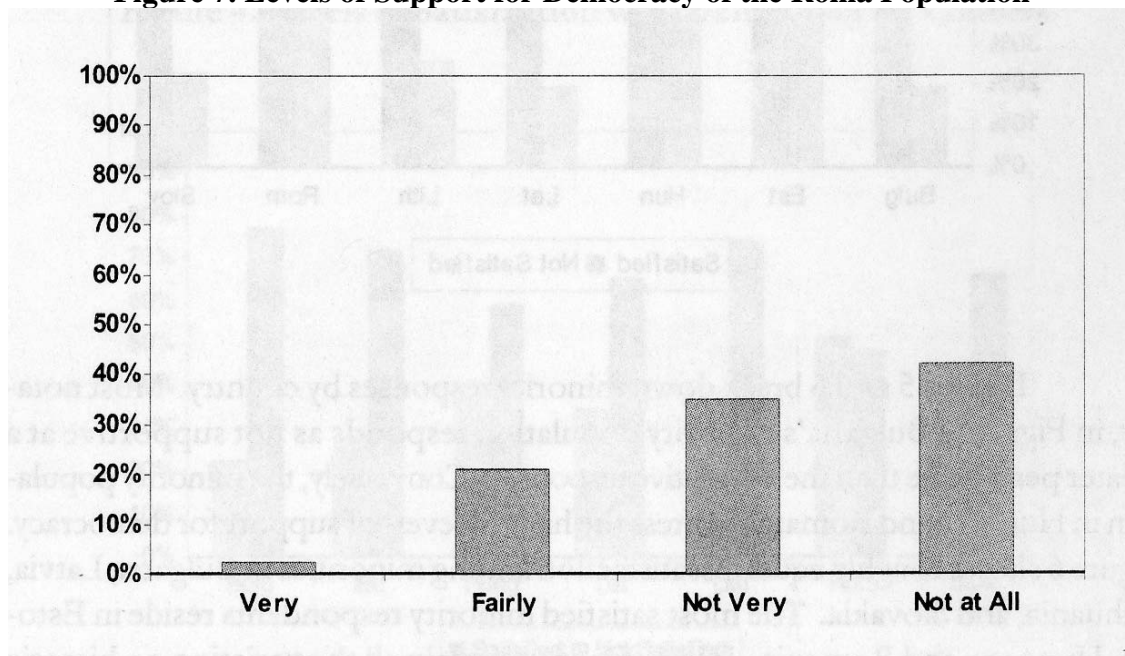
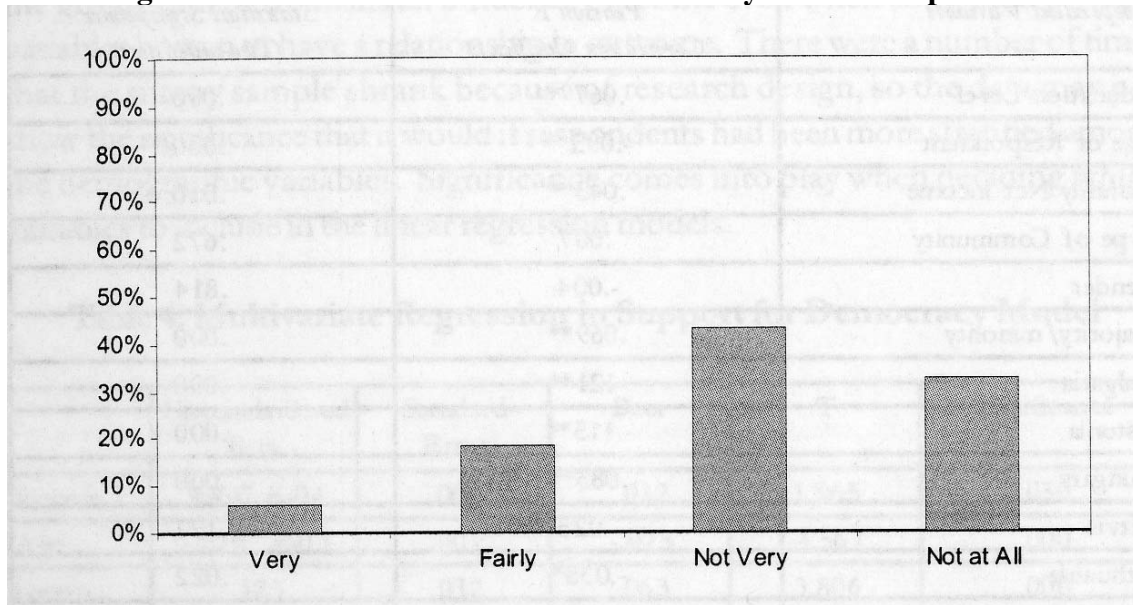


Figure 8. Levels of Satisfaction with Democracy of Roma Population



Figures 7 and 8 display Roma attitudes toward democracy to analyze whether we can establish a linkage between marginalization and support for/ satisfaction with democracy. More than 40% are not at all supportive of democracy while a little over 30% are not at all satisfied with the way democracy is working, with an α of 100. The findings in Figure 7 and, to a lesser extent, Figure 8 support the second hypothesis that the extent of dissatisfaction is high when minority group members experience high marginalization.

Statistical Findings: Expected Direction

In order to analyze the extent that group membership influences support for democracy, Tables 2 and 3 show bivariate correlations for all the independent variables in their relationship to support and satisfaction, respectively. Because group membership is correlated at .069 and .082 and is significant at the .01 level, we can reject the null hypothesis of no relationship between group status and support for democracy. In both tables, all variables moved in the expected direction. Young, highly educated, affluent, urban, males, and members of the majority ethnic group tend to be more supportive of democracy and more satisfied with the performance of the regime. These characteristics, not surprisingly, also describe the people who have reaped the benefits of transition. The dummy variables for country provide interesting information as well. People who live in Bulgaria tend to be dissatisfied, as are people who reside in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. People who reside in Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia tend to be supportive.

Table 2. Support for Democracy

<i>Independent Variable</i>	<i>Pearson R Correlation Coefficient</i>	<i>Statistical Significance (Two-tailed test)</i>
Education Level	.067**	.000

Age of Respondent	-.093**	.000
Monthly Net Income	.043"	.010
Type of Community	.007	.672
Gender	-.004	.814
Majority/minority	.069**	.000
Bulgaria	_.121**	.000
Hstonia	-.115**	.000
Hungary	.083**	.000
Latvia	-.025	.127
Li thu ania	-.038*	.022
Romania	.105**	.000
Slovakia	.118**	.000

Table 3. Satisfaction with democracy

<i>Independent Variable</i>	<i>Pearson R Correlation Coefficient</i>	<i>Statistical Significance (Two-tailed test)</i>
Education Level	.043 **	.011
Age of Respondent	-.106**	.000
Monthly Net Income	.039**	.022
Type of Community	.045**	.009
Gender	-.047**	.007
Majority/ minority	.082**	.000
Bulgaria	-.097**	.000
Estonia	-.054**	.002

Hungry	.074**	.000
Latvia	-.014	.402
Lithuania	-.087*	.000
Romania	.034*	.047
Slovakia	.148**	.000

Tables 4 and 5 display the multivariate results where the findings from Tables 2 and 3 still hold. The significance levels show that all demographic variables, with the exception of income, are significant to the 0.001 level. Direction is more important to this study than significance because we are testing to see whether the group variable remains an influence outcome even when compared to other variables known to have a relationship in outcome. There were a number of times that the survey sample shrank because of research design, so the data may not show the significance that it would if respondents had been more stratified among the demographic variables. Significance comes into play when deciding which variables to include in the linear regression models.

Table 4. Multivariate Regression in Support for Democracy Model

	Unstandardized Beta	Standard Error	Beta	T	Significance
Income	9.447 E-04	.000	.032	1.965	.050
Age	-3.207 fi-03	.001	-.075	-4.567	.000
Group	.123	.032	.063	3.806	.000
Bulgaria	-.193	.037	-.088	-5.201	.000
Lithuania	.231	.038	.103	6.160	.000
Romania	.239	.036	.111	6.588	.000
N=3610 F=29.823 Sig= .000 Adj R ² = .046					

Table 5. Multivariate Regression in Satisfaction with Democracy Model

	Unstandardized	Standard	Beta	T	Significance
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	Beta	Error			
Income	7.030 E-04	.000	.025	1.455	.146
Age	-4.014 R-03	.001	-.095	-5.567	.000
Group	.180	.032	.094	5.546	.000
Bulgaria	-.129	.037	-.060	-3.435	.001
Estonia	.238	.039	.106	6.074	.000
Romania	.292	.037	.138	7.957	.000
N=3392 F=3 1.460 Sig= .000 Adj R ² =.051					

Income remained in the regression models despite its relative insignificance in the correlation tables because of its importance in the literature. The variables of age, group, Bulgaria, and Romania were all retained for both models because significance was .000 and the Pearson's coefficient was stronger than most other variables. In the support model, Lithuania is included because of its level of significance. In the satisfaction model, Estonia is also included because of its significance. Again, the important aspect of the data here is the direction, not strength of significance. What is most relevant to the research is that group membership models in the expected direction because it supports the first hypothesis and remains a force along with the usual variables the literature presents.

The bivariate table and regression tables show that the 'group' category remains significant even when all other variables are held constant. Although it is important not to overstate the importance of ethnic cleavages, it is important to note that ethnic considerations do play a role in how people perceive levels of satisfaction.

Conclusions

Contrary to most research on the topic of democratic support, income here resulted in an insignificant numerical outcome in the model. This may be due to problems with measuring income on the individual level. The amount of money people make is a sensitive issue for a survey. Most studies evaluate economic variables on the aggregate level and yield results that find economics significant. Using individual level data from a survey like the CEEB, whose goal may be different from that used in the literature on this topic, may result in lower levels of significance. Perhaps the survey should include a specific section on attitudes toward economic perceptions, instead of a demographic variable of income. Splicing different surveys to get at comparative time perceptions of economic benefits was not possible here because the design remained on the individual level and the same respondents were required in order to make conclusions valid.

The data supported both original hypotheses, starting with cross-tabular data analysis through to linear regression models. Being a member of a minority is inversely related to support

for and satisfaction with democracy, and marginalized outgroups are more likely to be highly dissatisfied. Members of one highly marginalized minority, the Roma, express more dissatisfaction than any other response, which also corresponds with the initial theory put forth. The next step in research is to create a survey that is specifically geared toward the marginalization issue. It would poll minority groups of all kinds in Eastern Europe to see any fundamental economic and social differences among the minorities and compare them to levels of satisfaction. This preliminary study indicates that there is a link between the two. The cycle of marginalization begins with biased attitudes toward a group, offering them limited means, thus subjugating them to the lowest strata of society. Perhaps upset at this marginalization, the group displays behavior that, to the majority group, justifies the original stereotype. The Roma respondents were highly concentrated in the lowest level of educational attainment as well as the lowest income levels. This, in and of itself, shows that the Roma tend to have fewer means than the norm of society. The fact that they overwhelmingly respond as dissatisfied supports the theory.

All countries have the potential to achieve a balance of satisfying different sub-groups within the populace. In spite of lingering dissatisfaction in post-communist societies, each country has been able to meet at least the minimum requirements for democracy. They have accomplished this while struggling to overcome outdated industry, a weak economy, and a society disillusioned by politics, all of which were left behind by communism. The data shows that when studying support for democracy, the group with which individuals most identify matters in the outcome of responses.

Nicole Lalich graduated from Illinois Wesleyan University in 2001 with a double major in English Literature and Political Science and plans to attend the Law School of the University of Illinois beginning in Fall 2001. Honors awarded to Lalich include membership in Pi Sigma Alpha, Sigma Tau Delta (English honorary), and Phi Beta Kappa. This research was presented at the John Wesley Powell Research Conference at Illinois Wesleyan University,

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