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Inequality and Attitudes

Postcommunism,
Western Capitalism and Beyond

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Abteilung „Sozialstruktur und
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Abstract

This paper* deals with attitudes towards inequality in cross-national perspective using survey data of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) of 1992. Factor analysis shows that perceptions and evaluations of inequality and stratification refer to four attitudinal dimensions: Egalitarianism, meritocratic beliefs, functionalist convictions and the perception of non-universalistic status ascription. With these dimensions one gets an impression of the patterns of attitudes held in different countries. The main differences between post-communist and western capitalist countries concern egalitarian attitudes: East Europeans are much more egalitarian. This applies especially to the role of the state. Concerning the other three dimensions, other variables explain international variation in attitudes better than the belonging to the East or the West. Nevertheless, over the whole range of questions there is a visible separation between post-communist and western capitalist countries - but not into two „blocs“, but into a number of „families of nations“. Cluster analysis brings together societies that are similar in terms of social history as well as in terms of geography and welfare institutions.

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Introduction

In sociological theory as well as in empirical research, values and norms have been and still are a major topic. In this paper, I focus on an area of values, that is surely among the most important for the political and social organization of societies: attitudes towards inequality and distribution. In this paper I want to (1) propose a new scheme to classify such attitudes, based on survey material; (2) provide some information about the determinants of attitudes on the macro-level of society; and (3) show the similarities and differences between seventeen nations, including several New Democracies of Eastern Europe and several Western Democracies. Data base is the International Social Survey Programme of 1992. Thus it has to be kept in mind that the interpretations and conclusions regarding the post-communist countries included in this survey are limited to the first three years of transformation.

1 Theoretical considerations: dominant ideologies and ideology patterns

For many sociologists, the decisive question was: „Do societies have dominant ideologies?“ And as one can see, answers differ widely. Lane (1986), for example, argues that in all western societies, distribution according to work and performance is dominant, with only little cultural variation. Other scientists (e.g. Haller 1989) stress international differences in political culture. These variations are said to be either due to different cultural traditions or to different institutional settings, or to a combination of both. E.g. the citizens of the U.S. are often described as „individualistic“, while the Germans are labeled „collectivistic“. But maybe this is too simple. Kluegel (1989) discovered for one country (the United States) affirmative and critical views on inequality at the same time (he called this „split consciousness“). Therefore he introduced the distinction between dominant value orientation and challenging belief. But the disadvantage of this solution is that it remains unclear how to decide: which attitude is dominant, and which „only“ challenging? Being aware of this problem, Wegener (1992) developed a model of primary and secondary ideologies. But his criteria for the distinction of both are waterproofed only at first glance. One can easily find cases that do not fit into the model.

Table 1: Dimensions of attitudes towards inequality

Item	D 1	D 2	D 3	D 4
v57 „government: reduce income differences “	.79	-.14		
v56 „income differences are too large“	.79			-.16
v80 „deciding pay: what is needed to support family“	.54	.21	.11	.17
v25 „Inequality: because ordinary people don't join together“	.51			.38
v67 „conflicts between rich people and poor“	.45		.11	
v82 „deciding pay: does job well“		.72		
v9 „getting ahead: hard work“	-.11	.65		
v78 „deciding pay: years of education“	.14	.54	.20	.20
v5 „getting ahead: well-educated family“		.21	.72	
v13 „getting ahead: person's religion“		-.18	.63	.18
v10 „getting ahead: knowing the right people“	.15		.62	
v23 „large differences in incomes necessary for prosperity“	-.32		.14	.73
v19 „no extra responsibility unless more pay“	.24	.11		.58
<i>explained variance</i>	<i>18%</i>	<i>12%</i>	<i>9%</i>	<i>8%</i>

Factor loadings, 17 countries, N=20720, countries weighted to N=1000. Principle-component-method, orthogonal rotation (VARIMAX); only factors with eigenvalue > 1; only loadings $\geq .10$ listed. Database: ISSP 1992. Own calculations.

The main problem of the conceptualizations is, in my opinion, the mishandling of the multi-dimensionality of attitudes. Attitudes towards social inequality embrace several different aspects, because social inequality in itself is a heterogeneous phenomenon. Distribution of rewards is one thing, distribution of social positions another. The idea of equal outcomes is not the same as the idea of equal opportunities. One „ideology“ alone can not cover all these aspects. Therefore, a scheme for describing political cultures has to be multi-dimensional, too. With the ISSP-database it is possible to detect the multi-dimensionality. Using factor analysis I condensed around forty items to thirteen dimensions in a first step; then these thirteen dimensions (each represented by one item) to four dimensions in a second step.

These dimensions are:

Dimension 1: Egalitarianism is characterized by critical views about current distributions of rewards and power and by the conviction, that society should be more equal, with the government as the central agent to achieve leveling.

Dimension 2: Meritocratic attitudes imply a positive evaluation of the performance-oriented society: the conviction, that the performance of the individual is actually decisive for getting ahead in life; and the conviction, that wages should be distributed according to work and position.

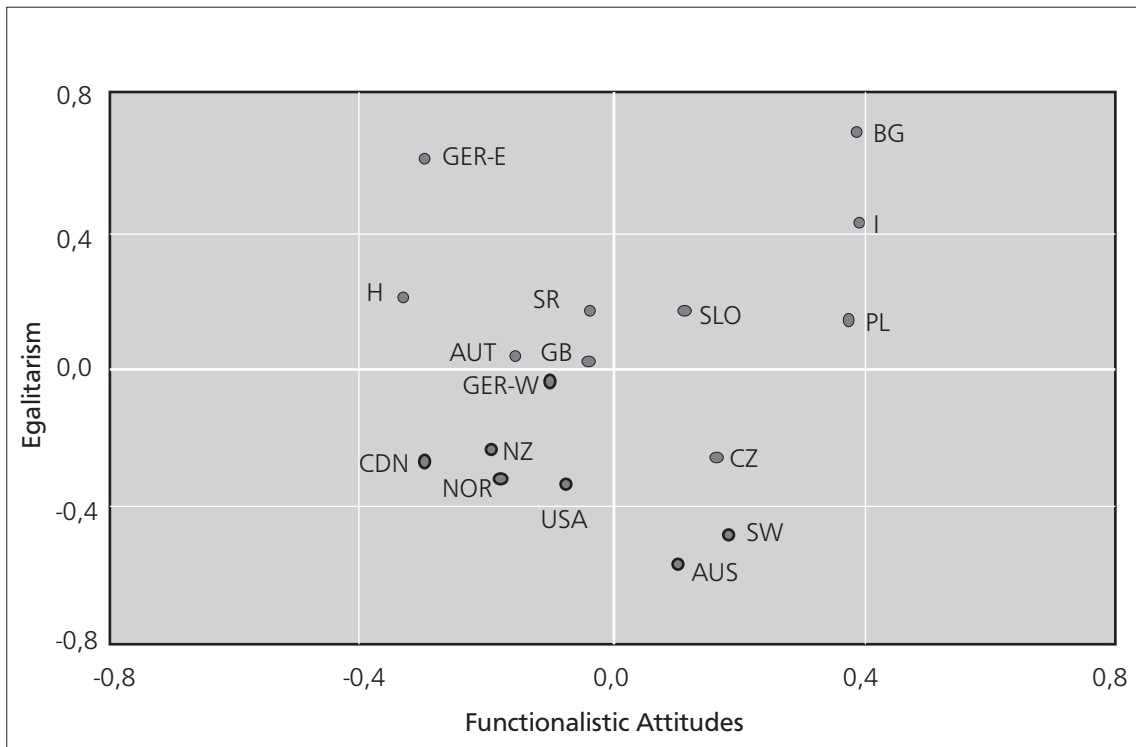
Dimension 3: The third dimension implies a critical view about status attainment. The question is: How important are non-universalistic principles (social background, connections etc.) for being successful in life? This dimension can be named status by means of ascription.

Dimension 4: Functionalistic attitudes contain opinions, that inequality has positive effects on society - either at the macro-level of society (by stimulating growth), or at the micro-level (by motivating individuals).

Now each country can be characterized by an average score on each of the four dimensions. These scores can be low, medium or high. Purpose of this scheme is not to identify one ideology that is „dominant“ or more common compared to the other three. Rather, this approach identifies the specific combinations of aspects assembled in the attitude towards inequality.

Next I will look at the pattern of attitudes held in the different countries participating in the ISSP. Because Hungary is our host, I choose Hungary as an example. Compared to the other nations, the Hungarian population is rather egalitarian; the score of functionalist attitudes is among the lowest; meritocratic views are also at a very low level; and last but not least „illegitimate“ status attainment is perceived as comparably unimportant.

Chart 1: Geography of beliefs in inequality - mean national factor scores



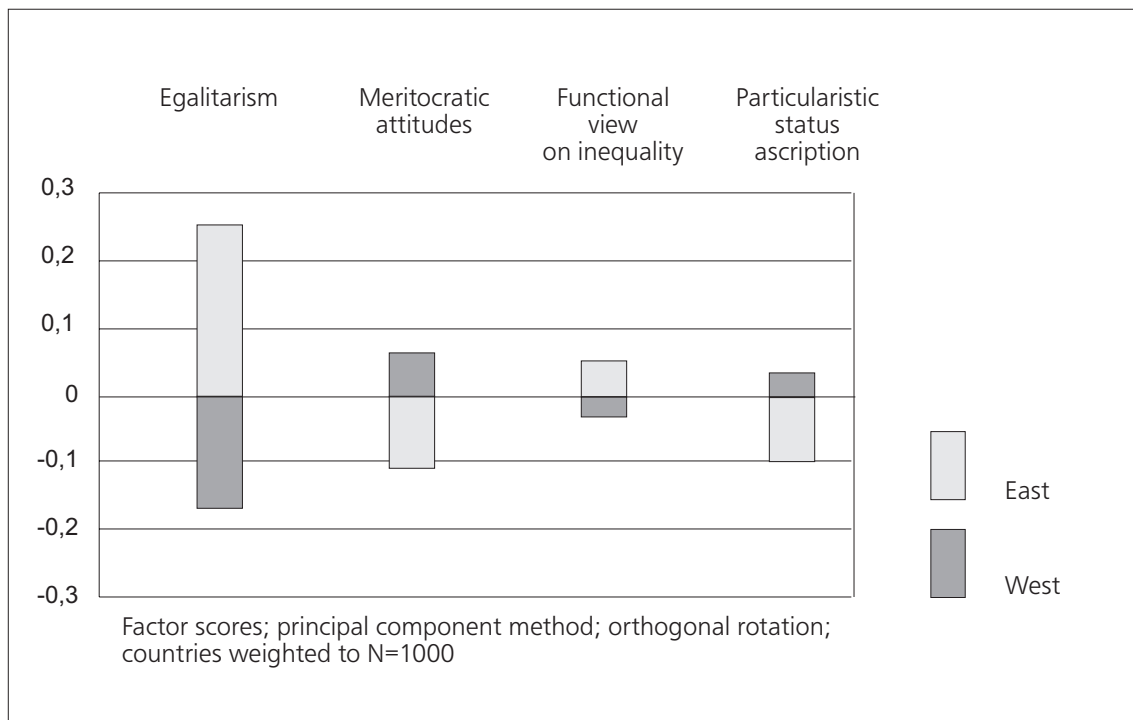
Database: ISSP 1992. Own calculations.

2 Determinants: „former system“ and beyond

Now I come to the second part: the determinants of attitudes. I want to start with a comparison between two different groups of societies, that is most interesting from a theoretical point of view: a comparison between post-communist and western capitalist societies. The assumption to be tested reads like: former system matters. Because of the ideological and institutional foundation of state socialism, the much lower average living standard and the economic and social costs of the first years of transformation (including the widening gap between rich and poor people), public views on inequality and stratification are expected to be more critical in Eastern Europe.

The survey data reveal one huge difference between the averages of both groups of countries. This is, the respondents in the CEEC are much more egalitarian. This applies especially for the role of the state. Citizens of the post-communist societies are much more in favour of a paternalistic state. Furthermore, respondents of the former eastern bloc are less meritocratic, which also is in line with expectations. For a long time, societies have actually been less meritocratic. Regarding non-universalistic status attainment, western respondents are slightly more critical about it. No significant difference occur on the functionalist dimension.

Chart 2: Ideology patterns in East and West - average means of factor scores



Database: ISSP 1992. Own calculations.

Table 2: Macro-structural determinants of attitudes (eta-coefficients)

Variable (number of categories)	Egalitarian attitudes	Meritocr. attitudes	Function- alism	Status by means of ascription
wealth (5)	.21	.23 (not linear!)	.16 (not linear!)	.18 (not linear!)
level of inequality (4)	.18 (not linear!)	.23	.04	.20
former system (2)	.21	.08	.04	.06
welfare regimes (5)	.27	.21	.10	.17
confession (4)	.23	.15	.13	.02
European (2)	.19	.17	.06	.08
MAT/PMAT (3)	.24	.07	.08	.08

All coefficients are significant at .000-level (at individual level).

Note: „not linear“ = presumably a statistical artifact.

Database: ISSP 1992. Own calculations.

Former system matters - but not always very much. It is most important if questions touch the idea of equality of outcomes and the role of government. This can be explained mainly by the ideological legacies of socialism, but also by the social insecurities and the rise of economic differences during the transition period. The New Democracies are in a special, hybrid position between Marx and Markets. All Central and East European Countries (CEEC) score high or very high on egalitarian attitudes - only the Czechs seem to have left the „one world of post-communism“. In the West, scores on egalitarianism vary much more. In this respect, Sovietization had a clear homogenizing impact on value systems.

Are there other macro-structural determinants, that explain international variation better? With a series of Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA) at individual level, I have tested several other possible determinants, some of them being cultural (e.g. dominant confession), some structural (e.g. level of income inequality), some mainly institutional (e.g. welfare regimes).

It follows from this analysis, that „former system“ is a good variable to explain egalitarian values (although challenged by other important determinants, too), but it is not a good variable for explaining the other three dimensions.

Meritocratic attitudes are much more influenced by actual income distribution, welfare regimes and cultural variables like religion or the division between European and non-European Anglo-Saxon countries.

Functional explanations of inequality seem to be connected strongest with confession, with catholic and especially orthodox countries having the highest score.

The feeling that „illegitimate“ factors or mechanisms are important for getting ahead in life is explained best by actual income distribution (low score in countries with small income differences) and by different welfare regimes.

Eta coefficients are generally highest concerning egalitarian opinions. Welfare regime and religion are the best explaining variables. The high coefficient for the former is not surprising, because welfare regimes combine institutional aspects of societies as well as structural and cultural aspects. Strong egalitarian opinions can be found especially in corporatist and in post-leninist welfare states. It is remarkable that the division between Europe and the New World is almost as important as the division between post-communism and western capitalism. The strong influence of living standard indicates, that the high scores in the CEEC can partly be understood as „scarcity values“, which is also underlined by the correlation between egalitarian values and Inglehart's (1995) materialism/postmaterialism-index.

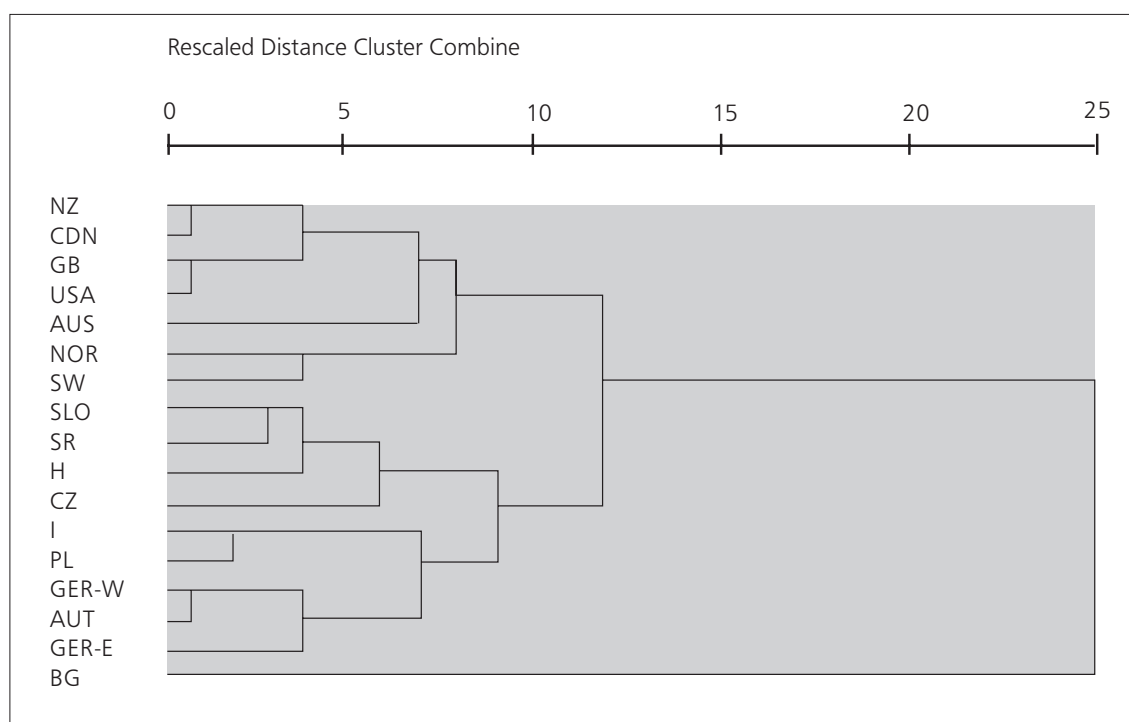
3 Similarities across countries: an international perspective

Now I come to the third part. In an international comparison, I want to see which countries are akin to each other regarding their political cultures? The best method to show similarities is Cluster analyses. I have used nearly all the data material the ISSP provides. Searching for a clear solution with only a small number of clusters, the following classification can be made, with the square brackets indicating „outsiders“ within clusters:

Cluster 1: NZ, CDN, GB, USA, [AUS]
Cluster 2: NOR, SW
Cluster 3: SLO, SR, H, [CZ]
Cluster 4: [I, PL], G-W, AUT, G-E
Cluster 5: BG

The diagram (chart 3) contains three main messages. First, only cluster 4 contains post-communist as well as western capitalist countries. All other clusters are „pure“ clusters, in the one or the other direction. The differences between the two groups of countries, though often not being marked, accumulate to a certain degree. Second, the Bulgarians have the most unique attitudes towards inequality. The other New Democracies are united with all

Chart 3: Families of nations according cluster analysis



Hierarchical cluster analysis; average linkage (between groups)
 Database: ISSP 1992. Own calculations.

the western nations, before Bulgaria is adopted. Third, cluster analysis brings together countries which are very similar in terms of social history as well as in terms of geography and welfare states. This gives some hints about how macro-structural determinants of attitudes interact. And this verifies considerations of Haller (1989), that social reality is somehow filtered by institutions and cultural models before reaching social consciousness.

Cluster 1 contains exclusively Anglo-Saxon countries, with Puritanism or Calvinism being historically dominant religions. In terms of welfare states, liberal and labourite welfare regimes are included. Income inequality is rather high, especially in the United States. Political culture is shaped more than in the other polled nations by liberal ideas and a strong emphasis on individualism. Moreover, the non-European countries had a particular development with the absence of feudalism and the experience of safe borders.

Cluster 2 is the Scandinavian cluster. Lutheran-protestant countries, with small class conflicts and small income differences due to universalistic, social-democratic welfare regimes.

Table 3: Ideology patterns by clusters of countries

Dimension	Cluster 1 „Anglo-Saxon“	Cluster 2 „Nordic“	Cluster 3 „CEEC“	Cluster 4 „Corporatist“	Cluster 5 Bulgaria
Egalitarianism	low	low	medium	high	very high
Functionalism	medium	medium	medium	medium	high
Meritocratic attitudes	high	low	low	medium	high
Ascription	medium	low	low	high	medium

Classification: medium = Factor score $]-.15;+.15[$; high = $[+.15;+.30[$; very high = $\geq +.30$;

low = $]-.30;-.15[$; very low = $\leq -.30$.

Database: ISSP 1992. Own calculations.

The Central-East-European post-communist countries, that belonged to the Austrian-Hungarian empire before World War I, constitute the third cluster. All have made a clear break with communist regimes and are rather similar in terms of economic development. Historically, Catholicism was the dominant confession.

Cluster 4 covers the conservative welfare states Italy, Austria and Germany (including East Germany) plus Poland, which is very close to Italy. Historically, Italy, Austria and Germany share late nation building and democratization, a strong impact of the state in modernization and a strong position of socialist parties, working-class movements and unions. With the exception of Germany, the catholic church with its anti-capitalist social doctrine was dominant. Compared to the Nordic countries or the CEEC, class inequalities are rather high.

Cluster 5, Bulgaria, is a single-country-cluster. In general, with its orthodox tradition and the domination by Ottoman empire Bulgaria is a clearly east-European country with a long egalitarian tradition. Income inequality has risen sharply since 1989. Transformation has been less successful when compared to Poland, Hungary or the former CSFR. In contrast to the CEEC, Bulgarian industrialization took place almost entirely under the communist regime.

In table 3, the ideology pattern of each cluster are listed. In a comparative view, the Anglo-Saxon cluster stands out with its combination of low score on egalitarianism and high score on meritocratic attitudes. The Scandinavian countries and the CEEC are very similar regarding their weak meritocratic beliefs and the low score of ascription, but they differ considerably in their egalitarian values. The conservative cluster is unique in its critical view on status ascription. And the Bulgarians stand out with the highest score on

egalitarianism, combined with a strong belief in the positive effects of inequality. In these patterns, real inequality regimes as well as institutional settings and cultures leave their mark, with the former filtered by the latter. The low egalitarian score of both the Nordic cluster and the Anglo-Saxon cluster is a good example: The Scandinavian score is low, because the Scandinavian societies are rather egalitarian. The Anglo-Saxon score is low, although their societies are rather inegalitarian. This confirms Hallers thesis of filter processes.

The analysis confirms also findings of Mason (1995), that „values and attitudes in East European countries are much closer to those in West Europe .. than to those in the United States“. Obviously the Central European countries share more than just neighbourhood. The comparative perspective leads also to a re-interpretation of the special German case. The „wall in the heads“ is a very popular description of Germany’s problem of now being one nation, but with two distinct societies. In the ISSP, some bricks of this wall are easy to detect (mainly in the egalitarian dimension). Nevertheless, in a more general view opinions towards stratification and inequality are not too different - otherwise the two Germanies would not come together in the same cluster. This is in line with results of Inglehart, who wrote, with respect to materialism/postmaterialism, on the basis of a 40-countries-survey:

„But even more impressive is the fact that, in global perspective, the basic cultural values of the two societies [former GDR and FRG, J.D.] were still relatively similar. This natural experiment indicates that, even when it makes a conscious and concerted effort to do so, the ability of a regime to reshape its underlying culture is limited. After 45 years under radically different political institutions, East Germany and West Germany were still as similar to each other as are the United States and Canada“ (Inglehart 1995: 395).

Acknowledgements

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Sample sizes in the ISSP 1992 and used abbreviations

Australia (AUS) 2203, Austria (AUT) 1027, Bulgaria (BG) 1198, Canada (CDN) 1004, Czech Republic (CZ) 678, East Germany (GER-E) 1094, West Germany (GER-W) 2297, Great Britain (GB) 1066, Hungary (H) 1250, Italy (I) 996, New Zealand (NZ) 1239, Norway (NOR) 1538, Poland (PL) 1636, Slovak Republik (SR) 423, Slovenia (SLO) 1049, Sweden (SW) 749, United States of America (USA) 1273.

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