

Kazimierz M. Slomczynski
The Ohio State University
slomczynski.1@osu.edu

**WHO STILL LIKES SOCIALISM AND WHY?
STRUCTURAL DETERMINANTS OF POLITICAL OPINIONS
IN POLAND***

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Introduction

In 1998, almost ten years after the fall of the system of so-called “real socialism,” in Poland roughly one third of the adult population assessed that socialism had brought most people more gains than losses. Data collected for following years reveal that the proportion of persons noting some good features of socialism does not decrease rapidly.¹ Why is this so? Is it because the “old guard” of those who were doing well under socialism stubbornly sticks to their old—and for them justified—assessments of that era? Or is it because, among the people who spent a major part of their lives under socialism, the old supporters of that system are replaced by the new? Although such questions are often asked in academic debates as well as social conversations, there have been few attempts to provide answers using a sound analysis of survey data. This paper constitutes such an attempt, using a panel survey, conducted in 1987-88, 1993, and 1998 in Poland.

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Theoretical Considerations

The main objective of this paper is to describe attitudes toward socialism among different social groups, especially social classes. The post-communist transition in Poland has formed a new pattern of social inequality. In particular, social classes – such as managers, experts, owners, supervisors, self-employed, office workers, skilled and unskilled manual workers, and farmers – play a different role in the market economy than they did in a command economy, and their shares in unequally divided goods have changed. A new category, the unemployed, became a part of the class structure. In addition, the economic situation of retirees and pensioners has altered in recent years.

Some of these segments of the population have gained in the process of the post-communist transition (managers, experts, owners, and supervisors) while others have lost (farmers, unemployed, and retirees and pensioners, in particular). Under the assumptions of self-interest and rational-choice theories, the general expectation is that subjective attitudes toward socialism significantly depend on actual and potential gains and losses stemming from the individual's position in the class structure. We examine in a dynamic manner the impact of people's current position in the class structure on attitudes toward socialism, taking into account their current and past judgments. Generally, we test the major hypothesis according to which *utilitarian calculations associated with individuals' location in the class structure produce not only different assessment of the past but also some changes of opinion*. In particular, we expect that *among winners the tendency to condemn socialism would have increased in time while among losers the opposite would be true: more and more individuals from this group would praise the socialist past*.

In recent years, Polish sociologists have presented a large number of studies dealing with the psychological aspects of the post-communist transition. These diverse studies focus on assessments of the system of political power (e.g., Ziółkowski, Pawłowska and Dąbrowski 1994), every-day ideas on democracy (e.g., Reykowski 1995), the public's interpretations of the political and economic situation in Poland (e.g., Kurcz and Bobryka 1997), opinions on various aspects of governance and the welfare state (e.g., Zagórski and Strzeszewski 2000), every-day understanding of social and political phenomena (e.g., Wojciszke and Jarymowicz 1999), and social justice (Cichomski, Kozek, Morawski and Morawski 2001). Most of the results of these studies provide adequate descriptions of the social and political attitudes in cross-sectional framework. Our study differs from these in that it pertains to *changes of opinion over time*.

We assume that the changes of opinion in political matters are something natural and easily understood; they depend on the individual interests of the persons involved. Even if the object of opinion remains the same—in our case, the *former political system*—the context in which this object is perceived and evaluated may, and usually does, change. To answer the question “who changes opinions and in what way?” a database is needed that stores information on opinions of the same persons at different points in time.

Data

The data that we utilize in this paper come from a panel study that took place in Poland in 1987-1988, 1993, and 1998. At the end of 1987 and the beginning of 1988 5,854 adult persons aged 21 to 65 took part in the survey. The questionnaire primarily concerned

social inequality but it also dealt with various issues of a political nature. This wave of research is usually referred to as 1988 (Słomczyński et al. 1989). In the second wave of the study, a random sample of respondents (N = 2,500) was drawn from the first-wave sample (Domański and Słomczyński 1994). Most of the questionnaire remained the same but many new questions pertaining to the ongoing transformation process were added. Finally, in 1998, in its third wave, the research involved all respondents from the two previous waves. While the questionnaire was modified slightly, the context of political questions remained basically the same (Słomczyński 2002). It should be noted that the response rate in both panel waves was greater than 75%, which is within the limits used by the public opinion centers for cross-sectional surveys rather than panel studies.

Assessment of Socialism and Its Change over Time: A Simple Analysis of Panel Data

Table 1 presents the distribution of answers to the question pertaining to the assessment of socialism in Poland. The question reads: *Do you think that the socialist system brought to the majority of people in Poland: (1) gains only, (2) more gains than losses, (3) as many gains as losses, (4) more losses than gains, or (5) losses only?* The first two categories of answers are considered as a *positive assessment of socialism*, the middle category—as a *neutral assessment*, and the last two categories combined—as a *negative assessment of socialism*.

The similarity in the proportions of persons providing a positive assessment of socialism for years 1988-1998 is striking: this proportion fluctuates between 28.7% and 33.7%, showing a slight tendency to rise. The distribution for 1988 differs from all other

years mainly because it includes a greater number of neutral assessments. However, if the negative and the neutral assessments are combined into one category, then the differences among the three distributions are very small, not exceeding 5%. Does this similarity of distributions prove that people do not change their opinions over time?

The answer to this question is negative. Between 1988 and 1993 and between 1993 and 1998, only 40.4% to 51.3% of the respondents did not change their opinions over the five-year periods (cf., the main diagonal of the part A and part B of Table 2). The changes that occurred were quite regular. Changes from a neutral opinion to a positive opinion involved 27.1% of persons between 1988 and 1993 and 28.8% between 1993 and 1998. Changes from a negative to a positive opinion were less frequent, in the range of 23% five-year-periods.

Regularities in opinion changes become even more striking when we apply a dichotomy: *positive vs. non-positive opinions*. A partial confirmation of this result is presented in Table 3. Among persons who did not have a positive opinion about socialism in 1998, about 60% had the same non-positive opinion in 1988 and 1993. The corresponding stability of positive opinions is 20% lower. This result makes the question about *who* changes opinions for positive even more interesting.

Before we address this question, it is important to emphasize that opinions from the past strongly influence opinions of the present. The logistic regression equation for the *positive* opinions about socialism in 1998 dependent on those opinions in 1993 and 1988 is the following:

$$Y_{1998} = -1.082 + 1.055 * X_{1993} + 0.207 * X_{1988}$$

(.071)

(.109)

(.104)

where Y_{1998} is defined as logarithm $(p / 1 - p)$, with p being the probability of a positive opinion on socialism in 1998; X_{1993} and X_{1988} are the values of the dichotomous variable of the opinion on socialism (1 = a positive opinion, 0 = any other opinion) in 1993 and 1988, respectively. The coefficients of the equation were estimated using LIMDEP.

Below the equation, in parentheses, we provide the standard errors. They are relatively small as compared to the parameters and they show that the impact of variables X_{1993} and X_{1988} on variable Y_{1998} is statistically significant at $p < 0.01$. Exponents for model parameters are 2,871 and 1,230, respectively. The first of these parameters means that the ratio of persons who had positive opinions on socialism in 1993 and expressed the same opinion five years later to the persons changing opinion from non-positive to positive is about three. According to the second parameter, for a person who had a positive opinion on socialism in 1988, the chances of expressing a positive opinion about socialism ten years later are 23% higher than in the case of a person who had a non-positive attitude in the initial period (1988). These results demonstrate that, although the past opinions make an impact on the present opinions, this impact rapidly decreases over time.² Therefore, because the proportion of persons expressing positive opinions on socialism is constant in time, the issue of opinion change becomes particularly important.

Position in Social Structure and Opinions on Socialism

In this paper, social classes are defined by relations of control over production and distribution of goods and services. These relations, *implicitly* or *explicitly* involving

relations of ownership, pertain in the first place to the process of work and its organization. Accepting this assumption, we also presuppose that social structure in Poland should be considered dynamically and reflect its national specific features (for discussion of these requirements, see Kohn and Slomczynski 1993; Slomczynski and Shabad 1997). Consequently, we utilize the following scheme of class categories:

1. *Managers* denote higher management executives in manufacturing and service companies, and also higher administration officials. In socialism—that is, until 1989—this category was an extension of the state-power apparatus. During the time of the post-communist transformation, the category consists of politicians and leaders managing state-owned and private companies.

2. *Experts* make up the category consisting of all those who work on jobs requiring at least a college degree. Traditionally, these people belong to the upper layers of the *intelligentsia*. Although the role of this class changed during both the velvet revolution of 1989 and the political and economic changes that followed, its defining characteristics are the same: occupational skills and qualifications.

3. *Owners* form the group among whom we selected only persons owning their companies and employing workers outside their close families. This is a category that actually emerged during the post-communist transformation. For the earlier period, those very few owners who hired outside workers were included, together with the independent contractors, in the category of self-employed.

4. *First-line supervisors* are individuals directly supervising the work of the smallest work-teams, usually 2 to 25 workers. They differ from managers in that their power is limited to just one sphere—the process of work.

5. *Self-employed* are those owners of businesses who do not employ workers outside their families. In socialism they constituted the core of the “private business,” being a rather homogeneous group of craftsmen and small shopkeepers. As a result of post-communist transformation, this group became internally differentiated. Eventually, the class of owners emerged from it.

6. *Lower-level non-manual workers – office workers*. The requirement of making a substantial mental effort in the process of work is a criterion enabling us to distinguish lower-level non-manual workers from manual workers. This group does not include the experts, who constitute a separate class category.

7. *Skilled manual workers* are mainly factory workers. Under socialism they were referred to as the *avant-garde of the working class*. However, in the process of post-communist transformation, their role changed dramatically, particularly in heavy industry.

8. *Unskilled manual workers* are employees who can be trained to perform on the job in a relatively short time, usually not longer than six months. A substantial proportion of these workers are employed in services requiring the performance of simple tasks.

9. *Farmers* make up a category that is highly differentiated with respect to qualifications and affluence. What links them together is ownership and cultivation of the soil. Under socialism farmers were very much dependent on the state, in that they needed to purchase state manufactured and controlled agricultural machines and other necessary materials necessary for their production process. Their agricultural production was also contracted by the state, practically their only large-scale customer. In the time

of post-communist transformation, competition on the market with cheap Western agricultural products became a real problem for Polish farmers.

In addition to these class categories, we distinguish the jobless, or *unemployed*, as a quasi-class category. We also take here into account the auxiliary category of persons who are neither employed nor seeking jobs, composed mainly of retirees and pensioners. Because retirees and pensioners do not differ from each other with respect to their opinions on socialism, we combine them into one category.

Table 4 demonstrates that, in 1988, 1993, and 1998, social class was an important factor influencing the proportion of persons having positive opinions on socialism. Inter-class differences are high – a maximum greater than 20% for each year. This result suggests that we should not reject the null hypothesis according to which the relationship between social class and a positive opinion on socialism is random at any point in time.

In addition, changes over time are remarkable. In 1988, the proportions of persons expressing opinions that the gains from socialism were greater than the losses are highest among managers, experts, retirees and pensioners, and supervisors. In the same year, the relative frequency of the same opinions was lowest among self-employed, unskilled manual workers, and farmers.

Ten years later, the frequency of support for socialism among these classes underwent a *radical change*. This change is described in the last column of Table 4. In the case of experts and managers we observe a *regular and significant decrease* in positive assessments of socialism: In 1988, they were at the top of the support-hierarchy for socialism, while, in 1998, they landed at the very bottom (experts), or close to it (managers). In contrast, among unskilled manual workers and farmers we observe a

large increase of positive assessments of socialism for the entire period of 1988-98. For some categories an increase of such assessments occurred only in the 1993-98 period, especially for retirees and pensioners, and the self-employed. In only two categories – owners and office workers – we observe no significant change overtime in the relative frequency of positive opinions of socialism.

Managers, owners, experts, and first-line supervisors are social classes that have gained during the post-communist transformation.³ In further analysis we will treat these categories together, as *winners*. Separately, we include three categories of losers: farmers, unemployed, and retirees and pensioners.

Because our analysis in Table 5 includes the lagged variable, the regression coefficients for all other variables can be interpreted as coefficients of change. Therefore, we conclude that winners relatively often shifted their opinions on socialism from positive to negative or neutral. In both models (with the lagged variables either for 1993 or for 1988), the B-coefficients are negative and statistically significant (at $p < 0.01$). Losers, in contrast, relatively often shifted their opinions on socialism from negative, or neutral, to positive. For them, the B-coefficients are positive and also statistically significant. Since belonging to the category of retirees and pensioners is highly correlated with age, we control for this demographic variable. Even under this condition, the impact of belonging to the category of retirees and pensioners on the favorable assessment of socialism is positive, strong, and significant.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have attempted to answer the question: *who still likes socialism and why?* The word “likes” obviously has a relative connotation: some people like the socialist past more than others. For example, in Poland, ten years after the collapse of socialism, about 40% of retirees and pensioners, farmers, and the unemployed perceived the advantages of this past system. This is in opposition to experts and owners, only 16-17% of whom expressed this opinion. We claim that such differences mirror the differences in success attained during the post-communist transformation by various social classes.⁴

Those who became winners in the process of transformation were, at its start in the late 1980s, in the forefront of those who liked socialism. However, when their success strengthened in the new system, they forgot about the advantages stemming from the old regime. Those who became losers in the transformation, at the beginning of the process were the most critical of the old system, yet once they found themselves in a bad situation—as compared to the other social groups—they realized the advantages of socialism. We are convinced that a simple mechanism of individual interests is responsible for this change of opinions about the past.

Mirosława Marody (1996) found that adequate adaptation to the new sociopolitical system—democracy and capitalism—depends on establishing instrumental ties of this system with individual life goals. She wrote: “Democracy ceases to be a goal *per se* and it starts to be assessed through the lens of social position as well as the costs and gains brought by functioning in different systemic conditions” (p. 276). As it turns out, the same can be stated—*mutatis mutandis*—about the past: People assess the past

through the lens of their social position as well as the costs and gains that they had in this past and that they have in the current system. In this light, the premise of this paper is simple: individual interests, well grounded in one's location in the social structure, constitute the basic mechanism of time-variation in political opinions.

Notes

1. Surveys of the Research Center of Public Opinion (Zagórski and Strzeszewski 2000) support the claim that the proportion of Poles expressing positive attitudes toward socialism does not diminish over time. The research of Banaszak and Rowicki (2002) indicates that socialism is defined by ordinary people mainly in terms of egalitarian division of goods, nationalized means of production, welfare state provisions, and equality of civil rights. This study, conducted in 1988 among men and women aged 18-35, shows that about one-third of respondent used an “antisocialist definition of socialism” (p. 165). For a comprehensive analysis of memory and forgetting after communism, see Ziółkowski 2002.

2. We are aware that the estimates of parameters in this equation are biased in that the procedure used for their calculation does not account for correlations between error terms of the dependent variable and each of the lagged (independent) variables. To correct for this bias, we estimated a *probit* model, using LIMDEP (see Chapter 22 of the manual). Essentially, the results are the same: present opinions (i.e., those expressed in 1998) are influenced more by relatively recent opinions (in 1998) than they are by those from the more distant past (in 1993).

3. Among studies defining the winners in the stratification system see Domański 2000; Słomczyński and Shabad 2000; Słomczyński 2002.

4. In this context, we would like to refer to Marek Ziółkowski’s (2002) thoughtful comment: “Paradoxically, the proportion of those who uphold an idealized image of certain aspects of the communist [system] ... could well be higher than it was at the time. This does not imply that people long for communism as a political system. Rather, it

creates a peculiar type of nostalgia which laminates the severity of the past, while weaving the resulting perceptions of the past back into the present. The advent of nostalgia entails the ambiguous longing for imaginary pasts, but not for their returns.”(p. 19).

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Table 1. Assessment of Socialism in 1988, 1993 and 1998

Year	Assessment ^a			N = 100%
	Positive ^b	Neutral ^c	Negative ^d	
	Percent of persons			
1988	28,7	46,8	24,5	2278
1993	30,0	37,8	32,3	2264
1998	33,7	35,8	30,5	1767

^a The questionnaire item: *Do you think that the socialist system brought the majority of people in Poland: (1) gains only, (2) more gains than losses, (3) as many gains as losses, (4) more losses than gains, or (5) losses only?*

^b Answer (1) and (2).

^c Answer (3) and *don't know*.

^d Answer (4) and (5).

Table 2. Changes in Assessment of Socialism in 1988-1993 and 1993-1998

Assessment	Assessment ^a			N = 100%
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	
	Percent of persons			
In 1988	A. Changes in 1988-1993 ^b			
Positive	40,4	34,5	25,1	569
Neutral	27,1	40,9	32,0	1050
Negative	23,3	35,5	41,2	640
In 1993	B. Changes in 1993-1998 ^c			
Positive	51,3	32,0	16,7	570
Neutral	28,8	45,5	25,7	666
Negative	23,2	27,9	48,9	530

^a Pytanie kwestionariusza i oznaczenia odpowiedzi podane są w tabeli 1.

^b Podstawą procentowania są odpowiedzi udzielone w 1988 roku.

^c Podstawą procentowania są odpowiedzi udzielone w 1993 roku.

Table 3. Assessment of Socialism in 1998 and in the Past (1988-1993)

Assessment of socialism in the past	Assessment of socialism in 1998	
	Positive	Non-positive ^a
	Percent of persons	
Positive in 1993 and 1988	19,5	7,6
Positive in 1993 but not in 1988	26,2	14,5
Non-positive in 1993 and positive in 1988	14,1	18,6
Non positive in 1993 and 1988	40,2	59,3
Total, N = 100%	596	1165

^a Non-positive assessment consists of both negative and neutral; see Table 1.

Table 4. Percent of Persons Positively Assessing Socialism, by Social Class, 1988, 1993 and 1998

Social Class	Years			Comments
	1988	1993	1998	
	Percent of persons expressing positive assessment of socialism ^a			
Managers	45,8	35,4	26,3	Regular and significant decrease
Experts	34,9	22,0	16,3	Regular and significant decrease
Owners	---	17,2	16,6	Lack of change in 1993-1998
Supervisors	32,9	23,8	24,7	Significant decrease in 1988-1993 and subsequent stability
Self-employed	16,6	18,8	30,8	Lack of change in 1988-1993 and subsequent increase
Office workers	26,2	21,1	22,4	Random fluctuation
Skilled manual workers	24,9	31,4	26,3	Increase in 1988-1993 and decrease in 1993-1998
Unskilled manual workers	21,5	28,6	32,2	Regular and significant increase
Farmers	25,9	39,8	42,4	Large increase in 1988-1993 and small increase in 1993-1998
Unemployed	---	32,7	42,3	Significant increase in 1993-1998
Retirees and pensioners	34,5	32,3	41,3	Lack of change in 1993-1998 and subsequent large increase
Total	28,4	29,5	33,9	Lack of change in 1993-1998 and subsequent small increase

Table 5. Logistic Regression of the Assessment of Socialism in 1998 on Social Class and Age, with Lagged Dependent Variable

Independent variables	Assessment of Socialism in 1998 (positive assessment = 1, otherwise = 0) Log (p / 1 - p)		
	B	SE	ExpB
Model with the Assessment of Socialism in 1993 ^a			
Assessment of socialism, 1993 ^b	1,021	0,111	2,777
Winners	-0,252	0,101	0,777
Farmers	0,541	0,196	1,718
Unemployed	0,797	0,232	2,220
Retirees and pensioners	0,582	0,152	1,790
Age	0,001	0,006	1,001
Constant	-1,392	0,275	
Model with the Assessment of Socialism in 1988 roku ^c			
Assessment of socialism, 1988 ^b	0,361	0,112	1,435
Winners	-0,336	0,188	0,715
Farmers	0,711	0,190	2,035
Unemployed	0,770	0,227	2,160
Retirees and pensioners	0,573	0,149	1,774
Age	0,005	0,006	1,005
Constant	-1,346	0,269	

^a Chi² = 144,9; -2log(likelihood) = 2114,6; Pseudo R² = 0,109

^b Positive assessment = 1; otherwise = 0.

^c Chi² = 69,3; -2log(likelihood) = 2185,6; Pseudo R² = 0,053