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Why Feed the Hand that Bites You?

Quality of Government and System Support in the Post-Communist EU Member States

Jonas Linde

QoG WORKING PAPER SERIES 2009:20

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August 2009

ISSN 1653-8919

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Introduction

The inclusion of ten post-communist countries into the European Union is probably the best indicator of democratic consolidation in these countries. The membership has made democracy “the only game in town” in the same way as in the established democracies in Western Europe. The new member states have all successfully shown their credentials when it comes to democratic government, market economy and the implementation of the *acquis communautaire*. However, despite the fact that citizens now enjoy the same political and civil rights as their counterparts in the West, numerous indicators point to the fact that the Central and East European countries lag far behind the old West European member states when it comes to the performance of the democratic political system and its institutions, especially when it comes to corruption (cf. Berg-Schlosser 2004; Karklins 2005; Holmes 2006). According to *Transparency International* levels of corruption in Romania and Bulgaria are on par with those of Mexico and Swaziland.¹

Low quality government and poorly performing political institutions are part of a reality that has to be dealt with in everyday life for many people around the globe. For many ordinary citizens democratisation implies not only universal political rights and civil liberties, but also a hope for a fair political system that can bring an end to corruption and other aspects of poor governance. For many East European citizens, however, the harsh reality of democratic transition did not match their expectations. And in many cases, they are clearly in a position to be able to demand more from their elected representatives and the political system in general. Political institutions receive the support and trust they deserve through their performance record. And in most post-communist countries the performance of the democratic political system has not lived up to even quite humble expectations (cf. Mishler & Rose 2001).

The result has come to be widespread discontent and distrust in democratic political institutions, in some cases to the extent that the legitimacy of the democratic regime could be questioned. Being the foundation of democratic legitimacy and an indispensable part of democratic consolidation, citizens’ perceptions of the quality of their government and institutions constitute an important empirical research question that in fact has received surprisingly limited interest from scholars within comparative politics.

This paper analyses the relationship between quality of government (QoG) and system support in the ten recent post-communist member states of the European Union. More

¹ http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2008/regional_highlights_factsheets

specifically, it focuses on citizens' evaluations and perceptions about the quality of government that is provided by the relatively new democratic regimes. The paper breaks down into three main parts. It starts with a discussion of the concept of quality of government (QoG) and its relationship with (the quality of) democracy. Then, the empirical analysis breaks down into two parts. First, some comparative macro-indicators assessing the QoG in the post-communist EU countries are presented. The second part maps out public perceptions of two important aspects of quality of government; whether the publics perceive the authorities to treat people fairly or not and to what extent the citizens believe public officials to be corrupt. In the third part the effects of QoG on support for the democratic political system are examined through multivariate analysis.

Conceptualising quality of government

The last decade has seen a drastic increase in academic studies that have analysed and assessed different aspects of political "quality". In comparative politics, much focus has been on "quality of democracy" (Altman & Pérez-Liñán 2002, Baker 1999; Diamond & Morlino 2005a, Berg-Schlosser 2004; Morlino 2004; Schmitter 2004; O'Donnell *et al.* 2004; Zielonka 2007). This research has made an effort to bridge two strands of comparative politics; comparative government in advanced democracies and democratization studies. Under the umbrella of "quality of democracy" researchers are analysing similarities and differences when it comes to the design and performance of democratic systems, both old and new (cf. Diamond & Morlino 2005). Another group of scholars – most notably from comparative government, political economy and public administration – has made progress in their efforts to explain the causes and effects of the quality of government or governance (Rothstein & Teorell 2008; cf. Adserá *et al.* 2003; La Porta *et al.* 1999; Treisman 2002; Geissel 2008; Charron 2009).

So how should "quality of government" and "quality of democracy" be conceptualised, and how are the two concepts related to each other? A search for "quality of government" on Google Scholar returns about 8,000 hits, while a search for "quality of democracy" results in 4,250 results. When randomly browsing a number of papers that come up, it does not take long to find out that there is not much consensus regarding the content of these two concepts. Many researchers assign the terms to one or a few statistic indicators, such as the Transparency International's index of perceived corruption, The International Country Risk Guide index or the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators (cf. Adserà *et al.* 2003;

Bäck & Hadenius 2008; Charron 2009; Charron & Lapuente 2009). Thus, as noted by Holmberg *et al.* (2008, 4) the fact that “researchers and practitioners have not yet arrived at a standard definition of what good governance (or QoG) is, different studies adopt different interpretations, generating a risk that researchers will employ definitions that best serve to confirm their theory”. This is by no means a unique situation in the social sciences, but it nevertheless constitutes an analytic problem. Here, the focus will be on QoG, and its relationship to QoD is only briefly discussed.

Quality of government as impartiality

In a recent critique of earlier research, Bo Rothstein and Jan Teorell propose that *impartiality in the exercise of public power* is the defining feature of quality of government. “When implementing laws and policies, government officials shall not take anything about the citizen/case into consideration that is not beforehand stipulated in the policy or the law” (Rothstein & Teorell 2008, 170). Thus, Rothstein and Teorell stress the connection between QoG as impartiality (the exercise of public power) at the output side of the political system, and political equality on the input side, i.e. the equal possibility of access to power and universal suffrage. In order for political institutions to be impartial, they have to rest on a basic norm of universalism, where public integrity is understood as equal treatment of citizens regardless of the group to which one belongs (e.g. on the basis of ethnicity or sexual orientation) (Mungiu-Pippidi 2006, 87–88).

It is important to note that the universality of the principle of impartiality does not imply universality when it comes to the content of policies. As Kurer (2005, 223) notes: “Who deserves equally, or, alternatively, on which grounds discrimination is ruled out, will be answered differently at different periods in time and will vary from society to society”. By definition, then, QoG as impartiality rules out all forms of corruption and “particularistic” practices such as clientelism, patronage and discrimination. However, as Rothstein and Teorell note, although impartiality implies the absence of corruption, the opposite is not necessarily true. Nonexistent corruption in a society does not exclude all forms of partial exercise of governmental power (Rothstein & Teorell 2008, 171).

The conceptualisation of impartiality as the basic norm of QoG places it closer to the concept of democracy than most other definitions found in the literature (which often focus on corruption, economic and political performance) (cf. Warren 2004). Still, they correctly argue that impartiality and democracy is not the same thing, and also that democracy is not a sufficient condition for QoG. They do acknowledge, however, that democracy and

impartiality do overlap at the conceptual level. Democratic legitimacy requires that political and civil rights are secured within a legal framework which must be impartially applied to its subjects. Thus, democratic rights must be universal. Moreover, in order for democratic elections to be free and fair, they have to be administered by impartial government institutions that do not favour the rulers at the expense of other contestants (Rothstein & Teorell 2008, 179–180). Such an uneven political playing field is not very unusual in countries that meet only minimal criteria of electoral democracy. Examples are not hard to find among the post-communist non-EU countries. Hence, it seems that the conceptualisation of quality of government as impartiality also requires a certain degree of quality of democracy.

Procedural fairness and legitimacy

Impartial implementation of political policy and citizens' experiences from contacts with different types of institutions are closely related to the theory, or perspective, of procedural fairness. This strand of research argues that it is the fairness of the procedures through which institutions and authorities exercise authority which is the key to the willingness of individuals to defer to the decisions and rules created and implemented by those authorities and institutions (cf. Esaiasson 2005). Procedural fairness is seen as the foundation of legitimacy (Tyler 2006). Empirical studies have shown that the legitimacy of political authorities and institutions becomes diminished when they do not adhere to norms of procedural fairness, not least in recent democracies. For example, Seligson (2002) show that procedural injustice in the form of corruption has a significant negative effect on support for the political system in general. Consider also Kluegel & Mason's (2004) analysis of survey data from five post-communist countries (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Russia and the eastern part of Germany), which shows that perceived fairness is an important factor when it comes to people's evaluations of the political system, both political trust and satisfaction with the political system. It should be noted, however, that Kluegel and Mason investigate *economic* fairness rather than the perceived fairness of political institutions. Empirical studies of established democracies have pointed to similar results. For example, Kumlin (2004) shows that individual experiences from interaction with welfare institutions have a substantial effect on trust and social capital in Sweden (cf. Kumlin & Rothstein 2005).

From the results of earlier research we may therefore hypothesise a causal chain between the citizens' *perceptions* of being fairly treated by the government officials occupying those institutions, and *system support*, or the legitimacy of the democratic regime.

Comparative macro-indicators of quality of government

There is an abundance of indicators of QoG related aspects available for the scholarly and policy making community. Table 2 presents scores on four governance measures from the *Worldwide Governance Indicators* (WGI) (World Bank 2008), which is one of the most frequently used data sources in empirical analyses of QoG and QoD. The WGI scores are based on a vast array of individual variables drawn from 35 separate data sources constructed by 32 different organisations worldwide (Kaufmann *et al.* 2008). The scores range between +2.5 (best) and -2.5 (worst). The indicator in the first column in Table 2 – “voice and accountability” – measures the extent to which citizens have the possibility to participate in selecting their rulers, as well as political freedoms and media freedom. It also contains data on popular perceptions of satisfaction with democracy and trust in parliament. All countries receive positive scores around 1, except for Bulgaria and Romania. The levels have been fairly consistent since the first survey in 1996, with small improvements in all countries except for Poland and Slovenia. When compared to the mean value for the OECD countries (where of course the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia are members), the average for the post-communist EU member states fall significantly behind.

In the second column, scores for “rule of law” are presented. This indicator taps the extent to which agents have confidence in and abide by the rules of society. A simple inspection shows that Bulgaria and Romania – and to some extent Poland and Slovakia – are lagging somewhat behind the rest of the countries. The difference between the post-communist countries and the OECD is 1.04, which must be seen as quite substantial.

The difference is even more substantial if we look at the corresponding figures for how successful the governments are in their “control of corruption” (column 3). This indicator measures the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain, covering the whole spectrum of corruption, from petty acts to state capture. When looking at different indicators of political and economic performance, there is not doubt that corruption poses a serious problem for all post-communist countries (cf. Holmes 2006; Karklins 2005). In fact, in many countries the situation has worsened during the last years. According to the World Bank, levels of corruption have increased in half of the countries since 1996. In this respect, Bulgaria and Romania once again stand out as laggards among the post-communist EU member states, and they have also received serious critique from the EU regarding the anti-corruption strategies. For example, on 12 February 2009 commission spokesman Johannes Laitenberger stated on a press conference that “it is important that the Romanian authorities

regain momentum on judicial reform and fight against corruption so as to reverse certain backward movements of recent months” (EUobserver.com).

Table 2. Comparative indicators of QoG 2007 (1996 within parentheses)

	<i>Voice and accountability</i>	<i>Rule of law</i>	<i>Control of corruption</i>	<i>Government effectiveness</i>
Bulgaria	+0.65 (+0.11)	-0.14 (-0.11)	-0.22 (-0.76)	+0.10 (-0.94)
Czech Republic	+0.98 (+0.97)	+0.77 (+0.87)	+0.26 (+0.58)	+0.99 (+0.81)
Estonia	+1.05 (+0.91)	+1.00 (+0.51)	+0.94 (-0.02)	+1.19 (+0.56)
Hungary	+1.10 (+1.05)	+0.74 (+0.84)	+0.44 (+0.63)	+0.70 (+0.59)
Latvia	+0.86 (+0.75)	+0.57 (+0.13)	+0.31 (-0.65)	+0.55 (-0.46)
Lithuania	+0.93 (+0.93)	+0.49 (+0.29)	+0.17 (-0.18)	+0.78 (-0.35)
Poland	+0.81 (+0.98)	+0.28 (+0.64)	+0.14 (+0.39)	+0.38 (+0.77)
Romania	+0.47 (+0.18)	-0.17 (-0.15)	-0.19 (-0.24)	-0.09 (-0.69)
Slovakia	+0.98 (+0.25)	+0.35 (+0.23)	+0.28 (+0.40)	+0.76 (+0.61)
Slovenia	+1.08 (+1.10)	+0.84 (+0.87)	+0.90 (+1.05)	+1.08 (+0.81)
PC EU mean	+0.89 (+0,72)	+0.47 (+0.41)	+0.30 (+0.13)	+0.64 (+0.17)
OECD mean	+1.31	+1.51	+1.72	+1.51

Source: World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators, 1996–2007.

The last indicator in Table 2 measures the quality of public and civil services and the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and also the credibility of the government’s commitment to such policies. Thus, to a large extent this measure contains the impartiality of institutions that Rothstein and Teorell put forth as the foundation of QoG. However, it also contains information about other things that are not directly related to that definition of QoG. Here too, the post-communist countries are lagging behind the OECD countries, and within the post-communist group Romania and Bulgaria show the worst performance. All in all, the data point to a substantial gap in government quality between the new EU member states and the OECD countries. It is also clear that the two latest member states, Bulgaria and Romania, have – on all indicators presented here – been falling behind the countries that achieved EU membership in 2004.

Coping with unfair institutions

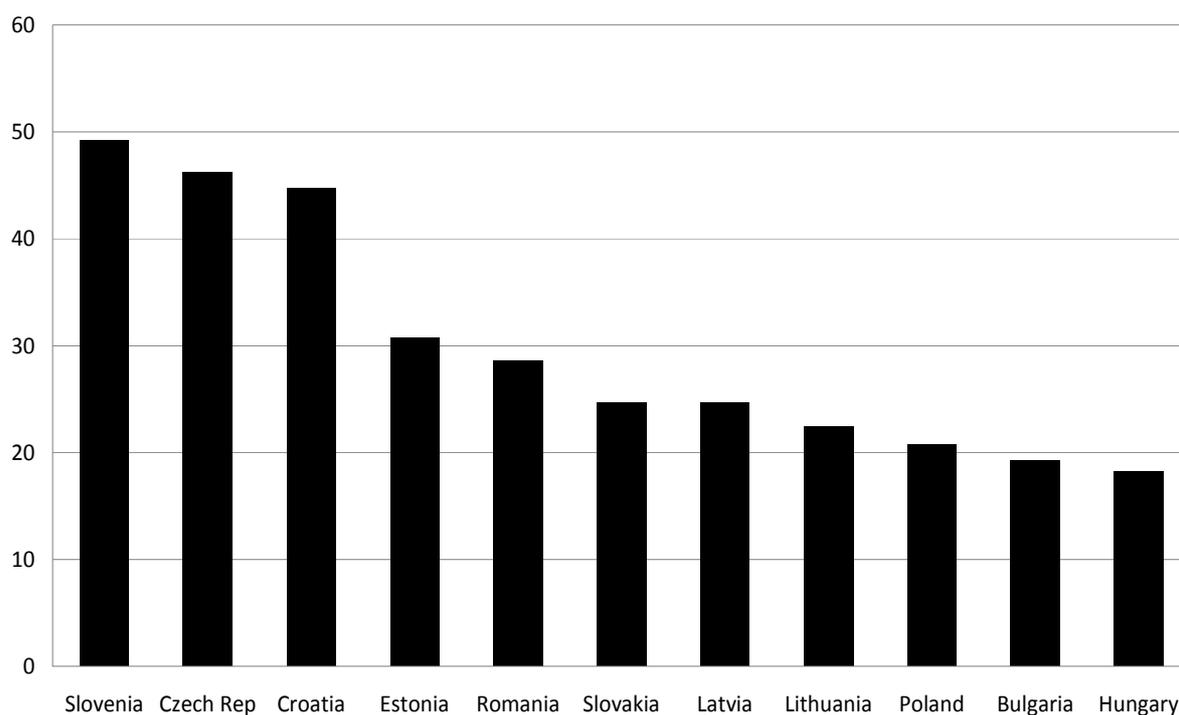
This section turns to comparative data on the micro-level. Moving from the macro- to the micro-level of analysis makes it possible to expand the analysis to also include public perceptions about quality of government. This approach lets us investigate the causes and effects of QoG on a micro level and also its relationship to system support in the new EU member states. Taking the norm of impartiality as a point of departure requires that ordinary citizens' perceptions of government performance are taken into consideration. If QoG boils down to impartial institutions and implementation of public policy, then public perceptions of equal treatment and institutional performance seem like a good place to start.

The *New Europe Barometer*² – which has been carried out in Central and East European countries on a regular basis since 1991 – provides a number of useful indicators of perceived quality of government. One item of particular interest to the definition of QoG employed in this study is the question whether ordinary people are treated fairly by the authorities. Unfortunately this question was only asked in the 2004 survey, which makes us unable to investigate if the perceived impartiality of the authorities has changed over time.

Figure 1 presents the share of respondents that claim that the authorities treat people like themselves fairly. In addition to the EU members, the figure also includes the candidate country Croatia as a point of reference. Judging from the data, large segments of the citizens in the new EU member states view the authorities as being partial, i.e. not treating all citizens even-handedly. Although this standpoint is the prevailing in all countries in Figure 1, there is a fair amount of variation between countries. In Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Croatia almost half of the citizens perceive the authorities to be behaving fairly, while around 8 out of 10 citizens in Hungary, Bulgaria, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Slovakia suppose that they would not be impartially treated by the government and public officials. It is interesting to note the widespread feelings of discontent in Hungary, a country that comes out on the positive side when consulting the macro indicators presented in Table 2.

² The *New Europe Barometer* (NEB) data analysed in the last part of the paper was collected with the assistance of grants from the British Economic & Social Research Council to study diverging paths in post-communist countries; the Swedish Tercentenary Fund to Professor Sten Berglund, Örebro University, for work on the Baltic States; and from the MacArthur Foundation programme to Professor Michael Marmot, University College London Medical School. I am very much indebted to Professor Richard Rose at the Centre for the Study of Public Policy, University of Aberdeen, for providing me with the opportunity to use a sample of the data for this paper.

Figure 1. “Authorities treat people like me fairly”, 2004 (%)



Note: Bars represent percentages that “definitely” and “somewhat agree”. “Don’t know” not included in the analysis.

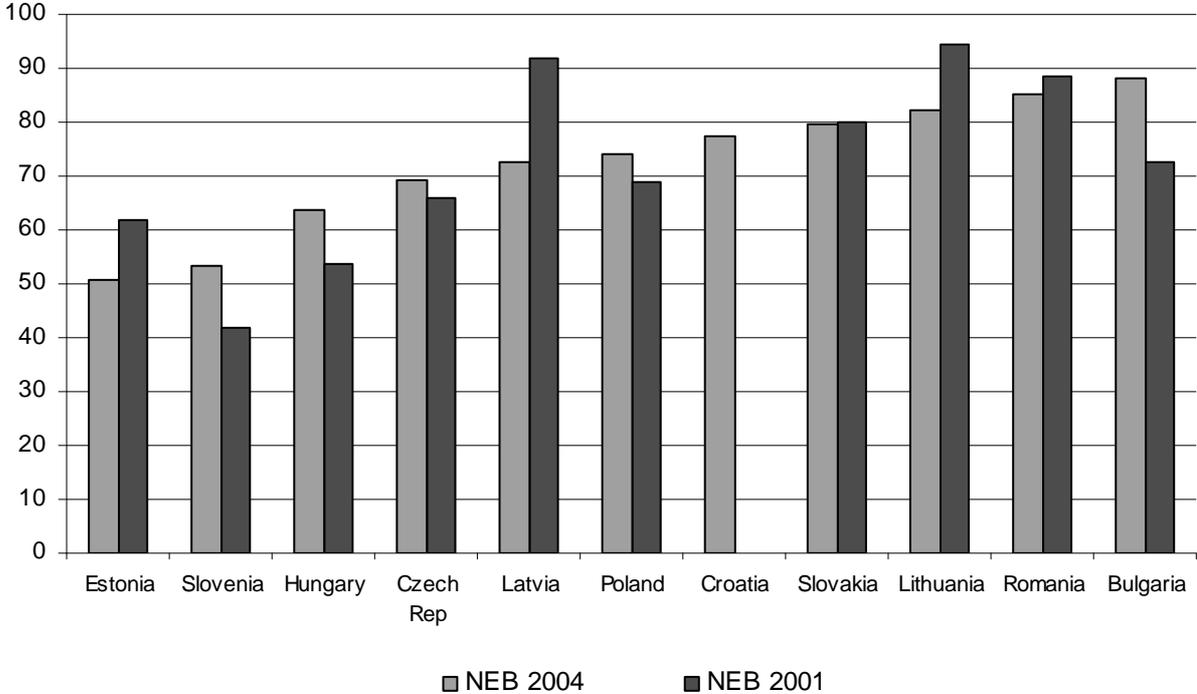
Source: *New Europe Barometer* (2004).

Another, closely related, indicator taps the extent to which citizens perceive public officials to be corrupt. Indeed, in a system where corruption is widespread among public officials and the citizens know about it and act accordingly, the prospects for impartial public institutions are slim. In such a system, a “social trap” – a situation where individuals, groups or organisations are unable to cooperate due to mutual distrust even though cooperation would benefit all – is a more likely outcome (Rothstein 2005). In the end, widespread corruption, and/or a prevailing public belief that the political system and its institutions are corrupt, could arguably also have dire consequences for democracy itself. If citizens perceive their political representatives and civil servants as being devoted to their own enrichment rather than to the public interest, trust and support in the democratic political system and its institutions decline, which in the end could negatively affect the legitimacy of the system (Anderson & Tverdova 2003; Sandholtz & Taagepera 2005; Seligson 2002; Norris 1999).

From the data presented in Table 2 and in other measures of corruption – such as the *Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index* and the *Nations in Transit* index – we know that corruption is widespread in the post-communist EU member states, although they score high on most measures of democratic development, such as the *Freedom House*

index and the *Economist Intelligence Unit's Index of Democracy*. Those indices are complex measures drawing on many sources, for example assessments by experts and business people. Here we will use survey data as a complementary measure of the problems of corruption in these countries. Figure 2 presents the shares of respondents that in 2001 and 2004 claimed that “practically all” and “a majority” of public officials are corrupt. A simple inspection of the data reveals that the East European citizens do not display much confidence in their public officials. In 2004, a majority in all countries stated that more than half of the public officials act in a corrupt manner when exercising their power. When comparing the figures for 2004 with the survey conducted in 2001, no systematic pattern of change is evident.

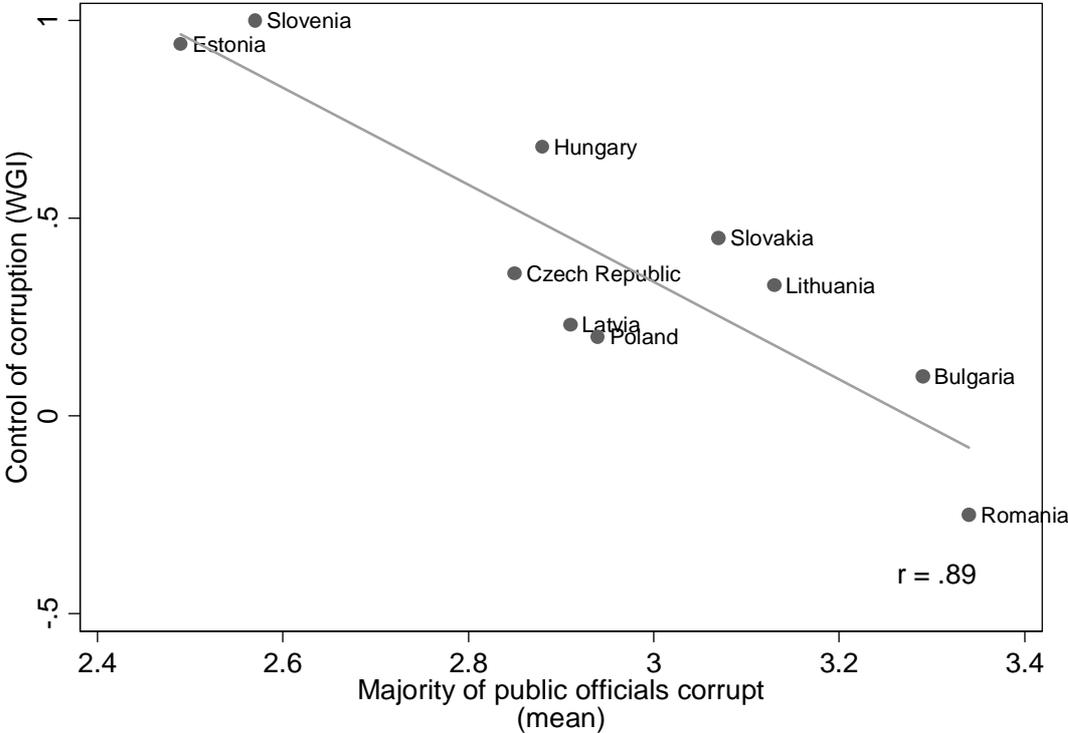
Figure 2. “Practically all or a majority of public officials are corrupt” (%)



Note: Bars represent percentages that state that “practically all” and “a majority” of public officials are corrupt. “Don’t know” not included in the analysis. For Croatia, data are available only for 2004. Source: *New Europe Barometer* (2001; 2004).

The levels of distrust are fairly consistent and quite remarkable in most countries, and most so in Bulgaria, Romania, Lithuania and Slovakia where 8 to 9 out of 10 citizens state that more than half of the public officials are corrupt. Thus, the poor ratings for Bulgaria and Romania in various corruption indices are clearly reflected in the survey data. In fact, the correlation between the scores in the World Bank data for 2004 and aggregated levels of perceived corruption in the NEB data is very strong (Figure 3) (Pearson’s $r = .89$ $p < .001$).

Figure 3. The relationship between “control of corruption” and aggregate perceived corruption



Sources: World Bank (2008); *New Europe Barometer* (2004). ($p < .001$)

The NEB data do not indicate an increase in quality of government over time in the post-communist countries, at least not as perceived by the citizens. In fact, in a survey from the late 1990s a strong majority of Central and East Europeans (an average of 71 per cent) said that corruption had become worse compared with the former communist system. 23 per cent believed that the level of corruption was about the same, while only 6 per cent of the respondents said that the new political and economic system was less corrupt than the old (Rose & Haerpfer 1998, 33).

So far we have observed a large amount of public confidence in the “corruptness” of public officials in general. The data analysed do not distinguish between different institutions, however. The question is if all institutions are perceived to be equally corrupt, or if some institutions are more distrusted than others. The data collected by the *Global Corruption Barometer* (Transparency International 2007) presented in Table 3 suggest that the publics tend to view the corruptness of institutions quite differently. The data confirms the results from several studies of institutional trust in the Central and East European democracies that have shown that some of the institutions that constitute the basis of representative democracy

– political parties and the parliament – are distrusted by large segments of the population (Mishler & Rose 1997; 2001; Rose *et al.* 1998; Linde & Ekman 2005; Lovell 2001). It is not a very bold “guesstimation” to suggest that the high levels of distrust in those institutions could stem from the fact that a large majority of the general public view them as being corrupt.

Table 3. Public perceptions of corruption’s impact on institutions 2007 (2004 within parentheses)

	<i>Political parties</i>	<i>Parliament</i>	<i>Legal system/ judiciary</i>	<i>Police</i>	<i>Educational system</i>	<i>Medical services</i>	<i>Tax revenue authorities</i>
<i>Bulgaria</i>	4.3 (4.3)	4.2 (4.3)	4.3 (4.2)	4.0 (3.7)	3.4 (3.3)	4.1 (3.8)	3.6 (3.5)
<i>Czech Rep.</i>	3.6 (3.9)	3.4 (3.5)	3.6 (3.5)	3.8 (3.8)	2.9 (2.6)	3.4 (3.0)	2.6 (2.9)
<i>Lithuania</i>	4.0 (4.2)	4.0 (4.2)	3.9 (4.2)	3.7 (4.1)	2.9 (3.0)	3.9 (3.8)	2.4 (3.5)
<i>Poland</i>	4.2 (4.2)	3.9 (4.1)	3.8 (4.0)	3.8 (3.9)	3.1 (3.5)	4.0 (4.1)	3.2 (3.5)
<i>Romania</i>	3.9 (4.2)	3.9 (4.0)	3.8 (4.1)	3.7 (3.8)	3.0 (3.3)	3.7 (3.9)	2.6 (2.9)
<i>Spain</i>	3.9 (3.8)	3.1 (3.2)	3.0 (3.4)	2.8 (2.9)	2.3 (2.7)	2.2 (2.6)	3.0 (3.4)
<i>Sweden</i>	3.2	2.5	2.4	2.5	2.1	2.4	1.9

Note: Question: “To what extent do you perceive the following categories in this country to be affected by corruption?” Please answer on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 meaning not at all corrupt, 5 meaning extremely corrupt)”. Figures are means on the 5-point scale. Data for 2004 are not available for Sweden.

Source: Transparency International (2004; 2007).

The data presented here indicate that the post-communist EU member states are plagued by widespread discontent with and distrust in the way that the public officials are doing their job. An overwhelming majority of citizens believe that they have not been or should not be evenhandedly treated by public officials and bureaucrats. This might not come as a surprise when considering the fact that the most common perception about public officials is that a majority of them are corrupt. An intriguing question is in what way and to what extent public perceptions affect the support for the political system, i.e. the legitimacy of the democratic regime. The next part empirically investigates the effects of perceptions of quality of government on diffuse and specific regime support.

Quality of government and system support

Are people who believe that public institutions are fair and that the officials are not engaged in pervasive corruption also more supportive of the democratic regime than those who express discontent with the impartiality and performance of the political institutions? If this is the case, the governments of the new EU member states have a lot to gain from improving the performance of the political institutions. As we have seen, distrust in political institutions seems to go hand in hand with perceptions of unfair and corrupt behaviour on behalf of the civil servants set out to implement public policy. One important question is what effects this has on diffuse support of the democratic political system, i.e. the type of public support for democratic principles that many analysts have emphasised as a necessary condition for democratic legitimacy, particularly in new democracies (cf. Easton 1965, Lipset 1959; Norris 1999; Linz & Stepan 1996; Diamond 1999; Rose *et al.* 1999). Widespread long-term distrust in the performance of political institutions could very well lead to scepticism towards the democratic political system as such and in the end affecting negatively the legitimacy of the democratic regime.

In the following, we will investigate the effect of perceptions of quality of government on system support. More specifically, we are interested in two aspects of system support: diffuse support for the principles underlying the democratic regime and the more specific kind of support for the performance of the democratic system (cf. Norris 1999). Support for democratic regime principles will be operationalised as “rejection of non-democratic alternatives”. Thus, a person that rejects all the non-democratic alternatives he/she is presented with is seen as supporting the current democratic regime.³ In general, this is a “tougher” measure of diffuse system support than the frequently used question about whether the respondent thinks that democracy is the best form of government or not (cf. Rose *et al.* 1998).

Support for the performance of the democratic regime is measured here by the question about whether or not the respondent is satisfied with the way democracy works. The ‘satisfaction with democracy’ item is a frequently used indicator in comparative analyses of regime support. It has not been utterly clear what the item actually measures, however. It has sometimes been used as an indicator of diffuse, or generalised, support, i.e. democratic legitimacy. Empirical analyses, however, have shown that it is better suited as an indicator of popular support for the perceived performance of the regime, i.e. a more specific type of

³ The non-democratic alternatives are “a return to communist rule”, “having the army rule” and “strong man rule” and “suspension of parliament and abolishment of parties”.

support (Linde and Ekman 2003; Anderson 2002; Diamond 1999; Fuchs, Guidorossi & Svensson 1995). Table 4 maps out the levels of support for regime principles and regime performance in the ten post-communist EU member states.

Table 4. Levels of diffuse and specific regime support 2004 (per cent)

	<i>Diffuse regime support</i>	<i>Specific regime support</i>	<i>Difference diffuse – specific support</i>
<i>Bulgaria</i>	46	20	26
<i>Czech Republic</i>	61	38	23
<i>Estonia</i>	65	38	27
<i>Hungary</i>	72	46	26
<i>Latvia</i>	54	34	20
<i>Lithuania</i>	62	41	21
<i>Poland</i>	43	33	10
<i>Romania</i>	66	38	28
<i>Slovakia</i>	58	30	28
<i>Slovenia</i>	66	68	-2
<i>Mean</i>	60	39	21

Source: New Europe Barometer (2004).

The democratic regime enjoys broad popular support, even when support for democracy is measured in this way. On average, 60 per cent of the citizens reject all four non-democratic alternatives. Only in two countries (Bulgaria and Poland) are those rejecting authoritarianism in minority. The levels of specific regime support are considerably lower in general. In Slovenia, however, the level of specific regime support outgrows the diffuse support. Slovenia is also the only country where a majority of respondents express satisfaction with the way democracy works. There is thus a substantial gap between support for democratic regime principles and regime performance. This is not unique for post-communist countries. The same pattern can be observed in most democracies (Klingemann 1999).

Earlier empirical research has pointed to a strong relationship between level of corruption and system support, both when it comes to more specific support in terms of public satisfaction with the way democracy works (Anderson & Tverdova 2003) and also when it comes to diffuse support for democracy and its alternatives (Rose *et al.* 1998, Mishler & Rose 2001).

The regression analyses presented in Table 5 more or less confirm these results and also add some further insights about the relationship between perceptions of quality of government and system support. The dependent variable in the first regression model is the dichotomy from Table 4, taking on the value 1 if the respondent rejects all non-democratic regime alternatives and the value 0 if one or more non-democratic alternatives are preferred. The model includes four socio-demographic control variables. Education, age and income show statistically

significant effects, while gender does not. The analysis also includes a number of control variables that have shown to be important in earlier studies of system support. Generalised trust, perceived economic situation of the household, political interest and satisfaction with the market economic system are all positively related to rejection of authoritarian rule. More interestingly, however, is that both perceptions of fair treatment and perceived level of corruption among public officials show strong and statistically significant effects on diffuse regime support.

Table 5: Effects of perceived quality of government on system support (unstandardised logit coefficients and standard errors)

<i>Independent variable</i>	Model 1	Model 2
	<i>Diffuse regime support (Reject non-democratic alternatives)</i>	<i>Specific regime support (Satisfaction with democracy)</i>
Fairly treated by authorities (1=definitely, 4=definitely not)	.314*** (.033)	.539*** (.034)
Corruption among public officials (1=almost all, 4=none or very few)	.218*** (.032)	.411*** (.033)
Generalised trust (-1=distrust, 0=neutral, 1=trust)	.156*** (.030)	.214*** (.031)
Economic situation (1=very bad, 4=very good)	.151*** (.037)	.390*** (.040)
Political interest (1=very interested, 4=not at all interested)	.079*** (.030)	.069** (.032)
Rating of current economy (-1=negative, 0=neutral, 1=positive)	.328*** (.028)	.238*** (.030)
Income (quartiles, 1=lowest, 4=highest)	.182*** (.026)	.051* (.028)
Education (1=minimum, 4=higher academic)	.212*** (.027)	-.061** (.028)
Age (in years)	-.006*** (.001)	-.010*** (.001)
Gender (1=male)	.033 (.051)	.028 (.053)
Constant	-2.061*** (.159)	-3.158*** (.170)
Pseudo R ²	0.10	0.14
N	7,304	7,304

* p<.10 ** p<.05 *** p<.01

Source: *New Europe Barometer* (2004).

If satisfaction with the performance of the political system and its institutions, i.e. specific system support, constitutes the foundation for democratic legitimacy in terms of diffuse system support, then an interesting question is what role public perceptions of QoG play in that regard. Can governments nurture public satisfaction with the working of the political system by providing just and non-corrupt institutions? The data at hand suggest that this is the

case, at least in post-communist democracies. The second model in Table 5 presents a regression model similar to model 1, but with satisfaction with democracy as the dependent variable. The two “QoG variables” have the strongest effects on satisfaction with democracy ($b=.54$ and $.41$ respectively). In general, the “performance related” micro-variables (fairness of authorities, corruption, perceived household economy, and support for the current economic system) have stronger effects on satisfaction with democracy than actual level of income. It might seem intriguing that educational level is negatively associated to specific regime support. However, it fits neatly in with results from recent comparative research showing that better educated citizens tend to be more sceptical towards the performance of the political system and demonstrate lower levels of institutional trust (cf. Dalton 2004). The trend of growing numbers of “dissatisfied democrat” or “critical citizens” which has been observed in established democracies thus seem to have some bearing also on post-communist Europe. In order to facilitate the interpretation of the logistic regression coefficients, the results can be transformed into changes in the predicted probabilities on falling into category 1, i.e. rejecting non-democratic alternatives and expressing satisfaction with the way democracy works (Table 6).

Table 6. Predicted probabilities of system support

<i>Values on independent variables</i>	<i>Predicted probability</i>	
	<i>Diffuse regime support</i>	<i>Specific regime support</i>
If fairly treated = 1 (definitely not)	0.50	0.24
If fairly treated = 4 (definitely)	0.72	0.62
If officials corrupt = 1 (almost all)	0.52	0.27
If officials corrupt = 4 (very few)	0.68	0.56
If fairly treated = 1 & officials corrupt = 1	0.45	0.17
If fairly treated = 4 & officials corrupt = 4	0.80	0.79

Note: The predicted probabilities are based on the logistic regression models in Table 5. The effects of the independent variables are calculated when all other variables in the model are held at their mean.

The two central variables have a similarly strong effect on the probability of being a “democrat”, i.e. rejecting all non-democratic alternatives. Feeling even-handedly treated and having confidence in the impartiality of public officials does not seem to be of critical importance. There is roughly 50 per cent chance that also those who do not believe that they are being fairly treated, and those who believe that almost all public officials are corrupt, express diffuse regime support. The differences are more pronounced when taking the combined effect of the two independent variables into consideration which, as we have seen, is not an unlikely situation due to the correlation between the two variables.

As indicated in Table 5, perceptions of impartial treatment and corruption are more important determinants of specific support. A change in feeling from unfairly to fairly treated increases the probability of being satisfied with the way democracy works by 38 percentage points (from 0.24 to 0.62). The same move on the “corruption scale” has a slightly weaker effect, increasing the probability by 29 percentage points (from 0.27 to 0.56). However, the impact on satisfaction becomes really sizeable when looking at the combined effect of the two QoG variables on support. A citizen who believes that he or she is being unfairly treated and at the same time believe very few officials to be corrupt has a probability of almost 80 per cent to also be content with the performance of the democratic political system, compared to only the marginal probability of 0.17 for the disillusioned citizen (perceiving herself as unfairly treated and seeing almost all officials as corrupt).

Conclusions

This paper has analysed public perceptions of the quality of government in the ten post-communist EU member states. If quality of government in the end boils down to *impartiality in the exercise of public power*, then there is not much of quality when it comes to post-communist government. Distrust in public institutions and officials are central features of the contemporary post-communist political culture. An overwhelming majority of citizens believe that they are being unfairly treated in their contacts with the authorities. This not very surprising considering the fact that also a strong majority of citizens perceive a most of the public officials as being corrupt in their implementation of public policy, a fact that mirrors earlier studies that have revealed widespread public distrust in political institutions.

Why do post-communist citizens perceive their institutions as unfair and the public officials corrupt? The obvious answer is of course that the institutions receive the trust and support that they deserve based on their performance. A public administration that engages in corrupt acts on a regular basis is of course going to be perceived as corrupt by an increasing number of persons that are affected by their decisions. The data at hand confirm this. The correlation between level of corruption assessed by the World Bank and citizens’ perceptions of the extent of corruption among public officials is very strong. The obvious question is thus why citizens should trust and support a political system that is corrupt and inefficient.

Drawing on earlier studies that have analysed the effect of levels of corruption on system support, we investigated in what way citizens’ perceptions of quality of government affect support for democratic principles and evaluations of democratic performance. The logit

regression analyses demonstrate strong effects of perceptions of QoG on system support. Citizens with a positive view of the exercise of public power by the authorities and the non-corruptness of public officials are clearly more likely to express support for both democratic principles and performance. In line with what could be expected, the effect of QoG is strongest when it comes to satisfaction with the performance of the political system, i.e. specific regime support. However, the importance for support for democracy on a principle level – and thus the legitimacy of the political regime – should not be underestimated. Considering earlier research (cf. Evans & Whitefield 1995) and the strong correlation between support for democratic performance and democratic principles in our data, the strong negative effect of perceptions of poor QoG on specific system support could in the long run spill over to the level of support for democratic principles and further undermine the legitimacy of the democratic regime.

The picture demonstrated by the data looks troublesome since it indicates something like a vicious circle, where poorly performing and corrupt institutions receive the distrust they deserve. And when large parts of the public are feeling that they are being unfairly treated they perceive the public officials as corrupt. And when believing that most officials behave corrupt they are expecting to be treated unfairly. The widespread distrust in authorities and officials is then transferred to the system level, where it affects citizens' general evaluations of the performance of the whole political system. And a long-time record of poor democratic performance may very well make extremist political alternatives more attractive. However, it is important not to overestimate the consequences for support for democracy and regime legitimacy. The democratic regimes in post-communist Europe are in “good” company. Trends of declining trust in institutions have been visible in most established democracies as well (cf. Norris 1999; Pharr & Putnam 2000; Dalton 2004, however not in the same range as in the post-communist countries. In general, post-communist citizens view democracy as the best, or the least bad, system of government and the data at hand show that the known alternatives are far from enjoying the same support as democracy. In the short run, however, the widespread, and in many ways justified, discontent with the performance of the democratic institutions and the thriving corruption in new democracies could open up for populist and extremist political forces that are trying to take advantage of the situation.

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