

Kazimierz M. Slomczynski and Irina Tomescu-Dubrow

Representation of European Post-Communist Countries in Cross-National Opinion Surveys

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Abstract

The democratization of political systems and the switch to market economies that people in various parts of the world have experienced over the past twenty-five years have resulted in increased general interest in the state of public opinion. This heightened concern with understanding public views on socioeconomic and political transformations has led to a rise in the number of cross-national surveys, both academic and commercial. However, the participation of countries in cross-national research on public opinion is very uneven, not only due to economic factors but also for political and cultural reasons: there are leaders, well-developed countries of the Northwest who participate most often, and laggards of the South and East. To the extent that exclusion or underrepresentation commonly affects countries that are systematically different from those included, comparative studies are likely to encounter serious problems.

With this in mind, we focus on the post-communist countries of Europe, and examine their representation in cross-national research projects to determine the extent to which the coverage is uneven, and what factors account for such inequality. Contrary to other studies that examine the growth of public opinion research from the perspective of data quality and comparability of the countries already included, we analyze why some countries are repeatedly left out or underrepresented, whether these omitted countries differ systematically from those included, and what consequences are likely to occur in comparative research.