

# The Dynamics of Dissent: The Winners-Losers Gap in Attitudes Towards EU Membership in Post-Communist Countries \*

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## Abstract

We examine the question of whether economic winners are more likely to support EU membership than economic losers in post-communist countries. We include in our analysis every cross-national survey of post-communist countries with both a measure of individual attitudes towards EU membership as well as an appropriate measure of individual self-assessment of economic progress. The resultant dataset contains data from 67 different surveys over a 12 year period (1991-2003) in all 10 post-communist countries that have joined the EU to date. Using a variety of analytical techniques, ranging from simple cross-tables and multivariate analysis of the individual surveys to multilevel models of a fully pooled data set, we demonstrate that the pattern of economic winners being more likely to support EU membership for their country is remarkably consistent across both time and space. At the same time, the dynamic component of the analysis allows us to demonstrate that the size of this gap varies over time, with winners being even more likely to support EU membership than losers when EU membership is a more realistic possibility.

**Key Words:** European Union, EU, post-communist countries, public-opinion formation,

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# 1 Introduction

For people living in the post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the last two decades have been times of dramatic change. Not only have citizens witnessed the collapse of communism and the end of the Warsaw Pact, but many have also seen their countries march towards – and in the case of ten countries actually join – the European Union (EU), a decision that may actually come to be an equally important determinant of long term political and economic development (Vachudova 2005). Not surprisingly, the process of EU accession in post-communist countries has attracted wide attention from scholars of public opinion who seek to explain how citizens form attitudes towards the EU and EU membership. A sizable body of literature exists on this question in the context of established democracies in Western Europe, and this existing literature drove much of the initial work on attitudes towards the EU in post-communist countries (Cichowski 2000, Tverdova and Anderson 2004).<sup>1</sup>

In contrast, Tucker, Pacek and Berinsky (2002) propose a theory of support for EU membership that explicitly takes into account the distinctive history of post-communist countries. The authors argue that in the post-communist context EU membership may imply something different than in established West European democracies, namely that EU membership can represent an implicit guarantee of cementing the post-communist economic transition to capitalism and free markets. Building on this assumption, they hypothesize that economic “winners”, or citizens who see themselves as having benefited economically during the transition period, ought to support EU membership as the ultimate guarantor of the new economic era. Conversely, “losers”, or those who have been hurt economically during the transition, ought to be more likely to oppose EU membership.<sup>2</sup> They find strong empirical support for this prediction across ten countries using cross-national survey data from the 1996 Central and Eastern European Eurobarometer.

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<sup>1</sup>On Western Europe, see for example Anderson and Kaltenthaler (1996), Anderson (1998), Eichenberg and Dalton (1993), Gabel (1998*a,b*), Gabel and Palmer (1995), Gabel and Whitten (1997), van der Eijk and Franklin (1996).

<sup>2</sup>The term “transition” has come under increasing scrutiny as of late, with some suggesting that it implies a successful transition to democracy as its ultimate outcome. We remain completely agnostic on this point, and use it here only in its commonly applied sense of referring to the period following the collapse of communism in East-Central Europe.

While an important first step, the analysis presented in Tucker, Pacek and Berinsky (2002) is static, looking at only one point in time, thus leaving important questions unanswered. Were winners more likely to support EU membership than losers early on in the transition period? Were they still more likely to do as EU membership changed from a public opinion question to actual referenda? Moreover, the micro-level finding of the study raises an interesting aggregate-level puzzle. One might suspect that if winners were more likely to favor EU membership than losers, then more economically successful countries would have higher aggregate levels of support for EU membership than less economically successful countries. However, when we turn to the data, we do not actually find such a relationship at the aggregate level. Indeed, to the extent that there is any relationship, it appears to be in the opposite direction, with less economically successful countries having higher levels of aggregate support for EU membership.

[Figure 1 about here.]

Figure 1 – where each cell represents a different cross-national survey and each observation country-level means from that survey – demonstrates this pattern using the European Bank for Recovery and Development (EBRD)’s Transition Indicator, an overall measure of a country’s progress in reforming its economy, but similar findings are apparent using a wide range of other economic indicators (see Appendix). Of course, we know from studies of ecological inference that just because a relationship is found at the micro level, it does not need to be present at the aggregate level as well (Gelman et al. 2007, King 1997). But at the very least, it again points to the importance of testing the empirical applicability of the winners-losers hypothesis in a more dynamic framework.

With this in mind, we proceed with two primary goals. First, we seek to assess the extent to which the winners-losers hypothesis is supported throughout the period of time from when communism first collapsed in Central and Eastern Europe until the bulk of the post-communist members of the EU voted in referenda on membership in 2003.<sup>3</sup> To do so,

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<sup>3</sup>Bulgaria and Romania subsequently joined in 2007.

we have collected every cross-national survey that we can find from this time period with the appropriate questions, resulting in a collection of data comprising of over 60,000 surveyed individuals from 10 countries at 7 different points in time over a 12 year period. The results are strikingly clear: whether we examine the raw data, employ multivariate analysis of each individual country-year survey with appropriate individual level control variables, or pool the entire data set and analyze it with multilevel modeling techniques and include both individual and country level control variables, economic winners are consistently more likely to support EU membership than economic losers.

Moving to a dynamic framework also allows us to add an important new piece to the theoretical story, which is that the gap in support for EU membership between winners and losers increases over time. Demonstrating the robustness of this finding is the second goal of our paper, and again, we are able to do so using raw data, multivariate analysis of individual country-year surveys, and multilevel models. On the basis of these analyses, we can also offer a potential explanation for why we observe the evolution of the winner-loser dynamic over time, why it varies across countries, and what we speculate may be driving it. Although we provide more details later in the paper, our basic argument is that as long as EU membership is uncertain in potential candidate countries – or at least a distant possibility in the future – citizens are likely to see it as an unmitigated “good”, signifying perhaps an escape from communism or acceptance into the richer, more successful world of the West. However, as EU membership becomes more likely and more proximate, it will become increasingly apparent that membership actually represents more than just entrance to the “West” and will imply a guarantee of new economic realities, the gap in support between economic winners and losers for EU membership ought to increase.

The remainder of our paper is organized as follows. We first describe our data selection process and key variables in greater detail. In Section 3, we present the empirical evidence that supports our two primary findings: across all of the post-communist countries that have now joined the EU and throughout the post-communist period, economic winners were more likely than economic losers to support EU membership and the size of this gap increased over time. In Section 4, we expand upon our explanation for why the gap may have increased over time, and present some empirical evidence that is consistent with our explanation. We

conclude with discussion in Section 5.

## 2 Data selection and variables

We have, to the best of our knowledge, reviewed all available cross-national surveys that assess support for EU membership that have been conducted in post-communist countries since the collapse of communism. From these surveys, we have included in our paper every study with both a measure of individual attitudes towards EU membership as well as an appropriate measure of individual self-assessment of economic status. Based on these two criteria, seven surveys qualified to be included in our analysis: the 1991, 1992, 1995 and 1996 Central and Eastern Eurobarometer (CEEB) studies and the 2001, 2002 and 2003 (October/November) Candidate Countries Eurobarometer (CCEB) studies, each with a sample size of about 1,000 respondents per country per year.<sup>4</sup>

The primary dependent variable of our study is whether or not a respondent supports EU membership for his or her country. More specifically, in 1991 and 1992, we measure this by whether a respondent favors or opposes European Community (EC) membership for his or her country. For all other years we use an individual's vote decision in a hypothetical referendum (or in the actual referendum, for surveys carried out in 2003) on the question of his or her country's membership in the EU as the dependent variable. We group respondents into four categories: "would vote for" membership, "would vote against" membership, "would not vote", and "undecided/don't know/no answer".<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>The sample size refers to the number of observations with non-missing values on all variables included in our analysis. In our descriptive analysis of change in aggregate support we can additionally include the 1997 CEEB and the 2003 (May) CCEB which contain measures of EU support but not a measure of individual economic progress. Combining data from the CEEB and the CCEB required us to establish equivalence between the variables from both surveys. (It is, of course, equally important to establish equivalence over time and across countries within a survey. But both the CEEB and the CCEB have been developed with exactly these two goals in mind.) In most cases we had to collapse variables into broader categories in order to make them comparable. We nevertheless have attempted to remain as careful as possible in the interpretation of our results, always noting when any difference we might find between the two surveys could be due to methodological reasons.

<sup>5</sup>The CCEB did not include "undecided" as an option for this question and hence we could have a biased measure if the undecided respondents had systematically chosen either "for" or "against" because of the lack of an "undecided" option. However, we do not think that this is the case. First, respondents could always refuse to answer a question if none of the categories matched their true attitudes. Second, we replicated our analysis

To classify respondents as economic winners or losers, we rely on individuals' self-assessment of their anticipated financial situation over the next 12 months. While admittedly a crude measure of whether an individual is an overall winner or loser from the transition experience, it does tap directly into the question of whether an individual feels as if he or she is doing well economically. Moreover, the theoretical basis behind the winners-losers argument really does apply to a subjective belief in being an economic winner or loser more so that objectively doing better or worse, thus again suggesting that this is an appropriate measure.<sup>6</sup> We furthermore recode responses on the CCEB from five to three categories – a prognosis that one's economic situation will “get better”, “get worse”, or “stays the same” – to match the CEEB, which offers only these three choices.<sup>7</sup> We refer to respondents who perceive that their financial situation will improve over the next twelve months as winners and those who think their economic situation will get worse over the same time period as losers. Respondents who answered that their financial situation will stay “the same” are referred to, creatively, as “the same”, and represent an intermediary category between being a winner or a loser.<sup>8</sup>

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with all undecided respondents in the CEEB excluded and the results and conclusions remained unchanged.

<sup>6</sup>Tucker, Pacek and Berinsky (2002) used individuals' retrospective (financial situation over the last 12 months) as well as prospective (financial situation over the next 12 months) financial evaluations, which they combined into a single measure. While we would have preferred to use a similar measure, the CCEB, unfortunately, only includes prospective financial assessment and hence we are forced to rely on this single variable. Nevertheless, Tucker, Pacek and Berinsky (2002) report a high degree of correlation between the two measures, suggesting that we would be likely to find very similar results had we employed such a measure.

<sup>7</sup>The categories in the CEEB are “get a lot better”, “get a little better”, “stayed the same”, “get a little worse”, and “get a lot worse”. The question wording is slightly different in the two surveys. Respondents in the CEEB were asked “And over the next 12 months, do you expect that the financial situation of your household will [answer categories]” whereas the question wording in the CCEB is “What are your expectations for the year to come: will 2001 [or other appropriate year] be better, worse or the same, when it comes to the financial situation of your household?”. We do not think that these differences will systematically bias our results. Furthermore, we do not find that the proportion of winners and losers increases or decreases significantly between the two surveys.

<sup>8</sup>One concern with many studies of public opinion is the issue of endogeneity, or whether the dependent variable might somehow be exerting an influence on the key independent variable. Had we used a variable that measured a respondent's belief about the likelihood that her country would get into the EU, then we might have reason to be concerned that people who believed EU membership was in their country's future might be more (or less) optimistic about their own personal economic situation in the future because of that impending EU membership. Since we rely instead on a dependent variable that asks merely whether or not one favors membership for one's country, it seems extremely unlikely that the mere act of favoring (or opposing) membership could exert any effect on one's beliefs about one's economic fortune over the next 12 months. Nor would it be likely that some sort of omitted “upbeat personality” variable could be causing both of these effects, which again could have been the case had we used a question about the likelihood of one's country getting into the EU as our dependent variable.

All of our multivariate models include gender, education, and age as individual level control variables. Three additional individual level control variables that we would have liked to have included in our analysis – residency, profession and income – were not available for 1991 and 1992, and hence we faced a trade-off between either extending the time frame of our study or extending the list of control variables. We selected the former option, in part because 1991 and 1992 were especially important for demonstrating the dynamics of public opinion towards EU membership. As a robustness test, though, we re-estimated all models for which we had the necessary data (i.e., the studies from 1995-2003) on the extended set of control variables. Fortunately, all of our key findings turned out to be extremely robust to the inclusion or exclusion of this set of additional control variables, and thus we feel confident proceeding with the reduced set of control variables that were available across all of the studies.

We begin by briefly examining our key variables graphically using the raw data. Figure 2 shows the proportion of respondents in favor of EU membership for their country in each survey by country.<sup>9</sup>

[Figure 2 about here.]

The figure reveals considerable variation in support between countries and over time. Support is quite high in all countries in 1991 and 1992 with, on average, more than 80% of individuals favoring EU membership for their countries. Support then decreases in the mid 1990s but then increases again in the 2001 to 2003 period. In terms of variation across countries, support is lowest in Estonia and Latvia, fluctuating around an average support of about 50%. Support was highest in Romania, with close to 80% of respondents supporting EU membership in most years.

In contrast to support for the EU, the proportion of respondents that are classified as either winners or losers is fairly stable across most of the surveys – representing about half of all respondents – with the two groups usually being about the same size (data not shown).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>For simplicity, we refer to both the European Community and European Union as the EU for the remainder of the paper.

<sup>10</sup>The one notable outlier in this regard is Romania in 1996, where about 80% of the respondents are

The fact that the proportion of winners and losers in each country is relatively stable over time and across the CEEB and CCEB surveys makes us more confident that our results are not being driven by differences in survey methods across the two studies. Furthermore, we do not find systematic variation between the economic well being of a country and the proportion of winners. We can therefore exclude the possibility that response behavior to survey questions about prospective financial well being is being overly influenced by the economic well being of the country in which the interview took place.<sup>11</sup>

[Figure 3 about here.]

In Figure 3, we combine our two primary variables in a manner that essentially allows us to examine cross-tabulations from all of the country-year observations in the data set simultaneously. Put another way, this provides a first test of our primary hypothesis – are economic winners more likely to support EU membership than economic losers? – using only the raw data. More specifically, we plot the proportions of respondents among economic winners ( $y$ -axis) and losers ( $x$ -axis) supporting EU membership for their country for each country-year observation in the dataset. The results are extremely clear: as indicated by the fact that all country-year observations lie above the 45 degree line, winners are always more supportive of EU membership for their country than losers. Given that we are reporting results from ten countries across seven different surveys that took place over a 12 year period, the consistency of the finding is really quite remarkable.<sup>12</sup>

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classified as winners. It is worth noting that this large proportion is not due to coding errors on our part (we have rechecked the original data), nor due to the lack of a weighting scheme. Most respondents in the winner category (86%) have answered “get a little better” to the question about their anticipated financial situation and accordingly only 14% come from the “get a lot better” category. We suspect that this could be partially a function of the results/anticipated results of the November, 1996 Romanian presidential and parliamentary elections, as the surveys were taken in the weeks immediately preceding and following these elections.

<sup>11</sup>We have used the EBRD Transition Indicator, GDP change compared to 1989, inflation, and unemployment rate as indicators of a country’s economic well being. Regressing the proportion of winners or losers in a country on these indicators yields neither statistically significant nor substantively relevant effects.

<sup>12</sup>It is also interesting to note that there is a country-specific effect for EU support because countries with high support among winners also have high support among losers. Omitted from Figure 3 are the proportions of EU supporters among respondents who expect their financial situation to remain the same. Here we find that this proportion is always between the two proportions among winners and losers, with the only exception being Poland in 1995 where the proportion of losers supporting EU membership is slightly larger than the proportion of those in “the same” category.

### 3 Winner and loser status as determinants of attitudes towards the EU in post-communist countries

In the previous section, we examined the relationship between citizens' economic status and their support for EU membership in a bivariate framework. In this section, therefore, we move to a more traditional multivariate framework, employing two different strategies for pooling our data. Regardless of the approach, though, we come to a similar conclusion: winners are more likely to support EU membership than losers across both time and space. However, we also demonstrate that the magnitude of this effect (e.g., the size of the gap between winners and losers in support for the EU) varies considerably over time and across countries.

As discussed above, our data covers the time period from 1991 to 2003, including survey data from 2003 that utilizes respondents' self-reported vote decision in the EU referendum. While we would have preferred to have a complete time series, the availability of data requires us to rely on surveys from 1991 and 1992, 1995 and 1996, and then again from 2001 to 2003. One advantage of these particular years, however, is that they allow us to draw upon three very distinct time periods: the immediate years after the collapse of Communism (1991 and 1992), the period of time when EU membership was seen as increasingly realistic possibility but not an imminent development (in the mid 1990s) as well as when the vote and eventual accession was becoming a more realistic event (from 2001 to 2003). In total, we have 67 country-year surveys, each comprising about 1,000 survey respondents, to test empirical support for the winner-loser hypothesis and to see if the postulated relationship holds over time.<sup>13</sup>

The dependent variable in our analysis consists of four unordered categories (for, against, would not vote, undecided/don't know/no answer) and hence we estimate multinomial logit models. The reference category in all models are respondents who are against EU membership for their country. We estimate our first model using a completely pooled dataset in which

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<sup>13</sup>The three missing cases are Slovenia in 1991 where the question about EU support was not asked, and Bulgaria and Romania in 2003 where no referenda were held and hence the question about actual vote decision was not asked.

all countries and years are analyzed together. In the next set of models we estimate separate models for each year with all countries within a year pooled together. Finally, we estimate separate models for each country and year.

[Table 1 about here.]

Table 1 summarizes the results from the completely pooled model. Our primary independent variable – the respondent’s economic status – is entered in the form of two dummy variables, one for being a “winner” and one for being “the same”. Doing so allows us not to force a linear effect on economic status, and means that the coefficient for each variable is to be interpreted as the difference in the effect of being in that category as opposed to be in the omitted category (here, being an economic loser). Taken together with how we coded the dependent variable, this makes the coefficient on the “winner” variable in the “for membership” regression results our primary variable of interest, as it explicitly measures whether being an economic winner makes the respondent more likely than an economic loser (the excluded category in the independent variables) to support membership as opposed to opposing membership (the base category in the dependent variable). As predicted, the coefficient for the winners variable is both positive and statistically significant, thus demonstrating that across the entire sample, controlling for demographic characteristics, economic winners were more likely to support than to oppose EU membership. Respondents in “the same” category (i.e., who were neither winners nor losers) were also more likely than losers to support EU membership, and the coefficient estimate of 0.33 ( $p < 0.001$ ) is, as expected, smaller than the estimate for winners. Substantively, a typical respondent in the survey had a 56% chance of supporting EU membership if she was an economic loser.<sup>14</sup> This same typical respondent’s chance of supporting EU membership goes up to 60% if she is in “the same” category, and goes up all the way to a 72% chance of supporting EU membership if she is an economic winner. Thus the effect is quite substantively meaningful as well.

Pooling the entire data set in this manner, however, obscures the presence of any underly-

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<sup>14</sup>A “typical” respondent here is a 44 year old woman with secondary education. These values correspond to the modus and mean values of the demographic variables.

ing time trends. With this in mind, we break the data down into separate data sets for each time period (e.g. each cross-national survey), but continue to pool across countries within years. Across all seven of these “pooled by year” analyses, the coefficient for economic winners is always positive, significantly different from zero, and always larger than the coefficient for “the same” category. Figure 4 concisely summarizes these findings by presenting the predicted probability of supporting EU membership for a typical respondent (as defined above) who also happens to be an economic loser (dotted line) or an economic winner (straight line) at each time period.<sup>15</sup>

[Figure 4 about here.]

In addition to showing that at each point in time economic winners were more likely to support EU membership than economic losers, Figure 4 also clearly demonstrates that there is considerable variation in the estimated probabilities over time, as well as in the size of the gap between winners and losers. This gap is smallest in the 1991 and 1992 surveys, precisely when the prospect of EU membership was most remote for post-communist citizens and when overall support was highest. By the mid 1990s, the size of the gap increases from about 0.10 (in 1991) to about 0.25 (in 1996), and then holds largely steady before declining to about 0.17 in 2003, the year of the actual vote on EU membership in 8 of the 10 countries. Again, it is worth noting that in every year, the predicted probability that winners will support EU membership is always larger than the predicted probability that losers will support EU membership.

Pooling the data by year, however, can obscure variation within years and across countries. Therefore we also estimated the effects of economic status on attitudes towards EU membership separately for each country-year survey. The results are once again remarkably consistent. In every one of these analyses, the coefficient for the winner variable was always positive. In fact, in one case, the 1991 Czech Republic survey, every single winner supported EU membership, thus rendering us unable to actually estimate the model in this case. In the

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<sup>15</sup>Full regression results are available from the authors upon request.

remaining 66 models, the winner coefficient was statistically significant in 45 of the models. As one might expect from the results presented previously in Figure 4, the vast majority of the cases where the coefficient was positive but not statistically significant came from the 1991 and 1992 surveys, where general support is very high and the difference between winners and losers relatively small.

[Figure 5 about here.]

As 66 sets of multinomial logit results are prohibitively long to present in the context of a paper, we again summarize our key findings by presenting the estimated probabilities for supporting EU membership for a typical winner and loser, this time by year and country, in Figure 5.<sup>16</sup> For most countries, we continue to find similar U or J-shaped patterns in predicted support, as was the case in the analyses pooled by year. However, there is clearly some variation by country. Perhaps the most notable from our perspective, however, is that the size of the gap remains smallest in the post-1992 surveys in Bulgaria and Romania, the two countries that were not admitted to the EU in 2003 and had to wait instead until 2007. Moreover, by far the smallest gap between winners and losers in the remaining 8 countries can be found in Slovakia in 1995 and 1996, two years when it looked like the country was likely to miss out on its opportunity to be among the first countries into the EU. We return to these points in the following section.

Taking all of these results – from the raw data, from the pooled multivariate analyses, and from the unpooled multivariate analyses, we can safely conclude that the winner-loser hypothesis is strongly supported by the data throughout the years of 1991–2003 in the ten post-communist countries that have so far joined the EU. There was undoubtedly a strong relationship between an individual’s self-assessment of his or her economic prospects and his or her attitudes towards joining the EU. The nature of this relationship, however, did change over time. It therefore should be clear that any static analysis that is limited to one particular year tells an inconclusive story about public opinion towards EU membership

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<sup>16</sup>All estimated probabilities are computed for the same average individual as defined above.

in post-communist countries. In particular, there are noticeable differences between surveys taken in Bulgaria and especially Romania and other countries, as well as striking differences between surveys taken in 1991 and 1992, and those taken in later years. We turn to these topics in the following section.

## 4 The dynamics of attitudes towards EU membership

In the previous section we demonstrated that (1) economic winners were consistently more likely than economic losers to support EU membership in post-communist candidate countries but that (2) the size of this effect varied across time and countries. In this section, we provide further insight on the second of these findings by testing two hypotheses that predict variation in the size of the gap in support for EU membership between economic winners and losers. Our first hypothesis is essentially a dynamic application of the of the original winners/losers argument. Accordingly, we begin with the assumption that to the extent that EU membership is seen to guarantee the permanence of post-communist economic reform, economic winners ought to be more likely to support EU membership than economic losers. However, we assume that EU membership does not *only* conjure up images of guarantees of the permanence of the post-communist economic changes. More specifically, EU membership may also represent the idea of escaping Soviet dominance and becoming part of the democratic and economically successful West. This is likely to be a rosy picture that appeals to many, and does not cut across economic winners and losers in the way that the “EU guarantees economic reforms” message does. Furthermore, we can combine these two different meanings for EU membership in a dynamic framework. To the extent that EU membership seems nothing more than a far off possibility – something to be aspired to in the future, but nothing that seems likely to take place any time soon – we might expect the relative salience of the EU as a guarantor of a new economic reality to be weaker than when EU membership is seen as a more realistic possibility. So while there is no reason that the gap in support for EU membership between economic winners and losers should not be present even when EU membership seems to be but a distant possibility, it should arguably be smaller during these periods of time than when EU membership appears more realistic. Importantly, we can think of this distinction across

countries – for some, membership will be more imminent than for others even at the same point in time – and over time.

We also test a second hypothesis that became part of the narrative of post-communist referendum process on EU membership. Namely, the concern arose that for some countries that had carried out far reaching economic reforms, EU membership might actually represent a step backwards economically, and thus have the potential to harm those who had done well during the transition. In Estonia, for example, it was claimed that EU membership would de-liberalize the economy: one Estonian opponent described the EU as “a ‘Soviet Union in disguise’ that will force the country to deliberalize its progressive economic policies, including a zero-percent corporate income tax”.<sup>17</sup> In these limited cases, we might expect a small subset of winners to come to oppose EU membership, and thus the size of the gap between winners and losers might also tighten a bit (or at least compared to other countries where support among winners would not be expected to drop).

As described in the previous section, Figure 4 (see above) is indeed quite consistent with the first of these hypotheses: the gap between winners and losers is smallest in the first years of the transition when EU membership appears most remote. The gap also stays smaller over time in Romania and Bulgaria, the two countries not admitted to the EU in 2003. By contrast, there is little in Figure 4 to support the second hypothesis: the size of the gap between winners and losers actually increases in both Estonia and the Czech Republic – two of the region’s more economically advanced countries – in the final surveys in 2003. These conclusions, of course, are only being made based on eyeballing a set of predicted probabilities, and thus do not generate measures of statistical certainty.

To do so, we turn to multilevel statistical models. Such models allow us to create interaction effects between country-level variables (such as whether one is living in a country at a time where EU membership is remote or likely) and individual-level variables (such as whether one is an economic winner or loser), which is exactly what we need for testing the

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<sup>17</sup>Stephen C. Johnson, “Gearing up for hard sell on EU membership,” *The Baltic Times*, Dec. 19, 2002, accessed via Lexis-Nexis Academic.

aforementioned hypotheses. More precisely, we specify a multilevel model in which we jointly estimate the effect of winner/loser-status within and across countries. The level-1 units are individuals and the level-2 units are the country-time specific surveys.<sup>18</sup> For computational efficiency we reduce our data set to those respondents who would either vote for or against EU membership, the two comparison groups in which we are primarily interested. This means we reduce our dependent variable to two outcomes – “for” and “against” – which then allows us to estimate logistic regression models.<sup>19</sup> This reduces our sample to a total of about 46,000 individuals with an average survey sample size of about 700 respondents.

To test the two hypotheses specified above, we create two new country-level dummy variables.<sup>20</sup> The first is a dummy variable indicating whether a country seemed “Likely” to join the EU in the future at that point in time: in 1991 and 1992, all countries are coded as 0; in 1995 and 1996 Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia are coded as 0 and the remaining countries coded as 1; and from 2001 to 2003 all countries are coded as 1.<sup>21</sup> To test the claim that support might decline among winners in the most economically advanced countries in the year of the referendum, we code a variable called “Economically Advanced” as 1 for the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, and Poland in 2003, and 0 otherwise.<sup>22</sup>

We first estimate a baseline model (Model 1) in which we allow each country-year survey to have its own intercept. Essentially, this can be considered as a robustness test of the results presented in Table 1 (the fully pooled model) where we are no longer constraining the average support across the countries – independent of the other variables contained in the model – to

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<sup>18</sup>Our model specification follows the design in Duch and Stevenson (2005). An alternative specification would be to treat countries and years as separate levels. The results from this alternative specification are almost identical to the design presented here, but are more complicated to present and interpret. Results are available from the authors upon request.

<sup>19</sup>Multilevel models with a dependent variable consisting of unordered categories are very complicated to estimate and are not yet implemented in current statistical software packages. Note that coefficients derived from logistic regression models are essentially the same as the corresponding coefficients from a multinomial logit model and hence we only lose some efficiency in the estimation as we take less information into account (Alvarez and Nagler 1998).

<sup>20</sup>While we could conceivably try to create more continuous or multinomial measures, the analysis in the context of interactive effects across levels of analysis is much more tractable with dummy variables.

<sup>21</sup>For a concise summary of when different countries passed different thresholds towards EU membership, see Pacek, Pop-Eleches and Tucker (2009), note 24.

<sup>22</sup>All four countries have EBRD Transition Indicator scores above the average score. (The EBRD transition indicator is discussed below.)

be equal. We then extend this model by allowing the “winner” and “the same” coefficients to vary by the 2nd-level units. As the 2nd-level units are the country-level surveys, this means that we are now allowing the effect of being a winner to vary across countries and years. All other (individual level) control variables – gender, education, and age – are included as fixed effects as we did not find systematic variation in their coefficients when estimating multinomial logit models on the country-year analyses in Section 3. In Model 3, we further harness the power of multilevel models to add a series of macro-economic aggregate level control variables: the EBRD Transition Indicator,<sup>23</sup> GDP as a percentage of GDP in 1989,<sup>24</sup> and a country’s unemployment rate.<sup>25</sup> This allows us to examine whether winner/loser status continues to have an effect independent of how well the country as a whole is doing.

Our key results from the previous section continue to hold up well in Models 1 to 3. The effect of being a winner is positive, statistically significant, and similar in size across the three models.<sup>26</sup> The effect of being in “the same” category is positive and statistically significant as well, but again is smaller than the effect of being a winner. The standard deviations for the winner and “the same” coefficients in Model 3 are both below the average coefficient estimates, which means that, in every survey, winners and “the same” respondents are more likely to support the EU than losers. Thus we can conclude that the results from the previous section are indeed robust to specification in a multilevel modeling framework.

[Table 2 about here.]

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<sup>23</sup>The Transition Indicator is measured by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and reflects the judgment of the EBRD’s Office of the Chief Economist about country-specific progress in transition. See <http://www.ebrd.com/country/sector/econo/stats/timeth.htm> for more details about the methodology. The average score on this indicator in our sample is 2.90 (std.dev.=0.75) with a minimum score of 1.19 (Latvia and Lithuania in 1991) and a maximum score of 3.85 (Hungary in 2001-2003).

<sup>24</sup>GDP in 1989 is an important reference year as it is the last year under communist rule. Thus GDP as a percentage of GDP in 1989 provides a good assessment of where the country currently stands as compared to when communism collapsed, or, put another way, the overall progress of the transition to date.

<sup>25</sup>Macro-economic data for post-communist countries kindly provided by Grigore Pop-Eleches.

<sup>26</sup>We are not presenting predicted probabilities for our “typical” respondent here because we collapsed the dependent variable for these analyses into only winners and losers for reasons described previously. But as a result, the predicted probabilities we could calculate from such a model would be the likelihood of being for membership *given* that one was either for membership or opposed to membership, and as such would not be intuitively comparable to the predicted probabilities presented in the previous section.

In Models 4 and 5 we test our two new hypotheses regarding the dynamics of public opinion towards EU membership by interacting our key independent variables at the individual level (winner status and “the same” status) with whether one lives in a country that is “Likely” to join the EU and (in Model 5) whether one lives in a country that is “Economically Advanced”.

The results in model 4 confirm our hypothesis that the size of the winner/loser-effect is affected by a country’s likelihood of joining the EU. Both interaction effects of the “Likely” variable are positive and statistically significant. At the same time, the winner coefficient (and the “the same”) coefficient remain statistically significant as well, albeit smaller than when we did not include the interactive effect. What this means is that winners are always more likely than losers to support EU membership, but the magnitude of that effect is greater in times and places when the likelihood of joining the EU is greater. Finally, in contrast to the conventional wisdom, in Model 5 we find that winners in the economically most advanced countries in 2003 (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, and Poland) are actually more likely to support EU membership relative to economic losers than winners in the other country-year pairs.

Taken together, the multilevel modeling exercise allows us to make the following three conclusions. First, the general finding regarding the over-time and cross-national preference of winners for EU membership is robust to re-specification in a multilevel modeling framework, and it is robust to controlling for macro-economic factors at the country level. This confirms the evidence from the previous section from the separate, unpooled analyses that the winners-losers finding is not simply picking up the fact that there is more support for EU membership in more economically advanced countries. Second, the size of the gap between winners and losers is larger when countries are more likely to join the EU. Again, this finding is present when controlling for macro-economic conditions at the country-level, which should further convince us as to its validity. Finally, contrary to expectations, we find that the gap between winners and losers is even further pronounced in the most economically advanced countries on the cusp of EU membership.

One final point about Table 2 is worth noting, which is that it provides further evidence along the lines of Figure 1 (which used only raw data), with which we opened the article. As in Figure 1, we find that even in a multilevel framework there is a statistically significant and

*negative* effect for the EBRD Transition Indicator at the country level, which means that, all else considered, support for the EU was *lower* in economically more advanced countries. Most of this effect, however, is due to the fact that overall support was relatively high in 1991 and 1992 while, at the same time, all countries scored relatively low on the transition indicator variable.<sup>27</sup> The effect of GDP (relative to 1998), by contrast, is statistically significant and positive. Taken together, this suggests that simply making progress on reform did little to build support for EU membership; recovering from the effects of economic downturns associated with the transition, however, did. For the unemployment rate variable we do not find a significant effect in any of the models.

## 5 Conclusion

We conclude by addressing contributions our paper can make in three important areas: our understanding of public opinion towards the EU in post-communist countries; the value of dynamic analyses of public opinion formation; and finally the importance of context in the study of public opinion.

First, we have provided a central unifying framework for public opinion towards EU membership in post-communist countries throughout the entire time period from the collapse of communism until the first eight post-communist countries were admitted to the EU. Drawing on over 60,000 separate interviews with citizens from 10 different countries over a 12 year period, we have presented a parsimonious yet nuanced picture of this phenomenon. Simply put, economic winners are more likely to support EU membership than economic losers regardless of a range of social-demographic characteristics. This rule is remarkably robust to variation in both time and place. The nature of this gap, however, is in part a function of the country's progress towards EU membership. When membership remains a far off ideal, the gap is smaller; when membership becomes more likely, the gap begins to widen as economic losers become increasingly less enthusiastic about EU membership than economic

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<sup>27</sup>Re-estimating model 3 without 1991 and 1992 the EBRD Transition Indicator turns out to be insignificant (but still negative).

winners. Moreover, counter to expectations, in the most economically advanced (or perhaps most economically reformed) countries, the gap is even larger.

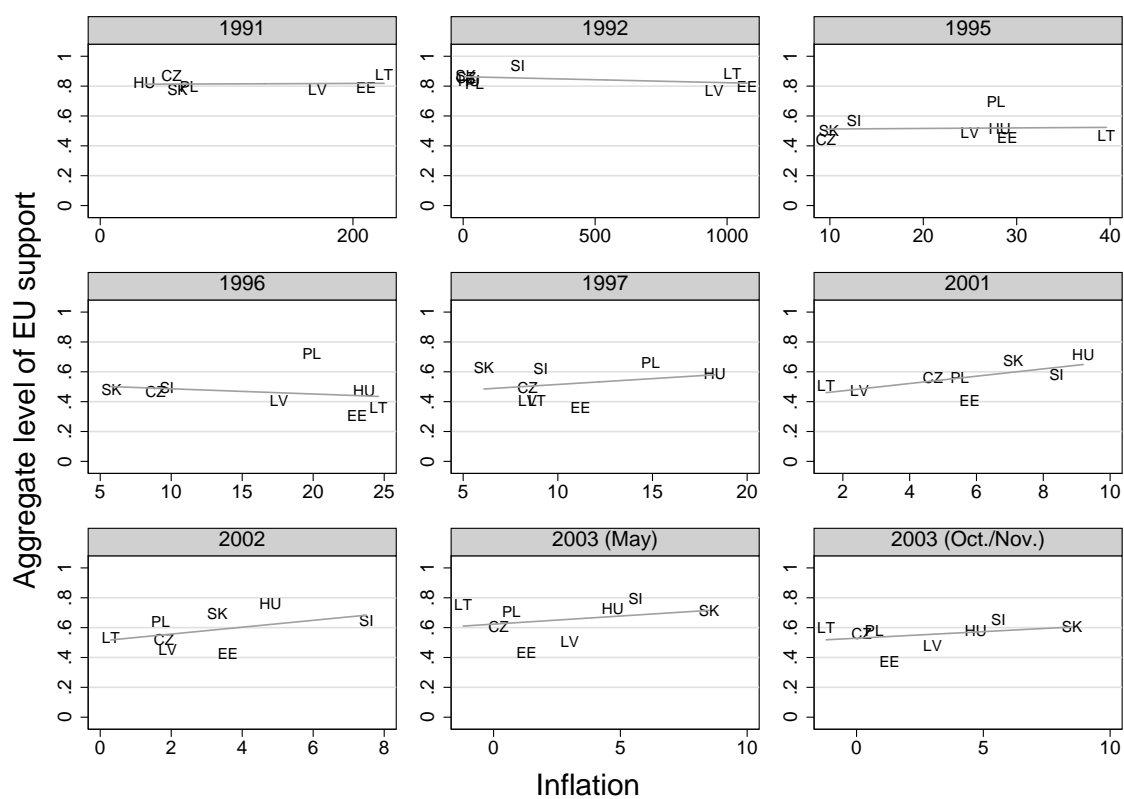
Second, we have highlighted the importance of including dynamic analysis in studies of public opinion. The high costs of survey research normally force academics into relying on small numbers of surveys, and in particular on relying on surveys conducted at a particular point in time. The results of this study, however, demonstrate how much we can miss when conducting analyses at a single point in time. The Tucker, Pacek and Berinsky (2002) article, in retrospect, had the good fortune to use the 1996 data; had the authors of that article started with the 1992 data instead, they might very well have gotten nowhere. Similarly, the dynamic framework we have adopted here has allowed us to learn that while the winners/losers gap was present throughout the transition period, it varied in important ways over time. Indeed, we have basically had the fortunate opportunity to watch a crucial area of public opinion develop from scratch. While on the one hand, we have identified a pattern that is remarkably stable – economic winners were always more supportive of EU membership in post-communist countries than economic losers – on the other hand, we have also identified an important time-trend in the data.

Finally, our work highlights the crucial importance of context in the study of public opinion formation. We do not intend any of these findings to be seen as a challenge to the excellent research on attitudes towards EU membership in West European democracies that focuses more explicitly on an individual's place in the economy and the nature of his or her skill set. Instead, we suggest that while EU membership (or EU deepening) may have had one meaning in the West European context, in the post-communist context it seems to have at least in part meant something else. And herein lies a valuable lesson for studies of public opinion generally: just because the same question is asked at different times and in different places, it does not mean that the same theoretical explanations will always be appropriate.

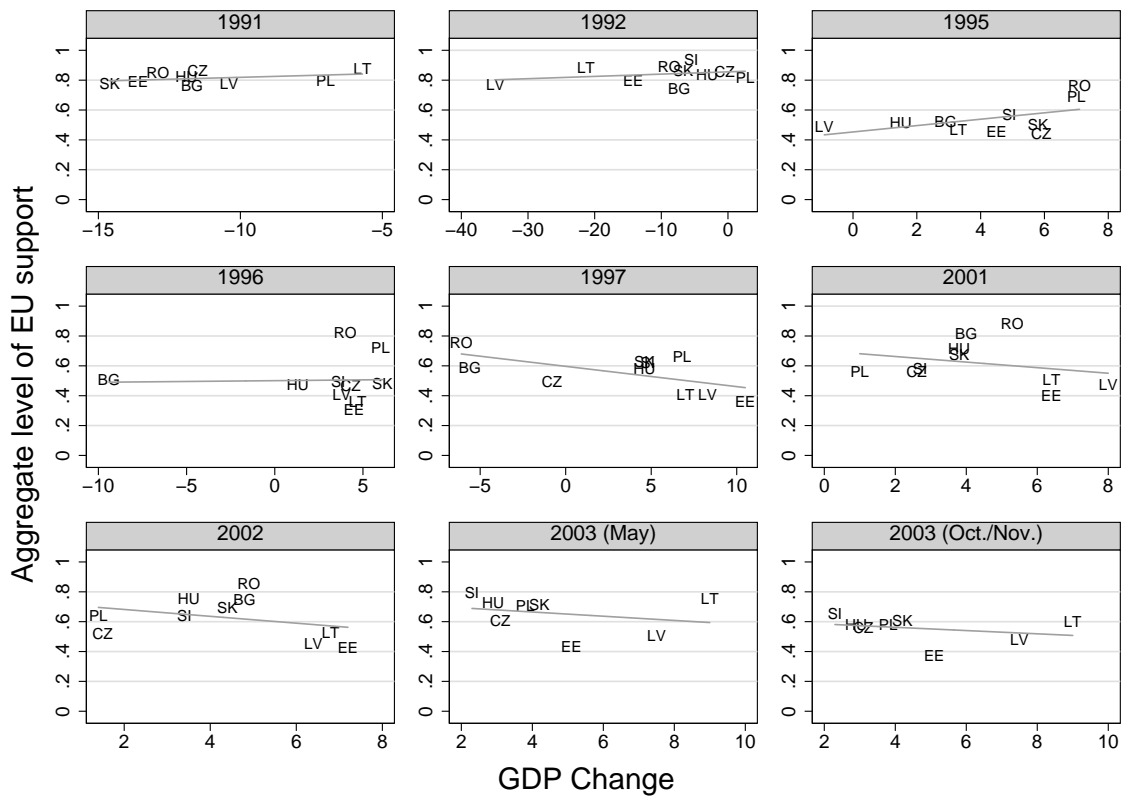
Finally, the fact that all of the countries featured in this study have now joined the EU opens up a fascinating new set of questions for scholars of public opinion. Will attitudes in these countries towards the EU generally, as well as towards EU deepening more specifically, continue to follow a distinctly post-communist logic? If so, will it continue to take the format of the winners/losers divide that governed attitudes towards accession, or will it take some

other format? Alternatively, will we see some sort of convergence with the forces that govern attitudes in the original EU-15? Or are we on the cusp of some new sort of divide, with certain forces determining attitudes towards the EU in large member states and other forces in new member states? Either way, our hope is that the basic tools and arguments presented in this paper will prove fruitful as a starting ground for answering some or all these interesting questions.

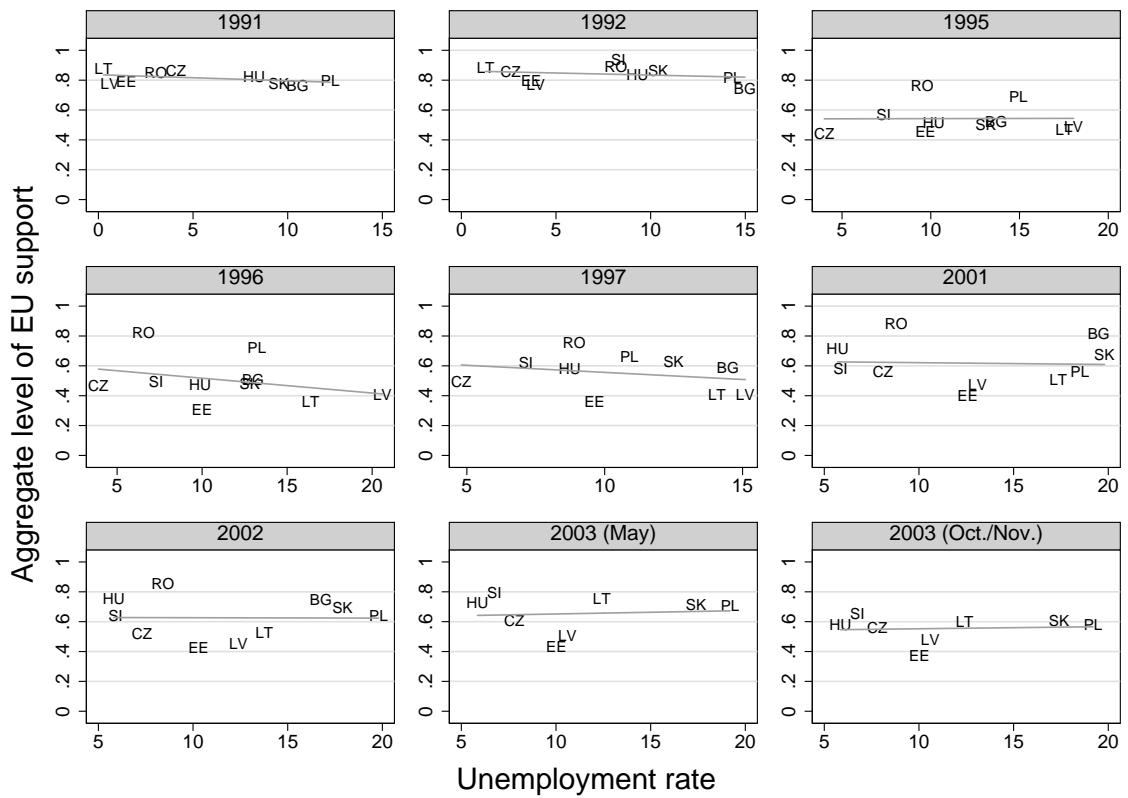
## Appendix



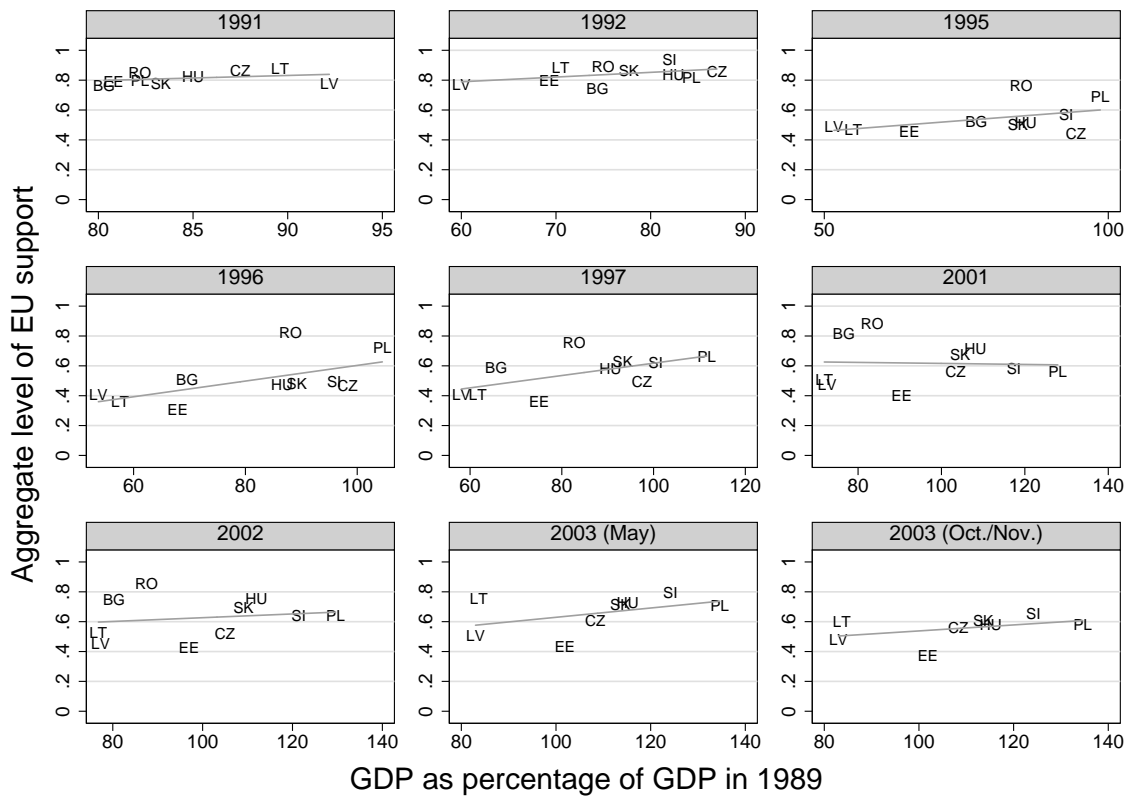
**Figure A-1:** Aggregate levels of EU support against inflation. Hyperinflation countries Bulgaria and Romania are omitted. Lines are OLS regression lines. Countries: Czech Republic (CZ), Estonia (EE), Hungary (HU), Latvia (LT), Lithuania (LV), Poland (PL), Slovakia (SI), Slovenia (SK).



**Figure A-2:** Aggregate levels of EU support against change in GDP (%). Lines are OLS regression lines. Countries: Bulgaria (BG), Czech Republic (CZ), Estonia (EE), Hungary (HU), Latvia (LT), Lithuania (LV), Poland (PL), Romania (RO), Slovakia (SI), Slovenia (SK).



**Figure A-3:** Aggregate levels of EU support against unemployment rate. Lines are OLS regression lines. Countries: Bulgaria (BG), Czech Republic (CZ), Estonia (EE), Hungary (HU), Latvia (LT), Lithuania (LV), Poland (PL), Romania (RO), Slovakia (SI), Slovenia (SK).

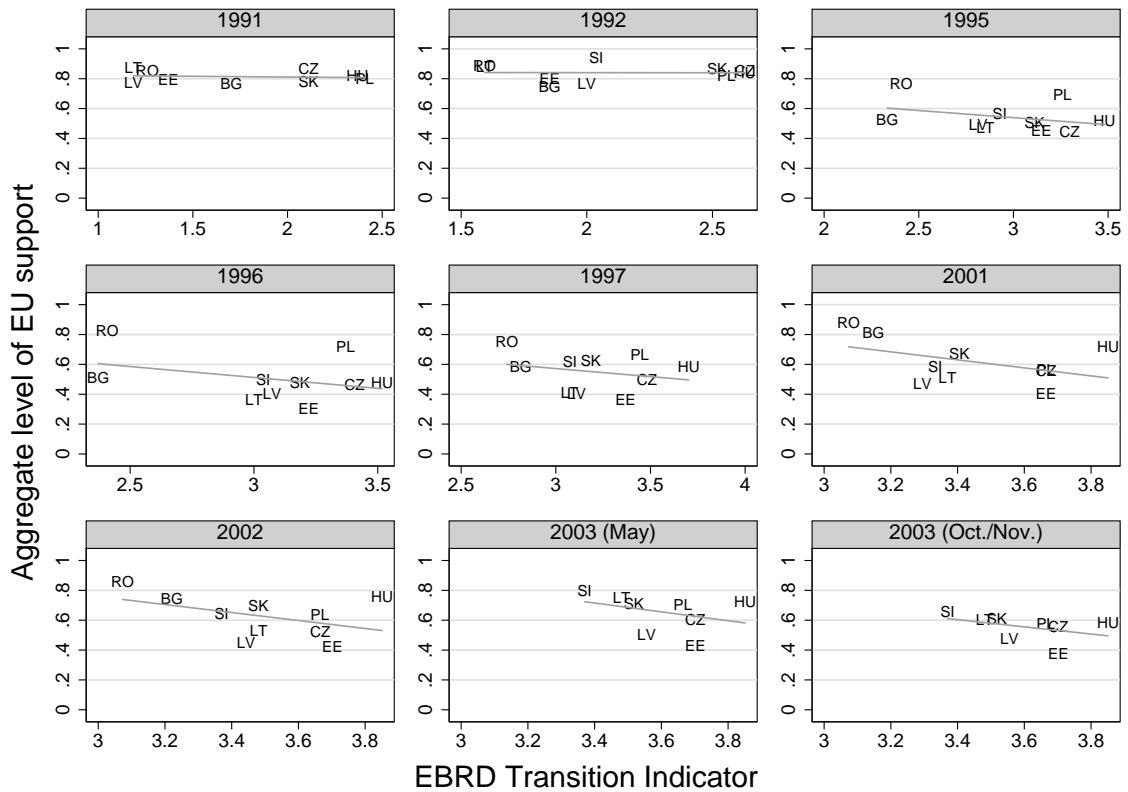


**Figure A-4:** Aggregate levels of EU support against GDP relative to 1989. Lines are OLS regression lines. Note that in this figure more economically advanced countries have higher levels of support. Countries: Bulgaria (BG), Czech Republic (CZ), Estonia (EE), Hungary (HU), Latvia (LT), Lithuania (LV), Poland (PL), Romania (RO), Slovakia (SI), Slovenia (SK).

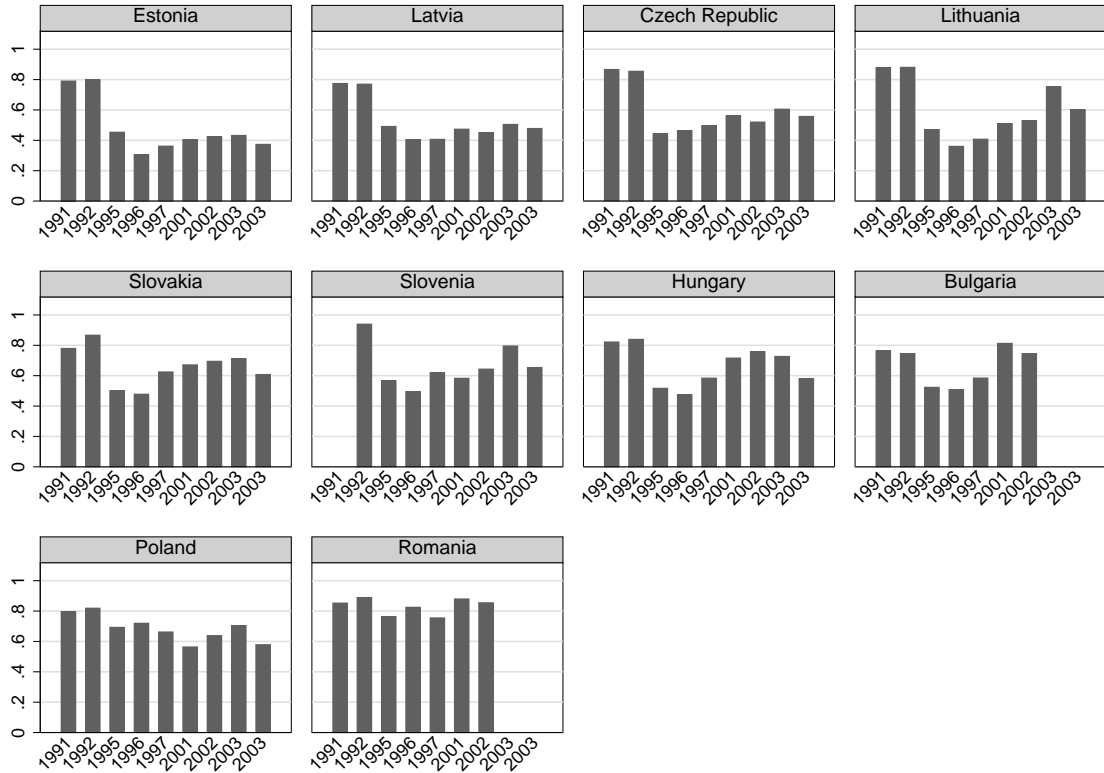
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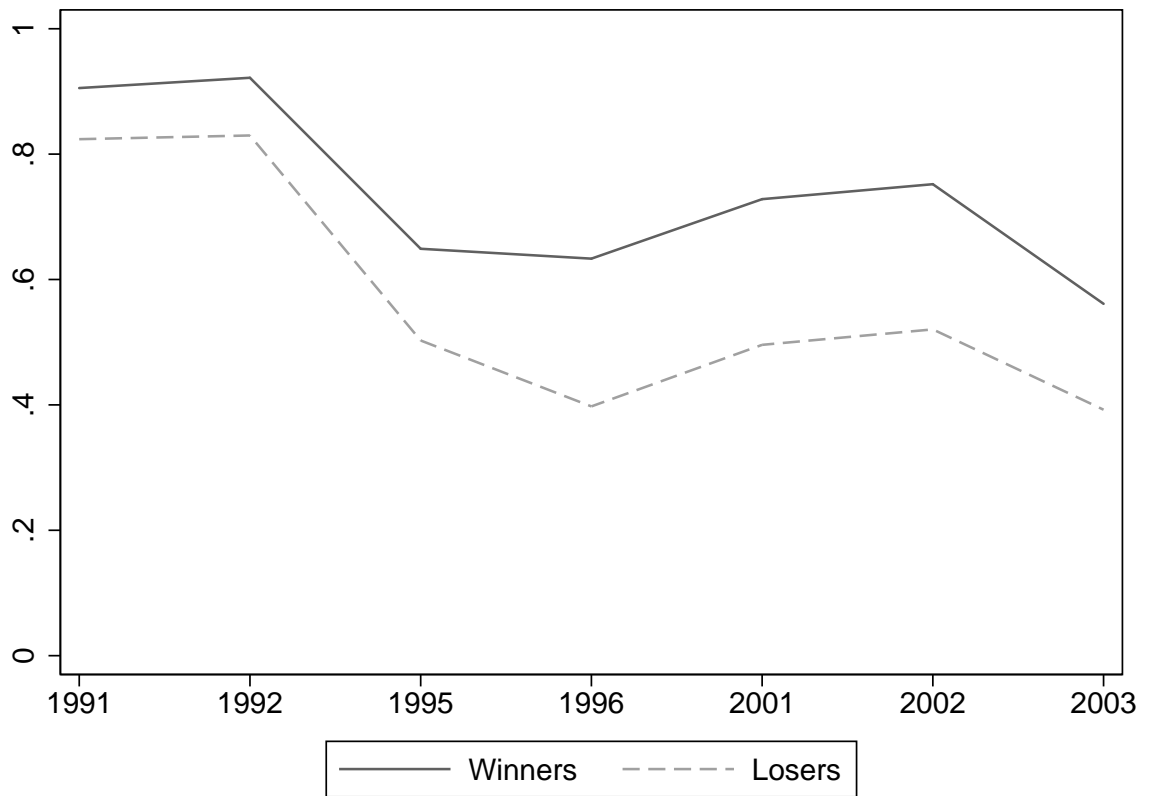


**Figure 1:** Aggregate levels of EU support against the European Bank for Recovery and Development (EBRD)'s Transition Indicator. Lines are OLS regression lines. The figures show that less economically successful countries had higher levels of aggregate support for EU membership. Countries: Bulgaria (BG), Czech Republic (CZ), Estonia (EE), Hungary (HU), Latvia (LT), Lithuania (LV), Poland (PL), Romania (RO), Slovakia (SI), Slovenia (SK).

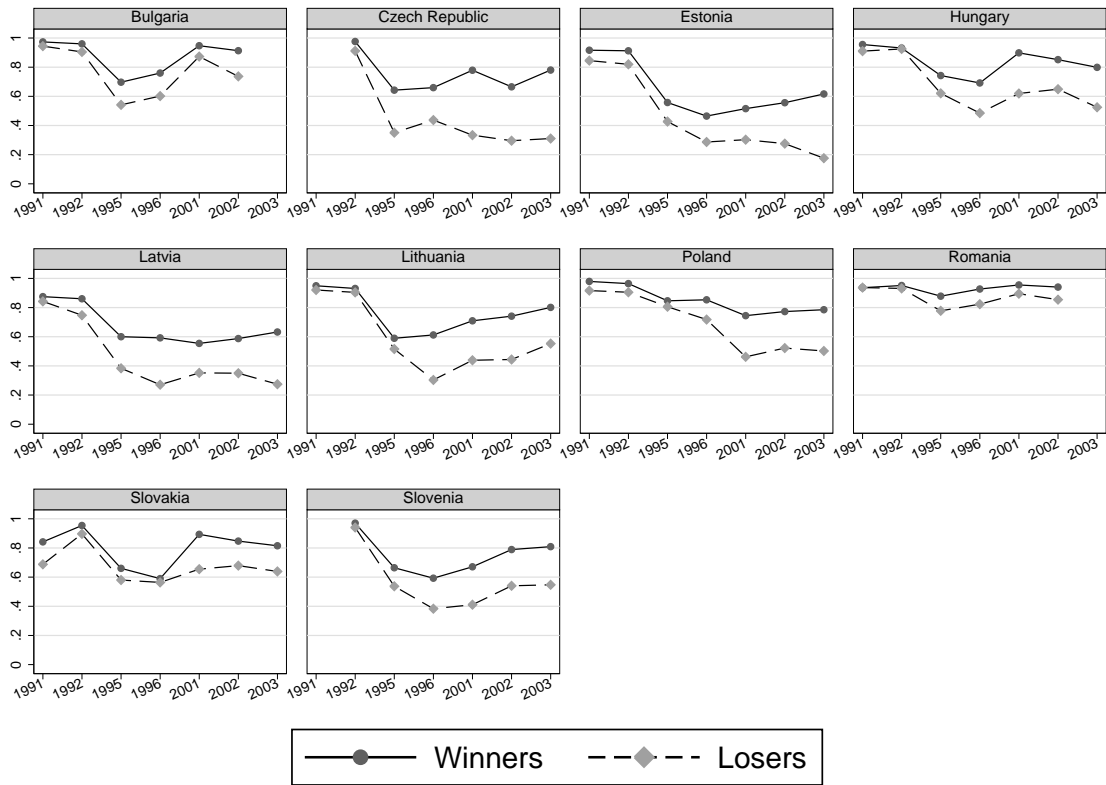


**Figure 2:** Percentages of respondents who favor EC membership of their country (1991 and 1992) or would vote for EU membership (1995-2003) of their country if a referendum were held tomorrow. Two surveys are available for 2003, one conducted in May and one in October/November 2003. In the latter, the survey question refers to actual vote decision. Data on EC membership opinion not available for Slovenia in 1991 because question was not asked. Data on EU membership opinion not available for Bulgaria and Romania in 2003 as no referenda were held. Countries are ordered by average support for EU membership in each country. Sample size in each year is about 1,000 respondents.





**Figure 4:** Predicted probabilities for winners and losers supporting EU membership. Estimates are based on seven multinomial logit models estimated on each year separately with countries pooled together. All other variables are held at their modal or mean values, representing a 44 year old female respondent with secondary education.



**Figure 5:** Predicted probabilities for winners and losers supporting EU membership. Estimates are based on 66 multinomial logit models estimated on each country-year observation separately. There are no estimates for the Czech Republic in 1991 because 100% of winners supported the EU. The question about EU support was not asked in Slovenia in 1991. In 2003, the survey question regarding EU support referred to actual vote decision in the referendum, and consequently was not asked in Bulgaria and Romania where referenda were not held. All other variables are held at their modal or mean values, representing a 44 year old female respondent with secondary education.

**Table 1:** Multinomial logit model of EU support on winner/loser status and control variables. All countries ( $N = 10$ ) and years ( $N = 7$ ) are pooled together.

	<b>EU Support</b>					
	For		Would not vote		Undecided	
	Coef.	(s.e.)	Coef.	(s.e.)	Coef.	(s.e.)
Winner	0.99	(0.04)	0.18	(0.05)	0.47	(0.05)
The same	0.33	(0.03)	0.23	(0.04)	0.21	(0.04)
Male	-0.05	(0.03) <sup>ns</sup>	-0.34	(0.04)	-0.47	(0.03)
Education: secondary	-0.10	(0.03)	-0.60	(0.04)	-0.59	(0.04)
Education: higher	0.12	(0.04)	-0.89	(0.06)	-0.68	(0.05)
Age (mean centered)	-0.72	(0.08)	-0.65	(0.11)	0.02	(0.09) <sup>ns</sup>
Intercept	1.49	(0.03)	0.39	(0.04)	0.97	(0.04)

$N = 63,200$   
 Log likelihood =  $-64860.951$   
 Likelihood Ratio  $\chi^2_{18} = 3398.94$  ( $p = 0.0000$ )

*Note:* “Against EU membership” is the baseline category of the dependent variable. Losers are the omitted category for the winner and the “the same” dummy variables; “Education: primary” is the omitted category for the education dummies. All coefficients are statistically significant at  $p < .05$  unless indicated by “ns”.

**Table 2:** Determinants of Support for EU Membership: multilevel model analysis.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
<i>Individual level variables</i>					
Winner	1.23 (0.04)	1.16 (0.09)	1.21 (0.09)	0.75 (0.14)	0.75 (0.13)
The same	0.74 (0.03)	0.63 (0.06)	0.66 (0.05)	0.38 (0.09)	0.38 (0.09)
Winner*Likely	-	-	-	0.68 (0.16)	0.60 (0.16)
The same*Likely	-	-	-	0.41 (0.11)	0.36 (0.10)
Winner*Economically most advanced in 2003	-	-	-	-	0.88 (0.30)
The same*Economically most advanced in 2003	-	-	-	-	0.44 (0.16)
Male	-0.08 (0.03)	-0.08 (0.03)	-0.08 (0.03)	-0.08 (0.03)	-0.08 (0.03)
Education: secondary	0.17 (0.04)	0.17 (0.04)	0.17 (0.04)	0.17 (0.04)	0.17 (0.04)
Education: higher	0.50 (0.05)	0.49 (0.05)	0.49 (0.05)	0.48 (0.05)	0.48 (0.05)
Age (mean centered)	-0.64 (0.09)	-0.60 (0.09)	-0.60 (0.09)	-0.60 (0.09)	-0.60 (0.09)
Intercept	1.64 (0.14)	1.67 (0.16)	4.02 (0.54)	4.24 (0.60)	4.18 (0.60)
<i>Country level variables</i>					
EBRD Trans. Indicator	-	-	-1.28 (0.17)	-1.29 (0.27)	-1.28 (0.27)
GDP relative to 1989	-	-	0.01 (0.07)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Unemployment rate	-	-	0.02 (0.02) <sup>ns</sup>	0.02 (0.02) <sup>ns</sup>	0.01 (0.02) <sup>ns</sup>
Likely	-	-	-	-0.28 (0.38) <sup>ns</sup>	-0.24 (0.38) <sup>ns</sup>
Economically most advanced in 2003	-	-	-	-	-0.49 (0.40) <sup>ns</sup>
<i>Error terms (std. dev. and s.e.)</i>					
Winner	-	0.59 (0.08)	0.58 (0.08)	0.48 (0.07)	0.43 (0.07)
The same	-	0.32 (0.05)	0.30 (0.05)	0.24 (0.05)	0.21 (0.05)
Intercept	1.06 (0.09)	1.20 (0.11)	0.72 (0.07)	0.71 (0.07)	0.70 (0.07)
<hr/>					
<i>N</i> individuals: 46,107					
<i>N</i> surveys: 67					
Average no. of individuals per survey: 688					

*Note:* All coefficients are statistically significant at  $p < .05$  unless indicated by “ns”.