

PART V:

INSTITUTIONAL ATTITUDES:
POLITICS, THE STATE,
AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

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STRUCTURAL DETERMINANTS OF RETROSPECTIVE ASSESSMENTS OF SOCIALISM

Prompted by the observation that many people in post-communist European countries redefine the historical experience of communism, the purpose of this chapter is to examine, from a structural perspective, the factors that trigger people's reassessment of the socialist regime in Poland. Previous research has shown that cross-sectional evaluation of socialism in post-communist Poland remained relatively stable over time, especially with regard to positive assessments: between 1988 and 1998 about one-third of the adult population expressed positive attitudes toward the past. However, *different* people made this type of assessment as years passed, based on individual interests that were well-grounded in their social class location (Slomczynski and Wilk 2002).

Understanding public opinion on socialism, that is, on a system that has ceased to exist and is now in the past, is important for two principal reasons. The first pertains to the role of history in the functioning of society. While this is a well-taken point in general, for Poland dealing with the socialist period involves the additional component of a regime change in 1989, which took place without a clear-cut break with the past. As a result, sixteen years after the transformation, "unresolved" issues of the communist era continue to riddle Polish society (Castle and Taras 2002). Second, examining the assessment of socialism and its determinants in post-1989 Poland opens a kind of testing ground for more general attitudes toward the emerging economic and political structures, such as the relation between references to the past and attitudes on state paternalism. Since socialism can be characterized as a strongly paternalistic type of state, on theoretical grounds having a favorable

attitude toward socialism would imply state paternalistic attitudes as well. Empirical evidence supports this line of reasoning (Tomescu-Dubrow 2006b).

In Eastern Europe, structural variables are found to strongly affect the way people react to social and political change (Rose, Mischler, and Haerperfer 1998). Following this line of research, and informed by rational choice and self-interest theories, I expect people's subjective attitudes toward socialism to depend on actual and potential gains and losses stemming from their position in the social structure. Positions in the social structure have been conceptualized differently: as occupational groups within the class paradigm (Goldthorpe 1980; Goldthorpe and Hope 1974; Wright 1989), and as socioeconomic status (hierarchical continuum) within the status attainment paradigm (Blau and Duncan 1967; Ganzeboom, de Graaf, and Treiman 1992; Treiman 1976). Challenging the death of class thesis that in the contemporary world "class maps converge with maps of stratification hierarchy" (Pakulski and Waters 1996: 151) this chapter builds on the argument that at both the theoretical and empirical levels the distinction between class structure and social stratification is justified and should be maintained (see Slomczynski and Shabad [1997] and Slomczynski [2000] for detailed discussions on the relevance of class). Hence, the main research hypothesis is that people's view of the past, and changes thereof, will depend on their class location and their stratification position before and after the 1989 systemic change.

Stability and Change in the Assessment of Socialism

In a previous analysis of the 1988–1998 POLPAN data, Slomczynski and Wilk (2002) showed that despite overall stability in positive evaluations of socialism over the 1988–98 period, significant change occurred at the individual level. To examine whether the same holds once the 2003 wave is included, I focus on the distribution of the assessment of socialism in the four survey waves, by looking at both the entire sample and the panel sample (Table 18.1).

The questionnaire item asks: "Do you think that the socialist system brought to the majority of people in Poland: (1) gains only, (2) more gains than losses, (3) as many gains as losses, (4) more losses than gains, or (5) losses only?" Since I am interested in a clear-cut distinction among outlooks on the past, I regroup the five-choice answer into three categories: *positive assessment* of socialism, comprised of "gains only," and "more gains than losses"; *neutral assessment*, corresponding to "as many gains as losses"; and *negative assessment*, which includes "more losses than gains," and "losses only."

Table 18.1. Distribution of Assessment of Socialism in 1988, 1993, 1998, and 2003

Year	Assessment of socialism					<i>N</i> = 100%
	three categories			five categories		
	positive (%)	neutral (%)	negative(%)	mean	SD	
Full samples						
1988	27.1	49.0	23.9	3.064	0.851	5,817
1993	29.3	37.0	33.7	2.941	0.917	2,258
1998	31.2	35.9	32.9	2.984	0.960	2,133
2003	36.3	33.1	30.6	3.032	0.975	1,631
Panel sample						
1988	29.3	47.0	23.8	3.077	0.869	1,241
1993	29.8	38.1	32.1	2.965	0.913	1,240
1998	33.2	35.5	31.3	3.015	0.943	1,241
2003	40.1	32.4	27.5	3.107	0.974	1,214

First, let us note the closeness of the percentage distributions for the assessment of communism for the whole sample and for the panel data. The almost identical results across all types of evaluation as well as the high similarity in mean values and standard deviation values indicate that the panel sample is not biased and reflects the larger sample well. The means and standard deviations, calculated for the five-category measure of assessment of the past, also show that the overall distribution of answers is relatively stable across time with respect to central tendency and distributional variation.

Second, the results showing people's preferences for socialism across waves are of particular interest. Both samples tell the same story: from 1988 to 2003 the proportion of people holding a positive view of the past does not diminish; if anything, positive answers become more common. The proportion of neutral responses decreases, while proportions for negative assessment first increase (from 1988 to 1998), and then decrease slightly (from 1998 to 2003). This latter drop in negative evaluations of socialism should be understood in relation to some negative aspects of the economic transformation that Poland was undergoing in preparation for joining the European Union (Słomczynski and Shabad 2003).

What do these by and large equal distributions of answers for the two types of samples mean, however, in terms of fluctuations in public opinion? Comparing responses across the 1988–93, 1993–98, and 1998–2003 intervals reveals a considerable degree of stability, with coefficients varying between 39 percent and 58 percent, but also substantial change in people's evaluations

of the past (Table 18.2). Over the years following the systemic transformations in Poland, one-fifth of the respondents switch from a negative to a positive assessment of socialism. Change also occurs in the reverse direction, from positive to negative outlooks, but after 1993 its magnitude is smaller than for switches to positive evaluations. In addition, one can see that, as time goes by, the proportion of people who initially held a neutral view of socialism but then switched to a positive one increases.

Table 18.2. Changes in Assessment of Socialism in the Periods 1988–1993, 1993–1998, and 1998–2003

Assessment of socialism	Assessment of socialism ^a			N = 100%
	positive (%)	neutral (%)	negative (%)	
In 1988	Changes in 1988–1993 ^b			
Positive	38.8	37.2	24.0	363
Neutral	27.5	40.4	32.1	582
Negative	23.4	34.6	42.0	295
In 1993	Changes in 1993–1998 ^c			
Positive	50.5	31.4	18.1	370
Neutral	29.0	45.8	25.2	472
Negative	22.1	27.4	50.5	398
In 1998	Changes in 1998–2003 ^d			
Positive	57.6	24.3	18.1	403
Neutral	39.5	43.3	17.2	430
Negative	22.3	28.6	49.1	381

^a Changes are examined on the panel sample.

^b Gamma = 0.215.

^c Gamma = 0.396.

^d Gamma = 0.431.

Before analyzing the mechanisms behind this phenomenon, one more aspect warrants attention: To what extent are previously held opinions about the past related to one's later assessments? Is this relationship equally strong across time? The correlation coefficients for the four survey waves (Table 18.3) indicate a positive, significant relationship between assessment of socialism at time t and at time $t + 1$; that is, more positive evaluations of the past at one particular point are associated with more positive evaluations at the next survey time. Moreover, when five-year periods are considered, the strength of the relationship increases at first (the correlation coefficient for the 1993 and 1998 evaluations is twice that for 1988–93), and then stabilizes.

If, on the other hand, we assess the relationship between earlier and later evaluations over the 1988–2003 interval, we find that the strength of the correlation decreases as more time passes between people’s answers; hence, the statistically nonsignificant r coefficient for the 1988 and 2003 evaluations of socialism. These results may be explained by the fact that the more distant the past becomes, the less impact opinions held at that time have on one’s current views (Rose, Mischler, and Haerpfer 1998).

Table 18.3. Correlations of Assessment of Socialism in 1988, 1993, 1998, and 2003

Year	Assessment of socialism ^a			
	1988	1993	1998	2003
1988	1.00	0.145**	0.121**	0.042
1993	0.145**	1.00	0.303**	0.286**
1998	0.121**	0.303**	1.00	0.310**
2003	0.042	0.286**	0.310**	1.00

^a Correlation coefficients are calculated on panel sample; assessment of socialism = 5 categories.

** $p < 0.01$.

Social Structure and the Assessment of Socialism

So far, I have shown that in the years between late socialism and 2003, in Poland a significant proportion of adults retained a positive opinion of socialism, while another important proportion reassessed their views about the historical experience of communism. As stated earlier in this chapter, I hypothesize that social structure significantly influences one’s evaluation of socialism as well as changes thereof. Numerous studies indicate that in the years following the fall of communism, social inequality overall increased as certain social groups, such as manual workers, have supported more “social costs” of the transition than others (e.g., managers) (Deacon 1993; Slomczynski and Shabad 1997, 2000; Zamfir 2004).

Following the logic of self-interest and rational choice theories, I expect “losers” of the post-communist transition to hold more positive views about the past than winners or those for whom the regime change has not entailed dramatic social loss. Moreover, I argue that the dynamics of the post-communist transformation also brings *changes* in individuals’ assessments of the past. Whether the reassessment is positive or negative depends on the nature of the overall change a particular person

experienced. Since this chapter assumes that class structure is conceptually and empirically distinct from the stratification system (see Slomczynski and Shabad 1997, 2000), I analyze the effects of social structure in terms of both social class position and position in the stratification system before and after the 1989 regime change.

Social Class and the Assessment of Socialism

Table 18.4 shows how members of the different social classes evaluate the communist period across time. Although the overall relationship between class and the assessment of socialism is weak, as indicated by the correlation coefficients, we see important differences between groups. In 1988, the proportion of positive assessments is highest among managers, experts, and supervisors. This is not surprising: these social groups were often tied to the *nomenklatura*, which offered certain political and economic privileges (Mach and Slomczynski 1995), while leaving little room for open criticism against the party-state. For the same period, the self-employed, factory workers, and manual workers are the last to praise socialism, for obvious reasons: the Polish communist system, while tolerating certain types of small enterprises, was not supportive of private businesses; as for workers, their discontent with the regime over the discrepancy between ideology (the leading role of the working class in particular) and the grim reality of everyday life translated into the well-known Solidarity movement (Laba 1991; Ost 1990).

Table 18.4. Social Class and Assessment of Socialism, 1988–2003

Social classes	Assessment of socialism					
	three categories			five categories		
	positive (%)	neutral (%)	negative (%)	mean	SD	<i>N</i>
	<i>1988</i>					
Managers	47.3	33.6	19.1	3.32	0.839	131
Experts	32.3	48.0	19.7	3.18	0.782	269
Supervisors	31.4	41.0	27.5	3.06	0.862	334
Self-employed	19.2	51.7	29.1	2.91	0.890	151
Technicians and office workers	28.8	50.7	20.5	3.13	0.808	1,008
Factory workers	23.4	50.0	26.6	2.98	0.851	1,325
Manual workers other than factory	21.7	52.5	25.8	2.98	0.864	706
Farmers	26.9	50.0	23.1	3.09	0.854	892
<i>Correlation</i>	Cramer's <i>V</i> = 0.10			Eta ² = 0.01		

Social classes	Assessment of socialism					
	three categories			five categories		
	positive (%)	neutral (%)	negative (%)	mean	SD	N
	<i>1993</i>					
Employers	14.5	29.0	56.5	2.50	0.954	62
Managers	35.3	35.3	29.4	3.09	0.847	51
Experts	21.3	41.0	37.7	2.80	0.827	122
Supervisors	24.5	38.7	36.8	2.84	0.874	106
Self-employed	20.5	43.2	36.4	2.84	0.850	88
Technicians and office workers	21.0	47.1	31.9	2.89	0.859	238
Skilled manual workers	31.9	37.6	30.4	3.02	0.878	263
Unskilled manual workers	26.6	30.9	42.4	2.81	0.929	139
Farmers	39.7	30.7	29.7	3.06	0.969	300
<i>Correlation</i>	Cramer's $V = 0.15$			Eta ² = 0.02		
	<i>1998</i>					
Employers	23.1	34.6	42.3	2.77	0.921	52
Managers	20.8	31.9	47.2	2.69	0.874	72
Experts	12.9	33.3	53.8	2.54	0.833	93
Supervisors	29.0	30.8	40.2	2.83	0.976	107
Self-employed	24.7	27.0	48.3	2.71	0.953	89
Technicians and office workers	22.4	45.2	32.4	2.88	0.902	250
Skilled manual workers	28.1	38.4	33.5	2.96	0.948	242
Unskilled manual workers	27.1	34.7	38.1	2.89	0.953	118
Farmers	41.9	31.8	26.4	3.17	0.999	148
<i>Correlation</i>	Cramer's $V = 0.15$			Eta ² = 0.03		
	<i>2003</i>					
Employers	7.1	42.9	50.0	2.48	0.773	42
Managers	20.5	29.5	50	2.59	0.948	44
Experts	15.7	45.7	38.6	2.69	0.843	70
Supervisors	25.4	41.8	32.8	2.91	0.900	67
Self-employed	32.2	37.3	30.5	2.97	0.946	59
Technicians and office workers	31.3	31.9	36.8	2.93	0.946	182
Skilled manual workers	37.4	34.4	28.2	3.06	0.947	163
Unskilled manual workers	34.1	31.7	34.1	2.95	0.999	41
Farmers	51.0	28.0	21.0	3.33	0.975	100
<i>Correlation</i>	Cramer's $V = 0.18$			Eta ² = 0.05		

Following 1989, we see a distinctively different pattern in classes' evaluation of socialism that mirrors their experience under the new socioeconomic and political conditions. Skilled and unskilled manual workers and farmers, disadvantaged by the post-communist transformation process, become the most outspoken in terms of positive views of the past, and their proportions increase over time. The groups that emerge as winners under post-1989 rule, on the other hand, become last in describing the former regime in a positive light.

Social Status and the Assessment of Socialism

In this chapter, I measure social status as a factor of people's education, occupational rank, and individual income. The eigenvalue associated with the factor is around 2, and the variance explained is greater than 62 percent (results not shown), indicating that the measurement model fulfills basic statistical requirements.

The relationship between social status and the assessment of socialism (Table 18.5) follows a pattern similar to that between class and the evaluation of socialism. Prior to the systemic change, the correlation coefficient is positive, showing a significant, albeit weak, association between the variables. That is, the expressed degree of content with the regime rises as social status increases. After 1989, the direction of the relationship between status and evaluation of the past changes. The association becomes negative and its strength increases.

Table 18.5. Correlation of Assessment of Socialism with Social Status and its Components, 1988–2003

Independent variables	Assessment of socialism			
	1988	1993	1998	2003
Social status	0.053**	-0.088**	-0.182**	-0.202**
Components of social status:				
Education	0.026*	-0.089**	-0.173**	-0.140**
Occupation (socioeconomic index)	0.074**	-0.061**	-0.156**	-0.136**
Income	-0.015	-0.084**	-0.122**	-0.179**

** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

For a more detailed look at how each of the components of status relates to opinions of socialism, Table 18.5 also presents a correlation of the assessment of socialism with education, occupation, and income. As expected, the overall pattern of association is similar to the one described above. The correlation coefficients for education and occupation are significant in all waves, but they change sign after 1989. The association of income and evaluation of socialism, on the other hand, becomes significant only after the regime change.

To gain better insights into the relationship between education and the assessment of socialism, particularly to determine whether people with different levels of schooling change their view of communism over time, Table

18.6 presents the distribution of assessment of socialism by education level for the 1988–2003 period. Three aspects are easily identifiable: (a) across all waves, there are marked differences in regard to how people with different education levels evaluate the past; (b) as expected, the 1989 systemic change prompts a switch in which groups view socialism most favorably. While during communism the largest proportion of positive evaluations comes from the most educated, under the post-1989 regime the largest proportion comes from people with the lowest levels of schooling; and (c) as was the case for social class and social status, the relationship of education to assessment of socialism is statistically significant, yet weak.

Table 18.6. Education and Assessment of Socialism, 1988–2003

Education	Assessment of socialism					<i>N</i>
	three categories			five categories		
	positive (%)	neutral (%)	negative (%)	mean	SD	
<i>1988</i>						
Elementary	26.0	50.6	23.4	3.07	0.861	1,990
Some secondary	23.6	51.6	24.7	3.01	0.847	1,693
Secondary	28.9	47.4	23.7	3.07	0.851	1,269
Tertiary	33.6	42.9	23.5	3.14	0.831	865
<i>Correlation</i>	Cramer's <i>V</i> = 0.06			Eta ² = 0.002		
<i>1993</i>						
Elementary	35.5	33.6	30.9	3.05	0.955	605
Some secondary	32.5	34.9	32.6	2.97	0.942	634
Secondary	24.5	40.5	35.0	2.88	0.884	551
Tertiary	22.6	40.2	37.2	2.84	0.851	468
<i>Correlation</i>	Cramer's <i>V</i> = 0.08			Eta ² = 0.008		
<i>1998</i>						
Elementary	43.7	33.1	23.2	3.23	0.976	426
Some secondary	38.2	33.5	28.3	3.13	0.994	495
Secondary	29.0	40.8	30.2	2.98	0.900	441
Tertiary	22.0	35.9	42.1	2.77	0.873	397
<i>Correlation</i>	Cramer's <i>V</i> = 0.14			Eta ² = 0.031		
<i>2003</i>						
Elementary	49.0	23.7	27.3	3.21	1.046	355
Some Secondary	39.8	32.2	28.0	3.10	0.993	522
Secondary	31.2	36.1	32.7	2.97	0.910	413
Tertiary	23.7	40.5	35.8	2.82	0.896	338
<i>Correlation</i>	Cramer's <i>V</i> = 0.13			Eta ² = 0.02		

The Overall Impact of Structural Factors on the Assessment of Socialism

I have shown that individuals' social class and social stratification positions are significantly related to their opinions about socialism. The next logical step is to examine these relationships in terms of causality. In particular, I am interested in the extent to which people's position in the post-communist class and stratification structure affects their views of the past. Given prior findings on winners and losers of the post-communist transition (see Chapter 2 in this volume), for this part of the analysis I measure class in terms of belonging to privileged social groups (i.e., employers, managers, and experts), disadvantaged groups—that is, manual workers and farmers—or a third category made up of supervisors, the self-employed, and technicians. The latter occupies the middle of the social hierarchy with respect to benefits and costs of the post-1989 transition. I use logistic regression to determine the effects on a positive assessment of socialism (positive evaluation = 1), and linear regression for the full distribution of scores on the gains from socialism (five categories).

Table 18.7 presents the results for three groups of models. The first group deals with the effects of social class, the second with the effects of social stratification, and the final model considers the effects of both types of structural position together. For social class position, both types of regression yield similar results. In 2003, employers, managers, and experts are less likely to evaluate socialism positively than are supervisors, the self-employed, and technicians. On the other hand, members of disadvantaged classes have a positive outlook on the past. This finding holds when controlling for gender and age, as well as when controlling for positive evaluation in 1988. While the coefficient for gender is not significant in either of the models, the effect of age is significant as long as the 1988 assessment, with which it correlates too highly, is not in the equation. As expected, older people have a more positive view of socialism.

Results in the second group of models reveal that one's position in the stratification hierarchy has effects on assessment of the past that are similar to those for class position. The higher a person's status in 2003, the less likely she/he is to evaluate socialism positively. Linear regression on the full distribution of scores yields similar findings. In addition, controlling for gender, age, and evaluation of socialism in 1988 does not alter the basic relationship. As in the class model, older people are more likely to say they had gained from socialism. Gender, on the other hand, does not significantly affect evaluation of the past nor does a positive assessment of socialism in 1988. Also, controlling for the latter variable does not change the relation between status and evaluation in 2003.

Table 18.7. Regression of Assessment of Socialism in 2003 on Social Class and Social Status, Controlling for Gender and Age

Independent variables	Logistic regression for positive assessment, $DV = \log(p/p - 1)$			Linear regression $DV =$ scores from 1 to 5		
	B	SE	Exp(B)	B	SE	Beta
A. Model I: Effect of social class without controlling for lagged assessment of socialism						
Gender	0.024	0.167	1.024	-0.066	0.069	-0.034
Age	0.023**	0.007	1.023	0.011**	0.003	0.137
Privileged classes	-1.021**	0.261	0.360	-0.372**	0.092	-0.157
Disadvantaged classes	0.475**	0.176	1.608	0.209**	0.077	0.107
Constant	-1.776**	0.326	0.169	2.507**	0.131	
Fit statistics $n = 768$	$-2LH = 909.9$ $R^2 = 0.08$			$F = 12.4$ ($df = 4$) Adjusted $R^2 = 0.06$		
A. Model II: Effect of social class, controlling for lagged assessment of socialism						
Gender	-0.183	0.202	0.833	-0.109	0.086	-0.057
Age	0.020	0.014	1.020	0.010+	0.006	0.075
Privileged classes	-0.709**	0.287	0.492	-0.294**	0.109	-0.130
Disadvantaged classes	0.692**	0.220	1.997	0.295**	0.096	0.154
Assessment of socialism, 1988	0.190	0.221	1.209	0.066	0.048	0.060
Constant	-1.715**	0.692	0.180	2.341**	0.326	
Fit statistics $n = 511$	$-2LH = 629.4$ $R^2 = 0.08$			$F = 6.2$ ($df = 5$) Adjusted $R^2 = 0.05$		
B. Model I: Effect of social status without controlling for lagged assessment of socialism						
Gender	0.092	0.166	1.097	-0.044	0.069	-0.023
Age	0.023**	0.007	1.023	0.011**	0.003	0.135
Social Status	-0.581**	0.093	0.559	-0.207**	0.034	-0.217
Constant	-1.839**	0.326	0.159	2.504**	0.131	
Fit statistics $n = 742$	$-2LH = 875.6$ $R^2 = 0.10$			$F = 15.5$ ($df = 3$) Adjusted $R^2 = 0.06$		
B. Model II: Effect of social status, controlling for lagged assessment of socialism						
Gender	-0.092	0.200	0.912	-0.076	0.086	-0.040
Age	0.018	0.014	1.018	0.009	0.006	0.065
Social Status	-0.627**	0.109	0.534	-0.217**	0.040	-0.241
Assessment of socialism, 1988	0.190	0.227	1.209	0.061	0.050	0.055
Constant	-1.529*	0.689	0.217	2.462**	0.325	
Fit statistics $n = 490$	$-2LH = 597.3$ $R^2 = 0.08$			$F = 7.6$ ($df = 4$) Adjusted $R^2 = 0.05$		
C. Final model: Effect of social class and social status						
Gender	0.052	-0.172	1.053	-0.069	0.071	-0.036
Age	0.025**	0.007	1.025	0.012**	0.003	0.142
Privileged Classes	-0.673*	0.305	0.510	-0.275**	0.110	-0.115
Disadvantaged Classes	0.147	0.208	1.159	0.104	0.090	0.053
Social Status	-0.389**	0.128	0.678	-0.109*	0.050	-0.114
Constant	-1.823**	0.333	0.162	2.506**	0.133	
Fit statistics $n = 743$	$-2LH = 869.9$ $R^2 = 0.11$			$F = 10.1$ ($df = 5$) Adjusted $R^2 = 0.06$		

** $p > 0.01$; * $p > 0.05$; + $p > 0.10$.

The final model in Table 18.7 examines the effect of social class and social stratification combined. Since the two variables are strongly correlated, one cannot expect everything to be statistically significant. The overall pattern of the relationship, however, holds: people belonging to the privileged classes as well as those having a higher social status are less likely to assess the past positively, and in both instances the coefficients are significant. For disadvantaged classes, the coefficients are not significant, but in the right direction. Again, while there are no gender differences in the assessment of socialism, age does matter.

Conclusions

This chapter aimed to explain the role played by structural determinants, conceptualized as class membership and social status, in people's reassessment of the past. We have seen that despite an overall stability in evaluations of socialism across the 1988–2003 period, significant opinion change occurred at the individual level. By and large, one-fifth of the respondents in each wave switched from negative to positive assessments; change also occurred in the reverse direction, from positive to negative outlooks. In addition, as time progressed, the proportion of people initially holding a neutral view on socialism but then switching to a positive one increased.

I have argued that the key to understanding this phenomenon is the gains and losses that people experienced during Poland's transition from a state-run economy to one ruled by the principles of free-market competition. It is well documented that the 1989 systemic change has benefited social groups differently: while managers, experts, and the new class of employers have, for the most part, successfully taken advantage of business opportunities opened by the post-communist environment, manual workers and farmers have been strongly hit by unemployment, inflation, and the withdrawal of state subsidies (see Chapter 2 in this volume).

I expected these differences in people's experiences with the post-communist transition to affect their views of the past, insofar as individuals assess their current state relative to their prior one as well as relative to that of people around them. The results confirm the hypothesis that gains and losses linked to social class position and social status affect one's evaluation of the past as well as changes thereof. We see that in late socialism members of the privileged classes were first in assessing the regime positively; yet, once they realized the possibilities that post-1989 rule entailed, they distanced themselves from socialism, and hence the negative

reassessment. The reverse holds for farmers and manual workers. In 1988, these groups were among the last to praise socialism. Nonetheless, as they continue to bear more “transition costs” than other groups, manual workers and farmers take the lead with regard to positive evaluations of the former regime, and their proportions increase over time. Similarly, while higher social status prior to 1989 increases the likelihood of positive evaluations of socialism, after the systemic change its effect becomes negative.

Analyses in this chapter offer insights into the relationship between structural determinants and individuals’ assessment of socialism in Poland. To broaden our understanding of the process of public opinion change with regard to evaluation of the past, however, future research should concentrate on two sets of issues, the first methodological and the second substantive. Methodologically, it is important to assess the extent to which the change in opinion of socialism for five-year periods is decomposable into short-term, for example, one-year changes, and to assess the reliability of responses. This will offer better insights into whether changes in the public’s opinion of socialism are due to some universal and time-constant processes and/or whether they actually reflect structural transformations and to what extent. Additional analyses using Markov-type assumptions suggest that for the period 1993–2003 the legacy of the past cannot be ignored in explaining changes of opinion about socialism in Poland (Tomescu-Dubrow 2006a).

From a substantive point of view, new independent variables are needed to provide a better explanation for the assessment of socialism and changes therein. The relationship between class and status, on one hand, and evaluation of the past, on the other, is statistically significant, yet in terms of explained variance, it leaves room for further explanatory factors. Of potential interest are meso-level variables—that is, characteristics defining smaller groups—especially people’s political biographies and the type of friendship networks they are part of. Central to an individual’s political biography is their involvement in political organizations and collective action over time. For Poland, Solidarity and the Communist Party are the two political movements that defined the 1980s, and people’s participation in either of these should have a long-lasting, albeit different, effect on how they retrospectively view the socialist regime. In addition, future research should consider the role played by the type of friends one has for how one views socialism.