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# The Crisis of Western Communist Parties: Reconsidering Socio-Structural Explanations.

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## 1. Introduction

Western Communist parties have experimented a process of deep crisis since the 1970s and 1980s. The most visible consequence and manifestation of this crisis has been the electoral decline that almost all of these parties have suffered since then. The Communists were never very electorally significant in Western countries except for a few cases (France, Finland, Cyprus or Italy) but after the 1980s their political relevance has been seriously threatened. The reduction of their electoral base in the last decades has caused the collapse of some parties, which have nearly disappeared from the political landscape, and the diminishing relevance of the surviving ones.[1] The reaction to the challenges they were confronting at the end of the 1980s and the first years of the 1990s also motivated a wave of change and transformation. These changes implied that some parties even abandoned their Communist identity and label and transformed themselves into Green organizations (as in the Netherlands), Social democratic organizations (as in Italy), or left-wing parties that combined some traditional left stances with new issues, primarily environmentalism (as in Sweden and Finland). Even the parties that maintained their loyalty to the Communist ideology adopted more or less profound organizational and political modifications (as in Spain and France).

Although the crisis of the Communists has had its most relevant manifestation in their electoral decline, these organizations had to confront significant difficulties in all the faces of their activity during the 1980s. This combination of problems was what placed Communist organizations in a new situation that challenged their very survival. In this vein, from the organizational point of view these parties suffered a profound

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[1] Nevertheless some Communist and post-Communist parties have been integrated in coalition governments at the end of the 1990s and at the beginning of the present decade in Italy (Italian Communists' Party), France (French Communist Party) and Finland (Left Party).

reduction of their membership. In some parties, the decreasing trend in party membership began before the critical period of the 1980s (for example, in the PCI). However, with the beginning of that decade the tendency was extended to the larger group of important parties (France, Spain, Portugal, etc.). Since the late 1970s, many of these the parties also entered a period of remarkable deterioration of their internal cohesion. Internal conflicts, controversies, and dissidence arose. On many occasions, the Communist identity itself was the subject of debate. Their social influence diminished, the main expression of this being the weakening of their links to the workers' movement as compared to previous decades. The trade unions with a Communist orientation were also weaker, but more importantly, unions became increasingly distant and autonomous from all kinds of political parties. Besides this, the links to new social movements had been problematic and plagued of mutual distrust. Thus, the Communists lacked a fluid dialogue with the more dynamic and politically active sections of society.

From an intellectual point of view, the 1980s were characterized by cultural dominance by the "new right", and this context increased the marginality of Communist ideas (Bull 1994). The proposals of Communist parties, bound to state intervention, began to seem extremely far removed from dominant neoliberal political values. The growing loss of prestige of Marxist currents of thought intensified their isolation (Lazar 1988). In what regards political strategy or tactics, the mid 1970s brought certain exhaustion, which cast doubt upon the role of these parties in their respective political systems. The effort of some parties to obtain the democratic legitimacy that would potentially enabled them to be government parties obtained no results (for example, the Euro-Communist experiment). Various parties tried out a complete range of strategic possibilities, from radical to coalescent and moderate

positions. Be it the radical path taken by the Portuguese party in the seventies, the oscillation between tactics of collaboration with the Socialists and sharp differentiation carried out by the French, the moderation of Spanish Communist, or the "historic compromise" and "democratic solidarity" of the Italians, the result was negative for all parties (Lazar 1988). But, in this adverse context, it was the almost continuous electoral decline that will be detailed in the next pages, what placed Communist organizations in a critical situation.

There are probably several causes behind the crisis of Western Communist parties. And we can assume that certain national factors have affected the specific evolution of some parties. However, the existence of a general trend of Communist decline may indicate that there are common variables influencing the entire family of Western Communist parties and causing their crisis. The literature on the recent crisis and change of the Communist parties has emphasized some elements that would have caused their demise. The aim of this paper is to check some of the most relevant hypotheses concerning the electoral crisis of the Communist parties that have been generally accepted without having really been empirically tested.

The Communist parties studied here are those of Western Europe plus the Japanese party. In this sense, I use almost the entire universe of Communist parties in the developed world instead of a sample, and I only exclude those parties that have been irrelevant in their respective societies since the end of World War II to nowadays.[2] In the 1990s some of these parties abandoned the already disjointed Communist family (the Dutch and Italian parties), while others, although still part of the non-Social democratic left and members of the same European and international

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[2] I have not considered the German PDS because its birth in the 1990s prevents its inclusion it in the analysis of the causes of Communist decline.
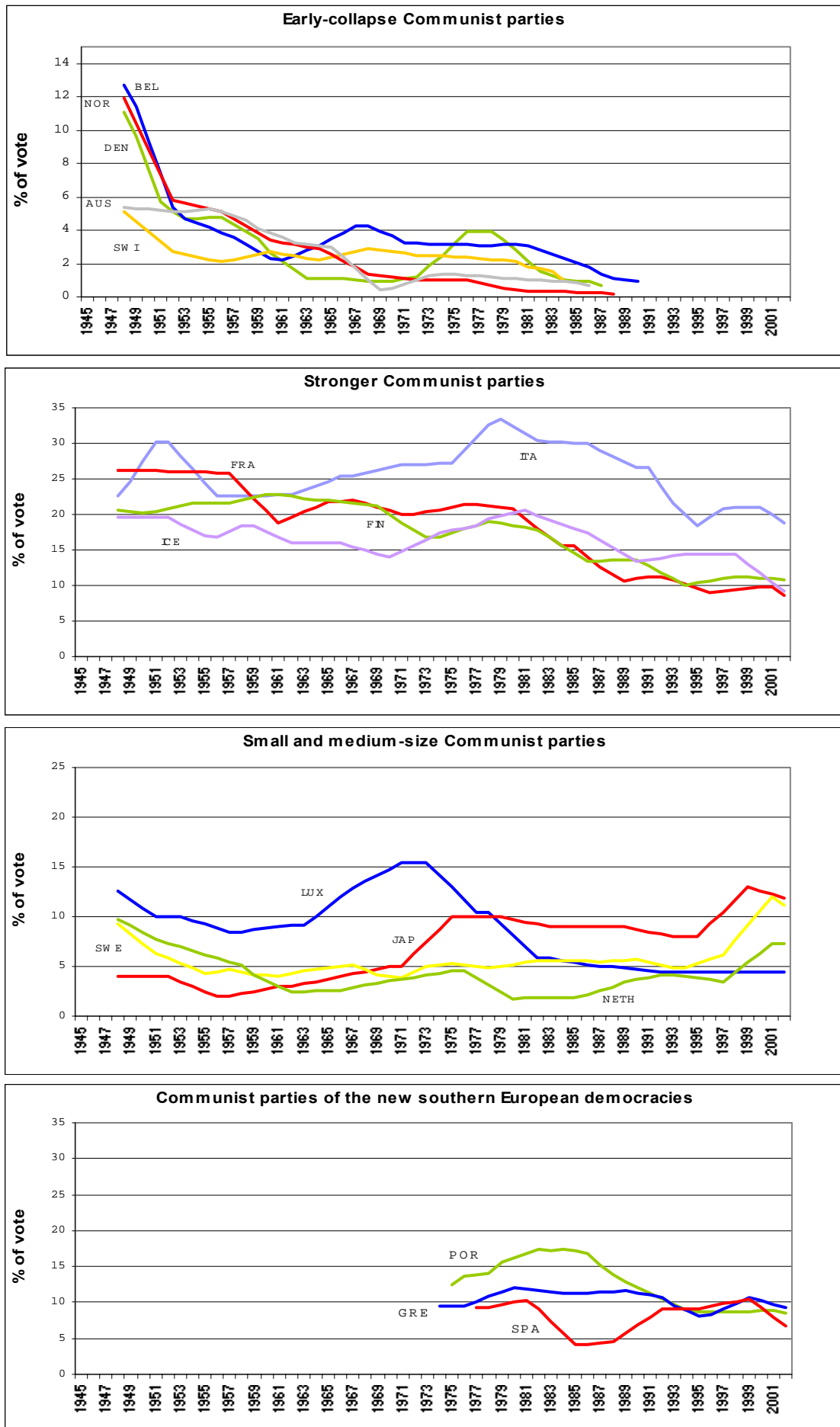
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bodies of other radical-left parties, deeply transformed themselves. I therefore, consider all these parties for the analysis of Communist decline, although at least two of them (the Dutch and the Italian) do not belong anymore to the family of Communist, Post-Communist or radical left parties since the 1990s. Finally, the period covered in this study is that of the five decades of democratic politics in Western Europe and Japan since World War II.

## 2. The electoral decline of Communist Parties

Before we can check some of the main hypotheses about the electoral crisis of Communist organizations it is important to describe how exactly has this electoral decline been. This is crucial in order to specify the degree to which it has really been a generalized demise, to explore variations across countries and possible national peculiarities, and to take into account the timing and deepness of the crisis. As we will see, behind the general trend of electoral decline some different models and interesting nuances appear.

The long-term general trend of Communist electoral results is, without doubt, one of reduction of the parties' strength. If we observe the evolution of the different parties (Figure A1 in the Appendix), the majority of them were afflicted by an electoral debilitation at the end of the 1970s that would not stop, in some cases, until the 1990s. The smallest parties (in Austria, Denmark, Norway, for example), which had already seen their votes extremely reduced at the beginning of the Cold War, after a brief recuperation in the 1960s, experienced again electoral declines, which led them to disappear. The rest of the parties have seen a constant reduction of their electoral percentages, and in certain cases, these reductions have been radical (as in France).

Figure 1. Electoral trends of Communist and Post-Communist parties, 1945-2001



**Early-collapse Communist parties**

**Stronger Communist parties**

**Small and medium-size Communist parties**

**Communist parties of the new southern European democracies**

Although the last two decades are characterized by an almost general reduction of the electoral weight of Communist parties, there are different intensities and rhythms too. We can better describe these trends by separating the parties in different subsets. A first group of parties is formed by the organizations that suffered the most rapid and deep crisis with the result of their practical disappearance in the 1970s and 1980s. The crisis of these parties started as soon as they left the national-unity governments that were formed after World War II and before the beginning of the Cold War. These "early-collapse" parties lost any of their political relevance in the 1980s when some of them disappeared. In some cases these parties were among the electorally weakest parties already in the 1940s and 1950s and their rapid loss of votes resulted in their early electoral collapse. The Communist parties of Norway, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, and Switzerland belong to this group.

A second subset of parties is that of the traditionally biggest Communist organizations: the Communist parties of France, Italy, Finland, and Iceland. All of them show a very acute decline. Nevertheless the Communist parties of Italy and Iceland entered the crisis after having obtained significant electoral gains at the end of the 1970s. In contrast, there is no doubt that the almost continuous fall of the French and Finnish parties conform the prototypical cases of profound crisis of the entire Communist family. Interestingly enough, the Italian party suffers new losses of votes even after its transformation into a Social democratic party.

The following subset is formed by some small-size Communist parties (Japan, Sweden, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands). In Luxembourg the Communists have lost votes from the beginning of the 1970s and now are below 5%. However, the picture of the evolution of the rest of the parties in this subset is in clear contrast with

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that of the previous subset. Even if two of these parties (in the Netherlands and Sweden) transformed themselves into Post-Communist organizations at the late of the 1980s and early-1990s, their evolution during the period in which they still were Communist does not reflect the existence of a crisis of a similar nature to the one suffered by other Communist organizations. The Dutch party did decline but it was able to avoid an early collapse and its strategy of forming electoral alliances in the mid-1980s was electorally successful (so successful that it favored the subsequent disappearance of the party and the creation of a left-wing green party at the end of that decade). Similarly, the Swedish party maintained its vote share with small fluctuations during the period in which it was a Communist organization. Its transformation into a non-Social democratic and non-Communist left party at the beginning of the 1990s marked the beginning of its electoral growth. In contrast, the Japanese case shows a trend of steady electoral growth, with the particularity that the party still remains loyal to the Communist identity. At least in this case, the absence of a clear party transformation and the loyalty to the traditional identity has not produced any electoral crisis.

Finally, the last subset is formed by the parties of the newer democracies of Southern Europe. The observation of the Greek case is complicated by the existence of two organizations, one of which can not be considered Communist anymore, which have formed common electoral alliances in certain moments and have competed in other periods. In all analyses their electoral results are added and in the graph the result is the inexistence of a clear trend of serious weakening of their electoral weight. In the Spanish case it is difficult, as well, discern any trend due to the peaks and valleys of the Communist electoral evolution, although the current position of the party is very weak. In the opposite case, the Portuguese party shows a clear decline since the late-

1980s and in this sense it is similar to other parties with sharp declines (as the French or Finnish parties, for example).

In summary, the electoral evolution of Communist parties since the end of World War II shows a general trend of decline with different intensities and rare exceptions. The crisis provoked the disappearance of some parties already in the 1980s. Other parties steady declined until their transformation into other kinds of organizations detached from Communism (as in the Netherlands), but others lost votes even after that organizational transformation (as in Italy and Finland). Some suffered very acute reductions in their vote share as in Iceland, France and Portugal. Very few have shown a trend of mild decline (as in Greece, and Luxembourg) or trendless fluctuation (as in Spain). Sweden stands out for its remarkable stability until the 1990s and its electoral growth with the transformation of the party into a non-Communist left-wing organization thereafter. And, finally, only in Japan the Communists seem to show a long-term evolution of growth, thus being really exceptional case.

## 3. The causes of Western Communist decline

The causes of this pattern of predominant Communist electoral decline have been analyzed in several works. A first cause emphasized in multiple accounts of the recent crisis of Communist parties is the changes in the class structure of Western societies. According to this hypothesis, Communist parties have undergone electoral decline due to the disappearance or reduction in the size of certain social groups on which these parties based their electoral strength. Thus the reduction in the weight of these groups of voters would have provoked the parallel reduction of Communist electoral fortunes. The diminishing size of the traditional working class, of the peasantry, of agricultural workers, and the crisis of some economic sectors (as the minery and the heavy

industry) are mentioned as key elements explaining the Communist electoral crisis. [3]

The examples of this argument are abundant and it can be found in almost every work related to this phenomenon (see, for example, Lazar 1988 and 2000, Waller and Fennema 1988, Waller 1989, Bell 1993, Bull 1994 and 1995, Bull and Heywood 1994, and Agosti 1999). [4]

If we consider the evolution of the parties he labels as "working-class parties" (basically Communist parties and some Socialist ones), Crouch (1999: 337) also argues that their decline is "partly explained by the decline in size of the working class that had taken place", although he also mentions their loss of votes among the remaining working class as a key factor in their weakening. [5] In fact, for some authors, the changes in the social structure and the reduction of the groups where the Communists had more support is the crucial factor that would enable us to explain the decline of these parties (Fennema 1988: 255). [6]

This hypothesis establishes a direct connection between the Communist electoral fortune and the social structure. In a certain sense it reminds the classical argument that posits that the success of Communist groups in certain countries was

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[3] Most of the successful Communist parties have been characterized as obtaining the support of both the working class and sectors of the rural population. As Bartolini (2000: 521) says: "Strong Communist movements are therefore 'dualistic' movements, combining support from the advanced industrial areas as well as from sectors of 'unsafe' agricultural groups".

[4] Lazar (1988: 251-252) states that: "Western European Communism has suffered from a decomposition of its social base. This happened, first of all, because what had been its principal vector in society –that is to say not the working class as a whole, but more or less significant fractions of that working class, depending on which country is examined- was diminished by recession and its attendant cortège of industrial restructurings and unemployed workers. The massive workforce reductions in traditional industries such as heavy manufacturing, steel, textiles, mining, shipbuilding, fishing and lumber directly affect the Communist parties, which had built their fortresses upon them. As for the rural communities, naturally very diverse, that had turned to Communism (…) they too were ageing and reduced in number".

[5] In this same line, Zolberg (1995) argues that the decline of some left-wing parties, including the French and Italian Communist parties, is due in large part to the reduction of the proportion of the national electorate constituted by "blue-collar" workers.

[6] Although it is sometimes recognized that the entrance of new social sectors into the Communist electorate could stop their electoral decline, it is argued that the behaviour of these groups (public sector employees or new middle classes) is volatile and would not counteract the decline (see, again, Fennema 1988: 255).

connected to the poverty or the absence of social modernization (Einaudi, Domenach and Garosci 1951). As predicted in this traditional hypothesis, the Communists had fallen due to economic and social modernization in Europe, and the reduction in the size of core sectors of the working class. Nevertheless, this argument was attacked with evidence that opposed the "poverty hypothesis" with the survival or growth of some Communist parties during the period of economic development in Europe in the 1960s (Tarrow 1990: 147). In summary, does the general trend of Communist decline mean that those who thought that economic modernization hinders Communist strength were right? We will return to this question in the next section.

A second element that is commonly regarded as a causal factor of the crisis of Communist parties is the cultural changes experimented by Western societies. This is a factor closely related to the previous one. According to this hypothesis, cultural changes imply the attribution of less importance to traditional collective identities such as class-consciousness or class identification, and the increasing relevance of other values such as individualism. This means that certain values traditionally attached to Communist identity loose influence, do not guide the political and electoral behavior of the individual, and therefore the electoral possibilities of these parties are more reduced (Lazar 1988: 253). This environment was also an obstacle for the survival of working class political subcultures and the maintenance of the politically closed communities upon which the Communists built their electoral strongholds (as in some rural and industrial areas). In this vein, in his classical analysis of value change, Inglehart (1990) suggests that these trends hinder Communist support.. The changes in the social structure, the increased weight of new social groups, and intergenerational value change make augments the importance of certain post-materialist issues that are far away from the economic and material priorities defended by Communists. Material

and collectivist issues and values have a diminishing relevance. And these were decisively connected to the economic security and the distributive conflict on which Communists built much of their political discourse (Wilson 1992 and 1993).

These two interpretations –the decline of working class size and value change- apply the ideas on the diminishing influence of the traditional cleavages, and specifically of the class cleavage, on political behavior (Nie, Verba and Petrocik 1981, Sarlvik and Crewe 1983, Clark, Lipset and Rimpel 1993, Inglehart 1984 and 1990, Franklin *et al.* 1992) to the case of Communist parties. Economic modernization, technological changes, and increasing levels of education and affluence, make life-styles more similar and blur the lines of social differentiation. This originates a pattern of electoral behavior less determined by social structure and more influenced by personal and sophisticated calculus, and independent of limits imposed by social structure (Dalton, Flanagan and Beck 1984, Dalton 1988). These social changes and the loss of influence of traditional cleavages would be the origin of the processes of dealignment and realignment that are behind certain political changes in Western Europe (Dalton, Flanagan and Beck 1984). In summary, class divisions are decreasing relevant for electoral behavior. The reduction in the size of groups with clear political loyalties increases electoral availability also because the new emergent social groups do not develop those loyalties. Thus, electoral behavior would is less socially determined (Crouch 1999: 343).

These social and cultural changes seem to especially affect left-wing parties (Callaghan 2000), traditionally attached to values and social groups that loose importance. This has often been suggested as an approximation to the difficulties found by Socialist parties. However, these social changes would logically have greater

effect on the Communists given that, especially some of them, were strongly dependent on the support of manual workers.

Social transformations would have affected different strata of the Communist electorate in different periods. Until the 1960s Western societies experimented a process or deruralization that reduced rural populations and especially the mass of agricultural workers. This was a first challenge for the social basis of support of Communism in some European countries. However, this trend was accompanied by the growth of industry and the subsequent increase of the number of workers employed in this sector. In this sense, it was not a clear challenge for the social basis of Communist support because the losses of agricultural workers were more than compensated by the increase of industrial manual workers. However, during the 1970s and 1980s the process of deindustrialization introduced a more acute problem. It was not only the starting point of the reduction of the working class, but also post-industrial trends broke up "the traditionally homogeneous and collective experience of employment, thus promoting individualization and differentiation" (Esping-Andersen 1999: 302). As Esping-Andersen (1999: 302-303) argues, this was related to the shift towards smaller-scale production units, the decrease in manual occupations in the manufacturing sector, the rise in educational attainment and the decline in employment stability.

However, the political consequences of these changes are not completely clear. First, the alleged reduction of the influence of class on electoral behavior is far from being proved (Manza, Hout and Brooks 1995, Evans 1999). And hence, neither are the alleged negative electoral consequences of that phenomenon for parties attached to specific classes. Secondly, even if the working class has lost its quantitative importance and collectivist values have lost ground, left-wing parties can build other

electoral coalitions and adopt new issues and demands in their platforms. That is, Communist or post-Communist parties can compensate the currently more reduced size of the working class by increasing the percentage of workers that vote Communist or by attracting the vote of white-collar employees. In this sense, it is far from evident how all these socio-structural changes are related to the electoral Communist decline.

If we consider these two main factors –changes in the social structure and value change- we can describe a first explanatory model that in a somewhat reductionist way, establishes a direct relation between the electoral fortunes of Communist parties and socio-structural determinants. The social and value structure of the electorate would be the key causal factor of Communist electoral evolution.

Apart from this primordial socio-structural explanation, other minor factors are mentioned as causes of the fall of Communist parties, such as their attachment to the Soviet Union and the increasing discredit of it, erroneous party tactics or decisions, and a model of party organization so rigid that made very difficult party adaptation. The merit of these other possible explanations is diverse. The strength of the link with the Soviet Union was very different for the various parties, and it certainly had diminished since the end of World War II. However, it could be argued that the detachment of Western Communists towards Moscow was in some cases far from being sincere, and that in any case voters perceived these parties as effectively tied to a totalitarian state. In addition, it could be also argued that the discredit of the Soviet Union among the Western public increased in the 1960s and 1970s. But in absence of survey data it is impossible to check this argument and its real influence on the Communist decline. In addition, we could also speculate on the scarce consequences that the wave of sympathy towards the leadership of Gorbachev in the second half of the 1980s had on the electoral fortunes of Western Communist parties. The other "political" variables

(the model of party organization and the adoption of wrong strategies) could have had a certain impact on the evolution of the Western Communists and we will return to it at the end of the paper. This notwithstanding, in most of the accounts of the Communist crisis, the influence of socio-structural variables is predominant. In summary, the socio-economic modernization of Western societies, the deindustrialization, the passing from industrial to post-industrial societies, the changing nature of working class, the tertiarization of Western societies, the rise of living standards, the loss of class solidarity, would have contributed decisively to dissolve the Communist electoral base.[7] Finally, the appearance of new social groups, values and political actors would have also increased the difficulties of the Communist parties very remarkably.[8]

## 4. Communist electoral support and the size of the working class

The argument that the reduction of the size of the working class causes a reduction in the votes received by left parties is not new, and neither has it been only linked to the Communist electoral evolution. As already mentioned, Crouch (1999) points to this phenomenon as one of the causes of the electoral troubles of "working-class parties". For example, Heath, Jowell and Curtice (1985) and Heath *et al.* (1991) argue that the reduction in the number of manual workers explains part of the negative electoral results obtained by the British Labour Party.[9] In a recent work Heath, Jowell and

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[7] Ross (1992: 47) uses this argument in relation to the French case although he also stresses the importance of political factors.

[8] Another hypothesis is to be found in the classical work of Lipset and Rokkan (1967) that linked the success of Communist parties to the responses of the political elites to the demands of the working class. In those countries where the elites responded with repressive laws and avoided to extend the scope of social and political rights to the workers, these ones adopted more radical attitudes that benefited the development of Communist parties. In a similar line of reasoning, Bartolini (2000) links the persistence of Communist parties to the presence of those variables that made possible their initial development in some countries.

[9] This argument is not strictly related to the existence or not of a class dealignment or realignment, since the latter processes can only be checked through the analysis of the electoral behaviour of each class (Goldthorpe and Marshall 1992: 391).

Curtice (2001: 10) retake this argument and suggest that "One of the few regularities of political behavior is that the left tends to be stronger in the working class, and the declining size of the working class implies that it will become more and more difficult for a traditional left-of-center party to win a majority in Parliament".[10]

However, some analyses of the evolution of the Social democrats' electoral fortunes have also concluded that the size of the working class gives only a partial explanation to that evolution, or that it does not predict adequately Socialist electoral performance (Piven 1991, Crewe 1991, Kitschelt 1994).[11] This thesis is what Kitschelt (1994: 40) refers to as the "naive theory of class politics". In spite of this, other authors (Pontusson 1995) have sustained that there is an association between certain socio-structural variables, as the growth of private nonindustrial employment, and the electoral performance of some Socialist parties. The goal of this section is to determine if the electoral evolution of Communist parties has been affected by the reduction in the size of the working class and whether or not it is associated to other socio-structural variables.

Given the difficulties to historically and cross-nationally measure the size of the working class I will use in a first step several "proxy" variables. The absence of survey or census data for a long period like the one covered here forces me to concentrate first in sectors of the economy rather than in, strictly speaking, classes. The sectors examined, agriculture and industry, are traditionally thought to be those where the Communists grounded their classical electoral support (blue collar workers in the industry, and agricultural workers). Hence, I check the effect of the evolution of

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[10] This reasoning and the perception that the aspirations and priorities of the working class had changed were in the origin of the changes introduced in its platform by Blair's New Labour (Heath, Jowell and Curtice 2001).

[11] In this sense, Callaghan (2000: 209) says that "If the prospects of social democracy were simply a function of the size of the blue-collar workforce, Sweden would be one of the places where the left would be in sharpest decline".

employment in those sectors on Communist electoral support. Later on I adopt a closer approximation to the working class concept by measuring the effect of the evolution of the percentages of wage earners in the Mining and Manufacturing sectors and in the Agricultural sector out of the total wage earners on Communist electoral performance. Therefore, the variables used to measure the size of the working class reflect the weight of some occupations and salaried in certain economic sectors. Finally, I check the effects of rates of unemployment on the electoral evolution of Communist parties. The theoretical expectations with regard to unemployment are, however, not clear. On the one hand the unemployed could be considered as (potential) workers, and even as workers suffering a situation of deprivation. From a certain point of view this could transform them in potential left-wing or politically radicalized voters. On the other hand the increase in the rates of unemployment also produces a dissolution of the traditional working class and reduces class homogeneity, since it increases the disparity in interests among unemployed and employed workers. From this point of view, then, unemployment could be negative for the electoral prospects of left-wing and Communist parties. This latter interpretation is the one adopted in the works that relate the support to Communists with the size of the working class, and it will be the one tested below. Given that measurement limitations are evident, I have tried to use several data sources and multiple levels of aggregation in order to overcome these as much as possible.[12]

The following analyses consist in a series of correlations between the percentage of vote for Communists and each of the five socio-structural variables just mentioned. I have calculated the correlations for each of the 16 countries considered

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[12] In fact, many of the results presented here corroborate the problems of "ecological phalacy" involved in the analysis of this and related topics.

separately. The correlation coefficients that would support the hypothesis that establish a direct correspondence between the size of the working class and the electoral performance of the Communists are highlighted in gray shade. This hypothesis is most strongly supported when the vote for the Communists is higher when the percentage of people working on agriculture, the percentage of agricultural wage earners, the percentage of industrial workers, and the percentage of wage earners salaried in manufacturing and mining are all of them higher (positive correlation coefficients), and when the percentage of unemployment is lower (negative correlation coefficients).

Table 1. Correlations between % of Communist vote and several socio-structural factors

| | Agricultural employment | Agricultural wage earners | Industrial employment | Manufacturing & mining wage earners | Unemployment rate |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Austria | **0.84** (28) | **0.92** (28) | **-0.47** (28) | **0.62** (28) | 0.01 (26) |
| Belgium | **0.43** (35) | 0.02 (32) | **0.62** (35) | **0.52** (32) | **-0.64** (34) |
| Denmark | 0.28 (29) | **-0.36** (15) | -0.17 (28) | **-0.02** (11) | 0.14 (22) |
| Norway | **0.95** (32) | **0.95** (29) | **0.54** (32) | **0.78** (29) | **-0.57** (30) |
| Switzerland | **0.59** (26) | | 0.35 (26) | | **-0.62** (24) |
| | | | | | |
| Finland | **0.85** (42) | **0.79** (33) | **0.48** (42) | **0.88** (33) | **-0.75** (39) |
| France | **0.80** (45) | **0.74** (42) | **0.85** (45) | **0.91** (42) | **-0.90** (44) |
| Iceland | 0.30 (40) | 0.19 (31) | **0.35** (40) | **0.36** (30) | **-0.53** (36) |
| Italy | -0.15 (45) | -0.17 (42) | **0.33** (45) | **0.31** (42) | -0.14 (44) |
| | | | | | |
| Japan | **-0.87** (45) | **-0.87** (42) | **0.74** (45) | **-0.84** (42) | **0.70** (44) |
| Luxembourg | 0.22 (42) | 0.16 (35) | **0.85** (42) | 0.34 (21) | **-0.85** (36) |
| Netherlands | **0.42** (40) | -0.06 (37) | 0.06 (40) | -0.21 (36) | -0.18 (39) |
| Sweden | **-0.42** (42) | **-0.51** (33) | **-0.57** (42) | **-0.54** (30) | **0.36** (38) |
| | | | | | |
| Greece | **0.41** (24) | **0.64** (20) | **0.66** (24) | **0.85** (20) | -0.37 (24) |
| Portugal | **0.76** (23) | **0.76** (22) | **0.64** (23) | **0.81** (19) | **0.58** (23) |
| Spain | -0.31 (21) | -0.35 (21) | 0.14 (21) | -0.20 (21) | -0.31(21) |

Source: OECD and ILO yearbooks, various years. In black Pearson correlation coefficients significant for $p \leq 0.05$. In gray shade the relationships consistent with the "working-class size" hypotheses. In brackets the number of time points used for the calculations.

As a first look to the coefficients shows, the "working-class size" hypothesis finds only partial support. The hypothesis seems to be entirely confirmed in the cases

of Belgium, Norway, France, Finland, Greece and Portugal but not in the other 10 cases. It seems that there do not exist clear patterns of support to the hypothesis in the four subsets of parties analyzed. Lets give, however, a closer observation to the behavior of the different variables. The two variables linked to the agricultural population should only be expected to be related to the support for the Communists in those countries where it has been traditionally reported the existence of Communist electoral support among rural populations: Finland, France, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and Greece. In this sense, in four of the six countries the hypothesis seems to be confirmed. The correlation coefficients of industrial employment, manufacturing and mining salaried, and unemployment find even a more partial confirmation, especially if we consider that in some countries the sign of the coefficients are the opposite to what is expected.

We can further examine the relation between working class size and Communist vote through the more limited time series of survey data. These data have the advantage that they strictly measure the concept of working class as defined by the occupation of survey respondents.[13] Unfortunately the use of survey data is constrained not only by the shorter time series of data available but also by the logical fluctuations of sampling errors and certain changes in question wording that can introduce further measurement errors. With these limits in mind, I will use Eurobarometer (EB) trend data to check this hypothesis for the countries included in these surveys. Table 2 shows the correlation between the aggregate % of vote received by the Communist party and the % of adults with working class occupations as measured by the EB data.

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[13] The stratification categories of Goldthorpe and his colleagues (EGP) have been used to classify occupations. For Eurobarometers (EBs) 11 to 29 the working class is composed of the category "manual workers" only; for EBs 30 to 36 it is composed of the categories "skilled manual workers" and "other manual workers"; and for all EBs from 37 onwards of the categories "skilled manual workers" and "unskilled manual workers".

Table 2. Correlations between % of Communist vote and % of population with working class occupations

| | % Working class |
|---|---|
| Belgium | -0.36 (13) |
| Denmark | 0.47 (10) |
| | |
| France | **0.64** (25) |
| Italy | **0.46** (25) |
| | |
| Luxembourg | 0.26 (25) |
| Netherlands | -0.21 (25) |
| | |
| Greece | -0.10 (20) |
| Portugal | 0.45 (15) |
| Spain | 0.38 (15) |

Source: The Mannheim Eurobarometer Trend File, 1970-1999. In black Pearson correlation coefficients significant for $p \leq 0.05$. In gray shade the relationships consistent with the "working-class size" hypothesis. In brackets the number of time points used for the calculations.

Using Eurobarometer data, only in two countries (France and Italy) we find a correspondence between the size of the working class and the vote for the Communists receives. Belgium, Denmark and Greece show results inconsistent with those of Table 1, and in most cases the coefficients are not statistically different from 0. Partly, the results are affected by the more limited time series of the EBs, but we also find that in most cases the signs and sizes of coefficients are consistent with the results shown in Table 1. In summary, the analyses in Tables 1 and 2 leads us to conclude that there is not enough evidence to support the hypothesis that posits a direct causal relation between the number of workers and the electoral results of Communist parties. Certainly, the data suggest that this might have been the case in some countries, but by no means it seems to be a valid general explanation of the Communist crisis.

*4.1 The social composition of Communist electorate*

The weak support that the previous analyses give to the "working class size" hypothesis means that we should give a closer look to the electoral base of Communist parties, and to the role that this specific social group plays in their electorate. Using again the EB survey data I will show the evolution of the social composition of the electorate of the Communist parties for which comparable data exists. In the cases of France and Italy the data begin in the late 1970s when the most acute period of crisis begins. In the cases of Greece (merging votes to KKE and Synaspismos), Spain and Portugal the years available are 1988, 1990 and 1995. For Finland and Sweden the data are only available for 1995, when former Communist parties had already transformed themselves into new left parties. A first conclusion stemming from the results in Tables 3 and 4 is that, for all cases for the different decades and for the different kinds of parties considered (Communist or Post-Communist) the electoral support of these parties was and is multi-class. Communist and Post-Communist do not exclusively, nor most of the times predominantly, base their support in the working class. Table 3 shows the percentage of each social class that votes for the Communists.

The results in Table 3 show a decline of the vote of the working class for the Communists in France, Italy and Greece but not in Spain and Portugal. In this sense, irrespective of the size of the working class, some Communist parties have progressively lost the support from the workers, but more importantly, they have also lost votes among other social groups. The Italian case is especially interesting because it was the most multi-class one and that in which the working class has been the least loyal to the Communists.

Table 3. Vote for Communist Parties within each social class[14]

| | | 1979 | 1988 | 1990 | 1995 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| France | Inactive groups | 3.2 | 2.4 | 3.2 | 1.9 | |
| | Service class | 7.7 | 5.1 | 2.0 | 1.8 | |
| | Middle classes | 6.2 | 2.1 | 2.0 | 1.9 | |
| | Farmer-fisherm. | 1.6 | 1.2 | 0.8 | 1.3 | |
| | Working class | 9.9 | 4.3 | 4.2 | 4.3 | |
| | N | 1996 | 1994 | 3031 | 5012 | |
| Italy | Inactive groups | 6.3 | 4.3 | 4.8 | 1.2 | 4.4 |
| | Service class | 8.3 | 6.1 | 7.5 | 1.3 | 4.7 |
| | Middle classes | 8.8 | 6.8 | 7.1 | 1.6 | 4.9 |
| | Farmer-fisherm. | 2.3 | 2.4 | 8.4 | - | 4.2 |
| | Working class | 14.6 | 11.2 | 12.0 | 1.8 | 5.8 |
| | N | 2348 | 2079 | 3138 | 5225 | |
| Greece | Inactive groups | | 3.1 | 5.3 | 3.1 | |
| | Service class | | 8.2 | 5.7 | 8.7 | |
| | Middle classes | | 5.3 | 6.1 | 4.8 | |
| | Farmer-fisherm. | | 3.2 | 4.7 | 3.0 | |
| | Working class | | 8.1 | 5.9 | 4.8 | |
| | N | | 2000 | 3007 | 5028 | |
| Spain | Inactive groups | | 2.2 | 4.5 | 4.7 | |
| | Service class | | 1.9 | 1.6 | 5.6 | |
| | Middle classes | | 3.3 | 3.9 | 5.1 | |
| | Farmer-fisherm. | | - | 1.1 | 4.6 | |
| | Working class | | 2.4 | 4.0 | 5.3 | |
| | N | | 2030 | 3001 | 5000 | |
| Portugal | Inactive groups | | 1.7 | 2.4 | 2.1 | |
| | Service class | | 5.9 | 1.4 | 1.8 | |
| | Middle classes | | 2.1 | 3.5 | 3.0 | |
| | Farmer-fisherm. | | 0.6 | 2.1 | 0.8 | |
| | Working class | | 1.3 | 4.2 | 4.2 | |
| | N | | 2000 | 3000 | 4930 | |
| Finland | Inactive groups | | | | 3.0 | |
| | Service class | | | | 1.1 | |
| | Middle classes | | | | 2.8 | |
| | Farmer-fisherm. | | | | 1.4 | |
| | Working class | | | | 4.9 | |
| | N | | | | 5164 | |
| Sweden | Inactive groups | | | | 4.5 | |
| | Service class | | | | 0.9 | |
| | Middle classes | | | | 3.3 | |
| | Farmer-fisherm. | | | | - | |
| | Working class | | | | 4.2 | |
| | N | | | | 5143 | |

Source: The Mannheim Eurobarometer Trend File, 1970-1999. In the case of Italy in 1995 the first percentage belongs to the PRC (Communist) and the second to the PDS (Socialist). The other European countries (Belgium, Denmark, Luxembourg and the Netherlands) have been excluded because by the time of these surveys their respective Communist parties were either extremely small or no longer Communist parties.

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[14] The class categories were constructed as follows. Service class: EBs 11-29, professionals + management; EBs 30-36, professionals + employed professionals + general management + middle management; EBs 37 onwards, professionals + employed professionals + general management + middle management + large business owners. Middle classes: EBs 11-29, white collar employees + business owners; EBs 30-36, office employees + non-office non-manual employees + supervisors + business owners; EBs 37 onwards, office employees + non-office non-manual employees + supervisors + shop owners. Working class: EBs 11-29, manual workers only; EBs 30-36 skilled manual workers + other manual workers; EBs 37 onwards, skilled manual workers + unskilled manual workers.

Table 4 shows more clearly this multi-class nature of the Communist parties across different periods of their evolution, and the role of the working class within their electorate.

Table 4. Social composition of the Communist electorate

| | | 1979 | 1988 | 1990 | 1995 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| France | Inactive groups | 30.2 | 42.6 | 53.5 | 51.0 | |
| | Service class | 7.5 | 16.7 | 7.0 | 6.7 | |
| | Middle classes | 28.3 | 20.4 | 17.4 | 22.1 | |
| | Farmer-fisherm. | 0.9 | 1.9 | 1.2 | 1.9 | |
| | Working class | 33.0 | 18.5 | 20.9 | 18.3 | |
| | N | 1996 | 1994 | 3031 | 5012 | |
| Italy | Inactive groups | 38.5 | 34.1 | 28.4 | 50.0 | 53.1 |
| | Service class | 3.1 | 3.1 | 4.7 | 7.1 | 7.3 |
| | Middle classes | 30.8 | 32.6 | 40.5 | 30.0 | 25.7 |
| | Farmer-fisherm. | 0.5 | 0.8 | 3.3 | - | 2.0 |
| | Working class | 27.2 | 29.5 | 23.3 | 12.9 | 11.8 |
| | N | 2348 | 2079 | 3138 | 5225 | |
| Greece | Inactive groups | | 30.0 | 40.6 | 34.7 | |
| | Service class | | 11.1 | 6.1 | 9.5 | |
| | Middle classes | | 32.2 | 27.3 | 33.2 | |
| | Farmer-fisherm. | | 10.0 | 12.7 | 11.1 | |
| | Working class | | 16.7 | 13.3 | 11.6 | |
| | N | | 2000 | 3007 | 5028 | |
| Spain | Inactive groups | | 54.2 | 56.5 | 54.9 | |
| | Service class | | 2.1 | 0.8 | 5.7 | |
| | Middle classes | | 22.9 | 21.8 | 17.1 | |
| | Farmer-fisherm. | | - | 0.8 | 2.4 | |
| | Working class | | 20.8 | 20.2 | 19.9 | |
| | N | | 2030 | 3001 | 5000 | |
| Portugal | Inactive groups | | 48.5 | 43.7 | 43.2 | |
| | Service class | | 3.0 | 1.1 | 2.4 | |
| | Middle classes | | 30.3 | 26.4 | 23.2 | |
| | Farmer-fisherm. | | 3.0 | 5.7 | 2.4 | |
| | Working class | | 15.2 | 23.0 | 28.8 | |
| | N | | 2000 | 3000 | 4930 | |
| Finland | Inactive groups | | | | 44.2 | |
| | Service class | | | | 5.4 | |
| | Middle classes | | | | 21.8 | |
| | Farmer-fisherm. | | | | 3.4 | |
| | Working class | | | | 25.2 | |
| | N | | | | 5164 | |
| Sweden | Inactive groups | | | | 61.9 | |
| | Service class | | | | 2.1 | |
| | Middle classes | | | | 22.7 | |
| | Farmer-fisherm. | | | | - | |
| | Working class | | | | 13.4 | |
| | N | | | | 5143 | |

Source: see Table 3.

We can extract several conclusions from the results of this last table. First, the importance of the working class within the Communist electorate in France, Italy, and

Greece has decreased, but this trend is not visible in Spain and Portugal. Secondly, in all cases the heterogeneous set of inactive groups (retired, students, etc.) has gradually become the main base of support of these parties. In addition to inactive groups their electorate is composed by an important contingent of voters that belong to the working class and the middle classes. In certain cases, as in Greece or Italy, working class support to the Communists has constantly remained smaller than that given by the middle classes; while in others the relative position of workers and the middle classes within the Communist electorate has oscillated. Therefore, while important, the relative size of the working class is by no means the only or main determinant of the electoral fortunes of Western Communist parties.

*4.2 The nature of the working class and the Communist vote*

In section 3 we saw that some authors argued that the loss of class identification and the reduction of the political distinctiveness of the workers could contribute to dissolve the political meaning of the working class. According to some authors, one of the factors that indicate the socio-economic transformations that tend to reduce the classical social and political nature of the working class is the reduction of the size of the units or plants of production (Esping-Andersen 1999). This reduction tends to produce individualization and to put barriers to the existence of a working class identity. I have chosen three indicators that can measure this phenomenon, and that are expected to negatively affect the prospect of Communist organizations. The first variable is the percentage of people working in a firm with more than 500 workers (as measured by responses to EB surveys). The second variable is and index of strike

activity, and the third one is union membership.[15] As in the previous variables analyzed the latter two do not directly affect Communist support but they could do so indirectly through the creation of a political environment in which Communist activity finds better possibilities of success (Communist parties are more likely to succeed when workers are organized and mobilized). In the last decades, even if there are certain particularities, the more general trend is one of a decreasing number of strikes. With regard to union membership the general trend is one of growth since the 1950s (so we could already expect a weak relation between this variable and Communist decline). Table 5 shows the correlation coefficients between the percentage of vote for Communist parties and the percentage of people who work in firms with more than 500 workers, the index of strike activity, and union membership for each of the countries for which data was available.

Table 5. Correlations between % of Communist vote and other socio-structural variables

| | Firms more 500 workers | Strikes | Union membership |
|---|---|---|---|
| Austria | | **0.47** (24) | -0.37 (24) |
| Belgium | **0.86** (13) | -0.19 (21) | **-0.53** (28) |
| Denmark | -0.23 (10) | 0.22 (25) | 0.22 (25) |
| Norway | | 0.28 (26) | **-0.80** (26) |
| Switzerland | | -0.13 (24) | **-0.52** (24) |
| | | | |
| Finland | | 0.04 (41) | **-0.90** (35) |
| France | **0.82** (17) | **0.79** (39) | **0.75** (33) |
| Iceland | | 0.14 (31) | |
| Italy | **-0.74** (17) | **0.46** (41) | **0.38** (33) |
| | | | |
| Japan | | **-0.47** (40) | **0.86** (34) |
| Luxembourg | -0.16 (17) | | |
| Netherlands | 0.40 (17) | -0.12 (41) | 0.25 (35) |
| Sweden | | -0.03 (41) | **0.49** (35) |
| | | | |
| Greece | -0.45 (12) | 0.13 (21) | |
| Portugal | 0.40 (7) | **0.86** (22) | |
| Spain | 0.17 (6) | 0.09 (24) | **0.61** (18) |

Sources: For firm size, The Mannheim Eurobarometer Trend File, 1970-1999; for strike activity Armingeon, Beyeler and Menegale (2002). In black Pearson correlation coefficients

significant for p≤0.05. In gray shade the relationships consistent with the "working-class organization and mobilization" hypothesis. In brackets the number of time points used for the calculations.

The hypothesis that better Communist electoral results should be expected when the units of production are bigger because this favors the traditional working class does not find generalized support with these data. Only in the cases of Belgium and France are the correlation coefficient positive and statistically significant, in Italy the coefficient goes in the opposite direction, and in most other cases the coefficients are not significant and low.

The results also indicate that the association between Communist vote and workers' mobilization and organization is not generally strong nor in the direction suggested by the hypothesis. Only in certain countries we find support for part of the hypothesis and only in France the confirmation seems total. In this latter case, where the main union (CGT) has traditionally been linked to the PCF, the vote for the PCF is strongly associated to strike activity and union membership. In Spain the vote for the Communists is also positively associated to union membership (in Spain one of the two biggest unions had until the 1990s close links with the Communist party) but not with strike activity. The vote for the Communists is also associated to strikes activity in Austria, Italy and Portugal. However, in Italy there is no strong association between union membership and vote for the PCI (the correlation coefficient is positive and statistically significant but it is low), although there was, as in France, a union classically linked to the party (CGIL). Unfortunately I still do not have information about Portugal. Apart from France and Spain union membership is associated to Communist support also in Sweden and Japan.

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**5. Post-materialism and vote for Communist parties**

Another hypothesis previously mentioned suggested that the appearance of new political preferences and new issues related to post-material priorities entailed serious difficulties for Communist parties. These ones were traditional parties that were linked to highly "material" issues, to the traditional class politics and to left-right conflict. In the new framework of post-industrial and post-material politics the Communists would appear far away from the needs of the new emergent and politically dynamic sectors and would suffer electoral decline due to this isolation.

In this section I will explore if this hypothesis can be accepted with the present empirical evidence.[16] I will proceed in two steps. First, I will show a correlation analysis between the vote for the Communists and the levels of post-materialism in each of the countries where data were available. Later on I analyze the vote for the Communists among the three different groups according to their value structure.

The correlation analysis (Table 6) shows that only in France, Portugal and Luxembourg it seems to exist evidence in support of the hypothesis that higher levels of post-materialism tend to produce lower levels of Communist vote. In Italy, the correlation coefficient is not statistically significant but it is close to it. In any case, the support for the hypothesis is partial and the Italian and, specially, the Spanish case (where the coefficient goes in the opposite direction to the hypothesis) introduce some caution on the validity of its argument.

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[16] I, therefore, do not discuss the validity of the post-materialism thesis itself even if it has shown very contentious.

Table 6. Correlation between vote for Communist parties and levels of post-materialism

| | |
|---|---|
| Belgium | 0.21 (15) |
| Denmark | -0.51 (10) |
| | |
| France | -0.67 (23) |
| Italy | -0.40 (23) |
| | |
| Luxembourg | -0.49 (21) |
| Netherlands | 0.19 (22) |
| | |
| Greece | -0.16 (16) |
| Portugal | -0.73 (11) |
| Spain | 0.67(11) |

Source: The Mannheim Eurobarometer Trend File, 1970-1999. In black Pearson correlation coefficients significant for $p \leq 0.05$. In gray shade the relationships consistent with the hypothesis that "post-materialism" has negative effects on Communist vote. In brackets the number of time points used for the calculations.

Table 7 shows, in turn, the percentage of vote for the Communists between post-materialists, mixed-values individuals and materialists. Given the instability of the data on post-materialism I use two close time points so we can be aware of the oscillations of this index. However, in spite of this, the data show the same trend in the two time points. The table shows the percentage of vote that the Communists obtain among the three groups: those with post-materialist values, those with materialist ones and those with a mixed value structure.

According to these results the Communist parties of these countries obtain their best electoral results precisely among the post-materialists (except in 1990 in the case of the Portuguese survey). If this trend is stable it is not possible to convincingly argue that the increase in the number of post-materialist voters hinders Communist electoral prospects. Although the scarcity of data should introduce some caution in the conclusions, this individual-level evidence does contradict the hypothesis on the negative electoral effects of the spread of post-material values on the Communists' electoral evolution.

Table 7. Vote for Communist parties according to value structure

| | | % vote for Communists | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1988 | 1990 |
| France | Materialist | 1.9 | 1.5 |
| | Mixed | 2.2 | 2.7 |
| | Post-materialist | 5.1 | 5.1 |
| | N | 1931 | 2911 |
| Italy | Materialist | 6.6 | 6.2 |
| | Mixed | 5.5 | 6.5 |
| | Post-materialist | 8.4 | 10.2 |
| | N | 2024 | 3052 |
| Greece | Materialist | 2.2 | 2.4 |
| | Mixed | 5.1 | 6.6 |
| | Post-materialist | 14.8 | 12.9 |
| | N | 1864 | 2863 |
| Spain | Materialist | 1.2 | 1.8 |
| | Mixed | 2.8 | 4.2 |
| | Post-materialist | 5.0 | 9.7 |
| | N | 1914 | 2812 |
| Portugal | Materialist | 1.1 | 3.7 |
| | Mixed | 2.4 | 2.3 |
| | Post-materialist | 3.0 | 3.0 |
| | N | 1825 | 2802 |

The other European countries (Belgium, Denmark, Luxembourg and the Netherlands) have been excluded because by the time of these surveys their respective Communist parties were either extremely small or no longer Communist parties.
Source: The Mannheim Eurobarometer Trend File, 1970-1999.

## 6. Discussion: towards an understanding of Communist parties' decline

From these analyses it seems that socio-structural variables have not rigidly constrained or determined the electoral fortune of Communist parties even if it is an element that surely has affected in certain ways the structure of political competition. Neither the size of the working class, nor the dissolution of the classical features of this social group, nor the rise of post-materialist values seem to have an undisputed negative effect on the Communist electoral evolution. Even taking into account the partial nature of the data used in these analyses the conclusion is that there is no strong support for the hypotheses that linked socio-structural factors to the decline of Communist parties in the developed world. In this sense we should confirm that "social change should not be made the scapegoat for political failures, but the long-term

strategy of any party, and especially a left-of-center party, must clearly take on board the changes" (Heath, Jowell and Curtice 2001: 18).

This conclusion would support a research agenda that puts more emphasis on political and organizational variables. In this area the literature cited in the first sections of this paper introduces two variables that have been also highlighted in the accounts of the evolution of other kinds of parties: the internal organization of the parties and the strategies they adopt in the environment of electoral competition. Lets consider briefly these two issues.

The study of the role that the organization of Communist parties has played in the decline of these parties should go beyond the statement of the negative effects of democratic centralism. First, because, the degree of application of those norms was highly unequal. And, secondly, because it could make us forget that many parties outside the Communist family have used very centralized and undemocratic internal procedures without that causing any evident negative electoral trend. The important aspect is not democratic centralism but, probably, the degree of centralization and of leadership autonomy due to the relation of these aspects with the organizational flexibility needed to modify the party's strategy in a situation of environmental challenge. This does not mean that we disregard the peculiarities of Communist parties but that we have to contextualize them within classical organizational analyses, and take into account the particular structure of incentives of these parties.

The decline of Communist parties could be put in relation with erroneous reactions of these parties to changes in the structure of party competition. As a product of the cultural and value change associated to the wider social changes mentioned in previous pages, new political actors have appeared to represent those new issues and demands. This would be the case of the new social movements and of Green parties. In

this sense, the Communists had to confront not only a modification of the social structure and a value change that could be unfavorable for the electoral opportunities of their parties but also a new set of competitors. The new social movements and the "New Politics" parties challenged the organizational and electoral status of Communist parties, because they were appealing to some constituencies that otherwise could support more classical left-wing forces.[17] Therefore, the inability of many Communist parties to respond to these new demands and to the appearance of new issues caused their effective replacement by Green parties in some countries (Waller 1989) and, in more general terms, their isolation from important sectors of the electorate. [18]

Hence, we need to find the factors that help explain why did some Communist parties adopt such political strategies in their competition with Green and Socialist parties, the timing of these strategies, how the structure of party competition played or not a role, and the position and character of Socialists and Greens (and other possible competitors) in the different countries. In this sense, the model used by Kitschelt (1989 and, especially, 1994) could be of great value. According to this model we should study the different national party systems and the structures of competition, the internal organizational dynamics and their relation with the political decisions, and the role of ideological legacies in party strategy.

Finally we should also take into account one factor especially relevant in the case of Communist parties. As it has sometimes been stressed, Communist parties were very different organizations already in the 1980s. And one of the factors that made

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[17] As it has been argued by Gallagher, Laver and Mair (2001: 254-255) postmaterialism and the appearance of Green parties entails a limited realignment given that these parties finally locate themselves in the left and do not alter substantially the lines of division between left and right.
[18] Confronted to this wave of new radicalism the Communist parties were not only uncapable of obtaining the support of these citizens, but also in several countries and with varying intensity they ignored or attacked this manifestations of political dissent. The reaction of the French Communists to the appearance of environmentalism was initially negative, ignoring, marginalizing or trying to exclude it from the political agenda (Sainteny 1995). The Italian Communists had an equally hostile initial reaction to the appearance of new social movements (Hellman 1988: 218).

them different in that moment was the distance from the traditional Communist identity. This different distance was the product of previous strategies or attempts of change. This legacy of previous attempts that acted on the ideological loyalty and made new attempts of change easier should also be taken into account in the explanation of their reaction to their decline.

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# Electoral trends of Communist and Post-Communist parties, 1945-2001



**% of vote**

**Year**