

CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN VICTIMISATION RATES: TO COMPARE OR NOT TO COMPARE?

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It seems pertinent, before attempting to compare the results of the 1992 International Crime Survey in the countries of Eastern Europe, to state the reasons why such an analysis might present some formidable, if not insurmountable difficulties.

Firstly, the comparisons are being made between units (a term which I shall continue to use since Moscow and Ljubljana are not countries) at different stages of social and economic development. The process of market-oriented reforms, for instance, is well advanced in Poland, much less so in Czechoslovakia and Slovenia, and has practically not yet been initiated in the territories of the former Soviet Union covered by the present study. The Polish experience clearly shows, however, that the process of political and economic transformation is always accompanied by an unprecedented growth in the crime rate.

Secondly, the regions under comparison differ widely with respect to both the ethnic and cultural homogeneity of their populations. The units range from Poland and Czechoslovakia with populations of 40 million and 16 million respectively, to Moscow with 10 million, Georgia with as little as 4 million and Slovenia - a very small country of 2 million inhabitants. The population of Poland is very homogeneous: ethnic minorities constitute an insignificant proportion of the society. In Czechoslovakia - besides the two main Czech and Slovak nationalities - there are the inhabitants of Moravia, the 700,000 strong Hungarian minority and a sizeable Gypsy community. Georgia is a melting pot of nationalities and ethnic groups, and Moscow, as the capital city, used to attract people from all the republics making up the Soviet Union.

Thirdly, there are major differences in the GNP per capita, in the development of infrastructure and industry and in the general level of social advancement. In this respect, Czechoslovakia and Slovenia are almost comparable with the poorest countries of the EEC, Poland is slightly less advanced, and the regions under survey of the former Soviet Union would have to be classified, with respect to the basic economic indicators, as belonging to the so-called Third World Countries.

Fourthly, we are dealing with both countries and cities, and all of different sizes. At the one end of the spectrum there is Moscow which - with its 10 million citizens - is a large metropolis, and at the other end we have Ljubljana, a middle-sized city of 350,000 inhabitants.

Moreover, the prevailing political situation varies greatly across the units analysed in the present study. Georgia is a country torn by civil war and by a tangle of acute ethnic and political tensions. Moscow, formerly the capital city of the Empire, then the USSR, and presently of Russia, provides a natural focal point for all political, social and economic tensions and, as a result, finds itself on the brink of

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chaos. Czechoslovakia, in turn, is on the eve of a break-up which also adversely affects the political and social situation. Slovenia is still feeling the shockwaves of Yugoslavia's disintegration and the raging war in Bosnia and Croatia contributes to the social and political destabilisation of the country. Against this background, Poland appears almost an oasis of tranquillity, although, of course, the country also has its share of social and political conflicts.

Lastly, even the survey samples were different. In Poland the survey was done on the basis of a big, nationwide simple random sample, in Georgia a stratified and multi-stage one was employed, and in Moscow a quota sample was used. Moreover, Poland was the only country in which the research was conducted in keeping with the study guidelines, i.e. in January 1992, which makes the results even less comparable.

In view of all this perhaps no comparative analysis should be attempted at all, since such a study not only inevitably violates all the basic principles of methodology but also of common sense. In fact, the only thing the countries seem to have in common is that most of them were part, in the past - and in one form or another - of the Soviet Empire.

Having mentioned all these necessary caveats and explanations let us now try to compare the incomparable, a task which might just prove to have some perverse appeal.

Starting with the first comparison, it becomes immediately evident just how hazardous it is to effect a comparative analysis of Eastern European regions. It appears that while 1.5%, 3.9% and 3.5% of car owners in Ljubljana, Poland and Czechoslovakia respectively had a car stolen during the five years covered by the survey, these figures rose to almost 5% for Moscow and as high as 14.4% for Georgia. The impact of civil war on the rate of car thefts in Georgia is even more clearly illustrated by the data for 1991. While car theft victim rates for Poland, Czechoslovakia, Ljubljana and Moscow ranged from 0.4% to 2.3%, the rate in Georgia was 5.6%.

Although the percentage of car theft victims who reported the incident to the police was generally high, there were nevertheless some differences. 94% of car theft cases were reported in Poland, but only 86% in Moscow. Interestingly, the reporting rate does not seem to mirror judgements on the seriousness of the incident; although Poland had the highest reporting rate, at the same time it had the least number of victims who considered car theft to be a serious incident (55%). The reverse is true of Moscow: with the lowest number of people reporting the theft, the largest percentage (66%) of these victims judged it as a serious incident. In Ljubljana 91.7% of car theft victims reported the incident to the police. Exactly the same number judged it to be a serious incident. Unfortunately, at the moment of writing no data are available on the reporting rate in Georgia.

Interestingly, however, Moscow - and not Georgia - ranked first in the number of victims of thefts from cars (48% over the five-year period and 22% within the last twelve months). Georgia ranked second (28% and 10% respectively), just ahead of Poland (24% and 11%) and Ljubljana (24.6% and 7.3%). Car owners in Czechoslovakia were least often robbed in this way - the corresponding figures being 20% and 7.5%.

Thefts from cars were most often reported in Ljubljana (58%) and Poland (51%), and least often in Czechoslovakia (32%). The most frequent reason given for not

reporting thefts from cars in Poland, Ljubljana and Czechoslovakia was that the incident was not judged serious enough. In Moscow, on the other hand, the dominant motive seemed to be lack of faith in police effectiveness. (No relevant data for Georgia are available.) Somewhat unexpectedly, of all the units, car vandalism was most widespread in Czechoslovakia. Almost 44% of car owners had a car damaged within the five years under survey, but only 7% of the incidents occurred in the last year. In Ljubljana, over the five-year timespan, 34% of car owners were victims of car vandalism, while 9% of the incidents occurred in 1991.

The reverse situation was registered in Georgia: only 12% of car owners considered themselves victims of car vandalism, but as many as 32% of the incidents took place in the last year. Contrary to what might be expected, Moscow did not have the highest car vandalism rate - 32% over the five-year period and 16% during the last year. Throughout the five-year period the car vandalism rate in Poland was only slightly higher than that in Georgia (19%), with 1991 accounting for 10% of car damage incidents. However, the percentage of victims reporting the damage was highest in Poland (28%), slightly lower in Moscow (22%) and Ljubljana (20%), and by far the lowest in Czechoslovakia (11%). None of the victims of car vandalism in Moscow who had reported the incident to the police described the damage as not serious, whereas 41% in Poland and 49% in Czechoslovakia judged the incident as such. In all units, the main reason given for not reporting was lack of faith in police effectiveness.

Over the five-year timespan moped thefts occurred most frequently in Ljubljana (13%) and Moscow (11%). During the last year under survey, most thefts were committed in Moscow (11%) and Poland (5%), and the least in Ljubljana (2%) and Czechoslovakia (only 0.3%).

An important finding is made when we compare the proportion of respondents who reported a moped theft. It appears that in Moscow - despite the lack of faith in police work - 100% of such thefts were reported. A very high proportion (96%) of moped theft victims also reported the offence to the police in Ljubljana. In Poland, on the other hand, motorcycle and moped thefts were reported by 88% of the victims, and in Czechoslovakia by as few as 39%. It might be assumed that the figures mirror to some extent the relative affluence of the respective societies and consequently also the subjective perception of the severity of the loss.

As regards bicycle theft, Georgia had the lowest rate for the five-year period (8%) and for 1991 (1.4%). Bicycle theft victim rates in Poland, Moscow, Ljubljana and Czechoslovakia for the five-year period were very similar - 19%, 19%, 18% and 16% respectively. In 1991 the lowest theft rate was recorded in Ljubljana (4.4%). The level of bicycle theft was slightly higher in Czechoslovakia, Moscow, and Poland (5.8%, 6.4% and 6.5% respectively). Although bicycle thefts were least frequent in Ljubljana and Czechoslovakia, the two units had the highest reporting rate: over half the victims reported the incident to the police. The reporting rate in Poland was slightly lower (47.5%), while that in Moscow was by far the lowest of all (25.6%). Lack of faith in police work was the main reason for not reporting and, as before, was the dominant motive in Moscow.

While the burglary victim rates were very similar for the five-year period (from 6.2% in Moscow to 10.9% in Czechoslovakia), the results for the last year range between 1.8% for Ljubljana and 4.3% for Czechoslovakia. A similar pattern emerges with attempted burglaries, with Moscow showing a victimisation rate of 4%

in the five years, Poland (3%), Georgia (2.5%), Ljubljana (2.4%) and Czechoslovakia (1.5%).

The highest percentage of persons reporting a burglary to the police was recorded in Ljubljana (68%). This kind of offence was less frequently reported in Moscow (56%), in Poland (53%) and in Czechoslovakia (50%). The most common reason given for not reporting in Czechoslovakia was that the offence was not considered serious enough, whereas in Poland and Ljubljana it was the conviction that the police could do nothing about it. In Moscow, besides the by now common lack of faith in police effectiveness, a new and most frequently given reason appeared: the victims decided to solve the case themselves. Burglaries were judged as least serious in Czechoslovakia: only 8% of the victims described the incident as very serious, compared to as many as 66% in Ljubljana and over 50% in Georgia.

Robbery victim rates for the five-year period did not differ very much: 7.7% in Moscow, 5.6% in Georgia, 4% in Poland and 3% in Czechoslovakia. The lowest robbery victim rate in the five years covered by the survey was recorded in Ljubljana (1.6%). Also by 1991 the robbery rates for the surveyed territories of the former Soviet Union (Georgia 1.6% and Moscow 3.4%) are higher than those recorded in Czechoslovakia and Ljubljana (1.1% and 0.2% respectively), while Poland is somewhere in the middle with 2.2%. The percentage of victims in Moscow that reported the crime to the police was less than half of that in Poland (34.2%) and Czechoslovakia (33.3%), where only 18 people did not report the incident to the police. In Moscow and in Poland, similarly to the previous offences, failure to report was most often ascribed to lack of faith in police work. It is interesting to note that in Moscow only 11.7% of robbery victims considered it a very serious incident, whereas over 30% judged it as such in Poland and in Georgia, and six times more in Ljubljana (68%).

Bearing in mind the present situation in Georgia, it is extremely difficult to construe the data relating to assault victim rates. It would appear, on the basis of the information provided, that the assault victim rate in Georgia for the five years was 4.6%, whereas in the relatively tranquil Czechoslovakia the figure was twice as high. In contrast to other rates, the data for the last year would also indicate that the assault victim rate - in spite of the civil war - is extremely low in that country (only 0.5%). Unless this is simply a mistake, we will have to assume that the relevant question was wrongly worded in the questionnaire. The emphasis is on assault or threat that evokes a feeling of fear. It might be that cultural differences as to what is considered to be fear-evoking were not taken into account, or that the Georgian culture does not allow for an admission of fear. In any case, this surprising result should be methodologically analysed and factually verified by further research. This does not, however, exhaust all the surprises in the distribution of answers to the assault and threat questions. While the results for the five-year period are roughly in agreement with theoretical expectations, i.e. the largest number of assault victims was recorded in Moscow (12.8%), followed by Czechoslovakia (9.4%) and Ljubljana (8.5%) and lastly - with relatively few cases - in Poland (7.8%), the rates for the last year provide a different picture. It appears that the number of assaults in Moscow (5%) and that in Poland (4.1%) was the highest, and that, besides the already mentioned case of Georgia, the lowest assault victim rates were recorded in Ljubljana (1.8%). This result could also be explained by the differences in various cultures in labelling a given act as really threatening.

Reporting rates were also unexpectedly low: 19.5% in Moscow, 22.5% in Czechoslovakia, 26.9% in Poland and 29.4% in Ljubljana. Among the reasons for not reporting, the most frequently stated motive in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Moscow was not lack of faith in police effectiveness, but the unserious nature of the offence. This could be taken to mean that although assaults and threats were not infrequent, they were seldom of a serious nature. This seems to be confirmed by the distribution of answers to the question about the seriousness of the incident.

As could have been predicted, thefts of personal property over the five year timespan were most frequent in Moscow (26%). What might come as a surprise, however, is the small difference in theft rates between Moscow and the other units. Personal property theft rates were 22% in Czechoslovakia, 20% in Poland, and as low as 14% in Georgia and 13.6% in Ljubljana. In 1991 Moscow ranked first with a rate of personal property theft at 11%. Poland ranked second with 8% and Czechoslovakia third with 7%. The least number of thefts of personal property were committed in Ljubljana (3.8%) and Georgia (3.5%).

There were no great differences in the proportion of people who reported personal property thefts to the police: in Moscow, Poland and Czechoslovakia the rates were 20%, 21% and 28% respectively. The highest proportion (36%) of people reporting the thefts to the police was recorded in Ljubljana. In every unit police ineffectiveness was most frequently mentioned as the reason for not reporting. Personal property thefts were most often judged as being serious by Slovenian respondents (42%), and least often by Czechoslovakian respondents (less than 10%).

Results related to sexual offences were also fairly uniform across the units. The Moscow, Ljubljana and Czechoslovakian rates for the five years under survey were almost identical (9.8%, 9.5% and 9% respectively), with a slightly lower rate recorded in Poland (almost 5%), and the lowest in Georgia (3%). The comparison of 1991 data reveals that in this instance Poland and Moscow drew level with the same sexual offence victim rate of 3.5%, ahead of Ljubljana (3.2%) and Czechoslovakia with the lowest rate of 2.6% (unfortunately, no data are available for Georgia). It is perhaps surprising that the level of sexual offences in Moscow was almost the same as in Poland, Ljubljana and Czechoslovakia. It would have been reasonable to expect the Moscow rate to be much higher.

Sexual incident reporting rates were also similar (7-8%), but substantial dissimilarities were revealed in the reasons for not reporting unlawful sexual advances. While in Moscow and Czechoslovakia the most frequently stated reason for not reporting the offence was that the victim solved the case herself, in Poland and Ljubljana the prime motive was the light nature of the offence. Also, fear of reprisal by the offender appeared for the first time as a reason for not reporting. In Moscow, Czechoslovakia and Poland, failing to report was justified in this way by about 10% of the victims. Sexual aggression was most often judged as something serious in Poland (over 30%), and least often in Czechoslovakia (under 20%).

There were, however, big differences in consumer fraud victim rates. In the surveyed regions of the former Soviet Union the victim rates were several times higher (Georgia 65%, Moscow over 50%) than in Poland or Czechoslovakia (11% and 14% respectively), with Ljubljana coming somewhere in between with a moderate rate of 24%.

As regards corruption, the unparalleled leaders were Georgia (21%) and Moscow (12%). Poland, with a 5% rate, came before Ljubljana which recorded the lowest rate for this kind of crime (0.6%). Unfortunately, no data are available for Czechoslovakia.

What conclusions can be drawn from the above analysis? As regards the more representative - in this particular case - five-year data, it is difficult to discern any clear-cut trends. As was expected, the victimisation rate was highest in Moscow (although with some exceptions), but the differences in the numbers of victims of various crimes between Moscow and the other units were smaller than might have been expected on purely theoretical grounds. Over the five-year period under scrutiny, the Moscovites fell victim slightly more often to violent crimes (including robberies), but less often to burglaries (although not attempted burglaries). The greatest differences between Moscow on the one hand, and the three states and Ljubljana on the other, appeared with respect to car thefts: the victim rate in Moscow was almost twice as high as that in Georgia, which took second place.

Except for a few minor differences, the crime patterns in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Ljubljana were on the whole very similar over the five-year period; the incidence of car vandalism and sexual offences was higher in Czechoslovakia and Ljubljana.

It should be noted that in the five-year timespan none of the five surveyed countries/cities registered a consistently highest or lowest victimisation rate.