

Chapter 7

Does Anyone Miss Communism?

ABSTRACT

This chapter examines whether there are any aspects of communism that are missed and how people feel about democracy. While almost everyone said they preferred democracy to communism, people felt more secure about things such as their job, housing, and basic necessities under communism. Many of these aspects were affected by the centrally planned system used by communists. This chapter will discuss the differences between a centrally planned system and a capitalist system and how attitudes and behaviors of both governments and individuals can be affected by them. Additionally, there were some components of democracy people did not like. Many said democracy and capitalism made people too individualistic and materialistic. Even with these perceived shortcomings, people still felt democracy was a better political system.

INTRODUCTION

While all but a few people interviewed preferred democracy to communism, most of them also identified something they missed. Sometimes it was a specific product, such as a type of candy that is no longer made, but for many others, it was characteristics about society. There was an overall feeling that people had better interpersonal relationships during communism and cared more about society as a whole. This chapter explores what people recall

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about their lives under communism and what they see as the positives and negatives of both communism and democracy.

The data for this chapter is derived almost exclusively from the more than 200 personal interviews conducted for this study. Since these are people's recollections, they may not all be completely accurate as people have a tendency to forget things or romanticize some memories over time. However, this data does represent people's genuine feelings about their experiences living under communism 30 years after its fall. It also allows communism and democracy as two different political systems compared and contrasted by people who have lived through both.

The first section of the chapter looks at what interviewees said were some of the worst parts of communism. For example, not having a wide variety of goods to choose from and only having access to a certain type of produce once or twice a year. Next, housing during communism is discussed. Prefabricated housing complexes were erected all over Czechoslovakia and Hungary—most of which are still used today. Having an affordable housing option was seen as a benefit to many, and a common complaint, especially in the Czech Republic, is the current price of housing.

The differences between a capitalist system and a centrally planned system are also discussed. In a capitalist system, people drive demand, whereas, in a centrally planned system, the government is more concerned with meeting a societal need. These different approaches the government types take can affect not only policy but also the attitudes and behaviors of citizens.

The third section of the chapter starts examining aspects of communism people miss. Sixty percent of interviewees said they felt more secure under communism. This security could be related to a number of different things, including jobs, housing, and pensions. The next section then looks at what people said were the downfalls of democracy. The main complaints were that democracy has created more socioeconomic inequality and has caused people to become too individualistic and materialistic.

People's reflections on communism and democracy are relevant to this study because a person's experience living under communism will have an impact on how they feel about democracy. In the US, people are politically socialized towards democracy, and the vast majority of Americans do not have experience living under any other type of government. However, in Hungary and the Czech Republic, political socialization towards democracy did not start with a clean slate. Anyone born prior to 1980 likely has some

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