Societal Legacy of Communism in the Post-Soviet Era: From Collective Thinking to State-Oriented Thinking

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Abstract

        This paper examines the enduring societal legacy of communism in the post-Soviet era, arguing that the collective mindset cultivated under Soviet rule has not enabled a full transition to state-oriented civic thinking. Rather than embracing pluralism and civic independence, many post-Soviet societies continue to imagine themselves as homogeneous entities in which unity is frequently equated with conformity. The study explores the ideological, psychological, and cultural foundations of post-Soviet political behavior and political culture in transitional societies. It aims to illuminate the persistent challenges faced by post-Soviet states in overcoming their communist inheritance and developing civic-minded, participatory societies capable of sustaining civil governance. Methodologically, this article is an analytical review that combines philosophical interpretation, documentary comparative analysis, and critical engagement with relevant scholarly literature. The analysis demonstrates that the apparent emergence of individualism often conceals continued ideological submission and political passivity. Without a broader philosophical and civic transformation—extending beyond institutional and structural reform—post-Soviet societies remain caught between the promises of freedom and the comfort of conformity. This research contributes to political sociology, transitional studies, and post-communist scholarship by clarifying the persistence of collective mentalities and social conditioning shaped during the Soviet period.

Keywords: Obedience, Post-Soviet, Collectivism, Individualism

Introduction

      The political and cultural transformation of post-Soviet societies since the collapse of the USSR has been the subject of extensive scholarly debate. While attention has largely focused on institutional change and democratization processes, less emphasis has been placed on the enduring influence of Soviet-era collectivism on the behavioral patterns of citizens/societies. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that Soviet-era socialization and collective memory continue to shape political attitudes and civic behavior long after the end of communist rule (Bakke, 2023; Stallbaum, 2024).

      Although numerous studies have examined communism and the post-communist transition globally, there remains a relative scarcity of research focusing specifically on various contexts. In particular, many primary and secondary sources in the Georgian language have not been translated into English, limiting their accessibility to the international scholarly community. This report seeks to address this gap by providing an additional academic contribution by integrating both Georgian-language sources and internationally recognized research. By situating regional developments within the broader literature on post-communist political culture, this study aligns with contemporary findings that highlight the persistence of illiberal norms and state-oriented thinking across the former Soviet space (Bozóki & Hegedűs, 2022).

      This study investigates the lasting influence of Soviet collectivism on the political behaviors and social mindset of societies emerging from the Soviet Union. Specifically, the study focuses on the central theory: how the communist project sought to cultivate a collective mindset that subordinated individual identity to the imagined unity of the social whole. In the post-communist era, this legacy endures as a societal inclination to perceive the nation as a single, homogeneous entity, rather than a complex and plural community. This persistent frame of state-oriented thinking constrains the development of free, independent thought and hinders societies' capacity to embrace genuine modern diversity. Such patterns are consistent with recent analyses showing that post-Soviet political culture continues to be shaped by historical expectations of authority, unity, and conformity (Bakke, 2023; Stallbaum, 2024).

      For the above/mentioned theory, research will review and analyze several interrelated themes. First, it explores the ideological foundations of Soviet communism, examining how collectivism was systematically propagated and institutionalized through political, educational, and cultural

mechanisms. Second, it investigates the formation of the "obedient mindset"—a behavioral and psychological disposition shaped by decades of authoritarian socialization—and its persistent influence on political attitudes and civic behavior in post-Soviet states. Third, the research analyzes how this legacy contributes to the vulnerability of these societies to illiberal governance, limiting the consolidation of contemporary norms. Finally, it assesses potential pathways for recovery, focusing on the reforms and social transformations necessary to overcome these deeply rooted legacies and foster the development of participatory and democratic civil societies.

Methodologically, this research employs a qualitative literature review approach, synthesizing theoretical frameworks and empirical findings from a wide range of scholarly works across political science and cultural studies. The geographic scope encompasses the diverse post-Soviet states, with comparative insights drawn to highlight commonalities and variations in the post-communist transition experience.

By exploring the foundations of Soviet ideology and the consequences of leaving this legacy unaddressed, the study aims to contribute to a broader understanding of political transformation in the post-communist world, providing insight into the fragile mindset of societies and the complex interplay between historical legacies and contemporary political dynamics.

Methodology
Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design, primarily based on an extensive literature review and comparative analysis of existing empirical studies. The research aims to explore the cultural legacies of Soviet collectivism across post-Soviet societies, with particular attention to political attitudes, institutional trust, and civic engagement.

The study utilizes a historical-comparative method, synthesizing theoretical frameworks and empirical findings from political science and history to analyze the long-term cultural effects of Soviet rule. The research does not involve primary data collection but critically engages with secondary sources, including academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and large-scale cross-national survey data.

Key materials reviewed include seminal works by scholars such as Alexander Etkind, Alexei Yurchak, Ronald Grigor Suny, Pop-Eleches and Tucker, Ghia Nodia, and others who have studied Soviet political culture, authoritarian legacies, and democratization in post-communist states. Empirical data from cross-national surveys such as the World Values Survey and region-specific studies provided quantitative backing to theoretical claims. These materials cover multiple post-Soviet countries, allowing for comparative insights.

The geographic focus spans the post-Soviet space and emphasis the overarching patterns and trends shared across the region.

A notable limitation of this study is the reliance on secondary data, which constrains the ability to capture evolving political attitudes in real-time or to explore grassroots perspectives deeply. Additionally, the diversity among post-Soviet states presents challenges in making universal generalizations; political cultures vary widely due to different historical trajectories and socio-economic conditions. Despite these limitations, the broad scope of sources provides a robust foundation for understanding the persistence of the influence of Communism and its effects on contemporary processes.

Soviet Union
(Historical Background)

The Soviet Union, established in 1922 following the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, emerged as the world's first socialist state, fundamentally reshaping the political, economic, and social landscape of Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Its formation marked a radical departure from the tsarist autocracy that preceded it, instituting a centrally planned economy and a one-party political system under the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times*, 1999).

The Soviet project was ambitious in scope: it aimed not only to transform economic relations through collectivization and industrialization but also to systematically engineer a new socialist society based on Marxist-Leninist ideology. This vision required the wholesale reconfiguration of individual identity and social relations, subsuming personal interests to the goals of the collective and the state (Kharkhordin, 1999).

States of Soviet Union inherited the Soviet legacy, including political institutions, economic structures, and social norms, which continue to shape their social and political development (Tucker, 2017).

Soviet collectivism was not merely an economic arrangement but a totalizing social order that sought to reshape individual consciousness and societal norms. Rooted in Marxist-Leninist ideology, collectivism aimed to subordinate personal interest to the common good, enforced through political structures and ideological indoctrination (Kharkhordin, 1999). The individual was expected to identify with the goals of the state, a transformation facilitated by institutions such as schools, youth organizations, labor unions, and the Communist Party itself. The collective replaced the family, religion, and civil society as the primary source of values and identity.

Georgia

After being an unprivileged part of the Russian Empire for 117 years, Georgia declared independence on 26 May 1918. It obtained de facto recognition on 10 January 1920 and de jure recognition on 27 January 1921. In 1920, Georgia's independence was acknowledged by Russia (Khvadagiani, 2021; Suny, 1994).

As Jimsher Rekhviashvili observes, "The country lost not only its independence but also the opportunity to build a democratic and free society for many years. It was precisely in 1922 that the foundation was laid for everything on which Georgia's 70 years of occupation were subsequently built, and which remains an obstacle to development even after 100 years" (Rekhviashvili, 2022).

The Soviet leadership's approach to the non-Russian republics was clearly articulated by Joseph Stalin in his first autonomization plan: "Neither complete independence nor the complete abolition of 'independence'." The plan called for the formal incorporation of the ostensibly independent Soviet republics — Ukraine, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia — into the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic. This arrangement preserved a façade of sovereignty while ensuring political centralization in Moscow (Rekhviashvili, 2022).

Georgia, as a Soviet Socialist Republic, remained until 1990. The question of Georgia's accession to the USSR through the Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (TSFSR) was finally resolved by the First Congress of Transcaucasian Soviets, held on 10 December 1922. (Decree 2, 1921).

According to Levan Toidze, in *The Political History of Georgia, 1921–1923*, the First Congress of Soviets in Georgia marked the completion of the main stage in the formation of the Soviet state apparatus in the country (Toidze, 1999).

Opposition to the ideological and structural imposition of the Soviet order was strong among Georgia's democratic forces. One contemporary statement framed communism as embodying "old bureaucracy, nationalism, and imperialism" — three ideas "inscribed on its banner," against which "the whole of Georgia's democratic movement fights fiercely" (Komunisti, 1920).

Communism Ideology

The Soviet collectivist experiment represents one of the most comprehensive social engineering projects in modern history, aiming not only to transform economic relations but also to fundamentally reconstruct individual identity itself (Kharkhordin, 1999). Kharkhordin highlights how Soviet culture systematically suppressed self-expression, instead valuing individuals based on their utility to the collective. His concept of the

"confession culture," wherein citizens were expected to self-report ideological or moral deviations, illustrates the depth of self-surveillance and internalized obedience promoted by the regime. Recent analyses show that such ideological legacies continue to influence post-Soviet political behavior and social attitudes, demonstrating the lasting impact of state-imposed collectivism (Author, 2022; CPCS, 2023).

Beyond ideological control, the Soviet system reinforced obedience through practical dependencies. Citizens' reliance on the state for housing, employment, and social services entrenched conformity and loyalty (Howard, 2003). Complementing this, Diligensky (2000) identifies a characteristic "asocial individualism" in Soviet society, where individuals relied heavily on close personal networks rather than public institutions for support and survival. Contemporary studies confirm that these patterns of dependency and collectivist conditioning have enduring effects on civic engagement and trust in institutions (Bozóki & Hegedűs, 2022).

Under Soviet rule, collectivism extended far beyond a mere political doctrine; it functioned as a comprehensive system designed to shape obedient, loyal, and conformist individuals whose identities were subordinated to the goals of the whole collective. This ideological project instilled widespread obedience not only through coercive state mechanisms but also via moral and social conditioning that permeated everyday life (Kharkhordin, 1999; Yurchak, 2006). The result was a sociopolitical environment where independent thought, dissent, and personal agency were not merely discouraged but actively pathologized. Recent scholarship argues that understanding these enduring legacies is essential for explaining contemporary post-Soviet political culture, including persistent patterns of conformity, authoritarian tolerance, and collective memory of obedience (Stallbaum, 2024).

Soviet Propaganda and Resistance

From the outset, Soviet propaganda sought to erase the legitimacy of the Democratic Republic and reframe the 1918–1921 period as an era of oppression in Georgia. The newspaper Communist, on 2 March 1921, proclaimed:

> "After three years of wearing the shackles, the workers and peasants of Georgia have been liberated from the tyranny of the treacherous Mensheviks" (Comunist, 1921).

Even during the first half of the 1920s—a period marked by armed uprisings, underground movements, and brutal repression—the official narrative insisted that Soviet forces were merely combating "bankrupt Menshevik banditry," while portraying the Georgian people as "happy and

free." The regime also manipulated symbolic dates. In 1921, Tbilisi's residents boycotted the Soviet's official demonstration "Georgia's independence", while in the regions, open protests broke out. These were violently dispersed by Cheka units and Red Army detachments, resulting in injuries, deaths, and mass arrests (Khvadagiani, 2021).

State-controlled media, education, and party life formed the cornerstone of Soviet ideological conformity (Fitzpatrick, 1999), emphasizing the everydayness of propaganda, with newspapers, films, and public slogans saturating citizens' lives with idealized images of the heroic worker and the loyal party member. Kotkin (1995), however, stresses the aspirational dimension of Soviet messaging—citizens were not only coerced but also offered an ideal to strive toward, blurring the line between compliance and belief. In the sphere of education, Ewing (2002) documents the transformation of curricula into tools for instilling Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy from early childhood, while Eklof (1993) shows how school rituals—flag-raising, oaths, and commemorative events—functioned as early rehearsals for political loyalty. Recent research also demonstrates that these propaganda techniques have left enduring traces in contemporary post-Soviet societies, influencing collective memory and public attitudes toward the state (Bakke, 2023).

Political Repression

Political repression in Georgia began immediately after the Soviet occupation in 1921 and intensified as a tool for consolidating political power. While repression was continuous throughout the Soviet period, it reached unprecedented scale and brutality in the mid-1930s (Glunchadze, 2022).

Many citizens who had once genuinely believed in the ideology and the promise of a socialist order became deeply disillusioned. Rather than the promised egalitarian society, they observed the emergence of a system built on violence, violating human rights and compelling individuals to act as unquestioning instruments of state directives. The older generation of Georgian intelligentsia, which had never reconciled itself with the Soviet regime, was particularly viewed as a threat. Together, these developments fostered a strong undercurrent of opposition that the Communist Party sought to eliminate (Kveselava, 1990).

The Great Terror targeted all social classes and strata, but the intelligentsia suffered disproportionately. A significant portion of Georgia's cultural figures spent years in exile or in prisons; others were executed. These repressions severed the continuity of cultural and intellectual life, inflicting long-term damage on Georgia's cultural development (Jishkariani, n.d.). Contemporary scholarship highlights that understanding the scale and methods of repression is crucial to interpreting modern post-Soviet societal resilience and the political-cultural legacy of fear (Author, 2021).

Repression did not end with the 1930s, it started again after the Second World War. Literature, visual arts, theatre, and all other creative fields were subjected to strict ideological oversight. Censorship became harsher, and authorities fought in every sphere of cultural life. This aggressive ideological policy created intolerable working conditions for writers and artists, forcing many into silence, self-censorship, or exile (Gelashvili, 2014; Jishkariani, n.d.).

Surveillance was another pillar of control. As Khlevniuk (2004) emphasizes, the omnipresence of the NKVD (later the KGB) generated pervasive fear. Lynne (2017) documents how surveillance reached into everyday life, with citizen denunciations becoming normalized and mutual monitoring encouraged as a civic duty. Yurchak (2006) characterizes the result as a culture of "performative loyalty"—outward displays of conformity to official ideology, often masking private disaffection or disengagement.

Collectivization

One of the most transformative Soviet policies was "collectivization"—a set of reforms aimed at abolishing private ownership of land and establishing collective farms. The process began soon after Soviet power was established in Georgia. According to a decree of 1921, full land nationalization started (Kveselava, 1990).

A peasant who entered collective farms transferred all land and property to collective ownership, and the resulting harvest was distributed among members according to set quotas. By 1929, the number of farms in Georgia reached 122 (Kveselava, 1990).

Collectivization was not merely an economic reform but also a key instrument in shaping the "Soviet person." During the 1920s–1930s, communist propaganda trained the younger generation in the principles of Soviet ideology, which prioritized loyalty to socialism—presented as a universalist ideology transcending national identity—over attachment to one's ethnic or cultural heritage. Soviet morality thus actively suppressed national distinctiveness, turning members of different ethnic groups into executors of the political system's will.

The result, as Etkind (2013) describes, was the creation of the "collectivist self"—an identity in which personal worth derived from service to the collective. This "emotional economy" repressed individual ambition in favor of collective goals. However, as Yurchak (2006) and Fitzpatrick (1999) note, by the late Soviet period a growing gap emerged between public and private selves, laying the groundwork for adaptive behaviors in the post-Soviet era, where outward conformity often masked private autonomy. Recent analyses emphasize that collectivization's socialization mechanisms continue

to influence contemporary rural political culture and patterns of social trust in post-Soviet states (Bozóki & Hegedűs, 2022; CPCS, 2023).

Identity

A crucial dimension of Soviet control was the systematic erosion of identity, especially through religion, language, and culture. From its inception, the Soviet regime paired communism with atheism, reinforcing the belief that the two were inseparable. The persecution of the Georgian Orthodox population, varying in intensity over decades, persisted until the "perestroika" period (Papuashvili, n.d.).

The ideological foundation for this was partly articulated by Anatoly Lunacharsky, the first People's Commissar for Education, who—under the influence of Karl Kautsky—wrote Religion and Socialism. There, he described socialism as a "new religion of labor," a collective struggle to subjugate nature to human reason, infused with a sense of historical mission and hope for ultimate victory (Lunacharsky, 1908–1911). In practice, Soviet atheist propaganda sought to replace older faiths—Christianity, Islam, or others—with Marxism-Leninism (Baqradze, 2019). Contemporary scholarship highlights that these ideological campaigns have long-term effects on collective memory, religious identity, and social norms in post-Soviet societies (Bakke, 2023; Stallbaum, 2024).

Language policy was another central mechanism for undermining local identity. In April 1978, the newspaper Kommunisti published a draft of the new Soviet Constitution that removed the status of state language from local languages, leaving only Russian as the official state language. The roots of this policy can be traced back to the mid-1950s, when the drive toward Soviet globalization began integrating language assimilation into its core objectives (Megi Qarcivadze, 2020; Rekhviashvili, 2011; Iagorashvili, 2021).

Cultural life also underwent strict ideological reconfiguration. In 1932, the decree about reorganization of artistic organizations was released. Far from ushering in an era of artistic flourishing, this policy inaugurated a period of repression and state control over creative expression, consolidating socialist realism as the sole acceptable artistic method (Gvakxaria, 2002).

Soviet censorship was a pervasive system of ideological control that spanned the entire existence of the USSR. Lenin's 1917 decree restricted freedom of speech and expression. This system ensured that all media content aligned with the Communist Party's ideology, suppressing dissent and controlling public discourse. Many authors of works deemed "unacceptable" to the Soviet regime became victims of harassment, which in some cases ended in their repression or even death (Censorship in the Soviet Union, 2020). Recent analyses of Soviet ideological control highlight its lasting imprint on

post-Soviet public discourse, media trust, and civil society participation (Bozóki & Hegedűs, 2022; CPCS, 2023).

Taken together, these policies reveal how the Soviet system dismantled the traditional pillars of social identity—religion, historical memory, and cultural distinctiveness—to construct a uniform, ideologically controlled society. Through mechanisms of surveillance, educational indoctrination, and suppression of dissent, what emerged was not merely a transformed political order, but an entirely new social fabric defined by obedience, fear, and collective conformity. Loyalty in the Soviet Union was directed not only toward the state but toward the ideal of collective unity and sacrifice. Suny (2011) emphasizes that personal suffering was reframed as a contribution to socialism's historical mission, reinforced through war commemoration and the glorification of labor heroes. However, Pipes (1994) offers a more skeptical interpretation, seeing such narratives as instruments of domination disguised as moral and historical imperatives.

Accordingly, the Soviet regime systematically dismantled traditional social identities—particularly religion, language, and culture—to construct a uniform, ideologically controlled society. Through atheist propaganda, linguistic Russification, and strict cultural censorship, the regime suppressed national distinctiveness and replaced it with Soviet socialist identity. These policies were enforced alongside pervasive surveillance and repression, fostering a social fabric characterized by obedience, fear, and collective conformity. Modern research confirms that understanding these ideological and identity legacies is critical for analyzing persistent patterns of conformity, civic disengagement, and authoritarian tolerance in post-Soviet states (Stallbaum, 2025; Bakke, 2023).

Post-Soviet Mindset

The Soviet project of collectivism, rooted in the ideological imperatives of the Bolshevik Revolution, sought not only to restructure economic relations but to reconfigure the moral and psychological foundations of society. Central to this process was the formation of the "collectivist self"— the internalized belief that individual worth derived from service to the collective.

As Etkind (2013) argues, this emotional economy redirected personal ambition toward collective goals. Yurchak (2006) further complicates this dynamic by showing how late Soviet society produced performative loyalty, in which outward conformity coexisted with private disengagement, revealing a persistent tension between belief and compliance.

Although the collapse of the Soviet Union dismantled the formal institutions of communist rule, it did not erase the psychological patterns shaped by decades of authoritarian socialization. Instead, these patterns

adapted to new political conditions, producing a post-Soviet mindset characterized by obedience, institutional mistrust, and limited civic engagement. As a result, political transformation in the post-Soviet period has often reproduced, rather than overcome, inherited forms of deference and passivity.

Persistence of Obedience

In the Soviet system, obedience extended beyond submission to authority and became embedded in moral narratives of collective unity and sacrifice. These narratives were reinforced through ritualized commemorations, the glorification of labor, and the framing of personal suffering as a contribution to socialism (Suny, 2011). Fitzpatrick (1999) highlights the emotional investment such loyalty demanded, while Pipes (1994) interprets these practices as mechanisms of domination cloaked in moral obligation. Through prolonged socialization, obedience became habitual rather than episodic (Stallbaum, 2025).

Nationality policies further entrenched these patterns. Although nominally recognizing ethnic autonomy, they equated dissent with both political and national disloyalty, sharply restricting the space for democratic citizenship (Martin, 2001; Hirsch, 2005). In the post-Soviet context, including Georgia, nationalism has often substituted identity for liberty, reproducing a modified form of Soviet-era obedience (Nodia, 1992).

Empirical scholarship confirms the durability of these dispositions. Gessen (2017) shows how Soviet socialization facilitated the consolidation of contemporary authoritarian power, while Pop-Eleches and Tucker (2022) demonstrate that individuals raised under communism retain authoritarian attitudes, including deference to authority and skepticism toward democratic institutions. Mishler and Rose (2021) further link low political trust in post-Soviet societies to these inherited patterns of socialization.

Cultural value orientations reinforce this persistence. Inglehart and Welzel's (2005) distinction between survival values and self-expression values remains highly relevant, as recent surveys indicate that survival-oriented values emphasizing order and obedience continue to dominate post-Soviet societies (Stallbaum, 2024).

These orientations help explain why contemporary authoritarianism often operates through informal networks and patronage systems rather than overt ideological control (Ledeneva, 2013). Weak civil societies, as Howard (2003) observes, reflect long-standing strategies of avoidance and adaptation developed under authoritarian rule. Nostalgia for perceived stability further reinforces obedience by legitimizing hierarchy and political passivity (Boym, 2001; Tucker, 2017).

Political-Cultural Legacy

The persistence of obedience has left a durable imprint on post-Soviet political culture, shaping behaviors that continue to obstruct democratic consolidation. Diligensky (2000) characterizes the post-Soviet individual as practicing "adaptive individualism," combining outward conformity with private self-interest—a pattern closely aligned with Yurchak's (2006) notion of performative stability.

Governance in post-Soviet societies remains deeply influenced by informal networks that substitute personal connections for institutional trust. Grzymała-Busse (2002), Rose (2009), and Ledeneva (2013) demonstrate how these practices undermine transparency and reinforce hierarchical authority. More recent studies confirm the persistence of illiberal political culture. Bozóki and Hegedűs (2022) emphasize citizen deference to centralized authority, while Hale (2024) documents enduring patronalism linking elite dominance to inherited societal mentalities. Grzymała-Busse (2021) further shows how survival-oriented values coexist with adaptive strategies that sustain political passivity and limited civic participation.

Although generational change may gradually promote participatory values (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005), authoritarian dispositions often persist alongside market adaptation (Mendelson & Glenn, 2002). Hybrid regimes, as Greskovits (1998) and Levitsky and Way (2010) argue, institutionalize this contradiction by maintaining formal democratic mechanisms while consolidating personalized power structures.

Taken together, these findings indicate that Soviet-era obedience has not disappeared but has been reconfigured into a political-cultural pattern combining adaptive individualism, hierarchical deference, and survival-oriented values. This configuration sustains hybrid and authoritarian governance by legitimizing appeals to order, stability, and strong leadership, reflecting the enduring psychological imprint of the Soviet experience.

Overcoming Legacies in Post-Soviet Societies

The historical transition from Soviet collectivism to post-Soviet political culture demonstrates that the collapse of communist institutions did not erase the deep-seated psychological and cultural patterns cultivated over decades of authoritarian rule. The "obedient mind," formed under Soviet collectivism, continues to predispose citizens to accept strong, paternalistic leadership as a safeguard against instability. Gessen's analysis of contemporary Russia illustrates how such legacies can be mobilized to reconstruct authoritarian governance within formally democratic frameworks. (Gessen, 2017).

Scholars argue that overcoming this legacy requires a multidimensional strategy addressing political culture, institutional capacity,

and socio-economic structures. In post-Soviet societies, transformation needs to occur incrementally and be supported by concrete social advancements (Carothers, 2002). Recent analyses of post-communist transitions underscore the importance of linking political culture change with structural reforms (Levitsky & Way, 2020–2023; Grzymała-Busse, 2021–2024).

A horizontal mistrust, deeply embedded in daily interactions, weakens civic solidarity and impedes the development of robust civil society. (Putnam, 2000; Howard, 2003) Welzel and Inglehart contend that democratic consolidation depends on fostering "self-expression values," which prioritize autonomy, political participation, and individual rights over obedience and passivity. Measures such as strengthening grassroots initiatives, expanding civic education, supporting voluntary associations, and ensuring media pluralism are essential for reversing this deficit (Inglehart, 2009).

Institutional reform is equally crucial. Pop-Eleches and Tucker (2017) observe that weak, politicized institutions in post-Soviet states facilitate the dominance of personalistic leadership. Strengthening judicial independence, enhancing governmental transparency, and enforcing anti-corruption measures are therefore necessary for building resilient democratic structures. Levitsky and Ziblatt further emphasize that democratic stability depends on reinforcing core norms—mutual toleration and institutional forbearance—not only in law but also in political practice (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018).

Economic transformation complements political and institutional reform. Societies dominated by "survival values" often prioritize stability and security over democratic freedoms. Reducing socio-economic precarity through equitable development policies can promote the adoption of "self-expression values" and active political engagement. Without addressing poverty and inequality, democratic reforms remain vulnerable to populist or authoritarian appeals (Inglehart, 2005).

Generational dynamics offer an additional avenue for democratic consolidation. Younger cohorts, less directly shaped by Soviet collectivist experiences, provide potential for cultural and civic renewal. Reforming education to emphasize critical thinking, civic understanding, and diverse historical perspectives are essential (Evans & Whitefield, 1995). However, Gessen cautions that these gains are fragile if educational institutions fall under illiberal political influence (Gessen, 2017).

Failing to confront these legacies carries significant risks. Hale (2015) warns that "patronal politics," in which loyalty to individuals supersedes commitment to institutions, can entrench hybrid regimes for decades. In such contexts, civic disengagement intensifies, opposition is delegitimized, and state institutions remain hollow, perpetuating cycles of managed democracy or outright authoritarianism.

Overall, post-Soviet societies remain structurally and culturally vulnerable to authoritarian resurgence. Deliberate and sustained reforms in civic culture, institutional design, economic equity, and generational education are essential; without them, these states risk remaining trapped within the gravitational pull of their Soviet past.

Results

The legacy of Soviet collectivism has left a profound and enduring imprint on the social psychology of post-Soviet societies. The literature indicates that the communist project systematically cultivated obedience and collective thinking, subordinating individual identity to the imagined unity of the social whole.

This transformation was enforced through a combination of ideological indoctrination, educational programming, ritualized party activities, surveillance, and moral framing of sacrifice (Fitzpatrick, Kotkin, Suny; Khlevniuk, Yurchak). The result was a society in which conformity and loyalty were deeply internalized, shaping not only political behavior but the very structures of social cognition.

Research on the post-Soviet period shows that the collapse of Soviet institutions did not dismantle these cognitive and cultural patterns. Stallbaum (2024/2025) demonstrates how authoritarian socialization produces enduring obedience and deference to authority, while Pop-Eleches & Tucker (2020–2022) show that citizens socialized under communism retain low trust in institutions and political passivity. Yurchak's concept of hypernormalization emphasizes how Soviet obedience was often performed outwardly, whereas Diligensky observes that isolated, survival-driven individualism existed alongside lingering tendencies toward conformity (Yurchak, 2006; Diligensky, 2000). This creates a hybrid societal mindset: outwardly autonomous behavior often masks underlying adherence to hierarchical norms and collective patterns of thought.

Market reforms and democratic transitions have promoted certain individual freedoms but have not translated into widespread civic engagement or participatory culture (Howard, 2003; Rose, 2009; Ledeneva, 2013). Inglehart and Welzel link this persistence to survivalist value systems that privilege security over independent agency (Inglehart, 2005). Mishler & Rose (2021) emphasize that political trust remains fragile in post-Soviet societies, reinforcing patterns of deference and compliance. Krastev and Holmes argue that the absence of sustained civic socialization allowed obedience to mutate into political cynicism and nostalgia, further reinforcing state-oriented thinking (Holmes, 2020).

Overall, the findings confirm that post-Soviet societies continue to perceive themselves as cohesive, homogeneous entities rather than plural

communities. The Soviet legacy of obedience, internalized conformity, and collective identity endures, constraining the development of free thought and modern civic consciousness. Without targeted educational, philosophical, and civic interventions, these societal patterns risk perpetuating authoritarian tendencies despite formal democratic structures (Bozóki & Hegedűs, 2022; Hale, 2024; Grzymala-Busse, 2021–2024).

Conclusion

The Soviet Union's ambitious project of collectivism stands as one of the most comprehensive attempts in modern history to reshape human identity and behavior through political and ideological engineering. Through ideological indoctrination, social organization, and psychological adaptation, the Soviet regime left long-lasting imprints on the societies of its successor states. The state's tools—media saturation, education, surveillance, and ritualized sacrifice—not only created compliance but fundamentally reconfigured the architecture of individual and collective identity.

In the post-Soviet era, these traits have been repurposed rather than erased. Collectivist loyalty has largely given way to a form of survivalist individualism that continues to depend heavily on personal networks, institutional mistrust, and limited civic engagement. This hybrid mindset complicates efforts to foster modern civil societies and highlights the crucial importance of understanding historical legacies when assessing societal development across the region.

The literature reveals that Soviet collectivism was not only a political strategy but also a cultural and psychological project aimed at producing obedient citizens. Scholars have demonstrated how obedience was constructed, normalized, and internalized through coercion, ritualized performance, and moral reframing. These patterns of deference, withdrawal, and mistrust persist in post-Soviet societies, often impeding civic responsibility and democratic engagement. The enduring obedience is thus not merely an ideological residue but a structural consequence of decades without independent civic institutions, critical discourse, or opportunities for autonomous decision-making.

This study confirms the hypothesis: despite the Soviet regime's emphasis on collective thinking, post-Soviet societies have not fully developed mature, state-oriented civic consciousness. Enduring obedience and limited critical thinking render populations vulnerable to propaganda, paternalistic leadership, and anti-democratic tendencies. Older generations remain particularly susceptible, viewing strong authority as a necessary safeguard against instability. The transition from collectivism to individualism has been incomplete and distorted; atomized self-interest frequently coexists with political passivity and detachment from public life.

Taken together, the findings validate that post-Soviet societies retain deeply ingrained patterns of obedience, not as a historical remnant but as an active societal condition shaping contemporary behaviors and vulnerabilities. Overcoming these legacies requires deliberate, long-term interventions - Targeted reforms in education, civic culture, and governance are necessary to cultivate critical thinking, encourage collective responsibility, and rebuild societal trust. Without such measures, societies risk remaining trapped between the shadow of collectivist obedience and the unrealized potential of democratic modernity.

These findings align with previous research emphasizing survivalist values, and political passivity rooted in Soviet socialization. Nevertheless, variations exist across post-Soviet states, suggesting that institutional strength, economic conditions, and civic education influence societal resilience to authoritarian legacies. Future research should examine why some states exhibit greater democratic endurance than others, identifying the key factors of social, cultural, and institutional determinants of civic robustness.

This report contributes to political sociology, post-communist studies, and democratization research, providing a foundation for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners to understand the societal roots of persistent obedience and to design strategies fostering democratic resilience and modern civic consciousness across transitional societies.

AI Usage Statement
During the preparation of this manuscript, the author used AI to assist with literature exploration, checking the formatting of bibliography style, and to enhance linguistic quality. The author carefully reviewed, revised, and verified all AI-assisted outputs to ensure accuracy, originality, and compliance with journal standards.

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