

Intergenerational objective and subjective mobility and attitudes toward income differences: Evidence from transition societies

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Abstract

This article explores the association between intergenerational social mobility and attitudes toward income differences in post-socialist societies. I hypothesise that based on the psychological mechanism of self-serving bias in causal attribution, those who experience upward social mobility are more likely to support greater income differences, and that subjective intergenerational mobility has stronger association with attitudes toward income differences than objective mobility because individuals filter their objective environment in order to derive their subjective perceptions of the world and their own experiences. The described hypotheses are tested with two cross-national datasets – European Values Studies (EVS) and Life in Transition Survey (LITS). The derived findings are robust to alternative statistical specifications and indicate that individuals who perceive themselves as subjectively mobile have indeed significantly different attitudes toward income differences in comparison to non-mobile groups, but that this effect is not manifested among objectively mobile individuals.

Keywords: Intergenerational mobility, subjective mobility, public attitudes, income differences, EVS, LITS, multivariate analysis.

Introduction

Scholars have long hypothesized that intergenerational social mobility has implications for individual attitudes and behaviours (Graaf, Nieuwbeerta, & Heath, 1995; Turner, 1992; Wilensky & Edwards, 1959). Existing research on this topic is mostly limited to Western welfare democracies, and the findings are far from being conclusive. Many authors, using various datasets and research designs, have found that upward mobility negatively associates with redistribution preferences (Alesina & La Ferrara, 2005; Schmidt, 2011; Shariff, 2015; Siedler & Sonnenberg, 2012); while others have found no, or even negative, associations (e.g. Guillaud 2013; Clark & D'Angelo 2010). Although the earlier years of socialist rule show movement to more prestigious occupational categories as an idealized goal, the consequences associated with individuals' experiences of social mobility are probably one of the most under-researched areas of intergenerational socialist and post-socialist stratification systems (Inglot, 2013; Wegren, O'Brien, & Patsiorkovski, 2006). Studying the links between social mobility and freely expressed attitudes and behaviour of a social and political nature was clearly problematic in the socialist context, because political, economic and civil society activities were severely restricted, if not completely blocked. This means that if social mobility had any influence on individuals' political and economic actions, manifestations of the effect would have been difficult to observe.

Since the collapse of the Berlin Wall, changes from one-party rule to electoral democracy, together with increased availability of survey data, provide new opportunities to observe the consequences of intergenerational social mobility in post-socialist societies. It is reasonable to assume that there are additional implications of the experience of social mobility, other than simply individuals' own levels of satisfaction, or normative assessments of the process by third parties such as social scientists (Swift, 2004). For instance, it has been suggested that high levels of social mobility may consolidate the stability of a political

regime, through enhancing loyal behaviour of the lower and middle classes (Leventoglu, 2013). Furthermore, existing studies indicate that attitudes toward inequality, redistribution and welfare state programmes significantly vary across post-socialist societies (Gugushvili, 2015b; Habibov, 2012a, 2012b; Lipsmeyer, 2004) and that the countries of the former Soviet Union display a significantly lower preference for greater income equality than other Central and Eastern European post-socialist societies¹ (Cojocar, 2014; Murthi & Tiongson, 2009). In this article, I speculate that one of the factors why newly independent states of the former Soviet Union exert less egalitarian attitudes is due to their higher intergenerational social mobility levels than those observed in other post-socialist societies. Existing studies suggest that the Central and Eastern European EU member states such as Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, and Czech Republic are characterised by the low intergenerational mobility levels, while the most intergenerationally mobile countries are the former Soviet republics of Latvia, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Estonia and Lithuania (Gugushvili, 2015a; Veraschagina, 2012).

To explore the association between intergenerational social mobility and attitudes toward income differences, this article employs an important social-psychological concept as the main pillar of its theoretical framework, namely the self-serving bias in causal attribution. The self-serving bias implies that individuals are more likely to attribute failures to factors that are beyond their control, or situational factors, and are more likely to explain success by pointing to their own merits, abilities and efforts, or dispositional factors (Semin & Zwiern, 1997). Depending on their origin, individuals start with an initial set of attitudes, but over time these preferences are amended, based on personal experiences of social mobility and on

¹ The Soviet Union consisted of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. Other post-socialist countries are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia and Serbia.

an associated self-serving perception of the role played by ascribed and attained factors in determining life chances and inequalities (Piketty, 1995). The upwardly mobile are likely to support income differences because they tend to overestimate their individual contributions to success and failure, therefore perceiving existing inequalities as just. Downwardly mobile individuals, on the other hand, support the reduction of inequality, because they tend to assign a greater weight to external factors in shaping their life course, and are therefore more likely to think that society as a whole should be responsible for narrowing the existing gap between the rich and the poor. The main research question of this article asks if the outlined theoretical links between intergenerational social mobility and attitudes toward income differences take place in post-socialist transition societies.

This study not only contributes to literature on the consequences of social mobility for egalitarian attitudes, but also simultaneously considers the effects of both objective intergenerational occupational mobility and subjective self-reported mobility experience on attitudes toward income differences. The latter distinction is important inasmuch as mobility experience might have implications for individuals' attitudes if they are aware of experiencing downward or upward mobility. To this end, European Values Studies (EVS) and the Life in Transition Survey (LITS) datasets are employed simultaneously because when used alone neither survey provides a possibility for comprehensive analysis of the effects of objective and subjective social mobility. The next section starts with a review of how rational self-interest, the principles of distributive justice, the self-serving bias in causal attribution, and social mobility experiences can explain individuals' varying attitudes toward income differences across post-socialist societies. Unlike most studies on the subject, the employed literature mainly derives from scholarship in social and cross-cultural comparative psychology. In the research design section particular attention is paid to independent variables because the article consecutively analyses the effect of two distinct explanatory

factors, subjective and objective social mobility, on attitudes toward income differences. The results section presents findings from bivariate and multivariate analysis and additional robustness checks. The final section of this article summarises the findings, discusses possible causal mechanisms, and speculates about their implications for the realm of policy and future research.

Theoretical framework

There is a consensus in current academic and policy literature that the transition faced in post-socialist countries has increased inequality in income distribution, which in turn has led to significant changes in attitudes toward income differences (Alam et al., 2005). The evidence available suggests that despite the growing trend of individualisation and marketization of existing public welfare provisions, overall support for redistribution has remained high in post-socialist societies (Habibov, 2012b). At the same time, the analysis of three waves of the World Values Survey (WVS) indicates that individuals in the former Soviet republics (for the list of countries, please refer to Footnote 1) exert a significantly lower preference for greater income equality than do individuals in Eastern Europe and even in some developed societies (Murthi & Tiongson, 2009). One possible reason why former Soviet republics demonstrate more inegalitarian attitudes toward income differences could be their historically high levels of intergenerational social mobility in comparison to other post-socialist societies (Gugushvili, 2014; Parkin, 1973). Before empirically testing if attitudes toward income differences among individuals indeed vary with their social mobility experiences, the theoretical foundations of this association first need to be discussed.

Self-interest, distributive justice, and self-serving bias in causal attribution

Preferences for income differences are likely determined by myriad of economic, institutional and behavioural factors (Alesina & Glaeser, 2004), self-interest, however, can be considered as one of the most important mechanisms (Linos & West, 2003). Scholars generally find that welfare attitudes are largely affected by social risks and people's expectations regarding their income streams in a hypothetical free market environment (Duman, 2009). If individuals believe that their wellbeing is uncertain behind "the veil of ignorance," then they tend to be more supportive of social policy investments (Iversen & Soskice, 2001). Similarly, class membership and socio-economic status are decisive determinants of attitudes toward redistribution (Armingeon, 2006). The role of self-interest in redistribution preferences is evident in relation to specific welfare programmes. For instance, educational expenses are mostly directed to the youth because children and young adults attend primary, secondary and tertiary educational institutions, therefore, the allocation of funds in this area would likely lead to support of greater investment among young adults (Busemeyer, 2012). At the other extreme of an age-defined welfare programme is a pension system that elicits stronger support from the elderly because it targets people who reach a defined retirement threshold (Busemeyer, Goerres, & Weschle, 2009; Gugushvili, 2015b).

The logic of self-interest is also clear from an intragenerational perspective. Among the various welfare dimensions, socio-economic foundations for preferences of pro-poor policies are most evident. Social need is determined by levels of material deprivation and is addressed using redistributive measures directed to poor individuals. Therefore, the beneficiaries of egalitarian policies—individuals with lower incomes—are the strongest supporters of these redistributive measures. Nonetheless, the justification of redistribution is far from being homogenous even within recipient groups, and especially among net tax contributors. It has been convincingly argued and demonstrated that one of the main reasons why preferences on redistribution vary is due to a heterogeneous system of justice beliefs

(Sabbagh & Vanhuyse, 2006). In turn, the principles of distributive justice are central components of justice beliefs that may define: (a) the values underlying the rules governing distribution – injustice of values; (b) the rules which are employed to represent the values – injustice of rules; (c) the ways that rules are implemented – injustice of implementation; and (d) the ways decisions are made about any of the foregoing – injustice of decision-making procedures (Deutsch 1975, p. 138). The analysis of data from 14 cultures indicates a strong relationship between the principles of distributive justice and support for the social provisions of basic needs (Shirazi & Biel, 2005).

An individual's principles of distributive justice are closely related to the cultural context and idiosyncratic country characteristics in which the respondent is nested (Kluegel et al., 1995). This is demonstrated by existing survey data in post-socialist countries (Habibov, 2012). Research also indicates that "sociotropic" assessments of the environment have a strong impact on political attitudes (Kluegel & Mason, 2004). One important social-psychological concept that may explain why socially mobile individuals might differ in their preferences for distributive justice, namely the self-serving bias in causal attribution. Causal attribution refers to "the process by which social perceivers arrive at causal explanations for their own, as well as others' behaviours" (Semin & Zwiier 1997, p. 55). The self-serving bias implies that people are more likely to attribute failure to factors that are beyond their control and explain successes by pointing to their own merits, abilities and effort. According to Miller and Ross (1975), the self-serving bias is related to individuals' need to have control over their environment: "the attribution to self of success and the attribution to external factors of failure provides for the continuation of control attempts" (p. 23). A meta-analysis of 266 separate studies confirms the pervasiveness of the self-serving attribution bias in the general population in various setting and countries and also demonstrates significant variability across various societal groups (Mezulis, Abramson, Hyde, & Hankin, 2004).

Hypotheses

After a short discussion of the role played by self-interest in distributive justice principles and the self-serving bias in causal attribution, we can relate social mobility to attitudes toward income differences. It is known that while some individuals in a society believe that predetermined circumstances are more decisive than one's own effort in shaping life achievements, others are convinced that individual effort rather than ascribed circumstances is the key to seizing chances in life. Piketty's (1995) intra-family theoretical model assumes that these perceptions are largely affected by life-long experiences. Depending on their origin, individuals start with an initial set of attitudes, but over time these preferences are amended based on their experiences of intergenerational mobility and an associated self-serving perception of the role ascribed and attained factors play in determining success or failure. What this means is that individuals who experience upward social mobility will be more likely than non-mobile individuals to make internal attributions (such as effort and hard work) to describe individual success. We should expect downwardly mobile individuals to be more in favour of the notion that individuals are not accountable for their own failure or success and to make external attributions.

Not only do mobile individuals have different perspectives on the causal determinants of success and failure in life, they are also more likely to express different attitudes than non-mobile individuals toward income differences. The upwardly mobile are likely to support income differences because, based on the self-serving bias in causal attribution, they tend to overestimate their individual contributions to success and failure, therefore perceive existing inequalities as just. On the other hand, downwardly mobile individuals are expected to support reducing inequality because they tend to assign a greater weight to external factors in shaping their life course and are therefore more likely to think that society as a whole is

responsible for narrowing the existing gap between the rich and the poor. This is in line with the empirical evidence presented by Wegner (1991) that shows that mobility experience correlates with individuals' feelings of being justly or unjustly compensated. Not only does social mobility affect individuals' preferred principles of distributive justice and their related views on inequalities, it also changes their propensity of being net beneficiaries (downward mobile) and net contributors (upward mobile) in policies associated with resource redistribution. Based on self-interest calculations of redistributive taxation, an empirical analysis of the links between mobility and attitudes is important to account for individuals' socio-demographic and socio-economic characteristics. The first hypothesis of this article takes the following form:

Hypothesis 1: *Intergenerational upward (downward) social mobility is negatively (positively) associated with egalitarian attitudes.*

Since my empirical analysis deals with the links between social mobility and attitudes, an important distinction to make here is the separation of objective occupational mobility and subjective perceptions of the intergenerational social mobility experience. It is true that self-serving bias in causal attribution is conventionally defined as a cognitive response to a set of objective conditions; nevertheless individuals' subjective perception of mobility can also be based on imagined obstacles or facilitating factors in the process of intergenerational mobility. If objective social mobility can be measured by the extent of the association between social background and occupational attainment, then subjective approaches to social mobility are based on respondents' perceptions of how well they have done in life in comparison to their parents. It is often assumed that objective social mobility almost exclusively determines an individual's subjective perception of mobility. Relationships

between subjective and objective mobility are generally, but not always, positive. For instance, some international migrants define their mobility experience as upward, which would qualify as downward according to objective definitions of social mobility (Segura, 1989). Nonetheless, empirical evidence suggests that subjective mobility is correlated with a broader set of factors (Kelley & Kelley, 2009). Inconsistencies between subjective perceptions of mobility and objective mobility experience are attributed to people's tendency to consider their own success in broader terms than occupational attainment (Duru-Bellat & Kieffer, 2008).

Subjective social mobility in post-socialist countries is relevant in at least two particular regards. First of all, the economic recession of the 1990s generated a much stronger perception of subjective (mostly downward) social mobility than in terms of objective occupational mobility (Kreidl, 2000). On the other hand, subjective mobility indeed appears to have had a stronger effect on individuals' attitudes than objective mobility (Turner, 1992). The effects of social mobility on individuals' worldviews might be relevant only if they are aware of experiencing upward or downward social mobility. One particular psychological explanation of this tendency suggests that individuals tend to filter their objective environment in order to derive their subjective perceptions of the world and their own experiences (Wolf, 1978). Furthermore, Baer et al. (1976) argued that the use of subjective social mobility measures minimizes the criticism of objective status mobility research, which is unable to determine whether or not the effect stems from status inconsistencies or a particular occupational status.

One important aspect in which objective and subjective measures are likely to differ could be underlying personality characteristics of individuals. Datasets analysed in this study suggest that objective mobility is more homogeneous than subjective social mobility across post-socialist societies, and, as we will see in the research design section, far less subjectively

mobile individuals declare that they have done much better in life than their parents. Those individuals who are characterised by higher levels of optimism, regardless of their actual social mobility experience, are more likely to consider themselves upwardly mobile, which in turn can also be responsible for egalitarian attitudes which are analysed in this article. In clinical psychology research, optimism has been related to higher levels of subjective well-being in times of adversity or difficulty. With this in mind, perhaps mobile individuals, due to their positive perspectives on life, believe that a lack of hard work, skills and ability are responsible for failure in life (Carver, Scheier, & Segerstrom, 2010). To summarise, based on an empirical review of the literature and theoretical considerations, it is expected that social mobility has statistically significant links with preferences for income differences and that this association is particularly pronounced among subjectively mobile individuals. The second hypothesis takes the following form:

Hypothesis 2: The association of intergenerational social mobility with egalitarian attitudes outlined in Hypothesis 1 is stronger for subjective perception of mobility rather than objective occupational mobility.

Research Design

Datasets

This section describes the dependent, independent and control variables, which were used in this study to make the most accurate interpretation as possible of the existing datasets via bivariate and multivariate analysis. I use two complementary cross-national surveys – EVS and LITS – as a basis for the empirical analysis of data from the following 21 post-socialist

societies: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, and Ukraine.² Montenegro is excluded because it was not an independent state when LITS survey was initiated, while Bosnia and Herzegovina is excluded because of complicated socio-political arrangements.³

The most recent wave of EVS, conducted in 2008, provides detailed information on respondents' social origin and occupational attainment and is used when looking at links between objective social mobility and attitudes toward income differences (EVS, 2010). EVS is a large-scale, cross-national survey covering a wide range of attitudes, opinions and values, and has been repeated every nine years since 1981. EVS was administered in the appropriate national language(s). Face-to-face interviews in each country were conducted using a representative, multi-stage (or stratified) random sample of the adult population, who were, at the time of the interviews, 18 years or older. The total number of completed interviews stood at around 1,500 respondents per country. Significant efforts were undertaken to guarantee high scientific quality standards and a special Theory Group ensured that the survey questions were appropriately standardised between countries.

The second wave of LITS, conducted in 2010, serves mainly as a source for the empirical analysis of the implications of subjective social mobility on individuals' attitudes. LITS covers all societies of interest to the present analysis and contains representative samples of the adult populations in each nation, derived from a two-stage sampling method

² Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan are not included in EVS dataset and cannot be compared in terms of the implications of objective and subjective social mobility.

³ The central government's power in Bosnia and Herzegovina is highly limited because the country is effectively divided into two parts – Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, while the third region, the Brčko District, is governed locally.

that used census enumeration areas as primary sampling units and households as secondary sampling units. The net sample size was approximately 1,000 face-to-face interviews per country. In most post-socialist countries, females and relatively older respondents dominated the datasets, a result of other such household members being away on a permanent basis, either for work or study. LITS does not provide weights to correct for this bias and hence weighting is not used in the descriptive and bivariate analysis.⁴ The quality of the employed datasets is validated by their extensive application in comparative social and political science research (Cojocaru, 2014; Dabalen, Parinduri, & Paul, 2015; Gugushvili, 2015a, 2015b; Habibov, 2012b, 2016; Verbakel, 2012). For more information regarding EVS and LITS consult the surveys' official websites.⁵

Dependent and independent variables

Our dependent variable assesses individuals' preferences for income differences. In both EVS and LITS surveys, the respondents are asked an identical question and to place their views on a 10-point scale: "Incomes should be made more equal"=1 versus "we need larger income differences"=10. The mean values of this variable are 5.7 (SD 3.0) in EVS and 4.6 (SD 3.0) in LITS. This difference could be a result of the 2008 economic crisis and corresponding growth in more egalitarian attitudes toward income distribution in 2010 across post-socialist societies.

⁴ EVS provides appropriate weights for country specific characteristics, but the descriptive results reported in the empirical section of this article are substantively similar whether or not EVS weights are employed. The problem of over-representation of females and relatively older respondents in the multivariate analysis is addressed by means of controlling for respondents' gender, age and labour market characteristics.

⁵ For EVS refer to www.europeanvaluesstudy.eu, and LITS refer to <http://www.ebrd.com/news/publications/special-reports/life-in-transition-survey-ii.html>.

The central explanatory factor employed in this article is intergenerational social mobility experienced by respondents across post-socialist societies. EVS gives information about the Standard International Socio-economic Index of Occupational Status (ISEI) (Ganzeboom, De Graaf, & Treiman, 1992). The main advantage of this schema is that it scales and hierarchically ranks occupations according to the average level of education and job earnings. ISEI scores vary from 16 to 90. Respondents are asked about parental occupations when they were around 14 years old, and if their parents have different ISEI scores then the higher level occupational position is assigned (Erikson, 1984). We have to be cautious of a “ceiling” and “floor” effect in our models meaning that those respondents who started from extremely low or extremely high ISEI scores are limited in their ability to experience social mobility in either direction. Therefore, I eliminate from the analysis those respondents whose parents scored less than ISEI 22 (about 16% of observations with ISEI scores) and more than ISEI 70 (about 5% of observations with ISEI scores).

There are several alternative ways to operationalize social mobility according to the ISEI status of the respondents and their parents. A straightforward approach that entails subtracting respondents’ ISEI scores from their parents’ ISEI scores provides a continuous measure of social mobility. LITS, however, only enables the investigation of the categorical social mobility variable; hence I transformed the derived continuous variable into a categorical measure of mobility with five potential outcomes. I coded those respondents who stayed within -5 and $+5$ margin of change in intergenerational ISEI score as non-mobile (28% of the sample). This is a reasonable assumption because a ± 5 change in ISEI score should also not imply a consequential transformation of a respondent’s status. On the upper end of mobility, those who increased ISEI within a range of 6-20 and 21-72 were classified as upward mobile (28% of the sample) and strongly upward mobile (21% of the sample), respectively. Meanwhile, those who had experienced a decrease within a margin of -6 to -20

and -21 to -72 were classified as downward mobile (15% of the sample) and strongly downward mobile (8% of the sample), respectively. 14.6% of respondents for whom information on ISEI scores are not available are excluded from the analysis.

Unlike EVS, LITS is limited in terms of providing information on the socioeconomic status of respondents and their parents and does not enable the calculation of robust measures of objective social mobility. Nonetheless, both LITS ask respondents whether they agree or disagree with the following statement: "I have done better in life than my parents." From a 5-point Likert scale respondents can choose "strongly disagree," "disagree," "neither disagree nor agree," "agree" or "strongly agree." Respondents are further instructed to compare their parents' position to their own when the former were the same age as them at the time of the interview. The answers from this question are transformed into five categorical variables: strongly disagree = strongly downward mobile (9% of the sample), disagree = downward mobile (21% of the sample), neither disagree nor agree = non-mobile (24% of the sample), agree = upward mobile (37% of the sample), and strongly agree = strongly upward mobile (10% of the sample). The main difference between objective and subjective social mobility is that the share of subjectively mobile individuals who are defined as non-mobile (23.5%) and strongly upward mobile (9.8%) is much lower than the share of objectively mobile individuals in the same mobility categories (30.4% vs. 19.4%, respectively).

Control variables

One of the goals of this article is to compare the effects of objective and subjective social mobility on attitudes toward income differences. For this purpose, similar control variables must be accounted for in models from different datasets. Unfortunately, some of the variables that have been identified as important covariates in earlier research such as social class, ideological preferences and religiosity, are not simultaneously available in both EVS and

LITS surveys or are available in slightly different forms; therefore, an accurate comparison is difficult to attain. For this reason, in the main analysis the control variables are limited in the default models to basic demographic and labour market characteristics.

The following socio-demographic variables are accounted for and are expected to be associated with the dependent variable: gender (male=42.9% in EVS and 38.3% in LITS); age of respondent (mean=43.6 [SD 16.8] in EVS and 50.7 [SD 16.4] in LITS), age of respondent squared and divided by 100.⁶ The highest level of completed education is based on the 1997 version of International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) (UNESCO, 1997), which varies from values of ISCED 0 – pre-primary education to ISCED 6 – second stage of tertiary education (mean=3.4 [SD 1.1] in EVS and 4.2 [SD 1.4] in LITS). Dummy variables for the following types of labour market status were also created: *employed* which serves as a reference category includes individuals who worked for income during the past 12 months prior to interview (55.6% in EVS and 45.6% in LITS); *unemployed* consists of individuals who were not employed but were looking for a job or were interested in finding one (10.9% in EVS and 12.4% in LITS); *students* (7.3% in EVS and 3.0 in LITS); *retired* (18.6% in EVS and 25.3% in LITS); *other* labour market statuses include homemakers (absolute majority of whom are females), disabled people, those who do not want to work, have no need to work or cannot find suitable jobs, and any other outstanding category (7.5% in EVS and 13.6% in LITS). Country dummies are used to account for country-specific characteristics in regression analysis.

For the robustness check of the baseline analysis, however, I include additional control variables that are only available either in EVS or LITS datasets and might be

⁶ Age squared variable enables the detection of possible curvilinear effects stemming from different age cohorts, while its division by 100 simplifies a comparison of the results with the main age variable.

associated with the dependent variable. In EVS, I account for the size of settlement (1=under 2,000, 10= 500,000 and more, mean= 4.6 [SD 2.6]), respondents' socio-economic index of occupational status (16=lowest status, 90=highest status, mean=43.5 [SD 16.6]), and monthly household income corrected for purchasing power parity in thousands of euros (0.00=lowest income, 14.7=highest income, mean=0.81 [SD 0.90]). For subjective social mobility, I control for the type of settlement (1=urban, 0=otherwise, mean=0.47 [SD 0.50]), subjective socio-economic status (1=lowest, 10=highest, mean=4.22 [SD 1.70]) and finally the index of material well-being, which is derived by calculating the availability of seven items from the survey questionnaire (car, bank account, debit card, credit card, mobile phone, computer and access to internet at home) per household member (0=minimum, 7=maximum, mean=1.44 [SD 1.25]).

Results

Bivariate analysis

I start with presenting bivariate links between objective and subjective social mobility and attitudes toward income differences. To remind the reader, respondents are asked to express their views using a 10-point scale: “incomes should be made more equal”=1 versus “we need larger income differences”=10. To observe possible links between the dependent and independent variables Figure 1 presents scatterplots showing, for each country, the mean level of downward and upward mobility and the mean attitudes toward income differences. For objective mobility, Figures 1.1a and 1.1b, we do not observe any significant association between the mean levels of social mobility and the mean attitudes toward income differences, although Azerbaijan is a clear outlier with the significantly higher share of downward mobile

individuals. The variation in the mean values of subjective mobility is more pronounced for subjective mobility, but it is difficult to identify any significant association between the dependent and independent variables in Figures 1.2a and 1.2b.

FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

Next, I present separate box plots for the pooled samples of objective and subjective social mobility and the aggregated attitudes toward income differences. Box plots are useful tools for comparing results among separate groups as they show the lowest and highest terms in the sets, the median, the upper and the lower quartiles. The associations in Figure 2 derive from the pooled dataset for 21 countries and do not control for any covariates. For objective social mobility (see Figure 2a), I do not find significant differences between downwardly mobile (mean 5.77 [SD 3.04]) and non-mobile (mean 5.58 [SD 3.03]) individuals; however upwardly mobile (mean 5.65 [SD 3.00]) and strongly upward mobile (mean 5.86 [SD 2.96]) groups express slightly stronger preferences for larger income differences than non-mobile individuals. On the other hand, for subjective social mobility, we see that the dependent and independent variables appear to have a significant association, which is in line with Hypothesis 2. For strongly downward and non-mobile groups, a mean value of preferred income differences equals 4.10 (SD. 3.08) and 4.43 (SD 2.77), respectively, while the mean value is equal to 5.07 (SD. 3.14) for the strongly upward mobile group. The following multivariate analysis will show if identified patterns are affected by specific country effects and/or demographic and labour market characteristics of the analysed samples.

FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

Multivariate analysis

OLS models seem to be the most appropriate regression specification for our dependent variable as preferences on the income differences variable varies from 1 to 10. Following Kastlelec and Leoni's (2007) suggestion, the derived regression coefficients are presented graphically in Figure 3, which shows the point estimates with corresponding confidence intervals of two separate models for both subjective and objective social mobility. The first model only controls for country fixed-effects, while the second also accounts for the variation in the dependent variable stemming from respondents' gender, age, education and labour market categories. Based on unreported nested analysis, in all models of objective and subjective social mobility most of the explained variation in attitudes toward income differences is attributed to country differences and Adjusted R^2 values are not significantly affected by social mobility or socio-demographic variables. While a review of coefficients for control variables is not the main interest of this article, it is still interesting to note how they are associated with the dependent variable. In both objective and subjective social mobility models, education is positively related to attitudes concerning larger income differences and the coefficient is stronger in the regression for subjective social mobility (0.18, $p < 0.05$ vs 0.26, $p < 0.05$). The unemployed are also less likely to prefer higher income gaps, as seen in Figures 3a and 3b, than individuals in the reference group, namely those who are employed. Regarding objective mobility, males express higher support for income differences (0.18, $p < 0.05$). In the subjective mobility model, students tend to be more egalitarian than individuals in the reference group, namely those who not participating in the labour market. In both Figures 3a and 3b individuals not participating in the labour market are significant more egalitarian (-0.22, $p < 0.05$ vs -0.19, $p < 0.01$).

Using dummy variables for upward and downward mobility, I am now able to test the validity of the proposed hypothesis regarding the net of country fixed-effects and individuals'

demographic and labour market characteristics. For objective mobility (see Figure 3a), controlling for country fixed-effects only results in strongly upward mobile individuals showing higher support for increased income differences (0.21, $p < .01$). In Model 2, when the control variables are introduced to the regression, all social mobility dummies become statistically insignificant, which means that our Hypothesis 1 for objective social mobility is not supported. Nonetheless, subjective social mobility demonstrates strong association with attitudes toward income differences in Figure 3b. In fact, the control variables have little effect on the statistical and substantive significance of derived OLS coefficients. In Model 2, the upward and strongly upward mobile groups demonstrate a higher preference for larger gaps in income, 0.61 ($p < .01$) and 0.27 ($p < .01$) points, respectively. The coefficients for both downward and strongly downward mobile groups exhibit a negative sign, while the latter also maintains statistical significance at the 5% level. These results suggest that the proposed Hypotheses 1 and 2 are confirmed only in terms of subjective social mobility with weak, if any, links between objective social mobility and attitudes toward income differences. The interpretation of these findings is discussed in the concluding section, but we can already infer that subjective perception of mobility is a much more important covariate of individuals' attitudes toward income differences than objective mobility experience.

FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

Additional controls and robustness of findings

An obvious question concerns the robustness of the described findings. To further test Hypotheses 1 and 2, I applied several alternative strategies. First, I tested what happens with the dummies on intergenerational social mobility when the presented OLS models include additional control variables. In the regression on objective social mobility, Model 1, Table 1,

the size of settlement, respondents' socio-economic index of occupational status, and monthly household income corrected for purchasing power parity in euros are controlled. These additions did not affect the previously observed results – downward and upward occupational mobility is not systematically and significantly related to attitudes toward income inequality. For subjective social mobility, the type of settlement, index of material well-being and subjective socio-economic status are added to regression in Model 3. Even after including all these additional control variables in the OLS regression analysis, upwardly mobile individuals still strongly prefer larger income gaps, with a statistically significant association at the 1% level.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Alternatively, for both objective and subjective mobility I analyse the effects on different but related dependent variables also concerned with redistribution. In Table 1, regarding an EVS question asking respondents whether or not individuals should take more responsibility for providing for themselves (1=“the state should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for”, 10=“individuals should take more responsibility for providing for themselves”, mean= 5.73 [SD 2.8]), OLS models were run with the same independent and control variables as in Figure 3. The latter test revealed that strongly upwardly mobile individuals are less likely than non-mobile individuals to believe that the state should take more responsibility for individual provisions, even after demographic and labour market characteristics are controlled for ($p < .01$). This is what we would expect for Hypothesis 1 – upwardly mobile individuals tend to believe that self-determining factors are responsible for life chances and therefore advocate for individual responsibility over an active role by the state in providing for everyone. One reason for finding statistically significant associations

with the latter dependent variable is that it is more closely related to personal responsibility and the self-serving bias in causal attributions among mobile individuals than to attitudes toward income differences. Nonetheless, the latter association vanishes when additional control variables discussed in the previous paragraph are accounted for.

In reference to subjective mobility, on the other hand, the LITS survey asked respondents about their attitudes regarding ownership of business and industry (1=“government ownership of business and industry should be increased”, 10=“private ownership of business and industry should be increased”, mean= 5.42 [SD 2.9]). This variable is also a proxy indicator of support for redistribution as higher government ownership implies higher levels of equality; meanwhile, the opposite is found when private ownership is preferred. The results indicate that the downward mobile group is less likely, and the upwardly mobile group more likely, to think that private ownership of business and industry should be increased, which again is in line with Hypothesis 2. Furthermore, in order to address the “ceiling” and “floor” effect more comprehensively in the unreported analysis I tested the same regressions as shown in Table 1, but this time restricting the sample separately for the bottom, middle and top tertiles of parental ISEI score. Lastly, for both objective and subjective social mobility I eliminated from the analysis all individuals aged 34 years or below as the existing research suggests that individuals only achieve their mature social statuses by their mid-30s (Bukodi, Goldthorpe, Waller, & Kuha, 2015). In both tests, the main findings remained unaffected.

Social mobility and cross-national differences in egalitarian attitudes?

Based on the reported main analysis and the robustness checks, I can assert that objective social mobility has no association with preferences for income differences. But the results also indicate that in post-socialist societies, subjective social mobility has strong and

statistically significant association with the dependent variable under consideration. In this final empirical section, I test whether or not the country-level differences in egalitarian attitudes, shown in Figure 1, can be explained out by accounting for individuals' subjective mobility experience. By specifying country fixed-effects in the main analysis, I cancelled out the variation in the dependent variables coming from specific societies, but the findings of the study with such a large sample of countries might differ if separate countries or country groups are analysed. There have been attempts to incorporate post-communist countries into a welfare state typology (Aidukaite, 2009; Fenger, 2007; Gugushvili, 2010, 2015b) and the varieties of capitalism frameworks (Adam, Kristan, & Tomšič, 2009; Bohle & Greskovits, 2007, 2012). The problem with using the latter typologies is that the links between these approaches, social mobility regimes and egalitarian attitudes are not quite clear. Additionally, these country classifications generally cover only a small portion of the countries in the broader post-socialist region.

In addition to analysing the effect of social mobility on differences in egalitarian attitudes between separate countries, a straightforward categorisation of post-socialist societies can be derived from annual Transitional Reports of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), in which economic reforms are described separately in (1) Central Europe and the Baltic states; (2) South-Eastern Europe; and (3) Eastern Europe and the Caucasus.⁷ Figure 4 depicts regression coefficients for country dummy variables and country groups from three separate OLS models. Model 1 does not include any other independent variables than those shown in graphs, Model 2 accounts for the socio-demographic and labour market characteristics described in section on control

⁷ The first group includes Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, the second group includes Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia; while the third group includes the former Soviet Union republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine.

variables, while Model 3 also includes the subjective social mobility experience of individuals.

FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE

The rationale of the test presented in Figure 4 is the following: if the coefficients for countries and country groups move substantially and significantly toward zero when social mobility variable is introduced in the regression models, we can conclude that subjective social mobility is the significant explanation of variance in egalitarian attitudes among post-socialist societies. Nonetheless, both Figures 4.1 and 4.2 demonstrate that the introduction of subjective social mobility in Model 3 does little to affect the association between dummy variables on countries/country groups and attitudes toward income differences. In fact, the 95% confidence intervals between Models 2 and 3 overlap in all instances, which suggests that although subjective perception of social mobility is significant predictor of individual-level attitudes toward income differences within countries, it cannot account for the country-level variance in egalitarian attitudes. The key reason why I do not report the similar test for objective social mobility is that the main results of this article suggest that there is no association between objective intergenerational mobility and attitudes toward income differences.

Conclusions

The presented study analysed how social mobility experience associates with attitudes toward income differences in transition societies. For this purpose, I mainly relied on social psychology literature and the concept of self-serving bias in causal attribution. The derived hypothesis implied that people are more likely to explain failures by causal factors beyond

their control and successes by individual merit, abilities and effort, and therefore justify greater rewards and larger income differences. It can be assumed that individuals start with an initial set of attitudes that are amended according to their personal experience of social mobility and the self-serving bias in perceptions about the role of ascribed and attained factors related to success or failure. I also looked at the consequences of both objective and subjective social mobility assuming that subjective mobility would have a stronger association with the analysed dependent variable.

In line with the proposed theoretical framework, the substantive results demonstrate that subjectively downward mobile individuals are less likely, and the upward mobile groups more likely, to support greater income differences, but that objective social mobility has little effect on preferences for income differentiation. Indeed, one of the central findings is that what really matters in the formation of attitudes is not an objective occupational upgrade in status (conventional measures of social mobility) but rather how people perceive their own mobility experience. Nonetheless, we do not find that subjective social mobility can explain out county-level differences in egalitarian attitudes. The reported findings are well aligned with an observation made by Lipset (1992) that subjective perception of mobility has stronger implications on political attitudes than objective mobility experience, with similar findings having been reported in earlier literature on status inconsistency (Baer, Eitzen, Duprey, Thompson, & Cole, 1976). Compared with objective social status, subjective self-placement in the social hierarchy was also closely related to health-related factors (Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, & Ickovics, 2000). Relative expectations might also play a role in the importance of subjective over objective social mobility because those who consider themselves upward or downward mobile, unlike objectively mobile individuals, are more likely to express varying attitudes toward income differences (Whyte, 2010).

One of the main caveats of the presented study is that the employed data and methods do not allow for an unequivocal assertion that the observed associations are the result of a self-serving bias in causal attributions as our Hypotheses 1 and 2 suggest. At least two alternative explanations of the findings can be proposed. First, the possibility of reverse causation cannot be excluded in the revealed associations since we do not have a longitudinal dataset. It could be that upwardly mobile individuals had the same attitudes before they experienced upward mobility and that individualistic personalities contributed both to their successes in life and attitudes toward income differences. Although the latter problem cannot be addressed in this article, most of the studies in the field have faced similar constraints, which have not prevented them from making associative conclusions. In addition, several longitudinal studies suggest that changes in attitudes do occur over time and along with social mobility experience (Clark & D'Angelo, 2010; Marshall & Firth, 1999). The second explanation for the observed results is individual rational self-interest. Upward mobility increases the chances of people becoming net contributors in the public redistributive system, while downward mobility diminishes this probability. This problem is mitigated but not eliminated when a wide array of control variables is accounted for, as shown in Figure 3 and Table 1. Another important caveat of this study is that for the comparison of the effects of objective and subjective social mobility on attitudes toward income differences is based on the samples from two different surveys that were collected between 2008-2010 and therefore might be affected differently by the major economic recession in post-socialist societies.

Lastly, it is interesting to consider the possible implications of social mobility for social policies in post-socialist countries and beyond. First of all, the rates of objective social mobility across countries are not drastically different. In addition, this type of mobility does not exert a particularly strong influence on welfare attitudes; whereas subjective social mobility displays much stronger links with attitudes toward income differences. As the

hypothesis on the relationship between objective mobility and attitudes to income differentials is not validated, the main implication of the described findings for the realm of social policy is that the recent vivid discourse in political and media circles on the declining trends in social mobility in Western welfare democracies, and particularly in the United Kingdom (Goldthorpe, 2013), might have more normative implications rather than specific political consequences with regard to voting behaviour or social movements. The recent evidence in the British context (see Bukodi & Goldthorpe, 2015) also suggests that educational policies may have only a limited effect on intergenerational social mobility. What appears to matter more are the equality of conditions and opportunities and boosting “top-end” jobs in the structure of occupational hierarchy; however, the latter areas are usually out of the politicians’ relative comfort zone of educational policy and are much more difficult to amend through social and public policies (Goldthorpe, 2013).

Subjective social mobility, in turn, in addition to objectively experienced mobility, is closely related to an individual’s current socioeconomic status and “sociotropic” attitudes related to the broader economic and social developments in their home countries (Kelley & Kelley, 2009). This might imply that in societies with strong economies subjectively mobile individuals are less likely to support income differences and social policies that help the poor. In new post-socialist democracies, with high levels of subjective mobility, governments have to take into account median voter preferences and, as a result, social policies can become less egalitarian. There is a strong indication that the latter phenomenon reduces social mobility in the long run (Esping-Andersen, 2004). In a way, social mobility and resultant egalitarian attitudes can create a loop in which an increase in the former leads to a decrease in the latter and vice versa. Beyond transition societies, the advanced welfare democracies in Western Europe and North America might be interesting cases for exploring the links between social mobility and welfare state development because in the last few decades they have

experienced significant changes in the intergenerational reproduction of occupational status with corresponding shifts in egalitarian attitudes and reforms in social policies.

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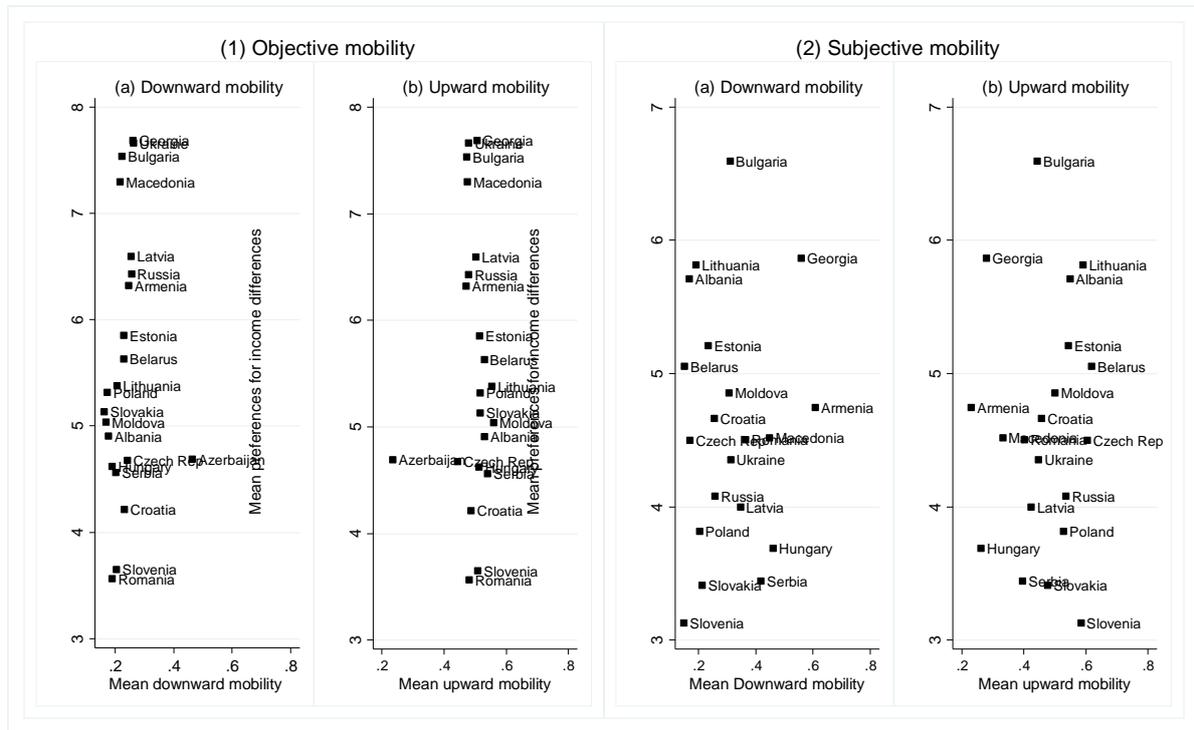
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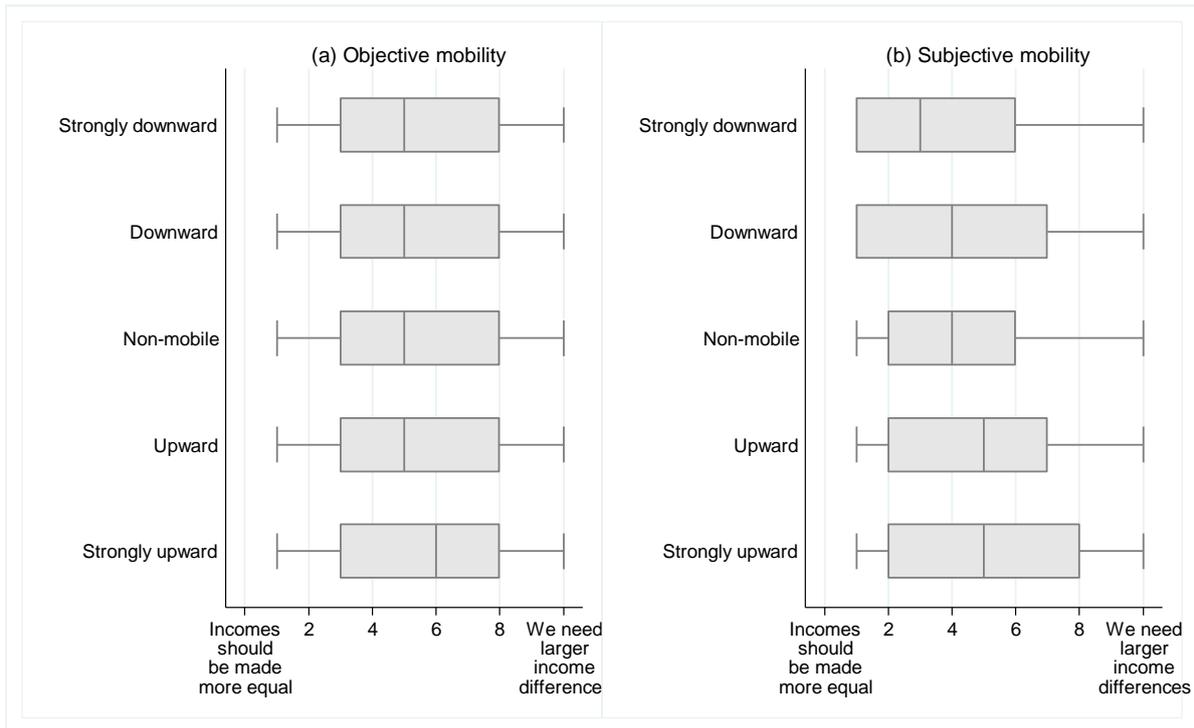
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Figure 1: Downward and upward mobility and attitudes toward income differences in 21 post-socialist societies



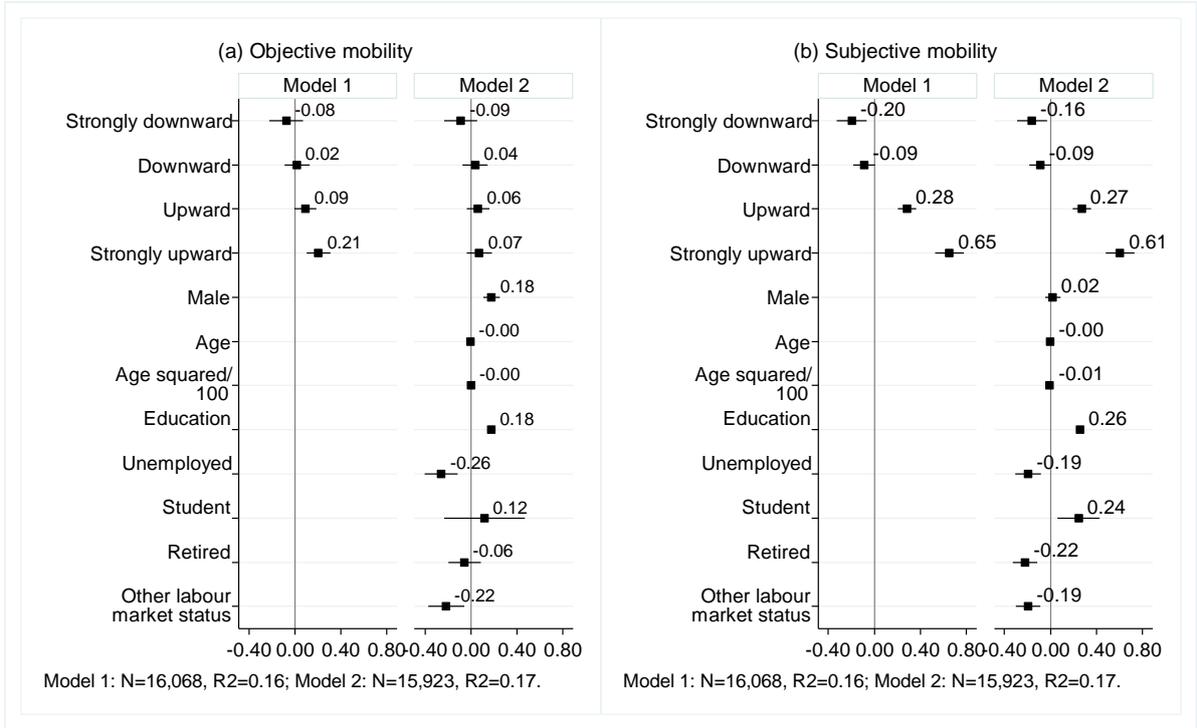
Source: EVS (2008) and LITS (2010).

Figure 2: Bivariate associations between social mobility and attitudes toward income differences



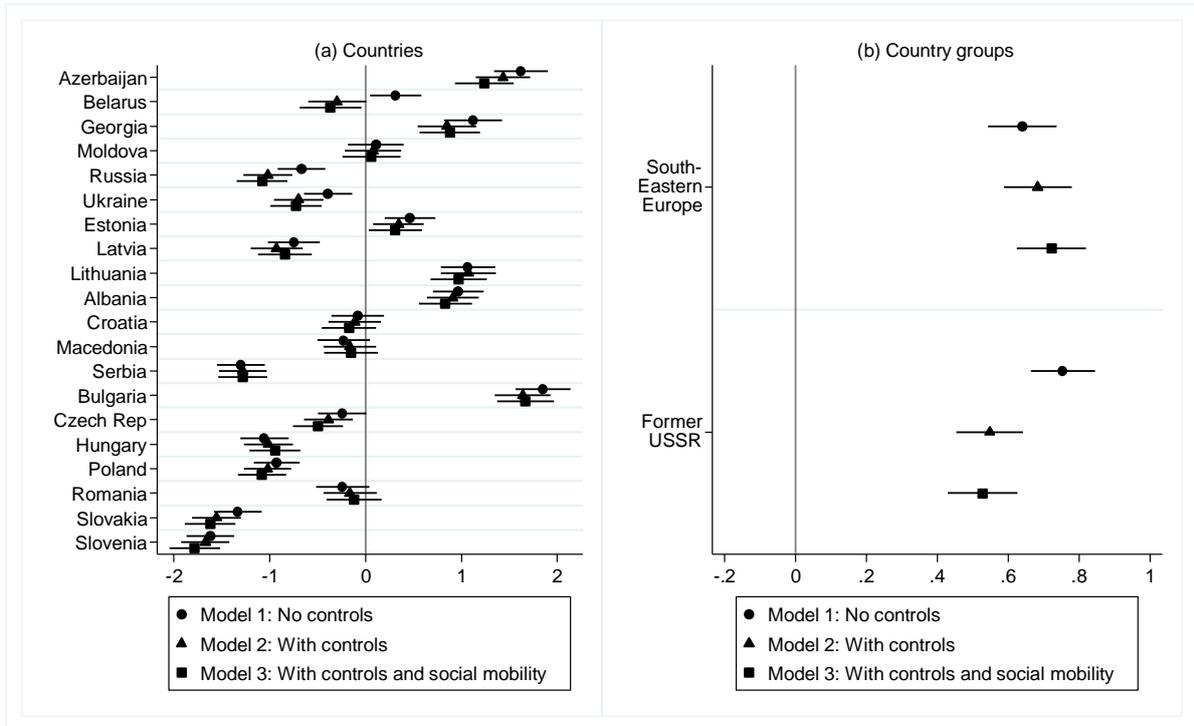
Notes: Box plots show the lowest and highest terms in the sets, the median, the upper quartile, and the lower quartile. Source: EVS (2008) for objective mobility and LITS (2010) for subjective mobility.

Figure 3: Intergenerational social mobility and attitudes toward income differences [“Incomes should be made more equal”=1, “we need larger income differences”=10]. Coefficients from OLS models



Notes: Bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Robust standard errors are calculated. Models control for country fixed-effects. Reference categories are non-mobile individuals, female, employed individuals. Source: Author’s calculations based on data from EVS (2008) for objective mobility and LITS (2010) for subjective mobility.

Figure 4: Social mobility and county-level differences in attitudes toward income differences [“Incomes should be made more equal”=1, “we need larger income differences”=10]. Coefficients from OLS models



Notes: Bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Robust standard errors are calculated. Reference categories are Armenia in Figure 4a and Central Europe and the Baltic states in Figure 4b. Source: Author’s calculations based on data from EVS (2008) for objective mobility and LITS (2010) for subjective mobility.

Table 1: Intergenerational social mobility and attitudes toward income differences, individuals' responsibilities and type of preferred ownership. Coefficients from OLS models

	Objective social mobility		Subjective social mobility	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
	<i>Attitudes toward income differences</i>	<i>Attitudes toward individuals taking more responsibility for themselves</i>	<i>Attitudes toward income differences</i>	<i>Attitudes toward ownership of business and industry</i>
Intercept	5.21 (0.27)***	4.88 (0.24)***	3.19 (0.22)***	6.33 (0.22)***
Social mobility				
Strongly downward	-0.13 (0.10)	-0.14 (0.09)	-0.04 (0.08)	-0.16 (0.08)*
Downward	0.06 (0.07)	-0.11 (0.07)	-0.04 (0.06)	-0.14 (0.06)**
Non-mobile	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference
Upward	0.03 (0.07)	0.06 (0.06)	0.23 (0.05)***	0.04 (0.05)
Strongly upward	-0.00 (0.09)	0.19 (0.07)***	0.51 (0.08)***	0.38 (0.08)***
Basic controls				
Male	0.19 (0.05)***	0.36 (0.05)***	0.03 (0.04)	0.17 (0.04)***
Age	0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)*
Age ² /100	-0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Education	0.13 (0.03)***	0.16 (0.02)***	0.19 (0.02)***	0.11 (0.02)***
Unemployed	-0.24 (0.09)**	-0.40 (0.08)***	-0.11 (0.07)	-0.21 (0.07)***
Student	0.14 (0.24)	-0.38 (0.21)*	0.13 (0.11)	0.11 (0.11)
Retired	-0.05 (0.09)	-0.22 (0.08)**	-0.16 (0.06)**	-0.36 (0.07)***
Other labour market status	-0.15 (0.10)	-0.31 (0.09)***	-0.10 (0.06)	-0.07 (0.06)
Additional controls				
Size of settlement	0.03 (0.01)***	....	....	....
Respondents ISEI	0.00 (0.00)*	....	....	....
Monthly household income	0.05 (0.03)	....	....	....
Urban settlement	....	....	0.18 (0.04)***	....
Index of material well-being	....	....	0.13 (0.02)***	....
Subjective socio-economic status	....	....	0.14 (0.01)***	....
Statistics				
AIC	67,089	77,570	100,288	99,084
BIC	67,360	77,823	100,573	99,345
Number of observations	13,813	16,015	20,540	20,243
Adjusted R ²	0.166	0.062	0.137	0.076

Notes: ***, **, and * denote statistical significance at the 0.01, 0.05, and 0.10 levels. Robust standard

errors are in parentheses. Models control for country fixed-effects. Reference categories are non-mobile individuals, female, employed individuals. Source: EVS (2008) for objective mobility and

LITS (2010) for subjective mobility.