polish sociological review 2(222)'23
ISSN 1231 – 1413
DOI:10.26412/psr222.02

MILOSLAV BAHNA
Institute for Sociology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences

OĽGA GYÁRFÁŠOVÁ
Comenius University in Bratislava

Inequality Concerns, Social Location, and Perception of Opportunities for Social Advancement: Czechia and Slovakia in a Comparative Perspective

Abstract: The analytical puzzle of this study is straightforward: how do people's concerns about inequality and social location affect their beliefs about the opportunities for advancement? This study compares Czechia and Slovakia, two states with very low objective levels of inequality but quite different levels of concern about it. In both countries, social welfare expectations derive from the state-run economy in the pre-1989 period. However, in Slovakia the economic changes caused social difficulties and considerable discontent, whereas Czech society demonstrated more free-market friendly attitudes, and the perception of social inequalities was less critical. Based on the ISSP data we analyze what factors are seen as important for "getting ahead" and whether perceptions of inequality and social location reflect meritocratic beliefs or their opposite—corrupt advancement strategies. While there is a stronger feeling in Slovakia that corrupt strategies are necessary in Slovakia, in both societies preferences in regard to strategies for social advancement are better explained by socioeconomic position than by attitudes toward inequalities.

Keywords: social inequality, concerns, social location, social advancement, Czechia, Slovakia

Introduction

Social inequality is a salient political issue because it is of considerable concern to voters. As many authors agree (e.g., Rabušic and Sirovátka 1999; Džambazovič 2011; Bucca 2016; Loveless and Whitefield 2011), ideological preferences and social policy strategies also have a substantial impact on the overall legitimacy of governments in the eyes of the public. In other words, popular beliefs about social inequality are politically significant as "… they may reflect the degree of legitimacy of a given stratification structure, the notions of social justice widely adhered to, and the potential for conflict generated by inequality" (Bucca 2016: 98). The question has even greater relevance in post-communist countries because, as Tomáš Sirovátka argues, "the criteria of social (distributive) justice are being redefined over the course of the economic transformation and social policy measures are being rebuilt accordingly" (Sirovátka 2002: 326–327).

Nevertheless, social inequality is an inherent feature of market economies. Yet the ideal cannot be a "dream" about a homogeneous society but must rather be about a fair one. As Lavrijsen and Nicaise (2016) argue, some degree of social inequality might be

necessary and "the aim is not equal outcomes, but a particular distribution of possible outcomes that are unrelated to a person's social background" (Lavrijsen and Nicaise 2016: 1). Therefore, it is academically and politically relevant to study the relationship between how social inequality is perceived, whether upward mobility is open to everyone, and what factors are seen as important for it. There is also a substantial body of research examining how concerns about inequality are not "politically explosive" when there is a general understanding that everybody has an equal chance to get ahead and that in social advancement, individual responsibility counts more than ascribed characteristics (e.g., Loveless and Whitefield 2011; Hadler 2017; Mijs 2021).

Two significant questions are linked to this issue. The first is the objective level of income inequality compared to how it is perceived by the public (Loveless and Whitefield 2011; Buchel et al. 2021; Becker 2021). We can identify two kinds of gaps. The first is between objectively quantified income inequality based on the GINI index[1] on the one hand and the public perception of existing inequalities on the other. The second is the gap between social "location"—as expressed in indexes of occupational status (ISEI), and individuals' self-placement on a social stratification ladder such as the Top-Bottom scale (or any other measurement of subjectively perceived social location).

Perceptions of social inequality are also connected with beliefs about what is important for getting ahead (Kreidl 2000; Reynolds and Xian 2014; Bucca 2016; Mijs 2021; Meraviglia 2017; Alesina et al. 2018; Heiserman et al. 2020). Is social mobility available to everyone, and what determines success in life? Is it social background (wealthy parents, their social status), ascribed characteristics such as gender, race, or other characteristics, or is it individual responsibility and so-called meritocratic characteristics—working hard, being ambitious, attaining a good level of education? Corrupt strategies such as cheating and bribing, which may lead to success, are a special category.

After consideration of the existing literature, the key objective of our study was to identify how the perception of inequality and social location (objective and subjective) is linked with factors perceived as important for getting ahead. In regard to the getting-ahead factors, we concentrated on two principal yet contradictory strategies: the meritocratic strategy and strategies that try to circumvent the legitimate system through deceit or cheating.

Furthermore, we were interested in analyzing these objectives from a Czech and Slovak comparative perspective. We see this comparison as particularly interesting because a) both countries started the post-communist transformation in a common state, and although their transformation trajectories diverged after the split, many commonalities still remain, and b) both countries have an extremely low level of income inequality, but they differ quite significantly in their level of concern about inequality and the intensity of public support for an intervening paternalistic state.

---

[1] "Gini coefficient is the most common measure of economic inequality. The Gini coefficient indicates to what extent the actual distribution of incomes deviates from a hypothetical distribution in which all incomes are equal" (Becker 2021: 4–5). The Gini coefficient for Slovakia and Czechia are the lowest in the world: according to the World Bank in 2018 it was 25.0 for both countries (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI?locations=SK-CZ).

Both aspects of the ex-Czechoslovak countries provide important analytical benefits. The shared culture and common languages are likely to prevent potentially different understandings of meritocracy, which can be an issue across cultures and contexts (see Heuer et al. 2020; Mijs and Hoy 2021). For example, Heuer et al. (2020) highlight that the understanding of meritocracy can be quite different even in countries that appear similar in many respects (i.e., Germany, Norway, Slovenia, and the United Kingdom). Such comparability problems with regard to which merits should count are much less likely in the case of the two ex-Czechoslovak countries. The low level of inequality in both societies also provides an opportunity to go beyond the research by Roex et al. (2019) and seek further understanding of the various observed levels of importance of the structural position thesis (Hadler 2005). In highly equal societies, the tools to success in life should be in general equally available or unavailable. If differences in views persist, they are most likely due to different perceptions of the available opportunities. Therefore, we expect that objective social position might be less important when explaining meritocratic beliefs than subjective position in these two societies, which have extremely low levels of income inequality. On the other hand, Slovakia's citizens have faced harsher social costs of the economic transformation over the three decades of the transformation, and based on several comparative surveys, we know that the general view of social positioning has been more negative there than in Czechia (Bútorová 2019). Taking into account these circumstances, we want to find out if perceptions of the factors required for getting ahead vary in the two countries.

The next part of our article is organized as follows: we provide a detailed justification of the case selection, discuss the theoretical framework, and continue with methodology, hypotheses, and analytical strategies, followed by the results. We conclude by discussing the findings and outlining possibilities for future research.

Case Selection

Czechia and Slovakia had the same starting point for economic transformation, but their paths differed, particularly in the first decade of transition. Slovak society was more sensitive to social losses, and people were less persuaded that a transformation of the pre-1989 economy was needed. The Czech public saw the changes more positively; more people thought change was justified, and criticism of the previous regime was sharper (Šanderová 1993; Krivý 1993). The Slovaks' different perceptions could be explained by the higher costs of economic transformation in their country due to its less favorable economic structure. For example, the unemployment rate was constantly higher than in Czechia, and the same is true for the at-risk-of-poverty and social exclusion rates (Správy 2003–2010).

Many studies have analyzed the differences between the two societies in order to explain the background of the relatively smooth "velvet divorce" in January 1993. Jiří Musil used the term "asynchronous modernization" to explain the structural legacies of the two societies (Musil 1992).

Nevertheless, it was not only objective macro data that informed individual views of the social situation and public beliefs; political narratives mattered as well. The Slovak political

discourse, led by then PM Vladimír Mečiar, was about social martyrdom, resentment, and feelings of being a loser, whereas the Czech discourse, led by then PM Václav Klaus with his market-liberal stances, presented Czech society as the most successful and resilient "pupil of transformation" and constructed an entirely different self-image.

While the majority in both societies perceived income inequalities as being "too large," the intensity of these perceptions in relative terms was quite different. Rising social inequality was one of the most prominent popular concerns during the post-communist transformation, mostly due to the fact that society under communism was—and still is (cf. Bahna 2020)—retrospectively perceived as equal. It is worth mentioning that wage differentials in Czechoslovakia were objectively extremely low even by the standards of Central and Eastern European countries (cf. Večerník 1992).

To this day both ex-Czechoslovak countries have comparatively low Gini coefficients.[2] However, individuals' perceptions of income inequalities are in sharp contrast to the objective situation: in both republics there are strong concerns about income equality.[3] In Slovakia, over 96 percent of the population (strongly) agree with the statement "income differences in [country] are too high." In Czechia the share is lower (almost 74% in 2019) (based on the 2019 ISSP data for Czechia and 2020 data for Slovakia). While the roughly 20 percentage point difference might seem small, it is notable in a relative comparison of the nations included in the ISSP 2019 survey. Here, Slovakia has the second highest level of concern, while Czechia is among the five countries with the lowest level. Also, as Osberg and Smeeding (2006) show, Slovakia and Czechia are very different with regard to what is perceived as justifiable earning inequality. In this respect, the same level of income inequality is reflected by a very different level of subjective concern (cf. Hadler & Haller 2019). These different levels of subjective concern might have an impact on attitudes to the factors involved in "getting ahead."

Concerns about inequality and egalitarian beliefs are closely linked with expectations of state paternalism (as measured by agreement with the statement that the state/government should reduce income differences). The desire for government intervention is similarly higher in Slovakia, while Czechs see the responsibility of the government to reduce inequalities in incomes as relatively less important.

The Theoretical Frame: Perceptions of Inequality and the Factors Involved in Getting Ahead

Most approaches to explaining the roots, nature, and popular perception of social inequality could be summarized in two main categories: a) theories that aim to explain beliefs about inequality by focusing on individual-level factors; and b) those that emphasize country-level factors more. As Mauricio Bucca (2016) explains, individual-level factors could be seen as structural positions: 1) social and economic status (SES), education, and social class; 2) social mobility (intragenerational and intergenerational); and 3) a third category

[2] Documented according to several sources, e.g., https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI?locations=SK-CZ.

[3] In the ISSP survey, social inequality is operationalized as income inequality, income differences.

that includes race, sex, and age as ascriptive factors that may lead to marginalization and discrimination (Bucca 2016).

Similarly, Loveless and Whitefield theorize that the determinants of views on social inequality are both: a) national-level factors, which "operate by shifting the context in which citizens in different countries make judgments about the acceptability of social equality" (Loveless & Whitefield 2011: 241) and b) individual-level factors such as social location, experience, perceptions, and core normative beliefs (ibid., 243). Among the national-level factors, the authors point to the characteristics of post-communist economic transitions and the role of corruption. They hypothesize "that the higher the level of corruption in a society, the more excessive social inequality will be perceived" (p. 243). We could add that perceived corruption might also have an impact on how social advancement mechanisms are perceived, that is, whether cheating and bribing are seen as legitimate options.

Perceptions of the causes of wealth and poverty in society can be classified in the same way as determinants of inequality. The key distinction is between the individual level (personal motivation) and the macrostructural level (problems of unfair distribution of resources) (Džambazovič 2011).

The connection between perceptions of inequality and factors involved in getting ahead

As we argued earlier, concerns about inequality are linked to perceptions of the advancement mechanisms prevailing in a society. An awareness that there are fair rules that apply to everyone may reduce concerns. However, Jonathan Mijs argues against the common wisdom that people are generally concerned about social inequality. His argument is twofold. First and foremost, citizens may be unconcerned simply because they are unaware of the extent of inequality in their country. The second argument is more challenging and says that people increasingly believe that inequality is the outcome of a fair, meritocratic process where societal success simply reflects talent, ambition, and hard work (Mijs 2021: 2). On the other hand, what fuels citizens' concerns about inequality is their belief that income inequality reflects structural processes that benefit some people while putting others at a disadvantage. We could agree with Mijs that concerns about inequality are based on people's beliefs about the causes of inequality. Those who believe inequality reflects hard work are much less concerned about inequality than citizens who see inequality as being driven by structural forces such as a person's family wealth and connections. In short, income inequality is accompanied by popular beliefs that dampen citizens' concerns by legitimating the growing income gap as being merit-based. The empirical evidence is more valid for western democracies than for the post-communist world, where concerns about inequality are very high although income inequality, as measured by the Gini index, is relatively low. This is in line with Mijs's general argument that there is no evidence of "a statistical relationship between country-level inequality and citizens' concerns about inequality" (Mijs 2021: 33), and also applies to the countries of ex-Czechoslovakia.

As for the factors involved in getting ahead, we could conceptualize them as life chances, (see Lubelcová & Zeman 2019) which are influenced by two basic facts. On the one hand, there are social conditions and the structure of opportunities. On the other, there is the ability and capacity of social actors to take advantage of these opportunities. As Ján

Sopóci argues sociologically, life chances—which depend on the openness of the social space and the extent of institutional and structural channels and barriers affecting the life choices of social actors—have a particularly significant economic determinant. The topic of life chances is therefore directly related to the topic of social stratification and social mobility (Sopóci 2014), and as emphasized by several authors, the perceived chances of getting ahead may correlate with the overall perception of advancement opportunities (e.g., Mijs 2018; Sopóci 2017; Kuhn 2019; Knell & Stix 2020; Buchel et al. 2021).

The "getting ahead" battery of questions in the ISSP Social Inequality module has been used on several occasions as an indicator of what people think about the determinants of inequality in their society (e.g., Linos and West 2003) or as a measure of people's perceptions or beliefs about inequity (Becker 2021; Mijs 2021). Various authors use different classifications of those determinants. For example, Xian & Reynolds (2017: 630) distinguish between what they call "meritocratic elements" and "nonmeritocratic elements," and Mijs (2021) works with meritocratic and nonmeritocratic factors (a person's family wealth and connections); similarly, Kreidl refers to "merited" and "unmerited" wealth and poverty (2000), and in the same line Kuhn distinguishes meritocratic and non-meritocratic principles (2019: 336), whereas Lavrijsen and Nicaise (2016: 9) separate "ascribed assets" and "individual responsibility."

In our approach to factors involved in getting ahead, we try to identify support for the meritocratic strategies of getting ahead and for their most explicit negation. While Krauze and Słomczyński (1985) draw a dichotomy between meritocracy and success in life based on pure luck (the lottery principle), we draw a contrast between meritocracy and the employment of corrupt strategies in life advancement. Our preference for the latter is based on two circumstances. The first is a practical one: in the data analyzed, no item establishes belief in the importance of luck for getting ahead. Second, the above-mentioned, usual dichotomy between meritocratic and non-meritocratic, which in Western societies can be translated into fair competition and unfair advantages due to inherited ascriptive factors, has a post-communist counterpart in the dichotomy between fair competition and winning by bending the rules (see e.g., Smith 2010). Analyses of post-communist countries were unable to confirm the relation between corruption and income inequality found in Western European countries (Bašná 2019). This might partly be due to the fact that succeeding on the basis of inherited privilege of various types is far less a matter of discussion in the still very egalitarian countries of post-socialist ex-Czechoslovakia. We could say that the "Western" narrative of unfairness claims that some have better conditions to prepare for "the game" but does not question how the "game" itself is played. The "Eastern" narrative of unfairness, which is less concerned with starting positions, touches on corruption by arguing that for some the basic rules of the "game" do not apply.

Research Hypotheses

Building on the theoretical framework reviewed above and on earlier empirical studies, we formulate the following hypotheses regarding how opportunities for advancement are perceived in the countries of the former Czechoslovakia. We hypothesize that:

H1a. People in objectively higher socioeconomic positions in a society will more frequently see opportunities for advancement as meritocratic and will less frequently mention corrupt strategies for advancement.

H1b. People in subjectively higher positions in a society will more frequently see opportunities for advancement as meritocratic and will less frequently mention corrupt strategies for advancement.

H2a. People describing income differences in a society as too large will less frequently see opportunities for advancement as meritocratic and will mention corrupt strategies for advancement more frequently.

H2b. People who expect the government to reduce income differences in a society will less frequently view opportunities for advancement as meritocratic and will mention corrupt strategies for advancement more frequently.

We hypothesize that the following differences between Czechia and Slovakia will be observed:

H3a. People in the Czech Republic will see opportunities for advancement as more meritocratic than in Slovakia.

H3b. People in Slovakia will see corrupt strategies as more important than respondents in the Czech Republic.

We expect people in a position of higher socio-economic status to be more likely to legitimize the current status quo by more frequently mentioning the meritocratic elements of getting ahead (see Kunovich & Slomczynski 2007; Roex et al. 2019). This is also in line with recent findings by Buchel et al. (2021: 475) who state that "both objective and subjective status are positively related to acceptance of inequality." On the contrary, we expect respondents from lower societal strata to be more skeptical about the meritocratic dimension of advancement in society and more likely to regard corrupt means of advancement as important (Skendaj 2016).

The second hypothesis (H2a and H2b) reflects the assumption that the high percentage of respondents answering that inequalities are great in their country are the result of the transformation and the overall feeling that wealth did not fall into the hands of the most capable or deserving but of those who used unfair strategies. This is also in line with research by Loveless and Whitefield (2011), who found a strong link between perceiving too much social inequality and the importance of personal connections in getting ahead.

Finally, we expect that the higher social costs of the economic transformation in Slovakia, as well as the populace's different level of concern regarding income inequality, and strong desire for government intervention, will have an impact on how opportunities for advancement are evaluated in Czechia and Slovakia (H3a and H3b).

Data and Methods

Our study relies on data from the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), a cross-national survey fielded in almost 50 countries. We specifically used data from the ISSP 2009 and 2019 Social Inequality module, which was fielded in 2009 and 2019 in Czechia and in 2009 and 2020 in Slovakia. The ISSP Social Inequality module series comprises five surveys conducted in 1987, 1992, 1999, 2009, and 2019. Successive surveys are always partial replications of earlier surveys. While Czechia and Slovakia have participated in all the Social Inequality modules since 1992, data from 1992 and 1999 does not include all the variables necessary for our analysis. We therefore used descriptive data from 2009 and 2019 and partially from 1992, and for the analytical part we relied solely on data from 2009 and 2019. By using data from two ISSP waves, we were able to observe the temporal dimension in order to discuss the changes that can be observed between the 2009 and 2019 waves. The whole dataset consists of 41 countries in the 2009 ISSP and 17 countries in the 2019 ISSP module.

Our analytical strategy contrasts Czechia and Slovakia as individual country cases and compares them against the results of all other countries available in the ISSP data set. This has the advantage of enabling us to focus simultaneously on the two cases studied and allows us to contrast the relationships observed in these cases with the more general tendencies observed in the cross-national dataset. This also provides background when discussing the results in the two ex-Czechoslovak countries—do the patterns observed in the whole data set correspond to the results in the two cases studied?

Dependent variables

To find the most reliable indicators of meritocratic beliefs and corrupt advancement strategies from the getting ahead question battery, we ran a series of factor analyses for the 2009 and 2019 ISSP data. Analyses using all countries identify a three-factor solution as optimal, with factors that could be described as ascriptive, meritocratic, "bend the system," or corrupt. However, in the separate analyses for Slovakia and Czechia, the situation becomes more complicated.[4] For example, having a good education and working hard do not belong to the same factor in the Czech data. Similar inconsistencies could be observed with regard to the strategy of giving bribes. Based on these ambiguous results, we decided to focus on single items measuring the most meritocratic strategy (hard work) and the most corrupt one (giving bribes) as our dependent variables. In all the factor analyses—done separately for the Slovak, the Czech, and the all-countries data sets—these variables were identified either as belonging to different factors or as having opposite factor loadings within the same factor. This supports our hypothesized expectation of corruption being perceived as a negation of—or the opposite of—meritocratic strategies.

Independent variables

Concerns about inequality are operationalized as respondents' agreement with the statement that income differences in the country are too high (on a five-point scale) and agree-

[4] These analyses are available from the authors upon request.

ment with the statement that it is the government's responsibility to reduce differences in income between people with high incomes and those with low incomes.

Objective social position is measured using the International Socio-Economic Index of occupational status (ISEI), derived from the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) (Ganzeboom et al. 1992). While education might also be considered a part of a person's objective social position, our definition relies on the usual assumption that education is an antecedent of social position, not the social position itself.

Subjective social position is measured using Top-Bottom self-placement,[5] and standard demographic variables such as gender, age, and education (years of schooling) are used as control variables.

While we acknowledge that attitudinal variables such as concerns about inequality and subjective social position are influenced by a person's objective social position, we expect each attitude to provide also a separate explanatory power net of the objective circumstances.

We start our analysis by providing descriptive statistics of the questions on getting ahead in three waves of the ISSP Social Inequality module. Later, in the multivariate models, our analytical approach is to contrast results for Czechia and Slovakia and to offer the results for all the participating countries together as a benchmark. While the expectation is that on most occasions, the observed pattern will be universal and therefore valid in all models, this approach allows us to identify differences between the two societies themselves and the general pattern "defined" by the whole dataset.

While the descriptive results presented in Table 1 use weights, the regression models reported in Tables 2a and 2b are calculated without weights. The analysis uses listwise deletion for missing cases. Descriptive statistics for all variables included in the models are provided in Appendix 1.

Analysis and Findings

Thanks to three waves[6] of the ISSP Social Inequality module we could observe trends in the perception of factors of success in Slovakia. The highest importance is repeatedly given to hard work, followed by characteristics such as being ambitious and talented, as well as having a good education. The relevance of good education has significantly increased, particularly in comparison with the early 1990s, and the belief in meritocracy is strengthening. The low significance of education in the early years of the economic transformation might still reflect the situation under the previous regime, where education was not a reliable path ensuring upward social mobility. Moreover, there were significant changes in social structure during that period, with new societal hierarchies being formed, and the potential vehicles for getting ahead seemed hard to identify (cf. Tuček 1994; Džambazovič 2011).

[5] The wording of the question is as follows: "In our society there are groups which tend to be towards the top and groups which tend to be towards the bottom. Below is a scale which runs from top to bottom. Where would you put yourself now on this scale?" (10-point scale).

[6] In the 1999 ISSP Social Inequality survey only two questions out of the battery on getting ahead were included, so we have left out that wave.

The next cluster of factors is related to specific social networks: knowing the right people; having the right political attitudes; and having political connections. Compared to 1992 the importance of having well-educated parents has also increased, whereas coming from a wealthy family has lower relevance. Finally, the importance of ascriptive attributes—gender, age, race, religion—is seen as relatively low. The ranking order finishes with "giving bribes." The perceived rise in importance of education as "an elevator to success" (Džambazovič, 2011; Keller & Tvrdý 2008) could be seen as a positive trend reflecting the increasing value of education on the labor market.

Table 1

Getting ahead: How important is … (in % of essential + very important on the 5-point scales)

	Slovakia			Czechia		
	1992*	**2009**	**2019**	**1992**	**2009**	**2019**
Hard Work	68.6	75.2	82.7	71.0	76.1	68.8
a good education yourself	30.0	68.6	74.1	30.3	48.2	32.0
knowing the right people	55.6	68.3	59.8	51.2	56.3	46.7
having well-educated parents	16.3	38.1	36.6	12.3	20.1	20.3
a person's ethnicity or race	6.6	18.2	26.7	5.4	17.6	17.2
having political connections	16.5	45.4	26.3	14.2	23.6	16.9
coming from a wealthy family	25.5	38.3	25.6	18.9	24.2	17.9
being born a man or a woman	9.7	15.1	23.3	9.5	16.7	17.5
a person's religion	5.4	11.0	20.9	3.6	7.6	11.4
giving bribes (GivBribes)	n.a.	20.1	11.4	n.a.	12.7	10.6

* The survey was conducted in Czecho-Slovakia, representative sample for Slovakia was only 423 respondents.

The priorities of Czech society are similar to those in Slovakia: hard work is seen as the most important, followed by knowing the right people and having a good education. Ascriptive factors are evaluated as being of lesser importance.

With regard to our hypotheses on differences between Slovakia and Czechia, we can confirm the expectation that corrupt strategies would be regarded as more important in Slovakia (H3b). In both years, when these are compared in Table 1, there are more people in Slovakia who say that giving bribes is a major means of advancing. While the difference was significant in 2009, it was notably smaller in 2019. On the other hand, the descriptive results provide no support for the expectation that people in Czechia will see opportunities for advancement as more meritocratic than in Slovakia (H3a). The share of respondents who say that hard work is important is only slightly higher in Czechia in 2009 and is lower in Czechia than in Slovakia in 2019.

Who views advancement opportunities as fair?

Tables 2a and 2b present a series of single-level and hierarchical linear models explaining why people consider advancement opportunities in a society as fair or corrupt (in both tables Models 1 and 4 are hierarchical, while the remaining models are single level). We provide individual models explaining the importance of unfair advancement opportunities (giving bribes) and models explaining the importance of fair advancement opportunities

(hard work) for all countries participating in the relevant ISSP module, as well as separate models for the Czech and Slovak data-sets. All continuous variables have been mean-centered.

We expect people who view income inequalities as too large and those who would like to reduce them to be more skeptical about hard work as a means of advancement and to be more inclined to see corruption as a tool for moving forward (H2a, H2b). Similarly, we generally expect people holding higher positions within their societies—regardless of whether this is measured objectively via ISEI or subjectively as placement on the top-bottom scale—to regard the advancement opportunities in their societies as meritocratic more frequently and less often as corrupt (H1a, H2b).

All models include basic demographic variables as control variables.

We see that in 2009 as well as in 2019 both H1 hypotheses are supported in the analysis of all the countries. People in either objectively or subjectively higher positions tend to mention hard work more frequently and giving bribes less frequently. The relationships are in the expected direction and are significant on all occasions. As for the separate analyses of the Czech and Slovak data, H1a is supported in all instances in 2019 (with the relationship being statistically insignificant for giving bribes in Slovakia). In 2009, we find the expected relationship in the case of hard work (not significant in Czechia, $p = 0.103$), but we do not find the expected relationship for giving bribes in either Czechia or Slovakia.

In the Czech and Slovak data, H1b is supported in 2009 in all instances. In 2019 most models are in the expected direction but are not significant (p values between 0.064 and 0.246) except for Czechia, where we find a significant relationship in the opposite direction, suggesting that persons placing themselves subjectively higher in Czech society tend more frequently to mention corruption as a way to advance in society. This is interesting with regard to H3 as well, as this relationship appears in the survey where the level of the perceived importance of corrupt strategies is almost equally low in both the countries compared (see Table 1).

Overall, while we can say that H1a and H1b are confirmed by analyses of all the countries in 2019 as well as in 2009, the results for the individual analyses of Czechia and Slovakia are mostly in support, with only one statistically significant exception: when subjectively higher placed individuals in Czechia more frequently mentioned giving bribes as important in 2019.

Regarding hypotheses H2a and H2b, we see that in analyses of all the countries together, H2b (assuming that people who expect the government to reduce income differences will less frequently see opportunities for advancement as meritocratic and will mention corrupt strategies for advancement more frequently) is supported on both counts in 2009, while there is mixed support in 2019, when it is statistically significant that those who call for a reduction in inequalities by the government at the same time also more frequently mention hard work as the way to career advancement. H2b is also supported in 2009 in the Czech data but not in the Slovak data and there is no support for H2b in the Czech or Slovak data in 2019.

As for H2a (which assumes that people describing a society's income differences as too large will less frequently see opportunities for advancement as meritocratic and will more often mention corrupt strategies for advancement), it turned out that this hypothesis is not

Table 2a

Explaining the importance of meritocratic and corrupt strategies in getting ahead, single-level and hierarchical linear regression, ISSP 2009

Predictors	Important: Giving bribes									Important: Hard work								
	All countries Model 1			Slovakia Model 2			Czechia Model 3			All countries Model 4			Slovakia Model 5			Czechia Model 6		
	B	Beta	p	B	Beta	p	B	Beta	p	B	Beta	p	B	Beta	p	B	Beta	p
(Intercept)	1.084	−0.024	**<0.001**	2.390	−0.000	**<0.001**	1.401	−0.000	**<0.001**	2.834	0.002	**<0.001**	2.700	0.000	**<0.001**	2.668	0.000	**<0.001**
TooLarge	0.017	0.014	**0.008**	0.011	0.007	0.859	0.071	0.059	0.104	*0.018*	*0.019*	***0.001***	−0.002	−0.002	0.964	0.019	0.019	0.584
GoRedIncDiff	0.017	0.017	**0.002**	0.014	0.012	0.755	0.083	0.089	**0.017**	−0.011	−0.014	**0.013**	0.020	0.022	0.544	−0.071	−0.093	**0.011**
topbot	−0.029	−0.047	**<0.001**	−0.117	−0.148	**<0.001**	−0.054	−0.076	**0.030**	0.017	0.036	**<0.001**	0.053	0.090	**0.014**	0.047	0.081	**0.018**
Man (r. woman)	0.134	0.060	**<0.001**	0.088	0.036	0.286	0.245	0.110	**0.001**	−0.013	−0.007	0.120	0.045	0.025	0.458	−0.112	−0.062	0.053
Age (years)	−0.003	−0.048	**<0.001**	−0.005	−0.059	0.087	−0.005	−0.073	**0.025**	0.001	0.010	**0.038**	−0.002	−0.029	0.391	0.002	0.042	0.186
Educ. (years)	−0.000	−0.000	0.922	−0.017	−0.034	0.428	−0.000	−0.002	0.951	0.001	0.011	**0.028**	−0.004	−0.012	0.783	−0.001	−0.004	0.898
ISEI	−0.001	−0.013	**0.008**	0.001	0.017	0.695	0.001	0.009	0.802	0.001	0.022	**<0.001**	0.005	0.084	**0.042**	0.004	0.057	0.103
Random Effects																		
σ²	0.99									0.70								
τ00	0.20 c_sample									0.06 c_sample								
ICC	0.17									0.08								
N	41 c_sample		41 c_sample															
Observations	39494			878			964			42664			926			1005		
Marginal R² / Conditional R²	0.010 / 0.178			0.027 / 0.019			0.038 / 0.031			0.003 / 0.084			0.020 / 0.012			0.029 / 0.022		
AIC	111965.851			2769.968			2907.028			106096.037			2389.317			2619.944		
log-Likelihood	−55972.925			−1375.984			−1444.514			−53038.018			−1185.659			−1300.972		

Note: Cells using italic contradict the relationships expected by our hypotheses, cells marked gray support them. As there is no consensus in the literature to what extend are standardized coefficients informative, we provide them along with unstandardized coefficients.

Table 2b

Explaining importance of meritocratic and corrupt strategies in getting ahead, single-level and hierarchical linear regression, ISSP 2019

Predictors	Important: Giving bribes									Important: Hard work								
	All countries Model 1			Slovakia Model 2			Czechia Model 3			All countries Model 4			Slovakia Model 5			Czechia Model 6		
	B	Beta	p	B	Beta	p	B	Beta	p	B	Beta	p	B	Beta	p	B	Beta	p
(Intercept)	1.194	−0.028	**<0.001**	1.878	0.000	**<0.001**	1.827	−0.000	**<0.001**	2.782	−0.097	**<0.001**	2.451	0.000	**<0.001**	2.196	0.000	**<0.001**
TooLarge	0.015	0.013	0.105	−0.096	−0.052	0.217	*−0.186*	*−0.168*	***<0.001***	0.002	0.002	0.752	0.077	0.061	0.141	*0.234*	*0.236*	***<0.001***
GoRedIncDiff	0.017	0.016	**0.049**	0.043	0.031	0.474	−0.030	−0.031	0.290	*0.022*	*0.024*	***0.002***	*0.167*	*0.173*	***<0.001***	0.033	0.037	0.195
topbot	−0.017	−0.027	**<0.001**	−0.054	−0.059	0.117	*0.043*	*0.067*	***0.010***	0.012	0.022	**0.003**	0.026	0.042	0.246	0.028	0.047	0.064
Man (r. woman)	0.121	0.053	**<0.001**	0.123	0.051	0.153	−0.106	−0.049	**0.043**	0.031	0.016	**0.012**	0.031	0.019	0.590	0.157	0.082	**0.001**
Age (years)	−0.004	−0.053	**<0.001**	−0.011	−0.147	**<0.001**	−0.008	−0.121	**<0.001**	−0.002	−0.031	**<0.001**	0.003	0.054	0.120	−0.003	−0.046	0.061
Educ. (years)	−0.009	−0.035	**<0.001**	−0.001	−0.002	0.958	−0.007	−0.018	0.523	0.002	0.007	0.427	0.004	0.015	0.689	0.018	0.052	0.067
ISEI	−0.002	−0.031	**<0.001**	−0.002	−0.038	0.357	−0.008	−0.149	**<0.001**	0.001	0.024	**0.004**	0.004	0.093	**0.019**	0.005	0.096	**0.001**
Random Effects																		
σ^2	1.09									0.78								
$\tau 00$	0.23 c_sample									0.11 c_sample								
ICC	0.18									0.13								
N	17 c_sample									17 c_sample								
Observations	19181			790			1600			20518			832			1652		
Marginal R^2 / Conditional R^2	0.011 / 0.185			0.032 / 0.023			0.083 / 0.079			0.003 / 0.128			0.051 / 0.043			0.080 / 0.076		
AIC	56230.484			2459.098			4631.440			53374.138			1964.438			4415.750		
log-Likelihood	−28105.242			−1220.549			−2306.720			−26677.069			−973.219			−2198.875		

Note: Cells using italic contradict the relationships expected by our hypotheses, cells marked gray support them. As there is no consensus in the literature to what extend are standardized coefficients informative, we provide them along with unstandardized coefficients.

supported in the analysis of all the countries either in 2009 or in 2019 and the results are always ambiguous and mixed. The same can be said based on analyses of the Czech and Slovak data.

As a robustness check, we included dummy variables indicating upward or downward social mobility of the respondent in our models in Tables 2a and 2b to see if some of our results might be explained by inter-generational mobility. Including those variables did not, however, change any of the reported results with regard to our hypotheses.[7]

Marginal effects of objective and subjective placement in society

Observing marginal effects in the ISSP 2009 data in Figure 1, we can conclude that the connection between objective status and seeing advancement opportunities as meritocratic (hard work) is very similar in the Slovak and Czech samples. While giving bribes was more frequently mentioned in Slovakia (thus supporting H3b), the connection with objective social status is weak and insignificant in both countries of the former Czechoslovakia.

Looking at Figure 2, which summarizes marginal effects in the ISSP 2019 data, we can see that the relationship between objective economic status (ISEI) and meritocratic views on advancement opportunities is similarly strong in Slovakia and Czechia, with the Slovak respondents having a generally higher propensity to see hard work as a way to get ahead in life (not supporting H3a). We can also say that, while the averages are similar, the relationship between objective status and the stress on corrupt advancement mechanisms (i.e., giving bribes) is stronger (and also significant, see Table 2b) in Czechia, where people in higher social positions mention corruption as a mechanism for advancement significantly less frequently.

The marginal plots for subjective social status in the 2009 data (Figure 3) show a pattern universally confirming hypothesis H1b. The connection between higher subjective social status and a lower level of belief in corrupt practices is stronger in Slovakia.

On the other hand, Figure 4, displaying the marginal plots for ISSP 2019 data, shows the only case that is non-compliant with H2b: in Czechia a higher subjective social status is connected with a higher share of people mentioning corruption as a way to get ahead. The pattern of the connection between subjective social status and meritocratic strategies is similar in both countries, albeit with a generally higher belief in the efficacy of meritocratic strategies in Slovakia.

Conclusion

The empirical tests of our hypotheses suggest clear support for the structural position thesis (Hadler 2005), that is, whether societal advancement is regarded as fair or unfair is well explained by the position of the respondent within his/her society. An important further finding is that this relationship is a very clear one even in societies with extremely low levels of income inequality. Contrary to our expectations, even in such settings, objective social position maintains its explanatory power and there is no clear dominance of subjective

[7] These models are available from the authors upon request.

Figure 1
Marginal plots for objective social status (ISEI) predicting meritocratic and corrupt advancement strategies, ISSP 2009

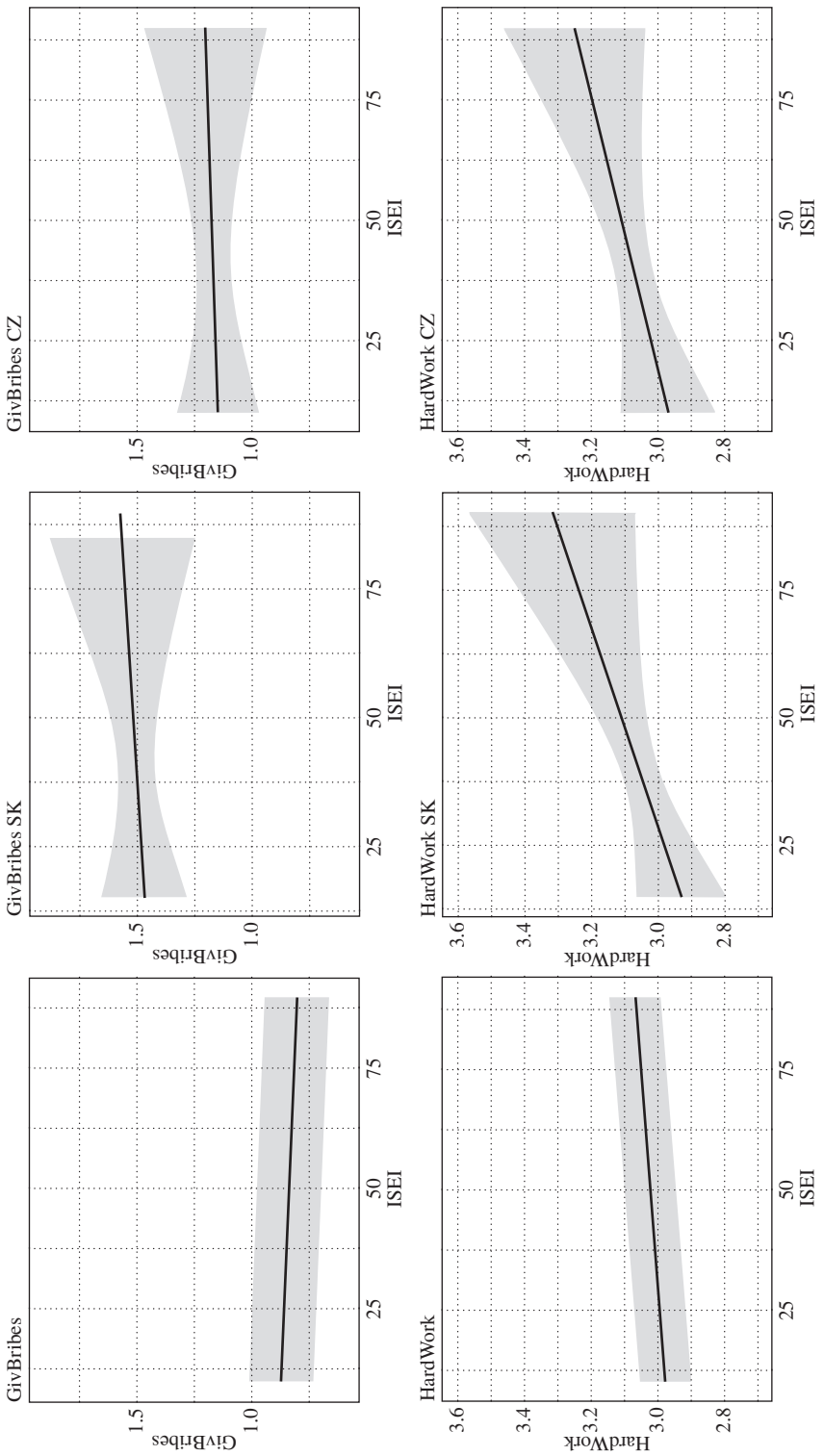


Figure 2

Marginal plots for objective social status (ISEI) predicting meritocratic and corrupt advancement strategies, ISSP 2019

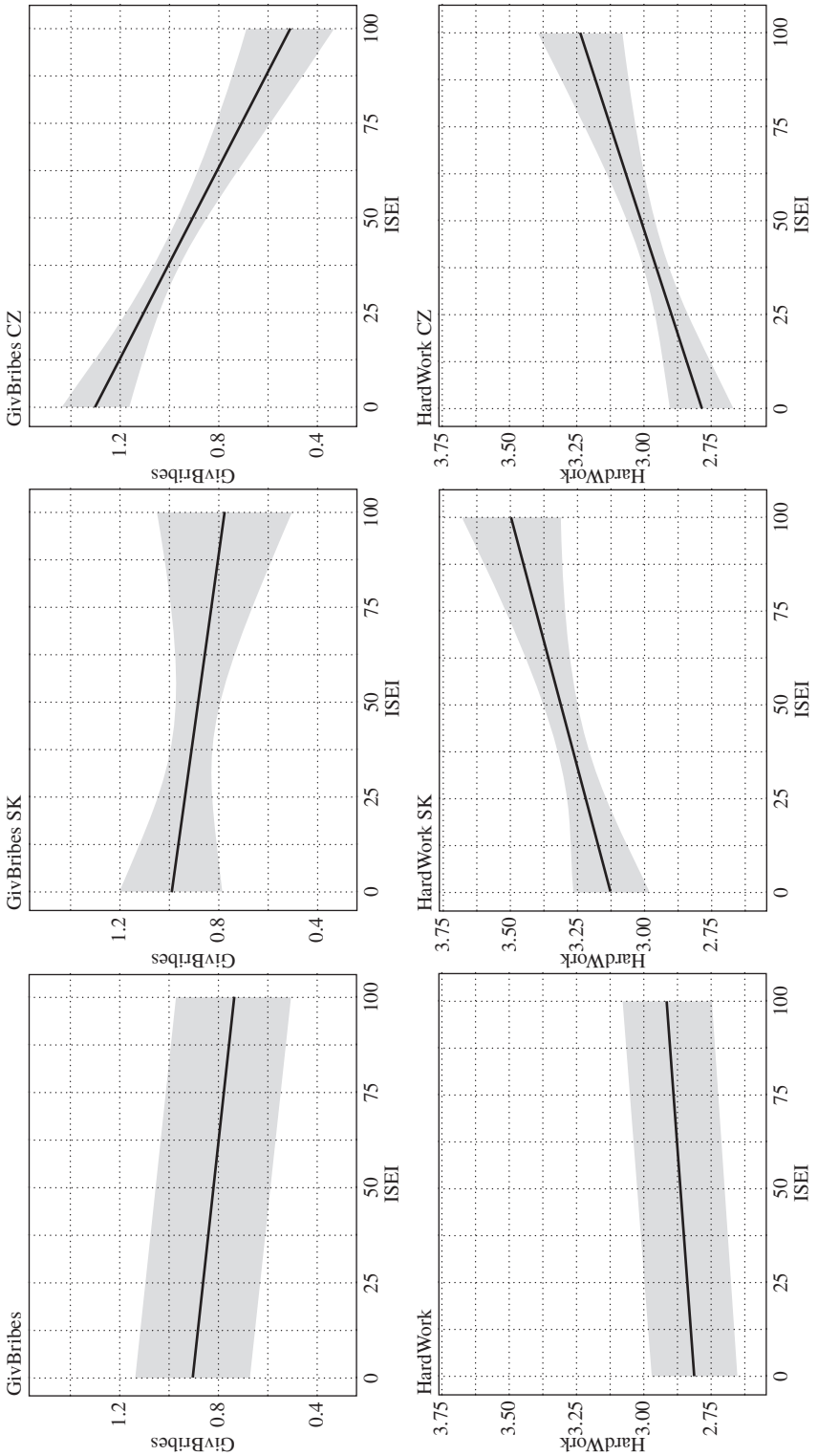


Figure 3

Marginal plots for subjective social status (TOPBOT) predicting meritocratic and corrupt advancement strategies, ISSP 2009

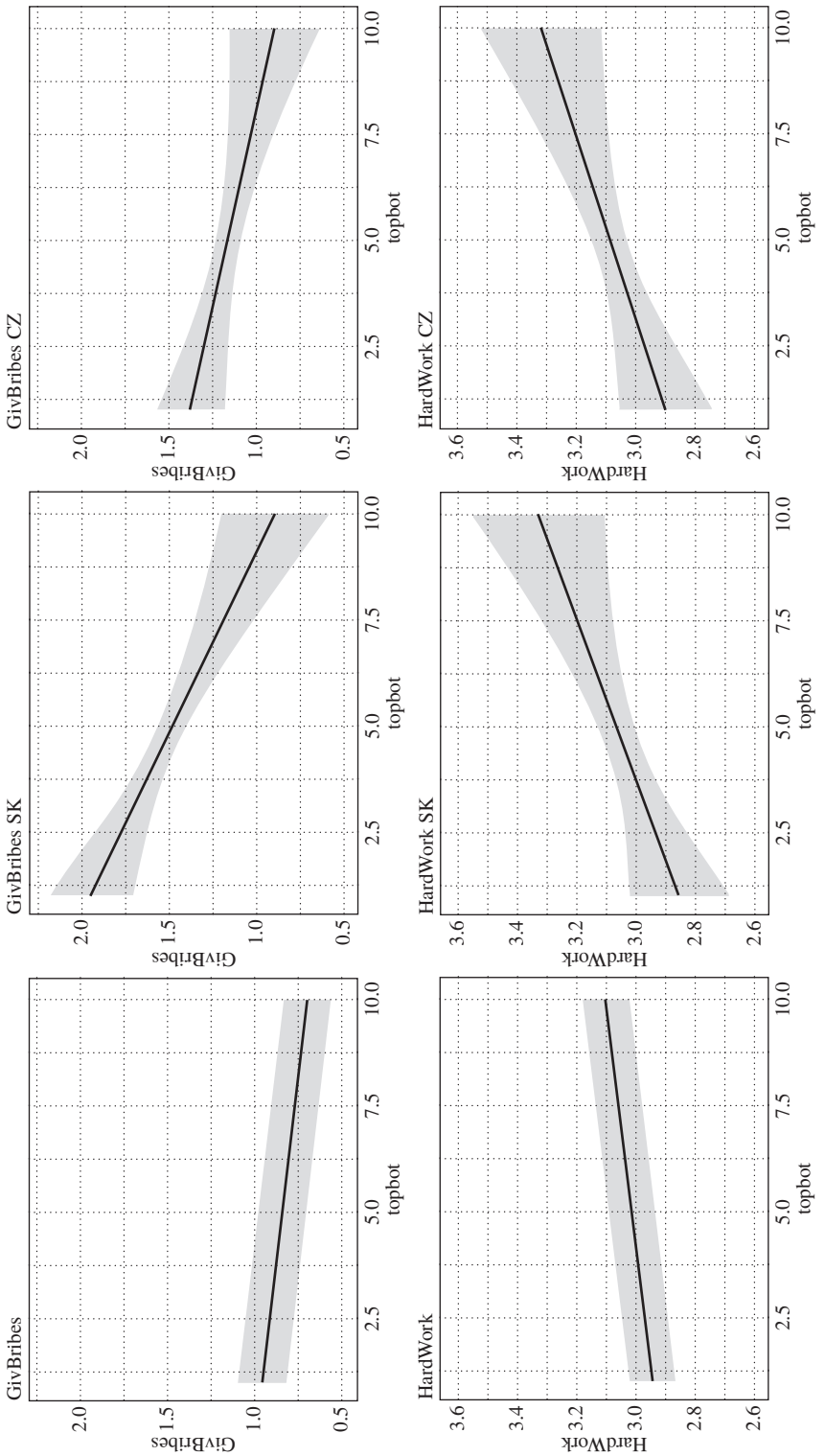
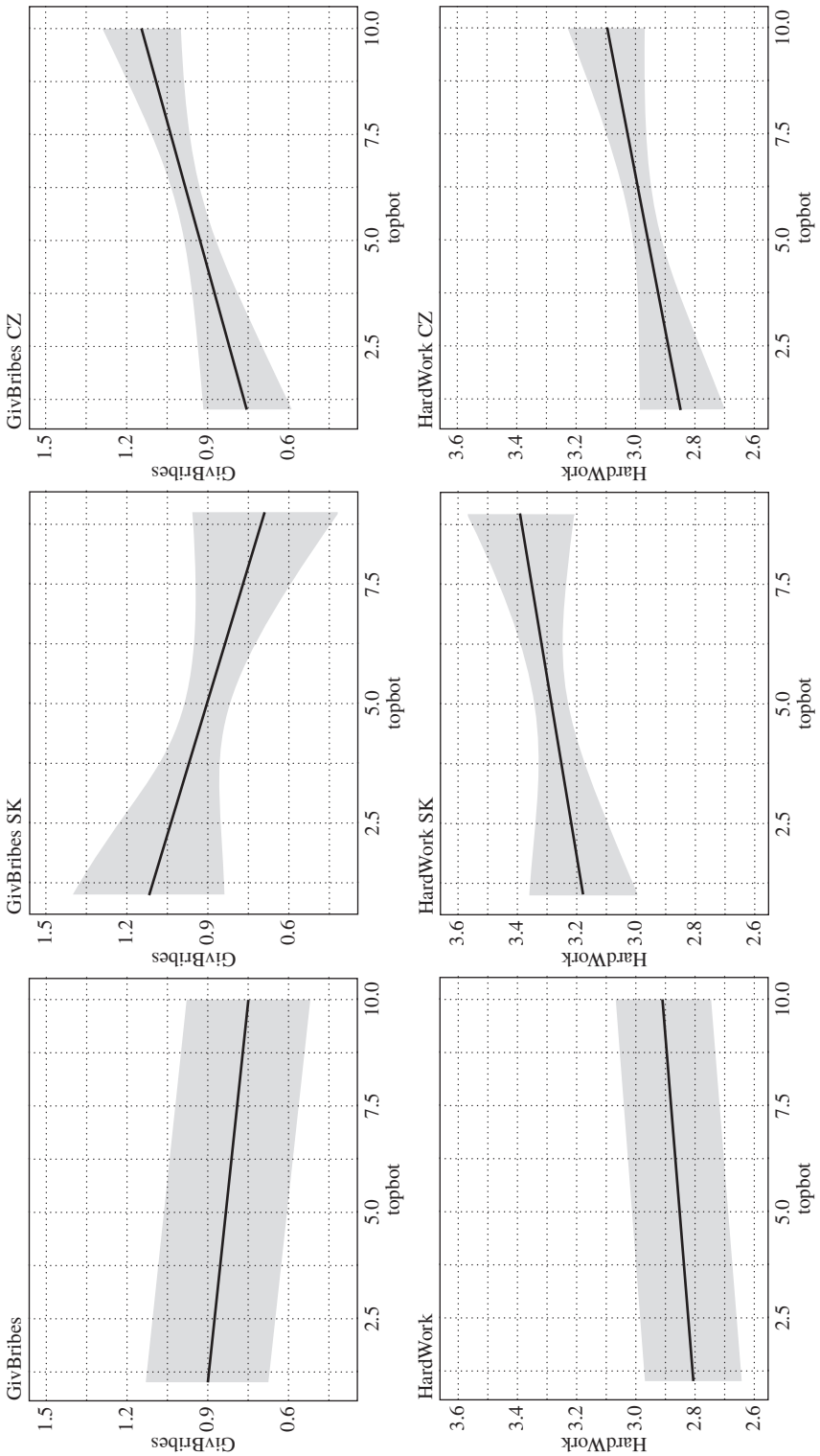


Figure 4

Marginal plots for subjective social status (TOPBOT) predicting meritocratic and corrupt advancement strategies, ISSP 2019



social position. On the whole, both measures of societal placement perform better than the overall evaluation of the extent of inequalities and the perceived need to deal with them. In most cases, seeing income differences as too large and desiring the government to do something about it are not clearly connected to how advancement opportunities in a society are perceived. This most likely suggests that the call for a reduction in inequalities is not directly linked to support for meritocratic principles, as these by themselves leave room for defining how unequally the "meritocratic awards" should be distributed.

While the expectation that overall, there would be more support for merit-based advancement options in Czechia could not be confirmed, the expected higher importance of non-meritocratic strategies in Slovakia was observed in the data. This could mean that the expected differences between Czech and Slovak society, based on the latter's higher inequality concerns and a more challenging economic and social situation, are demonstrated not in rejection of meritocratic strategies, which are still clearly dominant, but rather in attaching higher importance to corrupt strategies. These might be perceived as relevant alternatives in dealing with an economic order that is considered unfair (cf. Smith 2010).

As for the differences in Slovak and Czech society regarding hypotheses favoring the role of personal position in society or views on inequality, we can say that the expectation that there will be a connection between viewing inequality as excessive and considering career advancement options as non-meritocratic is not confirmed in the Slovak data: whether or not inequalities are perceived as high does not impact which factors are perceived as important in societal advancement. The expectation regarding the expressed wish that the government should reduce income inequalities is only confirmed in the 2009 Czech data. In this case, people with such a preference were less likely to say hard work is important for getting ahead. Importantly, although much more "inequality intolerant," this feature of Slovak society does not seem to have an impact on the positive relationship between social position and evaluation of advancement as merit-based (which is equally significant in both countries).

While the positive connection between status and preference for meritocratic means is similarly strong in the Czech and Slovak data, the negative link between objective social status and corrupt practices is stronger in the 2019 data from Czechia. On the other hand, the link between preference for corrupt practices and subjective social status is stronger in the 2009 Slovak data.

Overall, the connection between objective or subjective position and the perception of advancement possibilities seems to be universally valid in both societies, with a single exception, which is hard to explain: in the 2019 Czech data, people placing themselves higher in the social hierarchy also tend to mention corruption more frequently as a means to advance in society. This goes against both the results for other countries and the Czech results in 2009, in which people who place themselves higher mention corrupt means of getting ahead less frequently. Future surveys will show if this is just a short-term deviation or a phenomenon deserving further attention.

Finally, we can conclude that despite the different experience of post-communist transformation trajectories, and despite the prolonged exposure to a high level of structural unemployment and the almost universal agreement that inequalities are too large in

Slovakia, the respondents of the two ex-Czechoslovak countries do not seem to have different mechanisms for evaluating the possibilities of advancement in their society. These evaluations are clearly connected to how people define their position in society.

Based on a case study of two societies with a low level of objective inequality and relatively different levels of inequality intolerance, our research adds a strong argument in favor of the structural position thesis to the literature exploring meritocratic beliefs and inequality. Why is it that, even in this case, a person's objective or subjective structural position is a reliable predictor of their meritocratic or anti-meritocratic beliefs? We think that the origin of the elusive relationship between societal-level inequality and personal-level meritocratic beliefs lies in the fact that meritocratic beliefs are based on the everyday hands-on experiences of people rather than on evaluations of mechanisms forming the social structure. The answer to the "paradox" outlined by Mijs (2021) lies in this micro-macro distinction. Whether people are highly concerned by inequality or not, they are more likely to evaluate societal advancement as fair if they themselves are in a favorable position or interpret their position as a success. The indication is that in both societies objective and subjective socioeconomic status is a better explanation of beliefs about ways to get ahead than are concerns about inequality and/or paternalistic expectations. This implies that there is more similarity between the two ex-Czechoslovak societies than might be expected, given their different fates in the post-communist transformation.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their valuable feedback.

Funding

This work was supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency under Grant APVV-18-0218.

References

Alesina, A., Stantcheva, S., and Teso, E. 2018. Intergenerational Mobility and Preferences for Redistribution, *American Economic Review 108*(2): 521–554. DOI: 10.1257/aer.20162015.

Bahna, M. 2020. *Subjektívne vnímanie štruktúry slovenskej spoločnosti*. http://www.sociologia.sav.sk/cms/uploaded/3165_attach_TS_Bahna.pdf

Bašná, K. 2019. Income inequality and level of corruption in post-communist European countries between 1995 and 2014, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies 52*(2): 93–104. DOI: 10.1016/j.postcomstud.2019.05.002.

Becker, B. 2021. Temporal change in inequality perceptions and effects on political attitudes, *Political Research Exchange 3*(1): 1–21. DOI: 10.1080/2474736x.2020.1860652.

Bucca, M. 2016. Merit and blame in unequal societies: Explaining Latin Americans' beliefs about wealth and poverty, *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* 44: 98–112.

Buchel, O., Luijkx, R., and Achterberg, P. 2021. Objective and Subjective Socioeconomic Status as Sources of Status-Legitimacy Effect and Legitimation of Income Inequality, *Political Psychology 42*(3): 463–481. DOI: 10.1111/pops.12707.

Bútorová, Z. 2019. *30 rokov po Nežnej revolúcii. Zisky a straty očami verejnosti*. Bratislava: Inštitút pre verejné otázky.

Džambazovič, R. 2011. Legitimita sociálneho štátu: názory verejnosti na princípy a fungovanie sociálnej politiky, in: D. Gerbery (ed.), *Potrebujeme sociálny štát? Úvahy (nielen) o verejnej politike*. Bratislava: FES, pp. 131–161.

Ganzeboom, H.B.G., De Graaf, P.M., and Treiman, D.J. 1992. A standard International Socio-Economic Index of Occupational Status, *Social Science Research 21*(1): 1–56.

Hadler, M. 2005. Why do people accept different income ratios? A multi-level comparison of thirty countries, *Acta Sociologica 48*(2): 131–154. DOI: 10.1177/0001699305053768.

Hadler, M. 2017. Social Conflict Perception Between Long-term Inequality and Short-term Turmoil A Multi-level Analysis of Seven Countries Between 1987 and 2009, in: J. Edlund , I. Bechert, and M. Quandt (eds.), *Social Inequality in the Eyes of the Public: A Collection of Analyses.Based on ISSP Data 1987–2009* (GESIS-Schriftenreihe, 17). Köln: GESIS—Leibniz-Institut für Sozialwissenschaften, pp. 35–53.

Hadler, M., and Haller, M. 2019. Social Stratification and Its Perception in Austria and Its Central-East European Neighbouring Countries from 1960 to 2015: Historical Legacies, Socialist Pasts and Recent Developments, *Sociologický časopis / Czech Sociological Review 55*(6): 697–733. DOI: 10.13060/00380288.2020.55.6.490.

Heiserman, N., Simpson, B., and Willer, R. 2020. Judgments of Economic Fairness Are Based More on Perceived Economic Mobility Than Perceived Inequality, *Socius* 6. DOI: 10.1177/2378023120959547.

Heuer, J.O., Lux, T, Mau, S, et al. 2020. Legitimizing inequality the moral repertoires of meritocracy in four countries, *Comparative Sociology 19*(4–5): 542–584. DOI: 10.1163/15691330-BJA10017.

ISSP Research Group. 1994. *International Social Survey Programme: Social Inequality II—ISSP 1992*. GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA2310 Data file Version 1.0.0, DOI: 10.4232/1.2310.

ISSP Research Group. 2002. *International Social Survey Programme: Social Inequality III—ISSP 1999*. GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA3430 Data file Version 1.0.0, DOI: 10.4232/1.3430.

ISSP Research Group. 2017. *International Social Survey Programme: Social Inequality IV—ISSP 2009*. GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5400 Data file Version 4.0.0, DOI: 10.4232/1.12777.

ISSP Research Group. 2021. *International Social Survey Programme: Social Inequality V—ISSP 2019*. GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA7600 Data file Version 1.0.0, DOI: 10.4232/1.13599.

Keller, J., and Tvrdý, L. 2008. *Vzdělanostní společnost? Chrám, výtah a pojišťovna*. Prague: Slon.

Knell, M., and Stix, H. 2020. Perceptions of inequality, *European Journal of Political Economy 65*(C) DOI: 10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2020.101927.

Krauze, T.K., and Slomczynski, K.M. 1985. How Far to Meritocracy? Empirical Tests of a Controversial Thesis, *Social Forces 63*(3): 623–642.

Kreidl, M. 2000. Perceptions of poverty and wealth in western and post-communist countries, *Social Justice Research* 13: 151–176.

Krivý, V. 1993. Slovak and Czech definitions of the situation. Time: 1992, January *Sociologický časopis 29*(1): 73–87.

Kuhn, A. 2019. The subversive nature of inequality: Subjective inequality perceptions and attitudes to social inequality, *European Journal of Political Economy 59*(C): 331–344. DOI: 10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2019.04.004.

Kunovich, S., and Slomczynski, K.M. 2007 Systems of distribution and a sense of equity: A multilevel analysis of meritocratic attitudes in post-industrial societies, *European Sociological Review 23*(5): 649–663. DOI: 10.1093/esr/jcm026.

Lavrijsen, J., and Nicaise, I. 2016. Ascription, achievement, and perceived equity of educational regimes: An empirical investigation, *Social Sciences 5*(4). DOI: 10.3390/socsci5040064.

Linos, K., and West, M. 2003. Self-interest, Social Beliefs, and Attitudes to Redistribution. Re-addressing the Issue of Cross-national Variation, *European Sociological Review 19*(4): 393–409. DOI: 10.1093/esr/19.4.393.

Loveless, M., and Whitefield, S. 2011. Being unequal and seeing inequality: Explaining the political significance of social inequality in new market democracies, *European Journal of Political Research 50*(2): 239–266. DOI: 10.1111/j.1475-6765.2010.01929.x.

Lubelcová, G., and Zeman, M. 2019. Životné šance sociálnych aktérov v kontexte spoločenského vývoja na Slovensku—subjektívna dimenzia, *Sociológia 51*(5): 455–482. DOI: 10.31577/sociologia.2019.51.5.20.

Matějů, P., and Lim, N. 1995. Who Has Gotten Ahead after the Fall of Communism? The Case of the Czech Republic, *Czech Sociological Review 3*(2): 117–136.

Meraviglia, C. 2017. The Social Ladder. Status Mobility Across Time and Countries, in: J. Edlund, I. Bechert, and M. Quandt (eds.), *Social Inequality in the Eyes of the Public: A Collection of Analyses.Based on ISSP Data 1987–2009* (GESIS-Schriftenreihe, 17). Köln: GESIS—Leibniz-Institut für Sozialwissenschaften, pp. 11–33.

Mijs, J.J.B. 2018. Inequality Is a Problem of Inference: How People Solve the Social Puzzle of Unequal Outcomes, *Societies 8*(3): 64.

Mijs, J.J.B. 2021. The paradox of Inequality: Income Inequality and Belief in Meritocracy go Hand in Hand, *Socio-Economic Review 19*(1): 7–35.

Mijs, J.J.B., and Hoy, C. 2021. How Information about Inequality Impacts Belief in Meritocracy: Evidence from a Randomized Survey Experiment in Australia, Indonesia and Mexico, *Social Problems*: 1–32. DOI: 10.1093/socpro/spaa059.

Musil, J. 1992. Czech and Slovak Society. Outline of a Comparative Study, *Czech Sociological Review 1*(1): 5–21.

Osberg, L., and Smeeding, T. 2006. "Fair" Inequality? Attitudes toward Pay Differentials: The United States in Comparative Perspective, *American Sociological Review 71*(3): 450–473.

Rabušic, L., and Sirovátka, T. 1999. Český sociálny štát a jeho legitimita, *Sociologický časopis 35*(3): 397–421.

Reynolds, J., and Xian, H. 2014. Perceptions of meritocracy in the land of opportunity, *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility 36*: 121–137.

Roex, K.L.A., Huijts, T., and Sieben, I. 2019. Attitudes towards income inequality: 'Winners' versus 'losers' of the perceived meritocracy, *Acta Sociologica* (United Kingdom) *62*(1): 47–63. DOI: 10.1177/0001699317748340.

Saxonberg, S., and Sirovátka, T. 2018. Central and Eastern Europe, in: B. Greve (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of the Welfare State* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315207049

Sirovátka, T. 2002. Opinion of Czechs about the Welfare State, *Sociologický časopis 38*(3): 327–344.

Skendaj, E. 2016. Social Status and Minority Corruption in the Western Balkans, *Problems of Post-Communism 63*(2): 108–120. DOI: 10.1080/10758216.2015.1106323.

Smith, M.L. 2010. Perceived corruption, distributive justice, and the legitimacy of the system of social stratification in the Czech Republic, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies 43*(4): 439–45. DOI: 10.1016/j.postcomstud.2010.10.005.

Sopóci, J. 2014. K niektorým otázkam spoločenskej triedy a sociálneho statusu v slovenskej spoločnosti, *Sociológia 46*(2): 146–166.

Sopóci, J. 2017. *Sociálna stratifikácia a mobilita v sociologickej perspektíve*. Bratislava: Stimul.

Správy o sociálnej situácii obyvateľstva Slovenskej republiky. Ministerstvo práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny SR. Available at: https://www.employment.gov.sk/sk/ministerstvo/vyskum-oblasti-prace-socialnych-veci-institut-socialnej-politiky/spravy-soc-situacii.html

Šanderová, J. 1993. Differences Between the Czech and Slovak Perceptions of the Economic Transformation, *Czech Sociological Review 1*(1): 43–57.

Tuček, M. 1994. Postup meritokratizace společnosti v České a Slovenské republice, *Sociológia 26*(4): 381–393.

Večerník, J. 1992. Změny v příjmové nerovnosti v letech 1988–1992, *Sociologický časopis 28*(5): 666–684.

Xian, H., and Reynolds, J. 2017. Bootstraps, Buddies, and Bribes: Perceived Meritocracy in the United States and China, *Sociological Quarterly 58*(4): 622–647. DOI: 10.1080/00380253.2017.1331719.

Biographical Notes:

Miloslav Bahna (Ph.D.), senior researcher at the Institute for Sociology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. His research focuses on international migration, quantitative comparative sociology and quantitative survey methodology. He is a long-term representative of Slovakia in the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) and the CESSDA ERIC pan-European infrastructure.

ORCID iD: 0000-0003-2544-3660

E-mail: miloslav.bahna@savba.sk

Oľga Gyárfášová (Ph.D.), associate professor at the Faculty of Social and Economic Science, Comenius University in Bratislava. In her research she focuses on electoral studies, minority rights, social equality, and political culture. She is national coordinator of the European Election Studies (EES) and principal investigator of the world-wide project Comparative Studies of Electoral Systems (CSES).

ORCID iD: 0000-0003-0016-7866

E-mail: olga.gyarfasova@uniba.sk

Appendix 1
Descriptive statistics of variables used

	Slovakia										Czechia									
	ISSP 2009					ISSP 2019					ISSP 2009					ISSP 2019				
	n	mean	sd	Mi	Mx	n	mean	sd	Mi	Mx	n	mean	sd	Mi	Mx	n	mean	sd	Mi	Mx
GivBribes	1090	1.53	1.20	0	4	949	0.88	1.14	0	4	1139	1.16	1.13	0	4	1855	0.97	1.09	0	4
HardWork	1152	3.03	0.90	0	4	1000	3.25	0.82	0	4	1194	3.08	0.89	0	4	1917	2.95	0.97	0	4
TooLarge	1153	1.52	0.70	−2	2	995	1.52	0.64	−2	2	1199	1.28	0.93	−2	2	1901	1.03	0.99	−2	2
GoRedIncDiff	1128	1.02	0.99	−2	2	991	1.27	0.83	−2	2	1183	0.70	1.18	−2	2	1872	0.72	1.12	−2	2
topbot	1125	4.86	158	1	10	981	5.09	1.30	1	10	1204	4.87	1.56	1	10	1923	5.75	1.69	1	10
Man	1159	0.40	0.49	0	1	1003	0.36	0.48	0	1	1205	0.45	0.50	0	1	1924	0.45	0.50	0	1
Age (years)	1154	46.27	16.33	18	85	1003	50.75	17.04	18	93	1203	46.79	16.78	18	87	1890	52.03	16.93	18	93
Educ. (years)	1153	18.33	20.96	6	96	1003	13.66	3.42	0	40	1171	15.70	16.16	2	96	1900	13.24	2.87	0	40
ISEI	977	40.21	14.27	16	88	854	42.47	20.11	12	89	1057	41.10	14.41	16	88	1745	42.58	20.09	11	89

Note: Mi = min, Mx = max