

# Is Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe as Weak as Commonly Claimed?

Roberto Foa  
Harvard University  
[foa@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:foa@fas.harvard.edu)

Grzegorz Ekiert  
Harvard University  
[ekiert@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:ekiert@fas.harvard.edu)

# Voluntary Associational Memberships, per capita



Source: World Values Surveys, waves 3-5 (1994-2007)

# Voluntary Associational Memberships, per capita



Source: World Values Surveys, waves 3-5 (1994-2007)

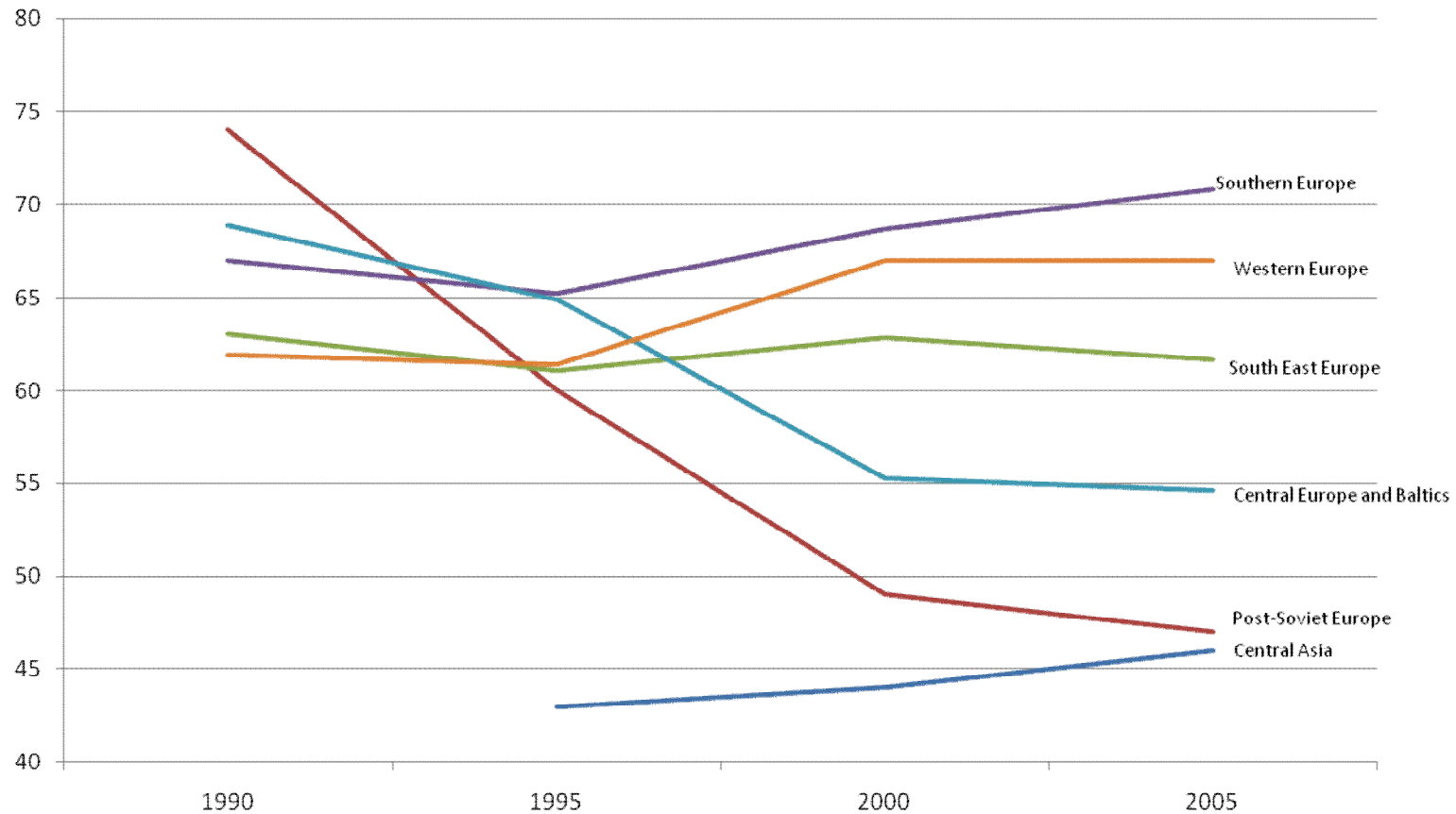
The Weakness of Civil Society  
in Post-Communist Europe



CAMBRIDGE

Marc Morjé Howard

# 'Have done' or 'would' join a peaceful demonstration

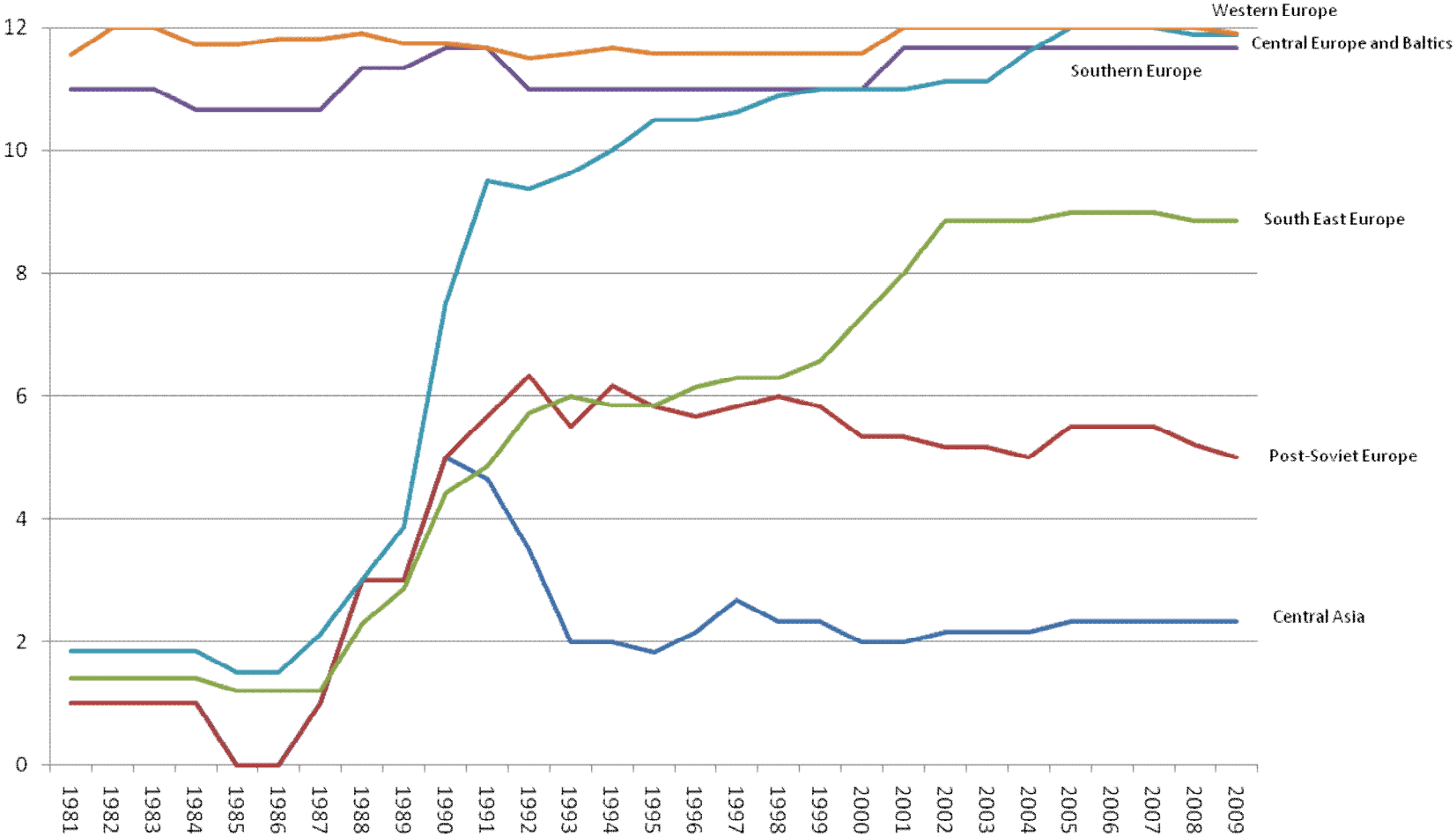


Source: World Values Surveys, waves 2-5 (1989-2007)

# A Paradox?

- Voluntary association data suggests weak civil society across the post-communist world
- Civic engagement is typically seen as a precondition for successful democratic transition, and consolidation
- Yet since 1989 the trajectories of democratic transition and consolidation in the region have widened, and continue to widen further

# Combined Freedom House Scores, 1981-2005

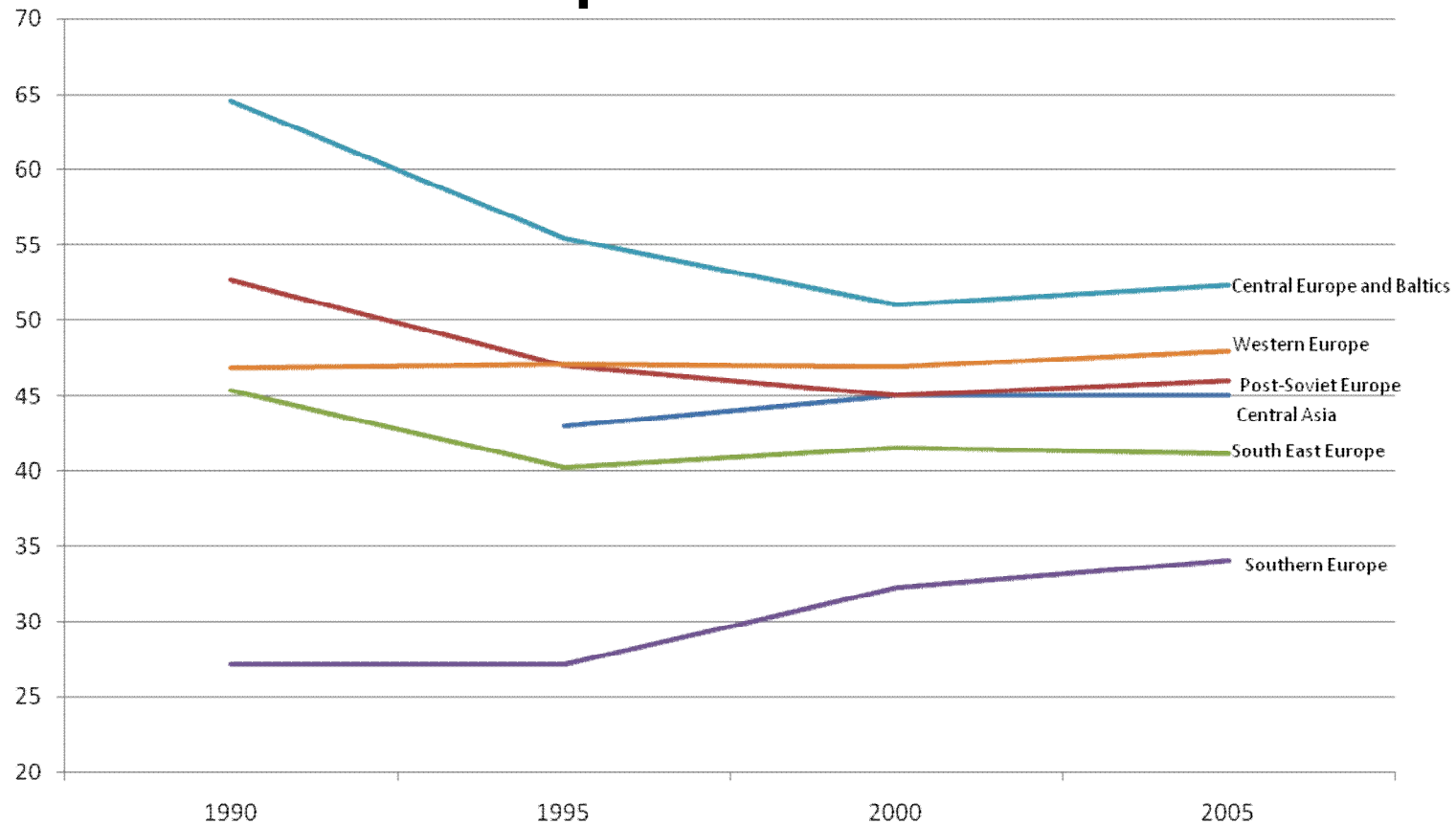


# Gathering Broader Indicators

Variable	Description	Source	Aspect of Civil Society	Countries Covered
<i>Media</i>	Average of the daily newspaper circulation	UNESCO	Public sphere	166
<i>Democracy</i>	proportion of public agreeing that 'democracy is the best form of government'	World Values Survey	Values	78
<i>INGOs</i>	international NGO density (number of INGOs with members in that country relative to country population)	LSE Civil Society Yearbook	Structure	175
<i>Polarization</i>	Variance of the left-right placement of the general public	World Values Survey	Values	89
<i>Confidence</i>	Average of the public who have confidence in civil society organisations	World Values Survey	Values	91
<i>Interest</i>	proportion of public who are 'interested in' politics	World Values Survey	Public sphere	103
<i>Demonstration</i>	rating on likelihood of violent demonstrations and protests	International Country Risk Guide	Protest	140
<i>Activism</i>	proportion of public who have or would be prepared to sign a petition, join a boycott, or join a peaceful demonstration	World Values Survey	Protest	100
<i>Strikes</i>	Participants in strikes and lockouts, per capita	ILO	Protest	105

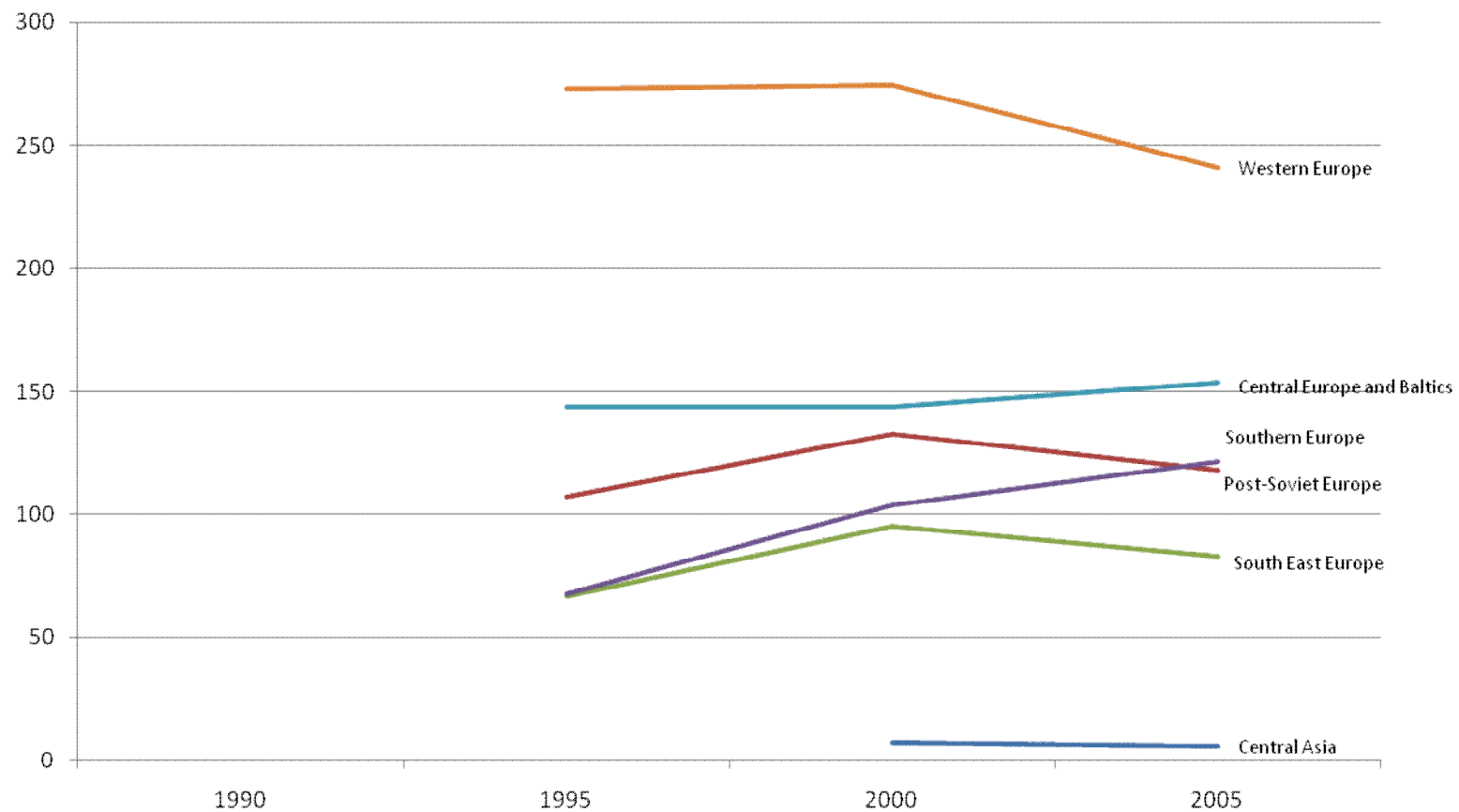


# Percentage of respondents 'interested' or 'very interested' in politics



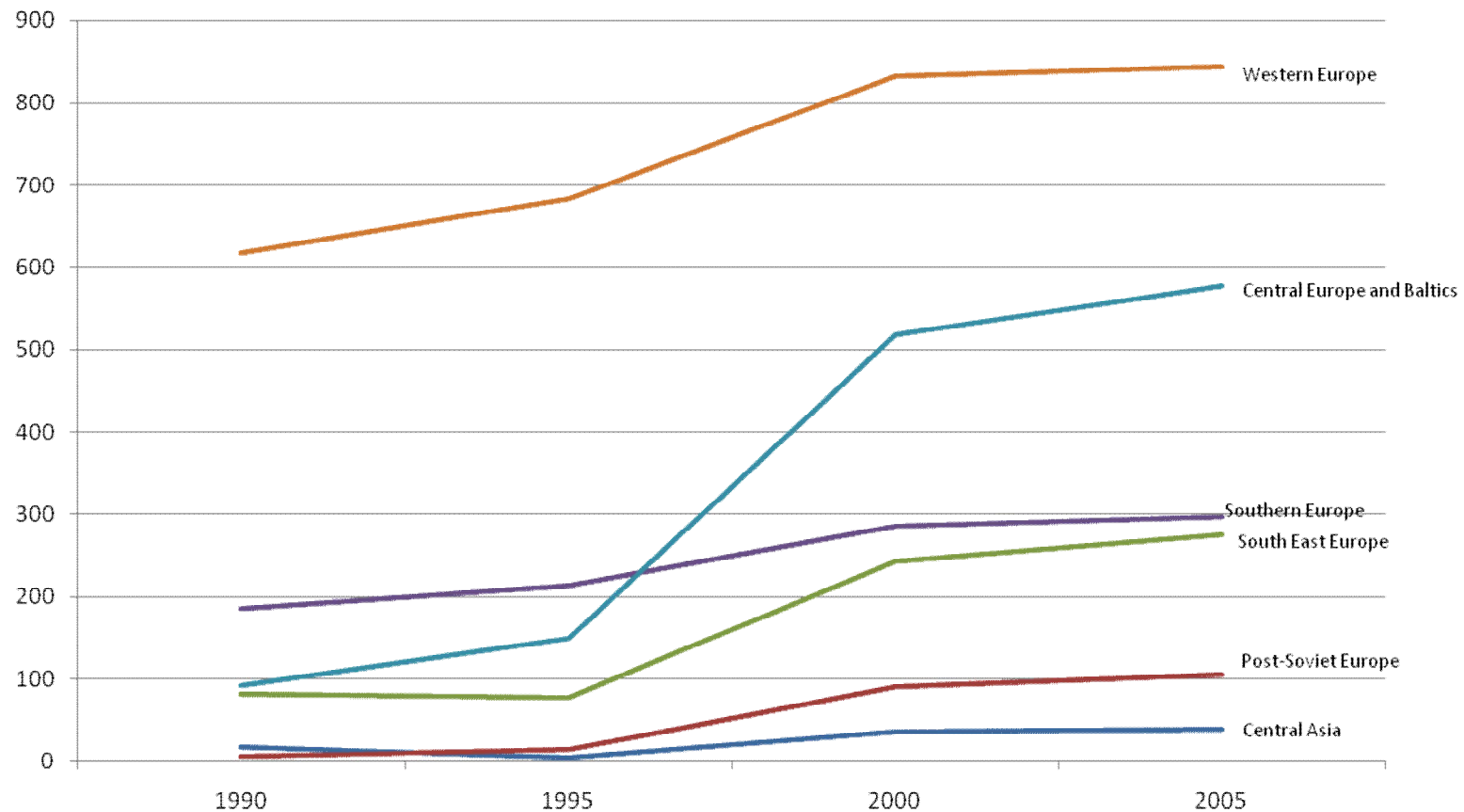
Source: World Values Surveys, waves 2-5 (1989-2007)

# Daily newspaper circulation, per 1,000 population



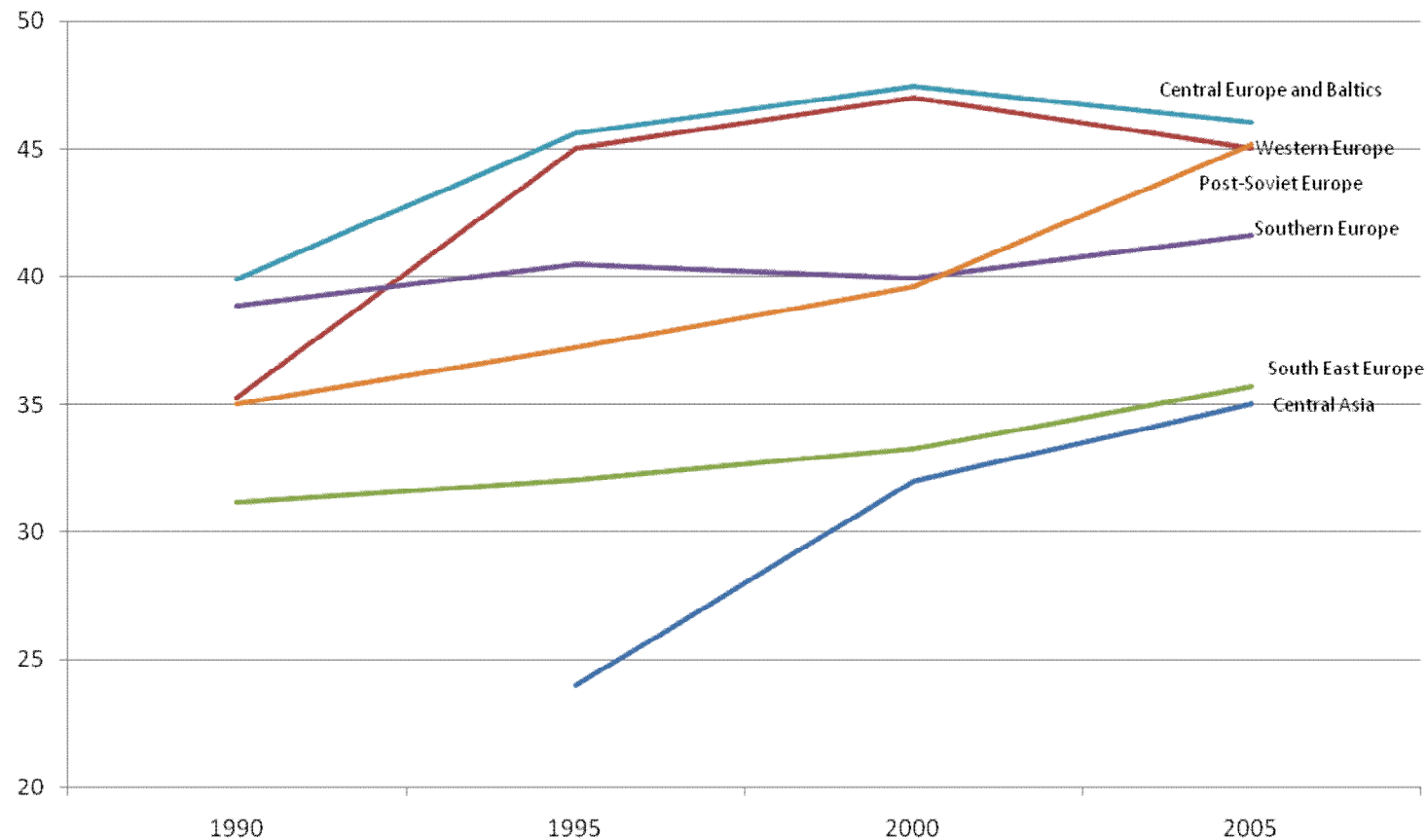
Source: UNESCO

# International NGOs with membership, per million population



Source: LSE Global Civil Society Yearbook (2000-4)

# Percentage with 'some' or a 'great deal' of trust in Civil Society Organizations

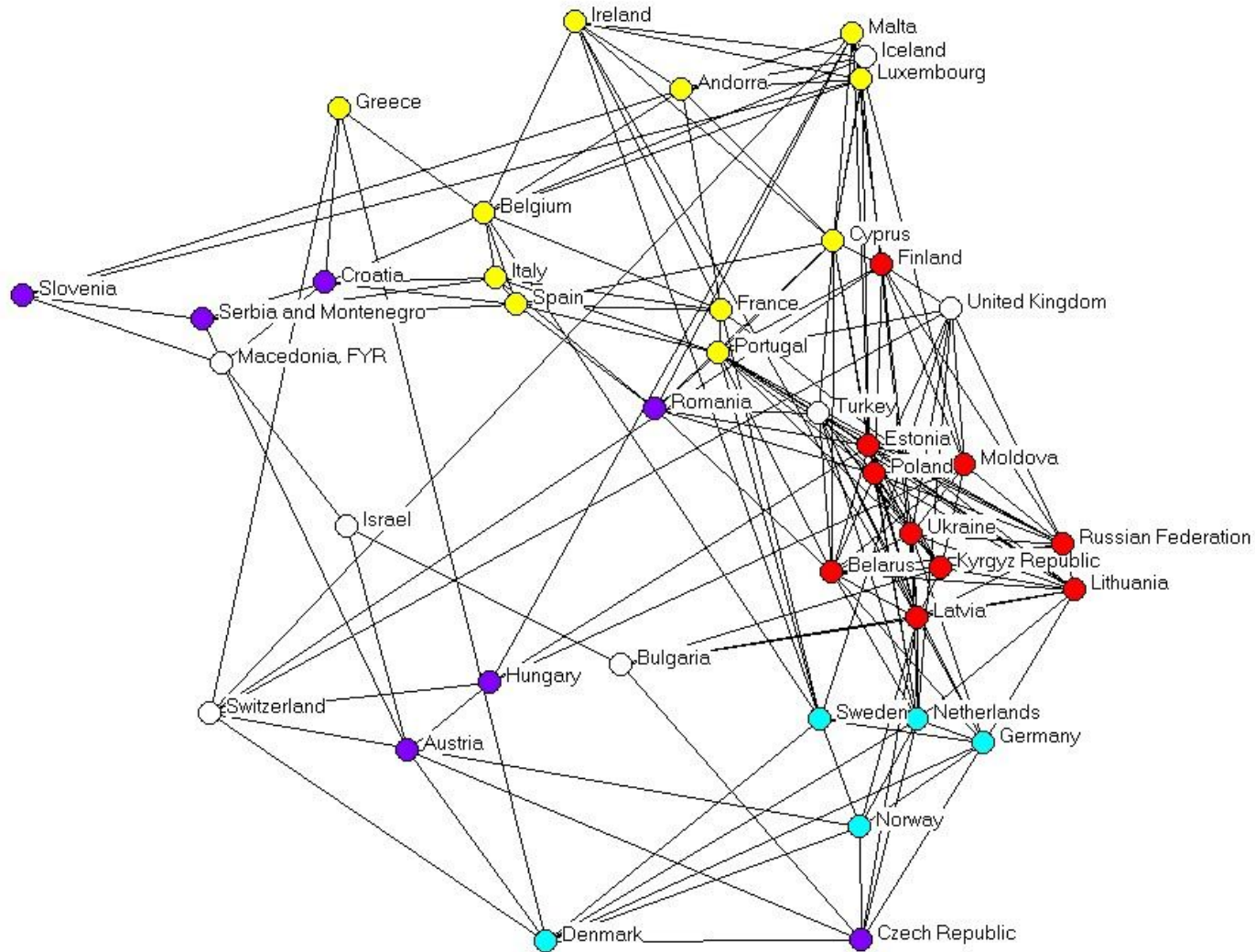


Source: World Values Surveys, waves 2-5 (1989-2007)

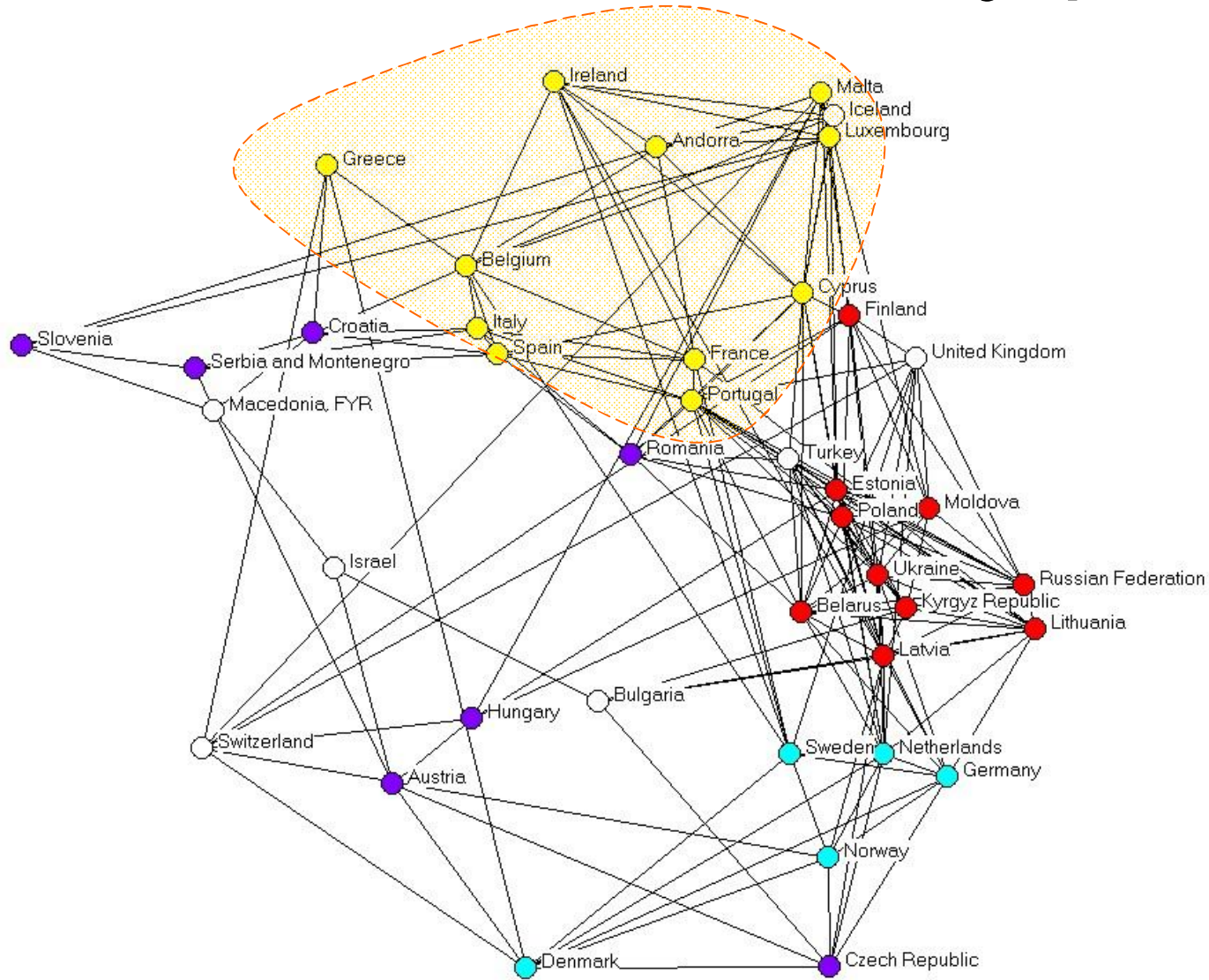
# Using Metric MDS to Make Inferences

- Network analysis on country nodes, using multidimensional scaling
- Strength of ties between countries based on similarities in the *pattern* of 9 civil society indicators
- Allows quick inductive analysis – which countries share structural similarities? What ‘natural groupings’ emerge from the data?

# MDS based on country-pairs

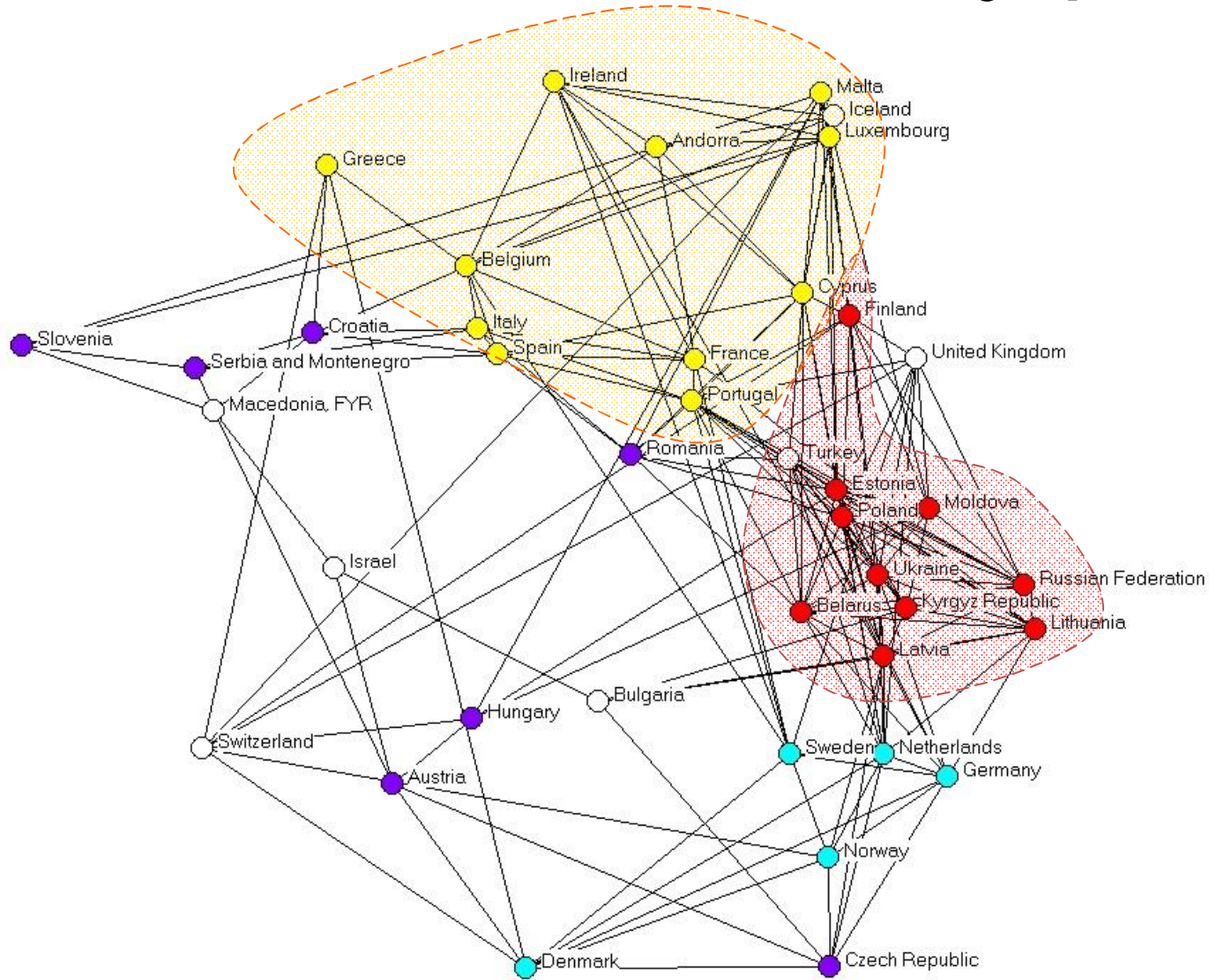


# MDS based on country-pairs



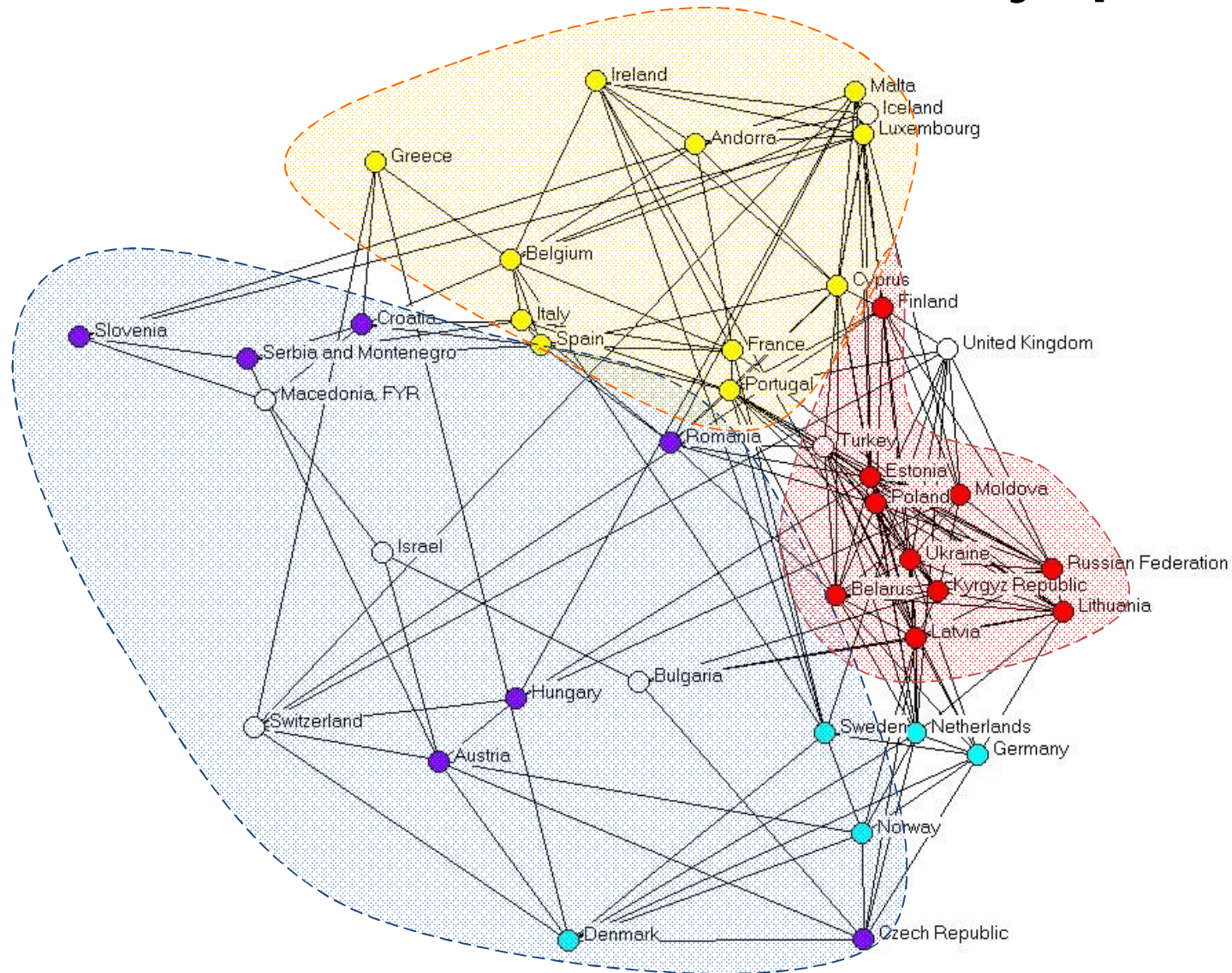


# MDS based on country-pairs

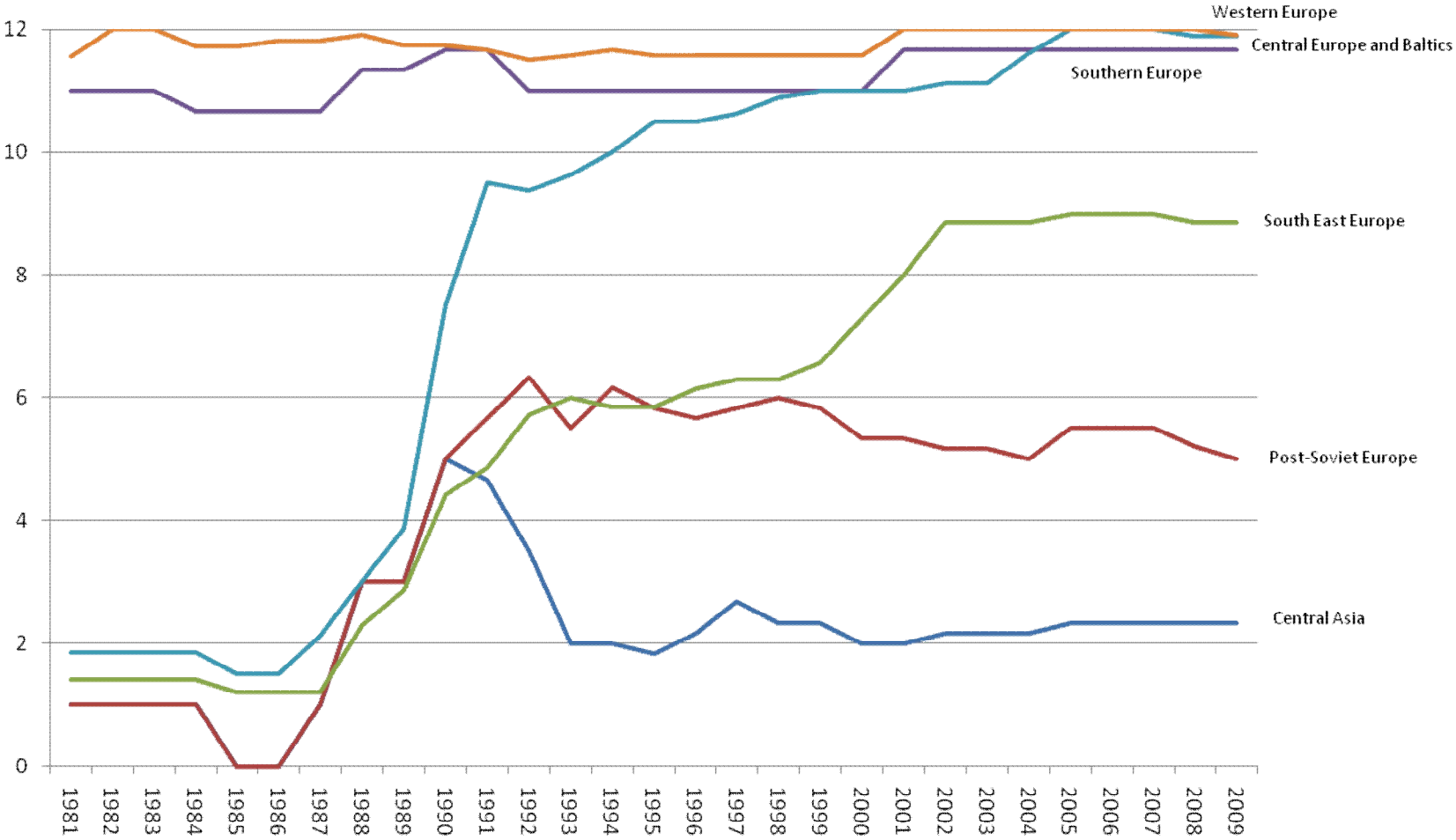




# MDS based on country-pairs



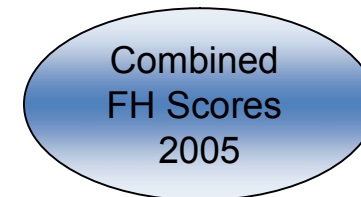
# Combined Freedom House Scores, 1981-2005



# Simplified Regression Form

Independent variables

Dependent variable

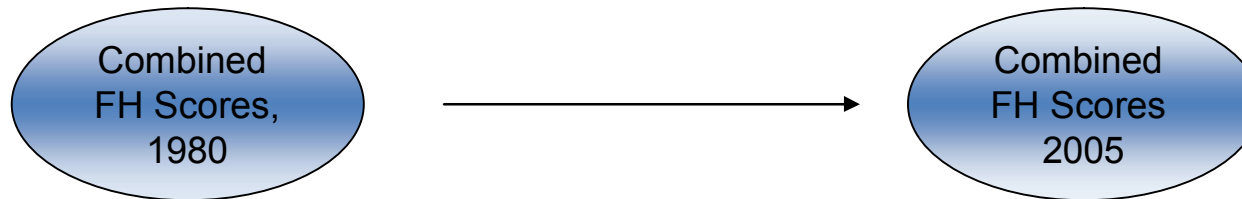


**Sample: All countries making a democratic transition (moving from 'not free' to 'party free' or 'free' on the Freedom House ratings) from 1980-2005**

# Simplified Regression Form

Independent variables

Dependent variable

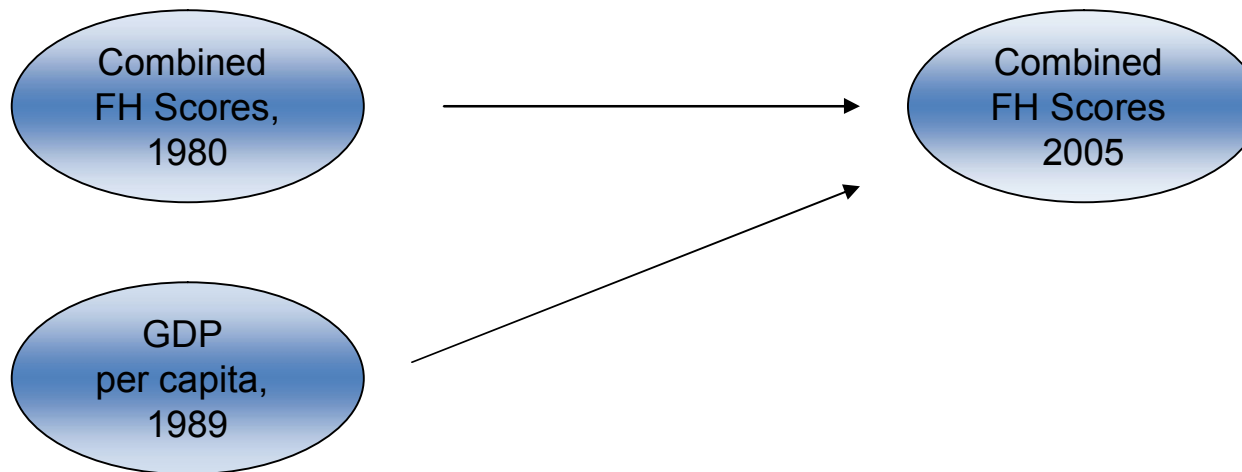


**Sample: All countries making a democratic transition (moving from 'not free' to 'party free' or 'free' on the Freedom House ratings) from 1980-2005**

# Simplified Regression Form

Independent variables

Dependent variable

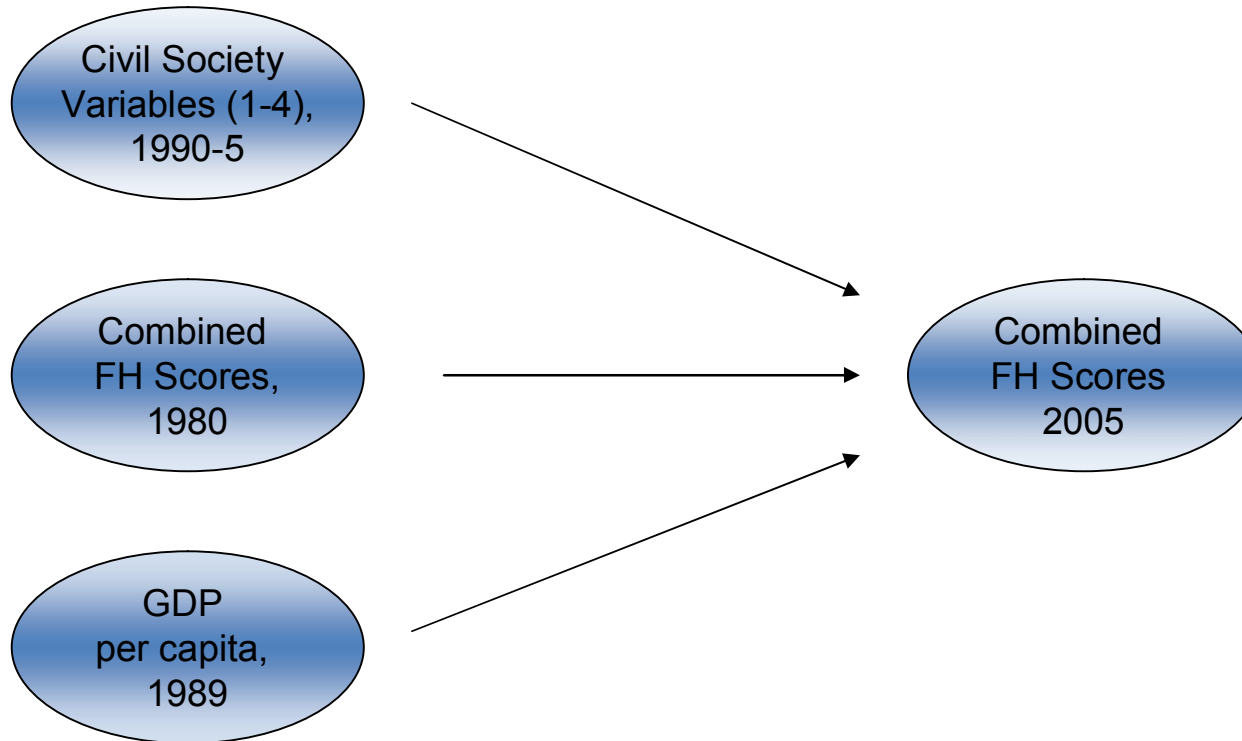


**Sample: All countries making a democratic transition (moving from 'not free' to 'party free' or 'free' on the Freedom House ratings) from 1980-2005**

# Simplified Regression Form

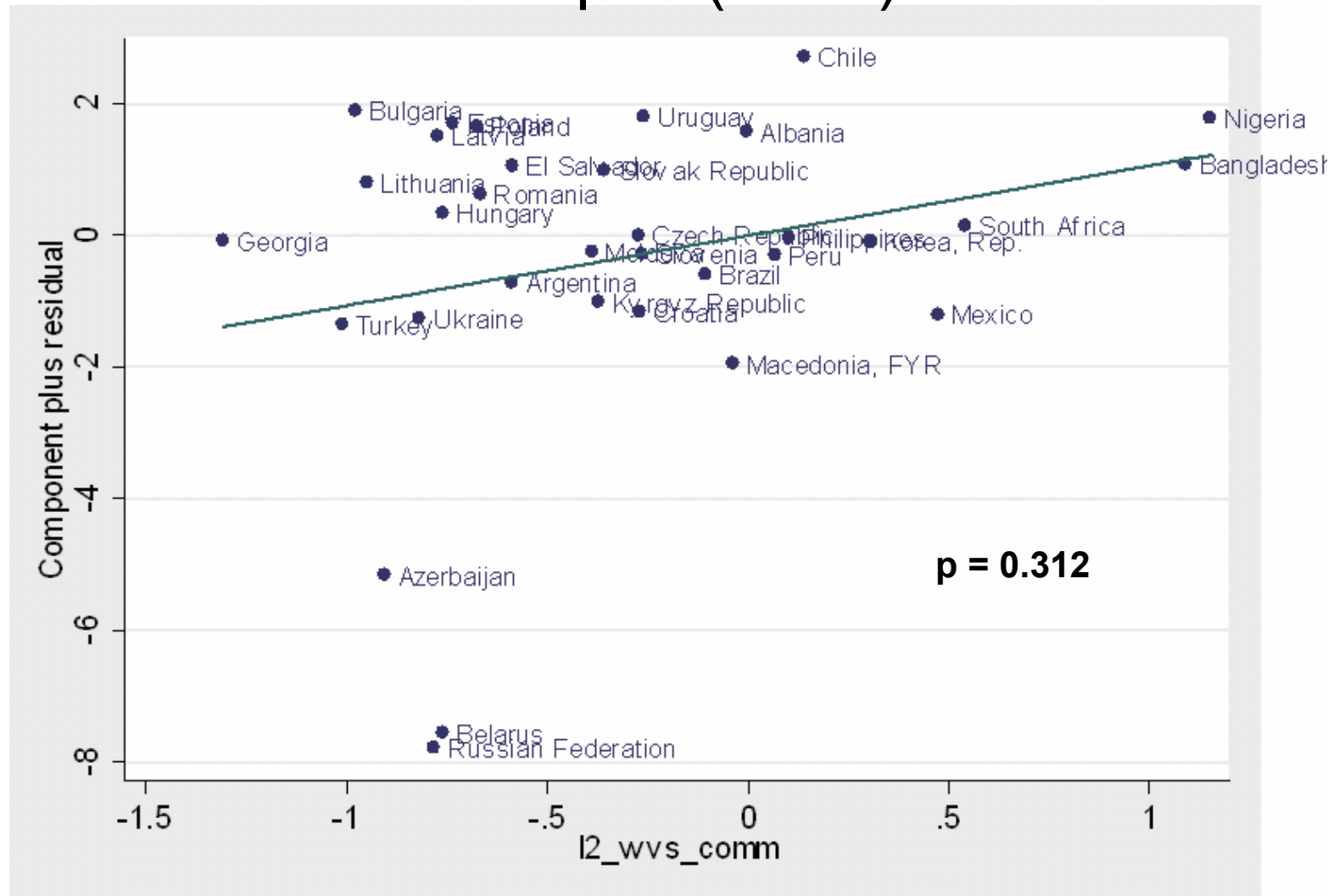
Independent variables

Dependent variable

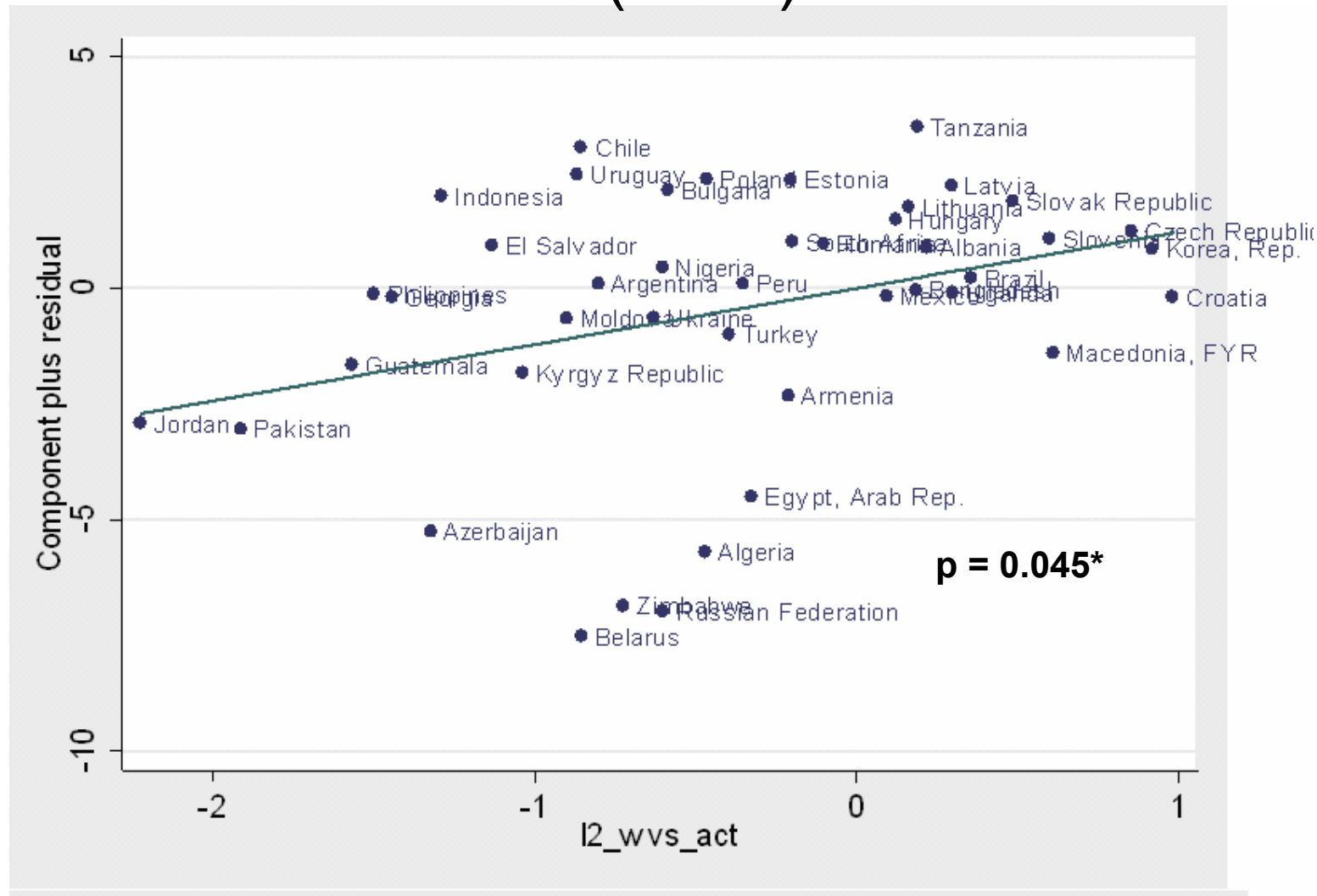


**Sample: All countries making a democratic transition (moving from 'not free' to 'party free' or 'free' on the Freedom House ratings) from 1980-2005**

*Partial correlation* – Increase (to 2005) in Combined Freedom House Scores and **Voluntary Association** (1990-5), Controlling for GDP per capita (1990)

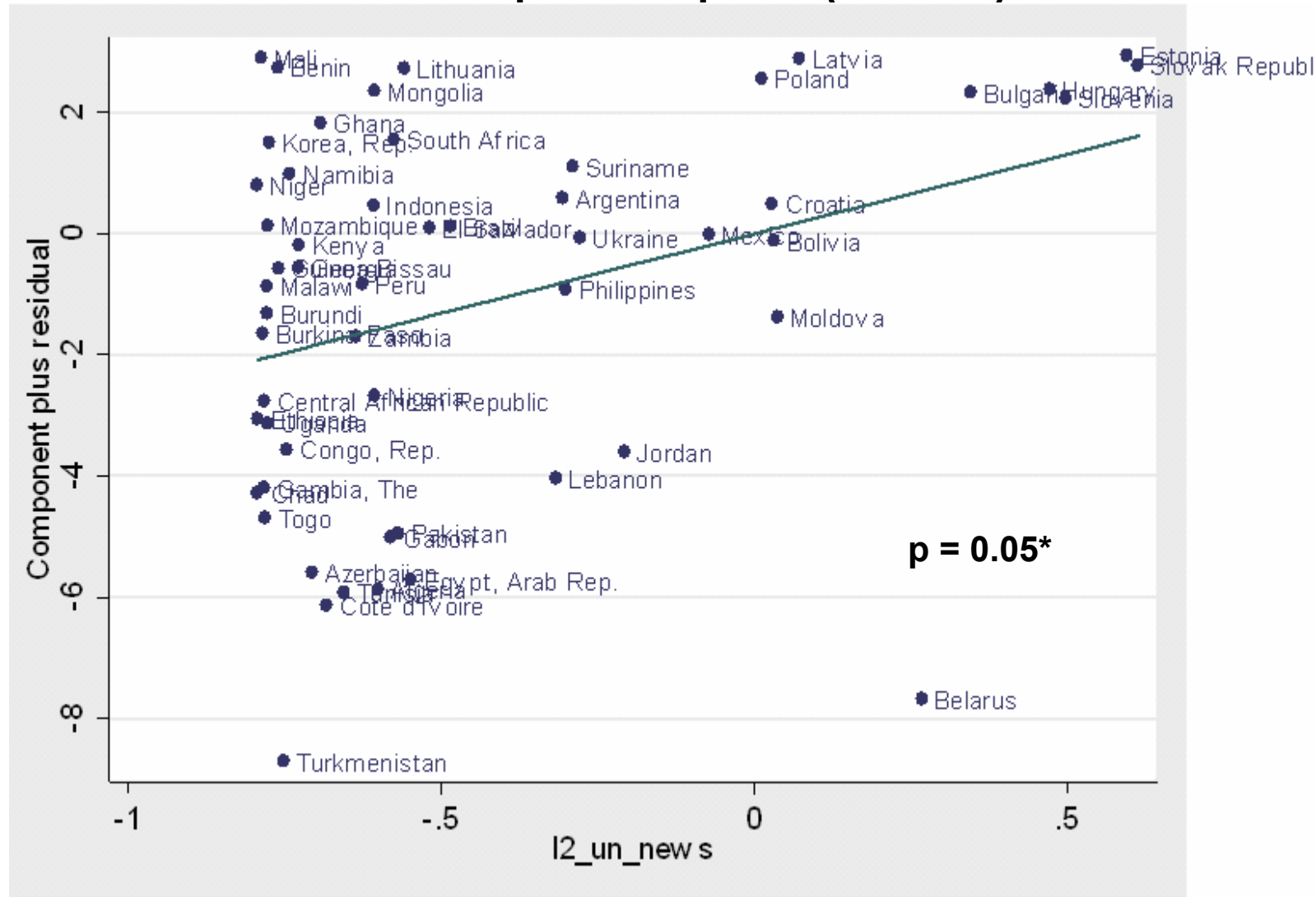


*Partial correlation* – Increase (to 2005) in  
 Combined Freedom House Scores and **Protest  
 Behavior** (1990-5), Controlling for GDP per capita  
 (1990)





# Partial correlation – Increase (to 2005) in Combined Freedom House Scores and Newspaper Circulation (1990-5), Controlling for GDP per capita (1990)



# Conclusions

- Instead of focusing on ‘social capital’ indicators (voluntary association, trust etc) we should focus on *politically relevant* civic behavior – protest, information, media – to understand pathways of democratic consolidation.
- The weakness of post-communist civil society argument is not backed by the data
- There is no single ‘post-communist’ civil society, but a sharp divide between the post-Soviet and ‘post-Habsburg’ space

END