Why are people in post-communist countries less politically active than in mature democracies? Just before and right after the collapse of Communism, the new democracies witnessed a massive political engagement of citizens. However, since its democratization in the early 1990s, the post-communist region has experienced a dramatic decline of both participation in electoral politics and social movements. These trends are worrisome, since, as Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) wrote, there is not much democracy in a country where only few citizens engage in decision-making.

This dissertation considers the relatively low levels of political participation in post-communist democracies through the lens of social trust. It explains why social trust has not only a positive direct effect on political involvement, but also leads to feelings of political efficacy, which in turn stimulates individuals to embark on political action. Thus, political efficacy is shown to be a mediating variable between social trust and political participation. These claims are empirically corroborated by data from the European Social Survey 2008 and Lithuanian National Election Study 2012.

This book enhances our understanding of the development of post-communist civil society from a historical and contemporary perspective. It reveals how the deterioration of social trust during the communist regime and after its fall undermines individuals’ willingness to participate in politics. By doing so, this book underlines that Eastern European democracies are still fragile in terms of the penetration of the political system from below. After all, it is much easier to implement political reforms than to impel a cultural shift towards more democratic values.

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Teodora Gaidytė (1983) obtained her Master’s degree in Comparative Politics at Vilnius University, Lithuania. The present study was conducted at the Institute of International Relations and Political Science at Vilnius University and the Sociology department of the VU University, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Her other academic work experience encompasses policy analysis at the Centre for Strategic Studies, research at the Competence Center of Intermodal Transport and Logistics in Lithuania, data management for a comparative study of street demonstrations, as well as editorial assistance for Sociopolis.net, the online review journal of the International Sociological Association. Her main research interests include the development of social and political attitudes in contemporary European countries and the quality of democracy in post-communist societies.