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**Bulgarian Brain Drain: The Flight of Human Capital from the
“World’s Fastest-Shrinking” Nation**

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Abstract

Bulgarian Brain Drain: The Flight of Human Capital from the “World’s Fastest-Shrinking” Nation

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Bulgaria is in the midst of a demographic crisis which is, in part, due to an annual net population loss from emigration. Many of these emigrants are highly-educated, highly-skilled, or are students that attend universities abroad and do not return after graduation. Compared to other post-communist Eastern European countries, Bulgaria has showed the slowest growth in GDP after 1989 and is the poorest country in the EU. As these educated migrants leave to become productive members of other societies, Bulgaria loses the value that they would otherwise be bringing to their home country.

This thesis explores the personal factors that influence Bulgarians in making migration decisions. With a focused-examination of a sample of alumni from a single private high school in Bulgaria, I argue that leaving Bulgaria has become a norm for young educated Bulgarians. I also find that for this sample, Bulgarians that have chosen to live outside of Bulgaria are nearly as satisfied with their lives as those who have decided to live in their home country.

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INTRODUCTION

“Raise your hand if you plan on attending a university in Bulgaria” I prompted my 8th grade students during a discussion about higher education. I looked around my classroom in Sofia, Bulgaria and my eyes fell on a lone student who began to raise his hand, but upon seeing that no one else had, put it back on his desk. “Raise your hand if you plan on going to a university in the United States” I tried. At this, about half of my students excitedly put their hands into the air. “The UK?” I asked and a few more hands were raised. “Anywhere else?” Other students explained that they had goals of living in other parts of *Western* Europe: Germany, France, or the Netherlands. I asked if they planned to return to Bulgaria after their studies and was met with many blank faces and negative responses. At just 13 and 14 years old, my entire class of students planned to leave their home country for good. I worked as a teacher for three years in Bulgaria in both public and private schools, and it was at this time that I became aware of this phenomenon. Emigration from Bulgaria is so prevalent that the dream of leaving has become a norm not only for my students, but for many other bright minds in the country.

Over the past 28 years, over 1 million Bulgarians left their home country and permanently resettled abroad.¹ A large part of this mass emigration stems from an ongoing brain drain in Bulgaria as many young, educated Bulgarians are leaving to attend universities or pursue careers in different countries around the globe; many with no intent

¹ Vaksberg, Tatiana. "Колко българи са емигрирали в чужбина?" DW.COM. Last modified October 24, 2017. <http://www.dw.com/bg/%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%BA%D0%BE-%D0%B1%D1%8A%D0%BB%D0%B3%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%B8-%D1%81%D0%B0-%D0%B5%D0%BC%D0%B8%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%B8-%D0%B2-%D1%87%D1%83%D0%B6%D0%B1%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B0/a-41083550>.

to return. Bulgaria's continually-decreasing population of a little over 7 million is shrinking even more because of this phenomenon.² Small towns and villages are gradually becoming abandoned as younger generations move to larger cities within the country or set their sights abroad. Parents and teachers encourage young educated Bulgarians to pursue educational and employment opportunities abroad and when these talented Bulgarians leave, other countries reap the benefits. But, what are the causes and consequences of this phenomenon in Bulgaria? What are the main factors that young, educated Bulgarians consider in making migration choices after completing secondary school? What motivates young Bulgarians to leave their country or to stay? How is this related to their level of satisfaction with their lives?

The UN declared that Bulgaria is currently the "world's fastest-shrinking country" and projects that its population will decrease from 7.2 million to 5.2 million people by 2050 if current trends continue.³ This demographic crisis is fueled by both loss from annual emigration and low birthrates—two phenomena not uncommon in Eastern Europe. In fact, based on UN projections, the other nine of the top ten "fastest-shrinking countries" are all in Eastern Europe. These countries are also experiencing their own brain drains at similar rates to Bulgaria; the impacts of which are further-compounded by the overall demographic crises occurring across Eastern Europe. In comparison, however, Bulgaria seems to be the hardest-hit.

² Krastev, Ivan. "Britain's Gain is Eastern Europe's Brain Drain." *The Guardian*. N.p., n.d. Web. 17 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/mar/24/britain-east-europe-brain-drain-bulgaria>>.

³ The Economist. "If Hell is Other People, Bulgaria is Paradise." *The Economist*. Last modified January 11, 2018. <https://www.economist.com/news/europe/21734391-bulgarias-population-shrinking-fast-and-its-people-are-reluctant-welcome-immigrants-if-hell>.

Albert Hirschman, a German Economist, published *Exit, Voice and Loyalty* in which he describes how people actively deal with dissatisfaction with non-functioning institutions, expounding three methods: loyalty, exit or voice.⁴ Dissatisfied Bulgarians have the choice of fighting, i.e. using their voices in order to promote reform within their country; they can choose to leave, i.e. emigrating from their homeland; or they can remain loyal, i.e. do nothing. Examining recent history and current events in Bulgaria shows us that Bulgarians have tried to use their voices, to fight. In 2013, massive protests took place in the largest cities across the country catalyzed by a rise in utility bills across the country that many could not afford. This was just the tipping point, however, as the protests were really initiated to voice discontent with “government corruption, nepotism, and oligarchy.”⁵ According to Eurostat, “43% of all Bulgarians faced ‘severe material deprivation’” in 2013 and today Bulgaria remains the poorest member state of the European Union.⁶ Yet the elites flaunt their wealth by buying new cars and taking expensive trips—making blatantly apparent the level of inequality between this group and low-to-middle income families. As things became even more heated between 2013 and 2014, seven desperate citizens set themselves on fire on separate occasions during these protests.⁷ Still, significant policy changes have not occurred. Many Bulgarians are

⁴ Hirschman, Albert O. *Exit, voice, and loyalty: Responses to decline in firms, organizations, and states*. Vol. 25. Harvard university press, 1970.

⁵ Lipkis, Sarah. "2013: *The Year of Bulgarian Protest*." *World Policy Institute*. N.p., 17 Dec. 2013. Web. 19 Nov. 2015. <http://www.worldpolicy.org/blog/2013/12/17/2013-year-bulgarian-protest>

⁶ "Return to Europe Revisited: Transition and Happiness – a Bulgarian Paradox?" *ERSTE Stiftung*. N.p., n.d. Web. 17 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.erstestiftung.org/blog/return-to-europe-revisited-transition-and-happiness-a-bulgarian-paradox/>>.

⁷ Ibid.

frustrated with their government, their economy, and the lack of social mobility that they experience. Thus, a widespread tendency of pessimism about the future of Bulgaria permeates the minds of many across the country.

According to an international poll involving over 150,000 people from 140 countries in 2009, Bulgarians were ranked lowest in their view of what their life would be like for them in five years, below citizens of countries like Iraq and Afghanistan.⁸

Another study from the Center for Liberal Strategies claims that this pessimism is not directly linked to the economic situation in Bulgaria. Instead, it is related to “transition fatigue” or disillusionment from the long period of a failed transition to a functioning and free democracy within the country since 1989.⁹ According to Dr. Andrew Barnes, political scientist, Bulgaria has been led by a system of “competitive state capture” in which groups of political actors compete for control of the country not for purposes of reform or growth, but to pursue their own interests.¹⁰ Thus, reform projects are either nonexistent or unsuccessful leaving many Bulgarians feeling as if they cannot trust the leadership or political processes within the current structure of their country. This has led many to question the ability of those elected to enact change as well as question the future of their country.

⁸ "Gallup Study: Bulgaria Citizens Most Pessimistic in World." *Novinite.com - Sofia News Agency*. N.p., n.d. Web. 17 Nov. 2015.

⁹ Krastev, Ivan. "Britain's Gain is Eastern Europe's Brain Drain." (21). *The Guardian*. N.p., n.d. Web. 17 Nov. 2015. <<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/mar/24/britain-east-europe-brain-drain-bulgaria>>.

¹⁰ Barnes, Andrew. 2007. "Extricating the State: The Move to Competitive Capture in Post-Communist Bulgaria."(4). *Europe-Asia Studies* 59, no. 1: 71-95. *American Bibliography of Slavic and East European Studies*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 4, 2015)

In this study, I seek to contribute to current research on the brain drain phenomenon that is occurring in Bulgaria. Through the use of surveys, I examine a sample of Bulgarians' personal motivations for emigrating as well as how Bulgarians feel about their futures after re-settling abroad compared with those who stayed, and those who went abroad and returned. The sample used for this survey will consist of alumni from a single private high school: the American College of Sofia (ACS) in Sofia, Bulgaria. While this sample is not representative of the population in Bulgaria, it allows for a focused-examination and comparison of perceptions of Bulgarians who came from a similar background and had a similar high school experience. I will frame this issue using Hirschman's Theory of Exit, Voice, and Loyalty, and Lee's migration theory of Push and Pull. I will contextualize the issue within the present day political situation in the country and in relation to the period of transition in Bulgaria since 1989. I argue that the main driver of the Bulgarian "Brain Drain" (of young educated Bulgarian migration abroad) is psychological. This driver is what I coin as "the culture of leaving" in order to achieve success. Young Bulgarians see leaving (for school or work) as a sort of "rite of passage." In order to feel successful for themselves and in the eyes of their family, friends, and community, they must leave their country. I do not refute that there are economic push and pull factors at play, but I think that the Bulgarian case is more complicated due to this phenomenon.

BACKGROUND

A seemingly-endless Transition: Communism to State Capture

The fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 was an exciting time. All around the world people watched as the process of German reunification occurred and revolution after revolution brought down the communist regimes throughout Eastern and Central Europe. The Iron Curtain had dissolved, and hope and optimism spread through the world. Francis Fukuyama famously declared this period of time “the end of history” as a nod to Marx’s vision of Communism being the end of history. It was, instead, Western liberal democracy and capitalism that would prevail as the preferred model for modern society.¹¹ Transitioning from decades of communist rule, however, was easier said than done. The process varied from country-to-country. Some countries, like the Czech Republic and Poland, experienced “shock therapy” in which they immediately converted to a capitalist market system. All of their citizens had to acclimate no matter how painful the results.¹² Others, like Bulgaria, had a different transition. The process was slow as people were both cautious and suspicious about the privatization process. The excitement of the change gradually dissipated among Bulgarians as time wore on and economic conditions worsened for the country. Politically, the “revolution” also did not bring about as much change as the country would have expected. Many leaders from the communist era retained power, and other opportunists took advantage of the transition, taking control of

¹¹ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

¹² Sachs, Jeffrey. *Poland's jump to the market economy*. mit Press, 1994.

money and power by nefarious means. Instead of a free democracy, Bulgaria transitioned into a captive state.

The end of the communism in Bulgaria began with the bloodless overthrow of Prime Minister, Todor Zhivkov, led by Petar Mladenov, one of Zhivkov's closest allies.¹³ This was premeditated with the blessing of Gorbachev in Moscow who supported party reforms and saw Zhivkov as a possible impediment to reform in Bulgaria. Mladenov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Communist party, wrote a letter to the Politburo and Central Committee denouncing Zhivkov's manner of rule. He claimed that Zhivkov held "a dictatorship over the country and the [Communist] party."¹⁴ After weeks of resistance and inter-party fighting, Zhivkov eventually resigned and Mladenov took over as Interim Head of State. Other political parties began to form and the "Bulgarian Communist Party" changed its name to the "Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP)."¹⁵

At first, Bulgarians joyously celebrated the overthrow of Zhivkov and they took to the streets chanting phrases like: "this is our time." However, eight days after the coup, more than 50,000 Bulgarians took to the street demanding political reform.¹⁶ It was clear that the "revolution" that was initiated internally, was not going to bring about the changes that the people of Bulgaria desperately wanted. People felt manipulated and believed the coup was staged. In countries like Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, the revolution came from the people and therefore communist leaders were ousted from their

¹³ Crampton, R. J. *Bulgaria*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. (387).

¹⁴ Ibid. (391).

¹⁵ Ibid. (391).

¹⁶ "1989: Protesters Demand Reform in Bulgaria." *BBC ON THIS DAY*. BBC News. Web. 8 Dec. 2015.

governments. This was not the case in Bulgaria.¹⁷ The Bulgarian Socialist party (BSP) which was essentially made-up of previous communist party leaders, “won” the first post-communist elections in Bulgaria in 1990.

The first seven years as a democratic nation, the government of Bulgaria could not produce a clear and effective economic policy, according to political scientist Herbert Kitschelt in *Post-Communist Party Systems*. Kitschelt described the political party system that was created as featuring as much internal-party conflict as external party conflict. These disagreements thus stymied policy development. Additionally, the lack of a clear “break” from the old system slowed the transition as old communist leaders maintained power and contributed to disagreements among political parties.¹⁸ Part of the problem stemmed from the fact that most of the educated elites and politicians in Bulgaria were associated with the Bulgarian Communist Party simply because the BCP was in power for so many years. However, the larger issue was that Bulgaria did not implement a lustration law during this period of transition. Therefore, former communist elites and former secret police took over the politics and benefited from the privatization process.¹⁹

Within the first few years under the democratic parliamentary system, often-fragile majorities existed within the Bulgarian parliament and some parties would only

¹⁷ Stoilkova, Maria Milkova. "Exiles at Home and Abroad: The Bulgarian Intelligentsia in Emigration." (93). Order No. 3121716 University of California, Berkeley, 2003. Ann Arbor: *ProQuest*. Web. 13 Dec. 2015.

¹⁸ Kitschelt, Herbert. *Post-Communist Party Systems: Competition, Representation, and Inter-Party Cooperation*. (200).Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

¹⁹ *Great Rebirth: Lessons from the Victory of Capitalism Over Communism*. Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2014. (144).

have a few more seats (i.e. votes) than the next party.²⁰ “They had to cope with deep and continuing divisions in their own ranks between Westernizing quasi-social democrats, middle of the road technocrats, and stalwarts of the old order who maintain their power, particularly in the countryside, through extensive patronage networks.”²¹ Additionally, the “Movement of Rights and Freedoms (DPC)” party, which is known as the ethnic-Turkish party, came into being and largely opposed the Bulgarian Socialist party.²² This party grew in representative size and influence, which initially created further external party conflict with the other two major parties; however, throughout the years DPC has had several parliamentary coalitions with the BSP and others.

Throughout the 1990’s and early 2000’s, disagreements among political parties and leading party turnover nearly every election contributed to not only delays and changes to many proposed reforms, but many reform reversals.²³ Simeon Djankov, Bulgarian Economist and current Deputy Prime Minister of Bulgaria, writes about the “great vacillations” during this period of time. One example of this was the passing and repealing of a tax code, allowing the Bulgarian tax administration to gather evidence on “fraudulent or illicit deals.” The code was implemented and repealed five times between 1992 and 2012, each repeal being pushed through when the BSP was in power.²⁴

²⁰ Deacon, Bob. *The New Eastern Europe: Social Policy Past, Present and Future*. (70). London: Sage Publications, 1992.

²¹ Kitschelt, Herbert. *Post-Communist Party Systems: Competition, Representation, and Inter-Party Cooperation*. (200). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

²² Deacon, Bob. *The New Eastern Europe: Social Policy Past, Present and Future*. (66). London: Sage Publications, 1992.

²³ *Great Rebirth: Lessons from the Victory of Capitalism Over Communism*. Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2014.

²⁴ Ibid.

Examples such as these illustrate the nature of Bulgaria's transition, where old elites continuously fought and manipulated the system to remain in control.

Bulgaria's new democracy, with a lack of lustration laws and growing influence from organized crime, created fertile ground for corruption to flourish. Members of the Bulgarian Socialist Party gave vouchers and concessions to old "Red" corporate groups that were affiliated with parliament members. For example, some "business groups" received lines of credit from the increasingly decentralized Bulgarian National Bank to start enterprises. One such group would buy domestic goods cheaply that were supposed to be sold for a profit on the international market and additionally increased the prices of imported foreign goods sold to struggling state-owned companies that relied on the goods for their production. These practices became more commonplace after the elections in 1995 when the Bulgarian Socialist Party had gained a true majority in the parliament.

The BSP had won in 1995 after the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) had run the Bulgarian government for four years. During this time, hopes for progress under the new democratic and capitalist Bulgaria were dashed as the country teetered on the brink of economic collapse.²⁵ The anti-communist UDF party did work towards "punishing" Zhivkov and began to hold other corrupt leaders accountable, but they lost public faith due to a lack of effective economic reforms as well as the vast material deprivation that many Bulgarians were experiencing. So, the Bulgarians looked towards the BSP for stability.

²⁵ Crampton, R. J. *Bulgaria*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. (400)

This period marked the beginning of a system of “mafia capitalism” and “competitive state capture.”²⁶ In a system of competitive capture, various actors, namely enterprises or corporations, compete for influence over the state to ensure that the rules of the government are made and carried out in such a way that benefits them. In general, elections should bring about positive change with new leaders that are not affiliated with the previous leaders’ “captors.” Yet, in this competitive state capture scheme, the new party that comes into power may not be affiliated with previous captors, but instead work another group of captors that have their own interests.²⁷ “Over time, the country experiences a parade of captors, eventually leading to a system where no single group owns the state, but where the state is still not insulated. Instead, several different groups fight with each other to raid it for their own benefits.”²⁸ Consequently, reforms to the country stagnate and appear partially, if at all.

The system of competitive state capture in Bulgaria developed for a number of different reasons. After the fall of communism and the first democratic elections in Bulgaria took place, the lack of a party majority within the parliament led to consistent fighting among politicians from different political groups. During this time, the Bulgarian

²⁶ Barnes, Andrew. 2007. "Extricating the State: The Move to Competitive Capture in Post-Communist Bulgaria." (4). *Europe-Asia Studies* 59, no. 1: 71-95. *American Bibliography of Slavic and East European Studies*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 4, 2015)
<http://ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=sbh&AN=77560&site=ehost-live>

²⁷ Ibid. (4).

²⁸ Barnes, Andrew. 2007. "Extricating the State: The Move to Competitive Capture in Post-Communist Bulgaria." (4). *Europe-Asia Studies* 59, no. 1: 71-95. *American Bibliography of Slavic and East European Studies*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 4, 2015)
<http://ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=sbh&AN=77560&site=ehost-live>. (4)

Socialist Party lobbied for privileges like 50% discounts for former Communist Party affiliates that wished to buy enterprises. Many “deals” were made, and many industries were handed over to friends of the BSP. However, not all of these measures were passed until the Bulgarian Socialist Party gained a majority in 1995.²⁹

Privatization was largely delayed by the UDF from 1991-1994, during which “massive asset stripping” had taken place behind the scenes. So, in 1996, many state assets like old government or factory buildings were no longer functional and had to be sold in “fire sales” only to be acquired by the elites, furthering corruption.³⁰ These elite relationships continued as large companies had access to political power. For example, Andrei Lukanov who served as Prime Minister after Mladenov, had ties to “Multigrup,” a conglomerate. During his time as Prime Minister, he made certain decisions that aided organizations like Multigrup. For example, he destroyed the records of the “Committee for Party and State Control” which monitored the activities of state-owned enterprises.³¹ After which, during the period of 1990-1994, the financial sector of Bulgaria, under the control of former secret police, became more and more unregulated as unmonitored banks distributed numerous loans to large firms.

²⁹ Ibid (4).

³⁰ *Great Rebirth: Lessons from the Victory of Capitalism Over Communism*. Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2014. (143).

³¹ Barnes, Andrew. 2007. "Extricating the State: The Move to Competitive Capture in Post-Communist Bulgaria." (11-14). *Europe-Asia Studies* 59, no. 1: 71-95. *American Bibliography of Slavic and East European Studies*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 4, 2015)
<http://ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=sbh&AN=77560&site=ehost-live>

Finally, in 1996, Bulgaria suffered from a huge economic collapse. In 1995, state-owned banks had granted subsidies to poor-performing private enterprises in an amount equivalent to 15 percent of Bulgaria's GDP that year.³² These enterprises had been granted loans by private banks—loans that were never paid back. Several banks went under throughout the course of just a few months, interest rates exceeded 300 percent and inflation reached 578 percent. With no money in the banks, people could not receive their salaries for months. Many Bulgarians, thus, could not access food, and in June of 1996, over 1 million people protested in the streets of Sofia.³³ In discussing the first private bank failure of that year, historian R. J. Crampton writes: “The Vitosha Bank had failed and its failure showed graphically the weakness of Bulgaria's transition from Communism. It showed too the nexus between corruption, the political system, and the economy” (404).³⁴

In 1997, after the financial collapse under the BSP, the liberal United Democratic Front (UDF) won the majority in parliament. In time, other captors, like “Orion” competed for power against captors like Multigrup for political influence. UDF, now in power, sought to weaken Multigrup and remove them from Bulgarian politics. They released a report to the public called “the list of credit millionaires” in which the amounts of money laundered and “borrowed” from the government by these companies was released to the public for the first time and shocked the country. This tactic helped take

³² Crampton, R. J. *Bulgaria*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. (404).

³³ Ibid. (400).

³⁴ Ibid. (400).

down Multigrup, but as this is a system of competitive capture, the Prime Minister was working with yet another economic group, Olimp.³⁵ Therefore the cycle of State Capture continued as the BSP and UDF parties cycled in and out of power, both of which being influenced by their own captures.

By the mid 2000's, the situation in Bulgaria wasn't improving. Over 300 known members of organized crime were assassinated in public as tensions grew between various corrupt state actors, captors, and banks.³⁶ Additionally, for the first time the enormous income gap between the millionaire mafia elite and the average citizen was also out in the open. Mafia capitalism became the new norm as most citizens struggled with an average income of about \$140 per month. Consequently, over the years, different parties were removed, elected, and re-elected, and Bulgaria reached an equilibrium of competitive capture.³⁷

Still, the prospects of EU and NATO accession did serve as an effective motivator for political and economic reform in Bulgaria. Under the government of Ivan Kostov, from 1997-2001 and of Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha from 2001-2005, many reforms were passed to prepare Bulgaria to meet the accession criteria. Trade was liberalized in 1998 as

³⁵ Barnes, Andrew. 2007. "Extricating the State: The Move to Competitive Capture in Post-Communist Bulgaria." (11-14). *Europe-Asia Studies* 59, no. 1: 71-95. *American Bibliography of Slavic and East European Studies*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 4, 2015)
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³⁶ *Great Rebirth: Lessons from the Victory of Capitalism Over Communism*. Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2014. (137).

³⁷ Barnes, Andrew. 2007. "Extricating the State: The Move to Competitive Capture in Post-Communist Bulgaria." (21). *Europe-Asia Studies* 59, no. 1: 71-95. *American Bibliography of Slavic and East European Studies*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 4, 2015)
<http://ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=sbh&AN=77560&site=ehost-live>

Bulgaria entered the European free trade zone; poor-performing enterprises were liquidated; Bulgaria entered into the Schengen area in 2001, allowing for free movement of Bulgarian citizens; a minimum wage was introduced in 2001; and even anti-discrimination laws were passed in 2003. In 2002, Bulgaria was officially invited to join NATO, and in 2007, the EU.³⁸ After years of a long and painful transition from communism, Bulgarians were hopeful. The EU seemed to be the answer to Bulgaria's problems and optimism in the country peaked in 1997 when Kostov was elected and again in 2001 as the former Tsar, Simeon took office as the Prime Minister (see **Figure 2**).³⁹

However, both Kostov and Simeon struggled to produce effective judicial and anti-corruption reforms. Therefore, when Bulgaria was granted EU membership, the EU created a new monitoring instrument, the "Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM)." This allowed the EU to leverage punitive actions such as pulling EU funding or restricting free travel in the EU if Bulgaria did not stick to the reforms it made during the pre-accession years. Sure enough, in 2008, the EU froze funds for several programming due to mismanagement.⁴⁰ Additionally that year, Transparency International declared that Bulgaria had the "highest level of corruption in the EU."⁴¹

³⁸ Crampton, R. J. *Bulgaria*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. (407-417).

³⁹ "ОБЩЕСТВЕНИ НАГЛАСИ." AlphaResearch.bg / Алфа Рисърч ООД - агенция за маркетингови и социални проучвания. Last modified December 2017. [http://alpharesearch.bg/userfiles/1217-Alpha_Research_Public_Opinion\(3\).pdf](http://alpharesearch.bg/userfiles/1217-Alpha_Research_Public_Opinion(3).pdf).

⁴⁰ Aneta B. Spendzharova & Milada Anna Vachudova (2012) Catching Up? Consolidating Liberal Democracy in Bulgaria and Romania after EU Accession, *West European Politics*, 35:1, 39-58, DOI: 10.1080/01402382.2012.631312

⁴¹ Ibid.

Today, the country still does not have a prosperous, regulated market economy, and each election may “offer[s] at least the possibility of change”; but at this point, most major economic actors have relationships with each of the 22 parties in the system.⁴²

Optimism in Bulgaria began to sink after the hopes of positive change from EU accession dissipated. This situation has hit many Bulgarians hard, including both the lower and middle classes, and has left many frustrated and dissatisfied with their country.⁴³

⁴² Barnes, Andrew. 2007. "Extricating the State: The Move to Competitive Capture in Post-Communist Bulgaria."(21). *Europe-Asia Studies* 59, no. 1: 71-95. *American Bibliography of Slavic and East European Studies*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 4, 2015)
<http://ezproxy.lib.utexas.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=sbh&AN=77560&site=ehost-live> (23).

⁴³ Brunwasser, Matthew. "With Many Despairing, Bulgaria Heads to Polls." *The New York Times*. 10 May 2013. Web. 19 Nov. 2015.

Norms: Defeatism and Dissatisfaction

“Every country has national myths. Whereas some countries have people who they feel are the greatest lovers, the best artists, and the smartest people... in Bulgaria, the national myth is: ‘nothing is possible, so don’t try.’”

- Matthew Brunwasser⁴⁴

In 2010, the *Economist* released an article claiming that Bulgaria was “the saddest place in the world.”⁴⁵ Many other countries were in far-worse economic conditions, yet Bulgarians reported being the least satisfied with their lives. The study within the article compared happiness in relation to the average income per-person and found that the two are not always correlated; in fact, sometimes cultural factors beyond wealth influence the perception of a people.⁴⁶ For the outliers like Bulgaria, an explanation to this phenomenon was not provided. The extent or type of sadness or dissatisfaction that was found within Bulgaria is also not explained. Nevertheless, throughout the years, various research has been done to examine the nature of this phenomenon.

In an extensive study by a team at the Center for Liberal Strategies think tank, this pessimism was found to be related to “transition fatigue” since 1989.⁴⁷ Even during periods of economic growth, Bulgarians still view themselves as “systematic losers”⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Brunwasser, Matthew. "With Many Despairing, Bulgaria Heads to Polls." *The New York Times*. 10 May 2013. Web. 19 Nov. 2015.

⁴⁵ "The Rich, the Poor and Bulgaria." *The Economist*. 16 Dec. 2010. Web. 9 Dec. 2015.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Krastev, Ivan. "Optimistic Theory about the Pessimism of the Transition." (21). (2004): Web

⁴⁸ Krastev, Ivan. "Optimistic Theory about the Pessimism of the Transition." (21). (2004): Web

because compared to other developed countries, a large gap exists between them and the rest. Bulgarians also tend to compare their lives to the way things were pre-1989 and the present, instead of comparing their lives after the 1997 financial crisis. This nostalgia for the past also contributes to the pessimism of the present; in fact, only 22% of Bulgarians were found to be satisfied with democracy in 2004, the time of the study. Krastev remarks: "It should be noted that we live in a society in which the vast majority of people do not know what is good about democracy and have forgotten what is bad about socialism".⁴⁹ These Bulgarians focus on the positives that they felt during the communist era including feeling secure and stable, yet somehow forget their lack of political and economic freedom at that time.⁵⁰ In turn, Bulgarians looked-toward the BSP and supported the BSP-run governments several times during the period of transition. Compared to other Eastern European countries, Bulgarian approval of the transition to Democracy has dropped significantly over the years. **Table I** below shows results from PEW on changes in approval ratings among a sample of Eastern European countries. Out of this sample, approval of democracy in Bulgaria has dropped from 76% in 1991 to 52% in 2009. This is the second largest drop among countries sampled and in 2009, Lithuania, Russia, and Hungary all had similar approval ratings.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ibid.(17).

⁵⁰ Todorova, Maria. "Daring to Remember Bulgaria, Pre-1989." *The Guardian*. N.p., 9 Nov. 2009. Web. 8 Dec. 2015.

⁵¹ PEW Research Center. "End of Communism Cheered but Now with More Reservations." Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project. Last modified November 2, 2009. <http://www.pewglobal.org/2009/11/02/end-of-communism-cheered-but-now-with-more-reservations/>.

Approval of Change to Democracy			
% Approve of change to...	1991	2009	Change
Multiparty system	%	%	
East Germany	91	85	-6
Czech Rep.	80	80	0
Slovakia	70	71	+1
Poland	66	70	+4
Hungary	74	56	-18
Lithuania	75	55	-20
Russia	61	53	-8
Bulgaria	76	52	-24
Ukraine	72	30	-42

Table 1: Approval of the change to a democratic system between 1991 and 2009⁵²

Furthermore, 80% of Krastev's respondents reported that they could not prosper in the country without connections. "This [...] strongly erodes the meaning of all personal effort, economic activity, professionalism and personal decency. The lower an individual's confidence in his ability to direct and control his own life through personal efforts, the stronger his pessimism. This is one of the most powerful correlations observed in the survey."⁵³ If people truly feel as if they have a lack of agency or power to change their lives for the better, they lose hope. Bulgarians did lose hope, but looked to

⁵² PEW Research Center. "End of Communism Cheered but Now with More Reservations." Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project. Last modified November 2, 2009.

<http://www.pewglobal.org/2009/11/02/end-of-communism-cheered-but-now-with-more-reservations/>.

⁵³ Todorova, Maria. "Daring to Remember Bulgaria, Pre-1989." *The Guardian*. N.p., 9 Nov. 2009. Web. 8 Dec. 2015.

other avenues of change, only to be disappointed later, much like perceptions towards the EU around 2007.

Corruption is a common issue in Eastern Europe and many Eastern Europeans have indicated corruption to be among the top problems facing their societies. In a study from PEW Research Center, it was found that 76% of Bulgarians believe that corruption is the top problem facing the country. Only Lithuania surpassed this percentage out of the countries included in the study. **Table II** below portrays the landscape of perceptions in several Eastern European Countries. It can be seen that Eastern Europeans indicate that corruption, crime, illegal drugs, pollution and emigration to be among the top problems in their societies. Bulgarians cited corruption, crime, and illegal drugs as its biggest problems.⁵⁴

Top National Problems Beyond the Economy					
Bulgaria	%	Czech Rep.	%	East Germany	%
Corruption	76	Corruption	71	Illegal drugs	50
Crime	76	Crime	55	Emigration	49
Illegal drugs	74	Illegal drugs	51	Crime	47
Hungary	%	Lithuania	%	Poland	%
Corruption	76	Corruption	78	Corruption	58
Crime	69	Crime	76	Crime	49
Pollution	58	Illegal drugs	66	Illegal drugs	49
Russia	%	Slovakia	%	Ukraine	%
Illegal drugs	54	Crime	55	Corruption	70
Corruption	52	Corruption	52	Pollution	64
Pollution	52	Illegal drugs	46	Crime	56

Questions 9a through 9j.
Percent citing each as a "very big problem" in their country; top three problems shown.

Table 2: Top problems facing Eastern European countries in 2009⁵⁵

⁵⁴ PEW Research Center. "End of Communism Cheered but Now with More Reservations." Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project. Last modified November 2, 2009.

<http://www.pewglobal.org/2009/11/02/end-of-communism-cheered-but-now-with-more-reservations/>.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Even examining recent research, we can see that Krastev's findings from 2004 still hold true today. A Eurostat survey from 2015 reported 80% of Bulgarians think that corruption is widespread throughout the country.⁵⁶ In 2009, the European Union suspended about \$600 million dollars in aid from Bulgaria because the money from previous aid projects was not being accounted for.⁵⁷ In terms of public trust in institutions, Alpha Research, a Bulgarian think tank that specializes in social research, publishes annual reports of public perceptions. **Figure 1** displays the trend in approval ratings between 2009 and this year. Currently, the Bulgarian government has an approval rating of just 22%. While this is an improvement over recent years, it is still quite low. When specifically looking at perceptions of the Bulgarian Parliament, this approval rating drops to 9%. As for the court system, only 10% of Bulgarians trust their judicial system.⁵⁸ Thus, even today, Bulgarians are still largely dissatisfied with their government. Acknowledging this dissatisfaction, we can look to Albert Hirschman's theory of "exit, loyalty and voice" to better understand how Bulgarian citizens are reacting to their predicament.

⁵⁶ "Return to Europe Revisited: Transition and Happiness – a Bulgarian Paradox?" *ERSTE Stiftung*. Web. 17 Nov. 2015.

⁵⁷ Dyer, John. "Bulgaria Won't Be Celebrating 1989." *GlobalPost*. N.p., 30 May 2010. Web. 12 Dec. 2015.

⁵⁸ "ОБЩЕСТВЕНИ НАГЛАСИ." AlphaResearch.bg / Алфа Рисърч ООД - агенция за маркетингови и социални проучвания. Last modified December 2017. [http://alpharesearch.bg/userfiles/1217-Alpha_Research_Public_Opinion\(3\).pdf](http://alpharesearch.bg/userfiles/1217-Alpha_Research_Public_Opinion(3).pdf).

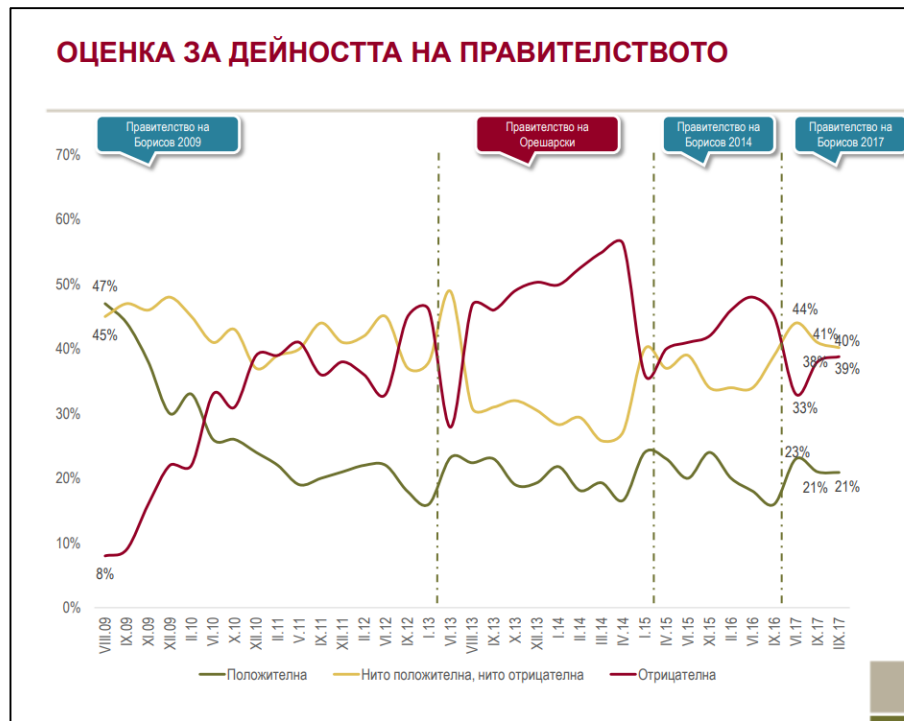


Figure 1: “Evaluation of the activity of the government”⁵⁹

Legend: Green=Positive, Yellow=Neither positive or negative, Red=Negative

VOICE

In 2013, hundreds of thousands of Bulgarians took to the streets to voice their dissatisfaction with the corrupt governing practices that they had been enduring for so long. The protesters did not just consist of those from the lowest socioeconomic-levels of society, but many middle-class Bulgarians came out as they too were being hit hard by the rising energy costs. The protests were the biggest that Bulgaria had seen for over 15

⁵⁹ "ОБЩЕСТВЕНИ НАГЛАСИ." AlphaResearch.bg / Алфа Рисърч ООД - агенция за маркетингови и социални проучвания. Last modified December 2017. [http://alpharesearch.bg/userfiles/1217-Alpha_Research_Public_Opinion\(3\).pdf](http://alpharesearch.bg/userfiles/1217-Alpha_Research_Public_Opinion(3).pdf).

years and as a result of the protests, the Prime Minister, Boiko Borisov, resigned.⁶⁰ Soon after Borisov's resignation, however, his party took the lead in the reelections and many Bulgarians further felt helpless and disillusioned. Today, Borisov is still acting as Prime Minister.

Throughout this time, seven Bulgarians self-immolated in protest, leaving strong sentiments felt throughout the country. Nadege Ragaru, a political scientist at the Center for International Studies and Research at Sciences Po in Paris is quoted as saying that "Bulgaria is perceived as lost, desperate, unhappy and having no future. Before, people said, 'Look, there is no future, everyone is emigrating.' Now they say, 'Look, they are so desperate, they self-immolate.'"⁶¹ Ragaru's statement, pokes fun at the desperation felt by so many Bulgarians during that period; however, in addition to using their voices and other acts of protest, Bulgarians have continued to leave their country.

EXIT

The group within Krastev's study who were identified as being "Optimistic about themselves and pessimistic about the country" is likely the most important group to consider in an examination of Bulgaria's brain drain. Simply put, these people believed that they could have better futures, but they did not believe that Bulgaria would help them achieve these goals. The prospects of leaving Bulgaria, specifically for Bulgarians under

⁶⁰ Brunwasser, Matthew, and Dan Bilefsky. "Boiko Borisov, Prime Minister of Bulgaria, Submits Resignation." *The New York Times*. N.p., 20 Feb. 2013. Web. 20 Nov. 2015.

⁶¹ Brunwasser, Matthew. "With Many Despairing, Bulgaria Heads to Polls." *The New York Times*. N.p., 10 May 2013. Web. 19 Nov. 2015

the age of 45 was a major source of their optimism.⁶² Already, more than 1 million Bulgarians have permanently resettled abroad, a number that continues to grow each year. It is difficult to determine, however, how many of these “exits” are those of highly-skilled Bulgarians, because the Bulgarian National Statistics Institute (NSI) does not report the distinction between the types of emigrants that leave Bulgaria, only the total number.⁶³ However, some speculate that over 800 thousand of those that emigrated could be considered highly-skilled or educated Bulgarians.⁶⁴ In 2016 alone, there were roughly 30 thousand Bulgarian students studying outside of the country. The number of students that return is not tracked or reported by the NSI.⁶⁵

These Bulgarians are choosing to separate themselves from their country, believing that the opportunities abroad will bring them more satisfaction than returning home. This mass exit is harming the political and economic system of Bulgaria as qualified professionals in areas such as businesses or health are hard to find.⁶⁶ Thus by choosing to exit in order to deal with their dissatisfaction, many educated Bulgarians are contributing to the brain drain, and leaving their home country for good.

⁶² Krastev, Ivan. "Optimistic Theory about the Pessimism of the Transition." (21). (2004): Web

⁶³ Бочева, Надежда. "Мониторингът на завършилите висше образование не е ефективен." Investor.bg. Last modified May 19, 2017. <https://www.investor.bg/drugi/128/a/monitoringyt-na-zavyrshilite-visshe-obrazovanie-ne-e-efektiven-239705/>.

⁶⁴ Stoilkova, Maria Milkova. "Exiles at Home and Abroad: The Bulgarian Intelligentsia in Emigration." (1). Order No. 3121716 University of California, Berkeley, 2003. Ann Arbor: *ProQuest*. Web. 13 Dec. 2015.

⁶⁵ Бочева, Надежда. "Мониторингът на завършилите висше образование не е ефективен." Investor.bg. Last modified May 19, 2017.

⁶⁶ Krastev, Ivan. "Optimistic Theory about the Pessimism of the Transition." (21). (2004): Web

LOYALTY

Hirschman's final group comprises those that neither use voice nor exit to attempt to change their wellbeing, but rather accept their lives as they are. This group likely includes both those who approve of their government and trust their judicial system. Also, members of this camp, may in fact be living good lives, either separate from the pressures of urban life, or as a part of the elite groups that manipulate the government to meet their desires. Either way, although beyond the scope of this project, understanding this group and how they think could bring a better understanding of the whole situation, especially as to the reasons why some choose to stay when they had the opportunity to leave.

Optimistic Trends

Since the 2010 Economist article declaring Bulgaria the saddest country in the world was published, recent data trends have been showing changes in these numbers and public sentiments. Alpha Research also produces a metric on Bulgarians' average level of optimism. **Figure 2** shows the trend in optimism between 1998 and 2017. 55% of respondents "expect 2018 to be better than last year," and this is the highest that this percentage has been in response to this question since 1998.⁶⁷ This trend seems to coincide with a decrease in unemployment rates, and an increase in GDP. The current

⁶⁷ "ОБЩЕСТВЕНИ НАГЛАСИ." AlphaResearch.bg / Алфа Рисърч ООД - агенция за маркетингови и социални проучвания. Last modified December 2017. [http://alpharesearch.bg/userfiles/1217-Alpha_Research_Public_Opinion\(3\).pdf](http://alpharesearch.bg/userfiles/1217-Alpha_Research_Public_Opinion(3).pdf).

unemployment rate for Bulgaria is about 6.6%, nearly half of what it was in 2011.⁶⁸

However, it is important to consider the difference between optimism about one's self and that of one's country. Within the same publication, people generally expressed mistrust and dissatisfaction with their government. Therefore, perhaps it is this dissonance that drives some people away or keeps others from returning. Additionally, the population in Bulgaria has changed from year to year, that the populations being sampled in one year to another are made up of different and increasingly-less people. If many of those who leave are dissatisfied with Bulgaria and this group of people is no longer present in succeeding sample years, perhaps this too contributes to the results reported below.

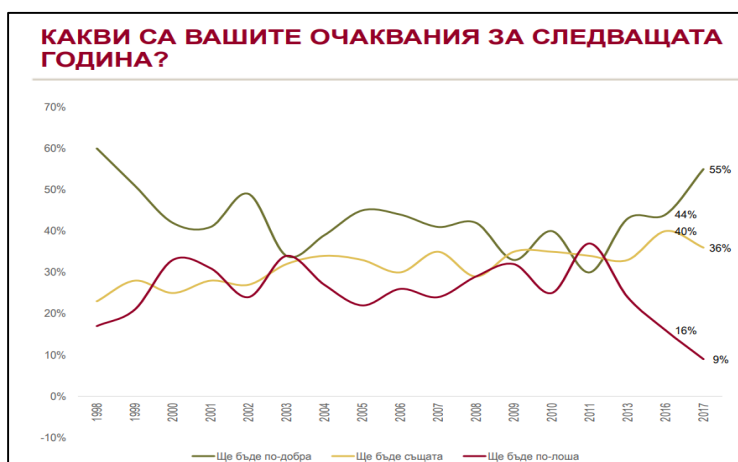


Figure 2: “What are your expectations for the next year”

Legend: Green=It will be better, Yellow=It will be the same, Red=It will be worse⁶⁹

⁶⁸ "Bulgaria" *The World Factbook*. Central Intelligence Agency. Last modified March 8, 2018. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bu.html>.

⁶⁹ "ОБЩЕСТВЕНИ НАГЛАСИ." AlphaResearch.bg / Алфа Рисърч ООД - агенция за маркетингови и социални проучвания. Last modified December 2017. [http://alpharesearch.bg/userfiles/1217-Alpha_Research_Public_Opinion\(3\).pdf](http://alpharesearch.bg/userfiles/1217-Alpha_Research_Public_Opinion(3).pdf).

But how do Bulgarians rank on a global scale? Taking a look at the annual “World Happiness Report,” Bulgaria is ranked 105 out of 155 countries in terms of happiness for 2017.⁷⁰ This report is annually-supported by the UN and compares self-reported happiness among several potential determining variables. These variables include GDP per capita, social support, healthy life expectancy, social freedom, generosity, and absence of corruption. What makes this study unique is the treatment of happiness as a subjective measure according to the perspective of whoever is being asked. So, the report surveys samples from every participant country and asks participants to self-rate their level of happiness on a scale of 0-10, with 10 being the highest (a more detailed description of this can be found in the *Methods* section). Traditional thinking associates a country’s GDP with a country’s happiness: the thought being that if a country were to increase its GDP, then the country would be happier. This mode of thinking, while partially true, fails to explain the cases in which countries that have lower GDPs are overall “happier” than those with higher GDPs. Or, as in Bulgaria's case, the opposite: the country’s reported happiness levels are lower than those of poorer countries.

While still in the lowest third of all of the participant countries, Bulgaria’s happiness score actually increased by 0.0870, almost a full point, between the years 2005-2007 and 2014-2016. This increase was the 6th largest positive change seen in the

⁷⁰ Helliwell, John, Richard Layard, and Jeffery Sachs. "World Happiness Report 2017." World Happiness Report. Last modified March 20, 2017. <http://worldhappiness.report/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2017/03/HR17.pdf>.

World Happiness Report (see **Figure 3**).⁷¹ To put that into context, the report explains that: “These gains and losses are very large [...] For each of the 10 top gainers, the average life evaluation gains exceeded those that would be expected from a doubling of per capita incomes.”⁷² Bulgaria's GDP per capita did increase from 3,881.6 USD in 2005 to 6,846.8 USD in 2017, which is just shy of double.⁷³ Either way, the increase in happiness levels do point to an unexpected shift for Bulgaria. Again, as people continue to Emigrate each year, the change in population could contribute to the trend seen below.

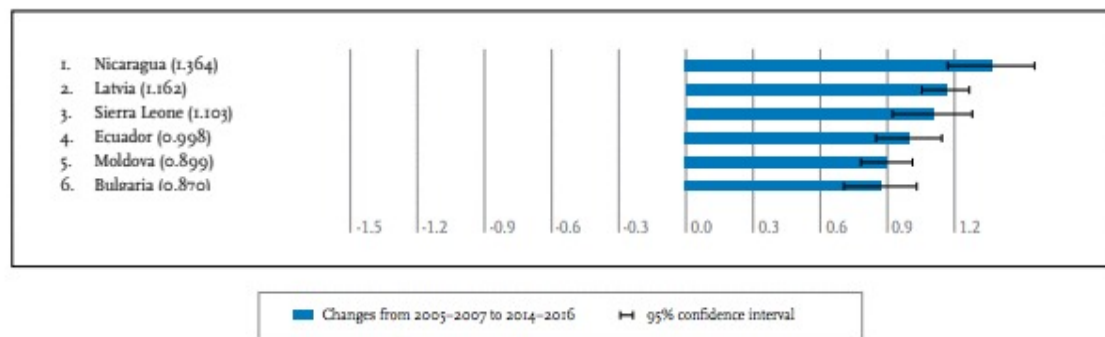


Figure 3: Changes in Happiness from 2005-2007 to 2014-2016⁷⁴

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Helliwell, John, Richard Layard, and Jeffery Sachs. "World Happiness Report 2017." World Happiness Report. Last modified March 20, 2017. <http://worldhappiness.report/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2017/03/HR17.pdf>.

⁷³ United Nations. "Bulgaria Economic Indicators." UNdata. Accessed March 13, 2018. <http://data.un.org/en/iso/bg.html>.

⁷⁴ Image cropped from original. Helliwell, John, Richard Layard, and Jeffery Sachs. "World Happiness Report 2017." World Happiness Report. Last modified March 20, 2017. <http://worldhappiness.report/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2017/03/HR17.pdf>.

When comparing happiness levels among other Eastern European countries, it is clear that Bulgaria's average happiness rank (4.714) falls below the average reported score (see **Figure 4**). Additionally, the Happiness Research Institute, a Danish think tank, produced a study in 2015 that ranked all of the European countries based on their self-reported happiness scores from the latest round of the "European Social Survey" (ESS). The ESS also has respondents self-assess their happiness levels on a scale of 0-10, just like the World Happiness Report. The study took their work a step further and plotted the average scores by their standard deviations. This created a "Happiness Equality Index" that ranked countries by how "equal" their scores were to see if there was a correlation. They found that lower average happiness scores correlated strongly with inequality or larger standard deviations. Bulgaria was ranked 28 out of 29 European countries on its "Happiness Equality Index" and had the lowest reported happiness score from the ESS (see **Figure 5**).⁷⁵

⁷⁵ The Happiness Research Institute. "Happiness Equality Index Europe 2015." The Happiness Research Institute. Last modified July 27, 2015.
https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/928487_1f4d07b8ffb040cb8f0944e61a32c017.pdf.

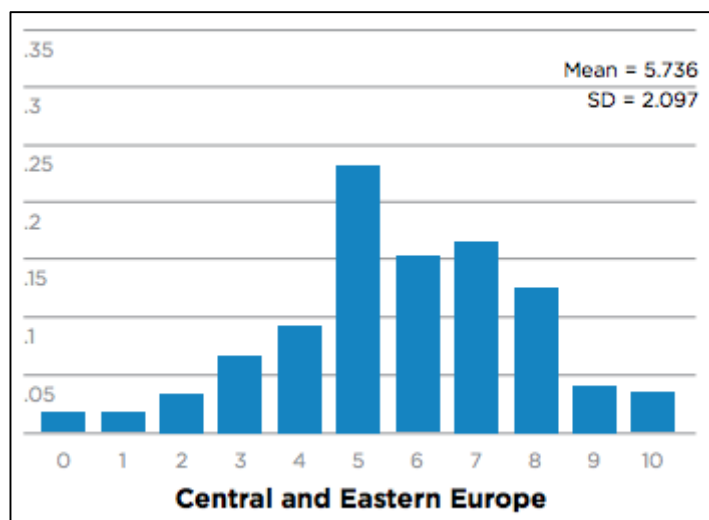


Figure 4: Average happiness scores for Central and Eastern Europe⁷⁶

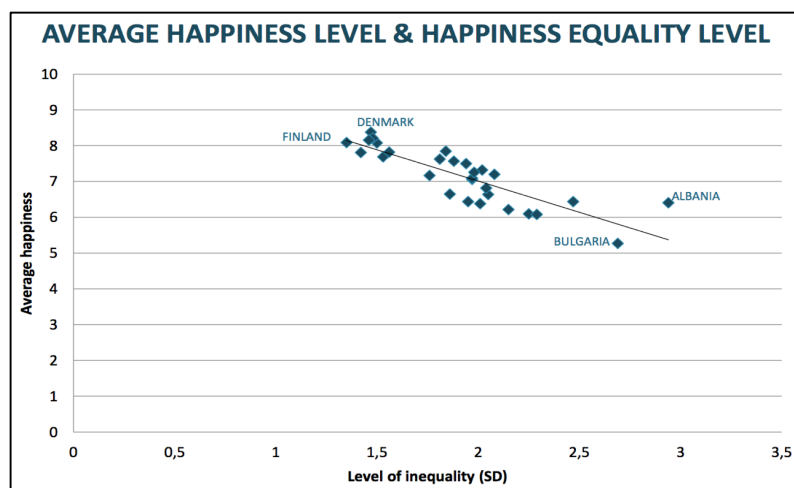


Figure 5: Average happiness scores in Europe by level of inequality within each country.

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⁷⁶ Helliwell, John, Richard Layard, and Jeffery Sachs. "World Happiness Report 2017." World Happiness Report. Last modified March 20, 2017. <http://worldhappiness.report/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2017/03/HR17.pdf>.

⁷⁷ The Happiness Research Institute. "Happiness Equality Index Europe 2015." The Happiness Research Institute. Last modified July 27, 2015. https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/928487_1f4d07b8ffb040cb8f0944e61a32c017.pdf.

Comparing the results reported by the World Happiness Report and Alpha Research, we can see that perceptions in Bulgaria are slowly changing. The Bulgaria from the 2010 Economist article is doing better eight years later, but when compared to other European countries, it is still lagging. Corruption is still rampant throughout the Bulgarian government and citizens largely do not trust their public institutions. More Bulgarians are still leaving each year than those returning, and the population is shrinking rapidly. In spite of all that, Bulgarians, on average, are reporting to be happier than years past: why?

Education in Bulgaria

Out of those that leave Bulgaria to seek higher education outside of the country, many cite the education system in Bulgaria as the reason for this decision. While there are few reports produced in Bulgaria regarding the state of its education system, some European initiatives shed light on how Bulgaria's education system compares. A study by Eurostat, shows us that Bulgaria falls among the European countries that invest the least in their students among other European countries. **Figure 6** below shows the amount of money that each European country invests per student per sector. It is clear that in 2014 Bulgaria falls far below the rest, but since Bulgaria is the poorest country in the EU, this is not surprising. When looking at the amount European countries invest in education as percentages of GDP, however, we can see that Bulgaria's expenditures are near the bottom, but are not the lowest. In 2014, Bulgaria spent 4.2% of its GDP on education. European countries which spent below this include: The Czech Republic, Italy,

Luxembourg, Hungary, Slovakia, and Romania. The average education expenditure in the EU is 5.1% and the countries that are often touted as having the best education systems like Finland, Sweden and Norway spend around 7% of their GDP.⁷⁸

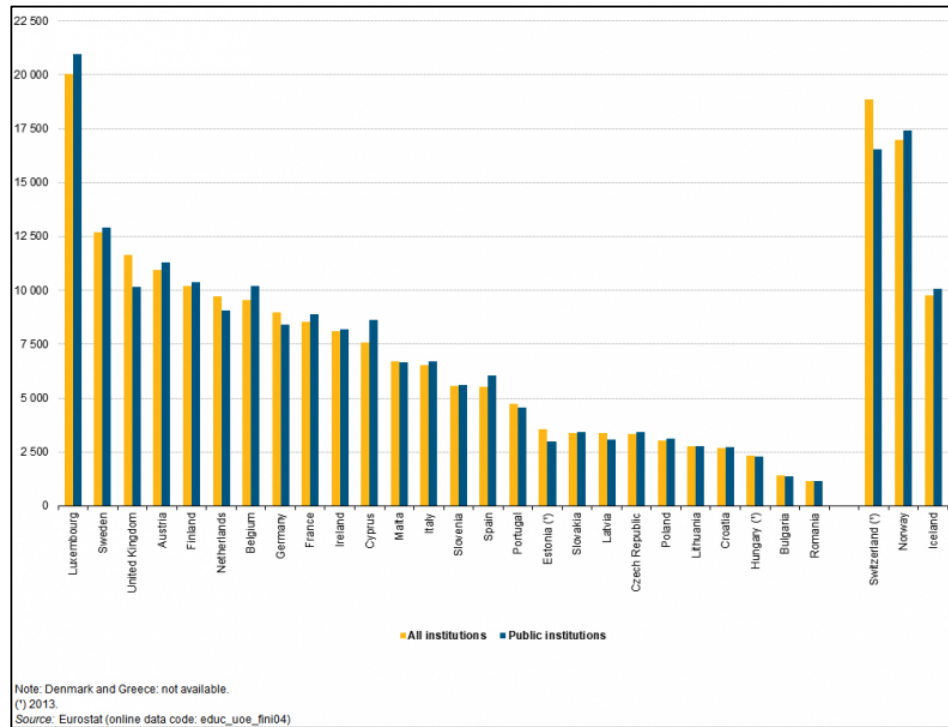


Figure 6: Education expenditures, per country, per student.

In terms of quality of education in the country, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)'s report from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) provides some metrics, comparing the levels of student

⁷⁸ Eurostat. "Educational Expenditure Statistics." European Commission. Last modified July 2017. http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Educational_expenditure_statistics#Public_expenditure.

performance from 72 participant countries. The test measures the abilities of 15-year-old students in science, math, and reading. Bulgaria overall, ranked 45th out of the 72 participant countries and on each section of the test, Bulgaria ranked below the OECD average.⁷⁹ Bulgaria's average scores were 446 in science, 441 in math, and 431 in reading. The OECD averages in those categories were 493, 490, and 493 respectively.⁸⁰ Top performers scored above 500 in all categories and included countries like Singapore (the top performer in each category), Canada, and Estonia (the EU's top performer).⁸¹ Examining the above numbers does make a case for Bulgarians who believe that there are other, better educational opportunities outside of Bulgaria; however, changes to the education system in Bulgaria have produced some positive measurable results in recent years.

A report released by the World Bank in 2010, compared Bulgaria's 2006 and 2009 OECD PISA scores and noted improvements in both math and reading by 14 and 27 points respectively. This report highlights these improvements and attributes them to Bulgarian education system reforms in 2007. The report finds statistically-significant evidence of systematic improvement in Bulgaria instead of attributing the difference in scores due to the difference between the cohorts of students taking the test. The report

⁷⁹ Novinite. "Bulgarian Students' Disturbing PISA Results Show Need for New Teaching Methods." Novinite. Last modified December 7, 2017. <http://www.novinite.com/articles/177829/Bulgarian+Students%27+Disturbing+PISA+Results+Show+Need+for+New+Teaching+Methods>.

⁸⁰ OECD. "Education GPS - Bulgaria - Student Performance (PISA 2015)." OECD. Accessed March 14, 2018. <http://gpseducation.oecd.org/CountryProfile?primaryCountry=BGR&treshold=10&topic=PI>.

⁸¹ Jackson, Abby, Kiersz, Andy. "The Latest Ranking of Top Countries in Math, Reading, and Science is out ? and the US Didn't Crack the Top 10." Business Insider. Last modified December 6, 2016. <http://www.businessinsider.com/pisa-worldwide-ranking-of-math-science-reading-skills-2016-12>

also found that the poorest 20% of students who took the test showed improvements consistent with the rest of the population.⁸² These findings are encouraging for the educational trajectory of Bulgaria even though more work still needs to be done. Svetla Petrova, Bulgaria's national PISA coordinator remarks: "We should focus on what changes our colleagues in Estonia did to achieve this success" when considering changes in policy.⁸³

Even if there is not much official talk among state institutions in Bulgaria regarding Bulgaria's educational standing in comparison to other countries, the National Statistics Institute in Bulgaria does produce numbers regarding the educational makeup of students that are enrolled in all levels of education. In their latest report from the 2015-2016 academic year, they reported that 232 thousand children were enrolled in pre-school, 602.2 thousand students were enrolled in public primary or secondary schools and 266,707 students were enrolled in higher education. Both the total number of institutions open in Bulgaria as well as the total number of overall students in the country has decreased over the last five years. Preschool and higher education enrollment saw the steepest drops of 3.8% and 4.4%, respectively, from the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 academic years. Changes in enrollment for students in primary through secondary school can be seen in **Figure 7** below. During the 2014-2015 academic year, 16 thousand students left Bulgarian high schools, 7.2 thousand of which left to study abroad, the rest

⁸² World Bank. 2010. Assessing the Quality of Education in Bulgaria using PISA 2009. Washington, DC. World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/12767> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO."

⁸³ Novinite. "Bulgarian Students' Disturbing PISA Results Show Need for New Teaching Methods." Novinite. Last modified December 7, 2017.

of which dropped out. It is interesting to note that even high school students are leaving to attend schools abroad instead of finishing their studies in Bulgaria. Another interesting and related trend is that primary school students (grades 1-4) are being taught foreign languages more than ever before. 83.1% of primary school students study a second language and 90.4% of these students are learning English. It appears that even from a young age, Bulgarian children are gaining the skills they need to leave their country, some doing so while in secondary school. Finally, **Table III** below shows that the number of schools from year to year has decreased over the last five years as student numbers drop.⁸⁴

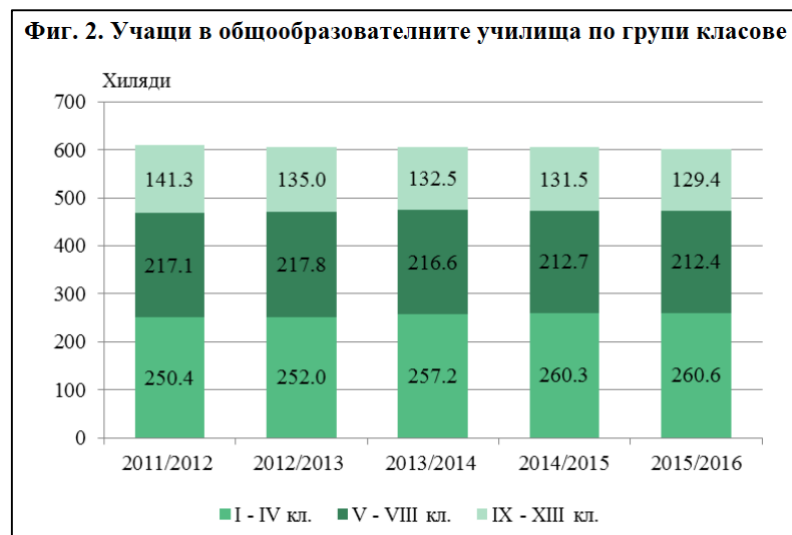


Figure 7: Changes in student totals by Primary, Middle and Secondary levels of education in Bulgaria⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Национален статистически институт. "ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ В РЕПУБЛИКА БЪЛГАРИЯ 2016." Национален статистически институт. Accessed March 15, 2018. <http://www.nsi.bg/sites/default/files/publications/education2016.pdf>.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

Learning institutions by type					
	(Number)				
	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Total	5164	5067	5060	4975	4964
Kindergartens	2112	2070	2051	1991	2002
General and special schools	2144	2112	2097	2087	2078
Primary (I - IV grade)	156	153	150	150	152
Basic (I - VIII grade)	1431	1402	1393	1386	1381
Junior High Schools (V - VIII grade)	12	11	8	7	7
High Schools (IX - XIII grade)	139	140	140	137	133
Secondary General Education (I - XIII grade)	406	406	406	407	405
Professional schools	499	494	488	481	469
Arts Schools	22	22	23	23	22
Sports schools	22	19	24	24	24
Vocational high schools	414	416	402	394	387
Professional colleges after secondary education	36	37	39	40	36
Professional schools	5	-	-	-	-
Vocational training centers ¹	356	338	371	362	361
Higher Schools ²	53	53	53	54	54
Independent colleges	8	8	8	8	4
Universities and specialized higher education institutions	45	45	45	46	50
Colleges in the structure of universities and universities specialized higher education institutions	21	20	19	19	18
1 Centers carrying out programs for acquiring a degree of professional qualification.					
2 Includes universities and specialized higher education institutions and independent colleges.					

Table 3: Number of institutions in Bulgaria from the last five academic years.⁸⁶

The NSI report also provides some data from Bulgarian students in Universities and Colleges in the country. For example, out of the 166,700 students working towards bachelor degrees, 0.7% were studying Natural Sciences and 0.3% were studying Math and Statistics compared to the largest groups of “Economic and Administrative Affairs, 22.4% and Technical Sciences and Engineering, 15.1%. Out of the 81.6 thousand students pursuing Master’s degrees, the three smallest disciplines were Mass

⁸⁶ Национален статистически институт. "ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ В РЕПУБЛИКА БЪЛГАРИЯ 2016." Национален статистически институт. Accessed March 15, 2018. <http://www.nsi.bg/sites/default/files/publications/education2016.pdf>.

Communications and Journalism, 0.4%, and Natural Sciences, 0.3% and Math and Statistics, 0.1%. These numbers seem consistent with the argument that Bulgarian high school graduates that want to pursue highly-technical degrees such as those of Natural Sciences or Statistics, may be pursuing those outside of Bulgaria. Unfortunately, the NSI does not report on how many college students leave to study abroad each year, nor do they track the students that return after completing their degrees abroad.

Some estimates of the number of Bulgarian students that leave to study abroad each year range between thirty thousand and ten thousand,⁸⁷ however, between 2013 and 2015 alone, 60,585 foreign “Apostille” certificates were processed for Bulgarian students.⁸⁸ This number, however, does not capture the total number of students in this range, nor does it account for the number of Bulgarian students already enrolled in their programs. Last year, the Bulgarian National Audit Office audited the work of the migration monitoring systems and declared that improvements must be made to the system as well as a clear “Migration Monitoring Policy” developed since one does not currently exist.⁸⁹ If we had access to more data regarding how many students leave each year as well as how many eventually return, policy makers could better understand the real magnitude of the brain drain and work to address gaps in their education system.

⁸⁷ Захариев, Боян. "Какви и колко българи "изтичат"." 24chasa.bg. Last modified January 5, 2016. <https://www.24chasa.bg/mnenia/article/5211729>.

⁸⁸ Бочева, Надежда. "Мониторингът на завършилите висше образование не е ефективен." Investor.bg. Last modified May 19, 2017. <https://www.investor.bg/drugi/128/a/monitoringyt-na-zavyrshilite-visshe-obrazovanie-ne-e-efektiven-239705/>.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Brain Drain

EASTERN AND CENTRAL EUROPE

Bulgarians may choose to emigrate because of the quality of their education system, the poor economic situation, or the corrupt captive state; however, the brain drain is not a concept unique to Bulgaria. In other post-communist states that have “open and accountable” governments and decent economies, such as Poland, mass emigration continues to be an issue.⁹⁰ Poland’s Central Statistics Office reports that in 2013, 2.1 million Polish citizens were living abroad, a number that continues to increase each year.⁹¹ According to Mark Adomanis, the reason for this is simply that those who remain within Poland cannot make as much money as those that leave. “In 2012, its [Poland’s] PPP adjusted per-capita income was about 54% of Germany’s.”⁹² Other trends can be found in other Central European countries. For example, in the 1990’s, the number of scientific researchers in Latvia and Estonia shrank by 35% and in the Czech Republic, by 70%.⁹³ Just as Bulgarians were found to feel as if they were “relative losers” compared to these other post-socialist states, these other post-socialist citizens feel that their countries offer inferior opportunities to other, more powerful countries.⁹⁴ Therefore, both highly-educated and uneducated people from these states also choose to “exit” their

⁹⁰ Adomanis, Mark. "All Of Eastern Europe Has A Brain Drain Problem." *Forbes*. Forbes, 8 Nov. 2013. Web. 30 Nov. 2015.

⁹¹ C, G. "Poland and the EU: Poland's Emigration Headache." *The Economist*. The Economist, 5 Nov. 2013. Web. 30 Nov. 2015.

⁹² Adomanis, Mark. "All Of Eastern Europe Has A Brain Drain Problem." *Forbes*. Forbes, 8 Nov. 2013. Web. 30 Nov. 2015.

⁹³ Woodard, Colin. "Eastern Europe Struggles to Halt Scientific Brain Drain." *The Chronicle of higher education* 51.37 (2005): 34. Web. 30 Nov. 2015.

⁹⁴ Krastev, Ivan. "Optimistic Theory about the Pessimism of the Transition." (21). (2004): Web

countries and find other opportunities abroad. The transfer of human capital affects both the countries involved with the exchange: the country losing human capital and the country gaining.

A country's investment in human development, i.e. developing its human capital, increases individual earning power as well as the national economy. Education, job training, or learning through work experience are all examples human capital development. The loss of this investment in human capital, through the flight of human capital, i.e. brain drain, negatively impacts the people in the country who are left behind.⁹⁵ The educated that leave do not become productive, contributing members of their own country, instead they use their talents elsewhere and their native countries lose out. Therefore, as peoples from post-communist states have migrated West, they have left their home countries which could otherwise benefit from their productive value. If they had stayed, or returned after an experience abroad, perhaps they could bring about the sort of positive change these countries need.

Various developments in European policy have facilitated the migration that, in part, contributes to this continued Eastern European brain drain. First, with the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, people from Eastern states began applying for visas to get their tickets West. The establishment of the EU in 1993 and later the free-movement permitted under the 1995 Schengen agreement, initially did not include Eastern European states, but eventually expanded and created avenues for Eastern Europeans to leave. In 2004, the

⁹⁵ Ndulu, B.J. "Human capital flight : stratification, globalization and the challenges to tertiary education in Africa." *World Bank*. World Bank, 1 Jan. 2014. Web. 30 Nov. 2015.

EU implemented its biggest accession including 10 new member countries. These countries included Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. Although having applied, Bulgaria and Romania were not included in this group as they still had several reforms to enact before they met the minimum standards of the Copenhagen Criteria, i.e. requirements for candidate countries to meet in order to be considered for EU accession.

Finally, in 2007, they were granted accession under special conditions including safeguard measures to ensure Bulgaria and Romania continued to work towards reforms to their judicial systems and corrupt governments as well as fight to end organized crime. From 2007-onward, it became easier for Bulgarians and Romanians to migrate to other EU states, although some countries, like the UK (pre-Brexit), placed restrictions on the immediate free movement of labor from Bulgaria and Romania because of the immigration boom that they experienced in 2004. Those restrictions had a maximum time limit of seven years. So, in 2014, all free labor restrictions had been lifted.

A large percentage of the migrants from Eastern Europe post-1989 were, in fact, educated and skilled. According to a joint study by the University of California and The University of Vienna, the highly-educated groups from both Romania and other Eastern European Union countries represented the largest percentage of their emigrants in the year 2000. In the study, people were grouped into four categories: “low education” for those with 0 to 8 years of schooling, “intermediate” for those with 8 to 12 years, and

“high” for those with 13+ years. With this framework, those with high levels of education made up the largest percentage compared to the other categories.⁹⁶

A comparative study from 2014 highlights emigration trends among several Eastern European EU member states between 1980 and 2010, based off census data from each country. **Figure 8** below shows the trend of total emigration rates from these countries. While all of the countries in the study seem to have increasing rates of emigration, Bulgaria and Romania surpassed all others between the years 2005 and 2010. When looking at trends specific to highly-educated migrants from these countries, we can see greater similarity among them. **Figure 9** shows that Romania had the highest incidence of highly-skilled migration in 2010 at 20.36%. Bulgaria’s rate was 12.22%, closer to that of the Slovak Republic, the Czech Republic, and Hungary. Still, this study underlines the magnitude of the brain drain occurring in each of these Eastern European countries.⁹⁷ When these highly-educated migrants exit, these countries lose their investment in human capital and lose the potential benefits that these talented individuals would otherwise contribute to their society.

⁹⁶ Mayr, Karin; Peri, Giovanni "Brain Drain And Brain Return: Theory And Application To Eastern-Western Europe." *B.E. Journal Of Economic Analysis & Policy: Contributions To Economic Analysis & Policy* 9.1 (2009): 1-50. *Business Source Complete*. Web. 3 Dec. 2015.

⁹⁷ Ionescu, Luiza. "Emigration from Eastern Europe with a focus on brain drain." *PhD diss., Aarhus University*, Resource page http://pure.au.dk/portal/files/75142686/Luiza_Ionescu_Emigration_from_Eastern_Europe_with_a_focus_on_Brain_Drain.pdf (2014).

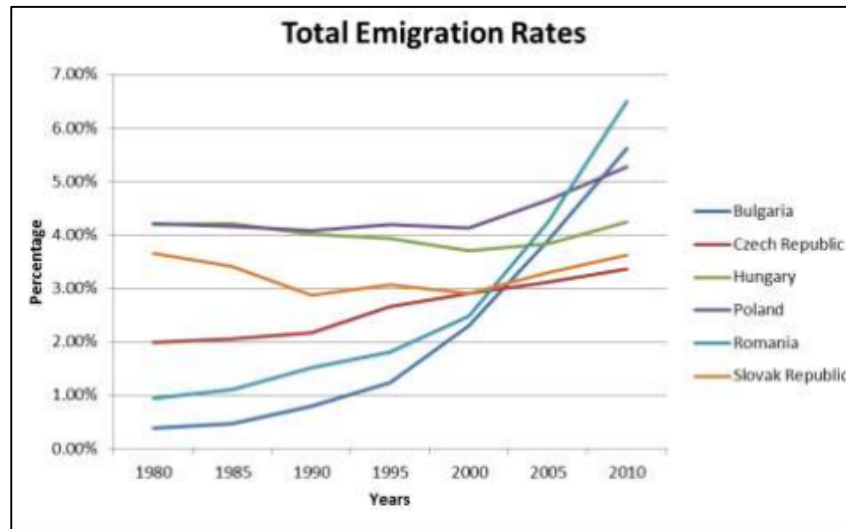


Figure 8: Total emigration trends from Eastern European EU countries

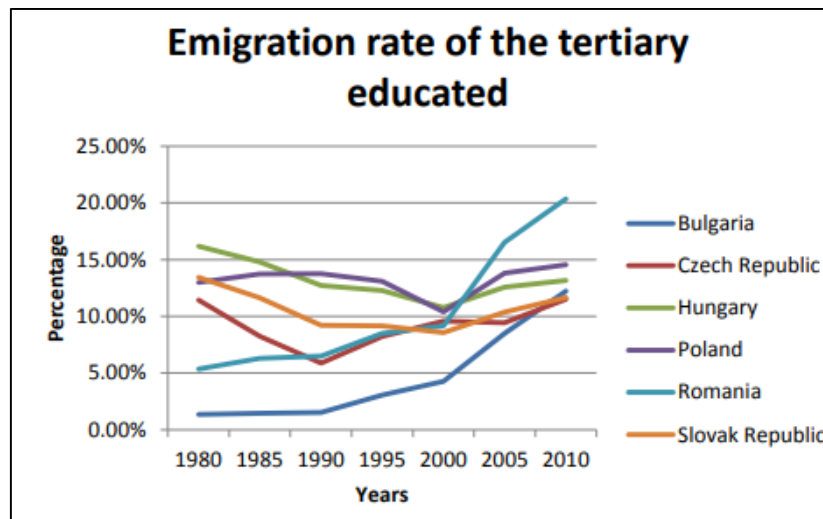


Figure 9: Emigration trends of highly educated migrants from Eastern European EU countries

Considering the concept of human capital flight, the fact that migrants leave in order to seek better opportunities shows that the state cannot provide the same kind of

opportunities within the confines of their own territory and they can consequently be considered weak. However, when they leave en masse, they make their situation at home worse. Many of these states also rely on other countries to function. They receive assistance from International Organizations (IOs) to subsidize development projects within the state. By opting in and joining these various IOs, however, they give up some of their sovereignty in regard to certain functional aspects of statehood.

States that are integrated into the EU, both strong and weak, enter into a new, international social contract that supposedly protects the weaker states from failing and benefits stronger states by increasing access to markets for trade. This agreement takes away from the absoluteness of a singular state's sovereignty, but adds to the capability of the EU as a "supranational institution."⁹⁸ The idea of a brain drain within the borders of the EU therefore becomes complicated. One may argue that if citizens from Eastern European countries are moving and working within the EU, they are still contributing to the EU as a whole. However, the fact remains that there are deficits of skilled laborers within countries like Bulgaria, Poland and Hungary. Also, many migrants leave the EU entirely for countries like the United States, or now post-Brexit UK. In these cases, the loss of human capital affects both the EU as well as the individual EU states on their own.

⁹⁸ Philpott, D. (1999), Westphalia, Authority, and International Society. *Political Studies*, 47: 566–589. doi: 10.1111/1467-9248.00217 (586).

Ukrainians for Hire

With the ongoing Ukrainian Crisis, many Ukrainians are massively emigrating to EU countries to seek asylum and to work, but mostly to work. The Ukrainian economy has been hit hard since the crisis began. To put it into context: \$1USD was equal to 8 Ukrainian Hryvnia in 2013 before the crisis began and today, \$1 USD is equal to 27 Hryvnia.⁹⁹ This critical devaluation has created opportunities for countries like Poland in particular to attract “cheaper” Ukrainian labor. Relative to the value of Ukrainian currency, Poland is able to pay Ukrainian workers nearly five times as much as they would make in their country at this time. Today, between 1 and 1.5 million Ukrainians are estimated to be working in Poland. Poland seized the opportunity to accept Ukrainian workers and offered them temporary working permits to help boost the Polish economy. Now, Poland’s unemployment rate has dropped to 6.6%, the lowest it has been since 1991.¹⁰⁰ Also, their economic growth rate has reached 4.5% last year.¹⁰¹ Recently, the EU has allowed free movement of Ukrainians without visas to Schengen countries for a period of 90 days and the Polish government is worried that this move will decrease their flow of Ukrainian labor. The worry stems from the idea if Ukrainians “visit” other Schengen countries, they will actually begin searching for job opportunities in these

⁹⁹ Exchangerates.org. "US Dollar to Ukraine Hryvnia Exchange Rate History: 31 December 2013 (31/12/2013)." exchangerates.org. Accessed March 15, 2018. https://www.exchangerates.org.uk/USD-UAH-31_12_2013-exchange-rate-history.html.

¹⁰⁰ "Ukrainian Immigrants Are Powering Poland's Economy." The Economist. Last modified August 5, 2017. <https://www.economist.com/news/europe/21725707-now-poles-worry-visa-free-travel-may-lure-them-rest-eu-ukrainian-immigrants-are>.

¹⁰¹ Deutsche Welle. "Poland Fears Economic Hit As EU Opens Door to Ukrainians." DW.COM. Last modified January 30, 2018. <http://www.dw.com/en/poland-fears-economic-hit-as-eu-opens-door-to-ukrainians/a-42367764>.

countries instead of choosing to work in Poland. Poland's Union of Entrepreneurs and Employers (ZPP) believe that “five million more workers are needed to sustain growth over the next three decades and Ukrainians alone will not be enough to plug the gap.”¹⁰²

Poland, a country with a situation similar to, but not as drastic as Bulgaria, opened its borders to their neighbors in crisis, and by doing so, created a mutually-beneficial economic arrangement. Poland still has over 2 million Poles abroad, and has an aging population that’s quickly approaching a demographic crisis. The Ukrainians have acted as a sort of bandage for Poland’s suffering economy. Only time will tell as to whether Poland will pass policy to offer full citizenship to the workers that have been continuing to come over the last four years. Since the arrangement has created a net positive for the country, Polish politicians have been seriously discussing it. According to a poll conducted in Poland, 63% of voters believe that the Ukrainians are good for the Polish economy, although a similar amount believe that their migration needs to be better-regulated.¹⁰³ The Polish case presents an interesting policy option for countries that are experiencing brain drains or are facing demographic challenges. Could a solution like this exist for Bulgaria?

THE BULGARIAN CASE: BRAIN DRAIN IN THE MIDST OF A DEMOGRAPHIC CRISIS.

Bulgaria lost over 3% of its population in 1989. After years of ethnic tensions brought on by racist policies and ethnic violence towards Turks from the Communist

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ukrainian Immigrants Are Powering Poland's Economy." The Economist. Last modified August 5, 2017. <https://www.economist.com/news/europe/21725707-now-poles-worry-visa-free-travel-may-lure-them-rest-eu-ukrainian-immigrants-are>.

party in Bulgaria, Party Leader Todor Zhivkov addressed the Turks on national TV and said that those would wanted to leave the county, should. This created a mass exodus of Turkish Bulgarians as “nearly half of the 900,000 Turks in Bulgaria” left between May and August of 1989.¹⁰⁴ This, as one of Zhivkov’s last policies before being taken down as the Communist Party Leader, became known as “the Great Excursion.” The name was coined from the state-run propaganda campaign used during the chaos that claimed that the Turks were simply “going on holiday to visit family.”¹⁰⁵ Only between 40,000 and 60,000 returned in the following months.¹⁰⁶ The mass emigration left many homes and villages abandoned, jobs undone, and was the start of what is now widely-known as the “Demographic Crisis” in Bulgaria.

The UN declared that Bulgaria is currently the “world’s fastest-shrinking country” and projects that its population will decrease from 7.2 million to 5.2 million people by 2050 if current trends continue.¹⁰⁷ Both unceasing annual emigration of young Bulgarians as well as having one of the lowest birth rates in the world have contributed to Bulgaria’s demographic crisis. As a result, the population in Bulgaria is quickly getting older, as Bulgaria is Europe’s “5th greyest” country.¹⁰⁸ In 2016, 20.7% of the population was over 65 years-old, a rapid increase from 17.7% in 2010. Consequently, these projections do

¹⁰⁴ Neuburger, Mary. *The Orient Within: Muslim Minorities and the Negotiation of Nationhood in Modern Bulgari*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2011.

¹⁰⁵ Deutsche Welle. "Recalling the Fate of Bulgaria's Turkish Minority." DW.COM. Last modified December 24, 2014. <http://www.dw.com/en/recalling-the-fate-of-bulgarias-turkish-minority/a-18149416>.

¹⁰⁶ Crampton, R. J. *Bulgaria*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. (407-417).

¹⁰⁷ The Economist. "If Hell is Other People, Bulgaria is Paradise." The Economist. Last modified January 11, 2018. <https://www.economist.com/news/europe/21734391-bulgarias-population-shrinking-fast-and-its-people-are-reluctant-welcome-immigrants-if-hell>.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

not bode well for Bulgaria's labor force. The working age population (people from 15-64 years-old) decreases by about 45,000 annually by both emigration and aging (see **Figure 10**).¹⁰⁹ In 2016, the net decrease between immigrants and emigrants was 9.3 thousand. Out of those immigrating to Bulgaria, about 9,300 were Bulgarian and 12,000 were non-Bulgarian immigrants.¹¹⁰ The total numbers of population decline due to emigration have decreased in recent years when compared to the early 1990's, but the annual net loss of Bulgarians is consistent. The immigration/emigration trend between 2012 and 2016 can also be seen in **Figure 10**.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Capital.bg. "България е на път да се превърне в хиперзастаряваща страна." Wwww.capital.bg. Last modified April 13, 2017.
https://www.capital.bg/politika_i_ikonomika/bulgaria/2017/04/13/2952771_bulgariia_e_na_put_da_se_pre_vurne_v/.

¹¹⁰ "International migration by age and citizenship of migrants" Национален статистически институт. Web. 12 April. 2017.

¹¹¹ Capital.bg. "България е на път да се превърне в хиперзастаряваща страна." Wwww.capital.bg. Last modified April 13, 2017.
https://www.capital.bg/politika_i_ikonomika/bulgaria/2017/04/13/2952771_bulgariia_e_na_put_da_se_pre_vurne_v/.

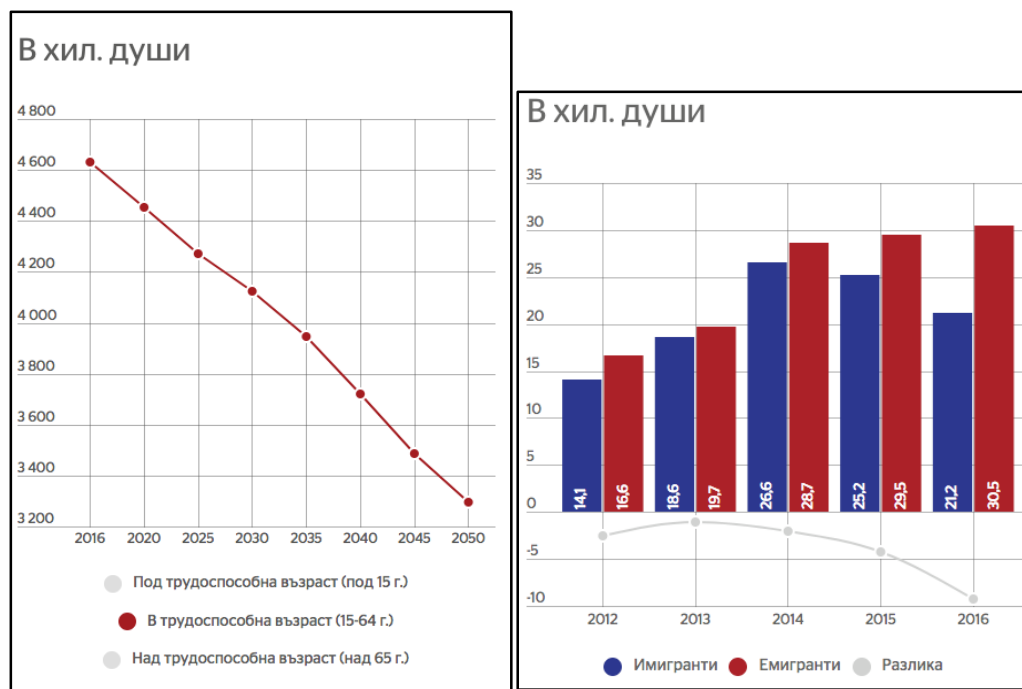


Figure 10: (Left) the decrease in working-aged adults in Bulgaria in thousands

(Right) numbers of immigrants to (blue) and emigrants from (red) Bulgaria in thousands¹¹²

In the early post-communism 1990s, and again in the years preceding the EU accession in the 2000s the hope for a stronger economy, democratic political system, and new employment opportunities left many Bulgarians feeling optimistic towards Bulgaria's future. However, these hopes faded with the onset of state capture, mafia capitalism, and rampant corruption. Thus, with freer travel restrictions, hundreds of

¹¹² Capital.bg. "България е на път да се превърне в хиперзастаряваща страна." www.capital.bg. Last modified April 13, 2017. https://www.capital.bg/politika_i_ikonomika/bulgaria/2017/04/13/2952771_bulgariia_e_na_put_da_se_pre_vurne_v/.

thousands of Bulgarians turned their sights abroad.¹¹³ At first the exit of these young and educated individuals was seen as a waste of social resources for Bulgarian society for individual gain, but later, it became more and more normalized. Eventually, emigrating became recognized as “the only feasible route for social mobility” and great value was placed upon those who sought foreign education.¹¹⁴ In 2014, emigration numbers for those aged 20-40 were the highest among all other age categories in Bulgaria.¹¹⁵

A study from the journal of *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* from 2015 on the brain drain in Eastern Europe found Bulgaria to have suffered the most in regards to the brain drain in comparison to other countries in the region. Their study was based on research from the World Economic Forum that compared twelve Central and Eastern European countries based on their ability to “retain talented people”. **Figure 11** below shows their results. A score of 1 indicates that the “best and brightest normally leave to pursue opportunities in other countries” and a score of 7 indicates that “the best and brightest stay and pursue opportunities [with]in the[ir own] countries.”¹¹⁶ Results from Bulgaria were the lowest among the other Eastern European countries and even though this study was based on samples of perceptions of business executives in each country,

¹¹³ Stoilkova, Maria Milkova. "Exiles at Home and Abroad: The Bulgarian Intelligentsia in Emigration." (4). Order No. 3121716 University of California, Berkeley, 2003. Ann Arbor: *ProQuest*. Web. 13 Dec. 2015.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. (6,21).

¹¹⁵ "External Migration by Age and Sex. "National Statistical Institute." *Национален статистически институт*. Web. 12 Dec. 2015.

¹¹⁶ Ienciu, Nicoleta Maria, and Ionel-Alin Ienciu. "Brain drain in Central and Eastern Europe: new insights on the role of public policy." *Journal Of Southeast European & Black Sea Studies* 15, no. 3 (September 2015): 281-299. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed April 19, 2018).

the work presents a valid comparison in lieu of robust national data from the Bulgarian state.

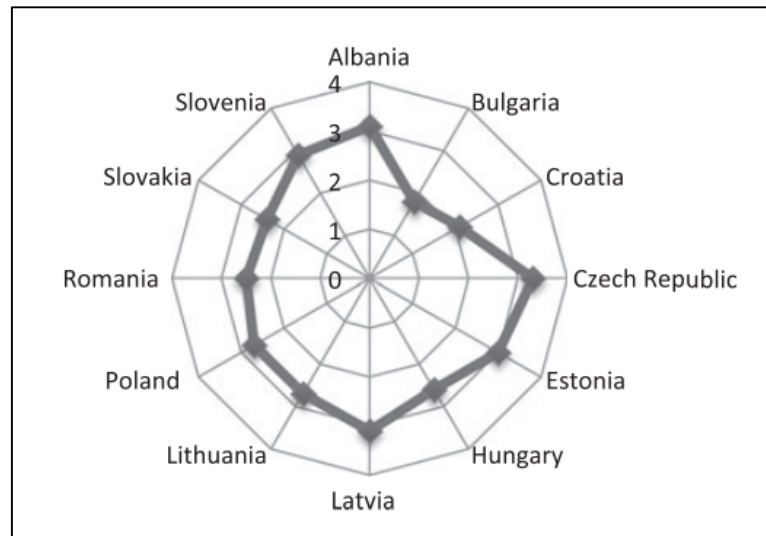


Figure 11: The extent of brain drain in Central and Eastern Europe¹¹⁷

The reasons for the Bulgarian brain drain are likely related to the dissatisfaction that many Bulgarians have felt towards their country combined with the new choice to seek residence abroad. Maria Stoilkova, an anthropologist who focuses on migration and transnationalism, believes that there are three main reasons why the educated or elite of Bulgaria sought opportunities abroad in the early 1990s. First were the demographics and characteristics of those going abroad. Most were between the ages of 20-40, middle class, and often those “whose value system, social position and authority were compromised

¹¹⁷ Ienciu, Nicoleta Maria, and Ionel-Alin Ienciu. "Brain drain in Central and Eastern Europe: new insights on the role of public policy." *Journal Of Southeast European & Black Sea Studies* 15, no. 3 (September 2015): 281-299. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed April 19, 2018).

with the fall of the communist regime.”¹¹⁸ Meaning, these people who had comfortable opportunities and positions under the old system, sought to leave instead of risking the loss of these lifestyles during the transition from communism and the privatization process. Secondly, during the transition to capitalism in the early 1990s, as old communist leaders still made decisions leading to the rapid privatization of industries and the development of a decentralized bank system, many employment opportunities were simply lost. This greatly affected this group of young and educated Bulgarians who simply could not find satisfactory employment within the country. Third, along with the structural governmental change, previously-set social rules and hierarchies were changed from what they were under the old system. Therefore the elite sought to maintain their social prestige and did so by emigrating, afraid of what the transition might bring to their social status.¹¹⁹

Other thinkers take a more rational and economic approach to frame the decision to migrate. For example, Lee’s “Push and Pull” theory of migration can be applied to the Bulgarian case. The theory suggests that migrants are motivated by various “push” and “pull” factors when considering emigrating from their current country of residence. The country of origin must have push factors or negative issues that will be remedied by complementary pull factors or solutions to these issues in the prospective destination. In

¹¹⁸ Stoilkova, Maria Milkova. "Exiles at Home and Abroad: The Bulgarian Intelligentsia in Emigration." (30). Order No. 3121716 University of California, Berkeley, 2003. Ann Arbor: *ProQuest*. Web. 13 Dec. 2015.

¹¹⁹ Stoilkova, Maria Milkova. "Exiles at Home and Abroad: The Bulgarian Intelligentsia in Emigration." (30). Order No. 3121716 University of California, Berkeley, 2003. Ann Arbor: *ProQuest*. Web. 13 Dec. 2015.

Bulgaria's case, many Bulgarian citizens have been dissatisfied with the economy, the corrupt state capture system of government, and lack of social mobility in Bulgaria. These are the push factors that motivate young and educated Bulgarians to leave. Therefore, these Bulgarians must look for other places of residence that have the pull factors that they desire. In general, they look towards stronger states with better economies. In addition to push and pull factors, Lee's theory also discusses the obstacles that migrants must overcome in order to successfully-emigrate. Immigration laws, school applications and acceptances, and costs can all be considered obstacles.¹²⁰

Considering the concept of the "culture of leaving," in Bulgaria, besides feeling pressure from their family and friends to leave Bulgaria, many other examples can be seen in Bulgarian society that support the existence of this norm. When Bulgarian high school students get into universities abroad, often local newspapers publish stories praising these accomplishments. One such example can be seen in an article from 2015 about a graduate from Kardzhali, a small city in Bulgaria, who in addition to winning several academic competitions, is reported to be attending a university in the United Kingdom. The author notes this accomplishment and writes: "никой не се съмнява, че му предстоят само големи успехи и сериозна професионална реализация."¹²¹ *"No one doubts that he will only have great success and a serious professional realization."* Meaning that he will become a professional in his field upon finishing his degree abroad.

¹²⁰ Push and Pull Factors." *Association of American Geographers*. 2011. Web. 10 Dec. 2015.

¹²¹ "Иван Герганов с отличие за „П.Р.Славейков“ и по английски език." КърджалиНюз. Last modified June 22, 2015. <https://kardjali.news/06/22/27868/ivan-gerganov-s-otlichie-za-p-r-slavejk/>.

This article only contains praise for the graduate, and does not criticize him for leaving his family and country.

Another recent example seen in several news reports across Bulgaria praising Physicist Tenyo Popminchev who was recently declared one of Science News' ten "Scientists of the future" for being a part of a research team in Colorado that created an x-ray laser. This laser is still in its development phases, but has the potential to soon be used as a new diagnostic medical device.¹²² Popminchev's story brings bragging rights to Bulgarians who praise his work as a Bulgarian, not as a Bulgarian who left Bulgaria. Similarly, many Bulgarians will remind you that the inventor of the first computer, John Atanasoff was Bulgarian even though he grew up in the United States. Someone even created a website devoted to this specific story at www.johnatanasoff.com/pride_in_Bulgaria.php.¹²³ These examples indicate that just as leaving is praised as a success in society, even the accomplishments of Bulgarians abroad will continue to be praised at home.

Other examples can be found online, such as one youtube video titled "10 Странности на България след Живот в Германия" "*10 strange things about Bulgaria after life in Germany.*" This video pokes fun at the cultural differences between that one notices upon living abroad and returning to Bulgaria. The message being the way some things are done in Bulgaria is so backwards, that it is funny. In a way, it glorifies the

¹²² БНТ. "Теньо Попминчев в "Плюс това" по БНТ." *YouTube*. December 31, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W5MWxXEtMoU>.

¹²³ "John Atanasoff." Accessed April 22, 2018. http://www.johnatanasoff.com/pride_in_Bulgaria.php.

experiences of those that have lived outside of the country since they too can relate to the “strange differences.” The video has over 100 thousand views.¹²⁴ These are just some examples among countless others that indicate that Bulgarians generally view leaving Bulgaria to work or study abroad as a positive and successful venture. In conjunction with pressure from family and peers, young Bulgarians interact with messages like these and eventually see leaving as the only way forward.

When examining the Bulgarian case through these various lenses, it becomes clear that the causes of the Bulgarian brain drain stem from many causes. Lee’s theory of push and pull works congruently with Hirschman’s theory of Exit and Voice. After choosing to “exit,” Bulgarians that wish to emigrate must consider factors of push and pull when deciding why and where they will go. Stoilkova’s suggested factors of emigration from Bulgaria pointed more towards the cultural reasons for Bulgarians to emigrate after the fall of communism in Bulgaria. The decision to pursue lives abroad and redefine themselves after a restricted-period of travel appealed to these Bulgarians, and those who could, took advantage. Now, more than 28 years after the fall of communism and 11 years after the accession of Bulgaria to the EU, it seems as if leaving Bulgaria has become a norm among young, educated Bulgarians. The following sections will take these ideas and apply them to a focused-examination of a sample population from Bulgaria. The goal: to understand how Bulgarians think about their lives and their migration choices at a personal level. Is there evidence of a culture of leaving? What

¹²⁴ "10 Странности на България след Живот в Германия." *YouTube*. November 7, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SmoganBkXHo>.

influenced their migration choices and how does this relate to their personal sense of satisfaction in life? What makes the Bulgarian case different?

METHODS

Through the primary research described in this and the following section, I seek to contribute to existing research on the brain drain phenomenon that is occurring in Bulgaria in three main ways. First, I look for trends between the personal motivations or factors that young Bulgarians from my sample consider when making migration choices. Second, I compare the difference in self-reported life satisfaction between the sample of Bulgarians that have re-settled abroad and those live in Bulgaria (those who stayed and those who went abroad and returned). Third, I argue that the main driver of the Bulgarian "Brain Drain" is psychological. This driver is what I coin as "the culture of leaving" in order to achieve success. Young Bulgarians see leaving (for school or work) as a sort of "rite of passage." In order to feel successful for themselves and in the eyes of their family, friends, and community, they must leave their country. I believe that this norm has developed as Bulgarians have had the freedom to "exit" for close to 30 years. The first two objectives point towards comparisons among the perceptions of respondents in my sample. The third relates to a norm that exists within my sample and in Bulgaria generally. The goals of this examination are to create a better understanding of migration in Bulgaria and to inspire future research that considers the stories, perceptions, and happiness levels of migrants.

Sample

The sample population for this study consists of alumni from a single private high school, the American College of Sofia (ACS) in Sofia, Bulgaria. While this sample is not

representative of the population in Bulgaria, it allows for a focused-examination and comparison of perceptions of Bulgarians who both came from a similar background and had a similar high school experience. Therefore, when surveying participants from this constrained-sample, extraneous confounding variables are reduced. Doing a country-wide, randomly-selected survey of Bulgarians that live in and outside of Bulgaria would be ideal and would enable generalizations to be made about the country as a whole. However, there is still much to be learned by examining the responses from alumni from one of “the best schools in Bulgaria” and this study can be used as a stepping stone to a larger and lengthier study in the future.

The American College of Sofia is one of the oldest American educational institutions outside of the United States. It was first founded in 1860 by American Protestant missionaries, but was forced to cease operations during WWII in 1942 when America declared war on Bulgaria. The college remained closed during the communist period (1944-1989), but reopened in 1992. The first class to graduate after the reopening was in 1997, and since then over 1,900 students have graduated from ACS.¹²⁵ Each year, ACS ranks among the top ten performing schools on the Bulgarian state matriculation exam, a standardized test for all Bulgarian high school students and 97% of senior ACS students apply to non-Bulgarian universities. While specific matriculation data is not

¹²⁵ American College of Sofia. "History." American College of Sofia. Accessed March 15, 2018. http://acs.bg/Home/About_ACS/History.aspx.

publically-available, ACS does post a list of colleges and universities where ACS alumni have enrolled between 2011-2016 (see **Table IV**).¹²⁶

Bulgaria	Exeter, U of	Oxford, U of	Erasmus U (Rotterdam)	Bates College	Ohio Wesleyan U
AUBG	Glasgow, U of	Oxford Brookes U	European U (Barcelona)	Bennington College	Pace U
Medical U (Sofia)	Glasgow School of Art	Plymouth, U of	Graz, U of	Bentley U	Pennsylvania, U of
National Academy of Art	Greenwich, U of	Portsmouth, U of	Groningen, U of	Berklee College of Music	Pomona College
New Bulgarian U	Hull, U of	Reading, U of	Heinrich Heine U	Brown U	Princeton U
Sofia U					
United Kingdom	Imperial College	Robert Gordon U	Hochschule Deggendorf	Chicago, U of	Ramapo College (NJ)
	Kingston U	Salford, U of	Hotel Institute Montreux	Columbia U	Reed College
			Instituto Europeo di Design	Cornell U	Richmond, U of
Aberdeen, U of	Lancaster U	Sheffield, U of	Jacobs U (Bremen)	Dartmouth College	Savannah College
Abertay Dundee U	Leeds, U of	Sheffield College	John Cabot U (Rome)	Davidson College	Stanford U
Arts U Bournemouth	Leicester, U of	Sheffield Hallam U	Maastricht U	Dickinson College	Suffolk U
Aston U	Liverpool, U of	Southampton, U of	NABA (Milan)	Drexel U	Syracuse U
Bangor U	London, U of	Southampton Solent U	Roosevelt Academy	Flagler College	Trinity U
Bath, U of	-Goldsmiths College	St. Andrews, U of	Sciences Po	George Washington U	Tufts U
Birmingham, U of	-King's College	Stirling, U of			
	-Queen Margaret U				
Birmingham City U	College	Strathclyde, U of	Technische U München	Grinnell College	UCLA
Bournemouth U	-Queen Mary College	Surrey, U of	The American U of Paris	Harvard U	UC San Diego
Brighton, U of	-Royal Holloway	U for the Creative Arts	The Hague U	Indiana U	Vanderbilt U
	-University College				
Bristol, U of	London	Warwick, U of	TUHH	Johns Hopkins U	Vassar College
Brunel U	London Metropolitan U	Westminster, U of	Twente, U of	Kenyon College	Washington and Lee U
			University College		
Buckinghamshire New U	Loughborough U	West of Scotland, U of	Utrecht	Macalester College	Wellesley College
Cambridge, U of	Manchester, U of	York, U of	VIA U College (Aarhus)	McGill U	Williams College
	Manchester Metropolitan U				Worcester Polytechnic Inst.
Cardiff U		Other EU	Vienna, U of	Miami, U of	Yale U
Courtauld Inst. of Art	Middlesex U	BHMS (Luzern)	Vienna U of Technology	Mount Holyoke College	
Coventry U	Newcastle U	Bocconi U	Webster U (Vienna)	New York U	Other
Dundee, U of	Northampton, U of	Delft U of Technology	US & Canada	North Carolina, U of	Central Queensland U
Durham U	Nottingham, U of	Den Haag Hotelschool	Adelphi U	Northeastern U	New York U, Abu Dhabi
Edinburgh, U of	Nottingham Trent U	EBS Universität	American U	Northwestern U	New York U, Shanghai
Edinburgh Napier U				Oberlin College	Pontifical Catholic U

Table 4: Colleges and Universities attended by ACS students from 2011-2016¹²⁷

Since the purpose of this study is to understand the brain drain in Bulgaria, the alumni of the American College of Sofia are prime subjects to survey as they are among the Bulgarian high school graduates with the most potential to attend universities abroad. The question is: what do these alumni do once they finish their higher education training

¹²⁶ American College of Sofia. "School Profile." Welcome to the American College of Sofia. Accessed March 15, 2018. http://acs.bg/Home/Academics/College_Counseling/School_Profile.aspx.

¹²⁷ American College of Sofia. "School Profile." Welcome to the American College of Sofia. Accessed March 15, 2018. http://acs.bg/Home/Academics/College_Counseling/School_Profile.aspx.

abroad? If the Bulgarian students return to Bulgaria after graduating, then technically this exchange is a *brain gain* for Bulgaria. The final sample for this study consisted of ACS alumni who graduated between the years 1997 and 2013 to focus on ACS alumni who had already finished their undergraduate training.

Survey Design

I began the iterative process of creating a survey that captured the data necessary to understand the factors that the respondents considered when making their migration choices. The goal of the questions was to gather data to use to understand three groups of people: 1, those that never left Bulgaria; 2, those that left to work or study and returned after; and 3, those that left Bulgaria and have not returned. The questions related to respondents' demographic information, information regarding their migration choices and factors that influenced those choices, and their level satisfaction in life.

In order to analyze respondents' satisfaction level or level of happiness in life, I used the "Cantril Scale" that the Gallup World Poll uses to collect data for the annual World Happiness Report. The Cantril Self-Anchoring Scale assessment looks like this:

"Please imagine a ladder with steps numbered from zero at the bottom to 10 at the top.

- *The top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for you.*
- *On which step of the ladder would you say you personally feel you stand at this time? (ladder-present)*
- *On which step do you think you will stand about five years from now? (ladder-future)"*¹²⁸

¹²⁸ Gallup Inc. "Understanding How Gallup Uses the Cantril Scale." Gallup.com. Accessed March 16, 2018. <http://news.gallup.com/poll/122453/understanding-gallup-uses-cantril-scale.aspx>.

The theory behind using this scale is that happiness is a subjective concept, therefore one can anchor themselves on the scale based on their own life evaluation. Grouping one's unique perspective with all other responses from a sample, allows for groups of people to be understood and inferences to be made. The scale asks for both a present and a future ranking in order to account for "daily affect" or items present in one's life at that particular time that may affect the way that they feel, such as an illness or a negative/positive experience from that day. Gallup groups the responses into three groups: those with scores of 7 or higher are thriving, those reporting scores between 5 and 6 are struggling, and those with scores of 4 or below are suffering.¹²⁹ Since Bulgaria has been consistently rated as being an unhappy country based on these metrics, I wanted to employ the same scale in this study to see if there were any visible differences among my survey respondents.

After developing the initial set of questions, I piloted the survey questions in interviews in Bulgaria and analyzed both the answers to questions as well as the way in which subjects responded to the questions. After the interviews, I asked for feedback and ensured that the subject understood the intent behind all of the questions. After this process, the survey was revised, improved, and uploaded to Qualtrics, an online survey tool. The online survey was adaptive; so, depending on the responses that participants submitted while taking the survey, the survey adapted and only asked the questions

¹²⁹ Gallup Inc. "Understanding How Gallup Uses the Cantril Scale." Gallup.com. Accessed March 16, 2018. <http://news.gallup.com/poll/122453/understanding-gallup-uses-cantril-scale.aspx>.

relevant to each respondent. For example, a Bulgarian who had never left Bulgaria would have to respond to different questions than a Bulgarian who permanently resettled abroad. Questions like: “did you return to Bulgaria after graduating from university” would not be relevant to a respondent who never left Bulgaria. The purpose behind this was to make the survey as streamlined and user-friendly as possible with the hopes of reducing survey-dropout rates. See **Appendix A** to look at the final survey questionnaire.

RESULTS

The survey received a total of 98 responses. After removing incomplete responses and several irrelevant responses (often from ACS alumni that had graduated after 2013 and were still attending undergraduate studies) 69 total relevant responses were retained for analysis. Out of these survey respondents, 43 (62.32%) were “Leavers” or Bulgarians who left Bulgaria and have not returned, 20 (28.99%) were “Returners” or Bulgarians who had left Bulgaria for school or work and have since returned to live in Bulgaria, and 6 (8.7%) were “Stayers” or Bulgarians who never lived outside of Bulgaria for more than a year. The ages of respondents ranged from 22-40 years old and nearly one-third of respondents reported to be married. Out of those that are married (or were previously

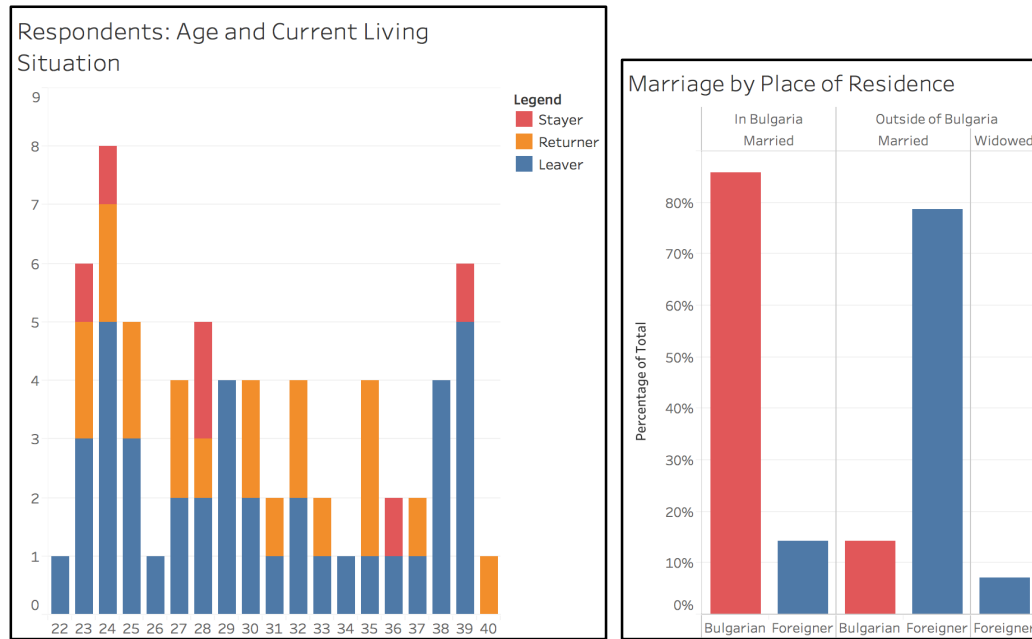
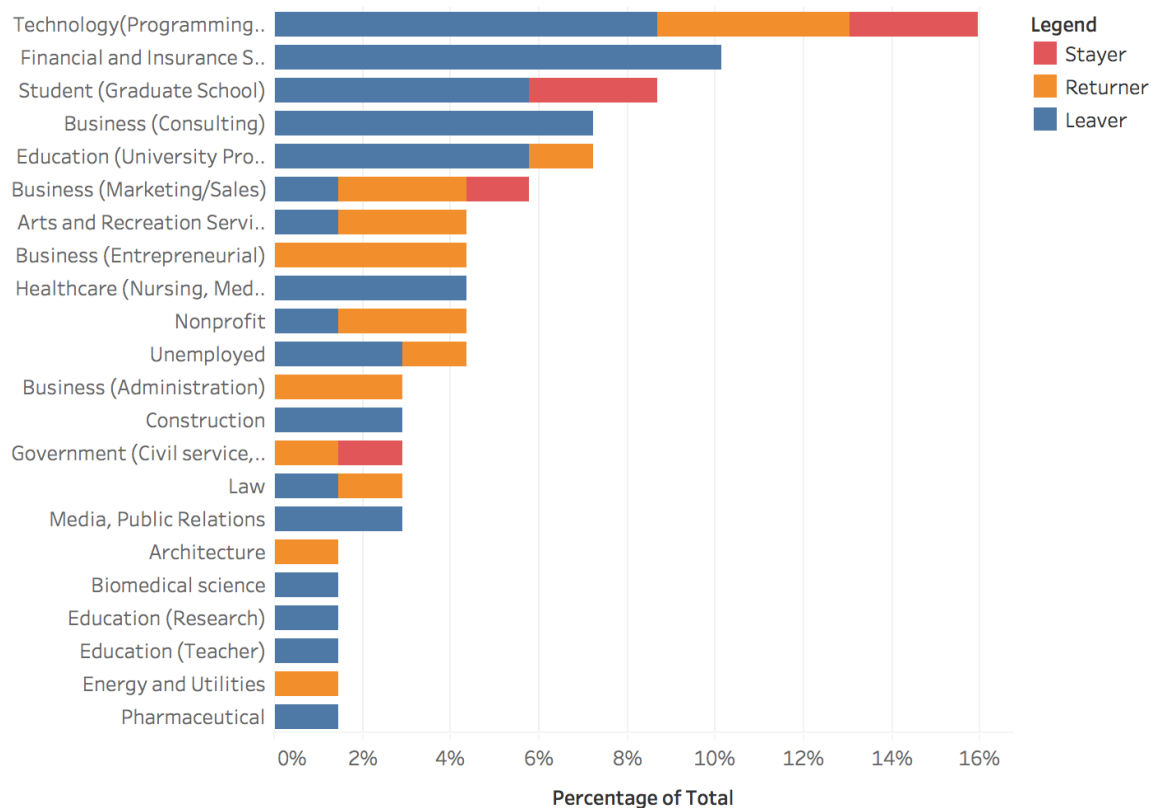


Figure 12: Respondents by Age and type (left), Marriage by place of residence (right)

married and are now widowed), 85.7% of those in Bulgaria have spouses from Bulgaria and 85.7% of those that live outside of Bulgaria have spouses that are not Bulgarian. See **Figure 12** above to better visualize the cohort of respondents.

Figure 13 provides the range of careers represented in the sample of respondents. Technology, Financial and Insurance Services and Consulting comprise the three largest careers reported in the sample, 8.7% of respondents were in graduate school and 4.3% were unemployed. Leavers were represented in nearly every industry, but examining Returners' careers more closely shows some interesting trends. The top two careers for Returners are in entrepreneurship and technology; in fact, no Leavers or Stayers responded as having a career in entrepreneurship at all. Other popular careers among Returners include careers in business, arts, and nonprofits. Also, more Returners are working in nonprofits than Leavers or Stayers.

Respondents' Careers



Returners' Careers

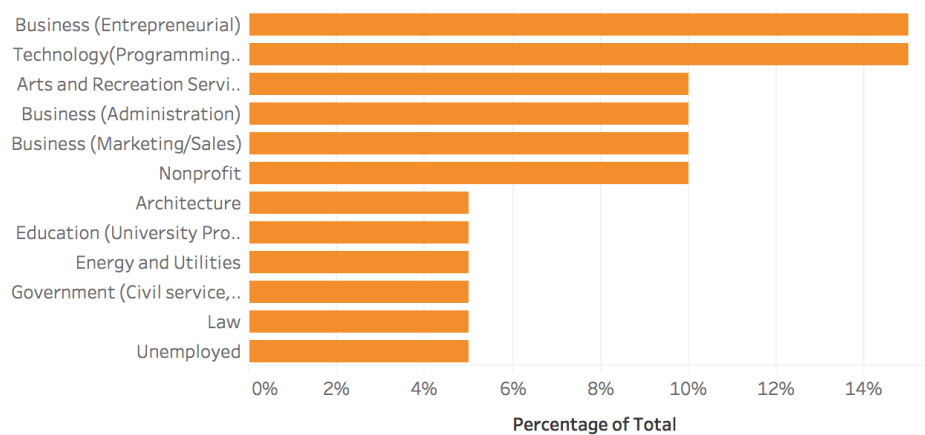


Figure 13: Respondents' Careers

Examining Satisfaction

In order to better analyze the results for Cantril-Scale responses on self-reported satisfaction, responses from Stayers and Returners were combined into one “In Bulgaria” group. Only six out of the 69 responses were from those who had never left Bulgaria; therefore, combining these two groups allows for a more-robust comparison between the group of people that have decided to reside in Bulgaria and the “Outside of Bulgaria” group or those that have decided to live abroad. **Figure 14** presents a visual comparison of life satisfaction rankings between the two groups. Since the groups are not equal in size, weighted-percentages are used in order to allow for an accurate comparison. The levels are relatively similar, although a slightly greater proportion of responses from those that live in Bulgaria reported higher levels of satisfaction than those outside of Bulgaria.

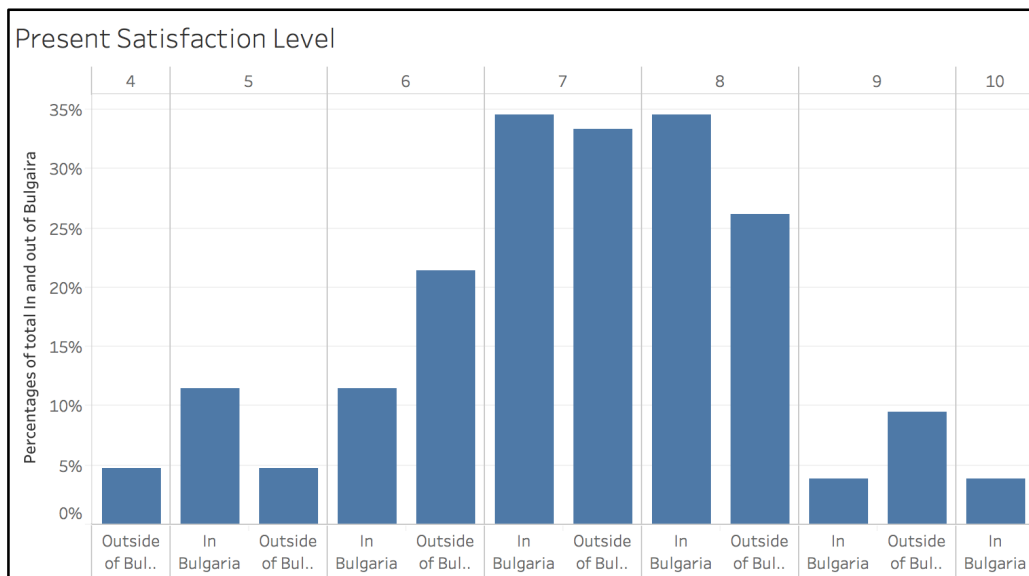


Figure 14: Present self-reported satisfaction with life shown in weighted percentages.

More specifically, the mean value of present life satisfaction for the “In Bulgaria” group is 7.16, whereas the mean for the group “Outside of Bulgaria” is 7.02. This phenomenon remained consistent as seen in the results from the future satisfaction with life responses in **Figure 15**. Again, responses from the In Bulgaria group have a slightly

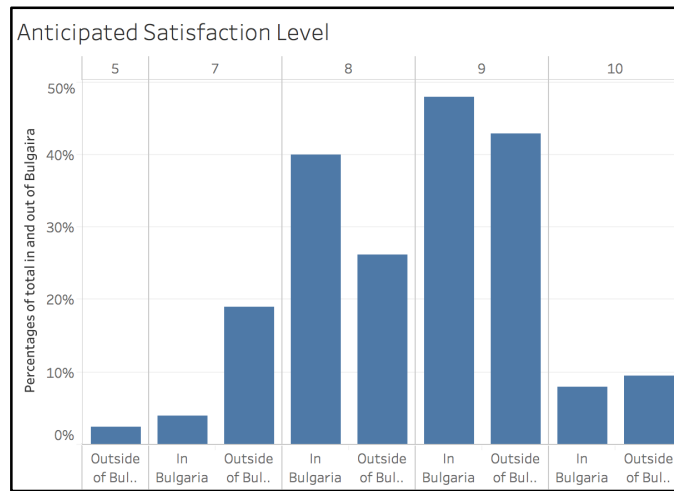


Figure 15: Future self-reported satisfaction with life shown in weighted percentages.

higher mean value at 8.58, than the group from outside of Bulgaria with a mean of 8.37. These means are different, but the differences are not large or statistically significant. When performing a t-test on the sample responses for both present and future satisfaction to determine whether this difference in means is statistically significant, the resulting p-value was large in both cases, indicating that the null hypothesis cannot be rejected and there is not a significant difference between the means of both groups (see **Figure 16** for the R output).

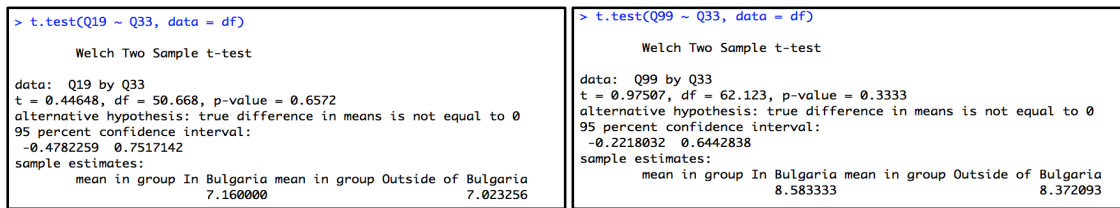


Figure 16: t-test results for present (left) and future (right) self-reported levels of satisfaction.

One of the main reasons for this is likely due to the sample size of the study. If there were more observations in the sample, these results could prove to be more significant.

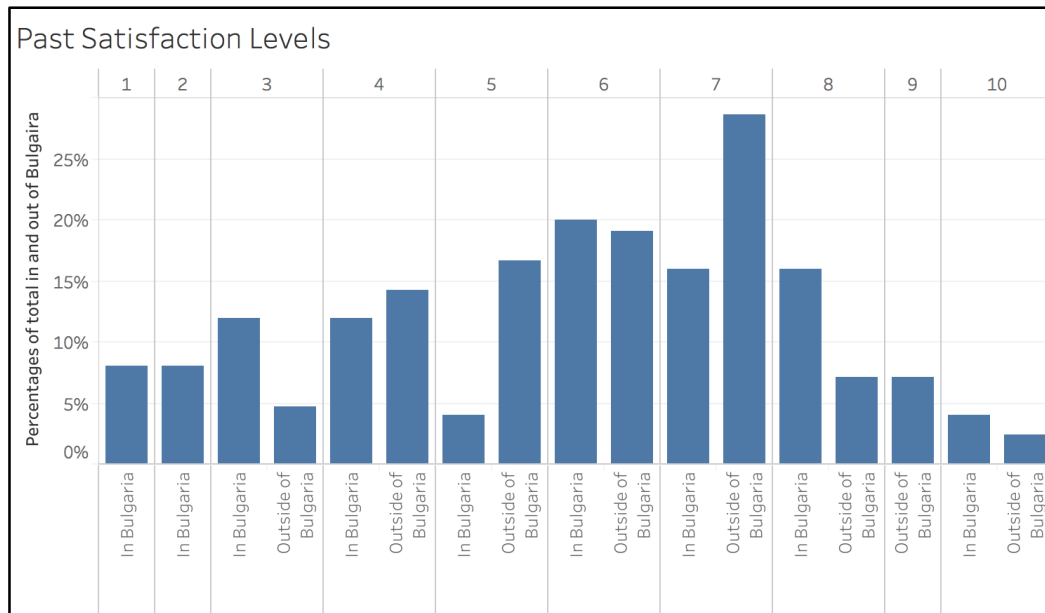


Figure 17: Past self-reported satisfaction with life shown in weighted percentages.

Respondents were also asked to reflect on how they were doing five years ago, and the results of this can be seen above in **Figure 17**. The majority of responses seem to center between four through seven. The means of these two groups are the most different of the three. The In Bulgaria group has a mean satisfaction level of 5.17 and the Outside of Bulgaria group has a mean of 6.18, about a full point higher. This difference is not

significant at the 95 percent confidence level, but with a p-value of 0.078, it is significant at 90 percent level (see **Figure 18**).

```
> t.test(Q100 ~ Q33, data = df)

Welch Two Sample t-test

data:  Q100 by Q33
t = -1.818, df = 35.385, p-value = 0.07754
alternative hypothesis: true difference in means is not equal to 0
95 percent confidence interval:
 -2.1572711  0.1185114
sample estimates:
mean in group In Bulgaria mean in group Outside of Bulgaria
5.166667                    6.186047
```

Figure 18: t-test results for past self-reported levels of satisfaction.

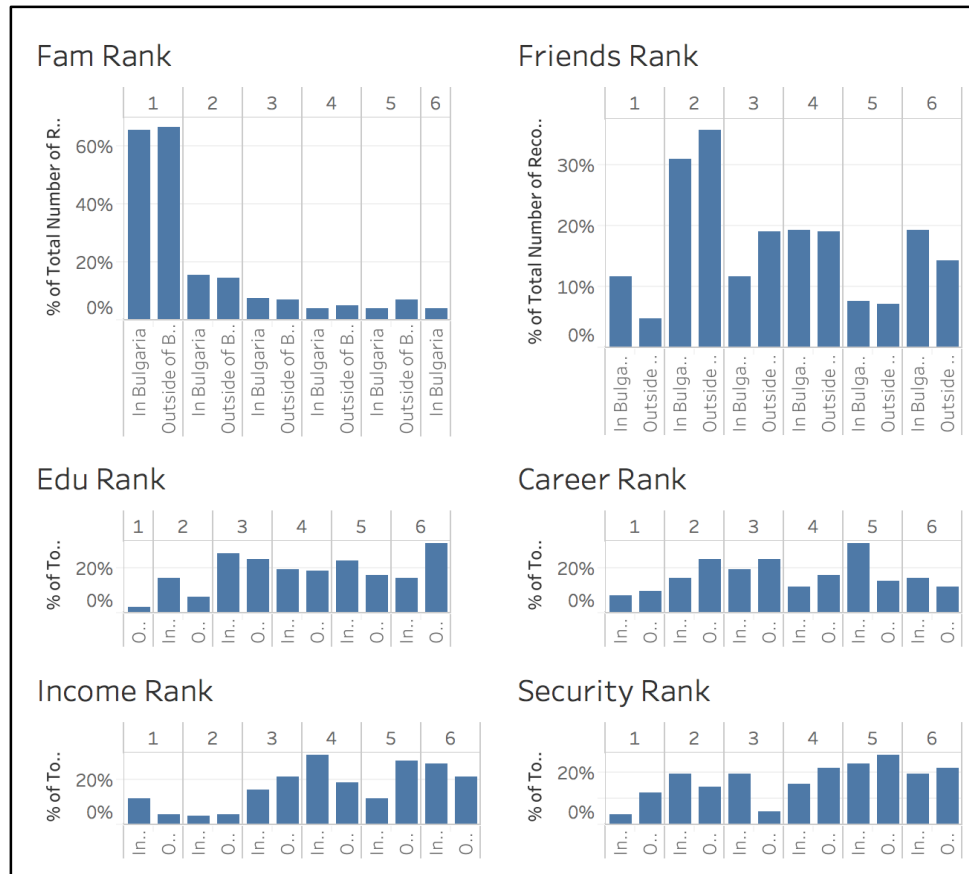


Figure 19: Ranked factors related to respondents' satisfaction in life with 1 being most important and 6 being least important.

Respondents were also asked to reflect on their satisfaction ratings and to rank the above aspects of their lives in relation to their influence on their self-reported satisfaction levels (see **Figure 19**). The factors included were: family, friends, education level, career success, income level, and feeling of security in one's life. The rankings ranged from one through six, with one being the most important contributing factor and six being the least important. Looking at **Figure 19**, it can be seen that there was a lot of consistency between the two groups of respondents. The two most important factors were family and friends, the first and second rankings, respectively. The career, security, education, and income rankings are harder to interpret; but looking at their mean rankings makes them a little more comparable (see **Table V** below). There is again consistency the means of the first four ranked-factors: family, friends, career success and feelings of security, respectively. However, the differences between the rankings of education and income within both groups is incredibly small. In **Figure 20**, the output of a linear classification regression model gives us some insight into how these factors correlate to a respondent belonging to either the In Bulgaria or Outside of Bulgaria group. Again, the model does not show statistical significance, since none of the coefficients from the model have any p-values that are 0.05 or less.

	In Bulgaria	Outside of Bulgaria
Family	1.76	1.72
Friends	3.48	3.255
Career	3.8	3.44186
Security	3.92	4
Education	4	4.302326*
Income	4.04	4.27907

Table 5: Ranked means of factors related to respondents' satisfaction in life with one being the most important and six being least important. *Note: the income ranking for those that live outside of Bulgaria is slightly higher than the education ranking.

<pre>glm(formula = Q33 ~ Rank.Fam + Rank.Friends + Rank.Income + Rank.Career + Rank.Security + Rank.Edu, family = binomial, data = df)</pre>	<pre>glm(formula = Q33 ~ Rank.Income + Rank.Career + Rank.Security + Rank.Edu, family = binomial, data = df)</pre>																																																																						
Deviance Residuals:	Deviance Residuals:																																																																						
<table><tr><td>Min</td><td>1Q</td><td>Median</td><td>3Q</td><td>Max</td></tr><tr><td>-1.6750</td><td>-1.3398</td><td>0.8062</td><td>0.9514</td><td>1.3403</td></tr></table>	Min	1Q	Median	3Q	Max	-1.6750	-1.3398	0.8062	0.9514	1.3403	<table><tr><td>Min</td><td>1Q</td><td>Median</td><td>3Q</td><td>Max</td></tr><tr><td>-1.6276</td><td>-1.3393</td><td>0.8094</td><td>0.9543</td><td>1.2761</td></tr></table>	Min	1Q	Median	3Q	Max	-1.6276	-1.3393	0.8094	0.9543	1.2761																																																		
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<table><tr><td></td><td>Estimate</td><td>Std. Error</td><td>z value</td><td>Pr(> z)</td></tr><tr><td>(Intercept)</td><td>3.0762188</td><td>3.1585308</td><td>0.974</td><td>0.330</td></tr><tr><td>Rank.Fam</td><td>-0.1443759</td><td>0.2506473</td><td>-0.576</td><td>0.565</td></tr><tr><td>Rank.Friends</td><td>-0.2330369</td><td>0.2380177</td><td>-0.979</td><td>0.328</td></tr><tr><td>Rank.Income</td><td>0.0003212</td><td>0.2325181</td><td>0.001</td><td>0.999</td></tr><tr><td>Rank.Career</td><td>-0.2929035</td><td>0.2253380</td><td>-1.300</td><td>0.194</td></tr><tr><td>Rank.Security</td><td>-0.1112789</td><td>0.2306786</td><td>-0.482</td><td>0.630</td></tr><tr><td>Rank.Edu</td><td>NA</td><td>NA</td><td>NA</td><td>NA</td></tr></table>		Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> z)	(Intercept)	3.0762188	3.1585308	0.974	0.330	Rank.Fam	-0.1443759	0.2506473	-0.576	0.565	Rank.Friends	-0.2330369	0.2380177	-0.979	0.328	Rank.Income	0.0003212	0.2325181	0.001	0.999	Rank.Career	-0.2929035	0.2253380	-1.300	0.194	Rank.Security	-0.1112789	0.2306786	-0.482	0.630	Rank.Edu	NA	NA	NA	NA	<table><tr><td></td><td>Estimate</td><td>Std. Error</td><td>z value</td><td>Pr(> z)</td></tr><tr><td>(Intercept)</td><td>-1.10298</td><td>2.13049</td><td>-0.518</td><td>0.605</td></tr><tr><td>Rank.Income</td><td>0.19792</td><td>0.19506</td><td>1.015</td><td>0.310</td></tr><tr><td>Rank.Career</td><td>-0.09259</td><td>0.18008</td><td>-0.514</td><td>0.607</td></tr><tr><td>Rank.Security</td><td>0.08928</td><td>0.18173</td><td>0.491</td><td>0.623</td></tr><tr><td>Rank.Edu</td><td>0.19299</td><td>0.20850</td><td>0.926</td><td>0.355</td></tr></table>		Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> z)	(Intercept)	-1.10298	2.13049	-0.518	0.605	Rank.Income	0.19792	0.19506	1.015	0.310	Rank.Career	-0.09259	0.18008	-0.514	0.607	Rank.Security	0.08928	0.18173	0.491	0.623	Rank.Edu	0.19299	0.20850	0.926	0.355
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Figure 20: Summary of Generalized Linear Regressions of ranked-factors among those in Bulgaria and those outside of Bulgaria. The left output includes all ranked factors, and the right shows the model with values Family and Friends removed.

This is also likely due to the small sample size. Upon first trial, the regression model did not define one of the coefficients “because of singularities.” This error usually occurs when two or more of the independent predictor variables are strongly correlated.

Thinking about the spread of the data above, we can see that the majority of respondents ranked family and friends as their number one and two most important factors. Therefore, analyzing the effect of these variables further does not tell us much about how In Bulgaria and Outside of Bulgaria groups differ.

The model was thus run with family and friends rank variables removed and the output produced can be seen on the right of **Figure 20**. Because the data is rank data, interpreting the coefficients of the data shows the effect size of a change in one rank over another in terms of whether a person belongs to the In Bulgaria group or the Outside of Bulgaria group. Both the income and education variables show the largest positive coefficient effects indicating that if there was a change in a rank of one, for one of these factors, that the respondent would be more likely to be in the “Outside of Bulgaria” group. Negative coefficients indicate that the positive change in rank of one would mean that the respondent was more likely to belong to the “In Bulgaria” group. Again, none of these results have low p-values and therefore are not statistically significant.

Normative Influences

Survey respondents were also asked to respond to questions regarding influencers in their lives that may have factored into their decision making when choosing to stay, leave, or return to Bulgaria. **Figure 21** below shows that both Leavers and Returners report having been influenced by family and friends in deciding to leave (or leave then return to) Bulgaria. 69.05% of Leavers report influence from family and/or friends and 76.47% of Returners report the same. Interestingly, the opposite is true of the Stayers,

two-thirds of which report not having been influenced. Each group also reports knowing close friends or family who are living or have lived abroad: 97% of Leavers, 100% of Returners, and 83.33% of Stayers. Likewise, the majority of every group reported being supported in their decision to live in or out of Bulgaria: 92.86% of Leavers, 94.12% of Returners, and 83.33% of Stayers.



Figure 21: Weighted percentages of responses from each group regarding influencers

Respondents were also asked about how their self-assessed social values compare of the values of Bulgarian society generally. 78.05% of Leavers, 70.59% of Returners, and 66.67% of Stayers reported being more liberal than the predominant values of Bulgarians (see **Figure 22**). Additionally, a large majority of Bulgarians are making up

their minds about their futures at a young age. In **Figure 22** we can see that 85.71% of Leavers and 88.24% of Returners made these decisions between the ages of 14-18, as opposed to 33.33% of Stayers at this age.

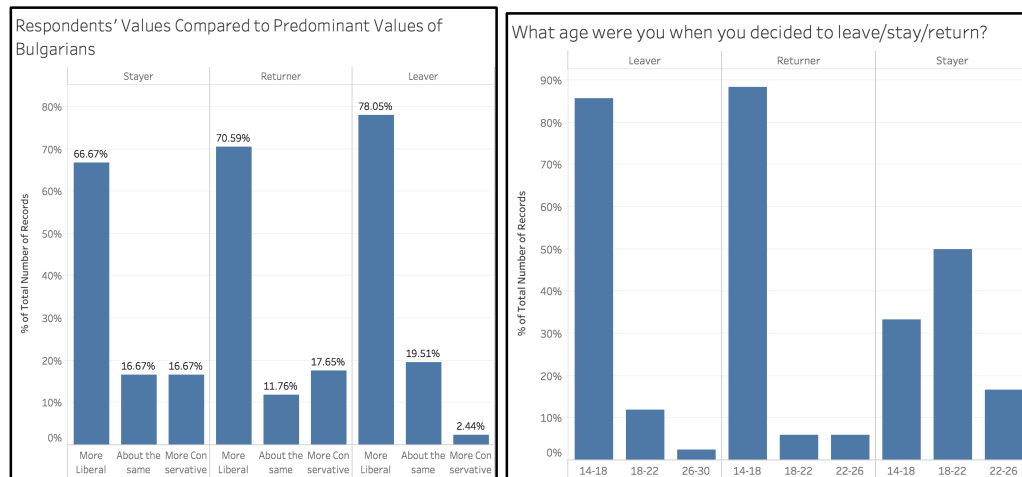


Figure 22: Weighted percentages of social values of respondents compared to predominant values of Bulgarians (left), Age when respondents decided to leave, leave and return, or stay in Bulgaria (right)

LEAVER FEVER

The respondents that were identified as Leavers were also asked several additional questions to provide a better understanding of their personal situations and perceptions. Responses can be seen below in **Figure 23**. More than half of the Leavers investigated career opportunities in Bulgaria before choosing to live abroad or while finishing their schooling abroad. 88.10% consider their industry worse in Bulgaria than where they currently live and the majority of respondents actually do not send remittances back to their families in Bulgaria. Only a little over 20% of the Leavers from

this study would not consider returning to Bulgaria to live. 22.73% would consider returning and more than half of the respondents (56.82%) “might” consider it someday.

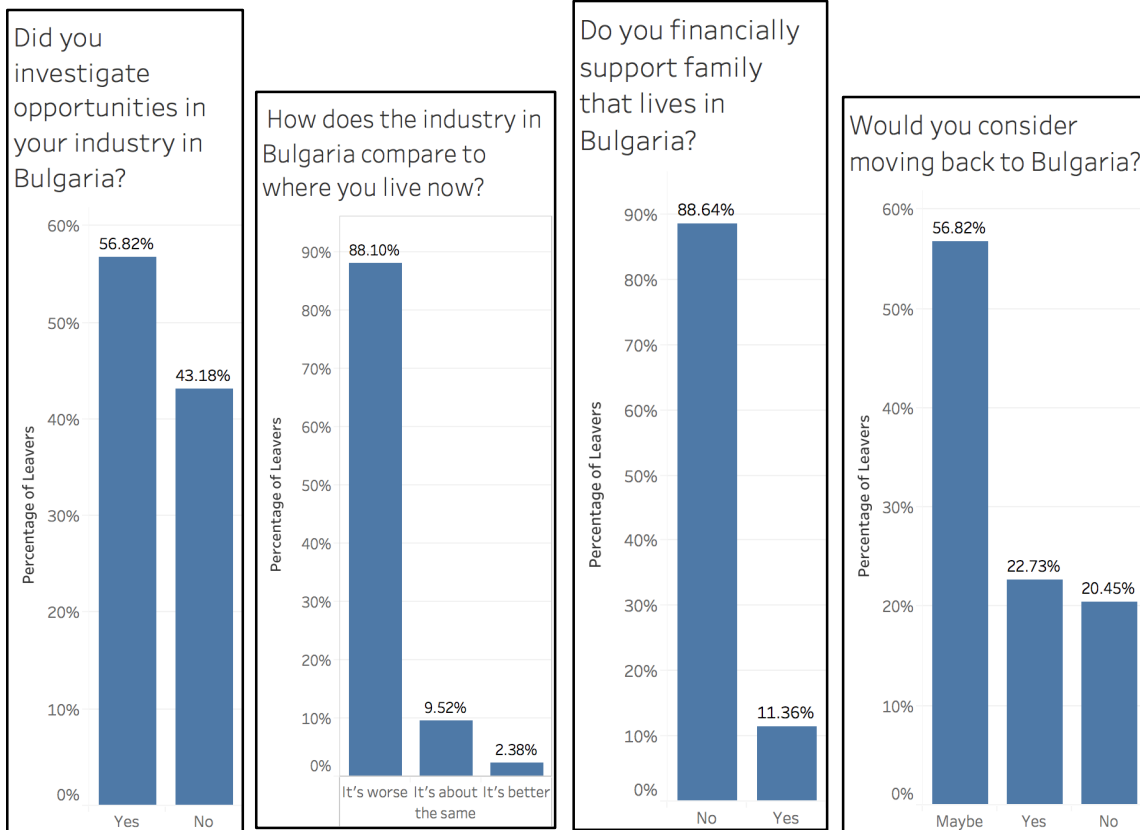


Figure 23: Responses to questions specific to those that have left Bulgaria and have not returned.

DISCUSSION

The Norm of Leaving

The objective of this study was to understand the reasons why young, educated Bulgarians decide to leave Bulgaria at such a young age, before the pressures of careers, universities, and adulthood set in. Informed by my research and personal experience working in secondary education within Bulgaria for three years, I argue that the main driver of the Bulgarian "Brain Drain" is "the culture of leaving" in order to achieve success. The brief review presented earlier in the *Background* section as well as survey results from this study support this argument as well as point towards some other interesting avenues for analysis. Even though the sample used in this study is not representative of the population, I believe that these trends are consistent among young Bulgarians that have similar opportunities to go abroad. In the future, a larger study randomly sampled across the nation may be able to capture these trends and allow for greater inferences to be made about Bulgaria generally. Again, my argument does not purport that greater economic push and pull factors are not also driving this emigration. I agree that greater economic or educational opportunities pull people away just as other reasons push people out. However, what makes the Bulgarian case different is that Bulgarians are leaving because they feel as if they must to succeed due to pressures and expectations from their families and peers. Additionally, they are widely praised and supported by their communities in pursuing opportunities abroad.

Consistent with my experience in the country, survey respondents began to think about leaving Bulgaria at a young age. 85.71% of Leavers and 88.24% of Returners made their decisions to leave between the ages of 14 and 18 and these two groups comprise over 90% of my sample size. It is important to note that average Bulgarian high school students graduate at the age of 19, therefore these students were likely all in high school when they made these huge life decisions. Considering the matriculation data from the sample school with an average of 97% of seniors applying for schools abroad, these trends make sense. However, 50% of respondents from the Stayers group, the largest percentage reported for this question, claimed to have made their decision to remain in Bulgaria between the ages of 18 and 22. One possible interpretation of this could be that college acceptances or financial burdens of foreign institutions could have factored into this decision at this point in time for these respondents.

When asked directly as to whether they were influenced by family and/or friends in their decision to leave/return or stay, 69.05% of Leavers report influence from family and/or friends and 76.47% of Returners report the same. One respondent writes:

“My family put overwhelming pressure on me to move abroad, citing multiple reasons, and we had many fights over it. There was never a question of me remaining in Bulgaria, as far as they were concerned. I am not sure I would have made the choice to move without the pressure from them. Our relationship is strained now.”

Additionally, nearly all respondents have family or close friends that have lived or continue to live abroad. These combined influences support the argument that pressures from within these respondents' communities influenced these young Bulgarians to choose

a life abroad at a young age. Therefore, a case can be made for an existing norm for this community of Bulgarians.

Two-thirds of Stayers, however, reported not being influenced by family or friends in their decision to stay. This can be interpreted in two ways, either their choice to stay was their own, or other factors prevented them from having the means to leave. For example, one Stayer writes:

“When I made the choice to stay I also considered higher career advancement opportunity in Bulgaria, rather than in the US for example. And indeed I was promoted [t]o a management position a year in[to] my first job. But definitely the opportunity to be close to family and friends and settle down were the biggest influencers for my decision to stay in Sofia.”

Another reports:

“I stayed in Bulgaria after graduating from high school mainly because of the financial situation of my family back then. My parents decided that me studying abroad would not be worth taking numerous loans and in a way I was forced to pursue my undergraduate degree in Sofia even though I really wanted to go abroad like all my friends...”

Comparing these two quotes tell two different stories: one from a person who decided to stay in Bulgaria for their own reasons, and another who still wanted to study abroad, but simply could not afford it. It appears even some of the Stayers still felt the pressure from the “culture of leaving” despite it not working out for extraneous reasons beyond their control.

All of the above data points to there being a psychological “culture of leaving” for the respondents in this study. In order to “succeed” students work to find ways of leaving Bulgaria. Families want this success for their children and push them to seek opportunities outside of Bulgaria. Other examples from within society further support this

argument as we see communities praising and supporting Bulgarians abroad in the news and online. Still, the distance between friends and families at home and abroad is often hard for both parties to endure.

Is the Grass Always Greener?

Examining the results of self-reported satisfaction from respondents allows for the interpretation of the perceptions of Bulgarians from this sample that feel compelled to leave their country. Are those that leave happier or more satisfied than those that live in Bulgaria? According to these survey results, perhaps not. The mean present life satisfaction value of Bulgarians that live in Bulgaria from this sample was actually slightly higher at 7.16 than those outside of Bulgaria at 7.02. This phenomenon was consistent for the values of anticipated life satisfaction as well. When performing t-tests to compare the two groups, the difference in means in each case were not statistically significant. This lack of statistical significance is likely due to the small sample size of respondents in the study, but regardless, the means between the two groups are empirically not very different. So, it seems that for this sample, people are just about as satisfied abroad as they are in Bulgaria.

Perhaps, in the aggregate, being far from family combined with the personal challenges and that one faces in choosing a life abroad reduce the overall happiness that one feels in life. One respondent writes:

“I feel I belong to a generation where everyone who could, left Bulgaria. I am more curious of the motivations of those who stayed. I often envy their resolve

and strength. My life now is great but my family was fractured by our decision to leave and I'm losing a fundamental part of my culture.”

Another says:

“The decision to study abroad after graduating had many strains of influence. Having just passed my 10-year anniversary of living abroad, I don't think my 19-year-old self fully understood how significant a life choice I was making at the time. I don't think my parents realized either. Somehow this utopia of a better education and a better life seemed too alluring to resist. All my peers were doing exactly the same so in a way it was a semi-automated response to the aspiration for success. I love my life abroad and I am grateful for meeting my husband out here but I never thought about the fact that missing my Bulgarian family is never ever going to get easier.”

The Leavers experience career success, start new families, make new friends, but also miss their families back home; they miss their culture, and may not be using their native language abroad. Additionally, when one leaves one's home country for another, they have to adapt to the culture in the new country; perhaps this too is a reason for an overall happiness level that is quite close to the In Bulgaria group.

Likewise, the challenges of choosing to live in Bulgaria could be reducing respondents' overall feeling of satisfaction as the majority of respondents may feel like failures to their families and peers for staying, or feel as if their values do not match those of the general Bulgarian society. Yet, these people also choose to live in their home country, are closer to their family, and many are able to maintain a high quality of life with fulfilling careers. One respondent writes:

“Being an employee of an international IT company in Bulgaria offers a good pay grade. If I were working in my company's NY office, I'd have an average salary (compared to country levels). Since I am working in the company's Sofia office, what I receive is quite above average for Bulgaria. I have received multiple offers to move to other countries and they all offer me much more money than I receive now. But all of those would be an average salary for the respective country.”

Another says:

“Family was supportive when I was leaving BG [(Bulgaria)], but not so much when I decided to return. There are other major reasons for wanting to come back - the idea of giving back to society, the sense of belonging, the possibility to do good, [and] the entrepreneurial opportunities”

It seems that despite expectations and pressures for these Bulgarians to work and study abroad, some that come back are living good, happy lives. In either case, those that stay in or return to Bulgaria must face the challenges of living in Bulgaria and going against the norm of leaving.

It is stories like these that contextualize this survey data, and help us understand what may be going on. For some Leavers, it appears that their lives abroad and being away from their family, their country proves to be difficult. Both groups of respondents ranked their families as being the most important factor when considering satisfaction in life; so being away from family is the cost that one bears in living abroad. For those that have never left and those that returned, they get to be close to their families. However, the majority of these Returners and Stayers have values that do not fit with the rest of society and have to deal with the dissonance of choosing to go against the norm. So perhaps these conflicting forces and considerations are causing life satisfaction levels to converge around seven for each group. Recall that the figure for the general Bulgarian

population as reported from the World Happiness report was 4.714 in 2016;¹³⁰ so, in either case, this sample is happier and doing better than Bulgarians generally.

Good News: They might return!

56.82% of the Leavers from this sample claimed that they might consider moving back to Bulgaria in the future and 22.73% said that they would consider it. Despite there being a culture of leaving, perhaps with time and positive change, these people will come back and begin a Bulgarian “brain gain.” Nearly a third of all respondents from this survey have already returned to Bulgaria to live (the Returners); however, there need to be greater incentives to bring more of these Leavers back. As the Returner above wrote: “There are other major reasons for wanting to come back - the idea of giving back to society, the sense of belonging, the possibility to do good, the entrepreneurial opportunities.”

A recent article from “Capital.bg”, a Bulgarian news agency, discusses the reasons that some Bulgarians are returning, including a relatively open market with few competitors for entrepreneurs as well as growing IT and “outsourcing” sectors in Sofia.¹³¹ When asked whether they had investigated career opportunities in their respective industries in Bulgaria, 43% of Leavers reported that they had not. Yet, 88% believe that

¹³⁰ Helliwell, John, Richard Layard, and Jeffery Sachs. "World Happiness Report 2017." World Happiness Report. Last modified March 20, 2017. <http://worldhappiness.report/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2017/03/HR17.pdf>.

¹³¹ Капитал. "Как България да печели от миграцията." www.capital.bg. Last modified February 7, 2014. https://www.capital.bg/politika_i_ikonomika/obshtestvo/2014/02/07/2236813_kak_bulgariia_da_pecheli_ot_migraciata/.

their respective industries are worse in Bulgaria than where they currently live. Clearly, there are greater economic push and pull considerations keeping many away, but 43% from this sample did not even consider looking at their field in Bulgaria. Perhaps, this is, in part due to the “culture of leaving”. The Capital.bg article refers to returned Bulgarians as “екзотични птици” or *exotic birds* in a society that welcomes them with a “Вие лудили сте, бе.” [...] вместо “добре дошли, откога ви чакаме” “‘*Are you crazy?*’ instead of ‘*Welcome, we’ve been waiting for you*’ [to return]”¹³² Changing these perceptions and encouraging society to welcome these educated Bulgarians to return, instead of questioning their sanity, is no easy task, but should be in the minds of Bulgarian policy makers. Until then, it is up to the “exotic birds” to be on the front lines in Bulgaria.

¹³² Капитал. "Как България да печели от миграцията." www.capital.bg. Last modified February 7, 2014. https://www.capital.bg/politika_i_ikonomika/obshtestvo/2014/02/07/2236813_kak_bulgariia_da_pecheli_ot_migraciata/.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The flight of human capital from Bulgaria, a country in the midst of a major demographic decline, has many negative implications that policymakers must consider. To date, due to a lack of an effective tracking system by the NSI or the Ministry of the Interior, it is difficult to quantify the true magnitude of the phenomenon. We do have numbers of the overall population in Bulgaria and the total numbers of emigrants from year to year, but we can only estimate how many of these exits are of highly-educated/skilled Bulgarians. Bulgaria also does not track how many students return after graduating from universities abroad. Still, we have identified some of the main reasons that Bulgarians leave: they seek educational or job opportunities abroad, they view their government and media as corrupt, they have different values than the general Bulgarian society, and they feel pressured to leave in order to succeed. Policymakers must keep these push and pull factors in mind when taking measures to lessen the flow of the Bulgarian Brain drain, or even change the direction of the flow and bring back these highly skilled Bulgarians. Clearly, the situation is complex and there is no simple policy that can provide an overarching solution to all of these contributing factors. Rather, several measures should be taken in conjunction to address these issues. To reach these goals, action needs to be taken by not only Bulgarians and the Bulgarian government, but also by institutions and organizations external to Bulgaria like the EU, private companies, and NGOs.

This study adds to the conversation of push and pull factors in Bulgaria by making a case for the existence of the “culture of leaving” in Bulgaria generally, as well as offering a focused examination of perceptions from a small sample of Bulgarians that have faced migration choices. The latter tells us that the general level of satisfaction in life between Bulgarians in and out of Bulgaria from within this sample is nearly the same. If a larger study can be performed in the future that includes comparisons from a representative group of Bulgarians at home and abroad and similar results are found—that can produce a power message that may work towards shifting the norm of leaving. In terms of addressing policies that work towards both this and other ends, the following subsections present a review of what policies have been put forth by Bulgaria thus far, as well as offer some suggestions for policy considerations in the future.

What has been done?

Coinciding with the accession to the EU in 2007, Prime Minister Stanishev issued an order for the formation of a working group to develop a national strategy on migration. By 2008, an inter-institutional working group produced the 2008-2015 Migration and Integration Strategy. This document had two goals: one, attracting Bulgarian citizens and “foreign nationals of Bulgarian origin” to return, and two, developing a policy to permit “third-country nationals” to move to Bulgaria to contribute to the economy.

In terms of implementation, progress was slowed by the 2008 financial crisis, but small measures were taken in the years succeeding. In 2009, the Ministry of labor and Social Policy began to host career fairs and campaigns to attract Bulgarians living abroad.

Four hundred Bulgarians are said to have attended a fair in Germany this year; however, no data exists as to whether any of these Bulgarians have returned. Other measures targeting foreign workers of Bulgarian origin, largely from Moldova, Macedonia, Ukraine, and Armenia have been taken to attract these foreigners to move to Bulgaria. The idea behind this tactic is that these people, since they connected to Bulgaria, will more-easily integrate into society.¹³³ Finally, in 2011, Bulgaria joined the EU “Blue Card” system, which allows non-EU citizens to apply to work in an EU country, contingent upon need from employers and the higher education credentials of the applicants.¹³⁴

These were good initial steps towards the development of a Bulgarian migration policy; however, they were a little shortsighted and unorganized. The career fairs and media campaigns should have clear monitoring instruments in order to track successes and understand their impact. The blue card policy only allows foreign workers to reside and work in the EU for three years; after which they must return home for a period of 18 months. While this can temporarily aid industries that lack skilled-Bulgarian workers, the policy does not offer a permanent solution. Finally, the measures taken to attract foreign nationals that have a Bulgarian origin have had very little impact. The thinking behind the idea that those of Bulgarian origin will be able to better integrate into society fails to

¹³³ Kazalarska, Svetla. "Ivaylo Dichev & Orlin Spassov (eds.), *Novi medii, novi mobilizatsii* [New media, new mobilizations] (Sofia: 2011: Open Society Institute) ISBN: 978-954-2933-07-6. [In Bulgarian]." *Southeastern Europe* 36, no. 3 (2012), 421-423. doi:10.1163/18763332-03603007.

¹³⁴ "Bulgaria Launches Blue Card Scheme, Welcomes Non-EU Workers." Novinite.com - Sofia News Agency. Last modified June 20, 2011.
<http://www.novinite.com/articles/129462/Bulgaria+Launches+Blue+Card+Scheme%2C+Welcomes+Non-EU+Workers>.

account for the people coming in from those countries that have never even spoken Bulgarian before. In addition, granting them citizenship creates another avenue for organized crime to enter the EU, as these new “Bulgarians” now have the freedom to travel throughout the EU.¹³⁵

In 2011, a new migration strategy was released focusing more on security and countering illegal migration. This shift in policy is likely due to the expertise and priorities of Prime Minister Borisov as well as security taking more of a priority across the EU generally.¹³⁶ The brain drain was also publically discussed in 2011, when Borisov floated the idea of creating a “forced detention” policy for Bulgarian graduates to prevent them from going abroad.¹³⁷ While this sort of policy was not implemented, a punitive immigration law such as this would likely receive a lot of backlash from citizens that have since been accustomed to the status quo. With the world as globalized as it is and with many Bulgarian and other Eastern European families already abroad, such a law would not be supported.

¹³⁵ Krasteva A. Bulgarian migration profile.- Medved, Felicitia. Proliferation of migration transition. Selected new EU member states. European liberal Forum, 2014, 189 – 211.

¹³⁶ Krasteva A. Bulgarian migration profile.- Medved, Felicitia. Proliferation of migration transition. Selected new EU member states. European liberal Forum, 2014, 189 – 211.

¹³⁷ Бояджиев, Ясен. "България: безмозъчност и изтичане на мозъци." Deutsche Welle (www.dw.com). Last modified May 23, 2011.
<http://www.dw.com/bg/%D0%B1%D1%8A%D0%BB%D0%B3%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D0%B1%D0%B5%D0%B7%D0%BC%D0%BE%D0%B7%D1%8A%D1%87%D0%BD%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82-%D0%B8-%D0%B8%D0%B7%D1%82%D0%B8%D1%87%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B5-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BC%D0%BE%D0%B7%D1%8A%D1%86%D0%B8/a-15097384>.

Lastly, in 2015, The National Council on Migration and Integration was finally established after years of bureaucratic delays.¹³⁸ This Council is the official coordinating body that oversees the National Migration and Integration Strategy. While the policy produced by this body is slow moving, its creation indicates that the government is taking the demographic and European refugee crisis seriously. Now with this body in place, where should Bulgaria direct its efforts?

What more should be done?

GOVERNMENT REFORMS

In 2009, a group of students from the University of Mannheim surveyed 1,425 Bulgarian students in Germany. 90% of respondents cited that corruption and incompetence of state institutions were major problems and reasons as to why they would not consider moving back to Bulgaria.¹³⁹ Clearly, a major avenue for bringing these Bulgarians back and improving the lives of Bulgarians in Bulgaria generally would be for the government to finally tackle the country's corruption problems. Anti-corruption measures and judicial reforms should be the first place that policymakers look towards in

¹³⁸ "Национален съвет по миграция и интеграция." Министерство на вътрешните работи. Accessed April 8, 2018. <https://www.mvr.bg/nsmi>.

¹³⁹ Йорданова, Йорданка. "Заслужава ли си да се върна в България?" Deutsche Welle (www.dw.com). Last modified May 17, 2011. <http://www.dw.com/bg/%D0%B7%D0%B0%D1%81%D0%BB%D1%83%D0%B6%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%B0-%D0%BB%D0%B8-%D1%81%D0%B8-%D0%B4%D0%B0-%D1%81%D0%B5-%D0%B2%D1%8A%D1%80%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%B2-%D0%B1%D1%8A%D0%BB%D0%B3%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%8F/a-15081936>.

attempting to make Bulgaria a more attractive place for people to reside. Bulgarians abroad need to believe that they will be able to conduct business and live in a country where their freedoms will be respected.

The EU should create better mechanisms of enforcement for the anti-corruption policies that already exist. If the EU is considered a postmodern state where mutual interference and transparency are supposed to be norms, then more investment in the sectors of the EU in charge of monitoring EU project implementation and oversight of the governments of the states within the EU should be made. Considering Bulgaria specifically, if the EU mandated that Bulgaria clean up its corrupt state with stronger threats of sanctions, further fund withholdings, or expulsion, then the changes that most Bulgarians have been asking for might actually come to fruition. The Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM) that was created upon Bulgaria's accession to the EU was supposed to only last a few years. Eleven years later, the CVM still issues annual reports, and Bulgaria's institutions have remained largely corrupt despite some small steps towards quelling organized crime.

It is also important to consider that combatting corruption is no easy task. If the EU is too heavy handed, member countries may even reconsider their membership to the EU. Euroscepticism has been sweeping through the post-Brexit EU and countries like Poland have threatened to leave the EU if funding is cut. To complicate things further, Boyko Borisov, Prime Minister of Bulgaria, is currently acting as the president of the Council of the EU. This position rotates every six months, and many think Borisov is using this position to apply pressure the EU to finally let Bulgaria into the Eurozone and

full Schengen zone.¹⁴⁰ In either case, Borisov will likely not institute any major policy changes in Bulgaria while acting in this capacity in order to keep things calm at home.

If Bulgaria does want to tackle their corruption problems at home, they should consider creating an independent entity solely tasked with prosecuting high-level acts of corruption. This body would be supported by the government, would be granted permission to act within the country and would consist of a team of prosecutors, perhaps including a visiting prosecutor from another EU member country. Additionally, the judicial system should be reformed by reducing the current term length of the head of the Bulgarian judiciary and instituting an effective inspection protocol on his or her duties in order to ensure that the Rule of Law in the country is being upheld.¹⁴¹ The road to ending corruption is dangerous and the process, complicated. The EU has the power and position to offer that support to Bulgaria, and if things change, Bulgarians will likely want to return.

Another policy avenue for the Bulgarian government to consider would be to turn the current refugee crisis in Europe into an opportunity. Mostly due to racist sentiments that permeate much of Eastern Europe, as well as vocal opposition from the far-right nationalist parties that are a part of the coalition leading the Bulgarian government, these policy options have been ignored.¹⁴² As it stands, the majority of their efforts have

¹⁴⁰ Rankin, Jennifer. "Cloud of Corruption Hangs over Bulgaria As It Takes Up EU Presidency." The Guardian. Last modified January 16, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/28/bulgaria-corruption-eu-presidency-far-right-minority-parties-concerns>.

¹⁴¹ *State Capture Unplugged: Countering Administrative and Political Corruption in Bulgaria*. Center for the Study of Democracy, 2016. <http://www.csd.bg/artShow.php?id=17723>.

¹⁴² Hope, Kerin. "Bulgaria Battles to Stop Its Brain Drain." Financial Times. Last modified January 11, 2018. <https://www.ft.com/content/51f1bd86-d6cc-11e7-ae3e-563c04c5339a>.

reflected attracting Bulgarians abroad or groups that look like Bulgarians abroad. These policies have had little impact, however, and there are still thousands of displaced refugees in Europe, many of which could be contributing to the economies in these Eastern European countries. Much like Poland has created fast-track international work permits for Ukrainian workers, Bulgaria could do the same for these migrant groups. However, this policy is hard to sell to Bulgarians since they believe that “the arrival of migrants signals their exit from history” according to Bulgarian Political Scientist, Ivan Krastev.¹⁴³ Yet, if depopulation trends continue as they are in Bulgaria, it seems that ignoring policies like these will actually contribute to Bulgaria’s “exit from history”.

EDUCATION AND LABOR

Many Bulgarians leave Bulgaria in search of greater educational and career opportunities abroad. As it stands, Bulgaria invests among the least of its GDP compared to other European countries. Therefore, one policy avenue would be for Bulgaria to invest more in education and to seek creative ways at modernizing its institutions at both the secondary and tertiary levels. NGOs in the country like *Заедно в час* (Teach for Bulgaria) have been working to improve struggling primary and secondary schools across the country. Other institutions invite teachers and professors from abroad to teach, lecture, or train other teachers in Bulgaria in order to improve these systems. It is important to note that strengthening these systems without pursuing other avenues of

¹⁴³ The Economist. "If Hell is Other People, Bulgaria is Paradise." The Economist. Last modified January 11, 2018. <https://www.economist.com/news/europe/21734391-bulgarias-population-shrinking-fast-and-its-people-are-reluctant-welcome-immigrants-if-hell>.

reform could simply contribute to the brain drain within the country since the other push and pull factors will still motivate the exit of educated Bulgarians. However, if the education system is strengthened in conjunction with other reforms, perhaps Bulgaria will begin to retain more highly-educated citizens.

Other avenues within education include sponsoring students to study abroad with the understanding that these students will return to Bulgaria to work after completing their programs. The Fulbright Commission in Bulgaria, for example, supports Bulgarian students and scholars each year to pursue research or study in the United States. After completing their time abroad, these scholars agree to then stay in Bulgaria for at least two years. Private companies can even offer students university fellowships for students to study abroad that are contingent upon the individual returning and working for the company sponsoring. PricewaterhouseCoopers Bulgaria, for example, has a scholarship program called *избереш България* (choose Bulgaria) that offers a one-year scholarship for Bulgarian students attending university and even provides them with a PwC internship and mentor.¹⁴⁴ Issues of enforcement could come into play with policies such as these, however. If for example, a scholarship recipient gets offered a job upon graduating within the country that he or she was studying in. For example, the Hungarian government attempted to create a policy along these lines which tried to keep graduates of higher education institutions in Hungary that received state financial aid in the country

¹⁴⁴ PricewaterhouseCoopers. "избереш България." PwC. Accessed April 8, 2018. <https://www.pwc.bg/25reasons>.

for several years post-graduation. If students left, they would have to pay back their school fees. The policy backfired, however, because students still found jobs abroad that paid much more than jobs in Hungary and could simply afford to pay the relatively-inexpensive school fees after leaving. Additionally, another effect of the policy was that some students simply applied to universities abroad that still offered fellowships but did not require them to agree to any restrictions.¹⁴⁵ So, while these policies may temporarily bring people back or require them to contribute back to the government if they decide to leave, people will still pursue opportunities abroad if other push and pull factors still exist.

The labor sector of Bulgaria can also provide creative solutions to improving the market in Bulgaria and creating more jobs. The IT and outsourcing sectors, for example, have been growing exponentially over the last few years. Bulgaria can invest in state-sponsored training programs for Bulgarians interested in entering into these industries. Also, to incentivize entrepreneurs to come and start new businesses, Bulgaria can implement tax breaks for both foreign-owned and Bulgarian-owned start-ups. In addition, they can update their bureaucratic systems to make starting these businesses easier for people interested in investing in Bulgaria.

Finally, a policy mandating remittances as a means of compensation for the loss of human capital to Bulgaria could be created. In this way, when the best and brightest of a Bulgaria are contributing to the development of another country, Bulgaria could

¹⁴⁵ Ash, Lucy. "Hungary 'traps' Graduates to Stop Brain Drain." BBC News. Last modified August 16, 2012. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-19213488>.

actually gain some profit from that production. This could come in the form of a tax on the income of a Bulgarian that was working in another country. This however could be hard to enforce across international lines after a citizen has already permanently resettled and changed his or her citizenship. For Bulgarians that have retained Bulgarian citizenship, it could be enacted as a clause upon receiving an international work permit to ensure enforcement. The receiving country would then face the burden of enforcing the mechanism and would have to agree to revoke the work permits of those who cheat.

PERCEPTION

Considering the “culture of leaving” discussed in this thesis, Bulgarians can work on changing this norm and challenging this perception. This is probably the hardest sort of policy to pitch, as it seeks to affect change to something intangible, but it is still an important area to consider. If young educated Bulgarians felt as if they could be welcomed back after some time in school or work abroad, or if they felt as if they could feel successful by not leaving Bulgaria or returning to Bulgaria, then perhaps more would stay or return.

A media campaign, sponsored by the American Embassy in Sofia that started in summer 2017, has sought to tackle this perception. The campaign titled “Силата е в теб” or “The power is in you,” has included a series of videos for TV and online, as well as a series of outdoor advertisements. The series features short vignettes of ordinary Bulgarians that have chosen to live and work in Bulgaria and make Bulgaria a better place. The U.S. Ambassador to Bulgaria, Eric Rubin, in a recent announcement of the

continuation of the campaign said “We are supportive of a strong Bulgaria. We are committed to Bulgaria’s sovereignty, democracy, and prosperity. We are optimistic about Bulgaria’s future, and this campaign is our way of telling you why.”¹⁴⁶ The campaign has received mixed feedback, but the messages are strong and positive. Most of the negative feedback regards the American sponsorship in the project because “they don’t know what it is like.” Other feedback points to other major problems facing Bulgaria, like corruption, which need to be changed. I think that this feedback is valid, and if Bulgaria worked to change these perceptions themselves, the messaging would be more effective. Likewise, the approach to slowing or reversing the brain drain in Bulgaria needs to include multiple approaches. Work towards shifting perceptions without reforming the corrupt institutions will likely do little to bring Bulgarians back.

¹⁴⁶ "The U.S. Embassy in Bulgaria Supports the Power of the Bulgarian Spirit." U.S. Embassy in Bulgaria. Last modified January 10, 2018. https://bg.usembassy.gov/us-embassy-bulgaria-supports-power-bulgarian-spirit/?_ga=2.83790550.1544388643.1523220704-911526542.1523220704.

CONCLUSION

Bulgaria has earned many unflattering titles in recent history, ranging from “the unhappiest place on earth,” to “the world’s fastest-shrinking nation” and “the poorest country in the European Union.” Undoubtedly, the country is facing many challenges including a corrupt, captured government, a struggling economy, and a major demographic crisis. The former two challenges contribute to the push factors that people consider in choosing to emigrate; the latter is, in part, a product of this emigration. The choice to exit is influenced by both push and pull factors. Bulgarians have been “pulled” to greater educational and career opportunities abroad. They have also been “pushed” by dashed hopes of a slow and unsuccessful transition to democracy, a lack of significant positive changes brought about by the accession to the EU, as well as the psychological pressure from their families and peers to leave their country in order to be successful.

This thesis explored these themes and sought to learn more about the perceptions of Bulgarians that have faced these pressures. I chose to perform a focused examination of a sample of Bulgarians from a similar background, a background that prepared them for a successful future in higher education abroad. I wanted to gather evidence related to the macro concept of the “culture of leaving” and to also focus on a micro analysis of the measure happiness between those who stayed and those who left within the sample in order to see if those that left were truly happier or not.

Examining the data from this sample of Bulgarians, we can see that the majority of respondents indicated that they were influenced by their families and/or friends to make their decision to leave their home country. At the same time, Bulgarian society largely praises these exits and encourages these exits in the news or in online communities. For those that stayed or returned, many reported facing objections from

their peers and families. They were described as “exotic birds” like beings that were out of place, that were too good to be in Bulgaria. These instances all point to the existence of a push factor that goes beyond economic or social incentives. It indicates that the culture of leaving has developed as a norm for these young educated Bulgarians and because of this, some did not feel as if staying in Bulgaria was even a choice. Thus, from a young age, these young Bulgarians have chosen to leave their countries, some indefinitely. After nearly 30 years of having the choice, the “right choice” is to leave.

When searching for a difference in life satisfaction between these two groups of people: those that have left to live abroad and those that have stayed in or returned to Bulgaria: a major difference in happiness could not be found. It seems that for this sample, the people that have chosen Bulgaria are just as happy as those who chose life abroad. In addition to these findings from within this sample, other surprising trends in Bulgaria generally have been reported: Alpha Research has found optimism levels in Bulgaria at an all-time high, and the World Happiness Report found Bulgaria to have made one of the largest increases out of the countries included in their research. New IT and outsourcing companies in Bulgaria are experiencing growth and some entrepreneurs are looking to the market in Bulgaria to start new businesses. Finally, even with an annual net loss of emigrants leaving the country over immigrants returning, the numbers of emigrants lost from year to year has been decreasing as more Bulgarians have returned. Perhaps these trends are indicative of a greater change to come to Bulgaria as the generation of those who have never grown up in communist Bulgaria begin to reach adulthood. As one respondent writes: “A significant contributing factor to my decision to move back to Bulgaria was my sense of civic duty/patriotism/giving back to the community.” Perhaps this mode of thinking will be the new norm.

Limitations and future research

Several limitations to this work must be considered in understanding the information presented and conclusions drawn in this piece. Firstly, many numbers that are reported from secondary research in this thesis are based on research and reports available from the Bulgarian National Statistics Institute, which has been criticized by scholars for producing unreliable numbers and having inconsistent data collection practices. Other numbers reported are from scholarly research, but even these largely use NSI data. This presents a major problem in fully understanding the actual magnitude of the brain drain. Most significantly, there is no current data reported on how many students leave each year and how many of these eventually return.

Secondly, as stated in the Methods section of this thesis, the sample used in this work is not representative of the general population in Bulgaria. The positives of using alumni from the American College of Sofia are that they are all have graduated from the same, highly-selective high school in Bulgaria. This helps account for variances among respondents if another sampling method was implemented. They are also graduates from a school that often has students accepted into to higher education institutions abroad; therefore, they are among the high school students would likely have to face the decision of whether or not to apply to schools abroad. On the other hand, examining perceptions of ACS alumni may also bias results because many of these students attend this school in order to pursue universities abroad. Additionally, the sample includes a wide range of respondents aged 22-40 years old. Therefore, other factors such as the number of years

that one has lived abroad, or variances in domestic and international policy or economy from year to year likely also influenced the choices of respondents.

It is my hope that in the future, other scholars can explore these social phenomena in a larger-scope study that looks at high school graduates from across Bulgaria using a robust random sampling procedure. Also, they can focus comparisons of perceptions among students of the same age and graduation year to better draw conclusions and accounting for larger changes that may occur from year to year. Additionally, as there is much evidence from this study in support of a “culture of leaving” in Bulgaria, another avenue for analysis would be to see if other Eastern European countries have developed similar norms. Since the brain drain phenomenon is common in Eastern Europe, there is a lot of potential to examine the situation in other countries in order to determine if this is in fact a unique phenomenon for Bulgaria or not, and to better understand the implications of migration choices among other Eastern European countries.

Appendix

APPENDIX A: SURVEY

Start of Block: Intro

Hello! My name is Michael Deegan I am a Master's student at the University of Texas at Austin. I am researching the migration choices that Bulgarians make after completing high school. The questions within this survey will help me understand what people consider in making the choice to leave or to stay in Bulgaria after completing secondary school, as well as how this has influenced their satisfaction in life. By answering these questions, you are offering your consent to have this information included in a published report and possible articles that will result from the research.

I will not use any personally identifiable information in the published work. Your privacy will remain protected.

The survey should take you between 10-15 minutes to complete.

End of Block: Intro

Q2 What is your age?

Q3 What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Other _____

Q5 Where are you from?

- ☐ City _____
- ☐ Country _____

Q7 Are you employed?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Q8 Within which industry are you employed?

- Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing
- Arts and Recreation Services
- Business (Consulting)
- Business (Marketing/Sales)
- Business (Entrepreneurial)
- Business (Administration)
- Construction
- Education (Teacher)
- Education(Nonprofit)
- Education (Research)
- Education (University Professor, Administration)
- Financial and Insurance Services
- Government (Civil service, entry level)
- Government (Leadership)
- Healthcare (Nursing, Medical Technician,etc)
- Healthcare (Doctor)
- Information Media and Telecommunications
- Law
- Nonprofit
- Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services
- Student (Graduate School)
- Technology(Programming, Software Engineering)
- Other

Q56 (Other)Within which industry are you employed?

- Please type in your industry
-

Q10 Why are you not working? (*optional*)

Q11 What is your marital status?

- ☐ Married
- ☐ Widowed
- ☐ Divorced
- ☐ Separated
- ☐ Never married

Q12 Where is (was) your spouse from?

- ☐ Bulgaria
- ☐ Other _____

Q57 How long have you been (were you) married? (in years)

- ☐ Please type in the length of time in years
-

Q58 Do you have any children?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Q59 How many children do you have?

Q14 When did you graduate from secondary school (high school)?

Q15 What languages do you speak at a high-functioning level? (*Select all that apply*)

- ☐ Bulgarian
- ☐ English
- ☐ German
- ☐ Russian
- ☐ French
- ☐ Spanish
- ☐ Other (Please type) _____

Q62 Have you lived in Bulgaria for your entire life?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Q33 Where do you currently live?

- ☐ In Bulgaria
- ☐ Outside of Bulgaria

Q17 How many countries have you lived in (for at least a year)?

- ☐ 1

End of Block: Dems

Start of Block: Countries

Q71 Please type in the country name and the number of years that you lived there, separated by a comma (example: Bulgaria, 19 USA, 4...).

End of Block: Countries

Start of Block: Satisfaction

Q18 The following questions relate to the level of your satisfaction in life. *Please imagine a ladder with steps numbered from zero at the bottom to 10 at the top. The top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for you.*

Q19 On which step of the ladder would you say you personally feel you stand at this time?

- ☐ 10
- ☐ 9
- ☐ 8
- ☐ 7
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 5
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 3

☐ 2

☐ 1

☐ 0

Q99 On which step do you think you will stand about five years from now?

☐ 10

☐ 9

☐ 8

☐ 7

☐ 6

☐ 5

☐ 4

☐ 3

☐ 2

☐ 1

☐ 0

Q100 On which step do you think you were standing on about five years ago?

☐ 10

☐ 9

☐ 8

☐ 7

☐ 6

☐ 5

☐ 4

☐ 3

☐ 2

☐ 1

☐ 0

Q21 What do you think of when you think of satisfaction in life? Rank your choices below with 1 being the highest and 6 being the lowest. *Click and drag choices to rearrange.*

- _____ Education
- _____ Career
- _____ Family
- _____ Friends
- _____ Income
- _____ Feeling of Security

End of Block: Satisfaction

Start of Block: Stayers

Q23 When you graduated from secondary school, did you pursue an undergraduate degree?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Q24 What subject did you study in your undergraduate institution?

Q25 Where was your undergraduate institution?

- ☐ In Bulgaria
- ☐ Outside of Bulgaria

Q26 Have you ever lived, worked, or studied outside of Bulgaria for at least a year?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Q27 What did you do?

- ☐ Worked
- ☐ Pursued a graduate degree
- ☐ Worked and pursued a graduate degree
- ☐ Other (please specify) _____

Q28 If you went to graduate school, what did you study? (Degree name, level--example: History, PhD)

Q29 What influenced you in deciding to stay in Bulgaria?

- ☐ Education
- ☐ Career
- ☐ Family
- ☐ Friends
- ☐ Income
- ☐ Feeling of Security

Q30 About what age were you when you made the decision to stay in Bulgaria?

Q78 Has anyone from your family or close friends lived abroad for longer than a year?

- ☐ Yes, Family
- ☐ Yes, Friends
- ☐ Yes, Family and Friends
- ☐ No

Q82 List your family members or close friends that have lived abroad for longer than a year. (For example: "mother, sister, 2 cousins, 3 friends, etc.")

Q74 Did anyone beyond yourself influence your decision to live/study/work in or out of Bulgaria?

- ☐ Yes, Family
- ☐ Yes, Friends
- ☐ Yes, Family and Friends
- ☐ No

Q80 How do your values compare to the predominant views of other Bulgarians according to your perspective?

- ☐ More Conservative
- ☐ About the same
- ☐ More Liberal

Q84 What was your family's reaction to your choice to live/study/work in or out of Bulgaria?

- ☐ Supportive
- ☐ Neither supportive nor unsupportive
- ☐ Unsupportive

Q76 Feel free to use this space to share any additional information that may help me understand your decisions and experiences.

End of Block: Stayers

Start of Block: Leavers

Q32 Did you return to Bulgaria to live?

- ☐ Yes, I live in Bulgaria now
- ☐ Yes, but only until I found a job abroad
- ☐ Yes, but only until I started graduate school
- ☐ No, I still live abroad
- ☐ Other _____

Q38 What did you study in graduate school?

Q93 Do you live in Bulgaria now?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Q34 What influenced you in deciding to not return to Bulgaria? (check all that apply)

- ☐ Education
- ☐ Career
- ☐ Family

- ☐ Friends
- ☐ Income
- ☐ Feeling of Security

Q36 About what age were you when you started thinking about leaving Bulgaria?

Q37 What age were you when you left Bulgaria?

Q44 Would you consider moving back to Bulgaria in the future?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No

Q51 Did you investigate opportunities in your industry in Bulgaria?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Q52 How does the industry in Bulgaria compare to where you live now?

- ☐ It's better
- ☐ It's about the same
- ☐ It's worse

Q46 Do you financially support family that lives in Bulgaria?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Q90 Has anyone from your family or close friends lived abroad for longer than a year?

- ☐ Yes, Family
- ☐ Yes, Friends
- ☐ Yes, Family and Friends
- ☐ No

Q94 List your family members or close friends that have lived abroad for longer than a year. (For example: "mother, sister, 2 cousins, 3 friends, etc.")

Q86 Did anyone beyond yourself influence your decision to live/study/work in or out of Bulgaria?

- ☐ Yes, Family
- ☐ Yes, Friends
- ☐ Yes, Family and Friends
- ☐ No

Q92 How do your values compare to the predominant views of other Bulgarians according to your perspective?

- ☐ More Conservative
- ☐ About the same
- ☐ More Liberal

Q96 What was your family's reaction to your choice to live/study/work in or out of Bulgaria?

- ☐ Supportive
- ☐ Neither supportive nor unsupportive
- ☐ Unsupportive

Q88 Feel free to use this space to share any additional information that may help me understand your decisions and experiences.

End of Block: Leavers

Start of Block: Returners

Q41 What influenced you in deciding to return to Bulgaria? (check all that apply)

- ☐ Education
- ☐ Career
- ☐ Family
- ☐ Friends

- ☐ Income
- ☐ Feeling of Security

Q42 About what age were you when you started thinking about leaving Bulgaria?

Q91 What age were you when you left Bulgaria?

Q92 What age were you when you returned to Bulgaria?

Q39 Did you take a job in the same field of which you studied or worked abroad?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Q102 Has anyone from your family or close friends lived abroad for longer than a year?

- ☐ Yes, Family
- ☐ Yes, Friends
- ☐ Yes, Family and Friends
- ☐ No

Q106 List your family members or close friends that have lived abroad for longer than a year. (For example: "mother, sister, 2 cousins, 3 friends, etc.")

Q98 Did anyone beyond yourself influence your decision to live/study/work in or out of Bulgaria?

- ☐ Yes, Family
- ☐ Yes, Friends
- ☐ Yes, Family and Friends
- ☐ No

Q108 What was your family's reaction to your choice to live/study/work in or out of Bulgaria?

- ☐ Supportive
- ☐ Neither supportive nor unsupportive
- ☐ Unsupportive

Q104 How do your values compare to the predominant views of other Bulgarians according to your perspective?

- ☐ More Conservative
- ☐ About the same
- ☐ More Liberal

Q100 Feel free to use this space to share any additional information that may help me understand your decisions and experiences.

End of Block: Returners

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