

# **The Impact of Public Opinion on Ethnic Minorities in the Post-Communist State: A Focus on the State-Sanctioned Sterilization of Roma Women in the Czech Republic**

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## Abstract

*In this comprehensive project, I research the social and reproductive rights of the Roma within a post-communist society. Conducted with a specific focus on the incentivized and forced sterilizations of Roma women within the Czech Republic and how these individuals are only recently being compensated for those abuses which started over 60-years ago. The negative treatment of this ethnic minority is no new issue to the state and the region's history where World War II ethnonational propaganda is reflected in today's treatment and policies. Why has public opinion on the Roma people remained similar to that during the time of the Roma Holocaust, despite there being an otherwise massive progressive political-ideological shift in the Czech Republic? Questioning why it has taken the state over 60 years to compensate victims and understanding why these human rights abuses continue to persist despite the country's EU and UN membership and democratization period. My project sheds light on the significance of underlying public opinion and the complexities of democratization on the rights and protections of marginalized groups.*

Public opinion surrounding the rights and treatment of the Roma ethnic minority has defined the lives and wellbeing of the population for hundreds of years. Anti-Roma rhetoric has been a significant part of Czech culture, society, and history since the early 6th century and continues to detrimentally impact the ethnic minority to this day. Ethnonational propaganda instigated by the Nazis and their “final solution of the Gypsy question” provides a similar level of indifference to the Czech government and its citizens during Communism, Post-Communism, and the period following the decision to compensate Roma women who were victims of state-sanctioned forced sterilizations.<sup>1</sup> The Roma community was actively discriminated against on social, political, and economic grounds in manners that manifested in many different forms. Looking at the current government-funded projects, or lack of demonstrates the indifference and racist ideology which still drives the current institutions. The fall of communism, symbolized by the December 1989 non-violent Velvet Revolution, was meant to be a shift towards progressive democratic values and a new foundation for fundamental human rights for all citizens, regardless of race, gender, or class. However, it provided little to no results toward a more just and equal life for the Roma people of the Czech Republic. Today, the Roma continues to be disadvantaged on a series of fronts, “On almost every indicator of human development, in almost every European country, the Roma fall far below the national average. They have lower incomes, worse health, poorer housing, lower literacy rates, and higher levels of unemployment than the rest of the population”.<sup>2</sup> The United Nations published a 2003 report labeling the Roma people as the most disadvantaged ethnic group in Europe and described the exclusions they faced on a

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<sup>1</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. (n.d.). *GENOCIDE OF EUROPEAN ROMA (GYPSIES), 1939–1945*. United States holocaust memorial museum. Retrieved April 7, 2022, from <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/genocide-of-european-roma-gypsies-1939-1945>

<sup>2</sup> Amnesty International UK. (2010). *Roma in Europe Briefing - Amnesty International UK*. Briefing- Human Rights on the Margins Roma in Europe. Retrieved April 11, 2022, from [https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/roma\\_in\\_europe\\_briefing.pdf](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/roma_in_europe_briefing.pdf)

variety of social, economic, and political fronts.<sup>3</sup> Acknowledging the struggles Roma women went through on the grounds of race, gender, and socioeconomic status is critical in understanding the complexities of the flawed social and political system in the Czech Republic. By understanding the historical, cultural, geopolitical, and economic significance of the Roma sterilization case, it is better understood what prevented Roma women from obtaining any forms of justice or acknowledgment from the state and from the people. Looking at where these negative public opinion perspectives began and where throughout history have gotten more violent and targeted may be indicative of why Roma sterilization victims were finally compensated after decades of invalidation and indifference by the state, Czech citizens, and the international community.

#### Early Roma History:

The exact date is unknown, however, it is estimated that the first tribes of Roma people entered Moravian and Bohemian lands from India in the late-14th century. Immediately, Roma people were hunted down and removed from Czech and Slovak lands. The Holy Roman Emperor, Ferdinand I, issued the first-ever verdict in the Czech Kingdom that prevented the Roma from living or even stepping foot in the regional territory.<sup>4</sup> Although many generations of Roma entered the Bohemian and Moravian regions in the 14th century, the majority of Roma people living in the Czech Republic now actually are Hungarian and Slovak refugees fleeing the Nazi occupation of World War II. During the Nazi occupation period, the Roma population was targeted and labeled as an inferior race that is a burden to the ‘true’ white Europeans. The already underrepresented Czech Roma population became even smaller as researchers estimate a

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<sup>3</sup> Open Society Foundations. (2019, May). *The Roma and Open Society*. Open Society Foundations. Retrieved April 10, 2022, from <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/explainers/roma-and-open-society>

<sup>4</sup> Horváthová, J. (n.d.). *Roma Civil Rights Movement*. RomArchive. Retrieved April 7, 2022, from <https://www.romarchive.eu/en/roma-civil-rights-movement/roma-czech-lands/>

mere 600 or fewer Roma survived the horrors of the Holocaust.<sup>5</sup> The influence of public opinion and labeling of Roma people as ‘inferior’ and ‘culturally substandard’ continued for decades with instances still occurring to this day.

#### Communist Czechoslovakia:

On February 25, 1948, the first-ever Czech communist government was established during the relatively peaceful Soviet expansion into Central and Western Europe. World War II was a turbulent time for Czechoslovakia politically as the influence of the Axis and Allied powers stormed through the country’s borders. The United States and other major powers in the West feared Soviet influence and determined a German presence was necessary during the high propaganda period of the Red Scare. Despite the Soviets maintaining control of Czechoslovakia through a national electoral process, Nazi influences and high levels of economic turmoil took a hold of the country which would continue to impact the social, political, and economic realm for decades to come. Between the years 1970 and 1980, forced assimilation was pushed by the communist party, and the rights of the Roma were targeted on the education, housing, and medical fronts to name a few. The forced segregation of the Roma continued during the communist rule as their culture, language, and well-being were further diminished.

#### Communist Dissolution:

From November 17, 1989, to December 29, 1989, the Czechoslovakian people hosted a national non-violent protest now referred to as the Velvet Revolution in an attempt to end the 41-year Communist party rule in the country. Public tolerance of the economically and socially degrading communists grew to be too much for the majority of Czech citizens triggering nearly

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<sup>5</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, R. D. I. and R. B. C. (1997, November 1). *Roma in the Czech Republic: Identity and culture*. Refworld. Retrieved April 7, 2022, from [https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6a80f1c.html#:~:text=The%20Roma%20first%20appeared%20in,II%20\(Radio%20Prah%201997\)](https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6a80f1c.html#:~:text=The%20Roma%20first%20appeared%20in,II%20(Radio%20Prah%201997))

500,000 people to join protests during the month and a half long process. Protesters were fighting against the stagnant and repressive communist rule in the state that prevented citizens from living the lives they felt they were deserving of. This period was expected to bring improvements to Roma's livelihoods as democratization promised greater economic, social, and political freedoms for all. Unfortunately, many of the abuses that occurred in the Czechoslovak communist period persisted long into the democratization period of the Czech Republic with Roma people, especially Roma women being targets of hate to this day.

*Post-Communist Czech Republic:*

The process of democratization in the Czech Republic was a relatively smooth and seamless process following the Velvet Revolution, hence the symbolic name. The state was officially dissolved on January 1, 1993, with the first general election being held on May 31, 1996, with over 76 percent of eligible voters participating.<sup>6</sup> Nationality laws used to determine Czech and Slovak citizenship caused tension in the region with nationalism causing strain in the country. This combined with the economic turmoil caused by the separation from Soviet economic systems and methods also produced tensivity in the region especially following the reveal of new government funding programs for marginalized groups. The tense economic situation in the region and the distinct social policies of the center-right government caused a series of new political parties to emerge allowing electoral processes to reach their democratic potential. Unfortunately, these parties and leaders failed to address the democratic wishes of the Czech people, and the state's flawed social, political, and economic endeavors combined with the increasing tensions with the Roma community threatened the possibility of European Union membership opportunities. Groups such as Implus '99 formed as a voice for those impacted by

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<sup>6</sup> Turnovec, F. (1997). Votes, seats, and power: 1996 Parliamentary election in the Czech Republic. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 30(3), 289–305. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45302034>

the limits of new Czech civic institutions. They attempted to rebuild the structures of a communist society in a way to benefit the citizens not the people in power, "We came up with the intent to do exactly this -- we came up to tell people, 'Look, your future is in your hands. If you leave everything in the hands of politicians, many of whom are really still influenced by the patterns of behavior that were common under the Communist system, you will not be living in a truly democratic society.'" <sup>7</sup> Social services in post-communist Czech included progress in the welfare support programs which began almost immediately in 1993. Social security including insurance opportunities, social support, and assistance progressed especially for those falling below or along the poverty line, however, the health system maintained a very similar flawed structure to that of communist times. <sup>8</sup> For the Czech people, democratization meant opportunities for the free market, political contributions, and civic engagement and developments. <sup>9</sup> For the Roma people, communism and capitalism factors were the driving force of social inequalities and the driving point for much of the hate and violence they would continue to experience into the 21st century. This leads me to believe that the root cause of anti-Roma sentiments in the Czech Republic was not purely caused by economic, political, and social structures but a combination of a variety of public opinion influencing factors.

### Forced Sterilizations:

Roma women in the Czech Republic are being attacked on a multitude of grounds and have been for decades. Not only are the group targeted on the basis of their race and socioeconomic status, but gender too. This manifests itself in an attack on female autonomy

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<sup>7</sup> Hill, D., & Navazelskis, I. (2008, April 9). *Czech Republic: New Group strives for civil society*. RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty. Retrieved April 10, 2022, from <https://www.rferl.org/a/1091844.html>

<sup>8</sup> Illner, M. (1998). The Changing Quality of Life in a Post-Communist Country: The Case of Czech Republic. *Social Indicators Research*, 43(1/2), 141–170. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27522303>

<sup>9</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica. (n.d.). *History of the Czech Republic*. Encyclopædia Britannica. Retrieved April 10, 2022, from <https://www.britannica.com/place/Czech-Republic/History>

perpetuated by the prejudicial health care system. The first known cases of forced sterilizations occurred in the early 1970s. The process typically included a Roma woman coming into the hospital to birth her child and during intense levels of pain, they were handed forms to sign which due to the vulnerability of the situation, they typically did. Unknowingly to them, the women signed away their ability to ever be able to produce a child again. Many of these sterilizations occurred during cesarean section or vaginal births unknowingly, however, some were performed as a result of threats of the state taking away women's existing children or their family's government welfare support. Many human rights critics would claim that these violations were made by the individual doctors rather than the state. In reality, the state is to blame as those doctors who performed the sterilization methods were given their practicing licenses by the state as a way to "discriminate, seclude and eradicate" the Roma population, claims human rights advocate, Gwendolyn Albert.<sup>10</sup> The Czech healthcare system maintained a similar structure during the communist and into the early 21st century providing little assistance for any Czech citizens regardless of their ethnicity. Evidence of these sterilizations is minimal as records dictating sterilizations are limited during the communist period and the population policy created to allow them to occur is an unofficial policy. There was little incentive for non-Roma individuals to stand for the abuses Roma women faced as medical attention of any kind was limited. There is evidence of hundreds of cases of forced sterilizations in the Czech Republic with many women claiming it has ruined their mental health and marital relations. Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Dunja Mijatovic said, "The singling out of Roma women can only be seen in connection with the long-standing and deep-rooted prejudices and

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<sup>10</sup> Koslerova, A. (2021, March 8). *'I always wanted a girl': Scandal of Czech Roma forcibly sterilised*. The Guardian. Retrieved April 7, 2022, from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/mar/08/czech-republic-roma-women-forcibly-sterilised-scandal>

discrimination (against) Roma in Czech society”.<sup>11</sup> Many women have spoken out about their experiences and that is the best form of evidence there is for the decades of forced sterilizations in Czechia.

### 2021 Decision to Compensate:

On July 22, 2021, the Czech Senate voted to sign a bill compensating the hundreds of Roma women who were victims of state-sanctioned forced sterilizations. The law provided a 300,000 Czech crowns compensation award to women sterilized between the years 1966 and 2012. Roma victims and supporters were overjoyed at the passing of the bill as it finally provides some form of justice and closure for the victims of the state-sanctioned abuse.<sup>12</sup> Elena Gorolova, a sterilization survivor addressed the inadequacy and yet a necessity for compensations to occur, “No amount of money will bring us back the chance to have more children, but the compensation is important for justice”. The decision to compensate women was a win in the fight to gain women some form of closure on the matter, however, it brings into question why the decision to compensate was finally made and why it took so long.

In this paper, I will explore why it took the Czech government over 60 years to compensate Roma women who were victims of state-sanctioned forced sterilizations. Why do the rhetoric of the state and the attitudes of the citizens have an impact on the rights of the Roma people? The rise of Roma sterilizations is somewhat of an anomaly as they arose at a time when Czechoslovak officials were worried about the declining population rates of the state. Pronatalist policies pushed to have as many children as possible as birth rates rapidly declined in the early to

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<sup>11</sup> Batha, E. (2021, February 10). *Czech lawmakers urged to compensate sterilised roma women*. Reuters. Retrieved April 10, 2022, from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-czech-roma-sterilisation-trfn/czech-lawmakers-urged-to-compensate-sterilised-roma-women-idUSKBN2AA0TS>

<sup>12</sup> John, B. (2021, August 9). *Czech Republic to offer compensation to Roma women illegally sterilized*. The Organization for World Peace. Retrieved April 10, 2022, from <https://theowp.org/czech-republic-to-offer-compensation-to-roma-women-illegally-sterilized/>

mid-1960s.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, Roma families were incentivized to avoid having children, mostly in the form of cash handouts and other government grants. Roma families who were already receiving minimal government support or funding took advantage of the initiative as it would support them and their family's livelihoods. The Czech government was aware of Roma's higher fertility rates and economic insecurities and would take advantage of this both publicly and privately. In fact, official documents and government representatives would commonly publicly declare what little value Roma populations had for the greater value of Czech society. It is important to understand what it took for the state to admit to its wrong-doings and what finally allowed for the compensation efforts to begin. It will set a precedent for future state-sanctioned abuses and how the state should acknowledge, be held accountable, and compensate victims of human rights violations.

For many Roma people and Roma-rights advocates in the Czech Republic, the post-communist space was expected to be a time of hope and advancements in social and reproductive rights. Generally, the democratization of a state is viewed as an opportunity for improved protection for marginalized individuals. Unfortunately, the Czech Roma sterilization case provides a look into the ways marginalized individuals continue to be used as a way of power control and demonstrates the lack of international inaction proving the influence eugenics and white supremacy continues to have in the modern world. This paper examines the intersections of race, socioeconomic status, and gender and how these traits continue to impact marginalized individuals despite the progressive nature of a democratic society. I argue that it took the Czech Republic over 60 years to acknowledge and compensate for the decades of forced sterilization of

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<sup>13</sup> POPIN Czech Republic, Burcin, B., & Komanek, D. (1999). *Past and Recent Population Policy*. POPIN Czech Republic- Czech Republic Population Information. Retrieved April 7, 2022, from <http://popin.natur.cuni.cz/html2/index.php?item=5.1>

Roma women because of the complex combination of deeply historical rhetoric rooted in World War II ethnonationalism propaganda, generationally harmful or indifferent public opinion, and a lack of firm and accountable anti-discriminatory laws in the international community.

This is an extremely peculiar case as it pertains to a state which rapidly shifted from a 40-year totalitarian rule to a full-functioning democratic state engaged with human rights and intergovernmental organizations with the goals of maintaining international and domestic harmony. Reports about forced sterilizations had been cycling through media outlets and among Roma communities for nearly six decades but were typically ignored. During Czech communist rule, Roma women were incentivized to have abortions and sterilizations as an act of keeping the Czech bloodline ‘clean’. The Czechoslovak Federal Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs issued a paper in 1972 claiming the Roma as “culturally substandard” and justified their claims by stating that due to health and safety reasons, Roma people were unable to “properly” care for their children.<sup>14</sup> It was believed that this openly racist rhetoric would only persist from World War II to the end of the communist rule period as a refreshing new democratic wave approached but it has lingered. Unfortunately, the acts of sterilization became acts of targeting women at weak points and non-consensually signing their autonomy over to racist individuals. In a way, the shift from communism to democracy split the blame between the state and the individual as the doctors performing procedures were using their racism to take away the rights of Roma women. This is why I believe it is important to analyze public opinion and how the fall of communism places a lot of the blame on the general perspectives of the public on the rights of

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<sup>14</sup> Hutt, D. (2021, August 2). *The story of Roma Women's forced sterilisation in Central Europe*. euronews. Retrieved April 7, 2022, from <https://www.euronews.com/2021/08/02/the-shameful-story-of-roma-women-s-forced-sterilisation-in-central-europe>

Roma women. It is important to understand how newly democratic states' values and policies must be framed in order for marginalized individuals to be protected.

In order to defend my argument, I begin by explaining the general struggles of the Roma community within the Czech Republic which will provide a foundation for understanding the general disadvantages Roma people face in the country. Next, I provide a holistic assessment of non-western feminist issues in the form of a literature review in order to understand the historical, cultural, geopolitical, and economic significance of this Roma sterilization case. Then, I will introduce the case analysis to analyze the situation in Czech and understand what impacted public opinion throughout the history of the case. I display data collected from various sources in order to demonstrate the variety of independent variables that align with my dependent variable and research question. The methodological section uses the independent variables of elected-official rhetoric, the emergence of Roma organizations, intergovernmental organization membership, and GDP wealth to attempt to answer what impacts public opinion. Following the presentation of the data collected, the analysis section will use the data found and compare it to my argument in order to see what impacted the lack of acknowledgment by the Czech government for nearly 60 years and what led to the compensation of Roma victims in 2021. Finally, I provide a conclusion to summarize my findings and understand what the international community can do leading forward with states with a history of human rights violations.

### **Literature Review**

#### **A Holistic Assessment of Non-Western Feminist Issues**

In the academic world, there are a variety of works centered around feminist theory and the abundance of challenges women face in modern society. Unfortunately, many of these works are those of white Western women with similar privileged backgrounds who approach the

concepts from this specific lens. The academic domain is primarily filled with American scholars with broad generalizations and developments which do not apply to and are less significant in understanding the Roma sterilization case. In the Czech Roma sterilization case, it is important to focus on scholars from or with extensive knowledge of the Czechoslovak region who have a broader understanding of the region's historical and regional significance. Generalizations of feminist theory do not apply to regions where massive political, economic, and historically significant shifts have occurred as these works do not take into account the struggles these specific groups have faced in these niche circumstances. The height of the communist regime and the fall of the period had unique and tremendous impacts on the women of the Czech Republic, especially those of Roma descent. Despite a rise in democratic values triggered by the 1989 Velvet Revolution, reproductive rights abuses continued to persist against Roma women. Human rights were severely impacted during the turbulent political transition period, especially rights supporting and protecting women of color.

The themes I chose to focus on in this literature review cover a wide range of factors which eventually solidified my argument on how Roma women were the victims of state-sanctioned forced sterilizations and why compensations took over 60 years to commence. I begin with a focus on the importance of a strong historical understanding and how a deep knowledge of Czechoslovak conflicts and rhetorics is important for studying the case. The emphasis on rhetoric is important to my argument as it was one of the main tools used by the Czech government to justify, promote, and continue the sterilizations for decades. Next, I introduced the culture and the flaws of generalizations in feminist theory when applied to this specific case. Understanding the problematic conventional standards set in place by the Czech government's fear of Roma culture will demonstrate why Roma women were targeted and why protests and social

movements in support of Roma began. The economic section strives to focus on the direct correlations between GDP wealth and social justice. How are marginalized citizens impacted by government funding and spending strategies both within a communist and post-communist economic structure? Finally, geopolitics is a thought-provoking thematic area as it takes intergovernmental organization membership into account which on its own has a tumultuous and criticized history of human rights policy work and laws. When applied to the Roma sterilization case, it demonstrates the lack of accountability within human rights laws and states' ability to break international law with no repercussions.

### Historical Analysis

Understanding the case of Czechoslovak feminist theory is one that requires complex historical knowledge as the discrimination of Roma individuals has been occurring for hundreds of years with the implications of those decades of unfair treatment harming them to this day. This especially applies to Roma women who were discriminated against on basis of a variety of levels, "For Eastern European Women, the developed theoretical apparatus of feminism is conducive to a quick application to our personal experience and to such generalizing, often conflicting diagnosis as "Our society is patriarchal" or, on the contrary, "It is generally matriarchal"; "It is sex-conscious" or, on the contrary, "Equality of the sexes is not a problem that concerns us."<sup>15</sup> During Czech communism, women were attacked by ethnonationalism ideology stemming from the Nazi regime, capitalist ideology perpetrated by bourgeois feminists Czech nationalism caused by the fall of communism, and societal dehumanization on the basis of

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<sup>15</sup> Havelkova, H. (2020). In N. Funk & M. Mueller (Eds.), *Gender politics and post-communism: Reflections from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union* (1st ed., pp. 62–74). essay, Routledge.

being a woman and a person of color.<sup>16</sup> Rhetoric and public discourse play an important role in the ways in which Roma people are treated socially in the Czech Republic and both are fueled by the historical and structurally-rooted racism and ethnonationalism culture. Anti-Roma rhetoric is obviously one of the main pieces of the Roma sterilization cases and understanding how the social norm is created is important in learning how to repair and dismantle the conflict. It demonstrates the historical consistency of Roma hatred that is present to this day and continues to dictate the ways they are treated in the Czech Republic. I argue that individualism pushed by Western thinkers is an ineffective measurement of progress in post-communist women's rights movements and progressions as it does not take historical contexts into consideration and in turn depreciates the Roma woman's experience.

When questioning how ethnic stereotypes and discrimination persist and increase within a society, understanding the impacts of social norms driven by groupthink and politicians' vocal opinions is critical. The "homophily principle" as described by Luca Varadi, refers to the grouping of prejudiced views and the parallels to certain socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic groups. This forms preferences strengthened by shared commonalities furthering the divide between people of color and white folk, "The first process implies the selection of friends who are similar in certain aspects. This leads to the research field of interpersonal attraction, with the principle that a person perceived to be similar is generally found to be attractive. The second process is that of growing common socialization and shared experiences of the friends, through mutual influence, conformity or even social pressure"<sup>17</sup>. Social pressure is also created through government influence, more specifically the opinions of influential individuals in a place of

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<sup>16</sup> Ferber, M. A., & Raabe, P. H. (2003). Women in the Czech Republic: Feminism, Czech Style. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 16(3), 407–430. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20020174>

<sup>17</sup> Váradi Luca. (2014). In *Youths trapped in prejudice Hungarian adolescents' attitudes towards the roma* (pp. 129–129). essay, Springer VS.

elected power. In the case of Czech anti-Roma rhetoric, President Miloš Zeman was quoted in late 2017 claiming that 90 percent of “unadaptable citizens” are of Roma descent.<sup>18</sup> Historically speaking, white citizens and the Roma population were set up against one another in multiple instances from the Nazi invasion to economic decisions. This promoted the agenda of the leaders in charge and historically has remained that way since the Roma migrated into Czech lands.

Another example of historically-driven rhetoric is a CNN Prima News interview with the Czech Public Defender of Rights, Stanislav Křeček, where he denies his past claims of targeting Roma localities. In this article, Křeček claims, “...After all, everybody knows those localities were not always 'excluded,' and they did not become these devastated, excluded parts of our lives until the 'activities' of specific individuals.”<sup>19</sup> This attitude is similar to that of propaganda spewed by the Nazi party during their invasion in 1939 as the population was framed as freeloading outsiders who stole government resources that belonged to the white citizens of Europe. The need to isolate these individuals into concentration camps mirrors the strategically selected Roma localities found scattered throughout the Czech Republic and public officials attempting to turn these locations into something the Roma decided for themselves is inaccurate and misleading. This political rhetoric future divides the Roma-Czech relationship and creates social pressures that future segregates the two populations.

Understanding the historical context of the Czech-Roma relationship is important in understanding why it took so long for the compensation period to begin. Rhetoric stemming from Nazi ideology, self-serving capitalist ideology, and racist rhetoric stemming from white

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<sup>18</sup> Romea.cz. (2017, November 13). *Czech president says 90 % of "inadaptable citizens" are Romani*. romea.cz. Retrieved April 7, 2022, from <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/czech/czech-president-says-90-of-inadaptable-citizens-are-romani>

<sup>19</sup> Romea.cz. (2022, February 11). *Jarmila Balážová further reveals Czech Ombudsmans incompetence and lack of professionalism during discussion on CNN Prima News*. romea.cz. Retrieved April 7, 2022, from <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/jarmila-balazova-further-reveals-czech-ombudsman-apos-s-incompetence-and-lack-of-professionalism-during-discussion-on-cnn>

supremacy ingrained in the modern systems is still present in the 21st century. Varadi's work demonstrates the significance of perceptions and social pressures on the rights of ethnic minorities within society. Commonalities bond groups together and many politicians use the strategy of historical hatred for a certain group to bond together the majority of citizens. Simply for the purpose of this section, I argue that Roma victims were not compensated for sterilization abuses until 2021 because of toxic ethnically motivated rhetoric that modern-day feminist theory fails to shed a light on as it lacks an understanding of Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic's tumultuous political, economic, and social history.

### Cultural Analysis

In the communist and post-communist state, women are grouped and viewed as philosophically lesser with less privilege than those in the west, "The concepts of "feminism," "emancipation," "equality," and "quotas" all have different meanings East and West, as does the relationship of the individuals to the totality"<sup>20</sup>. It is a common misconception that democratization and modernity symbolize progress in morals and social standards. In the Czech case, cultural context is extremely important in understanding the injustices that occurred as the basis of being a woman and a part of a marginalized ethnic group. The application of Western words and concepts does not apply to the arguments of post-communist feminist thinkers. The concept of the individual did not exist in the communist state, "The individualism presupposed by Western feminist conceptions is often alien to post-communist women as well".<sup>21</sup> This applies even more to the Roma population that was segregated and discriminated against based on gender, class, and race, among other things. Culturally speaking, the Roma people have a strong

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<sup>20</sup> Funk, N. (1993). Feminism and Post-Communism. *Hypatia*, 8(4), 85–88. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3810371>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 20

heritage with oral traditions, language, and a strong emphasis on familial ties. To the Roma, keeping their traditions is of utmost importance to them as the risk to migrate to unknown lands took away everything they had ever known. To the Czechs, these traditions were extremely unusual and framed by Czech leaders as unusual and parasitic.

Following the fall of communism, nationalism raged through the Czech Republic as a loss of identity was taking place for many Czechs and now Slovaks. I argue that this shift to high levels of nationalism is the point that turned the Czech feminist movement from a fight for women's rights to a fight for white women's rights. The Roma were excluded on a series of fronts, especially those pertaining to social rights. Western feminists continued to view the situation in Europe as one of a fight between totalitarianism and women, however, it is a much deeper culturally and socially ingrained issue. Funk writes, "In order for Western feminists not to misunderstand post-communist women...it is important to pay heed to differences in meaning and the different issues and historical and social contexts of the post-communist women"<sup>22</sup>.

I argue that this connects directly to the Roma sterilization case as many Western feminist thinkers focused solely on women's rights of the post-communist state versus the rights of culturally-targeted marginalized individuals such as the Roma. By prioritizing the rights of the general woman population, the niche abuse circumstances were diminished. This all ties back to the strategically created systems that cater to the straight, white, male populations within society. A system that was created with this population in mind pays no attention to the struggles or exclusions of marginalized populations as they are not wanted there in the first place. In the context of the Roma sterilization case, I argue that it took so long for Roma women to be compensated because the Czech systems prevented the voices of Roma women and supporters to

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 20

be heard. The systems have the power and ensure that they are unable to be held accountable for crimes against minority groups. The impacts of the rise of social media and pro-Roma organizations challenged these ideals and are a large reason why Roma women were finally compensated for the crimes that occurred.

### *Geopolitical Analysis*

The geopolitical aspect of the Roma sterilization case is especially important when looking at the timeline in which the Czech Republic was in the European Union and United Nations ascension and full membership periods. The emphasis on democratic values and social justice these organizations bring should have promoted these ideals in a state that wanted to join these institutions. An even more intriguing situation is how the Czech Republic continued to produce Roma sterilizations after its accession to the European Union and United Nations. Zoltan Buza unpacks the limitations of legalization for protecting human rights and the significance of laws versus norms. Looking at how member-states of influential intergovernmental organizations continue to abuse human rights laws while not technically violating them, may provide some answers to the Roma sterilization case.

The concept of “norm evasion” describes racist domestic policies conformed in a way to legally achieve an outcome outlawed by their international membership and documents.<sup>23</sup> The connection between laws and norms is a conflicting and consistent occurrence within the international system. The relationship between the two creates a gap that makes breaking laws a strategically legal endeavor for member states “Because of these gaps, law compliance and

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<sup>23</sup> Búzás, Z. (2021). A Theory of Norm Evasion. In *Evading international norms: Race and rights in the shadow of Legality* (pp. 33–70). essay, University of Pennsylvania Press.

legality on the one hand and norm following and normative appropriateness on the other often diverge.”<sup>24</sup>

In terms of racial discrimination, intergovernmental organizations tend to have broad laws and policies pertaining to civil-political and social-economic rights. The United Nations 1976 International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights ensures access to economic, social, and cultural rights to citizens without fear of discrimination. The covenant demands immediate not progressive actions on discrimination prevention. The Roma sterilization case stands as evidence of the weak bindings of right protection documents such as the ICESCR. Laws and protections that hold states accountable are able to be modified to protect themselves from specific violations, “The applicable international and European laws prohibit racial discrimination but allow differential treatment based on “an objective and reasonable justification”<sup>25</sup>.

The geopolitical analysis of the Roma sterilization case and feminist theory, in general, demonstrates the flawed and modifiable international system that benefits the white male population. On the topic of the Roma sterilization case, the politics of the international system are easily skewed to protect the state versus the members of the Czech Republic. Marginalized individuals face violations on the basis of gender, race, and socioeconomic status and the protections put in place at the highest level fail to do what they are intended to do.

### Economic Analysis

At the start of World War II, the Czech Republic was ranked as one of the top GDPs of Central and Eastern European countries. The future of the country’s economy was looking bright

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<sup>24</sup> Búzás, Z. (2021). After Legalization: The Persistent Violation of International Human Rights Norms. In *Evading international norms: Race and rights in the shadow of Legality* (pp. 3–32). essay, University of Pennsylvania Press.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 24

as it was relatively untouched by damages caused by the war and was able to prioritize other endeavors as opposed to countries such as Austria, Germany, and Poland which struggles with post-war reconstruction efforts. However, the country's economic decline occurred almost immediately at the start of the post-war period and this decline persisted well into the fall of communism as annual growth was at a minimum.

The Czech state struggled economically in the years following World War II and through communism as the turbulent political realm allowed for the downfall of economic privileges. As economic and political tension increased, discrimination and prejudice increased as social funding became more of a sensitive topic and less time was dedicated to morals in the system.

The application of the Soviet economic model was thought to be a period where minor but positive changes were to take place, “In this context, the Prague Spring of 1968 was bound to be more a timid call for a more diversified portfolio of political and cultural alignments (a return to the "third way") than a bid for a return to capitalism”<sup>26</sup>. Citizens were prepared for social and economic diversity which was a stark difference from the general public's opinion on the ambivalent Soviet invasion. Unfortunately, what was intended and expected to be a period of minimal growth actually became the Czech’s worst economic disaster in history. The annual growth rate was at a minimum during the entirety of communist rule, “The bottom estimate of the growth rate during 1948-91, based on commercial exchange rates (which are more suitable in reflecting international competence), would be as low as 0.43%”<sup>27</sup>.

Following the dissolution of the communist party, the Czech Republic was left with little debt and a strong labor force prepared to join the free market. The state’s location benefitted the

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<sup>26</sup> Benáček, V. (2001). *History of Czech economic and political alignments viewed ...* HISTORY OF CZECH ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ALIGNMENTS VIEWED AS A TRANSITION. Retrieved April 15, 2022, from <http://www1.ceses.cuni.cz/benacek/hist%20kniha2.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 26

newly democratic state with many of its direct neighbors having successful Western economies and markets. The privatization process was also relatively seamless as the state immediately implemented a voucher system that allowed individuals to purchase various shares.

Unfortunately, the quick economic shift led to many factors being overlooked, and proper protections were not established, “Poor management and corruption in the banking industry (much of which had remained largely state-controlled) resulted in the failure of eight banks in 1996.”<sup>28</sup>

Reactions to the economic crisis varied, however, one thing remained certain, the Czechs needed to shift their focus completely on saving and rebuilding their economy. There was little interest and few resources to dedicate to social rights and citizen protections during the communist-led economic crisis. Benáček claims, “Instead of stressing productive aspirations and trade links with advanced nations, the ideology turned to self-sufficiency, Slavonic fundamentalism, state capitalism, and nationalization”<sup>29</sup>. What little social funding was available was highly monitored and the distribution of it to marginalized communities was highly criticized. As economic tensions grew, an increase in socioeconomic discrimination grew as well among other things, “As economic and political tension increased, discrimination and prejudice increased as social funding became more of a sensitive topic and less time was dedicated to morals in the system.”<sup>30</sup>

I argue that as economies decline, the state has a lesser incentive to focus on social rights and ethnic relations within their society. Tensions caused by economic turmoil promote higher levels of human rights abuses as ethnic groups dependent on government benefits and funding

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<sup>28</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica. (n.d.). *Economy of the Czech Republic*. Encyclopædia Britannica. Retrieved April 10, 2022, from <https://www.britannica.com/place/Czech-Republic/Economy>

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 26

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 15

are blamed for the economic decline. White citizens frequently used the Roma as a scapegoat for their discontent with the state of the Czech economy as the average citizen was receiving fewer benefits and freedoms than prior generations. Unfortunately, this was understood by the Czech government and was transformed into a strategic tactic to justify the ethnonational and eugenic-inspired attacks on Roma women's bodily autonomies.

### *Case Analysis:*

In this case analysis, I looked at specific themes to understand why it took the Czech government over 60 years to acknowledge the state-sanctioned forced sterilizations of Roma women and what impact certain variables have on the overall public opinions surrounding the rights and treatment of Roma people in the Czech Republic. What impact did communist and post-communist settings have on the decision to remain indifferent to injustices and to neglect the Roma people? I question what events and factors shifted and occurred in order for the 2021 decision to compensate Roma women who were victims of state-sanctioned human rights abuses. By collecting the necessary data, I was able to conclude which variables impact the public opinion of Czech citizens and it created some clarity on my research question.

### *Methods:*

The tools incorporated in this methodology section include past and contemporary news coverage, various attitudinal surveys, economic journals and data, expert interviews and opinions, and contemporary academic literature. Using tools such as Google Scholar made finding relevant journal articles extremely helpful as I was able to narrow down texts which focused on the specific themes, I chose for this research paper.

#### a. Cases

For the three cases, I chose 'Communism' which highlights 1948 to 1991, 'post-Communism' which is 1991 to 2021, and 'Post-Compensation' which is from 2021 onwards. I believed these three time periods would accurately represent distinct attitudinal shifts towards human rights, specifically towards the reproductive rights of Roma women. Diving up the distinct time periods characterized by differing political, economic, and social climates, demonstrates the very niche atmospheres in which compensations could be made. It is also important to note that for the sake of the context of my paper, I will begin my analysis from the 1948 time period and onward in order to focus directly on the relationship between the communist and the post-communist period. However, it should be understood that the Roma people have been facing acts of discrimination and hate for centuries beginning at the start of their migration into the Czechoslovak region during the 6th-11th century. It is also important to note that finding data associated with the communist period is extremely difficult and unreliable as the goals of the communist party were influenced by assimilation in an effort to promote the cultural and social ideas of the dominant white majority. Because of this, the desire to actively promote the ethnic group's differences was not proudly broadcasted in attitude surveys as the communists rejected the concepts of sociology as their organizational principles intended to create uniform societies with no outside influence.

#### b. Dependent Variable

Czech society's public opinion surrounding the injustices faced by Roma women represents the dependent variable. I attempt to understand what independent variables impact the overall attitudes of the state and its citizens which will lead me to be able to form answers to my research question. It was quite difficult to find data from the same publications to fall into the three cases which explain the variety of publications used. Using a variety, I complied data to

determine the general public attitudes towards the Roma people in the three distinct cases. This will set a baseline for what the general opinions are towards the Roma people and will be readily available to apply the independent variables later. I apply the independent variables to determine which factors made a difference in the shift in public opinion.

<b>Dependent Variable: Public Opinion</b>	<b>Communism (1948-1991)</b>	<b>Post-Communism (1991-2021)</b>	<b>Post-Compensation Decision (2021-)</b>
<b>Attitudes towards Roma people (European Values Survey/world values)</b>	<i>1991 Public Opinion Poll: “What are your opinions on the Roma in Czechoslovakia?”-- 91% of the population dislike the Roma<sup>31</sup></i>	<i>Spring 2019 Pew Research Center Publication: “What is your opinion on Roma in your country?”-- 66% are unfavorable<sup>32</sup></i>	<i>November 2021 Standard Eurobarometer Publication: “The most vulnerable citizens should be supported by their national government in order to lead a decent life.” -- 66% in agreement<sup>33</sup></i>

### c. Independent variables

As for my four independent variables ranked in order from most to least significant, I chose to focus on elected officials’ rhetoric, the emergence of Roma organizations, intergovernmental organization membership, and GDP wealth per capita. Together, I believe these variables cover the historically, culturally, politically, and economically motivated actions

<sup>31</sup> Minorities at Risk Project, *Chronology for Roma in the Czech Republic*, 2004, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/469f387ec.html> [accessed 15 April 2022]

<sup>32</sup> Wike, R., Poushter, J., Silver, L., Devlin, K., Fetterolf, J., Castillo, A., & Huang, C. (2020, December 10). *6. minority Groups*. Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project. Retrieved April 15, 2022, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/10/14/minority-groups/>

<sup>33</sup> Eurobarometer. (2021, November 17). *Values and identities: Overwhelming support for EU values in all EU countries says new commission report*. Representation in Cyprus. Retrieved April 15, 2022, from [https://cyprus.representation.ec.europa.eu/news/values-and-identities-overwhelming-support-eu-values-all-eu-countries-says-new-commission-report-2021-11-17\\_tr](https://cyprus.representation.ec.europa.eu/news/values-and-identities-overwhelming-support-eu-values-all-eu-countries-says-new-commission-report-2021-11-17_tr)

of the state and the beliefs of the average Czech citizen. I assumed these variables to be an accurate measurement of citizens' attitudes towards Roma women in the Czech Republic and are indicative of the social climate in the state.

Data:

Variables & Cases	Communism (1948-1991*) <sup>34</sup>	Post-Communism (1991-2021) <sup>35</sup>	Post-Compensation Decision (2021-)
<b>Emergence of Roma Rights Organizations</b>	<b>0</b> Active Human Rights-Based Foundations and Organizations Concerned with the Roma Minority	<b>&lt;8</b> Active Human Rights-Based Foundations and Organizations Concerned with the Roma Minority	<b>8</b> Active Human Rights-Based Foundations and Organizations Concerned with the Roma Minority <sup>36</sup>
<b>Rhetoric-Elected Officials</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) <b>Klement Gottwald</b> (June 14, 1948-March 14, 1953)-- Bias Motivated Violence</li> <li>2) <b>Antonín Zápotocký</b> (March 21, 1953-November 13, 1957)- - Bias Motivated Violence</li> <li>3) <b>Antonín Novotný</b> (November 19, 1957-March 22, 1968)-- Bias Motivated Violence</li> <li>4) <b>Ludvík Svoboda</b> (March 30, 1968-October 29, 1975)-- Genocide</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) <b>Václav Havel</b> (December 29, 1989- July 20, 1992*) (February 2, 1993- February 2, 2003)-- Biased Attitude</li> <li>2) <b>Václav Klaus</b> (March 7, 2003-March 7, 2013)- - Bias Motivated Violence</li> <li>3) <b>Miloš Zeman</b> (March 8, 2013-Present)-- Bias Motivated Violence</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) <b>Miloš Zeman</b> (March 8, 2013- Present)--- Bias Motivated Violence</li> </ol>

<sup>34</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica. (2022, March 10). *Communist Party of Czechoslovakia*. Encyclopædia Britannica. Retrieved April 7, 2022, from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Communist-Party-of-Czechoslovakia>

<sup>35</sup> Sousa, G. (2019, April 19). *Presidents of the Czech Republic (Czechia) since 1993*. WorldAtlas. Retrieved April 7, 2022, from <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/presidents-of-the-czech-republic-czechia-since-1993.html>

<sup>36</sup> Romov.radio.cz. (n.d.). *Foundations and Organizations Concerned With the Romani Minority*. Foundations and organizations concerned with the Romani minority. Retrieved April 7, 2022, from <https://romov.radio.cz/en/article/18366>

	5) <b>Gustáv Husák</b> (October 29, 1975- December 10, 1989)- - Genocide 6) <b>Václav Havel</b> (December 29, 1989- July 20, 1992*)-- Bias Attitude		
<b>Intergovernmental Organization Membership</b>	Accession (UN): No Entry (UN): No Accession (EU): No Entry (EU): No	Accession (UN): Yes Entry (UN): Yes Accession (EU): Yes Entry (EU): Yes	Accession (UN): No Entry (UN): Yes Accession (EU): No Entry (EU): Yes
<b>GDP Wealth per Capita#</b>	<b>1948</b> (GDP per capita 225 USD) <b>1991</b> (GDP per capita 588 USD)	<b>1998</b> (GDP per capita 11632.6 USD) <b>2007</b> (GDP per capita 16739.18 USD)	<b>2021!</b> (GDP per capita 18983.65 USD)

\*Although the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia officially relinquished its power in 1989, I chose 1991 as my official start date of the Post-Communist era as it more accurately reflects a settled and distinct shift in capitalist and democratic ideals that reflect the state's modern-day values.

#The GDP per capita is obtained by dividing the country's gross domestic product, adjusted by inflation, by the total population.<sup>37</sup>

! The most recent GDP per capita data produced by the World Bank is a 2020 statistics. Although labeled as the 2021 GDP per capita, the number correlates with the 2020 GDP per capita which is still significant to this chart's intended purpose

### Analysis:

#### Roma Rights Organizations Analysis:

##### a. Communism

Finding data on Roma rights organizations during the communist period was relatively difficult as much of the collected data was either skewed or did not focus on Roma protection efforts. The communist party's emphasis on assimilation ensured data pertaining to ethnic

<sup>37</sup> Trading Economics. (2021). *Czech Republic GDP per capita 2021 data - 2022 forecast - 1990-2020 historical*. Czech Republic GDP per capita - 2021 Data - 2022 Forecast - 1990-2020 Historical. Retrieved April 14, 2022, from <https://tradingeconomics.com/czech-republic/gdp-per-capita>

differences and domestic conflicts remained at a minimum. With this being said, I was unable to discover any data pertaining to Roma organizations between the years 1948 to 1991. An important piece of this puzzle is the significance of the first-ever RomFest which took place in July of 1990. This festival was organized by Václav Havel in an effort to celebrate the culture and voices of the Roma. In his speech at the event, he highlighted the negative impacts communism had on the lives of the Roma, “The communist powers may have created different Government commissions and developed various conceptual documents, but Romani people were just the objects of these different social experiments and had no say in what their own fate should be. They suffered what we all suffered: The existential necessity of the system to make everything uniform, to exert centralized control, and to force upon all citizens the exact same banal way of life”.<sup>38</sup> Due to the festival being viewed as a transformational and revolutionary event, I believe it is accurate to state that there were very limited Roma social movements prior to the RomFest festival of 1990.

#### b. Post-communism

Roma's reintegration efforts took off following the fall of communism with a great emphasis on education, housing, state assistance programs, and health. This did anger much of the Czech majority population as they felt abandoned by the government, especially in the economic sphere. Social resources and employment rates decreased for the general Czech population while state assistance efforts for the Roma became a priority for the government. Many Czechs expressed this anger towards the Roma, “a survey conducted by the Centre for Empirical Research in Prague (STEM) (*Helsingin Sanomat* 1 Aug. 2000) in June 2006 found that

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<sup>38</sup> Romea.CZ. (2020, July 30). *Thirty years ago, Czechoslovak president Havel spoke on the right of Romani people to their national self-awareness*. romea.cz. Retrieved April 14, 2022, from <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/czech/thirty-years-ago-czechoslovak-president-havel-spoke-on-the-right-of-romani-people-to-their-national-self-awareness>

two-thirds of Czechs "have a negative stance on Romanies" while a third felt that it would be "unacceptable" to have a Rom as a neighbor (CTK 16 June 2006)".<sup>39</sup> Luckily, with the new century came new developments in technology such as news and social media outlets. Already existing organizations in neighboring countries such as the European Roma Rights Centre used the internet to achieve its mission of "Challenging Discrimination Promoting Equality" while connecting with activists and Roma in the state.<sup>40</sup> Czech events hosted by affiliating Roma rights organizations took off with human rights organizations affiliated with Roma rights growing to eight by 2021.

### c. Post-compensation

According to Praha Radio, there are eight active human rights organizations affiliated with Roma concerns in the Czech Republic. These groups are actively hosting events and gatherings to discuss the rights of the Roma in the context of the state and Europe. I believe that without the advancements in technology and social media, these organizations would not reach the numbers that they have today. In the years leading up to the 2021 decision to compensate Roma women, activists affiliated with these organizations hosted events and rallies to challenge the Czech courts and other deniers of sterilization abuses. Social media provided a place for Roma sterilization victims and Roma supporters to come together and decide on locations for events such as protests and even theatre premieres for projects highlighting state-sterilization

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<sup>39</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, R. D. I. and R. B. of C. O. (2007, December 12). *Czech Republic: Situation of roma, including treatment by the authorities as well as in the education, employment, health and housing sectors; state protection and assistance from Romani organizations; prevalence of Roma among judges, legislators, physicians, police and teachers (January 2006 - November 2007)*. Refworld. Retrieved April 14, 2022, from <https://www.refworld.org/docid/47d6544a23.html>

<sup>40</sup> ERRC. (n.d.). European Roma Rights Centre. Retrieved April 14, 2022, from <http://www.errc.org/>

efforts.<sup>41</sup> Elena Gorolova, a Roma sterilization victim and activist, had led a 15-year campaign in the fight for compensation to occur, with her fight finally being successful on July 21, 2021.<sup>42</sup>

### Elite Rhetoric Analysis:

By understanding the political leadership from 1948 to 2021, readers will be able to understand why the state handled the forced sterilizations of Roma women in the manner that it did. It is important to understand the processes of forced sterilizations during the communist era specifically because it was a state-sponsored event led by ethnonationalism motives during a period when the country was attempting to distinguish itself from the international superpower which controlled them. I argued that rhetoric towards the Roma people would become more positive as communism fell and a commitment to democracy was made. Unfortunately, I discovered that the fall of communism ignited Czech nationalist rhetoric within some of the political leaders and the citizens which harmed the Roma and prevented compensation and acknowledgment from taking place.

Although it is difficult to collect data and analyze this independent variable, I believed rhetoric to be the most significant portion of the puzzle in answering my research question. There are a variety of layers to the rhetoric circling around the Czech region and every level should be analyzed to understand the big picture. I decided the most valuable way to demonstrate how public opinion is impacted is by looking at election results and analyzing the opinions of elected officials on the topic of ethnic discrimination.

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<sup>41</sup> Zee, R. van der. (2016, July 19). *Roma Women Share Stories of forced sterilisation*. Human Rights | Al Jazeera. Retrieved April 14, 2022, from <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2016/7/19/roma-women-share-stories-of-forced-sterilisation>

<sup>42</sup> Batha, E. (2021, February 10). *Czech lawmakers urged to compensate sterilised roma women*. Reuters. Retrieved April 14, 2022, from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-czech-roma-sterilisation-trfn/czech-lawmakers-urged-to-compensate-sterilised-roma-women-idUSKBN2AA0TS>

In this rhetorical analysis I will be highlighting four individuals I believe summarized the overall rhetoric of the three distinct cases or time periods. For the Communism period, I will focus on Gustáv Husák who was the Czechoslovak president at the time when Roma sterilization policies were at their height. For the Post-Communism period, I chose Václav Havel and Václav Klaus as the former demonstrates the new democratic trend the Czech Republic was expected to follow and the latter demonstrates the unfortunate trajectory which was taken. Finally, I focus on the current president Miloš Zeman for the post-compensation case as he was the head of state during the decision to compensate Roma victims and yet demonstrates the consistent bias and discriminations Roma women continue to face in the country.

Historically, rhetoric has defined the Roma quality of life within the Czech Republic and it continues to impact it to this present day. Charter 77, a petition designed to urge the Czechoslovak government to acknowledge and respect human rights, was published in 1977 as a way to trigger reforms within the state. Notable political characters including a future president, Václav Havel, were the brainpower behind the creation and later on drafted a variety of extensions to the charter. For the Roma sterilization case, the most notable testament was Chapter 23 which was intended to prompt Czechoslovak citizens to act on the injustices of the state. The reform cited Roma sterilization as the main topic of abuse.

The ADL Pyramid of Hate provided a baseline that assisted in ranking the various levels of discrimination in society.<sup>43</sup> I applied this model to the various claims and beliefs of eight Czech presidents from the year 1948 to 2021 and ranked their outlooks on ethnic discrimination to the levels they correlated with on the pyramid. I used a variety of sources including

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<sup>43</sup> Anti-Defamation League. (2018). *Pyramid of hate - anti-defamation league*. ADL: Pyramid of Hate. Retrieved April 13, 2022, from <https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/pyramid-of-hate.pdf>

interviews, speeches, and writing from these eight individuals to decide where they should be located on the figure. Although this is not an all-encompassing example of what public rhetoric was regarding the rights of Roma women's sterilization, I believe that it has the potential to somewhat depict the views of the majority on the rights of Roma individuals, especially following 1989 when democratic values such as fair general election were implemented. Russell Brooker and Todd Schaefer argue that despite elections being a very simple measure of public opinion, it still accurately represents public opinion as politicians prioritize spewing sentiments that align with the general public's attitude as it wins the elections, "A state legislator may refrain from voting for an obscure but unpopular bill because she is afraid that constituents would be offended and vote for her opponent in the next election-- even if, in fact, they would never know"<sup>44</sup>. Václav Havel, the first president of the Czech Republic, critiqued this as a threat to democracy, "The danger of western democracy is that it is very often too cautious and politicians only think from one election to the next. We lack personalities such as Winston Churchill and Charles de Gaulle, who went after things that were unpopular but managed to earn their authority and in the end, to even win support for their moves."<sup>45</sup> I concluded that rhetoric presented by elected officials does reflect the views of the state and because the forced sterilizations were state-sanctioned, I believe the information is relevant and indicative of attitudes.

The Communist period was a tumultuous and foundational time for the Roma sterilization case. Gustáv Husák, the fifth official president of Czechoslovakia was both a

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<sup>44</sup> Brooker, R. G., & Schaefer, T. M. (2006). Introduction. In *Public Opinion in the 21st century: Let the people speak?* (1st ed., pp. 2–2). introduction, Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

<sup>45</sup> Romea.cz. (2011, March 11). *Václav Havel: If this were Germany, Klaus would have to resign*. romea.cz. Retrieved April 7, 2022, from <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/czech/vaclav-havel-if-this-were-germany-klaus-would-have-to-resign>

Czechoslovak nationalist and a notorious supporter of USSR efforts in the country. Officially, his title was the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSČ), and a few years later as President of the Republic. The KSČ was able to easily implement decisions on all grounds during their rule as nepotism and cronyism ran rampant in the political party. This applied to social efforts and rights protections and plays a big role in the effectiveness and swiftness of the call to sterilize Roma women. Husák's rule was the period in which Roma sterilizations began and hit their peak. Unfortunately, official records indicating the specific amount of sterilizations that occurred do not exist, however, it is estimated that during his rule nearly 9000 Romany women were sterilized during this period.<sup>46</sup>

Just three years before Husák's rule as president, the health ministry of the federal republics of Czechoslovakia issued Directive No. 01/1972 of the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs of the Czech Socialist Republic, a sterilization law that allowed sterilization to be legally performed in the state. This was passed as a way of population control despite the state emphasizing the need for more couples to reproduce as mentioned previously with the rise of pro-natal efforts. The Czechoslovak government incentivized Czechoslovak and Roma women in opposing directions, "After bearing a fourth child, a Czechoslovak woman could be sterilized on payment of 2,000 crowns; Romany women, on the other hand, were offered 2,000 crowns to be sterilized after the second child".<sup>47</sup> Husak's presidency demonstrated the result of that law being passed where the state intentionally targeted a set demographic of people and utilized the legal protections of Directive No. 01/1972 to forcefully and unconditionally sterilize hundreds of women. Gwendolyn Albert and Marek Szilvasi highlighted the comparatively high percentage of

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<sup>46</sup> Kenrick, D., & Woronoff, J. (2011). *Historical Dictionary of the Gypsies (Romanies)* Second Edition. Retrieved April 7, 2022, from [https://www.gitanos.org/documentos/1.1-KEN-his\\_HistoricalDictionaryoftheGypsies.pdf](https://www.gitanos.org/documentos/1.1-KEN-his_HistoricalDictionaryoftheGypsies.pdf)

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 24

Roma women who were targeted, “...Romani women constituted a disproportionately large group among those sterilized—up to 36.6 % of all female sterilizations in those years were performed on Roma (who are estimated to have constituted less than 2% of the population)”<sup>48</sup>.

On the ADL Pyramid of Hate figure, genocide is defined as “The act or intent to deliberately and systematically annihilate an entire people”. The period was a strategically planned attempt to mask a genocide of a marginalized ethnicity deemed inferior by many elected officials and citizens. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia had full control politically, socially, economically, and legally and was able to escape blame and punishment while annihilating the future Roma bloodline of Czechoslovakia.

Vaclav Havel is perceived to be the perfect example of the Czech Republic’s new democratic values and morals. From being the final president of Czechoslovakia in 1989 to the first president of the Czech Republic until 2003, he exhibited political and social beliefs which label him as a liberalist phenomenologist.<sup>49</sup> Havel believed that bureaucracies limited and alienated humans as they promoted individual survival rather than social morals and injustice awareness. Prior to becoming president, he was a praised filmmaker who focused much of his work on exhibiting the dehumanizing flaws of the totalitarian state and he was frequently arrested due to his involvement in protests defending human rights. His rule was perceived as a sort of restoration of Czech potential and posed as a launching point for Roma rights in the country. Havel is quoted as saying, “I feel that the dormant goodwill in people needs to be stirred. People need to hear that it makes sense to behave decently or to help others, to place

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<sup>48</sup> Albert, G., & Szilvasi, M. (2017, December 6). *Intersectional discrimination of Romani women forcibly sterilized in the former Czechoslovakia and Czech Republic*. HHR Archived. Retrieved April 13, 2022, from <https://sites.sph.harvard.edu/hhrjournal/2017/12/intersectional-discrimination-of-romani-women-forcibly-sterilized-in-the-former-czechoslovakia-and-czech-republic/>

<sup>49</sup> Sarah Marks, The Romani Minority, Coercive Sterilization, and Languages of Denial in the Czech Lands, *History Workshop Journal*, Volume 84, Autumn 2017, Pages 128–148, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbx033>

common interests above their own, to respect the elementary rules of human coexistence”.<sup>50</sup> His major involvement with the drafting and publication of Charter 77 exhibited his firm belief in social justice and the Charter 23 extension showed his commitment to protecting the victims of Roma mass sterilization. With this being said, I decided to rank Havel under ‘Biased Attitudes’ on the ADL Pyramid of Hate. Although a strong advocate for Roma's rights and holding the state accountable for human rights violations, the level of hate speech and violence against Roma persisted in the country. With this being said, I believe Havel’s administration falls under Discrimination. While it is important to bring awareness to the injustices Roma people face in the Czech Republic, words without action are meaningless and the economic, political, educational, employment, and medical aspects of the Czech state were still flawed in assisting the Roma.

The transition from Havel to Klaus demonstrates an unfortunate setback in human rights advocacy as heightened levels of nationalism triggered by post-communist ideology brought the Czech Republic’s government back to the rhetoric of communist times. Václav Klaus is a Eurosceptic who has a history of supporting politicians with racist and ultra-nationalist tendencies and beliefs. During his presidency, he had a variety of insulting claims to say about the Roma people specifically surrounding their experiences during the Roma Holocaust. His predecessor, Václav Havel claimed Klaus’ remarks could have landed him removed from office in neighboring European countries, “For example, when the head of state says a concentration camp [editor's note: for Roma at Lety by Písek] was not a concentration camp but was merely an internment camp - if this were Germany, he would have had to resign.”<sup>51</sup> Klaus was president

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<sup>50</sup> quote fancy. (n.d.). *Václav Havel quotes*. Quotefancy. Retrieved April 13, 2022, from <https://quotefancy.com/vaclav-havel-quotes>

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 22.

during the period in which the Czech state apologized for and acknowledged the decades of Roma forced sterilizations in the past. His administration period also saw a steep increase in Roma hate speech and violence and despite the state acknowledging the sterilizations, individual complaints continued to be denied compensation by the courts. The courts would quote expired time limits as their reasoning behind denying such claims and although the forced sterilizations had been acknowledged and condemned, they persisted with one complaint citing 2012 as the year of her illegal sterilization.<sup>52</sup> Despite being the leader of the state, there is little coverage of his perspective on the Roma forced sterilizations cases. I argue that his general public views and claims on the Roma people, in general, demonstrate his opinions on the attacks on Roma women's autonomies. With this being said, I argue that Václav Klaus and the general attitudes toward Roma women stand at Bias Motivated Violence on the ADL Pyramid of Hate.

Anti-Roma rhetoric is at an all-time high during the years of COVID-19 due to the economic turmoil, rise in xenophobia, and a decrease in government-funded benefits. The use of anti-Roma language is proudly used by many high-ranking officials including the current president, Miloš Zeman. Zeman has openly discussed the benefits of communism and their violent methods of maintaining power over the Roma people, "I am decidedly no friend of communism, but during communism, Romani people had to work."<sup>53</sup> The European Roma Rights Center condemns the hate speech and intolerance spewed by the current president claiming, "This statement is blatant hate speech, crude racist incitement and has no place in the

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<sup>52</sup> Koslerova, A. (2021, August 4). *Illegally sterilised Czech women to be offered compensation*. The Guardian. Retrieved April 7, 2022, from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/aug/04/illegally-sterilised-czech-women-to-be-offered-compensation>

<sup>53</sup> Romea.cz. (2018, September 26). *Czech president alleges Romani people "do not want to work" and that "slapping them" is the best way to deal with them*. romea.cz. Retrieved April 7, 2022, from <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/czech/czech-president-alleges-romani-people-don-t-want-to-work-and-that-slapping-them-is-the-best-way-to-deal-with-them>

European Union”.<sup>54</sup> There is little information on the president’s stance on the recent decision to compensate Roma victims, however, his multitude of assault threats and racist statements through his eight years of Czech presidency lands the post-compensation period Pyramid of Hate ranking under ‘Bias Motivated Violence’.

#### Intergovernmental Organization Membership Analysis:

Intergovernmental organization membership is an important aspect of this time period as states that are attempting to join or have joined these organizations are expected to demonstrate and align with the democratic values written in the bylaws. I believed that when the state joined notable intergovernmental organizations such as the European Union and the United Nations, the attitudes toward the Roma would become more positive as this membership indicates a commitment to democratic values and social justice reform. Although the rate of sterilizations decreased around the time of EU and UN accession, these acts of abuse continued for hundreds of Roma women well into the 21st century. It is believed that the majority of Roma sterilizations occurred during the 1970s and 1980s and declined but remained consistent during the 1990s and early 2000s. It turns into a question of what UN and EU membership really means for states and demands a reevaluation of the foundational principles of these organizations as they have so painfully failed an entire ethnic group. There are a variety of examples of how intergovernmental organization membership has little accountability or protective aspect in the name of human

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<sup>54</sup> Rorke, B. (2018, September 27). *Europe's own trump goes un-muzzled again: Czech president Milos Zeman reckons roma need a slapping in his latest racist outburst*. European Roma Rights Centre. Retrieved April 7, 2022, from <http://www.errc.org/news/europes-own-trump-goes-un-muzzled-again-czech-president-milos-zeman-reckons-roma-need-a-slapping-in-his-latest-racist-outburst>

rights. Some examples include Rwanda and the Rwandan genocide, Israel in the Israel-Palestine conflict, and the Cambodian genocide to name a few.<sup>55 56 57</sup>

A complexity in all of this is the significance of Czech's European Union accession period and its potential effects on Roma treatment. During the Czech Republic's attempts to join the EU, its conduct towards the Roma population gained international news coverage and raised questions pertaining to the state's potentially flawed human rights policies and actions. When a state is in the accession period, the European Union utilized the 'carrot and stick strategy to motivate states to implement democratic EU values in order to ensure future membership. Scholars argue that it is easier for the European Union to value good behavior versus acknowledging poor examples of democratic values which is what made the international acknowledgment of unfair Roma treatment alarming to Czech leaders.<sup>58</sup> In 1999, then Czech Prime Minister Miloš Zeman admitted the Czech government's negative treatment of the Romani population jeopardizes the state's potential EU membership.<sup>59</sup> The Roma sterilization cases were better left unnoticed by the Czech state, and instead, efforts to boost Western European relations were prioritized.

Once the state secured its EU membership in 2004, state leaders and representatives shifted from indifference toward acts of falsification as their spot was now officially confirmed.

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<sup>55</sup> BBC News. (2014, April 7). *Rwanda genocide: Un ashamed, says Ban Ki-moon*. BBC News. Retrieved April 8, 2022, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-26917419>

<sup>56</sup> Nebehay, S. (2014, March 21). *U.N. rights investigator accuses Israel of 'ethnic cleansing'*. Reuters. Retrieved April 8, 2022, from <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-palestinian-israel-un/u-n-rights-investigator-accuses-israel-of-ethnic-cleansing-idUKBRE2K1JM20140321?edition-redirect=uk>

<sup>57</sup> BBC News. (2018, November 16). *Khmer Rouge: Cambodia's years of brutality*. BBC News. Retrieved April 8, 2022, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-10684399>

<sup>58</sup> HAZELZET, H. (1970, January 1). *Carrots or sticks? EU and US reactions to human rights violations (1989-2000)*. Cadmus Home. Retrieved April 9, 2022, from <https://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/7157>

<sup>59</sup> Fawn, R. (2001). Czech Attitudes towards the Roma: "Expecting More of Havel's Country"? *Europe-Asia Studies*, 53(8), 1193–1219. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/826267>

In 2006, Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Affairs, Čestmír Sajda, claimed "It's fake. They exaggerate in all cases," at a UN committee meeting.<sup>60</sup> The priorities of the Czech state were demonstrated during their EU ascension period and this case highlights the flaws of the IO systems and their accountability measures.

The Czech Republic became a member of the United Nations in 1993 only a few years after the democratically symbolic Velvet Revolution. A few years later in 2004, the state completed its mission of joining the European Union. Unfortunately, the state didn't even acknowledge the forced sterilizations until 2005, nearly 30 years after the fall of communism.<sup>61</sup> It is interesting to see how hopeful Vaclav Havel was during the UN accession period and how it would define the democratic Czech experience, "We now want to focus on entering NATO and the EC because we see ourselves as Europeans who embrace European values. The Czech Republic wants to help implement these values in the center of Europe".<sup>62</sup> Although Havel was hopeful, sterilizations continued to occur in the Czech Republic and the various treaties the UN and EU are affiliated with ceased to assist those who were victims of the state. The EU accession period demonstrates the Czech state's dedication to keeping sterilization news coverage hidden as it would destroy the possibility of becoming an EU member state.

### GDP Wealth Analysis:

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<sup>60</sup> Brp, čtk. (2014, February 18). *Česko řeklo v OSN, že Romky přehánějí: Aktuálně.cz*. Aktuálně.cz - Víte, co se právě děje. Retrieved April 14, 2022, from <https://zpravy.aktualne.cz/domaci/cesko-reklo-v-osn-ze-romky-prehaneji/r~i:article:218615/>

<sup>61</sup> Sarah Marks, The Romani Minority, Coercive Sterilization, and Languages of Denial in the Czech Lands, *History Workshop Journal*, Volume 84, Autumn 2017, Pages 128–148, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbx033>

<sup>62</sup> National Security Council and NSC Records Management System, "Declassified Documents Concerning President Vaclav Havel of the Czech Republic and President Lech Walesa of Poland," *Clinton Digital Library*, accessed April 10, 2022, <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/101118>.

I hypothesized that as states become more wealthy, they become more modern and the human rights conditions grew to be significantly better. As mentioned in the economic analysis in the literature review portion, the Czechoslovak economic conditions leading into World War II were ranked among the best in eastern and central Europe. As Germany began to annex and invade other parts of central Europe, the threats against Czechoslovakia's economic successes became greater and the only supporter to them became the Soviet Union.

a. Communism

Immediately following the implementation of communism and the Soviet economic model, the economic department of the state hit an immediate decline with social conditions falling along with it. As mentioned in the data chart, the mean GDP per capita during 1948 was estimated to be as low as 225 USD per capita according to economist Felix Butschek. During this period, hate speech and violence against Roma people increased as economic tensions and resentment also increased.

b. Post-Communism & Post-Compensation

Following the fall of communism, the country took on strong nationalist strategies especially during Václav Klaus' presidency onward. The focus was now to define the Czech Republic as the economic powerhouse that it was prior to the Soviet invasion. Benáček explained, "Instead of stressing productive aspirations and trade links with advanced nations, the ideology turned to self-sufficiency, Slavonic fundamentalism, state capitalism, and

nationalization”<sup>63</sup>. The internal system of the Czech economic structure began to fail in international trade and internal funding which revealed deeper social system failures.

The state disregarded long-term threats as their only goal was to build a stable economy as quickly as possible with no concern for future detrimental effects, “Large-scale privatization, combined with the existence of semi-state infant banks, unregulated investment funds, disorganised capital market and loopholes in legislation have again shown the way to redistribution as the main means of short-term “prosperity”.”<sup>64</sup> There is a strong emphasis on how short-term of a solution these economic factors played in the new capitalist Czech system. As the cracks in the economic system began to impact export growth and internal monetary affairs, GDP decreased up to 22% from 1989 to 1993<sup>65</sup>.

The circumstances in the Czech Republic's economy did not become significantly better until 1998 when the government realized privatization efforts and foreign investments should become a priority. The state launched a revitalization program known as the “The Packages” to create structures that would support those two priorities<sup>66</sup>. Domestic and international sectors were taken into consideration and private enterprises began to thrive in the country.

During this period, Roma sterilizations persisted and the state had yet to acknowledge the situation. Even after the positive effects of the Czech economic revitalization packages were felt, the government still did not take accountability for the abuses, and evidence of sterilizations was still discovered in the year 2012. Although the rise in GDP and the benefits of economic

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 26

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 26

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 26

<sup>66</sup> Kroupa, A., & Mácha, M. (1999). *Human development reports / United Nations Development Programme*. Human Development Report Czech Republic 1999. Retrieved April 15, 2022, from [https://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/czech\\_republic\\_1999\\_en.pdf](https://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/czech_republic_1999_en.pdf)

restructuring and revitalization may have slowed down the rates of Roma sterilization cases, they continued to persist and continued to be unacknowledged. Public opinion surrounding the Roma only got worse during the years of post-communism as the average white citizen was now in a vulnerable financial position due to the state being less involved in their employment opportunities and benefits, I do not believe there is enough evidence to prove this is a cause of GDP growth. However, as the state support and public services increased for the Roma population, Czech citizens grew even more resentful of the group as many perceived them to be benefitting while putting no effort into the declining workforce. Even as the economic situation in the Czech Republic leveled out, negative public opinion towards the Roma persisted.

### Results

My results determined that only one of the four independent variables chosen significantly impacted public opinion surrounding Roma sterilization and the decision to compensate the victims. The most important variable is the 'Roma Rights Organizations' category as its relationship with the rise of the internet and social media allowed for a greater distribution of knowledge and awareness while also promoting the creation of more Roma rights organizations to develop in the Czech Republic. Public opinion shifted significantly as there was less ignorance and more education surrounding the lives of the Roma people. The decision to compensate victims of forced sterilizations came after years of fighting and support from Roma rights organizations and movements.

I argue that political officials' rhetoric also has a significant impact on the public's opinions, especially those dealing with the Roma minority, however, not strong enough to impact the decision to compensate victims of forced sterilizations. Throughout history, trends

surrounding Roma hate speech and violence correlate with the rhetoric of the administrations in power at the time. The early democratization period led by Vaclav Havel saw a decrease in violence towards Roma people as he was actively educating and bringing awareness to the injustices of Roma hate. Unfortunately, leaders such as Miloš Zeman show high levels of ignorance toward the Roma people, and yet the decision to compensate victims was still made during his administration period. I believe this independent variable does impact public opinion, however, it could not have promoted the act of compensation on its own.

I believe it is fair to say that intergovernmental organization membership does not impact the attitudes of the Czech people and state enough to be considered a variable that led to the eventual compensation of Roma victims of sterilization. However, the EU accession period may have had an impact on the treatment of Roma people in the Czech Republic superficially, but not systemically. With this being said, I now understand there is no evidence that leads me to believe intergovernmental organization membership is a reason behind significant public opinion shifts or Roma women being compensated for forced sterilizations. The crimes persisted despite the Czech Republic's transition into a democratic state and compensation occurred over 16 years after the EU and UN accession periods.

I believe GDP wealth to be the least impactful independent variable as I do not believe there is substantial evidence proving that an increase in GDP promotes an increase in public opinion towards the Roma people. The increase in GDP did not have an impact effect on the Czech government's decision to compensate victims of Roma sterilization efforts in July 2021. The fall of communism demonstrated a hopeful time for Czech economic endeavors and statistically was a hopeful time as high levels of skilled workers was readily available in the state. Individuals were excited to work and were prepared for higher wages to come out of those

efforts. Public opinion surveys at the time demonstrated people were anxious about the lack of government control as it would mean people would have to take control of their work lives. Low labor costs combined with companies' need to cut employment created tension that translated into the social and political sphere. With the increased government support projects targeting marginalized groups in the Czech Republic increasing, citizens became resentful and angry at the state and the people that it was benefitting. I believe some economic aspects impact public opinion towards Roma people, however, I do not believe that GDP is a great indicator of public opinion and reasoning behind victim compensation efforts.

### **Conclusion**

The decades of sterilizations forced upon the Roma women of the Czech Republic is a topic the Czech state and citizens should never forget about. As a part of their history, they should take accountability in more ways than just financial compensations. Unfortunately, gender-based human rights abuses are not the only challenge Roma women are faced within the Czech Republic. The forced sterilization case provides a significant starting point for the complex and systemic challenges Romani people are faced with and have been dealing with for decades. Understanding the dangers of declaiming human rights abuses is dangerous for everyone involved as it promotes a culture of indifference and a law of regard for international laws. Racism and discrimination in the Czech Republic are so normalized and not understood as detrimental to the well-being of basic human rights for all. Ethnic discrimination against the Roma in the Czech Republic is still a massive problem and bringing light to one of the many problematic actions put on by the state is very important. My biggest goal is to understand how we can hold states accountable for human rights violations, how to assist the victims of state-sponsored crimes across the globe, and how to promote positive and uplifting language

surrounding minority groups as a lack of public cooperation and acceptance prevents positive change. Although financial compensation does support the victims and families of forced sterilizations, the mental, emotional, and physical implications of the procedures will never be able to be repaid and will continue to impact families for generations to come.

The systemic human rights abuses and discrimination against the Roma in the Czech Republic are a product of the normalized bigotry that shows up publicly, privately, professionally, and in this specific case, medically. The Czech population is faced with a sense of numbness surrounding the topic of racism and discrimination as it is viewed as a normal aspect of public life and discourse. Anti-Roma rhetoric remains similar to that of the World War II-era despite the massive progressive ideological shift that occurred in 1989. This brings in the question of the social and political significance of democratization and what it means for the population of said democratized state. It is important to acknowledge what went wrong in the Czech Republic's transformation into a parliamentary democracy and how the human rights of marginalized individuals were neglected. The country's lack of anti-discriminatory laws and protections directly goes against the missions and treaties the state is affiliated with through a variety of organizations such as the United Nations and the European Union. This suggests the continued systematic presence of eugenics and white supremacy within our 'civilized' democratic Western societies and how progressive living conditions only apply to those for which the systems were strategically built. Cases such as this one should be analyzed and understood when non-democratic states are working towards a democratic transition as all citizens regardless of race, gender, or socioeconomic status should be included in the benefits and protections of a democratic state. What tactics should newly democratic states with state-

sponsored past human rights abuses use to ensure an equal and just society that promotes a compensatory atmosphere?

Luckily, the international community is beginning to address the challenges the Roma community is facing in Europe with a variety of events and projects focused on challenging stereotypes and promoting equal access opportunities for the ethnic group. In 2018, the United Nations promoted and launched 'I Am Fatmira', a documentary following Roma activist Fatmira Dajlani through her Roma community and how she fights and challenges her ethnic group's many stereotypes.<sup>67</sup> This topic is only a small fraction of the systemic struggles Roma people face in the Czech Republic, and the journey to justice is just beginning.

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