



Detlef Pollack, Jörg Jacobs, Olaf Müller, Gert Pickel. *Political Culture in Post-Communist Europe: Attitudes in New Democracies.* Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003. 286 S. \$130.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7546-1969-7.



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The scholars contributing to this book are examining the “readiness” of Post-Communist countries for democracy, using cultural factors as their points of measure. As indicated in the title, the authors investigate “attitudes” in Post-Communist Europe. Needless to say, it is difficult to measure attitudes in populations and the obstacles to such qualitative research have been discussed in great length elsewhere. The authors frame the essays around the question of the “political culture approach” (xi) and discuss the various obstacles to democratization in Post-Communist countries from Eastern and Central Europe. They are interested in evaluating how “practically” democracy is manifested into society (xiv). They choose the political culture approach to investigate people’s attitudes, basing the study of the book on the assumption that “people have to get used to the new rules, seek to reach their aim within the given rules, and be convinced that a democracy is the best way of solving problems of a community such as their own” (xiv). Furthermore, people have to favour democracy over communism. The authors, however, do not sufficiently explain how the political approach informs the thirteen arti-

cles that follow. The political culture approach is discussed throughout all the essays but receives its final (and most comprehensive) analysis in the conclusion.

The fundamental problem with the discussion of democracy in this book begins with the title. It announces that the authors discuss “new democracies” in “post-communist Europe.” One must wonder what they mean with new democracies and post-communist; does their work only consider countries who made it into the EU by 2003 (the year the book was published), or those who are moving towards gaining membership? What constitutes a democracy or a post-communist country? Romania, Hungary, Poland and other countries that went through transformations in 1989 are certainly significant, but other countries like Italy and France also had phases of strong influences by communist parties. The authors neither clarify their choices in the introduction nor do they elaborate on this issue in their conclusion. This leaves the reader with a normative conception of democratization that has been decreed since 1989 and before.

Edited by Pollack, Jacobs, Müller, and Pickel, this book offers thirteen articles divided in four parts. The first part, entitled *The Political Culture Approach and Democratization*, starts with an essay by Pye that deals with past and present approaches to analyzing democratization in communist and post-communist countries. He proposes that in the 1970s and 1980s, the realities of the demise of communism laid bare the minute influence leaders like Stalin and Mao had on changing long-established behaviours. The dictators, however, left their countries severely damaged and Pye surmises that globalization under the flag of democracy faces bitter challenges such as corruption, a “weakened civil societies,” mistrust in “shared interests,” and general cynicism (pp. 12-13). He leaves the reader with three important questions: what influences do economics, leadership and social mobilization have on the democratization effort in post-communist countries? Unfortunately the book does not offer comprehensive answers to all these questions.

Brown’s essay offers some insight to these issues specifically in the context of Russia. He discusses political culture in terms of “values, deeplying beliefs and sense of identity” and offers a short survey of literature on political culture (p. 19). He acknowledges that analysis of the development of democratization in Russia through surveys is limited and misleading; yet he believes it offers the opportunity to compare differences in values of communist countries globally. Overall, surveys have shown an increased sentimentality toward “pre-perestroika” in the last decade. Brown concludes that the leadership of Yeltsin resulted in tremendous setbacks for the democratization process of Russia. Russian mistrust in democracy was and still is well deserved, so Brown, given the suspiciously dictatorial direction of Putin’s administration.

In the second part of the book, entitled *New Democracies in the Process of Consolidation*, Ulram and Plasser’s findings confirm Brown’s con-

clusion about Russia; along with Ukrainians, a majority of Russians favour “antidemocratic sentiments” (p. 40). Overall, Ulram and Plasser study confirms that the East-Central and Eastern European Countries (here: Slovenia, Czechia, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, Bulgaria, Croatia, Russia and Ukraine) were disappointed by democratic transformation; either their hopes for improvement were not fulfilled or people’s general mistrust in the power of democracy was confirmed.

While these findings seem to make a lot of sense, it is curious how the questions were delivered and what choices people really had in answering them. If people were to ask anyone living in western Germany or the United States a question like: “In general, are you satisfied with democracy and the whole political system in (your country)?” (p. 41), one would be hard-pressed to find enthusiasm and satisfaction, despite the fact that those people supposedly live in old (as opposed to “new”) democracies.

Jacobs, Müller and Pickel provide a large comparative study of East-Central European countries (Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia) and Russia, Latvia, Bulgaria, the US, UK, the Federal Republic of Germany and the GDR. Their work is prompted by the question of whether democracies are going to collapse in the near future. Using the Freedom House Index and the political cultural approach, the authors analyze the attitudes toward democracy. Their study stands out because they found that there are no significant differences in resistance to democracy between the Eastern and Western countries; rather they also observed significant differences in the level of acceptance of the system in itself.

The text written by Delhey and Tobsch examines the causes for satisfaction with democracy specific to East Germany and Hungary. They found that politics and economics have great influence on people’s level of satisfaction with democracy. While responses from East Germans imply that personal freedom is the most impor-

tant factor in determining the future of democracy, Hungarian responses indicate that individual economic conditions are most important. This comes as no surprise when considering that the standard of living in Hungary is significantly lower and that East Germany “has gained ‘more’ from transformation than the Hungarians” (p. 127). The notion of ‘gaining more’ is rather speculative and relies on the assumption that democracy has fundamentally improved civil liberties in the GDR. However, their findings and comparisons to previous studies offer more convincing arguments than some of the other essays.

The third section deals with Change of Values. The first essay by Muelmann investigates the difference in level of achievement and in/equality within East and West Germany. Achievement for Meulemann constitutes an individual’s opportunity for “self-realization” within the workforce, family and other social spheres, while in/equality refers both to the opportunities for and consequences of achievement. The very nature of seeking or receiving employment opportunities in the FRG and GDR differed greatly; while people in the FRG had the freedom to make a choice (job, fashion, fiscal responsibilities), choices were often made by higher authorities for GDR citizens. Surveys conducted from 1990-1995 showed that West Germans consistently favoured equality (over achievement), while East Germans initially showed greater preference for achievement, but with time showed a polarization of values. Muelmann interprets the polarization as a step towards “modernization” and unification of Germany. His emphasis on GDR’s need to move toward “modernization” is rather problematic because it imposes a value judgement that elevates the “West” and that has inbuilt implications of the “East” as primitive – hence in need to be modernized.

Schwarz offers two interviews (case studies) of former GDR citizens as alternative ways of analyzing GDR sentiments. Despite their integration

into the FRG, both individuals still revealed underlying value systems that followed communist principles; to be exact, an emphasis on responsibility towards society or the family (rather than emphasis on the individual). Schwarz concludes that the interviewees revealed latent conservation of former socialist ideologies, as well as open embrace of new live styles offered by the FRG. These two case studies serve as great examples of the qualitative nature of this kind of research and its limitations. The interviewees are forced to recollect their memories and feelings much in the same way as people who are taking the surveys. But it becomes clear here, that the categorization of “communist” ideas is rather problematic. A lack of criticism toward the state because it is seen as unproductive (p. 160), for example, does not necessarily imply a disposition that is still influenced by communism. Upon reading Schwarz’s interpretations of the two case studies, the reader gains a sense of the challenges involved in studying attitudes and their connections to politics.

Wegener addresses values relevant to social justice in the overarching question of unification in Germany, which he believes is still divided by an “inner wall” (p. 209). Categorizing solidarity as a measure of justice both in GDR and FRG, Wegener uses data retrieved from the International Social Justice Project (from 1991, 1996, & 2000) to analyze the relationship between conceptions of justice and “social structural phenomena” (p. 210). He concludes that there are strong differences in justice ideologies between East and West and that the “inner wall’ still stands” (p. 227).

In the Conclusion, Mishler and Pollack investigates political culture as a research method and offers a system of dividing research into two strands; namely thick and thin culture. Thick culture is shaped by time and generations of cultural development, leaving societies with “a fundamental consensus on basic values and beliefs, shared symbols and meanings, and basic social practices and institutions” (p. 239). Thin culture is part of

thick culture but is less rooted in the collective conscious of a society and therefore fosters diversity. Furthermore, thick culture is static, while thin culture changes over time. The authors summarize the arguments made in previous chapters with respect to the future of post-socialist democracies and conclude that “only time will tell” whether thick culture (difficulties in “adaptation”) or thin culture (minimal power of socialism overall) will determine the fate of democracy. The conclusion, therefore, leaves us with an open end and underlines that a conclusive analysis is not possible, since only time will tell what will happen.

Overall, the range of the studies in this book seems limited. Martin’s essay, for example, only includes Slovenia, but none of the other former Yugoslavian countries. Furthermore, it is also not always clear to the reader which countries are Central and which countries are Southern European in her analysis. One could argue that Macedonia should have been included in some of the other analyses, especially in those that discussed Croatia. Considering that Macedonia and Croatia had both signed the Stabilization and Association Agreements by 2003, there is no reason why the authors should have chosen Croatia over Macedonia. As indicated above, there is a general confusion around the classifications of Post-Communism and new democracies in this book that leads to the conclusion that the choice of countries is rather arbitrary.

With respect to issues relating to 1989, Jacobs, Müller and Pickel’s essay is probably one of the best essays indicating changes in attitude since 1989. Focusing on a large sample of countries, the essay offers findings and methods that help explain resistance or acceptance to democracy. This book is worth reading especially for scholar’s interested in East Germany and issues of unification. It is a valuable source for other countries in East-Central- and Southeastern Europe for with respect to individual chapters but does not contribute a great deal to the discussion of the politi-

cal culture approach. Rather, it undermines the approach with frequently heavily biased conclusions that favour western normative ideas about democracy and that rely on questionable surveying methods.

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