

*Linde, Jonas: Doubting Democrats? A Comparative Analysis of Support for Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe.*

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The Swedish political scientist Jonas Linde successfully defended his PhD thesis in the fall of 2004. The thesis was entitled "Doubting Democrats?" and is available in Örebro Studies in Political Science. The purpose of the thesis is to analyze democratic consolidation at the mass level, through a comparative analysis of popular support for democratic regimes in Central and Eastern Europe. The result is a well written book that can be recommended also to the politically interested general public. The strong points are the comparative perspective and the empirical analysis, but the thesis also has great potential as a handbook, due to the many tables. Included in the analysis are the eight post-communist EU member states, as well as Romania and Bulgaria, and the analysis is based on data from "New European Barometer". The data set covers the period from 1991 to 2001, but Linde's main emphasis is on the 2001 data. His theoretical point of departure is David Easton's classical three-dimensional model of political support, taking into account Pippa Norris' modifications. The thesis therefore belongs to the political culture tradition.

Norris distinguishes between five objects of political support: the political community, regime principles, regime performance, regime institutions and political actors. Support for the political community (the state) is the most diffuse form of support, while support for political actors is the most specific. Linde's focus is on the

three objects in the middle: principal support for democracy as the best possible regime (or the lesser evil), support for regime performance and support for the democratic institutions. A central conclusion is that although there is widespread dissatisfaction in all the ten countries with political institutions as well as with regime performance, a majority is supportive of democracy as the best possible regime – hence the title of the thesis: “Doubting democrats” are citizens who are critical to the performance of the system, while still being convinced of the principal advantages of democracy compared to all other regimes.

In the first part of the thesis, Linde presents his research questions, and then moves on to the theoretical and historical context. The historical part is mainly about the post-1945 period. The author is well versed in the theoretical as well as the historical literature, and argues convincingly that we can – and should – distinguish between different dimensions of support for democracy. In the second, main part Linde presents his empirical analysis.

The analysis starts in chapter 5, where he analyzes specific support for political institutions, measured in terms of trust. His findings correspond to earlier findings, showing widespread distrust towards political institutions in all ten countries. Political parties and parliaments are the least trusted. There are nevertheless differences between countries, and in the latest survey (2001) Slovakia achieves the lowest scores. However, there are large fluctuations in trust levels over time, suggesting that trust in political institutions is influenced by current political crisis or happenings. The regression analysis of the 2001-data shows that the independent variable which explains most of the variance is general trust in “most people” – people who are generally trusting towards other people are also more inclined to trust political institutions. Nevertheless, people who are satisfied with democratic performance are more likely to trust political institutions than those who are dissatisfied.

In chapter 6 Linde argues that, contrary to what is often assumed, “satisfaction with democracy” reflects popular support for regime performance rather than principal support for democratic regimes. Also satisfaction with democracy varies between countries and over time, and moreover, satisfaction with democracy correlates clearly with the respondents’ satisfaction with the economic situation of the country as well as of their own household. The share that is satisfied with regime performance is higher than the share that displays trust in political institutions. Finally, the chapter repudiates the hypothesis often heard in the early 1990s that democratic consolidation in post-communist countries would be difficult because dissatisfaction with the economy would turn people against democracy. Economy is not the only important consideration when people evaluate regime performance.

In chapter 7 the author analyzes the most diffuse form of support: support for regime principles. The analysis shows that a stable majority of the citizens in all ten countries prefers democracy to all non-democratic alternatives – in spite of all democracy’s shortcomings. There is a significant difference between Central Europe and the Baltic States in terms of what the “most popular” non-democratic alternative is: in Central Europe return to communism is the preferred alternative, while strong-man-rule is the most popular non-democratic alternative in the Baltic States. Military rule has minimal support in the whole region. Communist nostalgia is more

common among the elderly than in the younger generations, and well educated groups are most likely to support democracy and reject all non-democratic alternatives. Lithuania has the lowest support for democratic principles, followed by Bulgaria and Poland.

In conclusion, this is a well researched and well written book, which shows that the ten countries are well on their way to becoming consolidated democracies. However, a few critical remarks are perhaps in order. First, the book could have benefited from a more in-depth reflection over central concepts, like for instance "democratic consolidation". If consolidation is a matter of overcoming democratic deficits, and we therefore accept that a democracy can survive over time without being consolidated, do we not run the risk of conceptual stretching? Linde cites the exclusion of large ethnic or cultural minorities from the political system as an example of a democratic deficit (p. 48). But without universal suffrage a given regime does not even meet Dahl's classical minimum requirements for democracy, so why call it a democracy in the first place? This distinction between a stabile and a consolidated democracy is obviously not fruitful, and Linde could have taken a clearer stand against it.

Second, the comparative analysis could have been enhanced by commenting the patterns of variations between countries in a more systematic way. A question that really stands out is: how do we explain the big difference between the Czech Republic and Slovakia – formerly two parts of the same country? The Czech Republic scores higher in terms of trust as well as satisfaction with democracy, and has the strongest support for regime principles of all the countries. In Slovakia a majority of 60 percent rejects all non-democratic alternatives, but the trust and satisfaction levels are much lower. Why?

Third, communist nostalgia among the elderly may not only be a result of socialization. Some people in the 60+ cohort had their formative years before communism, and it is very likely that the family played an important role in the socialization process also during communism. Nostalgia among the elderly may have something to do with the fact that the economic transition hurt them more than younger people, as Linde also points out. Conversely, highly educated groups were among the winners of the transition – so there is no wonder they are satisfied with democracy.

Finally, there are some minor factual errors. The information concerning the election system in Hungary and Lithuania is contradictory (p.124 and 126) – the correct is that both have mixed systems. Poor Yugoslavia (which is not included in the survey) is indirectly presented as a bastion of orthodox Stalinism, and Croats as Orthodox Christians (p.94). This can easily be corrected by a couple of modifying sentences. These are all but minor points of criticism. My overall judgment is that this book is worthy of a large readership.