

VOTERS AND PARLIAMENTARIANS. AN ATTEMPT FOR A PORTRAIT

In July 1990 the Center for the Study of Democracy carried out a post-election opinion poll study of the political orientations of the Bulgarian electorate. The study used the method of the direct questionnaire, carried out on a random sample of about 3 000. Parallel with this study, the Center carried out a testing for the values orientation of the respondents. The test was a kind of continuation of the questionnaire, was targeted at the same respondents at the same time as the poll itself.

In contrast with the multitude of opinion polls in this country, aiming as they do at an "instant photograph" of the state of the public mind at a certain time and in a certain situation, the test attempts to capture a more long-term orientation of Bulgarians vis-a-vis certain values and combinations of values. This makes for a more thorough interpretation of the results, for the outlining of a certain socio-psychological field over which are played out the present day political processes of this country. The testing was carried out also among parliamentary deputies at the Grand National Assembly with the aim of comparing the values orientations of the electorate and of its elected representatives. The primary analysis was focused on the different pairs of answers, and then the data was generalized for a clearer overview. The pairs analysis makes it possible to capture the orientation of different communities (demographic and political) to the basic values presented in the test. The analysis of the test as a whole enabled us to come to a preliminary distribution of voters and deputies along three basic groups, called by us "conservative", "liberal" and "moderate".

The following analysis of the test is part of the Center's program "Bulgarian Political Life".

The test contained nine pairs of opposing statements: 1) Different ethnicity hinders (does not hinder) real friendship; 2) The airing of French and American programs on Bulgarian TV places us under foreign domination {expands our knowledge of the world}; 3) It is inadmissible (it is normal) for journalists to reveal to the public the weaknesses and defects of political leaders; 4) The introduction of strip-tease in the country is immoral (normal); 5) Money corrupts (is the best of all known stimuli); 6) The cohabitation of unmarried people of the opposite sex is something quite normal (indecent); 7) In my work, I prefer to define myself the aims and conditions of the work (I prefer for others to set the working conditions and present me with tasks); 8). The motherland is where one feels best (emigration saps the prestige and is inimical to the national interests of Bulgaria); 9) Private property everywhere and always leads to exploitation (is the precondition for the free expression of the individual).

One side of each pair of statements was intended to be an indicator of a "conservative" inclination (a preference for what is established, traditional), and the other, of a "liberal" disposition (a preference for what is new, modern). The respondent was asked to state the degree of agreement with one or the other. At the directly evident level of "old-new" is situated the general inclination towards the transcendence of the "settled reality" (of the "old"), and towards a change aiming at a new state of affairs, frequently seen as identified with the West, or, at least, with the general knowledge about things in the West (the "new"). At a deeper level ("modern-traditional") we believe that the

responses reveal dispositions towards an openness, respect of autonomy and personal liberty, openness towards new values, towards the world - or, vice versa, a striving for a "closed", "traditional" society.

As a first approach to the state of mind of the nation, we will concentrate on the "new-old" aspect. For "old" we take identification with the tenets of the old regime, underpinning the authoritarian consensus which made the regime more or less stable. Preference for the opposing values is taken to mean a negation of the "old" and an orientation toward the "new".

VALUES AND POLITICAL CHOICE

The nine pairs of statements outline four "values fields" that have been present in the minds of Bulgarians over the last 100 or so years. At the same time, they continue to be present in the political debate today, they form important symbols of the political struggle. The test aimed at capturing values connected with the national idea, social authorities, morality and property. In further analyses we will treat the test for other basic values like freedom and justice.

THE NATIONAL IDEA

The national idea has always been a painful tangle in the mass mind and politics in this country from the Liberation from Turkish rule onwards. Today, the problems relating to the national unity and national identity have become exacerbated due to the non-solution of national and ethnic problems, and as the outcome of a political polarization in which various political forces use nationalist motifs for their own political ends.

And yet, on the level of individual consciousness, the "national problem" does not look all that dramatic. It is to be noted that the different electorates, and parliamentarians as a whole evince an enviable level of tolerance: all of these groups overwhelmingly agree that different ethnicity cannot be a barrier to friendship. And this kind of result is not surprising: Bulgaria has a long history of ethnic tolerance (there is the mass sympathy for Armenian refugees in the beginning of the century, the defending of Bulgarian Jews during the Second World War, and the absence of ethnic strife in the new history of the country). What ethnic conflicts there are, they do not seem to start on a personal level. For example, 85% of MRF* electors believe that people belonging to different ethnic communities can be real friends. The group contradictions between Bulgarians and ethnic Turks are to a great extent the result of the policy of "renaissance" (the forcible re-naming of ethnic Turks with Christian names) of the old regime.

Nevertheless, the inter-personal level is subsumed in artificially stirred intercommunal conflicts. Possibly because of this, the attitude to the motherland becomes the most sensitive element in the values profile of the political communities. Deputies both from the BSP** and from the UDF*** declare a greater "love for the motherland" than their electors, choosing the option that emigration is inimical to the national interests and saps the prestige of the country. This may be interpreted in two ways: as a rejection of

the freedom of movement and domicile, or as the expression of the fear that mass emigration may depopulate the nation. But the very choice of one or the other interpretation is an indicator of a different type of disposition: one that has as its starting point the interests of the collective body (anti individualism), or of the state (etatism). As a whole, the above statement is very popular in all groups. The exception is the MRF electorate, but this is less likely to be an expression of individualism than of a collective psychological rejection of a state authority which is held responsible for the suffering of the ethnic Turkish minority. The forcefully expressed apprehension about the wholeness of the motherland on the part of the two leading parliamentary groups (UDF and BSP) is an indication of "statesman's thinking" as the result of their presence in the structures of power. Apart from the internalized responsibility for the fate of the whole, this may also be an expression of the "managerial corporate spirit", of the attempt to hold on to the mass of "ruled" sapped in numbers by emigration.

The declared preference for living in one's home country seems in conflict with the mass utopia called "Europe" (the "common European home", "European United States" and other popular ideas of that ilk). But the pair of statements which captures the degree of openness to the world throws light on this contradiction. The high percentage of people interested in foreign TV programs points not only to the falling away of the ideological curtain, but also to the age-old Bulgarian drive for integration into Europe (the "complex of the periphery"). Between the two types of integration - personal emigration and welcoming of foreign culture - most Bulgarians choose the second: not for us BULGARIANS to go to Europe, but to let EUROPE into our impoverished home. There is the possibility of a third kind of interpretation of hostility towards foreign culture: the opposition to the commercialization and "Americanization" of culture. But this can only apply in the case of a small group of intellectuals who have chosen the apparently conservative option about foreign cultural dependence due to an attempt to preserve the national cultural heritage and identity.

SOCIAL AUTHORITIES

Until recently we all knew that "power belongs to the people". Because of this tenet, many were inclined to forgive the rulers their misdeeds, or simply to remain silent even when the actions of the rulers violated the interests of the ruled. We all expected constantly to "receive something", to be "given something". The abandonment of this passive attitude is an expression of a disposition in favour of the "new".

"I prefer to define myself the conditions and aims of my work" - this is an active, searching option. From the point of view of the "work discipline" propagated until recently, this is an "underground" statement. Whereas the choice of the opposite is almost certainly a preference for the old state of affairs, and for the implicit acceptance of the authority of the powers that be.

The vast majority of BSP deputies (92%) and of UDF deputies (97%) prefer to be in charge of their working conditions (leaders will be leaders...). But the electors of the

BSP, APU* and the MRF evince a more collectivistic disposition, sharply contrasting with the electorate of the UDF.

Something similar can be seen in the question about the right of journalists to reveal weaknesses in leaders. Until recently, the details of the private life of political leaders were sacrosanct, and their revelation was actionable in law. 86% of UDF deputies stand on the platform of public criticism and revelation of weaknesses, followed by 80% of their electors. The voters of the other three major political forces, and the BSP deputies evince a more lukewarm attitude to the freedom of journalistic inquiry - possibly influenced by the fear of de-heroization and the ultimate threat of revelation that the King has no clothes on. On the other hand, the high proportion of the electorate which demands to know everything about the leaders is an indicator of a certain amount of populism in the nation: the leaders are again set apart from other people and are seen as something "unusual", "extraordinary". This demand "to know all" may also signify a lack of respect for the autonomy and the secrets of the individual. We should be wary of coming to a clear conclusion about people, possibly not very many, who desire to shield from the glare of publicity the personal weaknesses of political leaders.

MORALITY

The traditionalism of contemporary Bulgarian society is possibly to be seen at its clearest in the responses concerning strip-tease and cohabitation outside marriage. Strip-tease is seen as amoral by 39% of respondents (the lowest proportion is among UDF voters - 26%, and the highest, 51%, in the BSP "electorate). Cohabitation outside marriage is rejected by 39% of the population, with the highest percentage again being in the BSP electorate, 54%, and the lowest, in the UDF electorate at 26%.

These subjects were treated firmly under the old regime. Striptease has always been connected with the image of the "decadent West". In a way, striptease together with prostitution (and in the public mind the two are often confused) was made a symbol of exploitation. In this way, traditional morality had become the official one.

Again, the cohabitation question also targets the official morality of the old regime. The family, even at the expense of the official proclamations of the "founding fathers" of communism, was proclaimed by the regime an almost official state institution. ("the most fundamental cell of society").

In relation to these two questions, the BSP electorate on the one hand, and the UDF electorate plus most parliamentarians on the other, represent two different cultural standards: the first we could call "ascetic (traditional) and the second, "hedonistic" (modern).

From the point of view of the old/new divide, the picture here is not all too clear. In the West itself, in this country taken as the "new", the "modern", public opinion is split on these issues. In our case it is important that personal rejection does not take on the character of official prohibition.

PROPERTY

As of at least 150 years, the question of property has been the great divide in European societies. Today's Bulgaria is no exception. Private property has sound grounds to claim to be the basic values divide in the nation: UDF electors who believe private property to be a precondition for personal liberty are two-fold over the proportion of BSP electors of the same opinion. Despite the fact that in the BSP pre-election platform private property was declared to have a legitimate presence in "democratic socialism", most of the socialist electorate continues to associate private property with exploitation. On the other hand, the UDF electorate sees private property as a panacea for all national ills.

To a great extent the attitude to private property is similar to the attitude to money. BSP and UDF parliamentarians, as well as the UDF electorate are all agreed that money is the best stimulus for human initiative. On the opposite pole cluster the electorates of the BSP, MRF and APU, who tend to believe that money corrupts. In this we see the traditional egalitarianism and the moral approach to money. In our traditional culture, money is endowed with mystic characteristics, it is seen to have a hedonistic potential which threatens egalitarian inclinations. On the other hand, the traditional socialist approach also condemns money and aspires to do without it, driving society towards direct exchange of produce as the means to overcome alienation. But the "corruption" option is ambivalent: it may be that people believe recipients of money to be already corrupted, that money is not a stimulus, but the result of some immoral and corrupt activities.

In this way, the attitude to private property and to money is indeed the basic divide in the political culture of the country.

"CONSERVATIVES" AND "LIBERALS"

The political history of the modern Bulgarian state begins with the struggles between liberals and conservatives in the 1880s. Over the last four decades this tradition was somewhat overshadowed under the totalitarian regime, but it was carried across to today as a real psychological and political experience. It would be very difficult today to say whether the average Bulgarian is a conservative or a liberal. Recent studies have shown that a great proportion of our nation desire to present themselves as liberals, while at the same time carrying deep inside traditionalism and a nostalgia for the "familiar past". And yet, the instrumentarium of sociology does provide the potential for unravelling the tangled question of "liberalism" and "conservatism" in Bulgaria.

The primary analysis of the test eliminated all "don't knows", and united all degrees of agreement into one single category.

Ultimately, we discovered five categories of people. The first includes people who have chosen completely conservative options; the second includes "conservatives" who have chosen one or two of the liberal options; the third includes people who stand exactly mid-way between the two; the fourth and fifth categories include, respectively, "liberals" who have chosen one or two conservative assertions, and full liberals. The

first and second category may be thus said to cover "conservatives", the last two, "liberals", and the middle option we have called "moderates".

The results here are not altogether unexpected. The young age groups dominate the "liberal" category, the middle-aged tend to be "moderate", and the older age groups cluster around the "conservative" category. It was also not surprising that in Sofia and the big to mid-size cities "liberals" dominate, whereas the villages are staunchly "conservative".

On the basis of the data thus received we can construct a "table of dispositions" in the political communities (voters and parliamentarians):

<i>Voters:</i>					
<i>Categories</i>	1	2	3	4	5
BSP	10.5	11.1	35.1	27.6	15.9
UDF	0.8	2.9	15.7	27.8	52.8
APU	7.4	14.7	30.5	28.9	18.4
MRF	2.2	8.7	20.7	43.5	25.0
Total	5.1	7.6	24.6	28.9	33.7

<i>Parliamentarians:</i>					
BSP	0	6.8	13.6	42.4	37.1
UDF	0	0	7.0	23.0	69.9
APU	0	0	13.3	20.0	66.6
MRF	0	0	0	46.6	53.4
Total	0	3.2	10.4	33.3	53.0

The results of the test confirmed expectations as to differences between the voters of the two greatest political forces BSP and UDF. When we take account of all options stated (i.e. non-generalized in the three composite categories), most of the BSP voters (63%), choose options 3 and 4, whereas no less than 80% of the UDF electorate tend towards more "liberal" peak achievements (categories 4 and 5). It is worth noting that BSP members are more "liberal" than its electorate, whereas in the case of the UDF there is no difference between members and voters.

The electorates of the BSP, APU and the MRF as a whole tend to exhibit the same characteristics. In the choice between pairs 2,4,5,6 and 7 they tend towards the "conservative" opinion (Western TV programs, striptease, cohabitation, money and

work). The three electorates are also similar in the attitude to the great divide - private property. As a whole, the UDF electorate is of the "liberal" ilk.

These conclusions are partially confirmed in the generalized classification of the electorates along the three categories outlined. About 44% of the BSP electorate and 47% of the APU voters can be classed as "liberals". "Conservatives" are respectively 21% and 20%. In the case of the MRF, almost 69% can be classed in the "liberal" generalized category, with only 11% to be found in the "conservative" camp. But once we split up the answers along all the options, we see that the MRF electorate is closer to the BSP and APU than, as first glance would have it, to the UDF voters. The high "liberal" profile of the MRF electorate comes primarily out of high "liberal" values registered on the "ethnicity" options. The biggest categories in the BSP and APU electorates are the "moderate" ones, respectively 35% and 30%. In the case of the UDF, detailization of the answers lead to 53% being classed as pure "liberals" (compared to 80% of "liberals" according to the more generalized category), with "conservatives" a mere 4%.

The tables of "dispositions" show that the political representation of the different parties in parliament is as a rule more "liberal" than its respective electorates. The differences in the acceptance of "liberal" options between voters and parliamentarians are particularly pronounced in the case of the BSP, APU and MRF (in the case of the BSP - 36 percentage points, the APU - 39 percentage points, the MRF - 32 percentage points, and the UDF - 12 percentage points, the mean difference between voters and parliamentarians being 24 percentage points).

Consequently, on the one hand, the electoral bodies of the BSP, APU and the MRF have similar characteristics, which are on the whole tending to the "conservative" category, and, on the other, their representatives in parliament have more pronounced "liberal" characteristics. Up to a point, this discrepancy can be explained in terms of differences in the levels of education, but this is not the whole story. The reasons must also be looked for in the specific characteristics of the present political situation.

The discrepancies between the values systems of voters and parliamentarians are the result of the intensive changes in society, and in the public mind. This situation contains a destabilizing potential and can, under certain circumstances, result in a break down of the fragile bridges of trust existing between voters and parliamentarians.

CONCLUSIONS

The generalized interpretation of the test makes it possible to outline the social contours of three "values groups". The first - the "liberals" - contains primarily people under 45, living in Sofia or the big cities, with more clear individualistic inclinations, voting for the UDF. The second group - the "conservatives" - encompasses above all people over 45, living primarily in the villages and sensitized to collective norms of life. These have voted as a rule for the BSP or the APU, but are also present in the UDF electorate. The group of the "moderates" (equally distributed between those attracted by the "old" as by the "new", but seeming to be oriented to, above all, a kind of "present") are people in the active age groups (26 - 60), living above all in the

smaller cities and voting for the BSP. There is hardly a "Chinese wall" between all these groups, and in practice they co-exist in every community. It would seem, at the end of the day, that the question of prime importance is not "the new" or "the old", but a search: "what should we take from the old?", and "what should we take from the new"?

It would be premature to try and make clear-cut conclusions. We have presented the above as a preliminary information and food for thought. After we finished the study, we came up with more questions than answers. How do interests and values combine in determining the vote? Is it time to reject the traditional scheme of the socio-group determination of political behavior, and to replace this with the construction of "values-groups" models? Are there any purely political dominants in the act of the political choice? The answers to these, and a multitude of other questions, requires much further study and analysis.

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