VALUES AND CONNOTATIONS OF DEMOCRACY IN LITHUANIA: ORDINARY CITIZENS VS. LOCAL ELITES

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Introduction

Not only cultures and societies may have specific nuances in the meanings of seemingly universal social and political concepts but also, within one single society, there may be different, if not competing meanings attached to the same concept. Moreover, these diverse meanings are apt to change, and change quite substantially in the case of rapid post-communist developments (Miller, Hesli, Reisinger 1997, Marcus, Mease, Ottemoeller 2001).

The term *democracy* falls into the class of political cognitions or „memory representations and the mental processes involved in political understanding and interaction" (van Dijk 2002: 207). It refers to sociopolitical attitudes and knowledge (Luskin 1987). Answers to an open-ended question which asks respondents to describe the meaning of an abstract political concept can be grouped by some meaningful analytical dimensions, i.e. size and extent (of political information) and coherence (of political knowledge). Standards derived from political (democratic) theory would allow us to assess these answers as representative of one or another tradition of political thought.

Another way to analyze such descriptive answers is to typify their contents in terms of the images of democracy they display (for instance, par-

ticipatory vs. representative, based on majority rule vs. inclusive regime, etc.). However, too many configurations might appear and too many of them might not fit into one image or tradition of democratic thought. A viable alternative is not to deal with the whole answer (not to examine what the overarching ideology of a respondent is), but to divide the data into several meaningful categories and to compose a map of democratic thought in a given society at a given point of time. Any definition of the abstract political concept *democracy* may refer not only to such fundamental values as freedom, solidarity and equality, but also to some more procedural values as majority rule, free elections, the responsibility of state officials, transparency of governance, etc. These connotations are political values, objectified and preferred one over another in the practice of democracy, internalized during individual socialization, and/ or transmitted/ imposed through mass-media. It is debatable if the interconnectedness of elements in these definitions is conscious, or whether enumerated meanings are not simply kinds of non-attitudes or mimicry taken from the mass media and everyday social experiences. Despite the shortcomings of the imperfect measures employed, such topographic research on political orientations and their sophistication appears to be fruitful (Luskin 1987: 885–889).

Dimensions in the meanings of democracy

As has been indicated above, one framework to analyze a variety of definitions of *democracy* is to use political philosophy and to categorize definitions according to the basic elements of democracy that are widely discussed in political theory, such as liberty, freedom(s), rights, equality, tolerance, rule of law, order, etc. Another way is to refer to different traditions of democracy, such as procedural (formal) democracy emphasizing elections, elected representatives, and majority decisions versus participatory democracy, emphasizing a broad participation of citizens, multi-faceted decision-making, etc.[1] In the following analysis, we concentrate on abstract principles and adjectives connected with democracy, and exclude other types of meanings (negative comments on democracy, elements of nationalism or economic interests).

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[1]   http://www.ssc.upenn.edu/dlg/ques_english.html

The concept of democracy is a rather elusive concept so that many empirically oriented social scientists concentrate on some aspects instead of trying to provide an extensive interpretation. The most widely accepted is the liberal-representative understanding of democracy, underlying its minimal and procedural features (Dahl, Pennock, Bobbio). Alternatively, substantive democratic thought advocates direct, communitarian, participatory (Pateman) and deliberative (Fishkin, Habermas) democracy and emphasizes the direct and active participation of citizens, the promotion of reasoned public debates. Along with the issue of political equality and the rule of law, it also includes concerns about social and economic equality, equality of opportunities and results, etc. We have selected values or elements of both interpretations of democracy. We emphasize categories of order (rule of law) and freedom(s), as representatives of two generalized dimensions of political democracy (for instance, liberal democracy "might be defined as the extent to which a political system allows political liberties and democratic rule" (Bollen 1993: 1208).

Our working definition of democracy dwells on these two generalized dimensions in the definitions of liberal (or political) democracy. These dimensions are meaningful in various theoretical contexts: for example, post-materialist and materialist values (for instance, Inglehart (1990) in his measures of post-material and material values uses indicators of maintaining order in society and giving more say to people); liberal and conservative modes of thinking (usually, conservatism vs. liberalism are defined in terms of universal values such as justice, order, balance, and moderation (Huntington 1957: 455), see also (Wilson 1960)); and broader reflections on personal autonomy and social control (first and foremost exercised through laws (Meier 1982: 43)).

After reviewing the word frequencies in the surveys under analysis, we have identified ten viable categories:

1. Freedom: freedom, free, liberty.
2. Rights: rights, right (singular of rights).
3. Equality: equal, equally, equality, equal against the law.
4. Order and laws: not anarchy, discipline, frames of law, order, orderly, law, and laws.
5. Constitution: Constitution, constitutional.
6. Elections: votes, voters, voting, multiparty, elect, elected, elections.
7. Majority rule: majority, majority rule.
8. Responsibility: responsibly, responsible, responsibility, responsibilities, duty, obligation.

9. Openness: transparency, transparent, public, publicly, open, openly.
10. Tolerance: tolerance, pluralism, tolerant, tolerate, and diversity.

Social context and meanings

Diversity in the meaning of democracy might arise for various reasons: societies are influenced by specific cultural, political or administrative traditions; various collective life experiences are possible, and cognitive differences are pertinent for diverse social strata. Here we shall focus on the latter aspect and will demonstrate a not-so-homogenous understanding of democracy in the case of Lithuanian society, which may to some degree be typical of post-communist societies in general.

In the last decade Lithuania has undergone all kinds of societal transformations. Because of Soviet political practices (lack of political information and discourse) and the real absence of democratic accountability and representation in Soviet political culture, we can find incoherent and unsophisticated democratic beliefs (Miller, Hesli, Reisinger 1997: 160, 158). Carrnaghan (2001: 361) finds that democracy is understood by the Russian public more and more in terms of law, when the experience of democratic practices extends, compared to the earlier findings of Miller et al. (1997).

A number of studies demonstrate that the divide between ordinary citizens and elites reflects itself in differences of political attitudes (Miller, Hesli, Reisinger 1995: 3–4). Differences in attitudes and definitions of democracy between elites and ordinary citizens may be treated as a sign of the absence of a shared political culture (Reisinger, Miller, Hesli 1995, Miller, Hesli, Reisinger 1997: 158). We should also see if any convergence of the meanings of democracy occurs as democratic experience grows. The hypothesis is that, with time, more structured (coherent) definitions of democracy would dominate inside political-affiliation groups. However, even though these articulated patterns may appear for all political groupings, they may be not distinct among them; in this scenario, political affiliation and the cognitive processes behind them are superseded by time variables (experience with democracy). Another scenario is possible: across the political spectrum, there are apparent differences in meanings, but no change over time. In a third possible scenario, both time and political affiliation matter: meanings are changing or/and they are regrouped systematically by reemerging political affiliations.

Thus we concentrate on several selected variables: personal political affiliation, the divide between the elite and general public (this divide is highly significant in political attitude constraint differences, see e.g. Converse 1964) and time (since time in a transitional society marks important social transformations and increasing experience with democracy, subjective definition of democracy should be constantly updated in the course of these experiences, similar to the lifetime learning model of regime support, Mishler, Rose 2002).

Sample

We analyzed the answers to an open-ended question "There is considerable argument concerning the meaning of democracy. What does democracy mean to you?"[2] The question was used in three consecutive surveys of local political and administrative elites in 20 Lithuanian local municipalities in 1991 (n=289), 1998 (n=308) and 2001 (n=322) conducted by the Institute for Social Research in Vilnius under the international comparative project "Democracy and local governance". The same question was also used in the mass survey "Public participation in Kaunas region" in 2003 (n=859), conducted by Public Policy Research Center (Kaunas University of Technology).

Responses vary from not giving an answer at all to answering the question in several sentences. For instance, order was defined either briefly, e.g., „A strong hand in all spheres" or with additional referents to other democratic principles, e.g., „As order, justice and responsibility"; „A certain order, resting upon laws, which are passed by representatives, elected directly by a majority". The same holds for the term freedom, that was defined as „Freedom of speech"; „Personal freedom and rights to live however you want" or longer explanations with many other meanings. In many cases, both freedoms and order are placed next to each other: „Universally acknowledged order, freedom to act without violation of the law" or „Freedom within the limits of laws".

[2] Another way to discuss the meanings of democracy is to underline that democracy consists not only of abstract principles and values, but to apply them via certain collective actors and actions. Thus it is meaningful to look at how these actors/actions are qualified: society and state (free, economically developed), authorities, parliament, government (representative, accountable, effective), politicians and officers (honest, responsive, responsible), parties (inclusive, competing), press (independent), civil society groups (influential, widespread, active), people, individuals or voters (free, active, responsible).

The percentage of "don't know" answers shows that there is not much difference between local elites and ordinary citizens, in so far as missing answers might be interpreted as a reflection of a lack of a mental image of the "democracy" concept. In 1998, 37% of local elites did not answer the question, while the percentage was 31% in 2001. In the mass survey 27% of respondents did not answer this question. Thus in fact we see the reverse to the picture that was expected: ordinary citizens seem to be able to define democracy at the same, if not a higher level than local elites. Of course, this difference might be due to factors such as different content, length and approach to interviewing in different questionnaires. However, the local elites' quality of definition is much higher, as local elites use more key concepts per respondent (mean 1.5 for local elites in 2001 and 1.1 for ordinary citizens, the difference being statistically significant at 0.95 level).

Differences in the meaning of democracy for local elites and ordinary citizens

In general, ordinary citizens see democracy more in terms of freedom(s); they seldom mention order, adherence to or the functionality of laws (Table 1). Local elites just as frequently mention freedoms and order (while order is only in the 4th position for ordinary citizens). Clearly,

Table 1. Ranks of key–concepts in local elites' and ordinary citizens' definitions of democracy

	Local elites (2001)		Ordinary citizens (2003)	
	Ranks	Percentages*	Ranks	Percentages*
Freedom(s)	1	20%	1	38%
Order and laws	1	20%	3	6%
Rights	3	10%	2	9%
Majority rule	3	10%	6	3%
Elections	5	8%	3	6%
Responsibility	5	8%	7	2%
Equality	7	7%	5	5%
Openness	8	7%	7	2%
Constitution	9	5%	9	1%
Tolerance	10	2%	9	1%

* the percentages reflected the ratio of the number of respondents who named the category compared to the total number of respondents (including those who did not answer). Several or no category could be identified in a respondent's definition of democracy, so that percentages across categories do not add up to 100 percent.

various kinds of freedom is at the core of democracy for both local elites and public, but ordinary citizens stress them much strongly.

All ten of the categories selected but freedom is more frequent in the local elite's notions of democracy, which shows their richer political understanding. In terms of percentages (which reflect saliency), local elites differ from ordinary citizens in giving less importance to freedom and more importance to order, majority rule, responsibility, and openness. In terms of relative importance (the rankings reflect the relative importance of different elements of definition) of different meanings, ordinary citizens stress elections and equality, while the local elite emphasizes order, majority rule and responsibility. This emphasis on order, majority rule and responsibility is surely the local elite's distinctive features.

Different kinds of freedom for ordinary citizens stand out in absolute terms, interpreted as high awareness and expectations about democracy, but local elites also acknowledge freedom to be at the core of democracy. From this analysis of rankings and absolute measures, we conclude that local elites have richer and more balanced view of democracy; in terms of both higher saliency and relative importance, local elites tend to stress order, majority rule and responsibility, while ordinary citizens conceive of democracy in terms of freedom and rights. The stress on freedom by ordinary citizens is unique in the context of the lack of saliency of other elements in definitions of democracy, while for local elites, order and freedom are of the same relative importance.

The 'ruling' and the 'ruled' have different approaches about how to maximize their public power or democracy. Ordinary citizens are in favor of bottom-up influence: emphasis on freedom and rights suggests their eagerness to increase their autonomy of action and to assure non-interference by the state and other collective actors; fair and free elections refer to securing equal influence and power as opposed to an unequal distribution of power. While rights and freedom are at the core of the concept of democracy, the meanings of order, majority rule and responsibility are also rather well acknowledged and important (not in percentage only, but in rankings as well) in the case of local elites, which suggests that elites might tend to maximize power and/or promote democracy by the democratic rule, flowing from top to bottom through the responsible behavior of leaders, procedures of majority rule and effective implementation of decisions. On the other hand, if one looks at the three top rankings, the ordinary citizens' definition of democracy rely on virtues of autonomy (freedoms, rights) and procedures

that are available for ordinary citizens (elections). Local elites are different in that they emphasize order/laws, majority rule and responsibility, which are related to control and rule.

What are the generating processes behind these distinctive findings? Miller et al. (1997: 169) say that elites emphasize the rule of law, because they are "directly involved in creating laws and institutions that provide the rule of law". In other words, the character of their professional activities enhances the elite's concept of a social reality which needs to be regulated through collective decisions and legal acts. On the other hand, if one interprets it in a "political culture" way, authoritarian attitudes stressing order as social control which stem from Soviet political culture may be evoked (Miller et al. 1997: 170). It seems, however, that, in general, ordinary citizens tend to stress freedoms in all societies, not only in post-soviet countries (Marcus, Mease, Ottemoeller 2001: 115). Such a universal emphasis on freedom and rights favors a non-cultural intra-societal (structural) explanation. A distinct functional place in society and specific secondary political socialization explain why local elites underline the element of the rule of law in their definition of democracy as opposed to the definition of democracy which is provided by ordinary citizens.

Definitions of democracy in a time perspective

Political cultures are rather stable (Inglehart 1988, Putnam, Leonardi, Nanetti 1993) so that in the post-communist context, one would expect to find legacies of Soviet political culture (e.g., Fleron 1996). Some soviet or socialist ideals might be reflected in social beliefs in general (Schwartz, Bardi 1997), and in the meanings attached to democracy in particular, i.e., equality, state protection, subordinate citizen, and so on (Miller, Hesli, Reisinger 1997).

Our data permit us to look at differences across time in definitions of democracy offered by local elites (Table 2). Statistically-significant trends in the increase or decrease of the importance of key concepts of democracy would indicate changes.

Local elites initially (at the beginning of the 1990's) tended to mostly define democracy in terms of freedom(s) and order. As Table 2 shows, order and freedom as key features become less prominent but still dominant in the local elites' understanding of democracy up to 2001. While some

Table 2. Rankings of the concepts in local elites' definitions of democracy

| | Local elites | | | | | |
| | 1991 | | 1998 | | 2001 | |
	Rank	Percent	Rank	Percent	Rank	Percent
Freedom	1	40%	1	27%	1	20%
Order and laws	2	33%	2	22%	1*	20%
Rights	3	17%	3	12%	3	10%
Elections	4*	14%	4	8%	5	8%
Majority rule	4	14%	7	5%	3*	10%
Equality	6	9%	7*	5%	7	7%
Constitution	7	6%	7*	5%	9	5%
Responsibility	8	5%	5	6%	5	8%
Openness	9*	3%	5*	6%	7*	7%
Tolerance	9	3%	10	1%	10	2%

* The same rank is given to several categories, because their percentages are the same.

major meanings of freedom and order decline in time (although they stay in the top positions), some meanings that were minor in 1991, such as responsibility or openness acquire higher a ranking with the passage of time. Similarly, equality and the constitution are ranked lower over the course of time. In terms of rankings, there is little change in major meanings, just changes at the lower part of Table 2.

Thus, in conclusion, the saliency of major meanings of democracy decreases over time, and some minor increases and decreases occur in the periphery of the meanings. Are these changes meaningful? Among local elites, the meanings of democracy seem to have a rather stable structure, although over time, the saliency of the major democratic values of freedoms and order decreases. This might be interpreted as the decrease of classical meanings and the increasing saliency of new features related to openness and responsibility, representing a higher emphasis on standards of democratic governance. It can also be an indication of the increasing professionalism and specific ethics of local elites.

Converging meanings of democracy for local elites: fading political divisions, 1991–2001

It is widely assumed that political concepts are clustered and combinations of meanings are grouped by political affiliations and political pref-

erences. Do clusters and combinations of meanings of democracy change across the political spectrum as democratic experience grows? Our hypothesis is that diffused, undifferentiated, incoherent and uncritical notions of democracy (high levels of acceptance of the abstract principles of political democracy, but low levels of more specific application of these principles (Rohrschneider 1996)) at the beginning of the post-communist transition would later become more coherent and more differentiated among right-wing, center and left-wing groups of local elites. Again, our data permit us to test this assumption in the case of local elites at three points in time and in the case of ordinary citizens in 2003.

It is possible to distinguish the key concepts held by political groups distinct from one another in each survey:

- 1991: left-wing local elites emphasize order rather weakly, while right wing elites emphasize it more.
- 1998: leftist parties adhere more to freedoms than to openness (transparency), and center and right-wing parties as political blocs do not have any distinctive vocabulary.
- 2001: left-wing local elites avoid mentioning responsibility, the center parties skip freedom(s), and the right defines democracy mostly in terms of order and the constitution.
- 2003: among ordinary citizens, the right-wing self-identification is related to concepts of order, openness, rights and responsibility, while the centrists emphasize openness and tolerance. The left-wing supporters do not have any distinct vocabulary of democracy.

The right-wing local elites and ordinary citizens are distinct from other groups in their emphasis on order/law and openness. The left-wing definitions are coherent in that they tend to ignore order and emphasize freedoms and equality in their definitions of democracy. This coherence is an internal one, in the sense that, although the same distinct features do not appear in all surveys, on the whole these distinct meanings or lack of them is consistent with the generalized image of the left worldview: the leftists highlight equality and majority rule, and are in contrast to the right, so far as order and freedoms are concerned. However, these patterns of meanings are diffuse. The right-wing affiliation group seems to express more coherent definitions of democracy across time. The political right in post-communist Lithuania seems to craft more coherent definitions of democracy than other groups over the course of the last decades. This coherent argument is relevant for both right-wing local elites and ordinary citizens.

Conclusions

Differences between ordinary citizens and local elites are the most obvious along lines of control and autonomy, i.e., the general public emphasizes freedom (various freedoms), but not so much order and rule of the law, while local elites see order and law as key concepts of democracy. Another difference between the 'ruling' and 'ruled' is the increasing importance of openness and responsibility as a feature of democracy for elites and the lack thereof for ordinary citizens.

Certainly, time is an important factor here, which shapes interpretations of democracy in post-communist societies. Among local political elites over time, freedom, rights, order, and some procedural notions of democracy (elections) as key meanings seem to lose their weight. On the contrary, responsibility and transparency/openness become more pronounced, reflecting new demands of daily political practices.

As for clusters of meanings of democracy along political affiliations, there is a lack of a clear pattern of distinct meanings being coherently reflected on the left, center or right in the local elites or ordinary citizens' definitions of democracy. In fact, only the right-wing local elites and ordinary citizens to some degree systematically diverge from other groups, as they emphasize order/law and openness. The left-wing definitions are coherent in that they ignore order and emphasize freedoms in their definition of democracy. In general, political groupings are more similar than distinct in their definitions of democracy, and changes in definitions of democracy in time are similar within all political groupings (e.g., invariant decrease in the usage of freedoms and order in definitions of democracy). The coherence of meanings of democracy along political or party self-identification lines is not increasing, but it exists in a somewhat more attenuated version, whose interpretation requires other methods than those employed in this study.

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