

LATVIAN POLITICAL CULTURE: DEMOCRATIC OR AUTHORITARIAN BIAS? AN INTERPRETATION ATTEMPT BASED ON A SURVEY STUDY

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INTRODUCTION: LATVIAN DEMOCRACY – ANY REASON FOR CONCERN?

Authoritarianism is passé. Democracy is in. Is there any reason for concern? After more than a decade of democratization it has become a commonplace that the political and economic reforms in Eastern Europe, Latvia included, have resulted in the creation of political systems possessing all the traits of a Western-type democracy. The prevalent perception is that Latvia is reclaiming its historical and cultural location, in ‘the West’. Although it is broadly admitted that this process is going to take a while, few doubt the direction of the ongoing change. The existence of a legally enshrined system of democratic government is beyond any doubt and the commitment to democracy has been the official ideology of the consecutive Latvian governments for more than a decade now. So, why bother?

During the past decades ‘new democracies’ have been mushrooming at an incredible speed and only few democratic governments have as yet been defeated and substituted by conspicuously non-democratic regimes. Yet, the years of change have not dissuaded the concern over some of the emerging democracies becoming ‘Frankensteinian democracies’, rather un-dead than alive. Such political systems seem to have become indiscernible from regimes authoritarian in all but name. Together such political regimes constitute the rule, rather than exception in the post-Soviet area. Considering this, as well as the fact that Latvia at the moment of inclusion in the Soviet Union was an authoritarian regime, it seems that the answer to the question: *how sustainable is Latvian democracy?* is not necessarily self-evident. If, as Harry Eckstein puts it, ‘the existence of stable democracy requires much explaining, while unstable democracy practically explains itself’ (1993:223), then the claims of sustainability by the Latvian democracy merit explanation.

As political systems survive, collapse or change for many different reasons (see for instance, Sørensen, 1993:25), the issue of sustainability of democracy invites a multifaceted answer. The empirical study presented here only concerns with one, cultural set of preconditions for a sustainable democracy.

About 50 years ago, in the wake of World War II, Almond and Verba in their study ‘The Civic Culture’ used survey techniques ‘to study citizens’ attitudes and values ... to deal with the macropolitical problem of democratic stability’ (Almond and Verba, 1989: 397). The present study, is informed by the same intention. It adheres to the notion that the stability of democratic regimes depends, among others, on the values and attitudes of a society. Therefore, the basic assumption of this study, taken for granted here, is that *political culture matters*. While a democratic regime can emerge regardless of the political culture of a society, all other factors will not be sufficient to secure *sustainable* democracy, if the cultural preconditions are not in place. Therefore, the problem of the present study can be phrased like this: *is the political culture of the Latvian society capable of sustaining democratic process?* While we can’t hope to answer such question at the first attempt, this study was a practical, as well as methodological, exercise in mapping political culture in order to make such answer possible.

First of all, we shall give some consideration to the main concepts: political culture, democracy and democratic sustainability. Thereafter we can develop some ideas about what is to be expected of political culture of a sustainable democracy. This, together with a short review of what is already known about the

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Latvian political culture, will prepare a better framework for an overview and interpretation of some of the survey data².

POLITICAL CULTURE OF A SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACY

POLITICAL CULTURE

Most political culture theories oscillate between values and behaviour. While Almond & Verba represent a behavioural strain, Inglehart offers a value oriented theory of political culture. As result of this theoretical diversity, we are left with a concept without an unambiguous and broadly accepted definition.

With this basic ambivalence in mind we accept, for practical purposes, a short definition of political culture as *'a more or less consistent pattern of values, norms, attitudes, knowledge and behavioural patterns'* (Andersen, 1997:8). All these elements of political culture define two dimensions of the individual's relationship to the political sphere of life. One, 'vertical' dimension (as phrased by Andersen) defines how people see their and others' orientation towards the political system, i.e. possibilities to influence political decisions. The other, 'horizontal' dimension defines how individuals relate to each other within the political sphere.

Basically, political culture reflects all norms and values contained in a culture, inasmuch they relate to the field of the political. It is an aspect of culture, not a part of it. Culture is not a set of givens of which political culture is a subset; it is a communicative process, meaning that culture as norms, values and borders is being constantly recreated. 'Political culture' refers to that process in its political aspects (see Welch 1993:164). When we speak about the dynamics of political culture, it is the dynamics of culture as such we are dealing with. This has an important implication for our understanding of how political culture changes: as it is a part of the general cultural background of a society, its transformation is only possible as a reflection of transformation of the society's culture as a whole. Alteration of the political system proper is insufficient for such change.

While our initial definition of political culture calls for a 'consistent pattern', it is important to keep in mind that, when talking about *values systems*, we have no reason to expect a functional consistency as a sort of teleological, purposeful 'harmony' of values within it. Different values within a culture can be conflicting, and however clear these values are when pressed into a Procrustean bed of definitions, *the actual interpretation of values by a reflecting and acting individual will create a high degree of contingency*.

It would be better to think of a value as a continuum, or a natural dichotomy of values. For instance, even a culture usually described as collectivistic will possess a strong individualistic aspect (as described by Lucian Pye). Then, what looks like a set of stable and settled values is actually *an open process of reinterpretation and re-negotiation*.

It is important to distinguish between evaluative beliefs, i.e. values and norms inherent in a culture (Borgotta et al., 2000:2828) and the way they are reflected in an individual's perception of a certain fragment of social or political reality, i.e. attitudes. The latter relate to settled opinions or ways of thinking about a particular (for instance, political) issue. Different attitudes can evolve from basically similar value systems. The other way round, one political attitude can have several and even different value justifications.

The obvious *discrepancy between values and actual attitudes* in most democratizing societies is well-known. It is often explained as lack of democratic habit. Democracy is being explained as a sort of

² A more detailed account of the survey results can be found at www.understand.dk/research.

knowledge or habit that should be ‘learned’. This approach still has to interpret the many cases when the acquisition of such knowledge (or getting into the habit) has been a total or partial failure, sometimes recurrently so. Yet, the aspect of learning as such is a necessary part of explaining political culture. In what way and how effectively can new political values be learned? Generally, we lack a satisfactory explanation for the way political cultures change - a central and challenging issue in examination of political culture of societies in transition.

SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACY

What is a stable democracy? Definitions of democracy abound, the main question being the scope of the democratic process. Democracy can be seen simply as electing leaders, or as form of government or even as a form of social life (Jakobsen, 1999:168-171). For our purposes we accept the second, comprehensive notion of democracy, and settle with three major analytical dimensions for evaluating a democracy (Jakobsen, 1999:176): 1) Meaningful political *competition*; 2) Inclusive political *participation*; 3) Civic and political *liberties*.

Within this notion, what we look for to sustain is actually not an ‘ideal’ democracy, but what Robert Dahl calls *polyarchy*. (Dahl 1989:222). This defines our search for a political culture: it should, *firstly*, sustain polyarchic institutions *and then*, a democratic political system.

In a political system that claims to be democratic or polyarchic, according to Dahl, we should be able to find a high degree of a) voting equality; b) effective participation; c) enlightened understanding; d) public control over agenda e) broad inclusion of the population in the political process.

Harry Eckstein provides a useful definition of stability or sustainability of democracy. According to Eckstein, sustainability ‘implies three conditions: persistence of pattern, decisional effectiveness and authenticity’ (1993:184). In other words, the democratic regime has to be enduring, the government must govern effectively, and democracy must be real and not an arrangement for window-dressing. This means, among other things, that whenever we talk of sustainable democratic government, we also mean an effective government, but the not the other way round.

THE PRINCIPLE OF DEMOCRATIC BIAS

Harry Eckstein suggests that ‘a government will tend to be stable if its authority pattern is congruent with the other authority patterns of the society of which it is a part’ (Eckstein, 1993:188). If accepted, Eckstein’s congruence hypothesis means that the democratic pattern of government can not limit itself to being a simple technology of government. It must permeate through the whole mindset of a society. Its component principles, such as individual autonomy, public participation in decision-making etc. must resonate with the experiences received by individuals in other spheres of life. Taking further this thought we can conclude that democracy has to be not simply a principle of politics, but also a major principle of social life. It is not enough for the idea of democratic government to be justified as an instrument of achieving other ends such as welfare, stability, national independence etc. The meaning and ultimate justification of democracy must be rooted not within politics, but on the level of major ethical and moral concepts of the society. This leads to an assumption that sustainable democracy is not secured by a political culture simply tolerant towards the principles of democracy, i.e. accepting a democratic political system. Sustainable democracy needs a culture and political culture focused on democracy as a core value.

We can now phrase our principle of democratic bias which will be central for the further investigation: *In order to sustain a system of democratic government, a society shall possess a political culture strongly biased towards democracy, meaning that democracy must be perceived as a self-contained core value of the society.*

We assume that, first of all, democratic bias means a strong inclination towards democracy as a wholesome concept. But it is not enough for a political culture to support the idea of democracy per se. A democratically biased culture shall also favour the values underlying the requirements for democracy (Dahl, 1989:233) and, to a large extent, values and norms pertaining to a ‘modern, dynamic, pluralist society’ (Dahl 1989:324). Such democratic mind-set would have to be matched by pro-democratic attitudes on two levels. Firstly, *democracy* as a wholesome, *aggregate concept* has to rank as a priority in the value system of society. Secondly, the *main constituent principles* of democracy/polyarchy have to enjoy strong support.

The latter condition means, for example, that the democratic nature of leadership has to be primary to the effectiveness and ‘strength’ of such leadership; inclusiveness of the political process should be supported; lawful participation in the political process should be considered meaningful and the only acceptable form of exerting effective political influence; individuals should strive for political influence rather than simply expect leadership and government to provide the desired results etc.

LATVIAN SOCIETY BETWEEN AUTHORITARIANISM AND DEMOCRACY: A HISTORICAL OUTLINE

A short overview of what already is known about political culture of the Latvian society will prepare us for the interpretation of the survey data. We will begin with an outline of the historical ‘variety of legacies’ (Plakans 1997:253) of the Latvian society and then continue with a general sketch of its present-day value orientations.

DEVELOPMENT OF LATVIAN POLITICAL CULTURE: A BRIEF ACCOUNT

The pre-independence period (-1918)

Relatively little was heard of Latvians as an ethnic group until the first ‘national awakening’ began in the latter half of the 19th century. Before that moment two distinct cultures co-existed. The basically German high culture of the gentry and the merchant class held a dominant position in all aspects of life and only reluctantly (if at all) assimilated influences from the countryside Latvian population and from the imperial Russian suzerainty. Beside, there was the peasant culture of Latvians who were regarded as ‘low class’; the social mobility of this stratum was limited. While the main concepts of Latvian *national identity* were formed in opposition to the German domination and are by and large unrelated to the German identity, the German influence created a background of European cultural *values*, bringing in the concepts of the rule of law, individual autonomy etc.; in Latvia these influences were stronger, more enduring and more socially pervasive than within the main body of the Russian empire.

The advent of the Latvian modernity and the national awakening resulted in the emergence of a Latvian-speaking urbane elite with a European orientation receptive towards the Western intellectual tradition. This elite created a secular and written Latvian culture capable of supporting nation building. It is important to remember that the emergence of Latvian national identity was a part of the modernization and that ‘ethnic values were by no means a determinant factor in defining this new identity’ (Priedite, 1999:6). The fact that the Latvian identity was focused on the idea of a ‘culture nation’ and not an ethnic nation, to this day plays an important part in shaping the tradition of handling ethnic cleavages in Latvian society.

While this period of Latvian history barely gave the population any experience of politics, the emergence of a strong Latvian national identity was its most important fruit in terms of political culture. It was an identity of a ‘culture nation’ that had adsorbed the pre-modern ethnic values into a mind-set of the modern age, yet it was – and remains to this day – haunted by the pre-modern sentiment; it was an identity aspiring towards European ideas, but devoid of possibility to practise them. The tragic effects of such ‘split personality’ of the Latvian mind were revealed in the next period of Latvian history.

The interwar period of independence (1918-1940)

The doubts regarding acceptance of democracy in the political culture of the Latvian society, which will be discussed later, are partially grounded in the historical record of the first period of Latvian independence.

After 1918, when independence was declared, in 1920 the first republic began to function and in 1922 a democratic constitution was adopted, creating a vibrant political life with a large number of parties, including a strong Social Democracy, political freedoms and extensive autonomy rights for ethnic minorities.

Yet the new democratic institutions immediately encountered strong criticism, mainly from the political Right, for their alleged inability 'to protect the Latvian nation'. The institutions of the first republic were far from perfect and characterizing them as a 'motley' parliamentary democracy is not entirely groundless. The ensuing May 1934 coup was staged against a fragmented system of political parties, of which many could be better described as interest groups (Rothschild, 1974:376).

Yet these imperfections alone do not explain the failure of democracy, which gave way to an authoritarian regime in 1933, preceding an irrefuted Soviet occupation in 1940. As Andrejs Plakans indicates, 'the undeniable popularity of Karlis Ulmanis after 1934 suggests that devotion to parliamentary democracy was none too strong in all quarters of Latvia's population then' (1997:256). In fact, even during the brief period of republic the devotion to democracy had not been uncontested.

The first period of independence was characterized by wavering between authoritarianism and democracy not only on the level of political system, but also in the minds of intellectuals who shaped the nation's perception of politics. The political thought of the period contained two major strains, the focal point of division being the relationship between state and individual. According to one description (Revele, 1991:10), the 'parliamentary type of theories', represented by Karlis Dislers, strived to harmonise the different individual interests in the society by means of democracy, claiming that 'the rights of the state have to yield to the legal mindset of the society, and not the other way round, and that the stability of the rights is ensured not by the state power per se, but by the public's confidence in the righteousness of the state'.

The opposite strain of thought claimed the primacy of the rights of the state, against which the attitude of the civil society is of no significance. These theories promoting 'the spirit of the state' were taken further by Edvards Virza, a leading ideologist of the Ulmanis regime, to include 'the principle of leadership' and the 'principle of unity' ('harmony and unity between the people and the state').

While the two strains of political thought were basically concurrent, the authoritarian ideas prevailed in the end. The seeds of the autocratic drift in Latvian politics fell into a fertile soil of popular authoritarian creed. The fall of Latvian democracy was in no way merely a result of adverse external conditions, but a logical fulfilment of authoritarian inclinations of the political culture of the Latvian society.

According to most historical explanations, the authoritarian transition in 1933-1934 occurred as a reaction to the growing Radical Right extremism and was aimed at protecting the nation from the internal crises and the increasingly nasty international environment. When by the May 15-16 *coup d'état* of 1934 Karlis Ulmanis, the 'grand old man' of the Independence movement, suspended the legislature, introduced martial law, suppressing the Right and Left radical parties, the proclaimed intention was to save, rather than abolish, democracy. Ulmanis' regime was, and is to this day, perceived by many as a 'benign dictatorship', a lesser evil needed to restore things back to normal. Beyond the powerful nationalist

rhetoric, there seems to have been no powerful and dynamic social ideology to inform the first Latvian authoritarian transition, unlike in the case in Germany.

Such were the results of the first independence period, bringing into the legacy of Latvian political culture the first experience of parliamentary democracy, but also the first example of its failure and an authoritarian transition largely welcomed by the population.

The Soviet period (1940-1988)

Of the Soviet period in Latvian history little needs to be said, as its main features were similar to those of the rest of the Soviet Union. When discussing the legacy of this period we have to distinguish between its influence on Latvian national identity and the way the Soviet political practice and education shaped values and attitudes of the people.

The Soviet period did not succeed in exterminating the established national identity of Latvians. As the new awakening period demonstrated later, Latvian national identity was silenced but lived on. The process of identity transmission effectively outflanked the institutions of the state. The husk of the new identity of a 'Soviet people' fell off as soon as the instruments of coercion into it vanished. One important stipulation is due here: the massive influx of people from other Soviet republics created a large group of population with an identity completely different from that of the native Latvian population (regardless of ethnicity). To this day, this cleavage created in the Soviet time constitutes a major feature of Latvian political culture.

While the Soviet period resulted in the emergence of two identities distanced from each other, its influence on the political values and attitudes has been uniform. The ideas of primacy of individual rights were strongly discouraged, while the already existent authoritarian tendencies were reinforced by strongly authoritarian political practices: one-party political system with sham elections, curtailed political freedoms and human rights etc. The Soviet political culture combined reliance on the state as the main provider of welfare and distrust to the same state. The predominant feature of this culture was 'the readiness to submit to the dictate of power without reservations. The authoritarian mind was founded on the notion of state power as a force placed above the society, impossible to control' (Ozolzile, 1998:75).

When the Latvian independence movement legally emerged in 1988, the Latvian society faced the dual challenge of reconstructing the national identity and dismantling its authoritarian values.

LATVIAN POLITICAL CULTURE TODAY

The historical review suggests that the past record of Latvian political culture is not very conducive to democracy. While few studies of Latvian political culture are available, none of them systematic or complete, the assessments of the present state of political culture by Latvian experts are generally pessimistic.

Although this is a very general assumption, the basic social values of the Latvian society have been strongly influenced by its recent agrarian roots. The traditional farm-stead way of life, away from large rural conglomerations, put the nuclear family into the centre, making it the main source of security, trust and respect. According to Talis Tisenkopfs, despite the weakening of the capacities the institution of family has experienced recently, its value might increase in the future, along with the search for security leading towards nationalism and ideas of a stronger state power (Tisenkopfs, 2002). At the same time, there is no reason to assume that a concept of a nation as a 'super-family' is characteristic for Latvia (Vebers, 1997:222).

Another important feature of the Latvian society is its 'fundamentally leftist social instinct based on the idea of social justice'. This leads T. Tisenkopfs to the conclusion that 'the political superstructure [liberal

democracy and right-wing political orientation] is quite artificially constructed and does not reflect the national sentiment' (Tisenkopfs, 2002)³.

As the authors of the UNDP report point out, 'the public policy climate is influenced by the observance of such democratic principles as competence, honesty, accountability, transparency and public participation, but, at the same time, the embodiment of democratic values in the activities of Latvia's political institutions is insufficient' (UNDP, 2002:17). 'Although a democratic parliamentary system has been successfully re-established in Latvia, and although various forms of public participation are gradually emerging, relations between the country's civil society and State institutions are generally characterised by 'scissors' of political dependency and influence (UNDP, 2002:18).

Describing the main features of Latvian political culture, Gunars Ozolzile points at the fragmented mass consciousness which embraces opposite and even contradictory stereotypes and orientations. Summarising the authoritarian heritage of the Latvian society, Ozolzile mentions several traditions: legal nihilism; *etatism* (support for strong state power) and indifferent and even cynical attitude towards politics (Ozolzile, 1997:53-55). The fragmentation of consciousness is reflected in the quite ambivalent perception of the state. It is relied on and distrusted at the same time. 'There is this idea that politics are shaped by the state, and Latvians see their state as a strongman that will put things in order', Aija Putnina (2001) claims. As Aivars Tabuns points out, the period of transformation in Latvia is characterised by the illusion that 'everything will be all right when freedom comes', that 'if the right people are in power the situation will improve'. Along with this paternalistic perception of democracy Tabuns finds 'identification of the rule of law with authoritarianism' (Tabuns, 1999:26). On the other hand, 'there is a wide-spread scepticism about the capacity of the state as well as new messiahs' (Putnina, 2001). According to E. Vebers, 'In the notion of nation prevalent in Latvia the state has not yet assumed an appropriate position, as it is still substituted by the imaginary omnipotence of language and culture' (Vebers, 1997:222).

Off the record, many experts confirm that there is a difference between the official discourse and what people seem to think privately. In secondary school teachers of social sciences do follow the guidelines and present democracy as an important. At the same time, the unofficial thoughts are often very different, bearing the abovementioned preference for a strong authoritarian leadership. Some observers point at the Latvian children's reluctance to discuss political matters with their schoolteachers. In this way, the family becomes the main source of (usually authoritarian) values and attitudes. The new democratic discourse is being imposed on the more traditional, basically authoritarian beliefs. Even very positive general assessments of democracy in surveys do not necessarily reflect what the respondents really feel. Real life observations show that these indicators quite often are attempts by the individuals to conform to the demands of the 'new democratic ideology', as some respondents put it.

The deep splits in the Latvian society are one of its major characteristics. The ethnic cleavage is the one paid most attention to, but experts point at the deep divisions between labour and capital, the urban and rural population. 'In Lijphartian terminology, Latvian society could be characterized as a segmented community of people... [This] makes questionable the desire of the political elite to erect the building of democracy on the basis of majority rule and competition' (Ozolzile, 2000:46). On the other hand, religious affiliation is not a core element of Latvian identity (Kilis, 2000).

The 50 years as part of the Soviet Union have produced a peculiar situation in Latvia. Not only did the traditional Latvian ethnic identity survive; it was hardened at the 'national awakening' period demonstrated. With it returned the spectres of the problems 'frozen' into Latvian identity in 1940 (Latvian

³ This observation is contrasted by the fact that Latvia to this day is the only Easter European country never to have had a left-leaning government since 1990, although this can be explained by the specific national context of Latvian political spectrum.

chauvinism, anti-Semitism etc.), aggravated by the changes of the Soviet period. The population of the country is divided by two different pre-histories (Latvian and Soviet) by and large denying each other.

On the Latvian side, there is a general reluctance to see the Russophone immigrants as equal political actors. As to the ‘immigrant’ part of the population, it is not enthusiastic about the predominant idea of political community strongly centred on the Latvian cultural and linguistic identity. While Latvians would be eager to cut the Soviet period out of their history, for most immigrant and their descendants this is about the only history they can relate to.

At the same time, the Latvian society has a long tradition of ethnic, cultural and religious tolerance. The grid of ethnic, linguistic and cultural differences is rather complex and leaves a lot of space for political inclusion and social mobility.

How true are these preliminary assessments? Is the political culture of Latvian society evolving towards more democratic values along with the change generations and political transformation? The survey presented below attempts give some tentative answers to these questions.

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS: RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

ABOUT THE SURVEY

The history

The Latvian survey was conceived as a supplementary contribution to a comparative study of political culture conducted by the Eurasia Political Culture Research Network (EPCReN)⁴, which, in its turn, was originally tailored for the Republic of Korea. The prototype questionnaire was thus designed for research in a post-authoritarian society undergoing democratic transformation. The idea of involving another, yet immensely different, case of post-authoritarian democratic transformation in this comparative project seemed both obvious and fascinating. In this way the core data set for the study was constructed and collected *before* a theoretical framework specifically for the Latvian study had been set up. It is therefore not perfectly ‘tailored’ for the resulting line of argument and is to a high degree an experiment in comparative research.

The sample

For practical reasons, we decided to target the college and university students as an easily accessible and clearly definable cluster of the population. To a high degree, the sample of this survey totalling 363 valid cases is representative for this group. While there is a certain overweight of female respondents (one out of three respondents, i.e. 33 per cent⁵ is male and two out of three, i.e. 66 per cent are female), the ethnic and linguistic groups are fairly represented. 43 per cent stated they were ethnic Latvians, 45 per cent ethnic Russians, 8 per cent claimed another ethnic affiliation and 4 per cent said they were both Latvian and Russian in terms of ethnic origin. Only 68 per cent of the respondents held Latvian citizenship. Both parameters are very close to the national statistics. While 43 per cent of the respondents claimed Latvian ethnicity, only 40 per cent told Latvian was their mother tongue. 45 per cent said they were ethnic Russians, but for almost 50 per cent Russian is their native language. 8 per cent stated both Latvian *and*

⁴ About EPCReN’s research project *Political Culture and Good Government in East Asia and the Nordic Countries Compared* see: *Home Page*. Published 11.04.2001 <<http://eurasia.nias.ku.dk/epcren/>> 03.07.2002. The two versions of the questionnaire used in the Latvian survey are modified and translated versions of EPCReN’s comparative version applied in China, Denmark, Japan, Korea, Norway and Taiwan. The EPCReN questionnaire originates from Geir Helgesen’s studies of Korean political culture presented in detail in: Helgesen, 1998.

⁵ The percentages in the text are rounded up to whole numbers and are, unless stated otherwise, valid percentages, i.e. not counting ‘don’t knows’ and ‘no answers’. The frequency tables (see www.understand.dk/research) list decimal figures.

Russian as languages equally native to them. For 2 per cent neither of these languages was native. The distribution of the sample is also representative in terms of the different lines of study, educational institutions and age distribution within the 15 to 30 years range. The most serious weakness of the sample is the regional distribution, or rather lack of such. Only few questionnaires were filled in by students at the educational institutions outside Riga.

As to the validity of the findings and conclusions for the whole population in general, despite all the necessary reservations, it seems that the vector of bias can be predicted to a certain degree. It is more plausible to expect the student population to be more democratically minded, individualistic, modern-value oriented etc., than to expect the opposite. Yet we still know nothing about the degree to which this cluster differs from the general population. When discussing the findings we often speak of the Latvian population as whole, it is, of course, conditional. But we assume that the degree to which the subgroup represented in the sample bears the traits characteristic of the whole population is sufficient for the level of approximation of this study.

RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUALISM

Personal qualities

The importance ratings for personal qualities ‘which children can be encouraged to learn at home’ were supplemented by asking the respondents to name three most important qualities among those mentioned named. Summarized, the most important qualities in the top-3 rating are *feeling of responsibility, ability to think independently, tolerance and respect for other people, diligence, determination and perseverance and independence*.

The same qualities in a different order and with inclusion of *thrift and imagination* are the most important qualities according to the mean, with more than 70 per cent of the respondents calling them important. *The feeling of responsibility* is ‘very important’ for about two in three respondents (64 per cent), while *tolerance and independent thinking* are ‘very important’ for about every second respondent. Then follow *obedience, self-restraint, unselfishness and good manners*. These qualities are mentioned as important by about 60 per cent of the respondents.

Notably, *religious faith* and *patriotism* are at the bottom of the list, with 55 per cent and 50 per cent finding them important to teach. About one in four respondents (24 per cent) find religious faith ‘very important’, and only 14 per cent state the same about patriotism. But only a marginal percentage of the respondents place these qualities in the top-3 rating. *Ambition* closes the list, important to one in three respondents (33 per cent).

Human relationships in a society

More than two in three respondents (71 per cent) are optimistic about human nature, believing that it is fundamentally cooperative. Three in four respondents (75 per cent) also agree that ‘the ideal society is like a family’ and just as many agree that ‘people from the same country should have same basic values’. While 12 per cent agree completely with the first statement, 25 per cent support completely the idea of common values. Less than one out of five respondents (19 per cent) agree that ‘one should first think of the interests of the society, and only then take care of one’s own interest’. One in three respondents strongly disagree with the idea.

85 per cent agree that the society ‘should provide all people with equal opportunities to succeed’, one out of two respondents (49 per cent) agree completely.

56 per cent of the respondents believe that ‘we should always take care of other people regardless of who they are’.

Somewhat fewer than every second respondent (47 per cent) agree that ‘the individualism and materialism of the western world contradict the culture and values’ of their people. About two in three respondents (67 per cent) agree that modern life-style ‘is contributing to the breakdown of society/family’, and one in five respondents (21 per cent) completely agree with this statement.

More than two in three respondents (69 per cent) agree that ‘without competition, there can be no good society’, and somewhat fewer (62 per cent) agree that they enjoy working under competitive circumstances.

45 per cent agree that ‘rules are always there for a good reason and must therefore be followed even if you do not understand them’, while only 8 per cent completely agree with this statement. At the same time, 38 per cent of the respondents find it ‘acceptable to break a rule if you find that it is unjust’.

Interpretation

The respondents are clearly oriented towards responsible individualism, which very much reminds of the so-called ‘protestant ethics’. Qualities relating to being subject to the influence of various social institutions (family, religion, state) as well as traditionally ‘humble’ qualities catch less attention than the ‘individualistic’ qualities. The respondents are quite secularly minded, nor does patriotism seem to be a focal value. If we are to judge whether our respondents are traditionalists or modern individualists, the findings here strongly suggest the latter.

The majority of respondents seem to have a positive orientation towards society and other individuals. *Ideally*, man is believed to be basically good-natured, society – not anarchistic, but organized and united by common values. This somewhat sets off the distrustfulness of the respondents described later. One might suggest that for the majority distrust is circumstantial, while the faith in the good nature of man is fundamental.

The respondents take a very individualistic stance when choosing between their own and public interests. This is also in agreement with the previous conclusion about the individualistic value orientation of the respondents. On the matter of following rules and regulations that are doubtful from their subjective point of view the respondents seem to be split. The majority deny following rules they don’t understand and quite a large group would act according to their understanding of justice to the point of breaking rules.

All in all, the findings in this section also confirm the suggestion that what we find is a *socially responsible* kind of individualism. The majority, albeit not an overwhelming one, agree that fellow humans should be taken care of regardless of who they are – a rather rigorous moral statement. The respondents entirely agree that the society should provide all its members with equal opportunities.

Now that the predominantly individualistic orientation of the respondents has been established, it is rather surprising to find that about half of them react positively to the quite provocative statement about contradiction between ‘individualism and materialism of the western world’ (a rather vague and doubtful concept) and ‘the traditional values of the [respondent’s] people’ (another elusive theoretical construction). This means that the very individualism the respondents subscribe to looks unattractive to many of them when presented as a foreign, non-native concept.

INTERACTING WITH THE STATE

Does political participation matter?

A number of negatively phrased statements presented to the respondents asked for a self-evaluation of their political involvement on four different levels: understanding the basic ideas of the existing parties; understanding of the political decision-making process; belief in the ability to influence politics; actively participating in politics (voting etc.).

The scepticism of the respondents increases along with the level of participation. 34 per cent of the respondents agree that they ‘cannot see any differences between the political parties’ (and a fitting 42 per cent do not think people they know are aware of the main policies of the political parties). Slightly more – 39 per cent - believe ‘politics and government are too difficult for them to understand’. At the same time, a whole 72 per cent - an absolute majority among the respondents - believe they ‘don’t have any influence on the government’s actions’, and practically as many tell they ‘are not very politically active’.

A closer look at the data showed that 60 respondents out of 259, i.e. 17 per cent, had agreed (‘rather agreed’ or ‘completely agreed’) with all three statements: no difference between parties, complexity of politics and inability to influence the government. And a group as large as 17 per cent, or 59 respondents, disagreed with all these statements, making up another extreme.

How to participate?

While 84 per cent of the respondents state that people they know are likely to use the ballot to influence the government, only 50 per cent believe it to be effective. 31 per cent think using personal and family connections can be effective, nearly the same percentage (28 per cent) say it’s a practice likely to be used by people they know. Contacting a member of parliament is deemed ineffective (18 per cent). It is also unlikely, as only 16 per cent of the respondents say people they know might do it. About as unlikely (18 per cent) is petitioning the president or prime minister. Organized participation in public politics gets somewhat more recognition. A whole 71 per cent think working through a political party is efficient, but only less than half as many (32 per cent) deem it a likely activity for the people they know. 58 per cent think participating in NGOs can be effective, but, again, only 32 per cent state it is likely to be used. At the same time, more formalized non-governmental organizations, like trade unions, are considered less effective (45 per cent), but are more widely used (45 per cent). Taking contact to the press is considered effective by 61 per cent and about as many respondents (57 per cent) state it is likely to be used by people they know. 50 per cent deem participating in protest demonstration effective but fewer (38 per cent) consider it likely to be used.

Every third respondent states that violence is an effective way of influencing the government. The uncontested winner of the effectiveness competition is bribery. A total of 77 per cent of the respondents deem it efficient (40 per cent ‘very efficient’). But ‘only’ about every third (34 per cent) tell that people they know are likely to use it.

Interpretation

While the majority of the respondents believe they have an overall understanding of politics, the same majority do not believe in their own ability to influence politics and (as a consequence?) do not make an active attempt to. They passively distrust the political system that in their view is based on a muddled party system and irresponsible government.

Another quite conspicuous result is the belief in the effectiveness of illegal ways of influencing politics, especially bribery. Also using it by about every third citizen seems to be a substantial contradiction to

democratic norms. The same can be said about using personal and family connections to influence governmental decisions, something that is quite suspicious, if not illegal.

Yet, probably the most interesting finding is the difference between what is deemed effective and what the respondents' milieu (and subsequently themselves) is likely to use. Voting is deemed effective only by one in two respondents, but used practically by all. The respondents admit the effectiveness of participating in political parties and NGOs but are more likely to participate in the less effective trade unions.

Which strategy the respondents choose to use is not only, or even primarily, dictated by considerations of effectiveness. Passive strategies requiring less effort seem to be preferred – probably a normal phenomenon, if not for the realization of their extremely low efficiency. Thus, the absolute majority among eligible respondents participate in the elections, but they do not put much trust in it as a way of influencing politics. All together, this points in the direction of a strongly 'subject', instead of 'participatory' political culture.

POWER AND AUTHORITY

Leaders as they should be

40 per cent of the respondents see political power primarily as a 'burden of responsibility', but only half of them (20 per cent of the total) are quite sure about that. At the same time, 60 per cent tend to believe the opposite, more than half of them with surety so. In other words, more than every third respondent (35 per cent) are quite convinced that power, by virtue of giving influence, is first of all a privilege.

Choosing among different characteristics of a politician, the respondents give the highest priority to the political ideas of the candidate and his/her personal qualities as a strong and competent leader. 94 per cent and 90 per cent respectively state these qualities are important and for the majority these characteristics are 'very important'. Somewhat fewer find important the moral character of the candidate (81 per cent, 44 per cent 'very important'). Less important are the potential leader's independence of sectional interests and party affiliation (66 per cent and 74 per cent). Especially notable is the drop, compared to the previous characteristics, down to about 30 per cent in the 'very important' column. Only for one respondent in three is the politician's Soviet-time career in the Communist party important. Even less important factors are the ethnic, regional and social backgrounds (26 per cent, 27 per cent and 18 per cent).

Another set of questions asked about more personal qualities. The results seem to confirm the previously described findings, as the respondents point at the political leader's competence and the ability to get things done as the single most important quality (91 per cent). Slightly lower ratings are given to tactical skills and political convictions (87 per cent and 83 per cent). Only after that come humane, caring character (74 per cent) and pragmatism (ability to compromise) (70 per cent). Moral uprightness/sincerity closes the list as only six in ten respondents find that quality important. If judged by the 'very important' column, the preferences of the respondents look like this: While four in six emphasise competence, only about two in six (half as many) think political convictions or the tactical skills are very important, and only one in six emphasise the pragmatic ability to compromise. Again, moral qualities generally get lower ratings: only two in six respondents find humaneness very important, and only one in six feel as strongly about moral uprightness and sincerity.

The observations made above can be compared with the next set of questions. About every second respondent (52 per cent) believes that 'the experience of a political leader is more important than his education', although only 12 per cent agree with this completely. Only less than one in three respondents (29 per cent) agree that 'the political ideas of a political leader are more important than his moral and

human qualities', only 4 per cent fully agree with that. At the same time, about two in three respondents (63 per cent) 'prefer a politician who understands the power game to a morally irreproachable one'.

The next set of questions was focused on the role of political leaders as the respondents see it. 43 per cent of the respondents agree with the rather strong statement that 'compromise in politics is nonsense and the politicians should pursue their ideas'.

One in two respondents (50 per cent) agrees that 'politicians should hold strong opinions on political issues', but only 16 per cent agree completely. An absolute majority agree that 'politicians should act according to their principles' (86 per cent) and at the same time just as many (87 per cent) also agree that 'a good political leader should follow the public opinion rather than his/her own convictions'. 80 per cent agree that 'good political leaders should keep harmony in the group', although only 17 per cent agree with that completely. 91 per cent subscribe, one in two respondents (49 per cent) – completely so, to the analogy between a political leader and a caring parent.

Interpretation

According to the previously chosen framework of interpretation, we should conclude that the majority of the respondents do not see power as a burden of responsibility, but rather as a resource to be used to the benefit of those who hold it. The respondents may ideally prefer responsible leaders, but they do not see the actual power relationships in that way (this being confirmed by the questions on trust, described elsewhere). Even this awareness of the ideal concept of responsibility is expressed by a minority of the respondents.

Summing up the findings described above, we find that the competence of the leader and the ability to get things done, i.e. to see the political ideas fulfilled, is the predominant expectation. The exact nature of the political convictions, party affiliation and the ability to compromise, required in a democratic party system, are less important. Such interpretation may be too straightforward, but still, if the political ideas of a single politician are very important for twice as many people as the party affiliation, this does seem to contradict the traditional notion of a proportional electoral system and the politics that follow with it (a model also adopted in Latvia). In other words, the 'ideal' leader is a statesman - strong and on his own rather than part of a political system with inherent valuable qualities.

While the less-than-total interest in the moral qualities of a politician is not in itself something that contradicts democratic values, it is interesting that care for people is in higher esteem than moral uprightness. Again, the caring (i.e. patronising) aspect of the leadership seems to find more response than the more inner quality of being honest and sincere. The ideal leadership is not seen as a moral authority, nor is it hoped to be one. The leadership is respected for the beneficial effects it provides.

The preference for strong individual statesmanship mainly judged by the results it creates is not necessarily incompatible with a democratic political system. But it does not show any bias in the desirable consociational direction: a better appreciation of the collective and compromising nature of politics. On the other hand, such preference harmonises well with the ideas of benevolent authoritarianism.

The moral and human qualities of a political leader are not completely neglected, as only less than one in three respondents value them somewhat less than political ideas. This seems to contradict the relatively low share of the respondents who considered moral uprightness and sincerity 'very important'. Furthermore, we know that an absolute majority prefer skilfulness to moral irreproachability.

The prevalent approval of 'parental' care by politicians seems to testify to the subject inclinations of the respondents. On the other hand, we should also keep in mind what has been said about the nature of the

parental authority. The answers are not necessarily inspired by respect for traditional authority as such. They may also reflect the socialist state welfare arrangement⁶.

Again, we see a bias towards a political leadership catering to the needs of the public and skilled enough to fulfil them. The preferred authority is a pragmatic, and, if needs be, autocratic management, rather than a leadership inspiring by new ideas, moral standards, education etc. The political leadership assumes the function of management and is respected for the goods it provides. The ideal, deserving leader is a strong loner acting on his own, rather than as a part of a polyarchic and consociational political system based on collision and compromise of plural interests. Such a leader would be relied on, to the point of overshadowing other considerations, including those of democracy. Whatever authority exists, it is the pragmatic *quid pro quo* relationship, and not tradition, that seems to be its main source.

A POLITICAL CULTURE OF DISTRUST

Trusting society: fellow citizens, institutions, leaders

The respondents were asked about how much they trusted different groups of society.⁷ Practically all (96 per cent) tell they trust their family, tree in four respondents – much so. 85 per cent trust their friends, but only one in four respondents express ‘much trust’ in their friends. All the other categories receive much lower trust ratings. Between 40 and 50 per cent of the respondents trust their colleagues and people they went to school or university with. 32 per cent trust their superiors and 27 per cent trust their neighbours.

Strangers of different kinds are only trusted by between 10 and 20 per cent of the respondents. More or less equally trusted are strangers of same nationality regardless of ethnicity, *if they speak the language of the respondent*. Strangers who do not speak the same language as the respondent, enjoy almost half as much trust – regardless whether they are a compatriot or a foreigner. For all of the above-mentioned groups the percentage of ‘much trust’ is marginal.

Another set of questions dealt with the respondents’ confidence in the political and social institutions of their society.

The most trusted institution on the list in is not political, but societal. Two in three respondents express confidence in the intellectuals (the notorious word *intelligentsia* was used both in Latvian and Russian), one in six - much confidence. The judicial system is the next most trusted institution, but only 55 per cent of the respondents express confidence in it. The press and major companies follow with 48 per cent and 43 per cent. The next group consists of the president, the police (39 per cent and 38 per cent), followed by trade unions (36 per cent) and civil service (35 per cent). Less than one in three respondents had confidence in the national parliament and the armed forces (31 per cent and 30 per cent). The political parties close the list, trusted by 24 per cent of the respondents.

While most institutions have a strong ‘no confidence’ rate between 14 per cent and 24 per cent, the ‘much confidence’ range for all except the intellectuals is between 1 per cent and 8 per cent.

⁶ The interesting point is that the social, not to mention socialist, welfare is very distant from the ideology of the Latvian society after independence (Latvia being the only country in Eastern Europe never to have a leftist government in the last decade). It is during this period of time that values and attitudes of most young respondents in this survey were formed. Where did this attitude come from, then?

⁷ The two trust questions reported below are modified borrowings from Ronald Inglehart’s World Value Survey (<<http://wvs.isr.umich.edu/wvs-ques4.html>>, 10.11.2002).

The next group of answers seems to confirm the abovementioned results. Three in four respondents (76 per cent) agree that bureaucrats (public officials) do not care what people like them think, even more respondents (82 per cent) agree that the country is run by a few large organizations and just as many (83 per cent) do not trust their government to do what is right. Interestingly, the percentage of strong sceptics in all questions is about 30 per cent.

Two in three respondents (66 per cent) believe that there are many dishonest people among Latvian politicians, or that all are dishonest (4 per cent). Most respondents (83 per cent) agree that the persons they elect stop thinking about the interests of the people after taking office. Fewer, but still two in three respondents (67 per cent) agreed that Latvian politicians are rather legatees of the Soviet past than true democrats.

Interpretation

The level of trust among the respondents is generally very low and restricted to the proximate social environment. Strangers of any kind, including fellow citizens, are distrusted. Ethnic differences as such not to cause distrust, while linguistic distance does so for many respondents.

One of the most manifest findings of the survey is the extremely low trust in the political institutions. We would obviously expect the judicial system to be trusted by more than every second respondent. Just as discouraging is the low (one in three people) confidence in the institutions of representative democracy. The executive branch of power is generally more trusted than the institutions of representative democracy. Interestingly, further data analysis shows no significant correlation between the respondents' belief in their own influence on the government's actions and their confidence in the political parties, the parliament, the president etc. Both findings suggest that political influence is not the main source of trust in the political institutions. What is then? Political institutions can be distrusted if they lack legitimacy, but there is no reason to suggest that the post-Soviet political institutions in Latvia could be considered illegitimate. As the majority of respondents are eligible and have more influence on the representative institutions than they have on the executive branch, one explanation is that trust mainly relates to the perceived effectiveness and responsiveness towards the needs of the subjects, rather than the feeling of having a share of influence on these institutions. The lack of confidence may be caused by the political system's failure to 'provide'. This hypothesis cannot be confirmed or refuted by the survey findings, as the respondents are not asked about how effective they think the political institutions are. On the other hand, some other findings do confirm that it is effectiveness (or responsiveness) rather than influence that is the main expectation. This is an apparent trait of authoritarian, 'subject' political culture, where the main expectation is that of being provided for. At least, it does not testify in favour of democratic predisposition of the respondents. All in all, the interpersonal trust is hardly a resource to fall back upon when the confidence in the political institutions is low, and the same is true the other way round.

The political leaders are, if anything, even less trusted than the political institutions. Neither the abilities of the politicians nor their personal qualities get a positive assessment. At the same time, while distrust in the Latvian political class in general is obvious, we cannot establish with certainty its sources. In a democratic political culture we expect the scepticism of political leaders to be a matter of principle in the first place, that is to say, to be caused by scepticism of the power relationship as such with the ensuing reliance on jural state, division of power etc. In theory, though, the sceptical answers in the survey may also be caused by distrust in personalities. Such scepticism does not leave out the possibility of enthusiasm for a single political leader, creating a fertile field for a political culture impaired not only by distrust, but also predisposed towards authoritarian expectations. As other survey items show, good and effective leadership is an extremely important value for the respondents.

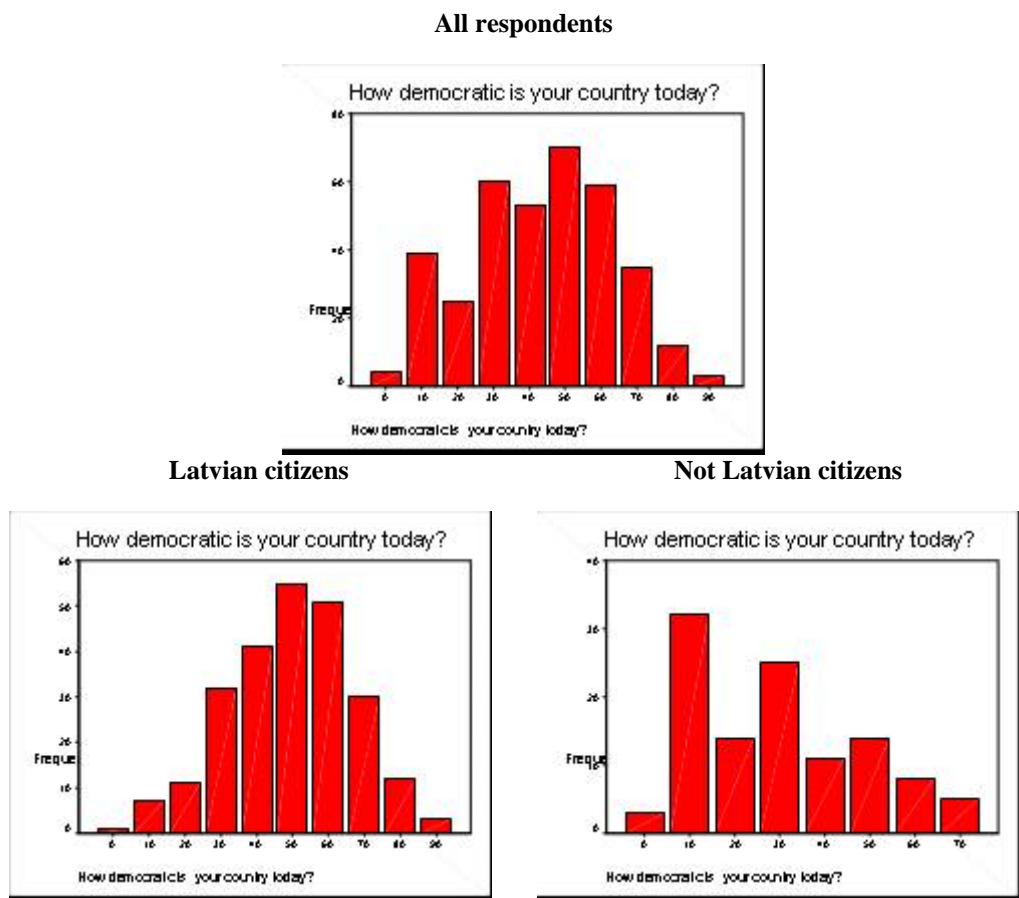
DEMOCRACY

Democracy may be a great idea, but...

About one out of two respondents (55 per cent) are satisfied with their right to vote, and less than one in five are completely satisfied with this right. Among the citizens the satisfaction level is 77 per cent. 59 per cent are satisfied with the right to participate in organizations. The satisfaction level is higher among Latvian citizens – 74 per cent. 58 per cent are satisfied with the right to assemble and demonstrate, 66 per cent among Latvian citizens. Only one in three respondents (33 per cent) are satisfied with the right to full information about the government work and function, among Latvian citizens 38 per cent are satisfied with this right. The freedom of speech is satisfactory for more than two out of three respondents (68 per cent); the percentage is even higher among Latvian citizens – 76 per cent. Almost two in three respondents (61 per cent) are satisfied with the right to criticize the government, while 71 per cent of the Latvian citizens are satisfied with this right.

Figure

How democratic do you think that your country is today?



The figure above shows the distribution of assessments of ‘how democratic Latvia is’ by all respondents and by those who hold Latvian citizenship. In the sample as a whole, 36 per cent placed their evaluation of the level of democracy in Latvia between 1 and 3 on a 1 to 10 scale, another 36 per cent ranked it around middle (4, 5 or 6 points) and 14 per cent gave Latvian democracy top marks (7 to 10). Among those respondents, who are Latvian citizens, 21 per cent put their satisfaction at 1 – 3 points, 61 per cent chose a mark around middle (4, 5 or 6 points) and 18 per cent gave Latvian democracy top marks (7 to 10). Among non-citizens, two in three respondents (66 per cent) placed Latvia between 0 and 3 on the scale,

less than one in three (29 per cent) ranked it around middle (4, 5 or 6 points) and only 5 per cent gave 7 points.

What does democracy mean?

Considering several statements about the objectives of democracy, practically all respondents believe that the objective is 'to ensure individual freedom', nine out of ten (90 per cent) believe that the objective is 'to maintain harmonious social relations' and two in three respondents (68 per cent) believe the objective of democracy is 'to ensure that nobody has to live in poverty'.

About one in three respondents agree that 'democracy presupposes equal distribution of wealth' and only 8 per cent completely agree with this statement. Four in five respondents (80 per cent) agree that in a democracy leaders should be elected by the people. 70 per cent agree that 'democracy is characterized by competition of power between different parties', 21 per cent agree completely.

Interpretation

The 77 per cent satisfaction with the right to vote may seem low, but it can be explained by the fact that many respondents are below the voting age. For all the democratic rights and freedoms listed above there is a 20 - 30 per cent level of dissatisfaction. One notably insufficient right is 'the right to full information about the government's work and function'. The phrase is, strictly speaking, not a correct one, but it reflects strong dissatisfaction with the oblique nature of Latvian politics. At the same time, the majority of the respondents believe that Latvia is quite democratic.

How should we interpret this finding, remembering that the absolute majority are very distrustful of the political institutions and politicians, and believe they have no or little influence on the political process? It is difficult to believe that the respondents can be satisfied with a political system they distrust so intensely. As a matter of fact, we never asked the respondents *how satisfied they were* with the political system in Latvia, but only *whether they were satisfied with the extent of their democratic rights*. The majority of respondents, although far from all of them, believe they are free to use the democratic instruments of influencing politics, but ultimately they may believe it is futile.

This is confirmed and illustrated by the findings. Only less than one in five respondents hold a very positive view on '*how democratic Latvia is*'. The majority, who place their marks around middle, seem to believe what they experience is a *half-democracy*. This can be interpreted as a car that is in one piece but does not run.

Another clear conclusion from this set is that however strong the disillusionment with democracy among the respondents in general, it is even stronger among those who do not hold Latvian citizenship. The absolute majority of these respondents simply do not consider Latvia to be a real democracy. It is interesting that non-citizens are less satisfied not only with the extent of rights they do not have (vote), but also the rights they enjoy equally with Latvian citizens such as right to criticize the government, to demonstrate etc. The estrangement of the non-citizens seems to be related not only to demands of certain political rights, but also to the general disbelief in the democratic nature of the political system. Whatever reasons for this situation, it shows a veritable political cleavage in the Latvian society.

The respondents are aware of the basic idea that leaders should be elected in a democracy, and a majority, although far from all respondents also accept the idea of competition between parties. Considering the fact that these ideas are very central, even the 20 to 30 per cent who do not support this notion seem to be a very substantial share.

At the same time, while democracy has a very strong association with personal freedom, the majority also believe that democracy should result in solving social problems and maintaining harmonious social relations. The respondents are responsive to 'the nearly unchallenged positive ring' the word 'democracy' has received in the years after World War II (Jakobsen, 1999:156).

How indispensable is democracy?

Slightly less than half of the respondents think it justifiable for the government to suspend the democratic procedure and political rights 'in times of war' (47 per cent). Between 36 and 41 per cent think restrictions on democracy and freedoms are acceptable when 'the social order is endangered', 'if non-democratic movements threaten the security of the state', or 'the social and economical stability', or 'if neighbouring states threaten the sovereignty of the nation'. Less than one in three respondents find abovementioned restrictions justifiable 'during a severe economic crisis' (31 per cent). In most cases, the Russian respondents are more positive about restrictions by 10 to 15 percentage points.

More than half of the respondents (53 per cent) believe that democracy, while it 'may be a good thing, won't improve people's lives'.

77 per cent concur with the statement that 'there will always be conflicts in a democracy, therefore we need strong national leaders to maintain social order'. More than two in three respondents (68 per cent) agree that 'it is better to trust a good political leader's judgement than accept different groups' influence on the decision-making. 39 per cent agree that 'the quality of the politicians is more important than laws and institutions'. Slightly less than one out of two respondents (48 per cent) believe that 'it is more important to have an outstanding political leader than political democracy'. At the same time, slightly more than one in three respondents (36 per cent) agree that 'we can trust morally upright leaders to solve all problems'. At the same time, four in five respondents (81 per cent) believe that 'leaders would abuse their power if they were not constrained by popular control'.

Almost two in three respondents (62 per cent) think that 'traditional values of [the respondent's] people⁸ favour democratization of the society'. At the same time, exactly half of the respondents (50 per cent) agree that 'the historical heritage of Latvia is not conducive to democracy'.

Slightly less than two in three respondents agree with the statement that 'effective government is more important than democracy'.

Interpretation

One of the most significant questions of the set is that about the ability of democracy to improve people's lives. The respondents are split in half on the issue, therefore, as so often in this survey, we are left with the problem of judging 'whether the bottle is half empty or half filled'. About every second respondent believes in the beneficial effects of democracy. Is that enough? The notion of democracy as an essential condition for a good human life is very central in a real-life democratization process, arguably even more so than the more abstract belief in the rightness of this particular form of government. In a democratically biased political culture we expect, above all, that this basic justification for democracy is at the core of the broadly accepted common ground of political behaviour. With only less than half on the respondents agreeing to this central reason for adhering to democracy, we can no longer speak of such common ground. As already mentioned, we expect a sustainable democratic culture to be based on the belief that it is indispensable, not just 'a good thing'.

⁸ The reference to 'my people', indeed, refers to a unknown variable: we can only guess what 'people' the respondents, especially non-Latvians associate themselves with. Nevertheless, what we test in this question is importance of democracy as a value, and the vague alternative to democracy is actually a purposeful 'provocation'.

Several findings in the set suggest that democracy actually is dispensable for the majority of respondents. Two main candidates for supremacy in the value system that are highlighted in this survey are 'interests or values of the people' and 'effective government'. The former is an elusive phrase, and what does it mean? The rhetoric value of 'interests and values of the people' in the Latvian society is multivalent: to some this may mean ethnic consolidation, advancement of the national culture and language (a prominent issue on the Latvian agenda) or economic achievement, none of them clearly definable. Whatever it may mean, this agglomeration of phantoms comes out a sure winner out of the contest with democracy. Almost as persuasive is the choice of effective government over democracy. All this considered, the absolute majority of respondents are unenthused by the idea of democracy as an aggregate political concept.

The proportion of respondents expressing authoritarian views is larger than can be seen from the answer frequencies. As already mentioned, crosstabulations show that while at least three in four per cent of the respondents express an authoritarian bias with varying degree of consistency, more than one in three respondents react positively to at least to strongly phrased authoritarian statements.

The perception of leadership by the respondents is ambiguous, though. On the one hand, in agreement with the earlier findings, the respondents are strongly distrustful of the political leadership and expect abuse of power without popular control. On the other hand, they see strong leaders as a guarantee of social order.

The two above mentioned positions (strong leadership vs. popular control) are contradictory, if we assume that leaders can only be strong at the expense of constraints laid on them by democracy. Then the preference for leadership would indicate a *strongly authoritarian* stance.

But this is not the only possible interpretation. The respondents may also believe that the strength of political leaders means rising above the petty politics, still within the framework of democracy, and two out of three respondents directly express a desire to see 'a few good men' rather than a medley of many politicians representing different interest groups. Such position is, arguably, *mildly authoritarian*, as it belittles the importance of articulation of different interests present in a society and limits the democratic process to periodically giving the seal of approval to the political leaders, Schumpeterian style.

Whatever the case, we find the respondents strongly dissatisfied with their current leadership, but ready to accept better leadership, even at the cost of abandoning democracy.

To recap the conclusions based on this large chunk of data, the majority of the respondents are only partially satisfied with Latvian democracy: they are satisfied with the availability of instruments of democratic control, but disbelieve their effectiveness, and a big share of the respondents does not even possess these instruments because of being non-citizens. The majority, although far from all respondents, are aware of the basic ideas of electability of leaders and competition of political parties in a democracy. While democracy has a very strong association with personal freedom, the majority also tend to ascribe to democracy a wide scope of objectives, such as solving social problems and maintaining harmonious social relations. The notion of democracy in terms of its objectives is rather diffused. Regardless of the ethnic differences discussed elsewhere, democracy is less important than effectiveness of leadership and other, vaguely defined, considerations of 'national values' and 'interests'. Most respondents, and many of them consistently so, express overtly authoritarian attitudes.

ETHNO-LINGUISTIC⁹ CLEAVAGES: THE OBJECTIVE DIFFERENCES

Social values

A crosstabulation for ethnic groups excluding the predominantly Russian adult group consisting of school teachers showed that some qualities are somewhat differently valued by the Latvian and Russian respondents.

On single item where the differences between Latvian and Russian respondents differ strongly, by 19 percentage points (56 per cent and 37 per cent), is *patriotism*. At the same time, the percentage of those who find fostering this quality in children ‘very important’ is the same: 12 and 11 per cent.

For the Latvian respondents the following qualities are somewhat more important: *diligence, independence of thinking, obedience*. The Russian respondents give more importance to *imagination, thrift, religious faith and self-restraint*. The difference between the two groups for these items is between 6 and 13 percentage points. There are no differences on the importance of fostering *independence, feeling of responsibility, tolerance, unselfishness and ambition*.

The value of democracy

The main point of difference is the Russian respondents’ scepticism about preconditions for democracy. The influence of Latvian historical heritage on democratization gets an extremely negatively assessment, diverging from the Latvian respondents by a whole 33 percentage points, and the opinions on the matter of traditional values ‘of [the respondent’s] people’ are much more negative among Russians (22 percentage points).

Another major difference is that Russian respondents are more inclined to favour ‘outstanding leadership’ over political democracy (by 19 percentage points), and to believe that effective government is more important than democracy (by 17 percentage points).

On the other hand, the Latvian respondents show, consequently, although on a minor scale, more trust in political leadership: by 9 more percentage points they ‘trust the government to do what is right’, they are by 5 percentage points more inclined to believe in the need for ‘strong national leaders to maintain social order’. They are marginally (2-3 percentage points) more inclined to trust ‘morally upright leaders to solve all problems’ and prefer ‘a good political leader’s judgement’ compared to accepting influence on decision making by different groups’. By 2 percentage points the Russian respondents are more inclined to agree that ‘most leaders would abuse their power if not constrained by popular control’.

At the same time, on several central questions there is no, or only marginal difference: almost by the same majority as Latvians the Russian respondents disagree that ‘the quality of the politicians is more important than laws and institutions’ (3 percentage points’ difference), and the same less than third of respondents in both groups choose to ‘follow the democratic principles even if they contradict the interests or values of their people’.

Table 1

Please indicate how much you Completely Rather Rather Fully **Ethnic**

⁹ The differences within the survey sample described above are rather ethno-linguistic than ethnic. The only reason the ethnical identification is used here instead of language is that it shows more clearly the main division lines and contrasts characteristic of the sample, while still representing the absolute majority within the sample and the population alike. All other combinations of ethnic, linguistic factors and citizenship can be expected to bear attitudes within the range created by the two major ethnic groups. Additional cross tabulations based exclusively for those respondents who hold Latvian citizenship show results similar to cross tabulations according to ethnic origin presented above.

agree with each of the following statements	disagree	disagree	agree	agree	deviation scores¹⁰
Democracy may be a good thing, but it won't improve people's lives	13.6 La: 15.6 ¹¹ Ru: 11.3	32.9 38.3 27.7	39.8 33.8 45.9	13.6 12.3 15.1	Ru 15
It is more important to have an outstanding political leader than political democracy	9.8 9.7 8.2	42.2 50.6 32.9	36.0 29.9 44.9	12.0 9.7 13.9	Ru 19
We can trust morally upright leaders to solve all problems	18.1 12.7 21.3	46.5 50.8 45.3	27.1 28.6 24.0	8.4 7.9 9.3	La 4
Most leaders would abuse their power if they were not constrained by popular control	5.0 4.5 4.5	14.2 15.6 14.0	48.0 48.7 45.9	32.7 31.2 35.7	Ru 2
It is better to trust a good political leader's judgement than accept different groups' influence on the decision-making	3.2 0.0 5.3	29.0 30.2 28.0	54.8 54.0 58.7	12.9 15.9 8.0	La 3

Cross tabulation 1

		Answers among the respondents, who DISAGREE that 'it is more important to have an outstanding political leader than political democracy'	Answers among the respondents, who AGREE that 'it is more important to have an outstanding political leader than political democracy'
Effective government is more important than democracy	<u>Agree</u>	49.2	77.9
The quality of the politicians is more important than laws and institutions	<u>Agree</u>	26.9	49.4
If the interests or values of my people contradict a democratic principle one should follow the democratic principle	<u>Disagree:</u>	66.3	73.5

As already mentioned, a clear preference for 'strong leadership over democracy' is expressed by about half of the respondents (48 per cent). This group can be described as taking a rather authoritarian stance. The crosstabulation shows that among those who disagreed with this statement one in two respondents also express preference for 'effective government over democracy'. In other words, about three in four

¹⁰ Deviation in percentage points between ethnic Latvian and ethnic Russian respondents. For instance 'Ru 17' in 'Effective government is more important than democracy' means that the percentage of ethnic *Russian* respondents who agreed with the statement was *higher* by 17 percentage points (54 per cent for Latvians and 71 per cent for Russians). For 4-value questions ethnic scores are based on recoded variables. The 'ethnic' variable is explained in footnote on page 23.

¹¹ In this as well as other cells in this table, the first line of figures shows frequencies for the whole sample, the second and third line in smaller letters show frequencies for Latvian and Russian respondents, respectively. NB! The total sample frequencies are based not only on the two groups, but also include respondents with other ethnic backgrounds.

respondents agree to at least one of these overtly authoritarian statements and more than 35 per cent agree to both. There is also a large proportion in this group who set ‘quality of politicians above laws and institutions’ or give primary importance to ‘values and interests of the people’.

Interpretation

Other findings of this survey suggest that the basic values of the respondents are not very different. At the same time, the discussion of differences between ethnic groups’ attitudes towards democracy shows that, while Latvian respondents perceive of themselves as largely more democratic and vastly more optimistic of their national preconditions for democracy, the real difference in attitudes towards democracy is much less significant. This suggests that we see a marking cleavage based on differing identities rather than on strongly different value systems.

The first impression is that the Latvian respondents tend to have more pro-democratic attitudes. Yet a detailed examination reveals that this conclusion can only be accepted with some serious reservations.

The Russian respondents are much more sceptical about historical and traditional *preconditions* for democracy in their society. But this, per se, does not signify lesser appreciation of democracy, only that the Russian respondents are less hopeful about possibility of democracy. Although the Russian respondents are more sceptical of compatibility of traditional values with the requirements of democratic government, they are not more inclined to set them above democracy.

Yet Russian and Latvian respondents show undeniably different preferences when choosing between effective leadership and democracy as a concept. The Russian respondents on the whole are more inclined to see democracy as such as dispensable. It is illustrated by the very consequent difference in answers regarding acceptability of restrictions in situations of national or economic threats etc. It rather is safe to conclude that the Russian respondents show less appreciation of democracy as an aggregate value. In other words, they express a more authoritarian, *attitude*.

At the same time, the need to differentiate between attitudes and values should be taken into account. The negative attitude towards democracy as an aggregate political concept does not in itself signify a systematically more authoritarian political value orientation on the whole. Such conclusion would also require a more negative attitude towards the basic constituent concepts of democracy. In fact, though the two groups show no serious variance in that area.

We have seen that the Russian respondents are slightly less inclined to demand strong leadership, and they do not set leadership above laws and institutions or traditional values above democracy substantially any more than the other respondents. They are, if anything, even less inclined to trust political leaders at the expense of public control.

All in all, democracy as a political concept and value is to a much greater extent accepted by the Latvian respondents. The Latvian respondents clearly also see themselves as more democratically minded and are more optimistic about their own historical and cultural preconditions for democracy. But in fact, the Latvian respondents are not necessarily more inclined to support the whole set of value orientations that are characteristic of a democratic political culture. Indeed, the Latvian respondents are somewhat more dedicated to the virtues of strong leadership. They also exhibit a rather uncertain and unenthusiastic mindset regarding one central problem of Latvian democracy – inclusion and enfranchisement of the Latvian non-citizens.

ETHNIC AND LINGUISTIC CLEAVAGES: THE SUBJECTIVE PERCEPTIONS

In the set of questions testing for societal cleavages, on three occasions Latvian and Russian respondents had similar views.

Both ethnic Latvian and Russian respondents largely acknowledge common interests and agree that, ‘in reality, both ethnic Latvians and the Russian speaking people have common interests’ (Latvians: 77 per cent, Russians: 76 per cent).

At the same time, the respondents are aware of the differences between the two groups, as 45 per cent of Latvian and 51 per cent of Russian respondents agree that ‘between ethnic Latvians and Russian speaking people, there are more differences than similarities’. The recognition of unity on this issue is thus lower than in the previous question by 25-30 percentage points (of all Latvian and Russian respondents). On this issue the Russian respondents are marginally more sceptical of similarity.

The Russian respondents were somewhat more sceptical about the prospects of the non-citizens living in Latvia becoming ‘a part of the Latvian people’ 39 per cent agreed to this negatively phrased statement, against 31 per cent Latvians.

In the remaining six questions of the set the opinions of the two ethnic groups differed substantially.

The Latvian respondents are much less prone to consider everyone from Latvia a compatriot: one in two Latvians (48 per cent) agreed against two in three Russians (67 per cent).

More than one in two ethnic Latvian respondents (58 per cent) agree that Latvians are more devoted to democracy than the Russian-speaking people, while only less than one in five ethnic Russians (19 per cent) agree with this statement.

60 per cent among ethnic Latvian respondents believe that Latvians would gain from Russians and other ethnic minorities developing their culture, while 85 per cent of Russians think so.

While for 90 per cent of Russian respondents someone who is not an ethnic Latvian would be acceptable as prime minister, if otherwise qualified, it is only true for 61 per cent of the Latvian respondents.

The absolute majority among the Russian respondents agree that restraints on citizenship are undemocratic (86 per cent) and do not think that extending Latvian citizenship to the majority of non-citizens would and would not ‘endanger Latvian culture and independence’ (10 per cent agree). Only about one in two Latvian respondents share these opinions: 51 per cent and 45 per cent, for the two questions respectively.

Table 2

Please indicate whether you agree with each of the following statements	Disagree	Agree	Agree Latvians ¹²	Agree Russians
Ethnic Latvians are more devoted to democracy than the Russian speaking people	62.7	37.3	57.8	19.4
The non-citizens living in Latvia are not and	64.9	35.1	29.6	39.4

¹² To simplify the presentation, the ethnic cross tabulations column ‘Agree Latvians’ and ‘Agree Russians’ only include respondents stating either of the two nationalities and not other nationalities or mix, thus somewhat reducing the sample. Therefore, the results only reflect the views of two major population groups and are not entirely representative for the whole population. Frequencies for the smaller ethnic groups would have been based of too small sample.

will never become a part of the Latvian people				
If the majority of non-citizens were to receive Latvian citizenship, it would endanger Latvian culture and independence	74.2	25.8	45.4	10.1
The restraints on Latvian citizenship are undemocratic	27.1	72.9	50.8	85.7
Between ethnic Latvians and Russian speaking people, there are more differences than similarities	52.9	47.1	45.1	51.3
In reality, both ethnic Latvians and other people in Latvia have common interests	23.5	76.5	76.6	75.5
I consider everyone from Latvia to be a compatriot	42.3	57.7	47.6	66.7
If the ethnic minorities, including Russians, develop their cultures and languages, ethnic Latvians, too, will gain from it	25.9	74.1	59.5	85.4
I could accept as a prime minister a person who is not an ethnic Latvian, if he/she is qualified, speaks fluent Latvian and is a Latvian citizen	21.8	78.2	61.4	90.4

Correlations

The correlation analysis within this set of questions shows an interesting result: the correlations are different for the two ethnic groups.

For example, those Latvian respondents who are sceptical of integration of the non-citizens are much more likely to believe that Latvians and Russians are mostly different ($r=0.431$ at $p=0.01$), that 'extending citizenship endangers Latvian culture and independence' ($r=0.342$ at $p=0.01$), and that Latvians are more democratic ($r=-0.253$ at $p=0.01$).

The Russian respondents' scepticism regarding integration also correlates positively with acknowledgement of differences between the ethnic groups, but the correlation is weaker ($r=0.279$ at $p=0.01$). Yet there is no tendency in this group to favour the opinion that Latvians are more democratic.

The Latvian integration sceptics disagree that Latvians and others have common interests ($r=-0.296$ at $p=0.01$) and that supporting minorities is good for Latvians ($r=-0.260$ at $p=0.01$), while the Russian sceptics do not show any correlation on these issues.

On the other hand, those Latvians respondents, for whom a non-ethnic Latvian would be acceptable as prime minister if otherwise qualified, also are more likely to agree that supporting minorities is good for the ethnic Latvians and that Latvians and others have common interests (in both cases $r=0.253$ at $p=0.01$). They also tend to disagree that 'extending citizenship endangers Latvian culture and independence' ($r=-0.205$ at $p=0.01$) and that non-citizens 'will never become a part of the Latvian people' ($r=-0.190$ at $p=0.01$).

More interestingly, the ‘integration-sceptical’ Latvians are also more prone to agree that democratic principles are more important than traditional values and interests, while the sceptical Russians tend to be less ‘pro-democratic’.

In the question about the importance of a politician’s ethnic origin we saw that 26 per cent of the respondents stated they attached considerable or much importance to the candidate’s ethnic origin when voting. In the present section, exactly the same percentage disagrees to accept a non-ethnic Latvian as a prime minister. When the two groups are analysed separately, though, we find more divergence: while 33 per cent of the Latvian respondents find ethnicity of the candidate to be of considerable importance, 39 per cent in the same group would not accept a non-Latvian prime minister. To make the matter even more complicated, the correlation between the two questions is quite weak ($r=0.169$ at $p=0.05$), which means that quite a large share of respondents test ‘positive’ on the ethnic factor.

Interpretation

On the whole, the findings show a split society. The lack of belief in commonality of interests between Latvians and other ethnic groups, which is expressed by one in four respondents, is a very strong statement to this effect. The other factors are the widespread belief in differences between the two groups, limited feeling of compatriotship with other fellow countrymen, as well as scepticism regarding integration of non-citizens on both sides.

It is also noticeable that many attitudes enthusiastically supported by the Russian respondents are not strongly shared by their Latvian counterparts. This is true for the acknowledgement of the non-democratic nature of restrictions on citizenship, Latvian interest in developing minority cultures, the acceptability of non-ethnic Latvian as a government leader. And a very large proportion of Latvian respondents, as we have seen, state bluntly that they believe enfranchising the non-citizens would have negative effect on their culture and national independence.

All in all, this creates a sense of ethno-linguistic differences in the Latvian society (the existence of which is a trivial fact) that transcend the cultural and social spheres and permeate the realm of Latvian politics in a systematic way, creating a cleavage that both parties are aware of but see rather differently.

But the split is complex and especially the Latvian group of the respondents is heterogeneous on the issue of ethno-linguistic minorities and non-citizens. The correlations between different questions are not very strong and the most obvious conclusion that can be made from them is that the views of the respondents regarding the ethno-linguistic cleavage are quite eclectic. They may be quite pro-integrative in one aspect but negative on another.

Indeed, the correlations testify to some consistency in the views of the respondents. A large group of the ethnic Latvian respondents believe in differences between the two ethnic groups, dissimilar interests, do not expect the predominantly Russian-speaking non-citizens to become a part of the people but rather think it dangerous to extend citizenship and unnecessary to support minority cultures. At the same time, these respondents consider themselves more democratic. It seems safe to conclude that a large fraction or about a half of the Latvian respondents are strongly opposed to accepting the ethno-linguistic minorities completely.

Among the Russian respondents, unsurprisingly, the scepticism about prospects of integration is not combined with misgivings about the process of integration itself, but rather by a sense of differences between the two groups.

On the other hand, although it cannot be unambiguously concluded from the survey, there is a strong impression of a high level of tolerance that prevents tensions from escalating into conflict. Suspicions of a political culture soaked in ethno-linguistic hostility and images of ethnic identities built upon the idea of historic confrontation with each other are not confirmed by the findings.

Summing up the essence of both the subjectively perceived and objective cleavages, it seems safe to conclude that the respondents represent a society with a deep but rather complex ethno-linguistic cleavage. The cleavage between the two groups is mainly, although not exclusively, a subjective 'marking cleavage', based on identities rather than on substantially different value systems. For instance, there is no sign of a religious undertone in the identity difference. The value orientation towards responsible individualism is shared by all respondents across the ethno-linguistic split. While nothing in the findings suggests a culture of animosity and political confrontations between the ethno-linguistic groups, a very large share of ethnic Latvian respondents is opposed to fully accepting the ethno-linguistic minorities and non-citizens as their political peers. On the other hand, the absolute majority of Latvian non-citizens do not consider Latvia to be a real democracy and are even more estranged from the political system than the rest. Ethno-linguistic divides do not as such necessarily make a society less democratic. For example, the political attitude objecting to a non-ethnic Latvian as a leader of the government is in itself no more undemocratic than objections caused by race, gender, sexual orientation etc. which are quite wide-spread in democracies. What is important here is that the findings in this section lead to the conclusion that *a sustainable democracy in Latvia must be consociational i.e. suited for handling the ethno-linguistic divide*. A democratic political culture in such circumstances has to be oriented towards sharing influence with minorities and balancing the interests of different groups. It needs a national identity based on ideas acceptable to all groups of the population. The consociationalism as such has to be an element of the common political value system. In the case of Latvia, the standards for what can be deemed a viable democratic political culture should take this factor into account.

CONCLUSION: A CULTURE OF PRAGMATIC AUTHORITARIANISM?

Having outlined the main findings we can address the central question of the survey: how conducive to democracy is the political culture portrayed by the survey? According to our assumption regarding 'democratic bias', a sustainable democracy needs to rely on a political culture which is not simply tolerant of democracy, but maintains a consistent and strong appreciation of democratic values. As suggested earlier, such pro-democratic mind-set would have to be matched by pro-democratic attitudes on two levels. Firstly, democracy as a wholesome, aggregate concept would have priority among other values. Secondly, the main constituent principles of democracy have to be strongly supported by the predominant majority of the population.

As to the first part, the results seem quite unambiguous. For the absolute majority of the respondents, democracy, despite its diffusely positive ring, is not a predominant value. If there is a value bias on this level, it is authoritarian and not democratic.

The constituent principles of democracy have received a less than optimal treatment in the survey and the conclusions on this matter are incomplete. By the same token, the survey was not designed to give a comprehensive panorama of the respondents' value system in general. Yet on some aspects conclusion can be drawn.

First of all, in a democratically biased political culture we would expect participation in the political process to be considered meaningful and accepted as the main form of exerting effective political influence. The respondents in the survey do grasp the meaning of democratic participation, but they do not believe that such participation gives them real political influence.

We would also expect the democratic nature of leadership to be seen as an indispensable quality of strong and effective leadership. The survey paints a totally different picture. The respondents express unmistakably authoritarian views. The democratic source of government is not as important for them as its effectiveness. Again, in a democracy citizens are supposed to strive for political influence rather than simply expect leadership and government to provide the desired results. The respondents in this survey have given up the idea of exerting influence and are prepared to put control in the hands of 'worthy' political leaders and rely more on institutions of the executive.

As the Latvian society is characterised by a deep ethno-linguistic cleavage, a sustainable political culture needs to contain some fundamental consociational features. First of all, the limits of inclusiveness have to be broad enough to incorporate the main segments of the society into the arrangements of democratic influence and government instead of excluding them to the outskirts of the political system. Whatever the obstacles brought about by historical preconditions and conflicting identities, they must be superseded by an understanding of the need to confine resolution of conflicting identities and interests to the framework of democratic institutions. The value preferences of the ethnic Latvian respondents seem to be quite reluctant to accept the necessary degree of inclusion. At the same time, the scepticism of the ethnic Russian respondents towards Latvian democratic process further complicates recruiting them into it.

Substantial differences of values and opinions characterising the cleavage have to be tolerated and accepted not as a manifestation of marginal radicalism, but rather as an acknowledged attribute of the society. Insistence on unification by subordination could easily undermine societal stability. Such acceptance of difference is only partially shared by the respondents.

A consociational arrangement would also demand acceptance of consensual, compromising political leadership and politicians able of and trusted for their adherence to the consociational process. If any preference can be traced among the respondents, it is the preference for dominance by strong, uncompromising singular leadership, which, parenthetically, is a historically recurrent feature of the Latvian political culture. Contrary to the hopes that such leadership would unite the Latvian society, if made real, it is bound to contribute to dividing and weakening it, much as it already has done so.

Summarising these observations, we must conclude that there is nothing to justify ascribing a democratic bias to the presented political culture portrait. If there is any characterisation that fits the results, it is probably pragmatic authoritarianism of resentful individualists.

Despite the limitations of the survey sample, in our final conclusions we want to address the issue of political culture of the Latvian society in general. How well does the picture of the respondents painted above represent the whole Latvian society?

What was said earlier about the historical preconditions of political culture of the Latvian society, as well as the few existing scholarly observations of it suggests that the views of our respondents are to a large extent representative for the whole population. Indeed, we would expect that young people, who were receiving their college or university education during or after the democratic transition, would have values and attitudes somewhat different from the rest of the society. But if anything, this would be a difference directed towards more 'modern' and democratic values and attitudes. If this survey registers lack of such proclivity among the respondents, we can hardly expect the society in general to be anything but even more disinclined towards democracy. In our view, the value orientations and attitudes registered in this study are unable to sustain democratic institutions in the long run.

Most widespread optimistic accounts of the post-Soviet years in Latvia claim that the Latvian society, having 'chosen the democratic way', is in the process of 'learning democracy'. Such learning, it is said,

means understanding and adopting the rules of the game of democracy, acquiring skills and experience to make the fundamental democratic institutions work effectively etc. Learning this takes time, the argument goes, but the young generations are apt to learn democracy well and fast.

Yet this logic may be wrong and the main challenge of democratization may be just the opposite. The Latvian society, including the young generation, has shown great agility in learning how the democratic 'game', but it has not accepted it as the focal point of its value system.

Despite having set up democratic institutions, the Latvian society has until now failed to bring about a political culture capable of sustaining them. While political culture may have played a minor role in achieving a democratic setup in Latvia, we believe that without a democratic set of mind to guide it, the Latvian democracy remains a 'Frankenstein', a stillborn creation of the tidal wave of democratization. That tidal wave may change. The demise of the Soviet regime has eliminated the fear of state power, but the fundamental distrust of the state and society remains. This distrust together with the insecurity caused by global change may throw the society back into the embraces of its deep-rooted authoritarian illusions. Whether the younger generations of Latvians will succeed in time in animating their democracy and making it viable, remains to be seen.

From a theoretical point of view, this conclusion supports the suggestion that political culture is resilient. Culture does change, but it resists swift transformation. While this does not justify promulgating that 'culture is destiny', seeing politics in cultural brackets should humble the constructivist fever of the democratization project and keep us awake to the dangers lingering beneath the surface of the apparently triumphant political change.

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