CHAPTER NINE

CHANGING SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE BETWEEN 1995 AND 2005: COHORT REPLACEMENT AND CONTEXTUAL EFFECTS

Mălina Voicu

The replacement of communist government with a new democratic system was one of the main features of the post-communist transition in Central and Eastern Europe. While in Western Europe democracy and social support for the democratic regime is generally taken for granted, in the newly established democracies of Central and Eastern Europe the population’s support for the new political order has been and still is of high importance for the consolidation of the new regime.

Previous studies have been rather interested in individual and societal factors influencing support for democracies in Central and Eastern Europe (Dalton, 1994; Evans & Whitefield, 1995; Haerpfer, 2008; Hofferbert & Klingemann, 1999). This chapter focuses on the dynamic of support for democratic rule and tries to explain the mechanism underlying variations in support. The longitudinal changes in values and attitudes are usually attributed to three processes: individual aging, socialization effects and contextual effects. According to the aging approach, people may change their values and beliefs as they become older. The second theory attributes the transformations to cohort changes, i.e. the changes occurring due to the modification in the population’s structure. The third perspective assigns the transformation to historical changes in context and considers changes in opinions and values to be reactions to changing circumstances.

1 Part of this research was carried out during a research internship at the Department of Sociology, Tilburg University, which provided me access to its research facilities. My work was partially supported by a research grant provided by the Romanian National University Research Council (ID56/2007). I am thankful to Paul de Graaf, Andries van de Broek, Loek Halman, Paula Tufiş and Bogdan Voicu for their helpful comments and suggestions.
The goal of the present analysis is to decompose the transformation in support for democracy in European countries, between 1995 and 2005, into changes attributable to intracohort changes, under the impact of social and political events, and changes generated by the replacement of the older cohort by new ones. The first category includes changes determined by individual aging as well as by adjustments to changing historical circumstances. However, based on previous studies, I assume that aging has a limited impact on attitudes towards democracy. Consequently, I use the intracohort change as a proxy for the effect produced by socio-political circumstances. The analysis aims at comparing the change mechanisms in support for democracy in post-communist countries. I investigate this using three waves of World Values Survey and European Values Study data (1995, 2000 and 2005), which allows longitudinal comparisons.

In the first section I provide a short overview of the existing literature on cohort replacement versus intracohort change and on theories explaining the dynamic of support for democratic rule. The second part introduces the indicators and the strategy used for analysis, while the third section presents the data analysis. The final section is dedicated to conclusions and a short discussion.

Theoretical framework

Cohort replacement versus intracohort change

According to theories of social change, changes in social values and attitudes may occur as a result of two mechanisms: through cohort replacement and through intra-cohort change. The first mechanism relies on the assumption that values and beliefs are formed during the childhood and youth period and remain stable during the adult life. As cohorts age, they are integrated into occupation, family and other social networks, which presumably leads to a greater stake in maintaining the status quo (Danigelis, Hardy & Cutler, 2007: 814). The implicit supposition is that, once formed, attitudes and values are resistant to change. Social change then results from cohort replacement, younger cohorts socialized in a different social and political context replace the older ones.

As Mannheim (1952) and Ryder (1965) have pointed out, early formative experiences leave an imprint on the values and attitudes of