

John S. Dryzek and Leslie Holmes, Post-Communist Democratization: Political Discourses across Thirteen Countries, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, xii + 300pp., £47.50 (\$65.00) h/b, £16.95 (\$23.00) p/b.

Much of the existing literature on democratic transition in the post-communist world, Dryzek and Holmes argue, has been shackled by the use of narrowly procedural definitions of democracy and an over-reliance on deterministic structural – and in particular, cultural - explanations of democratization. What has been left out, in their view, is any account of the multiple and varying understandings of democracy which citizens in post-communist states bring to the process of democratization. These, they believe, will differ from both the theoretical constructs of political scientists and the normative models of democracy advanced by political philosophers. In *Post-Communist Democratization* Dryzek and Holmes attempt to address this omission by mapping democratic discourses across eleven post-communist states, as well as in two ‘pre-transitional’ cases, China and Yugoslavia - still under the rule of Milošević at the time of the book’s completion. The post-communist states selected represent a diverse range of outcomes. They include the democratic ‘trailblazers’ of Poland and the Czech Republic, the cases of Romania, Bulgaria and Slovakia regarded as ‘late developers’, and the ‘halting transitions’ of Russia, Ukraine and, curiously, Belarus (usually regarded as an example of authoritarian regression). The authors also examine, as separate category, three post-Soviet states, whose transitions have been marred by armed conflict, Georgia, Armenia and Moldova.

The book begins with a lucid theoretical discussion, which steers a middle course between the Rational Choice views of ideas of mere rationalisations of interests and post-modern discourse theory, which sees political action as wholly discursively constructed. Discourse, the authors argue, has a dual character. At one level it is a

structural factor, shaping social and political action through the cognitive frameworks, which frame and constrain an actor's view of political events. At the same time, however, discourse is also a resource, which actors can shape and modify as they reflexively rethink their strategies and positions. To investigate this empirically, the authors use 'Q methodology', a technique derived from social psychology. This technique initially derives statements regarding democracy from unstructured group discussion in each country surveyed. These statements are then put to a panel of local respondents and their responses are subjected to factor analysis to identify key sets of associations and linkages making up distinct discourses of democracy. Typically two to three such discourses are identified for each state.

The national case studies are then presented in turn, with a short background section preceding the findings of the authors' research. These are then reviewed in a concluding chapter. The key conclusions to emerge are that alongside socialist-authoritarian, egalitarian-populist and nationalist discourses on democracy, in almost every case, liberal democratic discourses are clearly identifiable. This is sometimes true for states widely considered to lack strong civic traditions such as Bulgaria and Belarus and may indicate that their prospects for successful democratization are better than conventionally assumed. Moreover, the authors also find that, where they do occur, liberal-democratic discourses are often closer to the civic republican model of democracy, stressing consensus and citizen participation, than the Schumpeterian model of elite competition, which usually informs transition and consolidation literature. Scholars should, it is argued, therefore anticipate and accept a greater diversity of democratic forms and practices, rather than implied by the single yardsticks of democracy prevalent in much 1990s democratization literature.

*Post-Communist Democratization* is in many ways an ambitious and impressive book. It sets out an undoubtably innovative research agenda and covers an impressive geographical and political spectrum, including many little researched cases. However, both regional specialists and comparativists are likely to be struck by a number of limitations in the book. Firstly, the sheer number and range of case studies tackled makes it difficult to present either background information or research findings in adequate detail. Some chapters on national case studies are as short as fifteen pages long. A smaller number of cases explored in more depth would arguably have allowed greater insights to emerge. Secondly, although seven of the thirteen case studies are co-authored with local researchers, elsewhere there seem to be serious gaps in the findings (or their interpretation). Czech specialists, for example, will immediately recognise both the discourse of ‘civic enthusiasm’ and that of ‘disaffected egalitarianism’ identified as characteristic of the liberal centre, on one hand, and, to varying degrees, of the Social Democrats, Communists and the populist far right, on the other. However, the analysis wholly fails to identify the dominant discourse on democracy in the Czech Republic during the 1990s, that of majoritarian democracy and elite-based party competition as a vehicle for free market reform associated with the Czech centre-right of former Prime Minister Václav Klaus and his Civic Democratic Party.

Thirdly, although it uses statistical analysis, Q methodology is a self-consciously qualitative technique, which does not use representative sampling. However, as the authors concede, without supplementing their findings with data from other sources (for example, conventional opinion polling), it is impossible to know how widely held or influential the discourses identified are. This undermines some of their conclusions. It is, for example, uncertain whether the liberal democratic discourses they find are

strong popular undercurrents or merely facets of a narrower intelligentsia or elite sub-culture. Finally, and perhaps most seriously, although the authors suggest that political discourses can be loosely identified with parties and other social actors, there is little indication from the case studies as to how discourses have been deployed in practical politics and whether (and how) they have influenced political outcomes.

Overall, therefore *Post-Communist Democratization* emerges as a somewhat fragmented and unsatisfactory work, which offers an impressive and suggestive *tour d'horizon*, but whose substantive conclusions fall disappointingly short of its provocative and original agenda.