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Voting in the First Posttotalitarian Elections in Bulgaria

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The voting intentions of Bulgarians as a function of their attitudes toward political formations and the impact of the social environment were studied on the basis of a representative sampling survey. Rosenberg's (1956, 1960) theoretical model of attitude was adopted. Social influence was investigated by means of Ajzen and Fishbein's (1973, 1980) concept of the subjective norm. The relative strength of the impact of the two factors, attitude and social influence, on voting intentions was obtained by means of stepwise regression analysis. As expected, attitude was the more powerful determinant of intention. The results revealed significant differences between the followers of the two main political formations (the Bulgarian Socialist Party, the former Communists, and the Union of Democratic Forces, an anti-Communist coalition) with regard both to the way they perceived the political situation at the time and to the motivation for their voting intentions.

KEY WORDS: attitudes; social influence; posttotalitarian elections; voting intentions.

INTRODUCTION

The year 1990 will remain memorable for Bulgarians. After 45 years of totalitarian rule they, like citizens of most of the East European socialist states, were able to decide a model of development for their own country. For the first time in almost half a century they participated in real elections casting their vote freely.

Two main political formations emerged representing the prevailing social orientations—the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), the renamed party of the former Communists, and the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) comprising a

vast and anti-Communist diverse coalition. All other parties defined themselves in terms of their closeness to either the BSP or the UDF. Even parties based chiefly on ethnic principle developed their political platforms by proclaiming their anticommunism rather than asserting their ethnic identity. They declared themselves to be the natural allies of the UDF. The ultimate polarity was communism or democracy, and all other issues were projected through it. This was a time of deep reassessment of aspirations, hopes, and values, a time of change of mentality.

The major objective of our study was to explore, understand, and explain the voting behavior of Bulgarians at such a crucial time.

The study of the determinants of social behavior has been one of the main topics in the discipline since the dawn of social psychology (Thomas & Znaniecki, 1918; Allport, 1935; Krech, Crutchfield & Ballachey, 1962). Despite periods of pessimism and even rejection of the notion of attitudes (Wicker, 1969; Bem, 1972; Abelson, 1972), the theoretical and empirical evidence concerning their structure (Schlegel & DiTecco, 1982; Ajzen, 1989), accessibility (Fazio, 1986; Fazio, Powel & Williams, 1989), salience (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) and the conditions under which they operate (cf. Sherman & Fazio, 1983) have promoted attitudes as the most powerful candidate for determinant of social behavior (Kelman, 1974; Ajzen, 1988; Greenwald, 1989).

We adopted this construct as the main tool of our investigation. We found the so called instrumentality X goals, or expectancy X values, (McGuire, 1986) the most appropriate approach for the conceptual framework of the study of attitudes with regard to the uniqueness of the electoral situation at the time, particularly the radical changes taking place in society that put to the test the very foundations of the world Bulgarians had been living in.

Rosenberg (1956, 1960) argued that a person's attitude towards an object is related to his or her beliefs that the object helps or prevents the attainment of valued states. Fishbein (1963) and Fishbein & Ajzen (1975) proposed the expectancy value model, which elaborates on the relationship between beliefs about an object and the attitude towards that object. This relationship was expressed in the following equation:

$$A = \sum_{i=1}^n b_i e_i \quad (1)$$

where A = attitude towards the object, action or event; b_i = belief about the attribute i of the object, action or event; e_i = evaluation of the attribute or the consequence i ; n = number of attributes or consequences.

Thus, for example, according to the model "an attitude towards a behavior can be estimated by multiplying the evaluations of each of the behavior's consequences by the subjective probability that performing this behavior will lead to the expected consequences" (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, p. 223).

Alongside the role of attitudes in determining social behavior, situational

factors have also been discussed (Caver, 1975; Warner & DeFleur, 1969; Wicklund, 1975; Abelson, 1982). Our expectations were that external social pressure would play an important differentiating role in forming people's intentions to vote for BSP or UDF.

The arguments for such a hypothesis could be found in the specificity of the socialist way of life. Bulgarians, or at least those who were not ardently devoted to the "building of the developed socialist society" (as stated in the Communist party directive) used to live in two worlds—"public" and "private." The public world was the world of presentation where one was expected to show his or her compliance with the "party line" and readiness to put forward the best efforts to support it. The private world was the world of timid freedom, that of close friends and carefully selected audiences where one ventured to express a different opinion, criticize or even reject the system. The breakup with this pattern of life was imbued with tension, uncertainty, and subdued fear. After years of separation, these two worlds merged. All kinds of referent groups, starting with official institutions and ending with circles of friends, were involved in vehement discussions. This was a completely new phenomenon. Cases of family dramas, conflicts between parents and children, were not uncommon. Throughout the entire pre-election campaign, up to the very last moment of casting their vote, people were under intense social pressure.

As a model for studying this influence, we used the construct "subjective norm" from Ajzen and Fishbein's theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1973; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Subjective norm is a function of the individual's beliefs about what reference groups and persons would expect and approve him or her to do, multiplied by that individual's motivation to comply with each of these referents. The equation expressing this relationship is:

$$SN = \sum_{j=1}^k nb_j mc_j \tag{2}$$

where SN = subjective norm; nb_j = strength of the normative belief concerning referent j ; mc_j = motivation to comply with referent j ; k = number of referents.

To summarize, in the design of the investigation, the intention to vote for a given political formation was studied as a function of two factors: attitudes towards voting for the given party and the subjective norm for this behavior. This relationship is expressed in a formal way in the following regression equation:

$$B \approx BI = \left[\sum_{i=1}^n b_i e_i \right] w_0 + \left[\sum_{j=1}^k nb_j (mc_j) \right] w_1 \tag{3}$$

where B = overt behavior; BI = behavioral intention; $b_i e_i$ = product of beliefs and evaluations; $nb_j mc_j$ = product of normative beliefs and motivation to comply; n = number of beliefs; k = number of referents; w_0, w_1 = empirically determined weights.

METHOD

Pilot Study

In accordance with the chosen approach to the study of attitudes, our first task was to make a list of relevant values that would form the attitude towards voting for BSP or UDF.

In a pilot study, a list of 27 values was administered to a random sample of 150 subjects (70 males and 80 females). The 27 values in the list were included on the following principles: (a) theoretical considerations concerning their instrumentality or terminality (Rokeach, 1967, 1979); (b) relevance to the current political situation and the platforms of the competing parties.

Respondents had to rate each value on a 7-point scale (from *very important* to *not at all important*). Having done this they were asked to indicate (for each of the two political formations separately) their subjective probability that voting for the given party would lead to the attainment of the given value. Again a 7-point scale was used (from *very likely* to *very unlikely*).

Behavioral intention was measured for two behaviors separately: voting for BSP and voting for UDF. Answers were given on a 10-point scale from 0 (*I have no intention at all*) to 9 (*this is my only intention*). After data-processing, the sample was divided according to the strength of subject's preferences for BSP or UDF in three groups: followers of BSP, followers of UDF, and neutral. Further analysis of the values was carried out only for the groups of BSP and UDF followers, the neutral group was excluded. Fifteen values were selected. The criteria for selection were: (a) importance of the value for at least one of the groups (ratings from *more important than not* (5) to *very important* (7)); (b) subjective probability for the value to be attained by voting for BSP or UDF (ratings from *more likely than not* (5) to *very likely* (7)).

Main Study: Subjects and Procedure

The study was carried out in May 1990, a month before the elections. Two-step cluster sampling was applied. The sample was representative for the country. It comprised 408 subjects (48% male and 52% female). The average age was 46.4 years, varying from 18 to 72 years. The structure of the sample corresponded to the official statistical data for the Bulgarian population concerning sociodemographic indicators such as place of residence, ethnic group, economic status, etc.

Subjects were interviewed in their homes. The interviewer explained that the study was anonymous and answers would be treated with complete confidentiality. The rejection rate was 6.8% of the original sample. Most of the explana-

tions referred to lack of time, uncertainty about anonymity, fear of giving "wrong" answers, and lack of interest in politics.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of three parts: questions concerning the attitude, the subjective norm, and the intention. The first part consisted of three sets of items:

1. A set of 15 values selected in the pilot study, rated on a 7-point scale ranging from *very important* to *not at all important*. The values were:

- family well-being
- self-fulfilment
- calm, uneventful life
- dignity, self-respect
- confidence in the future, not feeling helpless in the face of power
- belief in God
- equal opportunities
- freedom of speech and action
- professionalism and efficiency at work
- individual prosperity
- private property
- competition for jobs
- preservation of nature
- peaceful coexistence with other ethnic groups
- gaining the confidence of developed countries

2. A set of statements indicating on a 7-point *likely-unlikely* scale the subjective probability that the given value would be attained by voting for BSP. For example: "My voting for BSP would help us live calmly, with no surprises."

3. A set of statements indicating on a 7-point *likely-unlikely* scale the subjective probability that the given value would be attained by voting for UDF, for example: "My voting for UDF would help us get freedom of speech and action."

The second part of the questionnaire, concerning the subjective norm, consisted of three sections: normative beliefs with respect to BSP, normative beliefs with respect to UDF, and motivation to comply.

Bearing in mind the considerations we expressed about the socialist life style, and assessing the current situation in the country on the eve of the elections, we listed the following reference groups: friends, family, government officials, bosses, Europe, election commission.

In addition to the abovementioned public and private domains, the selection of the reference groups was based on the specificity of the entire atmosphere of

the pre-election campaign. Until the 1990 elections, official government representatives used to be outstanding members of the Communist party. For 40 years this party had achieved perfection in organizing "elections" with only one ticket, which the voters were supposed to "choose" unanimously. Not surprisingly, the election commissions once again comprised another set of outstanding Communist party members. In the work-place, managers were also appointed with the decisive consent of the local party committee. Hence we expected that, despite declarations of neutrality, these institutions would be perceived by people as a source of social pressure to vote for BSP.

In its turn, Europe as a notion, as a symbol, was part of the campaign of all political formations. Each of them took great pains to convince the electorate that only its program could lead the nation along the "road to Europe", the road to prosperity and civilization. By including Europe among the referent groups, we wanted to test the impact of this propaganda.

With respect to each referent, respondents indicated their normative belief on a 7-point scale, for example: "My family thinks that I should vote for BSP (UDF)" (likely-unlikely).

For each reference group, motivation to comply was elicited only once, with respect to voting in general. Respondents had to indicate on a 7-point scale the degree of their readiness to answer the expectations of the given referent.

Behavioral intention was measured for two different behaviors (voting for BSP and voting for UDF) on a 10-point scale ranging from 0 ("I have no intention at all to do that") to 9 ("This is my only intention").

RESULTS

Attitude and subjective norm towards voting for BSP and UDF were calculated for each subject according to equations (1) and (2). These variables were entered into a stepwise regression analysis with the dependent variable "intention to vote for BSP" and "intention to vote for UDF" respectively. When attitude was only included into the regression equations, the coefficients of multiple regression for BSP were $R = .81$ ($F(1,406) = 793.04$; $p < .0001$) and for UDF $R = .84$ ($F(1,406) = 995.4$; $p < .0001$). When the second independent variable (subjective norm) was also entered into the equation, the coefficients increased—for BSP $R = .83$ ($F(2,405) = 458.2$; $p < .0001$) and for UDF $R = .85$ ($F(2,405) = 528.7$; $p < .0001$).

As expected, both variables were significant predictors of intentions: Attitude towards BSP ($\beta_A = .64$ $p < .0001$); attitude towards UDF ($\beta_A = .75$ $p < .0001$); subjective norm concerning BSP ($\beta_s = .25$, $p < .0001$); subjective norm concerning UDF ($\beta_s = .14$, $p < .001$).

Indicative of the characteristics of the electorate of the two formations, the difference between the predictive power of attitude and subjective norm in the UDF regression equation is considerably greater than the difference between the same two predictive variables in the BSP equation. Thus ($\beta_A = .75$ and $\beta_s = .14$), for intention to vote for UDF, but ($\beta_A = .64$ and $\beta_s = .25$) for intention to vote for BSP.

These results could be interpreted in terms of lower influence of subjective norm when intention to vote for UDF is considered, as compared to its impact when voting for BSP is borne in mind. In other words, when one considers voting for UDF, one relies predominantly on the attitude towards the political formation. If, however, the question refers to the intention to vote for the socialist party, one is more apt to yield to social pressure.

To obtain a more adequate picture of the determinants of the subjects' voting intention before turning to the analysis of the components of the attitude (15 beliefs \times evaluations), we tried to reveal the semantic interpretation of the values included in the study. For this purpose we applied factor analysis. The pattern of interrelation between the values, which the method provides, was used as a basis for making inferences about their semantic connotation.

Thus subjects were divided according to their preferences either for BSP or UDF (according to their answer to the intention question). Then the 15 values were factor-analyzed for the two groups separately. Three interpretable factors emerged for both the followers of BSP and the followers of UDF. For the first factor in both groups the highest factor loadings had values such as self-fulfilment, family well-being, efficiency at work. For the second factor the highest factor loading had values such as belief in God, individual prosperity, private property. Equal opportunities and competition for jobs defined the third factor.

The fact that we did not obtain different factors in the BSP and the UDF groups gives evidence that subjects adhering to both political formations understood the semantic connotation of the values in a similar way.

Upon completing this procedure we entered the components of the attitude (the 15 beliefs \times evaluations) into a stepwise multiple regression analysis. The procedure was carried out twice, with respect to the intention to vote for each of the two political formations. The significant predictors of the two intentions are given in Table I.

Two of the predictive variables for the intentions to vote for UDF and for BSP coincide. These are "self-fulfilment" and "dignity and self-respect." Material prosperity was also found to be a predictive variable for both intentions. However, for BSP the accentuation is on family well-being, while for UDF on prosperity of the individual. The comparison of the two tables also shows the differences in the predictive strength of the variables. The leading variable for the followers of BSP is confidence in the future, not feeling helpless in the face of

Table I. Predicting Intention to Vote for BSP and UDF From Attitude (Stepwise Regression Results)

Significant Predictors (b_i , e_i)	β (BSP)	β (UDF)
1. Dignity and self-respect	.15($p < .06$)	.15($p < .001$)
2. Self-fulfilment	.18($p < .01$)	.32($p < .001$)
3. Confidence in the future, not feeling helpless in the face of power	.24($p < .001$)	ns
4. Appreciation of professionalism and efficiency at work	.19($p < .001$)	ns
5. Family well-being	.20($p < .001$)	ns
6. Belief in God	-.07($p < .03$)	ns
7. Gaining the confidence of the developed countries	ns	.16($p < .001$)
8. Equal opportunities	ns	.14($p < .001$)
9. Individual prosperity	ns	.13($p < .001$)

Note: $N = 408$; $b_i e_i$ = product of behavior belief strength and outcome evaluation

power, whereas the followers of UDF assign first place to self-fulfilment, or in other words, security against competition.

The components of the subjective norm (five normative beliefs \times motivation to comply) were entered into a stepwise regression analysis. The significant predictors concerning the intentions to vote for BSP or UDF are given in Table II.

Three of the predictive variables are the same: family, friends, and Europe. For the intention to vote for UDF, we obtained a negative coefficient for the variable "election commission." The very fact that the impact of the variable election commission was significant is indicative of the uniqueness of the nation's experience at the dawn of democracy. In no country with a tradition of democratic elections would such an institution have even the slightest effect.

Table II. Predicting Intention to Vote for BSP and UDF From Subjective Norm (Stepwise Regression Results)

Significant Predictors (nb_j , mc_j)	β	
	BSP	UDF
1. Friends	.40	.51
2. Family	.39	.36
3. Europe	.13	.16
4. Election commission	ns	-.08
5. Government officials	ns	ns
6. Bosses	ns	ns

Note: $N = 408$; nb_j , mc_j = product of normative belief strength and strength of motivation to comply, $p < .001$

More detailed analysis of the sources and implications of these findings is given in the discussion below.

DISCUSSION

The assumption that there would be two factors determining voting intentions of Bulgarians, namely attitude and subjective norm, was confirmed. Both factors were significant predictors of the intentions to vote for BSP and UDF. The finding that attitude is the more powerful predictor of intention is consistent with the discussed theoretical presuppositions.

The present study focused on revealing the specific predictors of the two behavioral intentions—voting for BSP and voting for UDF. Two beliefs related to terminal values were found to be predictive for both intentions—"self-fulfilment" and "dignity and self-respect." This predictive power could be explained by the general character of the values expressing the essence of personal development and realization, thus embodying the voters' deepest hopes and expectations. Common ground could also be seen in the beliefs that BSP would contribute to "family well-being," whereas UDF would contribute to "individual prosperity." Although both refer to material prosperity, where BSP is concerned, the focus is on the well-being of the group (family), and where UDF is concerned, it is the individual who is expected to prosper. This dichotomy might reflect more general collectivistic or individualistic orientations (Triandis, McCusker & Hui, 1990).

Now we turn to the specific predictors of the two behavioral intentions. For BSP, these are "confidence in the future, not feeling helpless in the face of power" and "appreciation of professionalism and efficiency at work." These beliefs reflect fears of political discrimination if change of power takes place, fear that personnel selection would be based on political prejudices rather than on professional criteria. These apprehensions can be understood only in the light of the recent history of Bulgaria, which was marked with tacit discrimination towards anybody who was not an apologist of the dominant Communist ideology. The atmosphere of uncertainty and fear was additionally incited by the BSP election campaign. This campaign counted on the specificity of the Bulgarian Communist Party. Unlike other Communist parties from the Soviet bloc the Bulgarian Communist Party was not a party of Communist functionaries solely. For at least 15 years, the rules of Party acceptance had been less rigorous and many people who aspired to a career were tempted to apply for membership. In 1989 the Communist party members were one million, but the total number of people who had the right to vote was about six million. It was precisely due to this characteristic of the political situation in Bulgaria that such propaganda, relying on professional anxieties, fell on fertile ground.

The negative predictive value of the item "belief in God" is indicative of the subjects' expectation that BSP would continue to maintain the traditional Communist ideology, one of the essential components of which is atheism.

Specific predictors of the intention to vote for UDF were the items "gaining the confidence of the developed countries" and "equal opportunities for all." To explain this fact we again have to refer to the country's recent history. For a long time Europe, the world beyond the "Iron Curtain," has been the symbol of liberty and progress. In contrast within the boundaries of the socialist camp, there were the privileged ("active fighters against capitalism") and the neglected ("ideological enemies"). Therefore, it is not surprising that the change which UDF was expected to carry out had to be directed towards integration with the free world where, as it was believed, everyone could enter the competition on an equal basis.

Our expectation that subjective norm would have a stronger impact on subjects' intentions to vote for BSP compared with their intentions to vote for UDF was supported. The reference groups "government," "bosses," and "election commission" were associated with BSP. Such associations might have triggered the long-cultivated syndrome of submission to totalitarian institutions.

An indirect support for this thesis was the negative correlation between the normative belief concerning the reference group "election commission" and the intention to vote for UDF. This is the only difference in influence of normative beliefs on the two behavioral intentions. During the period of totalitarian rule, election commissions were one of the embodiments of the power of Communist dictatorship. These commissions were entitled to ensure the "full victory" of the Communist party in the elections. Therefore people still perceived them as representatives of Communist rule; hence the respondents' subjective experience was that they had to overcome this social pressure when intending to vote for UDF.

The significant impact of the item "Europe" on both intentions can be explained by the important place assigned to the integration with Europe in the political platforms of the two formations.

The predictive power of the items "friends" and "family" is natural and expected.

The results obtained suggest some more general conclusions. The content of the predictors reveals to us two completely different motivational patterns. The first one (the motivation to vote for BSP) seems to be based on anxiety and fear of breaking the status quo; hence efforts are directed towards preservation and stability.

The second one (the motivation to vote for UDF) is based on hope—hope of change, opening up of the world, asserting oneself in the world.

These are fundamental differences pertaining to a different perception of the objectives a given society should aspire to. The implications of this deep division for the introduction of democratic order might be very serious.

One of the main characteristics of democracy is tolerance towards the opinion of others. However, when polarization concerns not the means a nation should follow but the ends it should achieve (which is what our results showed) and when this is taking place in a country that is only just learning to walk in democracy, it might be very hard to overcome.

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