

AUTHORITARIAN STATE BUILDING AND THE SOURCES OF REGIME COMPETITIVENESS IN THE FOURTH WAVE

The Cases of Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine

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INTRODUCTION

THIS article explores the sources of regime competitiveness in the post-cold war “fourth wave” transitions¹ through a structured comparison of regime trajectories in Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine during the years 1992–2004. All four countries experienced relatively competitive political regimes at the beginning of the 1990s despite such important obstacles as continued dominance of old regime incumbents, a lack of democratic history, weak civil society, weak rule of law, and relative international isolation. By the end of the 1990s and early 2000s, all four countries had become noticeably more closed, although to very different degrees that ranged from highly closed regimes in Belarus and Russia to more open ones in Moldova and Ukraine.

This article focuses on two core puzzles. First, why was it that all four countries were relatively open in the early 1990s despite the presence of key obstacles but became more closed over time? Second, why by the beginning of the twenty-first century did the countries emerge

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¹ Michael McFaul, “The Fourth Wave of Democracy and Dictatorship: Noncooperative Transitions in the Postcommunist World,” *World Politics* 54 (January 2002).

with different levels of competitiveness? An examination of the mechanisms of regime formation and reproduction in these cases demonstrates the need for a fundamental rethinking of the transition process, especially in countries that face relatively weak international democratizing pressures.

Recent discussions of regime transitions have focused overwhelmingly on the democratic end of the regime spectrum.² This is a problem not because it has led to unwarranted optimism but because it has caused scholars of competitive and semicompetitive regimes to ignore factors and institutions—such as effective coercion and the capacity of leaders to keep their allies in line—that may be relatively unimportant for democratic development but that are central to maintaining autocratic rule. In fact, such inattention to authoritarianism has inhibited our understanding of why competitive political regimes persisted where many thought they would not.

To understand the sources of regime development in Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine, it is necessary to examine not just the process of democratic institution building but also the factors that facilitate or undermine autocratic consolidation and regime closure. Approaching these countries as unconsolidated autocracies rather than as simply emerging democracies draws attention to key sources of political competition that have largely been ignored in the literature on competitive regimes. Thus, competitive politics were rooted much less in robust civil societies, strong democratic institutions, or democratic leadership than in *the inability of incumbents to maintain power or concentrate political control* by preserving elite unity, controlling elections and media, and/or using force against opponents. The result has been what might be called “pluralism by default.” Such failure to consolidate political control has been the outgrowth of strong anti-incumbent national identity and/or incumbent weakness as defined by a lack of know-how, ineffective elite organization, and/or the weakness of key dimensions of state power. Incumbent capacity has shaped regime trajectories by affecting the ability of incumbents to control political outcomes and consolidate any kind of political order, whether democratic or authoritarian. In turn, the availability of a widely popular national identity that can be framed in anti-incumbent terms has undermined incumbent capacity and facilitated mobilization of the opposition even where civil society is weak.

² Thus, the APSA annual meeting division on regimes is called “Comparative Democratization” and standard quantitative indicators for regime type—such as Freedom House and Polity—measure distance from a well-known set of standard democratic institutional practices.

Early political competition in all four countries was facilitated by the extremely sudden dissolution of the Soviet state in 1990–91 that deprived incumbents of the organization, skill, and finances necessary to maintain power and/or concentrate political control. The weakness of informal or formal elite organizations such as ruling political parties or established informal networks made it harder to prevent prime ministers, vice presidents, or other key allies from going into opposition. Further, while the relatively robust state infrastructure inherited from the Soviet era prevented complete state collapse, weak incumbent control over the state complicated efforts to use security and other state agencies to impose political control, either by stealing elections or by using coercion against opponents. In addition, particularly in early 1990s Belarus, incumbents often lacked the experience and necessary skills (such as the ability to speak on television) to cope with even a relatively weak opposition. As a result, all four countries exhibited dynamic and competitive politics in the early and mid-1990s, a situation that resulted in electoral turnover in three of the four cases.

However, in the absence of consistent Western pressure via the European Union or other institutions, increased incumbent capacity created by improved state finances, better elite organization, and experience with competitive politics opened the way early in the twenty-first century for greater autocracy in all four cases, although to very different degrees in each country. In Alyaksandr Lukashenka's Belarus and Vladimir Putin's Russia, greater regime closure was facilitated both by relatively weak anti-incumbent national identity and by the leaders' success in either preserving (Belarus) or reasserting (Russia) the *de facto* scope of state power over economic actors. By contrast, in Moldova and Ukraine, stronger anti-incumbent national identity and the lower scope of state control over economic actors undermined authoritarian consolidation, as successive oppositions mobilized pro- and anti-Russian national identities against successive incumbents. At the same time, because the governing elite in Ukraine was more disorganized than the one in Moldova, Ukrainian incumbents faced slightly greater competition than did their Moldovan counterparts in the early 2000s.

The article concludes by offering a preliminary look at how the dynamics of both anti-incumbent identity and incumbent capacity may help us to understand regime trajectories in other fourth-wave transition cases in the 1990s and the early twenty-first century. The problems of authoritarian state building may be one key to identifying the sources of divergent regime outcomes within the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Africa.

INCUMBENT CAPACITY AND AUTHORITARIANISM

Relative inattention to authoritarianism in regime studies has resulted in a disproportionate focus on the ability of regime actors to create and sustain democracy rather than on their capacity to maintain autocratic rule. Thus, analysts of competitive and semicompetitive regimes have overwhelmingly focused on the ways in which political skill, or “crafting,” and strong parties and states promote democratic consolidation.³ Yet the organization and preservation of authoritarian rule entails a degree of incumbent capacity that—with only a few notable exceptions—has been almost entirely ignored in studies of competitive regimes.⁴ Indeed, students of autocratic regimes (and revolutions) have long argued that tactical skill and strong parties and states are key to autocratic stability.⁵ Especially in the post-cold war era autocrats face significant obstacles in their efforts to maintain power and/or concentrate political control. First, leaders must be able to keep allies in line. While democratization is often threatened by elite disunity around certain procedural norms, the consolidation of authoritarian rule is almost always endangered by elite disunity around a specific autocrat or ruling group.⁶ Further, in an international environment that demands at least nominal adherence to democratic procedures, autocrats must be able to rig elections as well as intimidate the opposition, control the media, and prevent economic actors from supporting rival forces. By itself, failure in these areas almost never translates into democracy. However in the post-cold war era such incapacity has often generated sporadic political competition that is frequently referred to as unconsolidated democracy but that is also usefully described as unconsolidated authoritarianism. In such cases, political competition results from autocratic failure.

Capacity is likely to affect regime outcomes most immediately where leaders are prepared to undertake antidemocratic measures to stay in

³ Giuseppe Di Palma, *To Craft Democracies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Scott Mainwaring and Timothy R. Scully, eds., *Building Democratic Institutions: Party Systems in Latin America* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1995); Stephen Holmes, “What Russia Teaches Us Now: How Weak States Threaten Freedom,” *American Prospect* 8 (July 1, 1997–August 1, 1997).

⁴ For exceptions, see Philip Roeder, “Rejection of Authoritarianism,” in R. Anderson et al., eds., *Post-communism and the Theory of Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); McFaul (fn. 1).

⁵ Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Eva Bellin, “The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective,” *Comparative Politics* 36 (January 2004); Barbara Geddes, “What Do We Know about Democratization after Twenty Years?” *Annual Review of Political Science* 2 (1999); Jason Brownlee, “Durable Authoritarianism in an Age of Democracy” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2004); Gordon Tullock, *Autocracy* (Dordrecht, Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1987).

⁶ John Higley and Richard Gunther, eds., *Elites and Democratic Consolidation in Latin America and Southern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Tullock (fn. 5); Geddes (fn. 5).

power⁷ and where they do not face especially strong international pressures to democratize. In some regions, such as post-cold war Central Europe or Latin America, international pressures for democratization have been sufficiently strong to convince leaders to underutilize their power.⁸ Capacity therefore has a much less obvious impact on regime type. In other parts of the world, however, where pressures for democracy are weaker, incumbent strength is much more likely to have a direct effect on regime dynamics.

Incumbent capacity is here defined along three interrelated dimensions: authoritarian state power, elite organization, and know-how. First, key elements of a strong state are critical for maintaining non-democratic rule. Although recent discussions have focused overwhelmingly on the rule of law and on state capacity as prerequisites for democracy,⁹ other elements of state power are central to the establishment of autocratic rule. I define *authoritarian state power* along the dimensions of *control*, *scope*, and *size*. *Control* refers to the extent to which top-level state officials can rely on their subordinates to obey orders to suppress opposition and to steal elections. In turn, control is likely to be directly affected by the state's fiscal health, which influences the ability of state leaders to pay salaries and/or co-opt potential sources of opposition through patronage. The capacity of leaders to impose and maintain autocratic rule also depends on the *scope* of issues over which state leaders have discretionary control.¹⁰ Specifically, greater scope of state power over the economy should make it easier for autocrats to prevent the emergence of opposition. Alternatively, the existence of a strong private sector outside direct state control creates more potential resources for an independent media as well as for an opposition.¹¹ Finally, the *size* of the state and the economy it controls affects the degree of incumbent exposure in the post-cold war era to Western pressure for democratization as well as the state's fiscal health. Incumbents in Russia (or China) should be less vulnerable to Western pressure than incumbents with control over smaller states and economies. At the same

⁷ Naturally, capacity will not be an issue if leaders refuse to engage in antidemocratic behavior.

⁸ Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, "Linkage versus Leverage: Rethinking the International Dimension of Regime Change in the Post-Cold War Era," *Comparative Politics* (forthcoming).

⁹ Holmes (fn. 3); Valerie Bunce, "Rethinking Recent Democratization: Lessons from the Postcommunist Experience," *World Politics* 55 (January 2003), 180–81.

¹⁰ I emphasize discretionary control to distinguish it from the high scope of state legal powers over economies in developed capitalist countries.

¹¹ Circumstantial evidence for this argument comes from the widely noted positive correlation between privatization and democracy in the postcommunist world. See Martha De Melo, Cevdet Denizler, and Alan Gelb, "From Plan to Market: Patterns of Transitions," *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper*, no. 1564 (1996).

time, smaller states may be able to deflect Western democratizing pressure with financial and other forms of assistance from larger non-Western states.

Second, formal or informal elite organization also may be key to preventing elite defection that undermines regime closure. Prime ministers, close advisers, and other allies are often in a particularly good position to build up resources and (because of access to state media) popularity that can be used to challenge incumbent control. Strong formal or informal organizations—such as political parties,¹² well-established patron-client relationships, or large quasi-familial networks—have often provided important mechanisms to reduce defections. Alternatively, the absence or weakness of such organizations increases opportunism among allies, who are more likely to change sides when they perceive the incumbent to be vulnerable. The strength of such organizations can be measured in part by the degree to which members have access to resources outside the organization's direct control. Thus an organization or informal network consisting of a coalition of members with autonomous patronage networks is weaker than one whose members lack such autonomously controlled resources.

Finally, while political skill has been central in discussions of democratic “crafting” and transition, know-how is also important in building authoritarian regimes. Such issues became especially critical after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The post-cold war environment created fundamentally new challenges for autocrats who had almost never faced open internal opposition and who were accustomed to the extensive assistance of external patrons. Leaders finding themselves in this new context had to learn how to use existing resources to compete in semicompetitive environments, to keep allies in line, and to coerce opposition without provoking international reaction.

The problem in analyzing the impact of skill is that there is a temptation either to treat it as a residual variable (that is, to suggest its importance only when the outcome cannot be explained by other factors) or alternatively to conflate it with the outcome (that is, to identify successful imposition of autocratic rule as evidence of know-how). To avoid these pitfalls, I operationalize know-how as experience with post-cold war national elections that provide incumbents with a better understanding of how to manipulate and survive elections. *Ceteris paribus*, actors with greater experience should have greater skill and therefore be in a better position to cope with the challenges of semi-

¹² Geddes (fn. 5); Brownlee (fn. 5).

competitive politics. In addition, I focus on specific types of know-how and show how their presence/absence affected outcomes.

These three elements of incumbent capacity—authoritarian state power, elite organization, and know-how—are treated here as a single variable rather than as three separate ones because they are interrelated and because the strength of one component may partially compensate for the weakness of another. First, the relative importance of elite organization is not constant in all circumstances and hinges in part on the scope of authoritarian state power discussed above. Reduced scope increases the importance of elite organization in preventing open defection by allies and appointees. This is because more limited state scope increases the size and number of resources and allies available to former associates who choose to go into opposition. In particular, where the scope of state power over the economy is more restricted (and therefore where the private sector is more developed), former associates will have an easier time building and sustaining opposition finances. By contrast, such opportunities will be more restricted in countries where the state has broader control over the economy. As a result such autocrats should have an easier time restricting defection even in the absence of a strong elite organization. As I argue below, more restricted privatization in Belarus under Lukashenka made it easier for him to maintain control even in the absence of a strong formal or informal elite organization. By contrast, more limited state control over the economy in Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine made elite organization essential for maintaining regime closure. In such cases, the greater dispersion of resources outside the state has increased opportunities and resources for elite defection.

In addition, to a limited extent, skill or know-how may also compensate for weak elite organization—at least in the short term. Thus leaders with experience in semicompetitive environments may survive if they can identify and weaken potential challengers from among their allies before such associates become a serious threat. Especially in the context of a restricted scope of state control, however, this by itself can be expected to be a very unstable source of autocratic persistence.

In turn, open elite contestation caused by weak elite organization and/or limited state scope is likely to undermine autocratic state control, for several reasons. Elite contestation manifested in the proliferation of conflicting laws and decrees by the executive, ministries, and legislature undermines implementation by creating confusion among subordinates about which order should be followed. Division at the top may also create opportunities for subordinates to craft areas of autonomous action by playing one side off against the other. Finally, open

contestation among governing elites may create enough uncertainty to discourage subordinates from taking risks on behalf of a particular side. The possibility of victory by the other side is likely to encourage subordinates to play it safe and do nothing rather than risk alienating a particular leadership faction. Thus, a highly divided elite is likely to undermine regime closure by reducing the incumbent's control over subordinate state agencies that are necessary to impose nondemocratic rules of the game. And it becomes more likely that orders to the media to provide biased coverage, to security agencies to repress opposition, or to local governments to steal votes will be ignored. Alternatively, a leader backed by a unified elite has a great deal of leeway in using state power to limit threats to his/her tenure.

In sum, incumbent capacity—defined here by authoritarian state power, elite organization, and know-how—has an important impact on the imposition of nondemocratic rule. All three of these elements of incumbent capacity directly affect regime outcomes by determining the extent of open elite contestation in a given regime and by determining the administrative and material resources available to an autocrat (or group of autocrats) seeking to maintain hegemony. At the same time, these dimensions are interrelated. First, a broad scope of state control over the economy and to a much lesser extent know-how may compensate for a weak elite organization in preventing open elite defection. Further, open defection by members of the governing elite—caused by reduced state scope, weak organization, and/or the absence of know-how—is likely to undermine authoritarian state control directly by creating opportunities for subordinates to ignore central commands.

STRENGTH OF ANTI-INCUMBENT NATIONAL IDENTITY AND POLITICAL COMPETITION

A second important factor shaping regime outcomes is the strength of a national identity that can be framed in anti-incumbent terms. A widely popular anti-incumbent national identity has both facilitated opposition mobilization and weakened incumbent capacity. First, opposition leaders have often had an easier time mobilizing protest when they are able to portray the incumbent as opposed to a particular national culture or worldview. Alternative national conceptions have offered ready-made viable alternatives to authoritarianism, alternatives that Adam Przeworski contends are critical for undermining incumbent support.¹³ Emotive ap-

¹³ Adam Przeworski, "Some Problems in the Study of the Transition to Democracy," in Guillermo O'Donnell et al., eds., *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Comparative Perspectives* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), chap. 2.

peals to nationalism have arguably made it easier to stimulate the sustained personal sacrifice and cross-class coalitions necessary to carry out successful mobilization—even in cases where civil society is relatively weak. Thus, Mark Beissinger, in his study of protest behavior in the Soviet Union in 1987–92, shows that many times more participants took part in demonstrations supporting ethnonational demands than in demonstrations on behalf of economic or liberalizing demands.¹⁴ *Ceteris paribus*, groups able to frame regime opposition in national terms that have broad resonance in the population should have an easier time mobilizing support.

Second, a salient national identity that can be framed in anti-incumbent terms may also undermine incumbent capacity. A broadly popular anti-incumbent national identity may affect internal state control. Emotive appeals that bring citizens out onto the streets would also seem likely to convince regional or other state officials to disobey central state orders—making it more difficult for incumbents to manipulate elections or impose force in those places where national identity is particularly salient. Thus, as we shall see below, in 1994 eastern state officials in Ukraine defected from President Kravchuk, who was perceived as anti-Russian; and in 2004 some western Ukrainian officials resisted central efforts to manipulate the vote in support of Kuchma's pro-Russian stance.

Finally, national identity has influenced incumbent capacity by affecting the degree to which incumbents can rely on certain types of external resources. Faced with a strong anti-incumbent national identity, autocrats may have a harder time drawing on outside support that is viewed as a threat to the national culture or way of life. Thus in Ukraine and Moldova, incumbents have been restricted in their capacity to rely on support from Russia by the strength of anti-Russian identities. The introduction of such external assistance has in some cases created a political issue that contributed to increased opposition mobilization and weakened central control.

The dynamic of strong anti-incumbent nationalism described above is most evident in opposition struggles against colonial powers. In Central Europe, the Baltic republics, and Georgia in the late 1980s, the opposition was able to stimulate mass protest and to undermine state control by framing opposition to incumbent autocrats in terms of national liberation. Further, external intervention by Moscow in Lithuania (January 1991) and Georgia (April 1989) served only to further stimulate opposition mobilization.

In far fewer cases, including Moldova and Ukraine, two competing

¹⁴ Mark R. Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 76–79; see also Dan Slater, “Emotions in Motion: Identity Politics and Democratic Mobilization in Southeast Asia” (Paper presented at the conference, “Authoritarian Regimes: Conditions of Stability and Change,” Istanbul, May 29, 2005).

national conceptions have vied for dominance. As we shall see below, elites and populations have divided between “pro-Western” and “pro-Russian” conceptions of national identity. Such a situation has created greater problems for the opposition than in the less divided anticolonial movements described above. First, the divided character of identity has left opposition nationalists with fewer potential supporters than are found in decolonizing efforts in other countries. Simultaneously, once victorious, the opposition has found itself up against many of the same problems of opposition mobilization faced by the previous incumbent. Successive incumbents with different national conceptions have been forced to confront mobilization threats from the other side. At least in the short run such a situation has undermined consolidation of either democracy or authoritarianism.

By contrast, the situation is very different in countries where a potential anti-incumbent national identity is nonexistent or supported by a small minority. Absent a strong civil society, such incumbents should face weaker mobilization threats and fewer obstacles to controlling the state than should their counterparts who confront strong anti-incumbent nationalism. In cases where anti-incumbent identity is shared by a small minority, nationalism is in fact much more likely to serve the incumbent and promote greater regime closure by creating opportunities for divide and rule.

In sum, incumbent capacity promotes regime closure by determining the extent of potential elite defection, the autocrat’s access to administrative resources, and his/her exposure to international pressure. Simultaneously, a strong and popular national identity that can be framed in anti-incumbent terms undermines autocratic consolidation and regime closure by promoting opposition mobilization while undermining incumbent capacity to control the state and gain access to external resources (see Figure 1). These factors have promoted competition by undermining autocratic consolidation. Autocrats with lower incumbent capacity who face stronger anti-incumbent nationalism should encounter greater obstacles to consolidating autocratic rule and maintaining regime closure than should those autocrats who have greater capacity and face weak or nonexistent anti-incumbent nationalism.

THE PUZZLE: REGIME TRAJECTORIES IN BELARUS, MOLDOVA, RUSSIA, AND UKRAINE

The importance of incumbent capacity and anti-incumbent national identity in shaping regime development can be seen through a compar-

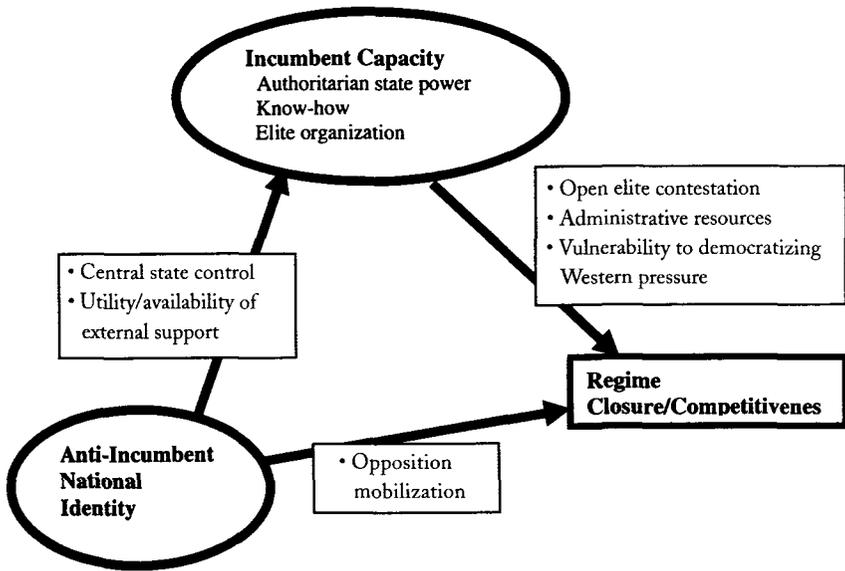


FIGURE 1
OBSTACLES TO REGIME CLOSURE

ative examination of regime trajectories in Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine—cases that are similar on a range of variables typically thought to affect regime outcomes. First, none of the four countries had experience with democratic rule prior to 1991. Second, all were dominated by former high-level Soviet officials who demonstrated a willingness to use antidemocratic measures to stay in power. Third, relative to Central Europe on one side and Central Asia on the other, the four have similar densities of ties to Western Europe¹⁵ and were never officially considered for membership in the European Union. Fourth, the strength of the opposition at the beginning of the 1990s—as measured by the share of oppositionist democrats elected to parliament in 1990—was about the same in all four cases.¹⁶ Fifth, all of the countries inherited a relatively robust infrastructure of state power from the Soviet era that helped to prevent a complete descent into full-scale chaos and state col-

¹⁵ Jeffrey S. Kopstein and David A. Reilly, “Geographic Diffusion and the Transformation of the Postcommunist World,” *World Politics* 53 (October 2000).

¹⁶ Democrats controlled about one-third of parliamentary seats in 1990 in all four cases. Ivan Gerasiuk, *Agoniia Nomenklatury* (Minsk: “Belarus,” 1991), 49; Andrew Wilson, *Ukrainian Nationalism: A Minority Faith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,), 120; Sergei Filatov, *Sovershenno nesekretno: kulyary rossiiskoi vlasti* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2000), 46; William Crowther, “Moldova: Caught between Nation and Empire,” in I. Bremmer and R. Taras, eds., *New States New Politics: Building the Post-Soviet Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), chap. 8.

TABLE 1
AVERAGE REGIME CLOSURE IN BELARUS, MOLDOVA, RUSSIA, AND UKRAINE
(1992–2004)

	<i>Belarus</i> 1992–96	<i>Moldova</i> 1992–2000	<i>Russia</i> 1992–99	<i>Ukraine</i> 1992–95
<i>Early/Mid-1990s</i>				
Government manipulation of elections	moderate	low	moderate	low
Incumbent monopolization of media	moderate	low	moderate	moderate
Opposition weakness	moderate	low	moderate	low
De facto power of executive over parliament	moderate	low	moderate	low
<i>Late 1990s/Early 2000s</i>	<i>1997–2004</i>	<i>2001–4</i>	<i>2000–2004</i>	<i>1996–2004</i>
Government manipulation of elections	high	moderate	moderate	moderate
Incumbent monopolization of media	high	high	high	high
Opposition weakness	high	moderate	high	moderate
De facto power of executive over parliament	high	high	high	moderate

lapse.¹⁷ While these various factors have been shown in other analyses to affect certain regime outcomes, they are roughly controlled for in my analysis here. Finally, in an area where important differences exist—economic development—the outcomes run counter to theory. Thus, economic development measured by GDP per capita was significantly lower in the two more competitive countries (Moldova: \$520 per capita; and Ukraine: \$1,133 per capita) than in the two more autocratic ones (Belarus: \$2,248 per capita; and Russia: \$3,528 per capita).¹⁸

An examination of the development of competitive politics in the region reveals two sets of patterns that require explanation. (1) All four countries were relatively competitive in the early 1990s but became less so over time. (2) And the four countries emerged from the twentieth-century with different levels of closure. (See Table 1.)

I measure competitiveness/closure after the fall of the Soviet Union along four dimensions.¹⁹ The first is the level of proincumbent manipulation of the electoral process—the extent to which the incumbent manipulates the vote count, bans opposition candidates, and/or invalidates

¹⁷ On the dynamics of state breakdown, see Richard Snyder “Does Lootable Wealth Breed Disorder? A Political Economy of Extraction Framework,” Working Paper no. 312 (South Bend, Ind.: Helen Kellogg Institute, July 2004).

¹⁸ There are 2003 figures in constant 1995 dollars; World Development Indicators Online.

¹⁹ My codings here more or less match Freedom House scores for these countries with the exception of Moldova, which was scored as less democratic in the early and mid-1990s. This appears to be because Freedom House included in their score the autocratic regime in the breakaway region of Transnistria. In contrast, my analysis includes only the regime controlled by Chisinau.

opposition victories post facto.²⁰ Second, incumbent monopolization of media reflects the extent to which the population has access to anti-incumbent views via large audience electronic media.²¹ The third indicator, opposition weakness, is defined in terms of how much access the opposition has to financial and/or organizational resources.²² The final dimension of competition is de facto executive control over parliament. A high score indicates that the executive manipulates the legislature at will to the extent that the body provides virtually no source of opposition. A moderate score means that the balance of power favors the executive—but parliament is able nonetheless to challenge the executive occasionally in a serious way or force compromise on important issues such as appointments or key policy decisions. Examples of moderate executive control include Russia in 1994–99 and Ukraine in 1995–2004, when presidents generally dominated but strong and vocal anti-incumbent parties presented persistent and sometimes effective sources of opposition. Finally a low score indicates that the balance of power favors parliament. Examples include Ukraine in 1992–94, when parliament consistently thwarted presidential initiatives and forced early presidential elections. Moldova in 1993–2000 is another a case of low executive control—as evidenced by the fact that parliament forced important constitutional changes against the will of successive presidents—including a decision in 2000 to abolish the popularly elected presidency.

Table 1 outlines the level of regime closure for each case after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. During the early 1990s all four cases were highly competitive. Most notably, incumbents in all four cases faced serious electoral competition in presidential elections in 1994–96 and lost power everywhere but in Russia. Simultaneously, the opposition was given relatively free rein to organize; parliament was relatively strong; and the media, while often biased in favor of the incumbent, included important levels of open dissent.

²⁰ A “high” score indicates that at least one of the activities is sufficiently high to eliminate uncertainty in the electoral process. A “moderate” score means that at least one of the activities is widespread enough to tilt the playing field seriously in favor of the incumbent—but not so much as to make the elections noncompetitive. For example, a moderate score reflects a level of vote stealing in the range of 5–10 percent (as in 1990s Serbia, Ukraine under Kuchma) that still leaves important opportunities for regime opponents—as opposed to the apparently much larger percentage in contemporary Azerbaijan and Belarus that make elections less meaningful.

²¹ A “high” score indicates the almost total absence of opposition views in large audience electronic media; a “moderate” score means that most electronic media is incumbent controlled but that there exist significant large audience media that openly criticize the government.

²² A highly weak opposition is one that has virtually no financing and/or organizational resources. A “moderate” weak opposition is one that has significant financial and organizational resources but is still seriously outmatched by the incumbent. Finally, a low score indicates an opposition that has roughly equal or greater financial and organizational resources than the incumbent.

Later, politics in all four countries became more closed—although to very different degrees. First in Belarus, Lukashenka, who won presidential elections against the incumbent prime minister Kebich in 1994, established a highly closed regime by 1997, including a totally compliant legislature, media, and court system. Russia also became increasingly autocratic. By the early 2000s Putin had managed to take relatively firm control of parliament and to reduce media freedom by systematically eliminating independent television stations. During the 1990s Moldova had the most competitive and dynamic politics of the four cases. The country had a strong legislature, diverse media, few restrictions on political organization, and two democratic turnovers—more than any other non-Baltic post-Soviet country at the start of the twenty-first century. However, Moldova became more autocratic after it was transformed into a parliamentary republic and the Communist Party won 70 percent of seats in 2001. The communist government increased control over state media and the courts. At the same time, the opposition controlled the country's capital and benefited from important levels of financing in the mid-2000s. Ukraine also became increasingly autocratic over the course of the 1990s and the early twenty-first century. Leonid Kuchma, who took the presidency from Leonid Kravchuk in 1994, strengthened control over parliament and instituted much more systematic electoral manipulation and harassment of the opposition. Yet the Kuchma regime, in contrast to its counterparts in Belarus and Russia, faced serious challenges and fell in late 2004.

In sum, this analysis yields two puzzles: (1) that cases that were all relatively competitive in the early 1990s became less so over time; and (2) that the countries emerged with different levels of competitiveness by the beginning of the twenty-first century.

UNDERSTANDING THE PUZZLE OF REGIME DYNAMICS IN BELARUS, MOLDOVA, RUSSIA, AND UKRAINE

In the 1990s leaders failed to maintain political control despite the prevalence of antidemocratic institutional legacies of the old regime, including an absence of democratic history, a weak rule of law, and weak civil society. So how do we account for the very real if flawed political competition that resulted from such inability to concentrate political power?

First, approaches focusing on formal institutional design²³ that now

²³ Juan J. Linz and Arturo Valenzuela, eds., *The Failure of Presidential Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); M. Steven Fish "The Dynamics of Democratic Erosion," in Anderson et al., eds. *Post-Communism and the Theory of Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

dominate regime studies can at best only partially account for variations in outcome. All four countries established (on paper at least) semipresidential systems in the 1990s—although formal differences in the power of president and parliament existed within these systems.²⁴ Variations in the formal and de facto power of the president among the cases and across time has to a large extent been the product of divergent incumbent capacities and the preexisting balance of power between president and opposition. In a context of weak or fragile political institutions, constitutions and other political institutions are often a *reflection* of incumbent authority rather than a *cause* of it.²⁵ Thus President Yeltsin imposed a superpresidential constitution *after* he successfully gained cooperation of the military in bombing parliament in 1993. Similarly, as we shall see below, Lukashenka's ability to impose a highly centralized constitution in 1996 was itself the product of a much weaker opposition and greater autocratic state capacity than in Moldova and Ukraine. Next, de facto executive authority has often had less to do with formal constitutional rules and more to do with elite organizational capacity. Thus, in Moldova, the rise to power of a highly cohesive Communist Party in 2001 meant that the regime ironically became *more* closed after the introduction of parliamentary rule. Similarly in Russia, even in the absence of constitutional change, de facto presidential power over parliament became much greater in 2000–2005 after the emergence of a strong pro-presidential party.

Second, while political competition is sometimes seen as the outgrowth of a democratically inclined leadership, such an approach is not helpful here.²⁶ While most leaders in the region have not attempted to create the type of highly repressive and closed autocratic rule prevalent in parts of Central Asia, executives in all four countries—former communist elite with little exposure to the West—demonstrated a willingness to use extralegal tactics to stay in power and/or to reduce their exposure to public criticism in the 1990s. Yeltsin in Russia, for example, bombed a recalcitrant parliament in 1993 and came extremely close in 1996 to canceling presidential elections that he thought he might lose. In Moldova the first president, Snegur, manipulated election laws to become the sole candidate in the first presidential elections just prior to the dissolution of the USSR in 1991 and soon after that passed a law dictating steep fines and prison terms for “slandering” the president or

²⁴ For a particularly sophisticated treatment of variations in legislative powers, see M. Steven Fish, *Democracy Derailed in Russia: The Failure of Open Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

²⁵ Gerald Easter, “Preference for Presidentialism,” *World Politics* 49 (January 1997).

²⁶ McFaul (fn. 1).

chairman of parliament.²⁷ Kravchuk in Ukraine shut down an antipresidential television station in 1994 and came close to closing the oppositionist parliament with military force in 1993.²⁸ Finally, Prime Minister Keбich in Belarus shut down anti-incumbent media and engaged in vote stealing during the 1994 elections.²⁹ Such actions suggest that it is unlikely that democratic values account for the extensive political competition in these countries in the early 1990s.

Further, there is no evidence that the divergent regime outcomes were a function of popular support for democracy. In fact, surveys conducted in the 1990s show that popular support for democratic institutions was *greatest* in Belarus (in line with Baltic countries) and *least* in Moldova.³⁰

A much more promising approach focuses on the changing character of the international environment in the 1990s. Western liberal hegemony created by the dissolution of the Soviet Union resulted in the extremely widespread adaptation of formal, if often not effectively enforced, democratic institutions. Recently, several authors have also argued that the density of ties to the West affect the strength of post-cold war Western democratizing pressures.³¹ Yet such ties, while they may account for differences between these four countries and their counterparts in other regions such as Central Asia, cannot explain variations among the cases because, as noted above, these countries have similar levels of exposure to the West. Such ties, which *increased* over time, also cannot explain the relative *decline* in political competition.

INCUMBENT CAPACITY, ANTI-INCUMBENT NATIONAL IDENTITY, AND POLITICAL COMPETITION

To an important extent, variations in regime competitiveness across cases and time can be traced directly to differences in incumbent capacity and the salience of anti-incumbent national identity. The scores for each country are summarized in Table 2.³²

Based on the scorings in Table 2, we should expect to find (1) more regime closure in the later periods than in the earlier periods in all four

²⁷ TASS, January 9, 1992. Subsequently, however, Snegur was unable to secure a second term and faced a highly critical media and a strong parliament that basically dictated the terms of the 1994 constitution.

²⁸ Leonid Kravchuk, *Maemo te, shcho maemo: Spohady i rozhdumy* (Kyiv: Stolittia, 2002), 227–28.

²⁹ Author interview with Alyaksandr Dabravolskii, observer in the 1994 elections, Minsk, Belarus, June 21, 2004.

³⁰ Christian Haerpfer, "Electoral Politics of Belarus Compared," in E. Korosteleva et al., eds., *Contemporary Belarus* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).

³¹ Kopstein and Reilly (fn. 15); Levitsky and Way (fn. 8).

³² Experience here is measured by the number of national-level multicandidate elections undertaken by the incumbent or his/her party (no national election experience=low; 1=moderate; more than 1=high). Elite organization reflects the extent to which the incumbent is able to rely on partisan orga-

TABLE 2
INCUMBENT CAPACITY AND ANTI-INCUMBENT NATIONAL IDENTITY

	<i>Belarus</i> 1992–96	<i>Moldova</i> 1992–2000	<i>Russia</i> 1992–99	<i>Ukraine</i> 1992–95
<i>Early/Mid-1990s</i>				
Incumbent capacity				
Experience	low	moderate	moderate	moderate
Authoritarian state power	moderate	low	moderate	low
Elite organization	moderate	moderate	moderate	low
Strength of anti-incumbent national identity	low	high–moderate	low	high
<i>Late 1990s/Early 2000s</i>				
Incumbent capacity				
Experience	high	high	high	high
Authoritarian state power	high	moderate	high	moderate
Elite organization	moderate	high	high	moderate
Strength of anti-incumbent national identity	low	moderate	low	moderate–high

countries because of increased incumbent capacity over time and (2) less closure in Moldova and Ukraine than in Belarus and Russia because of stronger anti-incumbent identity and lower incumbent capacity in the former. This is precisely what we find. The section below reviews the causal mechanisms by which each factor affected the extent to which incumbents were able to undermine opposition and concentrate political control. After that, I show how different combinations of anti-incumbent national identity and incumbent capacity led to divergent outcomes in the four cases.

INCUMBENT CAPACITY

Changes in incumbent capacity account for differences in the degree of regime closure over time. In the early 1990s the Soviet collapse under-

nization to maintain power. (Low = absence of virtually any allied formal or informal groups that directly support the incumbent; moderate = existence of numerous and loosely organized groups allied to executive; high = single, vertically integrated formal or informal organization with high discipline and close ties to the incumbent.) Finally, authoritarian state capacity reflects the size of the state and the economy it controls; degree of central control over security agencies and local governments (measured by the extent and openness of insubordination by lower-level officials); and the scope of state control over the economy (measured by the extent of privatization and de facto central state control over economic actors). Despite its relatively small size, Belarus is scored as high in the late 1990s because of strong patronage from Russia (see discussion below).

The salience of anti-incumbent national identity is measured by the relative elite and popular support of national identity that can be framed in anti-incumbent terms. Variations between moderate and high reflect the relative strength of different (anti-Russian and pro-Russian) anti-incumbent national identities within Moldova and Ukraine across time (see discussion below).

mined the capacity of posttransition elites to concentrate power and to carry out extralegal measures despite their overwhelming access to state resources and the weakness of an institutionalized civil society. First, the dissolution of the Communist Party that had earlier provided a key source of *elite organization* meant that most elites in the former Soviet Union were forced to rely on informal ties to coordinate activity and assert control. Yet informal elite networks in Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine were relatively weak—at least in the early 1990s if not later. Executives suddenly put in charge of new states with larger bureaucracies often had to staff their administrations with strangers. Simultaneously, informal Soviet-era elite norms of loyalty to the “patron”³³ were frequently ignored in the post-Soviet period—a fact that generated important levels of political competition in the 1990s. Much to the consternation of incumbents, high-level appointees frequently broke from their patrons. For example, Moldova’s first president, Snegur, angrily complained to the author that in 1996 the prime minister whom Snegur had appointed decided to run against him for president even though Snegur “had been the one to advance his career [*Ia ego tianul!*]!”³⁴ In Russia and Ukraine as well, presidents often faced their most serious competition not from outsiders but from former appointees and/or allies—such as Vice President Aleksandr Rutskoi and Moscow mayor Iurii Luzhkov in Russia; and Prime Ministers Kuchma, Pavlo Lazarenko, and Viktor Yushchenko in Ukraine. The equivalent in the United States would be if Dick Cheney rather than John Kerry had run against George Bush in 2004. In addition, a weakly organized ruling elite contributed to conflicts between the parliament and the executive in the four cases—even though executives controlled extensive patronage and parliaments included large numbers of relatively nonideological deputies presumably open to patronage appeals. In each of these countries, the executive was initially unable to organize an effective ruling coalition in parliament that could implement executive programs and concentrate de facto authority.

In Moldova, Ukraine, and Russia increased formal and informal elite organizational capacity led directly to greater regime closure in the late 1990s and early 2000s. In Moldova the overwhelming victory of a highly disciplined and centralized Communist Party in 2001 effectively transferred decision-making powers from the legislature to the party. In Russia, Putin used a relatively disciplined ruling party and security networks to secure control over both the parliament and the central state bureaucracy. In

³³ T. H. Rigby and Bohdan Harasymov, eds., *Leadership Selection and Patron-Client Relationships in the USSR and Yugoslavia* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983).

³⁴ Author interview with Mircea Snegur, Chisinau, Moldova, February 8, 2002.

Ukraine, President Kuchma established patronage relations with a loose group of propresidential parties in parliament and created a relatively institutionalized system of blackmail to keep allies in line.³⁵

Second, the dissolution of the Soviet state and fiscal crisis undermined the *authoritarian state* in the early 1990s. Though state leaders in the early 1990s generally had wider formal scope of state power than they would have later, the weakness of vertical control caused by a failure to pay salaries or subsidies to local governments gutted such power of real meaning. First, state fiscal problems combined with open division at the top reduced control over security and intelligence agencies. The fall of the Soviet Union itself can be partially traced to a breakdown of control over the military, police, and KGB who refused to cooperate with the 1991 coup attempt.³⁶ In the post-Soviet period executives in all four countries had difficulty convincing security officials to put pressure on the opposition. In Ukraine, for example, President Kravchuk had to abandon plans to break up parliament in January 1994 after the head of the Ministry of Interior resisted. “[Shutting down the legislature] without the support of the Ministry of Interior,” Kravchuk admitted in his memoirs, “would have been risky.”³⁷

Weak control over local governments in many cases also undermined efforts at electoral manipulation in the 1990s. In the 1996 Moldovan presidential elections, competition between the prime minister, the parliamentary head, and the incumbent president undercut efforts to enlist local governments solidly behind any single candidate.³⁸ Weak control over regional governments in these cases also reduced central control over regional media that were frequently tied to local governments. In Ukraine, Kravchuk’s control over central state media in Ukraine in 1994 was balanced by pro-opposition media controlled by local governments in many parts of southern and eastern Ukraine.³⁹ Similarly, in Russia during the 1999 parliamentary elections, the Moscow city government-controlled *TV Tsentr* provided a major source of (ultimately unsuccessful) anti-Kremlin coverage.⁴⁰ Finally, weak incumbent control over govern-

³⁵ Keith Darden, “The Integrity of Corrupt States: Graft as an Informal State Institution,” *Politics and Society* (forthcoming).

³⁶ John Dunlop, *The Rise of Russia and the Fall of the Soviet Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

³⁷ Kravchuk (fn. 28), 228.

³⁸ Author interview with Rusnac Filaret, Lucinschi official in 1996 presidential campaign, Birdec, Moldova, July 28, 2004.

³⁹ European Institute for the Media, *The 1994 Parliamentary and Presidential Elections in Ukraine: Monitoring of the Election Coverage in the Ukrainian Mass Media* (Düsseldorf: EIM, October 1994), 197–99, 220–21.

⁴⁰ In contrast to Snegur or Kravchuk, Yeltsin was able to exchange regional autonomy for partisan support from many provinces and republics in the 1990s. However, these alliances proved remarkably tenuous, as numerous regional leaders abandoned the Kremlin in the run-up to the 1999 election. See

ment capitals in Moldova and Ukraine in the early 2000s undermined efforts in both cases to suppress antigovernmental demonstrations.

In addition, in the mid- and late 1990s governments in Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine (but not Belarus) embarked on extensive programs of privatization that reduced the *scope* of direct government control over significant parts of the economy and made it harder for incumbents to prevent the emergence of a strong opposition. Because of the extraordinarily weak rule of law in these countries, such reform did *not* create a Western-style autonomous business class—but instead created a group of very rich “oligarchs” who continued to depend on government connections. In Moldova under Petru Lucinschi, Russia under Yeltsin, and Ukraine under Kuchma, executives sought to use such dependence to buy support from individual oligarchs while playing off different groups against one another. Yet such a strategy, in the absence of strong pro-presidential (formal or informal) political organization, proved unreliable in the medium term as oligarchs defected from incumbents in key instances—funding opposition parties and media. Most strikingly, in Ukraine in 2004, opposition candidate Viktor Yushchenko benefited enormously from the support of businessmen who had been closely tied to Kuchma just a few years earlier.⁴¹

In all four cases, improved state finances as well as reduced elite contestation led to greater central control and thus greater manipulation of the media and the electoral process. In Russia, as well, Putin systematically increased the scope of (formal and informal) power of state leaders over the economy; this in turn reduced the resources available to opposition leaders and parties.

Finally, inexperience and lack of *know-how* hampered efforts to maintain power and/or concentrate political control. The sudden disappearance of the USSR meant that incumbents, who had dealt with only sham Soviet elections, lacked the skills to cope with opposition despite disproportionate access to organizational and material resources. Yet over time, leaders either learned to do a better job manipulating public opinion and reducing elite defection or were replaced by new leaders who could do so. Ironically, many of the skills, such as political marketing, that are essential to politicians in established democracies have been used effectively by these leaders for very nondemocratic ends.

Timothy J. Colton and Michael McFaul, *Popular Choice and Managed Democracy: The Russian Elections of 1999 and 2000* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 83–84.

⁴¹ For a more detailed discussion of the role of oligarchs in the collapse of the Kuchma regime, see Lucan A. Way, “Ukraine’s Orange Revolution: Kuchma’s Failed Authoritarianism,” *Journal of Democracy* 16 (April 2005).

The pluralizing impact of inexperience with political competition is most obvious in Belarus, where, in contrast to the other countries, the Soviet-era government experienced almost no turnover from the late 1980s until the early 1990s and the executive did not face a national election until 1994. Although Prime Minister Kebich had the support of the media, most regional governments, and most parliamentarians in the 1994 presidential elections, his inexperience blinded him to the emerging threat posed by Lukashenka until very late in the campaign. Most critically in 1993, Kebich did nothing to prevent Lukashenka, then a relatively unknown parliamentarian from rural Belarus, from taking charge of a major parliamentary committee tasked with investigating governmental corruption. In the words of a close Kebich associate at the time: "None of us thought that an uneducated head of a farm [such as Lukashenka] could understand the intricacies of government finances. We did not see how someone could use such a committee to make a reputation for himself. We simply had no experience of this."⁴² Kebich even allowed Lukashenka to use government-controlled offices in the center of Minsk for five months until just before the election, when it became clear that Lukashenka was a real threat.⁴³ As a result, Lukashenka became well known as an anticorruption crusader and was victorious in a presidential election that stunned almost everyone involved.

Increased experience has in many cases led leaders to learn from past mistakes and more effectively to concentrate power. In Belarus, Lukashenka learned from Kebich's fatal error of underestimating potential challenges by effectively squelching emerging elite sources of opposition.⁴⁴ In Russia, Timothy Colton and Michael McFaul trace pro-government Unity Party's success in the 1999 elections to the fact that the government learned from previous failed efforts to create ruling parties and effectively cast the pro-Kremlin group as youthful and anti-Moscow.⁴⁵

ANTI-INCUMBENT NATIONAL IDENTITY

Although differences in incumbent capacity most clearly account for changes in regime closure over time, they only partially illuminate divergent regime trajectories across cases. Rather, differences between cases are best explained by the relative salience of anti-incumbent national identity. Anti-incumbent national identity was strongest in Moldova and Ukraine,

⁴² Author interview with anonymous source, former Kebich associate, Gomel', Belarus, July 9, 2004

⁴³ Author interview with Aleksandr Feduta, Lukashenka campaign official in 1994, Minsk, Belarus, June 23, 2004.

⁴⁴ Most recently in April 2004, Lukashenka jailed Mikhail Marynich, a parliamentarian, whom Lukashenka feared was becoming too popular.

⁴⁵ Colton and McFaul (fn. 40), 53–56.

where the split character of national identity meant that successive incumbents on both sides have faced relatively serious threats from mobilized anti-incumbent nationalism. In contrast to Belarus and Russia (and most of the rest of the former Soviet Union), Moldova and Ukraine included significant territories where the populations had gained a strong non-Russian/Soviet national identity prior to their incorporation into the USSR—a difference that Keith Darden links to the extent of popular literacy at the time of incorporation into the USSR. As a result, populations in these areas actively mobilized against Soviet rule in the late 1980s, when Soviet central control began to weaken.⁴⁶ At the same time, these countries also contained areas where Soviet identity was highly legitimate at the time of the Soviet dissolution. As a consequence of this contestation, both sides (the pro- and the anti-Russian/Soviet groups) were able to mobilize national identities in opposition to incumbent power. This facilitated mass mobilization even in the absence of a well-institutionalized civil society, and it deprived incumbents of central control. By contrast, relatively weak support for anti-Soviet Belarusian identity in Belarus and isolated support for secession in Russia left the oppositions without this important mobilizational tool.

Identity also affected incumbent access to external resources in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine, where states are smaller and have been unable to draw on significant domestic natural and other resources. In particular, this affected the degree of incumbent assistance from Russia. In Moldova and Ukraine relatively strong anti-Soviet/Russian movements complicated incumbent efforts to gain Russian support.⁴⁷ By contrast, in Belarus, where anti-incumbent nationalism was very weak, Lukashenka benefited from significant Russian energy subsidies that in the late 1990s accounted for 20 percent of the Belarusian economy.⁴⁸ Belarus paid between two and three times less for gas than Ukraine or Moldova. Below, I review how both incumbent capacity and anti-incumbent national identity combined in each of the four cases to produce divergent regime trajectories.

MOLDOVA

The post-cold war regime trajectory in Moldova was shaped by the availability of anti-incumbent national identity and stark changes in elite organization over time. In the 1990s weak elite organization, frag-

⁴⁶ Keith Darden, "Literacy, Nationalization, and Political Choice: The Origins and Consequences of National Identities among the Post-Soviet States" (Manuscript, Department of Political Science, Yale University, 2002).

⁴⁷ On Ukraine, see Rawi Abdelal, *National Purpose in the World Economy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001), 103.

⁴⁸ Anders Aslund, "Is the Belarusian Economic Model Viable?" in A. Lewis, ed., *The EU and Belarus: Between Moscow and Brussels* (London: Federal Trust, 2002), 182.

ible authoritarian state capacity, and relatively strong pro- and anti-Russian identity led to very high levels of political competition. However, the emergence of a highly cohesive Communist Party in the early 2000s significantly increased regime closure.

The character of Moldova's incorporation into the USSR created a strong basis for both anti-Russian and anti-Romanian national identity. Moldova was formed out of Romanian territory captured by the Soviet Union as part of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939. In the post-Soviet period this resulted in a high degree of contestation over national identity, as some nationalists sought unification with Romania, others supported an independent Moldovan state, and yet others focused on closer relations with Russia. The strength of both pro-Romanian and pro-Russian anti-incumbent national identity undermined efforts by incumbents to maintain power and/or concentrate political control. The first president, Mircea Snegur, gained power in the early 1990s by riding a wave of anti-Soviet feeling. However, association with an unpopular pro-Romanian nationalism and a violent conflict in Transnistria in eastern Moldova pitted him against a large portion of the leadership and the population, leading to his defeat in the 1996 presidential elections by a pro-Russian candidate, Petru Lucinschi. Simultaneously, the availability of anti-incumbent national identity undermined efforts to strengthen presidential powers. Throughout the 1990s Moldovan leaders were caught between a Romanian-leaning nationalist movement on one side and pro-Russian forces on the other. In the early 1990s, for example, pro-Romanian nationalists refused to support Snegur's efforts to concentrate presidential authority because of his opposition to Romanian unification.⁴⁹ President Lucinschi, who followed him, also faced strong opposition from both nationalists and pro-Russian communists. In response to efforts by Lucinschi to increase presidential power, these disparate groupings combined to transform Moldova into a parliamentary system.

Nonetheless, the emergence of a highly organized and cohesive Communist Party led to notable regime closure despite the establishment of a parliamentary regime. Thus, the party, which gained 70 percent of parliamentary seats in 2001 and 56 percent of seats in 2005, used its dominance and cohesiveness to gain virtually unilateral control over state media and the court system—both of which had maintained autonomy in the 1990s by playing off competing political parties against one another. The Communist Party maintained high cohesion

⁴⁹ Author interview with Nicolae Andronic, parliamentary deputy (1990–2001), Chisinau, Moldova, February 12, 2002.

in part because members generally had little access to resources outside the party's direct control. Thus, in contrast to ruling groups in Ukraine under Kuchma, the Moldovan Communist Party was populated by numerous deputies otherwise employed as midlevel engineers, agronomists, and academics with little to fall back on if they left the party.

At the same time, anti-incumbent national identity continues to weaken the government. In the winter of 2002 the communist government backed down from efforts to expand Russian-language instruction in schools after nationalists were able to mobilize between thirty thousand and eighty thousand protestors for months on end in the Moldovan capital, which had a total population of just 670,000. More recently, conflict with Russia over Transnistria made the government extremely dependent on U.S. and EU support at the same time that the Russian government lent support to groups opposed to the regime.

BELARUS

In Belarus weak anti-Soviet Belarusian national identity and the preservation of authoritarian state power greatly facilitated regime closure under Lukashenka. While popular support for democracy and democrats in Belarus was equal if not greater than in Moldova and Ukraine, anti-Russian/Soviet or pro-European Belarusian identity was weak. As in the other cases, opposition democrats won about a third of the parliamentary seats in the 1990 parliamentary elections. Yet in contrast to Moldova and Ukraine, just a small share of parliamentarians (5–8 percent) consisted of anti-Soviet Belarusian nationalists, who subsequently failed to gain *any* seats in the following elections in 1995.

The weakness of anti-Russian or pro-European Belarusian identity promoted autocratic consolidation and regime closure in several important ways. First, the absence of a popular alternative national idea meant that—in contrast to Moldova or Ukraine—the opposition had a much harder time framing anti-incumbent conflicts in ways that resonated with larger groups in the population. Thus, parliamentarians resisting Lukashenka's efforts to shut down parliament in 1996 reported to the author that they felt isolated and bereft of popular support because “at the time it was less clear what [they] were fighting for ... there was no obvious deep basis of conflict.”⁵⁰ As a result, the parliamentarians could not mobilize significant support and did not attempt to occupy parliament and force Lukashenka to risk relying on large or even

⁵⁰ Author interview with Vladimir Novosiad, parliamentary deputy (1995–96), Minsk, July 8, 2004. See also Kathleen J. Mihailisko, “Belarus: Retreat to Authoritarianism,” in Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott, *Democratic Changes and Authoritarian Reactions in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), chap. 6.

medium-scale coercive measures.⁵¹ More recently, the opposition failed to mobilize significant protest in response to a pro-Lukashenka referendum in October 2004 that many objective observers believe was stolen. Second, the weakness of anti-Soviet Belarusian nationalism meant that overt Russian intervention in support of Lukashenka was uncontroversial. In November 1996 Russian prime minister Viktor Chernomyrden was able to use his influence to convince the head of the Belarusian parliament, Semyon Sharetski, to give in to Lukashenka's efforts to shut down parliament. In addition, the significant Russian energy subsidies to Belarus, noted above, allowed the country to escape much of the economic downturn and wage arrears that plagued other countries in the mid- and late 1990s. By contrast, such overt Russian engagement in Ukraine generated significantly more controversy—as witnessed most clearly in the 2004 elections, discussed below.

In addition, regime closure in Belarus was facilitated by the preservation of autocratic state capacity. In stark contrast to the other three cases, Belarus was never divided by regional or ethnic rebellion. More importantly, Lukashenka preserved the scope of state power by never undertaking the kind of privatization that was tried in Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine.⁵² And therefore, in stark contrast to his counterparts in the other cases, Lukashenka had never had to cope with a powerful quasi-independent oligarchic class. The combination of national unity and the maintenance of autocratic state power made it easier for Lukashenka to prevent serious elite defection even in the absence of strong formal or informal political organization. At the same time, the combination of such weak organization and Lukashenka's dependence on Russian support has created important potential regime vulnerabilities. Russian-backed defection of a high-level regime official has the potential to cause relatively rapid regime breakdown—a scenario that clearly obsessed Lukashenka.⁵³

UKRAINE

In Ukraine divisions between east and west, combined with weak ruling-party organizations and a weak authoritarian state, have under-

⁵¹ Foreign Broadcast Information Service SOV-96-233. Several security officials interviewed by the author questioned whether militia would have agreed to attack parliament.

⁵² Perhaps as a result, Belarus has had one of the lowest levels of inequality in the world; http://www.worldbank.org/data/wdi2000/pdfstab2_8.pdf. One parliamentary deputy interviewed by the author commented that in contrast to Ukraine, where he had recently spent time, “you just don't see rich people in parliament”; author interview with Novosiad (fn. 50).

⁵³ Thus, the imprisonment of former government official Mikhail Marynych was generally tied to the official's frequent visits to Moscow and Lukashenka's fears that he was secretly negotiating with Putin on how to unseat the president.

mined efforts at authoritarian consolidation and regime closure throughout the post-Soviet period. Ukraine is divided between western Ukraine, which developed a strong Ukrainian national identity under Austro-Hungarian rule in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and eastern Ukraine, which is culturally closer to Russia. Ukraine's first president, Leonid Kravchuk, rose to power by allying himself with nationalists and supporting independence from the Soviet Union. However, as the economy declined precipitously in the early 1990s, eastern industrial elites grew increasingly hostile toward Kravchuk. In 1994 large sections of the eastern state bureaucracy actively undermined Kravchuk's campaign by supporting Kuchma, who at the time backed closer ties to Russia. Kuchma was victorious. But while he was more successful at strengthening presidential rule than were his counterparts in Moldova, his tilt toward Ukrainian nationalism in the mid-1990s provoked a strong pro-Russian left. Dominated by well-organized leftist parties, parliament failed to pass many of Kuchma's economic reform measures in the 1990s.

Kuchma's efforts to consolidate nondemocratic rule were also undermined by the reduction of the scope of state control over the economy as well as a highly fragmented elite organization. First, like Yeltsin, Kuchma oversaw privatization and the creation of a very wealthy group of quasi-independent oligarchic businesspeople who partly depended on the state for support but nonetheless accumulated substantial capital in foreign bank accounts outside the reach of the Ukrainian state. In addition, like Yeltsin and in contrast to Putin in Russia and the communist Voronin in Moldova, Kuchma never threw his support behind a single party but instead relied on a loose and highly volatile coalition of often competing oligarchic parties. As a result of this strategy, Kuchma like Yeltsin had a hard time keeping his allies in line. In the 2004 presidential elections, opposition candidate Viktor Yushchenko, who had been Kuchma's appointed prime minister in 1999–2001, benefited enormously from the financial and organizational backing of a team of oligarchs and former ministers who only a few years earlier had been closely tied to the president. Further, although Kuchma had a majority in parliament in 2002–4, key supporters, including the head of parliament, Kuchma's former chief of administration, abandoned him just before the elections.

In turn, division at the top led to a breakdown of the authoritarian state hierarchy following the government's attempt to steal the presidential election on November 21, 2004. Weak central control contributed directly to large-scale demonstrations in Kyiv in late 2004.

First, as the author witnessed traveling to Kyiv on the first day of protests, the command and control structure of the police broke down and highway police put up extremely weak resistance as busloads of protestors drove into the capital after November 21.⁵⁴ Some state railroad employees also defected from the government by carrying thousands of protestors into the capital, thereby allowing large numbers of the most ardent pro-Yushchenko supporters from western Ukraine to enter the city very quickly. In addition, the opposition's domination of the capital's administration gave demonstrators access to key infrastructure such as electricity, sewage, water, and trash removal. Further, key units of the police, military, and security forces quickly defected to the opposition.⁵⁵

Finally, anti-incumbent national identity aided the opposition. In contrast to their counterparts in Moscow or Minsk, liberals in Kyiv could count on strong regional support against a regime that was perceived by many (especially in western Ukraine) as anti-Ukrainian. This emotive national basis for Yushchenko's support likely contributed to the willingness of hundreds and thousands of activists to endure almost three weeks of subfreezing temperatures on the streets of the capital. The salience of a pro-European national identity also meant that overt Russian support for the incumbent that worked in Belarus in 1996 led to a strong pro-sovereignty backlash in Ukraine. At the same time, the pro-Russian support in other parts of Ukraine seems likely to hinder any future attempt by Yushchenko or his allies to monopolize political control. Thus, despite weeks of positive coverage in the state media before the rerun of the November election, Yushchenko managed to capture only 52 percent of the vote.

RUSSIA

Regime dynamics in Russia have been shaped by a weak anti-incumbent identity and the size of the state and economy, as well as by changes in authoritarian state and elite organizational capacity. First, and most obviously, Russia's large and powerful state and its access to enormous oil and gas reserves⁵⁶ make the country significantly less vulnerable to outside pressure than the other three cases. However, in the early 1990s

⁵⁴ Opposition deputies were able to convince the police to take down all roadblocks within a day and a half after protests began. Author interview with official close to Yulia Tymoshenko, Kyiv, December 28, 2004.

⁵⁵ Taras Kuzio, "Security Forces Begin to Defect to Viktor Yushchenko," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 1, issue 137 (December 1, 2004).

⁵⁶ Russia has 4.6 percent of global oil reserves and is the world's largest supplier of natural gas; CIA Factbook (2004).

fiscal and economic crisis severely weakened the state—making incumbents much more vulnerable to outside pressure. Further, like his counterparts in the other cases, Yeltsin had weak formal and informal elite organization. Yeltsin's decision to abandon the party deprived him of any elite organization with which to maintain control over his allies and subordinates. While he initially tried to rely on his informal Sverdlovsk network to staff the government, Yeltsin was eventually forced to reach out to a much broader range of officials, people he often did not know.⁵⁷ Partly as a result, many of his appointments and/or allies in the early 1990s—including most notably Aleksandr Rutskoi, Ruslan Khasbulatov, and Iurii Luzhkov—showed little loyalty and quickly turned against him. Further, Yeltsin faced uncertain support from parliament. During the 1998 financial crisis, many who had supported him in the past abandoned him. As a result, Yeltsin's choice for prime minister was rejected and he was forced to accept Evgenii Primakov, who subsequently backed the major anti-Kremlin opposition force in 1999. In turn, Yeltsin's final decision to select Putin appears to have been based on a perception that Putin would be loyal.

Yeltsin also faced problems of authoritarian state control. He was barely able to convince the military to engage against parliament in 1993 and faced vocal resistance from security agencies when he initially decided to postpone the 1996 presidential elections.⁵⁸ Perhaps most importantly, Yeltsin's aggressive privatization program reduced the scope of state control over the economy. While the oligarchs that emerged from privatization were far more dependent on the state than their Western business counterparts, they proved to be unreliable allies for the government and tended to look after their own interests first. Most notably, Vladimir Gusinsky, who controlled NTV television, obtained favorable loans and extensive broadcasting rights in exchange for the television station's overt support of the Yeltsin campaign in 1996.⁵⁹ However, this did not stop Gusinsky from backing the main opposition to the Kremlin in the 1999 parliamentary elections.

Under Putin, the government's capacity to impose autocratic rule increased dramatically. Economic growth and rising oil prices improved the state's fiscal health and enhanced public support for the govern-

⁵⁷ Appointments were often made by "chance" in the early 1990s. Aleksandr Korzhakov, *Boris El'tsin: Ot rassveta do zakata* (Moscow: Interbuk, 1997), 123; V. Kostikov, *Roman s prezidentom* (Moscow: Vagrius, 1997), 271.

⁵⁸ B. El'tsin, *Zapiski Prezidenta* (Moscow: Ogonek, 1994), 386; Boris Yeltsin, *Struggle for Russia* (New York: Belka Publishing, 1994), 11–13; B. El'tsin, *Prezidentskii Marafon* (Moscow: AST, 2000), 32.

⁵⁹ Chrystia Freeland, *Sale of the Century* (London: Crown Business, 2000), 240.

ment. Simultaneously, Putin was much more committed to organization building than Yeltsin had been for most of his reign. Putin successfully promoted the pro-presidential Unity Party and then the Unified Russia Party—which controlled two-thirds of parliament in the mid-2000s—and was more disciplined than previous “governing” parties and made the Russian legislature generally compliant to executive wishes.⁶⁰ Perhaps more importantly, Putin drew from the relatively obedient and hierarchical security services to reassert control over the state. Thus, the president brought in an enormous number of former military and security officials to staff state positions and regional governments.⁶¹ This strategy appears to have significantly strengthened the center’s control over regional governments and increased the scope of de facto state control over the economy. In 2000–2003 Putin used his control over the security forces and courts to restrict the independence of the oligarchs—culminating in the arrest of Mikhail Khodorkovsky and the seizure of Yukos. In 2003, in contrast to 1999, the Kremlin controlled all national television stations as well as regional ones such as Moscow’s *TVTsentr*. Relative to his counterparts in both Moldova and Ukraine, Putin was more successful at limiting oligarchs’ contributions to government-sanctioned parties.

Finally, while national identity was an opposition weapon in Moldova and Ukraine, it strengthened incumbent power in Putin’s Russia. Thus, Putin exploited his war against secessionist Chechnya to portray himself as the “defender of the homeland” in the run-up to the presidential election in 2000.⁶² Putin was also able to use the dominant Russian national idea to discredit opposition—including predominantly Jewish oligarchs such as Mikhail Khodorkovsky. As a result, in early 2005 Putin faced a relatively weak oppositional threat.

At the same time, while incumbent capacity was greater in Russia than in the other three cases, certain aspects of the incumbent party organization and the de facto scope of state control over the economy created points of regime vulnerability. First, while Unified Russia was much more coherent than any previous governing party in Russia (or in Belarus or Ukraine), it included several powerful officials with autonomous access to resources—most obviously Moscow mayor Iurii Luzhkov—who would be in a position to defect quickly from Putin should the president appear vulnerable. Further, given the large amount of oligarchic wealth in for-

⁶⁰ Thomas Remington, “Putin and the Duma,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 17 (November–December 2001).

⁶¹ *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, June 19, 2003. Olga Kryshatanovskaya and Stephen White, “Putin’s Militarocracy,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 19 (November–December 2003).

⁶² Colton and McFaul (fn. 40), 180–82.

eign bank accounts that the Russian government could not control, it is not clear how effectively Putin could prevent businesses from giving resources to a credible opposition if such were to emerge.

CONCLUSION

This article has used four post-Soviet cases to explore the sources of competitive politics in inhospitable conditions characterized by weak civil society and relative international isolation. In Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine, the simultaneous collapse of state and regime undermined incumbent efforts to maintain power and/or concentrate political control. In this early period incumbent capacity weakened by the sudden dissolution of the Soviet Union contributed to the emergence of pluralism by default with significant political competition in all of the cases. Later, increased organizational capacity, improved state finances, and experience with semicompetitive rule promoted increased regime closure. In turn, salient anti-incumbent national identities in Moldova and Ukraine undermined efforts at autocratic consolidation.

A preliminary examination suggests that anti-incumbent national identity and weak incumbent capacity undermine authoritarian consolidation and promote regime competition in other cases. First, the power of anti-incumbent nationalism as a mobilizing tool is evident from anticolonial mobilization in Central Europe, the Baltic states, and Georgia in the late 1980s. Cases of split national conceptions are much harder to find but are approximated in cases such as Albania and to a lesser extent Mozambique, where strong regional identities—in conjunction with very weak states—have facilitated the persistence of relatively well organized and mobilized oppositions.⁶³

In post-Soviet cases where anti-incumbent nationalism has been weaker, differences in incumbent capacity account for at least some of the variation in regime competition. In the Caucasus, for example, the country with the weakest state—Georgia—also had the most dynamic regime, with a relatively open media and, by the early 2000s, strong opposition. In contrast to the state in Azerbaijan, the state in Georgia has few natural resources and its economy suffered one of the most severe crises in all of the former Soviet Union. At the same time, Georgian governments have also had significantly weaker control over both coercive agencies and local governments than in Armenia. Thus the mili-

⁶³ Elez Biberaj, *Albania in Transition: The Rocky Road to Democracy* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1998), 321–22; Carrie Manning, “Constructing Opposition in Mozambique: Renamo as Political Party,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 24 (March 1998).

tary in Armenia, which conquered 20 percent of Azerbaijani territory in the early 1990s, was able to stand down Armenian opposition protests of 150,000 following a stolen election in 1996, by relying on experienced and cohesive war veterans. By contrast, security officials in Georgia abandoned Shevardnadze in the face of less significant protests, which reached only twenty thousand to forty thousand, in late 2003.⁶⁴ Differences in incumbent capacity may also account for some of the variation in regime outcome in Central Asia. Thus, Eric M. McGlinchey has recently argued that the surprising extent of political liberalization in Kyrgyzstan in the early 1990s was the outgrowth of limited state resources that, in contrast to neighboring Kazakhstan,⁶⁵ left the “leadership incapable of either buying or enforcing compliance among its political elite.”⁶⁶

Even more broadly in Africa, increased state weakness resulting from severe fiscal crisis was arguably an important source of political liberalization—a problem that other parts of the world such as the Middle East have managed to avoid.⁶⁷ Africa therefore experienced far greater authoritarian regime collapse than did the Middle East or East Asia. And within Africa, differences in autocratic state power may also account for divergent regime outcomes. Thus, autocrats such as Zimbabwe’s Robert Mugabe, who maintain tight control over strong security forces, have had an easier time surviving opposition protest than others such as Zambia’s Kenneth Kaunda, who had weaker influence over coercive forces prior to his fall in 1991.

In sum, focusing on the authoritarian end of the regime spectrum means much more than calling glasses half empty that others call half full. Attention to the sources of authoritarianism draws our attention to a whole range of issues—including mechanisms of repression and elite unity to an autocrat or party—that have received scant attention in a literature focused overwhelmingly on the prerequisites for democratic rule. By itself, incumbent failure is unlikely to create democracy. Yet it has often generated important openings for political competition in the post-cold war era.

⁶⁴ Elizabeth Fuller, “Armenia: The Fall from Democratic Grace,” *Transition* (November 15, 1996), 45. “Shevardnadze’s Resignation Resolves Constitutional Deadlock,” *RFE/RFL Caucasus Report*, vol. 6 (November 24, 2003).

⁶⁵ Despite a large Russian population in Kazakhstan, the country has not faced the same cleavages as in Ukraine or Moldova because Kazakh national identity was not salient prior to its incorporation into the Soviet Union.

⁶⁶ McGlinchey, “Paying for Patronage: Regime Change in Post-Soviet Central Asia” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2003), 13.

⁶⁷ Bellin (fn. 5); Jeffrey Herbst, “Political Liberalization in Africa after Ten Years,” *Comparative Politics* 33 (April 2001).