

**COMPETITIVE AUTHORITARIANISM:**  
**The Origins and Dynamics of Hybrid Regimes in the Post-Cold War Era**

Steven Levitsky  
Harvard University

Lucan A. Way  
University of Toronto

*This piece combines parts of Chapter 1 (Introduction) with Chapter 2 (theoretical framework) of an early draft of our book manuscript. The chapters that will eventually follow cover each of five regions: the Americas, Central Europe, former Soviet Union, East Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa.*

## CHAPTER 1

### THE RISE OF COMPETITIVE AUTHORITARIANISM IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA

The end of the Cold War posed a fundamental challenge to authoritarianism. Single-party and military dictatorships collapsed throughout post-communist Eurasia, Africa, and much of Asia and Latin America during the late 1980s and early 1990s. At the same time, the formal architecture of democracy—particularly multiparty elections—diffused widely across the globe.

Transitions did not always lead to democracy, however. In much of Africa,<sup>1</sup> the former Soviet Union,<sup>2</sup> and in parts of Central and South-Eastern Europe,<sup>3</sup> East Asia,<sup>4</sup> and the Americas,<sup>5</sup> new regimes combined electoral competition with varying degrees of authoritarianism. Unlike the single-party or military autocracies that predominated during the Cold War era, regimes in Kenya, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Taiwan, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and elsewhere were competitive, in that opposition forces used democratic institutions to contest vigorously—and at times successfully—for power. Nevertheless, these regimes were not democratic. Government critics suffered harassment, arrest, and in some cases, violent attacks, and electoral fraud, unfair media access, and abuse of state resources skewed the playing field heavily in favor of incumbents. In other words, competition was real, but unfair. We call such regimes *competitive authoritarian* (Levitsky and Way 2002). Competitive authoritarian regimes proliferated during the post-Cold War period. In 1995, at least 36 regimes were competitive authoritarian,<sup>6</sup> which exceeded the number of democracies among developing and post-communist countries.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Cameroon, Cote D'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

<sup>2</sup>Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine

<sup>3</sup>Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia.

<sup>4</sup>Cambodia, Malaysia, Taiwan.

<sup>5</sup>Dominican Republic, Haiti, Mexico, Peru, and later Venezuela.

<sup>6</sup>Albania, Armenia, Benin, Belarus, Botswana, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Cameroon, Croatia, Dominican Republic, Ethiopia, Georgia, Gabon, Ghana, Haiti, Kenya, Ivory Coast, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Mali, Macedonia, Mexico, Moldova, Mozambique, Peru, Romania, Russia, Senegal, Serbia, Slovakia, Taiwan, Tanzania, Ukraine, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

<sup>7</sup>See, for example, the scoring of Diamond (2002: 30-31) and Schedler (2002b: 47).

The study of post-Cold War hybrid regimes has been marked a pronounced democratizing bias.<sup>8</sup> Viewed through the lens of democratization, hybrid regimes are often categorized as flawed, incomplete, or “transitional” democracies (Collier and Levitsky 1997; Carothers 2002). During the 1990s, for example, Russia was treated as a case of “protracted” democratic transition (McFaul 1999). Even the deepening authoritarianism under Vladimir Putin was viewed as a “failure to consolidate” democracy (Smyth 2004). Likewise, Cambodia was labeled a “nascent democracy” that was “on the road to democratic consolidation” (Brown and Timberman 1998: 14; Albritton 2004); Haiti was said to be undergoing a “long” (Gibbons 1999: 2), “ongoing” (Erikson 2004: 294), and even “unending”<sup>9</sup> democratic transition; Cameroon, Georgia, and Kazakhstan were characterized as “democratizers” (Siegle 2004: 21), and Central African Republic and Congo-Brazzaville were called “would be democracies” (Chege 2005: 287). Where transitions failed to bring democracy, they were described as “stalled,” “protracted” or “flawed.” Thus, Kenya was said to be in a state of “arrested democratic consolidation” (Harbeson 1998: 162), Zambia was described as “stuck in transition” (Rakner and Svasand 2005), and Albania and Nigeria were said to be in “permanent transition” (Human Rights Watch 1996; Kramer 2005).

These characterizations are misleading. They assume that hybrid regimes are—or *should be*—moving in a democratic direction (O’Donnell 1996, Carothers 2002). However, such assumptions lack empirical foundation. In reality, hybrid regimes followed diverse trajectories during the post-Cold War period. Although some of them democratized (Ghana, Mexico, Slovakia, Taiwan), most did not. In many cases, regimes either remained stable (Gabon, Malaysia, Tanzania) or became increasingly authoritarian (Belarus, Cambodia, Russia, Zimbabwe). In still other cases, autocrats fell but were replaced by new autocrats. In Albania, Macedonia, Madagascar, and Moldova, regimes experienced two or more transitions without democratizing.

Nearly two decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall, it is time to abandon teleological characterizations of hybrid regimes as “incomplete” or “transitional” democracies. As of 2006, many competitive authoritarian regimes had existed for 15 years

---

<sup>8</sup>Carothers (2002) offers an important critique of this bias.

<sup>9</sup>Robert Fatton, Jr., in *New York Times*, January 4, 2004, “Week in Review,” p. 7.

or more, exceeding the life span of most Latin American military regimes.<sup>10</sup> Hybrid cases should therefore be conceptualized—and theorized—for what they are: distinct, non-democratic regime types. Rather than assuming that such regimes are “in transition” to democracy, it is more useful to examine why these regimes followed such diverse paths after 1990. That is the goal of this book.

This book examines the post-Cold War (1990-2005) trajectories of 37 regimes that were or became competitive authoritarian between 1990 and 1995.<sup>11</sup> The study spans five regions of the world: it includes six countries in the Americas (Dominican Republic, Guyana, Haiti, Mexico, Peru, Nicaragua); seven in Central Europe (Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia); three in East Asia (Cambodia, Malaysia, Taiwan); six in the former Soviet Union (Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine); and 15 in Africa (Benin, Botswana, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Senegal, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe).

The book seeks to explain why some competitive authoritarian regimes democratized (Mexico, Slovakia), while others remained stable and authoritarian (Malaysia, Russia), and still others experienced turnover without democratization (Georgia, Zambia). Our central argument, which is presented in detail in Chapter 2, focuses on two primary factors: ties to the West and the strength of governing party and state organizations. Where linkage to the West is extensive, competitive authoritarian regimes democratized between 1990 and 2005. Where linkage was low, regime outcomes hinged on incumbents’ party and state capacity: where incumbent capacity was high, regimes remained stable and authoritarian; where incumbent capacity was low, regimes were generally unstable, although they frequently remained authoritarian.

The rest of this introductory chapter is organized as follows. The first section defines competitive authoritarianism and makes the case for a new regime type. The second section examines the rise of competitive authoritarianism, linking the proliferation of competitive authoritarian regimes to the incentives and constraints created by the post-

---

<sup>10</sup>These include Albania, Armenia, Cameroon, Gabon, Macedonia, Malaysia, Moldova, Russia, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Contra Huntington (1991: 137), then it appears that halfway houses often *do* stand. For similar critiques, see Case (1996b) and Brownlee (2004).

<sup>11</sup>Several cases of competitive authoritarianism emerged after 1995, including Gambia, Kyrgyzstan, Niger, Nigeria, the Philippines, Uganda, Venezuela, and Thailand.

Cold War international environment. The third section shows how competitive authoritarian regime trajectories diverged after 1990. Finally, the fourth and fifth sections provide an overview of the book's central argument, and highlight the book's main theoretical contributions.

### **What is Competitive Authoritarianism?**

*“Politics...is not like football, deserving a level playing field. Here, you try that and you will be roasted.”*

---Former Kenyan President Daniel arap Moi.<sup>12</sup>

Competitive authoritarian regimes are civilian regimes in which formal democratic institutions are widely viewed as the primary means of gaining power, but in which fraud, civil liberties violations, and abuse of state and media resources so skew the playing field that the regime cannot be labeled democratic. Such regimes are *competitive*, in that democratic institutions are not merely a façade: opposition parties use them to seriously contest for power; but they are *authoritarian* in that opposition forces are handicapped by a highly uneven—and sometimes dangerous—playing field. Competition is thus real but *unfair*.

### **Situating the Concept: Between Democracy and Closed Authoritarianism**

Competitive authoritarianism is a hybrid regime type, with characteristics of both democracy and authoritarianism.<sup>13</sup> We employ a “midrange” definition of democracy: one that is demanding but mainstream and procedural (Diamond 1999: 13-15) Following Dahl (1971), scholars have converged around a “procedural minimum” definition of democracy that includes four key attributes: (1) regular elections that are competitive, free, and fair; (2) full adult suffrage; (3) broad protection of civil liberties, including freedom of speech, press, and association; and (4) the absence of non-elected “tutelary” authorities (such as militaries, monarchies, or religious bodies) that limit elected officials’

---

<sup>12</sup>Quoted in Munene (2001: 24).

<sup>13</sup>For discussions of hybrid regimes, see Karl (1995); Collier and Levitsky (1997); Zakaria (1997); Carothers (2002); Ottaway (2003); and the articles in the April 2002 issue of *Journal of Democracy*.

effective power to govern.<sup>14</sup> These definitions are essentially “Schumpeterian,” in that they center on competitive elections (Schumpeter 1947; Huntington 1989). However, scholars have subsequently “precised” the concept of democracy by making explicit criteria—such as civil liberties and effective power to govern—that are implicitly understood to be part of the overall meaning, and which are viewed as necessary for competitive elections to take place (Collier and Levitsky 1997).

Although we remain committed to a procedural minimum conception of democracy, we precise it by adding a fifth attribute: the existence of a reasonably level playing field between incumbents and opposition. Obviously, some incumbent advantage—in the form of patronage jobs, pork-barrel spending, clientelistic social policies, and privileged access to media and finance—exists in even the most established democracies. Nevertheless, these advantages neither systematically advantage one party nor seriously undermine the opposition’s capacity to compete.<sup>15</sup> In other cases, however, incumbent manipulation of state institutions and resources is so excessive that it “impedes political competition” (Chu 1999: 63). Such “hyper-incumbent advantage” (Greene 2005) is clearly undemocratic.

A level playing field is implicit in most conceptualizations of democracy. Few analysts would classify as democratic a regime in which governing parties virtually monopolize access to the media and finance. Indeed, much of what we associate with an uneven playing field could be conceptualized as part of “free and fair elections” or “civil liberties.” However, there are two reasons to make this attribute explicit. First, some aspects of an uneven playing field (including disparities in resources and media access) have a major impact between elections and are thus missed in evaluations of whether elections are “free and fair.” Second, some government actions undermine a level playing field but may not be viewed as civil liberties violations. For example, whereas closing down a newspaper is a clear violation of civil liberties, *de facto* governing party control of the private media, achieved through patronage deals or proxy arrangements—is

---

<sup>14</sup>See, for example, Huntington (1991: 5-13); Schmitter and Karl (1991); Collier and Levitsky (1997); Diamond (1999: 7-15), and Mainwaring et al. (2001). Other scholars, most notably Adam Przeworski and his collaborators (Alvarez et al. 1996; Przeworski et al. 2000), have maintained a more minimalist definition that centers on contested elections and electoral turnover.

<sup>15</sup>Thus, although U.S. congressional elections are marked by an uneven playing field, incumbents of both major parties enjoy these advantages.

not. Similarly, state-party-business ties that create vast resource disparities between incumbents and opposition are clearly undemocratic but are not civil liberties violations *per se*. Attention to the character of the playing field thus highlights how regimes may be undemocratic even in the absence of overt fraud or civil liberties violations.

We characterize as *closed authoritarian* all regimes that are non-competitive, in that no viable channels exist through which opposition forces may contest legally for power. This category includes regimes in which democratic institutions do not even exist on paper, as in China, Cuba, or Saudi Arabia. Yet it also includes regimes in which formal democratic institutions exist on paper but are reduced to façade or “window dressing” status in practice. In these regimes, which are often characterized as “pseudodemocratic” or “electoral authoritarian,” elections are so marred by repression, restrictions on opposition candidates, and fraud that there is no uncertainty about their outcome. Though legally tolerated, much opposition activity is forced underground by repression, and leading regime critics are often imprisoned or exiled. Thus, in Nicaragua under the Somozas, Mexico at the height of PRI hegemony, and post-Cold War Egypt, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan, formal democratic institutions served primarily a legitimizing function; they were not viewed by the opposition as viable means to achieve power.<sup>16</sup>

Competitive authoritarian regimes may be distinguished from closed authoritarian regimes in that legal and (semi) effective channels exist through which opposition parties compete seriously for power. Elections are held regularly, and opposition parties are not legally barred from contesting them. Opposition activity is above ground. Civil liberties are sufficiently respected for opposition parties to open offices, recruit candidates, and organize campaigns, and opposition figures are generally not exiled or imprisoned. In short, democratic procedures are sufficiently meaningful for opposition groups to take them seriously as arenas through which to contest for power.

Yet competitive authoritarian regimes are not democracies. Although democratic institutions are sufficiently respected to permit real competition, they are violated to such

---

<sup>16</sup>Our category of closed regimes thus includes a wide range of autocracies, including monarchies, sultanistic regimes, bureaucratic authoritarianism, and single party regimes. The differences among these regimes are vast and of theoretical importance (Munck and Snyder 2004). For the purposes of this study, however, these regimes are all closed, in that they lack significant legal contestation for power.

a degree that competition is *unfair*, and opposition parties are seriously handicapped in their effort to challenge incumbents in elections, the legislature, the courts, and other public arenas. Competitive authoritarian regimes fall short on *at least one*—and usually more—of three defining attributes of democracy: (1) free elections; (2) broad protection of civil liberties; and (3) a reasonably even playing field.

### *Elections*

In democracies, elections are *free*, in the sense that there is virtually no fraud or intimidation of voters, and *fair*, in the sense that opposition parties are able to campaign on relatively even footing: they are not subject to repression or harassment, and they are not systematically denied access to the media and other resources.<sup>17</sup> In closed regimes, multiparty elections either do not exist (e.g., China, Cuba, Saudi Arabia) or exist but are non-competitive competitive in practice (e.g., Egypt, Uzbekistan). Elections may be considered non-competitive when (1) major candidates are excluded (via bans, imprisonment, or exile); (2) repression or legal controls make it impossible for opposition parties to sustain public campaigns; or (3) fraud is so massive that there is virtually no observable relationship between public preferences and electoral results.

Competitive authoritarian regimes fall in between these extremes. On the one hand, elections are competitive, in that major opposition candidates are not excluded; opposition parties are able to campaign publicly; and there is no massive fraud. On the other hand, elections are often unfree and almost always unfair. In some cases, elections are marred by at least some fraud, in the form of manipulation of voter lists (Dominican Republic 1994), ballot stuffing (Ukraine 2004), or falsification of results (Cameroon, Gabon). Although such measures may periodically alter the outcome of elections, they are not so severe as to make the act of voting meaningless. Public opinion still very much matters.<sup>18</sup> Elections may also be marred by large-scale intimidation of opposition activists, voters, and poll watchers, including the establishment of opposition “no go” areas (Cambodia, Georgia, Kenya, Russia, Zimbabwe). Nevertheless, these abuses are not sufficiently systematic to prevent the opposition from sustaining a national

---

<sup>17</sup>See Elklit and Svensson (1997).

<sup>18</sup>Thus, vote fraud in Serbia in 2000 and Ukraine in 2004 accounted for about 10 percent of the vote – large enough to alter the results but small enough to make voting meaningful.

campaign. In other cases, voting and vote-counting processes are reasonably clean, but an uneven playing field renders the overall electoral process manifestly *unfair*. In these cases, incumbent control over the bulk of the media, massive abuse of state resources, and/or numerous forms of petty abuse by state agencies make elections unfair even in the absence of significant violence or fraud (Greene 2005). Thus, although Mexico's 1994 elections were technically clean, uneven access to resources and media led one observer to compare the election to a "soccer match where the goalposts were of different heights and breadths and where one team included 11 players plus the umpire and the other a mere six or seven players" (Castañeda 1995: 131).<sup>19</sup>

### *Civil Liberties*

In democracies, basic civil liberties, including rights of free speech and association, and a free press, are broadly protected. Although these rights may be periodically violated,<sup>20</sup> such violations are infrequent and do not seriously hinder the opposition's capacity to challenge incumbents. In closed regimes, basic civil liberties generally either do not exist or exist on paper but are so systematically violated that citizens, civic and opposition groups, and media are not even minimally protected from state abuse (e.g., Egypt, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan). As a result, much opposition activity takes place either underground or in exile.

In competitive authoritarian regimes, basic civil liberties are formally guaranteed and are to some extent protected in practice. Significant independent media exist, and civic and opposition groups operate above ground: they meet, demonstrate, and criticize the government in public. Yet civil liberties are frequently violated. Opposition politicians, independent judges, journalists, human rights activists, and other government critics are subject to harassment, arrest, and in some cases, violent attacks. Independent media are frequently threatened, attacked, and in some cases, suspended or closed. In some regimes, overt repression—including the arrest of opposition figures (Albania, Cambodia, Zambia), killing of opposition activists (Cambodia, Zimbabwe), violent

---

<sup>19</sup>Similarly, Malaysian elections "have not been characterized by widespread fraudulent practices" (Crouch 1996b: 57), but due to unequal access to resources and media, the "opposition's prospects of defeating the government at the polls are...minimal" (Crouch 1996b: 115).

<sup>20</sup>In the U.S., examples include the 1970 Kent State killings and the Nixon administration's illegal surveillance of Democrats and other critics.

repression of protest (Ethiopia, Kenya), or closure of independent media (Russia, Zimbabwe)—is widespread, pushing regimes toward full-scale authoritarianism. More frequently, however, assaults on civil liberties take more subtle forms, such as surveillance and blackmail, denial of credit, licenses, and government contracts to opponents and their private sector backers, denial of licenses, newsprint, or state advertising to independent media, the selective use of tax and anti-corruption agencies to target critics, and the use of libel or defamation laws against media and other critics.

Although civil liberties violations in competitive authoritarian regimes are not systematic or severe enough to force opposition underground or into exile, they clearly exceed what is permissible in a democracy. By raising the cost of critical media coverage (and thus inducing much of the media into self-censorship) and opposition activity (and thus convincing all but the boldest activists to remain on the sidelines), even intermittent civil liberties violations can seriously hinder the opposition's capacity to organize and challenge the government.

### *An Uneven Playing Field*

Finally, competitive authoritarian regimes are characterized by a highly uneven playing field between incumbents and opposition.<sup>21</sup> Obviously, at least some incumbent advantage exists in all democracies, and many new democracies are characterized by extensive clientelism and politicization of state bureaucracies. To distinguish such cases from cases of what Kenneth Greene (2005) calls “hyper-incumbency advantage,” we set a high threshold for unevenness. We consider the playing field uneven where: (1) state institutions are widely abused for partisan ends; (2) the incumbent group or party is systematically favored at the expense of the opposition; *and* (3) the opposition's ability to organize and compete in elections is seriously handicapped.<sup>22</sup> Three aspects of an uneven playing field are of particular importance: access to resources, media access, and access to the law.

---

<sup>21</sup>For discussions of uneven playing fields in hybrid regimes, see Schedler (2002a, 2002b); Mozaffar and Schedler (2002); Ottaway (2003: 138-156); and Greene (2005).

<sup>22</sup>The question of where to draw the line between “acceptable” incumbent advantage and a truly uneven playing field will always be subject to dispute. However, such judgments about where to draw the line must be made on all dimensions of democracy. For example, scholars must decide whether relatively minor electoral or civil liberties abuses are sufficient to merit exclusion from the category of democracy.

Access to Resources. Access to resources is uneven where incumbents use the state to create or maintain resource disparities that hinder the opposition's ability to compete.<sup>23</sup> This may be done in several ways. First, incumbents may make direct partisan use of state resources, while denying other parties access to those resources. In a few cases, this state financing is legal. In Guyana and Zimbabwe during the 1980s, special public ministries existed to finance the activities of the governing party. More frequently, state financing is informal. A classic case is the Mexican PRI, which "enjoyed virtually unlimited access to government funds" (Cornelius 1996: 58; Morris 1995: 98). During the early 1990s, the PRI reportedly drew an estimated \$1 billion in illicit state finance, usually disguised in the budget the form of public works (Oppenheimer 1996: 88). In Russia in the 1990s, Yeltsin obtained essential financial assistance in exchange for the transfer of state property to key supporters (Freeland 2000). In 1996, tens of millions of dollars in government bonds were diverted to Yeltsin's re-election campaign (Hoffman 2002: 348-351).<sup>24</sup>

Incumbents may also make systematic use of the state's infrastructure—including buildings, vehicles, communications equipment, and personnel—for electoral campaigns. In poor countries with weak private sectors, such as Cambodia, Guyana, Nicaragua, and Tanzania, this has given incumbents a vast resource advantage over opponents. In numerous countries, public employees were mobilized in large numbers to work for the governing party. In former Soviet countries such as Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine, this mobilization included not only low level bureaucrats but also teachers, doctors and other budget-financed professionals (Allina-Pisano 2005; Way 2006). Security forces may also be mobilized on behalf of governing parties. In Serbia, for example, the security apparatus provided large-scale logistical support for the "anti-bureaucratic revolution" movement that helped Milosevic consolidate power (Le Bor 2002: 200-1; Silber and

---

<sup>23</sup>For a detailed discussion of how incumbent abuse of state resources shapes party competition, see Greene (2005).

<sup>24</sup>Likewise, the ruling party in Cameroon enjoyed "unlimited access to the government treasury" (Fombad 2004: 372-3), and party expenses such as salaries, rent, and phone bills were all covered by state agencies (GERDDES-Cameroon 1995: 89-92). In Senegal, there was "no effective separation of [governing party] and government spending" (IFES 1992: 31), which went "a long way to compromise equal chances of candidates" (Gueye 1995: 155). In Serbia, Slobodan Milosevic financed his inner circle through a complex system of foreign bank accounts, state controlled "black markets," smuggling, and currency manipulation (Le Bor 2002: 209-218).

Little 1996: 59, 37-9). In Peru, army personnel were mobilized to work for President Fujimori's re-election campaigns (Rospigliosi 1994: 49; Arias 2001: 63), and in Guyana, the army was "practically an arm of the ruling PNC" (Griffith 1997b: 275).

Incumbents may also use the state to monopolize access to private sector finance. Governing parties may use discretionary control over credit, licenses, state contracts, and other resources to enrich themselves via party owned enterprises (Taiwan), benefit crony proxy-owned firms that then contribute money back into party coffers (Malaysia), or simply corner the market in private sector donations (Mexico, Russia). In Taiwan, the KMT's business empire--valued at more than \$4.5 billion—made it "the richest party in the world" (Fields 2002: 121-127; Tien 1997: 147). Hundreds of millions of dollars in annual profits gave the KMT "an independent financial base which operated on an unheard of scale in any representative democracy" (Chu 1992: 150). In Malaysia, UMNO used its discretionary control over state policy build a network of proxy-controlled firms into a vast business conglomerate with at least \$1 billion in assets (Milne and Mauzy 1999: 60-1; Searle 1999: 103).<sup>25</sup>

The state may also be used to starve opposition parties of resources. In Ukraine, for example, businesses that financed the opposition were routinely targeted by tax authorities. As a former head of Ukraine's security services put it, "If [your business is] loyal to the authorities, they will ignore or overlook anything. If you are disloyal, you or your business will be quashed immediately" (Way 2005b: 134). In Russia, the Putin government went even further, effectively halting all major business contributions to the opposition (McFaul and Petrov 2004). In Ghana, entrepreneurs who financed opposition parties "were blacklisted, denied government contracts and [had] their businesses openly sabotaged" (Oquaye 1998: 109), which left the opposition badly under-financed (Boafo-Arthur 1998a: 86), and in Cambodia, the opposition Sam Rainsy Party (SRP) was "starved for funds by a business community told by [the government] that financing SRP was committing economic suicide" (Heder 2005: 118).

In these cases, resource disparities far exceeded anything seen in established democracies. In Mexico, for example, the PRI admitted to spending thirteen times more

---

<sup>25</sup>In Mexico, the PRI raised hundreds of millions of dollars in donations from business magnates who had benefited from government contracts, licenses, or favorable treatment in the privatization process (Oppenheimer 1996; Philip 1999).

than the two major opposition parties *combined* during the 1994 election, and some observers claim that the ratio may have been 20-to-1.<sup>26</sup> In Russia, access to state financing allowed the Yeltsin campaign in 1996 to spend between 30 and 150 times the amount permitted the opposition in 1996 (McFaul 1997: 13). In Taiwan, the KMT spent more than 50 times more than the opposition DPP during the 1994 election (Wu 1995: 79),<sup>27</sup> and in Malaysia, resources are concentrated so “overwhelmingly in the hands of the governing coalition” (Funston 2000: 21) that the governing UMNO is widely viewed as “unbeatable” (Case 1996: 182).

Access to Media. Where opposition parties lack access to (state or private) media that reaches most of the population, there is no possibility of fair competition. Media access may be denied in several ways. Frequently, the most important disparities exist in access to electronic media (television and radio), combined with highly biased and partisan coverage. In many competitive authoritarian regimes, the state maintains a monopoly over television and most—if not all—radio broadcasting. Although print media is often pluralist, with a diversity of independent newspapers and magazines circulating freely, these papers were often confined to a small urban elite. In poor, predominately rural societies (e.g., much of Africa), only a tiny fraction of the population read newspapers. In such cases, if radio and television are in the hands of the state, and state-run channels are biased in favor of the governing party, opposition forces are effectively denied access to the media. This was the case, for example, in Cameroon, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Nicaragua in 1990, Guyana through 1992, and Ghana, Kenya, Senegal, and Belarus, Georgia, Russia, and Ukraine through the early-to-mid-1990s.

In other cases, private media is widespread but major media outlets are closely linked to the governing party—via proxy ownership, patronage ties, cronyism, and other forms of corruption. In Malaysia, for example, all major private newspapers and private television stations are controlled by individuals or companies linked to the governing Barisan Nasional (Nain 2002; Rodan 2004: 25-6), leading one scholar to describe the private media as a “semi-privatized appendage of the information ministry” (Slater 2003:

---

<sup>26</sup>See Oppenheimer (1996: 110); Bruhn (1997: 283-4); and de Swaan (1998: 165).

<sup>27</sup>In 2000, the *Taipei Times* reported that the KMT held in \$6.7 billion in assets, compared to just \$900,000 for the DPP (Rigger 2001: 950).

93).<sup>28</sup> In Peru during the late 1990s, all private television stations signed informal “contracts” with the National Intelligence Service (SIN) in which they received up to \$1.5 million a month in exchange for limiting coverage of opposition parties (Bowen and Holligan 2003: 360-61; Felch 2004: 44). In Ukraine, President Kuchma controlled television coverage through an informal network of pro-government private media empires. Viktor Medvedchuk, acting as both head of the Presidential administration and owner of the most popular television station (1+1), issued unsigned orders (*temnyki*) to all major stations dictating how events should be covered (Human Rights Watch 2003; Kipiani 2005). Finally, in Russia, after the independent NTV television network backed the opposition in 1999 and aired criticism of Putin in 2000-2001, the government used debt arrears to the quasi-state gas company (Gasprom) to take over the station and install a new pro-government management (Lipman and McFaul 2001).

Biased Referees: Uneven Access to the Law. In many competitive authoritarian regimes, the courts, electoral authorities, and other nominally independent arbiters of the rules of the game are not only controlled by incumbents (via packing, blackmail, bribery, or intimidation) but also are systematically employed as partisan tools against the opposition. Consequently, in electoral, judicial, and other critical disputes, agencies that are designed to act as referees rule systematically in favor of incumbents.

Incumbent manipulation of the legal system may affect political competition in several ways. First, where the judiciary is solidly under the control of the governing group or party, the government may violate democratic procedure with impunity. For example, the Fujimori government’s control over judicial and electoral authorities enabled it to violate legal and democratic procedure with impunity. Illegal acts included bribery, illegal surveillance, the stripping of media owner Baruch Ivcher’s citizenship, the massive forgery of signatures on behalf of the governing party, and the passage of dubiously constitutional legislation permitting Fujimori’s bid for a third term in 2000 (Cameron 2006). In Ukraine, a packed Constitutional Court issued a dubious ruling permitting Kuchma to run for a third

---

<sup>28</sup>In Mexico, the leading private television station (Televisa) and most private radio stations were in the hands of “sympathetic private owners” through the mid-1990s (Lawson 2002: 26).

term in 2004. In Belarus in 1996, Lukashenka is said to have blackmailed the head of the Constitutional Court to block parliamentary efforts to impeach him.<sup>29</sup>

Second, incumbents may engage in “legal” repression, or the discretionary use of legal instruments—such as tax, libel, or defamation laws—as a weapon against opponents or the media. Although such repression may involve the technically correct application of the law, its use is selective and partisan, rather than universal. A spectacular example is Vladimir Putin’s use of the courts to destroy Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the owner of the enormously powerful Yukos oil company. In 2003, after Khodorkovsky began to finance opposition parties and expand his influence in the legislature, the government jailed him on tax charges, imposed enormous fines on Yukos, and seized company property and stock (Baker and Glasser 2005: 272-292). On a more modest scale, the Fujimori government in Peru “perfected the technique of ‘using the law to trample the law’”(Youngers 2000a: 68). The courts and the tax agency “were converted into institutions of political persecution” (Ames et al 2001: 220), becoming “a shield for friends of the regime and a weapon against its enemies” (Durand 2003: 503, 459). Rivals—particularly internal rivals—may also be prosecuted for corruption. In Malaysia, for example, Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad used corruption and sodomy charges to purge and eventually imprison his chief rival, Anwar Ibrahim, and in Ukraine, Kuchma used corruption charges to derail the presidential candidacy of Prime Minister Pavlo Lazarenko (Darden 2001).

Perhaps the most widespread form of “legal” repression is the use of libel or defamation laws. In numerous countries, governments routinely used libel and defamation laws to arrest journalists and editors and/or suspend and even close down media outlets. In Croatia, independent newspapers were hit by more than 230 libel suits as of 1997 (Pusic 1998). In Moldova, where the Communist Party packed the judiciary after taking office in 2001 (Way 2002: 131), the government had not lost a single libel case against journalists as of mid-2004.<sup>30</sup> In some cases, the government’s repeated use of costly lawsuits led to the disappearance of many independent media outlets.<sup>31</sup> In others, the threat of legal action led to widespread self-censorship (Malaysia, Ukraine). Defamation laws were also used against opposition parties. In 2005, for example, the

---

<sup>29</sup>Lucan Way interview Mikhail Pastukhov, former constitutional court judge, Minsk, Belarus, 6 July 2004.

<sup>30</sup>Lucan Way interview with Vladislav Gribincea, lawyer, Chisinau, Moldova 29 July 2004.

<sup>31</sup>This was the case, for example, in Belarus, Cambodia, Cameroon, Gabon, and Russia.

Cambodian government orchestrated a flurry of libel and defamation suits against the opposition Sam Rainsy party, jailing several SRP legislators and forcing SRP leader Sam Rainsy to flee into exile.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, partisan control over nominally independent electoral authorities may allow incumbents to engage in fraud and other forms of electoral abuse. In numerous cases, including Armenia, Belarus, Cameroon, Dominican Republic, Gabon, Haiti, Madagascar, Malawi, Tanzania, Ukraine, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, biased electoral authorities either directly engaged in fraud or tolerated fraud and other illicit acts committed by incumbents. In other cases, electoral and judicial authorities issued rulings that had a decisive impact on opposition chances. Examples include the decision to ban Kenneth Kaunda from the 1996 presidential election in Zambia and legalization of Fujimori's presidential candidacy in Peru in 2000.

*Competition without Democracy: Contestation and Uncertainty in Non-Democracies*

Table 1.1 summarizes the major differences among democratic, closed, and competitive authoritarian regimes. As the table suggests, a distinguishing feature of competitive authoritarianism is *unfair competition*. Whereas fully closed regimes are characterized by the absence of legal competition (and hence, of uncertainty) and democracy is characterized by fair competition, competitive authoritarianism is marked by competition that is real (and often intense) but unfair. Formal democratic institutions are meaningful. Opposition parties are legal, operate above ground, and compete seriously in elections. However, they are subject to surveillance, harassment, and occasional violence, their access to media and finance is limited, electoral and judicial institutions are politicized and used as weapons against them, and elections are often marred by fraud, intimidation, and other abuse. Yet such unfairness does not preclude serious contestation, and even occasionally opposition victories.<sup>33</sup> Put another way, whereas officials in closed regimes can rest easy on the eve of elections, as neither they nor opposition leaders expect anything but an incumbent victory, incumbents in competitive authoritarian regimes can not. Government officials fear a possible opposition victory (and must work hard to thwart

---

<sup>32</sup>*The Economist*, November 5, 2005, pp. 46-47; *New York Times*, January 9, 2006, p. A3.

<sup>33</sup>Examples include opposition electoral victories in Nicaragua in 1990, Zambia in 1991, Guyana in 1992, Belarus, Malawi, and Ukraine 1994, Croatia 2000, and nearly Zimbabwe 2002.

it), and opposition leaders believe they have at least some chance of victory. In competitive authoritarian regimes, incumbents are forced to sweat.

What this suggests is that uncertainty and even incumbent turnover are not defining features of democracy. Influential scholars, particularly Adam Przeworski and his collaborators,<sup>34</sup> have argued that what distinguishes democratic from non-democratic regimes is uncertainty of outcomes and the possibility of electoral turnover.<sup>35</sup> Such a conceptualization ignores the very real possibility that serious violation of democratic procedure may occur in competitive elections. At times during the 1990-2005 period, elections in Albania, Armenia, Belarus, Cameroon, Cambodia, Gabon, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Russia, Zambia, and even Zimbabwe, were characterized by considerable uncertainty and—in some cases—incumbent defeat. However, none of them were democratic, and some were not even remotely so. We must therefore be able to conceptualize regimes that are sufficiently competitive to generate real uncertainty (and even turnover), but which fall short of procedural minimum standards of democracy. As this book shows, such regimes were widespread during the post-Cold War period.

### **The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism**

Competitive authoritarianism is a post-Cold War phenomenon. Although a few competitive authoritarian regimes existed during the interwar and Cold War periods,<sup>36</sup> they proliferated after the fall of the Berlin Wall. This was no coincidence. Key changes in the international environment after 1989 created conditions highly favorable to the emergence and survival of competitive authoritarian regimes. First, the end of the Cold War led to a withdrawal of external support for many superpower-sponsored dictatorships. Beginning in the late 1980s, both Soviet-backed Leninist regimes and U.S.

---

<sup>34</sup>See Przeworski (1986, 1991); Alvarez et al. (1996); also McFaul, Petrov and Ryabov (2004: 5-6).

<sup>35</sup>As Przeworski famously put it, democracy is a “system in which parties lose elections” (1991: 10).

<sup>36</sup>In interwar central Europe, competitive authoritarian regimes emerged in Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Romania. In the postwar period, competitive authoritarianism included Argentina under Perón (1946-55), the Dominican Republic under Balaguer (1966-78), Senegal after 1976, and post-colonial Botswana, Guyana, Malaysia, and Zimbabwe.

backed anti-communist regimes faced a precipitous decline in external military and economic assistance. In many cases, the elimination of Cold War subsidies coincided with mounting domestic economic crises, which eroded—often severely—the capacity of many autocratic governments to maintain themselves in power. States became bankrupted, patronage resources disappeared, and in many cases, coercive apparatuses began to disintegrate, leaving autocrats with little choice but to liberalize or abandon power (Herbst 1994; Bratton and van de Walle 1997: 104; Joseph 1997).<sup>37</sup>

The collapse of the Soviet Union also led to a marked shift in the global balance of power, with the liberal West—and particularly the United States—emerging as the dominant center of economic and military power. In the post-Cold War era, as in interwar central Europe (Janos 2000), the disappearance of a military, economic, and ideological alternative to the liberal West had a powerful impact on peripheral states. On the one hand, it created an “almost universal wish to imitate a way of life associated with the liberal capitalist democracies of the core regimes” (Whitehead 1996b: 21), which encouraged the diffusion of Western democratic models.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, however, diffusion was rooted in an instrumental logic: the primary sources of external assistance were now located almost exclusively in the West (Joseph 1999a). Effectively “[r]eading the handwriting on the (Berlin) wall,” many autocrats adopted formal democratic institutions in an effort to “position their countries favorably in the international contest for scarce development resources” (Bratton and van de Walle 1997: 182-3).

Another critical change in the post-Cold War international environment was a shift in Western foreign policy in favor of democracy promotion.<sup>39</sup> With the disappearance of the Soviet threat, the United States and other Western powers stepped up efforts to encourage and defend democracy, through a combination of external assistance, military and diplomatic pressure, and unprecedented political conditionality.<sup>40</sup> In 1990, the U.S., Great Britain, and France each announced that they would link future economic assistance to democratization and human rights, and during the 1990s both

---

<sup>37</sup>Outside of Eastern Europe, autocracies that were particularly hard hit by the end of the Cold War include those in Benin, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Guyana, Haiti, Liberia, Madagascar, Mozambique, and Nicaragua.

<sup>38</sup>See Sharman and Kanet (2000), Schmitz and Sell (1999) and Kopstein and Reilly (2000).

<sup>39</sup>See Carothers (1991, 1999); Diamond (1992); Burnell (2000a); Von Hippel (2000); and Schroeder (2002a).

<sup>40</sup>U.S. funding for democracy assistance programs “took off” (Burnell 2000b: 39-44), increasing from near zero in the early 1980s to \$700 million at the turn of the century (Carothers 1999: 6; Burnell 2000b: 49).

governments and multilateral institutions began to condition loans and assistance on the holding of elections and respect for human rights (Nelson and Eglinton 1992; Stokke 1995a). Though never applied consistently, the use of political conditionality (and in some cases, the mere threat of it) induced many autocrats to hold multiparty elections.<sup>41</sup>

The “new political conditionality” was accompanied by efforts to create permanent international legal frameworks for the collective defense of democracy (Franck 1992; Halperin 1993; Farer 1996a; Pevehouse 2005). Thus, the 1990s saw the emergence of an “international architecture of collective institutions and formal agreements enshrining both the principles of democracy and human rights” (Diamond 1995: 38). These efforts went furthest in Europe, where full democracy was an explicit requirement for membership in the European Union (Vachudova 2005). Yet they were also seen in the Americas, where the Organization of American States (OAS) adopted new mechanisms for the collective defense of democracy in 1991 and 1992 (Farer 1993, 1996b; Halperin 1993).

A final component of the post-Cold War international environment was the growing transnational infrastructure of organizations and networks—including international party foundations, election monitoring agencies, and a burgeoning community of international organizations and NGOs—committed to the promotion of human rights and democracy.<sup>42</sup> Strengthened by cheaper air travel and new information technologies such as the internet, transnational human rights and democracy networks drew international attention to human rights abuses, lobbied Western governments to take action against abusive governments, and helped to protect and empower domestic opposition groups (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Risse and Sikkink 1999). Due to the presence of these networks, human rights abuses increasingly triggered a “boomerang effect,” as they were widely reported by international media and human rights groups, which often led Western governments to take punitive measures against the violating government (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 12-13). At the same time, the growing number and sophistication of international election observer missions helped call international

---

<sup>41</sup>Clear examples include Kenya and Malawi (Clinkenbeard 2004).

<sup>42</sup>See Sikkink (1993); Diamond (1995); Keck and Sikkink (1998); Middlebrook (1998); Carothers (1997b, 1999, 2000b); Risse et al. (1999); Burnell (2000b); Florini (2000); Ottaway and Carothers (2000).

attention to fraudulent elections, which deterred an increasing number of governments from attempting fraud.<sup>43</sup>

These changes in the post-Cold War international environment raised the cost of open authoritarianism. Peripheral elites had powerful incentives avoid large scale human rights abuses and to adopt the formal architecture of liberal democracy, which, at minimum, entailed multiparty elections (Joseph 1997). This dynamic was most striking in sub-Saharan Africa: in 1989, 29 African countries were governed by *de jure* single party regimes; by 1994, not one single party regime remained (Bratton and van de Walle 1997: 8). Similarly, among 26 post-Communist states in Eurasia, only a single one-party regime (Turkmenistan) endured through the 1990s.

Yet if the post-Cold War international environment challenged existing autocracies and encouraged the diffusion of multiparty elections, it did not necessarily bring democracy. International democratizing pressure was limited in important ways. First, it was applied selectively and inconsistently (Nelson and Eglinton 1992; Carothers 1999; Lawson 1999; Crawford 2001), with important countries and regions (such as China and the Middle East) largely escaping pressure. Second, international democratizing pressure was often superficial. In much of the world, Western democracy promotion was markedly “electoralist” (Karl 1986), in that it focused almost exclusively on multiparty elections while often ignoring dimensions such as civil liberties and a level playing field.<sup>44</sup>

Notwithstanding strong external pressure to hold elections and refrain from large-scale human rights abuse, then, many post-Cold War autocrats retained considerable room to maneuver.<sup>45</sup> Over time, governments “learned that they did not have to democratize” in order to maintain their international standing and access to external assistance (Joseph 1999a: 61; also Young 1999: 35). Because partial liberalization (often in the form of holding passable elections) was often “sufficient to deflect international system pressures for more complete political opening” (Young 1999: 35), governments

---

<sup>43</sup>See McCoy et al. (1991); Rosenau and Fagen (1994); Carothers (1997b); Chand (1997); and Middlebrook (1998).

<sup>44</sup>As Fareed Zakaria put it, In the end, . . . elections trump everything. If a country holds elections, Washington and the world will tolerate a great deal from the resulting government. . . . In an age of images and symbols, elections are easy to capture on film (How do you televise the rule of law?) (1997: 40). Also see Carothers (1999); Diamond (1999: 55-6); Lawson (1999); and Ottaway (2003).

<sup>45</sup>See Stokke (1995b); Joseph (1997, 1999a); Carothers (2000b); Schedler (2002a, 2002b); and Ottaway (2003).

learned how to “impose enough repression to keep their opponents weak and maintain their own power while adhering to enough democratic formalities that they might just pass themselves off as democrats” (Carothers 1997a: 90-1). In short, the post-Cold War international environment raised minimum standards for regime acceptability, making single party or military rule difficult to sustain, but the new standard was electoralism, not democracy.

Due to the limits of international pressure, then, democratization continued to require a strong domestic “push” during the post-Cold War period. Where favorable domestic conditions—such as a strong civil society, effective political institutions, and a rule of law—were absent (e.g., much of the former Soviet Union and Sub-Saharan Africa), the new international environment was more likely to give rise to regimes that combine multiparty elections with various degrees of electoral manipulation, repression, and incumbent abuse.<sup>46</sup> These are precisely the characteristics of competitive authoritarianism.

The post-Cold War international environment was thus particularly favorable to the emergence and survival of competitive authoritarian regimes. Indeed, as military and single party regimes disappeared across much of the world after 1989, competitive authoritarian regimes proliferated. In 1985, just prior to Mikhail Gorbachev’s ascension to power in the Soviet Union, perhaps six—and certainly fewer than 10—competitive regimes existed in the world.<sup>47</sup> In 1995, four years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, 36 countries were competitive authoritarian. Thus, although the end of the Cold War triggered an unprecedented wave of democratization, it triggered an even larger wave of *hybridization*. The “fourth wave” (McFaul 2002) was at least as competitive authoritarian as it was democratic.

### **Diverging Outcomes: Competitive Authoritarian Regime Trajectories, 1990-2005**

Competitive authoritarian regimes did not uniformly democratize during the post-Cold War period. Indeed, contrary to widespread expectations (or hopes), only a

---

<sup>46</sup>See the set of articles on this subject in the April 2002 issue of the *Journal of Democracy*, as well as Carothers (1997a, 2000a, 2002), Zakaria (1997); Joseph (1999a), Lawson (1997); Young (1999); and Ottaway (2003).

<sup>47</sup>The clearest cases are Botswana, Guyana, Malaysia, Mexico, Senegal, and Zimbabwe. Panama, the Philippines, and Nicaragua might also be placed in this category.

minority of them had made transitions to democracy by 2005. Rather, competitive authoritarian regimes can be said to have followed three broad trajectories during the post-Cold War period (1990-2005) (See Table 1.2).<sup>48</sup> The first path is *democratization*, which entails the establishment of free and fair elections, the broad protection of civil liberties, and a leveling of the political playing field, such that no single party dominates access to state, media, and other critical resources. Such reforms may be overseen by established autocratic incumbents, as in Mexico and Taiwan, or they may occur after autocrats fall from power, as in Croatia, Nicaragua, Peru, Serbia, and Slovakia. Although the removal of autocratic incumbents is not necessary for democratization (arguably, democratization occurred in Mexico and Taiwan before incumbents lost elections), all of our democratizing cases experienced such a turnover by 2005. As Table 1.2 shows, 14 of our 37 cases democratized between 1990 and 2005: Bulgaria, Croatia, Dominican Republic, Ghana, Guyana, Mali, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Taiwan, and Ukraine.

**--Table 1.2 about here--**

The second trajectory is *unstable authoritarianism*, or cases that undergo one or more transitions but nevertheless fail to democratize. In these cases, autocratic incumbents are removed from power but the architecture of competitive authoritarianism remains intact. Successor governments inherit an uneven playing field and politicized state and regime institutions, which they use to weaken and/or disadvantage their opponents. Democratization in such cases requires that new governments consciously *under-utilize* their power, which is relatively rare.<sup>49</sup> In a few cases (Madagascar, Moldova), successors governed democratically but were later replaced by governments that revert to competitive authoritarianism. Twelve cases fell into the unstable authoritarianism category during the 1990-2005 period: Albania, Belarus,<sup>50</sup> Benin,

---

<sup>48</sup>Note: our method of scoring cases will be spelled out in detail in an appendix to this chapter.

<sup>49</sup>Examples include Mali and Ukraine after 2004. If (as is reasonable to assume) incumbents seek, above all, to remain in office, then the most likely outcome—indeed, the path of least resistance—is continued competitive authoritarian rule.

<sup>50</sup>Belarus is labeled unstable because turnover occurred in 1994. Since 1994, the regime has become increasingly stable.

Georgia, Haiti, Kenya, Madagascar, Macedonia, Malawi, Moldova, Senegal, and Zambia.<sup>51</sup>

The third regime outcome is *stable authoritarianism*. In these cases, incumbent autocratic governments or their chosen successors remain in power—by means of an uneven playing field, electoral manipulation, and civil liberties violations—through 2005. In some cases (Armenia,<sup>52</sup> Malaysia, Tanzania), regimes remain competitive authoritarian. In others (Russia, Zimbabwe), they become increasingly closed. Eleven of our 37 cases remained stable and authoritarian during the 1990-2005 period: Armenia, Botswana, Cambodia, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Gabon, Malaysia, Mozambique, Tanzania, Russia, Zimbabwe.

This diversity of regime outcomes challenges the democratizing assumptions that underlie much of the recent literature on regime change. Neither the breakdown of authoritarian regimes nor the holding of multiparty elections necessarily led to democratization during the post-Cold War period.<sup>53</sup> In *nearly two thirds* (23 of 37) of our cases, no democratization occurred between 1990 and 2005. Indeed, the regime patterns examined here suggest that electoral turnover—even where longtime autocrats are removed—should not be equated with democratic transition. In many of our cases, the electoral defeat (or post-electoral removal) of autocratic incumbents generated little institutional change, and successor parties did not govern democratically. In some (Albania, Macedonia, Madagascar, Moldova), two or more transitions occurred without democratization. Such transitions without democratization are far too numerous to be ignored or treated as exceptions.

---

<sup>51</sup> Although Benin and (post-2000) Senegal are often viewed as democracies, we score them as competitive authoritarian due to continuing attacks on the media and, in the case of Benin, serious questions about the fairness of the 2001 election.

<sup>52</sup> In Armenia, the incumbent president Levon Ter Petrosian was forced from power in 1998 by his own allies and Prime Minister (Robert Kocharian). Thus, we count this as a shift of power within the existing regime.

<sup>53</sup> Carothers (2002) and Brownlee (2006) make similar points.

## CHAPTER 2

### EXPLAINING COMPETITIVE AUTHORITARIAN REGIME TRAJECTORIES: INTERNATIONAL LINKAGE AND THE ORGANIZATIONAL POWER OF INCUMBENTS

This book seeks to explain diverging competitive authoritarian regime paths during the Cold War period. As noted in Chapter 1, we divide post-Cold War (1990-2005) regime trajectories into three categories: (1) *democratization*, in which autocrats fell and their successors governed democratically; (2) *stable authoritarianism*, in which autocratic governments or chosen successors remained in power through 2005; and (3) *unstable authoritarianism*, in which autocrats fell from power at least once, but successors did not govern democratically. Our central question, then, is why some competitive authoritarian regimes democratized after 1989, while others remained stable and authoritarian, and still others experienced one or more transition without democratization.

Our explanation integrates insights from classical structural theories of regime change and recent work on the international dimension of democratization. Earlier studies of regime change, ranging from the more structuralist theories of the 1960s and 1970s to the agency-centered transitions literature of the 1980s and early 1990s,<sup>54</sup> focused almost exclusively on domestic variables.<sup>55</sup> Scholars viewed democratization as “a domestic affair *par excellence*” (Schmitter 1996: 27), with external factors playing an “indirect and usually marginal role” (Schmitter 1986: 5). The unprecedented wave of democratization triggered by the end of the Cold War forced scholars to take the international environment seriously.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, the spatial and temporal clustering of post-1989 transitions convinced even leading proponents of domestic-centered approaches that it was “time to reconsider the impact of the international context upon regime change” (Schmitter 1996: 27). Thus, the debate has turned from whether international factors matter to *how much* they matter. On the one hand, some scholars posited the primacy of

---

<sup>54</sup>Classical regime analyses include Lipset (1959, 1960); Almond and Verba (1963); Moore (1966); Huntington (1968); O’Donnell (1973); and Skocpol (1979). The “transitology” literature of the 1980s and 1990s includes O’Donnell and Schmitter (1986), Di Palma (1990); and Karl (1990).

<sup>55</sup>Skocpol (1979) is an important exception.

<sup>56</sup>On the international dimension of democratization, see Huntington (1991); Pridham (1991a); Starr (1991); Pridham et al. (1997); Diamond (1992, 1995); Whitehead (1996a); Grugel (1999a) Kopstein and Reilly (2000); Gleditsch (2002); Schraeder (2002a); Kelley (2004); Levitsky and Way (2005, forthcoming); Mainwaring and Perez Liñan (2005); Pevehouse (2005); Vachudova (2005); Brinks and Coppedge (2006).

external factors, arguing that international effects outweigh those of domestic variables.<sup>57</sup> In this view, international pressure may so decisively change actor calculations that that “the influence of many traditionally important domestic variables may be mitigated” (Pevehouse 2005: 209). Other scholars argued that the international environment plays a secondary role,<sup>58</sup> or that its effects are largely superficial, yielding democracies that are more “virtual” (Joseph 1999b) or “artificial” (Pinkney 1997: 216) than real.

We offer a different take on this debate. Rather than assert the primacy of either international or domestic factors, we argue that their relative causal weight *varies across countries and regions*. External forces reshape domestic incentives and power distributions, often in ways that are decisive to regime outcomes. However, they do so to varying degrees across cases.<sup>59</sup> In regions with extensive ties to the West (particularly Central Europe and the Americas), international influences were so intense that they contributed to democratization even where domestic conditions were highly unfavorable. In these cases, we concur with those who posit the primacy of international variables. However, where ties to the West were less extensive, post-Cold War international democratizing pressure was weaker, and consequently, domestic factors weighed more heavily. In these cases, regime outcomes are explained primarily by domestic structural variables, particularly the strength of state and governing party organizations.

### **The International Dimension: Leverage and Linkage**

Analyses of the international dimension of democratization proliferated during the post-Cold War era. These studies pointed to at least five distinct mechanisms of international influence.<sup>60</sup> One is *diffusion*, or the “relatively neutral transmissions of information” across borders (Whitehead 1996b: 5), via either “demonstration effects” in neighboring countries or

---

<sup>57</sup>For example, see Kopstein and Reilly (2000); Gleditsch (2002); Kelley (2004); Pevehouse (2005); and Vachudova (2005).

<sup>58</sup>See Bratton and van de Walle (1997); Linz and Stepan (1996); McFaul (2001, 2005); and Fish (2005).

<sup>59</sup>Kopstein and Reilly (2000); Gleditsch (2002); and Brinks and Coppedge (2006) make similar arguments.

<sup>60</sup>For summaries of the various mechanisms international influence, see Diamond (1993, 1995); Schmitter (1996); Whitehead (1996a); Grugel (1999b); Burnell (2000b); and Schraeder (2003).

modeling on successful democracies.<sup>61</sup> Facilitated by the spread of new information and communication technologies,<sup>62</sup> diffusion is said to account for the “wave-like” temporal and regional clustering of democratic transitions.<sup>63</sup> A second mechanism of international influence is *direct democracy promotion* by Western states, particularly the United States.<sup>64</sup> Here the primary force for regime change is “efforts by the world’s most powerful liberal state to promote democracy abroad” (Peceny 1999: 185), via diplomatic persuasion, threats, and, in a few cases (e.g., Panama, Haiti), military force (Peceny 1999; von Hippel 2000).

A third mechanism of international influence is *multilateral conditionality*, in which external assistance or membership in international organizations is linked to countries’ democratic or human rights performance.<sup>65</sup> Forms of political conditionality ranged from “negative conditionality,” or the withdrawal of external assistance to recalcitrant autocrats, to the “positive” or membership conditionality employed by regional organizations such as the European Union.<sup>66</sup> A fourth mechanism is external *democracy assistance*.<sup>67</sup> Western governments, party foundations, and international organizations dramatically increased funding for civic education programs, electoral assistance, legal and legislative reform, and independent media and civic organizations. These programs have been said to have “an enormous political impact, shaping people’s expectations and standards for future elections and establishing a model of what constitutes a free and fair election” (Ottaway and Chung 1999: 104). Finally, a fifth mechanism of external influence is *transnational advocacy*

---

<sup>61</sup>Whitehead (1996b: 5-8) calls this democratization by “contagion.” See Huntington (1991); Starr (1991); Drake 1998; O’Laughlin et al. (1998); Schmitz and Sell (1999); Kopstein and Reilly (2000); Gleditsch (2002); Starr and Lindborg (2003); and Brinks and Coppedge (2006).

<sup>62</sup>On the role of the internet, see Ferdinand (2000a); Deibert (2002); Simon (2002); and Kalathil and Boas (2003).

<sup>63</sup>See Huntington (1991); Starr (1991); O’Laughlin et al. (1998); Gleditsch (2002); Beissinger (2005); and Brinks and Coppedge (2006).

<sup>64</sup>Whitehead (1996b: 8-15) calls this democratization “by control.” See Carothers (1991); Lowenthal (1991); Smith (1994); Robinson (1996); Whitehead (1996c); Peceny (1999); Cox et al. (2000); Rose (2000); von Hippel (2000); and Schraeder (2002a).

<sup>65</sup>See Nelson and Englinton (1992); Sorensen (1993); Stokke (1995a); Crawford (1997, 2001); Zielonka and Pravda (2001); Linden (2002); Schimmelfennig (2002); Ethier (2003); Clinkenbeard (2004); Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005; Vachudova 2005; and Pevehouse (2005).

<sup>66</sup>On EU conditionality, see Pridham (1991); Pridham et al. (1997); Schimmelfennig et al. (2003, 2005); Jacoby (2004); Kelley (2004); Pevehouse 2005; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2005); and Vachudova (2005).

<sup>67</sup>See Diamond (1995); Carothers (1999, 2000b); Ottaway and Chung (1999); Erklit (1999); Burnell (2000a, 2000b); Ottaway and Carothers (2000); and Ethier (2003). U.S. funding for democracy assistance programs “took off” in the 1990s (Burnell 2000b: 39-44), increasing from near zero in the early 1980s to \$700 million at the turn of the century (Carothers 1999: 6; Burnell 2000b: 49).

*networks*.<sup>68</sup> Human rights, democracy, and election-monitoring NGOs grew rapidly in size, number, and influence during the 1980s and 1990s. These organizations drew international attention to human rights violations, electoral fraud, and other violations of international norms and lobbied Western governments to take punitive action in response to them (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Risse and Sikkink 1999).

Notwithstanding this scholarly attention, however, the relationship between the international environment and regime change remains poorly understood. Two problems are worth noting. First, there has been little effort either to adjudicate among the various mechanisms of international influence cited above or to integrate them into a coherent theoretical framework (Pevehouse 2005: 204). Most studies either simply present a laundry list of the various mechanisms of international influence or limit their focus to a single mechanism.

Second, many analyses of international democratizing pressure pay insufficient attention to how it varies—in both character and intensity—across cases and regions.<sup>69</sup> Democratic diffusion has been shown to be “spatially dependent,” or contingent upon geographic proximity.<sup>70</sup> Diffusion effects were far more pronounced in the Americas and Central Europe than in Asia and the former Soviet Union.<sup>71</sup> Regional variation was also manifest in Western efforts to promote democracy. Whereas Western powers invested heavily in democracy promotion in Central Europe and Latin America during the 1990s, democracy continued to be trumped by “power politics” in East Asia (Izoguchi 2000).<sup>72</sup> In Africa, where Western policy was characterized by “indifference and neglect” (Alden 2000: 355), democracy promotion was largely “rhetorical” (Bratton and van de Walle 1997: 241).<sup>73</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup>See Sikkink (1993); Keck and Sikkink (1998); Risse et al. (1999); and Florini (2000a).

<sup>69</sup>An exception is the literature on diffusion. On regional variation international influences, see Schmitter 1996: (28, 47); Whitehead (1996e: 395-6); Kopstein and Reilly (2000); Gleditsch (2002); Mainwaring and Pérez Liñan (2003, 2005); and Brinks and Coppedge (2006)

<sup>70</sup>Kopstein and Reilly (2000: 1-2); also see Starr (1991); O’Loughlin et al. (1998); Gleditsch (2002: 4-5); and Brinks and Coppedge (2006)

<sup>71</sup>Starr (1991); Bostrom (1994); Chu et al. (1997); Prizel (1999); Whitehead (1999); Kopstein and Reilly (2000).

<sup>72</sup>Western funding for democracy assistance programs also followed a regional pattern. Both the U.S. and the EU spent more on democracy promotion in their neighboring regions than in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East (Crawford 2001: 109, 113). In the early 1990s, seven of the top ten U.S. political aid recipients were located in Latin America (Crawford 2001: 109), and U.S. spending on democracy assistance in Latin America was more than three times greater than its spending in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East combined (Carothers 1999: 51).

<sup>73</sup>As Larry Diamond put it, “The United States and the international community demand real democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean....For Africa, a lower standard is set by the major Western powers: opposition

The effectiveness of conditionality also varied by region. Whereas EU membership conditionality was relatively effective,<sup>74</sup> conditionality had a limited democratizing impact in Russia and sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>75</sup> Finally, the impact of globalizing forces such as transnational advocacy networks and new information technologies also varied across regions. Transnational human rights movements were more influential in Central Europe and Latin America than in other regions during the 1990s,<sup>76</sup> while Middle Eastern and Sub-Saharan African countries were said to be “severely underrepresented” in these networks (Florini and Simmons 2000: 7).<sup>77</sup>

In sum, post-Cold War international democratizing pressure varied considerably by region (Kopstein and Reilly 2000; Gleditsch 2002). The international dimension was decidedly “thicker” in some regions (Central Europe, Latin America) than in others (Africa, the former Soviet Union). To capture and explain this variation, and to integrate the large number of seemingly disparate mechanisms of international influence discussed above into a concise theoretical framework, we organize the post-Cold War international environment into two dimensions: *Western leverage* and *linkage to the West*.

### **Western Leverage**

Western leverage may be defined as governments’ vulnerability to external democratizing pressure. Our conceptualization of leverage includes both (1) regimes’ bargaining power vis-à-vis the West, or its ability to avoid Western action aimed at punishing autocratic abuse or encouraging political liberalization *and* (2) the potential economic, security, or other impact of Western action on target states. Leverage thus refers not to the exercise of external pressure, *per se*, but instead to a country’s vulnerability to such pressure. Where countries lack bargaining power and are heavily affected by Western

---

parties that can contest for office, even if they are manipulated, hounded, and rigged into defeat at election time” (1999: 55-6).

<sup>74</sup>Linden (2002); Kelley (2004); Pevehouse (2005); Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2005); Vachudova (2005).

<sup>75</sup>On Russia, see Goldgeier and McFaul (2003) and McFaul (2005). On Sub-Saharan Africa, see Bratton and van de Walle (1997: 182, 219) and Roessler 2005 (210-211).

<sup>76</sup>Sikkink (1993: 435-6, 1996: 166); C. Kumar (2000: 137); Risse and Ropp (1999: 240).

<sup>77</sup>Likewise, the influence of new information technologies was greater in Europe and Latin America than in Africa and the Middle East (Corrales 2002: 38-9; Florini 2000b: 221; Ott and Rosser 2000: 143-4).

punitive action, leverage is high. Where countries possess substantial bargaining power and/or can weather Western punitive action without substantial harm, leverage is low.

Leverage is rooted in three factors. The most important factor is the size and strength of countries' states and economies. Governments in weak states with small, aid-dependent economies (such as much of sub-Saharan Africa) are more vulnerable to external pressure than those in larger countries with substantial military and/or economic power (such as China, India, or Russia) (Nelson and Eglinton 1992: 20, 47). These latter states have the bargaining power to prevent pressure from being applied; and the various types of pressure employed by Western powers—such as aid withdrawal, trade sanctions, and the threat of military force—are less likely to inflict significant damage.

Second, Western leverage may be limited by competing Western foreign policy objectives. In countries where Western powers have countervailing economic or strategic interests at stake, autocratic governments may have the bargaining power to ward off external demands for democracy by casting themselves—and regime stability—as the best means of protecting those interests (Nelson and Eglinton 1992: 20; Crawford 1997: 87). Thus, the U.S. and other Western powers have exerted little democratizing pressure on major energy producing states—such as Saudi Arabia—that are deemed strategically important. In such cases, efforts to take punitive action are likely to divide Western governments, thereby diluting the effectiveness of those efforts (Crawford 2001: 211-227).

Third, the degree of Western leverage is affected by the existence or not of countervailing powers—what Hufbauer et al. (1990: 12) call “black knights”—that provide alternative sources of economic, military, and/or diplomatic support, thereby mitigating the impact of U.S. or European pressure. Russia, China, Japan, France, and South Africa played this role at times during the post-Cold War period, using economic, diplomatic, and other assistance to buttress or bail out autocratic governments in neighboring (or in the case of France, former colonial) states – thus softening the impact of any democratizing pressure. Examples include Russian backing of governments in Armenia, Belarus and Ukraine, France's support for autocrats in former colonies such as Cameroon, Gabon, and Ivory Coast, and South Africa's support for the Mugabe government in Zimbabwe. In Central/South-Eastern Europe and the Americas, by contrast, no significant countervailing

power (regional or otherwise) existed during the post-Cold War period.<sup>78</sup> For countries in those regions, the EU and the U.S. were “the only game in town,” which heightened their vulnerability to Western democratizing pressure.

Leverage raised the cost of building and maintaining authoritarian regimes during the post-Cold War period. In externally vulnerable states, autocratic holdouts were frequent targets of Western democratizing pressure after 1990 (Nelson and Eglinton 1992: 20; Crawford 2001: 210-227; Vachudova 2005). Western punitive action often triggered severe fiscal crises, which, by eroding incumbents’ capacity to distribute patronage and pay the salaries of civil servants and security personnel, seriously threatened regime survival. Indeed, even the threat of punitive action or—in the case of Central Europe—the promise of external reward may powerfully shape the calculation of autocrats and their backers. Thus, Western pressure has at times played a central role in toppling autocratic governments (Haiti, Panama, Serbia), forcing authoritarian regimes to liberalize (Kenya, Malawi, Nicaragua, Romania), deterring military coups (Ecuador, Guatemala, Paraguay), and rolling back coups or stolen elections (Haiti, Dominican Republic, Serbia).

By itself, however, leverage rarely translated into effective democratizing pressure, for several reasons. First, outside the EU and its potential member states, Western powers employed democratizing pressure inconsistently during the post-Cold War period, allowing many autocrats to escape sanction (Crawford 1997; Lawson 1999; Ethier 2003). Even where Western powers pushed for political change, these efforts were limited in important ways. First, Western democracy promotion strategies (again, with the exception of EU membership conditionality) were markedly “electoralist” (Karl 1986), in that they focused on the holding of multiparty elections while often ignoring dimensions such as civil liberties (Zakaria 1997). Thus, while coups and other blatant acts of authoritarianism often triggered strong Western responses, “violations that are less spectacular yet systematic tend[ed] to be left aside” (Stokke 1995b: 63). Even in internationally-monitored elections, incumbents often got away with widespread harassment of opponents, massive abuse of state resources, near-total control over the media, and substantial manipulation of the vote (Geisler 1993; Carothers 1997b; Lawson 1999). Moreover, Western pressure tended to ease up after the holding of elections, even if the elections did not result in democratization. During the mid-1990s, for

---

<sup>78</sup>Russian support for Serbia in the late 1990s is a partial exception.

example, autocratic governments in Kenya, Peru, Russia, Tanzania, and Zambia faced little external pressure after elections had been held.

Electoralism was exacerbated by difficulties in monitoring and enforcing conditionality. Although external pressure may be used effectively for easily-monitored “one shot” measures, such as blocking coups or forcing governments to hold elections, it is less effective at guaranteeing other aspects of democracy, such as the protection of civil liberties and the maintenance of a reasonably level electoral field (Nelson and Eglinton 1992: 35; Stokke 1995b: 63-67; Ottaway 2003). Outside of the EU, the mechanisms of monitoring and enforcement required to impose the full package of democracy were largely absent. Hence, it is not surprising that cross-national studies have found the impact of political conditionality to have been limited during the post-Cold War period.<sup>79</sup> According to one study, conditionality made a “significant contribution” to democratization in only two of 29 cases during the 1990s (Crawford 2001: 187). Even in sub-Saharan Africa, where Western leverage is greatest, scholars have found no positive relationship between conditionality and democratization (Bratton and van de Walle 1997).

By itself, then, leverage generated blunt and often ineffective forms of external pressure during the post-Cold War period. Even where political conditionality was applied, autocrats frequently enjoyed substantial room to maneuver. Though compelled to hold elections and avoid massive human rights abuses, they routinely got away with minimal reforms—such as holding elections without ensuring civil liberties or a level playing field—that fell short of democracy.<sup>80</sup> In other words, leverage was at times sufficient to force transitions from full-scale autocracy to competitive authoritarianism, but it was rarely sufficient to induce democratization.

### **Linkage to the West**

A second dimension—linkage—is central to understanding variation in the effectiveness of international democratizing pressure during the post-Cold War period. We

---

<sup>79</sup>See Nelson and Eglinton (1992); Stokke (1995b); Bratton and van de Walle (1997); Crawford (1997, 2001); and Burnell (2000b: 26-7).

<sup>80</sup> See Ottaway (2003: 193-4); Carothers (1997a, 1999, 2000), Joseph (1999a, 1999b); Levitsky and Way (2002), and Schedler (2002a, 2002b).

define linkage to the West as the density of ties (economic, political, diplomatic, social, and organizational) and cross-border flows (of capital, goods and services, people, and information) between particular countries and the U.S., the EU, and Western-dominated multilateral institutions.<sup>81</sup> Linkage is a multidimensional concept that encompasses the myriad networks of interdependence that connect individual polities, economies, and societies to Western democratic communities.<sup>82</sup> Though hardly an exhaustive list, six dimensions of linkage are of particular importance for this study:

\**Economic* linkage, or flows of trade, investment, and credit.

\**Diplomatic linkage*, which includes both bilateral diplomatic and military ties and participation in Western-led alliances, treaties, and international organizations.

\**Technocratic* linkage, or the share of a country's elite that is educated in the West and/or has professional ties to Western universities or Western-led multilateral institutions.

\**Social* linkage, or flows of people across borders, including immigration, exile and refugee flows, diaspora communities, and tourism.

\**Information* linkage, or flows of information across borders, via telecommunications, internet connections, and Western media penetration.

\**Civil Society* linkage, or local ties to Western-based NGOs, international religious and party organizations, and other transnational networks.

Linkage is rooted in a variety of historical factors, including colonialism, military occupation, and geopolitical alliances. It is enhanced by capitalist development, which generally increases cross-border economic activity, communication, and travel, as well as by sustained periods of political and economic openness. However, the most important source of linkage is geographic proximity (Kopstein and Reilly 2000; Gleditsch 2002; Brinks and

---

<sup>81</sup>This discussion draws on the work of Laurence Whitehead (1991, 1996b, 1996d, 1996e) and Geoffrey Pridham (1991b). It is worth reiterating that this argument applies *only to the post-Cold War era*. We do *not* expect ties to the United States to have a democratizing impact during the Cold War period.

<sup>82</sup>This conceptualization draws on Keohane and Nye's work on "complex interdependence," a central characteristic of which is "multiple channels of contact among societies" (Keohane and Nye 1989: 33-4). However, whereas Keohane and Nye focus on linkage *among* Western powers, we examine countries' ties *to* Western powers. Our conceptualization of linkage is broadly similar to those of Geoffrey Pridham (1991b, 1991c) and Barbara Stallings (1992), as well as to Rosenau's use of the term "penetrative linkage" (1969b: 46), Scott's (1982) use of "informal penetration," Li's (1993) use of "penetration," and Kopstein and Reilly's (2000) use of "flows." Our conceptualization differs from international relations work on "linkage diplomacy," which has been defined as government attempts to project power "from an area of strength to secure objectives in areas of weakness" (Oye et al. 1979: 13; Hass 1980; Stein 1980; Li 1993).

Coppedge 2006). Proximity “induces interdependence among states” and creates “opportunity for interaction” (Gleditsch 2002: 4-5). Countries in regions that are geographically proximate to the U.S. and the EU, such as Latin America and Central Europe, generally have closer economic ties, more extensive diplomatic contact, and higher cross-border flows of people, organizations, and information than countries in less proximate areas such as sub-Saharan Africa or the former Soviet Union.

Linkage serves as a transmitter of international influence. Many international effects that are commonly described as “global” are in fact rooted in concrete ties—networks, organizations, and flows of people, information, and resources—between states (Gleditsch 2002: 13). For example, diffusion is facilitated by “intensive and long term contacts” (Bostrom 1994: 192), which are rooted in “networks of communication” (Brinks and Coppedge 2001: 11-12) and flows of resources and people between countries (Kopstein and Reilly 2000: 13). Similarly, transnational pressure has a greater impact where NGO networks are “strong and dense” (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 206) and inter-state relations are characterized by extensive interaction (Risse-Kappan 1995b: 30-1; 1995c: 286-287). In short, many “globalizing” forces are not felt evenly across the globe. Post-Cold War demonstration effects, “CNN effects,” and “boomerang” effects were most pronounced in countries with extensive ties to the West (Whitehead 1996e: 395-6; Kopstein and Reilly 2000). Where ties to the West were minimal, international influences were “weaker and more diffuse” (Whitehead 1996e: 396).

Linkage contributed to democratization in three ways during the post-Cold War period: (1) it heightened the international reverberation caused by autocratic abuse, thereby raising the cost of such abuse; (2) it created domestic constituencies for democratic norm-abiding behavior; and (3) it reshaped the domestic distribution of power and resources, strengthening democratic and opposition forces and weakening and isolating autocrats.<sup>83</sup>

### *Shaping Incentives: International Reverberation and the Cost of Autocratic Abuse*

Linkage heightens the international reverberation triggered by autocratic abuse, thereby raising the cost of non-democratic behavior. All else equal, extensive media,

---

<sup>83</sup>This argument draws heavily on the work of Pridham (1991c), Whitehead (1991, 1996d, 1996e), Schmitter (1996), and Kopstein and Reilly (2000).

intergovernmental, and NGO penetration and cross-border flows of people and information increase the likelihood that fraud or repression will become “news” in Western capitals. The activities of transnational NGO networks, exile communities, and multilateral organizations have an amplifying effect, turning what would otherwise be a minor news item into an international scandal (Risse and Sikkink 1999: 18). In such a context, even relatively minor abuses may gain substantial attention in the West. Whereas stolen elections in Armenia, Cameroon and Gabon went virtually unnoticed in the U.S. media during the 1990s, fraud in two of Mexico’s *gubernatorial* elections gained widespread U.S. media coverage in 1991 (Dresser 199b: 332; Mazza 2001: 84). Similarly, the 1994 Zapatista uprising attracted a massive influx of international media and human rights organizations to Southern Mexico (Dresser 1996b: 334), and consequently, government efforts to repress the guerrillas “inspired an overwhelming reaction from civic groups throughout the United States” (Kumar 2000: 117). In Central Europe, a dense array of multilateral organizations allows for perpetual monitoring at a level of detail not witnessed in other parts of the world (Schimmelfennig 2002; Pridham 2002). For example, the Slovak government was once cited for violating *informal* parliamentary norms of committee assignment (Vachudova 2005: 158). By contrast, where Western media and INGO penetration is weak, even egregious abuses often fail to make international headlines. In parts of Africa, even regimes that “rely overwhelmingly on violence and exclusionary tactics...manage to slip almost completely beneath the radar of the international media” (Joseph 2003: 160). Similarly, months after the 2005 massacre of more than 100 protesters by Uzbek security forces, even Western regional experts knew “very little” about what had happened.<sup>84</sup>

Linkage also increases the probability that, all else equal, Western governments will take action in response to reported abuse. Extensive media coverage and lobbying by INGOs, exile and diaspora communities, and religious and party networks often generates a “do something” effect that puts pressure on Western governments to act (von Hippel 2000: 102-3). In Haiti, for example, intense lobbying by Haitian refugee organizations, human rights groups, and the Congressional Black Caucus played a critical role in reversing U.S.

---

<sup>84</sup>Presentation by Victoria Clement, “Yellow Revolution? Recent Referendums and Elections in Central Asia,” at the conference “Shades of Revolution: Democratization in the Former Soviet Union,” University of Illinois, 12 September 2005. See also, “A show trial,” *The Economist*, October 1, 2005.

policy and pushing the Clinton Administration to take action against Haiti's military regime in 1994 (Malone 1998: 166; Martin 1999: 725-726).

Western governments are also more likely to take action in high linkage cases because they perceive direct interests to be at stake. For the U.S. and EU members, the potential social, political, and economic effects of instability in the Caribbean Basin and Central and Southern Europe are greater than those of instability in Sub-Saharan Africa or most of the former Soviet Union. For example, Serbia's proximity to Western Europe explains why NATO opted for a military response to abuse in Kosovo, but took little action in response to similar or worse crises (in terms of number of refugees and internally displaced persons) in Afghanistan, Angola, Ethiopia, and Sudan (Daalder and O'Hanlon 2000: 194).<sup>85</sup> Similarly, the domestic impact of large-scale refugee flows helped trigger U.S. military action in Haiti in 1994 (von Hippel 2000: 102) and European intervention to resolve the Albanian political crisis in 1997 (Johnson 2001). EU choices regarding potential new members were also tied to proximity and security concerns. For example, the 1999 decision to offer or accelerate membership applications to underdeveloped Balkan states (but not to Moldova or Ukraine) was clearly linked to the threat of regional instability (Vachudova 2005).

Where linkage is less extensive, the probability of Western response is lower. For example, due to limited media coverage, weak intergovernmental ties, and the relative weakness of African diaspora communities and Africa-oriented human rights networks, Western governments have felt little domestic pressure to take action against autocratic abuses in Africa (Herbst 1991: 165-6; Moss 1995: 198-9; Schraeder 2001: 391-394).<sup>86</sup> U.S. politicians thus view it as "politically unwise to incur the possibility of alienating their constituencies by focusing on Africa," and consequently, even fairly major problems—such as the Congo civil war in 1999—have often "failed to rise to the level of a policy making crisis" in Washington (Schraeder 2001: 392). A similar pattern of limited response can be seen in the former Soviet Union. For example, there existed relatively little pressure on Western governments to take a strong stance against large-scale Russian human rights

---

<sup>85</sup>On a per capita basis, refugees in the Balkans received ten times more aid than refugees in Africa (Chinkin 1999: 847).

<sup>86</sup>South Africa under Apartheid is an exception to this pattern.

abuses in Chechnya (Goldgeier and McFaul 2003: 138-144), or to punish the 2005 massacre of unarmed protestors in Uzbekistan.

In sum, linkage increases the probability that government abuses will gain the attention of—and trigger responses by—Western powers, thereby narrowing autocrats’ room for maneuver. In such a context, even leaders who engage in relatively minor abuses, such as Vladimir Meciar in Slovakia or Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, are likely to be tagged as rogue autocrats, even though they are often less repressive than governments in low linkage countries (e.g., Zenawi in Ethiopia, Chiluba in Zambia) that are accepted—and even embraced—by the West.

*Shaping Preferences: The Emergence of Domestic Constituencies for Democratic Norm-Abiding Behavior*

Linkage also shapes the distribution of domestic preferences, increasing the number of domestic actors with a stake in adhering to regional or international democratic norms. Where linkage is extensive, a plethora of individuals, firms, and organizations maintain personal, financial, or professional ties to the West. Because international isolation triggered by flawed elections, human rights abuse, or other violations of democratic norms would put these ties—and consequently, valued markets, investment flows, grants, job prospects, and reputations—at risk, internationally-linked actors have a stake in avoiding such behavior. For example, regional economic integration increases the number of businesses for whom a sudden shift in trade or foreign investment flows would be costly. These economic actors will have a stake in their governments’ adherence to regional democratic norms (Pridham 1991c: 220-225; Pevehouse 2005). As a European official describing the effect of integration put it,

You can never prevent an adventurer trying to overthrow the government if he is backed by the real economic powers, the banks and the businesses. But once in the Community, you create a network of interests for those banks and businesses....; as a result, those powers would refuse to back the adventurer for fear of losing all those links.<sup>87</sup>

This dynamic was apparent in the Dominican Republic, where, despite a severe political-economic crisis in the early 1990s, business leaders opposed a coup out of fear that it

---

<sup>87</sup>Quoted in Pridham (1991c: 235).

would “hurt the country’s economic prospects, affect tourism, and impact relations with the United States” (Hartlyn 1993: 166).

Linkage also increases the number Western-educated technocrats with ties to Western universities, INGOs, and international organizations such as the World Bank and IMF. Not only are technocrats sensitive to developments in the international arena, but they often aspire to either funding from, or positions in, Western universities or international agencies in the future.<sup>88</sup> Fearing the professional or reputational costs of association with a norm-violating government, they are more likely to advocate reforms that improve the country’s international standing and/or oppose abusive acts that threaten international rebuke. Likewise, close ties to the West may induce politicians within authoritarian governing parties to seek to reform those parties from within, as occurred in Croatia, Mexico, and Taiwan, or to defect to the opposition, as occurred in Slovakia and (to a lesser extent) Romania during the mid-1990s (Vachudova 2005: 161, 163, 172). Linkage may even shape voter preferences. Citizens in Central Europe, Mexico, or Central America who expect integration with the Europe or the U.S. to bring prosperity are likely to vote against parties whose behavior appears to threaten the process of integration. Thus, oppositions in Bulgaria in 1997, Croatia in 2000, Romania in 1996, and Slovakia in 1998 focused their campaigns on a promise to end their countries’ relative estrangement from the EU (Vachudova 2005: 177).

Linkage thus creates new domestic constituencies for adherence to regional and international norms. By heightening domestic actors’ sensitivity to shifts in a regime’s image abroad, linkage blurs international and domestic politics, transforming international norms into powerful domestic demands. When a large number of political, economic, and technocratic elites perceive they have something to lose from international isolation, it becomes difficult to sustain a coalition behind authoritarian rule. For example, when Alberto Fujimori’s presidential “self-coup” threatened Peru’s re-integration into the international financial system, technocrats and business allies convinced him to abandon plans for dictatorship and call early elections (Mauceri 1996: 89). Likewise, Serbia’s

---

<sup>88</sup>For example, Mexican President Carlos Salinas aspired to be President of the World Trade Organization after her terms ended (Kaufman 1999: 185), and his successor, Ernesto Zedillo, became head of Yale University’s Center for the Study of Globalization after leaving the presidency. Both leaders were highly sensitive to international opinion perceptions during their presidencies.

increasing isolation from the West in the late 1990s led key military and security officials to defect, which undermined Milosevic's subsequent ability to crack down on opposition protest (Cohen 2001: 214; Bujosevic and Radovanovic 2003: 24-26). By contrast, in countries such as Armenia, Belarus, Cambodia, Malaysia, and Zimbabwe, where Western-linked economic, political, and technocratic elites were less numerous and influential, authoritarian coalitions remained cohesive in the face of criticism and even isolation from the West.

### *Shaping the Distribution of Power and Resources*

Linkage also reshapes the balance of power and resources within countries in ways that favor democratization. For one, ties to the West help to protect opposition leaders and groups who would otherwise be vulnerable to repression. Because individuals who gain extensive Western media exposure and have powerful allies in the West are more difficult for governments to imprison or kill, governments in high linkage contexts are often forced to tolerate persistent voices of criticism and opposition that they otherwise would have silenced. For example, although the Mexican army possessed the raw coercive capacity to destroy the Zapatista rebels, heavy international media attention and the presence of thousands of international human rights observers "made it literally impossible for the Mexican government to use repression" against them (Castells 1997: 80). In Romania, Western condemnation brought about by intense European engagement during the early 1990s helped to convince the Iliescu government to cease violent harassment of opposition by coal miners (Vachudova 2005: 102).

Second, ties to Western governments, transnational party networks, international agencies, and INGOs may provide critical resources to opposition and pro-democracy movements, helping to level the playing field against autocratic governments. Where autocrats monopolize—or nearly monopolize—access to the media and sources of finance, opposition parties are often so starved of resources that they cannot mount effective national electoral campaigns. External ties may help compensate for these resource asymmetries, by providing assistance in organization-building and financing for independent media, human rights, and electoral observation groups. In Slovakia, support from the EU and European party networks helped a relatively weak and fragmented

opposition defeat Vladimir Meciar in 1998 (Pridham 1999: 1229-1239; Vachudova 2005: 170-171), and in Serbia, U.S. and European assistance in 2000 helped level the playing field against the Milosevic government by injecting an enormous amount of money to support independent media, opposition activists' salaries, and a massive get-out-the-vote campaign (Carothers 2001). Similarly, in Nicaragua, where a weak and fragmented opposition stood little chance of wresting power from the Sandinistas on its own, U.S. officials helped unify the anti-Sandinista forces, select their presidential candidate, and—through extensive finance of civic, party, and media organizations—build a national infrastructure capable of defeating the Sandinistas at the polls (Robinson 1992; López Pintor 1998: 41-44). In East Asia, by contrast, few opposition parties benefit from strong international party ties (Sachsenroder 1998: 13), and power and resource asymmetries have been more difficult to overcome (Gomez 2002a; Rodan 2004).

Third, ties to the West may enhance domestic support for democratic opposition groups. Western media penetration heightens citizen awareness of their country's international standing—and its consequences. The wide availability of the internet, international cable, and other news sources in Central Europe and the Americas has made it harder for autocrats to hide foreign criticism of their governments from citizens. In such a context, opposition politicians who enjoy close ties to the West may gain prestige and support, either because they become identified with valued Western ideals or, more concretely, because they can credibly claim to be able to improve their country's international standing (for example, by securing entry into the EU or improving relations with the U.S.). Thus, in Nicaragua, where the Sandinista government suffered a costly U.S.-sponsored war and trade embargo, the National Opposition Union's (UNO) ties to the U.S. allowed it to “claim with confidence that if it won the election, the United States would end its economic embargo...and open the floodgates of U.S. economic assistance” (Moreno 1995: 240), which proved to be a critical source of electoral support (Anderson and Dodd 2004: 152-154).

At the same time, linkage may erode domestic support for autocratic incumbents. Leaders whose pariah status is perceived to threaten their countries' regional or international standing may pay a significant cost in terms of domestic support. In Slovakia, for example, most voters and politicians viewed Vladimir Meciar as an obstacle

to European integration, which was widely seen as a leading priority (Vachudova 2005: 174-5; Schimmelfennig et al. 2005: 40). Not only did Meciar's pariah status become a major issue in the 1998 election, but it undermined his party's ability to find coalition partners with which to form a government—despite the fact that it had won a plurality of votes (Schimmelfennig et al. 2003: 515). Similarly, in Croatia and Romania, where the EU actively discouraged alliances with parties that were viewed as non-democratic, governments pushed those parties out of ruling coalitions.

Finally, linkage may alter the balance of power *within* autocratic parties, helping strengthen reformist tendencies. In Croatia, for example, widespread frustration with international isolation helped reformists wrest control of the Croatian Democratic Union from radical nationalists after the death of Franjo Tudjman (Fish and Krickovic 2003). A similar reformist takeover occurred in Guyana after the death of Forbes Burnham.

Compared to military force, diplomatic pressure, or conditionality, the effects of linkage are subtle and diffuse. Linkage influences a variety of non-state actors, generating multiple and decentralized forms of pressure that often operate below the radar screens of international observers. Nevertheless, linkage effects may be more potent than the punitive measures meted out by foreign powers. Moreover, the diffuseness of linkage should not be interpreted to mean that its effects are strictly normative or ideational. Although linkage may facilitate the diffusion of ideas and norms, it also creates new interests, reshapes actors' incentives, and alters power and resource distributions. Indeed, without denying the importance of ideas and norms, our argument focuses on these latter effects.

### **Linkage, Leverage, and Democratization**

Both linkage and leverage raised the costs of authoritarianism during the post-Cold War era. However, they did so in distinct ways and to different degrees. As noted above, leverage alone generates inconsistent and often superficial democratizing pressure. Where linkage is low, external monitoring and sanctioning is usually limited to elections and large-scale human rights violations, which leaves autocrats with considerable room to maneuver. Even where external pressure succeeds in removing autocrats from power, transitions frequently do not result in democracy. Without

extensive ties to the West, and usually facing little external pressure, new governments have weaker incentives to play by democratic rules. Indeed, in low linkage cases such as Belarus, Georgia, Madagascar, Malawi, Moldova, Ukraine (in 1994), and Zambia, transitions have frequently ushered in new autocratic governments .

Where linkage is high, leverage is more likely to generate pressure for full-scale democratization. Linkage enhances the democratizing impact of leverage in at least three ways. First, it vastly improves external monitoring. In a context of extensive penetration by international media, INGOs, and multilateral organizations, autocratic governments face intense scrutiny. Crucially, this scrutiny extends beyond elections and gross human rights violations to include civil liberties, press freedom, and a range of electoral procedures—in other words, the full package of democracy. Moreover, monitoring tends to be permanent, rather than limited to crises or election cycles. Consequently, Western attention is less likely to wane after elections or after autocrats have been removed.

Second, linkage increases the probability that Western states will actually use leverage for democratizing ends. Because autocratic abuses—even relatively minor ones—are more likely to reverberate in Western capitals and trigger demands for a response from Western powers, norm-violating governments are more likely to suffer punitive action. In other words, the “boomerang effect” discussed by scholars of transnational advocacy networks (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Risse and Sikkink 1999) is more likely to be set in motion in a context of extensive linkage.

Third, linkage magnifies the *domestic* impact of external pressure, by increasing the likelihood that it will trigger broad domestic opposition to the regime. Because economic elites, politicians, technocrats, and voters are more aware of how their country is perceived abroad and are more likely to believe they have something to lose from international isolation, governments that violate international norms confront a *double boomerang effect*: abuses trigger hostile reactions on both the international and domestic fronts. For example, after Guatemalan President Jorge Serrano’s 1993 “self-coup” was condemned by the U.S. government, the “threat of international economic and diplomatic isolation loomed in the minds of both economic and military elites, both of which valued their international contacts” (Pevehouse 2005: 192). “[F]ear of the international consequences of allowing the

coup to stand” led them to mobilize against Serrano, forcing his resignation (Pevehouse 2005: 190-2).

Linkage also increases the likelihood that autocratic collapse will result in democratization—and that new democracies will be stable. In a high linkage context, successor governments have stronger and more permanent incentives to play by democratic rules. For one, in nearly all cases, officials in successor governments maintained close ties with Western actors that were forged during periods of opposition. In Bulgaria, Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Peru, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and elsewhere, opposition leaders had relied heavily on Western allies for resources, protection, and legitimacy. In many cases, their domestic public support was rooted in their promise to deliver better relations with the West. Thus, once opposition leaders such as Violeta Chamorro (Nicaragua), Constantinescu (Romania), Mikulas Dzurinda (Slovakia), Leonel Fernández (Dominican Republic), or Alejandro Toledo (Peru) came to power, they were unlikely to “bite the hand” that helped get them there. Second, because the infrastructure of international monitoring remains in place, new governments face the same level of scrutiny—or nearly so—as their autocratic predecessors. Hence, even former opposition leaders who are not committed democrats face strong domestic and international pressure to govern democratically.

Where linkage is less extensive, opposition groups maintain weaker ties to Western actors, and in the absence of an infrastructure of media, NGOs and other transnational actors to monitor abuse, new governments enjoy greater room for maneuver. Consequently, as long as domestic pro-democracy forces remain limited, the incentives to play by fully democratic rules will be weak. In such cases, transitions are more likely to bring new autocrats to power (e.g., Georgia, Malawi, Zambia). Even where transitions bring democrats to power (e.g. Mali, Ukraine in 2004), new democracies will be more vulnerable to authoritarian reversal in the future.

In sum, the democratizing impact of Western leverage varies with linkage. In the absence of linkage, the effects of leverage are too limited and too inconsistent to contribute in a significant way to democratization. But where linkage is extensive, more rigorous monitoring, more systematic sanctioning, and greater domestic pressure for international norm-abiding behavior raise considerably the cost of autocratic abuse—

making authoritarian rule much more difficult to sustain. In such a context, external pressure is often highly effective in bringing down autocratic governments. Moreover, transitions in high linkage cases are more likely to result in stable democratization.

Linkage effects are often obscured by formal mechanisms of external pressure, leading observers to overstate the latter's causal impact. For example, scholars have attributed the region-wide success of democracy in Central Europe and the Americas to pressures exercised by regional organizations such as the EU and the OAS (Halperin 1993; Pevehouse 2005; Schimmelfennig et al. 2005). Although conditionality was indeed effective in these cases (particularly in Europe), its effectiveness was rooted, to a considerable extent, in linkage.<sup>89</sup>

The dimensions of leverage and linkage thus help us understand cross-national variation in international pressure for democratization. (These variables are operationalized in Appendix I). In effect, different combinations of leverage and linkage create distinct external environments (see Table 2.1). Across these environments, the relative influence of domestic and international forces varies considerably (Levitsky and Way 2005, forthcoming).

Where linkage and leverage are high, as in much of Central Europe and the Americas, external democratizing pressure is consistent and intense. Violations of democratic norms frequently gain international attention and trigger costly punitive action, which is often magnified by opposition among domestic constituencies. In such a context, autocracies are least likely to survive. Moreover, turnover is likely to result in democratization. It is in this context, then, that international influences are most pronounced. Democratization is likely even in countries with relatively unfavorable domestic conditions (e.g., Nicaragua, Romania).

Where linkage is high but leverage is relatively low (Mexico, Taiwan), external democratizing pressure will be diffuse and indirect, but nevertheless considerable. Notwithstanding the absence of direct external pressure, governments face intense scrutiny from international media, transnational human rights networks, and internationally-oriented domestic constituencies. Consequently, governments—particularly those with many Western-educated technocrats, as in Mexico and Taiwan—

---

<sup>89</sup>Pridham (1991b) and Whitehead (1991, 1996d, 1996e, 1996f) make similar arguments.

will be highly sensitive to shifts in international opinion. Even if are not directly pushed to democratize, the pursuit of international legitimacy creates incentives to avoid egregious abuse and may even induce governments to build increasingly credible democratic institutions.

In low linkage countries, international democratizing pressure is weaker. Where both linkage and leverage are low, as in parts of East Asia and the former Soviet Union, external pressure is likely to be minimal. In such a context, even serious abuses may fail to trigger a strong international reaction, and when punitive action is undertaken, it is unlikely to have a significant impact. Consequently, governments will have considerable room to maneuver—including the use of large-scale repression or fraud—in building or maintaining authoritarian regimes. In this context of relative international permissiveness, regime outcomes will hinge primarily on domestic factors. Democratization in such cases thus requires a strong domestic “push.”

Where linkage is low but leverage is high, as in much of Sub-Saharan Africa and parts of the former Soviet Union, international pressure may be significant, but it tends to be limited and sporadic. Governments that fail to meet international electoral or human rights standards may confront debilitating cuts in external assistance. However, such pressure is often limited to the holding of minimally acceptable elections, thereby leaving autocrats substantial room for maneuver. Even when autocrats fall, regimes may not democratize. In the absence of extensive linkage, international pressure often ceases after an electoral turnover, which may allow successor governments to violate democratic norms at low external cost. Hence, although a high leverage/low linkage environment may raise the cost of authoritarianism, it is less propitious for democratization.

### **The Domestic Dimension: The Organizational Bases of Authoritarian Stability**

Our domestic-level analysis centers on the balance of power between autocrats and their opponents.<sup>90</sup> Much of the recent literature has focused on the opposition—or

---

<sup>90</sup>Here we draw on classic structuralist analyses of regime change (Skocpol 1973, 1979), as well as more recent work highlighting the role of state and party organization and social mobilization, such as

societal—side of this story. An established body of scholarship has highlighted the centrality of organized labor and other class actors,<sup>91</sup> civil society,<sup>92</sup> mass protest,<sup>93</sup> and insurgency<sup>94</sup> in undermining authoritarianism and/or installing democracy. Other recent studies point to the importance of opposition strategy. For example, Marc Howard and Philip Roessler (2006) have linked the formation of broad opposition coalitions to the liberalization of competitive authoritarian regimes, while Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik (forthcoming) attribute the success of recent “electoral revolutions” in the post-Communist world to the diffusion of particular opposition techniques and tactics that were initially developed in Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia and Serbia.

Yet regime outcomes also hinge on *incumbents’ capacity to resist opposition challenges*.<sup>95</sup> Autocratic governments vary considerably in their ability to control civil society, co-opt or divide oppositions, repress protest, and steal elections. Consider the story of the three little pigs. Normative preferences aside, imagine that the pigs are autocratic incumbents, their houses are their regimes, and the wolf represents pro-democracy movements. The wolf huffs and puffs at all three houses, but the impact of his huffing and puffing varies across cases: whereas houses of straw and sticks quickly collapse, the brick house remains intact. The key to explaining these outcomes lies not in the wolf’s abilities or strategies, but in differences in the strength of the houses.

The contemporary regimes literature has focused almost exclusively on democratic huffing and puffing, while largely ignoring the considerable variation that exists in the strength of authoritarian houses. In some countries, bankrupt states, weak, underpaid, and disorganized security services, and fragmented elites left regimes vulnerable to collapse in the face of minimal protest (Herbst 2001; Way 2002a; 2003; 2005a). Thus it was “the weakness of African states rather than the strength of democratic opposition” that drove many regime transitions in that region (Herbst 2001:

---

Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens (1992); Collier (1999); Wood (2000); Way (2005a); Slater (2003); Brownlee (2004); Bellin (2004); Smith (2005); and Waldner (2005).

<sup>91</sup>See Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens (1992); Collier (1999); and Bellin (2000).

<sup>92</sup>See Fish (1995); Diamond (1999); and Howard (2003).

<sup>93</sup>See Bratton and van de Walle (1997); Beissinger (2002); Thompson and Kuntz (2004, 2005); and Tucker (2005).

<sup>94</sup>See Wood (2000).

<sup>95</sup>On this issue, see Skocpol (1979); Luckham (1996); Snyder (1998); Brownlee (2002); Slater (2003); Bellin (2004); and Way (2005a, 2005b).

364). Many African democracy movements confronted states that “were rotting from within. With a mere push many would collapse” (Herbst 2001: 361). A similar dynamic can be seen in parts of the former Soviet Union (Way 2002a, 2005a, 2005b). For example, in Georgia, where police had not been paid in three months, Eduard Shevardnadze abandoned the presidency in the face of “undersized” crowds, largely because he “no longer controlled the military and security forces” and was thus “too politically weak” to order repression (Mitchell 2004: 345, 348). In Kyrgyzstan, it took only 5,000-10,000 protesters to overthrow President Askar Akayev (Silitski 2005). Finally, in Haiti, the Aristide government was “toppled by a rag-tag army of as few as 200 rebels.”<sup>96</sup> The rebels “did not fight a single battle. The police simply changed out of their uniforms, grabbed bottles of rum, and headed for the hills” (Dudley 2004: 27).

In other cases, the story played out differently. Where state and/or governing party institutions were strong, autocrats often thwarted serious opposition challenges. In Armenia, for example, the government, backed by army veterans who had recently returned from a successful war with Azerbaijan, faced down crowds of up to 200,000 (in a country of 3 million) protesting a rigged presidential election in 1996.<sup>97</sup> In Zimbabwe, opposition plans for “mass action” to protest the flawed 2000 elections were “deferred indefinitely” in the face of brutal police repression.<sup>98</sup> Two years later, opposition leaders were “unwilling to consider” mass protest “given the vast repressive machinery that would confront them” (Raftopoulos 2002: 418). In Malaysia, although the 1998 arrest of Anwar Ibrahim gave rise to a vibrant *Reformasi* movement, regime opponents confronted a “highly effective and repressive police force” (Slater 2003: 89). Protest was “met forcefully” by riot police (Hilley 2001: 151) and ultimately “posed no threat to the government’s stability” (Felker 1999: 46). Finally, in Serbia, the opposition to Milosevic was highly mobilized throughout the 1990s, but autocratic breakdown occurred only after four military defeats and a severe economic crisis had eroded the power of the state and the governing party. Opposition movements in Armenia, Zimbabwe, and Malaysia were arguably stronger than those in Haiti, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan. The fact that regime change occurred in the *latter* cases (or in Serbia, only *after* the state was battered by

---

<sup>96</sup>*The Economist*, March 6, 2004. Also see Wucker (2004).

<sup>97</sup>See Fuller (1996: 45); Stefes (2005).

<sup>98</sup>*Africa Today*, January 2001, p. 25; Also Raftopoulos (2001: 23)

successive military defeats) suggests that the fate of authoritarian regimes rests not only on the opposition forces but also on the robustness of the regime they are up against.

Variation in incumbent capacity is particularly important in the study of competitive authoritarianism. The regimes analyzed in this study had not democratized by 1990 (or, in a few cases, suffered authoritarian reversals between 1990 and 1995), despite a highly favorable international environment. In nearly all of these cases, the domestic impetus for democratization—the “push” from civil society—was weak (Howard 2003). With a few exceptions (Mexico, Taiwan), civil societies lacked the organization, resources, and rural presence to sustain the kind of robust democracy movements seen in countries such as Poland, South Korea, or South Africa. Given this lack of variation, societal or opposition-centered variables are of limited utility in explaining diverging outcomes.

Our approach to incumbent power is *organizational*. As Samuel Huntington argued nearly four decades ago, organization is “the foundation of political stability” (1968: 461). Sustaining modern authoritarianism is a complex and costly endeavor. It entails dissuading diverse social and political actors from challenging the regime (through co-optation, intimidation, or repression), as well as maintaining the loyalty and cooperation of powerful actors within the regime. These organizational challenges are especially great in competitive authoritarian regimes, as incumbents must tolerate—and yet at the same time control—myriad actors (parties, media, judges, NGOs) and arenas of contestation (elections, legislatures, courts) that do not exist—or exist merely as a façade—in fully closed regimes. In all but the most traditional societies, these tasks require robust organizational mechanisms for coordination, monitoring, and enforcement (Selznick 1960; Slater 2003; Brownlee 2004, Smith 2005).

Two types of organization are particularly important for competitive authoritarian regime stability: states and parties. Effective state and party organizations enhance incumbents’ capacity to prevent elite defection, co-opt, repress, or deny resources to opponents, defuse or crack down on protest, win (or steal) elections, and maintain control over the legislative process. Where states and governing parties are strong, autocrats are often able to survive despite vigorous opposition challenges. Where they are weak, incumbents may fall in the face of relatively weak opposition movements.

## State Coercive Capacity

As Vladimir Lenin observed, military and police forces are “the chief instruments of state power” (1975: 52). Nevertheless, the role of coercive capacity has received relatively little attention in recent regime studies.<sup>99</sup> Recent analyses have highlighted the importance of state strength to democracy. Scholars such as Guillermo O’Donnell (1993, 1999) and Stephen Holmes (1997, 2002) have argued cogently that an effective state, grounded in the rule of law, is essential to protecting basic liberal-democratic rights.<sup>100</sup> Yet as an earlier generation of scholarship made clear, strong states also enhance autocratic stability (Huntington 1968; Skocpol 1979). Whereas some state institutions check executive power and uphold a democratic rule of law, others provide key mechanisms to suppress opposition and maintain political hegemony. *Authoritarian* state institutions—from security forces to local prefects to intelligence agencies to informal patronage and corruption networks—furnish governments with tools to monitor, co-opt, intimidate, and repress potential opponents, both in civil society and within the regime itself (Slater 2003).<sup>101</sup> Although these state institutions often perform illiberal and even illegal functions, they may nevertheless be effective (Darden forthcoming). And the more effective they are, the more stable authoritarian regimes will be. State-building is thus as important to authoritarianism as it is to democracy.<sup>102</sup> Where post-Cold War autocrats inherited weak states and failed to rebuild them (e.g., Georgia, Haiti, Madagascar), they rarely endured in power. Where autocrats invested seriously in state-building, as in Nicaragua and Zimbabwe during the 1980s, Cambodia and Armenia during the 1990s, and Russia under Putin, the result was not democracy but more robust authoritarianism.

Coercive capacity has long weighed heavily in regime outcomes. In her critique of Barrington Moore, Theda Skocpol argues that the erosion of the English monarchy’s monopoly over political power was rooted not only in the rise of commerce but also in the fact that it lacked a centralized standing army (Skocpol 1973). Skocpol’s classic work on social

---

<sup>99</sup>Recent exceptions include Thompson (2001); Brownlee (2002); Way (2002; 2005a, 2005b); Slater (2003); Bellin (2004), and Darden (forthcoming).

<sup>100</sup>Also see Linz and Stepan (1996); Sperling (2000); Carothers (2002: 16); van de Walle (2002: 76); Bunce (2003: 180-81); Joseph (2003: 16); Mengisteab and Daddieh (2003); Gonzales and King (2004); and Bratton (2005).

<sup>101</sup>A variety of other state agents—including local, finance, and educational officials—may also be used to both intimidate opposition and manipulate elections.

<sup>102</sup>See Way (2002, 2005a).

revolutions (1979) similarly pointed to the centrality of state coercive power. Only where states' coercive apparatus was weakened—often by war—did autocracies fall prey to revolution. More recently, Eva Bellin (2004) has highlighted the role played by strong security apparatuses in sustaining authoritarianism in the Middle East. As Bellin argues, “democratic transition can be carried out successfully only when the state’s coercive apparatus lacks the will or capacity to crush it” (2004: 143). At the same time, Lucan Way (2002, 2005a) has shown how weak coercive capacity undermined autocratic consolidation in the former Soviet Union.

Coercive capacity is central to competitive authoritarian stability. A strong coercive apparatus enhances incumbents' capacity to monitor, intimidate, and when necessary, repress opponents. The greater is incumbents' capacity to crack down on opposition protest (or prevent it from emerging in the first place), either on the street or at the ballot box, the greater are the prospects for stable authoritarianism.

Incumbents in competitive authoritarian regimes rely on various forms of state coercion. Some, which we label *high intensity coercion*, are highly visible (both at home and abroad) acts that target large numbers of people, well-known individuals, or major institutions. A clear example is the violent repression—in most cases, involving security forces firing on crowds—of high profile mass demonstrations, as occurred in Mexico City in 1968 and Tiananmen Square, China in 1989 (and more recently, in Uzbekistan in 2005). Although such massacres are uncommon in competitive authoritarian regimes, violent repression of protest – in each case, with dozens of reported deaths—occurred in Kenya (1990, 1997), Madagascar (1991), Cambodia (1998), Tanzania (2001), and Ethiopia (2005). Other forms of high intensity coercion include campaigns of sweeping violence against opposition parties (e.g., Cambodia 1997; Zimbabwe 2000-2002), which often force much of the opposition temporarily underground or into exile, or targeted acts of repression against major opposition figures, including assassination (successful in Belarus, failed in Ukraine), imprisonment (Malaysia, Russia), and forced exile (Cambodia). In competitive authoritarian regimes, high intensity coercion may also be said to include high profile assaults on existing democratic institutions. Examples include the closure of legislature, as in Fujimori's 1992 self-coup and Yeltsin's violent assault on parliament in 1993, as well as the cancellation or the outright theft of elections, as in Armenia (1996), Serbia (1997, 2000), Madagascar (2001), and Ukraine (2004).

What these acts of repression share in common is the fact that they are extraordinary measures aimed at thwarting an immediate and serious challenge to the regime. Due to the domestic and international visibility of such acts, particularly in the contemporary period, they are extremely high risk ventures. As a result, they are relatively rare in competitive authoritarian regimes.

Yet competitive authoritarian regimes also rely on a variety of other, less visible, forms of coercion—which we label *low intensity coercion*. Because these acts of coercion do not involve major events or high profile targets, and thus rarely make headlines or trigger international condemnation, they are often critical to sustaining competitive authoritarian rule. One form of low intensity coercion is surveillance. Through a combination of capital intensive (phone tapping, bugs, and other listening devices) and labor intensive (agents and informant networks) activities, governments in Belarus, Cambodia, Nicaragua, Russia, Taiwan, Zimbabwe and elsewhere effectively tracked opposition activities throughout the national territory. Where effective, surveillance extends into the countryside and penetrates much of civil society. In Zimbabwe, for example, the Central Intelligence Organization infiltrated all major opposition parties, had spies in all university courses, and once identified “within an hour” a lawyer who traveled—in disguise—to a rural village to investigate a human rights case.<sup>103</sup> In Belarus, the government is said to have placed “hundreds of thousands” of informants in virtually every population center to monitor dissent.<sup>104</sup> In some cases (Peru, Ukraine), surveillance also systematically targeted agents within the regime itself, allowing executives to use blackmail to ensuring discipline within the cabinet, the security forces, and throughout the state bureaucracy (Cameron 2006; Darden forthcoming).

Another form of low intensity coercion might be characterized as low profile physical harassment. This includes the use of state security agents or paramilitary thugs to break up opposition meetings, vandalize opposition or independent media offices, and threaten, harass, beat, and occasionally kill journalists and opposition activists. It also includes the short-term detention (and in some cases, torture) of opposition activists by police or intelligence agents. In contrast to high intensity coercion, these attacks are often localized (in many cases, in rural areas), and victims generally lack national or international stature.

---

<sup>103</sup>*Africa Today*, February 2003, p. 27. Also Nordlund (1996: 193) and Stiff (2000: 303).

<sup>104</sup>Lucan Way interview with Sergei Anis'ko, former Belarusian KGB official, Minsk, 14 July 2004.

A third type of low intensity coercion is what might be called non-violent harassment. This category includes blacklisting, or the large-scale denial of public (and sometimes private) employment, scholarships, or university entrance to opposition activists.<sup>105</sup> In a few cases (Belarus, Ukraine), governments have used control over basic infrastructure—such as heat and electricity—to coerce individuals and communities.<sup>106</sup> Another form of non-violent harassment is “legal” harassment, or the use of tax, regulatory, or other state agencies to selectively investigate and prosecute opposition politicians, businesspeople, or media outlets.<sup>107</sup>

Finally, low intensity coercion may take the form of electoral abuse carried out by local prefects and other state officials. This includes everything from the procedural disqualification of opposition candidates in the legislature to the massive abuse of state resources and infrastructure during campaigns to manipulation of the vote on election day.

Whereas high intensity coercion is employed in response to large and imminent opposition challenges, low intensity coercion is often aimed at preventing such challenges from emerging in the first place. Where it is effective, many opposition supporters conclude that anti-government activity is simply not worth the risk, leaving only the most die-hard activists to openly oppose the regime. By deterring opposition protest (or nipping it in the bud), successful low intensity coercion thus reduces the need for high intensity coercion. Where opposition movements are so thoroughly beaten down that they do not pose a serious challenge, incumbents have little need to steal or cancel elections or order police to fire on crowds.

Coercive capacity may be measured along two dimensions: *scope* and *cohesion*. Scope refers to the effective reach—across territory and into society—of the state’s coercive apparatus. Specifically, we focus on the size and quality of the “internal security sector,” or the “cluster of organizations with direct responsibility for internal security and domestic order” (Weitzer 1990: 3). This includes army and police forces, presidential guards, gendarmes and riot police, secret police and other specialized internal security units, and the domestic intelligence apparatus (Weitzer 1990: 3; Luckham 1996:

---

<sup>105</sup>In Belarus, where a large percentage of the population works on short time government contracts, opponents face a serious threat of job loss, which discourages opposition activity.

<sup>106</sup>On Ukraine, see Allina-Pisano (2005).

<sup>107</sup>For a description of such low-intensity coercion in Ukraine, see Allina-Pisano 2005.

8), as well as informal paramilitary organizations such as death squads, militias, and armed “youth wings” (Roessler 2005). It may also include a variety of other state agents—local prefects, tax officials, state enterprise directors—who may be mobilized to harass the opposition. Where scope is extensive, as in Belarus, Malaysia, Nicaragua, Russia, Taiwan, and Zimbabwe, states possess a developed internal security sector—including extensive intelligence networks and specialized police and paramilitary units—whose presence is felt throughout the national territory. Security forces are well paid, trained, and equipped, and often have a proven capacity to monitor and suppress opposition activity.<sup>108</sup>

Where scope is low, as in Albania, Georgia, and Haiti, armed forces are small, poorly-equipped, and sometimes even lacking in specialized intelligence and internal security agencies. Security forces do not effectively penetrate the national territory; law enforcement agents are non-existent, or maintain only a token presence, in much of the country; or alternatively are underpaid to the extent that they largely ineffective and refuse to obey orders.<sup>109</sup> Such cases are frequently characterized by extensive “brown areas” (O’Donnell 1993), or parts of the national territory that lack even a minimal state presence and thus effectively lie beyond state control.

Scope is particularly important for low intensity coercion. Systematic surveillance, harassment, and intimidation of opponents require an infrastructure capable of directing, coordinating, and supplying agents across the national territory. Where such an infrastructure is absent or ineffective, incumbents’ ability to monitor and check grassroots opposition activity will be limited.<sup>110</sup> This (often *de facto*) space to organize makes it easier for opposition groups to organize electoral campaigns or protest

---

<sup>108</sup>In Malaysia, for example, the government possessed “highly developed coercive institutions” (Slater 2003: 83), including a “powerful counter-insurgency and surveillance infrastructure” that was “renowned for [its] expertise in ‘intelligence’ gathering” (Munro-Kua 1996: 22). In Zimbabwe, the Mugabe government inherited “a remarkably efficient and brutal state” (Herbst 1990: 17), whose vast internal security sector maintained “an elaborate and pervasive system of social control” (Weitzer 1984b: 81; 1990).

<sup>109</sup>In Haiti, for example, the Aristide government dissolved the army, and its 4000-man police force was one of the smallest per capita in the world (Erikson and Minson 2005: 4). The police “often lack[ed] lacks the means to conduct basic operations” (Schulz 1997-98: 85) and were largely non-existent in rural areas (McCoy 1997: 18)

<sup>110</sup>An extreme example is Haiti, where security forces were unable to prevent the emergence and spread of armed gangs—in urban slums, rural towns, and crucially, along the Dominican border—that eventually overthrew the Aristide government (Fatton 2002: 151-2; Erikson 2004).

movements. Indeed, the (attempted) use of high intensity coercion is often evidence that mechanisms of low intensity coercion are weak or have broken down.

Cohesion refers to the level of compliance *within* the state apparatus. For coercion to be effective, subordinates within the state must reliably follow their superiors' commands. Where cohesion is high, incumbents can be confident that even highly controversial or illegal orders—such as firing on crowds of protesters, killing opposition leaders, or stealing elections—will be implemented systematically on the ground. Security officials will obey executive orders to repress, and rank-and-file soldiers, police, and bureaucrats will carry out those orders. Where cohesion is low, leaders cannot be confident that such orders will be complied with, either by high level security officials or by the rank-and-file. Noncompliance may take a variety of forms. In extreme cases, top security officials may openly disobey presidential orders and even cooperate with (or defect to) the opposition (e.g., Madagascar 2001-02) and rank-and-file soldiers or bureaucrats may desert en masse (e.g., Haiti in 2004).<sup>111</sup> More subtle forms of non-compliance—what T. H. Rigby (1964) has called “crypto politics”—include calling in sick when coercive action is expected, promising compliance but failing to carry it out, and carrying out orders in ritualistic or formalistic ways that are intentionally ineffective.<sup>112</sup>

Cohesion is particularly critical during periods of regime crisis, when incumbents must often employ high intensity coercion to retain power. Acts of high intensity coercion (such as firing on crowds of protesters) are high risk ventures. Because they are likely to trigger strong negative reactions both at home and abroad (even in low linkage countries), such acts often exacerbate regime crises and may even contribute to regime collapse. State officials responsible for ordering or carrying out the repression thus run considerable risks, for if the repression fails and the regime collapses, they will be vulnerable to retribution. Hence, acts of high intensity coercion pose a particular threat to the chain of command, increasing the likelihood of internal disobedience. Breakdown

---

<sup>111</sup>In Ukraine in 1994, local officials in the eastern part of the country actively worked against President Leonid Kravchuk's reelection.

<sup>112</sup>For example, during protests in Serbia over the stolen 2000 presidential election, police reached an agreement striking miners whereby they would disburse the strikers from the mine as ordered but then allow their re-entry through a hole in a back fence. In this way, police nominally carried out their orders while allowing the strike to continue (Bujosevic and Radovanovic 2003: 19-20).

of the coercive command structures undermined incumbents' capacity to engage in high intensity coercion in Benin in 1990, Madagascar in 2002, Georgia in 1991 and 2003, Russia in 1993 and Ukraine in 1994 and 2004. Only where the state apparatus is cohesive (e.g., Armenia, Malaysia, Zimbabwe) can incumbents confidently order acts of large-scale repression or abuse.

Variation in state cohesion is rooted in several factors. One is fiscal health (Decalo 1998: 27; Gros 1998: 9-10; Geddes 1999: 139). Unpaid state officials are less likely to follow orders, especially high-risk orders such as repression or vote-stealing. Thus, in much of Africa and the former Soviet Union, deep fiscal crises severely eroded discipline within states during the immediate post-Cold War period. In extreme cases, such as Benin, Malawi, and Georgia, the non-compliance of under-financed or unpaid security forces left incumbents' without means to crack down on opposition protest.<sup>113</sup>

However, material resources are neither necessary nor sufficient to ensure cohesion. In Armenia, Nicaragua, and Zimbabwe, state apparatuses remained intact despite severe fiscal constraints.<sup>114</sup> Indeed, as we show throughout this book, incumbents who rely exclusively on material payoffs are often most vulnerable to insubordination during periods of crisis. Thus, although a minimum of fiscal health can be essential, the highest levels of cohesion are usually found where material payments are complemented by one of four alternative sources of cohesion. One is personal ties. As the literature on sultanistic regimes has shown, the appointment of family members and cronies to head army, police, intelligence, and other state agencies is often an important means of enhancing intra-regime trust and reducing the likelihood of elite defection (Chehabi and Linz 1998; Snyder 1998; Decalo 1998: 23). A second source of cohesion is shared ethnicity. Particularly in deeply divided societies (e.g., Guyana, Malaysia), autocrats have enhanced loyalty within security agencies by packing them with ethnic allies to (Enloe 1976; Decalo 1998: 19-21). Third, cohesion may be enhanced where state elites are bound by shared (usually nationalist or revolutionary) ideologies, as in Moldova,

---

<sup>113</sup>According to the Interior Minister in Georgia, the police were unwilling to suppress the opposition in 2003 because they "had not been paid at that point for three months. So why should they have obeyed Shevardnadze?" (quoted in Karumidze and Wertsch (2005: 39)).

<sup>114</sup>The Armenian economy contracted by 50 percent between 1991 and 1993.

Nicaragua, and Serbia.<sup>115</sup> Finally, elite cohesion may be rooted in solidarity ties forged during periods of shared military struggle, such as war, revolution, or liberation movements.<sup>116</sup> Thus, where top positions in the state are controlled by a generation of elites that won a war (Armenia) or led a successful insurgency (Mozambique, Nicaragua, Zimbabwe), state actors are more likely to possess the cohesion, self-confidence and “stomach” to use force.<sup>117</sup>

Measuring cohesion is tricky. One cannot know for certain how cohesive an organization is until it is seriously tested. However, using responses to regime crisis during the post-Cold War period as an indicator of cohesion risks tautology. To avoid this problem, we rely on two types of indicator. First, wherever possible, we examine previous levels of cohesion either in the Cold War era or prior to regime crisis. For example, coercive apparatuses in Mozambique and Nicaragua remained cohesive despite serious external challenges during the 1980s, while those in Albania, Benin, Georgia, Haiti, and Ukraine showed evidence of repeated indiscipline long before regime crises. Second, we look for evidence of non-material sources of cohesion, including kinship, ethnic, or ideological ties, or solidarity ties rooted in shared military struggle. Where evidence of either prior discipline under stress or non-material bases of cohesion exist, we score cohesion as high.

### **The Role of Party Organization**

Much of the recent literature on political parties and regimes has focused on the relationship between parties and democracy (Mainwaring and Scully 1995; Kitschelt and Smyth 2002). Analyses of Latin American politics, for example, have associated weak parties with a range of phenomena—such as low democratic accountability, severe executive-legislative conflict, electoral volatility, and the rise of neopopulist “outsider”

---

<sup>115</sup>Both Theda Skocpol (1979: 169) and Philip Selznik (1960) argue that ideology plays an important role in sustaining the cohesion of revolutionary leaderships.

<sup>116</sup>The different literatures on the origins of both states and parties have long emphasized the important role played by histories of conflict in generating strong and cohesive organizations (Tilly 1975, 1992; Huntington 1970; Shefter 1994; Hale 2006).

<sup>117</sup>Along these lines, Mark Thompson (2001) and Andrew Nathan (2001) argue that the survival of the original revolutionary generation in the Chinese Communist Party was key to its decision to crack down on protestors in 1989.

candidates—that undermine the quality and stability of democracy.<sup>118</sup> Similarly, students of Russian politics have argued that Boris Yeltsin’s failure to invest in a governing party weakened democratic forces and contributed to democratic failure in the 1990s (White 1993: 312; McFaul 1994: 312; 2001: 316-17).

Like states, however, strong parties may also serve as pillars of authoritarian rule.<sup>119</sup> As Barbara Geddes (1999) and Jason Brownlee (2004) have argued, governing parties help manage elite conflict, usually through the organization and distribution of patronage. Strong ruling parties “encourage continued cooperation over defection” (Brownlee 2004: 57), by providing institutional mechanisms to reward loyalists (with public posts, policy influence, and patronage resources), and by lengthening actors’ time horizons through the offer of future opportunities for career advancement (Geddes 1999; Brownlee 2004). As long as the party is expected to remain in power, even short-term losers in struggles over policy and patronage are likely to remain loyal in the expectation of access to spoils in future rounds (Geddes 1999: 129, 131). Where governing parties are weak or absent, elites will see fewer long-term opportunities for political advancement from within and are thus more likely to seek power from outside the regime (Way 2002; Brownlee 2004: 55). Such elite defections are often a major cause of authoritarian breakdown.<sup>120</sup>

Strong parties do more than limit elite defection, however. They also contribute to authoritarian stability “on the ground,” both by mobilizing support and by repressing dissent. Grassroots party organizations deliver votes, distribute clientelist goods, and mobilize supporters for pro-government campaigns. In Serbia, for example, the Communist Party helped mobilize up to five million supporters in the “anti-bureaucratic revolution” that allowed Slobodan Milosevic to overcome local opposition and consolidate power (Thomas 1999: 44-51), and in Mexico, the PRI’s “gigantic human network of clientelist relations” (Pacheco 1991: 255) was critical in “organizing, supporting, and controlling popular demands” (Centeno 1994: 53).

---

<sup>118</sup>See Mainwaring and Scully (1995); Mainwaring (1999); Weyland (1999); Levitsky and Cameron (2003).

<sup>119</sup>See Zolberg (1966); Huntington (1968: 400-01), Huntington and Moore (1970); Widner (1992); Geddes (1999); Brownlee (2004); Smith (2005); Way (2005a).

<sup>120</sup>This argument is made by Easter (1997), Geddes (1999) and Brownlee (2004), and is in line with earlier work by O’Donnell and Schmitter (1986).

Grassroots party organization also enhances coercive capacity (Widner 1992). Autocratic governments may use local party cells, “youth wings,” and other grassroots structures to monitor and suppress opposition, effectively transforming them into an “extension of the state’s police power” (Widner 1992: 8). For example, Kenyan autocrat Daniel arap Moi used the governing KANU as an “adjunct to the security forces in monitoring and controlling opposition,” deploying KANU’s “youth wing” to “patrol the country, instill support for the party, and monitor dissent” in markets and other public places (Widener 1992: 7, 132, 170). In Taiwan, the KMT’s “extensive network of secret police and informers” (Gold 1997: 170) was used to “keep watch over neighborhoods, factories, military units, businesses, and government offices” (Hood 1997: 59). Grassroots party structures were also used for surveillance and intimidation in Cambodia, Guyana, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Serbia, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe.

Parties are particularly important in competitive authoritarian regimes because—unlike closed authoritarian regimes—incumbents must retain and exercise power through nominally democratic institutions. Strong parties are essential to controlling these institutions. For example, parties enhance incumbents’ capacity to manage the electoral process. First, they reduce the likelihood of challenges from within. In countries with weak civil societies and oppositions, government officials often pose the most serious challenge to incumbents (Way 2005a: 236). Given the paucity of resources and media access outside the state, prime ministers, cabinet members, and other regime insiders are often best positioned to launch viable presidential bids. Name recognition, access to media, and control over administrative resources give regime insiders an opportunity to build support that most opposition leaders lack. Where high level insider defections occur, incumbents are more vulnerable to defeat. By providing mechanisms to manage elite conflict, strong parties help to limit such defections.

Strong party organizations also help win elections. Elections in competitive authoritarian regimes are often hard fought contests. Winning them usually entails some mix of voter mobilization and fraud—both of which require organization. Mass parties provide an infrastructure for electoral mobilization, through large-scale clientelism, door-to-door campaigning, public rallies, and other means. Similarly, illicit electoral strategies such as ballot stuffing, vote buying, and other forms of fraud often require a considerable

degree of coordination and discipline: a large number of lower level authorities across the territory must reliably carry out controversial orders and keep them secret.<sup>121</sup>

In addition, parties help control legislatures. Legislative control is critical in competitive authoritarian regimes, for several reasons. First, it enhances the executive's capacity to manipulate and control other areas of politics. Because top judicial and electoral authorities are often directly chosen by legislatures or require legislative approval, executive control over constitutional courts, electoral commissions, and other agents of horizontal accountability often requires a reliable legislative majority. Control over the legislature (usually with a two-thirds majority) may also allow the governing party to modify the constitution (for example, eliminating presidential term limits) to enhance or extend authoritarian rule. Finally, legislative control has a defensive purpose: to eliminate the legislature as a potential arena for contestation. When not effectively controlled by the incumbent, legislatures may challenge autocratic incumbents in various ways: they may thwart presidential appointments (including, in some countries, prime ministers), conduct embarrassing investigations into executive corruption or abuse, create new mechanisms of electoral oversight, and protect key opposition leaders from prosecution (via parliamentary immunity).<sup>122</sup> Finally, opposition-controlled legislatures may directly threaten an incumbent's survival by voting to remove him from office (as occurred in Madagascar in 1996 and as nearly occurred in Russia in 1993 and 1999).

Strong parties facilitate legislative control in two ways. First, they are more likely to win legislative elections. Presidents without strong parties (e.g., Soglo in Benin, Fujimori in Peru, Yeltsin in Russia; Kravchuk in Ukraine) have weaker coattails: they often fail to translate their own electoral success into legislative majorities. By contrast, where governing parties are strong (e.g., Malaysia, Tanzania, Mexico under the PRI), incumbent victories frequently generate solid legislative majorities. Second, strong parties help maintain legislative control between elections. Strong parties offer incumbents a variety of mechanisms (patronage distribution, a valuable label, ideology or

---

<sup>121</sup>For example, the PRI's large and disciplined organization allowed it to become "one of the world's most accomplished vote-getting machines" (Cornelius 1996: 57). The party was also notoriously effective in organizing fraud. The PRI was sufficiently disciplined that instructions issued by the Interior Ministry were effectively passed on to governors and then carried out by local party officials (Carbonell 2002: 85). The party infrastructure permitted organized ballot stuffing strategies, such as "flying brigades," in which voters were trucked from precinct to precinct so that they could vote multiple times (Cornelius 1996: 60).

<sup>122</sup> For a discussion of the powers and importance of legislatures, see Fish (2005).

other sources of cohesion) that help keep legislative allies in line. Where governing parties are weak, legislative factions are more prone to internal division, rebellion, and defection (Way 2005c: 200-204). Such internal crises create opportunities for opposition forces to gain control of the legislature, which can result in the weakening (Benin, Malawi, Moldova in the 1990s, Ukraine), paralysis (Haiti, Russia 1992-3), or removal (Madagascar) of incumbent governments. Where governing parties are strong, as in Cambodia, Malaysia, Moldova under the Communists, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe, such parliamentary challenges rarely emerge.

Finally, strong parties facilitate executive succession. Succession is a difficult challenge for most authoritarian regimes. Because they must worry about prosecution (for corruption or rights abuses) after leaving office, incumbents generally place a high value on finding a successor who will ensure their protection. This requires not only winning the election, but doing so with a candidate who can be trusted or controlled. Strong parties facilitate succession in several ways: they have a larger pool from which to draw strong candidates; they offer mechanisms to prevent the defection of losing aspirants; and they possess electoral capacity that is independent of the outgoing executive. Thus, it is not surprising that smooth competitive authoritarian successions almost always occur in countries with strong governing parties (e.g., Malaysia Mozambique, Tanzania, Mexico). Where parties are weak, succession is more traumatic: candidate pools are smaller; the likelihood of internal conflict and defection is greater, and the party's electoral viability is less certain. In such a context, incumbents often face a dilemma. On the one hand, the most electable alternatives are often (non-party) figures with independent resources or support bases, which make them difficult to control. On the other hand, loyal regime insiders can be trusted but often lack the stature to ensure electoral success (Way 2005d: 57). This dilemma has often undermined regime stability. In Ukraine, President Kuchma chose Viktor Yanukovich, a corrupt official with a criminal past, apparently because he could be controlled through blackmail; but Yanukovich's past as a violent criminal undermined his ability win the 2004 election (Way 2005d: 58). In Peru, the absence of a viable successor within Fujimori's personalistic parties induced him to seek an illegal third term, which contributed to the unraveling of the regime.

Like state coercive capacity, party strength may be measured in terms of scope and cohesion. Scope refers to the size of a party's infrastructure, or the degree to which it penetrates the national territory and society. Where scope is extensive, as in the KMT in Taiwan, UMNO in Malaysia, the PRI in Mexico, the Communist Party in Moldova, and the CCM in Tanzania, parties possess mass organizations with large activist and membership bases. Party networks penetrate the national territory, including the countryside, operating actively in virtually every population center. For example, UMNO's two million members and 16,500 branch organizations (Case 2001a: 52), allowed it to penetrate "every village in the country,"<sup>123</sup> assigning a party agent to every 10 households in each village (Case 2001b: 37; Slater 2003: 90). Similarly, the CCM maintained an "extensive apparatus" with two million members and a neighborhood-level "ten-house" cell structure (Barkan 1994: 16; Berg Schlosser and Siegler 1990: 81), and the KMT developed a "massive Leninist organizational network" (Kau 1996: 292), with "complex local political machines...throughout the island" (Chu 1994: 101). In these and other cases, mass organizations enhanced parties' capacity to mobilize voters, orchestrate fraud, and systematically monitor and intimidate opposition.

Where scope is low, as in Benin, Peru, Ukraine, Russia under Yeltsin, and Moldova in the 1990s, parties lack any real organization, membership, or activist base. Party operations are confined to urban centers, and in some cases, the presidential palace. Party infrastructure is often non-existent, or limited to the capital or the president's home region. In Ukraine, for example, President Leonid Kravchuk had "did not have the support of any political force in parliament" (Kravchuk 2002: 248) and "no political team" (Markov 1993: 34) in the country as a whole. In Peru, Alberto Fujimori's New Majority was characterized by its "near non-existence as an organization" (Conaghan 2000: 281). It "had scarcely any organizational presence outside the national congress" (Roberts 2002: 18), and after the 1995 election, "there wasn't even...a party headquarters where the president could celebrate his victory" (Degregori 2000: 62). Such parties

---

<sup>123</sup>Far Eastern Economic Review, June 24, 1999, p. 1.

generally lack capacity for voter mobilization, ballot stuffing, or intimidation. They often perform poorly in elections, often failing to secure legislative majorities.<sup>124</sup>

Cohesion refers to incumbents' ability to secure the cooperation of partisan allies within the government, in the legislature, and at the local or regional level. Cohesion is crucial to preventing elite defection, particularly during periods of crisis, when the incumbent's grip on power is threatened. Where cohesion is high, as in Malaysia, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Serbia, and Zimbabwe, allied ministers, legislators, and governors routinely support the government, implement presidential directives, and vote the party line. Internal rebellion or defection is rare, even in the face of major crises or opposition challenges, and when defections occur, they tend not to attract many followers. For example, the Sandinista party leadership did not experience a single public schism during the 1980s, despite a civil war and severe economic crisis that eventually led to the party's defeat.<sup>125</sup>

Where cohesion is low, as in Benin, Georgia, Ukraine, Zambia, and Russia under Yeltsin, parties are little more than loose coalitions of relatively autonomous actors, many of which derive their power and status from outside the party. Incumbents routinely confront insubordination, rebellion, or defection within the cabinet, in the legislative bloc, and among regional bosses. Consequently, regimes are vulnerable to internal crisis triggered by splits within the governing coalition, which give rise to opposition takeovers of the legislature or strong electoral challengers from erstwhile regime insiders. Indeed, in several cases, crises emerged *even in the absence of a significant external challenge*.

Sources of cohesion vary. The most common—but also the weakest—source of cohesion is patronage. Parties based exclusively on short-term patronage ties are vulnerable to elite defection during periods of crisis. When economic crisis threatens incumbents' capacity to distribute patronage, or when incumbents appear politically weak and vulnerable to defeat, patronage-based parties often suffer massive defections. For example, in Zambia, where a severe fiscal crisis undermined President Kaunda's access

---

<sup>124</sup> At a medium level of scope are organizations that extend across the national territory (i.e., party offices and networks exist in most population centers, including those in rural areas), but which are not mass based and do not penetrate deeply at the grassroots level. Examples include patronage-based governing machines such as UNIP in Zambia, KANU in Kenya, Senegal's Socialist Party, and the PRSC in the Dominican Republic.

<sup>125</sup> Similarly, ZANU in Zimbabwe experienced relatively little internal dissident, even during the severe crisis of 2000-05.

to patronage resources, UNIP legislators defected en masse to the newly formed MMD shortly before UNIP's 1991 electoral defeat. Cohesion is somewhat greater where patronage distribution is institutionalized in the form of consolidated machines (e.g., PRI, UMNO, KMT, CCM). In such parties, established norms of patronage distribution and career advancement, often reinforced by institutionalized mechanisms of centralized control, stabilize expectations and lengthen time horizons. These expectations are reinforced by time and success. A track record of successful cooperation generates confidence in the party's capacity to overcome crises, and repeated electoral success enhances the value of the party label, thereby raising the cost of defection.

Although most parties rely on patronage, some benefit from additional sources of cohesion. One is personal ties. In charismatic parties (e.g., Fujimori's parties in Peru; Banda's Malawi Congress Party), where cadres' political careers hinge on their ties to the president, cohesion is often high. Cohesion may also be enhanced by shared ethnicity (e.g., PNC in Guyana) or ideology (FSLN in Nicaragua, Socialist Party in Serbia, Communist Party in Moldova). Perhaps the most robust source of cohesion, however, is a shared history of struggle, particularly violent struggle (Smith 2005). Thus, parties whose leadership emerged out of successful revolutionary or liberation movements (Mozambique, Nicaragua, Zimbabwe) tend to be highly cohesive, at least while the founding generation survives.

We use two types of indicator for party cohesion: (1) instances of discipline during previous (i.e., pre-1990) periods of crisis and (2) evidence of non-material bases of cohesion. Newly constructed parties whose internal glue is clearly nothing more than short-term patronage deals (e.g., new governing parties in Benin, Malawi, Ukraine, and Russia) are thus scored as having lower cohesion. Charismatic parties (Peru), ideological or ethnic parties (Guyana, Moldova), parties that emerged out of revolutionary or liberation movements (Mozambique, Nicaragua, Zimbabwe), and consolidated machines with proven track records of discipline under crisis (Malaysia, Mexico, Taiwan) are scored as higher cohesion.

### **Economic Control as a Substitute for Coercive and Party Organization**

It is worth noting that discretionary state control over the economy also enhances incumbents' capacity to pre-empt or thwart opposition challenges (Dahl 1971: 48-61;

Fish 2005; Greene 2005).<sup>126</sup> Where such control is extensive, it may effectively substitute for powerful coercive and party organizations. Incumbents' economic power may be considered high when resources are concentrated in state hands *and* governments enjoy substantial discretionary power in allocating those resources. Economic resources are concentrated where the state maintains control over key means of production and finance, as in many partially reformed command economies (Fish 2005), or where a large percentage of national income takes the form of rents controlled by the state, as in many mineral-based rentier states.<sup>127</sup> Rulers exert discretionary control where they can routinely use the tax system, the financial system, licensing, concession, government contracts, and other economic policy levers to punish opponents and reward allies.<sup>128</sup>

Discretionary economic power furnishes autocratic governments with powerful tools to compel compliance and punish opposition. Where the livelihoods, careers, and business prospects of much of the population can be easily and decisively affected by government decisions, opposition activity becomes a high risk venture. Businesses linked to the opposition may be denied access to government credit, licenses, contracts, or even property rights;<sup>129</sup> independent media may be deprived of access to credit, newsprint, or advertising;<sup>130</sup> public employees may be compelled to work for the

---

<sup>126</sup>According to Robert Dahl, extensive state control over the economy will "provide political leaders with such powerful resources for persuasion, manipulation, and coercion as to make democracy extremely unlikely in the long term" (1992: 82). Similarly, Fish (2005) has argued that post-communist states that did not substantially liberalize their economies during the 1990s were less likely to democratize. According to Fish, competitive politics are most likely to emerge "where the state has limited resources and fewer levels of economic control at its disposal" (2005: 158).

<sup>127</sup>Our view of the causal link between oil and autocracy differs somewhat from many standard approaches (cf. Ross 2001). According to our view, reliance on oil promotes autocracy not only because it reduces taxation, or increases monies for security and patronage but also because oil makes it easier for even weak autocrats monopolize control over a large share of wealth in a particular country. In this sense, oil promotes autocracy in the same way that dominant state ownership over the economy does.

<sup>128</sup>In the absence of substantial discretionary power, even extensive state intervention may be compatible with democracy (e.g., Sweden). At the same time, where states have vast discretionary power, they may be put to autocratic ends even in predominantly private economies (e.g., Nicaragua under Somoza; Malawi under Banda; Ukraine under Kuchma).

<sup>129</sup>For example, the Putin government engineered a takeover of one of the world's largest oil companies, Yukos, in response to its owner's financing of opposition groups.

<sup>130</sup>In Zimbabwe, for example, the government pressured businesses not to advertise in independent newspapers and used debts to state banks to compel media owners to soften their editorial line (Makumbe and Compagnon 2000: 208-210; Ronning 2003: 205). Similar behavior was widespread in Mexico through the early 1990s (Lawson 2002).

governing party;<sup>131</sup> and government critics may be fired, blacklisted, or denied access to essential goods and services.

By providing governments with tools to co-opt potential critics and punish dissent, discretionary state economic power starves oppositions of resources (Greene 2005). For political oppositions to be viable, they must have access to resources. Unless those resources are distributed equitably by the state, they must come from the private sector and civil society. Where states control most means of production or monopolize the main sources wealth, private sectors will be small and civil societies will be poor (Dahl 1971: 48-61; Fish 2005: 156-157; Greene 2005), leaving “no conceivable financial base for opposition” (Riker 1982: 7). Where vast discretionary power allow governments to punish businesses in the economic arena for their behavior in the political arena, opposition parties, independent media, and other civil society groups will have few reliable channels of finance.<sup>132</sup>

In some cases, then, discretionary economic power may partially substitute for strong party and state organizations in limiting elite defection and thwarting opposition challenges. Where state economic coercive power is extensive, as in Belarus and Gabon, it may be so costly for elites to defect and so difficult for opposition forces to mobilize resources that incumbents go largely unchallenged even in the absence of strong state or party organizations.<sup>133</sup>

### **Combining State and Party Capacity**

Strong states and parties contribute to authoritarian stability in different ways. State coercive and economic power enhances incumbents’ capacity to suppress opponents and critics and defuse or pre-empt potential opposition movements through intimidation,

---

<sup>131</sup>On Serbia, see Thomas (1999); on Russia, see Fish (2005); on Ukraine, see Allina-Pisano (2005) and Way (2005b).

<sup>132</sup>By contrast, where economic liberalization and integration shifts resources into the private sphere and strips governments of tools of economic coercion, as in much of Central Europe and the Americas during the 1990s, entrepreneurs often play a major role in financing opposition. Limits on state economic power may also be *de facto*. In countries with large informal economies, states may possess vast economic power on paper but exercise little in practice. *De facto* weakness was widespread among neopatrimonial regimes in Africa (cf. Bierschenk et al. 2003: 162; Boone 1992: 352-3).

<sup>133</sup>In Belarus, for example, the state retains discretionary control over 80% of the economy and large sections of the population are employed on short-term contracts that make it very easy for individuals to be dismissed for political reasons.

co-optation, and deprivation of resources. Strong parties help incumbents manage intra-elite conflict, mobilize support, and win or steal elections. (These variables are operationalized in Appendix II).

State and party functions often overlap, and to some degree, they may be substitutable. For example, strong parties may be so successful at mobilizing support and maintaining elite cohesion that incumbents are able to survive even in the absence of particularly strong states (Moldova under the Communists, Mozambique, Tanzania). In addition, strong parties facilitate efforts to establish tight control over a wide range of state institutions through the provision of a pool of loyal cadres bound by a strong partisan identity. Finally, well-organized parties may also perform state-like coercive functions, including surveillance and other forms of low intensity coercion.<sup>134</sup>

Strong states may also partially substitute for weak parties. For example, state agencies may also be deployed as “party substitutes.”<sup>135</sup> In Peru and Ukraine, state intelligence agencies played a central role in maintaining elite cohesion, largely through surveillance, blackmail, and bribery (Darden forthcoming; Cameron 2006). In other cases, incumbents have used state agencies as party-like mobilizational tools. In Ukraine, governments mobilized public teachers and doctors for electoral campaigns (Allina-Pisano 2005; Way 2005b); in Peru and Serbia, army, police, and other security branches were used for campaign activities (Planas 2000: 357-8; Le Bor 2002: 200-1).

There are limits to substitutability, however. In Peru and Ukraine, for example, succession crises and legislative weakness—both exacerbated by party weakness—contributed to crises that ultimately toppled regimes. Although such crises did not occur in Belarus and Russia through 2006, party weakness—and consequently, the potential for elite defection—remained a point of vulnerability. Moreover elite conflict rooted in party weakness may eventually erode state cohesion by undermining incumbent control over coercive and other state agencies (Way 2005a: 238). When the governing elite is divided, security forces may be paralyzed by conflicting orders, and state officials may resist carrying out risky coercive action on behalf of any side. Incumbents may lose control

---

<sup>134</sup>Such party-based repression has been observed in Cambodia, Kenya, Malawi, Nicaragua, and Taiwan.

<sup>135</sup>The term comes from Hale 2005.

over entire security agencies—or be sufficiently uncertain about their loyalty that they cannot order repression.<sup>136</sup>

Incumbent capacity is thus greatest where both states and parties are strong. These are clear cases of brick houses: strong state and party organizations give incumbent governments the capacity to hold together even under serious crisis, and to thwart even relatively strong opposition movements—both at the ballot box and in the streets. Malaysia, Taiwan, and—to a somewhat lesser degree—Mexico, Nicaragua, Serbia in the early 1990s, and Zimbabwe fall into this category.

Incumbent capacity is most limited where both state and party organizations are weak. These are unambiguous cases of straw houses. Incumbents lack substantial capacity to win (or steal) elections or to crack down on protest. Moreover, they routinely suffer intra-elite conflict and defection. As a result, governments are vulnerable to collapse in the face of even modest opposition challenges. Examples include Benin, Georgia, Haiti, Madagascar, Malawi, Moldova in the 1990s, and Ukraine under Kravchuk.

Other cases exhibit mixes of state and party strength. A few cases, including Mozambique, Tanzania, and Moldova under the Communists, are characterized by strong governing parties but relatively weak states. In these cases, incumbents' capacity to win elections and limit elite conflict may be sufficient to ensure regime stability. However, these regimes remain vulnerable to medium or large-scale opposition mobilization. In other cases, including Armenia, Belarus, and Russia under Putin, incumbents possessed considerable state capacity but relatively weak parties. Although such regimes may be less vulnerable to mass protest, they are probably more vulnerable to internal conflict than those with strong governing parties.

### **The Impact of Opposition Strength**

Incumbent strength is, of course, only one side of the story. Opposition capacity has also been important in explaining regime trajectories. The strength and behavior of

---

<sup>136</sup> This was particularly evident in Ukraine in 2004 when significant elements of a well-paid and well-trained security force split off to support the opposition in the face of regime crisis (Way 2005b).

societal opposition forces are widely viewed as critical to democratization.<sup>137</sup> Strong civic and opposition movements shift the balance of power and resources away from state elites, which raises the cost of sustaining autocracy. Where opposition forces mobilize large numbers of people for elections or protest movements, incumbents must employ more nakedly autocratic means to retain power (e.g., blatantly steal elections or crack down violently on street protest), which erode public support, generate tension within the regime elite, and risk international punitive action. Thus, the greater the opposition's mobilizational and electoral capacity, the higher the probability that incumbents will opt for toleration (even at the risk of losing power) over repression (Dahl 1971).

Opposition strength is clearly important to explaining regime outcomes. During the Third Wave, opposition mobilization played a central role in democratization in Argentina, Poland, Spain, South Africa, South Korea, and elsewhere. Among our cases, opposition strength was critical to democratization in Mexico, Serbia, and Taiwan. In these countries, political and civic organizations developed a sustained capacity to mobilize large numbers of citizens across the national territory, which gave opposition forces the ability to launch sustained nationwide protest, compete effectively in elections, and monitor electoral processes. This organizational capacity increased the cost of repression and fraud, which contributed in an important way to democratization.

In general, however, opposition strength was less important in shaping competitive authoritarian regime outcomes, largely because most of these regimes confronted strikingly weak oppositions.<sup>138</sup> Because they were poor, predominantly rural societies with tiny middle classes (Cambodia, Haiti, Nicaragua, much of sub-Saharan Africa), or because they had recently emerged from decades of Leninism and state socialism (Central Europe, former Soviet Union), most of the cases examined in this study lacked the raw materials for a strong opposition movement: private sectors were weak, civil society was small and narrowly based, and political parties lacked organization and any significant presence in the countryside (Howard 2003). In none of these cases did opposition forces possess the infrastructure or resources to sustain a large-scale pro-democracy movement. Hence, although civil society and opposition strength is

---

<sup>137</sup>See Rueschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens (1992); Bratton and van de Walle (1997); Collier (1999); Diamond (1999); Wood (2000); Thompson (2001); Howard (2003); and Howard and Roessler (2006).

<sup>138</sup>Again, Mexico, Serbia, and Taiwan are exceptions.

clearly an important determinant of democratization in general, it has less explanatory power among our cases.

It is also worth noting that opposition strength may to some extent be endogenous to incumbent capacity.<sup>139</sup> For example, where incumbents possess powerful instruments of physical and/or economic coercion, they may use them to systematically undermine opposition organize. Thus, systematic coercion may weaken opposition movements by making civic political participation so risky that all but the most die hard activists exit the public sphere. In Zimbabwe, for example, the emergence of an independent labor movement and the well-organized Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) gave rise to a vibrant democracy movement during the late 1990s (Alexander 2000: 391; Raftopoulos 2001: 17). However, violent repression, restrictions on NGO activity and foreign finance, and heavy pressure on the private sector undermined the movement's organizational bases (Raftopoulos 2002: 425). By 2002, the labor movement was a "penniless, drifting shambles" (Blair 2003: 281), and the MDC "barely functioned" in the countryside (Blair 2002: 246). Repression also weakened opposition forces in Armenia and Cambodia.<sup>140</sup> In Malaysia, Belarus, and Russia under Putin, effective low intensity coercion helped deter strong opposition movements from emerging in the first place. Discretionary economic power may also be used to weaken or deter opposition movements. In Belarus, Gabon, and Russia, economic coercion and co-optation helped governments starve opposition movements nearly out of existence.

At the same time, incumbent weakness may contribute to opposition strength. In Georgia, Kenya, Malawi, Senegal, Ukraine, and Zambia, much of the financial and organizational muscle of successful opposition movements came not from society but from political, economic, and military actors who defected—in some cases, just weeks before the transition—from the governing coalition. In Ukraine, for example, much of the financial and organizational strength of the Orange Revolution was provided by business "oligarchs" who had only recently defected from the Kuchma government (Way

---

<sup>139</sup>Brownlee (2004) and Greene (2005) make similar arguments.

<sup>140</sup>In Armenia, although opposition forces demonstrated considerable mobilizational capacity through the mid-1990s, arrests, infiltration, and other repressive measures weakened them considerably, and protests following the fraudulent 2003 presidential election were easily suppressed (Hakobyan 2004; Danielyan 2004). In Cambodia, heavy repression in 1997 destroyed royalist party structures in the countryside, leaving the opposition much weaker than it had been in the mid-1990s (Hughes 2003: 122-123)

2005b). In Senegal, much of the opposition's electoral strength in 2000 was provided by political and religious leaders who had recently defected from the Socialist Party (Galvan 2001; Mozaffar and Vengroff 2002). In these cases, it was ultimately incumbent weakness, rather than opposition strength, per se, that drove transitions.

### Synthesis of the Argument

Our explanation of post-Cold War competitive authoritarian regime outcomes synthesizes the international and domestic arguments presented above. We make a three step argument (summarized in Figure 2.1). First, where linkage was high, as in most of Central Europe and the Americas, competitive authoritarianism was unsustainable and regimes almost invariably democratized. Among our high linkage cases, *not a single autocratic government or chosen successor survived through 2005*. Moreover, turnover almost always resulted in democratization. Only Macedonia, which experienced severe ethnic conflict, failed to democratize, and even there, autocrats failed to consolidate power.<sup>141</sup> In high linkage cases, then, international influences wiped out the effects of domestic balances of power: democratization occurred even where incumbent capacity was high and oppositions were weak.

Where linkage was combined with high leverage, as in most of Central Europe and the Americas, external democratizing pressure was intense. Due to penetration by international media, transnational human rights networks, and multilateral organizations, even minor abuses reverberated in the West and were likely to trigger responses from Western powers. Because numerous domestic actors maintained ties to the West, the threat of external punitive action often triggered considerable opposition at home. Consequently, the cost of fraud and repression was exceedingly high. Indeed, it was so high that even incumbents with strong state and party organizations chose to tolerate—and be defeated by—opposition challenges that, in a different international context, they could have easily suppressed. Thus, even autocrats with vast organizational capacity eventually ceded power (although in some cases, such as Nicaragua and Serbia, this

---

<sup>141</sup>Incumbents lost power three times in Macedonia. Two other cases in these regions, Albania and Haiti, scored as medium, rather than high, linkage.

occurred only after Western military intervention). Moreover, because opposition forces maintained close ties to the West (and often viewed Western support as critical to their success), and because they faced the same external constraints that had toppled their predecessors, successor governments almost always ruled democratically.

Where high linkage was combined with relatively low leverage (Mexico and Taiwan), autocratic parties also fell, but the process was more protracted and required a domestic “push.” The PRI and KMT governments faced less direct external pressure to democratize. However, media and NGO penetration, economic integration, close diplomatic ties to the U.S., and the prominence of U.S.-educated technocrats enhanced their sensitivity to their international standing. The pursuit of international legitimacy created an incentive not only to avoid large-scale abuses but also to maintain themselves in power via credible political institutions. Here opposition strength mattered. As long as oppositions were weak, incumbents could win via internationally credible electoral processes. However, when serious opposition challenges arose, governments were trapped by their efforts to maintain international credibility. Unwilling to pay the external and domestic costs of a large-scale crackdown, they accepted defeat and left power peacefully. For the reasons discussed above, successors governed democratically.

Where linkage was low, regime outcomes were driven largely by domestic factors. In the absence of extensive linkage, autocratic abuse was less likely to gain international attention or trigger external punitive responses. Even where punitive action was taken, it was rarely sustained and—due to the paucity of domestic actors with close ties to the West—rarely triggered substantial opposition at home. As long as they avoided large-scale repression or fraud, then, autocrats enjoyed considerable room for maneuver.

The second step of the argument thus centers on *incumbent capacity*. In low linkage cases, where autocrats possessed strong state and/or party organizations, competitive authoritarian regimes generally survived. In these cases, governments possessed the organizational tools to manage elite conflict and thwart opposition challenges in the streets and at the ballot box. In most cases, these tools were sufficient to prevent the emergence of serious opposition challenges, but where such challenges arose (e.g., Armenia 1996, Malaysia 1998-99, Zimbabwe 2000-2002), governments possessed

the cohesion and the coercive power to survive them. In the vast majority of cases of high incumbent capacity, the incumbent government or chosen successor remained in power through 2005. Where Western leverage was low, limited international pressure permitted the consolidation, in some cases, of increasingly closed regimes (Gabon, Russia under Putin). Where leverage was high, incumbents' external room for maneuver was more limited, and regimes remained competitive (Moldova, Mozambique, Tanzania).

Where incumbent capacity was low, competitive authoritarian regimes were less stable. Incumbents were more vulnerable to elite defection and ill-equipped to co-opt critics, repress even modest street protests, or thwart electoral challenges. In these cases, the combination of low incumbent capacity and weak opposition movements left regime outcomes more open to contingency than in other cases. In this context, Western leverage was often decisive (step three). Where leverage was low, due to countries' strategic or economic importance (e.g., Russia) or the support of "black knights" (e.g., Belarus, Cameroon), even weak incumbents generally survived. Where leverage was high, autocratic incumbents were more likely to fall. Thus, in Benin, Georgia, Madagascar, Malawi, and Zambia, where incumbents lacked organizational or repressive capacity and were highly dependent on the West, external pressure (or the failure of external powers to intervene on behalf of incumbents) often helped tip the balance, contributing to the collapse of autocratic governments.

Turnover in low linkage cases rarely brought democratization, however. In the absence of extensive linkage or a strong civil society-based opposition, successor governments had a weak incentive to govern in a democratic manner. In such cases, democratization only occurred when new leaders were prepared to under-utilize their power.<sup>142</sup> Such leadership was relatively rare, and as a result, transitions more frequently resulted in another round of competitive authoritarianism (Benin, Georgia, Madagascar, Malawi, Ukraine in 1994; Zambia). Thus, where incumbent weakness is combined with high leverage, the most likely regime outcome is *unstable authoritarianism*.

--Figure 2.1 about here--

---

<sup>142</sup>Examples include Mali and post-2004 Ukraine.

## Alternative Approaches

Before proceeding to the case analyses, it is worth examining alternative approaches to explaining competitive authoritarian regime trajectories: specifically, we examine approaches that focus on modernization, economic performance, leadership, elections, and institutional design.

### *Socioeconomic Explanations: Modernization and Economic Performance*

One potential set of alternative explanations draws on socioeconomic variables. Prominent among these is economic modernization.<sup>143</sup> It is plausible to hypothesize that the stable democratization of competitive authoritarian regimes will be more likely in wealthier countries with higher rates of literacy and urbanization, larger working or middle classes, and more developed civil societies than in poor, rural societies with high rates of illiteracy. Indeed, there is little question that economic development contributed to democratization in two of our cases: Mexico and Taiwan.

However, the explanatory power of modernization in our study is limited. This is due, in part, to the nature of our sample. Students of the relationship between development and democracy generally agree that the relationship is clearest at high levels of development. Wealthy industrialized countries are highly likely to be—and remain—democratic. However, with the exception of Taiwan, all of our cases fall unambiguously into the middle and lower income categories. In none of these cases would level of development lead scholars to confidently predict the installation or survival of democracy (Geddes 1999: 118-119). Not surprisingly, then, the relationship between level of development and democratization among our cases is weak.<sup>144</sup> Among our wealthier countries (above \$1,000 GDP per capita in 1995), several competitive authoritarian regimes democratized between 1990 and 2005 (Bulgaria, Mexico, Slovakia, Taiwan), but several others remained authoritarian (Belarus, Gabon, Malaysia, Russia). Likewise, among our least developed countries (GDP per capita below \$1,000 in 1995), many

---

<sup>143</sup>For various interpretations of the relationship between economic development and democracy, see Lipset (1960); Rueschemeyer et al. (1992); Przeworski and Limongi (1997); and Boix and Stokes (2003).

<sup>144</sup>Indeed, as we have shown elsewhere (Way and Levitsky 2005), linkage is more highly correlated with democracy than with GDP per capita. Controlling for a variety of other explanatory factors, linkage explains a larger share of the variance in regime outcome among our cases than does GDP per capita.

competitive authoritarian regimes failed to stably democratize (Cambodia, Haiti, Ethiopia, Zambia), as predicted by modernization theory, but a surprising number of them *did* (or very nearly did) democratize (Albania, Ghana, Guyana, Nicaragua). These outcomes suggest that modernization is, at best, only part of the causal story.<sup>145</sup>

A second economic approach focuses on short-term macroeconomic performance. Economic growth is widely viewed as an important determinant of regime stability.<sup>146</sup> As Przeworski and his colleagues have shown in their analysis of postwar regimes, growth rates are positively associated with the stability of both democratic and authoritarian regimes. Poor economic performance erodes public support for regimes and deprives governments of resources needed to maintain support coalitions. Following this logic, then, competitive authoritarian regimes with healthy economies should be most stable, where those that fail to deliver economic growth should be most vulnerable to collapse.

The relationship between growth and competitive authoritarian regime stability is also weak. Although poor economic performance contributed to regime collapse in certain cases (e.g., Nicaragua, Guyana, and Zambia in the early 1990s; Belarus and Ukraine in 1994), in many others (e.g., Armenia, Cameroon, Mozambique, Russia during the early 1990s, Zimbabwe) regimes survived despite severe crises, and in still other cases (e.g., Georgia, Slovakia, Taiwan, Ukraine in 2004), transitions occurred during periods of robust economic growth. Indeed, even though economies in Central Europe and the Americas were far more robust than those in Africa and the former Soviet Union between 1990 and 2005, not a single competitive authoritarian regime survived in the former regions, while the rate of authoritarian survival in the latter regions (9 of 21) was

---

<sup>145</sup>Economic development may *indirectly* shape competitive authoritarian regime outcomes in two ways. First, and most obviously, it enhances opposition capacity. Economic (particularly capitalist) development expands, enriches, and strengthens civil society (Lipset 1960; Dahl 1971; Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992). It is therefore not surprising that strong opposition movements emerged in Mexico and Taiwan during the 1990s, or that opposition forces remained weak in poor, rural countries such as Cambodia, Haiti, Madagascar, Malawi, and Tanzania. Second, economic development enhances linkage to the West. Capitalist development increases economic integration, cross-border communication, travel, and education, and more extensive ties to transnational civil society, all of which raise the cost of authoritarianism. Thus, relatively industrialized countries such as Malaysia and Taiwan are more closely linked to the West than is Cambodia. Hence, although level of development is less helpful than linkage or incumbent capacity in explaining post-Cold War competitive authoritarian regime outcomes, modernization's long term effects—via opposition strength and linkage—are nevertheless important.

<sup>146</sup>See Bermeo (1990: 366-67); Diamond, Linz, and Lipset (1990); Przeworski and Limongi (1997); Diamond (1999); Geddes (1999); and Przeworski et al (2000).

quite high. Thus, neither level of development nor economic performance easily account for competitive authoritarian regime patterns after 1990.

### *Contingency and Leadership-Centered Explanations*

Another alternative approach to explaining competitive authoritarian regime outcomes centers on political leadership. During the 1980s and 1990s, democratization in countries with seemingly formidable structural obstacles triggered a paradigm shift in regime studies. Following the influential work of O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986), scholars began to treat transitions as periods of “extraordinary uncertainty” (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986: 3), in which contingent events and the choices of political elites could be decisive in shaping regime outcomes.<sup>147</sup> Many of these scholars highlighted the role of leadership in “crafting” successful transitions (Di Palma 1990; Chu 1992: 36-7; Fish 1998). For example, M. Stephen Fish pointed to Mongolia's democratization as a “triumph of choice, will, leadership, agency, and contingency over structure, history, culture, and geography” (1998: 140). Along similar lines, scholars attributed non-democratic outcomes to either “poor elite decisions” (Moser 2001: 10; McFaul 2001) or contingent circumstances (Tanaka 2005). Other scholars stressed the importance of political leaders' commitment to democracy and compromise (Fish 1998; Gros 1998: 4-7; McFaul 2002; Tanaka 2005).<sup>148</sup>

Leadership clearly matters in shaping regime outcomes, particularly in the short run. It is difficult to understand the emergence of competitive authoritarianism in post-Cold War Serbia, Slovakia, and Venezuela, for example, without reference to the committed, risk-taking leadership of Milosevic, Meciar, and Hugo Chavez. At the other end of the spectrum, surprising levels of pluralism in Russia during the 1990s and Ukraine after 2004 were at least partly rooted in the unusual tolerance of incumbents.<sup>149</sup> Leaders also vary considerably in their will to face down—violently, if necessary—mass

---

<sup>147</sup>See O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986), Przeworski (1986); Di Palma (1990); Karl (1990); Higley and Gunther (1992).

<sup>148</sup>For example, Gros (1998: 4-7) distinguishes genuine (or “early”) African democratizers, such as Nelson Mandela, from “opportunistic” (Bongo in Gabon) and “recalcitrant” (Biya in Cameroon; Moi in Kenya) democratizers.

<sup>149</sup>In Russia, Boris Yeltsin's close aides report that Yeltsin was willing to allow open criticism in the media “as long as the situation did not become mortally dangerous for him and his power” (Baturin et al. 2001: 504). This changed under Putin.

protest. In this sense, Hun Sen in Cambodia and Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe differed markedly from Kenneth Kaunda in Zambia or Julius Nyerere in Tanzania.

However, evidence suggests that over time, leadership is far less important than international and domestic structural variables in shaping competitive authoritarian regime trajectories. The distribution of regime outcomes during the post-Cold War period was in fact much more patterned or “structured” than the early transitions literature would lead us to expect. (The fact that all eight Latin American countries covered in *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* democratized suggests that outcomes were far less contingent than initially expected). Widespread democratization in the Americas and Central Europe, and considerably less democratization in sub-Saharan Africa and the former Soviet Union suggest that—unless we are prepared to believe that leaders in the former regions were exceptionally skilled democrats— regime outcomes were *not* particularly open to contingency and leadership choice.

Indeed, our case analyses suggest that leaders’ choices are often heavily structured by the domestic and international context in which they operate. In numerous cases, autocratic leaders (Iliescu, Kaunda, Kerekou, Rawlings) and parties (Nicaraguan FSLN, Mexican PRI, Taiwanese KMT, Croatian HDZ, and Bulgarian and Romanian Socialists) have behaved democratically, allowing free elections and leaving power peacefully. At the same time, a striking number “democratic” opposition leaders, including Sali Berisha in Albania, Levon Ter Petrosian in Armenia, Alyaksandr Lukashenka in Belarus, Menes Zenawi in Ethiopia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia and Mikheil Saakashvili in Georgia, Bakili Muluzi in Malawi, and Frederick Chiluba in Zambia, governed in an autocratic fashion after coming to power.

Even where leaders’ behavior had important short-term effects, these effects frequently did not endure much beyond that leader’s tenure in office. Thus, Boris Yeltsin’s tolerance of media criticism during the 1990s did little to prevent Putin’s subsequent authoritarian crackdown. Similarly, the relatively benign rule of Viacheslau Kebich in Belarus (1992-1994) quickly gave way to Lukashenka’s autocratic regime. Likewise, abuse of democratic procedure by Tudjman (Croatia), Balaguer (Dominican Republic) and Meciar (Slovakia) during the mid-1990s did little to prevent their successors from consolidating democratic rule immediately after coming to power.

Hence, with a few exceptions, leadership has generally had only a marginal impact on longer-term competitive authoritarian regime outcomes.

It is more useful, therefore, to assume that incumbents in competitive authoritarian regimes seek to maintain themselves (or, in some cases, their successors) in power, using both democratic and—when available—non-democratic means. What determines whether these leaders behave democratically is thus less their beliefs than the opportunities and constraints that confront them. Where leaders possess effective coercive apparatuses and few international constraints (i.e., low linkage), as in Belarus, Malaysia, Russia, and Zimbabwe, they will generally use those instruments to govern autocratically—especially when their power is at stake. By contrast, where leaders lack a strong coercive apparatus (Benin, Moldova in the 1990s, Ukraine under Kravchuk) and/or face heavy international constraints (Mexico, Nicaragua, Romania, Taiwan), their behavior is more likely to be consistent with democratic norms.

Once we have identified the opportunities for (and constraints on) autocratic behavior, the impact of leadership may be more fruitfully analyzed. The role of leadership is often most significant when behavior and regime outcomes run *counter* to these opportunities and constraints. For example, because external incentives for democratic behavior were far stronger in Serbia and Slovakia than they were in Armenia and Belarus, the leadership of Meciar and Milosevic was arguably important in shaping the competitive authoritarian regimes that emerged in the 1990s. Similarly, the fact that external incentives for fully democratic behavior were relatively low in Ghana (compared to, say, Bulgaria or the Dominican Republic) suggests that Jerry Rawlings' leadership may have been especially important. Thus, although leadership always “matters,” identifying, a priori, the structural opportunities and constraints in which leaders operate permits a more systematic of *when* and *how* it matters.

#### *Do Elections (or Stolen Elections) Undermine Authoritarianisms?*

Another set of explanations links regime outcomes to electoral processes themselves. For example, some scholars have argued that multiparty elections themselves can be an independent cause of democratization (Rigger 1999, 2000; Barkan 2000; Lindberg 2006). According to Shelley Rigger, for example, Taiwan's

democratization “demonstrates that even limited electoral competition...can create powerful pressure for change” (2000: 143). By giving opposition parties an opportunity to organize, and by socializing citizens to value and expect elections, regular elections “created pressure for further reform” (Rigger 1999: 33). Similarly, in an analysis of African regimes, Staffan Lindberg finds that “repeated elections—regardless of their relative freeness or fairness—appear to have a positive impact on [democracy]” (2006: 139). According to Lindberg, elections heighten citizen expectations and activate civil society in ways that promote greater democratization (2006: 146-8). Thus, “the more successive elections, the more democratic a nation becomes” (2006: 149).

Our study finds little evidence in support of these hypotheses. *All* of our regimes held regular elections between 1990 and 2005, but most of them did not democratize. Indeed, some of our regimes held regular elections for 15 (Armenia, Belarus, Cameroon, Gabon, Russia), 25 (Zimbabwe), and even 50 (Malaysia, Mexico before the 1980s) years without democratizing. The existence of elections thus cannot explain why some competitive authoritarian regimes democratized after 1989 while others did not. Nor can they explain why Guyana, Mexico, and Taiwan democratized via elections during the 1990s but not during previous decades. More generally, research by Jason Brownlee (2006) has shown that holding of multi-candidate elections has no independent causal impact on authoritarian stability. Thus, elections are best viewed as “an *indicator* of regime change, rather than an independent causal factor” (Brownlee 2006: 31).

A second set of elections-related arguments links authoritarian breakdown to *stolen* elections (Thompson and Kuntz 2004, 2005; Tucker 2005). For example, Mark Thompson and Philipp Kuntz argue that stolen elections “create conditions favorable for the outbreak of democratic revolutions,” by raising (and then dashing) popular expectations, providing a focal point for opposition to the regime, serving as a trigger for mass protest, and generating splits within the governing elite (2004: 160-3). Thus, where incumbents steal elections, competitive authoritarian regimes should be “vulnerable to democratic revolution” (2004: 171).

There are two problems with such an argument, however. First, empirical evidence suggests that even during the post-Cold War era, autocrats get away with stolen elections more often than not. After 1989, failed efforts to cancel or steal elections

resulted in autocratic breakdown in five cases: Dominican Republic in 1994; Serbia in 2000; Madagascar in 2001-02; Georgia in 2003; and Ukraine in 2004. Yet in more than a dozen other cases, including Burma (1990), Algeria (1991), Cameroon (1992), Russia (1993 referendum), Armenia (1996), Kenya (1997 legislative), Serbia (1997), Zambia (2001), Zimbabwe (2002), Belarus (2004 referendum), and Gabon and Togo repeatedly, autocrats *succeeded* in canceling or (by most accounts) stealing elections.<sup>150</sup>

Second, even where stolen elections trigger the collapse of authoritarian regimes, they should not necessarily be viewed as an independent cause of that collapse. In many cases, stolen elections are a *product*, rather than a cause, of regime crisis. Where authoritarian regimes are well-entrenched, as in Egypt, Malaysia, Singapore, Mexico prior to the 1980s, or Russia under Putin, incumbents' control over the electoral process—and the opposition—is usually so extensive that they can “win” elections without having to resort to outright election day fraud. Elections are “won” in the weeks and months prior to the actual vote, as opposition forces are debilitated by repression, denial of resources, co-optation, and a variety of other legal and illegal machinations. In other words, events on election-day are the final link in a longer chain of processes. Whether or not incumbents are forced to engage in high risk fraud on election day is mainly a product of how capable they were of dealing with opposition challenges *prior to the election*. In general, only regimes that are weak or vulnerable from the outset have to turn—often in desperation—to tactics like canceling or stealing elections.

### *The Role of Political Institutions*

A final alternative approach focuses on institutional design. Over the past two decades, a vast body of literature has emerged that examines how constitutional and other formal institutional arrangements shape post-Cold War regime outcomes. For example, Andrew Reynolds argues that the “effects of institutional design” must be “at the center of an explanation of democratic success and failure in Africa” (1999: 4). According to

---

<sup>150</sup>We characterize as stolen all presidential elections in which election-day fraud was believed to provide the incumbent's margin of victory or, in runoff systems, assure victory in the first round. We also include legislative elections in which fraud is believed to have provided the incumbent party with a legislative majority that it otherwise would not have had. Other, more ambiguous, cases include the Dominican Republic (1990), Albania (1996), Russia (2000), Zimbabwe (2000), Nigeria (2003), Malawi (2004), Ethiopia (2005), and Belarus (2006).

Reynolds, consensus-oriented institutional arrangements such as parliamentarism and proportional representation electoral systems generate “improved prospects for democratic consolidation” in Southern Africa. Arguing along similar lines, scholars have associated powerful presidencies with authoritarian outcomes (Fish 2001, 2005, 2006).<sup>151</sup> According to M. Stephen Fish, “superpresidentialism”—defined as a “constitutional arrangement that invests greater power in the presidency and much less power in the legislature”—has “inhibited democratization” in Russia and other post-Soviet republics by undermining accountability and inhibiting the emergence of strong institutions, parties, and experienced political elites (2005: 248-250). In a different institutionalist argument, Timothy Colton and Cindy Skach (2005) point to *semi-presidentialism* as a cause of Russia’s slide into authoritarianism. In their view, semi-presidential systems are prone to inter-branch conflict and immobilism, which create incentives for presidents to “dominate the political process and rule by decree,” placing new democracies on a “slippery slope to dictatorship” (2005: 116-117). Finally, numerous studies have highlighted the role of constitutional courts, electoral commissions and other nominally independent institutions in deterring or blocking autocratic abuse (Ganev 2001: 194-196; Erklit and Reynolds 2002).

There is reason to be skeptical about the role of institutional design in shaping competitive authoritarian regime outcomes. Institutional analyses hinge on the assumption that formal institutions are: (1) regularly enforced; and (2) minimally stable, in that they survive minor fluctuations in the distribution of power and preferences (Levitsky and Murillo 2005). In other words, they take for granted that the rules that are written on parchment actually constrain actors in practice, and that they “stick” long enough for actors to develop shared expectations based on past behavior. Indeed, it is only under these conditions that institutional design can be expected to have a significant independent effect on regime outcomes. Although these assumptions hold up relatively well in the advanced industrialized democracies, they travel less well to other parts of the world. As Samuel Huntington (1968) argued nearly four decades ago, politics vary

---

<sup>151</sup>This work builds on earlier work on presidentialism by scholars such as Linz (1990); Stepan and Skach (1993); and Linz and Valenzuela (1994).

considerably on the dimension of institutional strength. Indeed, a striking characteristic of many competitive authoritarian regimes is the extent of sheer institutional *weakness*.

In most competitive authoritarian regimes, formal institutions are highly unstable. The Russian constitution was changed nearly 400 times between 1992 and 1993 (Filatov 2001: 180). In Madagascar, constitutional arrangements have been “tampered with so much...as to be unrecognizable” (Marcus 2004: 2), and as a result, constitutional rules have “functioned less as a constraint on the behavior of elites than as the object of elite manipulation” (Marcus 2005: 156).<sup>152</sup> In Malaysia, the governing UMNO can “change the constitution at will” (Crouch 1996b: 115), and even former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad once complained that “the manner, the frequency and the trivial reasons for altering the constitution” had reduced it to a “useless scrap of paper.”<sup>153</sup>

Competitive authoritarian regimes are also characterized by the weak enforcement of constitutional and other formal rules. For example, although Mexico’s 1917 constitution was formally “an advanced liberal democratic charter” (Whitehead 1995: 250) that prescribed a weak executive, a strong legislature, and an independent Supreme Court (Weldon 1997), in practice, PRI presidents enjoyed vast “metaconstitutional” powers (Garrido 1989: 425; Weldon 1997), while Congress was little more than a “rubber stamp” (Eisenstadt 2004: 40). In Fujimori’s Peru, key democratic provisions in the 1993 constitution “were transformed into facades” (Degregori 2000: 377), while in Cambodia, many democratic provisions “have remained dead letters” (Jennar 1995: 2). In Romania, post-Cold War politics was characterized by the “non-observance of the Constitution, its letter, its spirit, and its guarantees” (Weber 2001: 213).

Such constitutions routinely fail to constrain powerful executives. Thus, in post-Cold War Croatia, “the problem [was] not that the president has strong constitutional powers but that [President] Tudjman is going beyond them” (Uncaptive Minds 1994: 41). In Yugoslavia, the constitution granted federal executives “very little formal power,” but in practice, Slobodan Milosevic’s power was “almost unlimited” (Sekelj 2000; von Beyme

---

<sup>152</sup>Thus, constitutional rules “have neither served their intended purpose nor provided the means toward the end of democratic consolidation” (Marcus 2005: 156).

<sup>153</sup>Quoted in Lee (1995: 109).

2001: 16).<sup>154</sup> In Haiti, “no head of state has felt constrained by constitutions, even his own” (Weinstein and Segal 1992: 62).

In weakly institutionalized polities, formal rules and agencies that are designed to constrain incumbents are frequently subordinated, emasculated, or shunted aside. In Gabon, the nominally independent electoral commissions created during the 1990s “proved neither autonomous nor competent” (Freedom House 2004: 1), and in 1998, many of its functions were unconstitutionally transferred back to the Interior Ministry (Gardinier 2000: 236).<sup>155</sup> In Malawi, when Electoral Commission Chair Anastazia Msosa asserted her independence in 1998, the Muluzi government “promptly removed her” (Patel 2002: 157) and packed the commission with allies. In Haiti, when the President of the Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) refused to endorse the 2000 legislative election results, death threats forced him to flee into exile—after which a “reconstituted” CEP made the results official (Fatton 2002: 116-17; Maguire 2002: 33). In Russia, when the Constitutional Court declared unconstitutional Yeltsin’s 1993 decree disbanding parliament, Yeltsin responded by cutting off the Court’s phone lines and withdrawing all security forces before eventually disbanding it. Finally, after Peru’s newly created Constitutional Tribunal (TC) ruled against President Fujimori’s bid for a third term in 1997, Congress sacked three TC members, leaving the country’s highest constitutional authority dormant for three years.

The failure of formal institutions to constrain executives is also seen in the case of presidential term limits. Although term limits were imposed throughout much of Africa during the first half of the 1990s, Bruce Baker observed in 2002 that “in political circles across the continent the talk is of altering constitutions to allow [Presidents] to stay on for a longer term, another term or for an unlimited number of terms” (2002: 286). In Chad, Gabon, Namibia, Togo, Uganda, and Zimbabwe, Presidents modified or eliminated constitutional term limits to extend their stay in office (Baker 2002; Brown 2004: 329; Cheater 2001: 7). Term limits were similarly overturned in Ukraine, Belarus, Tajikistan,

---

<sup>154</sup> Similarly, in Slovakia, Prime Minister Meciar exercised near dictatorial control over the legislature despite the fact that constitutionally, the Prime Minister was “weak” (Malova 2001: 369).

<sup>155</sup> In Zimbabwe, the Electoral Supervisory Commission is “largely impotent” (Makumbe and Compagnon 2000: 47) and “does not seem to be able to fulfill its role as envisioned by the constitution” (NDI 2000: 18). In Ukraine, key functions of the Central Election Commission, including vote tabulation, were secretly transferred to the executive branch to facilitate fraud (Way 2005b: 136).

and Peru (where Fujimori first eliminated the ban on re-election and then violated his own constitution's two term limit).

Where formal rules do not effectively constrain powerful actors, they are unlikely to have a significant independent effect on regime outcomes. Rather, other factors—such as the organizational power of incumbents—are often more important. Thus, in Moldova, due to the organizational strength of the Communist Party, the post-2000 transition from semi-presidentialism to parliamentarism resulted in greater authoritarianism rather than democracy (Way 2002). In Russia, Yeltsin's partisan weakness led to serious legislative challenges despite a super-presidentialist constitution (Troxel 2003), whereas Putin, operating within precisely the same constitutional framework, emasculated parliament relying on a relatively disciplined political party (Remington 2001).

Indeed, the causal story is often reversed: rather than shaping regime outcomes, formal institutional arrangements are frequently *endogenous* to those outcomes (Easter 1997). For example, although presidentialism may contribute to democratic breakdown in some cases (Linz 1990; Stepan and Skach 1993), it has also frequently been imposed by regimes that were *already authoritarian*. In post-colonial Cameroon, Gabon, Ghana, Guyana, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Senegal, Zambia and Zimbabwe, the consolidation of autocratic power preceded—and surely facilitated—shifts from parliamentary to presidential constitutions. In Zimbabwe, for example, Westminster parliamentarism was replaced by presidentialism *after* violent repression of the opposition ZAPU had created a “de facto one party state” (Nordlund 1996: 153-4).<sup>156</sup>

Similarly, many contemporary “super-presidentialist” constitutions were products, rather than causes, of authoritarianism. For example, Peru's 1993 constitution, which greatly expanded presidential power (Conaghan 2005: 57-8), was drawn up after Fujimori's 1992 coup had dissolved the previous constitution, closed Congress, and exiled the most important opposition leader. Throughout much of post-communist

---

<sup>156</sup> In Gabon, Prime Minister Leon M'ba called a constitutional convention to replace parliamentarism with presidentialism only after declaring a state of emergency and jailing leading defenders of parliamentarism (Barnes 1992: 40-1, 52; Yates 1996: 106). Senegal adopted a French-style “semi-presidential” constitution at independence (1960), but in 1963, with leading dissidents in prison, President Leopold Senghor abolished the prime minister's post and strengthened the presidency. A weakened prime minister position was restored in 1970, abolished again in 1983, and then restored again in 1991 (Villalon 1995: 86; Gellar 1982: 35).

Eurasia, autocratic governments similarly imposed highly presidentialist systems *after* they had concentrated power (Easter 1997). In Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, superpresidentialist constitutions were imposed by leaders who had already monopolized political control by the time Mikhail Gorbachev introduced semi-competitive elections in 1990. Russia's superpresidentialist 1993 constitution was drawn up only after Boris Yeltsin had closed the legislature in a presidential coup; Belarus' highly presidentialist constitution was imposed after Alyaksandr Lukashenka had emasculated the legislature and constitutional court; and Romania's presidentialist (1991) constitution was passed after the autocratic National Salvation Front had consolidated power and violently put down opposition protest (Sellin 2004: 122-4). At the same time, stronger parliaments have often been a product, rather than a cause, of democratization. In Croatia, for example, parliament and the judiciary were strengthened after opposition forces had removed the autocratic HDZ from power.<sup>157</sup>

We are not making a general argument that formal institutions do not matter. Rather, the impact of institutions—the degree to which formal rules actually shape expectations and constrain behavior—varies across cases. Where formal institutions are regularly enforced and minimally stable, as in most advanced industrialized democracies (as well as some new ones, such as Chile, Poland, and South Africa), the causal power of institutional design may be considerable. In much of the developing world, however, formal institutions are weak: rather than constraining political elites, they are routinely circumvented and manipulated by them; rather than structuring the political game and determining winners and losers, they are repeatedly restructured by the winners at the expense of the losers. In such cases, the capacity of formal institutions to independently influence regime outcomes is likely to be limited. Such weakly institutionalized polities are far too numerous to be ignored or treated as exceptions.

Rather than take institutional strength as given, then, we treat it as a dimension along which regimes vary. In a few of our cases, including Mexico, Slovakia, Taiwan,

---

<sup>157</sup>RFE/RL Newswire November 10, 2000. Observers have often noted that all eight of the Central European countries admitted to the EU in 2004 (Czech Republic, Hungary, Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Poland, and Lithuania) had either parliamentary systems or presidential systems with weak presidencies (Stepan 2005; Colton and Skach 2005: 123). Yet seven of the eight countries established full democracies immediately following the collapse of Soviet rule. It is at least worth considering the idea that the more parliamentary constitutions and democratic consolidation were both products of close ties to Europe.

and Ghana, transitions were characterized by the emergence of stable and effective formal institutions. In these cases, formal institutions arguably *did* exert an independent influence on regime outcomes. Yet these outcomes need to be explained, rather than taken for granted. We develop some hypotheses regarding this question in the book's conclusion.

### **Conclusion: A Structuralist Argument**

Our structuralist approach departs from most analyses of contemporary regimes. Whereas analyses of nineteenth century and postwar regime patterns are often structuralist,<sup>158</sup> the third and fourth waves of democratization—in which electoral regimes spread to countries as structurally “unfit” as Albania, Benin, Bolivia, Mali, Mongolia, and Nicaragua—led scholars to abandon structuralist approaches in favor of explanations that center on contingency, elite choice, and institutional design.<sup>159</sup> Although this study focuses exclusively on post-Cold War regimes, it assigns less causal weight to contingency and leadership. Indeed, our argument centers on factors that are rooted in long-term historical processes—and which are not easily changed by individual leaders. At the international level, linkage to the West is (with the partial exception of EU-related integration) less the product of elite decisions than of geography, economic development, colonialism, and longstanding geo-strategic alliances.

Our domestic variables are similarly structuralist. The coercive and party organizations that underlie incumbent capacity cannot easily be crafted or designed into existence by political leaders. As an extensive literature has shown, strong states and parties are usually rooted in past periods of conflict and mobilization.<sup>160</sup> Indeed, among our cases, high coercive capacity was usually a legacy of previous regimes or military conflicts. Some governments inherited a powerful coercive apparatus built up colonial

---

<sup>158</sup>See Lipset (1960); Moore (1966); O'Donnell (1973); Skocpol (1979); Collier and Collier (1991); Lubbert (1991); Przeworski et al 2000; Boix and Stokes (2003); Acemoglu and Robinson (2005)

<sup>159</sup>See O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986) Di Palma (1990); Fish (1998, 2005); McFaul (2001, 2002); Howard and Roessler (2006). A notable exception is the recent literature on oil-based regimes (cf. Ross 2001, Bellin 2004).

<sup>160</sup>On war and state formation, see Tilly (1975, 1992); Skocpol (1979); Cohen, Brown and Organski (1981); and Jagers (1992). On party formation, see Huntington (1970); Shefter (1994); Smith (2005); and Hale (2006).

(Malaysia) or settler (Zimbabwe) regimes to defeat insurgencies (Weitzer 1990; Stubbs 1997). Others (Belarus, Ukraine, Russia) inherited the vast intelligence and security apparatus of the Soviet Union. In still other cases, states developed powerful coercive apparatuses in response to major security threats (Armenia, Nicaragua, Taiwan). Cohesion is also rooted in periods of conflict. Coercive apparatuses were most cohesive where they were created or taken over by a successful insurgent force (Nicaragua, Mozambique, Zimbabwe), or where states had recently fought and won a major war (Armenia). Where incumbents inherited weak state apparatuses (e.g., Albania, Benin, Georgia, Haiti, Malawi), they had to start virtually from scratch in building state capacity—an exceedingly difficult task.

As Benjamin Smith (2006) has recently argued, strong governing parties are also rooted in periods of mobilization and conflict. Indeed, most of the cohesive, well-organized mass parties covered in this study emerged out of periods of intense mobilization and conflict, including revolution (Mexico, Nicaragua), liberation movements (Mozambique, Zimbabwe), and civil war (Taiwan) These conditions are not easily replicated. Party-building is a costly and time consuming process. Sitting executives, who can rely on state resources and often averse to fostering the development of independent power centers, have little incentive to invest in party building (Zolberg 1966: 125; Shefter 1977, 1994). Disincentives for party-building were particularly strong in the post-Cold War period, as politicians could rely on mass media, rather than organization, to make electoral appeals (Levitsky and Cameron 2003). Consequently, where post-Cold War incumbents did not inherit strong parties—as in Haiti, Peru, and much of African and the former Soviet Union—governing parties were almost invariably weak.

Post-Cold War regime outcomes are far more patterned than contingency, choice-centered, and institutional design approaches would suggest. In fact, two broad structural factors—linkage and the organizational power of incumbents—take us a considerable way toward explaining variation in the trajectory of post-Cold War competitive authoritarian regimes. It is to these cases that we now turn.

**Table 1.1: Comparing Democratic, Competitive Authoritarian, and Closed Regimes**

	<b>Democracy</b>	<b>Competitive Authoritarianism</b>	<b>Closed Regime</b>
<b>Status of Core Democratic Institutions (Elections, Civil Liberties)</b>	Systematically respected  Widely viewed as only route to power	Exist and are meaningful, but systematically violated in favor of incumbent  Widely viewed as primary route to power	Non-existent or reduced to façade status  Not viewed as a viable route to power
<b>Status of Opposition</b>	Competes on more or less equal footing with incumbent	Major opposition is legal and able to compete openly, but disadvantaged by incumbent abuse, harassment	Major opposition banned, or largely underground or in exile
<b>Level of Uncertainty</b>	High	Some uncertainty; incumbents often “sweat”	Low

**Table 1.2: Competitive Authoritarian Regime Trajectories, 1990-2005**

<b>Democratization</b>	<b>Unstable Authoritarianis</b>	<b>Stable Authoritarianis</b>
Bulgaria	Albania	Armenia
Croatia	Belarus	Botswana
Dominican Republic	Benin	Cambodia
Ghana	Georgia	Cameroon
Guyana	Haiti	Ethiopia
Mali	Kenya	Gabon
Mexico	Macedonia	Malaysia
Nicaragua	Madagascar	Mozambique
Peru	Malawi	Russia
Romania	Moldova	Tanzania
Serbia	Senegal	Zimbabwe
Slovakia	Zambia	
Taiwan		
Ukraine		

**Table 2.1: How Variation in Linkage and Leverage Shapes External Pressure for Democratization**

	<b>High Linkage</b>	<b>Low Linkage</b>
<b>High Leverage</b>	Consistent and intense democratizing pressure	Intermittent and limited (“electoralist”) pressure
<b>Low Leverage</b>	Consistent but diffuse and indirect democratizing pressure	Weak external pressure; permissive international environment

**Figure 2.1 : Linkage, Incumbent Capacity, and Regime Outcomes**

