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Valerie Bunce e Sharon Wolchik

**MIXED REGIMES IN POSTCOMMUNIST EURASIA:
TIPPING DEMOCRATIC AND TIPPING
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“One of the most striking features of the ‘late period’ of the third wave has been the unprecedented growth in the number of regimes that are neither clearly democratic nor conventionally authoritarian.”
Larry Diamond (2002, p. 25)

Introduction

During the Cold War, the eastern half of Europe was composed of nine communist states that featured nearly identical political and economic systems. With the dissolution of communism, the Soviet bloc, and the Soviet, Yugoslav and Czechoslovak states from 1989-1992, however, the region underwent a dramatic differentiation (Bunce, 1999a, 1999b). The number of states in the area multiplied from nine in 1991 to twenty-seven by 1993 (with the addition to two more from 2006 to 2008), and the types of regimes multiplied as well (see Bunce, 1999a, 1999b, 2006, 2008; McFaul, 2002). In particular, three types of political-economic systems emerged from the wreckage of the communist experiment. In a minority of cases, such as Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, communism was succeeded by new, but still fully authoritarian regimes that maintained for the most part the economic structure of the communist era. At the other extreme and also in a minority of cases, communism was replaced by its “other;” that is, fully democratic polities that were quick to build liberal economic systems. This was the pathway followed by the eight countries that joined the European Union in 2004. However, the most common type of political and economic regime to emerge after the collapse of regimes and states was a mixed system that combined elements of dictatorship and democracy and that featured partial economic reforms that also straddled the liberal-illiberal divide (see, especially, Bunce, 1994, 1999a, 2004, 2006; Hellman, 1998). Such mixed political economies formed in particular in Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Croatia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Serbia, and Ukraine during the early years of the transition.

What explains the rise of mixed regimes? What has happened to these regimes over the course of the transition, and how can we account for their divergent evolution? The purpose of this paper is to provide answers to these questions by comparing regime developments over time in four post-Soviet successor states: Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine. These four countries are of interest for several reasons, aside from the fact that they are the focus of this conference. One is that they share a number of similarities. They are all new states that were once republics within the Soviet Union; they all began the transition as mixed regimes; and they have become what two analysts have termed the “new outsiders” in postcommunist Eurasia as a result of bordering the enlarged European Union (see White and McAllister, 2007; and, for the European Neighborhood Policy, see Fischer, 2005; Kelley, 2006; Beichelt, 2007; Schimmelfennig and Scholtz, 2007). These four states also exhibit some continuity with the Soviet past. In contrast to much of east-central Europe, the communist parties in these four countries maintained their names

and lacked strong reformist wings. At the same time, they managed to maintain an important political role after the “fall of communism.” Moreover, the economies of Moldova and especially Ukraine and Belarus are closely tied to the Russian economy. Finally, just as all four states have a long history of authoritarian politics that predate the Soviet period, so they have been the targets of considerable support for democratic development on the part of both the European Union and the United States government, along with a variety of private foundations based in specific countries in the West (see, especially, Finkel, et.al., 2006; Fischer, 2005; Beichelt, 2007; Green, 2007; Van Wertsch and de Zeeuv, 2005).

These similarities, however, are joined with some differences—which make these four countries ideal for comparative purposes. Perhaps the most important difference—and one of the puzzles addressed in this paper—is the variation in regime trajectories since mixed regimes formed in all four states at the beginning of the transition. While Belarus and Russia, like most of the mixed regimes in the post-Soviet space, have become increasingly authoritarian over time, both Moldova and Ukraine have bucked the post-Soviet trend by successfully resisting major authoritarian challenges and, in the Ukrainian case in particular, by making significant democratic progress in the aftermath of the “Orange Revolution” in 2004 (see, for example, Bunce and Wolchik, 2008; McFaul, 2004, 2007; Aslund and McFaul, 2006; Kuzio, 2005, 2006). These developments notwithstanding, unlike the mixed regimes of east-central Europe, which have all become demonstrably more democratic over time, whether through a more gradual process (as in Albania, the Baltic countries, Macedonia and Romania) or a more dramatic break with postcommunist authoritarianism (as in Bosnia, Croatia, and Serbia), the successor regimes in Moldova and Ukraine have nonetheless remained mixed polities falling short of full-scale democratic standards. In this sense, while democratic progress in these two countries has been disappointing from the vantage point of the transition experiences of mixed regimes in east-central Europe, such as Slovakia and Romania, it is impressive from the political perspective of the twelve successor states (minus the Baltic countries) that make up the core of the former Soviet Union.

The analysis is divided into three parts. We begin by defining mixed regimes and highlighting some of their key characteristics. As we will discover, mixed regimes have a number of common characteristics, and these characteristics are well-represented in our four postcommunist cases. We then address the question of why mixed regimes form—in general and in the cases of Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine. This discussion reminds us, once again, of the typicality of the postcommunist region, while helping us define the point of political and economic departure for subsequent regime developments in our four countries. In the final section of the paper, we trace and explain the contrasting political trajectories of Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine since the early 1990s. What is striking in this discussion is that, while all four of these regimes were tilting in a more authoritarian direction by the beginning of the twenty-first century, key elections in Ukraine in 2004 and in Moldova in 2005 moved these two countries away from authoritarian consolidation. Behind these elections, we argue, were some important factors that differentiated Ukraine and Moldova from Russia and Belarus—in particular, the design of political institutions in the early stages of the transition, subsequent patterns of political competition and turnover, and the role of international influences on regime developments.

Mixed Regimes: Definitions and Generalizations

By mixed regimes, we refer to regimes that combine elements of dictatorship and democracy. Thus, mixed regimes fall in the sprawling middle of a political continuum anchored by democracy on one end—that is, a type of regime where elections are regular, free, fair and competitive, where political institutions are representative, and where there are significant civil liberties and political rights guaranteed by law—and dictatorship on the other end—or a regime where government lacks accountability to its citizenry as a result of the absence of competition, widespread rights, rule of law, and representative institutions. While mixed regimes usually share the commonality of having an authoritarian leader in office who governs within the context of at least formally democratic institutions, and while all such regimes feature degrees of political competition that give oppositions some opportunity to win power, they nonetheless diverge from one another and over time with respect to *where* they are located along the continuum running from dictatorship to democracy. Thus, some mixed regimes are more competitive than others; the independence of the media and the courts varies; legislatures can be relatively powerful or relatively weak; and laws can be more or less consistent across time, space and circumstances. At the same time, a given mixed regime can limit civil liberties more in one period than another; elections can be rigged in one round and more open in another; and the powers of representative institutions can also change over time. It is precisely because of such variations within and across such regimes and the importance of agency, as well as structures in shaping these differences across country and over time that we prefer the looser category, mixed regimes, to the more precise (but ultimately misleadingly precise) designations of illiberal democracies, electoral democracies, semi-authoritarianism, or competitive authoritarianism (see, for example, Ottaway, 2003; Levitsky and Way, 2002; Diamond, 2002; Zakaria, 2005; Carothers, 2002; and see Bunce and Wolchik, 2008, Chapter Two).

There are several useful generalizations we can draw about mixed regimes that will help frame the discussion that follows. One is that authoritarian rule is rarely followed by the rise of full-scale democratic orders. Just as a long-term and global perspective on regime transitions suggests that authoritarian regimes in fact usually succeed authoritarianism (Hadenius and Teorell, 2007), so the experience of the third wave of democratization in particular suggests that the most common successor to authoritarianism has been in fact mixed regimes, rather than full-scale democracies (Diamond, 2002; Carothers, 2002, 2007a, 2007b; Roessler and Howard, 2007). When judged from these comparative vantage points, the regime transitions that have taken place in postcommunist Europe and Eurasia have been typical, rather than unusual. Thus, a “jump” to democracy, when authoritarian regimes weaken, has been both the regional and the global exception, not the norm.

Mixed regimes, moreover, tend to be unusually unstable—in several ways (see Goldstone, et.al, 2000; Epstein, et.al., 2006; Roessler and Howard, 2007). One is that they have a pronounced tendency of moving back and forth along the continuum defined by the extremes of dictatorship and democracy, with the latter two types of regimes far more “sticky” over time than regimes that fall in between these two poles. The other is that such regimes, again in comparison with dictatorships and democracy, tend to stand out with respect to their political deficits—in particular, the weakness of their states, their lackluster economic performance, and their unusually high levels of political disorder. For example, in one study it was found that mixed regimes were seven times as likely to become failed states as either fully democratic or fully

autocratic regimes (Goldstone, et.al., 2000). What these difficulties suggest is that mixed regimes are distinctive in their failure to achieve a political equilibrium—which is another reason why we are uncomfortable with exercises that try to draw refined distinctions among types of mixed regimes. Because of their fluidity, they are less “regime-ish” than most regimes, and their fluid structure means that specific events, such as elections, and the role of agency, such as the goals and calculations of individual leaders, can play an unusually important role in shaping regime developments over time.

Once again, the postcommunist experience seems to be relatively typical of global patterns with respect to these indicators of problematic political and economic performance. For example, the worst-performing economies in the postcommunist region have been mixed regimes (see, for example, Bunce, 1999a; Frye, 2002). Poor economic performance was certainly typical, moreover, of three of the countries of interest in this paper, with Belarus the one exception. Indeed, together with Serbia and Georgia, Ukraine, Russia and Moldova exhibit the worst economic performance in the entire region.

Moreover, most of the mixed regimes in the region have confronted the problem of fluid state borders. This is because their leaders tried to expand the size of the state as the larger state within which they were encased began to crumble (Croatia, Serbia, and Armenia); neighboring countries have challenged existing borders (Azerbaijan and Macedonia); regional leaders within the state have tried to continue the processes of state dissolution by pursuing secessionist political agendas (Bosnia, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine); or because it is in the interest of leaders to encourage tensions between the state and troublesome regions in order to consolidate political power and divert attention from policy failures (which was the story of Russian Presidents Yel'tsin and Putin in Chechnya and is the current situation with respect to relations between the Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili and Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia (see Bunce and Watts, 2005; Bunce, 2006; Protsyk, 2006). While taking place in every case early in the processes of regime and state transition, many of these challenges to the integrity of the state—with the recent exception of Kosovo--have congealed into “frozen conflicts” that continue to this day to block solidification of state boundaries.

A final generalization about mixed regimes is that they are more likely than authoritarian regimes to give way to fully democratic polities (Hadenius and Teorell, 2007; Teorell and Hadenius, 2007). This is not surprising, if we understand mixed regimes to be in effect a “halfway house” to democracy—in contrast to their fully authoritarian counterparts. Moreover, mixed regimes provide opportunities for democratic change, because they feature representative institutions; they hold regular and at least semi-competitive elections; their very absence of structure means that they resist attempts by authoritarians to institutionalize their powers; and they have often been the focus of considerable external democracy promotion efforts (see Bunce and Wolchik, 2006; Finkel, et.al., 2006; Schedler, 2006; Schedler, 2007; Hale, 2005, 2006; Levitsky and Way, 2007).

However, there are, nonetheless, sizeable constraints on democratization in mixed regime settings—constraints that have been underplayed, especially in studies of democratization in east-central Europe, and that appear quite applicable to the experiences of Moldova, Russia and Ukraine in particular (see, especially, Bunce and Wolchik, 2008, ch. 2). At the most general level, as Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way (2007; 28)) have argued, such regimes “...vary considerably in their ability to control civil society, co-opt or divide oppositions, repress protest, and steal elections.” On a

more specific level, the mixed character of these regimes, in combination with the resources enjoyed by authoritarian leaders, often translate into the construction of a powerful political apparatus supporting authoritarian rule and quite fragmented oppositions unable to make strong bids for political power (see, especially, Way, 2005; Way, 2005, 2008; Hale, 2005, 2006; Silitski, 2005). In addition, authoritarian leaders in such regimes are in a good position, because of these assets, to control the media, rig elections, and demobilize their opponents. It is also the case, but often ignored, that such leaders can be popular or at least more popular than oppositions that in many countries are widely viewed by the citizenry as divided, corrupt and incompetent. Indeed, it is easy for citizens to argue that, while both authoritarians and democrats are corrupt, at least authoritarians know how to coalesce and make durable governments.

There is also a more general constraint on political change. Mixed regimes, we must remember, are often mixed for some very good reasons. The combination of dictatorial and democratic features often speaks to the existence of important and durable divisions within the citizenry regarding national identities and regime-type preferences and, at the same time, the value of forming various external alliances that would push such regimes in a more democratic or a more authoritarian direction (see, for example, White and McAllister, 2007 on Ukraine, Belarus and Russia). Such cleavages, moreover, play out in the party system, with the common effect of producing the multiplication of parties and their resistance to forming broad coalitions willing and able to challenge authoritarian incumbents. At the same time, most mixed regimes have a long history of authoritarian politics that has made its mark on the political culture, the ways political institutions operate, and the size, goals, and organization of the opposition.

Challenging the power of authoritarian leaders in mixed regimes, therefore, is difficult. This has certainly been the case in all four of our countries, especially in Belarus and Russia, where incumbent elites, such as Lukashenka and Putin, have had the “double” advantages of building strong institutions to back their power and significant personal popularity. However, while the first could be said to also apply to Ukraine under Kuchma, the second was not, and this provided an opportunity for Yushchenko to challenge the power of his former patron. This opportunity, however, was “earned” by Yushchenko and his allies in a hard political struggle for power in 2004. Here, Larry Diamond’s observation (2002: 24) is a telling one, whether we focus on Ukraine or on Belarus and Russia. The defeat of authoritarian leaders in mixed regimes “... requires a level of opposition mobilization, unity, skill and heroism for beyond what would normally be required for victory in a democracy.”

However, perhaps the biggest problem for democratic development in mixed regimes—and one that is particularly relevant to the four cases analyzed in this paper—is one that Dankwart Rustow (1970) noted thirty-eight years ago. Sustained democratic development is unlikely in the absence of a viable state and a popular consensus around the definition and the geographical reach of the nation, as well as the rights associated with membership in national communities (Bunce, 2005a, 2005b, 2006; Bunce and Watts, 2005). If nation and state issues are not settled, politics can become extraordinarily divisive; liberal constituencies can be divided and therefore ineffective; and the state can become too weak to provide a minimal level of political order (see, especially, Gagnon, 2004; Bunce, 1999b, 2005a, 2005b). This is a story, in a nutshell, of all of the countries of interest in this study, along with Georgia, Macedonia, and Serbia in particular. This is hardly surprising, since the countries of

interest here are new states with diverse populations that tend to be geographically-concentrated and that tend to lack as well a history of stateness.

It is also important to recognize that debates about the nation are costly in terms of both political stability and democratic development, because such discussions are invariably exclusionary (see Marx, 2003). In practice, this means that such debates create security dilemmas for minorities, especially in the postcommunist context where many minorities had earlier been protected, if not courted by the larger state that dissolved. This was precisely what happened, for example, in the cases of Transnistria in Moldova and Crimea in Ukraine. Such debates, moreover, have a pronounced tendency of privileging illiberal nationalist discourse in the struggles for political power that are unleashed by state disintegration and regime and state formation.

Origins of Mixed Regimes

One puzzle in the study of democratization is explaining the rise of so many mixed regimes—in the third wave in general and in the particular case of the postcommunist region. There are four lines of argument that we can propose, with each of them, it is important to emphasize, quite applicable to the formation of mixed regimes in the early years of the transition in Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine. One explanation focuses on historical legacies. Most mixed regimes in the world, including the four of interest in this paper, have a long history of authoritarianism, whereas the most successful cases of democratization during the third wave have often involved re-democratization. This contrast is one reason, for instance, why mixed regimes are so much more prevalent in Sub-Saharan Africa and the postcommunist region than in Latin America. Long experience with authoritarian rule can compromise subsequent democratic development by bequeathing a weak tradition in rule of law, an independent media, well-defined political parties anchored in socio-economic cleavages, robust civil society, and strong political institutions; a mass political culture that can embrace democracy in surprisingly rapid fashion, but nonetheless exhibit some ambivalence about liberal values; and an opposition that is weak, divided and often politically compromised (see, especially, Howard, 2002; Gelman, 2005; Stoner-Weiss, 2001; Rose, 2000; Gibson, 2001a, 2001b; Hale, 2005b). In addition, many authoritarian regimes stayed in power by building institutions that divided publics in general and the opposition in particular and that played groups off against one another. As the war in Iraq, for example, reminds us, with liberalization of politics, especially in the absence of strong institutions, the short-term result can be heightened conflicts among citizens, as well as between the government and various groups. Such conflicts are all the more likely when there is a widespread perception that short-term bargaining outcomes will have powerful and lasting effects on the future character of the regime and the power and resources of individuals and groups in the state and the economy.

Mixed regimes also tend to form in contexts, common in much of Sub-Saharan Africa and post-Soviet Eurasia and the Balkans, where there are severe difficulties involved in defining the nation and solidifying the boundaries of the state. While these difficulties, as already noted, undermine democratic development, they also work against the consolidation of dictatorship—largely because continuing contestation over the nation and the state weaken the ability of authoritarian leaders to consolidate their powers as a result of contentious politics at home, fragmented states, and threats

to state sovereignty abroad. Thus, mixed regimes represent a compromise between the limitations of both democracy and dictatorship in a transitional context where there has developed: 1) an explosion of rival definitions of the nation; 2) weakened and often brand new states that have little historical precedent and that are composed of multiple national communities with very different experiences during authoritarian rule; 3) increasingly assertive majorities committed to “nation-building,” which in practice usually meant homogenization of the nation in their own image; 4) increasingly nervous minorities that are usually geographically concentrated, live on the perimeters of the state, have a recent history of privileged status under the old regime and state, and that often serve as majorities in neighboring states. These dynamics in turn lead to other outcomes associated with mixed regimes, as noted earlier; that is, the syndrome of weak states, secessionist regions, failing economies, and unstable governments and more generally politics.

While severe in all four of our cases, the problems with nation and state formation nonetheless varied (Way, 2005a). In Belarus, a state tradition was lacking, and ethnic diversity combined with both a strong connection to the Russian state and Russian identity (especially in terms of language and culture). With independence, therefore, Belarussian identity was weak (Marples, 1999). However, unlike the other three countries, Belarus did not face secessionist pressures or economic collapse. Put simply: it had a state because of its republican status and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, but a limited sense of the community in whose name the state existed (ioffe, 2004; Silitski, 2007b; Kunker, 2000).

In the Moldovan transition, a complex political struggle unfolded that included minorities seeking independence or in some cases a return to the Russian state and a majority that was also divided in this case over the question of whether to embrace a distinctive Moldovan identity and an independent state or merge with Romania (King, 2000; Cashu, 2005; March and Herb, 2006; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2007). In this sense, Moldova featured virtually every alternative available with respect to policies addressing the definition of the nation and the state.

In Ukraine, the Russian/Ukrainian divide (which was complicated, as in Belarus, by overlapping use of the Russian language and identification with Russian culture and the Soviet state) combined with three other divides, making the national (and linguistic and religious) distinction quite potent in politics (Kubicek, 2000; Way, 2005a, 2005b). One divide was geography, with western and northwestern Ukraine counter-posed to the east and south. Another was economic interests, with the corridor abutting Russia an area of heavy industry that was tightly integrated with the Russian economy versus the rest of Ukraine. Finally, there were significant differences in historical experiences. Western Ukraine had been part of the Habsburg, not Russian empire; it was added to the Soviet Union during World War II; and Crimea, a largely Russian area in the far south, was in turn added to Ukraine in a capricious decision by Nikita Khrushchev in the 1950s. Like Moldova and the Transnistria issue, moreover, there were secessionist pressures on the new Ukrainian state—in this instance, from Crimea (with such demands also appearing, more generally, in eastern Ukraine in response to the Orange Revolution in 2004).

Finally, although the Russian federation was far more homogeneous in ethnic terms (though more heterogeneous along religious lines) than the other three countries, it faced nonetheless considerable secessionist pressures from Chechnya, as well as Tatarstan—with the former leading to two unusually violent wars and the latter leading to the establishment, thanks to the clever actions of Shamiev, of significant local autonomy (Bunce, 2004b). In addition, Russian identity was closely

tied to Soviet identity, the role of the Soviet Union as a Super Power, and, more generally, the communist experiment.

This leads to a third explanation for the rise of mixed regimes: the impact of international factors. As Steve Levitsky and Lucan Way (2007, 2006) have argued, sustainable and full-scale democracies are more likely to succeed authoritarian politics where countries are located close to well-established democratic polities—what they term linkage—and where democratic change is in the clear interest of the West—what they term leverage. Just as linkage speaks to high levels of interaction between the two sets of countries as a result of shared borders and commonalities in history, culture and institutional forms, so leverage is an important contributor to democratic change because of the incentives and resources made available to leaders and citizens in strategically-located countries. Such incentives and resources, moreover, can tip the balance of domestic politics in countries in transition in the direction of empowering supporters of democratic change against their opponents (see, especially, Vachudova, 2005; also see Kubicek, 2005; Linden, 2002; Pevehouse, 2005; Youngs, 2004).

This line of analysis, it can be noted, explains the striking contrast in the postcommunist region, whether focusing on the early years of the transition or later, between political developments in east-central Europe, on the one hand, and the former Soviet Union, on the other. In contrast with new democracies, mixed regimes, it can be argued, are less affected by linkage—since they tend to be more geographically removed from the Western core—and leverage—because their political trajectories tend to be either irrelevant to the West or what one might call “too relevant” in the sense that Western leaders value oil, tight alliances, and political stability too much to press for anything other than relatively cosmetic democratic reforms. This is the story in part of Western relations with Russia, as well as Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan.

It is fair to argue, therefore, that the mixed regimes in the postcommunist region, with the four countries of interest in this paper providing particularly good examples, occupy the *borderlands* between east and west. This means far fewer linkages to the West than in, say, Poland, but more than in, say, the Caucasus or Central Asia. This also means more divided political cultures (with each “camp” often occupying different geographical locales as well), and heightened competition among external players providing resources and making threats for the purpose of influencing regime developments, whether in a democratic or a dictatorial direction (see, especially, White and McAllister, 2007).

The international context of democratization and its consequences for the formation of mixed regimes can also be analyzed with respect to democratic norms. Because of the rise of democracy as a global value and the widespread belief among citizens around the world (as public opinion surveys repeatedly show in the postcommunist region as elsewhere) that legitimate regimes are those that can claim to be democratic by, for example, having liberal constitutions and holding competitive elections, authoritarian leaders have been under growing pressure to add some democratic “decorations” to the way they conduct politics. Such “decorations” also have a practical side. Even rigged elections can reveal the distribution of public sentiments to authoritarians and help them fine-tune patronage networks (Lust-Okar, 2004, 2007). In addition, since the second half of the 1980s, we have seen the proliferation of non-governmental organizations that increasingly serve as the core distributors of external economic assistance and that also serve as major proponents of democratic improvements (Mendelson and Glenn, 2002; but see Gershman and Allen,

2006). During the same period, we have also seen a change in the international financial community. Questioning the effectiveness of both defining development in purely economic terms and making direct transfers to governments, IFIs have increasingly defined their mission as one of linking development assistance to the expansion of social capital and civil society and to demonstration on the part of the recipient regime that it has made strides in improving democratic performance (see, for example, Knack, 2004). While these policy changes can have some negative consequences, such as strengthening the power of illiberal groups, creating a fragile and dependent civil society, and weakening the state by forcing political leaders to hide their coercive tendencies by “farming out” responsibilities for repression to allies outside the state and then losing control of the privatization of violence (see Jamal, 2008 and Roessler, 2005), the message of such actions is nonetheless clear. Mixing democracy with dictatorship can be beneficial for regime survival. As a result (and with a certain amount of irony), it can be argued that rational authoritarians can prolong their rule by adding some democratic features to their regimes—to divide the opposition while courting external funding. In this sense, mixed regimes are an “efficient” response to the demands of the international system—as leaders in Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine quickly recognized early in the transition.

Finally, a number of scholars have drawn on the focus in early third wave studies of democratization as a bargaining outcome and argued that mixed regimes reflect a specific set of bargaining processes and consequences that take place once authoritarian regimes weaken (Bunce, 1999a; McFaul, 2002). In particular, in the postcommunist region, mixed regimes have tended to form under one of two conditions. The first is a balance between weak and divided oppositions versus weak and divided authoritarians—which describes quite well what happened in Russia and Moldova throughout the 1990s and Belarus in the first half of that decade. The other is a balance between the same two groups, but in conditions where both are relatively strong. This describes the politics of Ukraine throughout the 1990s. Thus, mixed regimes are testimony to the failure of either of the two key players in the transition to establish an overwhelming political advantage.

Indeed, the outcomes of the first competitive elections in the postcommunist world as a whole provide strong evidence of the importance of these considerations. Just as the countries that were quick to establish fully democratic polities all featured decisive victories of the opposition in the first competitive elections (with the communists at times defecting in effect to the liberal project, as in Hungary and Slovenia in particular), so the authoritarian countries in the region feature one of two scenarios. One was a decisive victory of the communists coupled with limited support, especially outside of major cities, of the opposition, and the other is an equally decisive victory by an illiberal opposition (as in Croatia and Georgia in particular). In the latter cases, the common story was that the communists had lost support from key players because they were associated with repressing nationalist mobilizations during communism. As a result, once the regime and state began to disintegrate, the struggle for political power shifted to struggles within the opposition, which the nationalist agenda had divided into liberal and illiberal groups. The illiberal flank won, among other reasons, because it was able to demobilize the liberal opposition, and it could lay claim to being long at the forefront of the struggle for the nation and statehood against communism and the larger state.

Finally, with respect to mixed regimes, we see in the postcommunist region what can be termed ambiguous electoral outcomes (also see Fish, 1998; Frye, 2002). For example, in Ukraine and Russia, the first elections allowed the opposition to

establish a clear presence in the legislature, though communists or former communists won the Presidency; in Moldova, the liberal opposition won with a weak mandate and then divided over the question of Moldova's relationship to Romania; and in Belarus, while the opposition was weak, the communists were quite divided. A rough balance between contending political forces, therefore, led to compromise with respect to both democratic development and economic reform, with the result that both dynamics had the effect of generating in regional terms unusually unstable politics and either limited economic reforms (as in Belarus and Ukraine) or stop and start economic reforms (as in Russia and Moldova). The failure to reach closure on both democratization and economic reform, therefore, as a result of important divisions in society as a whole, the communist party, and the opposition created not just mixed regimes, but also unstable politics and unusually poor economic performance. Also common in these scenarios was considerable corruption, reflecting the partial character of economic reforms and the continuing power of rent-seekers to capitalize on the gaps created by occupying a halfway house between socialism and capitalism (Hellman, 1998).

Points of Departure: Belarus and Russia

This discussion of the origins of mixed regimes leads to a clear conclusion. When all is said and done, the key point is that such regimes—in contrast to transitions from authoritarian rule that lead either to democracy or dictatorship—reflect *continuing* contestation among elites and among publics over the regime, the state and the economy. They occupy, in short, what Thomas Carothers (2002) has termed the grey zone, but with the additional meaning that this zone is at once political, economic, cultural and historical.

What did this mean in practice? On Table 1, we have provided a snapshot of our four regimes in the early years of the transition. As this table suggests, all four regimes were mixed—though Russia and Moldova, interestingly enough, tilted more in a democratic direction than Belarus and Ukraine. However, as Table 2 indicates, once we take a longer-term view of the transition, we find significant changes in these regimes over time. To put the matter simply and to echo an earlier point: these mixed regimes were far from frozen in their political attributes. We now turn to a brief overview of our four regime trajectories. We begin with a synopsis of what transpired in Russia and Belarus: the two countries that became more authoritarian over time (and see graphs 1 and 2).

In Belarus, the key development was the election of Aleksander Lukashenka to the Presidency in 1994. While a longstanding member of the communist party, Lukashenka was very low in the hierarchy of the Belorussian Communist Party, and he came in effect out of nowhere to win the Presidency. Once in office, Lukashenka committed himself to weeding out non-supporters in the party and building a strong political machine and a strong state—in direct contrast, for example, to what transpired during communist rule in Ukraine and Moldova (see Way, 2005; also see Silitski, 2005a, 2005b, 2006, 2007a, 2007b). Over the course of his time in office, Lukashenka has avoided economic reforms; formed a close alliance with Russia (which has been quite frayed in the past two years); and built a full-scale authoritarian system based upon state control over the media, the courts and the legislature. He has also done a thorough-going job of rigging local and national rigged elections; harassing the opposition; and supporting a quite corrupt system that uses economic benefits to pay off supporters. He is a very popular leader, in part because of personal

charisma and the in part because of the striking economic stability of Belarus over the course of the transition, and he was very successful at limiting the ability of the opposition to make effective challenges to his powers in both the 2001 and 2006 presidential elections. This is because Lukashenka has been unusually attentive to any potential threats to his power. For example, just as he was a careful student of what happened to Milosevic in Serbia in 2000, so he followed developments in Georgia in 2003 and Ukraine in 2004, when democratic oppositions coalesced to oust Shevardnadze in the first case and when they managed in the second to defeat Kuchma's designated successor. For example, when participants in Georgia's Rose Revolution in 2003 entered Belarus to help the opposition prepare for the 2006 presidential elections, Lukashenka was quick to throw them in jail.

The Russian road to authoritarianism began later, but it was also a function of the work of one leader who also benefited from strong economic performance; that is, Vladimir Putin, who was chosen by Boris Yel'tsin to succeed him in late 1999 and who was elected in landslide presidential elections in 2000 and again in 2004 (see, especially, Knight, 2008; Fish, 2005; Lyall, 2006; Stoner-Weiss, 2007; Wilson, 2005; Wilson, 2006; Kamhi, 2006; Krastev, 2005, 2006; Hale, 2006; Dimitrov, 2008). Moreover, while having to step down as President because of the two-term limit specified in the Russian constitution and choosing a close ally, Dmitry Medvedev, to succeed him, Putin has nonetheless succeeded in maintaining his powerful position in Russian politics by agreeing to become the Prime Minister under President Medvedev. Here, it is striking to note, first, that Medvedev has been rumored to have headed the failed Russian attempt to influence the outcome of the 2004 Ukrainian elections by supporting Viktor Yanukovych—who lost to Viktor Yushchenko. At the same time, a March, 2008 poll in Russia showed that sixty-six percent of Russians assumed that a vote for Medvedev for President would necessarily lead, in contrast to the time Putin was President, to a shift in power in the direct of the office of the Prime Minister (Knight, 2008). Put simply: Russians assumed that Putin would remain in charge. With United Russia, headed by Putin, dominating the legislature, it is unlikely that Medvedev will be able to carve out an independent political position—though his background, unlike much of the rest of the Russian political elite, is not in the security services.

Like Lukashenka, Putin has been committed to building a strong state by constructing an authoritarian regime, using many of the same mechanisms, such as control over the media and elections, harassment of the opposition, the use of nationalism to promote public support, and widespread corruption. To provide two telling examples: eight journalists have been killed this year in Russia, and Transparency International currently ranks Russia 123 out of 175 (with Moldova 111; Ukraine 118; and Belarus 150—see http://transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2007).

These similarities recognized, there are nonetheless some contrasts between Putin and Lukashenka with respect to how they have consolidated their power and their approach to de-democratization (and see Hassner, 2008). In Putin's case, the regime is dominated by the "siloviki," that is, members of the security police (currently termed the FSB) and the Foreign Intelligence Service. Moreover, unlike Belarus, the Russian state was very weak at the time of Putin's rise to power, given difficulties the Russian state had with respect to maintaining its borders, collecting taxes, imposing a common legal framework on the regions, and providing political order. At the same time, the Russian economy, again in contrast to Belarus, was in shambles. Putin responded to these problems by "winning" the second war in

Chechnya (which in practice unleashed terrible devastation and widespread violations of human rights) and introducing a series of institutional reforms that strengthened the presidency, while weakening parliament, the courts, and local governments (which were consolidated into much larger units and then denied institutional opportunities for separate political voices through changes in parliament and voting procedures). He has also made it far harder for the opposition to contest, let alone win power at the local or national levels, and to organize largescale and effective political protests (Benardo and Neier, 2006; Robertson, 2008).

For example, it has become very hard, given the huge number of signatures required for candidates to run for office, the absence of transparency in electoral commissions, and the high thresholds for representation in parliament after the elections, for the opposition to run for and take office. Moreover, United Russia currently controls seventy percent of the seats in the Russian parliament. As a result, the Russian opposition has decided that electoral politics are no longer a meaningful route to popular influence, and their leaders have focused instead on two kinds of activities: popular demonstrations and the slow formation of a nation-wide, Solidarity-like political movement (see Lyall, 2006). Both actions have also been embraced by the Belorussian opposition. These reactions, ironically, signify a return to the communist past, where mobilization outside formal political institutions constituted the only effectively available approach to challenging dictatorial power. At the same time, Putin has reasserted state control over the energy sector, and he has benefited from a return of the Russian economy to growth, largely as a result of buoyant energy prices. As Putin has boasted, Russian incomes are two and one-half the size of what they were when he came into office, and the Gross Domestic Product is seventy per cent larger (see Knight, 2008).

There is little doubt, therefore, that Russia has de-democratized under Putin. A recent strategy paper by the European Commission has provided an apt summary of Putin's—and Medvedev's—Russia at this time:

“Russia is characterized by a powerful bureaucracy, increasingly dominated by the Kremlin and widely seen as highly corrupt, a legal system described by some as politically-biased, powerful and repressive law enforcement agencies, and a relatively weak civil society “ (EU Country Strategy Paper, 2007: 14-15).

Resisting Authoritarianism: Moldova and Ukraine

As Lucan Way (2002, 2003, 2005a) has argued, Moldova during the 1990s was a good example of “pluralism by default” (also see Mungiu-Pippidi, 2007; Quinlan, 2007). During this period, while the Moldovan economy imploded and the issue of either an independent Transnistria or its reincorporation into the state continued to fester, Moldova nonetheless maintained a relatively democratic polity, especially with respect to such standards as extensive civil liberties and regular, free and fair elections (though the communist party was banned from 1991-1994). However, there were many problems besetting Moldova throughout the 1990s. For example, the Gross National Product in 2000 was approximately thirty percent of the size it was in 1990; there was a huge emigration of the working age population in response to constricted economic opportunities at home; and the ruling opposition was plagued by divisions, political paralysis, and very high rates of turnover in office. Not surprisingly (though the results took most observers by surprise, much like the 1994 election in Belarus), the opposition lost power in the 2001 parliamentary elections to

the communists, who won a strong political mandate in elections that were, it is important to note, fully free and fair. The communists, who had not reformed themselves in either name or ideology, ran on a platform that combined economic populism with closer relations with Russia—a platform that was similar to the one that was embraced by Lukashenka in his elections, beginning in the 1994 and continuing thereafter (but see Liakhovich, 2007).

From 2001 to late 2004, it appeared that Moldova under the leadership of its new President, Vladimir Voronin, would go the way of Belarus and Russia. For example, like Lukashenka, Voronin sought closer economic and political relations with Russia, and, like both Putin and Lukashenka, Voronin intimidated the opposition; packed the judiciary; revised the constitution; attacked the media; returned the structure of local government to its design during communism; and held rigged local elections (Barbarosie, 2001; Cashu, 2005; Fenger, 2008; Quinlan, 2007). However, the media managed to stay relatively independent and active, as did the opposition, which began a cycle of protests in 2002, and Russia overplayed its hand with respect to both its interventions in Transnistria (where Russian troops were still stationed) and the prices charged Moldova for Russian energy products. As a result of these factors, along with large-scale political protests, declining public support for the communists, and the precedent of the Orange Revolution next door (which in the short-term had led Voronin to push through a bill prohibiting students from participation in demonstrations!), Voronin reconsidered his approach to governing by the end of 2004 in anticipation of the upcoming parliamentary elections in 2005. Stealing the thunder of the opposition, he embraced a return to Europe and with that moved away from his authoritarian political practices. He was reelected, helped in part by a relatively successful economic record, and he has come to resemble in his rhetoric and policies the reform communists that, for example, came back to power in Hungary in 1994. To draw on an observation by Alina Mungiu-Pippidi (2007): if the choice for Moldova was between Romania and Belarus, Moldova, as of this writing, has opted for the former over the latter.

In the case of Ukraine, a similar choice was confronted during the second and final term of President Leonid Kuchma, a communist like earlier leaders of independent Ukraine, who was, in contrast to his predecessor, a very close ally of Russia (and Putin) and a leader with strong support in both the Russian-speaking, heavy industrial belt of Ukraine that borders Russia, along with the Crimea. Like Russia and Moldova, the Ukrainian economy was in a freefall throughout the 1990s, with Ukrainian economic performance, not surprisingly, moving in tandem with its neighbor and closest trade partner, Russia. During that period, there was a two-way competition for power—between the communists and the opposition, with the opposition well-represented in the parliament, and, especially with respect to the office of the presidency, within the communist party as well, which was divided with respect to its geographical and economic bases of power, along with its commitments to economic and political reform (see Way, 2005a; 2005b; McFaul, 2004, 2007; Aslund and McFaul, 2006).

Over the course of Kuchma's second term in office (with Ukraine, like Russia, having a two-term limit for presidents), politics in Ukraine became far more violent and authoritarian. For example, Kuchma cracked down on the media, going so far as to kill a journalist. However, there was resistance to his policies—as revealed, for example, in popular protests and in the local elections in 2002, where the opposition came together and won a number of elections. In early 2004, Kuchma selected his prime minister, Viktor Yanukovych, to be his successor in the presidential elections

that were to take place late in the fall of that year. Kuchma's former Finance Minister, Viktor Yushchenko, also decided to run and built a large and powerful coalition of opposition groups along with other groups in Ukrainian society, including important members of the economic elite. Thanks to Western assistance for free and fair elections and an empowered civil society, rapid critiques of electoral procedures on the part of the United States and the Europeans (with the Polish President, Aleksander Kwasniewski playing a key role, along with the Lithuanian President), massive protests in Kyiv and throughout Ukraine, the breakdown of the regime's control over the media and the police, and key decisions by the Ukrainian Supreme court and, at the same time, despite rigged elections, the poisoning of Yushchenko, and substantial Russian support, the electoral battle between the "two Viktors" in the fall and winter of 2004 finally led, after the election was held again, led to the defeat of Yanukovytsch and the victory of Yushchenko (See Aslund and McFaul, 2006; Bunce and Wolchik, 2006, 2008, Ch. 5).

While Yushchenko has faced enormous difficulties since the Orange Revolution in creating a stable and effective government, given the divisions of the Ukrainian opposition, the continuing impact of political, economic and geographical divisions in Ukraine, and subsequent electoral pressures to name his former opponent, Yanukovytsch as Prime Minister, Ukraine has nonetheless made significant progress in democratization since Kuchma was in power. Put succinctly, while turbulent, the Ukrainian political scene is a good deal more democratic than it has ever been, especially with respect to civil liberties and political rights, the independence of the media, the powers of the legislature, rule of law, and the existence of free and fair elections.

While different in many ways, political changes in Ukraine and Moldova are similar in three key respects. In both countries, there was a serious brush with authoritarianism, beginning a decade or so after the transition from communism began. At the same time, in both countries, elections have played a key role—first in moving these mixed regimes in a more authoritarian direction and then in returning both countries to a far more democratic path. It is also striking that both countries are currently ruled by presidents with a similar profile of being communists who embraced a reformist position; who won power in part by supporting more ties with Europe, while distancing themselves from Russia; who sit on top of a quite factionalized coalition of supporters; and who are associated in the public mind with improved economic performance.

Explaining Divergent Trajectories

The four synopses of regime developments presented above suggest a more muddled contrast than one of, say, two mixed regimes becoming increasingly authoritarian over time, on the one hand, and, on the other, two mixed regimes moving into the democratic column. Instead, what we found was that, while both Belarus and Russia slid in a consistent way into authoritarian politics since the transition began, with Belarus starting its journey earlier than Russia, Moldova and Ukraine, also confronting the threat of de-democratization, succeeded in returning to the democratic path, but in a manner lacking the democratic guarantees built into stable and full-scale democratic polities. In this sense, while Russia and Belarus have become authoritarian orders, both Moldova and Ukraine were able to remain mixed regimes—albeit ones where the future of democracy, especially in Ukraine, is far

better than in the past. The question then becomes: what explains this contrast between what could be termed, alternatively, authoritarian versus mixed polities, or successful versus failed authoritarianism?

We can begin to answer this question by noting some factors that fail to differentiate well among our two sets of cases. Economic performance, for example, does not account for the contrast. The Ukrainian economy was in fact on the upswing the last years of the Kuchma regime—a trend that also applies to the Russian economy prior to Putin’s attack on democracy and the Moldovan economy during the first term of Voronin. At the same time, it is striking that neither cultural heterogeneity nor the presence of secessionist pressures on the state explains the contrast between Belarus and Russia, on the one hand, and Moldova and Ukraine, on the other. Third, it is notable that *all* the leaders who played key roles in either building authoritarian orders or deconstructing them were tied to the communists, rather than being political outsiders whose entire career was associated with the liberal opposition. Moreover, external factors have not played a consistent role. Both the United States and the European Union have devoted substantial resources to the promotion of democracy in all four of these countries—though far less so in Russia and especially Belarus in recent years, given concerted actions by Lukashenka to block foreign democratic assistance (and see Gershman and Allen, 2006; Bunce and Wolchik, 2008; Finkel, et.al., 2006; Green, 2007; Spector and Krickovic, 2007; “The Role,” 2006; USAID, 2005). Finally, it is important to note that the two countries closest to Russia in economic terms and with respect to the location of Russian pipelines—that is, Belarus and Ukraine—have moved in different political directions (see Yasmann, 2008).

There are, nonetheless, three factors that stand out as playing critical roles in these “showdowns” with authoritarianism. One grows out of contrasts in the outcome of the first competitive elections and their consequences in turn for the selection of political institutions at the beginning of the transition (see Table 3). In Moldova, the first competitive election led to a victory of the opposition, whereas in Ukraine the first election led to the victory of the communists in the presidential election, but sizeable representation of the opposition in parliament. As a result, in both Moldova and Ukraine, the combination of divided, but nonetheless sizeable oppositions facing divided and far from hegemonic communists led to a decision to adopt in the Moldovan case a parliamentary system, where the president is elected by parliament, and in the Ukrainian case, a mixed presidential-parliamentary system, where the parliament has significant powers. Because of the investment in strong legislatures, therefore, it was far harder in both of these countries for communist presidents to build durable coalitions and ambitious political machines that supported their power and that allowed them to centralize and abuse the powers of the presidency. As Steven Fish (2004, 2006, p. 5) has summarized his study with Matthew Kroenig of legislatures around the world: “...the presence of a powerful legislature is an unmixed blessing for democratization.” We might also add here that of the fifteen successor states that arose from the dissolution of the Soviet Union, only four were parliamentary: the three Baltic states, together with Moldova. These were also the only successor states where the opposition won the first competitive election—a pattern that we also see in east-central Europe.

By contrast and far more typical of the post-Soviet space, both Russia (albeit with a more divided electoral outcome) and Belarus opted for more powerful presidencies and weaker legislatures—with the latter becoming even weaker over time as presidents in both of these countries consolidated their powers. What this

meant is that presidents, such as Putin and Lukashenka, bent on limiting civil liberties and political rights, rigging elections, preventing the opposition from competing for power, exerting control over key economic sectors and the media, harassing and sometimes murdering journalists, and redrawing the structure of local governments and even parliaments and their rules for operation in favor of limiting political competition and independence, were in a position to use the presidential office as a platform to carry out these actions and expand their powers (and see McFaul and Stoner-Weiss, 2008). It is also telling that, while the courts in Russia and Belarus were silenced, they played a more active role in Moldova and especially Ukraine in limiting what presidents and their anointed successors could do to amass political and economic resources. While it is hard to disentangle electoral outcomes from institutional selection (especially given the Russian case), since they correlate with one another, the key point remains that weaker presidential offices are associated with greater resistance to authoritarian challenges in the mixed regimes of interest in this chapter.

A second factor that differentiates between the two cases is political mobilization and competition. Here, we refer to all types of political actions, ranging from protests and public engagement in local politics to competition for national office and turnover in governments. While political protests have been relatively constant in Moldova and have played a key role in Ukraine, especially from 2002 to 2004, they have been far less evident in either Russia or Belarus (Lyll, 2006; Barbarosie, 2001; Cashu, 2005; Mendelson and Gerber, 2005; Robertson, 2008). While repression increasingly explains the contrast, it is striking that neither Putin nor Lukashenka was challenged in their early years of their rule by political protests; that is, before their political agenda became evidence and before they consolidated their powers. By contrast, both Ukrainians and Moldovans were quick to challenge signs of growing authoritarianism.

At the same time, local elections in both Moldova and Ukraine, especially during the period of growing authoritarianism, have functioned as constraints on the center (as they also did in Serbia and Georgia, which also experienced pivotal elections), whereas they have failed to do so in Belarus and Russia. This contrast leads in turn to a more general point. The overall level of competition and turnover of officials in Belarus and Russia has been lower than in Ukraine and Moldova. Over the course of the transition, the latter two countries have more often been the sites of divided and changing governments, ample representation of the opposition in parliaments and in Moldova in the Presidential office as well. This has meant in turn considerably more turnover in governing officials. This is in sharp contrast to the relative continuity in electoral coalitions in Russia and especially Belarus.

This leads to a final consideration, which applies to three of the four countries: the role of Russia. It is fair to argue that Voronin (in his first term), Kuchma (in his two terms in office), and Lukashenka all built very close ties to Russia, while rejecting linkages to Europe. However, the Russian state has engaged in a series of policies that alienated publics in both Ukraine and Moldova—for example, interfering in the 2004 Ukrainian elections to the point where Putin congratulated Yanukovych on his victory even before the votes were counted (!), pushing a radical decentralization plan for Transnistria which undermined opportunities for a political compromise, and raising energy prices by substantial amounts. Moreover, Russia has taken a similar tack in Belarus over the past two years, pushing Lukashenka towards a more conciliatory policy with the West (though less so over the past year). The key point here is that, while Russia does indeed have both strong historical and economic

connections with Moldova and especially Belarus and Ukraine, it has pursued at times policies that, counter to its interests, have encouraged Moldova and Ukraine to turn to the West. Thus, it can be suggested that, while a number of criticisms have been leveled at Western policies towards Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova, these concerns about the limits and the costs of democracy promotion must be placed alongside the surprisingly inept policies of Russia in all three countries. While Russia under Putin has become more assertive in international affairs, especially in countries that were once part of the Soviet Union, it has done so with rather mixed results. In this sense, if the West has been clumsy at times with respect to promoting democracy abroad, so has Russia with its support of “managed democracy.”

Conclusions

The purpose of this paper has been to use the cases of Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine to address two questions. One is: why do mixed regimes form? Second, what explains variations over time in the weight of democratic versus authoritarian elements in mixed regimes? Our answer to the first question emphasized a variety of factors, including contestation over the nation and the state along with a rough balance at the time of the transition between authoritarians and democrats. With regards to the second question, we argued that three factors seemed to have played a key role in how mixed regimes evolved: institutional selection in the early years of the transition, the degree of political competition and contestation during the transition, and international influences on the transition, such as the role of Russia in the particular cases of Moldova, Belarus and Ukraine.

Embedded in these arguments, however, is a larger generalization that our comparison has highlighted. The formation and evolution of our four mixed regimes points to the important role of elections. A number of analysts of both democratization and international democracy assistance have rightly argued that perhaps too much emphasis has been placed on elections—as an indicator of overall democratic performance and as a “producer” of political change. However, it is nonetheless striking in this study that elections feature quite prominently in our story of both why mixed regimes form and why they move in either an authoritarian or a democratic direction. It is not just that founding elections carry implications for institutional choice, or that specific elections can function as turning points. It is also that a pattern of vibrant competitive politics and high rates of turnover in governing parties and public officials—a pattern that, we must remember, also characterized those postcommunist countries that have joined the EU—seems to contribute to democratic development. They do so for a variety of reasons—because elections themselves can be schools for democracy; because authoritarians can either be defeated (as in Ukraine in 2004) or persuaded to embrace more democratic priorities (as in Moldova in 2005), and because democrats replace dictators. Elections, therefore, are critical to democratic and authoritarian change, because of both their dynamics and their outcomes (and see Bunce and Wolchik, 2008; Forbrig and Demes, 2007).

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