

Democracy in a Russian Mirror



EDITED BY

Adam Przeworski

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What can we learn about democracy from the experience of post-Soviet Russia? What can we learn about the prospects for democracy in Russia from the experience of “really existing democracies”? Must some “prerequisites,” cultural or material, be fulfilled for democracy to become possible? This book examines the current state of and prospects for democracy in Russia, posing several challenges to our understanding of democracy. Thirteen contributors expand the debate over these questions, offering a variety of insights, interpretations, and conclusions vital to understanding the conditions of emergence and survival of successful democracies.

Adam Przeworski is the Carroll and Milton Petrie Professor of Politics at New York University. He previously taught at the University of Chicago, where he was the Martin A. Ryerson Distinguished Service Professor. Przeworski is the recipient of the 1985 Socialist Review Book Award, the 1998 Gregory M. Luebbert Article Award, the 2001 Woodrow Wilson Prize, the 2010 Lawrence Longley Award, and the 2010 Johan Skytte Prize. He has been a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences since 1991.

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ADAM PRZEWORSKI

New York University



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Contributors

John Dunn is a Fellow of King's College, Cambridge, and Emeritus Professor of Political Theory at Cambridge. He is a Fellow of the British Academy, an Academician of the Academy of the Social Sciences, and a Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. His most recent book is *Setting the People Free/Democracy: A History* (2005–6).

John Ferejohn is the Samuel Tilden Professor of Law at New York University and Professor of Political Science Emeritus at Stanford University. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Science and of the National Academy of Sciences and was a recipient of an honorary doctorate in the social sciences from Yale University in 2007. He is the author of *Pork Barrel Politics* (1974) and a coauthor of *The Personal Vote* (1987) and *A Republic of Statutes* (2010).

Stephen Holmes is Walter E. Meyer Professor of Law at New York University School of Law. Former editor of the *East European Constitutional Review*, Holmes has written numerous essays on the disappointments of liberalization and democratization after Communism.

Mikhail Ilyin is professor of political science and vice-dean of the Faculty of Politics at the National Research University–Higher School of Economics in Moscow and the head of the Centre for Advanced Research Methods in Humanities of the Institute of Scientific Information on Social Sciences of the Russian Academy of Sciences. He also teaches comparative politics at MGIMO University in Moscow and at Immanuel Kant Baltic Federal University in Kaliningrad. With Andrei Melville, he coauthored *Political Atlas of the Modern World: An Experiment in Multidimensional Statistical Analysis of Political Systems of Modern States* (2010). Ilyin is a vice president of the International Political Science Association.

Boris Makarenko is the chairman of the board of the Center for Political Technologies, an independent Moscow-based think tank, and director of internal policy at the Institute of Contemporary Development. Author of two books and more than fifty articles, he recently coauthored *Russia in the 21 Century: The Image of Desired Tomorrow* (2010).

José María Maravall is professor of sociology at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid and an Honorary Fellow of St. Antony's College, Oxford. He is a Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He was the Spanish minister of education and science between 1982 and 1988. His recent books are (as coeditor with I. Sanchez Cuenca) *Controlling Governments: Voters, Institutions, and Accountability* (2008) and *La Confrontacion Politica* (2008).

Andrei Melville is professor of political science and dean of the Faculty of Politics at the National Research University–Higher School of Economics in Moscow. He is author and coauthor of ten books, most recently *Political Atlas of the Modern World: An Experiment in Multidimensional Statistical Analysis of Political Systems of Modern States* (with Mikhail Ilyin, 2010).

Andranik Migranyan is the director of the Institute on Democracy and Cooperation, a Russian nongovernmental organization based in New York City, and a member of the Russian Public Chamber. He was previously a professor at the Institute of International Relations, MGIMO University, Moscow, and a member of the Russian Presidential Council.

Pasquale Pasquino is Senior Research Fellow at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique EHESS, Paris, and Distinguished Professor in Politics and Law at New York University. He is the author or the editor of five books and a hundred articles about European constitutional and political theory and history. His recent publications include *La controverse sur "le gardien de la Constitution" et la justice constitutionnelle. Kelsen contre Schmitt* (coedited with Olivier Beaud, 2007) and *How Constitutional Courts Make Decisions* (coedited with B. Randazzo, 2009).

Adam Przeworski is the Carroll and Milton Petrie Professor of Politics at New York University. A member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, he is the recipient of the 1996 Gregory Luebbert Prize, the 2001 Woodrow Wilson Prize, the 2010 Lawrence Longley Award, and the 2010 Johan Skytte Prize. He recently published *Democracy and the Limits of Self-Government* (2010).

Ian Shapiro is Sterling Professor of Political Science and Henry R. Luce Director of the MacMillan Center for International Studies at Yale University. He is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and of the American Philosophical Society. His recent books include *Death by a Thousand*

Cuts: The Fight over Inherited Wealth (with Michael Gratz) and *Containment: Rebuilding a Strategy against Global Terror*.

Valery Solovei is a professor at Moscow State Institute of International Relations (University). He is author and coauthor of five books, including, published in the United States, *Russia's Communists at the Crossroads* (with Joan Urban). His latest book, *Failed Revolution* (2009), was awarded the National Prize for "The Best Books and Publishing."

Alexei D. Voskressenski is dean of the School of Political Affairs and professor of comparative politics and Asian studies, MGIMO University (Moscow). He is the author, coauthor, and editor of fifty books (the latest is *The East and Politics: Political Systems, Political Cultures, Political Process* [2011]), of which twelve are monographs, including *Russia and China: A Theory of Interstate Relations* (2003) and *Political Systems and Models of Democracy in the East* (2007). He also edits a Russian journal, *Comparative Politics*.

Introduction

The title of this volume, *Democracy in a Russian Mirror*, and the motivation behind it call for an explanation.

We are going through times when the value, the feasibility, and the prospects of democracy are under intense scrutiny in different parts of the world.

1. Several aspects of the functioning of democracies in the West are currently a source of intense dissatisfaction among their citizens. There is widespread dissatisfaction that democracy seems unable to generate equality in the socio-economic realm, to make people feel that their political participation is effective, to ensure that governments do what they are supposed to do and not what they are not mandated to do, and to balance public order and noninterference in private lives. Indeed, at one time, we thought that the title of the book should be “Really Existing Democracies.”

2. In turn, governments and their ideologues in many nondemocratic countries claim that although democracy is a universal value, it does not have to assume the same forms as democracies in the West. Different projects of “Non-Western democracy” claim that the “essence” of democracy is “the unity of the government and the governed” (a phrase coined by Carl Schmitt) and that the existence of political opposition and the institution of choosing governments through elections are not necessary for democracy. In such views, the form of democracy must depend on cultural traditions, or at least some countries are “not yet ready” for democracy in the Western sense.

These debates pose several general questions about democracy, the paths to it, and the paths away from it:

1. Must some “prerequisites,” cultural or material, be fulfilled for democracy to become possible?
2. If democracy can be established only under some conditions, are these conditions sufficient for democracy to emerge?

3. Is the “strong state” a prerequisite for democracy or an obstacle to it?
4. Are democratic reforms from above credible, or must the impetus come from below?
5. Is the experience of really existing democracies sufficiently appealing to compete with models of economically successful authoritarianism?
6. Is the normative appeal of democracy a teleological force propelling all societies toward this goal, or is the Western model of democracy a parochial one?

Although for many of us, these questions are mainly of scholarly interest, they are lived every day by the Russian people. Is the current situation in Russia a stage in a progression toward democracy; a path to something else, reflecting specifically Russian traditions and conditions; or just some amorphous but stable political arrangement? Are the conditions for democracy not yet “mature” in Russia, or are they already stale? How credible is the commitment of Russian leaders to introduce democratic reforms once the Russian state becomes strong internally and externally? Is the political apathy in Russia a result of satisfaction with its current economic success, of resignation due to the perception of futility of opposition, or of deliberate manipulation and repression by its rulers? Can one infer from it that there is no potential for change, including explosive political change?

This volume examines the current state and the prospects of democracy in Russia in the light of the experience of existing democracies, posing several challenges to our understanding of democracy and the paths to it. What can we learn about democracy when we view it from the perspective of contemporary Russia? What can we learn about Russia from the experience of democracy around the world? These two questions motivate our inquiry.

Juxtaposing these two perspectives – democracy in a Russian mirror and Russia in the democratic mirror – turns out to be both revealing and demanding. Our purpose is to confront the actual experience of democracies across the globe with both normative and positive conceptions of democracy. We are particularly interested in placing the current political situation in Russia – its origins, its present form, and its possible futures – in the context of general knowledge about the functioning and the evolution of different political regimes. We hope that this knowledge generates lessons from which all can learn, even if perhaps particular people will draw different conclusions. But it would be presumptuous to think that outsiders know better: the experience of American advisers to Russia during the Yeltsin period – “imitate us” – was disastrous not only for Russia but also for the good name of democracy in Russia. “Democracy” is a slogan containing a geopolitical agenda, and it has been used to prove the superiority of some countries over others. A book about Russia and the West cannot ignore this ideological legacy.

Perhaps most obviously, we should not be surprised that post-Communist Russia did not smoothly embrace institutions and practices that we recognize

these days as “democracy.” The correct question is not “Why is there no democracy in Russia?” but “Why would one expect there would be?” “Democracy,” even in its minimalist understanding as systems in which elections are “free and fair” and their results are obeyed by the losers, is a historical miracle, a contingent result of circumstances and intentions, a speck in human history. The paths to it are convoluted, and as the experience of Russia manifests, it is easy to get stuck or even derailed onto a new form of authoritarianism (Makarenko and Melville, this volume).

But why step onto this path at all? Put yourself in the place of someone who believes that peaceful political order cannot be maintained unless it is regulated by an authoritarian state, that democracy must be “guided,” “tutored,” or “led,” and examine the experience of the country that heralds itself as the cradle and the prototype of modern democracy. You will see a society in which almost half of citizens do not vote even in presidential elections, in which money unabashedly permeates politics, a society that has the highest income inequality in the developed world and the largest prison population in the entire world. This picture may be self-serving, but it cannot be easily dismissed. Most people around the world evaluate democracy by its outcomes and political freedom but also by material welfare and socioeconomic equality. To put forth a case for democracy, including democracy in Russia, one must confront the experience of democracies as they are, “really existing democracies.” It is not enough to urge, “Do as we say, not as we do.”

As one Russian colleague exclaimed during our discussions, “If democracy is flawed, what is the difference?” We think that there is a difference; indeed, there are differences. But pinning down the value of democracy, the value of competitive elections and of political freedom between elections, is not easy, and the answers cannot be facile. While several specific answers are proposed here, perhaps the most important feature of democracy is that it is unceasingly perfectible, that the democratic project is never completely accomplished, that democracy is a system that can and does adapt to changing circumstances, perpetually open to institutional innovation. And the force of democratic vitality comprises not only reforms from above but also voices from below. As the first democratically elected Spanish prime minister, Adolfo Suarez, announced in his opening speech to the parliament, “The future is not written, because only the people can write it.”

This is why the participants in this adventure – Russian and non-Russian – can share the same pursuit, a pursuit of freedom, welfare, and equality. This is why those of us who live in countries with well-entrenched democracies are not afraid that finding faults in our democratic systems will undermine the value of democracy: we can simultaneously criticize the way democracy functions in our countries and advocate its generic virtues.

It bears emphasis that it is not our intention to attach labels or award points to particular political regimes. The elephant in the room are the questions “Is Russia a Democracy?” or “Is it less of a democracy than the United States, Italy,

or Japan?” But any attempt to address such questions becomes inevitably mired in definitions, which perhaps please but do not enlighten. We need to escape the prison of polarities, especially the authoritarian-democratic dichotomy, which led many self-proclaimed victors of the Cold War to conclude that it is sufficient to get rid of the former to get the latter. Yet this approach does not imply that we see no standards by which all political regimes should be evaluated: political freedom, social and economic welfare, and civil peace are certainly among them.

As the chapters in this volume amply testify, these are controversial issues. The book exposes major disagreements about the present situation in Russia and its prospects. These are not differences that can be resolved by scientific methods: rival views are each logically coherent, and each finds facts in its support. Analysis of concrete historical situations is an art. It is constrained by science to the extent to which it must be consistent with general theories; it conforms to scientific criteria by relying on facts to rationalize beliefs. But in the end, some differences of opinion are not resolvable. They reflect the criteria by which political regimes are judged, they entail interpretations of the intentions or moral virtues of politicians, they follow intuitions. Indeed, we see it as a central aim to clarify the divergence of views, to admit the fallibility of the analyses, to highlight the uncertainty inextricably entailed in formulating judgments about any complex situation. The history of interpretations of the Soviet Union and post-Communist Russia is a cemetery of failed closures: from the myth of the immutability of “totalitarianism” to premature triumphs heralded in titles such as *How Russia Became a Market Economy* or *Democracy in Russia*. The Soviet Union has fallen, but we are far from certain what Russia has become or what it is becoming. This is as it should be: pretensions of certainty are a recipe for disaster.

PART I

RUSSIA

I

Peculiarities of Russian Politics

Andranik Migranyan

I.1 THE LAW OF THE PENDULUM

One of the peculiarities of Russian politics is that over the past two centuries, all the attempts to modernize Russia's political system have veered from one extreme to the other. The attempts to modernize the autocratic government in tsarist Russia ended in the chaos of February to October 1917, which gave rise to the totalitarian regime of Bolshevik Russia. Thus, the pendulum of Russian power traveled from the extreme right to the extreme left, lingering for a while in the center to see the chaotic disintegration of the old institutes and values.

The lack of culture of democratic self-organization, the inability to achieve compromise through negotiation and mutual concessions, the absence of stable institutions of civil society, and the existence of deep demarcation lines based on social, economic, ethnic, cultural, and confessional principles predetermined both the collapse of old tsarist Russia and the rise of the new despotic power in place of it.

What happened in Russia in 1917 closely resembled Tocqueville's description of the revolutionary transformations in France after the fall of the old regime. He pointed out that one should be very cautious with democratization of the political system in a country that has no strong democratic traditions or culture. The people cannot keep up with the fast changes, the situation escapes the reformers' control, and the process assumes a life of its own, which more often than not results in chaos and in the disintegration of the old institutions and values and gives rise to a new form of tyranny, sometimes even more terrifying than the one of which reformers wanted to rid themselves.

It was this realization of the threat of new chaos and collapse in the Soviet Union as a result of Gorbachev's radical reforms during the years of perestroika that motivated me to write a number of articles in 1988–90 warning of the impossibility for the USSR to make a direct transition from bureaucratic

totalitarianism to democracy because such a transition in a society with no infrastructure for establishing democratic institutions and values would inevitably end in chaos and pose a threat of civil war in a country stuffed with tens of thousands of nuclear warheads.

For a number of objective and subjective reasons, Gorbachev's perestroika ended in chaos and the disintegration of the Soviet Union. From underneath the wreckage emerged Russia, which was destined to transform the Soviet state machinery and retune it for the performance of new functions for the new state. Right after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the new regime in Russia was similar to what G. O'Donnell (1994) described in his concept of "delegative democracy." The weakness of the institutions, the lack of influence of the electorate on the authorities, was compensated by the excessive presence of Boris Yeltsin – a charismatic leader who had been elected president of Russia in a general election. At that point in history, it was he who embodied the Russian state, which had neither defined borders nor functioning institutions. I gave my analysis of the Yeltsin regime in several publications, so I will not dwell on it any longer (Migranyan 2004). I will just point out that the Russian authorities should have expected that, sooner or later, this chaos would result in the process of consolidation of power, and the state would go on to claim almost all the political space, leaving very few opportunities for other political actors to influence the political and economic decisions of the state power.

However, after achieving consolidation of power vertically (limiting the mandates and potential of regional leaders who, under Yeltsin, turned Russia into a de facto confederation) and horizontally (banishing the oligarchs from politics and depriving them of influence over the bodies of state power), after establishing the political party of the authorities, United Russia, which gained dominance in parliament and in the regions, after abolishing the majority system, holding the elections based entirely on party nomination lists and doing away with the direct gubernatorial elections, the new Russian powers headed by Putin came to face a new serious challenge. How do you preserve the openness of society and power when it has no formal opposition, when there is no intrainstitutional or interinstitutional conflict that, according to Weber (1978), can impart dynamism on the political system? After the acquisition of the lost statehood, the Russian leaders are faced again with the complicated task of creating institutions of conflict and competition in the political area as well as independent – not controlled by the state – organized interests in the economic, social, cultural, and religious areas of society. One has to bear in mind that a threat of disintegration of the state, which Russia experienced firsthand twice in the process of democratic modernization, is a serious restraining factor for the Russian leadership in their decision-making process with regard to creating a competitive environment in the country's political life. It is all too recent that Russia experienced a painful falling apart of the country, and the devastating consequences of the 1990s chaos that are often referred to as the outcome of radical liberal reforms in Russia's economic, political, and social lives.

1.2 ON ELECTIONS

In political science, one of the most quotable statements on elections is [Przeworski's](#) (1991, 1996) assertion to the effect that the essence of democracy and alternative elections consists in the uncertainty of results. This statement is indisputable for the evaluation of the level of democratic advancement of a given country.

However, in my view, this statement cannot be automatically transposed onto the countries in transition to democracy and, on this basis, come up with the assessment of their level of democratic advancement. The point is that participation in the election process and competition between parties in modern democracies have their own history of evolution. This is why we cannot give a correct evaluation of an emerging institutional system, especially with regard to elections, without putting it into a historical context.

According to [Dahl](#) (2000), the involvement of masses in the political process in Great Britain took place gradually over the centuries, and this was in a country that set an example in forming a liberal democratic system of institutions and values. The participants in the political process had property, education, and so on. They had self-organization skills and the culture of horizontal relations; in case of conflict, they did not resort to violence but were ready for a compromise and mutual concessions. Over a long period of time, they also learned to cope with the complex state machine and its institutions. In Great Britain, the political struggle occurred between the parties whose members did not question the existing system of institutions and values. Further on, even the emergence of mass parties and the replacement of the Liberals by the Labor Party did not result in a significant destabilization of the political party system. In essence, there was a consensus between the Liberal, Tory, and Labor with regard to the institutional and value systems. That is why [Spengler](#) (1922) remarked after the First World War that the British political system could not be mechanistically transferred to the German land. If in England a conflict emerges in the political area or in the interparty struggle, it is usually a conflict over how to resolve certain social and economic issues and does not put in question the foundations of the system itself. However, if a conflict like this emerges in the German political sphere, it will not be confined merely to argument on finding ways to solve specific problems; it will go in depth and raise the very issue of the foundation on which the system is based, which will inevitably result in the death of the system itself, as well as the state. Spengler's warning turned out to be prophetic. The Weimar system gave rise to a national-socialist totalitarian regime in Germany. Therefore, both in the British and in the American political systems, the opposition parties and the party struggle with an uncertain election result came into being only when there was confidence that such uncertainty only manifested itself in the context of greater certainty, when, regardless of who wins the election, the foundations of the system will not be questioned. In this connection, of particular significance is

the book by [Hofstadter \(1969\)](#), in which the author, based on extensive materials, shows that the emergence of the party system in the United States had to overcome the ideas of the Founding Fathers, who perceived party struggle as a threat to the Republic.

The idea of an opposition party in the United States became viable when it was possible to say that, for the Republicans, the Federalists stopped being a party of radical disruption and allies to the monarchy and when Jefferson was able to say that a difference in opinion did not mean a difference in principle; therefore he was able to say, “We are all Republicans, we are all Federalists” ([Hofstadter 1969](#), 152). Jefferson was prepared to accept the existence of parties only on one condition: when “whatever names the parties might bear the real division would be into moderate and ardent republicanism. In this division there is no great evil, not even if the minority obtains the ascendancy by the accession of federal votes to their candidate; because this gives us one shade only, instead of another, of republicanism” ([Hofstadter 1969](#), 168). This is why Jefferson accepted the idea of practical division and the reality that the opposition would be embodied in the form of parties; but concretely he could never see the legitimacy of any particular opposition in his own country.

However, over the decades, this attitude to opposition changed, and during the time of Van Buren, Michael Wallace (quoted in [Hofstadter 1969](#), 248) writes, “They were able, therefore, to realize that the continued existence of an opposition was necessary, from the perspective of perpetuating their own party; opposition was highly useful, a constant spur to their own party’s discipline.” Expanding on this approach to the role of the opposition, [Holmes \(1995\)](#) justly points out that the existence of opposition helps the authorities, to a great extent, not to make blunders, which would be possible in the case of absolute lack of control.

Going back to the election situation in Russia and the attitude of the authorities to the opposition, we have to point out that although today there is no threat that a coming to power of opposition in Russia would change the institutional and value foundations of the current authorities – a threat that was real in 1996 if the Communists scored a victory – nowadays the authorities have to face a totally different set of issues.

The policy of the new Russian authorities, aimed at marginalization and co-optation of the opposition parties, a policy launched in the late 1990s to early 2000s, resulted in the fact that the party in power, United Russia, became the dominant party in the Federal Assembly and the legislative bodies of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation. An overwhelming majority of governors are also members of United Russia. Besides the marginalization and co-optation actions on the part of the authorities taken against the left and right opposition, there were also objective reasons for abruptly weakening the positions of the Communists and the so-called liberal parties, Yabloko and SPS. Here I would like to point out that the existing situation causes serious

concern on the part of the architects of this party system in Russian politics. They realize that the domination of United Russia and the absence of effective party competition, with no checks and balances in the current RF Constitution, doom this system to potential stagnation with all its consequences well known to everyone in Russia who is at least somewhat familiar with Russian history under Brezhnev. However, they also realize that there is another circumstance that makes the future of the existing system vulnerable to any threats to the stability of the system. The point is that in the 1990s, there was an unprecedented, large-scale privatization of multi-trillion-dollar state property that, through a dubious process, ended up in the hands of new owners, which to the majority of the Russian people looked like stealing their assets. According to the theoreticians of democracy, a country can be called a democracy if, as [Huntington \(1991, 266–67\)](#) believes, power changes hands from one party to another twice or at least once as a result of elections. For Russia this transition is even more significant. The transition of power from one party to another may signify not only the fact of consolidation of democracy and strengthening the new system in the country but, even more important for Russia, also the legitimations of the property redistribution, which, up to now, has been considered illegitimate. In a number of southern and eastern European countries, it took the left, socialist parties to come to power to legitimize and finalize the transition to the new system and establish the new status quo acceptable to the public. The Russian authorities now face the challenge of fostering a pro-system leftist party which, in the case that it comes to power, would legitimize both the redistribution of property and the emergence of the new system of institutions and values. Since KPRF the Russian Federation Communist Party (KPRF) turned out to be too rigid to play the role of a new moderate socialist party, the authorities helped the emergence of the patriotic leftist party Rodina (Motherland), and when, due to certain circumstances, that project was not successful, they helped with the creation of the left-wing socialist party Spravedlivaya Rossia (A Just Russia). In addition, to prevent the United Russia party from becoming a party like the CPSU, the Kremlin party builders agreed to establish party clubs – in fact, factions within United Russia – with a view to create a conflict of opinions and interests, thus making the party more dynamic and, by encouraging competition among the parties, to enliven the political system as a whole. In doing that, they pursued another very serious objective – to shape a new political culture in Russia.

Today it is obvious that in developed democracies the mechanism of checks and balances and the culture of horizontal relations between conflicting interests aimed at arriving at a compromise are geared toward overcoming a winner-takes-all culture. Unfortunately, for many centuries, in Russia the prevailing culture has been the culture of hierarchy, in which everyone is supposed to see very clearly “who is the boss.” Therefore, the artificial “transplant” of the checks-and-balances system to Russian soil resulted in a conflict between the legislative branch, represented by the Congress of People’s Deputies, and

the Russian president elected by the population of the country. The conflict erupted in October 1993 when the parliament building was bombed and the parliament dissolved. The new Constitution put the institution of the presidency above the political system, thus doing away with the need to concord the interests of the different branches of power horizontally.

This does not mean that such a culture of hierarchic relations in power structures is given to Russia once and for all. As Russian society and the political class assimilate democratic norms and traditions, they may very well master the culture of horizontal relations. According to Przeworski (in this volume), “The claim that the antidemocratic proclivities of “civilizations” are given once and for all hurls itself against historical experience. To go back to Mill, ‘People are more easily induced to do, and do more easily, what they are already used to; but people also learn to do things new to them’”. Przeworski furthermore concludes that we have failed to corroborate the assertion that some cultures are not compatible with democracy.

In recent years, as I mentioned earlier, the administration of the president has begun developing the culture of horizontal relations both within the United Russia ruling party and in its relations with the Kremlin-sponsored left-wing A Just Russia Party.

The year 2008 saw another important event that, in my opinion, may have a significant influence on the development of a new culture of horizontal relations between different government institutions. This is the issue of relations between the president and the government. Since the beginning of Putin’s second presidential term, he was always asked what he planned to do after 2008, when his second term came to an end. In accordance with the Russian and European political traditions, the acting president does not vanish into nowhere if he is still full of energy and commands a high confidence rating among the electorate, let alone when he holds a key position in the political system, both formally, as head of state, and informally, as the elite consensus guarantor during this transition period for the country and the regime. Furthermore, the Russian Constitution allows the acting president to become president again if he does not participate in the presidential election after his second term. In any case, it became clear by 2006 that the country, the electorate, the political elite, and Putin himself were ready for the latter to retain his position as a key political figure in Russian politics even after 2008. The easiest option for many both in United Russia and in the elite and academic circles interested in maintaining the stability and the status quo in Russia was to amend the constitution. To do this, the ruling party had the necessary resources to lift the presidential election term limitation. This would give Putin an opportunity to be elected president for a third time, in 2008, without too much effort. However, this option of internal political development would definitely have placed Russia on an equal footing with central Asian states of the post-Soviet era, which would have eliminated any opportunity to further develop the Russian political system by creating more effective government institutions and democratic political culture based

on respect for the constitution and the inadmissibility of amending it to appease the acting president and the powers-to-be.

In October 2006, at the peak of the debate about Putin's destiny after 2008 and the demands of the third term for the acting president, I suggested another option for keeping Putin in Russia politics after 2008 (Migranyan 2006). Without changing the current constitution, that option assured Putin's leading role in Russian politics and kept the possibility of his return to the Russian presidency in 2012 should he choose to do so. According to that option, Putin was to nominate one of his associates, make use of his own prestige and popularity to promote that candidate resenting himself as a person who was ready to continue Putin's course, while he himself would take the position of the prime minister and leader of United Russia – the dominant party in Russia politics. To the satisfaction of the supporters of the consolidation and development of the Russian political system in the Western fashion, President Putin rejected the idea of his supporters to amend the constitution and give himself an opportunity to be elected for a third term – he chose the path of making the Russian political system more complicated. He ceded the power to the new president, vested with practically unlimited mandate under the Constitution, and took the post of prime minister and leader of the ruling party. This created an unprecedented situation in the Russian power structure. Now Russia had a duumvirate whereby the constitutional mandate of the presidency was offset by Putin's high standing with the electorate that he had gained over the past nine years, and his authority as the leader of the government, and of the ruling party, which had a constitutional majority in parliament. Thus, the Russian authority has entered a completely new stage when the interinstitutional balance of powers is not so obvious anymore and rests on more than purely constitutional mandates. Perhaps, for the first time in the history of the new Russia, there emerged a situation that required a new culture of horizontal relations between the institutes of presidency and government. Many politicians and analysts were skeptical about the prospects of such a configuration of authority, pointing out, not without reason, that the Russian political culture required a clear understanding of who was the boss – for bureaucracy, business, and the population. But, however strange it was, this tandem has not only proved viable but has also withstood the test of the serious global economic crisis of 2008–9. It can be asserted that the two years of duumvirate have been a major contribution to shaping the new culture of horizontal relations in the area of executive power, where the skills of reaching a compromise and consensus through mutual concession and agreement are being formed.

1.3 ON SOVEREIGN DEMOCRACY

Recent years have seen many publications in the West describing the regime which emerged in Russia under Putin in the years 2000, including the works

claiming to interpret the phenomenon of “sovereign democracy” (Krastev 2009). Unfortunately, many of these writings are superficial, often politically motivated and to a great extent rely on the opinions of Freedom House, which evaluates the level of democracy in a country based on purely formal attributes, out of the context of internal development of the political process in that country. Noting the flaws of such a formalistic approach to democracy, O’Donnell (2007, 35) points out correctly, in assessing the level of democratic evolution of new states one should look at the democratic process in a historical context, as this was done in the countries of Northwestern Europe, instead of expecting an overnight emergence of highest degrees of democracy in the new states.

The evolution of democracy in Great Britain and other Northwestern European countries and in the United States was, according to Weber (O’Donnell, 2007, 24), the result of “historically unique circumstances that profoundly impressed the characteristics of these countries”. On the other hand, as O’Donnell (2007, 22) points out, “In most other democracies new and old, in the East and in the South, these processes occurred later, in different sequences, with far less completeness and fewer homogenizing consequences than in the originating countries. These differences, abundantly attested by the respective historical records, also profoundly impressed the contemporary characteristics of the latter countries, including their states and regimes.”

O’Donnell’s view of the development of rights and freedoms and the evolution of democratic regimes finds that in the countries where modern democracies emerged first, in the beginning, only some of the individuals acquired rights, which regulated a considerable portion of their lives, whereas the majority of the population was excluded from the political process and did not have any political rights. He concludes that (O’Donnell 2007, 23) “as a result of this long and complex historical trajectory, contemporary democracy is based on the idea of agency as legally enacted and backed. The resulting government, regime and state exist with reference to and for individuals who are carriers of subjective rights.”

Thus, even before democracy, with its universal participation of the population in politics, became a reality, the foundations of the legal and institutional architecture of a democratic state were created, with the civil rights of an individual and the introduction of time limits for terms in office of elected politicians and the division of power inside a regime, with ideas of limited power of the government, so that the power itself would be regulated by the existing legal system from which it receives its authority and mandate.

This means that political freedoms and political citizenship are preceded by civil citizenship and subjective rights, as well as the development of civil institutions and a legal system for the participation of a limited number of persons in politics. When the time comes for everybody to participate in politics, the rights, values, and institutional mechanism are already in place and are ready to function in the interests of the majority and with their involvement.

Without understanding this, one cannot comprehend why, for many countries, the path to democracy turns out to be so complicated, and for some quite impossible. For many, this necessary layer of civil citizenship is missing, and this is the reason why political citizenship does not work or is faulty.

From these considerations, O'Donnell draws the conclusion that is necessary for all those who would like to understand the level and depth of democracy, not on the basis of formal attributes of Freedom House, but in the context of the evolution of the country itself and the existence of democratic potential in the entire prior history of the country in the process of civil citizenship building – the only basis on which political citizenship can be built.

It is not by chance that O'Donnell keeps pointing out that many of the rights that became political later on first emerged as civil rights in the countries that subsequently became democratic regimes. Perhaps not as elegantly as O'Donnell, but in the 1980s, I also proceeded from the assumption that until the overall social context is ready, it would be very difficult to expect that a purely mechanistic transplantation of liberal and democratic institutes and values onto Russian soil would make them take root, that they would be accepted by Russian society and would function effectively. As I show, Vladislav Surkov, first deputy chief of the presidential administration, in his understanding of sovereign democracy, also tries to compare the process of democratic evolution in modern Russia with that in Western countries, where this process continued in an organic fashion over a long period of time.

Regrettably, however, both in Russia and in the West, the evaluations of a political regime are often based only on the formal criteria of Freedom House. This sort of formalistic approach is even further from the truth when we are dealing with such a complicated country as Russia. For example, what is one to make of a statement offered by Diamond (2008b, 67); “In my view Russia ceased to be a democracy in 2000, when Putin moved vigorously to eliminate the checks and balances in the creaky constitutional system.” If Diamond had been familiar with the Russian Constitution of 1993, adopted under Yeltsin, he would certainly have been surprised to find out that the constitution itself contained no checks and balances mechanisms. Therefore Putin was not in a position to eliminate something that did not exist. The allegation that democracy degraded from Yeltsin to Putin and that, by 2004, according to Freedom House, Russia was not a free country does not withstand any criticism either. Anyone who has some knowledge of Russian political history, unless he is politically biased, knows that the dirtiest election in the new Russia took place in 1996. The worst violations of the law and of the current Constitution occurred in 1993 and ended in the bombing of the Parliament building. Such an approach of the so-called liberal scholars leads one to believe that the falsification of election results, if it is aimed against communists, a coup d'état in violation of the constitution and the bombing of the parliament if the communists and their supporters are in the building are the signs of a higher level of democracy than the arrest or prosecution of criminal oligarch thieves like

Gussinsky, Khodorkovsky, Berezovsky, and the like. Today no one in Russia, including President Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin, claims that it has a developed democratic political system;¹ however, there is nothing further from the truth than the assertion that democracy died in Russia in the 2000s as compared to the 1990s. As the British journalist John Kampfner (2010, 86) correctly points out, “democracy had been bankrupted well before he [Putin] assumed his powers.”

Even more surprising is the ambitious article by the Bulgarian researcher Ivan Krastev, who claims to have found the theoretical interpretation of the sovereign democracy phenomenon. First, the author, on behalf of the European Council on International Relations, defines Russia “as an ideological alternative to the EU, with a different approach to sovereignty, power and world order” (Krastev 2009, 16). In fact, the new Russia under Putin has never claimed the role of an ideological alternative to the European Union or, more broadly, to the West; it seeks to find its place in the new system of international relations, however, not as a country with limited sovereignty under external management by the International Monetary Fund and Washington, but as an independent actor in international relations. Equally imaginary is Krastev’s (2009, 24) assertion that the concept of sovereign democracy for the description and explanation of Putin’s regime emerged as a response to the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004–5. One cannot but wonder at Krastev’s (2009, 48) statement that Russia is moving toward *realpolitik* of the nineteenth century in its foreign policy, and that the main conflict between Russia and the European Union lies in the fact that Russia embodies a traditional modern state whereas the European Union is building a postmodern state. In the same vein is his assertion that “the more capitalist and westernized Russia becomes, the more anti-Western become its policies.”

The critics of today’s Russian regime perceive Putin’s mortal sin even in the fact that Putin and the new Russian leadership want to reconstitute the historic continuity. According to Hassner (2008, 7), “one of the most shocking features of Putin’s policies is his attempt to claim continuity with both the Tsarist and the Soviet pasts.” One would think that the French author forgot that the new calendar introduced after the Great French Revolution was later cancelled for the reason that it reconstituted historic continuity with pre-Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary France.

In reality, the concept of sovereign democracy appeared as a result of the restoration of the personality of the Russian state as the subject expressing the joint interests of the people, which was not the case in the 1990s. According to research, before establishing effective democratic institutions and values, the regimes in transit to democracy must first establish a state as an effective and efficient tool (O’Donnell 2007, 34; Linz and Stepan 1996, 37).

Tilly (2007, 227), notes that “regimes developing into strong states conduct transformations along the vertical line (from top to bottom) more effectively and, at the same time, they provide the rulers with the resources and stimuli

to oppose attempts against their power.” Strong states have more chances to initiate top to bottom changes and achieve results even though a lot depends on their leaders and the political elite. However, if the powers-to-be do not engage the new liberated public forces and structures in public policy and do not view them as equal partners in discussing important economic and political decisions, such strong states may become a disincentive for further democratization.

The restoration of the personality of the state was an urgent need both for the restoration of state control over the country, which had turned into a de facto confederation by the end of 1990s, and, equally important, for the restoration of the Russian state as a subject in international relations. The breakup of the USSR and the economic and political dependence of Moscow on Washington, the IMF, the World Bank, and other Western financial and economic institutions turned Russia into a country with a limited sovereignty that was actually under external governance, as in the case of insolvent companies. The details of the budget and economic policy were coordinated with the IMF and the World Bank, because only under these conditions was it possible to get loans from Western countries and the financial institutions controlled by them and, especially, by Washington. In 1990s this economic dependence was accompanied by Russia giving up its external policy principles on all issues related to former Yugoslavia and the Balkans, the eastward expansion of NATO, and the formation of geopolitical pluralism in the post-Soviet space. It was during that period that the West had especially strong positions in determining both internal and external policies of the country. This was most vividly described by Talbott (2003) in his book *Bill and Boris*.

During Putin’s first presidency, his administration managed to restore the personality of the state, complete the consolidation of power, strengthen the vertical of power, and introduce some other changes.² A totally new political situation required a new definition of the existing authority. This was necessary, first, to explain the general direction of Russia’s development and, second, to determine its new role in international relations.

Putin’s rule was to determine the main direction of the development of the country so as to explain to his external partners and Russian society which way Russia was going. For Putin and his main ideologists, mainly Surkov, it was obvious that they would have to determine the normative direction of the development of the country quite unambiguously. In other words, the main direction for the Russian political system was to move toward democracy, market reform, and establishing market mechanisms, as well as to provide individual rights and freedoms, guarantee the inviolability of private property, and carry out a whole range of other measures that would determine the essence of rule in Russia in the near future under Vladimir Putin.

Despite of assertions by many Western analysts and politicians that Russia treats Europe as an enemy, the Russian leaders have always stated unambiguously that “Russia is a European country.” An important consideration here

is that in his policy statement, [Surkov \(2007, 35\)](#)³ places Russia in comparative historical context of the development of European nations to show that Russia for several centuries had been trying to master the complex institutional and value system that is the foundation of all modern democracies. The main conclusion that Surkov draws from this comparative historic analysis is that if many European countries and the United States after absolutism, slavery, and fascism finally came to modern democracy with the values of freedom and justice, then the Russian people must understand that “in this sense, we are not unique and should not consider ourselves outcasts that fail to do what others succeeded at” ([Surkov 2007, 35](#)). This statement contains an unambiguously negative assessment of the Soviet regime, which turned out noncompetitive and failed to resolve in an adequate fashion either internal or external challenges. “That society was not only unjust – it was also not free. It failed to resolve material problems, and it definitely was behind the West in meeting the demands of the people for a new quality of life.” And making a natural conclusion from this, he states, “Who needed this empire that failed to provide its citizens with bread and circuses? It is only natural that it disintegrated” [Surkov \(2007, 36\)](#).

Debunking the myth of the flourishing of democracy in the 1990s and of allegedly scaling down this democracy under Putin, Surkov points to the oligarchs’ control of the state and also mentions the unprecedented falsification of the 1996 elections. These falsifications were justified by Russian “liberals” and found sympathy in the West since this was the only way to block the communists’ return to power. It was during that period that mass media, instead of serving as the means to provide information, “became a weapon in the hands of well-known oligarchs’ groups and were mostly used to get a hold of new state property and divide it up among themselves” ([Surkov 2007, 39–40](#)).

This is what [Kampfner \(2010, 85, 87\)](#), who worked in Russia for many years, says about the Russian mass media of that period: “In 1996 the oligarchs turned television into a propaganda machine, and during the Yeltsin election campaign they were guided by the principle ‘the goal justifies the means.’ It was no coincidence that “according to a poll taken in November 2000 only 7 per cent of Russians believed that the main mass media were independent, whereas 79 per cent of those polled stated that the mass media depended on the oligarchs.” And it was not for nothing that the Russian population approved of ousting the oligarchs from the area of owning state media.

[Surkov \(2007, 46\)](#) goes on to say that for Russia to become a successful European country, it needs to strengthen its democracy and sovereignty. He further explains the necessity of democracy for Russia by the fact that “only a society based on competition between and cooperation among free individuals can be effective and competitive.” He arrives at the following conclusion: “I think one feels really more comfortable living in a democratic society.” This conclusion reminds me of [Przeworski et al.’s \(2000\)](#) assertion that democracies may not guarantee a maximum development rate but “lives under dictatorships

are miserable. The Churchillian view may not be enough, but it is accurate. Democracies are far from perfect, but they are better than all the alternatives.”

Anticipating the criticism of the concept of sovereign democracy as a call for separation of Russia from the West, Surkov (2007, 46) further notes that Russia does not at all need sovereignty to insulate itself from the world and turn Russia into a fortress. He says that “sovereignty is openness, it is a door to the world, it is also participation in an open struggle. I would say that sovereignty is a political synonym of becoming competitive.” However, as he underlines, the most important thing about the existence of truly sovereign states is not to allow dictatorship in international relations. In the nineteenth century, Lord Acton stated, “Any power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely.” This goes for the actions of the authorities in the country unless there are some checks and balances. This also goes for international relations when a single country tries to impose its will on all the others. A most recent example is the United States under President Bush, which illustrates this vividly.

Thus, from Surkov’s discourse and from the independent analysts’ statements, it definitely follows that the creation of the concept of “sovereign democracy” in the Russian political space is not related to any anti-Western sentiment or to the Orange revolution.

From the very beginning, the concept of “sovereign democracy” gave rise to controversy among politicians and analysts. Some totally rejected it, while others interpreted its notion and contents in a distorted way. Let us try to find out why this concept provoked such varied responses both in Russia and abroad.

First, the concept of “sovereign democracy” contains two differing elements that preclude its unambiguous perception. On one hand, it contains the element of “sovereignty,” which is applied, as a rule, to the state as the subject of international relations. On the other hand, it contains the element of “democracy,” which is a characteristic of the form of government and which, in principle, does not depend on the degree of state sovereignty. A state may have limited sovereignty regardless of the form of government, be it democratic, authoritarian, or even totalitarian. However, many critics of this concept simply ignore Surkov’s explanation of the internal connection that exists between sovereignty and democracy.

Liberal critics of this concept assert that if we apply the term *sovereign democracy* to the current authority, it means that this is some special kind of democracy that denies the very essence of universal democratic institutions and principles characteristic of the leading Western countries. Putin, Medvedev, Surkov, and all other Russian leaders have been constantly saying that Russia, as any other country, has its own national specificity. However, they have never questioned a universal nature of liberal democratic institutions and values. As was shown, this is what Surkov said in his numerous speeches, and this is what Putin and Medvedev have been saying all along.

Sometimes those who criticize the concept of “sovereign democracy” (in particular Evgeniy Primakov) state that they wonder if nonsovereign democracies exist. I would note that even among modern developed powers, there are some nonsovereign democracies. It means that they have had democracy imposed on them for a long period of time from the outside, with the democratic values and political institutions being developed due to outside efforts and, in the long run, they were accepted by the majority of the population.

For example, after World War II, the German people had to learn about democratic institutions and values under the occupation of the Allies. Over a long period of time, the democratic and political institutions were being established and developed from the outside. When the German economy got firmly on its feet, political institutions started functioning effectively, and only at that time did external influence began to decrease. The inclusion of Germany in the European Union (EU) and NATO was also done with the aim of “taming” the country and exerting external pressure on its foreign and military policies. At the same time, they were engaging Germany in transnational structures. Thus, the country has always been and still is under trusteeship.

It is also worth reminding that the Constitution of Japan is believed to have been authored by U.S. general MacArthur. Long-term occupation of Japan by U.S. forces helped introduce democratic political institutions and values in the political and economic life of Japan. It was only due to a long-term external trusteeship that Japan was able to integrate into Japanese-American and Japanese-Western institutions. Both in Germany and in Japan, a major contributing factor was significant economic development and an improvement in socioeconomic life of the population due to the Marshall Plan for Europe and U.S. economic aid to Japan.

Thus, there have been both sovereign and nonsovereign democracies. Democracies that appeared of their own accord rather than being imposed are sovereign democracies, like in Great Britain and later in the United States. One could also say that among the great powers, apart from Great Britain and the United States, only in France did the modern liberal democracy develop on its own without direct external interference. This certainly took a long period of time and was accompanied by significant social upheaval.

The critics of the concept of sovereign democracy believe that democracy cannot be modified by any adjectives – you either have it or you do not. I, for one, think that “democracy” without any qualification in front of the word is just a hollow concept. Democracy gains sense only if modified by a qualifier. When we say “ancient democracy,” we realize that we are talking about direct democracy and about a limited number of people who took part in decision-making, about a slavery state democracy where the entity of society and the state were indivisible.

When we speak about the evolution of “the democracy of the new times,” we do realize that it means a qualitative break from the ancient democracy, especially in its liberal version. It represents a certain synthesis between the

principle of equality, which is characteristic of democracy, and the principle of freedom characteristic of liberalism, which was totally absent in the ancient *polis*. This means that society guarantees the following: equal rights for all before the law and basic inalienable rights of individuals in relation to society and the state; an opportunity to set up professional, interest, social, or corporate associations; control of the society over the state; and individual rights and freedoms. Furthermore, unlike in the ancient *polis*, the winner does not take all. The majority rule does not mean its total domination over the minority. The minority retains its rights, opportunities, institutions, and resources for waging a political struggle and opposing the current authority, which was absolutely unheard of in the context of the ancient *polis* democracy.

Although, in his review of a book by [Kampfner, Dunn \(2010, 55\)](#) writes that “Freedom for Sale is an easy and enjoyable read. It has little to contribute to political judgment,” I still think that some observations by the author deserve attention. Talking about the problem of sovereign democracy, Kampfner notes that there may be some truth in the thinking of those who state that when there is a certain qualifier before the word “democracy,” like a “managed democracy” or a “sovereign democracy,” there is probably no real democracy there. However, he goes on to raise the following question: does this mean that Western countries have achieved a democracy without any prefix? He answers this question in the negative. He thinks that the concept of a “controlled democracy” is suitable for Great Britain, France, and other European countries. Italy can definitely be called a “corrupt democracy.” “As for the United States,” [Kampfner \(2010, 259\)](#) continues, “a number of unflattering prefixes could be applied.” Kampfner further notes that with time, democratic systems become more closed, while the qualitative gap between democracies and authoritarianism is getting smaller all over the world due to more restrictions on democratic norms and procedures in Western countries and to the wish of the existing democratic systems to maintain the status quo. Instead of a competition of ideas among different parties, which is supposed, according to J. S. Mill, to promote enlightenment in social life, there is a growing consensus among them that threatens to result in slavery-like conformism. This is what [Shapiro \(2003, 149\)](#) writes about the current U.S. political system:

The excessive number of veto points that result from federalism, and the separation of powers; the role of money in displacing competition for votes with competition for campaign contributions and expenditures – often from the same well-heeled contributors for both sides; the huge incumbency advantages that produce exceedingly low rates of turnover among political office holders; and the domination of the system of electoral regulation by bipartisan rather than nonpartisan institutions all render the American democracy remarkably uncompetitive by any comparative standard – let alone an ideal type. The problem here is not with competitive democracy but with its absence, and the answer is surely not to replace it with institutions that are less competitive still. Rather we should be pressing in the opposite direction – deploying the logic of political antitrust to develop theories about how the system can be made more competitive.

These statements tally very well with the thinking of the British writer Phillip Blond. In his numerous interviews and publications, [Brooks \(2010\)](#) asserts that “the free market revolution didn’t create the pluralistic decentralized economy. It created a centralized financial monoculture, which requires a gigantic government to audit its activities. The efforts to liberate individuals from repressive social constraints didn’t produce a flowering of freedom; it weakened families, increased out-of-wedlock births and turned neighbors into strangers. In Britain, you get a country with rising crime, and as a result, four million security cameras.” In *Prospect* magazine (February, 2009), Blond writes: “Look at the society we have become. We are a bipolar nation, a bureaucratic, centralized state that presides dysfunctionally over an increasingly fragmented, disempowered and isolated citizenry.” In yet another place he adds: “The welfare state and the market state are now two defunct and mutually supportive failures” ([Brooks 2010](#)).

Today the most relevant question, in my view, is the following one: why does Russia need a concept like “sovereign democracy” in our time at all? I believe that the authorities were not satisfied with the definitions given to the regime in Russia as it had evolved in the first years of the twenty-first century, which, in reality, did not truly reflect its nature, like a “managed democracy” or an “authoritarian regime.”

It should be recalled that in the 1970s, the United States came up with a universal concept that enabled it to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries – the assurance of human rights and democratic freedoms throughout the world. Acting under these slogans they exercised pressure upon the Soviet block Eastern European countries, upon the Soviet Union itself, and upon other countries.

In view of this experience, one could consider “sovereign democracy” as an ideological and foreign policy counterconcept. In my opinion, it could be used by such countries as Russia and China, some CIS countries, and certain countries of South Asia and Latin America to counter U.S. interference.

This concept can explain two important processes at work in these countries. They are undergoing the process of establishing political institutions and liberal democratic values. However, in doing that, these countries create political institutions and liberal democratic values based on their own historic traditions and specificity. They do not want and, even if they did, they cannot transfer ready-made Western political institutions and values, in particular, those of the United States, to their national conditions. Institutions and values that would be transferred in a mechanistic way from one country to another may only get rooted there after many years of strenuous effort, as was the case in Germany and Japan, which had allied forces on their territories and also had allied resources, food, and investments that created favorable conditions. Otherwise, it would result in a rejection, which was the case many a time when countries tried to transpose American, British, or European constitutional

models. Even though these models contained prescriptions for all democratic rights and freedoms and ideal mechanisms for the functioning of the system, they had no chance to get rooted in these countries and promote an effective functioning of the political system devised in this manner.

A second important thing is that under “sovereign democracy,” the leaders of these countries determine themselves the time, the rate, and the sequence of the development of their political institutions and values without artificial nudging from the outside. Indeed, for such countries to be able to afford this, state sovereignty is an absolute condition. Unless a country has real state sovereignty, it will be unable to protect itself against external interference.

The term *sovereign democracy* causes a certain allergic reaction in Russia and nonacceptance on the part of certain politicians and analysts owing to a large degree of political commitment of those who criticize it. If they agree that rather than denying the fundamental values of liberal democracy, if this concept provides for their breeding under their own national conditions over a certain period, then those critics will find it impossible to claim that Putin and Medvedev are really choking democratic rights and freedoms and driving Russia into a dead end.

The West dislikes the concept of sovereign democracy for a different reason. It is less concerned with the problem of democracy. Instead, the West is more worried that Russia is trying to assert its sovereignty in its external and internal policies. In the twentieth century, very few countries had full sovereignty in defining their internal and external policies. These were only the United State, the Soviet Union, and, to a lesser degree, China. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, it became evident that the balance of power in the world had tipped too much, and the United States, the world’s only dominant power, stopped viewing other countries as equal subjects of international relations. Rather, the United States started viewing the world as a conglomerate of states with limited sovereignty existing under the patronage of the United States. It is obvious that after World War II, many countries lost their sovereignty. One should merely look at Japan, which has very limited control over its defense and foreign policies. To a large extent, this is also true of Germany, Great Britain, and a number of other states. East European countries and many new states in the post-Soviet space are also trying to hand over their sovereignty and the right to decide major economic, political, and military issues from their capitals to Brussels and Washington. This also means that the world today, where only one country dominates all others, has become far more dependent on this power center. And this center will not tolerate anyone’s equal sovereignty.

Against this backdrop, Russia’s increasing role in international relations and its attempts to become an important hub of world politics are viewed as a direct challenge to the West and an attempt to resurrect an empire with claims for domination over its neighboring countries, regardless of the real objectives that Russia and its leaders are setting in its external policy. This is why the concept

of sovereign democracy is becoming the national ideology and the basis for policy-making for the entire Russian political class – a concept that is called to assure the continuity of the political course from Putin to Medvedev and beyond, to strengthen the Russian state.

In conclusion, in view of the preceding, I would like to respond to two questions Przeworski raised in the background material for our first meeting: “One is whether it is indeed true that democracy must be ‘directed’ as long as the state is weak: the logic of this argument is not obvious. The second is whether the theory of ‘sovereign democracy’ is intended to be developmentalist, that is, Russia will embrace liberal democracy when the state is sufficiently sovereign.” I think the answer to the first question may be quite the contrary, because only a strong state can “direct” the process of establishing democratic institutions and values. This follows from the experience and the democratization of the Soviet regime by Gorbachev when the Soviet regime simply collapsed, weakened by radical political reforms, as it was unable to establish market mechanisms in the economic sphere or functioning institutions in civil society or the state. The same happened under Yeltsin, when a weak state of the 1990s was unable to “direct” the process of establishing democracy and, instead, led the country to chaos and the excesses of the oligarchs.

The answer to the second question is even more obvious; it follows from what Russian leaders say and from the way I interpret the concept of “sovereign democracy.” This concept is definitely developmentalist. The Russian leadership understands that there is a certain ideal kind of democracy in the West that, even with its inherent flaws, still provides the best opportunities for economic growth and well-being of the people and that enables the country to be more competitive in the world market of high-technology products. However, for Russia to pursue this direction naturally, rather than being flogged by external forces, it must be a really sovereign country that would determine itself the main avenues of its economic development, the rates of economic and political transformations, and their implementation sequence.

The political leaders of Russia, serious analysts and public figures, have no illusions about the state of democracy in Russia. They are fully aware of the fact that Russia needs to carry out serious transformations in all spheres of life to come closer to the European and Western standards of a developed democracy. Among all Western researchers and analysts, it was Andrew Jack (2004), a former bureau chief of the *Financial Times*, who gave the most appropriate assessment of the post-Yeltsin regime. He noted that Russia is still far from Western democracy standards; however, considering the starting positions from which it has been moving toward democracy, one can assert with confidence that the country has made tremendous progress along this path. Thus, the objective evaluation of a regime depends on the extent to which the ongoing processes are viewed in a historic context, with due consideration of national peculiarities of the country.

1.4 A RESPONSE TO MY CRITICS

My original contribution generated several objections and questions: “Even if it were true that the state has to be strong for democracy to emerge, can democracy be orchestrated from above? When will the state be sufficiently strong and when will the authorities decide that conditions are ripe for competitive elections to take place? Why not now? Why would people who have monopolized political power want to expose themselves to competition? Why should we believe that Surkov is telling the truth when he is promising democracy?” My answers follow.

In the literature on democracy, the answer to the question of how democracy appears in nondemocratic societies has been well perfected. In England and the countries of northwestern Europe, the historical process of establishment of democracy proceeded in two phases. Civil citizenship appeared first, to be followed by a transition to political citizenship that included all actors in the political process, with a guarantee for all who were organized in political parties to be able to compete in elections. In the new democracies that follow authoritarian regimes, the process has two phases as well. Initially, institutions of civil society appear, sharp conflicts between radical left and right are smoothed; as a result of the success of the authoritarian regime in solving socioeconomic problems, moderate left and right centers are formed, and a culture of horizontal relationships becomes established, together with a culture of solving problems via compromise and mutual concessions and via rules created by law and institutional mechanisms for resolving conflict, which is when a radical break with authoritarianism occurs and the society moves toward democratic consolidation. This happens either with the help of a pact among elite groups, as in Spain or Poland, or as a result of an acute national crisis, as was the case in Greece with the Black Colonels. The break can also take the form of a massive revolution, as in Portugal, after which the more or less prepared political system attempts to function without the oppression of dictatorial authority. As Marx noted, the foundations of the capitalist order in economics ripened in the framework of feudalism, and I think the foundations of the democratic political system also ripened there. Revolutions only removed the superfluous, not only in the economy but also in the political sphere.

These general patterns apply to Russia:

1. Under Russian conditions, it was essential to have a strong state to begin this process because, as I said earlier, recalling Tilly, the availability of such a state makes it possible to begin this process from above. Yet a strong state could become an obstacle on the way to democracy if grassroots organizations are not created and consolidated independently of the state. A strong authority and a strong state are necessary for the launching of this process, until new political and social forces, uncontrolled by the state, under rules of law, acquire skills to conduct relations with each other and the state without destroying it or

allowing for the emergence of chaos and anarchy. This transformation requires enlightened elites and a certain consensus among them about the necessity of the changes to be implemented. This is how it was in Russia under Alexander II, when the most successful reforms in all spheres of life in society without serious social conflicts and cataclysms were implemented.

As a regularity, democratic reforms are the result of acute national crises. In Russia, the first wave of democratization that abolished serfdom occurred as a result of the defeat in the Crimean War in the middle of the nineteenth century. The second wave of democratization was a result of the Russian defeat in the Russian-Japanese War at the beginning of the twentieth century. Holmes, recalling Zacharia's claim of "state first, democracy afterward," says that this theory of stages is dubious, which I find surprising, as it is Holmes who has written more than once about the special role of the state and who noted that if there is no state, there are no rights; that if there is no strong state, there is no protection of the individual; and that if there is no state, there is chaos. It is obvious that in the current case, a state should be in place first, for when there is no state, there is nothing.

Whenever a process of democratization began in Russia, the state lost control, and the process collapsed, with some vested interests establishing a new powerful state structure that dominated all others. This is what happened with the fall of czarist Russia, with the reforms of Gorbachev, and with Yeltsin. In the present day, the Russian authorities are faced with an inordinately difficult task: to ensure that, on one hand, they help the formation of institutions of civil society, create a true multiparty system and a new culture of horizontal relations, while, on the other hand, they establish a particular balance between the state and society.

2. It is difficult to give a simple answer to the question of when the state is strong enough to allow free competition between political parties. If we agree with those who posit that the period of transition to democracy is quite long, then it depends on how much democratic potential is accumulated. The moment for transition will have arrived when it becomes not so important for the elites whether United Russia or Just Russia (the leftist alternative to the conservative United Russia) would win, because the political or social system would not change as a result of either of them winning; all that would change would be which elite would have more access to the resources of the state, while the other elite group would wait for its turn so that, when it wins, it will access those same resources.

It is not possible to predict exactly when this time will come, but it is possible to say what prerequisites ought to be in place for that to happen. When these objective conditions are present, a subjective factor must also be present to bring about the quality shift. The shift can be triggered either by a contract between the elites who understand that the time for a change has come or by a serious national crisis, as a result of which those in authority concede to an opposition that already exists in the system. Here I agree with Holmes that

human history is not a history of class struggle but of intra-elite struggle. Only after one part of the elite begins fighting another are the masses brought into the struggle, and then they begin to matter in the political strife. Unfortunately, in the Russian case, of all the four periods when modernization was attempted, only in one case did the state not collapse, as the process ended with the assassination of the czar who led the democratization. In the other three, the state disintegrated.

3. Today in Russia, we can see a new phase of the movement toward democracy. Serious researchers cannot trust the statements of leaders of this or that regime who say that they are moving their countries in the direction of democracy, protection of human rights, and the creation of a competitive system of power between parties. The statements have to be substantiated by the actions of the authorities. I think some of these actions are already covered in my first contribution. We can mention a few more that happened after Putin left the presidency. To overcome the growing alienation of society, which was already evident under President Medvedev, a series of steps were implemented to involve in the political process the parties that had not entered Parliament. First, on the regional level, the parties that had not been able to enter into the regional parliaments were given the option to have one or two deputies with the rights of forming factions to propose ideas and solutions to various problems. There are proposals to bring down the threshold for entering the state Duma and the giving of similar opportunities to the parties that cannot win enough votes to enter into the national elections. A bill passed allowing political parties that did not exceed 7 percent but received at least 5 percent of the vote to enter the Duma with one or two representatives. This new rule was in force for the 2011 Duma elections. The number of signatures necessary to register a party on the national level was reduced; a new law was adopted to allow equal access to the mass media for all parties represented in the state Duma; the parties outside of parliament are allowed to address formally from the tribune of the state Duma both the parliament and the country. Of course, one can say that these measures are insufficient. They cannot bring a qualitative change to the regime in which most power is concentrated in one center. Yes, it is not enough, but the Russian authorities, having taken this path, are attempting to create a new culture of horizontal relations so that later on, when the government allows those new parties or coalitions to compete for power, the political struggle will not be the next zero-sum game, so that there can be partner relations between state and society, which would substitute the hierarchical relations traditional for Russia.

4. An important question is why the people who have monopolized power and are using the main levers of financial, informational, and administrative influence must create this competitive atmosphere. If we assume that the Russian elite is hostile to society and even to itself, then of course we can claim there is no reason why they should do that. But nowadays not only political scientists but also politicians understand that elections, a competitive party

system, and democracy are necessary so that accumulated social discontent would not erupt in a revolution or assassinations of political figures (see Holmes's comment on Rome in what follows). This is why any elite, through certain concessions and the incorporation of various institutionalized interests in society into the political process, attempts to tame them and create some support for itself, thus guaranteeing the stability of the regime. This process is rather long. For the U.S. political system, it is well described by James Schlesinger in his *The Cycles of American History*. And, of course, this process demands enough time and readiness for constructive cooperation between elite forces. But, as a rule, Russia never had enough time nor constructive elite cooperation, and socioeconomic, ethnic, and political crises accumulating one on top of the other led to the process always stopping and the country ending up lagging behind. Another crucial reason for Russian elites taking up modernization efforts in the economic and political systems are foreign challenges. If a country is ineffective and does not develop well, but owns extensive resources and territory, it can always be plundered by foreign forces. In addition, with present-day information technologies and the impossibility of isolating your society from information flows, society will always compare itself and its conditions with foreign countries, and this will lead to the delegitimation of existing institutions and value systems if they cannot compete with foreign models that function better in the current competitive world. It is precisely these foreign challenges that have always caused Russian modernization: the movement toward democracy began with the reforms of Peter the Great because the threat of colonization of Russia by the Western powers began then. It was a major condition of the reforms of Alexander II after Russia lost the Crimean War, and it became obvious how backward it was compared with the West. The pressures were the reason for the reforms in the beginning of the twentieth century until the First World War, when Russia lost the Russo-Japanese War. These were the reasons behind Gorbachev's reforms when it became apparent that the existing model could not guarantee a proper standard of living for society and respond to the military and technological challenges posed by the West. For Russia to preserve its own competitive position and control over its territory and resources in this new and dynamically developing world, it no longer has to fight just the West, which has traditionally been more developed and advanced. Today's global situation is such that development of China, India, and several other countries challenges Russia. For Russia, the modernization of the socioeconomic and political systems has become an existential problem. Naturally, an adequate response to such challenges depends on how much the Russian elites understand it. Judging by what is being said and written nowadays in Russia and how the Russian authorities act, there is a growing understanding in all social strata that without democratization, without a competitive environment, without riddance of corruption, without guarantees for property rights and for private personal rights and freedoms, it is impossible to respond to these challenges. This understanding has become commonplace,

from the president to the street cleaner. In Russia, the question is not so much what to do but how to do it, and whether the political leaders possess enough patience, perseverance, and, most of all, time.

Notes

1. Dunn and Maravall both mention that president Medvedev defines the Russian regime as democracy. If Dunn has no problems with this definition, it caused a negative reaction by Maravall, who considers the Russian regime as a “pseudo-democracy.” Holmes, in turn, characterizes the current Russian regime as “neither democracy nor authoritarian.” In my opinion, the full version of president Medvedev’s definition of democracy is more adequate than Maravall’s or Holmes’s. In his Yaroslav Forum speech (in September 2010), President Medvedev said, “Democracy is a good regime which can provide prosperity, can solve the problem of poverty and humiliation of millions of people. Democracy has values that are shared universally. And I absolutely don’t agree with people who say that we don’t have any democracy but we have authoritarianism. Our democracy is young, not ripe, not perfect, not experienced, but in any case it is a democracy.”
2. Holmes (this volume) argues that the Putin’s regime is not a rupture with Yeltsin’s regime but rather its continuation, as both Yeltsin’s and Putin’s power are unaccountable to society. By this logic, one can say that there was no qualitative difference between the tsarist and communist regimes, as indeed, between the communist’s and Yeltsin’s or Putin’s regimes, as these authorities were not accountable to society either. On qualitative differences on Yeltsin’s and Putin’s regimes, see [Migranyan \(2004\)](#).
3. This is the most systematic explanation of the nature of the Russian regime, the role and place of Russia in the modern world, by a prominent Russian leader.

Imitating Democracy, Feigning Capacity

Stephen Holmes

2.1 INTRODUCTION

That Russia's savviest political experts, including the contributors to this volume, still disagree radically about the stability or instability of the Putin regime reinforces their country's reputation as an enigma shrouded in mystery. Some Russia watchers colorfully suggest that the two bulldogs fighting under the carpet, immortalized by Churchill, are the siloviki's Party of Blood, a driving force behind Putin's adventurism in Ukraine, and the oligarchs' Party of Cash, increasingly apprehensive about Putin's poisoned relations with the West. This is no doubt a cartoonish oversimplification, but it also typifies the anxious search to discover some sort of key to an inherently bewildering situation. If the best-informed diagnoses are so uncertain, it is no surprise that politically feasible remedies remain elusive to the point that they are not even seriously discussed.

To make matters worse, when Americans and West Europeans come to analyze Russia's rollercoaster trends punctuated by sinister palace intrigue, the country's fabled illegibility acquires a gratuitous layer of inscrutability. This additional obscurity derives in part from the forty-five-year standoff of the Cold War and the compulsion it bequeathed on the Western side to shoehorn all observed conflicts into the democracy-authoritarianism polarity. That such a dichotomy feeds American nostalgia for a moral showdown between the virtuous and the wicked is not its greatest defect, even though it is important to notice the inadequacy of idealizing one side and demonizing the other when studying, say, conflicts between an imperfect Russian government and unscrupulous privatization billionaires or violent Chechen separatists.

2.2 A PROCRUSTIAN DICHOTOMY

The problem lies not with the stock distinction between democracy and authoritarianism but with the two-part suggestion that it sometimes conveys: first, that when an authoritarian system collapses, democracy will naturally arise by default and, second, if democracy fails to develop, authoritarian forces must be to blame. Although seldom articulated with sufficient clarity to allow for refutation, these half-baked causal intuitions have had a pernicious influence on the understanding of democratic development and failure, especially in the Russian case. The first intuition bred unrealistic expectations about Russia in the early 1990s; the second spreads confusion among interpreters of Russia today.

A more fruitful approach begins with the observation that democracy is a tiny spot in human history. It is a political arrangement so rare historically that it obviously could neither emerge nor survive unless evolutionarily improbable preconditions were already in place. This becomes additionally self-evident when we define democracy as a system where parties lose elections or, ideally, where an organized incumbent party (or coalition) with substantial public support can lose an honestly conducted election to a rival group of political challengers who are similarly capable of governing the country and where, when the votes are tallied, current incumbents leave office voluntarily.

They will do so only if they are confident that they will not afterward be harmed in their economic interests or subjected to legal harassment and if they trust that they will be permitted to contest the next election slated to occur within a few years' time. The only political incumbents who will voluntarily vacate high office as a result of popular elections, in other words, are those convinced that they will not lose too much. Electorally dictated alternation in office (that is, democracy) presupposes, at a minimum, the creation and maintenance of soft landing sites for ousted incumbents. But physical safety and legal immunity for those who surrender the spurs and reins of power do not develop spontaneously. Credible guarantees for electorally defeated incumbents are essential to the endurance of democracy. Protecting former power wielders from the numerous enemies they have likely created while wielding power, in turn, requires a historically rare degree of political coherence. It is an uncommon achievement, not a given. If a social and political order is not already configured in such a way as to make postincumbency security possible, the sincerest efforts at democratization will be futile and abortive.

For this and other reasons, a vibrant democracy where rival political groupings alternate in power will not "pop out" fully formed, like toast from a toaster, once a repressive system has been relaxed. The absence of obstacles is not the same as the presence of preconditions. The weakening of autocratic restraints may be necessary but it is certainly not a sufficient condition for democracy to develop and survive.

That these insights are obvious to the point of triteness does not mean that they furnish the starting point for most commentary on post-Communist Russia. On the contrary, even Russia watchers who classify the Putin system as “semi-authoritarian” or as a “hybrid regime” implicitly accept the misleading democracy–authoritarianism polarity as the appropriate framework for locating the point at which Russia got “stuck” in its otherwise natural, or at least wished for, trajectory from authoritarian to democratic rule. The same can be said about one-time exponents of “sovereign democracy” (such as Andrankik Migranyan in this volume), who continue to defend the current leadership as a cadre of authoritarian modernizers who have temporarily adopted a Caesaristic strategy to drag Russia to that point of successful state consolidation where genuine democracy becomes for the first time possible.

The harsher Western critics of Russia are equally imprisoned by the authoritarian–democratic distinction, although they differ substantially among themselves about why, in their eyes, Putin’s Russia has failed to develop the “seeds of democracy” that were supposedly sown during the 1990s. The most notable disagreement among Putin’s detractors pits voluntarists against fatalists. The voluntarists maintain that Putin and his entourage, after acceding to power by chance, initiated their authoritarian turn by closing down opposition TV and turning the Duma into a rubberstamp assembly. The authoritarian instincts and skills of the new, post-2000 ruling circles, recruited largely from the armed wing of the state bureaucracy, they continue, were used to strangle the baby of Russian democracy in its crib. This political infanticide would not have happened, allegedly, if Yeltsin had chosen a different successor, almost anyone without Putin’s capacity and proclivity to recruit loyalist cadres from among the ranks of the “heavies” (*siloviki*).

The fatalists view things differently. They argue, roughly speaking, that, Putin or no Putin, Russia’s authoritarian DNA was destined to reassert itself after the feeble experiments with democracy in the 1990s had run their course (Hedlund 2005). Such critics, whether they stress “the Russian soul” or the country’s sprawling enormity, correctly note that Russia’s “democrats,” such as Boris Nemtsov and Grigory Yavlinski, proved unable to win many votes not only because the system was rigged, which it was, but also because such darlings of the West lacked the ability to connect ideologically or emotionally with large domestic constituencies. And they stress that Putin himself, before he announced his return to the presidency, and once again after his Crimean land grab, enjoyed and enjoys immense and seemingly genuine popularity. If he has squelched “democratic dissent,” he has done so with significant public approval. Much of Putin’s seemingly evergreen popularity inside Russia, these cultural determinists also report, stems from actions viewed with distaste and disgust in the West, not only his annexation of Crimea and his embrace of separatist rebels in eastern Ukraine but also his long-term imprisonment of Khodorkovsky, the 2008 war in Georgia, and the egregious strut and rudeness

with which he regularly flouts unspoken norms about how world leaders are supposed to behave in polite company.

Putin's apologists, it should be noticed, can be just as much in thrall to the authoritarianism–democracy polarity as Putin's critics. And they, too, employ the polarity to give deceptive credibility to an imagined chronological sequence. While Putin's adversaries spy the green shoots of democracy in the 1990s and decry the crushing boot of authoritarianism in the 2000s, Putin's champions depict the 1990s as the heyday of chaos, wild privatization, organized crime, state weakness, and international humiliation. The latter therefore celebrate the original accession of Putin to the presidency as the restoration of order, the lifting of Russia from its knees, and the gradual development of state capacity (or the reclaiming of scattered fragments of authority into a single, coherent vertical of power), which are arguably necessary preconditions for democracy and the rule of law.

The notion of a tectonic shift in governing approach between Yeltsin and Putin, in fact, is advanced in chorus by apologists and critics of both. It also suspiciously tracks a worldwide tendency to draw a thick line between the 1990s and the decade after 2000. The first is often considered an era of economic globalization and development, embellished with well-meaning invocations of human rights. And the second is frequently portrayed as an age of counterterrorism in which officials around the world exploited public anxieties about national security to shield themselves from accountability for corrupt, criminal, and incompetent conduct. To some, this stylized periodization makes the transition from Yeltsin to Putin seem smoothly in sync with world history.

Such all-too-perfect coincidences aside, mutually hostile schools in the contemporary debate about Russia nevertheless agree that a yawning discontinuity separates Yeltsin's Russia from Putin's Russia. Some see the transition from one to the other as a dismantling of democracy. Others see it as the restoration of order and national prestige. But everyone agrees that the shift was highly significant and consequential.

This is a mistake.

2.3 TWO INCARNATIONS, ONE SYSTEM

The roots of Putinism lie in Yeltsinism. Putin himself is a product of the past. He is less a child of the KGB than of the Yeltsin regime. Nor was he originally elected by the people; that was just a bedtime story. In reality, he was selected by the Yeltsin team after he had helped repress an anti-Yeltsin insurgency engineered by then Prime Minister Evgeny Primakov and supported by independently elected governors as well as by Yuri Skuratov, the procurator general who was investigating corruption in Yeltsin's family and entourage. Having established his bona fides by capably shielding regime insiders from an anticorruption campaign launched by political rivals, Putin was handed the

presidency on a silver platter. And he ruled not only with support from secret-service and shady business networks but also, from 2000 to 2008, on the basis of Yeltsin's "superpresidential" constitution of 1993.

To think fruitfully about democracy in the context of post-Communist Russia, therefore, we need to jettison not only the politically slanted story line of regime discontinuity but also the stylized democracy–authoritarianism polarity on which it is based. We need, on the contrary, to look seriously at the many underground continuities that bind together the Yeltsin and Putin regimes. Although such an approach will not validate all the hopes and fears voiced by apologists and critics of Yeltsin and Putin, it can, in compensation, make way for some skeptical common sense.

For all their incontestable differences in style and self-presentation, the Yeltsin and Putin systems, on closer inspection, reveal telling similarities that the critics and apologists of each regime prefer to disregard. Focusing on these masked continuities can be especially illuminating for democratic theory. For instance, when Michael McFaul and Kathryn Stoner-Weiss (2008, 70) claim that "the Russian regime under Yeltsin was unquestionably more democratic than the Russian regime today," they are inadvertently emptying the concept of democracy of any reference to the accountability of the rulers to the ruled. No one would say that the Russian regime under Yeltsin was unquestionably more accountable than the Russian regime today. If the Yeltsin regime had been accountable, it would not have shelled the Supreme Soviet in 1993, stolen the 1996 election, carefully avoided putting the Gaidar program to a popular vote, or allowed Russia's national wealth to be "looted by a narrow group of future oligarchs with the complete consent of Boris Yeltsin and his team of 'reformers'" (Pushkov 2008).

That Washington fêted Yeltsin then and spurns Putin now tells us more about the uneven trajectory of American foreign policy than about creeping regime change in Moscow. As a historical matter, Russia's unaccountable elite under Yeltsin morphed into Russia's unaccountable elite under Putin without a political revolution of any sort. No one should be deceived, therefore, by a cosmetic rearrangement of the well-cushioned deck chairs on Roman Abramovich's 557-foot yacht.

No one disputes Putin's desire to project an image of indomitability. But has he really strengthened the Russian state or even substantially impeded its post-Communist degradation and decay? To understand what is at stake in the controversy over continuity versus discontinuity, it is essential to grasp that state control over society is just as difficult to create and stabilize as a democratic system for alternating parties in power. They may or may not have entertained *les rêves étatistes*, but Putin's team has never had either the capacities or the incentives to impose authoritarian discipline on Russian society or even on the country's bloated bureaucracy. Ruling with an iron fist is neither as easy as it sounds nor as lucrative. Without an inspiring picture of the future around which to rally supporters, in fact, Putin's options for consolidating

the state have always been modest. True, Kremlin phrase makers have been promulgating the myth of Western Russophobia and promoting ethnic nationalism, homophobia, neo-imperial dreams, and uniquely Russian spiritual values to coopt the Right and rally the country's majority against liberal protesters. But these are bridges to the nineteenth century. They bespeak a vulnerable regime in desperate search of any possible source of popular support. They also suggest anemic confidence in Russia's ability to thrive in the world to come.

Moreover, a genuine restoration of Soviet-style rule would require a resealing of the borders, or at least a drastic scaling back of currently unshielded contacts with the West. A genuine break with Europe, even combined with a pivot to Asia, is no more realistic, however, than a reversion to economic autarky. It would strike directly at the material interests of influential individuals in the Russian establishment, including the security establishment, and drive into permanent exile those prosperous Russians who still shuttle in and out of the country. Insulation from the West would also leave Russia alone with some serious problems. The gravest of these is no doubt the challenge of maintaining Russia's territorial integrity despite a militarily exposed southern and southeastern flank. Ironically, this threat may have been aggravated by Putin's brazen violation of internationally recognized borders in Ukraine. Such an existential threat cannot be successfully parried, over the long term, without serious and sustained Western backing.

Even detractors who exaggerate Putin's ability to control his country's business and security elite admit that "Russia is not the Soviet Union." What they usually mean is that "Russians are not imprisoned as the Soviet people were; they enjoy personal liberties, including the freedom to travel" (*Washington Post* Editorial Board 2014). Thus, while condemning his occasional ruthlessness and caprice, they concede that "Putin is no tyrant. There are many freedoms in Russia despite the obvious imperfections of its democracy" (Read 2013). Similarly, those critics who focus on the shrinking space for press freedom in Russia today add that "the degree of censorship and pressure is hardly Stalinist" and that, even as he increases his control over the Russian media, "Putin will not undo glasnost. He couldn't even if he wanted to" (Remnick 2014a).

Speaking of freedom of movement, Russia's most active citizens may not regularly vote, but they continue to travel regularly. As recently as 2011, "Russian tourists took a record 60 million trips abroad in the first half of this year, spending a record amount of money via their credit cards, according to tourism and credit card companies. Citibank experts predict Russians will spend \$40 billion – 3 percent of the country's gross domestic product – abroad by year-end" (Narizhnaya 2011). This pattern, which has not substantially changed in the interim, contrasts sharply with authoritarian arrangements of an earlier age. Stalin controlled his elite by preventing them from enjoying unshielded contacts with foreigners. Despite his petty harassment of foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and unheeded calls to repatriate

Russian capital safely parked abroad, Putin continues to keep his elite on board in the opposite way: by allowing such contacts. His distance from Stalin reflects his closeness to Yeltsin in this regard as well. The all-important maintenance of essentially open borders is just the most obvious reason to dismiss the charge that Putin is dragging Russia back toward a closed society of the Soviet type.

So what factors continue to obstruct a full-bore autocratic restoration in Putin's Russia? No credit is due to the socially powerful resistance of pro-democracy groupings or human rights advocates for the simple reason that no such resistance exists. Pro-democracy forces have been and (despite the impressive Moscow street demonstrations in 2011–12) remain today poorly organized, without deep social roots, and basically ineffective. The near-universal support inside Russia for Putin's anti-Western adventurism in Ukraine has underscored once again the political impotence of liberal Russia. Re-creating a genuine authoritarian regime in Russia has proved difficult, therefore, not because Russian liberalism is strong but for a very different reason. The principal obstacle to the reestablishment of all-invasive centralized control has been the disproportion between the country's daunting problems and the meager tools and resources available to the Kremlin.

By the vastness of its problems, I mean more or less what Putin meant in his September 24, 2011, speech announcing his plan to reassume the presidency in 2012:

We must speak openly about the dependence of our economy on raw materials, about the dangerous level of social inequality, violence, corruption, about the feeling of injustice and vulnerability that people feel when they are dealing with government bodies, courts, and law enforcement. . . . All this, unfortunately, continues. (Barry 2011b, A1)

It is not hard to expand Putin's parsimonious list. Russia's chronic problems include a distressing combination of European birthrates with African life expectancy (Eberstadt 2011), including an acute crisis of male mortality (Clover 2011) and a gradual depopulation of the east with unknown strategic consequences; "the collapsing Soviet-era infrastructure" (Petrov 2010a) across eleven time zones; a chronic decline in the productivity of the Siberian oil fields (Ioffe 2011c); a public health disaster including a runaway HIV epidemic (McFaul and Stoner-Weiss 2008, 76) and an out-of-control heroin epidemic (Lally 2010); rampant deforestation as well as toxic water and air pollution; massive capital flight (Ostroukh 2014); the deprofessionalization of the workforce; many obsolete, value-subtracting, and inefficiently located industries, dilapidated vestiges of Soviet isolation from world markets that can be shuttered only by throwing an otherwise unemployable workforce onto the streets; the continuing and even accelerating brain drain of "Russia's most talented and innovative people to freer and more open societies" (Petrov 2011); a dangerously aging fleet of passenger aircraft that, if decommissioned for safety reasons, would isolate hundreds of Siberian towns from the rest of Russia (Odynova 2011a); as well as the "deteriorating quality of education, low levels

of competitiveness, weak financial regulation and crude management practices” (Amos 2011b). In shocking contrast to China, “Direct investment in the country’s crumbling industrial, transportation, and human resources infrastructures has languished, with the network of paved roads actually contracting by 9 percent in the Putin years” (Lynch 2011, 3). In this somewhat random selection among the many symptoms of “Russia’s acute necrosis” (Latynina 2011a), I have not even mentioned the North Caucasus, overdosed on Moscow subsidies but still seething with endlessly ominous violence.

Such factors constitute the vastness of the challenges facing the Russian government. By the weakness of the tools available for confronting these massive problems, I mean principally “the creeping paralysis within the leadership itself” (Petrov 2010a). The Kremlin’s failure to advance any socially appealing and feasible plan for the country’s future reflects uncompromising turf warfare, factionalism, and zero-sum competition over vast cash flows inside the Russian elite and the impossibility of imposing discipline or common goals on fragmented, self-dealing bureaucrats who, taking little interest in national development, feed off under-the-table payments and employ physical intimidation and violence in a competitive scramble to seize and redistribute public and private assets to themselves and their business associates.

It is generally agreed that “corruption is as prevalent as it was 10 years ago, if not more so” (Tsyvinski and Guriev 2010), although corrupt relations between government and business usually presuppose that government and business are more easily distinguishable than they are in Russia today. Even without massive corruption, in any case, executive agencies and ministries that habitually conceal essential information from each other and work at cross-purposes tend to produce incoherent and self-defeating policies, to seize up in periodic deadlocks, to react dangerously slowly to unexpected crises. That Russia’s power wielders do not always sing from the same songbook is clear from turf wars between, say, the Prosecutor General’s Office and the Investigative Committee, as well as from the shocking letter that Viktor Cherkesov, an FSB colleague of Putin’s from St. Petersburg, published in *Kommersant* on October 8, 2007, warning of a “war of all against all” within the country’s security services (Knight 2011). Today, “the grappling between apparatchiks in the Kremlin basement” (Piontkovsky 2008, 37) frequently escalates into competitive *raiderstvo* so intense that it cannot be entirely hidden from public view. Such intra-elite warfare reflects massive but hidden state weakness, suggesting strongly that the much talked-of consolidation of vertical power in the age of Putin is more illusion than reality.

Russia’s bureaucracies can be usefully described as orphans forsaken by the now defunct Communist Party of the USSR. This pattern of bureaucratic fragmentation crystallized in early 1992. As fragments broken off from the old system, for example, Gazprom (the former Soviet Ministry of Gas) and the Procurement were loosed from Communist Party superintendence. Oleg Gordievsky, a former KGB agent who also spied for MI6, makes a similar point about his

former employer: “The KGB without the Communist Party is a gang of gangsters” (LeVine 2008, 35). Populated by concrete individuals, such abandoned institutions developed strong corporate interests of their own, interests that did not necessarily jibe with those of the Kremlin. Yedinaya Rossiya, the political machine created by the Kremlin, obviously cannot do what the Communist Party did during the Soviet era, namely, impose some measure of coordination on the working parts of the immense and far-flung Soviet bureaucracy and industrial establishment, national and local. It can neither reoccupy the space vacated by the Soviet Communist Party nor reestablish the shattered unity of the ruling elite. Unable to reestablish a military-style hierarchy of command, therefore, Putin has been forced to resort to simulation.

Here lies the genuine uniqueness of Russia’s post-Communist political development. The disappearance of the Communist Party left the political landscape in Russia littered with highly developed fragments of a highly developed state but deprived of the traditional system for imposing a degree of coherence and coordination upon myriad departments and agencies with unclear and overlapping jurisdictions. There is no historical precedent for this bewildering state of affairs. The powerful Soviet bureaucracy did not vanish but survived in bits and pieces under weak Kremlin control, and that means without a strong incentive to desist from anarchical forms of self-enrichment or “feeding” from whatever trough is closest to hand. Maintaining *nomenklatura* solidarity proved wholly impossible in the face of a competitive race by rival bureaucratic-business clans to privatize the public patrimony left behind by the Soviet regime. The ongoing intra-elite struggle to control enormous cash flows and the top-to-bottom acquisitiveness of the internally fragmented Russian civil service are the two primary obstacles to political consolidation in post-Communist Russia. They are insurmountable obstacles, in fact, to either authoritarian or democratic consolidation.

The distinction between authoritarian power and its simulacrum is therefore an essential key to understanding Putin’s Russia. Cultivating an unearned reputation for power is a venerable political art. To properly evaluate claims that “since he returned to the presidency in May [2012], Putin has overseen the worst crackdown on human rights in Russia since the breakup of the Soviet Union” (Kramer 2013), we need to keep in mind how his reputation for irresistible power contributes to his political survival. But how much control does he actually exert? It is especially difficult to gauge accurately the power of a state in a situation where the irritants that it chooses to crush are intrinsically weak and defenseless, where the plants that it rudely plucks from the ground have pitifully shallow roots. It does not take much force to rip out a rootless plant. Forcing Vladimir Gusinsky and Boris Berezovsky into exile or yanking the satirical puppet show *Kukly* from TV or shuttering the British Council’s regional offices or cutting off the electricity during a campaign press conference by a disfavored candidate or politically marginalizing Boris Nemtsov and Garry Kasparov (Ioffe 2009a) or dispatching special forces to Triumphalnaya

Ploshad to snuff out rallies by “about a hundred aged liberals still clinging to the hopes of the early Yeltsin era” (Ioffe 2010b) or jailing the members of Pussy Riot or harassing Alexei Navalny with embezzlement charges or keeping Khodorkovsky locked up for years or withdrawing Dozhd TV’s access to cable broadcasting or turning the social networking site VKontakte over to a Kremlin flunky or jailing a random sample of the May 6, 2012, Bolotnaya Square demonstrators, or forcibly registering as a “foreign agent” any NGO that engages in (vaguely defined) political activity and receives funding from abroad – none of these newsworthy coups de main were especially demanding. The same can be said for the bloodless takeover of Crimea. Each of these actions insinuated massive power, as a consequence, without actually requiring it.

To estimate Putin’s success as a consolidator of power, in other words, we need to take the measure of the resistances he has so clamorously rolled over. The breaking of one or two privatization billionaires tells us almost nothing. If it turns out that the resistances he overcame were noisy but essentially feeble and defenseless, then we should hesitate to join the choruses of praise and blame for his recentralizing of formerly strewn powers. A better measure of Putin’s (limited) power is that, even though he can periodically use the Procuracy for private paybacks, he has not been able to transform it into a disciplined agency capable of serving a single coherent national purpose, as opposed to multiple conflicting private agendas.

And speaking of the oligarchs, it is now generally conceded that, prominent exceptions duly noted, Putin did not truly destroy their power but merely added his own favorites to their ranks and made them considerably less noisy. He never challenged big privatization. He merely made the Yeltsin-era oligarchs feel slightly less secure, leaving them mostly free to luxuriate in their ill-gotten wealth as if there was no tomorrow.

Not only old and new oligarchs, but top political authorities, too, have perfected the art of keeping their heads down. When confronted with an incompetent reaction of state officials to a national crisis (the Kursk, Beslan), the Putin circle responded reflexively, assuming a defensive crouch and making the state less legible than before, rather than strategically, by trying to fix the problem and improve the government’s emergency preparedness. An example from 2010 is the Kremlin’s reaction to the peat bog fires around Moscow: “The Moscow region administration said journalists would be barred from forests without special accreditation for safety reasons” (Odynova 2010). The Kremlin consistently strives to reduce the transparency of key government agencies and to make private citizens unable to criticize government decisions or suggest alternative policies on the basis of information promptly available from independent and reliable sources.

Yes, Western disinterest and policy disagreements within the European Union have allowed Putin to throw his weight around in Ukraine. But after he repocketed the presidency in 2012, he has continued to do what is easiest: not

capacity building but incapacity hiding. The idea that Putin has really “made his priority the reestablishment of a strong state” (Remnick 2014b) is therefore hard to square with some elementary facts. The principal institution of any state is a credible succession formula. Russia still lacks a credible succession formula, largely because the Kremlin cannot figure out how to guarantee Putin’s personal security were he to leave office. This is evidence enough that Putin has been focused exclusively on his entourage’s grip on power, not on his country’s institutional development. Perhaps Russia’s rulers can hide the failure of their overestimated state-building efforts only by creating an alternative reality through Kremlin-controlled television news and “obsequious national tabloids such as *Komsomolskaya Pravda* and *Moskovsky Komsomolets*” (Judah 2014). The regime’s desire and ability to render its actions opaque and illegible to the public, however, does not make it into an authoritarian regime in the classical sense.

The regime’s appetite for secrecy is not merely a residue of KGB training. It is also a clue. It suggests that policy makers understand perfectly well just how dysfunctional, boxed in, and bereft of feasible options their government remains. An awareness of the inadequacy of the resources it possesses to the problems it faces adds urgency to the classical political imperative never to show weakness (Mendras 2008, 34). A leadership unable to solve its country’s most pressing problems must carefully conceal its incapacities because any hint of vulnerability could prompt insubordination, mutiny, and perhaps a hostile takeover. To keep the sharks at bay, the best Putin can do is to use smoke and mirrors to imitate authoritarianism, hide the profligacy of Kremlin insiders, and theatrically inflate his reputation for power.

It should also be recalled in this context that the Soviet system was not overthrown by any type of Orange Revolution. It collapsed under the weight of its own incapacity and insolvency. The Soviet system was genuinely authoritarian and nevertheless collapsed. As Krastev (2009, 76) has noted, Putin and his men “know that, at the end of the day, even the secret police cannot save them. They were the secret police, after all, and they could not preserve the Soviet system or keep the USSR from coming apart.” In other words, Russia’s rulers have an unforgettable personal experience of the incapacity of authoritarianism to prop up a falling edifice. This does not make them into democrats, but it saves them from seeking to resurrect an authoritarian past that bequeathed them the staggering problems with which they now have to cope.

2.4 THE GREAT DISCONNECT

The relaxing of authoritarian controls is a necessary but insufficient condition for democratization. But this shopworn insight can be taken another step. Arguably, the very same factors that are now preventing real, as opposed to simulated, authoritarian consolidation under Putin previously prevented real,

as opposed to simulated, democratic consolidation under Yeltsin. The most important of these factors is arguably the incoherence of the deep state, that is, “competitive factionalism” (Sakwa 2011, 105) within the political-economic elite, amplified and exacerbated by fragmentation among governmental institutions and agencies. But the real problem lies deeper still.

What we can observe in Russia throughout the past twenty years is an incoherent state tenuously connected to what remains, despite the recent bout of nationalistic euphoria, a politically disorganized and demobilized society. This is neither a democratic nor an authoritarian arrangement. Roughly speaking, in a functioning democracy, the ruled hold the rulers accountable. In an authoritarian regime, conversely, the rulers dominate the ruled. In both Yeltsin’s Russia and Putin’s Russia, by contrast, state and society have basically turned their backs on each other, hiding from each other as much as possible. Unlike the Communist elite, the post-Communist elite takes too little interest in the lives of ordinary people to invest time and resources into micromanaging a complex system of mutual citizen surveillance and informing. Ordinary citizens are equally estranged from their rulers: “Nobody expects fair dealings from the government. The authorities are, at best, a source of trouble” (Politkovskaya 2004, 210). The haves and the have-nots “inhabit vastly different worlds” (Harding 2011, 153). The fundamental unfairness of this dispensation is papered over by upbeat statistics about per capita income and household consumption that notoriously omit, when calculating public welfare, any reference to inequality, mortality, morbidity, environmental degradation, or the wasting away of public infrastructure and public services. Such factors, however, cannot be hidden from the naked eye, which is why journalists on the scene report that “very few of Russia’s billions have trickled down to the poorest groups” and even that Putin’s system has created “the most unequal society in Russia’s history” (Harding 2011, 155). When the haves and the have-nots occasionally cross paths – as they are forced to do, for instance, on the streets of Moscow – the tension is almost unbearable (Ioffe 2011a). But most of the time, such rude encounters can be successfully avoided. The most important fact about the Putin regime, then, is that “there is almost no vertical relationship between elite and non-elite members” of society (Sakwa 2011, 104).

This arresting formulation suggests that the vaunted “power vertical” refers not to a vertical of domination but rather to a vertical of escape, that is, to the mountain climber’s rope by which a few friends manage to pull themselves up and away from their less fortunate fellow citizens, as in the 1967 Vladimir Vysotsky film *Vertikal* (Monaghan 2011, 12). Russia’s rich and powerful do not exploit or repress the country’s nonelite; they flee them. Single-minded self-enrichment by an unaccountable elite, with little commitment to national development, survived the change from Yeltsin to Putin. That is why we cannot describe the handover of power in 1999–2000 either as a dismantling of

democracy or as a restoration of authoritarianism. It was, instead, a well-executed covert mission to rescue a threatened system of privilege thinly disguised as a heroic and even populist attempt to change it.

Russian politics in the 1990s was already dominated by democratically unaccountable ruling and profiteering groups. Multiparty elections took place, but they provided no reason for the rich and the powerful to take much interest in the well-being of the citizenry at large. The Duma's futile opposition under Yeltsin, culminating in the impeachment gambit and the parrying of the Primakov challenge, made no difference, one way or the other, to the average Russian. Thus, neither the purging of antisystem deputies nor the Duma's lapsing into opportunistic servility was perceived as any great loss. Throughout the two post-Communist decades, the public has viewed politics, however decorated with democratic rites and symbols, as a game conducted by regime insiders for regime insiders. It is still viewed this way today – as having little or nothing to do with the everyday life of most people.

Something similar can be said about freedom of the press. Admittedly, the pluralistic media under Yeltsin was lively, and its unvarnished reporting on the first Chechen war forced the government into a temporary truce in the run-up to the 1996 presidential elections. But its contribution to accountable government was modest or negligible. This was due, first of all, to the overwhelming concentration of media holdings in the hands of a few oligarchs, with special private agendas unrelated to the voting public's right to multiple sources of information (Hoffman 2002, 476–85). As a consequence, freedom of the press, under Yeltsin, was commonly perceived as just another weapon in the arsenal of rival financial-industrial groups scheming to weaken one another by the selective release of *compromat*. Because freedom of the press in the 1990s patently served the interests of a few without plainly improving the lives of the many, it is not surprising that Putin's first-term takeover of broadcast media, for example, stimulated little protest by the public at large.

Every functioning state must have partisan friends or political support. This implies that every state must also, to some extent, play favorites. The choice is always between ruling with one set of partners or another. Russia is a weak state not because its leaders lack “political will,” therefore, but because the Kremlin has limited options for mobilizing politically useful support. Where did Anatolii Chubais look in 1996 when seeking funding for Yeltsin's bid to retain the presidency in the face of a plausible challenge from the rump Communist Party? He did not look to well-organized groups whose interests coincided largely with the well-being of the country, because there were no such groups in Russia. Instead, he struck a deal – “loans for shares” (Freeland 2000, 22–23, 169–89) – with the same predatory-redistributive networks that were stealing the country blind. The Yeltsin-era bargain with the oligarchs, moreover, is the immediate forefather of the Putin-era incorporation of personally trusted siloviki along with business-minded civilian bureaucrats and close business associates from St. Petersburg into the political-economic elite. The presidential

election of June and July 1996 was no more “democratic,” therefore, than the presidential election of March 2012, even though the antidemocratic tactics and machinery were somewhat different in the two cases.

Thus, the case for continuity between Yeltsinism and Putinism rests on the lack of connective tissue, under both presidents, between the country’s elite and the general public. Under Yeltsin as well as Putin, power and privilege have been monopolized by a hovercraft elite with few enduring connections to the population at large. Focused on the well-being of themselves and their families, the rich and powerful remain essentially detached from the population. The return to pre-Soviet levels of elite nepotism, the distribution of wealth and office through kinship networks and “amoral familism” within state structures, including the FSB, are perhaps the clearest symptoms of Russia’s institutional deterioration, providing the simplest refutation of the thesis that, under Putin, “the state is everything” (Hille 2014).

The elite’s callous indifference toward ordinary Russians is captured nicely by the prerevolutionary “joke” that Oscar-winning Russian director Nikita Mikhalkov apparently cannot resist retelling: “A peasant nursed and nursed his anger at his master, but the master didn’t know shit about it” (Ioffe 2011a). True, throughout the two post-Communist decades, Russia’s rulers staged democratic rituals. But they never displayed any serious interest in consulting regularly with law-abiding forces in civil society, such as they were, because such forces had, from the perspective of the rulers, nothing to offer.

Admittedly, old faces are sometimes retired from high office and new faces occasionally coopted to replace them, Medvedev being the most obvious example. But such changes have been largely cosmetic, hiding “the longevity of tenure of the senior figures, almost all of whom have held positions of authority for many years,” and “the survivability of lower-level officials in their posts despite the demands for their firing by Medvedev and Putin” (Monaghan 2011, 7, 12).

Who holds which post will no doubt continue to change, depending on Putin’s calculations as he completes his third term. Today’s ascendancy of more parochial security officials over more worldly economic elites may persist or be reversed. But experience suggests that we are not going to witness any time soon the emergence of a form of power in any way accountable to ordinary citizens. The state will remain detached and nonresponsive to society, although it will occasionally organize bread and circuses to distract the public from rampant corruption and economic contraction. It will remain a “corporation” that, however wracked by internal struggles, basically looks after itself. This lack of answerability of the Russian state to Russian society is the common thread uniting the two post-Communist decades. What repelled Putin in the Yeltsin system, arguably, was not the unaccountability of power but only the public squabbling among elite factions that Yeltsin seemed powerless to mitigate or conceal. He assumed the Russian presidency not to govern the country but to arbitrate high-stakes conflicts between rival business-bureaucratic clans over influence and money that risked spiraling dangerously out of control. To

arbitrate these conflicts successfully, Putin first had to make them less open to public inspection. That is why he seized control of the primary sites where intra-elite conflict had made itself visible during the Yeltsin years, namely, television and the state Duma. His aim was never to dismantle democracy (which did not exist) but only to make intra-elite conflict (which did exist) easier to manage. Russia's predatory classes themselves did not object strongly to the new opacity because they are not the kind of "middle class" that, in Seymour Martin Lipset's theory of democracy, wants to resolve its conflicts peaceably through an open political process (Shlapentokh 2008). This lack of an economically prosperous constituency for democracy is perhaps the most important continuity tying together Putin's Russia and Yeltsin's Russia, however different they conspicuously are in other respects.

The principal cause of the many eye-catching differences between the age of Yeltsin and the age of Putin is not some imaginary switch from democracy to authoritarianism but rather the dramatically changing role played from one decade to the next by natural resources in the Russian economy. The price of oil in January 1999 was seventeen dollars per barrel. That is not all you need to know to understand the transition from the age of Yeltsin to the age of Putin, but it goes a long way. Putin's Kremlin, by contrast to Yeltsin's, has been buoyed up by petrodollars, that is, by a revenue stream that sluices copiously into government coffers without any need to extract taxes from the population at large. The huge infusion of cash from world consumers of gas and oil helps explain why Putin's Russia, at least in the areas around Moscow and St. Petersburg, feels so much more prosperous than did Yeltsin's Russia. But an economy based on the sale of raw materials to foreigners does not necessarily motivate ruling groups to attend to the concerns of domestic electoral majorities. Unlike extracting hydrocarbons from the earth, extracting taxes from citizens excites popular resistance and goes smoothly only when the government offers palpable public services to the taxpayers in exchange for taxes paid. Along the same lines, classical democratic theory asserts that citizenship grows in the areas of contestation where the government tries to extract resources from the public (taxes and male military service), where the public resists, and where some sort of negotiated settlement is provisionally reached.

Whether or not the oil and gas curse alone explains the notoriously anemic nature of political society and civic life in Russia today, the democratic process of give-and-take between state and society has been bypassed thanks to the hydrocarbon solution to state revenue collection. Political elites in extraction-for-export societies have little concrete incentive to invest in the well-being of their population. Indeed, Russia's hydrocarbon princes, if left to their own devices, would probably prefer to sell the nation's raw materials to foreign buyers for high prices than, say, to sell gas to domestic pensioners who need to heat their homes. They cannot go this far in search of short-term profits, however, without unsettling the social truce that protects the haves from the

ire of the have-nots, and thereby putting in jeopardy the lifestyle of those who have benefited most from the oil boom. Nevertheless, a frustrated preference for foreign consumers with the ability to pay high prices over domestic consumers without that ability represents an important aspect of elite-mass alienation in today's Russia. A Marxist might even argue that Putin and his team are best understood as the executive committee of the country's quarreling business-bureaucratic elite. This predatory class would be too shortsighted and internally divided to manage its own affairs autonomously in a cogent manner. They can therefore be said to have "hired" Putin's Kremlin to do it for them. One of this executive committee's main tasks, if we want to play out this speculative thought, would be to channel some of the country's natural-resource wealth into pensions and other meager subsidies to keep the population basically quiescent and demobilized. Even though it marginally reduces the profits of the predatory elite in the short term, dishing out sedatives to quiet the street is a smart move in the medium term. Here is how [Shevtsova \(2010, 338–39\)](#) describes the Kremlin's task:

Money accumulated from the sale of energy and raw materials is the most effective method for keeping Russia in a state of sleepy oblivion. The government, for instance, is planning to spend an unusually large amount of money to raise pensions. Why does the government suddenly care about pensioners? Because it is entering a new electoral cycle and needs to bribe the most disciplined segment of society that goes to vote and usually votes for the regime.

Rather than buying votes or drumming up popular support, preelection expenditures aim to blunt the frustration felt by substantial swaths of low-income voters. Guaranteeing a social minimum, to which the Putin regime is obviously committed, represents a demobilizing rather than a mobilizing tactic. This interpretation is supported by the government's dramatic climb down in 2005, after thousands of Russian pensioners staged protests across Russia in response to proposed reductions in Soviet-era pensions ([Osborn 2005](#)). Fuel subsidies are particularly important, given the inelasticity of the public's demand for heating in winter. But eliminating wage arrears for state employees and minimizing mass firings in unprofitable industrial sectors of the economy are also crucial. Redistributive policies are not undertaken for moral reasons, of course, but only to avoid a degree of popular frustration that might stir awake an Orange revolution in Russia itself.

2.5 WHY STEAL ELECTIONS?

Shevtsova's mention of the next electoral cycle brings us to our next question. How have rigged elections helped stabilize power in post-Communist Russia? One reason why Kremlin policy makers might believe that they need an electoral charade is that they actually do. Indeed, most commentators agree that the

presidency could not have been transferred to Putin in 2000 or to Medvedev in 2008 or back to Putin in 2012 without a national election. But why?

In Yeltsin's case, we might possibly cite some sort of idealistic belief in democracy. But why did a leadership that palpably dislikes and distrusts periodic elections to public office feel compelled to organize and maintain periodic elections to the highest political office?

The fate of direct gubernatorial and mayoral elections in today's Russia remains unclear. What we know is that Putin has felt free to abolish both even if some backtracking has occurred. Putting legislative elections to one side, we are left with the following puzzle: Why, if Putin has felt free, for long periods, to abolish executive elections at the municipal (Bratersky 2011a) and regional levels, has he never felt free to abolish them at the national level?

Neither Putin nor Medvedev had to compete against other viable candidates for popular support. As a result, the Russian public, bereft of alternatives, played no role in the transfer of the presidency from Yeltsin to Putin in 2000, from Putin to Medvedev in 2008, or from Medvedev back to Putin in 2012. So what can we say about the Yeltsin-Putin, Putin-Medvedev, and Medvedev-Putin transfers of power in light of Przeworski's generalization (Przeworski 1991, 10) that elections are meaningful only if outcomes are uncertain? Does the utter predictability of Russian presidential elections imply that they are meaningless or unnecessary? And if, contrary to Przeworski's thesis, wholly predictable elections are as important as the Kremlin seems to think they are, then what do they tell us about the Russian political system?

The 2000 election that first elevated Putin to the presidency was organized by Yeltsin's entourage. Its phoniness was striking even at the time.

On television, on billboards, in the newspapers, were all the apparent hallmarks of democracy – a large field of competing candidates, genuine differences over the country's future, shamelessly pandering photo ops. But rather than being the flourishes of a vibrant new political culture, these proved to be deceptive, reflecting Russian expertise in the arts of *pokazukha* – displays meant only for show (Baker and Glasser 2005, 5).

Accounts such as these have led commentators to call Russia an “imitation democracy” (Shevtsova 2010, 319–28, 330–32), a “virtual democracy” (Wilson 2005, 33–48), a “pseudo democracy” (Robertson 2011, 2), and a “façade democracy that barely conceals the political and bureaucratic dominance of a self-interested bureaucratic corporation” (Silitski 2009, 42). But the indubitable truth that Russian elections are rigged should be the beginning, not the end, of inquiry. It leaves unanswered the essential question, namely, What is the political payoff, for the Kremlin, of Russia's fraudulent elections?

Why did Putin have to be elected in 2000, 2004, and 2012? And why did Medvedev have to be elected in 2008? Nikolai Petrov (2011) helps us focus on the seriousness of the question:

Elections in Russia no longer dictate agendas or serve as platforms for finessing programs. They do not provide much feedback between the citizens and the regime, nor

do they offer serious alternatives with respect to public policies or training grounds for politicians. They do not even play the role of a safety-valve for letting off steam. And as administrative control over elections increases, the elections become less able to fulfill the one remaining role of legitimizing the regime.

But seasoned burglars do not waste time filching valueless trinkets. So why steal an election if it contributes nothing to regime legitimacy? It must have some value in the eyes of the political technologists and *piarshchiki* (PR operatives) who organize the serial robberies. Indeed, the Kremlin would not have poured so many scarce resources into rigged elections if the country's leaders had not believed that such charades would help prop up a regime that feels itself inwardly fragile to a surprising degree.

Elections without surprises do not help solve conflicts without violence. Nor do they channel frustrations inside the system to prevent them from exploding in extraparliamentary movements. They do not reduce under-the-table payments to public officials by increasing the transparency of government. They do not give ordinary citizens a periodic opportunity to topple the mighty from their pedestals. They obviously do nothing to discipline elites by forcing them to compete for public approval or to explain their actions to a critical audience. And they do not provide mandates for elected officials to follow. So what do they do?

A preliminary answer involves the public demonstration that the government is strong enough to pull a rabbit out of a hat. Medvedev won the 2008 presidential election with some 71 percent of the vote. This landslide occurred even though the first elected office for which Medvedev had ever been a candidate was the presidency of the Russian Federation. A few years before, he was a completely unknown bureaucrat. Creating a household name overnight is a genuine triumph of political marketing, revealing the miracle-working power of political television. This suggests that show elections have a demonstration effect vaguely analogous to, though less cruel than, that of Stalin-era show trials. They demonstrate *vlast'* in a society where a leader's "popularity" is an effect, not a cause, of his perceived grip on power.

But this is far from being the last word on the subject.

Another fruitful hypothesis, which can serve as an illustration, is that Russia's *vybori bez vybora* (elections without a choice) function like full-dress military maneuvers or rehearsals for actual "combat," including shooting at simulated targets and, of course, the certainty that the government's side will emerge victorious. Rigged elections can help gauge the readiness of crack troops or test which regional leaders are competent and dependable and which are not. Local officials can be instructed to stuff ballots (Ryzhkov 2011a) or falsify tabulations. They can also be asked to frog-march students or public-sector workers to the polls (Garmazhapova 2011; Eremenko 2011; Harding 2011, 56; Ryzhkov 2010; Odynova 2011b). Only by the deft or crude use of carrots and sticks can local Kremlin operatives counteract the apathy induced by elections without surprises. Rigged elections help Moscow discriminate between

effective and ineffective local officials, therefore, something that self-reporting by the same local officials will obviously not help the central government reliably do. After Yedinaya Rossiya “received only 35 percent of the vote in the last regional elections” in Tver, for example, the region’s governor, Dmitry Zelenin, was dismissed partly as “a signal to all governors that they don’t need to work harder; they just need to count votes better” (Latynina 2011b).

In other words, rigged elections enable the central government to identify the weakest cogs in a creaking bureaucratic machine. They help the Kremlin weed out negligent officials who might otherwise go undetected: “Before every national and regional election local party branches receive unofficial orders to win more votes than the last time. Failure brings reprisals, perhaps even the dismissal of local officials” (Loginov 2011). Exemplary dismissals of insufficiently compliant underlings, carried out in public, presumably help encourage other local Yedinaya Rossiya officials to do their part in protecting the aura of invincibility around regime insiders, which of course includes producing a legislative majority, if not a supermajority, in the state Duma.

A regime universally acknowledged to be nondemocratic has an incentive to organize fraudulent elections to gather information useful to maintaining its power. There is no question here, as Petrov explained, of feedback from Russian society. What the regime gathers from a rigged election is information about which lower-level officials and party members are playing or botching their assigned roles. Electoral charades provide regularly scheduled occasions for replenishing local cadres assigned to do Moscow’s bidding. If there were to be no (fixed) elections, then the central government could not so publicly reward effectiveness and loyalty or punish ineffectiveness and disloyalty by deciding whom to place on the Yedinaya Rossiya party list and whom to seat in the Duma. This suggests that rigged elections are not only decorative or vestigial, or a going-through-the-motions to hoodwink democracy dreamers at home and evangelizing democratizers from abroad. Fixed elections, if we accept this argument, are a useful tool in the survival kit of nondemocratic regimes, although, or even perhaps because, no one is fooled into believing that the elections are free and fair.

No one can seriously claim, in fact, that Russia’s *vybori bez vybora* are meant to simulate democracy. Russian citizens know perfectly well that periodic electoral rituals give them no leverage whatsoever over their rulers: “according to a recent poll by the Levada polling center, Russians have not been conned by the democratic charade: Only 9 percent of Russians believe that their current form of government can be called ‘a democracy’” (Ioffe 2010a). Russia’s disillusioned citizens cannot be so easily gulled: “Since Putin came to power in 2000, the Kremlin has used the elections commission, just like the courts, as an in-house resource to create a Potemkin democracy”; but “the facade is often so clumsily constructed that even the most naive and faithful Putin supporters see right through it” (Bohm 2011a, 8). In other words, the fact that Russian elections are “engineered” is “something everyone in Russia, no matter

what their rhetoric or political persuasion, knows and accepts” (Ioffe 2009b). But if fraudulent elections do not defraud the public, what do fraudulent elections do?

In Russia, but not only there, potential rulers do not necessarily accede to power because they are popular. Some of the time, at least, rulers become fleetingly popular because they are momentarily believed to wield power. From the predictable tendency of opportunistic citizens to flock obsequiously to the power wielders of the day, it follows that an incumbent who seems to be losing power may see his poll-tested “popularity” vanish overnight, as happened, for instance, to Yuri Luzhkov when he was ousted from Moscow’s mayoralty in 2010.

Keen to avoid any appearance of weakness and aware that public support can be artificially inflated by the illusion of power, Putin’s team is naturally attracted to theatrical displays that, although they require relatively little capacity to stage, nevertheless give spectators an outsized sense of what the government can achieve. The absorption of Crimea into the Russian Federation, without a shot being fired, played this role, as did those widely disseminated photos of action hero Putin winging to the rescue in a firefighting plane, flooring judo opponents, revving a Harley Davidson, riding horses or fly-fishing bare-chested, diving into the Azov Sea to discover a sixth-century Greek urn, immobilizing tigers with a tranquilizer rifle, shooting a gray whale with a crossbow, and so forth, all crafted by a PR staff to embellish what an American diplomat called Putin’s “alpha dog” image.

Rigged elections arguably function in the same way. It takes only modest administrative capacity to rig an election; but rigged voting, especially in a country where noncompetitive Soviet-era elections linger in memory, allows a corrupt regime incapable of addressing the country’s problems or disciplining its bureaucracy or making and implementing policies in the public interest to imitate a degree of autocratic authority.

By erecting a neo-Soviet façade, meaningless elections and all, Putin and his team may have been aiming to excite opportunistic public support for rulers who have otherwise shown themselves unwilling to put the country’s wealth to public uses rather than into their own pockets. Elections in which the incumbent chose the opposition candidates (and that means fraudulent elections) have helped Putin hold onto power despite chronic thieving by government officials at all levels and the regime’s obvious failure to address the country’s many developmental challenges. They have done this by allowing a regime that can control itself or mitigate its country’s most acute problems to appear to be more powerful than it is. Fraudulent elections have arguably made it unnecessary for Putin to resort to the degree of physical intimidation historically typical of authoritarian regimes but of which his regime is structurally incapable. “Managed democracy,” on this account, is valued by Putin’s team not because it simulates democracy but because it simulates management, something that his government otherwise has a very hard time displaying.

Whether this system can survive today, after the contested election of 2012, remains uncertain. The engineered presidential elections of 2000, 2004, and 2008 bolstered the legitimacy of the regime because, in each case, the public, although fully aware that no plausible opposition candidates were allowed to run, quietly accepted the results. This changed in 2012. After the shocking anti-Putin demonstrations in Moscow during the winter and spring of 2011–12, provoked by the fraudulent legislative and presidential elections, the Kremlin realized that it could no longer depend on its old legitimacy formula of rigged elections without protest. The leadership's initial reaction was to answer the demonstrators' slogan of "Russian without Putin" by a slogan of their own: "Russia without Protest." They criminalized "unsanctioned" demonstrations, cracking down further on independent media, and smearing domestic critics of the Kremlin as paid agents of Russia's foreign enemies. But Putin also needed to find some alternative, nonelectoral way to legitimate his hold on power. This is no doubt where the Crimean annexation and saber rattling in Ukraine came in. According to a prominent Russian economist, "once economic growth is gone, territorial expansion is an authoritarian regime's tool of choice for bolstering its popularity and holding on to power" (Guriev 2014). But Stanislav Belkovsky is also on the right track when he remarks that "we are a Third World kleptocracy hiding behind imperial symbols. There are no resources for a true imperial revival" (Remnick 2014b, 57).

2.6 SHOCK-ABSORBER PARTIES

If we stick with the dozen years before 2012, another political function of rigged elections comes into view. What we see is the way Kremlin puppet-masters (Pomerantsev 2011) manipulated a fake party system to quiet antiregime sentiments in the population and to discourage elite factions from using electoral competition to snatch away each other's riches. It seems clear that "the Kremlin needs the tightly controlled, beautifully ornamental opposition" (Ioffe 2009b). The question is once more, Why? To answer this question, we need to examine briefly some of the "artificial puppet parties" and "satellite or subordinate parties" (Ryzhkov 2011b) that have populated Putin's political universe.

The Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF) has been called Russia's only real political party (Mendras 2008, 249). Not only is it Russia's second largest political party but it is "readily associated with angry pensioners" (Antonova 2011). Its continued existence, so long as its popular appeal is kept at a reasonable level, arguably helps cabin and neutralize some antiregime sentiment, thereby insulating the regime from social acrimony and unfeasible demands. The same can be said for the crackpot Zhirinovsky's LDPR, the Liberal Democratic Party, which, true to its Orwellian name, was invented by the KGB in the early 1990s to siphon off populist and nationalist voters. Like Russia's anti-immigrant nationalists and racists, the country's economically deprived elderly voters are especially difficult for the ruling clique to

call to order. Barriers to entry into the political game are a clumsy way to parry such potentially destabilizing social challenges. Much more artful is a technique inherited from czarist Russia, creating Potemkin associations that pull discontented citizens in and dissipate their energies under the regime's watchful eye.

"Managed democracy" does not mean either redressing the public's grievances or ignoring them outright but rather responding to the public's aches and pains in a wholly strategic manner, without trying to be needlessly helpful. The regime's central aim is to prevent any weighty voting bloc from coalescing to a point that it might attract defectors from the current elite, who, in turn, might wish to challenge the inner circle of regime incumbents. Political popularity, therefore, has a slightly different meaning for the ruling group than many commentators assume. Rather than popular support helping Putin govern the country, a lack of popular support prevents rival factions from challenging his dominant position. Real power in Russia is about intra-elite bargains and control of cash flows. Support from the electorate is important, too, but only in a negative sense. Political popularity must be systematically denied to potential challengers. This is what explains the curious obsession of Putin's team with public opinion polls (Barry 2011a). They scrutinize public opinion polls the way a doctor checks his patient for a fever, to know what temperature-reducing medicine to prescribe.

According to Daniel Treisman (2011, 349), "it is puzzling that Russia's central authorities have bothered to disqualify reformist candidates whose vote totals were unlikely to make it into the double digits." The solution to Treisman's puzzle lies in the Kremlin's fear that the national consensus around Putin might rapidly evaporate if a presentable alternative leadership were ever allowed to emerge. A 2007 Levada-Center poll reported that 35 percent of respondents said that they "trusted" Putin because they did "not see anybody else to rely on" (Lukin 2009, 80). Some respectable political scientists have marshaled impressive-looking data to illustrate what they see as Putin's ability "to robustly connect with the electorate" (Colton and Hale 2009, 503). But electoral results tell us nothing about Putin's vote-getting power, given that no serious alternatives are ever allowed to appear on the ballot. Indeed, polling in 2011 confirms the thesis that Putin's "popularity" reflects "a lack of other alternatives" (Schwartz 2011, A7). If voters can be convinced that no feasible alternative to the current leadership exists, they will adapt sheepishly to the status quo. This explains why the political technologists in the Kremlin spend so much time eliminating even vaguely plausible alternatives to Putin and replacing them with wholly implausible alternatives. Their exaggerated fear of politically weak challengers reflects the insecurity they feel about their own grip on power. They want to make sure that no counterelite of any kind is ever allowed to form or build an electoral base.

Around three months before the 2003 state Duma elections, the Putin team was sufficiently worried about public alienation to create a fake opposition

party, Rodina, or the “Motherland Party.” It was Kremlin-engineered to serve as a “shock absorber” with a left-wing, hypernationalist, anti-Western, and anti-oligarch profile and was meant to drain votes away from the CPRF. The plan succeeded. Only a few months after it was founded, Rodina won 9.2 percent of the vote and was awarded 37 seats in the 450-seat 2003–7 state Duma. The Communist vote was halved to 13 percent. (It should be recalled, in this context, that the Communists had led the fight to impeach Yeltsin in 1999. Cutting back, without eliminating, Communist representation in the Duma, therefore, was one way to ensure that nothing of the sort could happen again.)

But the Kremlin never allowed spoiler parties such as Rodina to survive too long. If they last for more than one electoral cycle, in fact, they might become rallying points for antiregime sentiment. This can be especially dangerous if the spoiler party wins votes by toying with frustrated nationalism and enflaming racial hatred for Caucasian immigrants (Wilson 2011). Thus, when Rodina’s leadership tried to act independently of the Kremlin, the party was barred from participating in regional elections and, in 2006, was dissolved and absorbed, along with the numerically insignificant but symbolically important “Party of Pensioners,” into Spravedlivaya Rossiya (Just Russia).

Using the examples of Rodina and Spravedlivaya Rossiya, Michael Bohm (2011b, 8) helps explain how repeatedly creating and dissolving shock-absorber parties has helped preserve the power and wealth of the incumbents:

In November 2005, Rodina placed an openly xenophobic political advertisement on television titled “Clean Up Moscow’s Trash” that pejoratively depicted dark-skinned people from the Caucasus. As it turned out, Rodina’s nationalist campaign from 2004 to 2006 was much more popular among Russians than Putin had expected. For the Kremlin, the threat was not so much that this would lead to a new wave of interethnic violence, but that Rodina’s rising popularity would take too many votes away from United Russia – or even overtake United Russia in the majority of federal and regional elections. This is why [Dmitri] Rogozin was forced to step down as party head in 2006 and then “exiled” to Brussels to serve as Russia’s envoy to NATO. Rodina was merged into a more moderate and tamed A Just Russia.

The latter party, Spravedlivaya Rossiya, was another “center-left party engineered by the Kremlin to serve as an opposition magnet” (Ioffe 2009b). It was a “left-leaning” party “established in 2006 with the Kremlin’s blessing as a spoiler to the Communists” (Bratersky 2011b), “very much a project party designed by the regime to occupy the center-left niche” and “established with Putin’s blessing” in order “to win the protest and communist vote” (Sakwa 2011, 221–22), another “privileged Kremlin project to edge the KPRF off the political stage” (Golosov 2011). Campaigning as a socialist alternative to the Communists, the new party won thirty-eight seats in the 2007–11 State Duma, where only three other parties, Yedinaya Rossiya, the Communists, and Zhirinovskiy’s Liberal Democratic Party, were allowed to sit. Putin’s

unshakable commitment to private wealth accumulation has left him with an exposed left flank. In a 2008 survey, 64 percent of respondents claimed that income inequality had risen during the Putin era (Petrov et al. 2010, 27). Thus, the need to vent simmering egalitarian resentment against the nouveaux riches explains why the Kremlin needs the tightly controlled, beautifully ornamental opposition. Shock-absorber parties can prevent discontented citizens from rallying around a genuinely plausible alternative to the ruling group. So, after Rodina was axed, a new sham opposition party was needed to channel and neutralize some of the discontent that rising inequality was bound to create. Devoted to social fairness, progressive taxation, and the proper functioning of the welfare state, and opposed to the barbarism of oligarchic capitalism, but without Rodina's ungovernable appeal to Russian racism, Spravedlivaya Rossiya, too, was designed to protect Putin's exposed left flank by siphoning votes away from the CPRF in a classical divide-and-rule operation. But this second shock-absorber party did not last long either. In 2011, Spravedlivaya Rossiya "fell out of favor . . . when it started draining votes from United Russia" (Bratersky 2011b).

A full analysis of this charade of toss-away-after-using parties, transitory pawns of the regime, would also cover the abortive attempt, in summer 2011, to have the billionaire owner of the New Jersey Nets, Mikhail Prokhorov, assume leadership of the pro-business Pravoe Delo (Right Cause) party. The Kremlin called a premature halt to this venture, almost before it began, when Prokhorov started campaigning with left-wing nationalist slogans. Putin's team had imagined that Pravoe Delo, under Prokhorov's leadership, would "co-opt the well-educated, well-traveled, and well-off liberals increasingly dissatisfied with the system" (Ioffe 2011b). But "Prokhorov's promise to give out free land to people willing to work it" was "a repeat of the Bolshevik slogan 'Land to the Peasants'" (Pankin 2011). He also "broke the rules by using nationalist language" (Barry 2011c, A5). Looking as if he, too, might draw votes away from an increasingly unpopular Yedinaya Rossiya, Prokhorov was temporarily swept from the scene.

Such contretemps aside, the Kremlin's toying with a phony party system opens a window onto its carefully crafted strategies of divide-and-rule and bait-and-switch. Periodic rigged elections provide an arena where the ruling group strategizes and struggles to keep itself afloat. Public disappointment and frustration with the current system cannot simply be crushed by intimidation and force. That would not only be overtaxing; it would also be pointless. Instead, or so the clique in power apparently believes, alienation from the government must be artfully managed by increasing the collective-action problems afflicting opponents of the regime. Fraudulent elections provide the "site" or context in which this dicey management, including the periodic splintering of politically hostile voting blocs, the cyclical building up and tearing down of rival coalitions, and the regular purging of potentially credible competitors before they gain momentum, occurs.

2.7 DEMOCRACY AND ITS PRECONDITIONS

To ask why democracy has proved unworkable under both Yeltsin and Putin is also to ask what democracy involves besides periodic competitive elections. What do the various phases of failed democratization in post-Communist Russia teach us about the indispensable preconditions of democracy? What do we learn from Russia about the conditions that can make democratization particularly difficult or even impossible?

To the question of why democratization has failed in Russia, various answers have been floated, including the alleged fact that not enough time has passed (Trenin 2007), as if time could not eviscerate as well as invigorate a system's democratic potential. But the most widely proffered answer is "culture." Russian culture is allegedly inhospitable to democracy. But cultural explanations of politics are notoriously unsatisfactory because any nominally unified "culture" is, in reality, so heterogeneous and malleable that it can, over a period of years, undergird many mutually exclusive arrangements. To cite the best-known example, one and the same German culture, in just a few decades, supported – or adapted to – a monarchy, a liberal republic, the Nazi regime, and an advanced liberal democracy. To argue that Russia has failed to develop a democratic political, legal, and economic system because it is culturally indisposed to democracy is, in fact, to echo Molière's doctor, who attributed the soporific effects of opium to the drug's dormative power. Pretended insight into the dormative power of Russian culture, its capacity to "put to sleep" all democratic aspirations and movements, should obviously not be the end of inquiry.

Rather than speculating imaginatively about cultural dispositions, we should focus on more structural factors. For example, post-Communist Russia has been heavily burdened by the economic (as distinct from the cultural) legacies of Sovietism. These legacies include an outdated industrial economy that developed and survived in isolation from world markets and that could not be deftly converted but had to be razed to the ground and rebuilt, with little regard for the personal fate of an already trained and aging workforce (Kotkin 2001). But the Soviet legacy that has arguably done the most to frustrate democratic aspirations is a fragmented and corrupt bureaucracy capable of intimidating disfavored individuals, embezzling money, and collecting bribes but spectacularly incapable of reliably enforcing basic rules of the game in the private economy.

The Russian state left behind when the Soviet Communist Party exited the scene has proved, paradoxically, to be too weak and incoherent to be democratized. Przeworski's (1995, 110) claim that "without an effective state, there can be no democracy" supports this line of reasoning. Indeed, the problem of state building is deeper than the problem of democratization because self-rule is impossible if there is no rule. Why should the public try to influence the content of legislation if no one obeys the law? Or why would a social movement bring

its grievances to the attention of public officials if the state is too disorganized and corrupt to furnish appropriate and timely remedies?

Democracy (to paraphrase James Madison) is a system designed first to give the state sufficient power to stifle the wanton resort to force and fraud among private citizens and then to prevent the state from misusing force and fraud for its own corporate advantage. Even if Putin were, at some point, to succeed in the former task, there is no reason to think that he would subsequently be successful in the latter. After more than a dozen years at the summit of power, he has not taken a single step in that direction. Russia's rich and powerful still face negligible incentives to concern themselves with the well-being of the poor and weak.

But is this Putin's fault? Or has he been crippled by external restraints? Formulated from the opposite perspective, under what conditions can ordinary citizens exercise some sort of control over politicians? State incoherence and the supremacy of informal networks over formal institutions are no doubt formidable obstacles to democratization. A state that cannot control itself cannot be controlled by a democratic electorate. But what other factors might make democratization unlikely or impossible?

For citizens to control politicians, periodic competitive elections (Schumpeter 1950), even when conducted honestly, do not suffice. Elections must be supplemented, at the very least, by the continuous testing and challenging of elected governments between elections. And elected governments will only be tested and challenged between elections if certain institutional and social conditions are in place, including an organized opposition party; a legislative assembly where the opposition can force the government to explain its actions; a court system where the public prosecutor (an executive branch official) has to convince independent judges that a criminal suspect is guilty before sending him to prison; multiple sources of information, including nationwide television news that is not controlled by the government; and an active civil society free to engage in public protest without fear of being intimidated or even violently attacked by security forces.

Russia lacks every one of these institutional and social preconditions. Therefore, the Russian case helps students of democracy focus on the indispensability of their contribution to democratic governance and the one-sidedness of Schumpeter's otherwise valid stress on periodic competitive elections. For example, "Russia has no real parliament." If "the lawmakers are very rich," it is only because "their parliamentary duties are far from their primary occupation. Most are businesspeople primarily" (Sonin 2010). The party system is a product of Kremlin manipulation, in no sense representative of political constituencies (Hale 2006). Civic activism has reappeared sporadically, in Kaliningrad, for example, and in Vladivostok (Schwartz 2010; Pan 2010). And Moscow itself has been the scene of a few moderately attended public protests, not to mention gang riots (Barry 2010). Some commentators report that the Kremlin was "badly spooked by the Arab spring," to the point that it was "deeply

fearful that a similar popular uprising could take place at home” (Harding 2011, 277). But a geriatric population strewn across an immense territory is unlikely to engage in 1917-style deadly urban riots and rebellions. That the Russian street can be appeased by paying pensions in a timely fashion is a dispiriting commentary on the democratic potential of Russian “civil society.”

2.8 DETACHED AND DISJOINTED

Democratic theory assumes that states become stronger when they become more responsive to the social needs of the majority. Responsiveness to social needs, at least in theory, strengthens a state by mobilizing dispersed social knowledge and cooperation for the identification and solution, under the state’s management, of pressing collective problems. Democracy is therefore a system for tethering government to society and, without destroying the former’s capacity for coherent action, for making it responsive to society’s needs and aspirations, interests and opinions.

Without being authoritarian in the Soviet manner, the Putin system is undemocratic in this specific sense. It has to grapple continuously with simmering intra-elite conflict. But it floats above society rather than being rooted in society. Russia’s rulers are fundamentally disconnected or untethered from the Russian population at large.

His most ardently loyal defenders, such as Migranyan, repeatedly say that Putin has been working to “strengthen” the Russian state. But the criticisms of Migranyan’s idea of sovereign democracy, advanced explicitly by Ferejohn and implicitly by Maravall in this volume, are basically persuasive, even though they miss the nuance that “sovereign democracy” refers not to an imagined type of democracy but rather to Putin’s attempt to consolidate his power non-democratically, by fueling the Russian public’s resentment of the obnoxiously haughty West allegedly treating Russia like a vassal state. In any case, Ferejohn and Maravall are right to stress, against Migranyan, that state effectiveness does not guarantee a secure pathway to democracy. The state being built must not only be effective; it must also be capable of becoming “accountable” or “responsive” to society in some sense. What if Putin were to accomplish the impossible and successfully reunify and discipline Russia’s fragmented state bureaucracy? Would that necessarily be a step toward responsive or accountable government? Why believe that it would? What does restoration of “the power vertical,” even if it were achieved, have to do with stabilizing the kinds of ongoing consultative relations between state officials and broad social constituencies that characterize democratic regimes?

Finally, how strong can a socially uprooted state actually become? Mikhail Khodorkovsky, in my opinion, has exploded the strong-state conceit as effectively as anyone, using the example he knows best:

I just have to laugh when people say that the Yukos affair has led to a strengthening of the role of the state in the economy. The people who are currently engaged in embezzling

Yukos's assets couldn't care less about the interests of the Russian state. They are unscrupulous, self-serving bureaucrats, nothing more. The whole world knows why I was put in prison; so as not to obstruct their plundering of the company. (Sixsmith 2010, 199)

In other words, Putin has reconfigured, not abolished, the Yeltsin system of unresponsive, unaccountable, and disconnected governance. He has done nothing to improve the capacity of ordinary Russian citizens to make demands that the country's political elite cannot safely ignore. On the contrary, he has done his best to ensure that Russia's rulers cannot have the props kicked out from under them electorally, effectively "defeat-proofing elections" (Robertson 2011, 149), although this process was already well under way during Yeltsin's presidency. We may not agree that Putin's "most important goal" is "the preservation of a system that enables incompetents to control the country's wealth" (Inozemtsev 2011, 78). But we have to admit that "transitology," a child of the Cold War, has not come up with categories adequate to describe the stagnant political arrangement, strained by massive unfairness, that Putin oversees. Gobbling up bits of Ukrainian territory will not compensate for his government's failure to develop the country's economy domestically. If the system eventually collapses, which it may or may not, its downfall will occur not because of democratic mobilization but only because an increasingly insulated Kremlin, overly concentrated on sustaining public support by defying the West, will allow rivalries among insatiably acquisitive insiders to spiral violently out of control.

Russian Perspectives on Democracy, Political Emancipation, and Integrity

Mikhail Ilyin

3.1 INTRODUCTION

An outstanding role of Russia in European and world history as well as a rather peculiar outward show of its supreme power holders have impressed many outside observers since the early eighteenth century. They tend to believe that Russia is prone to producing unique forms of political organization. Many Russians feel flattered and readily accept their exceptionalism.

Does this mentally exaggerated uniqueness of Russia have any actual affirmation? Any country in fact has a peculiar constitution of its body politic and national psyche as well as a history of its own. Many are so irregular from a common perspective that they may rightfully claim uniqueness. Russia may be a proper example of being very uncommon. But even actual inimitability cannot deprive a country of essential properties of its kind. Thus, any polity would have a power structure, albeit a very peculiar one. Any state would have individual members, be they citizens or subjects, or qualify to any other uncommon criteria of membership.

With all its exceptional appearance, Russia is a constituent of the global community of states, in many ways a fairly sound and reliable one. At present, members of this community resort to polar models of relations between people and state authorities. One implies one-way subordination of people to authority, another interaction between them including accountability of authorities. Of course, in any polity, one can find institutions and practices of subordination as well as institutions and practices of interaction and accountability. The question is, Which are dominant and shape political order? The ones where subordination still prevails are less modern and more autocratic. The ones where interaction and accountability already have an advantage are more modern and democratic. In many cases, we can see uneasy processes of subordination being gradually reduced and supplanted by accountability coming to the fore.

The Russian polity had been consistently Europeanizing since the end of the seventeenth century. It has been modernizing since the period of Grand Reforms that had been launched under Alexander the Liberator in 1860s. So by now Russia with all its incongruity has developed institutions, political culture with varieties of subcultures, and behavioral habits that pretend to be modern. Those institutions, cultures, and habits may account for the emergence of democratic properties of Russian polity. Still even quite genuine efforts to build a democracy, particularly in the recent couple of decades, are examined with a great degree of suspicion to say the least. Russians by their very odd nature are considered prone to yielding something unwarranted and aberrant. Their democracy is expected to become defective in any case. Russia is not supposed to apply patterns of democracy promoted by the West. This view of superficial and often hostile outside observers is readily accepted by many internal actors. They boast not to imitate accepted democratic patterns but to create something outlandish and better. Bolshevik ideals of Soviet democracy and current claims for sovereign democracy are the two most evident examples.

Needless to say, both critics and advocates of Russian-style democracy may find good arguments to support their views. Still it is far more fruitful at this juncture to explore Russian ways of supplanting premodern subordination with new and often unfamiliar ventures to assess and check authorities. It is important to highlight the well-entrenched genetic power makeup that is averse to partnership and contract relations. But it is equally vital to acknowledge the deep-rooted inherent inclination of Russians – both collectively and individually – to self-respect and independence. Specific twists of Russian history produced an array of combinations of ideas and practices to put together and to implement those conflicting demands.

The present shape of the Russian polity is the momentary wrapping up of a long story of ambiguous political emancipation coupled with the recurring tragic regression of triumphant moments of freedom into periods of self-inflicted restraint and subjugation. The emergence of the Grand Duchy of Muscovy in the late fifteenth century came as liberation from three centuries of external domination (Tatar Yoke). This grand act of total emancipation immediately transformed into ultimate subordination. The pattern was to be repeated in further history of the country. Thus, by the mid-seventeenth century, after overcoming the Polish and Swedish aggressions and the Times of Trouble, Russia reemerged again as *samoderzhavnaia* (literally “self-keeping,” i.e., both sovereign and autocratic) power. A highly centralized political domination of early Romanovs was consolidated. A most radical form of serfdom was introduced alongside a rigid system of mandatory personal service (virtual serfdom by all save the name) to the czar by all his subjects.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, rapidly westernizing Russia was ready for another move toward freedom. It was spurred by Napoleonic invasion. The Patriotic War of 1812 was a glorious moment of fighting back foreign aggression coupled with liberation and self-integration of Russia. It reemerged

again as a sovereign/autocratic power doomed to maintain the political and moral order of post-Napoleonic Europe, as Alexander the Blessed solemnly declared at the Vienna Congress. Another grand act of total liberation from foreign occupation turned into strengthening the autocrat and his power.

The next instance of liberation – abolition of serfdom in 1861 – seemed rather moderate and led to respectively moderate autocratic backlash. But in actual fact it was a period of genuine modernization. Within a few decades its contradictory effects upon the huge and heterogeneous country inspired a grand liberation revolution of self-integration. This time it was the so-called Great October socialist revolution. Again an overall act of total emancipation switched into outright dictatorship.

The Great Patriotic War of 1941–45 reproduced the pattern of the Patriotic War of 1812 with very similar results. Liberation struggle against fascism yielded superpower domination outside and a new brand of autocratic regime inside the country. The burden of ambitious claims led to a crisis. The way out seemed to be linked with a new emancipation makeover – this time a democratic one. The end of the USSR in December 1991 set the stage for the emergence of new polities all claiming to become democracies. In each case, the grand act of total emancipation turned into specific configurations of political institutions and practices. For the most part, those configurations were and continue to be highly ambiguous, combining both democratic and autocratic traits.

In present-day Russia, this contradiction is well expressed. Temptations to achieve radical breakthrough to “pure” or complete integrity of authority and the people (far older than the Russian democratization story itself) recurrently led to reestablishing autocratic “integration” of Russia top down. The present phase of sovereign democracy could be replaced by further moves toward more consequential accountability of authorities and popular political participation. Still further consolidation of autocratic control from the top could be enhanced as well. It is impossible to understand interweaving those conflicting tendencies and making appropriate political steps if one ignores effects of historical legacies on present-day politics of Russia. This crucial understanding is actually missing in Russian political quarters and citizenry at large. No surprise that it is also null and void outside the country. Yet it is particularly deplorable that mainstream experts on Russia and democratic transformations seem to pay no heed to the tragic story of Russian quest for freedom. To grasp that story, one has to take into consideration how its participants saw and called their efforts and institutions that they brought about. And to start with the word and notion of democracy.

3.2 PRIMEVAL DEMOCRACY

Russians did not talk much about democracy until the nineteenth century. In fact, the first use of the word *демократия* (*demokratiia*) in Russian can be traced

in translation of Samuel Puffendorf's "Introduction into European History" (1718). But this does not mean that there was no idea of democracy in Russia. With all its relatively late use, the word *democracy* was quickly given a very specific Russian implication. Democracy was considered to be deeply inherent to the everyday life of the Russian peasant community – община (*obschina*) – and exceptionally specific to that effect, nothing like its plain Western counterpart. It was a German scholar August von Haxthausen (1792–1866) who traveled Russia on the invitation of its government in 1843–44 and published a book on his expedition (Haxthausen 1847–52). In this book, particularly in the third volume, he highlighted the Russian peasant commune and certain patterns of its self-government resembling direct democracy. The book was permitted for circulation in Russia but was forbidden to be translated. Only in 1857 a progressive Russian magazine, *Sovremennik* (literally "Contemporary" but also may mean "Modern"), published parts of Haxthausen's work on the peasant community. This was a decisive time of profound social crisis and ongoing preparations for liberation of serfs and subsequent modernizing reforms. It was a time when talks on the democratic instincts of Russian peasants and the archetypal centrality of pure and incorrupt (direct) democracy to the Russian peasant community община (*obschina*) beset intellectual circles. Are there serious reasons that may support such claims? In fact, the democratic potential of popular involvement into decision making can be traced to primordial tribal times in any tradition. As for Russia, such democratic ways were fairly well expressed in history and were still alive in local communities in the nineteenth century and even later times.

Survival of direct tribal democracy in a great European power might have seemed exotic to a German legal scholar or to his European-educated Russian readers in the mid-nineteenth century. In the context of multifarious political developments discovered since then in many parts of the world, including European peripheries, it is nothing special. Relics or residues of archaic or even primeval customs are detected all over the world. Russia is no exception. More peculiar are forms and the actual coexistence of its initial democratic patterns with other power setups, including some very undemocratic and overtly authoritarian.

Innate democracy of Eastern Slavic tribes and tribal federations with their *poleis* interacted with the equally rudimentary military democracy of Varangian дружина (*druzhina* – princely retinue, literally "camaraderie") of Rurik invited to set up a common military-trade infrastructure.

Consolidation of the patrimonial power structure of Kievan Rus' was based on legitimizing effects of an intercourse between the prince and the people. There is very limited information on the way it actually worked. Systematic analysis of Old Russian Chronicles proved that in virtually all descriptions of "popular" activity, the chronicler nevertheless focuses on a prince as the central element of the narration. Still *polis* structures with their democratic potential like Old Russian вѣче (*veche* – *ecclesia* and/or *boule* in various cities, literally

“talk, deliberation, council”), весь град (*ves' grad* – general assembly or *polis* as a partner to a prince, literally “all the city”), старцы градские (*startsy gradskie* – “city elders”), сбор (*sbor* – “assembly”) were quite important. Equally significant were conciliar structures дружина (*druzhina* – early princely council, literally “camaraderie”, дума *duma* – late princely council, literally “thought,” etc.).

Polis democracy coexisted with aristocratic and monarchical orders – often in combination with each other. In many parts of the country, princely reign gradually prevailed. In some cities, periods of aristocratic rule of boyars or democratic control of citizenry succeeded for various periods of time.

With the conquest of Rus' by the Golden Horde in 1236–42, princes emerged as the only authority to control political order in Russian dependencies of the Horde in the eastern and southern parts of the former Kievan Rus'. Their rule was granted by Khan's ярлык (*iarlyk* – mandate, Mongolian *jarligh* – literally “order”). Actually the Khan was the only source of power, and the power was delegated only one way: from top down. Still there was only one, but significant, exception. Princes had also to maintain Christian *derzhava* (literally “something holding together”) that united them with the people and domestically was an alternative source of power and princely authority.

Since the early fourteenth century in the Western parts of former Kievan Rus', a regime of military conquest was finally established by Lithuanian princes. It was probably less ruthless than that of the Khan but structurally quite similar. In the North, Khan's supremacy was formally recognized, but in actual fact the two republics of Novgorod (1136–1478) and Pskov (1266–1510) managed to ensure their de facto independence. They were near-perfect Polybian mixed polities with a strong aristocratic component – very much like their European contemporary analogies. Naturally, important democratic practices and traditions survived there – for a period of time. Far more essential was survival of primeval democracy in the peripheries – geographical and social – where it was finally discovered by August von Hexthausen centuries later.

In Old and medieval Rus', ideas of democracy and autocracy were not opposed to each other but in actual fact closely interweaved. In fact, in medieval Russian texts, words like have already been mentioned – *samoderzhavie* (“self-consolidation”), *samovlastie* (“self-rule”), or *samovolie* (“self-will”) – were used to denote both democracy and autocracy. The difference would be contextual. It would depend on who is the self in question – the whole community or the ruling authority, or, more typically, both integrated into a single body politic. It was conceptual substance (consolidation of power) that was important, not the form of the consolidation – monocentric, polycentric, or dispersed.

The Russian word *samoderzhavie* is usually translated as “autocracy.” There is nothing wrong in such rendering because the word actually emerged as a Slavic calque of the respective Greek term *αὐτοκρατία*. But the Slavic equivalent of the Greek word *autocracy* was not exact. While the first components of

both words (auto- and samo-) may be considered fairly equivalent denominations of “self,” the second ones were somewhat different. Both implied power, but of different kinds. The Greek *kratos* denoted coercive and instrumental power mingling the ideas of “military or physical supremacy” (IE **krat-*) and of “hardiness” (IE **kartu-*) (Benveniste 1969). The Slavic *derzhava* connoted integrative power of holding people together originating from IE **dher-* (to hold together). So while autocracy suggested coercive power of an unrestricted self over his subordinates, *samoderzhavie* stood for the power of self-integration involving both the ruler and the ruled. Fairly primitive tribal power structure would not differentiate the power emanating either from the chief or the tribal community.

Initially, *derzhava* implied the commandment (mandates, sanctions, testament) of ancestors (*zavety predkov*). Since Christianization in the ninth century, *derzhava* typically signified the supreme authority of God. But it also continued to denote the common heritage and authority of the Rurik dynasty, the prince being the agent of both patriarchal tradition and new sacral authority.

From this perspective, *samoderzhavie* is not just autocracy as a simple and straightforward domination but the prerogative of a common, consolidated and independent mundane agency to manage the power granted by a Supreme Authority. Conceptually, it is implied that both authorities and people are fully integrated into a single body politic. In fact, this conceptual scheme has been so strong that it produced one of the most widespread Soviet slogans, “People and the party are integral” (*narod i partiia ediny* – literally “people and the party are one, single, united”). In fact, any ruling authority in Russia would be obsessed by the mandate of its unity with the people. Putin’s dominant party is typically called *Edinaia Rossiia* (literally “initially integral Russia”) and not *Obyedinennaia Rossiia* or “United (reintegrated) Russia,” as it is inaccurately translated.

A crucially important meaning of the adjective *samoderzhavnyi* is “sovereign.” Until well into the nineteenth century, it was a standard term for sovereign power in Russian diplomatic documents. And even then, the primordial word *samoderzhavnyi* and the transliterated term *suverennyi* continued to be synonymous until the later prevailed in Soviet times. Conceptual memory of the “autocratic” component of sovereignty persisted to influence recent discourses of Boris Yeltsin’s sovereignty claims as well as Vladislav Surkov’s sovereign democracy.

3.3 AUTHORITY VERSUS PEOPLE

The emergence of the Grand Duchy of Muscovy in the late fifteenth century was a great act of emancipation from three centuries of external domination poignantly called the Tatar yoke. Around that time, Ivan the Great of Muscovy and his brother-in-law Stefan the Great of Moldova introduced a conceptual innovation. Claiming political independence respectively from the Golden

Horde and the Ottoman Empire, they called themselves by the word *gosudar'* and *gospodar'* (two alternative forms of the same word) and the polities they controlled their “households” – *gosudastvo* and *gospodarstvo*, respectively. In current Russian, *gosudastvo* is a standard term for the state (Kharkhordin 2002).

The word *государь* (*gosudar'*) is just a form of the Old Slavic word *Господь* (*Gospod'* – “the Lord”). Its meaning could be traced back to an Indo-European notion of authority over aliens (*gospod'* < **hos(t)potis* = **host* + **pot*, IE **hostis* meaning “alien” and **potis* – “male kinfolk procreator,” while **potnia* is his female counterpart). In other words, the notion referred to an important function of discriminating who is kin and who is alien and deciding which alien could be treated as adopted kin and which could be pushed back as an enemy.

To stress his exceptional status, Ivan III called himself not just *gosudar'* but Великий (*Velikii* – “Great”) or Самодержавный (*Samoderzhavnyi* – “Independent”) *государь*. Typically another Russian polity Novgorod republic was often called Господин Великий Новгород (*Gospodin Velikii Novgorod*), which could be translated the “Great Overlord Novgorod,” or more accurately Great Sovereign Novgorod. In any case, both Muscovite and Novgorod claims to the status of *samoderzhavnyi gosudar'* implied that both the household lord – princely or republican – and his householders were integrated by the same *derzhava*, which made them all free.

The first glorious act of the long story of Russian liberation quickly turned into ultimate subordination within the state (or rather household) of the Grand Dukes of Muscovy. The pattern was to recur again and again in Russian tragic pursuits of freedom.

With all the autocratic control of the lord-householder, in two generations' time, new, important elements of a democratic nature emerged, including a system of representative bodies. They were of three main kinds. The oldest was Дума (*Duma* – literally “thought”) of old Kievan times. It was a match to the Anglo-Saxon Witenagemot or English Curia Regis. Its main bulk was made of boyars – the likes of English manor holders. In addition, a few major figures of the prince's court joined a Duma. In Muscovy, Boyar Duma became an extremely important body – an actual partner to the Grand Duke. It was the time when the famous formula of double decision emerged: “The Duke (later Tsar) has decreed and the boyars resolved that . . .” It was after the dramatic Moscow Riot of June 1547 that a young Tsar John the Terrible, who had been crowned in January of the same year as “Great Gosdar” of All Rus', Tsar and Grand Duke of Vladimir and Moscow etc., established a parallel and informal council to rule the country. But this was only a transitory measure. In 1549, he convoked the so-called Собор Примирения (*Sobor Primirenia* – Assembly of Reconciliation). It was composed of three bodies – Boyar Duma, Освященный Собор (*Osveschennyi Sobor* – Blessed or Holy Assembly), and Земский Собор (*Zemsky Sobor* – Assembly of the Land). A short-lived attempt was made to

create a structure of four estates – Tsar, nobility, clergy, and commoners – with the last three having their assemblies. This attempt failed. Proper estates never developed and were finally shaped from above in imperial Russia. Unfortunately, the scheme would not work. Quite soon, John the Terrible launched successive terror campaigns and even divided the country into Zemschina and Oprichnina to suppress all the pockets of possible disobedience.

Since the mid-sixteenth century, all kinds of assemblies were more or less regularly convoked. Zemski Sobor was an important but subordinate body under John the Terrible. It was essentially used to outbalance Boyar Duma. Sobors of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were instruments of political manipulation of various centers of power – quite often foreign ones. Many of them just rubberstamped adventurous takeovers and conquests. Zemski Sobor of the ‘tsarless’ period of 1610–13 became the actual legislative and even executive authority. In 1613, it had carried out a series of regional sobors and a special joint session to elect Mikhail Romanov as a new tsar and founder of a new dynasty. Under Mikhail, sobors met regularly until 1622 and helped to consolidate the new political regime. After a pause that lasted until 1632, the sobors resumed, but their role changed. They were only to authorize and legitimize major decisions of the consolidating tsarist administration. The last full-fledged sobor met in 1653 to approve incorporation of Ukraine into Russian tsardom. Furthermore, sobors with all the political importance of the acts they ratified were all “reduced” ones and ceased to be convoked after 1684.

The long and dramatic story of changing concepts and institutions of Russian *gosudarstvo*, *tsarstvo*, *derzhava*, *otechestvo*, and so on, arrived at a critical point in the mid-seventeenth century. In Europe, it was a time of termination of the epoch of confessionalism marked by the Peace of Westphalia. European sovereigns were emancipated from a mandatory subordination to transcendental authority and could rely on ratio status. They had to rationalize relations with their subjects by developing networks of bureaucracies and representative bodies. In Russia the time was equally decisive. A previous century saw gradual reduction of boyars, cities, church institutions, and other political agencies in a series of Ivan the Terrible’s repressions in the second half of the sixteenth century, the Times of Trouble in the early seventeenth century, and subsequent reshaping of the tsar’s “household.” By mid-seventeenth century, Russia had reintegrated after a near-collapse at the beginning of the century. It reemerged again as a sovereign, *samoderzhavnaia* power in its second revolution of self-integration. This time it was the so-called Великая Русская Самодержавная Революция (Velikaia Russkaia Samoderzhavnaia Revolutsia – Great Russian Autocratic Revolution) (Pivovarov and Fursov 1997). The pattern of radical emancipation turning into ultimate subordination repeated itself. This time the liberation moment was far more relevant to supreme political authority than the majority of people, so it would be accurate to call it the Great Russian Authoritarian Revolution.

In contrast to Western Europe, which was territorially divided, Russia, or rather northern Eurasia, was territorially integrated. In Europe, sovereign states developed agencies of various levels to circulate the power. In Russia, all former political agencies were reduced to insignificance, and the tsar alone emerged as the sole authority to his *tsarstvo* and his people.

Needless to say, this moment reaffirmed the primeval integrity of the people and the authority. The so-called Russian System as it is schematically presented by Pivivarov and Fursov (1997) is completely power centered. It rests on the sole political agency and the only source of power, the absolute Authority or Власть (the Power) personalized as Tsar'-Gosudar'. It is integrated with utterly impersonal Население (Populace), not the people, because people and their former political bodies – cities, local hereditary holdings or *votchinas*, proto-estates and their representative bodies, corporate bodies of various kinds, and so on – have actually lost their agency capacity. A natural component of the Russian System is an alienated segment that Pivivarov and Fursov pointedly call Excessive People (Лишние Люди). They were marginalized sectors of society including masses of Old Believers. Excessive People were those who would feel fit either to join the Power or create an alternative political agency but could not actually do that. The term itself was borrowed by Pivovarov and Fursov from the language of Pushkin times. It was Alexander Pushkin who described a typical excessive person – his friend and great thinker Petr Chaadaev

Он не рожден для службы царской,
 He hasn't been born for tsar's service.
 Он в Риме был бы Брут,
 He would have been Brutus in Rome
 В Афинах – Периклес,
 Pericles in Athens
 А здесь он – офицер гусарский.
 But here he is just a hussar officer.

Paradoxically, all three components of the Russian System equally share the same twinning of democratic and authoritarian instincts, intentions, and inclinations. They all share a common ideal of ultimate unity of the power and the people.

The abstract model of the Russian System reveals essential and persistent characteristics of power relations in Russia since the Great Russian Authoritarian Revolution. But this optic inhibits grasping many other indispensable aspects of Russian politics and everyday life. In pragmatic terms, a country as big as Russia simply could not run using only one simple principle of integration of the Power and the Populace. Many other patterns of rule, management, and decision making were applied particularly at geographical and social peripheries and specific domains of activity. It is there that undeveloped or even primeval patterns of democratic governance survived. Suffice to mention local

village communities or small townships typically called слобода (*sloboda* – literally “free settlement”), military orders of Cossacks (literally “free Rambler” in Turkic), religious and ethnic self-governing communities, companies of explores (important for the Russian frontier of unexplored land in Siberia, the steppes, and the Far North), merchants, and artisans (so-called артель – *artel'*), and so on.

Many institutions of administration and management had to be established and sophisticated. Only a few of them had to serve the Power directly; many more had to provide pragmatic and to that effect “rational” handling of practical issues. Those institutions as well as democratic patterns of operation at the peripheries of all kinds were influenced and distorted by the overall configuration of the Russian system, but they were to lesser or greater extent resistant to its sway. It took nearly two centuries (and more than a century of Europeanization) to expand the polity to such an extent that for practical reasons a vast network of institutions had to be developed to regulate relations between individuals, groups of individuals, and the imperial superstructure. But even more important was the fact that during that period, two important political notions emerged: Отечество (*Otechestvo* – “Fatherland,” a nation with a long conceptual history from collective heritage within lineage through *votchina*) and a member of the nation typically called Сын Отечества (*Syn Otechestva* – “Sons of the Fatherland”). Those two notions were extremely important alternatives both to the Power and to the Populace. Highly personalized Power was depersonalized, and the impersonal Populace turned into a community of personalized sons of the nation.

The very name Patriotic War – Отечественная война (*Otechestvennaia voina* – the war that Sons of the Fatherland waged to save their Fatherland) highlighted the conscious determination of the Russian people to withstand the Napoleonic aggression of 1812 and to stage one more conversion to liberation and self-integration of their Patria – the common fortune of its sons who were ready to commit themselves individually to their common fight against foreign subjugation. Victorious Alexander I, baptized by his grandmother Catherine II after Alexander of Macedonia, was determined to rest post-Napoleonic order in Europe on highly humane Christian principles and to become a constitutional monarch – the thing he could not afford back home in Saint-Petersburg, where he had to abandon his constitutional projects just on the eve of Patriotic War, then in Poland. Ironically, his well-meaning desires only spurred autocratic disdain to emancipation everywhere – in Europe, in Poland, and in Russia itself. Russian pursuit of liberation degraded into a strengthening of autocratic power.

Still it was not all that simple and one sided. Endogenous political development coupled with efforts to Westernize and integrate into European political order produced significant changes. Probably a decisive one was the emergence of a notion of people that would cover not only the populace but a potential actor safeguarding Russia itself. Typically it was “silent,” for example, in the

symbolic scene of elections of the tsar in Pushkin's "Boris Godunov," but it was able to act spontaneously and decisively during such crucial, "revolutionary" moments as *Otechestvennaia voina*.

An important reflection of the changes and of a new balance of essentials of Russian politics manifested itself with declaration of the guiding ideological formula: Православие (*pravoslavie* – "orthodoxy"), Самодержавие (*samoderzhavie* – "autocracy," but also sovereignty and self-integrity), Народность (*narodnost'* – nationality or people-mindedness, ability to think and act as the integral Russian people). It is true that the formula coined by Russian minister of education Sergei Uvarov in 1833 was a counterpart to the formula of the French Revolution – *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* – and to that effect was "the Russian version of a general European ideology of restoration and reaction" (Riasanovsky 2005, 133). But it is equally true that it redefined power setup within the Russian system. *Pravoslavie* reaffirmed the old principle of sacral *derzhava* with all the power coming from above. *Samoderzhavie* provided pragmatic *derzhava* of the autocrat and his police state administration as well for Russia's sovereignty and integrity. *Narodnost'* indicated that in practical terms, Russian people were the core frame of reference for conceptualizing and enacting politics. It was in fact the third *derzhava* that confirmed the actual prevalence of power within the populace at large. Conceptually, it implied that the Russian people, along with the Supreme Lord and the Autocrat, was another source of power. The modern principle of organizing politics bottom up was implicitly recognized. As we can see now, it was a major precondition to anticipated modernization and still murky democratization.

The tripartite formula was a step forward to rationalize political integrity not only conceptually but also functionally and structurally. It was confronted with the strong determination of Slavophiles Ivan Kireevskiy and Alexei Khomiakov to work out a new holistic idea for Russia that would be essentially based on the integrity of Orthodox *ecclesia* and Russian *obschina*. They introduced the idea of Соборность (*sobornost'* – holistic spirituality integrating worldly communities of Orthodox Russians). This new idea was potentially revolutionary because it could imply that there is no need either for absolutist administration or for the state itself. *Sobornost'* would rely not on mundane practicalities of rule and subordination but rather on traditions of conciliarism having clear connotations with Sobors of the patriarchal Muscovite past and romanticized spiritual integrity of the people and tsar.

3.4 SOVEREIGNTY OF THE PEOPLE

In the discourse of Alexander Herzen and later Nikolay Chernyshevskiy and his associates, *samoderzhavie tzarei* (autocracy of tsars) was opposed to *samoderzhavie naroda* (popular sovereignty). A clearly modern way of thinking was imbedded in the national tradition. Integration was a clear priority but could be achieved only on the basis of *Narod* (the People) becoming a true sovereign or *samoderzhets*, "autocrat." Early Russian democrats were very optimistic about

the prospects of peasant democracy and to that effect socialism in Russia. In 1862 they created a revolutionary organization Земля и Воля (Zemlia i volia – land and liberty, or rather unrestricted self-will, Russian “воля,” English “will,” and Greek “βουλή,” all derived from the IE *uel- “to wish”). The name of the organization clearly demonstrated the objective to surpass moderate results of the emancipation of serfs and to achieve a far more radical redistribution of land alongside with provision of individual liberties of all kinds. This venture was short-lived. It was brutally crushed a year later when a Polish uprising provoked harsh political repression throughout the country.

Soon after, in the late 1860s and 1870s, a broader movement of Народники (Narodniki – usually translated “populists,” but a more exact rendering would be “people-minded, concerned with people cause”) emerged. In spring of 1874, many Narodniki left the cities for the villages in a mission of Хожение в народ (*khozhenie v narod* – literally “going into the people”), attempting to reintegrate with the peasantry, thus bringing about moral and social revolution. They found almost no support.

Land and Liberty received its name in late 1878 with the creation of the printing shop with the same name. Its former names were Severnaya revolyutsionno-narodnicheskaya gruppa (Северная революционно-народническая группа, or the Northern Revolutionary Group of Narodniki) and Obschestvo narodnikov (Общество народников, or the Society of Narodniki).

In practical terms Земство (*zemstvo* – a name for a local representative body, literally “community of a land”) was one of the most significant achievements of the so-called Great Reforms. In 1864 Alexander II created self-governing bodies in a number of provinces and localities. Their number as well as competence gradually increased. *Zemstva* run educational and medical establishments, developed all kinds of infrastructural projects, and so on. What is particularly important is that they practiced elections to representative bodies, for example, representative councils (*zemskaie sobranie*) and accounting executive councils, for example, executive boards (*zemskaia uprava*). This was invaluable democratic experience for Russia.

Glasnost' (Гласность, usually translated “openness,” but deriving from the Russian word for “voice,” thus meaning “voicefulness”) became an important key word of the age. It implied accountability of authority and importance of public opinion in running of reforms (Lincoln 1981). *Perestroika* (Перестройка – literally “Rebuilding”) was another key word of the time.

Even more important was the political evolution of the Grand Duchy of Finland. The pledge of allegiance to Alexander I by the Four Estates (nobility, clergy, burgers, peasantry) at the Diet of Porvoo on March 29, 1809, preceded the formal entrance of the duchy into the Russian Empire in the form of personal union. Tsars at the time of their coronation pledged to uphold the special status of the local laws in Finland. In fact, gradually they turned into constitutional monarchs of Finland without a formal constitution – in contrast to Poland, which was granted a constitution in November 1815, but where it was gradually reduced and finally abolished owing to conflicts, conspiracies,

and rebellions. Finland had been run by a governor-general since 1809 and was, since 1816, jointly with the Senate of Finland (both the cabinet and the supreme court) made of exclusively Finnish subjects. The Finnish Diet convened regularly from 1863. Symbolically, it was also the year of the Polish uprising and of the final liquidation of all the remnants of Polish autonomy. Since 1872, Finnish elections for chambers of burghers and peasants were party based. In 1906, at the peak of the First Russian Revolution, the Diet was replaced by a modern parliament. Finland became one of the first countries in the world to introduce universal suffrage and eligibility, including both women and landless people. It also introduced proportional representation, second after Belgium.

With all the validity of local and autonomous self-government of specific communities, the imperative of *Volonté Générale* of the entire people still prevailed. Despite growing diversity in the political and intellectual landscape of post-Reform Russia, popular feelings and intellectual efforts focused on ideas of political integrity. One of the most significant instances was a notion of *самодержавная республика* (*samoderzhavnaya respublika* – “autocratic republic”) introduced by a founding father of Russian liberalism, Konstantin Kavelin (1818–85). His point of departure was “organic integrity [единство – literally “oneness”] of the authority and the people.” On that basis, he coined a formula – “Since the people [народ – collective singular] no doubt in its very essence is autocratic, so single with it authority, *eo ipso* must be autocratic.” He further developed his prognosis: “Czar is the only and most secure bulwark of peasantry against aristocratic and citizen [мещанских – *meschanskikh*, literally “town dwellers,” meaning “bourgeois”] constitutions. In future as well he is the best security against emergence of any privileged ruling classes. There is no doubt that by all its mass Russia would follow only the autocratic, i.e. free Tsar, who is independent either of boyars or of plutocrats. The history itself makes us create a new, unprecedented and unique political order that no other wording would fit but autocratic republic” (Kavelin 1989, 436).

If one tries to find an alternative translation for Kavelin’s autocratic republic, it would be Surkov’s sovereign democracy.

Ironically, it was the Russian revolutionary movement, not the autocratic power, that grasped Kavelin’s project of uniting popular masses at the bottom and populist authority at the top against the plutocratic bourgeoisie. It was to win in the October Revolution of 1917. But the project was conceptualized somewhat differently. Well before the revolution in 1905, Lenin started to speak about Soviet Power as a new form of political organization or direct democracy of the masses.

3.5 DEMOCRACY OF THE SOVIETS

Both sovereign and autocratic (*samoderzhavnaia*) power reemerged again in its fourth liberation revolution of self-integration. This time it was the so-called Великая Октябрьская Социалистическая Революция (Velikaia Oktiabrskaiia

Sotsialisticheskaia Revolutsia – Great October Socialist Revolution). Again the grand act of total emancipation turned into outright dictatorship. The Soviet Power was highly ambivalent. On one hand, it relied on mass participation and thus had a clear democratic calling coupled with institutional form of direct democracy of Soviets – “Councils of Workers and Peasants Deputies” (Советы рабочих и крестьянских депутатов). On the other hand, the emergent system could only be run by a highly integrated and disciplined new-type vanguard party. Lenin, in his seminal book of 1920, “*Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*” (Детская болезнь “левизны” в коммунизме), clearly fixed a hierarchy of power: leaders–party–(working) class–masses.

Democratic centralism was an answer to the practical running of the country. Initially, it was a set of the principles of internal organization of the nascent Russian social-democratic party advocated by the Bolsheviks and Lenin personally. Although Lenin’s book *What Is to Be Done?* (1902) is considered the founding text of democratic centralism, it was not a Russian innovation. In fact, well back in 1868, social-democrat Jean Baptista von Schweitzer coined the term democratic centralization (*demokratische zentralisation*) to describe the structure of the General Workers Unions of Germany (Allgemeinen Deutschen Arbeitervereins – ADAV) of which he was chair. In 1906, Lenin provided his illustrious formula – “freedom of discussion, unity of action” (Lenin 1965, 380). In its fuller version, democratic centralism implied five key points:

1. election of all party organs from bottom to top and systematic renewal of their composition, if needed
2. responsibility of party structures to both lower and upper structures
3. strict and conscious discipline in the party – the minority must follow the majority decisions until such time as the policy is changed
4. decisions of upper structures are mandatory for the lower structures
5. cooperation of all party organs in a collective manner at all times, and correspondingly, personal responsibility of party members for the assignments given to them and for the assignments they themselves create

With the consolidation of Soviet Russia, those five principles were introduced into internal machinery of the Soviet system of rule with very minor adjustments of a purely technical nature. Democratic centralism was formally fixed in Article 7 of the Soviet Constitution of 1977 as a principle for organizing the state: “The Soviet state is organized and functions on the principle of democratic centralism, namely the electiveness of all bodies of state authority from the lowest to the highest, their accountability to the people, and the obligation of lower bodies to observe the decisions of higher ones. Democratic centralism combines central leadership with local initiative and creative activity and with the responsibility of the each state body and official for the work entrusted to them.”

The democratic principles in the Soviet Constitution of 1936 are said to be one of the most advanced legal charters of the age. It was adopted on

December 5, 1936. Although it is often called the “Stalin Constitution,” it was Nikolai Bukharin who actually did most of the work alongside a number of legal scholars. The constitution repealed restrictions on voting and added direct universal suffrage and the right to work to the rights guaranteed by the previous constitution. The constitution also provided for the direct election of all government bodies and their reorganization into a single, uniform system.

The Soviet period of political development is highly consistent in its conceptual integrity. Nevertheless, there is a great difference between the prewar and postwar shape (and stage) of a single Soviet project both in structural (constitutional) and agency (regime) terms. While the first stage was a reduction of the direct democracy of the Soviets into outright totalitarianism, the second one was the dismantling of totalitarianism and extension toward far more versatile and heterogeneous modes of autocratic rule. One can even claim that the Stalin regime, defeated in 1941, was replaced halfway in the Great Patriotic War by a new one – capitalizing on the determination of the Russian people to fight back against fascist aggression at any cost at Moscow, Stalingrad, and later Kursk. The pattern of the Patriotic War of 1812 was reproduced during the Great Patriotic War of 1941–45. Their verbal appellation – patriotic – reflects an essential similarity. Effects were also comparable. Involvement in common anti-fascist liberation struggle and clear personal commitments of Soviet patriots to fight against foreign subjugation resulted in superpower domination outside and a new brand of autocratic regime inside the country.

The second (postwar and posttotalitarian) Soviet regime clearly differentiated from the first one during the Khrushchevian thaw and the Twentieth Congress of CPSU. Years and decades after Stalin’s death may be seen a gradual de-Stalinization or series of structural and substantive changes that had a very profound effect, despite the claims of radical anti-Soviet critics in the 1980s that “the system is untransformable.” Still the system was developing. During the Khrushchevian period, the concept of the All-Peoples State stressing the democratic nature of the USSR was introduced. The Party was keen to maintain the integrity of people and authority. A common slogan of the period was “People and the Party are single” (Народ и партия едины).

The institutional system of rule or the actual constitution proved to be quite adaptable and “transformable.” In fact, the system had expanded significantly, increasing its load of functional obligations and missions both inside and outside the country. For a huge country like the Soviet Union, its excess of “difficult territories” and its infrastructural handicap were great impediments. The system had to be made more complex and versatile despite its traditional predisposition toward “integrity” and doctrinal claims to introduce a homogeneous order. Typical structural solutions were “pockets of exceptions” to that order. The effect was a gradual slackening both of the institutional system and the regime. This slackening may resemble in some ways liberalization of the regime having a distinctly different character. Its more relevant quality were reactive types of policies and policy making. The reactive nature

of Brezhnevian policies was interpreted as “stagnation.” It was not conducive to systematic and resolute reforms but permitted another type of change – unprompted and intrinsic. What is more important, the reactive nature of late Soviet political behavior gave better chances for individual improvisation and thus to participation. It was in this situation that Perestroika had started.

3.6 PERESTROIKA: MORE DEMOCRACY, MORE SOCIALISM

In March 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev became general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The following month, the Central Committee of the CPSU, at its plenary session, endorsed proposals for reforms that soon developed into a great leap toward political and overall emancipation of the country and its people. It was fashioned upon a revolutionary pattern and had the Great October as its archetype. Gorbachev himself recognized it, speaking in Khabarovsk in summer 1986: “I would have put an equation sign between the words perestroika and revolution” (*Pravda*, August 2, 1986).

The key notions of Perestroika and Glasnost’ entered public discourse at the time of the twenty-seventh Congress of the CPSU in February 1986. The main administrative instrument of these two new concepts was supposed to be a law on working collectives (*zakon o trudovykh kollektivakh*) that made it possible and even mandatory to elect top managers of state enterprises.

Slogans such as “more democracy, more socialism” and “back to Lenin” implied embedding of democratic reform in Soviet tradition. Yegor Ligachev, the party boss from Siberia whom Gorbachev had brought into the Politburo, asserted that “the Party expresses the profound essence of perestroika by the formula ‘more socialism’” (*Pravda*, November 6, 1986).

The terms *democracy* and *democratization*, which had been used by the Party in all periods, became essentially contested concepts. Typical of perestroika jargon was the “democratization” of everything. During the Congress, Gorbachev himself, as well as others, spoke about the “free revelation [*vyjavlenie*] of interests and the will of all classes and social groups” and about the “self-regulation and self-government of society.” Though far-reaching in their implications, such statements gave no details of the institutional designs: a vague notion of “democratization” covered everything. When the legislative framework did appear, it was presented as a return to original Soviet institutions. Although Perestroika marked a radical departure in the country’s political setup, the constitutional arrangements adopted by the Supreme Soviet in November 1988 left a scope for traditional structures. Citizens would directly elect the People’s Deputies, who would constitute the Congress of People’s Deputies, which would in turn elect a bicameral Supreme Soviet. One-third of the deputies would be elected, not by territory, but by “public organizations” such as the Communist Party, the Young Communist League, and the trade unions. After a turbulent campaign in March 1989, the first competitive elections took place with more than thirty top Party officials defeated.

The elections were probably the best ever in terms of competitiveness and fairness due to sincere democratic expectations both of the authorities and citizenry. Growing disillusionment and an autocratic turn both on the top and at the bottom played down competitiveness and fairness. Nevertheless, the value of democratic elections is still very high in Russia. Today, practically everybody is keen to preserve at least minimal and formal standards of competitive elections, though many recognize that recent elections have been dysfunctional and meaningless.

All in all, Perestroika heralded an emancipatory advance both unprecedented and revolutionary in depth and scope. But it was anything but proper revolution. A typical anecdote of the time would say, “We have rebuilt what? Stagnation [*zastoi*].” This rang very true since the previous trend of reactive policies and regime slackening continued as they were. Gorbachev himself saw his most important achievement in letting things go. He was proud that “the process moved on” [*protsess poshel*]. Changes continued to be unprompted and intrinsic.

3.7 CRIPPLED DEMOCRACY

The end of the USSR in December 1991 added to ongoing spontaneous slackening only one, but crucial, element. Institutional changes had to be plainly formulated and constitutionally fixed. Emancipation was to get “a local habitation and a name.” And the name was democracy. All fifteen (and more) new polities claimed to become democracies. But new democracies could not be launched from scratch. Various aspects of autocratic and democratic traditions as well as of their uneasy symbiosis manifested themselves in individual cases. In each country, specific configurations of political institutions and practices were fixed. For the most part, those configurations were and continue to be highly ambiguous and contradictory.

It was very symbolic that the key word for the Yeltsin regime was “sovereignty” – not *samoderzhavie* this time, but still integrity of power was very much the main political issue. Although his opponents would look for constitutional changes imbedded in either Soviet or older Russian traditions, it was Yeltsin who insisted on radical rupture and claimed to launch a Western mode of democracy. Contrary to his claims, the new pattern of rule appeared fairly traditional. The Constitution of 1993 was structurally similar to the Constitution of 1906. Yeltsin’s regime continued reactive policies and a slackening trend.

Feelings that new-born Russian democracy was inefficient and/or insufficient were widespread in all the political quarters of the country, but interpretations were quite different. A great gap between expectations and results could not be denied. Some would attribute the problem to the loss of an independent and consolidated power base of the regime. Others saw the problem in the inability of the regime to stand up to normative ideals and best international practice.

While the first view seemed more practical and consonant with Russian traditions, the second one was clearly impractical, wishful, and foreign. The first one gradually prevailed in the minds of both the authorities and the populace in general. The second one resided in quarters of dogmatic “democrats” and zealous critics of the Yeltsin and then the Putin regimes.

With all the achievements of the late 1980s and early 1990s, both their proponents and opponents identified significant flaws of the “crippled democracy” – the formula used by ardent democratizer Yegor Gaidar. It was only natural because both resorted to normative interpretations. And when real apples could not match imaginary oranges, they simply concluded that the apples were bad.

Another and probably more substantial reason for the helplessness of democratic performance in the 1990s was a quick autocratic turn. However, the democratically motivated Gorbachev regime functioned within the postwar system. The twenty months that elapsed after the fall of the USSR were kind of a diarchy of “reformer-president” and “populist” Supreme Soviet. Both acted within very dimly defined democratic institutional frameworks. There was no actual commitment to proclaimed rules of democratic behavior. They were not related in any way to ongoing practices of decision making and “solving issues.” Although some people in the Supreme Soviet may have sincerely believed that their legislation was practically instrumental, it was Yeltsin who rushed to provide a minimal governability in the country. His victory was outright autocratic revenge, with the postwar system of rule restored albeit in a new legislative-constitutional attire and ideological verbiage of pseudo-democratic discourse. The slackening trend with its reactive policies and policy making was reinvigorated. The weakness of the regime was readily reinterpreted as its “liberalism.” Its inability to effectively consolidate the personal grasp of Yeltsin was considered to be a sign of democracy.

The crisis of 1998, with its financial default and crumbling rubble, clearly demonstrated that the slackening trend had reached its ultimate bottom. Reactive policies were combined with some urgent initiatives by the cabinet of Evgeny Primakov in 1998–99. It became evident that a new stage in political development of Russia was to open up. The next presidential term, or probably the next two, were not only to combine reactive and proactive policies but to serve as a time for pooling alternatives for Russia’s strategic development in decades to come. Potentially this challenge could help to introduce meaningful elements for democratic competition. But it was up to the next president how to respond to that challenge and to use those opportunities.

3.8 SOVEREIGN DEMOCRACY

The autocrat appointed his successor. Vladimir Putin easily won elections, but the tasks he confronted were not easy ones. Strategically regime swap could instruct to search and select alternative policies of further political reforms.

This debate could have facilitated democratization of inside working of the new regime and eventually of the political order itself. But this perspective was feasible only on favorable conditions – stability inside and no challenges outside the country. This was definitely not the case. More immediate tasks of strengthening governability were at hand particularly with the new Chechen war. Pragmatically consolidation of personal control by the president was still to be instrumented. And this personal control predictably slanted towards traditional authoritarian dealings. Would be democratic competition of policy options was to give way to a more practical consolidation of the vertical (hierarchy) of power – synonym for presidential control.

One of Putin's very first steps was to stop direct participation of regional governors in the Council of Federation. This initiative was aimed at preventing consolidation of a boyar-type alternative seat of power in the country and fully corresponded to the autocratic turn. But simultaneous creation of the State Council composed of key governors could also serve to promote democratic deliberation on strategic alternatives for development of the country.

Ambiguity did not last long. Already by 2003, the presidential administration was working to limit and narrow the agenda for democratic deliberation. In autumn of the same year, one of the most effective sponsors of that deliberation, Mikhail Khodarkovski, was arrested. In the aftermath of the Beslan school hostage crisis in September 2004, Putin proclaimed a policy of "strengthening the hierarchy of power." The outright autocratic turn made restoration of the Soviet ancien regime imminent. This was not a plain reproduction. But the reemerged system resembled the postwar Soviet one in many crucial aspects, primarily in its ideological construction of the political agenda. Information channels were dominated by official discourse, while all alternative discourses were marginalized. A crucial term to discriminate official from unofficial was "sovereign democracy" (суверенная демократия, *suveryennaya demokratiya*).

This formula was first introduced by Vladislav Surkov, the deputy head of presidential administration, in his speech to the trainees of United Russia's Center for Party Personnel Training on February 7, 2006. Soon the text was published as an article, "The Nationalization of the Future," in *Expert* magazine. It explained the notion as a proper synonym for "political competitiveness."

Initially, both Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev refrained from public support of the concept. They voiced their reservations on wording but agreed that the idea was worth elaboration. Gradually sovereign democracy developed into a conceptual domain of the would-be "Idea of Russia." When critics tried to interpret the notion as a cover for exceptional democracy void of any outside criticism, they actually marginalized themselves. While this may be a secondary interpretation, the champions of sovereign democracy insisted that sovereign democracy highlighted the great power status of Russia. Another possible but unfortunately not widespread interpretation was that of a sovereign (constitutional) state working to develop democracy.

Anyway, it cannot be denied that with the notion of sovereign democracy, traditional priorities of political integrity have gained momentum. Finally, consolidation of political order within the autocratic turn led to reconceptualization of the constitutional framework of the Russian Federation as a sovereign democracy.

3.9 SOME TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS

The curtailed outline of Russia's leanings toward political emancipation shows that it is wrong to treat all its traditions as outright authoritarian and democracy as something that could be imposed from scratch. Furthermore, the very term "authoritarian" seems far less appropriate than "autocratic." It may be far more adequate in treating the experiences of some regions and countries. In Russia's case, "autocratic" implies self-integration in addition to a more common understanding of centralized control from the top.

Russia's democratization story began as far back as the mid-nineteenth century. Its heritage is rich, albeit often tragic. Temptations to achieve radical breakthroughs to "pure" or complete integrity of authority and the people (far older than the democratization story itself) recurrently led to reestablishing the autocratic "integration" of Russia top down. The recurring tragedy of turning the emancipatory urge into an autocratic supremacy may be explained by institutional weaknesses and structural handicaps at the expense of agency overgrowth. The state – *gosudarstvo* – in Russia was often, if not always, personalized and treated as a "household" of an autocrat. Understanding of the state as an institutional structure was never central even in recent decades. So it is only natural that the Russian state is structurally weak and dependent upon agency – particularly of an autocrat. That makes Russia's search for democracy difficult, because "without an effective state, there can be no democracy" (Przeworski 1995, 110).

Attempts to strengthen the Russian state by consolidating the hierarchy of power relied too heavily on Putin's agency and personal sway. Although institutional and procedural aspects of accountability of authorities and of transparency remain grossly underdeveloped, sovereign democracy gives room for the further promotion and anchoring of democratic practices. The present phase of sovereign democracy could be replaced by further moves toward more consequential accountability of authorities and popular political participation, as long as essential elements of the Russian democratic tradition are adequately used and pitfalls of radicalism are avoided by the gradual growth of moderation and a readiness to accept halfway compromise solutions.

Color Revolutions and Russia

Valery Solovei

4.1 INTRODUCTION

“Color revolution” is an ambiguous term in Russian as well as English. Its meaning is difficult to pin down, and so is the nature of the upheavals that, between 2003 and 2010, convulsed Georgia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, and Kyrgyzstan. Were these color revolutions a second wave of the “velvet revolutions” that accompanied the fall of Communism in 1989? Or did they represent something new, a distinct type of revolution specific to post-Soviet space (or post-Communist space, if we include Serbia in 2000)? Or were the color revolutions, as the Russian propaganda machine alleges, inspired from abroad and directed against legitimate authorities in sovereign states and, indirectly, against Russia itself?

The real or imaginary involvement of the West in the color revolutions is the main reason why Russian officials adamantly deny the revolutionary character of these events and classify them, instead, as mere coups. In Kyrgyzstan, no Western involvement could be proved in either the Tulip Revolution that overthrew President Askar Akayev in March 2005 or in the events of April–June 2010 that resulted in the ouster of President Kurmanbek Bakiyev. Nor did anti-Russian motives play a significant role. Nevertheless, in the first case, Russian propaganda easily found a way to concoct a story line involving both outside interference and an anti-Moscow plot. A local “mafia,” allegedly associated with foreign forces, became a substitute for “the West,” and the pro-Russian character of the new regime was declared to be a “victory for healthy forces” over the “conspirators.” In April 2010, by contrast, the Russian mass media dropped all mention of foreign influence from its interpretation of the Kyrgyz events, focusing exclusively on the domestic factors that unleashed the mayhem.

From a scholarly perspective, in any case, the question of the nature of the color revolutions remains wide open.

4.2 WERE THERE ANY REVOLUTIONS?

Those who lose by a revolution are rarely inclined to call it by its real name.

– Leon Trotsky

Ironically, official Russian criticism of the so-called color revolutions is explicitly or implicitly based on the traditional Marxist definition of social revolution. This definition emphasizes the transfer of hegemony from one class to another and therefore the social gravity of the transformation. In effect, Russian commentators on the color revolutions avoid using modern social-scientific definitions of revolution. The reason is clear. Modern social science's definitions of revolution are broad and encompassing enough to include all types of revolutions, not only the most prominent ones. The semantic core of these definitions is more or less the same, having scarcely evolved over the past fifty years. Let us recall some of these definitions. Revolution is defined, for example, as a “change, effected by the use of violence, in government, and/or regime, and/or society” (Stone 1966, 159). Alternatively, “revolution in its most common sense is an attempt to make a radical change in the system of government. This often involves the infringement of prevailing constitutional arrangements and the use of force” (Laqueur 1968, 501). And here is the most up-to-date definition: revolution is “An effort to transform political institutions and the justifications for political authority in society. This effort is accompanied by formal or informal mass mobilization and noninstitutionalized actions that undermine authorities” (Goldstone 2001, 142).

The color revolutions, from Georgia's to Kyrgyzstan's, exhibit all of the elements cataloged in such definitions. In each case, mass mobilization was accompanied by sporadic violence or at least by threats of violence. Fortunately, full-scale violence entailing the death of many people happened only once – in Kyrgyzstan in April and June 2010. But, in each country, efforts were made to refashion political institutions and to reestablish political authority on a new footing. Sometimes these efforts were successful, sometimes not. In all of the countries where they occurred, the color revolutions were ideologically motivated either by an articulated democratic myth (Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova) or by a vague but fervent longing for justice and freedom (Kyrgyzstan). Though the color revolutions were not profound social revolutions, therefore, they can definitely be classified as political revolutions.

Theoretically, the dynamics of the color revolutions are especially interesting. They began as revolutions in the etymological sense: revolution as a return to the origins or the status quo ante; they were triggered, that is to say, when political incumbents violated written constitutional rules. In some sense, therefore, we can say that the color revolutions represented attempts to restore a lost legitimacy. But their specificity lies in the fact that the rules, whose violation sparked the protests, had never been respected in reality. They existed on paper but were routinely flouted in practice. As a consequence, to the extent that these

revolutions succeeded in “restoring” legitimacy, they were genuine revolutions in the modern sense; that is, they seriously transformed power relations in the affected societies.¹

Foreign involvement, even if real as opposed to imaginary, does not disqualify a political upheaval being considered a revolution. Indeed, the theory of revolution typically considers foreign intervention to be one of the principal causes of revolution (Laqueur 1968; Goldstone 2001). At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the forms and methods of foreign intervention have become more sophisticated and varied than in earlier times. Old-fashioned methods, such as the export of revolution or brutal pressure, have been replaced with soft power influence through culture, values, lifestyles, and institutional networks. In the case of the color revolutions, significantly, revolutionary activity was largely a by-product of Western influence, without necessarily been orchestrated by the West.

Both the European Union and the United States have established a network of foundations and grant-giving programs in Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova. Reliable estimates of the scale and influence of these efforts are not available, however. In any case, the effectiveness of these foundations and their programs obviously hinges on the receptiveness of the local populations, that is, on the already-accomplished sociocultural transformation of the prerevolutionary societies. The seeds of Western influence can grow only in soil that had been prepared.

Most of the labor migration from Ukraine and Moldova (and also from Belarus) has gone to Europe, not to Russia. Labor remittances from Europe are an important source of revenue for these countries. To their citizens, more importantly, Europe is much more attractive than Russia. In fact, Russia has increasingly become a negative, not a positive, model for other post-Communist societies. All of the young people in Georgia and Moldova, and a considerable number in Ukraine, take their bearings from Western values and culture. The new generation is almost completely oblivious to Soviet history and Soviet cultural heritage. This pro-Western orientation also prevails among Belarusian youth, foreshadowing Belarus’s probable future.

Responding to a journalist’s question about causes of the decline of Communism, the last Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, answered with atypical succinctness: “Culture.” The ground for the velvet revolutions of the 1980s–90s was prepared by the sociocultural transformation of Communist societies. Changes that were similar in size and vector provided the basis for the color revolutions too.

Russia was unable to prevent the color revolutions in a hostile Georgia, in the mainly loyal Ukraine and Moldova, and in the entirely dependent Kyrgyzstan. In 2004, Russia had much greater influence in Ukraine than any of the other foreign players. During the presidential elections, the Kremlin openly intervened in Ukraine’s internal affairs, actively supporting Viktor Yanukovich, one of

the presidential candidates. Vladimir Putin, Russian president at the time, was personally involved in Yanukovich's campaign.

It is implausible to finger the West as the main culprit behind Russia's failure to achieve the result it sought in this election. The inability of the Russian elite to understand post-Soviet dynamics, a mishandling of its potential influence, and the lack of appeal of Russia's developmental model provide an explanation for the failure of Russian policy in the post-Soviet region that is more convincing than some "geopolitical conspiracy" against Russia.

In any case, the role played by external forces in the color revolutions does not disqualify them from being called revolutions. On the contrary, it vividly confirms the revolutionary nature of the events.

4.3 CAUSES OF THE REVOLUTIONS

Successful revolutions resemble Leo Tolstoy's happy families. For a revolution to erupt and succeed, a well-known combination of structural factors is required (Brinton 1952; Stone 1966; Laqueur 1968; Goldstone 2001, 2003). We can identify more or less the same set of factors playing the same roles in all of the color revolutions.

The first common factor was a crisis of state power wherein the state was perceived by the elites and the masses as both ineffective and unfair. In the color revolutions, the charge that state authorities had conducted fraudulent national elections served to crystallize a widely shared belief in the injustice of the state, thereby triggering the revolutions. The extent of the fraud and the absence of dispositive evidence that it had occurred were unimportant. Post-Communist societies perceive their authorities as unjust and prone to electoral fraud a priori.² A deep moral distrust of state power fueled its political delegitimation. In the cultural context of a revolutionary crisis, political instability, material deprivation, and threats to personal security were attributed to the chronic injustice and moral defects of the state, in sharp contrast to the goodness and just intentions of the opposition. When the authorities refused to repress the opposition, their reluctance to use force did not elevate the moral authority of the state but was perceived instead as a sign of its weakness and ineptitude. Repression, however, was not an astute way to overcome the crisis. When used, it confirmed the impression of the state's unfairness and intensified mass protests, especially when repressive violence was employed against innocent bystanders, as happened, for example, in Kyrgyzstan in April 2010. The authorities were trapped. Repression proved that the state was unjust; but the refusal to repress, in a revolutionary crisis, demonstrated the state's weakness.

This trap was sprung because part of the elite refused to support the regime and preferred to seek alternative ways to resolve the revolutionary crisis. Supported by cohesive elites, states are generally invulnerable to revolution from

below (Laqueur 1968; Goldstone 2001). Splits within the elite constitute the second structural element observable in all successful revolutions.

Ordinary intra-elite conflict does not suffice. A revolution presupposes the formation of elite factions with divergent ideologies and different notions about the kind of social order that is desirable. A split of the elite, roughly speaking, into conservative and (proto-)democratic factions took place in all of the color revolutions from Georgia to Moldova. In Georgia, the weak regime grouping around Shevardnadze was opposed by the elite faction led by Saakashvili, Burjanadze, and Zhvania. In Ukraine, Yanukovich was opposed by Yushchenko and Tymoshenko. In Kyrgyzstan, Akayev was opposed by Bakiyev, Kulov, and Otunbaeva, and, subsequently, President Bakiyev was opposed by Otunbaeva. In Moldova, President Voronin was opposed by Gimpu and Filat. In every case, opponents of the regime offered what they called a democratic alternative to the status quo.

The third structural factor explaining the outbreak of revolutions is an economic crisis or crisis of national welfare. This factor did not play such a self-evident role in the color revolutions as the first two. In this regard, debates about the color revolutions resemble polemics between Vladimir Lenin and Alexis de Tocqueville. Lenin considered a socioeconomic crisis, the impoverishment of the lower classes (“the aggravation of the laboring classes beyond their normal needs and misery”), to be an important cause of revolution. Invoking the example of the French Revolution, by contrast, Tocqueville argued that revolutions are caused, paradoxically, not by a worsening but by an improvement of the socioeconomic situation. Economic development is politically destabilizing when the needs of the population grow faster than the resources required to satisfy them. In other words, political and social revolution begins with an eruption of rising expectations.

The experience of the color revolutions corroborates both hypotheses simultaneously, without favoring one or the other. In Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, the socioeconomic situation was horrific on the eve of the revolution. In Moldova, it had worsened because of the global crisis, but not dramatically. Conversely, Ukraine enjoyed an unprecedented period of economic growth of 12 to 14 percent per year for two to three years before the Orange revolution. This increased prosperity created a substantial Ukrainian middle class and emboldened its political ambitions, inducing Ukrainian society to press its demands on the Ukrainian state.

A sharp deterioration in the standard of living, we can infer, does not necessarily precede a revolutionary outbreak. This factor, emphasized by Lenin, is important, but only in combination with other structural factors that increase its impact. Even the most dramatic fall in living standards does not lead to revolution unless it is combined with other factors. The economic situation in Ukraine was much worse prior to the presidential elections of 2010 than they had been in 2004.

On its own, intra-elite conflict leads to coups, not to revolutions. Similarly, mass mobilization by itself leads to popular uprisings or even civil wars, but not to revolutions. A combined attack on state authority by the elites and the masses is critically required for a revolution. A successful revolution is hardly possible in the absence of this fourth structural factor.

An alliance between a portion of the elite and society at large played a key role in all of the color revolutions. In general, mass mobilization occurred peacefully, although it was accompanied by threats of violence and even some of its manifestations. Only the latest revolution, in Kyrgyzstan, was attended by widespread violence.

No revolution can occur in the absence of an opposition ideology. This is the fifth structural factor. An opposition ideology is required to unite a faction of the elite and the masses in their struggle against the government. It justifies this shared struggle and offers an alternative vision of social order. A utopia (in Karl Mannheim's sense) of justice and liberation formed the mythological core of the color-revolutionary ideologies. In Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova, this mythical core was rationalized and articulated in the form of a democratic ideology. In Kyrgyzstan, it took the shape of a vague but intense desire for justice.

The sixth and last – but not the least important – structural factor explaining revolution is external influence. In the color revolutions, as already explained, this influence took the form not so much of direct political involvement as of sociocultural influence, the perception of Western democracy as a guiding norm and image of the future. In this way, the West played an important role in the ideological utopia of the color revolutions (except in Kyrgyzstan).

External factors therefore fueled oppositional ideology and magnified the influence of factors such as deteriorating standards of living when they were present. In Ukraine, external influence was strong enough to compensate for the absence of an economic downturn. As mentioned earlier, it is impossible to detect any serious Western influence in Kyrgyzstan. The country was and remains Russia's financial client. Russia has a decisive sociocultural impact on Kyrgyz society and serves as the main outlet for Kyrgyz labor migration. Conversely, if external factors include revolutionary examples and the influence of revolutionary events per se, then we can detect external influence in Kyrgyzstan as well. There is no doubt that Georgia's Rose revolution served as a source of inspiration, a model and a reservoir of political experience for all of the color revolutions, including the first Kyrgyz or Tulip revolution. Roza Otunbayeva, one of the leaders of both the first and second Kyrgyz revolutions, was well acquainted with Georgian revolutionary experience.

Thus, in two countries, Georgia and Moldova, we find all six of the structural preconditions of revolution. In Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, we find five. In Ukraine, the national economy was not undergoing a significant crisis. In Kyrgyzstan, there was little external influence. At the same time, Kyrgyzstan

exhibited demographic overheating, a structural factor absent in the other color revolutions.

Demography has played an important role in large-scale historical upheavals. It served as a kind of “Malthusian” foundation for the revolutionary crises and wars in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A clear correlation between population growth and the scale of social violence cannot be denied. But demography played no significant role in either the velvet or color revolutions. The only exception is Kyrgyzstan, where the demographic overheating played an important structural role in the crisis. In a way, Kyrgyzstan’s “youth bulge” compensated for the missing external influence. At the same time, demographic overheating contributed to the atypical level of revolutionary violence.

Often associated with the color revolutions, the active participation of young people is actually common to all revolutions. An interesting comparative analysis of the color revolutions could be made using such parameters as protest identities and type of mobilization, the nature of leadership, gender, and so forth, but these issues are secondary to my main line of argument.

4.4 REVOLUTIONARY RESULTS

My claim is that the color revolutions were by nature democratic, or at least (as in Kyrgyzstan) proto-democratic. This thesis is supported by such evidence as the opposition’s democratic ideology, its choice of the West as a model of development, and the generally peaceful character of the revolutionary movements. The only exception, once again, was Kyrgyzstan.

But can the political regimes that were established in the wake of the color revolutions be called democratic? Revolutions are not linked deterministically to their aftermath, and that includes the resulting political regime. Similarly, the consequences of revolutions cannot be deduced from their structural preconditions. Democracy or dictatorship, peace or war, the depth of political and socioeconomic changes are the result of a complex and unpredictable constellation of structural factors. In general, the results of revolution are more random than predefined (Laqueur 1968; Goldstone 2001, 2003). The post-Soviet color revolutions abundantly corroborate this theoretical perspective.

They also confirm the observations that revolutionary efforts devoted to restructuring political institutions stifle economic growth and that pre- and postrevolutionary elite cleavage has a deleterious effect on economic progress. In most cases, the long-term economic development of revolutionary regimes lags behind the development of comparable countries that did not experience revolutions. Perhaps the development of democratic institutions will ultimately have a catalytic effect on the economic performance of countries emerging from the color revolutions. At present, however, the economic failures of the color revolutions are more evident than their achievements. And the development of political democracy does not necessarily compensate for these failures.

Only when discussing Ukraine, despite authoritarian tendencies of President Victor Yanukovich and, to a lesser degree, Moldova, we can speak more or less confidently about favorable prospects for democracy, while the democratic futures of Georgia and Kyrgyzstan look uncertain and troubling. Ukrainian democracy is showing promise if only because the country has changed governments in three out of four presidential elections. This has not led to democratic consolidation and stabilization. But Ukraine has witnessed an important and successful experiment in relatively free and fair elections, power sharing, and peaceful conflict resolution.

One of the key factors in the survival of Ukrainian democracy was a bitter conflict within the Ukrainian elite. An equality of forces between elite factions cast them into a shared dilemma: mutual destruction or compromise. A mechanism for compromise was, in turn, provided by democratic institutions and procedures. The Ukrainian situation confirms once again the perennial observation that democracy grows not from the merits of the people but from their shortcomings. Democracy serves not to build a paradise on earth but to prevent a hell on earth.

While elite conflict, on matters of policy, has promoted the development of democracy as a mechanism for intra-elite compromise, in the economy, it has caused disruption and managerial paralysis. The phenomenal Ukrainian economic boom ended almost immediately after the Orange revolution, and primarily because of internal, not external, factors. To reach even a limited degree of political democracy, Ukraine has had to suffer massive economic and social losses. Since the beginning of 2010, however, the Ukrainian economy has demonstrated a high rate of recovery – nearly as high as the rate of decline in 2008–9.

Moldova's economic problems cannot be attributed to a revolution that took place in the context of a global economic crisis. Moldova is very poor country by European standards. A significant portion of the population works in Europe and Russia. At the same time, democratic procedures and the rules of the game are respected in Moldova, and the country's regime is mainly pluralistic and reasonably liberal. Neighboring and ethnically similar Romania serves as a model and stimulus for Westernization in Moldova. The country's economic prospects, even in case of integration with Romania, do not look favorable, however.

In Georgia, the democratic potential of the revolution was emasculated. The regime of Mikhail Saakashvili displays all the signs of authoritarianism, nor can it be called successful from an economic point of view. Any country that chooses a military path to restoring its territorial integrity by definition diminishes its potential for normal economic development and will tend toward authoritarian government. Despite its defeat in the five-day war in August 2008, the Georgian government was able to resist the attacks of its domestic opposition, demonstrating its political strength. While the Saakashvili regime could not be called democratic and fair, it can at least be considered efficient.

The Georgian revolution therefore resulted in the establishment of a regime that is stronger than its predecessor, but less democratic, although the victory of the oppositional “Georgian Dream” coalition of billionaire businessman Bidzina Ivanishvili in the parliamentary elections of October 2012 significantly revived the chances of Georgia’s democratic transformation.

Unlike Georgia, postrevolutionary Kyrgyzstan did not produce any positive outcome: neither political democracy, nor economic growth, nor efficient power. Bakiyev’s regime turned out to be even more corrupt, inefficient, and unpopular than that of the deposed Akayev. Even massive migration of Kyrgyz workers to Russia was unable to save the country from demographic overheating. A deep internal crisis resulted in a new revolution in April 2010, which came as a complete surprise to observers.

Of the four countries that have experienced color revolutions, only two – Ukraine and Moldova – have achieved relative success in the consolidation of democracy. The regimes formed in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan are undemocratic, although they observe democratic procedures and rituals. In Georgia, however, the new government is more efficient than its predecessor, at least when it comes to suppressing domestic opposition. In Kyrgyzstan, the new government could not even achieve this much, a failure that eventually sparked another revolution. The new Kyrgyz authorities’ main problem now seems to be not the creation of genuine democracy but rather the preservation of Kyrgyzstan’s territorial integrity.

If the political results of color revolutions were ambivalent, their economic consequences were mostly negative. In Ukraine, postrevolutionary intra-elite conflict has led to the interruption of previously impressive growth and an economic crisis that has been worsened by the global crisis. Drastic economic deterioration occurred in Kyrgyzstan, despite Russian support, Chinese investment, and considerable (relative to the Kyrgyz budget) revenues from America’s lease of the “Manas” airbase. In Georgia and Moldova, the postrevolutionary regimes have failed to produce economic growth. Such growth was probably never a realistic possibility in either country.

The negative economic consequences of revolution are the rule rather than the exception. Nor does the democratic character of a revolution guarantee the consolidation of democracy. In Russian political debates, the negative results of the color revolutions have been cited as an important argument in a counter-revolutionary propaganda campaign meant to discredit both these revolutions and the idea of revolution itself.

4.5 FOLLOWING NICHOLAS I

The Russian reaction to the color revolutions was extreme. The Kremlin’s sharpest reaction was provoked by Ukraine’s Orange revolution. The reason is obvious. Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Moldova are small countries that do not interest Russia either from an economic or geopolitical point of view. As for Georgia, it is even perceived as a hostile state.

Russians have always considered Ukraine, by contrast, as a key post-Soviet country because of its size, geopolitical position, historical and cultural proximity, and economic potential. The Russian political elite, however, has consistently regarded its western neighbor in a haughty manner, erroneously viewing the 2004 Ukrainian elections as a foregone conclusion. The massive public protest, which radically changed the political situation, came as a complete surprise to Russian and European observers.

Appalled by its loss of political influence in Ukraine, the Kremlin also discerned within the Orange revolution potential dangers for Russia itself. Moreover, a wave of retirees' protests against so-called monetization (the transformation of in-kind subsidies for pensioners into depreciable cash payments) swept through Russia immediately after the Ukrainian revolution, although not because of it. These geriatric demonstrators broke the stereotype of Russians as passive and incapable of social protest.

The post-Soviet color revolutions have had a pervasive impact on Russian politics. I will mention only some of their most important consequences. First, government spending on pensioners and the poor were significantly increased to dampen social protest. Second, an ideological doctrine was developed to justify the status quo. This was Vladislav Surkov's concept of "sovereign democracy." Third, attitudes toward political opposition, protest, and unauthorized social activities became significantly more restrictive and illiberal. Fourth, anti-Western propaganda campaigns have been carried out from time to time to mobilize Russian society and convince the public that the West is conducting "subversive" actions against Russia. Fifth, pro-government youth groups have been created to disrupt unauthorized mass political demonstrations.

In general, the Kremlin's political and ideological activities between 2005 and 2008 were openly and consistently counterrevolutionary. Typologically, they replicated the counterrevolutionary strategy of the Russian emperor Nicholas I, during whose reign Russia was nicknamed the "gendarme of Europe." Needless to say, the forms and methods of the new Russian counter-revolution differ from those used in the second third of the nineteenth century. In 2005, Russia did not dispatch troops to the rebellious Ukraine, as it had sent them to a rebellious Poland in 1830 or to revolutionary Hungary in 1848–49. But in January 2006 and 2007, Russia did shut down gas supplies to Ukraine. Different times, different tunes – but the ideological music remains the same.

Conceptually, the ideological justifications for counterrevolution under Nicholas I and under Vladimir Putin were identical. The government of Nicholas I consistently defended the principle of legitimacy, opposed the export of revolutionary ideas (behind which it spied a vast international conspiracy), and opposed democracy on principle.

"Democracy cannot be exported from one country to another. Just as you cannot export revolution, just as you cannot export ideology," remarked President Putin in 2005. Nikolai Patrushev, then the Federal Security Service director, was even more outspoken in his statements, directly accusing foreign intelligence services of destabilizing Russia's neighbors.

During the reign of Nicholas I, Count Uvarov formulated the doctrine of Russian autocracy – the so-called theory of official nationality. It was meant as an ideological response to the revolutionary movements sweeping Europe. Despite the doctrine's name, its central point was not nationality but autocracy – the monarchy that exercised complete sway over the country and society and was not bound by any internal or external constraints. In other words, Uvarov's doctrine defined the Russian empire as a sovereign monarchy. It was a Russian response to the democratic principle of popular sovereignty. The two other items of Uvarov's triad, orthodoxy and nationality, were treated as derivatives, entirely dependent on and subservient to the monarchy. Uvarov's theory was ideologically opposed to the ideas of popular sovereignty, republicanism, and nationalism that pervaded the ideological climate of his time.

The idea of sovereign democracy, put forward by Surkov, the chief ideologist Russian power, is a modern version of Uvarov's theory. The meaning of "sovereign democracy" is simple: the Russian government is free from any internal and external constraints and exercised complete control over Russian society. Not unlike Uvarov's doctrine, Surkov's sovereign democracy emerged as an ideological response to the dynamics of the Ukrainian Orange revolution. As in the nineteenth, so in the twenty-first century, revolution abroad provided the decisive impetus for an ideological articulation of the inchoate sentiments of Russia's elite. Only thanks to foreign revolution was their implicit worldview explicated in the form of an ideological doctrine.

The term "democracy" in Surkov's doctrine has the same meaning as the term "nationality" in Uvarov's. The latter's "nationalism" did not mean popular sovereignty, whereas Surkov's interpretation of "democracy" has approximately the same relation to genuine democracy as did the "people's democracies" of Communist times. "Sovereign democracy" also reproduced *ceteris paribus* the internal policy of Nicholas I, adjusted for historical context. During Putin's second presidential term, the electoral process was sterilized, legislation against "extremism" (which means any unauthorized public activity) was tightened, non-governmental independent organizations were persecuted, anti-Western propaganda campaigns were conducted, pro-Kremlin youth mass and social organizations were created, and so forth.

These counterrevolutionary tactics were obviously redundant and overdone. Equally excessive was the response of Nicholas I's government to the tiny handful of opposition intellectuals, such as the Slavophiles and the Westerners. Then and now the Russian government's fear was genuine, although not especially clear-headed. The most instructive lesson of Nicholas I's time, however, is that the effectiveness of counterrevolutionary policies remains to be seen.

4.6 WHY NOT RUSSIA OR WHEN RUSSIA?

The theory of revolution openly admits that it cannot foresee if and when revolutions will occur. Revolutions can be described but not predicted. Always

surprising for their contemporaries, they occur when they are least expected. Structural preconditions of revolution do not necessarily produce revolution. The ripeness of these structural factors seems obvious only after a revolution has occurred.

The situation in Russia looked stable until the end of 2011. However, the mass manifestations in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and other cities starting after the parliamentary elections on December 4, 2011, cast doubt on long-term regional stability and opened up a new political perspective, not excluding intimations of revolution. At the very least, the structural preconditions for revolution in Russia need to be reevaluated.

Although the Russian Federation never seemed fair, until autumn 2011, it at least gave the impression of effectiveness in several important respects. First, the state demonstrated a capacity to achieve economic goals. From 2003 to autumn 2008, Russia experienced an economic boom unprecedented in the post-Communist era. The boom is regularly associated with Putin's policies. In reality, the welcome rise in living standards owed more to a favorable external economic environment than to any actions by Russian authorities; but nobody seemed to care. Without the government's actions, economic growth would have probably been even more significant. Then the global economic crisis in 2008 seriously weakened confidence in the economic efficiency of the Russian state, although not fatally.

Second, Putin's Russia seemed to be successful in achieving its foreign policy goals. In this sense, the contrast with the Yeltsin era, perceived by Russian society as a period of national humiliation and disgrace, played an especially important role. (Painful memories of the 1990s made Putin's regime look good by comparison.)

Third, the Russian government hounded its actual and potential opponents with cruelty and sophistication. Society long looked favorably on this harshness. For several years, only small and marginal political groups, the radical Left and radical liberals, dared openly to oppose Putin, who was extremely popular. A sidelined opposition did not enjoy the sympathies of Russian society. More or less influential opposition political parties were marginalized (Yabloko and the Union of Right Forces) and even politically liquidated (Homeland).

Full and successful government control of television news provided further evidence of the effectiveness of the Russian state. Influential opposition media were present in all the countries where color revolutions broke out. In Russia, such media disappeared during Putin's first presidential term. This was a consequential development. Only nationally viewed television channels free to criticize the government could have replaced the muted and dissolved opposition parties.

Fall 2011 saw the political situation in Russia beginning to change dramatically. The parliamentary elections were widely taken as unfair and dishonest and provoked mass demonstrations. The legitimacy of the dominant party United Russia was critically undermined, and the legitimacy of key

power-holding institutions was seriously weakened. Though in March 2012, Vladimir Putin was successfully elected president and the opposition couldn't really challenge him, for the first time in decades, Russian authorities faced a massive and revolutionary political threat. According to authoritative sociological and analytic research centers, an irreversible process of "delegitimation" of the regime has started in Russia – in fact, a moral and psychological revolution.

The Internet and social networks that proved influential alternatives to traditional mass media, including TV, played a great role in dissemination of this idea. New media served as an arena for free political discussions, played an important and successful role as antigovernment propaganda tools, and also helped to coordinate political protest.

What can we say about that other structural precondition of revolution, namely, a crisis of economic well-being? In the years of prosperity, the "golden rain" of oil prices watered Russia unevenly. Nevertheless, all social strata benefited from it to some degree. The lower classes, who, by some estimates, make up a third of the population, received massive subsidies. The Russian poor are entirely dependent on public assistance and exhibit pronounced paternalistic attitudes. As a consequence, those who live under the poverty line do not constitute an opposition to authority but rather serve as its stable support. During parliamentary and presidential elections, they voted for United Russia and Putin.

However, a new wave of global economic crisis starting in 2012 prejudices an ability of Russian authorities to fulfill their social programs and promises given during elections. Russian society is feeling a sharp increase in fiscal pressure and faces dismantlement of the last remainders of welfare state. Together these factors could prove enough to awaken the politically passive strata of the population. At the same time, Putin's "stability pact" – renunciation of political ambitions in exchange for economic growth and personal prosperity – is losing its appeal for the middle class and the large city population. There are no visible prospects for either economic growth or increased incomes now. The strengthening of administrative and fiscal pressure leaves small and medium businesses with no room for development. If the nature of the election campaign caused moral and political protest among urban middle classes, the Kremlin's social and economic policies, multiplied by monstrous corruption, threatens the very foundation of their existence.

For the first time in a decade, the social and financial risks of open opposition to the authorities proved acceptable to the urban middle classes, and the value of Putin's stability began to give in to the values of freedom and justice. The level of political activity of society as a whole has increased dramatically and shows no tendency to decline, and mass sentiments are becoming ever more radical.

A crisis of leadership, the opposition's ideological weakness, and relative cohesion of the ruling elite are the three factors that constrain the development of political protest in Russia. The large majority of the opposition leaders for

one reason or another are not acceptable to most of society and even to the participants of mass protests themselves. Their political antirating is usually much higher than their positive rating. In this situation, Putin remains the only viable alternative to the majority of the general public. Meanwhile, the country lacks an oppositional ideology. That is to say, it lacks the one structural precondition of revolution that could justify the loss of livelihood and even life that a public protest might conceivably provoke. Neither left, nor liberal, nor nationalist ideology can mobilize the whole society (or even a large part of it) to confront the ruling power. Although they know well enough what they do not want, people in Russia have only a vague idea about what they do want. In Russia, generally speaking, no broad cultural frame exists that can lend meaning to radical change and unite society on the pathway to it. A myth of freedom and justice, which could justify change, is less influential than the conservative myths of stability and order that justify the status quo.

Russian society remains highly atomized. Horizontal ties are scarce and weak, as are developed forms of civic solidarity. The Russian elite actively discourages all forms of civil activity and the emergence of independent civic associations. Russia's rulers consider the passivity of society as the primary guarantee of their hold on political power.

No external influence can either compensate for the absence of popular oppositional ideologies or mobilize civic activism inside Russia. Distrust and the presumption of guilt characterize the Russian government's view of international and Russian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Exceptions are NGOs and (pseudo)civil activities that have been created by the government and are controlled by it in an effort to simulate civil society. The most eminent example of this mimicry of political life is the Public Chamber.

Western sociocultural influence has a paradoxical effect in Russia, sharply distinguishing the country from the other post-Soviet states. The Russians share fundamental values associated with the West, have internalized Western consumer values, and believe that Russia is a European country. At the same time, unlike other post-Soviet states, and unlike Russia itself at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, for modern Russia, the West no longer incarnates a normative model or an inspiring example.

Even if mass mobilization were to occur, the Russian population's ability to defend its interests would encounter cohesive elite resistance. States supported by cohesive elites, as many scholars have emphasized, are generally invulnerable to revolution from below. The threat of revolution looms only when the elite themselves do not want to support the regime or are riven by discord over whether or not to do so, and if yes, then how (Laqueur 1968; Goldstone 2001, 2003). The Russian elite show no signs of suffering a fundamental split. While differences within their ranks increased during 2011–12, these differences have not led to polarization or the formation of elite groups with sharply differing views about the desirable social order. The factor that contributes most to a revolutionary outbreak (or at least to an acute state crisis) is not

intra-elite conflict itself but an emergence of elite factions with radically different programs.

At the same time, the experience of revolutions shows that polarization and formation of elite groups with entirely different ideas of the desired social order structure can occur in a short time. And in this way, Russia is not an exception, being the country where notable ideological and sociocultural differentiation – a potential basis for the formation of openly opposing elite factions – is traditional among the elite. However, any crystallization of such factions can occur only with further growth of mass protests and a frontal collision with the authorities. Without this condition, elite groups hostile to Putin won't dare to come out flat against the regime, out of fear of reprisals. Although they are already covertly stimulating the protest movement, it is still only a *Fronde*, not an open opposition.

One way or another, there can be no successful revolution without an alliance of a faction of elite and society. However, an alliance of the liberal elite unpopular in Russia and unpopular opposition leaders will certainly find no credit in Russian society. The public has fresh bad memories of the 1990s, when exactly such a union defined Russian politics. In turn, the liberal elite and counterelite demonstrate elitist attitudes and deep fear of public involvement in politics, as it threatens their strategic positions.

If an acute political crisis were to arise, the psychological profile of the Russian elite would be a key factor in determining the outcome. Is the Russian elite ready to resort to massive and brutal violence against the Russian street, or not? In the color revolutions, the authorities did not dare confront the opposition. They were afraid to assume responsibility for massive bloodshed. To avoid such an outcome, they surrendered. Characteristically, starting from late 2011, the society perceived crackdowns against participants of mass demonstrations as unfair and unreasonable. It is dialogue and compromise that society demands of authorities, not confrontation and violence.

To summarize, only two of the six preconditions of revolution are present in Russia today – a crisis of state power and a crisis of national welfare. Another three factors – division in the elite, union of the part of the elite and the people, and an articulated opposition ideology – are still more potential, although with the rise in the political temperature, they can easily become actual. Such factors as external influences in the case of Russia hardly have any significant value.

4.7 CONCLUSIONS

Modern Russia is drawn into a large-scale national crisis with increasing force. However, its development will not necessarily lead to a revolution. At least some of the key structural factors of the revolution have not yet emerged in Russia. Nonetheless, in general, the situation in Russia rather more predisposes to the position of agnosticism than to unambiguous judgments about the future.

As international experience shows, dramatic social and political changes most often start suddenly and are surprising for the observers. And certainly no revolution has ever been predicted.

Notes

1. I am grateful for this idea to Adam Przeworski and Boris Makarenko.
2. The mechanisms by which elections may provoke a revolution have been specified by [Weingast \(1997\)](#) and [Fearon \(2006\)](#) and applied to the color revolutions by [Tucker \(2007\)](#).

PART II

DEMOCRACY IN A RUSSIAN MIRROR

Judging Democracy as Form of Government for Given Territories: Utopia or Apologetics?

John Dunn

5.1 DEMOCRATIC AUTHORITY AS REPUDIATION OF SELF-AUTHORIZATION

Any form of government might hold authority for a given population at a particular time, and any form of government might also secure authority over it. Very evidently, for many populations and very much of the time, no form of government at all enjoys the first or can elicit the second. Authority over is behavioral – a matter of power; but authority for is inherently normative. It requires belief, attitude, and sentiment, and though power may generate it or issue from it, it can never in itself be simply a fact of power and is never reducible to a repertoire of behavior. What makes democracy such a hazardous category in contemporary political assessment (in striking contrast to three centuries ago) is precisely what makes it so seductive to deploy for that purpose: its constant flickering equivocation between the positive and the normative. The latent dual pretension of contemporary democracy is that under it and it alone, the personnel who govern, the people who hold power, do so solely because they provenly hold authority for their power to do so, whereas under democracy and democracy alone, those they govern can rely on being ruled without any particular human beings holding authority over them. The ideological allure of this combination thus adroitly synthesizes the blitheness of anarchy with the security of civil order. Actually existing democracies, unsurprisingly, have a more checkered record either of authority for or authority over the populations they enfold.

The very idea of a state requires authority over a given territory and population. Those states unable to achieve it have failed not merely in contemporary political nomenclature but all too palpably and by criteria they cannot coherently disavow. The extraordinarily complex articulations of the state idea which

still provide the most obtrusive and consequential format for human collective life across those areas of the globe where such life occurs on any scale and enjoys a format of significant extent undoubtedly vary dramatically. But the format they claim to furnish itself demands that each at least endeavours to assert and impose such authority. The process of generating those states, in all its violent and ugly disarray, consisted quite largely of disempowering a vast and even more variegated miscellany of rivals and prior occupants – the local counterparts to Richelieu's *Les Grands* (Dunn 1994). That process will always and necessarily remain incomplete; but by now it has run far enough almost everywhere in the world to leave the question of legitimacy hanging in the air. Actually existing democracies, for the present, are the least clumsy and fatuous claimants to clothe their states with the legitimacy they require. This prominent ideological feature of the world in which we now live may cast very little light on either the strengths or the vulnerabilities of other extant types of states; but no way of understanding the politics of those states that do claim legitimate authority in virtue of being democracies could be adequate that failed to capture just how they seek to vindicate that claim and how far their efforts to do so succeed. Actually existing democracies, too, differ from one another in innumerable and weighty respects; but individually, and still more in their ensemble, they form a single vast and extravagantly strained legitimization ploy. Harshly seen, each has at its very center a single glaring self-contradiction, asserting both authority over and authority for through a single rickety structure: the people's autonomous choice of its own mode of subjection, its categorically blithe and freely reiterated self-subjugation. Fully comprehensive authority for might well provide equally comprehensive authority over for as long as it lasted. (Rousseau envisaged something of the kind.) But it would be odd in any human grouping to anticipate such authority's readily coming into existence, let alone persisting intact for very long. Authority over, to be sure, is always partial too; and it also can readily unravel with some rapidity even where it has been achieved in the first place. It would be more than obtuse to attribute its successful imposition to the imaginative conviction it secretes before being ushered into existence, and at best naïve to be surprised how promptly such conviction can drain away under the pressure of experience.

No one studying the politics of actually existing democracy could readily conclude that any demos cocooned within it experience its ongoing political life as a seamless process of self-subjugation. The imaginative centrality of the idea of free and fair elections to contemporary capitalist democracies issues from its being the closest proxy thus far widely institutionalized to a seamless process of autonomous self-subjugation (Manin 1997). As yet there is no clear reason to believe that any closer proxy can be coherently imagined, still less institutionalized with either ease or reliability (Przeworski 2011). This gap between proxy and idea is of very great political consequence. Measuring it is acutely provocative, and its delegitimation implications may prove formidable in any contemporary polity. Over large areas of the world, this is now the main battlefield in current ideological struggle.

5.2 AGENDA

Assessing how democracy stands in the mirror of Russia, or Russia stands in the mirror of democracy, requires at least two sharply discrepant lines of interrogation. There are at least three types of questions to consider. Is democracy a self-certifying criterion for health and legitimacy to which Russia has no option but to measure up as best it can, on pain of self-denunciation wherever it shirks or strains to evade the criterion? How far really is democracy the appropriate criterion for political normality and political decency for the Russian Republic today or tomorrow? Insofar as it is the sole appropriate criterion, in what institutional form or through what structure of procedures is it to be applied, and what renders its application in that form appropriate (and the application of competing and plainly incompatible forms overtly and decisively inappropriate)? Or is Russia, in its present condition and beneath the heavy burden of its history, rather, a political, social, and economic challenge that democracy in any current practical interpretation lacks either definite or reliably available resources to meet? What chance is there, furthermore, that that criterion, so institutionalized, will in fact be applied at all effectively to Russia in practice, and who or what stands between it and its effective application to that setting, in the present, recent past, or readily and concretely imaginable future? Each of these questions is politically divisive and hard to focus. The last is overtly politically inflammatory, and, at least from a democratic point of view, at best precariously open to foreign adjudication.

For Russia itself, the immediate question at issue is whether it is indeed a democracy already (albeit a democracy with Russian characteristics), as President Medvedev forcibly claimed at Yaroslavl, and, if it is, what features render it such. What are the constitutive features of actually existing Russian democracy, insofar as the latter does actually exist? If (or insofar as) Russia is not at present or not yet or not still quite a democracy, could it now be one; and if it could be one now, should it be one now? (If, for one reason or another, it could not be a democracy at present, it makes no sense to claim that it should be one: *ought* implies *can*.) If it is not (or insofar as it is not) a democracy today, whose fault is it (or what's fault is it) that it fails to be one?

These are obtrusively questions of political choice and identification. They require their respondents to commit themselves and take sides; but they do so on the basis of highly insecure presumptions, and it is far from obvious how far they clarify either Russia's current political predicament or the options now genuinely open to it. Unsympathetic observers might view the great majority of Russia's population as especially bemused in the face of these questions; but a more generous or balanced appraisal would have to acknowledge the all but universal distribution of very similar degrees of bemusement across the globe and locate its sources not merely in the nature of man (*Homo sapiens*), or politics outside time (Dunn 2000), but also in democracy's current combination of extreme conceptual vagueness and plasticity with extravagant political hyperbole (Dunn 2010).

5.3 METHOD

Democracy is at least three things: a word, a concept, and a set of competing institutional formats and practices that purport to instantiate the word and exemplify the concept. It is in active contention today across the world in all three registers because it carries the most powerful legitimacy charge in contemporary political speech. That is why Obama and Ahmadinejad, Sarkhozy and Medvedev, Chavez and Lula, Mugabe and Goodluck Jonathan, like the Reds and Yellows in Thailand, all prefer to associate themselves with it but deny its mantle to their opponents. It is the most respectable and apparently cosmopolitan provenance for governmental power today and the least instantly disputable basis on which to claim the right to rule for any who are in a practical position to advance that claim. Whether democracy really deserves the respect it claims, and whether it really is the most compelling basis on which to rule anyone, are deep questions, no closer to being resolved today than they were when the word first entered human speech. But the global resonance it now carries gives it an ideological primacy from which it is, at the very least, economical to begin.

Beneath these questions, like an unreleased seismic charge, is the more fundamental question of just what has been going on in the shaping of forms of government across the world over the last century and more. What factors have driven the diffusion of word, concept, and rival institutional embodiments of each across time and space in the patterns they have assumed in recent decades; and what range of forces, throughout, or more fitfully by time and place, have checked that diffusion or driven it back? An optimistic view of the process of diffusion attributes it predominantly to the imaginative vitality and normative force of the concept itself (especially in contention with its surviving rivals), and perhaps also, still more heroically, to the integral plausibility of the currently most successful institutional claimants to embody it. A more pessimistic view, peering dimly through the fog of politics, war, and global economic interaction, sees a highly erratic process of selection from among even more conspicuously unfit competitors. Celebrants of democracy's advance naturally favor the first vision, while open opponents equally unsurprisingly reconcile themselves to the outcomes by questioning democracy's capacity in any shape or form to contribute reliably to the security, wealth, or flourishing of human populations. As [Przeworski's \(2010a\)](#) work has well shown, there is very little empirical support for this degree of scepticism about democracy's merits in its current institutional forms. But that finding, encouraging enough in itself, falls some distance short of vindicating the optimistic vision. It provides no ground whatever for assuming that any practical interpretation of democracy, if only it were to be installed with sufficient decisiveness and sustained punctiliously enough, would prove able to ensure its own perpetuation or enable Russia to civilize and rationalize its fearsomely erratic state and direct both state and society in well-judged pursuit of their common good.

5.4 ELECTIONS

The key institutional device for conferring plausibility on democratic regimes is the presumptively free and fair election by virtually all the citizenry. For all its plasticity of institutional form, the idea of an election is quite a clear idea, and its central motif, individual personal choice, is the emblematic form of human freedom. Despite Hobbes's formidable critique (Skinner 2008), we still model freedom through agency and still see the shadow of slavery as its fullest negation within this life. Unfortunately, the exemplary, and ideologically dynamic, clarity of election as an idea is not matched by any comparable clarity of outline or directiveness from either freedom or fairness (Sen 2009), and we have had very limited success, not least as social scientists, in extricating the latter two conceptions from the eye of the beholder and inserting them robustly into a publicly visible world. At one end of the continuum, we can identify unfreedom with some confidence: the DPRK, Zimbabwe at its last general election. But once massive and blatant coercion disappears from the scene, the uneven and often largely if not wholly covert matrix of threats and enticements that faces individuals defies reliable assessment. With fairness, the case is even worse. It is extremely hard to distinguish unfairness from social, economic, and even psychological or physiological reality, indeed, from life itself. One way of reading Przeworski's (2010a, 1–38) findings is as implying that, while avoiding extremes of unfreedom within the electoral process may in a variety of settings be both necessary and sufficient to consolidate a regime that is democratic in this now conventional modern sense, avoiding even the most drastic level of unfairness within that regime need make little difference to its prospective longevity.

The judgment that avoiding extremes of unfreedom within the electoral process is a necessary condition for consolidating a regime implicitly threatens not merely regimes which are conspicuously rickety already but also regimes that have by now faced down their challengers all too decisively for many decades (Myanmar) or shown remarkable historical prowess in enriching large segments of their population and expanding the power of their state (most consequentially, the People's Republic of China). In itself this verdict simply conflates particular historical judgments with laws of social and political development. Even if it had proved universally valid thus far, which it very evidently has not, this judgment of intrinsic regime insecurity could in any case always be refuted by the generation of new and potent tyrannies. As a firm political judgment, it is little better than wish fulfilment.

The judgment that avoiding extremes of unfreedom within an electoral process is sufficient to consolidate a regime likewise blithely ignores the possibility of coercion from the outside (Taiwan). It also flirts even domestically with tautology. Sustaining freedom within the electoral process is a highly elaborate state achievement (consider any Indian national election; Banerjee 2007). It is hard to imagine the enactment of the requisite capacities in any regime

already under acute threat (consider Afghanistan, or indeed at present even Pakistan).

The relative serenity of incumbent regimes in face of gross and often growing inequality has discomfited political analysts and would-be revolutionaries for more than two centuries. Most contemporary human populations are inured to very high levels of conspicuous unfairness, and correspondingly unsurprised to encounter them within an electoral process. This may be simply because they are cowed. But it may also be because they realistically presume that it is too hard or on balance too costly to diminish unfairness at all sharply to make the attempt existentially worthwhile: a version of the conclusions drawn from Rawls's (1972) original position but reached despite the full benefits of hindsight.

Personal choice is the moment of imaginative seduction within elections. Their most remarkable systemic property is the power of that moment in the teeth of virtually every other detectable element in the social, economic, and political processes that lead up to it and issue from it. The *imaginaire* of elections and their causal character are very obscurely related to one another; and the relations between them are fairly unstable over time. How far (if at all) does their ideological point or charter reflect their practical content and character? Where does agency lie within them (who, whom?) in the classic formula? Is agency dispersed, as the concept suggests, relatively evenly across all who are eligible to participate in them? (Answer, no.) Or is it altogether more concentrated, and very far from even? (Answer, unsurprisingly, yes.) How far is it realistic to view even the most freely contested elections as protracted exercises in popular deliberation, terminating in clear choices (however reluctant or despondent)?

Even where the moment of choice proves to divide one candidate or party sharply from its closest rival, how much of the content of that choice comes from the prior tastes or convictions of those who make the eventual choice? Modelling the causal antecedents of the choices presented has engaged the intelligence of at least two generations of talented political scientists, but as yet they cannot plausibly be said to have reached clear and compelling conclusions. Competitive electoral politics has remained as conspicuously heuristic and as flagrantly improvisatory as its long series of predecessors and may well be fated to remain so indefinitely (MacIntyre 1973).

Are such elections better viewed instead as severely professional competitions (Schumpeter 1942), with varying numbers of amateur hangers-on, most of whom figure within them largely as inadvertent captives? Insofar as the platforms eventually advanced by competing teams of career politicians are reshaped (or preshaped) decisively by popular deliberation and the tastes that enter or emerge from it, there must be ample dispersion of agency. Insofar as they blatantly are not, the imagery of popular deliberation is at best ingenuous and the reality of choice itself open to some degree of suspicion. If the balance of taste and the genuine freedom of competition between two teams

of politicians force them very close to the middle (Downs 1957), the choice between the two may well appear nugatory; but it will do so only because of the impacted weight of so much prior choice. The resulting choice space may not be existentially exhilarating, but it will scarcely impugn the presumptive freedom of the choice. What would threaten that presumption is a recognition that many other weighty causal factors have already entered the electoral space, excluding some types of choice, militating purposefully against others, and confronting the supposedly sovereign choosers with options weakly connectable with the balance and relative urgency of their own desires and purposes, and apparently impervious to any more direct insertion of the latter: offers they can scarcely refuse. (Are the voters of the Russian Republic predictably any less gratified by, or reconciled to, the choices that prove electorally available to them when they choose a president than those of the United States? Unless the answer to this is confidently affirmative, the idea that the fates of the two countries can be binarily divided between freedom and unfreedom by the ways in which they acquire the chief executives at the head of their governments is insecure, however much more blatant the immediate impact of coercion or bribery within or around the electoral process may be in the Russian case.) There is no obvious and reliable way of telling where that familiar outcome of (or verdict on) democratic experience is a consequence of the inherently depersonalizing process of aggregation, or whether it is better seen as a decimation of the vitality and purposes of a clear majority by the relentless application of dramatically unequal power. Both perspectives can be focused very sharply, and weighing the balance between the two by time and place is a very delicate political judgment in itself (Dunn 2000, Chapter 1). It is hard to believe that these outcomes too do not vary drastically from occasion to occasion.

You can ask comparatively just how responsive to the preferences and experiences of potential voters the electoral processes of the United States, the Russian Republic, Venezuela, Turkey, Thailand, India, Zimbabwe, the United Kingdom, Pakistan, Iraq, Gaza, Israel, or Myanmar really are, anticipating that the answers will vary substantially in each over time, as well as between all of them at the same time. What is clear throughout is the political force of that question. Elections on their own are too little to ask for: at the limit, empty shells for a choice which is systematically withheld. Untrammelled freedom and luminous fairness are too much to hope for in this severely imperfect world of earthquakes and seemingly endless human desolation. (They converge, incontinently, on the free play of fantasy.) How much freedom and how much fairness are required to make an election real? What is at stake in the answer is the contrast between self-authorization and other-authorization among regimes and the derivative contrast between valid authorization and pseudo-authorization. Governmental self-authorization (authorization of the rulers by themselves without opportunity for external assessment of any kind) is a familiar feature of the history of most areas of the world over long stretches of time: perhaps, duly adjusted for scale, of all of them. But the concept of

self-authorization is inherently precarious and at least covertly circular. Even in the most depleted and menaced of societies, the incumbents will normally prove to credit themselves with receiving their authority from something beyond themselves (until recently, usually God, or some broader array of superior powers: a dimension in which assessment of the validity or speciousness of the claim in question has drawn on an astonishing range of improvisatory imagination over time and space). To eschew any pretence of other-authorization requires either a very high degree of self-assurance or an unusual temperament. Understandably, few rulers care to instruct their subjects to obey them solely because they are too frightened to do otherwise. (Even the Emperor Tiberius – *oderint dum metuant*: let them hate, provided that they remain afraid – did not choose to proclaim his attitude in public.) It is not hard to grasp why a more direct and concretely imaginable form of other-authorization has come to seem a more attractive title on which to base the claim to rule, especially in a richer, more intensely interactive and communicative human world, with more formidable concentrations of coercive power, in which societies press more intimately and insistently on one another.

As an institutional form through which to demonstrate other-authorization of those who for the moment rule, mass suffrage electoral choice has yet to find a compelling rival. You can think of it despondently in cases where the prospect of decisive deauthorization is minimal or nonexistent as a vast charade in which the etiquette of choice is superimposed on a reality of pure submission. More optimistically, at the other end of a continuum, you can see it as a collective search, duly distributed across the individual members of the entire citizen body or even adult population and conducted under varying visibility conditions, for the least disconcerting potential candidates to exercise rule. In this image, the causal detailing of the search process itself and the more concrete picturing of the dispersed agency capabilities of the individual electors cover a stupefying range of possibilities and vary, accordingly, in the imaginative weight, existential force, and political plausibility that they confer on the outcome. Because any genuine choice of candidates to rule is at best an educated guess about its future consequences, all that other-authorization through this form can amount to is a transfer of responsibilities from very many to quite few. The disparity in interest in this transfer between professional politicians and amateur electors is difficult to exaggerate. For the former, once they have received the responsibilities, it is a handsome route to a keenly desired end. For the latter, once they have conferred the responsibilities as best they can, there is no reliable continuing interest in their having done so except whatever faint shadows fall backward from their varying reliable prospect in due course of a chance to take revenge for the scale of their subsequent regrets. A kind of wild justice is better than no justice at all, but it should not be mistaken for an effective sanctioning structure of the professionals by the amateurs (Dunn 1999).

If Russia needs elections at all (and it has after all felt a need for them in some setting and form or other fairly continuously for a good century or so

by now), may not the same prove true eventually even of China, the most protractedly independent and self-assured of all the human civilizations there have ever been, despite operating for the present under the aegis of a political inspiration that was always epistemically strained and that has proved acutely vulnerable politically elsewhere over the last two decades? If Russia does need elections at all, what exactly does it need them for, and just how free and fair do they have to be to satisfy its need?

The axiomatic freedom of electoral choice that defines the paradigm of contemporary legitimacy issues naturally in a range of concomitant demands: that electors be free to inform themselves adequately of the huge range of factors that bear on their several interests, that they be free to communicate freely with one another in the process of deliberating, subject to minimal prior constraints on the range of conclusions that they are free to reach, and free to organize themselves together to advocate their conclusions. Less clearly, and therefore less compellingly, they may also be entitled to any other freedoms or forms of resource needed to equip them to enquire, deliberate, and organize effectively for all these purposes. The appeals of untrammelled freedom and full fairness are very obvious in this context, as is their dramatic distance from the realities of every contemporary society and economy and the ways by which their chief executives accrue. The role of money or equivalent resources within electoral competition is the key tracer of toxicity in this respect in all contemporary regime claimants to democratic status. If (or insofar as) elections are simply bought, the axiomatic freedom inherent in their purchase is all but cancelled by the structure of market incentives, and democracy becomes, as Sorel perceived it as being, the paradise of which unscrupulous financiers dream (Dworkin 2006; Sorel 1961, 222).

Where citizens do have both opportunity and socially realized capacity to think and speak for themselves, the choices they proceed to make confer as much authority as it is open to humans to confer. Where they sell their suffrage for a mess of pottage, they confer little or no authority that does not already rest with the normative standing of existing control over food resources. When they are effectively silenced by intimidation, and still more when they are dragged into echoing their rulers' pronouncements, they are impotent to mold through their own agency the range of options that confronts them, and their passive complicity with the regime cannot reasonably be seen as assent to its legitimacy. For electoral authorization to carry political force, and for it to be worth having in the end even for the rulers, it must reflect recognizable elements of free association and unconstrained speech. Where these are clearly present, and where the forms of electoral choice, public deliberation, and unrestricted competition between political parties or advocacy groupings are long standing and well institutionalized, politics often assumes the form of competition between parties of government and parties of opposition. This may carry costs as well as benefits when it comes to clarifying the conclusions of public deliberation; but it certainly also helps to discipline the exercise of governmental

power, if not by arresting it peremptorily and permanently, at least by retarding or impeding its hastier impulses (Manin 1994). Within the structures of a modern democratic state, opposition can serve to enhance deliberation and accountability, above all through critical argument evocatively expressed, and by its effective diffusion. Organized disobedience and obstruction, where they go beyond the expressive, are perhaps closer to failures in democratic rule than enhancements of it. Democracy without rule is simply anarchy; and a state cannot be a state at all without retaining the right to decide what sorts of disobedience or obstruction it will permit and the capacity to enforce what it decides. By that criterion there are, of course, plenty of pseudo-states or impostor states today; but recognizing that this is so merely lowers the spirits – it does not help us to think clearly about anything.

One troubling issue about the nature and significance of elections is just what conceptual role to allot within them to political parties. Is a political party a necessary form, because it is a prerequisite for electoral authorization? If so, what features render it necessary, and even potentially sufficient, to provide this? Is its essential role to condense the opinions that emerge as deliberative outcomes (which requires a high degree of permanent deliberative responsiveness) or to give patterns of opinion and structures of allegiance institutionalized continuity over time – to convert them into political agencies? Is it principally to aggregate political judgment at a given point in time or to lend it shape and continuity over time? How deep is the fissure between elite aspirants to exercise rule for whom the party is a necessary vehicle to personal power and mass electorates for whom it is always likely to be at best a very weak and blunt instrument for constraining the shape and direction of rule? How far does the authorizing force of electoral choice depend on a refusal to recognize the depth of this fissure? How far do the intermittent plummetings in its authorizing plausibility come from involuntary exposure to its starkness? Just how should we see the relation between the party as deliberative facility and instrument for pursuing interests identified through such deliberation, and the party as channel to governmental power for those who will exercise it in the event of electoral success? Countries with strongly institutionalized political competition (like the United Kingdom) develop widely shared conceptions of how these elements relate. Those with more erratic patternings of political institutionalization are scarcely in a position to do so and foment the suspicion that they do not really relate at all. It is important to recognize how far shared understandings of what parties are and mean come from these habits rather than from the concept of party itself, or from the party as a presumptively universal political form. The cumulative political habit of viewing parties mainly as vectors of contrasting political ideologies seriously obscures these issues.

In the Russian case, after seven decades of communist rule, it was unsurprising that it proved far easier to build an organized and durable party from, by, and for the regime than from other components of Russian society and through the relatively insecure resources and meager facilities available outside

the regime's shelter. To run against the regime with any brio was to declare yourself an enemy of the state and proved to place in jeopardy the largest concentrations of private property that could be brought into political play. The decision, in effect, to reelect the state had a certain prudential plausibility for many, and even pronounced distaste for the state's current custodians was not an effective solidarizing force at an imaginative or practical level across much of the society at large. (In the wake of the second Khodorkovsky trial, this disparity of force is glaringly obvious.)

The equivocal character of parties as representative agencies and vehicles of personal mobility was one of the master themes of political sociology from its outset (Michels, Mosca, Ostragorski), as it was for would-be political leaders (Lenin, Trotsky, Martov, Bernstein, Kautsky, Luxemburg). The mass parties of the first half of the twentieth century arguably required as well as generated elaborate bureaucratic organizations with pronounced oligarchical elements. But they did also often link occupational and residential communities and class groupings relatively plausibly to structures of collective agency. The far smaller parties of today lack convincing links of this kind, without becoming notably more open in their internal dynamics. Increasingly, therefore, they find themselves hollowed out and ever more audibly specious in their representative claims. Reinjecting greater substance into them would require either the identification and mobilization of newer and comparably steady forms of collective identification or the location and deployment of compelling judgements about the content of collective interests. The first might seem merely an exercise in impression management; but the second obviously requires real cognitive insight, and perhaps also a type of insight that yields altogether sharper conclusions than social, political, or economic reality permit: conclusions closer to those that Plato deemed available to himself than any social scientist could ever hope to find (Dunn 2000).

The salience of compelling bases of representation for a given population (along perhaps with the absence of deep and rigid cleavages within it) furnishes a benign ecological setting for electoral democracy, and one less plausibly available as yet for Russia than, for example, Sweden or the Czech Republic. (Even for Sweden, that ecology is now under considerable strain.)

The recognition of cognitive insight as an independent normative limit (and potential practical impediment) to democracy's appeal goes back a long way (Dunn 2005) and fully retains its capacity to discomfit. At its core, democracy embodies the conviction that it is good, other things being equal, for a political community to do what most of those concerned believe should be done. But what if other things prove far from equal, and it quite plainly is not good? Democracy's political appeal readily wilts in the face of very hard cases. Suppose that we believed that some course of action was a necessary condition for human survival on earth, our belief happened to be true, and it happened not to be shared by the great majority of our fellow citizens; what then (or who then) should decide what in practice is to be done? The claim to comprehend

better can carry real menace in politics when deployed as a title to power; but it carries that menace precisely because of its intrinsic force. Where it does happen to be valid, what stronger claim to the power to act effectively on others' behalf could there be than a valid claim to understand what is at stake and what to do to protect it? Democracy in its modern sense may be a sophisticated prudential bet over what to do (and still more over what not to do and keep on doing). It cannot readily be converted into an intuitively compelling axiom of moral philosophy.

5.5 RUSSIAN PARTICULARITIES AND UNIVERSAL DILEMMAS

There are two well-defined and vigorously championed strategies on offer in global political development today, each of which has its advocates in and for Russia. One is a sequence in which effective authority over a population, allied to benign governmental purpose, generates legitimacy by achieving widely desired outcomes. Its rival is one in which convincingly demonstrated authority for the citizenry (legitimacy in its most compelling contemporary guise) generates effective authority over the same citizens, ensures benign governmental purpose, and engineers widely desired outcomes, not least through the power it accumulates and directs. Both strategies in a clear and well defined form require starting off from somewhere drastically different from where the Russian people currently find themselves. For a country that does not initially dispose of either efficacy or legitimacy in very handsome measure, neither strategy (the wager on strength or the wager on wholehearted loyalty and conviction) is available in anything like a pure form. The only options to hand must be a nervous bricolage of whatever elements of each prove to be within reach.

The wager on strength requires a potent, well-articulated, and highly disciplined state. The police force, prisons, security services, tax agencies, courts, and administrative organs of the Russian Republic do not compose such a state. Their boundaries are weak and all too permeable to dispersed and sometimes highly entrepreneurial criminality. However emphatic the idiom of command across this vast apparatus, the element of control from its apex is plainly altogether more fitful and precarious. In infrastructure, productivity, educational provision, and the capacity to handle natural disaster, it is in no condition to win legitimacy through its evident efficacy. The case for rebalancing power between denizens of the state apparatus and the people beyond it is all too obvious. What is less obvious is how far and quite how the enhancement of democracy in Russia can hope to remedy these intricate and all too pervasive limitations. Taming the more feral elements within the state is not merely a pressing democratic goal but also a plausible task for a more democratic government; but it remains hard to see how a more democratic government could come into existence through any political process at the mercy of the state in its present form. The formidable task of reforming that state would find allies

within either rival strategy of political development; but it would also face a dismaying range of enemies in both, and the fight may prove difficult to win from either angle.

The authorizing force of democratic validation requires free deliberation and unconstrained choice across the demos in question. To hold up in the face of experience, it may also in practice require some degree of cognitive support for most of its members. (This unthought-through element in all contemporary understandings of democracy has always been significant in the dispute between rival strategies of development; see [Walicki 1969](#).) Unconstrained choice in the last instance would not be unduly hard for the Russian state to provide to its citizens even today; but the prerequisites for free deliberation on reasonably fair terms would not be within ready reach, even if Russia's current government was united in commitment to supply them. Free deliberation for a citizen body requires that all its citizens have time to deliberate, time and opportunity to inform themselves adequately on matters bearing on their interests, time and opportunity to communicate clearly and instructively with their fellows, and firm assurance that the opinions and judgments with which they end up will not simply be suppressed by incumbents. It requires that the media of communication, and the opportunities and resources for communicating between citizens, are not monopolized by incumbents (or anyone else) but reasonably widely accessible to ordinary citizens, at least if they make the effort to coordinate for the purpose. Free deliberation does not require all citizens to focus their energies or dedicate their lives to pursuing it; but it does require those who actively wish to be aided rather than obstructed in doing so by their state and those who currently control it.

At present, the Russian government is not performing well by that criterion. For matters to improve markedly in the short term would require a lucky alliance between rulers with some real zest for democratization and democrats with some patience and sympathy for the travails and responsibilities of rule in every real state. Unless (or until) such an alliance proves available, it may be necessary to postpone the hope for decisive improvement for quite a long time.

Democracy: Ancient and Modern, Good and Bad

Pasquale Pasquino

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The word *democracy* covers nowadays a variety of different meanings; it qualifies for instance at the same time political regimes like the United States, the United Kingdom, Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries BC, and, according to some generous definition, even the Kemalist Turkey. An attempt to clarify at least some of the possible different meanings of this magic word may be useful to suggest a standard helping to discuss the political system that has existed in Russia since the end of the Soviet regime. Here the approach will be historical, taking into account the history of concepts. Democracy is not only the name we give to a set of institutions but also a positively value loaded term; that is why we discuss the reasons and the limits of this normative assessment.

By and large, *democracy* is used nowadays as an equivalent of “good (or decent) government” without specifying among other things what is good about this form of political regime, which most of the time is not even defined at all. The usual answer that democracy is better than dictatorship is theoretically unsatisfactory, because in most of the Western countries, there is no real threat to it, and such an answer can be justified only by intellectual laziness, the one happy to repeat what Sir Winston Churchill was supposed to claim. The approach chosen here – the history of institutions and political theory – offers only some preliminary remarks that may be useful to clarify some background aspects of the general topic of the book. This chapter intends to be essentially a contribution to conceptual elucidation, and it has no ambition to suggest anything regarding the practical political problems and urgencies of the Russian Federation. John Dunn is right when he writes at the beginning of his contribution (in this volume) that a question open to discussion is “how far democracy is the appropriate criterion for political normality and political decency for the Russian Republic.” Giving the name of democracy to the supposed solution

of all political problems in the contemporary world may be at the same time pointless, vague, and perhaps misleading.

We can begin with the common observation that what is considered now the name of the best form of government and the only legitimate regime, democracy, was the same name that Western political theory, since its inception and until the nineteenth century, considered mostly as a bad or “degenerate” form. To be sure, there were minor oscillations in the vocabulary, for instance, in Polybius’s classification of political forms of government, but there was at least a consensus concerning the fact that democracy by itself was either a bad regime or at least a very unstable one, which again was bad. A quote from the “republican” Machiavelli (rather than dozens of other political theorists) from his *Discorsi*, Book I, Chapter 2, will clarify the point:

Among those who have merited more praise for having similar constitutions is Lycurgus, who so established his laws in Sparta, that in giving parts to the King, the Aristocracy, and the People, made a state that endured more than eight hundred years, with great praise to himself and tranquility to that City. The contrary happened to Solon who established the laws in Athens, and who by establishing only the Popular (Democratic) state, he gave it such a brief existence that before he died he saw arise the tyranny of Pisistratus: and although after forty years his (the tyrants) heirs were driven out and liberty returned to Athens, for the Popular state was restored according to the ordinances of Solon, it did not last more than a hundred years, yet in order that it be maintained many conventions were made by which the insolence of the nobles and the general licentiousness were suppressed, which had not been considered by Solon: none the less because he did not mix it (Popular state) with the power of the Principate and with that of the Aristocracy, Athens lived a very short time as compared to Sparta.

The Florentine secretary was a republican, meaning in the contemporary language hostile to democracy – in the classical sense of this term, to which we will return immediately – and a strong supporter of a mixed constitution, a point generally not highlighted by supporters of the revival of classical republicanism, who are embarrassed by this mismatch.

It is pointless here to inflict upon the reader a list of citations; it may suffice to remember that one of the most relevant figures of the European Enlightenment, the German polymath Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, claimed in a letter to the Landgraf Ernst of Hesse-Rheinfels that he would have preferred to live under a despotic prince rather than under a democratic regime (see [Dunn 1979, 3](#)).¹ Polybius and Machiavelli but also Thomas of Aquinas (for us the most important of these old thinkers) believed indeed that democracy was not as bad as ancient philosophers thought and taught, but this more nuanced position depends on the circumstance that they wanted it to be compensated and moderated by other forms of government, notably aristocracy and, following the model of the Roman Republic celebrated by Polybius in his *Histories*, even monarchy.

All that is normative or evaluative language. But what was this ancient democracy and which are the roots of the great transformation that took place

in the last two centuries that left us with this idea that democracy is the only good form of government and the ultimate horizon for the organization of the political life? I can only hope to give here a very partial answer to these two questions and to the more difficult one concerning “what is good about modern democracy.”

6.2 ATHENS

When in the fifth century BC Greeks established in a variety of cities (*poleis*, political communities) a form of regime they called *demokratia*, what they had in mind was a form of government that included virtually all the adult free male citizens in the active government of the community. This type of regime, opposed to tyrannical and oligarchic ones, gave to everybody the real possibility and even more the obligation of participating in the decision-making process at the origin of each significant collective decision concerning the public life of the *polis* as well as in the exercise of the adjudicative function. Actually, not only the *demes* (the country-districts of Athens) sent regularly their members to the people’s assembly, but moreover, if a citizen was sorted by lottery to occupy a public function, it was not easy or even possible to refuse to perform the job, which by the way gave a salary and was for this reason attractive notably to poor people.

If we consider the institutions of the Athenian real existing democracy (RED) in the fourth century (the only democratic *polis* we know pretty well, notably thanks to the rediscovery of the Aristotelian manuscript of the *Athenaion Politeia* – the constitution of the Athenians – and to the systematic and exhaustive investigation of Hansen 1991), we see that citizens participated in the government of the city either attending the *ekklesia* (the people’s assembly), open to each citizen older than eighteen years, or manning the people’s courts (*dikasteria*), as jurors sorted by lotteries, or occupying, in this specific case through lottery and rotation, for one year, a seat in the *boulé*,² the organ of five hundred people (one hundred of which were constantly sitting each month by rotation) in charge of preparing the meetings of the *ekklesia*. Notice that, contrary to what many people think on the basis of a difficult text by Aristotle, “ruling and being ruled in turn”³ qualified (at least in Athens, the only *demokratia* of which we have an accurate understanding) only the membership in the *boulé*, an institution in the Athenian constitutional structure much less politically relevant than the *ekklesia* and the people’s courts, which were qualified by Aristotle as *kurioi* (the institutions exercising the supreme powers in the city).

Now to use our contemporary language, if from the legal point of view the Athenian democracy was based on the principle of the *isonomia*, that is, equal participation of all the citizens in the decision-making bodies of the city (a principle of nondiscrimination), sociologically instead the dominant groups in Athenian politics were the lower classes (*aporoï* or *demos*, in the language of

Aristotle). A variety of elements support the hypothesis that *demokratia* was a government of the *aporoï*. Not only Plato and Aristotle but also Aristophanes and the social and institutional analysis offered by Hansen (see also Pasquino 2010) confirm what is pretty much evident: in the Athenian *demokratia*, the upper classes were unable to control effectively the political power and tried indeed twice at the end of the fifth century BC to reestablish an oligarchy or even with Theramenes (in 411) a government based on the prominence of the middle-upper classes, the hoplites.

The rich upper classes were probably unhappy because of the regular high contributions they had to pay each year in the form of liturgies, religious ceremonies, and trierarchies, the building of boats for the fleet. Austin and Vidal-Naquet (2007, 347) observed that “la richesse personnelle n’est possédée que par délégation de la cite.” We are not claiming that Athens was an acephalous society (to use an expression of Max Weber); there were famous leaders, from Pericles to Demosthenes, and the democratic regime itself had its origin in the conflict between aristocratic families; but the power of the leaders depended on their ability to find popular support at the moment of each single important decision, not just each five years or so. Moreover, the political system especially in the fourth century after the reestablishment of *demokratia* was obsessed with institutional mechanisms controlling the leaders and public officials at each single step of their action, before, during, and at the end of their short mandates (lasting from one day to one year).

That the ancient *demokratia* was the government based on participation, and consent of the *aporoï* is also the best way to make sense of the difficult to grasp, long-standing hostility toward this regime until and through the eighteenth century, when representative government and modern constitutionalism were established on the two sides of the Atlantic. This hostility is well known to the historians of political theory (Manin 1995; Dunn 2005).

6.3 THE THOMIST CONCEPTUAL REVOLUTION

Democracy as government by the people, meaning the lower classes, largely⁴ disappeared from the political experience of Western societies after the invasion of Athens by the army of Philip of Macedonia,⁵ toward the end of the fourth century BC, at the very moment when Aristotle was writing the political theory of the Greek city-state, his *Ta Politika*. Theory, we know, is like Minerva’s bird; it rises at sunset.

Rome was never considered a democracy in the Athenian sense, at least until Jean Bodin, who, to disqualify the Roman Republic, which was the standard model of a stable regime in the Renaissance, claimed in the crucial Chapter 1 of book II of his *De Republica* that Rome was not a mixed government but a democracy: “There is no doubt whatever that after the expulsion of the kings, the Roman state was democratic, except for a period of two years [*sic*]” (Bodin 1992, 98). Pace Bodin, it seems more reasonable to claim, with

Polybius, Machiavelli, [De Martino \(1951\)](#), and [Nippel \(1980, 2008\)](#), that the Roman Republic was most of the time until the civil war of the first century BC a mixed regime, which implies by the way that democracy was indeed one element of the system. The significance of this element fluctuated over time, but the *comitia*, the popular assemblies, always played some important function (see now [Hollard 2010](#)) as the institution that promulgated *leges*, and sometimes as a court of justice. It is in any event more important and worth stressing that the *populus* in Rome exercised directly the segment of power assigned to it by the customary mixed constitution. The democratic element was democratic indeed, even though the voting system in the Roman *comitia* was at least extravagant (see [Taylor 1966](#), [Staveley 1972](#)).

We do not need to go here into more detail concerning Rome. Much more relevant for the story is to speak of the radical turn, at least in the language, that took place with Thomas Aquinas, certainly the most remarkable intellectual figure of the entire Middle Ages. The professor at the University of Naples and Paris, in his *Summa Theologiae*, not exactly a political theory book,⁶ presented an original version of the mixed government that can be considered the inchoate form of the modern regime we call nowadays “democracy.” In this now forgotten text presenting the model of the best government that God himself gave to the Jews – rhetorically a very powerful strategic move in a Christian Europe notwithstanding anti-Semitism⁷ – Thomas claimed that a good mixed government consists of a system where the people (the male subjects of a political society) have a part in the political regime, not, like in the ancient doctrine, exercising any direct form of governing power but choosing by election both the monarchic and the aristocratic element of the mixed constitution, in his language, the King and the Senate:

the best form of government is in a state or kingdom, where one is given the power to preside over all; while under him are others having governing powers: and yet a government of this kind is shared by all, both because all are eligible to govern, and because the rules are chosen by all. For this is the best form of polity, being partly kingdom, since there is one at the head of all; partly aristocracy, in so far as a number of persons are set in authority; partly democracy, i.e. government by the people, in so far as the rulers can be chosen from the people, and the people have the right to choose their rulers. (Quaestio 105.1 of *Prima Secundae*)

This text is fascinating for at least three reasons, which matter to our understanding of the political regime we call nowadays “democracy,” reasons that we shall consider briefly.

1. *Election becomes “democratic.”* I do not need to come back here to something that is well known and was clearly stated again by [Manin \(1995\)](#) in his book on representative government: elections were considered, and so until the end of eighteenth century, an aristocratic mechanism for the appointment of public officials – in Athens only the *strategoi* (generals) were regularly elected,

and that for quite evident reasons: it would have been too dangerous not to let the army or the fleet be led by the best soldiers; even for the Athenian democrats, notably on the battlefield, citizens were not equal.

The mechanism typical (by the way, not exclusive, according to Aristotle) for democratic appointments was the strict equalitarian system of lotteries, because only the lotteries give to everybody a (statistically) equal chance to get appointed independently from the preferences of the voters, which can be influenced and biased by lobbies or candidates because of their wealth and/or any other form of salience or power. Lotteries cancel preferences and put the accent on the absolute equality of potential selected officials. Elections, where each member of the choosing body has an equal say, favor the equality of the choosers over the one of the possible chosen individuals. In lotteries, the choosers play no role; equality, here the equal chance of being selected, is on the side of the chosen people. In this perspective, it is clear that lotteries have no legitimacy function, they only destroy any bias in the choosers suppressing their function. The principle of equality was moved by Aquinas from the end result of the selection mechanism (the equal chance to be elected) to the side of the input (everyone has an equal impact/say in the choice of those who will govern the political body): because all the members of the community, so claims our quote, can vote and express an equally weighting vote, we can assert that the vote is equalitarian (notice that this is one of the implicit meanings of the term *democracy*, a value – some form of minimalist equalitarianism – that we consciously or unconsciously associate with it). In other terms, citizens are not equal as to their chance to governing the collective body but have an equal chance to influence the choice of their masters pro tempore. The role of each single individual as such is (almost) nil, but legally at least this nil impact is the same for everybody. Inside a large body of citizens, say, many dozens of millions, the chance of being selected by a lottery is by the way equally almost nil. Thomas in any event goes further, claiming that the democratic element of his “Mosaic” mixed government implies not only universal suffrage (masculine, needless to say) but also the exclusion of any requirement for the passive right of being elected (*tum quia ex omnibus eligi possunt, tum quia etiam ab omnibus eliguntur*). He seems *prima facie* not to be aware that the selection will produce an elite, but it is probably more exact to state that this is what he had in mind, because the Senate (and the King) that results from the electoral process represents the aristocratic element (*secundum virtutem*) of the mixed government – so we have at the same time the Roman institutional tripartition of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy and the Aristotelian mix between the virtue of the best citizens and the inclusion of the common people.

2. *Political participation is reduced to election.* Similarly and possibly more important is that popular participation (the democratic element of Thomas’s mixed regime) has not any more for the citizens the form of being involved

in concrete and specific decision (except a single one: the choice of the Senate and the King) of the political community qua members of the decision-making process (*boulemai*) and of the judicial power (*dikazein*) as in the Athenian *demokratia* or as members of the *comitia* in the Roman mixed republic. Participation is assimilated and reduced, instead, to the electoral process; having the right to select those who will govern them, the subjects of Thomas give up any other form of active participation to the governing bodies. We cannot deny that this “medieval” approach – the reduction of democracy to popular election – looks particularly modern, which brings us to the fourth point of the analysis of Thomas’s text.

3. *Thomas and America*. The system depicted by Aquinas as mixed government looks, in its very abstract form, pretty much like the U.S. political system: the mother of each modern republican democracy (in its presidential form). It is pretty clear that if we use the Aristotelian language, in the revised form proposed by the author of the *Summa Theologiae*, who was taking into account the new reality of the emerging French monarchy of the Middle Ages (meaning the existence of a large territorial political community), we could say that the representative government, which we call now democracy, is more similar to the Mosaic model of the *Summa Theologiae* than to what the classical Aristotelian theory defined as *demokratia*. Our Western political systems, self-gratified by the term *democracy*, are indeed a variety of mixed constitution (deprived of its social anthropology; see Pasquino 1996, 2009).⁸

Thomas brings us directly into the twentieth century when the first systematic theories of the modern democracy were developed, most notably in the context of the dramatic experience of the Weimar republic and its breakdown.

It doesn’t seem possible, from the RED point of view, that we have been suggested to bear in mind in our contributions, and after considering what was the role of the *demos* in the Athenian democracy, to deny a crucial claim by Schumpeter. He was right in asserting that the people (whatever we mean by that tricky word – it would be better speaking of citizen-voters) do not govern in our democratic societies but rather authorize some small group to govern them, *pro tempore*, which for sure implies that they can be evicted by the governing positions:

it should be observed that in making it the primary function of the electorate to produce a government (directly or through an intermediate body) I intended to include in this phrase also the function of evicting it. The one means simply the acceptance of a leader or a group of leaders, the other means simply the withdrawal of this acceptance. This takes care of an element the reader may have missed. He may have thought that the electorate controls as well as install. But since electorates normally do not control their political leaders in any way except by refusing to reelect them or the parliamentary majorities that support them, it seems well to reduce our ideas about this control in the way indicated by our definition. (Schumpeter 1975 [1942], 272; italics mine)

Here it clear that Schumpeter is presenting the central core of a doctrine of retrospective judgment of the voters that has oft been repeated afterward. It is moreover apparent that the democratic method to access political power excludes any form of violence or military intervention. Anti-liberalism proclaims that democracy being an end to any means is licit to achieve that (not clearly defined) aim. It is not possible to discuss here this important question, but the Schumpeterian definition excludes any alternative to competitive and free elections as a mechanism for acquiring political authority.

The dependence from electoral authorization (that Dunn rightly suggests in this volume to call other-authorization), being repeated over time and in a competitive context, is somehow a constraint upon the representatives and, notwithstanding the constitutional provision of free mandate, that the representatives may exercise to their own risk, it binds the governing elites to the public opinion, meaning to the variations of its majority. The difficulty with this is that public opinion has no other measurable expression – between the elections, an important dimension considered by other contributions in this volume and to which I come back – than the opinion polls,⁹ which introduce into the picture a new elite. Sometimes we say that the representatives depend on public opinion; but actually they seem to depend on pollsters who are the mouth and the interpreters of it during the more or less long stretch of time between two elections. A conundrum and a paradox in that story is that politicians (and many people in general) tend to claim that opinion polls are not relevant (mostly when they do not like their results!) and that only the election matters. This is clearly true legally speaking, but if we do not know anything about public opinion until election day, how can the politicians anticipate the retrospective judgment of the voters and be rational in their actions, meaning doing what would be conducive to their reelection? In fact, whatever politicians say, it seems that they take polls even too seriously between elections, because there is no real serious alternative to foresee their chances to stay in office; looking at objective data concerning economy, for instance, is certainly useful for the incumbent, but what generally matters is the voters' perception of the economic situation more than any "objective" economic reality.

6.4 WHAT IS GOOD AND WHAT IS BAD ABOUT MODERN DEMOCRACY (ELECTIONS)

Two questions emerge at this point of our investigation that span off the *longe durée* of the history of democracy: (1) Is modern democracy, that is, representative government, based (nowadays) on universal suffrage bad, by which I mean, less good than the ancient one? (2) Is it good or, more precisely, what is good about it?

Schumpeter was not explicitly concerned by this normative question – we have to consider though that writing an unmitigated eulogy of the British regime in 1940–42, as he did, cannot be considered easily a neutral and detached

assessment – but we cannot avoid taking a stance concerning this evaluative question. We cannot really shun following the path of Hans Kelsen, who, in his seminal text on our problem published in 1929, spoke of nature and the value of democracy.

We can start with the first and in a sense less relevant question: “Is modern democracy bad or less good, compared with the ancient one?” Now, this issue presupposes in general an approach that reduces modern democracy to its majoritarian version and political participation mainly to the electoral game. To discuss this point, we need to take a step back.

Some people suggesting normative theories of participatory democracy – some neorepublican and the “deliberativists” of one sort or the other, the family being very large and differentiated (as Posner once observed; [Posner 2003](#), 130–57) – would change the reality and see citizens more directly involved in political life. That seems a good idea as far as it is workable. I have a different and less ambitious project and would try to change just a bit the theory pushing political theorists to take more seriously the concrete working of the institutions, and not only the elected ones but those that beyond election day realize the concrete and continuous functioning of constitutional democracies in the contemporary world. Coming back to my question, it is actually pretty clear that we cannot go back to Athens and its *demokratia*. The abbé Sieyès, with Condorcet, the most articulate French theorist of representative government, in his famous speech against the King’s veto in September 1789 at the National Constituent Assembly, claimed that in a commercial society, a society based on the division of labor, this strong involvement is not possible: “Les peuples européens modernes ressemblent bien peu aux peuples anciens. Il ne s’agit parmi nous que de commerce, d’agriculture, de fabriques, etc.; le désir des richesses semble ne faire de tous les Etats de l’Europe que de vastes ateliers; on y songe bien plus à la consommation et à la production qu’au bonheur” ([Sieyès 1789](#), 594; see [Pasquino 1987](#)). His basic idea was that in a modern commercial society, politics has to be a profession, with few people exercising it full time and most of the others essentially reduced to the role of voters.

Still nowadays, these claims seem to be uncontroversial, but notwithstanding the continuity that exists between the antidespotic regimes of the end of the eighteenth century and the modern political system based on party competition (*Parteienstaaten*), the doctrine of the representative government (now we say representative democracy) in its pure Sieyès/Schumpeter version is a crude and largely incomplete account if we want to describe and make sense of contemporary constitutional democracy. Since the French Declaration of Human Rights in 1789 and the enactment of the first ten amendments of the American constitution in 1791, a constitutional democracy is based not only on (competitive) elections but also on the separation of powers and the guarantee of rights; nowadays the instrument of this guarantee takes the form of the almost universal establishment of courts of justice independent from the elected branches of the government and in charge of adjudicating constitutional

conflicts between the citizens and their representatives (Ginsburg 2003) – not all these courts are independent, by the way, and in this case they are nothing.

In its minimalism, the doctrine misses some crucial elements of the regime RED, and it fails to be a comprehensive description of most of contemporary democratic political systems. For instance, on one hand, and just from the point of view of citizen participation, many forms of mixed government (here in a meaning different from the one of Aristotle and Thomas, i.e., combining aspects of representative and direct democracy, notably referendum, recalls, popular initiatives, etc.) have been proposed and sometimes constitutionalized, for instance, in Switzerland,¹⁰ in the western states of the American Union, in the Weimar Republic, and in a limited form in the Italian Constitution of 1948. For sure the bulk of political decisions – from waging wars to economic and social policies – are still largely in the hands of the elected representatives and not of citizens, with the usual caveat that they (the incumbent) have to take into account and anticipate, if and how they can, the opinion of the voters to stay in office. On the other hand, as suggested, we should take into account, among other nonelected institutions like independent central banks, the role of constitutional courts that exercise active normative power¹¹ ruining the legislative monopoly of the elected representatives.¹²

In any event, the back road to Athens seems barred. We cannot ignore the social-economic preconditions of the Athenian democracy largely dependent on the massive presence of slave work inside the *polis*. We should then move to the second, more difficult and embarrassing question.

What is good about representative democracy, here in the strict Schumpeterian sense? In Przeworski et al.'s (2000) characterization, it can be summarized in the following way: (1) the election of a chief executive either by direct election or parliamentary election; (2) the election of the legislative branch, whether by party slate or by direct election of the legislators; (3) the existence of more than one party; and (4) the possibility of “alternation” in office and some experience with incumbents being voted out, and peacefully leaving office.¹³ In its present form, thanks to universal suffrage, we may say that it is an inclusive rather than an exclusionary political system; in this perspective, it has a point in common with the Athenian *demokratia*, which yet excluded women and adult males not born from Athenian citizens. So said, we cannot easily deny that, more and more, citizens' turnout to elections seems to be declining in Western society. How far this decline is compatible with a stable representative democracy is probably a question to which no one has a clear answer. I would guess that in a national election, two-thirds of abstention would be a limit threshold, but this is clearly pure speculation based on no empirical evidence.

Elections, as Thomas Aquinas anticipated, are considered in any event, and independently from forms of immediate participation (like referendum) the paramount democratic, popular element of the political mixed regime we call nowadays and by a shortcut democracy. But most of the democratic regimes in the world have next to regular competitive election mechanisms that limit

the power of the elected majorities, since our democracies, thanks to the existence of rigid constitutions and various forms of checks and balances, impose constraints upon the power exercised by the elites popularly selected on election day. In virtue of these mechanisms, the constitutional rights guaranteed to citizens of a democratic society have some real chance to be respected by the government. So it is not true that citizens of constitutional democracies are free only one day each four or five years, as Rousseau used to say speaking of the British government. Between elections, citizens' rights are protected by courts of justice, which make more credible the promise that governments vow when they ask for obedience not only by those who chose them but by everybody.

Here though we need to come back to the role of elections, which remain a central piece of the modern democratic regime. They have in reality a variety of functions (even if we consider only the democratic context¹⁴); here are some of them (the list is everything but exclusive).

1. The most important in my opinion might still be the original one (at least in France): to bestow legitimacy to the political class (the people living of politics). From an historical point of view, we may notice that in Athens, the political class, in the Weberian sense, was largely overlapping with the citizenship; notably the *aporoï* (the lower classes) lived also thanks to paid participation in political offices (the people's assembly and the people's court). In this perspective, the question of legitimacy was absent. It only had a negative dimension: the oligarchs considered illegitimate the democratic regime assuming that the "many" (poor) were unable to govern the city. Modern elections are the concrete mechanism establishing citizens' political obligation, which is supposed to produce obedience without violence: "You citizen C have to obey the representatives since you chose them in order to govern you and since you can kick them out on the election day (something you could not easily do under an absolute hereditary monarchy or any other authoritarian system, since it would be very costly, as Locke asserted speaking of the appeal to heaven, an armed rebellion against the government)." Notice that there a trick in that story. Each single voter is not responsible for the government that was chosen by the majority, not by him; the citizen C may have even been voting for the opposition. But this is the problem of being bound by majority rule that cannot be discussed here. The citizen as such has only the right to express her preference, not the one to see it satisfied. What matters is that elections offer through the legalized practice of popular authorization a principle of legitimacy and of political obligation radically different from the one typical of monarchy or pure oligarchic regimes based on the principle that Weber called "traditional" legitimacy. We cannot ignore that a fundamental reason why elections and democracy have a "good press" is this idea of a popular authorization opposed to the premodern monarchical ideology. If the real antonym of the Greek democracy was the oligarchy, which excluded a large number of citizens from the direct government of the city, the antonyms of the modern

representative government were the absolute monarchical regimes dominant in Europe at the end of the eighteenth century.

This legitimizing function of the ritual of elections in the modern world explains the paradox of dictatorships or authoritarian governments that do not want to give up the electoral fiction because this one cannot be abandoned without losing face. In such undemocratic regimes, the elections have evidently not the function of guaranteeing a possible alternation in power; nonetheless they cannot be dismissed, because outside archaic societies, the fiction that the power comes from a popular authorization is not any more an option, but simply inescapable procedure. Free or unfree, competitive or not, elections cannot disappear in societies where, with the exception of some sultanates, no government can assert a power based on divine right or pure hereditary origin.

It is important also to observe that the idea of “competition” was absent from the original doctrine, which insisted instead on the principle of accountability, as the threat to remove the elected representatives at the end of their mandate – competition in the contemporary sense implies a *Parteienstaat*, or at least organized groups competing for political power, as for the American presidential election in 1800, which may be the first instantiation of such a type of election at the nationwide level.

2. The other function, the less credible one, but the one most usually stressed by the ideologists of the representative government (starting from Thomas, as we saw), is that election is a mechanism able to select the natural elite of a given society. (So this “elitist” version of democracy doesn’t seem the monopoly of Schumpeter, but just the standard one, at least until recently, when populist ideologies started replacing the classical doctrines of representative government.)

3. More interesting is that, under certain circumstances (when elections are really competitive, as we will see), they have the function of inducing moderation in the exercise of representative government. So they may be considered as an element of the constitutional engineering that Montesquieu qualified of the antidespotic regime. It may be useful to develop this point a bit (which in a different place should include at least a short analysis of the form of government that the author of the *Spirit of the Laws* called despotism).

The precondition for the effective enforcement of this moderating function is that the political class is divided and that the incumbent can actually lose the competition with the challenger. An interesting counterexample is instantiated by contemporary China. For sure, there are important disagreements inside the Party that monopolize political power, but these disagreements are processed internally rather than being exposed to electoral competition. As for Russia, I hesitate to say anything concerning this crucial question. It seems to a nonspecialist that political opposition is both weak and so far actively marginalized by the government. But it is possible that some form of pluralism will emerge also in post-Soviet society.

If we consider a country like Italy after the Second World War, it is a fact that the party system is pluralist, that the opposition exists and is allowed to compete with the majority, that moreover elections are free and regular; it seems nonetheless that we cannot speak for this country of real competitive democracy.¹⁵ Over sixteen elections since 1948, the challenger won the competition only twice vis-à-vis the incumbent majority, and in one case (1996) a segment of the conservative coalition (the Lega Nord) did not participate in the electoral alliance, while in the second case (2006), a small group of the same conservative coalition decided to run the election with the opposition (the experiment lasted, by the way, only two years, then the parliament was disbanded and the usual coalition won the election). So we have to say that, pace Sweden, where the social democrats were in power for a very long time, a democracy is competitive if enough voters are willing to change their minds. Actually more and more it seems that what matters is the number of abstentions on the two sides of the competition rather than the number (apparently irrelevant) of voters changing their positions and beliefs.¹⁶ In the absence of this electoral mobility (like seems to be the case in Italy), or more likely in the absence of cyclical abstentions, party pluralism doesn't guarantee by itself the competitive function of democracy, the function that Schumpeter considered as the qualifying element of his definition. Well, if democracy is competitive, really competitive in the sense I have been trying to specify (that there is a real risk for the incumbent to lose the competition with the challenger), then elections have the function of *frein et contre-pouvoir*; that would transform them as a Montesquieuan instrument of the moderate government, because the incumbent will take into account at least the demands and interests of his voters to stay in power.

It may be objected that I'm suggesting a too demanding definition of competitive democracy, and that it doesn't matter if there is alternation in power or not, provided at least that elections are free (like is largely true in Italy and in Japan). I'm not suggesting that we have to bar Italy from the family of potential competitive democracies – no one can exclude, and certainly not me, that at some unknown point in the future the conservatives will be defeated by a popular liberal majority. My claim here is that competition producing alternation in power is possible only if some voters change their positions (minds) or if the voters of one party abstain more than those of the other one, giving to the second one a competitive advantage. The numbers of these mobile voters can be very small. In this sense I think that it is possible to claim that the major difference between the classical aristocracy and the modern competitive democracy consists of having on one side a small number of people self-authorized to command over all the members of the political community, and on the other side a small number of people exercising political power thanks of the heteroauthorization of a small number of people, the mobile pivotal voters. This small number of decision makers who play a crucial role has been the object of great attention by political theorists starting at least from the

work by Anthony Dawns; they are also of an even greater interest for political actors who know the extraordinary importance of this small minority among the “equal” citizens.

We could add here that in a two-party (and perhaps in a two-coalition) system, the electoral competition produces moderation also in a slightly different sense – not the Montesquieuian but the Aristotelian one. Because competition has normally the aim to capture the median (here in the concrete sense of pivotal) voters, competitive election produces moderation in the sense of inciting policies that are median, something that in the Aristotelian tradition would be positive not only from a strategic point of view (if you capture the median voter, you win) but also from a normative one, because *mésōn te kai áriston* (Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, 2.6), *in medio stat virtus*.

A caveat is important though. It is evident that elections do not produce moderation everywhere; one can think of the electoral results in the Gaza strip. Elections and even competitive elections are not a panacea; that would be a naïve and occasionally very dangerous illusion. The political culture of the elites (as Schumpeter said explicitly in the very important Chapter 23 of his book) plays a decisive role. It is worth quoting directly the Austrian economist when he speaks of the “conditions for the success of democracy” (Schumpeter 1942, 289–96); five elements are considered of major importance: (1) “the human material of politics . . . should be of sufficiently high quality”; (2) limited government – “the second condition for the success of democracy is that the effective range of political decision should not be extended too far”; (3) a good bureaucracy – “the services of a well-trained bureaucracy of good standing and tradition, endowed with a strong sense of duty and a no less strong esprit de corps”; (4) “democratic self-control”; and (5) “finally, effective competition for leadership requires a large measure of tolerance for difference of opinion.”

The minimalist definition of democracy offered by Schumpeter is apparently compatible only with a very demanding set of sociocultural preconditions; it is interesting that the economist does not include in his list economic preconditions, even if he speaks of “modern industrial society” (Schumpeter 1942, 293).

Be this as it may, in these contexts, elections are an instrument to produce both legitimacy and limited government. “You representative can govern us but be careful since we can get rid of you if we dislike (for whatever reason) what you have been doing.” This is exactly what Schumpeter says, even though he seems to refrain from any normative dimension in his analysis: I say “seems” because the eulogy of the British political system in the chapters he devoted to democracy is so vibrant and unconditional, as already noticed, that it is not really possible to claim that he was speaking of democracy like ornithologists describe birds. Notice again that we do not know exactly who can say that, probably the potential nonvoters, those who abstain from going to the ballots. In specific circumstances, we know quite approximately who these voters are: African Americans in the United States, the voters in some regions of the

southern part of country in Italy, and so on. This is in any event what politicians ask of their electoral advisors: to identify the specific districts or the special segments of the electoral body they have to address and focus on during the campaign.

All this goes under the name of accountability of the elected representatives. I want to suggest, to answer my original question, that this property introduced by competitive or contested election is, embarrassingly so, at the same time good and bad. Representatives *pro tempore* in a competitive democracy know that they can lose elections and cannot do whatever they want because, if they desire to (and can) be reelected, they need to get the approval of their voters and in any event, of a majority of voters. Now, on one hand, this is good, because it creates an incentive to avoid imposing decisions that are largely unpopular (they can just impose decisions unpopular to minorities). On the other hand, accountability introduces myopia and partiality. The elected politicians care about their constituencies, or in any event about the 51 percent (in fact, because of electoral law, mostly simply about the plurality) of the voters, not about voters in general; the incumbent wants to stay in power, so he just needs the approval of his voters; he has no motivation to care about the others. Partiality is rational for an elected representative. Myopia comes from the same origin. The elected politicians cannot think about the consequences of the long run, because on the long and even medium run, they will be politically dead, or at least diminished, if they are not reelected. Electoral myopia, for instance, may have devastating effects inside the European Union. Many Europeans remember that the problems originated in the solution of the Greek financial crises in spring 2010 by the decision of the chancellor Merkel to postpone any real decision by the German government until the election in Nord-Rhein Westfalen. Some commentators do not agree with this explanation of Merkel's hesitation and dragging on. We can leave the question open. But similar examples are numerous.

The account presented so far is inevitably a simplification, but we believe that the assessment, at least concerning RED, is basically correct. To be sure, this may not be the starting point for normative theorists, but I believe that political analysis should begin with facts. Facts are not everything, but if we get the facts wrong, our analysis may just be pointless. Implicitly or explicitly, some arguments like the ones presented here are at the origin of the numerous independent and nonaccountable authorities established nowadays everywhere in democratic societies: from the constitutional courts to the central banks to the so called independent administrative agencies.

This question opens a different, huge, and scarcely explored question: the role of the unaccountable/nonelected organs that, conjointly with the voters, control the elected representatives. To speak with the last editions of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, the topic of a theory of constitutional, not just representative, democracy. It is in any event a fact that nowadays, voters, elected representatives, and constitutional or supreme courts are a quasi-universal element of the political landscape we are now used to calling democracy. And

any theory of RED, including a theory of the Russian political system, has to include and make sense of them.

I would like to offer in the form of a provisional conclusion some remarks summarizing the questions more than the answers presented so far. To speak about modern democracy, we need to begin from some solid starting point. We often use a variety of normative definitions because everybody tends to slip under the term what he likes, wishes, or desires. This is up to a point inescapable, because democracy is inevitably also a normative concept. Still, because we are interested in real existing democracies, we should look for a minimalist conceptual “starting point,” for some equivalent of Hobbes’s “right to self-preservation.” This starting point could be the following rephrasing of Schumpeter’s definition: a RED is a political regime where those in government can lose their command position because of an election (rather than by poisoning, a civil war, a military coup, or a revolution).

No power is stable in the world. Most of the modern literature on the *raison d’état* was devoted to the question of how to stabilize power; but only in a democracy, political power is kept by winning a free, competitive election. Losing power because of an election implies that there is a challenger able to replace the potential losing incumbent. Sometimes there is no such challenger (China! Russia? Italy??) for reasons that may depend on a variety of circumstances (including electoral laws). But democratic power is not just a power that can be lost peacefully. It is also a limited power. And perhaps the first point is true because the second one is true too. To lose, the incumbent has to accept criticism. This is possible only if the incumbent is not a *monopolist*. A sort of duopoly or an oligopoly (better if it is open) has to characterize the structure of the political elites if we speak of democracy. The military force has to be neutral, meaning not involved in the political competition; which was not the case in Turkey, for instance, until recently, not to speak of many Latin American countries. Balance of powers – a basic element of modern constitutionalism – has to be part of the minimalist definition of democracy. In absence of it, democracy could end up being an alternation in power of despotic regimes – a self-contradictory hypothesis, because it is not easily understandable why a despot would accept the verdict of the polls.

Democracy recognizes not only counterpowers necessary for alternation based on election but also citizens’ rights. Historically modern democracy, the form of representative government based on universal suffrage, emerged from the fight against the absolutism, and the new elites asked for popular support in exchange for the protection of rights (property rights at the beginning and political and social rights over time).

All that is possible only if violence disappears from political conflicts, or if it is at least marginalized. Elections as such are not an explanation for this fading but a possible consequence. Democratic morphology is not the same as its genealogy. Elections, when they work, are an orderly and peaceful form for regulating conflicts among elites and among groups of citizens and their elites. Why they work is a different question, certainly connected with the

preconditions spelled out by Schumpeter. We like that in a democracy, the incumbent is nervous because she can lose her position because of a few people changing their votes or abstaining. In quasi-authoritarian regimes, elections may be fake or manipulated because the incumbent fears that he will lose too much if he is not confirmed in his job. Limited power seems to be in a sense the most important presupposition for competitive democratic elections.

Ex parte principi, from the point of view of those who govern, the advantage of democracy is implicitly spelled out by Nathan (2009), which independently from the quote I can only very partially agree with: “the elements of potential crisis can occur at any time. If one imagines the Chinese system facing what the United States has recently gone through – two drawn-out wars, a plummeting economy, unpopular leaders, hypercritical media, deep divisions over cultural identity – it is as hard to imagine the Chinese system surviving as to imagine mature democracies like the United States (or Britain or Japan) collapsing. Cultures of open social dissent, robust rule of law, and the institutional capacity to change leaders in response to public discontent without changing the system keep such crises of government from becoming crises of the regime”.¹⁷ The interesting point here is that authoritarian governments may be too nervous about the perspective of losing an election to let the political competition work properly, where in the democratic societies those who lose can remain peacefully inside the political system and fight again for the next election or even take quiet and often rich vacations, without going in exile (like the defeated leaders of Kirgizstan) or in prison.

Competitive elections, finally, are not good in themselves; they can be considered good only looking at what they produce. Schumpeter (1942, 242) wrote:

Democracy is a political method, that is to say, a certain type of institutional arrangement for arriving at political – legislative and administrative – decisions and hence incapable of being an end in itself, irrespective of what decisions will produce under given historical conditions.

For decades, notably since the Second World War, in the Western rich countries, we have been used to thinking, to believing and to teaching, that peace, prosperity, and a decent society (some sort of economic equality and protection of human rights) are the result of democratic representative government resulting from competitive elections. Even if we think that constitutional democracy is still the best form of government as to protection of rights, the times are now mature for a less triumphant and hopefully deeper reflection.

6.5 LESSONS FROM RUSSIA

What can we learn about democracy looking at the post-Soviet political evolution in Russia? This is the question I want to ask at the end of this chapter, which presented the Western theory of democracy as a form of government.

A dialogue, the aim of this book, can take place only if we start with some common understanding of the words we use.

The collapse of the Communist regime went together in Russia – unlike in China – with the end of the hegemony of the Party that for a very long time monopolized political authority over the largest country in the world. The new political leadership formally approved – unlike in China – the transformation of the political system in the direction of Western democracy, based on open competitive elections, both for the president and the two houses of the Federal Assembly.

From 1989 through 2002, the Communist Party was the largest political group in the parliament (in both the 1995 and 1999 elections), but it lost its prominent position in all the successive elections. In 2003, United Russia received 38 percent of the vote, becoming since then the leading political party in the country. Alternation in power was achieved through a vote that was able to modify the nature of the majority in the parliament. The democratic method, notwithstanding all the possible criticisms concerning the free character of the electoral competition (see Maravall in this volume), was enforced, and in a rather minimalist sense, Russia is nowadays a “democracy.” Certainly the Democracy Index 2010 (http://graphics.eiu.com/PDF/Democracy_Index_2010_web.pdf) only classifies Russia under the category of “hybrid regimes,” like Turkey, which also experienced a radical change of political elite through electoral competitions in the last fifteen years. If the democratic method allows the possibility of rejecting the elite in power with “paper stones,” it is difficult to deny that in Russia, as well as in Turkey, the electoral body has been able to produce such a transformation – even if some doubts may subsist about the same possibility in the future.

The trouble, in any event, is that we use the word “democracy” both to designate a method (in Schumpeter’s language) and as a synonym of good government. As a rule for selecting the governing elite and as the equivalent of *buon governo*, a concept invented long before competitive elections and one that needs to be qualified since elections alone seem not to be enough to fulfill citizens’ expectations concerning what could straightforwardly be called “good government.”

It may be useful to deal with our conundrum to come back to the classical locus of the contemporary democratic doctrine. In the chapters that Schumpeter devotes to democracy in his famous book, the attention of the readers focused traditionally on the short definition of the democratic method, the one we find at the beginning of Chapter XXII.¹⁸ Still two other important sections are mostly disregarded, the one concerning the criticism of what Schumpeter called the classical doctrine and, even more importantly, the entire Chapter XXIII. If one reads the pages devoted to the conditions for the success of democratic method (289–96), it becomes clear that Schumpeter intended to distinguish between the democratic method (competitive elections, implying the possibility to oust the incumbent) and good government. A democratic

method after all imposes by synecdoche; only the will of the majority is the popular will. As the recent Turkish experience shows with sufficient evidence, the democratic alternation in power can be an alternation between illiberal and quite oppressive governments.

Now the Russian post-Communist political reality seems to make evident that the democratic method is insufficient to produce a good government in the absence of preconditions like “the human material of politics” (290), a “well trained bureaucracy” (293), the circumstance that “the effective range of political decision should not be extended too far” (291). Lacking such conditions, “the democratic method may turn out legislative freaks” (292).

It is very difficult and possibly unwise to make any prediction concerning the future development of the political system of Putin’s Russia. The country that in the twentieth century produced under Communism astonishing masterpieces of music and literature – we may only think of Shostakovich and Bulgakov – today seems to lack the conditions for the “success” of a competitive democracy. That may change in the future. But for the moment, democracy in the Russian mirror discovers its unsightly face and the need to rethink its own nature and value: what can make democracy – competitive elections – a good government, beyond the magic of synonymy.

Notes

1. The original quote “aujourd’hui il n’y a si méchant Prince sous lequel il ne vaille mieux vivre que dans une Démocratie” is in Leibniz und Landgraf Ernst von Hessen-Rheinfels, *Ein ungedruckter Briefwechsel über religiöse und politische Gegenstände*, ed. Chr. Von Rommel, vol. I (Frankfurt am Main, 1847), 369.
2. The best book on the *boulé* is still Rhodes (1972).
3. *Politics*, VI.2.1 (1317b2); this text has to do with the doctrine of justice and freedom that Aristotle attributed to the democrats and that he criticizes.
4. But not entirely, as Lene Rubinstein is going to show in her work on post-Athenian democratic regimes.
5. Machiavelli was wrong attributing the end of the Athenian democracy to its internal structure; the collapse had simply exogenous grounds, and it was similar for instance to the collapse of the Netherlands invaded by the Nazi Reichswehr at the beginning of the Second World War.
6. Thomas wrote indeed a short treatise about political theory, the *De regimine principum*, but the text was largely incomplete when he died and was rewritten and brought to an end by Ptolomeus of Lucca.
7. It is interesting and intriguing to notice that not the Gospel, but the Old Testament, was mostly used as the authoritative reference for political theory by major Christian political thinkers, not only as well known as Hobbes and Locke but also by John Selden (1640), Dietrich Reinkingk (1653), and many others.
8. A similar interpretation was suggested in the speech held by M.H. Hansen at the British Academy, on February 25, 2010; Hansen by the way presented there a French/Jacobin version of the doctrine of the separation of powers rather than the

American one based on a mechanism of checks and balances; his speech is now published (Hansen 2010).

9. For sure public manifestations play a role in democratic societies (notably in France), but it is not easy to measure their impact on the governmental policies; they are a more vivid form of protest but sometimes less significant than a decline of popularity of an incumbent measured by a survey. And in any event they have no legal effect, at least if they do not become a revolution which destroys the previous legal and political order.
10. On the significant exception represented by Switzerland, see the instructive book by Papadopoulos (1998).
11. By this adjective I mean the power of enacting general positive norms.
12. See the forthcoming book *Constitutional Courts as Positive Legislators: A Comparative Law Study*, ed. Allan R. Brewer-Carias (Cambridge University Press), which considers the role of constitutional courts in twenty-eight countries in the world, from Argentina to the United States.
13. I'm quoting here Sam Issacharoff's forthcoming article "Constitutional Courts and Democratic Hedging."
14. Adam Przeworski has drawn my attention to the role of elections in nondemocratic regimes.
15. I refer here to an argument developed by D'Alimonte (1989). Before 1996, the basic point was common in the comparative literature. I believe that La Palombara (1987) created the expression of "quasi-democracy" to qualify political systems like Italy and Japan. Contrary to general opinion, I believe on the basis of the electoral data analyzed by D'Alimonte that the situation is still pretty much the same.
16. The work by Renato Mannheimer on Italy and Anne Muxel on France shows quite clearly the point concerning these two countries.
17. "Beijing's Authoritarian Acrobatics Thursday: An Illegitimate Regime Can't Stave Off Political Crises Forever," *Wall Street Journal*, June 4, 2009.
18. "The democratic method is the institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for people's vote" (269); "it should be observed that in making it the primary function of the electorate to produce a government (directly or through an intermediary body) I intended to include in this phrase also the function of evicting it" (272).

The Role of Elections in Democracy

Boris Makarenko

7.1 WHY ARE ELECTIONS IMPORTANT?

7.1.1 Not Limited to Competition . . .

While democracy cannot be reduced to elections or explained solely by elections, very few questions about democracy can be answered without referring to elections. If politics is about making decisions and implementing them, elections are the first decision: they determine who entrusts in whom the power of making these decisions through an institutionalized procedure and for a given period of time.

Murray Edelman (1964, 3) characterized elections as a ritual act: voting is the only form in which most citizens ever participate directly in government – (elections) give people chance to express discontents and enthusiasm, to enjoy a sense of involvement. This ritualism is in fact the primary function of elections. As the wheel of history kept rolling, elections were replacing divinity of a monarch as the principal act of legitimation of authority as absolute monarchy was giving way to constitutional monarchies and republics. Voting for the same ruler or assembly symbolized belonging of a person to the same polity and reinforcing the sense of national unity, which in Rustow's (1970) observation is the main precondition of democracy. Elaborating on the same notion, Rustow (1970, 56) noted that the people cannot decide until somebody decides who the people are. No matter how much hypocrisy authoritarian rulers apply in praising the elections they have won as a democracy, at least until a certain point, most people believe that through elections, they demonstrate and/or confirm the unity of their nation. And, to the contrary, mass protests against unfair elections, such as “color revolutions” or protests in Moscow and other Russian cities after the Duma elections in December 2011, are a sure indication of a serious crisis of the legitimacy of the political regime.

Until recently, “throwing the rascals out” was not predominant function of elections. In nondemocracies, elections were either noncompetitive (like in the Soviet Union or Communist China) or only imitated competition (like in many countries of the Soviet bloc and Third World countries). But even in democracies, alternation of parties in office is a relatively recent phenomenon, and over the past century, incumbents won four out of five elections in which they participated (Przeworski, this volume).

Lack of competition or low competitiveness may be due to two different factors: type of regime (totalitarian or authoritarian) or its nature; dominant or predominant parties (Sartori 1976) are too diverse in nature to discuss within this short piece. The role of noncompetitive elections is manifold. First and foremost, they legitimize the polity per se. Second, they change citizens (or subjects) into voters, that is, beget habituation of citizens to voting as a sole way to create rulers (even if this act is only ritual). Come challengers, they would have a chance to be perceived as legitimate competitors and even winners of power. Third, though the number of cases is limited, elections on a subnational level may perform an unexpected function of creating legitimate government for a newborn state, when a former federal (or quasi-federal) stateness falls apart. A similar phenomenon occurred in many former colonies where full independence was preceded by limited autonomy and the emergence of legislative assemblies which turned into full-scale parliaments on Independence Day. This happened to all three Communist federations: Soviet, Czechoslovak, and Yugoslav (twice, including the more recent separation of Serbia and Montenegro). Negotiating the divorce and making the first steps of independence were legitimately elected assemblies and executives either formed by them or popularly elected. In this case, competitiveness of such elections was secondary to the state-building act, both as a ritual and as a legal institution.

The observation of Linz and Stepan (1996) that the dissolution of the Soviet Union was caused by the fact that local elections preceded federal seems convincing: the first round of republican (meaning republics comprising the Soviet Union) competitive elections held in spring 1990 begot legitimate legislatures, followed by direct presidential elections in most republics in 1991, certainly facilitated centrifugal trends. However, these processes were triggered by the first competitive elections to the federal legislature in 1989, which opened up the political system and drastically liberalized political life. Arguments among Russian political scientists over what would have happened if Michail Gorbachev dared to introduce direct elections of the USSR president (rather than being elected by the federal legislature in March 1990) are as futile as any attempt to reinvent the past. However, in this particular case, the answer seems to be available: a referendum on whether the USSR should be preserved held in March 1991 brought an overwhelming (76 percent) support to the preservation of the Union, but six out of fifteen Soviet republics de facto boycotted it. Popular presidential (or for that purpose any federal) elections held about the same time would have followed the same scenario, so they would have

enhanced the split rather than put the country together again. A hope that a smaller Union could have survived the centrifugal trends remains entirely hypothetical: it was the federal top elite that rebelled in August 1991 against Gorbachev's new Union treaty, a "coalition of the willing" Soviet republics, and the coup served as a coup de grace for the agonizing Soviet empire.

Finally, elections may serve as an interface between authoritarianism and proto-democracy in democratizing societies. As Snyder (2006, 222) points out, elections in nondemocratic contexts can have sharply contrasting effects on stateness, subverting state capacity in some instances and strengthening it in others, therefore characterizing their role as "regime-sustaining" or "regime subverting." The question is how to define subversion. In authoritarian contexts, elections may "subvert" their authoritarian nature. One of the main properties of such regimes is lack of proper information about public preferences and/or ability to analyze or interpret it. Sometimes authoritarian rules decide to "open up" elections and permit some degree of competition (for diverse reasons) without realizing how disastrous the results will be for them. If, according to Schmitter and Karl (1991, 39), democracy is about "bounded uncertainty," it is the inability of the ruling elite to comprehend the "uncertainty," or at least evaluate its degree, that determines its failure. Whether the old elites want to introduce pluralism or are forced to introduce it requires a case-by-case analysis.

A "good" or democratizing scenario is when reformist or pro-democratic forces receive a majority or a large share of the vote. This is what happened in most Central European states in 1989–91, and also in the Soviet Union in 1989: in the first competitive elections of 1989, members of the Communist Party received an overwhelming majority, but the CPSU leadership was shocked by the fact that thirty-eight regional party bosses lost in their majoritarian constituencies.

In other cases, like in Burma in 1990 and Algeria in 1991, the opponents represented a counterelite and/or antagonistic ideological or political camp, and therefore the ruling class pretended elections never took place and repressed the winners. Obviously the difference in reactions to "miscalculated uncertainty" is explained by several factors: (1) degree of antagonism between the ancient regime and the new winners and perceived threat of collapse of states – maximally high in the Algerian case and surprisingly minimal for Central Europe; (2) how "hardline" the regime is (Burma probably being the maximum); and (3) the emerging consensus over the need to depart from the ancient regime and/or democratize (Central Europe).

A milder version of the same "miscalculated uncertainty" are the "color revolutions," the list of which in our reasoning starts with the "snap elections" in the Philippines in 1986 and includes Serbia (2000), Georgia (2003), and Ukraine (2004). In all these cases, the incumbents miscalculated their ability to manipulate elections and/or control the opposition in situations which were close to fifty-fifty and, in the face of massive popular protests, had to concede their failure and step down.

The model of constituting elections followed by elections of disappointment seems to have become a classic of transitology. However, it worked only in Central and Eastern European states: the European choice of national development (or “North-Western Passage” formulated by [Przeworski 1995](#)) was nearly consensual for the political class of those countries. It explains the quick collapse of the ancient regime in the first competitive (thus, constituting) elections and it also facilitated transformation of the former Communist parties into socialist/catch-all formations, which challenged specific policies but not the strategic goals of the European choice. In the former Soviet republics, the scenario was different. Constitution of the new statehood went through the phases, described earlier, of competitive federal and republican-level legislative elections (in 1989 and 1990, respectively) and election of “republican-level” presidents in 1991, followed by independence at the end of the same year. Elections of disappointment followed only in the three Baltic states, which from that point followed the Central European rather than post-Soviet path of political development in all major respects. With certain reservations, the “disappointment pattern” may be applied to the presidential elections in Ukraine (1994) and Moldova (1996), both lost by incumbents. As for Russia, the voting of December 12, 1993 served both as the end of multiphased constituting elections (the liberal constitution was approved by a majority of 58 percent) and the elections of disappointment in which opposition parties received the plurality: such was the birth of “bipolarity” of Russian transitional politics described later. Other ex-Soviet states did not go through elections of disappointment.

7.1.2 Why Elections?

The genesis of elections remains one of the main puzzles of political science. Why do rulers subject their power to the test of popular vote? Obviously, there is no universal answer fitting all historic times and geographical spaces. Elections are a political institution with a long history of development.

The first elections are often the second-best solution to fill in the vacuum of legitimacy and/or power. They occur after revolutions, declarations of independence, dissolution of empires. The first decision of politics, with which this text starts, has to be made, while there is no divine force to anoint a king, and the dictator or the colonial ruler has been swept away by the hand of history.

A decision of eligible electors (defined differently in different historic contexts) is perceived as the only available alternative, known to the educated class as a tradition derived from Rome, both as an ancient republic and the Holy See. The tradition is of course not unique to Western Christianity: warlords, chieftains, and tribal leaders in all societies had to receive some kind of popular acclamation, and in most cases such procedures (including elections of early Popes) were striving for consensus rather than plurality (even if you had to lock up the electors, hence, the name of conclave, literally, “with a key”). In early Arab theocracy, electors were choosing a substitute for the deceased

Prophet – “someone smallish behind Him” is the etymology of the word *khalifah* (or Caliph) in Arabic. In 1613, Russian boyars elected to the tsar’s throne Mikhail Romanov, “young and compliant,” as one of the electors described the first of the would-be dynasty in a letter to another elector. Yet, modern elections as a ritual to create legitimacy are certainly derived from the tradition of Rome, reinterpreted by centuries of West European and North American history.

So, the explanation of the first elections is reasonably simple: it is engaged to resolve the issue of legitimacy of power, not the issue of competition. The winner of such first elections in most cases is a well-known, charismatic leader and/or victorious popular movement that destroyed or forced out the previous ruler.

After the first elections, the winner often consolidates power, and in cases of monarchies, no further legitimation is necessary (as in the case of the Romanovs or the caliphs after the first four still called the Righteous), but not with celibate popes who have no issue to succeed them.

What makes the second and consequent elections occur if the power is perceived as legitimate? We dare to formulate a menu of reasons, various combinations of which produce time and place-specific answers for each case:

1. The cost of elections is not too high: the supreme power rests in the hands of a monarch, and only the assembly with limited powers is subjected to elections, or, as in U.S. history, elected power is diluted between federal and state levels; hence the stability of statehood is not endangered.
2. The *pro tempore* principle is introduced as a safeguard against tyranny and further serves as the principal tool of voters’ control over the office-holder. It presupposes that power acquired through elections can also be lost by elections.
3. Absence of the Manichean “government vs. opposition” vision convincingly analyzed by Przeworski (this volume). The runner-up in early U.S. elections became vice president and heir apparent to his rival, assemblies deliberated to reach a decision favoring not their party but a common good, as described by Manin (1997). This author laments that parliaments (with the exception of the U.S. Congress) with time were losing the property of free deliberation, and this observation is loudly cheered by followers of United Russia, the party whose former parliamentary leader coined the phrase that Duma was no place for discussions, of course, completely missing Manin’s point.
4. The emergence of bounded or affordable uncertainty (discussed later). One of the parameters of emerging polyarchies, according to Dahl (1972, 203), is that competition precedes inclusiveness, that is, is limited to “good citizens” and excludes the lower classes, radicals, and so on. Loss of office does not result in either a loss of property and personal freedom or in revolutionary changes in political arrangements.

All the preceding factors apply mostly to the emergence of competitive elections in the first world: their work over time produces habituation to elections and increasing competitiveness. Nowadays, in a consolidated democracy, the question of “why elections?” has two exhaustive answers: “it’s the law” or “there is no other way.” However, these factors shed little light on the same questions pertinent to emerging democracies or societies in transition. What happens there after the issue of “birth legitimacy” is resolved? First, in the current age, almost no regime can do without elections, even if manipulated and noncompetitive, and few regimes are completely immune to international criticism of its poor quality.

Second, such regimes follow one of two strategies: either they strive to fake and manipulate elections to stay in power or they try to build the “affordable uncertainty” reducing the risks of power transfer. The first strategy may fail if the rulers miscalculate their ability to manipulate the exact configuration of forces of their supporters and opponents (like in color revolutions, though this is not the only set of examples); the second, if the cleavages in the society prove unmanageable. The outcome of these strategies defines the quality of elections.

7.1.3 How Much Competition?

Competitive elections are not synonymous with democracy. Rather we ought to distinguish between varying degrees of competition. The dependent variable is the degree of “affordable uncertainty” that is, to what extent the ruling elites are prepared to entrust the destiny of power holding to their voters, or, in a negative definition, the degree of control and manipulation of the electoral process.

In a minimal sense, competition is hardly more than an imitation when formally parties or opposition figures participate in elections and even win a minority of seats but in no way jeopardize the solid majority of pro-regime forces (united in a “party of power” or acting as independents). Such regimes are normally marked as “authoritarian” (to use the categorization of the Economist Democracy Index for purposes of simplicity).

The next form is a regime (normally a presidential republic or a monarchy) that allows competition in assembly elections but not in choosing the chief executive. Such competition is objective in the sense that opposition and parties are genuine and legal and the government does not control it directly, but possesses an inventory of tools to manipulate the elections and twist the arms of its opponents. The range of such regimes stretches from “liberal authoritarian” (characteristic of several Arab “enlightened monarchies” given by [Brumberg \(2003\)](#)) to regimes with predominant parties closely connected with the executive (in [Sartori’s 1976](#) definition), with many such regimes found in post-Soviet space. Euphemisms for the same category are “competitive authoritarian,” “hybrid regimes,” and so on.

Yet another form are regimes with dominant parties. A rule-of-thumb difference between “dominant” and “predominant” is the genetics of the ruling party: whether it constitutes a coalition built from above by the power-holding chief executive or a coalition built by the elites from below and only facilitated by power holders (more often in parliamentary systems). Competition in such cases tends to be higher because the holders of power tend to rely less on fiat and manipulation and more on their ability to attract and sustain elites’ support and popularity with voters. This is a difference between the Mexican Institutional Revolutionary Party or the Indonesian Golkar, on the one hand, and the Indian INC(I) or the Japanese Liberal Democratic Party, on the other hand. Limitation of competition by a dominant party is explained by the transitional character of stateness and/or processes of modernization or rebuilding the state: in all the mentioned cases, at least competition, if not democracy, advanced considerably since the period of classic domination, which proves that in certain contexts, this phenomenon serves as a democracy-building tool.

7.2 FUNCTIONS OF COMPETITIVE ELECTIONS

Competitive elections perform multiple functions in democratic societies, though of course their efficiency strongly depends on the quality and degree of competition. The inventory of functions provided works with utmost capacity in “full” or even “flawed” democracy and (to use the Economist categorization again) and with serious limitations in cases of limited competition described earlier.

7.2.1 Instituting and Consolidating Democracy

Most “rule of thumb” definitions of democracy follow Schumpeter: “that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote.” Therefore, they center on elections as its key property. This approach appears procedural rather than structural. However, all definitions of this kind stress that consolidation of democracy requires certain qualitative characteristics of elites and societies, namely, consensus and real-world “know-how” of conflict management, compromise, tolerance, and respect for others in the political sphere. This property of democratic societies overarches Przeworski’s “the only game in town,” Schmitter’s “bounded uncertainty,” Dahl’s conditions of polyarchy, Diamond’s elections as a “litmus test” of democracy, or Huntington’s two-turnover test of consolidation of democracy.

Therefore, on one hand, “more than elections is needed to have elections” (Przeworski 1999, 204). What exactly that “more” means is revealed by

Diamond's (2003b, 8) explication of the difference between "electoral" and "liberal" democracies:

in elections at least, the will of the voters can be reflected in the outcome, and in particular, unpopular incumbents can be booted from office. This requires an open electoral arena, with substantial freedom for parties and candidates to campaign and solicit votes, and thus to speak, publish, assemble, organize, and move about the country peacefully for that purpose. It also requires neutral and fair administration of the voting and vote counting, with universal suffrage, secrecy of the ballot, reasonable access to the mass media, and established legal procedures for resolving electoral disputes.

These properties of consolidated democracy are vital for everyday life of a democratic society, but at least as Diamond puts it, they need to be viable enough to ensure a reasonable degree of free and fair competition at the time of elections. On the other hand, as Schmitter and Karl (1991, 47) observe, "moderation, fair play, readiness to compromise and other aspects of civic culture emerge only over a long process that may take generations to sink deep, and contingent consent and bounded uncertainty can emerge from the interaction between antagonistic and mutually suspicious actors."

7.2.2 Legitimizing Winners and Losers

A legitimate state cannot exist without legitimate actors, and it is elections that publicly certify both winners and losers, allowing the former to rule and the latter, to quote Przeworski (1991, 26), "to try again within the same institutions under which they have just lost." By creating winners and losers, elections demarcate the political space and set the basic framework for resolution of conflicts without violence. They serve as the main "certifying agency" or "umpire" in the power game. Legitimacy is a concept broader than legality: it implies not only that the contestants won or lost in accordance with the letter of law but also that they proved worthy to enjoy a respectful share of public support. Contestants win publicity, which is a crucial feature of democratic politics. It is this property of elections that gives birth to a class of professional politicians and by extension political parties that have both legal and moral right to hold public office or challenge it: to rephrase Weber (1988[1921]), to live by passion of political struggle. Once born, this class privatizes (but not monopolizes) the right to formulate platforms and policies, and with time to significantly modify it, even retaining the same banners of "left" or "right," liberal or conservative or otherwise.

Owing to the pro tempore nature of elected offices, elections also resolve the problem of legitimate succession of power. The awareness of the need to confirm or challenge the mandate every several years disciplines incumbents, motivates the opposition, and tempers frustrations of the public. It is in the nations with weak or nonexistent traditions of democratic transfers of power

that the problem of succession is perceived as a potential shock to the stability of the system and forces the rulers to resort to dubious prolongation of their terms in office, or invent patterns of “managed” transfer to handpicked successors (as in Russia or Azerbaijan).

7.2.3 Shaping Competition and Political Regime

The relationship between election (rather an electoral system) and characteristics of political regimes is in a way a chicken-and-egg dilemma. Old democracies are well past it: in most cases, to quote Duverger, parties grew out of parliaments (except the United States, where they grew out of competition for the presidency). There is no easy way to summarize libraries of literature about strengths and weaknesses of presidential and parliamentary systems, Westminster systems versus multiparty coalitions, and specific models of interaction between elected officials and public under each type of system, leave alone each specific case. However, it would be reasonable to assume that each consolidated democracy knows its shape, that is, masters the art of coalition building to form an effective executive or a system of checks and balances between the executive and legislature in presidential or semi-presidential systems, and in both cases, the relations between government and opposition.

A dependent variable in this equation is the specific configuration of political forces. The classic triad of liberals, conservatives, and socialists follows different routes in forming two main nuclei of “left” and “right”; socialists change into “catch-all” parties and the political Right has to respond to this challenge; Greens and other new players appear as the classic political agendas enter a postindustrialist phase. A succinct explication of new and old divides can be found in [Lipset \(1994, 15\)](#), who refers to postmaterialistic issues, such as “a clean environment, use of nuclear power, a better culture, equal status for women and minorities . . . and a more permissive morality, particularly as affecting familial and sexual issues.”

More interesting and challenging is the role of elections in newborn democracies. [Grzymala-Busse \(2008\)](#) has pointed out that in the post-Communist world, parties perform vital state-building functions, “a preparatory rather than a representative role.” [Fish \(2006\)](#) calls parliamentary regimes “an unmixed blessing for democracy” for post-Communist countries because this shape of political regime allows the new elites to limit authoritarian traits of charismatic leaders who toppled Communist regimes and compensate for lack or weakness of other tempering institutions such as independent judiciary, civil society, or democratic tradition.

Another important aspect of agenda setting in transitional or unstable democracies is the degree of antagonism in the society. Many cases of democratic failure actually start with elections, which only record the numerical strength of support for various political banners. Worst-case variations occur when the winner applies the rule sardonically described as “one man – one

vote – one time,” usurps the victory, and suppresses the opposition and/or cancels next elections. Such cases are not limited to Third World countries where the majorities are often built on ethnic, confessional, tribal, or regional cleavages (or their combinations), but include Weimar Germany or post-Soviet Central Asian states and Belarus. More complex are the cases when opposition and elections survive, but antagonism shaped by elections persists bringing about democratic failures or long-term crises. Elgie (2008) explores the dangers of semi-presidentialism and identifies three cases of democratic failure caused by cohabitation of popularly elected presidents with opposition-led cabinets and seventeen failures due to minority governments (i.e., presidents lacking majority in parliament). One of, if not the main reason for, such failures is the lack of consensus over the rules of the democratic game.

Yet another problem of the same nature is the ambivalence of popularly elected presidents, described by Linz. They have to combine two roles, both acquired through elections: that of a national leader and that of a leader of a party or agenda, and “playing the second role means betraying the first” (Linz 1990, 61). In the latter capacity, a president’s electoral legitimacy “shields” a dividing or unpopular agenda of the executive, which may lead to the regime’s collapse (as in the example of Allende’s Chile offered by Linz), or tempts the incumbent to “fix stability,” that is, limit electoral challenge: a scenario foreseen by Linz even before it materialized in full strength in Yeltsin’s and post-Yeltsin’s Russia. In the Russian case, “agenda” matters more than formal belonging of the president (Yeltsin or his successors) to a pro-regime party: even with a bitterly underdeveloped party system, the camps of presidents’ supporters and opponents were quite clearly defined.

This discussion brings us back to the point discussed earlier. More than elections is needed to have regular democratic competition, and elections can both manufacture conflict-resolution mechanisms and fall victim to their absence. The emergence of democratic political culture cannot realistically precede “real” (i.e., competitive, free, and fair) elections, but the quality and regularity of subsequent electoral procedures in transitional society greatly depend on the progress of the society in building such political culture.

The effects of institutional choices on the character of an emerging political regime are well illustrated by the political development of post-Communist countries. All states located west of the USSR borders of 1939 chose parliamentary or premier-presidential models, and most of them introduced proportional or mixed electoral systems: two decades after the start of transformation, all of them (not without reservations, of course) are democracies with viable party systems (see Table 1 in Makarenko and Melville, this volume). East of that border, most countries chose presidential or presidential-parliamentary models with different electoral systems (including majoritarian): the democratic record in most of these countries is unimpressive. Only three countries have imperfect but “workable” party systems and are counted as electoral or flawed democracies: parliamentary (formerly presidential-parliamentary) Moldova;

Ukraine, which changed its regime type more than once; and premier-presidential Mongolia.

The case of Russia provides a good illustration of the failure of party building. The pro-reform minority in government, fearful of antagonism between reform and restoration forces, chose a strongly presidential system. Stand-off between reform and restoration left little room for any “third way” party to gain serious support, particularly that cleavages in transitional society were poorly delimited and civil tradition weak. Thus, presidential elections at all phases of post-Communist development constitute defense of the Kremlin by its incumbent or his handpicked (*el dedazo*, to use the Mexican political term) successor against partisan opposition candidates who have no chance of winning.

In electing weak parliaments, Russian voters either demonstrate their support of the president’s party or choose from a menu of protest emotions flavored with nostalgia for the Soviet regime (Communists), rightist populism/nationalism (Zhirinovksy’s LDPR), overt paternalism (“Fair Russia”), or Western liberalism (two parties with ever-shrinking support). Interparty competition is therefore effectively limited to a share of seats in weak legislatures, which is a prohibiting impediment to development of a viable party system.

7.2.4 Shaping the Style of Politics

Elections are a “peaceful warfare,” where opponents clash and mean to defeat each other. No matter how “cooperative” politics may be between elections, they are by definition adversarial during the campaign. Irrespective of degree of antagonism in agendas, parties and politicians vigorously compete for office. Therefore, we dare to formulate the following rule of political style: what is not permissible in campaigns is not permissible, either, between elections. How much can a politician promise? What degree of “lie” is permissible, and can it be exposed by opponents and mass media? How far can one go in criticizing an opponent? Answers to all these questions vary from democracy to democracy and constitute the fabric of national style of politics. Such style undergoes modifications as new channels of communications appear and the character of electoral campaigns change. A recent qualitative shift in the politician-voter relationship is brilliantly described by Manin’s (1997) concept of “audience democracy.”

In “good-case” scenarios, unwritten codes of fair play emerge and are carefully controlled by the civil society and mass media (over and above the courts). Once elections are over, opponents remain critical of each other and compete in parliaments and public space; on the eve of the next elections, the opposition has the privilege of scrutinizing the government’s performance and the degree of implementation of its promises.

In less fortunate cases, an adversarial style of politics hampers consolidation of democracy. Incumbents are tempted to portray the opposition as an “enemy” and/or foreign agents and its ascension to power as a catastrophe. Such cases are common in the post-Soviet space, from the electoral democracy of Ukraine to hybrid regimes in Russia, Georgia, and Armenia and authoritarian Central Asia. Paradoxically, such claims are more frequent in the current decade, when incumbents easily win sizable majorities in the first round of elections than in 1990s, when crises of transition and nation building were more acute and incumbents often needed a runoff to remain in the saddle (like in Russia in 1996 or Armenia in 1996 and 1998). Defeat of incumbents in the Ukraine (1995) and Moldova (1996) did not eliminate hostility in national politics but certainly contributed to transforming these two countries into electoral democracies.

Yet, in some cases, even “bad style” may become crucial to setting mechanisms of conflict resolution. Ukrainian politics of the current decade are hardly an example of good manners, yet regularity of elections and persisting uncertainty of results, as well as the need to build parliamentary coalitions, temper the style, force the losers to concede, and facilitate democratization. Having said that, Ukraine is probably the only case to which Huntington’s two-turnover test does not apply: three out of four presidential elections brought victory to challengers; moreover, twice cabinets changed as a result of parliamentary elections, but Ukraine is still far from becoming a consolidated democracy as the current administration of President Victor Yanukovich attempts to drastically broaden the authority of the presidency and suppress the opposition, which forces the country deeper and deeper into a political crisis.

7.3 PLATFORMS OR PERSONALITIES? WHAT IS BEING VOTED FOR?

Elections constitute competition between both personalities and policy choices (respectively, “horse race” and deliberation). In real-world campaigns, they are hard to separate. It is important, however, to analyze who or what is being voted for. In a minimal definition, each electoral platform requires “bearers” or “launchers,” that is, politicians worthy to promote it; conversely, each politician or a party has to build his/her/its popularity on an inventory of issues, or at least slogans. Even if we assume that two parties or candidates put forward identical platforms (this assumption is less hypothetical than it seems: Russian electoral politics knows several variations of such deliberate mimics), voters reactions will differ: they will compare and contrast the strengths and abilities of various platform holders to deliver their promises. This relationship works differently under different conditions.

Political culture is one of the key variables. To comprehend platforms, a median voter has to be not only “literate and informed” but capable of projecting his or her electoral decision into the political future, that is, to link the

act of voting with policy outcomes. Therefore, to follow [Almond and Verba's \(1965\)](#) approach to political culture, a nation with a prevailing participant culture will be more likely to deliberate and scrutinize platforms in an attempt to influence the "inputs" of the political system, whereas nations with a strong subject culture will tend to evaluate personalities hoping that "outputs" of the system produced by politicians they trust will be to their liking.

Maturity of democracy matters. In a consolidated democracy, the relationship between "horse race" and "deliberation" is also consolidated (of course, this factor strongly correlates with the previous one). Voters have more or less clear perceptions of parties' overall ideological creeds and know their leaders and representatives; therefore a basic balance between these two components emerges and persists. As a rule of thumb, we may assume that voters with stable party preferences put more emphasis on platforms (or policies), whereas the "swing voters" make their decisions on the basis of multiple factors, including the personality of candidates. These patterns are shifting: the ratio between "stable" and "swing" voters differs from country to country and from election to election. Performance of the incumbents, the economic situation, and other factors affecting the agenda may cause significant shifts in voting behavior, and holders of new ideas and new charisma have a chance to succeed.

In less mature democracies, voters are less likely to have rational perceptions of policy outcomes and would rather reason in terms of personalities. The critical dimension in these cases is "incumbency versus challenge." It exists even in mature democracies, particularly in cases of crisis or particularly poor performance of incumbents (Nixon or George W. Bush are the most obvious examples). One may argue that it is not the personality of the "failed leader" but the very fact of failure that enforces the desire to "throw the rascals out" (particularly that in both the mentioned cases the "failed leaders" did not run for reelection), but we would object that in such cases, "negative motivation" of voting against the incumbents is stronger than support for the challengers' positive platforms. Argumentation for and against these two factors unveils in spiral-like mode: would the message of "change we can believe in" be strong enough to unseat the GOP without the personality of Barack Obama?

Even more confusing is the case of "velvet revolutions" in Central Europe. Were the peoples throwing out Communism or Communists? The obvious answer is "both." Yet, when the voters' motivation is predominantly negative (anti-incumbent), voters normally have at best a superficial perception of the challengers' policy agenda, and *inter alia* tend to concentrate on the personality of those who "unseat the bastards."

An even lower degree of democratic maturity would shift the balance more heavily toward the personality, particularly (see later) if the regime is presidential; voting is often perceived as a personal contract between a voter and a leader: "I give you my vote, and you promise to do me good," whether the "good" is interpreted as good governance or opposition as strong as feasible, both formulated in very general terms.

Yet another factor is the regime configuration and the electoral system. By definition, majoritarian elections would put more weight on personalities, whereas proportional systems would stress platforms. One-round majoritarian elections require the candidates to move toward the center, to capture the median voter, and the personality factor serves as a strong facilitator of this “capture.” Proportional systems stimulate parties to retain their ideological platforms as distinctly as possible from all others, but in particular from their immediate “ideological neighbors.” Paradoxically, these considerations are borrowed from [Downs \(1957\)](#), who became famous by claiming that electoral competition is about power per se.

However, many more considerations apply. British parliamentary tradition amplifies the factor of party affiliation of a majoritarian candidate in contrast to the American tradition, where parties grew out not of Congress but of the White House, and often a candidate’s personality matters more than party affiliation. In Israel, people consider not only platforms of multiple parties but also personalities: parties tend to put the most popular candidates in the “gray zone” of the party list (determined on the basis of polls), stimulating voters to get into the Knesset their favorites.

7.4 FREE AND FAIR: HOW TO SMELL A RAT

Another crucial issue is the quality of elections. The best way to approach this issue is to give it a negative definition. While it is not easy to define “free and fair” (or “competitive and accurate”) elections, there is little difficulty in listing criteria that make them the opposite. Most of such criteria are relative, that is, they can exist in very different scopes, and measuring them is a sophisticated task. The list of “factors of unfairness” is easy to compile, with the most obvious “methods” being atop of it:

- Direct fraud, that is, falsification of the numbers of ballots cast for each participant. This is the worst form of unfairness, practically absent in consolidated democracies.
- Deviation from the four basic principles (equal, secret, direct, general) of elections, excluding justified cases such as indirect presidential elections in the United States. The first three principles are universal and at least in letter exist everywhere where competitive elections are held. The fourth principle can be violated in two ways described later.
- Various forms of exclusion, that is, denial of active voting rights to significant segments of citizens. Most contemporary elections are genuinely general, yet exceptions can be found, such as deliberate exclusion of most Russian speakers in post-Communist Latvia and Estonia, where citizenship laws created excessive barriers to them in the first years after independence (the situation has improved during the second decade of independent statehood, but these two democracies remain noninclusive even now).

- Exclusion of political actors, that is, denial of passive voting rights to legitimate political players. Such exclusion manifests itself in excessive and manipulated requirements for political parties and/or registration of candidates. They can be found in several ex-Soviet states.
- Significant and repeated disproportions in the distribution of mandates won in elections as a result of gerrymandering, excessive threshold barriers for party lists, and so on. The aim of such measures may look benign: to facilitate the emergence of strong parties in young democracies, to cut away extremes of the political spectrum and make politics less adversarial. Various forms of such manipulation, including gerrymandering and introduction of the two-round system in parliamentary elections in 1950s–1970s France, are described by Colomer (2001). Several “imperfect democracies,” such as Turkey and Georgia, introduced a 10 percent threshold; the increase of such a barrier from 5 to 7 percent in Russia was met with heavy criticism and has been recently reversed. The privilege of U.S. incumbents to reapportion districts (in their own favor) every ten years is another example in the same category. While there is no universal recipe for such criteria, case-by-case analysis may show whether such deliberate disproportions serve the announced cause or hamper free and fair competition.
- Lack of equal rights and opportunities to wage electoral campaigns, including incumbents’ efforts to restrict fund-raising of the opposition, its access to mass media, mass actions, advertising, distribution of campaign materials, and so on.

Therefore, in this negative definition, free and fair elections are those where direct fraud does not exist and none of the significant political players (and where applicable, international observers) complain of it; and other forms of violations are negligible (even this definition is not perfect: nobody complains of electoral fraud in North Korea). One may find anecdotal exceptions on most principles even in the most mature electoral systems (such as the Florida vote in 2000), and various forms of manipulation and “real-life” inequality of campaign capabilities even when the law provides for equal rights and opportunities of all candidates or parties. In “less-than-perfect” democracies, complaints of the opposition are numerous, so to draw a red line between acceptable and unacceptable, we may have to return to Diamond’s definition of electoral democracy and focus on whether such elections can be conducive to the defeat of incumbents. Mass rallies demanding fairness of elections in Russia in the winter of 2011–12 were provoked by a combination of two factors: first, frustration of a part of the society over Vladimir Putin’s statement that he would run (and imminently win) for the next presidential term, and second, the indignation over witnessed fraud on election day, a clear manifestation of the link between unfair elections and unchangeable power.

The “negative definition” approach does not provide an exhaustive answer about the fairness of elections. Is it fair that a party whose candidates collect

over 20 percent of the national vote receive less than 10 percent of seats in first-past-the-post elections (like the Liberal Democrats in contemporary Britain)? Is it fair that a party list winning a safe plurality of the vote finds itself in opposition to a government coalition formed by parties with a lower showing (like in Czech Republic or Moldova in recent elections)? Is it fair that a list scoring 5.01 percent receives more than 5 percent of seats, while another list with 4.99 percent gets zero? These are only the simplest questions that come to mind. A simple parallel with football: is it fair that a foul committed 15.5 meters away from a goal is punished by a penalty kick, and one committed 16.5 meters away is not? What makes players and fans admit it is fair?

One, they will say, these are the rules, it is in the book (positive law). Two, they saw it happening even since they started playing or watching football games (habituation). Three, players of both teams know the consequences of committing a foul within the penalty box (predictability). Four, the rules apply equally to both teams on the football field, so each team will alternatively benefit and suffer from its “conditional fairness” (equality of all actors in the face of rules). Finally, five, they trust the referee (an ideal one, not those who worked in the 2010 World Cup) will apply the rules consistently and impartially (neutral arbitration). So, if all these conditions are met, both the politicians and the public will accept “conditional fairness” of the game. If, however, one or more of the ingredients is missing (like the majoritarian system constantly working against the Liberals in Britain), fairness will be doubted by both the players and the spectators. Even more complicated from the point of view of fairness are rules that deliberately discriminate small parties or radicals, such as thresholds in PR elections or Imperiali quotas favoring stronger parties (no wonder that Imperiali have recently become widespread in regional legislative elections in Russia).

A more difficult question is whether elections of assemblies or local institutes can be called free and fair if the supreme executive authority cannot be defeated at elections. We are inclined to answer that in principle, yes, but it does not happen often. We ought to distinguish between institutions of elections and democracy, the latter being a much broader phenomenon. Nonelected rulers tend to be suspicious of “bounded uncertainty” imminent in any kind of elections and be tempted to manipulate it and limit competition. Yet, having said that, the closer such elections are to the principles of “free and fair,” the more pluralistic and competitive the regime becomes, the more impartial administrators of elections will emerge, and the more empowered the public will be to resist electoral fraud.

7.5 CONCLUSIONS

The preceding text is hardly more than a primer on the institutional role of elections in various types of politics from authoritarian ritualistic and imitative roles, to tools of democratization and consolidation of democracy and the

art of governing and resolving conflicts in full-fledged democracies. To return to the beginning, by casting their votes, people are making the first political decision about “who governs.” Elections alone do not answer other questions, such as, How does the Who govern? What happens to us as the Who continues to govern? But at least where elections deserve their name, the next question; Can we reward or punish the Who for his or her governance? can be answered with, Yes, in the next election.

The role of elections remains pivotal exactly because more than elections is needed to have them perform their pivotal role. Political actors become accustomed to elections as “the only game in town,” control their anxiety over “affordable uncertainty,” master the art of combining electoral hostility with building coalitions and managing conflicts with other actors, and build channels of communication with their voters and the public in general. The public, conversely, has to learn to both trust the political actors and to distrust them. Only this combination will make their decisions informed and rational and eventually to consider not only “outputs” of politicians they elect but also their own “inputs” into the political system, of which casting the ballot is the first act.

This discussion leads us to another conclusion: elections are a drama with an endless number of episodes. Exercise of both active and passive voting rights requires time for education of the respective actors, and it is only human that often they have to learn from their own mistakes. But the reward the students get over time is worthy. It is democracy

Elections and the Challenge of More Democracy

José María Maravall

8.1 A DEFENSE OF ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY

Willy Brandt, in a parliamentary speech delivered on October 28, 1969, when elected as the first postwar social democratic chancellor of the German Federal Republic, challenged politicians “to dare more democracy” (*Mehr Demokratie wagen!*). In his view, the problems of democracy could only be solved with more democracy. In the same vein, a few months after a failed coup against the recently reestablished democracy in Spain, the social democratic leader, Felipe González, defended a program of “deepening democracy” (*profundización de la democracia*). The program was eventually adopted by the congress of the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) in November 1981, a few months before winning the elections in 1982 that led to fourteen years of uninterrupted social democratic rule.

Why would these leaders make such statements? How should we interpret that the problems of democracy can be solved by “more democracy”? In both Germany and Spain, these statements were made when the countries were experiencing the first rotation in office since democracy had been reestablished. In both cases, suspicions and fears about this rotation and the future policies of the new incumbents existed. The obvious meaning of the statements is that the influence of citizens in the political process had to be reinforced; that no resistances should prevail over the power of votes. A usual electoral slogan of the PSOE was “your vote is our strength” (*tu voto es nuestra fuerza*) – implying that other political actors had powerful resources other than the vote. What Brandt and González expressed above all was trust in the voice of the people. Their statements may be seen as rhetorical, innocent, or perhaps dangerous if democracy is seen as a problem rather than as a solution. This is particularly so when democracy is questioned as an effective instrument to achieve substantive outcomes – such as order, welfare, or equality.

Some clarifications are needed before going any further. In the Schumpeterian conception, democracy is simply a procedure whereby citizens select with their votes rulers to govern them for a limited number of years, and then dismiss or reelect them at the time of the next elections according to their performance in office. As [Schumpeter \(1942, 272\)](#) put it, “the electorate controls as well as installs. But . . . electorates normally do not control their political leaders in any way except by refusing to re-elect them or the parliamentary majorities that support them.” This is perhaps a “minimalist” conception of democracy, but it is the substance of what the control of rulers by the people can mean today ([Przeworski 2010a](#)). And the vote can be considerably effective to control rulers: if some conditions are met, elections are a dissuasive instrument in the hands of citizens. They can protect citizens from political abuses and induce rulers to undertake particular courses of action. That is, elections can be an instrument for freedom – arguably a necessary institution if both negative and positive liberties are to be combined ([Berlin \[1958\] 2002](#)).

However, the conditions for elections to operate as an effective control of rulers by citizens are often insufficiently established. Some of the insufficiencies are the matter of this chapter: I shall discuss them with reference to well-established democracies. If “more democracy” may be a relevant political question in such cases, in other cases where there may be elections but no credible competition, it is simply democracy that is the problem. I shall come back to this – Russia being a particularly outstanding example.

Let me stress three obvious points. The first is that democracies are regimes in which citizens can vote rulers out of office. This is why elections define democracy: they are the basic instruments whereby rule by the people and for the people is preserved. Free and fair elections instill on politicians what Madison called “an habitual recollection of their dependence on the people” (*Federalist Papers* 1961, 352). Rulers can anticipate that voters may depose them: this possibility is the only remaining connection between self-government and representative democracy. And the anticipation by politicians that elections are effective instruments for punishment or reward powerfully disciplines their actions.

The second is that voting is not enough: popes in the Vatican are also elected. Democracy is not just about the origin of power: for “rule for the people” to exist, citizens must be able to throw an incumbent out of office through their votes if they believe that the use of power has not been in their interest. If democracy were to be just about initial selection, representatives would not face the risk of posterior dismissal by voters. Only the periodical opportunity of withdrawing the delegation of power provides people with the capacity to defend their interests through the democratic process.

The last point is that electoral punishment only makes sense for the welfare of citizens if they are sufficiently informed to allocate responsibilities, and if an opposition is there that can replace the incumbent government. This is where most of the strategies of rulers in pseudo-democracies operate: they manipulate

the information available to citizens, and they prevent the enforcement of electoral sanctions by undermining any credible opposition.

Therefore, elections are the core of “procedural” democracy. But “procedural” or “formal” democracy can have important consequences. For one, it can protect human rights and freedom. For two, electoral outcomes can be relevant for the material interests of different social groups. This is why elections are risky, both for interest groups and for political rulers. We know (Przeworski 1991, 2000) that if the stakes are high (due for instance to the wealth of the minority and the poverty of the majority), and if risks are not moderated by intertemporal agreements between the winners and the losers of today (who can be the losers and the winners of tomorrow), democracy will probably be subverted. Even in wealthy democracies where parties alternate in office, the policies of democratic governments cannot deviate too much from established interests: constitutional provisions and countermajoritarian institutions constrain the limits of what politics can achieve. And because democracy consists of electing politicians who can subsequently decide on courses of action, politics can become a restricted domain of politicians where citizens remain in the background. So “minimalist” democracies can be subverted, political decisions can have a restricted scope, and politicians may usurp the voice of the people. I understand that these are problems of democracy that Brandt and González had in mind, rather than an extension of democracy to new terrains (such as factories or schools).

If these problems of democracy are real, it makes no sense to argue that the limits between democracy and autocracy are shady. Under autocracies, interest groups are protected from electoral outcomes. Not however from political threats, as they are much more vulnerable to discretionary decisions of rulers. The “primacy of politics” (Mason 1968) is much greater in dictatorships or pseudo-democracies, because the disintegration of society leaves the state with much more autonomy to impose its decisions over interest groups. This “primacy of politics” under such regimes can also be found vis-à-vis the independence of courts, media, and the institutions of pluralism.

8.2 FEARS ABOUT DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS: THE RUSSIAN EXPERIENCE

Russian rulers appear to be much happier with their regime than Brandt and González with theirs. Prime Minister Vladimir Putin questioned what he called “the Western model of democracy,” demanded to “quit lecturing Russia on democracy,” and declared that “we must act with extreme caution” (interview with French journalists, June 10, 2010). President Dmitri Medvédev stated that “Russia is, without doubt, a democracy. There is democracy in Russia,” and insisted that “democracy is a condition for the development of Russia,” but warned that “nothing must change radically, not because it cannot be done but because it is not necessary,” and that parliamentary democracy

would be a catastrophe for Russia (speech in Global Policy Forum, Yaroslav, September 10, 2010).

Yet legislative and presidential elections were far from democratic. According to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the December 2007 election for the Duma “was not a fair election,” and the Council of Europe stated that “we cannot say these were fair elections.” The party of the Kremlin, United Russia, won 64.3 percent of the vote. Three other parties won 11.6, 8.1, and 7.7 percent: the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, the Liberal Democratic Party, and Fair Russia (source: Russian Election Commission). In the presidential election of February 2008, Amnesty International declared that “there is no real opposition.” The “official” candidate, Dmitri Medvédev, won 71.3 percent of the vote. The other three candidates, Genady Zyuganov (Communist Party), Vladimir Zhirinovsky (Liberal Democratic Party), and Andrei Bogdanov (Democratic Party), won respectively 17.5, 9.5, and 1.3 percent of the vote. *Prima facie* it is indeed difficult to imagine competition or opposition in Russian politics.

No division of power exists in Russian politics: the executive controls the legislative and the judiciary. Political power is strongly concentrated: the governors of the republics of the Russian Federation and the mayors of Moscow and St. Petersburg are appointed (and dismissed) from above. Citizens do not directly elect the members of the Council of the Russian Federation (the Upper Chamber of Parliament). President Medvédev has declared that “freedom of speech, of assembly and meetings, is being realized in practice in precisely established legal limits” (speech in Global Policy Forum, Yaroslav, September 10, 2010) – of course, these limits can be very restrictive, and “rule by law” can be very different from the “rule of law” (Holmes 2003). In contrast to the complacent – and elusive – comment by Medvédev, Reporters without Borders ranked Russia in place 121 out of 139 states for freedom of the press.

The value of elections in Russia appears to be very different from what elections mean in democracies. They are a dissuasive show for a potential opposition, a demonstration of strength toward individual citizens and toward expressions of dissent. Holmes (this volume) puts it forcefully: “the rich and powerful remain essentially detached from the population and are focused on their own well-being.” In his account of the Yeltsin/Putin-Medvédev periods, the oppressors have liberated themselves from the oppressed, a few plunder and the many try to survive. Rulers can safely ignore the country’s unprivileged many. Elections do not instill in the rulers a recollection of their dependence on the people: on the contrary, they manifest their autonomy. Rather than an instrument for negative and positive liberty, they are an instrument of domination.

Solovei (this volume) also argues that the Russian state is free from any internal or external constraints and has the complete control of Russian society. Pseudo-democracy depends on the passivity of society, on avoiding its

democratic reorganization after Communist rule: rulers prevent the emergence of any independent civil associations. And, when bursts of dissent and opposition emerge, violence is used, including the physical elimination of opponents. Indeed, dissent and opposition are judged as subverting the state.

The reconstruction of the state is the political priority after the collapse of Communism, the division of the Soviet Union, the economic and political chaos, and the corruption in the Yeltsin years. The main argument is that no democracy can exist without a state capable enough to deliver order, welfare, and equality. Building the capacity of a strong state is presented as the precondition for democracy. But preconditions for democracy are dubious. The state was deeply reorganized in several transitions from dictatorship, without democracy having to wait. And democracies have survived profound weaknesses of states. More particularly, there is no reason to accept that a strong, capable state would lead to democracy. Justifications to indefinitely postpone democracy can always be found. As Dunn (this volume) argues, "it remains hard to see how a more democratic government could come into existence through any political process, at the mercy of the state in its present form." A strong state consists of institutions inhabited by individuals with interests attached to the relative power of the institution. It is unlikely that the police, the army, the judges, the bureaucrats, the politicians, will detect that a threshold of strength/capacity has been reached, and then replace the present pseudo-democracy by democracy.

If some democratic leaders believed that the problems of democracy could be solved with "more" democracy, Russian rulers appear to think that their pseudo-democracy is already a democracy and that reforms are dangerous. This difference simply reflects confidence or fear of the people; on one hand, a view that a "better" democracy (i.e., a protection of elections as the present form of self-government) can lead to better substantive outcomes; on the other, a view that free and fair elections, separation of powers, and an effective political opposition are a threat to the state and to the country. Rather than accept the challenge of "more" democracy, Russian leaders simply avoid a program and a calendar to transform a regime that is only pseudo-democratic into a democracy.

8.3 SHORTCOMINGS OF ELECTORAL DEMOCRACIES

When Brandt, González, or other democratic politicians made programmatic statements of "more democracy," their understanding had to do with a more effective government by and of the people. This has to do with the information on the part of citizens, the uncertainty of electoral outcomes, the effective division of powers, the respect for the rules of competition and the relevance of the opposition, and the autonomy of politicians from the verdict of voters. In contrast, political rule in Russia does not question its dependence on restricted information of citizens, an absence of electoral uncertainty, an overwhelming

concentration of powers, an irrelevant opposition, and a full autonomy from citizens.

I now turn to examine these questions in some detail, interpreting that a better democracy can also generate better substantive outcomes. That is, although “more democracy” may be a political good, it can also deliver desirable substantive outcomes (integration of minorities, growth, or equality). On the contrary, such outcomes under dictatorships or pseudo-democracies depend on benevolent, enlightened leaders, emerging out of luck. And the passage of these regimes to full democracies is not a credible program if it depends on the good will of such leaders.

8.3.1 Asymmetries of Information

“More” democracy means citizens are better informed about the decisions and nondecisions of governments, capable of attributing responsibility for changes in their welfare. If citizens have little information on what politicians do, their voting rules will be arbitrary. The chances of electing a bad or a good candidate will be similar. That is, democracy will become a regime distant from rule “by the people” and “for the people”: oligarchies will rotate in office mostly due to random, unpredictable conditions. Voters may blame incumbents for conditions that were beyond their control or exonerate them for bad outcomes for which they were responsible. That is, “bad” governments may survive, “good” ones may be dismissed. As we know, the basis on which blame or merit is attributed is a major problem for the democratic control of rulers by citizens. [Achen and Bartels \(2004, 37\)](#) have argued, after an examination of voting patterns following natural disasters beyond the control of governments, that “a general theory of political accountability explaining when and why specific attributions or evasions of responsibility actually work is nowhere in sight.”

The preservation of rule “by the people” and “for the people” can only be ensured if the selection of candidates for office and the accountability of incumbents rest on accurate political information. We know that selection and accountability are two different aspects of voting. Madison (*Federalist Papers* 1961, 350) emphasized both: what elections do is “first to obtain for rulers men who possess most wisdom to discern, and most virtue to pursue, the common good of the society; and in the next place, to take the most effectual precautions for keeping them virtuous while they continue to hold their public trust.”

An important tradition of political science, that includes [Downs \(1957\)](#), [Fearon \(1999\)](#), or [Bartels \(1988\)](#), has pointed out that elections are about selecting the best candidates (or the closest to the ideal policy position of voters) and about mandates for the future. Comparative empirical research has indeed shown that policies subsequent to elections can be predicted from electoral programs ([Stimson et al. 1995](#); [Stimson 1999](#); [Page and Shapiro 1992](#); [Klingemann et al. 1994](#)). The evidence refers to the United States, Canada,

Australia, and seven European democracies. Harrington (1993) has analyzed the mechanisms that explain why incumbents tend to stick to their promises: with a formal model he shows that, in equilibrium, candidates will reveal in campaigns their true policy intentions and, if elected, will follow their promises.

Contrary to the view of elections as selection, another tradition of political science has emphasized that the democratic control of politicians lies on the second aspect of elections mentioned by Madison. Key (1966), Riker (1982), and Ferejohn (1986) have argued that if voters' information is limited, the retrospective accountability of incumbents is the only way to overcome the many obstacles to this control. Politicians often claim both things: that they are the best candidates for office and that, because they have been elected for a four or five year term, they will only respond retrospectively. This is what Margaret Thatcher declared: she had won against James Callaghan, would govern according to her judgement, and would respond at the time of the next elections.

There is contradictory evidence on the information that voters use either to select candidates or to punish/reward incumbents. For instance, Zaller (1992, 2004) has indicated that informed voters are more ideological and use their vote to "select" rather than to punish/reward for past outcomes. On the contrary, a comparative study of postelectoral surveys in Hungary, Poland, Portugal, and Spain has concluded that "retrospective control depends more on citizens' political knowledge than if voters use ideology to select the incumbent" (Fraile 2008, 183). But either if voting consists of selecting the best candidates, generally on the basis of ideological proximity, or involves holding governments accountable for their past performance, voters need information about politicians and their actions.

Rulers may use ideology to mitigate the negative effects of bad performance. Ideological manipulation can reinforce the link between the party and its voters ("my party, right or wrong"), serve to exonerate the incumbent ("bad outcomes are due to causes beyond the control of the government"), produce intertemporal justifications ("the present harsh conditions are necessary in order to reach light at the end of the tunnel"), or discredit the opposition as a worse alternative ("however bad the present conditions are, they would have been much worse had the opposition been in charge"). Stokes (2001) has shown the influence of ideological considerations on this kind of economic voting.

Because changes in citizens' welfare will be influenced by exogenous conditions beyond the control of governments, and citizens will hardly know this influence, politicians can manipulate the allocation of responsibility. Governments can claim that good outcomes are due to their effort and capacity: for instance, José María Aznar answered "I am the miracle" [*sic*] when asked about the causes of the high rates of growth of the Spanish economy. And they can attribute bad outcomes to "globalization," international crises, the IMF, or what Harold Wilson, the British prime minister, called "the gnomes of Zurich." Helmut Schmidt complained that he was only responsible for 5 percent [*sic*] of

economic outcomes and that voters placed too much responsibility on him. Voters will indeed be perplexed whether Aznar was a “miracle,” whether Zurich was inhabited by Anglophobic gnomes, or about whether Schmidt was mostly irrelevant for changes in their welfare. A large number will vote according to their ideological affinity and their past vote: what politicians try is to reinforce these loyalties, and to influence the equidistant, often undecided voters that decide turnover in office.

Thus, electoral campaigns mostly consist of parties trying to mobilize their electorates, demobilize those of the adversaries, and attract the undecided, equidistant voters. Eventually, victory or defeat will depend on the decision of a small minority of voters, while a large majority remains loyal to the party supported in the past. Past voting is, in fact, the best predictor of future voting.

The less ideological voters are also the target of another electoral strategy: the use of “valence” issues (Stokes 1963). These refer to preferences on which no differences exist among voters. Typical examples are corruption, political competence, partisan factionalist struggles, economic development, or terrorism. Nobody wants corrupt and incapable politicians, divided parties,¹ economic crises, or vulnerability to terrorist attacks. A better rating on a valence issue may give a politician or a party a considerable advantage over his opponents. To quote Enelow and Hinich (1984, 89, 100), “a candidate who might otherwise have won an election may lose if voters who prefer him on policy issues find his opponent more attractive in other respects . . . nonpolicy issues can destabilize election contests.” But, because ideological voters will be less receptive to propaganda that contradicts their political views, the strategy attempts to attract support among voters with little ideological or partisan attachments.

It has sometimes been argued that the introduction of valence issues has a centripetal effect on electoral competition (Bogdanor 2007, Green 2007). Political consensus should increase if everybody wants the same from politicians, and competition is only about which candidate would do it better. Yet valence issues can lead to virulent negative campaigns, in which the opponent is discredited on an issue on which voters share the same preferences. Such campaigns have become a usual feature of democratic politics. Elections in the United States offer some remarkable examples: one is the 1988 presidential election, when George H. W. Bush used the Willie Horton case against Michael Dukakis or the 2004 campaign of George W. Bush against John Kerry on patriotism and leadership – two typical valence issues.² Spanish politics also present good illustrations: in the electoral campaign of 2008, Mariano Rajoy, the leader of the PP (the conservative Partido Popular) accused the prime minister, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, of complicity with terrorism and of breaking up Spain.³

“Negative” campaigns are easier if voters have little information and weak political attachments. Politics then turns, to paraphrase Harry Truman, into a particularly heated kitchen: what matters is to present adversaries as accomplices of terrorists, moral degenerates, risks to the security of the country. This

kind of strategy to discredit the adversary is usual in pseudo-democratic Russian politics. Of course, this is contrary to what should happen if the country were to move toward a real democracy and “free” and “fair” elections. The sound and fury of destructive propaganda increase the difficulties for selecting the best candidate or for attributing responsibilities. “More” democracy means that the space for campaigns that take abuse of the limited information of voters becomes restricted. And, on the contrary, it diversifies and expands the opportunity sets of individuals – that is, their cognitive selection and their available alternatives for choice (Ferejohn 1993). This, of course, is just the opposite of what “enlightened” leaders in pseudo-democracies do: they restrict cognitive information and try to control alternatives.

8.3.2 The Predictability of Incumbents

“More” democracy depends on the uncertain outcome of elections. We know that elections are a necessary but not sufficient condition for democracy. In dictatorships or pseudo-democracies, elections do not instill in rulers a recollection of “their dependence on the people”: there are no genuine political alternatives, the legal opposition is a puppet of the government, people vote under threats, electoral results are predetermined. In present-day Russia, elections do not operate as a dissuasive instrument in the hands of citizens: it is only when electoral outcomes are uncertain that politicians may be controlled. In democracies, incumbents always face an uncertain verdict. Results anticipated by the polls have often been contradicted by voters: examples are the British elections of 1970, 1974, and 1992; the German election of 2002; and the Spanish elections of 1993 and 2004.

One reason democratic elections are always risky for incumbents is that they cannot know the criteria that will guide the verdict of voters. Uncertainty about which criteria voters will use at election time reflects their freedom to decide. Politicians do not set the criteria or the threshold of welfare that citizens set as their voting rule: this can keep politicians on their toes. Politicians and voters are parts of a particular kind of agency relation in which the agent does not know well what will satisfy the principal.

Politicians are endlessly searching for clues – for instance, opinion polls that might indicate the influence of economic accountability or of scandals of corruption on voters’ political views. They are upset by the inconsistent evidence of aggregate and individual-level data, by variations over time and between countries. They find some comfort, however, in some examples of survival in times of economic crises: Gerhard Schröder winning the 2002 elections in Germany with a stagnant economy (whose annual rate of growth was 0.0 percent) or Felipe González the 1993 elections in Spain with a GDP growth rate of –0.2 percent and an unemployment rate of 22.8 percent. But if things go well, politicians will worry about the fortunes of Jacques Chirac losing the French elections of 1988, John Major the British election of 1997, or José María Aznar

the Spanish elections of 2004, with respective annual rates of GDP growth of 4.6 percent, 3.0 percent, and 3.2 percent. Voters may follow other criteria than just economic performance at the end of the mandate.

If we look at more systematic evidence about the economic conditions when incumbents were defeated in 131 of 359 elections in 22 OECD parliamentary democracies since 1945,⁴ the GDP was growing at an annual average rate of 2.2 percent, and the unemployment rate stood at 5.9 percent. The averages for the whole period were 2.7 and 5.5 percent, respectively. That is, economic conditions had not deteriorated particularly when incumbents were punished by voters. Conversely, bad economic performance had only limited effects on the electoral vulnerability of governments. If GDP growth rates fell by one unit over the last two years, the odds of the incumbent party losing office went up by 4.0 percent. One unit increases in the annual rates of inflation and of unemployment only augmented the odds of losing office by 0.4 and 2.6 percent, respectively.⁵ So probabilities of remaining in office, or losing it, due to economic conditions were low; what would decide the final verdict of elections was a guess. In many cases, incumbents lost when economic conditions were good, and won when they were bad.

We know, however, that long tenures in office have been frequent. This could be a *prima facie* indicator that elections in such cases are neither “free” nor “fair.” [Przeworski \(2010a\)](#) has shown that partisan alternation in government is a recent phenomenon. Even after 1945, parties in office were sometimes hardly threatened by voters: alone or in coalition, they held power for about half a century in Italy (the DC, Democrazia Cristiana), in Japan (the LP/LDP, Jiyu-Minshu-to); in Luxembourg (the PCS/CSV, Parti Social Chrétien/Chrëschtlech Sozial Vollekspartie); in Belgium (the CVP, Christelijke Volkspartij). And, if we examine the 359 elections held in 22 OECD parliamentary democracies since 1945, the incumbent party won 228 (63 percent) of them.

How do we then define uncertainty and “free and fair” elections when there is no rotation in office? It is true that in Italy, voters, aided by judges, put an end in 1994 to parties that survived in office through an endless maneuvering of coalitions and colluded in their abuse of power. In Japan, the socialist opposition shared a brief spell in office, as a junior member of a coalition from 1994 to 1996; eventually, the main party of the opposition, the DPJ (Minshutō), replaced the LDP in government in the 2009 elections. In Belgium and Luxembourg, the conservative parties had to share power with their socialist rivals on several occasions. But Italy and Japan were democracies before these events took place. So what do we mean when we say that in democracies, electoral results are uncertain? I shall argue that long tenures are not an indication of nondemocratic elections if power is divided, that is, if the party in office does not control the media, the judiciary, the centers of economic power, or the unions. Elections are only democratic when power is divided, not monopolized by the incumbent, when the opposition is not politically subjugated and freely accepts the outcome of elections.

If elections may be risky for incumbents, their outcome is seldom questioned. Losers accept defeat: this can indicate that the competition was “free and fair.” Incumbents leave office, or the opposition waits for the next opportunity. When Edward Heath unexpectedly lost to Harold Wilson in February 1974, he just mumbled in frustration, “That little man . . . !” Long resistances to accept defeat generate suspicion that something is wrong with democracy, for instance, the rejection of electoral results by Andrés López Obrador in Mexico, following the presidential victory of Felipe Calderón in 2006.

8.3.3 Conflict over Divided Power

“More” democracy depends on the preservation of divided power. [Przeworski \(1991\)](#) has explained compliance with electoral results as the result of intertemporal calculations of losers in wealthy societies. What this means is that losers must stand plausible chances of winning in the future. However, that future may turn out to be very remote. The key to “free and fair” elections can only lie in the pluralism existing in society, that is, that the political rulers do not have overwhelming control over economic and social resources, that power is divided. This limits abuses from political rulers, preserves capacities to resist, organize, and defend a political alternative that may stand a chance to win. That is why Italian democracy has been undermined under Berlusconi, when power has become much more concentrated in the hands of one of the competitors.

Divided power is, therefore, a basic condition for genuine democratic competition. It opens up the possibility of citizens being informed – not so much because of the independence of the media but because of their plurality. It protects the opposition from subordination to the government; it also prevents powerful nonpolitical groups undermining democratic governments. [Holmes \(2003\)](#) has persuasively argued that the division of “factual” power is the foundation of the rule of law: no group can prevail indefinitely, and every group will be ready to defend its interests using the institutions of democracy. “The multiplication of influential groups, the pluralistic organization of power . . . the balancing of many partialities” ([Holmes 2003](#), 50) explains the self-restraint of political actors, the acquiescence with electoral outcomes, and the mutual respect of government and opposition.

However, because elections are not simple rituals, this division of power is highly unstable. We move beyond the confines of democracy when the government reaches “political autonomy” because all other powers are subordinated to it, when rulers rule unmolested by the opposition, the judiciary, the media, or centers of economic power. This is what happens with politics in pseudo-democracies: it is a feature of Russian politics at present times. And it is also the case that we cannot define as “democracy” a regime where electoral competition and political decisions are dictated by nonelected powers, mostly by money. Yet democratic politics also consists of a permanent conflict between

the government, the opposition, the media, the judiciary, and centers of economic power, where the procedural rules of the competition between genuine alternatives may be stretched but not broken, and the elected rulers decide on relevant, not marginal, issues.

The democratic struggle for power has independent institutions as a crucial target. These are inhabited by individuals with interests of their own, wielding powerful resources that can be used as political weapons (Maravall and Przeworski 2003). The judiciary has increasingly become part of strategies against the adversaries, particularly when its independence does not make it politically impartial. Hardly accountable governments can use an obedient judiciary to persecute opponents; an impatient opposition, unlikely to win in the foreseeable future, can use sympathetic, independent courts to undermine the government. The judicialization of politics and the politicization of justice subvert the rule of law and the democratic process when political confrontation is transferred from parliaments to courts. Politics then turns into a ferocious struggle to control this “independent” judiciary, an institution supposed to protect citizens from abuses of power, not to solve political competition throwing adversaries into prison.

The turbulent relation between media and politicians has a long tradition in democratic politics. Many politicians would subscribe the appeal of Stanley Baldwin to voters, on a famous speech delivered on March 17, 1931, to rebel against the power of media, “engines of propaganda for the constantly changing policies, desires, personal wishes, personal likes and personal dislikes of two men. . . . What the proprietorship of these papers is aiming at is power, but power without responsibility – the prerogative of the harlot through the ages.”⁶ Particularly since the 1930s, it has been usual for the press not only to exert overwhelming influence over policies, but to try to act as kingmakers. And for politicians not only to resist what Baldwin called “press dictation,” but to require the press to reflect the political majority of the day.

There is hardly a democratic government or an opposition that has not been in conflict with the media. Austrian Chancellor Bruno Kreisky complained that 80 percent of the media opposed him, but this was not an impediment for him staying in office from 1970 to 1983, when he retired undefeated. Andreas Papandreou in Greece, François Mitterrand in France, Felipe González in Spain struggled against media in the name of democracy with little success but were in power for 10, 14, and 13 years, respectively. It is the pluralism of media, not just their questionable independence, that may provide citizens with the information needed to control governments. This struggle between media and governments does not exist in pseudo-democracies, where rulers tolerate neither pluralism nor the independence of the media.

For voters to assess the aggregate performance of governments, independent institutions are crucial to provide information and to help voters to coordinate their electoral verdict. These institutions may be agencies that monitor governments, trade unions, the media, central statistical offices, independent

central banks, and so on. This is why democracy is not a regime that emerges every four or five years, when elections are called. Interelectoral monitoring and divided power are essential to ensure the consequential electoral rewards and sanctions that are the core of democratic politics.

8.3.4 Bending the Rules of Competition

Politicians start their strategies for the next election immediately after election day. There is no interelectoral truce in democratic politics. Between elections, the pace of politics is hectic: parliamentary controls, permanent political scrutiny by the media, public pressures from different social groups, endless opinion polls monitoring the changing support of the government and the opposition. To paraphrase [Blumenthal \(1980\)](#), electoral campaigns are now permanent.

Politics between elections consists of a fierce battle over the balance of power. Let me take an example from recent Spanish politics. On becoming prime minister, José María Aznar declared ominously “now some who had doubts will quickly learn who is in charge.” Those who had to learn were not just politicians but media owners and presidents of large corporations. The targets were a liberal-left media group, PRISA, owner of *El País*, the largest newspaper in the country, and the presidents of large public sector companies (Telefónica, Repsol, Banco Argentaria, Caja Madrid, Endesa, etc.), first replacing them, and then privatizing the firms. As for the opposition, the government promoted a judicial persecution against the former prime minister so that the opposition could be weakened as a credible alternative for a very long time. The government hoped to rely on the sympathy of a judiciary that had become independent with the Constitution of 1978 but was hardly impartial, not having been renovated in the transition to democracy.

An opposite example can also be found in Spanish politics. Adolfo Suárez, the first democratically elected prime minister, first legalized and then protected the opposition parties and the trade unions that were at that time very weak – “species under danger of extinction,” as Deputy Prime Minister, Fernando Abril-Martorell vividly described them. The organization of his own party (UCD, Unión de Centro Democrático) was delayed to enable the Socialist party (PSOE) to organize in the few months between its legalization (in February 1977) and the elections to be held four months later. He also stimulated the banks to provide credits to the opposition parties for them to compete ([Powell 2001, 192–209](#)).

In the first elections after a dictatorship that had lasted four decades, Suárez declared, “I can promise, and I do promise (puedo prometer y prometo), that we shall work in such a manner that voters will be able to control the actions of the government” (TV speech, June 14, 1977). That is, he asked to be held accountable for a program of reforms whose implementation would be scrutinized. After the elections, he passed amnesty laws, closed most of the media

that depended on the state (the Medios de Comunicación Social del Estado), financed with public funds politically unsympathetic trade unions (UGT, Unión General de Trabajadores, and CC.OO., Comisiones Obreras). Suárez also followed a strategy of consensus to pass a constitution (with the parliamentary support of left, right, and center: 93 percent of the deputies in the Cortes), to draft the crucial laws of the new democracy (including the parliamentary control of television, the protection of the freedoms of association, demonstration, and speech, the regulation of public order and of military justice), to design economic policies (the Moncloa Pacts of October, 1977), and to decentralize the state trying to accommodate nationalist demands in Catalonia and the Basque Country. This was the program of democratic reforms that he had promised and for which he had asked to be held accountable: he won the following elections in 1979 and paved the way for rotations in office, that is, for a stable political future.

It can, of course, be argued that tolerance toward the opposition depends on the value of the stakes at issue. But this question really refers to the acceptance of democracy, rather than to the tolerance of opposition – no democracy can exist without an opposition that can replace the incumbent in office. To claim the singularity of a particular country is hardly acceptable. If we consider the stakes in the Spanish transition to democracy, the risks involved were serious. They involved a legacy of three civil wars: the last one (from 1936 to 1939) was devastating: 140,000 deaths in the military fronts, 160,000 among civilians. Also, a long period of repression followed the end of the war: close to 200,000 people were shot, 270,000 were held in prison (Fusi 1985, 78–79). The European Committee for Amnesty reported some six hundred political prison sentences, of an average five years in length, for the period 1958–61. Between 1968 and 1970 alone, three states of emergency were declared. In September 1975, at the end of the regime, five political prisoners were executed. Basque and Catalan demands for self-government were harshly repressed. In the repression, not only the internal security forces had been involved, but also the armed forces. Meanwhile, vast fortunes were amassed in an economy where taxation and public expenditure were very low. Social expenditure amounted only to 9.9 percent of GDP in 1976. In conclusion, democracy – and the tolerance vis-à-vis the opposition – followed forty years of political cruelty and economic grievances.

Without a credible opposition, citizens lack a necessary instrument to control governments with their vote at election time. As Ferejohn (1986, 14) puts it, “the importance of challengers lies entirely in their availability. It is the existence of willing office-seekers that gives the voter whatever leverage he has on the incumbent.” Tweedledee may resemble Tweedledum, but as Przeworski (2010a) rightly argues, their political convergence depends on a previous choice by voters from a set of alternative courses of action. Furthermore, what matters more is that Tweedledee is there, as an alternative to replace Tweedledum at election time. The existence of an alternative to the present government is a

necessary condition for democratic accountability: the eventual enforcement of sanctions becomes plausible. If Tweedledum persecutes Tweedledee, it can be due to his fear of losing office rather than to ideological reasons.

“More” democracy depends on the respect by politicians of the main rules of competition. This is particularly so for governments, who usually have the advantages of incumbency: they have the capacity to enact laws and take decisions that may have dramatic consequences for interest groups. Their legislative and coercive powers can deter opponents: they can change economic regulations, modify penal sanctions, favor media, redefine the rules of electoral competition, and so on. The limits to these prerogatives of incumbents depend on the existing distribution of power in society. If power is divided, the rule of law will be effective; if plural interests are organized, governments will restrain themselves. They will also depend on calculations about the future: if the present rulers want stability and peace in unforeseeable political scenarios, it is better to respect adversaries and generate the conditions for a moderate opposition. No pseudo-democratic ruler can control the future.

In some cases, however, a government’s main strength may reside in the voters, while the opposition has far stronger support in nonelected centers of power (the “factual powers,” to use a euphemism from the Spanish transition to democracy, the *poderes fácticos*). This could give vast political capacity to the opposition, depending on its support among media, judges, and business. This was the reason of the slogan of the Spanish Socialist party: “your vote is our strength” (*tu voto es nuestra fuerza*). In many new democracies, an electoral victory by a party that has been illegal for a long time can leave it facing powerful enemies unreformed under the new regime.

This is not just an occasional experience of new democracies. Recent politics in the United States may also illustrate this. President Clinton was the target of a campaign to undermine his presidency from the very beginning. “Hate speeches” in radio programs, cable news, and Internet communications were corrosive. Meanwhile, the Republican opposition denounced Clinton as “an enemy of normal Americans” (declaration of Newt Gingrich, Republican speaker in the House of Representatives, *Washington Post*, October 14, 1993), and Gingrich’s “Political Action Committee” recommended to refer to the president as “sick,” “traitor,” and “corrupt” (Halperin and Harris 2006, 107). The independent counsel became a political weapon against Clinton in the Lewinsky scandal.⁷ The postelectoral “permanent campaign” against Barack Obama has perhaps been more ideological than against Clinton; less related to “moral” attributes, more to insinuations of sympathy with Islamic fundamentalism, socialism, and antipatriotism.

A similar strategy was deployed in Spain, first against Felipe González,⁸ the social-democratic prime minister from 1982 to 1996, then against José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, the prime minister after the PSOE won again the elections in 2004. Because this victory was in the wake of a terrorist attack

that killed 192 people and wounded more than 1,700, the PSOE was accused of conspiring with Islamic terrorism to dislodge the PP from office.⁹ When Zapatero explored the possibility that the Basque terrorist group ETA would give up “armed struggle,” as every one of the former prime ministers had done, the leader of the PP, Mariano Rajoy, accused him of “betraying the dead”: “if there are no bombs it is because you have surrendered.”¹⁰ The media were very active in the campaign, accusing both prime ministers of indignity, corruption, moral degradation, lack of moral scruples, of being grotesque and authoritarian nightmares: a list similar to that of Newt Gingrich.

There are, therefore, two related conditions if democratic accountability is to exist: that an opposition exists as a viable alternative to the government and that political confrontation has as a limit a point at which one of the competitors is indifferent about compliance with the democratic process – that is, about defending its interests through the verdict of citizens in “free” and “fair” elections. If rulers in a pseudo-democracy, as Russia under Putin and Medvédev, want to move toward democracy, they must protect the opposition and open the political process. This avoids turning an opposition from moderation to radicalism and protects the regime when times eventually become harsher.

8.3.5 The Usurpation of the Voice of the People

“More” democracy must protect the electoral verdict of citizens from its usurpation by politicians. In democratic elections, voters can either select representatives that mirror the composition of their society or get rid of bad rulers. These dual aspects have had a protracted history. For J. S. Mill ([1861] 1991, Chapter VII), “in a really equal democracy, every or any section would be represented, not disproportionately but proportionately.” Elections should lead to representatives that are a statistical sample of the population, that reflect its composition. Electoral quotas for women or ethnic or religious groups respond to a concern about who the representatives are rather than about what they do.

The opposite view is that elections must enable citizens to dismiss bad rulers. Proportional representation, however, makes electoral punishment more difficult, as it increases the number of parties in parliament and is likely to lead to minority or multiparty governments. This is why Popper (1988, 28) argued that, contrary to what happens under plurality rules and single-party governments, under PR and coalition governments, “people become used to the idea that none of the political parties or their leaders can really be made accountable for their decisions which may have been forced to them by the necessity to form a coalition.” Democratic control would only be possible if citizens can sack the incumbent. As Riker (1982, 244) put it, “all elections do or have to do is to permit people to get rid of rulers.”

Institutional reforms over time have mostly turned toward proportional representation. This has increased the menu of electoral choices for voters,

but coalition governments give more autonomy to politicians vis-à-vis voters (Maravall 2010, 87–97). Of the 22 OECD parliamentary democracies between 1945 and 2006, prime ministers' parties stayed in power for 8.8 years on average in PR systems, 5.9 years in plurality/majority systems. Under PR, prime ministers lost office due to an electoral defeat in 95 occasions and in 143 due to nonelectoral decisions by politicians. Under majority/plurality systems, prime ministers were replaced due to an electoral defeat in thirty-six occasions, and in twenty-eight due to fellow politicians of their own party.

Therefore, it is not only citizens that decide on the continuation or removal of prime ministers but politicians as well. It could be argued that these politicians simply replace “lame duck” prime ministers, anticipating the verdict of voters in the next elections. It would be in order to avoid an electoral defeat of the British Conservative Party that a conspiracy replaced Margaret Thatcher by John Major – a “scapegoat strategy.” This would respect the dissuasive power that voters have vis-à-vis rulers. However, for this interpretation to be convincing, politicians should share the criteria of citizens for punishing incumbents. There is empirical evidence, however, showing that this is not the case (Maravall 2007, 923–34). If the economy grows, the probability that a prime minister will survive election increases but also the likelihood that he will be replaced by another politician. That is, when voters reward prime ministers, politicians punish them. A plausible explanation of these contradictory criteria is that prime ministers are replaced by politicians guided by ambition, not by the interests of citizens. These different rules for voters and politicians undermine incentives for representation and weaken the voice of the people in democracy.

The usurpation of “the voice of the people” by politicians seems to bother citizens. If we use Eurobarometer surveys in the twenty-two OECD parliamentary democracies to detect what influences satisfaction with the way democracy operates, plurality/majority systems increase satisfaction, controlling for the average GDP growth over the last two years, inflation, unemployment, and the perception of corruption.¹¹

A somewhat different situation emerges when the opposition is co-opted into the government – so that rulers rule unmolested and electoral punishment becomes quite absurd. This happened in about 14 percent of the country/year observations for this group of twenty-two countries, for instance, in Austria over thirty years, in Finland for twenty-four years, in Luxemburg for thirty-one years, in the Netherlands for nineteen years. This sharing of office by the two main contenders from the Right and the Left could presumably have led to a greater abstention of voters for whom “party differentials” would have disappeared.¹² However, this was not the case. According to the Eurobarometer data, the probability of citizens being satisfied with democracy increased under such *grosse Koalitionen*.¹³ I shall not delve into the conditions under which these coalitions without oppositions emerge, but I suggest that citizens accept limits to confrontation for the sake of stable governance and that they do not see this as usurpation of their voice.

One last point needs mentioning. If coalition governments provide politicians with greater autonomy vis-à-vis citizens, it is also true that they redistribute resources from higher to lower income groups to a larger extent than single-party governments. The reason is that center-left parties dominate under PR systems. As [Iversen and Soskice \(2006\)](#) have shown, after examining seventeen advanced democracies between 1945 and 1998, under plurality/majority systems, 75 percent of governments were center-right, while under PR, 70 percent were center-left and redistributed more from the higher to the lower income groups.

8.4 ARE DEMOCRACIES A THREAT?

That democracies can be premature has been a usual authoritarian argument. In Spain, under the dictatorship of General Franco, politicians insisted that “Spaniards are not ready for democracy.” This has often been an argument to brutally crush democracies, as in Spain or Chile. The paternalistic terms of this antidemocratic argument are reflected in the statement of the Malaysian prime minister, Mahathir Bin Mohammed: “Should we enforce democracy on people who may not be able to handle it and destroy stability?” (speech to the Europe-East Asia Economic Forum, Hong Kong, October 14, 1992). Sometimes authoritarianism is defended as the best way to democracy.

Similar proposals have been expressed over time: from temporary commissarial dictatorships à la Carl Schmitt, pretending to defend the interests of the people, to sovereign democracies seen as necessary to reconstruct weak states. One problem of these proposals, of course, is why would “less democracy” be a temporary arrangement rather than a confirmation of [Benjamin’s](#) ([1940] 1969, 257) warning that “the state of exception . . . is not the exception but the rule.” Leaders that restrict democracy, however enlightened their policies to reconstruct the state, reestablish order, or introduce drastic economic reforms, cannot provide credible commitments that they would eventually raise such restrictions. Even if they indicate a list of conditions and a calendar that would lead to unrestricted democracy, there is no reason, other than political faith, to believe that they will fulfil their commitment. This is what happens in present Russian politics.

The conditions and the calendar for democracy are absent in the strategy of Russian rulers. They declare that “sovereign democracy” is an evolutionary process that consists of reforms from above. We know that the state, the regime, and the economy were in a chaotic state after 1989, and particularly so under the Yeltsin years. Migranyan (this volume) adds that the “color revolutions” in countries that split from the former Soviet Union increased the fear of chaos, of an opposition not accepting the verdict of elections and turning to the streets. It was in order to avoid chaos that political organizations were set up from, by, and for the Kremlin – a hegemonic party (United Russia) and several youth organizations. That is, the fear of people was the reason of strict restrictions to

pluralism, to freedoms of expression and association, to electoral competition – that is, to democracy.

The conditions for “cautious” reforms away from pseudo-democracy are unknown – they can be arbitrarily set and postponed. So is the calendar. In Putin’s first term in the presidency, the independence of media, including television, was suppressed. In his second term, the electoral process was far from democratic, independent organizations were persecuted, no real opposition was allowed, dissenters were eliminated. There is no reason to expect that Russia will be anything but a “democracy with adjectives” – that is, a pseudo-democracy with any other name.

If democracy can hardly be the result of a restricted pseudo-democracy, there is no reason to believe either that autocratic, insulated leaders will carry out better policies or guarantee political order. True, they may repress with greater impunity, impose silence and obedience. They may temporarily avoid chaos. But problems will not disappear.

Przeworski (2010a) has shown why democracies can be the best institutional arrangement to ensure civil peace. As he puts it (in this volume), “regularized political conflicts do not threaten civil peace and . . . political order can be maintained even in the presence of partisan competition.” Consider the integration of multi-national, multi-ethnic states. In their 1970s study of the political culture of communist systems, Brown and Gray (1977, 270–72) revealed the underlying strength of national identities: they had survived underground and would re-emerge with the collapse of autocracies. Similarly, forty years of Franco’s dictatorship in Spain could not suppress nationalist identities that had contributed to three civil wars in modern times: they could only be channelled when democracy was established in 1977. Problems may not be solved, but they can be dealt with through institutions that protect vital interests of minorities from being threatened by majorities. In multiethnic, post-Communist countries, democratic political institutions have moderated conflict when ethnic minorities have been incorporated to the political process (Alonso and Ruíz-Rufino 2007). The political integration of divided societies under democracy depends very much on the choice of parliamentary or presidential systems, electoral rules, checks and balances, federalism, and coalition governments (Horowitz 1985; Cohen 1997; Reynal-Querol 2002; Boix 2008). Political integration does not simply rest on intimidation.

The fear of the people and the distrust of democracy are also related to stereotypes about economic growth and socioeconomic equality. Rather than make references to individual historical cases, I synthesize now what an oceanic research appears to conclude.

8.4.1 Are Elected Governments Less Able to Promote Economic Growth?

It has often been argued that democratic elections may threaten the material conditions of citizens. And, because demands of economic growth and

socioeconomic equality are strong in new democracies, this becomes a source of conflict and instability. We know that poor democracies are more unstable, but so are poor dictatorships. We also know that, both in Latin America and in East Central Europe, demands for a rapid improvement in the material conditions of citizens have been substantially higher than in Western European countries. For instance, from 67 percent of Czechs to 91 percent of Romanians associated democracy with improved economic conditions; between 58 percent of Czechs to 80 percent of Bulgarians, with greater equality; that the state should play a redistributive role was supported by 55 percent of Hungarians, in contrast to 27 percent of West Germans. At the same time, an overwhelming majority – from 70 percent in former Czechoslovakia to 88 percent in Hungary – defended that elections are the best way to choose a government (Bruszt and Simon 1991, 26, 33–34, 98–99, 174–76).

No inevitable contradiction exists between elections and demands for material welfare.¹⁴ Although too many factors interfere in the direct association between regimes and economic development, democracies concentrate in wealthy countries, while dictatorships can only be found in poor ones. In the exhaustive research by Przeworski and his colleagues (2000) of 224 regimes between 1950 and 1990, most dictatorships did not grow over the whole period – of fifty-six dictatorships with a GDP below \$1,000 in the first year, forty-seven never grew beyond that threshold; of ninety-eight whose initial GDP was below \$2,000, seventy never surpassed this level. Altruistic, developmental dictators are not frequent; when they exist, they will easily choose bad economic policies. The research also shows that, under democracy, investment represents a higher proportion of GDP, although this is mostly due to the fact that the rate of investment increases with income. Democracies allocate their resources more efficiently, and factor productivity is higher – this gives them a substantial advantage over dictatorships once a threshold of capital accumulation has been reached.

If the “capacity” of governments to rule was to depend on the impotence of their citizens and on intimidation, politicians would lack necessary information to adopt the right policies. The responses of autocrats in Hungary, Poland, Spain, and Portugal to the economic crises of the 1970s and 1980s were similar: they ignored international diagnoses, avoided fiscal reforms, rejected austerity in public expenditures and wages (Maravall 1997, 38–73). A free press, a real opposition, and independent monitoring agencies can provide flows of information that do not exist under autocracy. In a classical study, Drèze and Sen (1989, 278) argue that

the contribution of political pluralism relates to the importance of adversarial politics and social criticism in influencing state action in the direction of greater sensitivity to the well-being of the population. . . . It is clear that the scope for effective public influence on the activities of the state tends to be greater in political systems that make room for opposition and criticism.

Autocrats may care more about their interests than democratic politicians. Competitive elections between parties having a longer-term horizon than politicians can reduce political opportunism (Wittman 1995). The risk of bad choices, on the contrary, increases if opposition parties are irrelevant, elections are manipulated by the government, free public criticism is hardly allowed, and no independent monitoring agencies exist, although governments may rule unmolested and have unencumbered “capacity.” As Brus (1992, 138) has noted, “macroeconomic choices are by their very nature political, and without a pluralist polity they will remain arbitrary.”

Economic reforms sometimes are only possible if backed by popular consent. Yet consent can only find strength in freedom. Two cases may serve to illustrate this. One is from Poland: a package of economic adjustment and reforms was rejected in a referendum held by the Polish Communist government in November 1987; a similar program was then passed in 1990 by the democratic government of Tadeusz Mazowiecki. In Spain, the Moncloa Pacts that followed the first democratic elections of 1977 introduced a harsh program of macroeconomic adjustment and structural reforms, agreed by all the parliamentary parties. The dictatorship had been unable to control the inflation rate, the public deficit, and the growth of real wages. Both institutions and strategies may allow politicians to handle economic problems without introducing limitations to democracy.

8.4.2 Are Elected Governments Less Able to Promote Socioeconomic Equality?

Beyond a threshold of development, democracies redistribute more than dictatorships. Comparing 65 countries between 1950 and 1990 (of which 22 were OECD countries) with 621 country/year observations, Boix (2003, 184–87, 191) finds out that when real per capita income is more than \$1,000, the public sector and redistribution are higher under democratic regimes. Yet democracies have often fuelled egalitarian expectations that have been frustrated.

The frustrations are intriguing because, as Przeworski (2010a, 169) remarks, “elections are the most egalitarian political mechanism we have.” Indeed ample comparative evidence shows that socioeconomic inequality has, in general, little effect on individual participation in elections: the poor are as likely to vote as the rich, the uneducated as the educated. But this makes it more paradoxical that, if the income of the median (decisive) voter is lower than the mean income, and if the policies of governments reflect the median voter’s preferences, democracies redistribute less than expected.

Why is this so? And why do important differences exist between democratic countries? The extent of such differences is shown by Brandolini and Smeeding (2008), who examine the distribution of equivalent disposable money income across persons (that is, the sum of all cash incomes earned by the household, net of income taxes and social security contributions) in thirty-two countries, using

evidence from the Luxemburg Income Study (LIS) for 2000. For instance, the ratios to the median income of the tenth and the ninetieth percentiles in Scandinavian countries are less than half the ratio in the United States. They confirm that “disposable incomes are more equally distributed than market incomes, suggesting that the tax and benefit system narrows the overall distribution” but whereas the percentage reduction of before-tax-and-benefit inequalities reaches forty-seven in Denmark or forty-five in Sweden, it is only twenty-three in the United States. Russia is, together with Mexico, the most unequal of the thirty-two countries. The ratio if the median income of the top and lower percentiles is about three times higher than in Scandinavian countries, and the difference is hardly smaller if Russia is compared to Germany and France. The growth in inequality since 1980 has been shown by [Atkinson and Micklewright \(1992\)](#): the Gini coefficient of income household per person went from 24.5 to 28.9 between 1980 and 1989; since 1989, economic inequality has risen very much, as has poverty. In 2000, the ratio between the top and the lowest deciles of income was 8.4, not far from that of Mexico (10.4) and substantially higher than in 1992 (6.7). Consider in contrast that the ratios for France and Germany, not the most egalitarian OECD countries, were 3.4 in 2000 (Luxemburg Income Studies; for Russia: Waves III and V, RU92 and RU00; for Mexico: Wave V and MX00; for France and Germany: Waves V, FR00 and DE00).

So, why such differences and how are they related to democratic politics? One argument stems from the alleged connection between political and economic equality. The poor would abstain more, with the consequence that the median income of those who vote would be higher than that of citizens in general. However, except in the United States, no great differences exist in the propensity to vote due to income inequalities. Nevertheless, economic inequalities have effects on other forms of political participation that may influence the distributive policies of governments, particularly if policies that benefit economically privileged groups are opaque to citizens.

A second argument has been that, because the vote is a blunt instrument to express preferences, governments may enjoy a wide margin for avoiding redistributive demands. These may be short-circuited by other issues, such as ethnic or religious demands. The median voter preferences become more difficult to define and express.

According to a third argument, the rich have a huge dissuasive weapon: the threat of withdrawing investment, and thus of undermining economic growth and employment. This capacity is stronger with mobile assets and capital mobility. Thus, paradoxically, egalitarian societies would redistribute more, as neither a plutocratic minority nor a deprived majority would exist ([Persson and Tabellini 1994](#); [Bowles and Gintis 1995](#); [Benabou 1996](#); [Aghion et al. 1999](#); [Moene and Wallerstein 2006, 2008](#)).

The last argument refers to the fiscal system. For electoral reasons, a disproportionate amount of public expenditure goes to the middle classes, at the cost of the lower deciles of income. And, on the input side, while income taxes

are redistributive, they represent roughly one-third only of public revenues in OECD countries – the rest are indirect taxes and social security contributions. The result is that, if we look at the revenue side of public budgets, the state does not distribute income; it only does so, to a limited extent, on the expenditure side.

Przeworski (2010a, 91–92) is right when he states that “some degree of inequality is just inevitable. Democracy is impotent against it, but so is every other conceivable political arrangement.” Yet, democratic politics matter for material equality: “Unless governments continually combat inequality, unless they maintain an active role in protecting the poor and in transferring productive resources to those whose income-earning capacity is low, inequality has a tendency to rise.” However, these actions by governments depend on the political organization of workers in free social democratic parties and trade-unions; on their capacity to counterbalance the threat of capitalists with agreements that can promote investment, growth, and employment, on the information about the extent of inequalities. The greater the information available, the more likely economic and social diagnoses will be accurate, and the greater the incentives for governments to achieve growth and reduce inequalities.

8.5 CONCLUSION

Sharp criticisms of democratic shortcomings are typical of politics in “really existing democracies”; in pseudo-democracies, on the contrary, criticisms are hardly acceptable. Contrary to the view of Putin/Medvédev and their apologists, citizens in Russia are far from living in a democracy. Besides the absence of a credible opposition, really contested elections, limitations to free speech and association, the monopoly of power in the Russian executive does not correspond to its division in democracies. Just as an example, if a prime minister anticipates the verdict of a criminal court in a political case, it will just show the subordination of the judiciary. Yet, on December 16, 2010, Vladimir Putin announced his verdict on Mikhail Khodorkovsky, before he was eventually sentenced. His words in a phone-in TV program – “A thief must stay in jail” – were interpreted by *Le Nouvel Observateur* (December 16, 2010) as “Poutine énonce son verdict a Khodorkovski.” *Libération* (December 28, 2010) saw the eventual court verdict as a political decision of “forcément coupable”; *The Guardian* (December 27, 2010) defined the case as “a ‘charade’ trial.” The general interpretation was that the sentence was Putin’s decision.

It can of course be that interpretations of Russian politics are politically biased, that they are misguided, that they result from political blinkers that ignore the complexity of Russian events, or from ethnocentric ignorance about “non-Western democracies.” I fully sympathize with the rejection of external interferences by Russian rulers when they make political decisions; I share the view that the term “democracy” has often been debased by foreign policy interests; I also accept that it may carry ethnocentric elements. We also know the

important shortcomings in really existing democracies of the control of incumbents by citizens and of the reflection of citizens' preferences into policies. But these biases and shortcomings do not blur the differences between really existing democracies and pseudo-democracies. Nor can these be disguised under the term of "non-Western democracies."

We all remember the exchange between Alice and Humpty Dumpty: "'The question is,' said Alice, 'whether you can make words mean so many different things'/'The question is' said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be master – that's all.'" This reflects well the extraordinary variety of cases to which the word "democracy" is attached to – and also the capacity of masters to use words just as they choose them to mean. In the course of the twentieth century, rulers in dictatorships or pseudo-democracies have attached adjectives to the word "democracy": popular democracies, organic democracies, guided democracies, sovereign democracies, and so on. Migranyan (this volume) argues that "'democracy' without any qualification in front of the word is just a hollow concept. Democracy gains sense only if modified by a qualifier." I disagree: qualifiers to democracy just blur discussions, produce classificatory "cells" that only lead to endless discussions of what cases fit into each of them. They often serve political purposes in the form of apologetic taxonomic exercises. In the political history of the twentieth-century democracies with adjectives had this political taint: a dictatorship presented as an "organic democracy" or as a "popular democracy" could be defended as just another type of democracy, faithful to the principle of rule for the people as well as to the cultural and historical peculiarities of the country – a species within a genus.

These comments are in no way a defence of the "Western model of democracy." They are meant to clarify discussions about democracy – about the rights and freedoms of citizens anywhere in the world. If discussions about democracy have been biased by ethnocentrism, to present the regimes of Chiang Kai-shek in Taiwan, Jiang Jingsong in China, or Suharto in Indonesia, as democracies, whatever the adjectives, is sheer intellectual manipulation.

Humpty Dumpty was right: when Alice asked him "must a name mean something?" his answer was "Of course it must." Democracy has a specific meaning that can take many institutional forms. These should always preserve, however, the control of rulers by citizens (which means their capacity to select and sack them), the division of power, and the transformation of citizens' preferences into policies. Democracies with qualifiers and confusions about pseudo-democracies are all too often apologetic exercises. The future of democracy in Russia is helped by clarity, not obscurity.

An intriguing question is why nondemocratic rulers pretend to be democratic. This is particularly so in the case of Russia. Although Putin and Medvedev were elected with overwhelming majorities, do they fear that this support is not compatible with a genuine opposition, a free press, contested elections? That is, do they mistrust the people? Is it the uncertainty of democracy what frightens them? The big question then is why would pseudo-democratic

rulers introduce “more” democracy (or just democracy) – that is, more controls of their actions by citizens. To adduce that reforms will be the product of idealism, altruism, or any other moral motive is just to express unwarranted hope, and to provide a lazy answer. Ferejohn (1999) has explained that these reforms are trade-offs between authority and accountability: politicians will accept more controls if, in exchange, they can extract more resources from society. Holmes (this volume) has argued that democratic reforms are likely when the state needs the cooperation of society: “when the few need the cooperation of the many between elections, and the many can credibly refuse to give their cooperation to the few.” Changes may emerge if there is a strong popular demand, parties do not collude, and restrictions to entry do not transform the party system into a closed arena.

Incentives to give more voice to the people may also increase if politicians think about the future: freedom of expression and association, plural and independent media, a credible opposition, may avoid political catastrophes. They may provide “early warnings” about economic and political risks and about exogenous crises. They help governments in avoiding huge mistakes and ruling intelligently (Holmes 1995). The flow of information and the fragmentation of power needed for fair and free elections may help citizens to get rid of bad governments but also contribute to a better rule.

Notes

1. In the United Kingdom, voters thought that the Labour party leader, Neal Kinnock, was more concerned with the interests of people than Margaret Thatcher (29 versus 20 percent), but that her capacity to govern keeping her party together was greater (59 versus 20 percent). As a result, 43 percent voted for Thatcher, and only 29 percent for Kinnock (Heath et al. 1994).
2. The patriotism of Kerry, backed by three Purple Hearts, was demolished by skilful defamation, helped by an ad hoc group called the Swift Boat Veterans. Eventually, Bush had an advantage of ten to twenty percentage points over Kerry in the popular evaluation of his leadership, reliability, and capacity to fight terrorism and to defend the U.S. The data are from CBS/New York Times surveys, October and December 2004.
3. This is an example of what was the leit motiv of the negative campaign against Zapatero: in a TV debate (February 25, 2008) Rajoy declared: “You have lied, you have cheated every Spaniard, you have negotiated politically with ETA, you have undermined the rule of law, you have surrendered to terrorists, you have accepted their blackmail.”
4. The countries are Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Luxemburg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.
5. These are the results of survival analysis with Cox regressions for 811 observations of the 22 parliamentary democracies since 1945. The wald χ^2 was 29.10, significant at 1 percent. The log pseudolikelihood was -4212.1407 . The coefficients for the three variables (GDP growth, unemployment, and inflation) were significant at

- 5 percent, with robust standard errors. This statistical significance disappeared if country fixed effects were introduced, although the signs of the coefficients remained the same.
6. The proprietors were William Aitken (Lord Beaverbrook) and Harold Hamsworth (Lord Rothermere). The papers were the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mirror*. Baldwin took the sentence “power without responsibility – the prerogative of the harlot through the ages” from his cousin, Rudyard Kipling. Beaverbrook declared to the Royal Commission for the Press in 1948 that he ran the *Daily Express* “purely for propaganda and with no other purpose” (Royal Commission for the Press 1947–49, Appendix 7, 257–68). See Williamson (1999) and Curran and Seaton (1997, 42).
 7. Although close to 60 percent of voters disapproved of Kenneth Starr’s methods, and less than one-third supported Clinton’s impeachment (Sonner and Wilcox 1999, 554–57).
 8. The campaign against Felipe González was orchestrated by the opposition (the PP) and carried out by a “yellow” conservative press, a banker involved in a massive financial fraud, and a judge. It was only stopped by the Supreme Court. The director of a newspaper involved in the conspiracy later declared, “There was no way of beating Felipe González with other means. This was the problem . . . González was a man with such political calibre that we had to go beyond the limits” (interview of Luis María Ansón, director of ABC, in *Tiempo*, February 23, 1998).
 9. This was the particular conclusion voted by the PP, against the final conclusions voted by the PSOE and the rest of parties in the Parliamentary Commission that investigated the terrorist attack in May 2004.
 10. Statements of Mariano Rajoy on May 11, 2005 and January 15, 2007.
 11. The Beta coefficient is 11.47 (with a robust standard error of 3.50). Of the control variables, the average GDP growth over the last two years and the unemployment rate also had statistically significant coefficients (with Beta values of 2.70 and 0.97, and robust standard errors of .47 and .32). The value of F was 9.97, statistically significant at .001. There were 312 country observations, of which 241 corresponded to PR systems and 71 to plurality/majority.
 12. The “party differential” refers to the value that a voter attributes to the implementation of the program of party A, compared to the program of party B. According to Downs (1957, 38–50), the expected party differential results from the difference in the expected utility incomes a voter believes he would receive were each of the competing parties in office.
 13. The Beta coefficient is 11.73 (with a robust standard error of 3.12). The control variables were the average GDP growth rate over the last two years, the rates of inflation and unemployment, and the perception of corruption. Only the average GDP growth over the last two years was statistically significant. The value of F was 17.53, statistically significant at .001.
 14. Causality appears to operate in both directions. If we examine seventeen Latin American countries in 2003, unconditional support to democracy correlates with economic development ($r = .39$) and with inequality ($r = -.63$). Support for a leader unencumbered by laws also correlates with both socioeconomic variables ($r = -.75$, and $r = .26$). Source: United Nations Human Development Report.

Democracy between Elections

Ian Shapiro

9.1 INTRODUCTION

Democratic elections empower winners with a time-bound right to govern. It might be for a fixed term, as in the United States, or a fixed term that can be shortened by the prime minister's decision to call an early election or a no-confidence vote in the parliament, as in the United Kingdom. Some democratic constitutions make provision for recall elections, which, in effect, make the government's tenure conditional on the continuing confidence of the electorate. Recall elections date back to ancient Greece, but they are rare among modern democracies and even more rarely are they successfully deployed.¹ Recalls are difficult to engineer even when they are provided for, as was evident when Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez fought off a recall referendum in 2004 and when Wisconsin governor Scott Walker survived a recall election in 2012. As well as the usual advantages of incumbency, recall petitioners must avoid numerous procedural tripwires as they gather large numbers of signatures, and they must do it with scant institutional support. Constitutions that provide for recall seem to have made provision for John Locke's exceptional "long train of abuses" rather than normal democratic politics.

One might speculate as to why governments are not subject to more robust continuing confidence requirements on the part of electorates. This could have to do with considerations of efficiency, with empowering governments to take unpopular measures whose benefits might not be immediately realized, or with other factors. Whatever the reason, elected governments regard themselves as free to govern unencumbered by that constraint, which would make representative government more likely to shadow what a direct democracy would do. Governments in representative democracies must pass final exams; they are not subject to continuous assessment.

This is not to say that democratic politics stops between elections. Shaping the legislation that governments enact, slowing down or curtailing the scope of unwelcome change, fund-raising and jockeying for positions in future elections, and building support with constituents are all ongoing political activities that are punctuated by elections rather than ended by them. Politics between elections takes three main forms that will be considered *seriatim* here: the role of “loyal opposition,” the activities of interest groups, and the political mobilization of civil society groups.

9.2 “LOYAL” OPPOSITION

This is an eighteenth century idea that originally had nothing to do with democracy; rather it was intended to solve a monitoring problem. The king’s insecurity about the conduct of His Majesty’s Ministers led to the creation of His Majesty’s Loyal Opposition to generate information about what the ministers were doing. In the democratic world, this idea has evolved into opposition that is loyal to the democratic order rather than the government of the day. It plays a number of roles in democracy between elections, sometimes in tandem and sometimes in tension with other democratic values.

It is most obviously realized in a two-party system of the Westminster sort, where the official opposition confronts the government on a regular basis to demand an accounting of what it is doing and demonstrate the opposition’s competence as a government-in-waiting to the electorate. Prime Minister’s Question Time is the weekly ritual; the leader of the opposition and shadow ministers hurl questions and abuse at the prime minister and the rest of the cabinet about the issues of the day. It is something of a macho exercise, instantiating a strongly competitive model of democracy. It fits less comfortably with the coalition systems that arise out of proportional representation. They depend less on institutionalized confrontations between two strong parties and more on the idea of including multiple parties in the government. In single-party dominant systems like Russia and South Africa, there is even less scope for formalized loyal opposition, since the opposition parties have no realistic hope of forming governments in the foreseeable future.

One role for loyal opposition is to facilitate alternation in government, the *sine qua non* of democracy in the Schumpeterian tradition. For alternation to be realistic, there has to be a plausible alternative waiting in the wings; the official opposition does everything it can to make sure it is visibly that. It is a proving ground for potential prime ministers to show back-benchers and voters that they are up to the task. In the 1997 British election, when John Major’s Conservative government was way behind in opinion polls and clearly headed for a rout, one Tory newspaper tried to float the argument that Labour should not be elected because they had been out of government for so long that they wouldn’t know how to govern. The argument was a measure of their desperation (not to mention their – perhaps willful – ignorance of British

electoral history²). Taking it seriously would have meant abandoning one of the most basic features of the British political system. Unsurprisingly, it cut no ice with the electorate.

When it operates effectively, loyal opposition also contributes to the quality of legislation. The opposition asks hard questions of government policies, exposing hypocrisy, misinformation, and bad arguments. The government fights back, defending its actions and impugning the opposition's motives. By giving the party that lost the election, and expects to fight the next one, the platform and incentive to make ongoing demands from the government to justify what it is doing, the system institutionalizes John Stuart Mill's insistence on the importance of argument in political life. The mere knowledge that the contest takes place is a disciplining device on both sides; it keeps them honest to a greater degree than would otherwise be true.

Notice that argument is a quite different regulative ideal than deliberation. Argument is competitive, geared toward winning; deliberation is cooperative, geared toward persuading. The defense of argument is an invisible-hand one: that the truth will out as a by-product of competition in the marketplace of ideas – or at least that this will happen more often than under any alternative regime. Deliberation, by contrast, aims at agreement. It can be agreement that ignores the truth if this suits the parties.

Bipartisan agreement is sometimes hailed as a desirable in politics. Barack Obama was widely faulted in the American media for failing to seek Republican support for his proposed healthcare reform in 2009–10. He finally caved in to the criticism in a desperate attempt to enact something. But from the standpoint of the competitive opposition model, bipartisan agreement is nothing to crow about. It is collusion in restraint of democracy. In my view, institutionalized competition embodies one of the advantages of the Westminster model over the proportional representation systems prevalent in much of Europe and which has been used in Russia since 2007. This is not to deny the value of deliberative institutions in improving the quality of legislation. In Britain, the House of Lords is a notably less competitive and more deliberative body than the House of Commons. The Lords who participate actively often develop expertises and work collaboratively on the minutiae of bills that MPs in the Commons often do not read. Deliberation has its place, but this should not be confused with argument. Just as markets in the economy are the best generators of reliable information that have been found because of the competition that drives them, so in politics the competitive dynamic is indispensable for shining the light of truth on politics. A system that institutionalizes opposition institutionalizes that dynamic.

Third, loyal opposition limits corruption. The same incentives that illuminate what governments do also illuminate how politicians behave. Competing politicians have every reason to expose the failings of their opponents when they can, and this knowledge serves as a constraint on behavior. Knowing that there are people with good access to information and institutional support who

want your job is a sobering fact. But it does not always work. The parliamentary expenses scandal that erupted in the UK in 2009 ending many political careers is an example, where there was tacit agreement on all sides to ignore the rules governing parliamentary allowances until a whistle-blower leaked the records to the media. It is an exception that proves the rule, however, because the system operated under the purview of the nonpartisan speaker (who lost his job over the affair) and so was not subject to the constraint that would have been present had MPs known that their opponents had access to their expenses claims. Had that been the case, the possibility of defection from the tacit agreement would likely have made people a good deal less sanguine about double and triple dipping, having their moats cleaned at taxpayer expense, and so on.

Fourth, institutionalizing loyal opposition contributes to stability by defusing disloyal opposition. We have known since the public choice literature of the 1950s and 1960s that there are no perfect democratic decision rules. One implication of this fact is that there will always be losers with legitimate grievances in democratic politics. The opposition can be a magnet for the discontented, on which they can pin their hopes to prevail in the future. Between elections, the official opposition can also be a conduit for grievances about how the policies of the government are being implemented; they can bring pressure to bear on the government to “edit in the application,” as Philip Pettit has put it – to mitigate the effects of winners’ policies on losers (Pettit 2000, 105–44). Providing avenues for loyal opposition gives aggrieved parties incentives to stay with the system rather than reach for their guns.

The risks to regimes of failing to create avenues for loyal opposition were dramatized by the events that snowballed through the Middle East starting in 2010. A dozen countries have seen major unrest, and three apparently stable dictatorships were overthrown. In Libya, for instance, Muammar Gaddafi’s regime had outlawed opposition parties, centralizing power in the General People’s Committee. Gaddafi also limited academic freedom and banned independent media (Freedom House 2012). The eventual response was an explosion of opposition that had no legitimate outlet except for violence and became an uprising-turned-civil-war that engulfed the country for the next year and ended in Gaddafi’s death. Comparable stories can be told about the roles played by the repression of dissent in the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt and in the civil war that was still under way in Syria in early 2013.

In Russia, a milder version of antiauthoritarian protest erupted in response to widespread allegations of fraud in the legislative and presidential elections of 2011 and 2012. For the first time since the early 1990s, tens of thousands took to the streets in December 2011 to protest a parliamentary election rigged in favor of then Prime Minister Vladimir Putin’s United Russia party (Elder 2011). The protests – which quickly spread to regional cities – reflected widespread frustration at the absence of legitimate avenues to express grievance. “To me, this election was like a game in which only some players are

allowed to compete,” said Heidi Tagliavini, an election observer, to the [BBC \(2011b\)](#). The protests continued into 2012, marring Putin’s inauguration in June. The repeated refrain was to demand fair elections, an end to corruption, a free media, and the release of political prisoners ([Bershidsky 2012](#)).

In the short run, the Putin regime defused the protests by comparatively subtle means. Cognizant, perhaps, of how damaging to China’s image its heavy-handed approach since Tiananmen Square has been, the Russians did not kill or seriously injure opposition leaders. They limited themselves to interrogations and arrests that seemed calculated, rather, to disrupt planning and chip away at the movement’s momentum ([Guardian 2012](#)). Arrested protesters faced individual trials away from the benefits that might have accrued to them from media limelight. The regime also orchestrated pro-government rallies (with turnout greatly exaggerated in the state-controlled media) through funding and “encouraging” youth groups to attend ([Rojansky and Balzer 2012](#); February 4, 2012). Putin even spoke at some of them, blaming the unrest on unidentified foreign villains. “We will not allow anyone to interfere in our affairs, to force their will on us,” he declared at Luzhniki rally in February. “I want to ask you . . . please answer with a simple short word – yes – do we love Russia?” ([BBC 2012a](#)).

How effectively these efforts will defuse Russian political opposition is unclear. On one hand, the protests have diminished in size and frequency, suggesting that the campaign to wear down the protesters has worked ([Bershidsky 2012](#)). On the other hand, Putin’s opponents seem stronger, bolder, and better organized than at any time since he replaced Boris Yeltsin as president in 2000. To cite one example, in October 2012, anti-Putin activists created a forty-five-member coordinating committee and elected Alexei Navalny, prominent critic of Russian corruption in general and Vladimir Putin in particular, to lead its operations ([BBC 2012c](#)). At least so far, the committee’s aims seem more disloyal than loyal. Whether the regime can coopt or marginalize such groups, and if so for how long, remains to be seen. The speed with which the protests flared up in 2011 suggests that it could happen again. In Russia, as with much of the Arab Spring, it is just too soon to know whether we are witnessing another 1989 or perhaps, as some commentators have begun to conclude, something more like 1848 ([Steinberg 2011](#); [Stoner 2012](#)). The conventional wisdom among political scientists is that liberalized authoritarianism is inherently unstable: either discontent must find avenues for expression within prevailing institutions, or, if they cannot be dismantled, they will endure only through suppression of dissent and reversion to hard authoritarianism ([Huntington 1991](#), 137; [Shapiro 1993](#), 121, 50).

9.3 INTEREST GROUPS

Between elections, interest groups can be major players in shaping policies enacted by governments. This was extensively documented in the “liberal

corporatism” literature of the 1970s, in which it was noted that groups like organized business and organized labor would negotiate over industrial policy, with government relegated to the role of a quasi-referee (Schmitter 1974, 85–131; Panitch 1976, 1977, 61–90). This might have been overstated. It is, in any case, less obviously relevant to a world in which organized labor has been on the retreat in most countries for the better part of three decades.

Generalizing about the role of interest groups between elections is unwise because they have greater scope for influence in some systems than in others. This is shaped by such factors as the strength and popularity of the government, the power of back-benchers, the relative autonomy and efficacy of the bureaucracy, and the rules governing lobbying and political contributions. Some of these factors might, in turn, vary systematically; perhaps legislators are more susceptible to interest group influence in single-member district systems, where they can be targeted, than in list-system PR, where they cannot – or at least not as easily. But it may be that lobbyists can deploy their resources more effectively in list-system PR because power is more centralized. Water flows around a rock.

An undernoticed factor that shapes the influence of interest groups between elections is the intensity of public opinion. Politicians can ignore public opinion on issues that the public does not much care about, because they know they will pay no electoral price. But that does not mean that they can ignore interest groups that might have the resources and incentives to reward or punish politicians depending on how friendly they are to the interest groups’ agendas. This is notably true of the politics of taxation in the United States, where mass preferences are not intense but those of organized activists are. This means that tax policy is mainly driven by the battles among interest groups, and the carrots and sticks that they can wave at politicians. This was dramatically true of the repeal of the estate tax in the United States in 2001. It was achieved largely due to the efforts of a lobbying coalition that was more effectively put together than the opposing lobbyists in a context where polling revealed to politicians that this would not be an important issue for voters (Graetz and Shapiro 2005). There are numerous other issues, ranging from abortion to the role of religion in public life, where this gap between the intense preferences of activists and nonintense preferences of voters exists (Fiorina et al. 2006). Organized interests battle to shape policy in the space created by that gap.

The amount of space available for interest groups to determine policy varies with the intensity of public opinion. For instance, in 2005 and 2006, exceedingly well organized interests, with strong support from the Bush administration, sought to get Congress to begin privatizing Social Security. They used all of the same tactics that had been so successfully deployed to repeal the estate tax four years earlier to no avail. They ran into the brick wall of intense public opposition to their agenda that could not be moved despite a massive propaganda campaign (Shapiro 2011, 1–38). Just what determines the intensity of public opinion on different issues is not well understood, but it is a subject of

major importance in understanding what the conditions are under which politicians will be responsive to organized interests, rather than to voters, between elections.

Sometimes, perhaps increasingly, powerful interests can work their way around the contours of public opinion by using their power to hijack the democratic process. One mechanism is to ensure that governments and regulators governments are supposed to control, become dependent on the interests they are supposed to be regulating. In effect, the foxes get the keys to the chicken coop. In this connection, it is worth pondering the remark by U.S. Congressman Spencer Bachus, the Republican chairman of the House Financial Services Committee, reported by Paul Krugman in the *New York Times* in December 2010: “In Washington, the view is that the banks are to be regulated, and my view is that Washington and the regulators are there to serve the banks” (Krugman 2010). This is ironic in view of a criticism that was commonly directed at Russia during those same years: that the Russian business oligarchs had more power than the Russian state.

The extent to which regulation of the financial services industry in the United States was dismantled in this way during the run-up to the 2008 financial crisis is now legion. Perhaps the most striking illustration was the Office of Thrift Supervision (OTS). Despite the experience of the savings and loan crisis during the 1980s and the bankruptcy of large thrifts under its control in the early new millennium, in the years leading up to the 2008 financial collapse, the OTS behaved more like a lobbyist for, rather than a regulator of, the lending banks it was meant to supervise. Dependent for its survival on the fees paid by the institutions it regulated, OTS shopped for business by promising – and delivering – a notoriously hands-off approach. America’s largest mortgage lender, Countrywide Financial, switched to OTS in March 2007 to avoid more prying regulators – five months before it would be forced to borrow \$11.5 billion in a vain attempt to stave off its unraveling (Bajaj 2007). By the end of 2008, thrifts under OTS’s regulatory purview controlling some \$356 billion had failed, and the government had seized the three largest institutions it regulated – including Washington Mutual, at the time the largest American bank ever to collapse (Appelbaum and Nakashima 2008).

In 2004, then head of Goldman Sachs Henry Paulson Jr. led a delegation of investment bankers to convince the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) that they should be exempt from capital reserve requirements on the grounds that, with assets in excess of \$5 billion, they could be trusted to protect investors on their own. In return, they promised to open their balance sheets to inspection by the SEC. But with a total of seven inspectors responsible for combined assets in excess of \$4 trillion, working in an office that for much of the time lacked even a director, virtually no inspections were performed. As late as March 2008, by which time Paulson had become secretary of the Treasury, SEC chairman Christopher Cox was reassuring Congress that the SEC had “a good deal of comfort about the capital cushions” of the major

investment banks. Six months later, Lehman Brothers went bankrupt and the other major investment banks were all quickly revealed to be on the verge of drowning in toxic consolidated mortgage debt. They had to be rescued by multi-billion-dollar bailouts from the federal government to forestall a systemic meltdown (Labaton 2008). And although executives from industrial companies like Chrysler and General Motors lost their jobs as the price of the 2009 government bailouts, it is notable that the investment bankers were immune – retaining their jobs and bonuses. It seems that their power is unchangeable (*New York Times*, January 2010; Scheer 2010).

Przeworski and Wallerstein (1988, 11–12) have written about the structural dependence of the state on capital, arguing that even governments with strong electoral mandates are forced to temper tax and regulatory agendas to anticipate the possibility of capital strikes. The decline in capital controls around the world in the decades since they wrote means that the threat of capital strikes increasingly means the threat of capital flight. But the financial crisis of 2008–10 revealed that capital can threaten much more than exit. Having contributed to the creation of a system in which political survival meant bailing out the banks, the banks were able to put guns to the heads of politicians. At each peak of the crisis, political leaders were confronted with the Hobson's choice of either bailing them out, or being held responsible for a catastrophic financial meltdown that would likely usher in a new depression. Thus, in May 2010, we saw the hitherto unthinkable specter of Angela Merkel risking an enormous electoral price by committing the German taxpayer to underwriting the German banks' exposure to Greek debt as that country teetered on the verge of default (*New York Times*, April 2010; Connolly 2010).

9.4 CIVIL SOCIETY

Interest groups are there to lobby politicians to resist or enact policies, but there are other players with political agendas who seek to shape the political process between elections, often with considerable success. The Tea Party movement in the United States is a recent example; their purpose was to obstruct Obama's domestic agenda as much as possible, by mobilizing public outrage, backing (and attacking) candidates in special elections such as the 2010 senate election to fill Edward Kennedy's seat, and putting pressure on Republicans who showed signs of compromise with the administration's legislative agenda. The Tea Party movement worked in loose collaboration with kindred forces in the media to achieve these goals, keeping the government on the defensive and limiting what it could achieve. The well-orchestrated grassroots opposition to the Troubled Assets Relief Program (TARP) crafted in the transition between the Bush and Obama administrations was a case in point. They created a steady drumbeat of opposition that limited Congress's power to act. Scores of senators and congressmen in vulnerable seats had their offices flooded with phone calls, emails, and letters opposing the bailout. This forced them to enact a scaled

down plan, and it made the possibility of a second TARP – in the event that the first proved insufficient – unthinkable.

This kind of civil society activism is by its nature event driven and episodic, but that does not mean that it is unimportant in shaping politics between elections. In addition to limiting governments' freedom of action, it shapes the terrain on which the next election will be fought and affects who will do the fighting. A big part of the Tea Party's agenda after 2009 was to pull Republican congressional and senate candidates for the subsequent elections to the Right by creating grassroots pressure in primary elections. The expansion of primaries since the 1960s was intended to weaken the control of party elites in the nomination of candidates. This it has won, but rather than bottom-up grassroots involvement that the authors of the McGovern–Fraser Commission envisaged when they recommended it for the Democratic Party in 1972, it has made primaries vulnerable to well-organized “astroturf” movements, whose leaders can orchestrate apparent grassroots support for objectives they seek to advance.

The same is true of ballot initiatives. Like the expanded use of primaries, ballot initiatives were conceived (mainly by people on the Left) as instruments to increase direct democracy and grassroots participation in politics. In practice, they have turned out to be susceptible to hijack by single-issue groups – such as antitax coalitions or opponents of gay marriage – who pour resources and activists into the fights they care about in states where they think they have a chance of success. The result is a certain amount of perpetual political campaigning rather than the traditional idea behind alternation in politics in which the side that wins has a limited time in which to implement its agenda. The continuous civil society politics often comes from opponents of the government of the day who are flatly unwilling to concede its mandate. This is evident in the opposition to health insurance reform in the United States, where the relentless drumbeat on Fox News, right-wing radio talk shows, and among the Tea Partiers was premised on the notion that Obama was trying to do something illegitimate. Yet Obama had made health insurance reform a central piece of his campaign, so whence the notion that it was illegitimate?

Just how much democracies should accommodate the mobilization and expression of intense contrarian preferences is a judgment call. Long ago Robert Dahl noted that some accommodation of intensity of preference might be worth trading off in the interests of stability – at least in principle (Dahl 1956, 90–123). The question that is not well understood is how much accommodation of intensity domesticates it, turning potentially disloyal opposition into loyal opposition, and how much accommodation of intense contrarian preference-holders emboldens them. Israeli governments make a habit of invoking the former when explaining to American administrations why West Bank settlers who defy agreements to stop expanding settlements should not be handled too harshly. But is it plausible to think this keeps them on the reservation for a potential peace agreement, or is it more plausible to think that every inch

they are given makes them that much more confident about grabbing the next mile?

That seems, increasingly, to be the view in Moscow. Commentators often observe that civil institutions in post-Communist systems, and especially in Russia, are weak. This is notoriously difficult to measure with much confidence (but see [Howard 2003](#)). It seems clear, nonetheless, that the Russian government is not interested in strengthening civil institutions that it cannot control. As Human Rights Watch summarized the situation in 2009, “the government continues tightening control over civil society through selective implementation of the law on NGOs, restriction and censure of protected expression and the media, and harassment of activists and human rights defenders. These actions form an unmistakable part of the Russian government’s efforts to weaken – in some cases beyond recognition – the checks and balances needed for an accountable government” ([Human Rights Watch 2009](#)). There is no evidence that things have since changed. The media remains tightly controlled. The Kremlin screens opposition commentators before they go on the air, and interviews with civic activists are edited before being aired ([Ortting and Walker 2012](#)). Reports that undermine the credibility of various independent NGOs, such as the attack against the Moscow-Helsinki Group in January 2012, stand in stark contrast to Putin’s messages – which are broadcast unadulterated ([RIA Novosti 2012](#)).

Independent journalists have not fared better. They are often harassed, and they get little protection from a corrupt judiciary. Proposed new censorship laws will further curtail the freedom of social networking, empowering the state to blacklist websites under the guise of protecting citizens from inappropriate and misleading content. The draft legislation submitted to the Duma in June 2012 envisages a new state agency with the authority to blacklist websites, and it gives similar power to courts which will be allowed to ban “extremist” and other types of Internet content that violates Russian law ([Sutter 2012](#)). In late 2012 it seemed clear that the government had spammed Twitter accounts protesting election irregularities, and there was evidence that it had sought to combat them with floods of machine-produced pro-Kremlin tweets ([BBC 2011b](#)). When it came to the watchdog groups themselves, the government simply ordered them to shut down their operations – as it did to USAID in September 2012, most likely in response to its support of election monitoring organizations ([Elder and McGreal 2012](#)).

The creeping authoritarianism in Russia that many have been complaining about for the last decade might not have accelerated to a gallop, but it is speeding up. This makes it harder, in the short run, for civil institutions to compensate for the democratic deficit in the Russian political system or to provide the impetus and resources to address it. Whether this means that a new era of disengaged quiescence is in the offing, or rather that stifled pressure for reform will soon explode, is impossible to predict. There stresses on the system are obvious. But the eruptions since of the past two years remind us – as did those

of 1989 – that while political change is often gradual, sometimes it operates more as the theory of punctuated equilibrium would predict. Disgruntlement might simmer for so long that elites discount it – or even forget that it is there. Then, when it does explode, the obvious question suddenly seems to be: why didn't it happen earlier?³

Notes

1. During the debate on the U.S. Constitution the Virginia Plan of 1787 proposed recall provisions for the House of Representatives, but this was not adopted. Eighteen of the American states contain provisions for recall of state officials, but seven of these require “cause” – malfeasance that can be disputed in court. This makes them more like impeachments. Recall is a rarely used instrument in state politics. State governors have been recalled only twice in American history: in 1921 Lynn Frazier of North Dakota was recalled during a dispute about state-owned industries, and in 2003 Grey Davis was recalled by California voters during a dispute over the budget. State senators and representatives, as well as local officials, are sometimes recalled, though this, too, is rare, and the courts have ruled that federal officials are not subject to state recall laws.
2. Walpole served for twenty-one continuous years between 1721 and 1742; William Pitt the Younger for eighteen years between 1783 and 1801 (and also from 1804 to 1806); and Lord Liverpool for fourteen years from 1812 to 1827.
3. Thanks to Wishcha (Geng) Ngarmboonant for his research assistance on this chapter.

General Settings, Regional and National Factors, and the Concept of Non-Western Democracy

Alexei D. Voskressenski

IO.1 INTRODUCTION

The economic and political problems facing the modernizing countries of the non-Western world are not unique to any of them. Western countries have solved them earlier, albeit in their own ways and within their own time frames. However, the ways of solving these nonunique problems are in fact exclusive to each country because of regional as well as national factors, including the cultural dimension, subsumed by the West on its way to political modernization and development. Western countries have already traversed this path of economic and political modernization and transformation from traditional to industrial societies long ago and have now finished, or are on their way to finishing, their transition to postindustrial societies in which the cultural dimension plays a subordinate role. Some Asian countries have also managed to complete this transition. However, other countries have only begun moving in the direction of modernization, and some are not even able to do so as of yet. Hence there are different ways in which a country's social, economic, and political systems modernize – these can be successful, problematic, or unsuccessful – and the ultimate result is either the success or failure of the entire modernization process. Yet, success in development and/or economic modernization may or may not be equated with success in political modernization, although economic competitiveness does have a positive correlation with political competitiveness (Downs 1957; Gerschenkron 1962; Frank 1998; Benhabib and Przeworski 2006). Therefore countries trying to catch up with the leaders in their field have modernized their economies as well as their politics, with the most successful creating a specific model of a competitive market economy within a competitive democratic political regime which is, as I will argue, of an individual type but within universally accepted rules. The recent rise of the non-Western world before and during the global financial crisis has raised the

question of de-Westernization (Mahbubani 2008; Zakaria 2009), where the cultural/historical/civilizational parameter is probably the most important one for determining the type of market, political system, and regime that the given state will take on (Pye and Verba 1965; Geertz 1973; Colson 1974; Pye 1985; Wang Gungwu 1979; Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Zakaria 2009; Calichman and Kim 2010). This parameter's lack of elasticity (Inglehart and Welzel 2005) may even hinder modernization and democratization, thus rendering its modernization incomplete. In economics, this problem is called "path dependency" (or the economics of QWERTY) though it is more complex than described by economists (Makarov 2010).

Remarkably, several countries in Asia – a region that, as a whole, has embarked on the path of economic and political modernization later than the West (McNeil 1963; Bairoch 1975; Landes 2000; Morris 2010) – have managed to come up with their own way, different from the Western one in practical implementation but within accepted by the democratic theory parameters. By preserving their culture and civilization, they have enriched the process of global development. To deny this implies a simplistic approach to global development and methodological bias. The concept of "controlled democracy under decreasing authoritarianism" (the last years of Chiang Kai-shek and Jiang Jinguo's government) or of "guided democracy" (Suharto) does not necessarily represent the "final stage" in the political transformation of various non-Western countries. Indeed these are only the interim stages in the sequence of measures aimed at creating national forms of stable democracy with an open social-political access as shown in practice by the most successful Asian countries. Scholarship exploring a modernized and sophisticated non-Western (or de-Westernized) mode of analysis of different segments of life that exist in different forms of equilibrium or harmony (Kennedy 1989, 446; Przeworski 1991, 253–73; Voskressenski 2003, 55–70; Makarov 2010) has been growing. The question is only how successful this evolving new intellectual trend will be in creating a distinct methodological base for explaining reality and what influence this new trend will have on the future mainstream paradigm in the social sciences (Acharya and Buzan 2010; Wang 2010). Remarkably, although there has been scholarship reflecting this new trend in Asia, Russia, and even the West, no attempt has yet been made to bridge the gap between this scholarship and earlier local studies that introduced similar concepts based on persuasive and methodologically correct arguments.

The most successful non-Western countries that have managed to catch up with the West and create what I will argue is their own model of competitive democratic rule are grouped under the category of "non-Western democracies." They possess the basic parameters of a democracy but also have individual features that are analyzed in this essay. The methodological premise of the idea elaborated in this essay is that a democracy must embody institutions (with basic and maximum parameters) that perform the same functions needed for a political regime to be called a modern democracy, but this position does

not necessarily imply mimicking the institutions of the contemporary Western political system. The reason is that in the contemporary Western world the form of these institutions derives from Western history and culture and thus varies from country to country – despite such institutions performing similar functions. This premise does not deny (and may actually emphasize) the danger of preserving a political system based on traditional institutions that does not perform the functions necessary for a political regime to be called a democracy or creating institutions that under specific cultural/historical conditions will not in any case perform functions necessary for a regime to be called a democracy and may in fact lead to economic and political disorder. So we are not arguing against the position that institutions can be imported, that they are not necessarily bound by the past and that traditions are modifiable and changeable. Institutions can indeed be imported and traditions can be modified, but every epoch creates the possibility for a different set of changes. Furthermore, historical and cultural settings can delimit the amount of change a society can process. Thus democracy also becomes a historically and culturally defined concept.

10.2 APPLIED POLITICAL ANALYSIS IN THE EAST AND THE WEST: GENERAL PARAMETERS AND SPECIFIC FACTORS

The scholarly literature on the Eastern and Western ways of economic, social, and political development visualizes four intellectual positions. The first stresses the ways for Western society and culture (seen as positive or negative depending on the author's view) to modernize itself and create a better, more competitive, way of development and political modernization (McNeil 1963; Said 1978; Frank 1998; Landes 2000). The second emphasizes geography and quantification of social development as a basis for differences between East and West (Morris 2010). Neither position accounts for differences between East and West during certain historical epochs. The third position stresses different kinds of structural differences (property rights, ethnic or psychological stereotypes, etc.) that explain why West is West and East is East (Pye and Verba 1965; Pye 1985; Vassiliev 1995; Nepomnin and Ivanov 2010). The fourth, explained in this essay, stresses complex structural differences during certain historical periods that have an effect on political development and political modernization.

Having set out the initial difference between Western and non-Western societies, we can try to determine the special character of the non-Western political process. This requires defining the systemic particulars of non-Western societies. Once we have determined the methods of comparison between the political systems of the two major types of societies, we can trace the evolution of Asian political systems, identify special regional characteristics, and isolate some models of basic ideology as they relate to political systems and processes (Pye 1985). It is necessary to mention that these special characteristics are revealed through an analysis of the West–East dichotomy, although such a dichotomy is only for analysis, has partial application and may disappear altogether in the course of human evolution.

First of all, we shall draw out two approaches within the third position. These are approaches to defining the particular character of Asian societies, which would shed light on the specific features of their political process. The two approaches are elaborated in detail in Russian Oriental studies. The structure of this debate in Russian Oriental studies is reflected in Voskressenski (2007); in Western scholarship, it is best represented by Pye (1956), McNeil (1963), Said (1978), Frank (1998), and Landes (2000), though with fewer details on specific structural features pertaining to the Oriental/Asian world.

According to the first approach, prehistoric Western and Eastern political structures were identical. Yet, beginning with ancient times, political structures became divided into two major types, the Western and the Eastern. In societies of the Western type, (1) proprietary relations structure the economy, (2) manufacture of commodities dominates, (3) there is no centralized authority, and (4) because of the latter the community is democratically self-governing, which later gives rise to the structure now commonly known as “civil society.”

According to this definition, such types of society have been subject to rapid structural changes that caused them to quickly become highly competitive because of their sophisticated system of political management.

In societies of the second, Asian type, private property did not play a dominant role, while public and state ownership prevailed. Power there was equated with property whereas in societies of the Western type there was a division of property/wealth between the property-owners and the governing power since the times of the Venetian Republic; the government existed for hire, its primary function being administrative (Landes 2000). In Asian societies, conversely, there were no laws to protect private ownership on the model of Roman law. There, state/communal economy prevailed, and the state dominated society, rather than vice versa. Although Asian society came up with alternative structures of opposition to state power (family, clan, community, caste, sect, etc.), these alternative systems were to a certain extent incorporated into the state system (e.g., India, China, and Southeast Asia) because their representative was typically connected to the government or acted as a low-level state official. Because of their political structure, societies of this type always sought internal stability, conservatism, and the status quo (Wittfogel 1957; Vassiliev 1995). Only those norms that corresponded to corporate/communal ethics gained a foothold there, and, by virtue of this fact, they constantly reproduced political structures of the same type. This explains why Asian/Oriental societies did not become democracies of the Western type and what was necessary for them to start moving in this direction. According to this logic, in the West, the driver of innovation – political and otherwise – was the individual property-holding citizen, while in the East the community only accepted that which corresponded to communal and ethical norms and traditions, in other words, collective rather than individual experience (Vassiliev 1995). According to this conceptual logic, all modernization was defined as Westernization, that is, the inevitable forward movement of all states based on the Western model of development.

However, during the last fifteen years, political science and regional studies in Russia and elsewhere have created an alternative explanation of the special character of Asian societies (*Istoriya Vostoka* 2006). In this interpretation, the creation and reproduction of social structures in Asian societies were defined by the following parameters: (1) the rights of the individual in the East existed and were protected only vis-à-vis other individuals, while the rights of the individual vis-à-vis the state were absent; (2) landed property in Eastern societies was of two kinds: (i) landed property for the people (i.e., property for taxation) which belonged to the ruling class in charge of the administrative apparatus of the state and (ii) landed property for economic activity which belonged to landowners and taxpayers, that is to say, to peasants and landowners at the same time; and (3) this situation led to the creation of two ruling classes.

Based on the aforementioned conditions, societies of the Asian type can be defined as follows:

1. In societies of this type, multiple forms of property have existed throughout their historical development.
2. Societies of this type will always have long interim periods between their principal economic epochs, when two or more kinds of socioeconomic activity will exist side by side.
3. Societies of this type will always be prone to conflict, which is endemic to “semi-civilizations” (Fernand Braudel’s terminology, *Braudel* 1993), that is, so-called civilizational heterogeneity where civilization is understood to be a stage in the development of a culture. This stage is part of a historically determined system of social relations and contains formative features while consistently accumulating cultural and political baggage (*Sanderson* 1995).
4. By virtue of their ethnic and cultural heterogeneity societies of this type require institutions that compensate for the heterogeneity of their communal and ethnic makeup; therefore, they all accord a hypertrophied role to state and religion in contrast to other types of societies. State and religion play a centralizing, cementing, and unifying role in societies of this type.
5. Because of both internal and external factors, in societies of this type, capitalism had a heterogeneous and localized identity that influenced both their economic and political development.

If we agree with this definition of the political and economic features of Asian (“Oriental”) societies, then we can easily identify the political features of Western versus non-Western societies.

In societies of the classic Western type:

1. The “technological” view of the world prevails: nature is the habitat of society, as stated in the aphorism “nature is not a temple but a workshop, and the individual is its owner.” In societies of the Western type, the rationalist will of the individual is not limited (we are free to do anything short of

murder – this is the “philosophical” foundation of all European wars), thus the concept of free, spontaneous will prevails. In this society, the status of the individual is not guaranteed by “the order of the Universe” thus, the individual is a nonconformist. Such a society is based on individual free will and has no place for fatalism, unlike societies of the Asian type, where there is no spontaneous variation and all is predetermined by “the course of things.” Western society is a sociocentric, self-determining system, not a cosmocentric one like Asian society. Nature and society (i.e., the individual) in the West are conglomerative, meaning that they are not a harmonious, indissoluble whole as in the traditional Asian model. In the West, the individual is always transforming nature. Thus, societies of this type are based on the primacy of law; they stress the juridical acceptability of social behavior and universal legal and constitutional norms.

2. Societies of the Western type are based on the principle of uncertainty; politics there is a game based on equal chances, with an unknown end result. In Western society, history is always open-ended and carries no guarantees; it is unknowable because people cannot see its horizons. In such societies there is no objective political truth; rather, the truth is conventional, that is, accepted by agreement. Therefore, there should always be a certain consensus and recognition of the minority point of view.

3. Societies of the Western type are based on the nominalistic principle which, in turn, is based on the civil contract: no one can force the individual to enter into any social relations without his consent, and these relations are valid only insofar as the individual voluntarily enters into them as an equal. From this follows the need for bilaterally responsible relations between the citizens and the state, instead of unilateral obligations of the citizens to the state, as in Asia.

4. Societies of the Western type are based on the principle of separation of power; state power there should always be elective and carried out by the majority, yet necessarily regulated by the constitutional rule of law. Thus state power cannot be extended to certain spheres of private life, while minorities must have legally defined guarantees of their rights. Moreover, state authority should be legitimate (the legislature must be elected), effective (executive power must be independent), and the judiciary must be independent of the first two branches (the citizens as well as the state should be equally subject to the law).

5. Western societies are based on the systemic-functional principle according to which it is the function of the political entity that matters, not what the entity is.

6. The principle of the separation of values from interests is enshrined in these societies: according to this principle, existential questions are not decided within the realm of politics since the outcome of the political competition is not final (after a relatively short period of time it is possible for the loser in the competition to lawfully come to power again, by election). During this political competition, the practical interests of various political forces are coordinated, and, if necessary, compromise is reached.

7. Societies of this type propagandize the political system of the “open” type (“open society”) where there is ideally no class segregation because of the high degree of social mobility within the life-span of one generation. There are no “great” collective values, and national sovereignty is gradually reduced to a minimum. All cultures are accorded equal respect, tolerance prevails, and society operates according to the rules of free competition.

In Asian Oriental politics, all the aforementioned principles can exist to some extent, but they do not structure the politics. Societies of the Asian type have other foundational principles, namely:

1. The principle of abstention from enforced activity (for example, the well-known concept of ancient Chinese political philosophy known as *wu-wei* (“non-action”), meaning the highest stage of economic/political management where the governing is done in such a sophisticated manner and according to cosmic rules (“The Mandate of Heaven”) that bring human actions to a minimum. This is somewhat analogous to the concept of Dar al-Islam in the Muslim world, where radical transformation must be in the sphere of Dar al-Harb; today its secular and rational embodiment is Deng Xiaoping’s expression “to cross the river by holding onto rocks.” In other words, in the Asian world, there is no “reorganizer”/“reformer” in the Western sense. Rather, people in this civilization follow “the course of things,” the great cosmic law where ethics and ritual are merged together and ritual codifies written and unwritten rules of behavior, while any creative improvisation in the realm of morals and ethics is discouraged. In this system social behavior must be predictable, and everyone waits for his appointed time. The ideal model for this type of society is paternalistic, based on paternal trusteeship and filial respect. Thus the political process does not aim at power production as in the West, but rather at the uncovering of that which is imminent, natural, proven, and established.

2. Asian societies are based on the principle of theocracy: the state is a carrier of moral and religious norms that aspires to control all social phenomena. This understanding of the state is based on an Eastern tradition according to which the city is the embodiment of state power, while the people are a spiritual community bound together by tradition or collective memory. Meanwhile, in the West, the city functions as the private individual’s alternative to state power and forms the basis of civil society, ideally allotting to the state the role of dispassionate observer of the processes occurring in this civil society and interfering only in the event of actual disturbances (Tilly 1994). In the East, political authority can be limited and supervised by spiritual authority which “commands one’s thoughts” – this authority provides supreme spiritual guidance. Hence the belief in the sacrality of all earthly things and in the primacy of “sobornost” (as defined by the Russian philosopher Aleksei Homiyakov): evoking the Russian Orthodox Church, this ideal denotes a secular society organized on the principle of a hierarchical spiritual community with a priest/tsar/prophet and, essentially, an intermediary between man and God, just like in the otherwise very different tradition of Islam.

3. In societies of this type, the individual achieves status not by virtue of his connections, money, or personal achievement but by diligent service to the state. And if he does so, his flaws (e.g., corruption, inefficiency) become unimportant. Consequently, administrative territories inside the state should be supervised by the supreme authority (*vertical' vlasti, federalnye okruga*); to some extent there should be central regulation of the economy and a state monopoly on certain indispensable goods (state monopoly on land property, salt, wine, mountains, lakes, coin minting, and so on, depending on the state and its historical stage of development).

4. States of the Asian type are based on the principle of “sacred validity,” meaning that their power is messianic, and statehood as a whole is sacralized and carries the highest importance for local communities. Meanwhile their concept of freedom does not apply to the individual, but to the collective. The people have a collective destiny, so salvation is not personal but collective.

Within the framework of these two approaches, it is possible to delineate the contrast between East and West (see the details in [Voskressenski 2007](#)).

On the structure of the universe: The West is anthropocentric. At the center of this universe is the individual who is the master of the universe, having subjugated nature and society. In politics this individual employs modernizing techniques. Meanwhile, the East is teocentric. At the center of the universe in this system is the transcendental will to which the individual submits. The individual's goal here becomes recognizing this will and working in line with its precepts. Therefore in politics it is desirable to use “soft” techniques which would not disrupt “the harmony of society and nature,” as well as moral laws and “sacred ethics.”

On the value systems of individual and society: The West is focused on the material side of life (e.g., Madonna's “I'm a material girl”), its society is oriented toward an ideal of general prosperity that is understood, first of all, as a “consumer paradise.” In the East, cultural wealth is proclaimed as the priority, while society is led to develop according to moral and religious principles. The purpose of such development is not so much material prosperity as harmony and balance guided by the sacred wisdom of the authorities.

On relation to property: In the West, private property and the manufacture of commodities are structured by the market. In the East, there is a relationship between power and property, where the place of the proprietor is mediated by his participation in the state, and vice versa.

On relations between secular and religious authority: The West has instituted a separation of the political sphere from ethical and religious traditions. In the East political authority is sacralized (though the degree of this sacralization can differ from country to country). It is the church that sacralizes political tradition, in most cases as the “state religion.”

On the scale of political time: The West is oriented toward the future. Time there is linear and continuously accelerates. The East is focused on the eternity; there, political time is cyclical.

On the attitude of the individual to “the truth”: In the West, there is a rational way of comprehending the truth – the individual recognizes the truth as that which his intellect and will can master. The East is focused on the intuitive way of comprehending the truth. The truth is necessary so that one can serve it; it is existence itself, and therefore does not depend on the will and intellect of the individual.

On the process of acquiring knowledge: In the West, the process of acquiring knowledge comes down to a learning activity on the part of the individual who investigates the properties of objects. In the East, this process consists of merging into the object and comprehending it on an intuitive level.

This dichotomy between East and West is above all characteristic of traditional Eastern and Western societies; clearly, in complex modern societies, it becomes less and less significant. Since the twentieth century, there has been a marked trend of interborrowing of the aforementioned principles between West and East, as well as mutual influence and synthesis. At the same time, in political culture, and also in other areas such as state power, economics, and management, for certain reasons, such synthesis and interborrowing have either not taken place or have just started to happen during the last twenty years or so. In this connection, it is important to understand which societies of the non-Western type have performed catch-up modernization by copying the Western experience and which others see modernization as a special way of development, alternative to the Western natural-historical one. For some of the latter, modernization can be an evolutionary process without periods of explosive (revolutionary) or stable (evolutionary) development. Some of them have also tried to carry out alternative, mobilizational modernization of the socialist/communist type based on the concept of explosive development. For all these non-Western societies (including societies of the Asian type), modernization now is a more or less successful synthesis of the Western political experience of democracy based on the principle of universal elections, constitutional liberalism, and their own political culture.

10.3 THE SPATIAL AND ANALYTICAL SYSTEM OF COORDINATES

According to the arguments developed earlier (see also Voskressenski 2007, 17–26, with some arguments based on Pye 1975), we can add a “spatial” dimension to the political analysis (Agnew 1997) of the development of non-Western countries; this is tied to the civilizational/geographical and cultural/political logic of their development. For this analysis we should take into consideration the definition of the international political macro-region as an economically and culturally defined special complex that is based on the uniformity of geographical, natural, economic, sociohistorical, political, and cultural conditions. This macro-region unifies local living conditions held together by a common structure and logic such that this logic and the historical and geographic coordinates of its existence are mutually determined (Voskressenski 2006, 9–16).

The preceding definition of a macro-region makes it possible to arrange the material in a certain spatial system of coordinates in addition to or in combination with the analytical aspect (Voskressenski 2007, 29–43). It thus reveals to what degree historical, ethnic, confessional, and cultural factors influence the particular evolution and functioning of political systems in societies across the world. As Barrington Moore once observed,

specific chains of historical causation that do not fit into any recognizable family of sequences may have to bear a substantial share of the explanatory burden. This has been the case in the study of Western societies; there is no reason to expect it to be otherwise as we turn to Asia. (Moore 1966, 1992, 161)

Robert H. Bates noted,

Cultures are distinguished by their institutions. . . . Cultures are also distinguished by their histories and beliefs. . . . Persons can be shaped by their histories. . . . The theory of decisions thus yields insight into the way in which history and world views shape individual choices and therefore collective outcomes. The theory thus provides a framework for exploring cross-cultural differences. (Bates 1977, 168; 12)

The preceding definition of an international political macro-region corresponds to our broader understanding of a region as a complex economic and cultural unit that can be defined by its attributes – concentration, diversity, and interconnectedness – while the uniformity of its geographic, economic, socio-historical, and cultural conditions form the basis for singling it out as a territorial (spatial) unit.

Recognizing these principles will allow us to complement the general rules according to which political systems function with the “flesh and blood” of regions and countries – in other words, to do a concrete analysis of the political systems and cultures of various regions and countries, in particular, as in our case, Asian states in all their complexity.

Our analysis should therefore begin with discovering the general principles of political systems’ typology and modes of functioning. It is then possible to proceed to the general characteristics of political systems of different countries and regions of the world, which are grouped according to a number of criteria. We will then go deeper into the analysis of the functioning of specific Asian political systems across different regions, and finally investigate the evolution of political systems and the special character of their regions and civilizations. This last stage of analysis is usually omitted in political scientists’ explanations. Yet, according to our logic, we should operate on the spatial-analytical principle, instead of juxtaposing the spatial and the analytical, as has been done before. Thus, it is clear that, when considering the particulars of region and country, one should keep in mind the following three factors that define the relationship between the general and the specific in modern development:

What is the distance separating the countries in question from the leaders of the global economy? (because the distance that needs to be overcome determines the sequence of problem solving in political modernization).

What is the relationship between the dominant ideology, the state policy, and the national development strategy in the given state?

What features of the political culture in the countries in question influence the formation of their political systems? What is the role of tradition in the given country's political culture? How do these factors influence its development trajectory?

Thus, by applying the spatial-analytical principle and considering the factors that determine the relation between general principles and regional and national factors in modern development we can understand the evolution and functioning of non-Western political systems. Yet, being aware of these general principles does not preclude detailed knowledge of the political culture of other countries or the specifics of their social, political, and economic functioning.

10.4 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE SPECIAL FACTORS OF NON-WESTERN POLITICAL SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES: GENERAL PRINCIPLES, REGIONAL FACTORS, AND MODELS OF DEMOCRACY

Political institutions are transformed in parallel with changes in industry, general standards of life, education, and household organization. Meanwhile, changes in the economies of societies that are caused by modern growth processes force sociopolitical institutions to adapt, acquire greater flexibility, and generate innovation.

In traditional societies, there was need for stability and maintenance. Accordingly, the preservation of political institutions was necessary there because it provided for the maintenance of tradition. For this reason, prior to the early nineteenth century, the majority of states were absolute monarchies. However, now, in the beginning of the twenty-first century, political institutions should provide for maximum adaptability/competitiveness to change and generate innovation to pave the way for economic modernization. This is why practically all societies now feature a political system based on universal suffrage. Without this there can be no modernization because the formation of political consensus in society becomes difficult, if not impossible. Conversely, some developed market democracies have not renounced their traditional political systems despite their age-old monarchic or theocratic form of governance (e.g., Great Britain and the Vatican). They have, however, limited these forms in such a way as to ensure conformity to tradition, but so as not to interfere with direct suffrage, a multiparty system, or separation of power – modern innovations in government. They have preserved tradition to the extent of allowing a monarchy to be labeled a democracy. Thus, it is not so much a specific type of political system as a mode of government, that is, a specific political regime of governing (Oleinik 2009, among others) that carries the title of democracy.

An important question arises in this connection: to what degree is it necessary to fulfill the conditions for organizing a democratic mode of

government? And, further, what is the ideal democratic mode of government? If we believe that the ideal is solely a democracy of the Western type, that is, the European and American model of liberal democracy, then the global political process can be described as Samuel Huntington's "third wave of democratization" at the end of the twentieth century, and all other examples would be judged on the basis of their conformity or nonconformity to the ideal (Huntington 1992). Within this framework, the global political process can be described simply as Western-style political modernization, with all countries and regions evolving into European or American liberal democracies (the concept of "democratic transition"), and thus the major task is to "push" "resisting" or "not understanding/not wise" countries and governments to the brave and bright new world. This is akin to Karl Marx coming up with his notorious concept of "the Asian way of production" due to his lack of knowledge of the Orient, as a result confusing scholars for the next hundred years (Brook 1989).

Today, there are more and more scholars, both in Western and non-Western countries, as well as in Russia, who place into doubt theories of modern Western political modernization (Westernization) and of "democratic transition," based on a vision of the world in the 1980s–90s. These scholars do not believe that democracies of the Western type are the only or the ideal democratic mode and instead see the global political process as based on regional and national specifications in all their variety. What is being negated here is not the idea of democracy itself, or democratic theories and concepts; neither do these scholars deny the prevalence of global democratic trends over autocratic ones. They do, however, argue for the necessity of expanding the methodological base and the nomenclature of methodological approaches, in particular, by using the methodology of regional and spatial analysis for a less biased de-Westernized explanation of the global political process (more details in Voskressenski 2007). This position does not necessarily posit democratization as directed only by the state and controlled by a centralized political authority. In contrast, it argues that in some societies, at a certain historical/civilizational stage of development, with specific cultural/historical characteristics, democratization may be prevailingly directed by the state and controlled by a centralizing political authority (Li Cheng 1990; Means 1996; Sachsenröder 1999; Suryadinata 2007) during periods of transition. Otherwise the result would not be a more democratic society but economic/political collapse, civil war, destabilization of the whole system, and so on. Sometimes people may not even be physically able to live in societies that are in a constant state of radical reform without periods of stability, this possibly having demographic consequences even worse than during periods of stagnation. At the same time, "flat" stabilization (zastoi and stagnation) without hope for a better future or reforms can also lead to tragic consequences for the whole nation-state. The most obvious argument in favor of this position is that the political systems of those states that originally did not fit into the democratic political model as defined

by classic Western political theory – most obviously, Malaysia and Singapore, and earlier Taiwan and earlier still even India and Japan – have been declared liberal democracies or, more precisely, limited liberal democracies.

Indeed, the concept of “guidance” and “trusteeship/tutelage” was born long before 1970s Asian leaders such as Suharto started to talk about “guided democracy” – notwithstanding the fact that their major intention at that time may or may not have been the defense of local authoritarianism and resistance to both American and Soviet military-political supremacy and thus their own subordination. The roots of this concept are in the idea of political “tutelage” envisaged by Sun Yat-sen (Schiffrin 1970; Spence 1990, 365), effectuated unsuccessfully by Chiang Kai-shek in mainland China and later successfully in Taiwan by himself and also Jiang Jinguo such that it indeed resulted in the creation of a Chinese democratic regime. A debate over these issues (“who lost China” or “why China was lost”) found lately that free competitive elections under certain circumstances can produce more harm than good. Such elections legitimate democracy but are not useful just anytime and anywhere. In terms of the agency-structure debate, this means that change of agency does not necessarily imply an automatic change in structure and sometimes the authoritarian modernization of the structure may lead to more profound changes to society and further changes of the agency. The problem of the sequences of measures during transitional periods makes it absolutely clear that this position does not necessarily defend authoritarianism instead of the prevailing global trend of democratization, or some political leaders staying in power for their whole lives, or the hereditary transition of power, or pretending that “imitative democracy” is a synonym for democracy itself as is sometimes done by clever but shallow defenders of a certain type of political regime (e.g., Mikhail Leontiev, as quoted by Adam Przeworski in his essay). This problematic is beyond the scope of the approach examined here and relates more to ideology than to social science. It seems in this connection that the step forward in political modernization (“the transition trap”) for some of the non-Western democracies is very difficult and painful. It was just as painful for the West when it first created this mode of governing in the first quarter of the twentieth century while simultaneously nourishing right-wing National Socialism in the form of Nazism that grew so strong that it could not be defeated by democracies alone but together with left-wing National Socialism in the form of the “totalitarian” USSR. The idea that democracy is the worst form of government that is simultaneously better than any other and is thus better for everybody does not deny the structural/cultural hegemony or, occasionally, the selfish attempts of the stronger to prosper at the expense of weak political regimes or unstable democracies (Easterly 2006). They first need to be stabilized politically to be able to defend their economic interests. The slogan “do like us” and “be like us” does not necessarily result in prosperity and democracy. In fact, it was found that globalization may not be a process beneficial to all to the same degree and that the mercantile market economies with authoritarian

political regimes may learn to articulate their economic interests better than young democracies or even old market democracies (Halper 2010). The attempt to keep ancient paradigms intact may thus create double standards that sustain the structural-cultural hegemony while an attempt to update ancient paradigms may be interpreted as defending this or that particular political regime. Ideas are indeed material, and their interpretation influences how the future is formatted.

It is clear that some non-Western democracies have problems deconstructing a dominant party system (it took even Japan more than sixty years to do this). Because of the fear of economic consequences in a modern world based on unfair competition, some of these countries' leaders have psychological problems stepping down as guarantors of the political process because power is seductive or because they feel that their societies are still not ready for more democratization and freedom and might destabilize and become unable to compete. These types of problems have only been related to the time frame, the sequence of measures, the political skill, and the internal preparedness of these countries. And there is always the problem of possible traditionalist revanchism as soon as the society in question is politically and economically stabilized. Thus the creation of a non-Western democracy becomes a process no easier than that of the creation of a Western democracy.

A long time ago, Lucian Pye not only recognized the existence of the "non-Western" political process but also formulated the rules for defining its characteristics (Pye 1965, 1985). According to him, the political model for non-Western societies is basically determined by the shape of their public and personal relations, while power and influence there depend largely on social status (Pye 1956, 468–86). The political struggle is not concentrated in alternative political developments but rather in access to power. The process of political recruiting in societies of this type is hence one of cultural socialization. Thus, the basic structure of non-Western political life is communal, with political behavior directly or indirectly linked to communal identification. Therefore, political groups in non-Western societies are focused on communal politics instead of on any one aspect of political activity. To win political parties in these countries have to define and defend a certain way of life. In this sense, they are more like social movements in the West than modern political parties. Consequently, the role of cliques and lobby groups sharply increases. Political loyalties have to do with a sense of identity with a group, and challenges to these loyalties are resolved by appealing to group interest. The struggle for power happens not between parties that represent differing political affiliations or between groups that argue for the superiority of their administrative methods, but between different ways of life. In societies of this type, there is thus no single political process but rather a set of independent political processes having to do with the many ways of life within the population. For this reason, positions of power in these countries quite often have no precisely defined functions: the state bureaucracy can be transformed into a party (or, more precisely,

the party in power), and the army or special divisions of the state can perform the role of government (Pye 1956, 468–86).

Thus non-Western countries actually have many informal political organizations; these operate as associations formed for the protection of their members' interests or represent the interests of the government and/or the most influential political party or movement; in other words, they mobilize the populace for the support of the dominant political or economic entity instead of functioning as political pressure groups. Statesmen in these countries have to resort to general slogans, instead of formulating a precise position on a given issue. Consequently, those in power have no need to find out or solve problems; it is enough for them to be in the center of the political – which is to say, the communal – process. Charismatic leaders unsurprisingly predominate in societies of the non-Western type, and political systems function without the participation of political “brokers” (Pye 1956).

This general structure of the non-Western society explains its special features. Having recognized the difference between non-Western and Western societies as based on their political processes, as well as the particularities of Asian societies as belonging to the non-Western world, we can attempt to determine the parameters of state systems featuring non-Western political processes that can nevertheless be called democracies. If we recognize that political culture can determine the political system and that political cultures are inherently pluralistic while conceding that democracy is not the ideal way of governing yet there is currently no better one, we should also recognize the existence of different types of societies, both Western and non-Western, with Asian Oriental societies being a special subtype of the latter.

Thus, we can ascertain the following:

1. The presence of different models of democracy (summarized by Held 1987), not only of the European and American, but also of the non-Western type, including its Asian variety (Japanese, Singaporean, Indian, South Korean, Malaysian, Taiwanese, Israeli, etc.). Democracies of the “other” (i.e., non-Western/Asian) type can strongly differ from the European and American model, because of the differences in sociopolitical structures and political culture, yet still be called democracies. They possess distinctive cultural, social, and psychological features – for instance, relating to their political character, national psychology, and national character – particularly in connection with the special role played by the religious factor as seen in the existence of a specific kind of legal system like the Sharia (Afsaruddin 2006, among others).
2. The presence of “other,” that is, non-Western political systems and cultures that are not “better” or “worse” but simply “different” (just as the male is not better or worse than the female but “different,” a trivial comparison that prevents us being misunderstood) and are probably better adapted for solving the political problems common to societies of the non-Western type.

3. In setting out the typology of political systems and their comparison to “the paradigm,” there is a tendency for ideological bias and subjectivity, because methodologically any theory leads to reductionism and oversimplification.

4. The recognition of different types of democracy will probably allow us to determine the objective rather than subjective criteria for defining liberal democracy, nonliberal democracy, and non-Western democracy, so that we can allocate and analyze different models of democratic governance with a significant degree of originality.

10.5 THE CONCEPT OF NON-WESTERN DEMOCRACY

Having formulated these ideas, we can now categorize all varieties of political systems and models into six types based on their ideologies of state governance and the structures of their political regimes, as well as on certain other parameters of their political systems. We should state in advance that this kind of classification is necessarily provisional, yet important for formulating assumptions concerning Asia’s special character, its path to political modernization, and connections between political and economic modernization.

We can thus single out the following:

- unstable democracies
- democracies (ultraliberal, liberal, non-Western, and illiberal)
- constitutional monarchies
- absolute monarchies
- military dictatorships
- authoritarian states (authoritarian military states, authoritarian communist states, and authoritarian republics)

Let us then explore democracy as a political system and a political regime.

A liberal democracy always contains the following: a constitutional form of government, free elections, a multiparty system, three balanced branches of power (executive, legislative, and judicial), an independent judiciary, the judicial guarantee of personal freedoms on the basis of the constitution, and an efficient and stable government that is limited by the existence of an independent pluralistic society and the accountability of the electorate. A liberal democracy can, in principle, be defined as a certain ratio of democracy (i.e., open, free, and fair elections) to constitutional liberalism (i.e., primacy of the law, private property rights, division of power, and freedom of speech and assembly).

All democracies have four parameters or conditions. Authority or power should be legitimate, that is, subject to elections and replacement. The leader of the state should be elected by all people through free and fair elections or by an electoral college that is chosen on the basis of a transparent procedure. The

legislature should be elected – depending on whether this democracy is direct or representative, this should be through either direct or indirect universal suffrage – and effective. Furthermore, the executive authority should be independent and accountable and the judicial authority should be independent from the legislative and the executive ones (i.e., both the state and the citizens should be subject to the law). It is natural that in this system, civil rights should also be upheld. Without these standard preconditions, the political system of a modern society cannot be considered democratic. And last but not least, for the modern democracy to be called a democracy, a system of the open social-political access must be introduced (North et al. 2009). According to this principle, a social-political access is maintained according to the transparent principles that are supported by the majority of the society, and a social-political access cannot be denied based on any racial, confessional, or other nontransparent principles not approved by the whole society. The really-existing system of the open social-political access even by the Western countries was introduced only in the second part of the twentieth century and not without difficulties.

As for the subsequent four parameters or conditions, the degree to which they are carried out varies depending on whether the states in question are ultra-liberal (i.e., as liberal as possible), liberal democracies or democracies, either of the non-Western or the nonliberal type. I agree with those who argue that the degree of these parameters correlates directly with economic and indirectly with political competitiveness (Przeworski 2005; Benhabib and Przeworski 2006, among others). According to these parameters, the press should be independent, to a degree that varies depending on the society, and must control (in various ways depending on the nation's political culture, i.e., through either direct or indirect influence) the state power and the political decision-making process. Individual freedom should be upheld as the citizen's inalienable right; this includes freedom of expression. The ways in which these principles are carried out, however, can vary to a significant extent. They can also be guaranteed in a variety of ways: by the presence of a powerful civil society; by civic law that declares private property to be the inalienable right of the individual which allows him or her to have a sphere of activity independent of the state; by the fair redistribution of public revenues (in democracies of the egalitarian type); or by the church, which grants the individual the freedom of moral choice on the basis of religious postulates. There should be competition between political forces, though it can be limited to some extent by the existence of the dominant party; a strong enough measure of societal openness, though this can differ depending on the society's political culture and religious features; and precise, as well as legal, guarantees of the rights of the political minority in case of electoral defeat. All democracies have a politically organized opposition, but the form in which it exists depends on the type of democracy.

During the last twenty years, a heated debate has been going on among the politicians and political scientists of East and West concerning the degree to which democratic conditions should be adhered to given the specifics of

national character and political development. This discussion (though never openly specified) indeed related to the possibilities of some national forms of the maintenance of the social-political access and the direct or indirect rules to control this system. This discussion has manifested itself in the occurrence of numerous philosophies: that of human rights (interpreted differently in the West) and Asian values (Li Kwan Yu and Kishore Mahbubani in Singapore, and Mahathir in Malaysia), of Islam and civil society (Hatami in Iran), of the “Three Represents” (*sange daibiao*) (Jiang Zeming in the People’s Republic of China), of the harmonious (*hexie shehui*) socialist society (Hu Jintao in the PRC), and of “sovereign democracy” (*suverennaya demokratiya*) (Vladislav Surkov in Russia). The limited or controlled democracy construct is generally used to describe the way power is organized in participatory democracies (limited plebiscitary democracies) and therefore differs from those with the open social-political access system by the existence of the nontransparent, not legal but obvious rules that somehow curb the social-political access. The limited or controlled democracy, even if it maintains the electoral system, does have rules that limit social-political access (North et al. 2009); these rules maintained by political elites cannot be contested within the society by its people because of various historical-cultural reasons or because of cultural hegemony (in Gramscian terms). However, these rules are always contested by the states with an open social-political access system because they managed to surpass the obstacles of introducing the open social-political access system. This discussion has a direct connection to the interpretation of the specific political regime and thus lies partially within the realm of ideology. It is also connected to the social-political maturity of different societies to introduce a precise sequence of measures to be taken to proceed to a further stage of political development, and thus lies within the realm of national political science as an academic discipline.

In extraliberal and liberal democracies, all the democratic conditions are met. Besides, all the states of this type have the highest share of per capita Gross National Product; therefore, they have a strong economic basis for guaranteeing the fullest implementation of all the aforementioned conditions. We can argue, albeit provocatively, that they are the most successful in the economic as well as the political sphere, thus determining the quality of life of their citizens. These types of democracies maintain a fully possible open social-political access system. In “simple” democracies, these parameters are held in relative balance. In unstable democracies, however, there is no historical legitimation or, consequently, stability of democratic institutions, the political process is personalized, and there is no balance of social and political forces. Unstable democracies are an interim type that can be transformed into either democracies, liberal democracies with an open social-political access system, or nonliberal democracies if the social access is controlled or limited by some direct or indirect rules, or else into other political models including dictatorships.

The nonliberal democracies (Zakaria 1997) have free and fair elections – which is why they can be called democracies – yet their measure of constitutional liberalism is highly limited or absent altogether so they cannot maintain an open social-political access or at least their rules to maintain this system are openly contested by full democracies as well as segments of their own population. The least liberal of the nonliberal type of democracies that are on the verge of authoritative rule are participatory democracies (limited plebiscitary democracies), which have open rules that curb a social-political access system. Such regimes combine authoritarian party rule with the expansion of national participation in the political process on a grassroots level, which is managed by legal means. At the same time, the authoritarian ruling party in these regimes generally avoids introducing general suffrage or limits it by not welcoming the creation of an effective parliament, system of checks and balances, or elections with multiparty participation.

Non-Western democracies feature a different relationship between democracy and constitutional liberalism from that of liberal democracies, yet they are more democratic than either nonliberal or participatory democracies. So the parameters to be controlled by this type of democracy (economic, political, social, law order) are more than in a liberal democracy or an ordinary democracy, and they are not consolidated by the approval of the whole society. So the distinction lay in the amount of sovereignty parameters being controlled by a state (Ziegler 2012, 14–20) to maintain its activity, including the degree and rules of the social-political access that can be maintained through the access to different levels of the educational system, meritocracy rules or some confessional settings. One of the clear examples of this system is Singapore and Malaysia proclaimed by political scientists “limited liberal democracy” regimes because their systems of social-political access differ from those of the liberal democracies but enable a social-political access through their own channels (highly selective educational system, meritocracy, political competition under the umbrella of the dominant party, and “personalized” selection). In such political regimes, religion can play a special role, a role that can be guaranteed by the state and/or the law (e.g., Islam in Malaysia; Judaism in Israel; Buddhism in Sri Lanka; Pancha Sila in Indonesia). The Asian, non-Western type of democracy is currently present in Turkey, Lebanon, Morocco, Jordan, Israel, Japan, India, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia.

While the non-Western democracies in the Middle East and Africa are not trendsetters in regional development, they do take on this role in East Asia. Yet, from the point of view of political theory, there is an open question about whether the non-Western democracies, that is, liberal constitutional regimes and their subcategory, Asian democracies, are a stable category or whether they should be transformed into stable forms of liberal or nonliberal democracy. That is related to the question how and what parameters they are being able to consolidate to ensure a sovereignty and an open social-political

access. Furthermore, within this group, there is a wide set of parameters that bring some of them closer to democracies of the liberal type (e.g., Japan and Taiwan), and others closer to the nonliberal type (Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia). There is also a differentiation within each group between those that are closer to the liberal type and those that are far from it. Some of the latter are stuck in an interim position, for instance, Egypt.

Asian democracies have accomplished a synthesis of Western and Eastern cultures, albeit to different degrees. The individual there is free, but moral laws and institutions (including religious ones) play a major role. Notwithstanding this confessional unity, the church is in most cases separated from the state, and its influence on society is exercised largely by moral and ethical example. Society in the non-Western democracy is a sociocentric self-determining system, yet its domain is determined by religious preference and can be cosmocentric if this does not hinder the efficiency of the state or contradict personal preferences. In other words, these societies are conglomerative and pluralistic. The public sphere in societies of this type is distinguished by the primacy of the law; universal and constitutionally legal norms are paramount. The economies of such states are transparent enough yet may have nation-specific features within international norms (this describes, in particular, the economies of Islamic democracies). In politics the societies that have accomplished a synthesis of the two traditions have equality of opportunity, yet one power acts as a guarantor of the stability of the political process. This is the so-called dominant party, or a combination of the dominant party and the leader-guarantor. As a rule, however, this is not a party created by the authorities but one that actually creates the authorities. Though political competition in such countries can be limited to some extent, its authoritarianism is always civil rather than military, is enlightened, and modernizes society rather than remaining tethered to traditionalism. Tradition here does not entail limiting the role of the individual, while the control of shared values is supervised by collective common sense. Thus, what is important for the political process is that which adheres to the dominant political norms, but is also sensible rather bound to tradition. There is a consensus that the minority point of view will be taken into consideration if it is rational, while the dominant point of view will first and foremost promote the rational modernization of the state instead of one faction monopolizing the political process for the sake of staying in power. The dominant party in such societies as a rule aids the formation of political pluralism and a competitive multi-party system since otherwise the political and economic components of society begin to stagnate. In this type of society the state can make demands on its citizens only to the extent to which it serves its citizens; therefore, the role of the state is more preponderant than in the Western liberal tradition (except in Catholic countries where religion plays a special role).

The state in Asian democracies plays a guiding role in social transformation yet does not limit economic competition; on the contrary, it encourages job creation. In these societies the principle of separation of powers exists, but can

be amended according to the norms of traditional political culture or certain religious provisions. The ruling power in such societies is elective, carried out by the majority, and regulated by obligatory constitutional laws (some countries add on nation-specific features), and can thus extend to certain spheres of private life to a broader and more significant extent than in societies of the Western type. At the same time, the principles of the functioning of authority in such societies include legitimacy, efficiency, power that is not alienated from the people, and an independent judiciary that upholds justice in society instead of undermining it. These states have their own sequence of transformation: change in the economic sphere (even in states that are basically market-oriented) followed state reform, the creation of an efficient bureaucracy, limited and controlled competition under the umbrella of the dominant party, and a unique system of stability guarantees (usually in the combined form of the dominant party and a charismatic guarantor of the political process), and finally further democratization that does not wreak havoc on the economic and social system.

In the non-Western democracies that are building societies of the synthetic type, values are not always completely separated from interests, yet, because of democratic elections, the results of political competition there are not final. After a certain, short period of time, it is possible to once again come to power legally, and the losers in a political competition will not be forever kept out of power, forced to emigrate (as in nonliberal or participatory democracies) or physically destroyed (as in dictatorships). In societies of this type there are divisions across class and other parameters, yet also dynamic social mobility (even for the lowest castes in India). National sovereignty becomes a guarantee against external illegitimate influence (including fiscal pressure in political competition), a guarantee which is zealously protected (special laws exist for this purpose in Taiwan, South Korea, and other countries). Fundamental universal values – equality, tolerance, and free competition – exist to various degrees, depending on the measure of tolerance in a given society and its traditional culture; even in such an open society as Japan, these fundamentals have only recently been opened up to discussion. In non-Western democracies the system of the open social-political access described by North, Wallis and Weingast (2009, 2011) is evolving but not yet consolidated, and the social/political institutions are not yet strong enough to maintain this system without direct or indirect rules needed on this particular stage of their historical/cultural development to ensure the stability of the state and the society. These rules under certain circumstances and in concrete cases may be contested by the extraliberal democracies that have strong institutions, have a long history of democratic development, and are on a forefront of social/political innovations because being on another stage of historical development.

According to a quantitative analysis of region-specific forms of government, it is in Africa that the gap between rival governmental structures – democracies and authoritative regimes – is the largest. As a rule, unstable democracies

there are inclined to accentuate elements of democracy to the detriment of constitutional liberalism. Authoritarian regimes can play up elements of constitutional liberalism, yet all of them view democratic norms negatively. Crucially, the African experience has shown that democracy with a weak economic base yet without the order provided by strict standards of constitutional liberalism tends to become transformed into an authoritarian regime. Some of the self-titled African democracies have gone through a dictatorship phase (for instance, Ghana, Tanzania, and Kenya). Only the Republic of South Africa and Botswana are successful examples of African democracy, albeit the destiny of South Africa as a liberal pluralistic democracy is increasingly in question. Meanwhile, the overwhelming majority of African states are unstable democratic regimes, and it is not yet clear which political models in the democratic bracket they will ultimately choose (Offor 2006, 275–77). It is also impossible to guarantee that these models will not be transformed into other, completely undemocratic ones – that they will manage to preserve their democratic nature at all. However, if the African continent manages to stabilize the volatile nature of its economic and political modernization, if its countries find the right balance between formal and informal institutions (Bratton 2007, 97–100), and if the maintenance of law and order improves, then this macro-region will exhibit marked economic growth.

In the Middle East, the situation is much more complicated. It is perhaps the most complex and inconsistent of all the Asian macro-regions. Democracies there are clearly in the minority, while monarchies and authoritarian – presidential and supra-presidential – republics prevail. Some countries in this macro-region (both republics and monarchies) have taken the step of political reformation. A major feature of the political culture of these countries is religious, namely Islamic; the outcome of the modernization process there will depend on what role Islam will play and how Islamic norms will be perceived in society. The Islamic legal and political precepts abjure direct or rigid instructions concerning the mode of power if the power in question does not oppose Islam and its values. This has led to a synthesis of Western political ideas and the Western political system with the traditional values of Islamic political culture in a number of Asian countries, such as Turkey, Malaysia, and Indonesia. However, the traditionalist understanding of Islamic norms can still perceive all that is not directly mentioned in the Koran or the Sunna as a threat to established values and thus prevent this synthesis from taking place. Such an interpretation hinders political modernization in the modern sense, especially political modernization of the secular type, the only one possible in multiethnic and multiconfessional societies.

The special distinction of Middle Eastern political development is that there are competing models of political modernization: launched by civil authorities, the army, or the Islamists. In the hands of any of these political forces, modernization entails religion-based prescriptions for local political culture. Despite these prescriptions being perceived in various ways, no model has yet received

full recognition as universal and determinant of political development in the whole region.

In addition to the importance of the religious factor in its many variations, an overwhelming majority of countries in the greater Middle East have strongly politicized military organizations; in many countries, the army is not effectively supervised by civil authorities, and in some, it has actually become one of the most efficient and capable state institutions.

The armies and secret services in the region try to determine – with occasional success – the outcome of political processes, to act as the guarantors of political development and stability, or to directly interfere with the direction, speed, and sequence of stages of political development. Transformed into one of the most powerful centers of influence, the army and special services have been known to organize several political revolutions and mutinies (e.g., Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Yemen, Turkey, Algeria, Pakistan, and Mauritania) or directly interfere with the maintenance of internal stability (Algeria, Iraq, Yemen, and Syria). The incorporation of the military into the government in a number of countries in the region, such as Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, for a fixed short term, had a positive effect on their development, initiated constructive shifts in the political structure of their societies, and also influenced the choice of their developmental models. Thus, on one hand, it was possible to strengthen central authority, consolidate society, and mobilize the population for solving pressing social and economic problems. Yet, on the other hand, in those states that could not quickly disengage from this model, authoritarianism – not in its enlightened form, either – was certain to become entrenched for a long time, while the development of democratic institutions and civil society was interrupted. Having stabilized their societies, the army and special services in practically all the countries of the greater Middle East appeared professionally unprepared and too inconsistent to carry out political and economic reforms or enact transformations in their societies, especially if these transformations contradicted the institutional interests of the power structures. The civil authorities of some of the states of the greater Middle East have gradually learned to cooperate with the army as a major political force. Gradually, a new developmental model has taken shape in the most economically and politically advanced countries in the region: the levers of state power began to be transferred to the politicians, the process of depoliticizing the army began, and the search for a mechanism of effective control over the army was launched. In the most advanced of these countries, the constitutional provisions which ensure the role of the army as guarantor of the political process were changed, with the power being transferred to the Parliament (Turkey); in the most advanced Asian democracies, the dominant party system was outright abolished (Japan). However, we do not yet know how the new system will work in Turkey without the army as guarantor of the political process, especially in the event that the Islamists come to control the parliament, or how stable the new political system in Japan will be without a dominant party.

Thus, a fierce struggle between different models of political modernization goes on in the greater Middle East, due to which the region cannot yet find the right vector of political and economic modernization. The authoritarian and traditionalist component of political regimes is not bound to be phased out there, although no alternative exists to modernization and democratization: after a certain time, it becomes impossible to carry out economic modernization without modernizing politically (i.e., without introducing social-political innovations) and still remain competitive. Yet, because of this existing opposition to political modernization, fast-paced macro-regional social and economic development has not occurred, and the region lags behind in global economic competitiveness.

The models of governance in East Asia are the least polarized. This fact apparently encourages the consensus of various political forces on the general vector of political and economic modernization in the region. Modernization (i.e., approaching the modern age, the Modernity) in the region is perceived not as Westernization but as a special way of development that constitutes a synthesis of the Western political experience of democracy, the norms of constitutional liberalism, and native political culture in all its religious, national, and regional uniqueness – see the Westminster model and caste in India; Buddhist statehood and democracy in Sri Lanka; the dominant role of the liberal-democratic party in Japan until 2009; the special role of the Islamic factor in Malaysia; Pancha Sila, a syncretic ideology that puts limits on Islam and creates confessional pluralism with soft Islamic domination in Indonesia; some restrictions on freedom and the presence of a charismatic political leader (a minister-mentor) in Singapore; and Sino-Marxism, intraparty democracy, direct elections only at the local administrative level, and emphasis on legality and Confucian ethics in the People's Republic of China. The overwhelming majority of political modes in this macro-region are democracies, stable democracies, and constitutional monarchies; these political regimes set the general vector of macro-regional development. States in the other vector of political development – rigid authoritarian or military regime – are in the minority (Voskressenski 2007, 172).

In this macro-region, the majority of countries are non-Western democracies that have managed to synthesize democratic principles and constitutional liberalism with features of their political culture in their own way, their unique balance and development leading to political modernization. Among these countries are those which exhibit impressive regional and global economic growth, such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore; this growth is carried out, not on the basis of the mobilizational model of development, but on the basis of modernization as a synthetic evolutionary policy. As a matter of fact, only these countries have caught up with the West on practically every parameter, regardless of their geographic or demographic size or availability of resources.

China represents a special case in the region. This country has retained its singular political culture in the form of Sino-Marxism, having by the beginning

of the twenty-first century synthesized it with some postulates of a transformed and modernized Confucian political culture (for instance, in its approach to ethics). The Chinese have launched an experiment with direct elections on the local and district level while introducing elements of constitutional liberalism – primacy of law, judicial protection of private property, partial separation of power, and limited freedom of speech and assembly – on the state level. So, controlling a social-political access at the top, Chinese government decided to loose it on a grassroots political level and in certain sectors of the economy (especially related to electronics and innovations) and also science and education. This participatory democratic model has moved the country closer to the model of the nonliberal and, simultaneously, non-Western democracy, and ensured its success in economic modernization. However, the destiny of this Chinese model will depend on the implementation and success of the concept of “harmonious society” (*hexie shehui*), in which development, freedom, and an open social-political access of the individual are paramount.

10.6 CONCLUSION

This study of special, regional, and national characteristics has shown that East Asia is the major playground for the evolving evolutionary model of political modernization, providing a successful synthesis of democratic modes of government (i.e., certain forms of popular participation in the governing process) and features of its own political culture, which may include a strong and organizing religious/cultural component. So a democracy becomes a process of governing maintained through an open social-political access system and not a consent (by force or coherence) to be governed by others, selected through nontransparent procedures. Thus an open social-political access system becomes a general and not a specific parameter for all democracies, though its form may be specific due to civilizational/cultural/historic parameters of the concrete society. The effectuation of this general parameter (even with some restrains in transitional societies) has resulted in models of impressive economic growth, such as Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, South Korea, India, and China. It may be key to understanding the current rise of East Asia and its catching up with the West. The successful combination of theoretical premises and the local form of political modernization, strengthened by the practical consideration that it is useful first to ensure economic modernization and then cautiously proceed to political modernization, can be found in East Asia, particularly in Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan, South Korea, and China. These countries are on an accelerated path to economic modernization involving, first, the creation of an economic base, with or without external support and, depending on the conditions of the given country, with or without coercion (Alagappa 2001), the introduction of economic liberalism, then an increasingly broad but gradual and simultaneously strong legislated introduction of the norms of constitutional liberalism,

and afterward further gradual democratization (gradually opening the social-political access) depending on the ability of the society's political culture to digest political change. Before proceeding to political democratization, some of these countries ensured the implementation of a new and effective political elite and bureaucracy, later entering on the path that led to political strife in the form of parliamentary competition. As a result, they found the way to foster an efficient elite/bureaucracy rooted in their own history and cultural traditions and therefore their own form to maintain the social-political access (exam system and strictly limited access to different levels of education needed to be appointed to political or governmental posts, political competitiveness without direct political struggle under the umbrella of a dominant party, etc.) that may be contested under certain circumstances by extraliberal and liberal democracies because local political elites can be blamed for indecisiveness in forging an open access system with its transparent and approved by social consensus rules (North et al. 2009, 2011). It is important to note that in all East Asian countries that have achieved economic prosperity, the speed with which this model was brought about and the forms that it took on have varied depending on the consensus in the local political elites, while the necessity to introduce this basic parameter has remained constant. Excepted from this model are only those countries with imported democratic models, such as India and Japan, and even then a detailed analysis of the Japanese and Indian experience of rapid economic growth more likely confirms than rejects this model (O'Neil et al. 2010, 231, 355–56). So, if we agree to the possibility of certain local/cultural/confessional differentiation in conditions and parameters to maintain an open social-political access, we may consequently find it useful to introduce the concept of a non-Western democracy. If we fundamentally disagree with this possibility, then a Western democracy becomes the only model of ideal best governance. However, this position will necessarily lead to the negation of the Western model of democracy as a mandatory mode of political governing to the countries with other historical/political/cultural/confessional settings that hinder by certain reasons the open social-political access system. This constitutes the essence of the current fierce ideological debate between the West and the political elites of the Rest. However the negation to introduce an open social-political access as the requirement for accelerated modernization and competitiveness because authoritarian modernization can be effectuated, implies the attitude of the local political elites to the people of their countries as to the slaves because thus democracy becomes a consent to be governed imposed by coercion or violence, with or without a consent of the society. Thus an open-social political access becomes a universal parameter of the democracy and not a regional factor or a specific one.

From the point of view of political theory, the study of the formation of national variations in “non-Western democracies” of the Asian type, such as liberal constitutional democracy as in Japan, Taiwan, Singapore, India, Malaysia, and Sri Lanka, and also models of evolutionary transformation of

nonliberal democracies (authoritarian states or constitutional monarchies) and participatory democracies (plebiscitary democracies) into non-Western democracies, will probably provide a key to finding such a model in other countries, in particular Russia, if by any reasons a considerable portion of the Russian political elite disagree in principle with the Western mode of governing and the Western model to maintain an open social-political access system. However, the impossibility to move to an open social-political access system or a negation of it in any form of local variation of governance pretended to be called a democracy will not be agreeable by other democracies and will be always contested from outside by them as well as from inside by the opposition (if any exists).

So, this essay has tried to show how countries enrich the political process, to figure out how new forms of this process correspond to the general trend of democratization and thus to provide suggestions to countries caught in this process because of internal issues (e.g., historical legacy, confessional specifics, struggle among the elites) or external ones (e.g., hindering some from moving up by labeling them “undemocratic,” using double standards, geopolitical/ideological considerations, snobbery) rather than defending one political regime or another. It is natural that in other countries the balance of factors that make up the essence of this model will probably be unlike that of Japan, Singapore, India, Taiwan, or China, just as the balance of factors in these aforementioned countries is different due to varying levels of economic and political modernization and degrees of attainment of global competitiveness. Political scientists can advise these countries about their path and explore different sequences of measures based on the understanding of their own traditions and history rather than only on the Western experience (even while not excluding it completely) or Western characteristics (without ruling them out). Yet on a certain stage of their development they should not forcefully “push these countries forward” in a prescribed way (a transformative diplomacy) that may not be necessary successful given their consequences if the countries in question are not yet ready inside and there are no heterodox mass killing, ethnic/confessional cleaning, political repression, physical elimination of the opposition, a danger to the civil society or acts of genocide that are now lawful reasons for the international community to intervene in the form of humanitarian intervention, peacekeeping/peace enforcing. However, the objective peer review process of these countries and the constructive support are very important to select really existing but not ‘ideal’ forms of democracy from the fake ones. From the theoretical point of view only thus humans can enrich the theory and practice of political modernization make sure to have all varieties of democracy, and at the same time keeping in mind that any limited social/political access system is uncompetitive in historical terms. From political point of view this position accentuate the blame of indigenous ruling elite unable to create competitive mechanisms of nourishing and selecting people not being afraid of the open competition (a convenient open social/political access system with

certain national characteristics) needed to ensure economic and political modernization that will be sooner or later obvious for their population and not on exogenous factors, whatever they are, that may hinder indigenous economic or political modernization/development and destabilize the country even for the benefits of promoting 'necessary' political developments.

“Non-Western Democracy” in the West

Adam Przeworski

II.1 INTRODUCTION

A central claim of various projects of “non-Western Democracy” is that democracy need not embody the institutional features that characterize it in contemporary “Western” democratic systems, specifically, opposition organized in political parties and contestation of control over government in the form of electoral competition. This stance is epitomized by Sukarno, the first president of Indonesia, who thought that parliamentary democracy was a foreign import that “incorporates the concept of an active opposition, and it is precisely the addition of this concept that has given rise to the difficulties we have experienced in the last eleven years” (quoted in [Goh Cheng Teik 1972](#), 231). The Indonesian political tradition, Sukarno maintained, was to reach collective decisions by consensus. Democracy had to be “guided,” based on mutual cooperation rather than on partisan conflicts.

This claim, and the argument behind it, is canonical, even if it comes in variants. The point of departure is either that the society is naturally harmonious – the people is united as one body – or at least that the goal of politics should be to maintain harmony and cooperation. Political divisions are artificial, spuriously generated by selfish and quarrelsome politicians. If they were allowed to be organized, most importantly through political parties, they would become dangerous: once conflicts are permitted to see the political light, they are unstoppable and lead to a breakdown of order, even to civil wars.¹ Moreover – here we get invocations of what [Schmitter and Karl \(1991\)](#) dubbed “the bias of electoralism” – purely procedural rules need not generate wise or virtuous outcomes. As [Lagerspetz \(2010, 30\)](#) observed, “there is something deeply disturbing in the idea that a purely mechanical, content-free procedure could determine what we should do.” Finally, nationalistic appeals never hurt,

consensual decision making is deeply rooted in the national tradition, while "formal democracy" is a foreign, Western import.

A Russian exponent of "sovereign democracy," Mikhail Leontiev (an interview with a Polish newspaper, *Dziennik*, of January 19, 2008), insists that "the Russian political system – in its essence although not in form – does not differ in anything from real, serious Western democracies." This distinction echoes Confucianism and Islam, which, according to Keller (2010, 4), "tend to define democracy as *yong*, a procedure or mechanism, whose impact will not threaten the Islamic or Confucian 'essence,' often interpreted as value." But if the form differs, does not the essence as well? Why do projects that reject the central features of the political arrangements that are identified elsewhere as "democracy" still claim this label for themselves? This question introduces us to a hall of mirrors: it is one question what these arrangements may be and a different one why they would claim the label of "democracy" (Dunn 2005). One might well say that the political arrangements developed in the West are not the best for a particular "non-Western" country without appropriating this particular denomination. I can only echo the astonishment of Dunn (2003, 5): "But what I want to emphasize is not just the implausibility of the idea of a single global criterion for legitimacy; it is the strangeness of the criterion we have chosen: the sheer weirdness . . . of picking on democracy as our name for how politics should be conducted everywhere and under all but the very worst of circumstances." Yet – perhaps revealing the ambivalence of the entire project – this label is universally claimed. Even the Democratic and Popular Republic of North Korea mimics the self-reference of the 1641 Constitution of Rhode Island, the first to call itself a "democratical or popular government."

The question becomes even more puzzling when we realize that the norm of identifying good governments as "democracies" is quite recent and that this label is in fact a foreign, even more narrowly, a U.S. export. When first established, in the United States, France, Spain, and several newly independent Latin America countries, the new systems were not seen as "democracy." This particular word gradually acquired a positive connotation in the first half of the nineteenth century (Hansen 2005),² but the principal line dividing political systems continued to be between monarchies and republics. The breakthrough seems to have occurred only after World War I, at the instigation of Woodrow Wilson. According to Manela (2007, 39ff), Wilson borrowed the language of "self-determination" from Lenin, but to counter its appeal, he combined it with the "consent of the governed." He thus used the language of self-determination "in a more general, vaguer sense and usually equated this term with popular sovereignty, conjuring an international order based on democratic forms of government." Indeed, Wilson's government established an entire propaganda machine to spread his conception of good government around the world. As a result, "democracy became a word of common usage

in a way that it had never been previously. An examination of the press, not only in the United States, but in other Allied states as well, shows a tendency to use the word democracy in ways that Wilson made respectable and possible" (Graubard 2003, 665).

Why, then, adhere to what is transparently a foreign implant, the label, while rejecting the institutional arrangements from which it originated? The claim entailed in this label, a claim that is irresistible in our times, is that the particular political arrangements implement "the rule of the people." Democracy may be representative (as in the West), "tutelary" (Sun Yat-sen, according to Keller 2010, 9), "guided" (as in Indonesia), or "sovereign," led by the state (as in Russia). Political arrangements, "form" or "function," may vary according to traditions and circumstances but the "essence" is the same because these are just different forms in which the people rule. The invocations of (Schmitt 1993, 372) – democracy is "the identity of the dominating and the dominated, of the government and the governed, of he who commands and he who obeys" – are not accidental: as long as government is exercised on bequest and on behalf of "the people," different institutional arrangements can implement the same political ideal, etymologically "democracy" or the rule of the people. Moreover, "unity," "harmony," or "cooperation" make a world that is more rational and more than just conflicts processed through purely procedural rules.

My intention here is not to dispute these claims, as disputable as they are. All I want to point out is that these beliefs were shared with only minor variations by the founders of representative institutions in the West. "United we stand" was the only way they thought stand we could. It took more than a century before Western democratic theorists realized that we can stand even divided. Although the nostalgia for "consensus" still lingers among some normative political philosophers, we now know that political institutions can cope with conflicts, that conflicts can be structured, regulated, and contained, that purely procedural rules can be effective in processing conflicts peacefully without relying on force, that political opposition may in fact improve the quality of collective decisions, and perhaps most importantly, that choosing governments through reasonably free elections is the only way of fostering political freedom in divided societies. I am not claiming that everyday life of democracy is a pretty spectacle: this is not a defence of specific institutions and procedures. My only point is that the Western experience shows that, even if always somewhat uneasily, societies can learn to live in peace in the presence of organized conflicts and that democracy is a system that enables this peaceful coexistence without excessive reliance on force.

This contribution is organized as follows. The next section summarizes the main features of the consensualist foundations of representative government in the West. The main lesson of this history is that views about politics can change and the text ends with a general argument about the plasticity of political "traditions."

11.2 THE "WEST"

11.2.1 Introduction

Representative government in the West was born under an ideology that postulated a basic harmony of interests in society. The basic assumption underlying the "classical"³ conception of representative government was that the society is characterized by a harmony of values and interests, so that there exists something that can be identified as the common, public, or general good, interest, or will. The role of representative institutions was to identify and implement this common interest. This role was thus epistemic: a search for truth. Since the truth was out there to be discovered, deliberation should arrive at consensus. Political divisions were seen as inimical to the search for truth. They could result only from passions or interests and as such they were dangerous, portending civil conflicts. Once the common good was identified, it was to be implemented by the representatives without interference by ordinary citizens. Thus, organized opposition to the government was seen as obstruction.

11.2.2 Harmony of Interests

Conceptions of the common, public, or general interest, good, or will offered by particular thinkers were not the same: the multiplicity of the terminology is not accidental. One distinction is whether the common good was assumed to exist independently of individual wills or was identified only as their aggregation. Rousseau thought the former, whereas utilitarians maintained the latter. Another distinction was whether the common interest could be identified by all the people through some process or only by some enlightened few.

Using modern analytical apparatus, we can distinguish two types of situations in which interests would be harmonious:

1. *Individual wills coincide in the sense that the same state of the world is best for each and all.* We all want to prevent foreign invasion; we all want to evacuate a coastal town if a hurricane is impending, and so on. As a small wrinkle, note that the same would be true if everyone was indifferent whether to do one thing or another as long as everyone does the same.

When interests are harmonious in this sense, the decision of each is the same as would be that of all others. Indeed, the fact that others want the same is irrelevant: if others command me to do the same that I command myself to do, I obey but myself. Moreover, the procedure for lawmaking is inconsequential: when everyone wants the same, all procedures generate the same decision. Each one and any subset of all can dictate to all others with their consent. Finally, this decision evokes spontaneous compliance: if each individual lives under the laws of his or her choice, no one needs to be coerced to follow them.

Disagreements may emerge in such situations only if individuals are uncertain which decision is best. For example, all members of a jury want to condemn

an accused if he is guilty and to absolve him if he is innocent. The jurors have no other interest than to administer justice. Hence, if the true state of nature (guilty, innocent) were known, the decision how to act would be unanimous. Everyone in a coastal town wants to evacuate it if the hurricane is to strike and not to evacuate if it will not, so that the only issue is whether it will. The collective decision process is then a search for truth. Its role is *epistemic* (Coleman 1989). If there are any disagreements, they are purely cognitive.

2. *Pursuit of individual interests leads to an outcome that is collectively suboptimal.* Such situations are typified by the prisoners' dilemma: situations in which whenever each individual pursues his interests or values, his will, all individuals are worse off than they could be. The collective result of individually rational actions is socially suboptimal. Examples abound. Everyone would want to grab everyone else's property, but if everyone tries to do so, the result is that everyone fights rather than invests, life that is grim, short and brutish. I want to catch as many fish from the lake as I can; so do you; and as the result over time each of us catches fewer fish.

How can we remedy this situation? We can adopt laws. The law would say that no one can steal or that no one can catch more than some number of fish, and that violations would be subject to punishment. Suppose we were to vote whether to adopt this law or to allow each individual to make decisions independently. Because compliance with this law makes each and all of us better off, the vote for this law would be unanimous. Our common interest is for everyone to obey the law and our general will is that everyone should obey it. Moreover, individuals are free to act in the common interest *only* if the law compels everyone to act in this way. In the state of nature, I would know that if I act in the common interest, others will not do so, so that I could not, would not be free to do what is best for me.

Note, however, that acting in the common interest is not in the best interest of each individual when other individuals do so. If others invest, I am still better off grabbing their accumulated property. If others do not overfish, I am still better off if I do. We have to be compelled not to act in our individual interests, against our individual will. The general will is thus not an aggregation of particular wills.⁴

The collectively beneficial outcome can also be supported by rational morality. Suppose I ask myself, "What is it that I would not want others to do to me?" the answer to which is that they should not steal my property or overfish. The rule of conduct I would want everyone else to adopt is thus "do not do to others what you do not want them to do to me." Each individual would want all others to adopt this rule. This, then, is the only rule that can be adopted universally, and, if we are guided by universal reason, we would all adopt it. Each and all individuals will want to live under the same laws, "for Reason itself wills this" (Kant [1793]1891).

Regardless of the nature of the common good, this ideology was based on the premise that there was a single truth, which was either self-evident or could

be discovered, à la J. S. Mill, if opinions are free to confront one another. Berlin's (2002, 191–92) characterization of this idea merits citing *in extenso*:

All truths could in principle be discovered by any rational thinker, and demonstrated so clearly that all other rational men could not but accept them. . . . On this assumption the problem of political liberty was soluble by establishing a just order that would give to each man all the freedom to which a rational being was entitled . . . it is only irrationality on the part of men (according to this doctrine) that leads them to wish to oppress or exploit or humiliate one another. Rational men respect the principle of reason in each other.

11.2.3 Fear of Divisions

This ideology was naturally hostile to any kind of political divisions. The people were a body and "no body, corporeal or political, could survive if its members worked at cross-purposes" (Ball 1989, 160).⁵ Protagonists of representative government thought that because the people was naturally united, it could be divided only artificially. As Hofstadter (1969, 12) reports, eighteenth-century thinkers "often postulated that society should be pervaded by concord and governed by a consensus that approached, if it did not attain, unanimity. Party, and the malicious and mendacious spirit it encouraged, were believed only to create social conflicts that would not otherwise occur."⁶ "There is nothing I dread so much," John Adams remarked, "as a division of the republic into two great parties, each arranged under its leader, and concerting measures in opposition to each other" (cited in Dunn 2004, 39). The founders of representative institutions could see no middle road between consensus and civil war, harmony and mayhem.

Now, neither Sieyes, nor Madison, nor Rousseau maintained that the consensus must include all issues: as Sieyes (cited by Pasquino 1998, 48) observed, "that people unite in the common interest is not to say that they put all their interests on common." All that was required was an agreement on some basics, in Rousseau's (1964, 66) words, "some point in which all interests agree."⁷ The classical argument admitted that people may disagree about many issues; it claimed only that some values or interests bind them together so strongly that whatever is common overwhelms all the divisions.

In the tradition originating with Hume, some social divisions were seen as inevitable: as Madison, educated in Hume, would observe in *Federalist* No. 10, "the latent sources of faction are . . . sown in the nature of man." Hume ([1742] 2002) himself thought that divisions based on material interests were less dangerous than those based on principles, particularly religious values, or affection. Both Hume and Madison maintained, however, that partisan divisions can be and must be moderated and mitigated by a proper design of representative institutions. The first virtue of the U.S. Constitution, Madison vaunted in the opening sentence of *Federalist* No. 10, was that "among the numerous advantages promised by a well constructed Union, none deserves

to be more accurately developed than the tendency to break and control the violence of factions.” Perhaps paradoxically, one solution to partisan divisions could be a single party, uniting everyone in the pursuit of common good. According to Hofstadter (1969, 23), the main proponent of this solution was James Monroe: “It is party *conflict* that is evil, Monroe postulated, but a single party may be laudable and useful, . . . , *if* it can make itself universal and strong enough to embody the common interest and to choke party strife Monroe did not think it legitimate to *prohibit* opposition by law. Rather he hoped that the single party would eliminate partyism through its ecumenical and absorptive quality.” Yet, however unity was to be attained, unity had to prevail. “If . . . separate interest be not checked, and not be directed to the public,” Hume predicted, “we ought to look for nothing but faction, disorder, and tyranny from such government.”

11.2.4 Opposition as Obstruction

According to Hofstadter (1969, 9), “when they [the Founders] began their work, they spoke a great deal – indeed they spoke almost incessantly – about freedom, and they understood that freedom requires some latitude for opposition. But they were far from clear how opposition should make itself felt, for they also valued social unity or harmony, and they had not arrived at the view that opposition, manifested in organized popular parties, could sustain freedom without fatally shattering such harmony.” Lavaux (1998, 140), in turn, observes that “les conceptions de la démocraties issues de la tradition du *Contrat social* ne font pas la part de la minorité, *a fortiori* celle de l’opposition. La démocratie conçue comme identité des gouvernants et de gouvernés ne laisse pas de place à la reconnaissance d’un droit d’opposition.” The notion that people can freely oppose the government elected by a majority emerged only gradually and painfully everywhere, the United States included. After all, Hofstadter (1969, 7) is right that “the normal view of governments about organized opposition is that it is intrinsically subversive and illegitimate.”

Many, even if not all, democratic protagonists thought that because the people were naturally united, they could be divided only artificially. Parties or “factions” were seen as spurious divisions of a naturally integral body, products of ambitions of politicians, rather than reflections of any pre-political differences or conflicts. Moreover, the rejection of political divisions was not restricted to parties. As Rosanvallon (2004) emphasizes, although democracy was not to be direct, it was “immediate,” in the sense that no body could stand between individuals and their representatives. In the famous phrase of Le Chapelier, “there are no more corporations within the state; there is no more that the particular interest of each individual and the general interest. No one is permitted to inspire citizens with intermediate interests, to separate them from the public realm by a spirit of corporation” (cited by Rosanvallon 2004, 13).

Rosanvallon (2004) emphasizes that in France, collective action was an improper instrument for influencing or opposing the incumbent governments.

The last decree of the Constituent Assembly stated in 1791, "No society, club, association of citizens can have, in no form, a political existence, nor exercise any kind of inspection over the act of constituted powers and legal authorities; under no pretext can they appear under a collective name, whether to form petitions or deputations, participate in public ceremonies, or whatever other goal" (cited in [Rosanvallon 2004](#), 59). And this principle seems to have traveled: the 1830 Constitution of Uruguay also made it illegal for citizens to organize into associations ([López-Alves 2000](#), 55).

Contrary to [Manin \(1997, 167\)](#), similar voices were heard in the United States. As [Hofstadter \(1969, 8\)](#) warns, "the idea of a legitimate opposition . . . was not an idea that the Fathers found fully developed and ready to hand when they began their enterprise in republican constitutionalism in 1788. We will misunderstand their policies badly if we read them so anachronistically as to imagine that they had a matured conception of a legitimate opposition." As Noah Webster wrote in the famous letter to Joseph Priestly:

In our country this power is not in the hands of the people but of their representatives. The powers of the people are principally restricted to the direct exercise of the rights of suffrage. . . . Hence the word *Democrat* has been used as synonymous with the word *Jacobin* in France; and by an additional idea, which arose from the attempt to control our government by private popular associations, the word has come to signify a person who attempts an undue opposition or influence over government by means of private clubs, secret intrigues, or by public popular meetings which are extraneous to the constitution. By Republicans we understand the friends of our Representative Government, who believe that no influence whatever should be exercised in a state which is not directly authorized by the Constitution and laws.

Thus, when President Washington called the clubs "self-created," he meant that they were extralegal and that only duly constituted bodies and duly elected representatives should deliberate or exert pressure on public issues ([Palmer 1964](#), 7). Washington's Farewell Address, written in 1796,⁸ is so astonishing in its intolerance of any kind of opposition that it merits being cited *in extenso*:

All obstructions to the execution of the laws, all combinations and associations, under whatever plausible character, with the real design to direct, control, counteract, or awe the regular deliberation and action of the constituted authorities, are destructive of this fundamental principle [the duty of every individual to obey the established government] and of fatal tendency. They serve to organize faction; to give it an artificial and extraordinary force; to put in the place of the delegated will of the nation the will of a party, often a small but artful and enterprising minority of the community, and according to the alternate triumphs of different parties to make the public administration the mirror of the ill-conceived and incongruous projects of faction rather than the organ of consistent and wholesome plan, digested by common councils and modified by mutual interests. (2002: 47)

According to [Palmer \(1964, 526–27\)](#), "Hamilton, supported by Washington, took the view that the opposition [to his measures] was opposition to

government itself. Since no parties of modern kind yet existed, nor was the idea or need of them even recognized, the issues soon took on larger dimensions, becoming a question of the propriety of opposition itself, or the right of citizens to disagree with, criticize, and work against public officials.”⁹

As [Manin \(1997, Chapter 6\)](#) observes, the advent of parties was perceived as much of a crisis as their weakness is now. Henry Peter, Lord Brougham, referred in 1839 to party government as “this most anomalous state of things – this arrangement of political affairs which systematically excludes at least one half of the great men of each age from their country’s service, and devotes both classes infinitely more to maintaining a conflict with one another than to furthering the general good” (2002: 52). Although they advanced democracy by tying the representatives to the represented and by offering explicit platforms from which to choose, parties were seen as destroying discussion and as undermining the separation of powers. “Party government” was a negative term, connoting conflicts motivated by personal ambitions of politicians, “obsession with winning power by winning elections,”¹⁰ pursuit of particularistic interests, altogether a rather unsavory spectacle. It required a remedy in the form of some neutral, moderating power, such as the emperor in the 1825 Brazilian Constitution or the president in the Weimar Constitution.¹¹ Even this solution was devoured by partisan politics; in the end, presidents were elected by agreements among parties ([Schmitt 1988](#)). And when this solution failed, constitutional review by independent courts emerged to constrain party government ([Pasquino 1998, 153](#)).

11.2.5 Conclusion

The classical theory thought that representative government is not possible unless interests are harmonious: political divisions portended violence, civil war. Divisions were a sign of a malady, either incomplete knowledge or particularistic interests. Voting was thought to be at best an expedient substitute for unanimity.¹² As a French political theorist, R  al de Curban (quoted in [Palmer 1959, 64](#)), wrote in the middle of the eighteenth century, if elections were to be contested, “given men as they are, there would be no agreement on merit; each would think himself or his leader more meritorious than others; conflict and even civil war would follow.” J. S. Mill (1991, 230) thought that ethnic and linguistic divisions made representative government “next to impossible.”¹³ Yet it is obvious that despite the dire warning about the effects of partisan divisions and independent unions, in many countries, representative institutions succeeded in confining conflicts to institutional channels.

11.3 ON THE POLITICAL USE OF “TRADITIONS”

Now that we have learned that representative institutions can tolerate political competition in which interests and values are organized by political parties

as well as by other intermediate organizations without resulting in civil strife, how should we think about the consensual foundations of the project of "non-Western democracy," outlined earlier? It bears emphasis that we now think that under a broad range of conditions the mechanism of competitive elections is effective in structuring, absorbing, and regulating conflicts, that conflicts need not spill beyond the institutional boundaries, that they can be contained and processed peacefully. No one evokes the fact that elections were uncontested in England until the latter part of the seventeenth century (Kishlansky 1986) or that almost all votes in the English parliament were unanimous at the end of the eighteenth century. Although the consensualist nostalgia still lingers, we have been weaned away from our traditions, and, following Kelsen ([1929]1988) and Schumpeter (1942), we developed a systematic understanding of democracy as a method for processing conflicts.¹⁴

Yet political traditions are used as a political weapon on both side of debates about democracy in non-Western countries. One side, epitomized by Huntington (1993) and prominent in the evocation of "Asian values," claims that some cultural traditions make unfeasible the political arrangements characterizing democracy in the West. The other side, recently revived by Sen (2003), evokes glimpses of native political institutions to claim that democracy is not a Western import but an indigenous tradition.

Huntington (1993, 40) began by observing that "Western concepts differ fundamentally from those prevalent in other civilizations. Western ideas of individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights, equality, liberty, the rule of law, democracy, free markets, the separation of church and state, often have little resonance in Islamic, Confucian, Japanese, Hindu, Buddhist or Orthodox cultures." And, he continued, "Western efforts to propagate such ideas produce instead a reaction against 'human rights imperialism' and a reaffirmation of indigenous values, as can be seen in the support for religious fundamentalism by the younger generation of non-Western cultures." It is difficult to guess on what basis one can arrive at this assertion: most students of Islamic religious fundamentalism attribute its rise to the deteriorating economic conditions of the urban masses, not to 'human rights imperialism'; the rise of religious fundamentalism is limited to some countries within some cultural areas and is prominent in the most "Western" country of them all, the United States. But more importantly, the Cassandras of the impending *Kulturkampf* (also Fukuyama 1995) would be well advised to look back before they plunge forward.

Consider the long-standing interpretation of Weber, according to which he is supposed to have claimed that Protestantism, as opposed to Catholicism, favors democracy. First, Weber made no such claim: although he arrived at the association of religion and politics at the very end of *Protestant Ethic*, he left the question open. Indeed, contrary to Lipset, Almond and Verba, or Huntington (1984), who claimed that cultures that are consummatory in character are less favorable to democracy, elsewhere Weber (in Gerth and Mills 1958, 337–38)

argued that the political role of organized religions depends on their interests, not their content: "The widely varying empirical stands which historical religions have taken in the face of political action have been determined by the entanglement of religious organizations in power interests and in struggles for power, . . . by the usefulness and the use of religious organizations for the political taming of the masses and, especially, by the need of the powers-that-be for the religious consecration of their legitimacy." In an exhaustive study of the rise of European Christian Democracy, Kalyvas (1996) showed that the relation between Catholicism and democracy followed strategic considerations of the Catholic Church. And in a daring comparison of nineteenth-century Belgian ultramontane Catholic fundamentalism and contemporary Algerian Islamic fundamentalism, Kalyvas (1997) concluded that the different outcomes in these two countries were due to the organizational structure of the respective religions rather than to their cultural content. Linz and Stepan (1996, 453) came to the same conclusion with regard to the recent cases of democratization. Im (2006) has documented that in Korea, both Protestant and Catholic churches supported transition to democracy in competition for their religious "market shares."

Claims about other cultural traditions, in particular Confucianism and Islam, are equally tenuous. Huntington (1993, 15) reported that "no scholarly disagreement exists regarding the proposition that traditional Confucianism was either undemocratic or antidemocratic." Yet Lee Teng Hui (1997), the former president of Taiwan, found in traditional Confucianism an emphasis on limited government that is essential to democracy. In a systematic review of writings on Confucianism and democracy, Im (1997), as some others before him, finds a very mixed picture: on one hand, Confucianism has no concept of civil society, no concept of individual rights (but instead of roles people should perform), or of the rule of law, but, on the other hand, it has deep traditions of limited government, recognizes the right of rebellion against rulers who deviate from the prescribed "Way," is religiously tolerant, and is antimilitaristic. Moreover, at least in Korea, a plurality of opinion, a public sphere, existed during the six centuries of the Choseon Dynasty.

The discussion within and about Islam is equally complex. Several Western writers find Islam incompatible with democracy (Eisenstadt 1968, 25–27; Gellner 1991, 506; Lewis 1993, 96–98). Yet, according to Esposito and Voll (1996), the three basic tenets of Islam lend themselves and have been subject to more or less anti-democratic interpretations. Thus, the principle of the Unity of God (*tauhid*), while requiring consistency with God's laws, can leave interpretation of them to every capable and qualified Muslim and need not be inconsistent with a system of government in which the executive "is constituted by the general will of the Moslems who have also the right to depose it" (24) or with "an assembly whose members are the real representatives of the people" (27). Similarly, the principle of God's representative on earth (*khilafah*) need not be interpreted in monarchical terms but can be extended to all men and

women. Finally, the traditions of consultation, consensus, and independent interpretative judgement can be used as arguments for or against democracy. And in fact, [Eickelman and Piscroti \(1996\)](#) show that such doctrinal interpretations have in the past served and now serve to justify quite different political arrangements.

There are several reasons to doubt that cultures, or civilizations, as [Mazrui \(1997, 118\)](#) prefers to think of Islam, either furnish requisites for or constitute irremovable barriers to democracy. For one, the arguments relating civilizations to democracy appear terribly *ex post*: if many countries dominated by Protestants are democratic, we look for features of Protestantism that promote democracy; if no Muslim countries are democratic, obviously there must be something about Islam that is antidemocratic. [Eisenstadt \(1968\)](#), for example, finds that the Indian civilization has what it takes but Confucianism and Islam do not, and one wonders what he would have found if China were democratic and India not.

For two, one can find elements in every culture, Protestantism included, that appear compatible and elements that seem incompatible with democracy. Protestant legitimization of economic inequality, not to speak of the very ethic of self-interest, offers a poor moral basis for living together and resolving conflicts in a peaceful way. Other cultures are authoritarian but egalitarian, hierarchical but respectful of the right of rebellion, communal but tolerant of diversity, and so on. So one can pick and choose.

Third, each of the religious traditions has been historically compatible with a broad range of practical political arrangements. Tunisia is no Afghanistan, South Korea is not North Korea, Costa Rica is not Guatemala; postwar Germany is not Hitler's Germany. This range is not the same for different religious traditions but is broad enough in each case to demonstrate that these traditions are quite flexible with regard to the political arrangements with which they can be made compatible.

Finally, and most importantly, traditions are not given once and for all: they are continually invented and reinvented ([Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983](#)), a point stressed by [Eickelman and Piscroti \(1996\)](#) in their analysis of Islam. [Laitin \(1995\)](#) examined in several contexts the role played by "cultural entrepreneurs" in the dynamic of cultural change, providing extensive evidence that, while conflicts over culture can end in different outcomes, they are a matter of interests and strategies, not of any primordially given cultural contents. In fact, the very analyses of the Confucian tradition cited earlier are best seen as attempts to invent a democratic Confucianism. Cultures are made of cloth, but the fabric of culture drapes differently in the hands of different tailors. As Mill observed, "people are more easily induced to do, and do more easily, what they are already used to; but people also learn to do things new to do them."

Traditions do not constitute immovable barriers, but neither are they necessary as building blocks. The aim of the project to find native roots of democracy is to make it appear less of a Western creation. Particularly now that the

very word “democracy” has been sullied by its instrumental use in American imperialist excursions, native authenticity can be a source of vitality. It turns out to be easy to find elements of democracy in ancient India, medieval Iceland, or pre-colonial Africa.¹⁵ But the implication that modern politics in these places owes something to their own political traditions is at best far-fetched. Indeed, modern Greek democracy has no roots in democracy of ancient Greece. English constitutional monarchy had more impact on modern Greek political history than Athens. And the same is true of India: Although some people advocated basing the 1950 Constitution of India on the tradition of the *panchayat raj* system, in the end the constitution “was to look toward Euro-American rather than Indian precedents” (Guha 2008, 119). In most countries that became independent at various periods during the twentieth century, representative institutions were an export or at best an import: even in those places where political institutions emerged without foreign domination, they were designed in the world as it was at the moment. The repertoire of institutional choices is a world heritage, not a native tradition.

Notes

1. On the importance of harmony and the fear of conflict in Confucianism, see Nathan (1986) and Hu (2000).
2. The first thinker to use the term “representative democracy” in place of “republic” in Latin America may have been the Peruvian constitutionalist Manuel Lorenzo de Vidaurre in 1827 (See Aguilar 2009).
3. Following Schumpeter (1942), I refer as the “classical” theory of representative government to the ideology under which it was formed at the end of the eighteenth century, rather than to ancient Greece.
4. On this issue, see the polemic between Grofman and Feld (1989), Eastlund (1989), and Waldron (1989).
5. A Chinese Communist Party leader, Hu Qiaomu, feared that if “we are not uniform [in our thinking], then our steps will be confused. Some would be going east, some west, some south, and some north, and our rank and file would not be able to march forward. Then we would not be able to unify our forces into a consistent body and speed toward our common destination; we would become split into fragments and could accomplish nothing” (quoted in Hu 2000, 101).
6. The spirit of party, George Washington (2002, 48) sermonized in his 1796 Farewell Address, “serves to distract the public councils and enfeeble the public administration. It agitates the community with ill-founded jealousies and false alarms, kindles the animosity of one part against another, foment occasionally riots and insurrections. It opens the door to foreign influence and corruption.”
7. The full quote is, “If there were not some point in which all interests agree, no society could exist.”
8. The Address was never delivered. Some parts of the Address were drafted by Hamilton: Ellis (2002, 152) hears Hamilton’s voice in the principle cited in the brackets.
9. For the evidence that opposition was seen as illegitimate by the government in the United States between 1794 and 1800, see Dunn (2004), Stone (2009), and Weisberger (2000).

10. This quote is from the German president Richard von Weizsäcker, in [Scarrow \(2002, 1\)](#).
11. The connection between the emergence of parties and the need for a moderating power was the theme of Henry Saint-John, Viscount Bolingbroke, in 1738: “To espouse no party but to govern like the common father of his people, is so essential to the character of a Patriot King that he who does otherwise forfeits the title” (2002: 29) Washington, in the Farewell Address, thought that parties have virtues under monarchy, where the king can arbitrate between them, but not under democracy.
12. Describing what he calls “decisions by apparent consensus,” [Urfalino \(2007\)](#) emphasizes that “le consensus apparent exige non pas l’unanimité mais, à côté de ceux qui approuvent, le consentement des réticents;” and “La contribution des participants à la décision est marquée par le contraste entre un droit égal à la participation et une inégalité légitime des influences.”
13. “Free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities. Among a people without fellow-feeling, especially if they read and speak different languages, the united public opinion necessary to the working of representative government cannot exist.”
14. Ironically, according to [Keller \(2010, 13\)](#), the same conception of democracy guides its advocates with Confucianism and Islam, who “tend to evision democracy in a restricted, almost mechanical sense – a system of rules to elect governments and make decisions, not as a system of values or a way of living.”
15. During the Indian constitutional convention of 1946–49, someone invoked a thousand-year-old inscription “that mentioned an election held with leaves a ballot papers and pots as ballot boxes” ([Guha 2008, 120](#)).

PART III

PATHS OF POLITICAL CHANGE

Instituting Political Change

John Ferejohn

12.1 INTRODUCTION

Modern democracy is normally conducted by elected representatives, chosen in competitive elections (where incumbents have a chance to lose). From the standpoint of the voters, elections are the (thin) connecting line between what voters want or will accept and the policies chosen by their government. But this is so only to the extent that elected officials can actually lose elections and are not able to so exploit the advantages of office as to insulate themselves from voters. From the standpoint of elected officials, elections are a matter of political life and death. To survive and have their policies persist, they have to win or at least win pretty often. Therefore, policies are chosen, in part, because officials think will help them prevail next time. One cannot of course expect governments to be very good at figuring which policies will have this effect. The connection between policies and the outcomes voters care about is complex and obscured by risk and uncertainty and, in many cases, very weak. Moreover, modern democracies are internally complex with separated powers and internal checks, making coordination on policy difficult and sometimes impossible to achieve (despite the invention of the political party). So governments get things wrong fairly often either because they cannot figure out what to do, or, cannot do actually manage to do what they know they should do. And, as a result, as long as elections really are somewhat competitive, sometimes governments lose elections.

For all its flaws, the traditional democratic conception is usually defended nowadays in the following way: the policies that work electorally are those that tend to produce good outcomes for voters. And elected officials are thought to be at least somewhat competent at finding such policies and so can be (rationally) expected to pursue them in between elections. So, even if there is a bit of noise (i.e., failed policies, electoral defeats, etc.), and even if the election

motive distorts policies a bit toward short run electoral concerns, and even if electoral worries can make it hard for representatives to coordinate their actions, on balance democracy usually tends to produce outcomes acceptable to the electorate.

Admittedly, this is a pretty weak defense of democracy, and it is only persuasive when the properties of other form of rule are considered. And until fairly recently, it was easy to believe that alternative regimes – regimes without genuinely competitive elections – mostly performed much worse than democracies. And, in support of this belief, it was common to cite the successive waves of democratization in Europe following the Second World War, pointing to the collapse of right wing authoritarian systems in the 1970s and then to the collapse of the Soviet system. Similar waves seem to have occurred in Latin America and in Asia too. Admittedly, there are exceptions, especially China, that have managed a high-performance authoritarian system.

From the perspective of this democratic theory, developments in Russia may be perplexing. No one can doubt the tumult and lawlessness that followed the collapse of the Soviet system and the plundering of its public resources by the quick and rapacious and the enormous losses that many people suffered as a result. It was natural to expect that the Russian people would want to see some kind of order and lawfulness restored, even if it was at a great price in terms of limitations on liberty. Perhaps it was inevitable that they would want to elect, and reelect, a government that promised a steady focus on reestablishing orderly and effective government able and willing to repress the lawlessness that prevailed in the 1990s, presumably with the goal of (eventually) establishing a genuine democracy. Hence, the establishment of what in this volume calls “sovereign” democracy. Migranyan argues that, before a democratic state with a full set of political rights can be established, it is necessary to put in place civil rights and liberties of a kind that would permit the development of robust civil society capable of forming and expressing interests. This, he argues, requires the establishment of a strong state capable of dictating the pace of democratization. “In reality, the concept of sovereign democracy appeared as a result of the restoration of the personality of the Russian state as the subject expressing the joint interests of the people, which was not the case in the 1990s. According to researches, before establishing effective democratic institutions and values the regimes in transit to democracy must first establish a state as an effective and efficient tool to achieve this” (in this volume, 18–19).¹

Maybe so. Certainly one could argue that in various predemocratic periods in the United States (the 1790s) or the United Kingdom (in the early eighteenth century) or France (before 1870 and perhaps again under DeGaulle), perhaps some liberal rights might have been somewhat insecure as necessary precursors to the full institutionalization of modern democracy. However, it seems to me that Migranyan is not really talking about civil rights or liberties of the kind that figure in the constitutional discourse of constitutional democracies: rights that protect people against tyrannical government actions such as

arbitrary arrests, repression of speech and religion, and so on. Rather, he sees sovereign democracy as establishing rights that people and groups can use to defend themselves against other people, specifically the powerful private interests, such as the oligarchs, that emerged from the wreckage of the Soviet Union. Rights of this kind are typically established by ordinary rather than constitutional law and generally require the creation of state institutions and practices such as an effective system of criminal laws together with a state apparatus capable of enforcing them (i.e., functioning courts, police, prosecutors, etc.). It is also necessary presumably to develop private law as well, tort and contract law, that permit people to interact with each other secure while protecting their interests from the negligent or unscrupulous. In other words, there is a need for a set of state institutions strong enough to control private lawlessness.

As far as I can see, sovereign democracy is not concerned with controlling government by establishing constitutional checks on officials but is aimed at empowering the state relative to the powerful private actors that appeared following the collapse of the Soviet system. Migranyan seems not to worry about the possibility that the state apparatus itself could pose a danger to citizens. In this respect, the situation in Russia seems very different from that in the United States in the 1790s, when the state itself was captured by the Federalists who put in place repressive legislation (such as the Alien and Sedition Acts) to repress their political opponents. But, as the Framers of the Constitution understood, a powerful state apparatus is dangerous in itself and needs to be restrained either internally (i.e., by establishing checks and balances among governmental institutions) or externally (by creating constitutional protections against unjust governmental actions). I imagine that the proponents of sovereign democracy may envision the imposition of such checks in the future. But once powers are concentrated, the future can tend to recede as it is approached.

In any case, ten years after Putin's first election, there are doubts that the reimposition of order and law was only a (necessary) first step in the progression to a modern democracy, or whether it has become, instead, a more or less permanent state of affairs in which the admittedly thin link in the chain of democracy (competitive elections) was broken in favor of a system in which the incumbent leaders can either be assured of re-election or can anoint their successors. In other words, it seems possible to some observers that Russia may be stuck in a kind of subdemocratic limbo.

Maybe the chaotic aftermath following the collapse of the Soviet system is the reason that Hobbes comes into the conversation so readily in assessing the contemporary Russian context ([Hobbes 1968](#) [1651]). There is a sense that the Russian people had peeked over the brink, to anarchy, and reacted with horror, empowering a Leviathan without limits, refusing to impose legal and political restraints on its government. And probably this is why people talk about Carl Schmitt too: how could it be the case, really (!), that Leviathan is restrained by law (see [Schmitt 2000](#))? Even when the society and the state are (or could be) careering out of control? Surely, you must be joking. Be that talk

as it may, it's been a decade now and, one hopes, the monster has been put back in the closet and door locked. Isn't it time to move forward a bit and establish some constitutional restraints on the state, both the name of liberty and of democratic rule, even if Schmitt is right that if things go seriously badly again, there could be a resort to harsh measures.

I can think of three basic reasons why the answer might be no or at least "not now." The first reason is that there has not been enough time or that problems of order have not been fully (enough) addressed. There variants on this response that put the right time a shorter or longer time in the future but all such answers seem to concede that when the time comes moving in the democratic direction would be good, natural, or even inevitable. The second reason might be that the political class – those who either are or could be elected officials are too disorganized or distrustful or selfish to actually make the electoral connection between government and people a credible support for good and effective policies. The third reason for a negative response is to deny that modern democracy is all that attractive a form of government for Russia: to insist that Russia is too heterogeneous ethnically, linguistically, and religiously or perhaps its people are too distrusting either of each other or of government for democratic rule of any kind to be effective. So it must find its own way. Obviously, this is more profoundly negative response, and it rests on two premises only one of which can I address. The first is that there is in fact a better way of organizing the Russian state. I don't know about that. The second is that the democratic project is too inflexible to deal with a sprawling, multiethnic society plagued with history of autocratic government and high levels of cynicism and distrust.

In some ways, this is a very old set of concerns, traceable to Montesquieu and probably to Aristotle as well. The idea is that some regimes "fit" better with certain kinds of society. Montesquieu himself thought that geography and climate were the principal source of societal variation ([Montesquieu 1989](#)). [Rousseau \(1947\)](#) and [Aristotle \(1958\)](#), as I read them, thought that social and economic homogeneity were the significant factors permitting some kind of democratic rule. Of course Aristotle and Rousseau were really concerned with premodern (and very strenuous) notions of direct democracy which rested on a great deal of popular participation, and it is likely that the modern version – one that relies on elections to select rulers – can tolerate higher levels of social heterogeneity. But even now there may well be limits to what kinds of a society would permit any kind of democratic rule: if a population simply does not see itself as a "people" with some range of common interests, even modern democratic rule may be impossible or unattractive.²

But even if one is optimistic about the development of democracy in Russia, it is still necessary, I think, to worry about the motivations of political leaders. As I said, Migranyan himself seems unconcerned by problems of accountability that worry many analysts of Western democracy. He is convinced that Putin and Medvedev have the intention to make Russia into an (unqualified)

democracy and does not appear to think that either has any temptation to retain powers for themselves. “The Russian leadership understands that there is a certain ideal kind of democracy in the West which, even with its inherent flaws, still provides the best opportunities for economic growth, well-being of the people and enables the country to be more competitive in the world market of high technology products. However, for Russia to pursue this direction naturally rather than being directed by external forces, it must be a really sovereign country which would determine itself the main avenues of its economic development, the rates of economic and political transformations and their implementation sequence.” In this respect, Migranyan treats the current Russian leadership as constitutional actors as much as ordinary politicians, capable of acting on principles rather than their own interests.

This is a hopeful point of view, but it is fraught with dangers. It is rare to see constitutional actors be completely selfless, as perhaps George Washington or Nelson Mandela were. Often they see those who oppose them as either morally inferior or politically naïve and convince themselves that holding on to power is in the public’s interest. Such beliefs are never groundless but they justify taking the easy course – using the powers of office to discourage or deflect challenges – rather than seeing that the nation can profit from a system in which new leaders can arise from anywhere, and that voters can usually sort out good from bad leaders.

12.2 WHAT’S GOOD AND BAD ABOUT DEMOCRACY

If democracy is good, it is either because it is intrinsically good – because it permits people to govern themselves according to the laws they make or help in making – or because it has good consequences. The problems with intrinsic justifications are notorious: in what sense can “you” be said to rule yourself according to “your” laws if you have not had any role in framing those laws, and if your vote is only one of millions of others and can be cast only when it is only asked for every few years? You could say that you have somehow authorized some people to rule you by somehow consenting to their rule by, for example, casting your vote in an election (perhaps not for the winner). In that sense, elections (though rare) constitute acts of temporary delegation of authority to rulers who then take actions on your behalf. When you hire a plumber to fix your faucet, you can be said to get your faucet fixed; it was fixed through your act, even if indirectly. So, one might say the same about being ruled. But, the use of majority rule and the sheer number of other voters interferes with this analogy. Someone would have been elected anyway no matter whether you voted or not, and would have claimed the right to rule, so it is a bit hard to say that “your act” had any connection with the delegation of authority. You might claim that you are not obligated to follow some laws if you don’t think they are good – at least as long as disobeying these laws does not do harm to others.

From the consequentialist viewpoint, democracy permits people to have some control over who shall rule them and to limit the term of this rule. Here we are not worried about your personal role in selecting or punishing rulers: we worry only about the effects of elections on the behavior of rulers. Consequentialism in this sense is ruler centered, not voter centered. Elections may force rulers to account for themselves and their actions, and having to do this may induce leaders to take actions that people would approve. Or they may simply shake things up by permitting people to get rid of leaders they tire of (for whatever reason) and to put in new officials who may have different ideas. The consequentialist justification of democracy amounts to this: democracy is a system that may select pretty good leaders (if people can tell one from another *ex ante*) and generally motivates them to serve public interests (as long as that helps win votes). Of course, no one could argue that democracy is perfect as a leader selector or motivator, much less than any particular version of democracy performs either task perfectly. So my guess is that the intrinsic justification is still needed – not because we have any really coherent version of such a theory, but simply because any consequentialist justification has to face the fact that the selection and motivational mechanisms of a democracy are pretty crude, and for that reason there is little reason to think that the consequences of democratic rule are reliably good as compared with alternative systems of rule.

In my opinion, neither intrinsic nor consequentialist justifications are very persuasive either standing alone or working in tandem. That is why so many people fall back on the Churchillian response: it is not that democracy is good, it is just better than any other system. I don't know about that. It would seem to depend on a more careful construction of the alternative regimes and this is such an open ended task as to be practically hopeless. Churchill may have been correct in comparing mid-century democracies to fascist and communist regimes or to historical monarchies and oligarchies. But people are endlessly creative in devising new forms of rule so Churchill should have qualified his claim. Besides, the notion of democracy is vague and not well defined. So to make his claim, Churchill needs yet another set of qualifications: perhaps he was referring parochially to the British model – often called the Westminster system of a highly disciplined majority (and given the electoral system there is nearly always a majority party, notwithstanding the 2010 elections) exercising undivided sovereign powers for the five years after its election. So, we need to consider the possible versions of democracy and which could be instituted in a particular context. And my guess is that there will be not be a one-size-fits-all solution.

To the extent that modern (representative) democracy is flawed, it must be because of how it chooses its officials and motivates its leaders or because of how those officials organize themselves into government (and opposition) to pursue their preferred policies, that is, to its use of competitive elections. In other words, elections must be the source of democracy's deficiencies as well

as its benefits. Elections are used for two things: to select the officials who will rule for a while and to motivate those officials by making them accountable to the voters from time to time. For a system to be recognizably democratic, elections must be somewhat competitive: incumbent officials must not have so many advantages that they cannot lose. Specifically, incumbents must not be able to rig the game so much that potential opponents have not real chance to challenge for office or that the various economic and social groups, who may oppose some governmental policies, find it impossible to give any support to potential challengers.

Given their control of the policy apparatus – which confers an abundance of electoral advantages – it is difficult to devise rules and mechanisms that can restrain incumbent officials from doing what must seem natural to them. Somehow either incumbents must learn some kind of democratic self restraint or, and this is the hard part, citizens generally must learn to react with appropriate disgust and be willing to vote out incumbent who behave badly. Each of these devices is difficult to establish, and it must appear, *ex ante*, extremely implausible that either could be created anew. That is why modern democracy, where it works well, is a real achievement, with all its flaws.

Criticisms of modern democracy focus on whether competitive elections are conducive to good government. Competitive elections may work badly as a selection device: they may tend to select as officials people who are ill suited to govern (demagogues, movie stars, wealthy hobbyists, vanity driven egotists, etc.). Or they may produce too much, too little, or too random replacement of officials. Competitive elections can create bad incentives for incumbents (to pander to popular prejudices, to posture, advertise meaningless things, etc.). These defects arise from informational asymmetries in a modern state. For one thing, voters can't know very much about which policies are actually chosen. For another, policies that are attractive to voters will often produce bad results because voters can't really know much about the causal connections between policies and outcomes and to reward good policies. Besides, sometimes policies can effectively be secretly bought by special interests in return for supporting incumbents. Moreover, it is likely that incumbent officials lack technical knowledge (compared to interest groups or bureaucrats) and are not very good at choosing or executing effective policies anyway. The literature on position taking basically builds on these simple ideas; so does that on pandering (Mayhew 1974). For these reasons (and others), there is every reason to believe that electoral incentives are distorting in some ways and that policies actually produced will be disappointing.

Faced with repeated disappointments, it is likely that voters tend to become jaded and cynical about politicians and to lower their expectations of incumbent performance. To the extent that this occurs, one reason that incumbents tend to win is because no one can rationally expect a challenger to do any better – so, better to settle for the devil you know. As a result, incumbent losses then are mostly simply random: bad luck, such being caught in a scandal of

some kind – or, like poor Gordon Brown, moving into 10 Downing Street just as the financial world was coming to an end.

Thus, the significant criticisms of modern democracy locate its defects in the very fact that it depends so centrally on competitive elections. Lurking in these critiques is the assumption that some other regime could do better if it could avoid the nuisance of regular and frequent elections. In this discussion I want to keep a comparison of that kind in mind: that is there is an alternative – a regime that is not quite a modern democracy and it is able to conduct government well enough that there is not an enormous immediate demand for change, at least as long as things are going well, or perhaps people are simply cynical about the prospects of doing better – and the choice for the government is whether to continue doing what it is currently doing or to try to move further in the direction of modern democracy by having genuinely competitive elections.

12.3 BUILDING DEMOCRACY IN REAL TIME

Since the time of American and French revolutions, it has seemed natural to think of constitutions as being intentionally designed, perhaps by a specially convened constituent assembly whose members could be seen as standing outside ordinary politics. These members, it might be thought, could take a perspective that career-oriented politicians would not: they might be expected to craft higher-order rules not with an eye to their own personal well-being but with the well-being of the people as their goal. This story seems naïve when actually written down of course, so usually it needs some plausible psychological underpinning to make it more convincing. Perhaps each of the constitutional framers couldn't really calculate the effect of this or that provision for his political future. Or perhaps each cared more for his historical reputation than for a chance at future office. Or perhaps they thought, the gratitude of the electorate will bring justly deserved awards later on, even without the need to seek them.

But whether any of these stories is plausible, each requires that somehow the constitutional moment arrives, and that usually means that the previous system has collapsed. In the case of Russia, as far as I can understand it, that moment has probably passed. So, if there is to be a move to democracy it will have to happen in real time and not in an atemporal constituent moment. And the critical actors will have to be political leaders who can anticipate, to some extent, the consequences of various new constitutional designs for their own political futures. But this fact does not eliminate the constitutional perspective. It simply underlines the fact that the constitutional and quotidian moments tend to be intertwined, and that there may be good reasons to avoid introducing competitive elections too early.

Note that this way of putting things is very different from Przeworski's self-interest-based explanation for adopting competitive elections and closer to Miganyan's perspective. The leaders of an authoritarian regime might not hesitate to go to elections because they fear losing (though they may dread

that); they may also worry that introducing competitive elections may have systemically bad consequences. In other words, their electoral hesitation could well be a genuinely constitutional one and not one completely shaped by the venal consideration of wanting to retain the fruits of office for as long as possible. Note also that the leaders of this regime may very well be tempted to employ elections if that will bring them some benefits, but only insofar as those elections can be tightly controlled so that the bad incentives of competitive elections will not come to interfere with their control of the governmental apparatus.

These considerations imply that we must consider two perspectives on competitive elections (and everything that goes between): as a narrow self-serving choice and as a constitutional decision. For the choice to have competitive elections to be attractive for incumbents – seen as a bunch of voracious or nervous incumbents – that having genuine elections confers some kind of benefit, on balance to the society as a whole. They must believe that they have a good chance to succeed in a competitive system: that there are policies that can work well to attract voter support; that they are reasonably competent to find and implement them; and that voters will tend to reward such actions at the polls. And that even if they make a mistake (or the voters do), they have a reasonable chance to get back into the government sometime soon. None of this has to be believed with certainty, but without some beliefs of this kind, it is hard to see why incumbents would surrender the power to control their own fate.

But, for competitive elections to be attractive to the government – thinking now as a constitutional actor – the considerations are a bit different. They must think that the payoffs in accountability and legitimacy are usually enough to offset the costs in perverse incentives. Unless there is some kind of severe crisis or disruption, the choice to move in the democratic direction is, however, one that has to take place in real time, not necessarily in a constituent assembly. To have a functioning modern (electoral) democracy, those with the power to act otherwise must want to call elections in a timely manner and to generally behave well in between the elections too. And this requires that they see a real election (and election you can believe in) as a good thing to have at some point in time not too long after the last one. But, governments can be convinced of these only if the criticisms of modern democracy are at least somewhat exaggerated (or can be restrained by designing the system appropriately). For example, perhaps the distorting effects of the electoral system can be minimized by adopting a proportional representation scheme of some kind, or by permitting courts to police campaign finance, or by building strong and disciplined parties that can control the venal motivations of individual politicians. And there may be disciplining mechanisms that remain (to some extent) outside the control of government – a free press, an active formation of critical public opinion both inside and outside the political capital, an active and somewhat autonomous system of parties, and a population of diverse and competing interest organizations of various kinds. The existence of such things is fragile

in that governments will always want to control them. Moreover, at least in some social circumstances, the government may think that these institutions are themselves dangerous to its own fate and not really worth risking.

12.4 TWO MODEL DEMOCRACIES

In this section I want to consider two relatively “extreme” cases of democracy – the United States and the United Kingdom – in which the system of competitive elections has been implemented in very different ways. The nations differ in many ways, of course, but especially in their size and internal diversity and in the very different roles that powerful regional political forces have played in their political histories. I think that these two implementations roughly bracket an important constitutional choice for Russia: between trying to build a unitary or “sovereign” democracy capable of a good amount of *dirigisme* over society and the economy versus a more pluralistic democracy that would be required to negotiate with social and economic powers rather than dictate to them.

It may surprise some that the United States and United Kingdom are taken to be extreme cases, but I suggest that the fact that both have plurality rule elections with single-member districts actually makes this characterization apt. Single-member district systems have two features that are important for the present: first, they give incumbent representatives strong reasons to prefer localist projects – to act as ambassadors for their constituencies rather than as representatives of the whole nation (to paraphrase Edmund Burke – indeed it was precisely because his electors expected him to act as their ambassador that Burke took such pains to reject that view). Second, SMD systems amplify the effects of shifts in the popular vote on the distribution of seats in the legislature. The popular vote winner tends to pick up a disproportionate share of legislative seats. This “amplification” factor, or swing ratio, tends to range between 2 and 3 but can sometimes be much higher than this (whereas for PR systems it is definitionally 1.0).³ Consider the 1979 (Thatcher) election in the United Kingdom: the Conservatives only managed to get a plurality of 44 percent of the vote, but that was sufficient to give them a solid majority of 53 in Parliament.

Though both have similar electoral systems, they differ greatly the constitutional organization of their elected officials, and in the coherence and organization of their political parties. The parliamentary system in the United Kingdom has the government chosen by the parliamentary majority and so in national elections only the individual member of parliament stands for election. In the United State’s presidential system, members of Congress stand for election separately from the president and, importantly, often run for election at times when the president is not on the ballot. Moreover, nominations for office are largely controlled by (local) party members in the United Kingdom, whereas nominations are generally done by primary elections in the United States, and the parties often have little control over who can run for office

under their banner. And finally (partly as a result of constitutional organization and the nomination process), in the United Kingdom, the parties are vastly more disciplined in voting in Parliament.

Moreover, in the United Kingdom, incumbents are not tightly identified with their constituencies. They are seen as mainly as proxies or representatives of the national party, able to run or represent constituencies throughout the country. In this context, the organizational problems for the elected party members are minimized: all are in the same boat and will succeed or fail electorally together. So both incumbents and their partisan opponents have ample reason to subordinate their individual motivations to ensure that their party team succeeds in implementing the goals they all share, perhaps hoping thereafter to rise within the party to a cabinet seat. As a result, a new British government has the capacity to execute rather sharp shifts in national policy following an election, even if its majority is rather slender.

In the United States, things are completely different. Elected officials are almost always drawn from the constituency. Their careers depend on maintaining a strong tie to the district and, in any case, their nomination and election depend on maintaining a personal basis of support, partly independent of the local party organization (if one actually exists). And potential opponents could come from anywhere in the district, either inside their party or outside. So their best course of action is try to keep all parts of the district happy by bringing home bacon (or other cuts of pork) from Washington. Not surprisingly, such officials tend to see themselves as lone wolves rather than as members of a party team. And while they may vote with others in their party, this is only because their district agrees with the party position. Policies enacted in such a system tend to reflect the summation of district and state interests and even sharp national level electoral shifts may not lead to big changes in the legislation.⁴

One way to summarize these differences is to point the differences in the party organizations. We have noted that British parties are, more or less, membership parties that have mechanisms to determine party positions and to instruct the candidates to adhere to them, whereas American parties are not. American parties are candidate centered, interest group dominated, permeable, and, above all, sporadic. They are shells that are taken over by successful candidates and abandoned otherwise. Sometimes they are useful for channeling money, and to some extent – especially recently – they have value as a brand. But basically they have little control over which candidates run under their banner, so there is little sense of their having any independent force in political life.

It is, of course, possible for an election to be competitive from the standpoint of the government without having very much competition in many election constituencies. For example, in the United Kingdom, governments can and do lose elections, so national elections are competitive. But most constituencies are actually quite safe for the incumbent. Something over 90 percent of incumbent MPs running for reelection win, and most of these constituencies would be very hard for another party to win because the incumbent's party is too strong in

the constituency. This number is quite similar to the rate at which incumbent congressmen win in the United States. Indeed, in the United States, usually only thirty or forty congressional seats are competitive in any election in the sense that the incumbent has a real chance to lose (Cain et al. 1987).

When Schumpeter (1942) formulated his democratic theory, and when Downs (1957) extended and elaborated it, each was thinking of the highly coherent party/electoral system in postreform United Kingdom – sometimes called the “Westminster” model – in which it was plausible to think of the government as a kind of “team” of elected officials. By the late nineteenth century, the United Kingdom had evolved highly disciplined and ideologically disciplined political parties; its government was formed by whichever party won the most seats and governed so long as it maintained its majority in parliament (Cox 2005; Beer 1969, 1982). Elections were constitutionally required at least every five years and each election was generally considered a referendum on the success of the government. Moreover, voters responded to government policies by producing electoral responses that were generally quite uniform across the whole country: the interelection vote swing tended to be approximately the same in each constituency (even though different constituencies would have had very different levels of support for the governing party). In other words, a 1 percent national swing toward Labour would tend to produce approximately a one percentage point swing in each constituency. Thus, members of the governing party understood that their electoral fates were tightly linked (by the voters) to each other and to the government. And so, in principle, members of the majority should have found it pretty easy to coordinate themselves into an effective government, as long as they could manage their private ambitions.

It is perhaps not very surprising, therefore, that the British developed various norms to help coordinate the actions of elected officials: the notion that parliament was somehow a unitary sovereign, the norm of ministerial responsibility (that one ought to resign if the government persisted in a policy she could not support); the confidence motion, the creation of the party manifesto and its treatment as more or less binding on party members, the notion of a loyal opposition that actually proposes and defends its own policies while out of office. And there are many other such norms which could be said, in total, to constitute the culture of the political class. There is no real parallel to these norms in the United States. Certainly members of Congress do not see themselves as part of a unitary sovereign, and there really is no norm of ministerial responsibility – one need only recall the embarrassing travails of Colin Powell during the period prior to the Iraq invasion to see how little meaning such an idea carries for Americans. And certainly the notion of a responsible opposition is . . . foreign. In the United States, the first duty of the opposition is to oppose, and this by any means possible (fair or foul). Guerilla warfare, conducted by disparate and independent cells, is the normal tactic of the opposing party between elections – at least until its presidential candidate is nominated a few months prior to the general election.

While Britain is a large and fairly diverse country, it seems clear that, comparatively speaking, competitors for office and voters essentially agree on a great deal about how elections and government are and ought to be conducted. More or less like a rugby game – each side could brutally pursue its aims when it had the ball, and each had ample reason to coordinate themselves to be effective competitors, but each side could also expect that periodically there would be rough fights over the ball. But each could also expect that the brutality of those fights would be rule governed. This was a unique and unusual situation – perhaps approximated for a time in New Zealand and to a (much lesser extent) in the more diverse countries of Australia and Canada – and probably should not serve as a model for what can be expected of democratic rule in large and very heterogeneous countries like the United States . . . or Russia.

By contrast, consider the American governmental system, one that neither Schumpeter nor Downs was writing about (though, ironically both lived in the United States). While the electoral system in the United States – single-member district plurality rule – is similar to that in the United Kingdom, it is used much more frequently: whereas the British vote for one national official (their MP) once every five years, and perhaps for a local councilor about as frequently, Americans vote for hundreds of thousands of officials at every governmental level, and elections of some kind occur every few months.⁵ Moreover, political aspirants tend to run as individuals rather than as party members, or at least they try to. In any case, the parties are very weak financially and organizationally – aspirants to electoral office have to raise their own money, assemble their own electoral machines, and campaign as individuals. They make promises to their local constituents and exert efforts to deliver particular benefits to them and they have to raise money from interest groups too, often located far from their home districts. As a result, their voters treat them as local ambassadors to a great extent. In recognition of these diverse electoral incentives, party discipline and coherence in the United States is generally low compared to in the United Kingdom, and this is so even now in the unusually partisan period that Americans are currently going through. Moreover, the constitutional system in the United States is much more complex than that in the United Kingdom – partly owing to state and regional diversity – characterized by separated powers and elaborate systems of checks and balances. In such a structure, it is hard for voters to really know who is responsible for the latest disaster. And so they tend to punish the most visible official (the president or governor) and often give their local representative a free pass. The American metaphorical game is more like baseball or basketball than rugby – the American games are ones in which individuals play a very large and identifiable (and often selfish) role and where everyone keeps statistical track of individual level performance especially when it comes to deciding who shall be on the team and how much they are paid. And it is notoriously difficult to instill team values in such sports.

The U.K. and U.S. systems, though extreme in some respects, remain democratic in the sense that competitive election outcomes largely determine the

composition of the government and what policies are chosen. Unlike in the United Kingdom, however, American public policies of all kinds, from the national to the local level, tend to change very slowly and incrementally. Even after a change in party control of government, policies usually do not change quickly, partly because voters tend to make very diverse judgments in each constituency, sometimes voting for their incumbent Democratic Congress and Republican presidential candidate. For this it is very hard for political leaders to interpret or act on messy election results in the United States – and everyone knows that any such interpretation is probably exaggerated for partisan purposes and will soon become outdated because new elections occur all the time. And because parties are not really strong enough to maintain governing majorities, political leaders are forced to disaggregate policies geographically to build and maintain majorities around each statute. And this often leads to a devolution of power – congressional committees, and even individual congressmen and senators, often play a large role in supervising the distribution of governmental benefits. Policies tend to distribute benefits widely even if such spreading is highly ineffective in achieving the specific policy goals. These patterns are evident not only in classical distributional issues such as highway funding, water treatment, flood control, agricultural subsidies, and military basing. But similar patterns can be found in the distribution of defense contracts, education policy, and so on, which typically advantage low-population states like Wyoming and Alaska because they have a representation advantage in the Senate (Stein and Bickers 1995; Ferejohn 1974).

The United Kingdom has in many ways has opposite characteristics: the elections of 1946 (Thatcher) had the effect of remaking the whole society into a social democracy (in 1946) and back to a neoliberal paradise (in 1979). Each followed a period in which the opposition party developed and publicized quite detailed policy plans that they intended to implement and, soon after the election, those policies were substantially enacted. To a lesser extent, the 1997 and 2010 elections may have marked similar turning points. Nothing like that has happened in the United States, not even following the massive Democratic victories following the Great Depression. The New Deal worked a very incremental and partial set of changes in American society, only some of which really stuck, and all of which were plagued by the characteristic geographic forms of compromise that the constitutional system requires to be workable. Although Roosevelt's Democrats had immense majorities for at least six years, the Democrats were really a very loose alliance of diverse social interests – southern farmers and big city liberals and organized labor – ranging across the ideological spectrum. As soon as the urgency of the economic crisis subsided, even a little, there was little chance of agreeing on a coherent set of policies and certainly no broad agreement within the party of construct a European style welfare state.⁶

The two models suggest that there are very different ways that a competitive democracy could be implemented and that the “constitutional” choices in going

in one direction or another are consequential for how the democracy works. And each model has its attractions: in the U.S. model virtually any powerful interest group, or geographic unit, will have a political voice and will be in a position to negotiate over policies that could affect it. The price of this kind of responsiveness to interests is that governmental policies cannot really change society or the economy very much, at least not in the short run. So if one thinks that society is working fairly well and that there are not high levels of injustice, such a system has great appeal. By contrast, the Westminster model can move quickly to change policy directions and exert transformative force on social and economic practices (as happened in 1946 and 1979), and so it is attractive to those who think that society is in need of big changes (for whatever reason). My guess is that the current Russian leaders are attracted to something like the U.K. model. The notion of sovereign democracy suggests a governmental capacity to dominate or transform society in ways that would be hard with U.S. style fragmented powers.

But I wonder whether it is desirable or even possible for Russia to take the United Kingdom as a model for Russia. Elections have big consequences in the U.K. model because a disciplined majority could rapidly shift policies and might not feel any great need to recognize the degree of social, ethnic, linguistic, and geographic diversity in the country. The imposition of such a system would vastly raise the stakes of elections, increasing the temptation of the incumbent party to postpone or rig elections or to try to hold on to power following an unexpected defeat. This could be a recipe for disaster or at least for a continued democratic “limbo” in which political leaders continually hold out the promise but not the reality of a genuine electoral competition.

Conversely the American institutional practices seem very unattractive too: since they seem to surrender the possibility of addressing the need to change or reform policies in the short term and could risk citizen disappointment and alienation. And it might also be hard for the government to deal with underlying sources of heterogeneity in ways that might help make the country more governable as a democracy.

Of course, these two models were chosen because they represent extreme cases, so it would seem possible to locate or construct intermediate models. For example, the localism of American policies might be restrained by adopting a PR system with large districts (as in Scandinavia) or a system that combines single member districts with PR (as in Germany). Similarly, PR would reduce the “swing” ratio, which limits the electoral gains of the party with the most popular votes. But PR also makes it less likely that any party wins a majority. While this might lower the stakes of elections, it also risks the formation of either coalition or minority governments. Such “negotiated” governments make policy formation depend post-election bargaining within the political class. This poses a different set of risks: if, as in postwar Italy, elections have little effect on which government is formed or what it will do, people may come to see government as irrelevant to their daily concerns. Maybe that’s not

so bad if the society is working well, but if there are serious needs for social reform, it may lead to social instability.

12.5 DISCUSSION: POSTTRANSITION POLITICS

The models discussed in the previous section tend to lead to very different kinds of opposition. If, for example, something close to the Westminster model were to be implemented, the predemocratic opposition, which is already well organized, could reconstitute itself as a party that offers itself as a government in waiting, naming a shadow cabinet and working out and publicizing the policies it will put in place when it returns to power. These practices, indeed, constitute a “responsible” opposition. But these same people were previously seen as regime opponents with suspicious origins and disreputable supporters. Such an opposition may appear threatening to the regime, and the temptation would be strong to continue to suppress or disadvantage it. Thus, it seems to me that although the “sovereign” aspect of sovereign democracy may be compelling to the current leadership, the “democracy” component is a bit less of an attraction.

Until quite recently, political leaders in Europe often thought it wise to keep the political universe small by restricting the franchise or making the organization of certain political interests illegal. These restrictions were invariably accompanied by plausible justifications of one kind or another. And sometimes – in 1789, 1848, and 1917 – the pursuit of such strategies essentially produced revolutionary conditions. But even where such official efforts have been given up (for whatever reasons), less repressive methods of keeping outsiders outside the system are common strategies even in advanced democratic states. The standard manual of election management in any system describes how to get your supporters to the polls while keeping the opposition away or at least discouraging them from showing up. Sometimes the techniques are brutal but even where they are not, they are governed by this principle.

Strategies to weaken the opposition will, of course, depend on the structure of opportunities in society and the political system. I know too little about Russia to know how to describe the options. But I am pretty sure that Russian incumbent officials are motivated to hold on to power and to adopt the usual strategies that incumbent officials do everywhere else. Generically, incumbents should try to keep potential opponents from gathering resources and coordinating strategies among themselves. Diminishing access to mass communications and publicity would be attractive in almost any case. And they should try to amass resources that they control that can make it hard, and even dangerous, to challenge for their offices. All this is common sense.

In the U.S. model, by contrast, because majorities have to be formed piecemeal, and because candidate-raised finance plays a huge role in constructing campaign organizations, opponents are forced to appeal to diverse sources of finance and votes. The need for each candidate to finance his own career makes

it hard to establish coherent and disciplined parties, so the opposition tends to be fragmented, and its members can often be induced to cooperate with incumbents in making policies. What this means is that once the opposition is allowed to come in from the cold (i.e., to compete for elections where it has a chance to win), its predemocratic (militant) structure tends to collapse. In the U.S. model, there is, effectively, no organized opposition in between elections at all. Of course, there is the other major party, whose congressional leaders may claim to speak with some authority. But these people are almost never the ones who will run for president at the next election, and their promises have no force for the potential candidates. What happens normally in the United States is that the party out of office goes into what could be called guerilla warfare mode against the newly elected government. Its potential candidates criticize new policies of course, but not until they look unpopular, but the most virulent criticisms come from peripheral voices often outside the party. And in any case, no potential candidate would want to announce the policies she would adopt until the next election gets very near (i.e., until after she is nominated as the official candidate of her party and cannot avoid saying something about what she might do if elected). And even then, opposition candidates usually seek to make the election a referendum on the failed policies of the incumbent and prefer not to ask voters to assess their own detailed policy plans.

Notes

1. He goes on to say that “the concept of ‘sovereign democracy’ contains two differing elements that preclude its unambiguous perception. On the one hand, it contains the element of ‘sovereignty’ which is applied, as a rule, to the state as the subject of international relations. On the other hand, it contains the element of ‘democracy’ which is a characteristic of the form of government and that, in principle, does not depend on the degree of state sovereignty.” (in this volume, 23).
2. Each of these authors argued that “preference” heterogeneity makes democratic rule difficult or impossible. James Madison famously argued that preference heterogeneity might also form a protection against majority tyranny (Madison 1982). So he argued for establishing a national government that was both large and geographically diverse because he thought that heterogeneous interests would make it harder for (tyrannical) majorities to form. One might argue that, in that sense, Madison was interested in mitigating the democratic elements of the proposed constitution. In a recent book, Scott Page argues for the importance of distinguishing between preference heterogeneity – which makes democracy work badly – and cognitive or skill heterogeneity, which can improve its performance (Page, 2007).
3. The existence of third parties tends to increase this factor: so in the United Kingdom the swing ratio tends to exceed 3.0, as it did in late-nineteenth-Century United States, and in contemporary Canada. The electoral incentives conferred by proportional systems tend to be intermediate between these cases depending on the size of the electoral districts. With very large districts, localist/fragmented incentives are minimized. With smaller ones, as in transferable vote systems, localistic incentives are much higher.

4. A good summary of the tendency of the American legislative process to gridlock can be found in [Krehbiel \(1998\)](#).
5. I should remind the reader that there is a very active debate among political scientists about the nature and powers of American political parties and what the current high rates of party voting in Congress actually signify. Some think that highly ideologically unified parties are able to exert some level of discipline on their members, essentially forcing them to vote for bills they don't like. Others think that high levels of party voting are simply a consequence of some kind of "sorting" of people with similar beliefs into the parties, a phenomenon that is amplified by the ways that parties nominate people to run for office under their label, and that parties remain unable to discipline their members.
6. Gradually such a welfare state emerged, but not until the 1950s, when the long-gestation policies embedded in Social Security and other programs were able to form their own constituencies that cut across the parties to a great extent ([Eskridge and Ferejohn 2010](#)).

Political Institutions and Political Order(s)

Adam Przeworski

The “normal” exercise of hegemony on the now classical terrain of parliamentary regime is characterized by a combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally, without force predominating excessively over consent... Between consent and force stands corruption/fraud (which is characteristic of certain situations when it is hard to exercise the hegemonic function, and when the use of force is too risky).

– Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*

13.1 INTRODUCTION

Political order can be maintained in different ways, involving different mixtures of force and consent (Gramsci 1971). During most of history, civil peace was maintained when some political forces consolidated their domination to the point that potential challengers were sufficiently intimidated to acquiesce to elections in which they had little of a chance to win: there is nothing new about “electoral authoritarianism.” The shadow of violence fades only when people are wealthy enough not to care much about whatever they can gain by fighting.

The purpose of this analysis is to place contemporary Russia in a broad historical context by analyzing why political order is frequently difficult to establish, why most often it emerges under the dominance of a single political force, and finally why some rulers allow competitive elections and leave office when they lose. By “political order,” I mean something minimal, only the absence of organized violence.¹ To this extent “peaceful order” is redundant. But “order” connotes any regularity and the use of violence can also be regular.

Political order is maintained by a combination of three mechanisms: ideological exhortation, regulation by institutions, and repression.

The first mechanism is exhortation, relying on political myths (Morgan 1988): the claim that “the people” are united, that there are no fundamental

conflicts in society, that interests and values are harmonious, and that collective life can be guided by consensus. “United we stand” is a slogan used by all rulers to induce compliance with whatever they stand for themselves.

The second mechanism is to structure the conflicts that may emerge in society, absorb some of them into an institutional framework, and regulate them according to some rules.

Finally, the last mechanism is repression by force of those conflicts that spill beyond the institutional boundaries.

These mechanisms are substitutes: different mixtures of exhortations of unity, regulation of some conflicts within the institutional framework, and repression of other conflicts generate different kinds of political order but order nevertheless.

My focus here is on the role of political institutions, the second mechanism. I should warn that these are just first thoughts on a complex topic. Moreover, what follows is obviously just an outline of a larger project, so these notes are highly schematic. The text is organized as follows. I first ask what makes political institutions successful in maintaining order. Then I point out that order can be maintained by different combinations of consent and force, and inquire into their determinants. Finally, I touch on the enormous literature concerning regime transitions and propose some hypotheses concerning comparative dynamics of regimes.

13.2 POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND POLITICAL CONFLICTS

13.2.1 Preliminaries

Political institutions peacefully regulate conflicts when most organized political forces channel the pursuit of their interests, values, and ambitions within the institutional framework and when they respect the outcomes resulting from the institutional interplay. Both parts of this definition are necessary because political actors may use political institutions yet may reject an unfavorable outcome. The contractarian theorem – “if actors agree to some rules, they will obey them” or “if they do not intend to obey them, actors will not agree to the rules” (Buchanan and Tullock 1962; Calvert 1994)² – is false.

An institutional order prevails if political activities are limited to organizations that have an institutionally constituted access to the representative system, if these organizations are able to discipline their followers, if they have incentives to pursue their interests through the institutions and to tolerate unfavorable outcomes. Specifically, conflicts are orderly if those political forces that have access to the institutional framework expect that they may be successful, at the present or at least in some not too distant future, by processing their interests within this framework, if alternative courses of action are costly, or if there is little to be gained by using force.

Note that thinking in strategic terms assumes that organizations can direct the actions of their followers. As Maurice Thorez famously remarked in 1936, “one has to know how to end a strike.” Organization, [Pizzorno \(1964\)](#) observed, is a capacity for strategy. Organizations can act strategically only if they can discipline their followers, if they can activate and deactivate them according to strategic considerations. When they do not have this capacity, political conflicts can assume the form of unorganized, “spontaneous” outbursts.

Institutions function under the shadow of violence. To understand civil peace, any kind of political order, it is necessary to ascertain what would have occurred if it broke down. No order is completely peaceful, so that some amount of repression is present even when peace prevails. As someone remarked, “that streets are peaceful does not mean that there is no violence.” But the capacity of any institutional framework to structure, absorb, and regulate conflicts depends on the out-of-equilibrium, counterfactual outcomes of violent confrontations. Specifically, peace prevails when institutions are designed in such a way that the chances of different groups to prevail on the institutional terrain reflect their chances of imposing themselves by other means, primarily force. The relation between military force and institutional chances becomes less important only when people value less whatever they can acquire by fighting. Hence, if conflicts concern income, peace is easier to maintain in wealthier societies.

13.2.2 Structuring Conflicts

All political institutions structure conflicts, by molding the organization of social interests into political forces,³ and by regulating their access to the state.

When the systems of representative institutions were first established, several countries banned all organizations “intermediate” between the individuals and the government. As [Rosanvallon \(2004\)](#) emphasizes, while democracy was not to be direct, it was “immediate,” in the sense that no body could stand between individuals and their representatives. In the famous phrase of Le Chapelier, “there are no more corporations within the state; there is no more that the particular interest of each individual and the general interest. No one is permitted to inspire citizens with intermediate interests, to separate them from the public realm by a spirit of corporation” (quoted by [Rosanvallon 2004](#), 13). The same was true in the United States: when President Washington called political clubs “self-created,” he meant that they were extralegal and that only duly constituted bodies and duly elected representatives should deliberate or exert pressure on public issues ([Palmer 1964](#)). As I document elsewhere ([Przeworski 2010a](#), see also [Rosenblum 2008](#)), the organizations that were particularly feared were “factions” or parties. The unmediated relation between individuals and the state still characterizes some contemporary institutional systems.

The most important difference among political regimes is whether they allow political opposition. Most regimes repress some political ideologies or some political organizations. Some regimes do not allow any opposition; some select the political forces that are permitted to organize (Lust-Okar 2005 on Egypt, the ban on Peronists in an otherwise competitive election in Argentina in 1963, the ban on Islamist parties in several Middle Eastern countries). Even some regimes generally considered as democracies ban forces considered as antidemocratic (the ban on Communists in West Germany, McCarthyism in the United States).

Political parties became at one point the main form for organizing interests. Parties were a mechanism for articulating and aggregating interests, vertical organizations that organized individuals into the state. For reasons that remain obscure (but see Manin 1997), however, political parties became over time organizations that function intermittently only at times of elections. They lost their socially integrative function: no one could say today with Ostrogorsky, “do not convince them, take them in socially.” Any kind of a daily, permanent connection is gone. And when parties do not have a day-to-day vertical connection with people who end up supporting them at the time of elections, they cannot discipline their political actions.

Even in a liberal democracy, not every type of political organization finds a place within the state institutions to which it can address itself. Parties compete in elections, occupy executive and legislative offices, and direct the functioning of the state. Interest groups, whether lobbies of business or non-governmental organizations, seek to influence parties as well as process their demands by addressing themselves directly to the executive, including the lower echelons of the bureaucracy. “Movements,” however, have no institutional address within the state. It is true that political parties often try to exploit the issues raised by nonelectorally oriented movements. But movements are forms of political organization that have no place in the representative institutions or other agencies of the state.

One important difference in structuring conflicts lies in the area of regulation of functionally defined interests. Unions were banned in all European countries until the middle of the nineteenth century. Even when they were finally allowed to organize, in several countries the state recognized only selective forms of organization. While some contemporary democracies permit multiple unions, “neo-corporatist” arrangements consist of selective, compulsory, and monopolistic representation of employees as well as of employers (Schmitter 1974). The fascist system, in its classical Italian form, consisted of state-directed, vertical organization of all functional groups. In some recent systems of “participatory democracy,” such as Ecuador, this form of organization extends to indigenous communities, which are represented as collectivities in various state councils. Indeed, in the model of “communitarian democracy,” “the individual’s freedom is restrained by his or her ties to a moral society. With this harmonious, less competitive system, they hope to avoid the immorality and chaos they perceive in ‘the West’” (Keller 2010, 4).

Powerful private interests have a more direct access to the state. I cannot delve into details – the topic is complex – but only repeat after Holmes (2003) that political institutions absorb political conflicts when those who have economic and perhaps other forms of power find it useful to direct their actions toward political institutions. Political institutions that are autonomous with regard to powerful interests are rare and short-lived. As the experience of the “developmentalist state” has shown, “embedded autonomy” (Evans 1995) is a tenuous equilibrium: if political institutions are effective, they become an attractive target for private interests, if they do not accommodate powerful private interests, they become ineffective.

Civil law and its adjudication by courts individualize conflicts and hence decentralize them. Without recourse to courts, many conflicts assume a form of spontaneous collective protests: China is said to experience between four and five thousands outbursts of collective protest each year. But when individuals can direct their claims to courts, even conflicts between them and the state become decentralized: in Argentina, for example, individuals sue the state in courts for not delivering services guaranteed in the constitution (Smulovitz 2003). The “rule of law” is thus a channel for processing conflicts without collective organization by the claimants.

In sum, states shape the organization of political forces that can appear on the terrain of political institutions. Other forms of political activity are either uneasily tolerated or actively repressed.

13.2.3 Incentives to Participate and to Obey

How then do institutions regulate conflicts? It is useful to inquire separately about the role of competitive elections and about the mechanisms that support peaceful order between competitive elections or with elections that are not competitive.

Elections

One mechanism by which conflicts can be peacefully regulated are competitive elections, elections in which the incumbents can be removed from office by the people’s vote and after which they leave if they lose. This mechanism is simple to understand, and, given that I analyzed it in several forms (Przeworski 1991, 2005, 2010b; Benhabib and Przeworski 2006), here I sketch only the central intuition.

Suppose that political parties or coalitions thereof face a conflict over some policies and that this conflict is resolved once and for all or at least indefinitely. The losing side may then revert to force rather than tolerate this outcome. Yet, if the current losers have some reasonable prospects of reversing the outcome by using the same procedure in the future, they may prefer to wait rather than fight. Think of political succession: if at stake is which dynasty would rule for an indeterminate number of generations, conflicts over succession may assume

the form of civil war; if at stake is who would govern during the next four years, the losers are more likely to wait for their turn.

Elections induce peace because they enable intertemporal horizons. Even if one thinks that people care about outcomes rather than procedures, the prospect that parties sympathetic to their interests may gain the reigns of government induces hope and generates patience. For many, the U.S. election of 2000 was a disaster, but we knew that there would be another one in 2004. When the 2004 election ended up even worse, we still hoped for 2008. And, as unbelievable as it still appears, the country that elected and reelected Bush and Cheney, voted for Obama. Elections are the siren of democracy. They incessantly rekindle our hopes. We are repeatedly eager to be lured by promises, to put our stakes on electoral bets. Hence, we obey and wait.

This mechanism does not work well under all conditions. Most striking is the effect of wealth. Partisan alternations in office are much more frequent, whereas coups and civil wars are much less frequent, indeed, absent, in societies that reach a certain level of income. Whether particular institutional arrangements also matter is more controversial. My view is that they matter in poor societies but not in wealthy ones: specifically, that in poor societies these institutions must give those powerful in terms of extrainstitutional – primarily military – resources enough institutional power to make it attractive for them to process their interests within this institutional framework.⁴ Which institutional arrangements achieve this effect is an issue I leave aside, together with an open question of whether peace can be induced by the presence of neutral “third” parties, such as constitutional courts (Xi 2010).

The role of noncompetitive elections in maintaining political order is less obvious, and to analyze it, we need to take a step back. When we think of competitive elections, we see electoral competition as a process in which parties campaign on their record or by offering policy platforms while voters cast their votes, sincerely or strategically, to maximize their expected utility. But there are much more to elections than competition over popular support:

1. Because elections must be organized by some rules – who can vote, whether voting is direct or indirect, secret or public, compulsory or voluntary, how votes are aggregated, and so on – and because rules affect outcomes, all elections are manipulated, in the sense that different rules may have produced different outcomes. Even minute details, such as the form or the color of ballots, location of the polling places, or the day of the week when voting takes place, can affect the result. As one U.S. politician observed, “in the state of New York, legislators choose voters, rather than voters choosing legislators,” which is literally true: every ten years the leaders of two parties sit around the table and allocate voters to themselves, with the result that the reelection rate to the New York House of Representatives is 99 percent.

2. In many elections, incumbents use the state apparatus and influence mass media in their favor. The idea of an official government list submitted to voters for a plebiscitary approval was present already in France under the Directorate

(Crook 1996), used under Restoration, and perfected under Napoleon III (Zeldin 1958). Promoting government candidates was not a transgression but a duty of public officials: the French prime minister, de Vilèlle, issued in 1822 a circular, instructing, "All those who are members of my ministry must, to keep their jobs, contribute within the limits of their right to the election of M.P.s sincerely attached to the government" (quoted in Zeldin 1958, 79). Partisan use of public administration was ubiquitous in Latin America as well as in Europe. Following Chile after 1831 (about which see Valenzuela 1995), several Latin American countries established stable systems of succession in which incumbent presidents completed their terms, faithfully obeying term limits, chose their successors, and used governmental power to assure their victory at the polls. Until 1920, elections were in all countries administered by the executive, and their results were validated by the newly elected legislatures, so that incumbents had a wide latitude in conducting them. According to IDEA's 2006 survey of 214 countries and territories, this system still prevails in 26 percent of countries covered; in 15 percent elections are administered by the executive and an independent judicial body certifies, whereas electoral management bodies are nominally independent in 55 percent of countries (Wall et al. 2006; in the remaining 4 percent, elections are not held).

3. Finally, in some elections, incumbents and at times the opposition revert to fraud. Note that while manipulation consists of establishing rules, fraud entails breaking rules, whatever they may be.⁵ And setting rules and breaking rules are subject to different sanctions even if they have identical consequences for electoral results. The same physical act – a campaign contribution – has a different meaning and is subject to different reactions when it is permitted by law and when it is illegal: "institutional facts have some autonomy with regard to brute facts" (Sánchez-Cuenca 2003, 81–82).

In sum, election results depend on the distribution of popular support but also on manipulation of rules, the use of state apparatus, and the extent of fraud. And because the relative contributions of these factors cannot be assessed, whenever they win incumbents can, and always do, claim that they are genuinely popular. A proponent of "sovereign democracy," Mikhail Leontiev (in an interview with a Polish newspaper, *Dziennik*, on January 19, 2008) plays on this ambiguity: "I do not understand what is undemocratic in that some force enjoying overwhelming social support wins elections."

With this general background, consider first the extreme case: one-party elections in which 99 percent votes and 99 percent votes for the regime. Many dictators, Communist ones prominently but also several in Africa and some in Latin America, every few years proudly reported that they won 99.28 percent of the popular vote. No one believes that such elections are "democratic": not those who had voted, not those for whom they voted, nor external observers. Such elections demonstrate most flagrantly that voting is not the same as electing. Their purpose is different, namely, to intimidate any potential opposition. Observe that being able to get millions of people to appear in designated places

at designated times and to manifest their compliance with the regime is not an easy undertaking. Such elections show that the dictatorship can make the dog perform tricks, that it can intimidate 99 percent of the population, so that any opposition is futile.

Other authoritarian regimes do want to pass as democracies, so they hold their vote down and claim it to be the free will of the people. Different regimes set different targets for themselves. In competitive elections incumbents want to win at least the share of the vote that would keep them in office according to the rules. In other regimes, say in Mexico under PRI, the incumbents did not want the turnout to fall below 65 percent, whereas under communism, the target was 99 percent. But once such targets become known – and they become known from the result of the past election – failing to reach them, any decline of numbers, indicates a weakening of political control and opens the doors to oppositional activities. Indeed, the fall of Communism in Poland was forecasted by the results of local elections of 1984, in which turnout failed to reach 75 percent: everyone knew that the regime just cannot control the situation any longer. Hence, rulers who hold noncompetitive elections must be concerned about their results. Elections make rulers nervous even when their tenure is not directly at stake because failure to produce the expected targets makes them vulnerable to removal by other mechanisms, whether military intervention or popular mobilization.

Now, the numbers can be manufactured by manipulating the rules or by fraud. One way to think about artificially generated numbers is that because they are not credible, they are discounted by the opposition, so they do not affect the perception of regime's strength. In this view, having to resort to fraud manifests that the regime has insufficient popular support. But I still see the capacity to control the rules and to commit fraud as a signal of regime's strength. Anastasio Somoza famously told his defeated opponent, "You poor s.o.b, you may have won the voting, but I won the counting." In my reading, he was saying that he may have not been popular but he had sufficient control over the apparatus of repression to rule regardless of the level of his popular support. He was saying "try me," and he could say it with impunity because physical force was on his side. Clearly winning the voting is better than winning the counting. Hence, authoritarian regimes that are authentically popular, at least insofar that they can win what they want just by manipulating the rules, may abstain from fraud. Indeed, they may welcome international observers or other monitoring bodies, to make their victory credible (Little 2010). But even fraudulent victories are sufficient to reveal the relations of force.

Thus, making rulers nervous is not specific to competitive elections or, to put it in a more elevated language, accountability mechanisms function even if elections are not competitive. Indeed, there is extensive evidence that authoritarian regimes exhibit electoral business cycles (Blaydes 2006; Block et al. 2003; Pepinsky 2007). Calorie consumption in Egypt is higher in years of elections (Blaydes 2006), and I know from personal experience that meat "appeared"

in Polish shops during weeks preceding elections. Elections impose constraints on rulers, whether or not elections are competitive. Authoritarian leaders seek popularity because relying on repression makes them hostage to the coercive apparatuses, which should make them even more nervous than elections. If they were sufficiently popular, they could run honest elections. Hence, if they run sham elections, it must be that they believe that they could not win on the basis of popular support alone and must calculate that repressing is still better than exposing themselves to the risk of losing. And at least after 1950, authoritarian leaders lasted longer than democratic ones.

Between Competitive Elections, without Competitive Elections

Competitive elections induce civil peace by allowing the conflicting groups to think strategically in intertemporal terms. Noncompetitive elections, in turn, sustain civil peace by demonstrations that opposition would be futile, either because the rulers are authentically popular or because they can hold onto power even if they are not popular. But elections, competitive or not, may be insufficient. How, then, do governments maintain order between competitive elections and without competitive elections? Are the mechanisms the same in the two types of regimes?

Now, an argument can be made that maintaining civil peace between competitive elections is not problematic, precisely because the prospect of being able to win future elections is sufficient to induce the opposition to suffer in silence between elections. While O'Donnell (1994) diagnosed the reduction of politics to elections as a Latin American pathology, "delegative democracy," for James Madison this was how representative government should function: the people should have no role in governing. Lippmann (1956) insisted that the duty of citizens "is to fill the office and not to direct the office-holder." Schumpeter (1942) admonished voters that they "understand that, once they elected an individual, political action is his business not theirs. This means that they must refrain from instructing him what he is to do."

As a description, this picture is obviously inaccurate. Conflicts over policies, competition for political influence, are the bread and butter of everyday politics. Political activities are not limited to elections, not even to efforts oriented to influence outcomes of future elections. But competition for political influence occurs in other political regimes as well. What, then, if anything, is specific to systems that hold competitive elections?

This issue was confronted by Kelsen ([1928] 1988, 65), who was the first to see democracy as a system for processing conflicts. He argued that "the application of the majority principle contains quasi-natural limits. Majority and minority must understand each other if they are to agree." But he encountered a problem so thorny that it required Freudian psychology, the "unconscious," to solve: why would concessions by the majority to the minority be specific to democracy? The only reason he could adduce was psychological: "Democracy

and autocracy thus distinguish themselves by a psychological difference in their political state” (64).

True, under democracy, the opposition can stop or modify some actions of the government. Suppose that the government proposes a policy that is unpopular. If this policy is subject to legislative approval, the government may fail in the parliament. Opposition parties may persuade government supporters to modify their views; they can exercise their institutional prerogatives to block some legislation (in Germany, presidencies of parliamentary committees are distributed proportionately to party strength; in the United Kingdom, the Committee of Public Accounts is by convention controlled by the opposition; in Argentina, passing legislation requires a supermajoritarian quorum); they can threaten with obstructive tactics (a government proposal to privatize an electric utility company was met with thousands of amendments in France; filibuster in the U.S. Senate); they can threaten with noncooperation at lower levels of governments they control. Note that if elections are expected to be competitive, the opposition faces a strategic choice of either accepting concessions from the government or going for broke with the hope of unseating the government in the next election.⁶

But authoritarian regimes also make concessions (Grossman and Noh 1990; McGuire and Olson 1996; Ginkel and Smith 1999; Bertocchi and Spagat 2001). Perhaps these are concessions made by a minority to a majority or at least to some specific groups of regime outsiders, but they constitute compromises in the sense of Kelsen. The extent of concessions depends on (1) the need for cooperation and (2) the threat represented by forces opposing them (Gandhi and Przeworski 2006). Political regimes differ in their need for cooperation: those that can extract rents from mineral resources need little of it, whereas those that must rely on bankers to loan them money, peasants to produce food, and scientists to do research need extensive cooperation. In turn, dictators are dictators because they cannot win elections, because their preferences diverge from those of the majority of the population. Hence, dictators may face a threat of rebellion, and the magnitude of this threat is again not the same for different dictators.

Policy concessions require an institutional forum access to which can be controlled, where demands can be revealed without appearing as acts of resistance, where compromises can be hammered out without undue public scrutiny, and where the resulting agreements can be dressed in a legalistic form and publicized as such. Gandhi and Przeworski (2006) argue that legislatures are ideally suited for these purposes because the dictator can select the groups to be granted access, the participating groups can reveal their demands without appearing to oppose the dictatorship, the flow of information about negotiations can be controlled. The mere existence of a legislature implies both that the dictator at least announces his current wishes and that there are some internal rules that regulate the prerogatives of respective powers (Machiavelli, according to Bobbio 1989). Legislatures are a good instrument because they are not the

inner sanctum of the dictatorship. Most important decisions are made by the dictator or by a narrow clique around him: a royal family council, a military junta, or a party committee. For the opposition, participation in legislatures provides an opportunity to pursue its interests and values within the framework of a dictatorship, to transform the dictatorship from within. When the opposition sees no chance to overthrow a dictator in the foreseeable future, it may prefer limited influence to interminable waiting.

Whether or not elections are competitive, one incentive to make concessions stems from the fear of popular unrest: mass demonstrations that end in violence, general strikes, or riots. When conflicts spill outside the representative framework, governments have only two choices: either to persevere with their policies while reverting to repression or to abandon their policies in order to placate the opposition. Neither alternative is attractive. The spirals of unrest and repression undermine political order, while repeated concessions render governments unable to implement any stable policies. But if the fear of unrest is what motivates governments to make concessions, the mechanism by which peace is maintained is not distinct with or without competitive elections.

Consider the incidence of mass demonstrations, riots, and national strikes in different democracies. Between 1946 and 1996, such events occurred only once in ten years in Norway and Iceland, only once in six years in Austria, and once in four years in Sweden (based on [Banks 1996](#)). Hence, in these countries, political activities were confined almost exclusively to the institutional systems. Now, it may well be that in these countries the prospect of future elections was sufficient to keep all oppositional activities within the institutional framework between elections. But it may also be that different parts of the potential opposition received concessions sufficient for them to refrain from extrainstitutional actions.

Consider a situation in which a government has the monopoly of legislative initiative and is assured of the support of a majority in the legislature. All bills are initiated by the executive, and all the bills become laws. Moreover, the government acts with full legality, so any recourse to the judicial system would be futile. Examine this situation from a point of view of a social group opposed to a particular policy. This group has no chance to influence government policy within the institutional system: the government wants to adopt the policy, the legislature is just a rubber stamp, and the courts have no grounds to intervene. The most this group can expect of the system of representative institutions is that if the policy turns out to be sufficiently unpopular, the government would lose the next election and the policy would be reversed. But suppose that in addition, the government is quite adept in using its partisan control to advance its chance to be reelected. Then this group has nothing to gain by acting within the institutional framework. And under such conditions, it may be sufficiently desperate to try stopping the policy by acting outside the institutional channels, say organizing mass demonstrations, blocking roads, or cutting bridges. In Italy

and France such events transpire almost every two months, in Argentina every three months.

Now, peaceful demonstrations as well as strikes are a standard repertoire of democratic opposition. As [Przeworski et al. \(2000\)](#) show, as a normal and legitimate part of the everyday life of democracies, they have no effect, at least on economic growth. Authoritarian regimes are much more vulnerable to such events, which demonstrate that the regime is not controlling the streets and open the possibility that the regime might fall, with the consequence of lowering the growth rate. But even under democracy, the line between a peaceful exercise of the democratic right to oppose and breakdowns of public order is thin and, as such, subject to political manipulation. For example, David Cameron, the British prime minister, is quoted to have commented on demonstrations by students against raising tuition that “protests were a part of democracy but violence and law-breaking was not.” In fact, neither democratic nor authoritarian governments enjoy facing mass demonstrations against them. And through the latter governments are more prone to use repression, both types are also willing to make some concessions.

13.2.4 Not All Is the Same

In principle, democratic governments can be removed by two mechanisms: elections and what I will generically refer to as “force” ([Bohlken 2010](#)). These mechanisms are not mutually exclusive. Governments willing to risk their rule in elections are not immune to being removed by force: for a long time the main preoccupation of many elected Latin American governments was to complete their term in office rather than to win the next election. “Praetorian politics,” in which some civilian forces deliberately provoke the military to act against the incumbent government, are a standard repertoire of opposition in many countries.

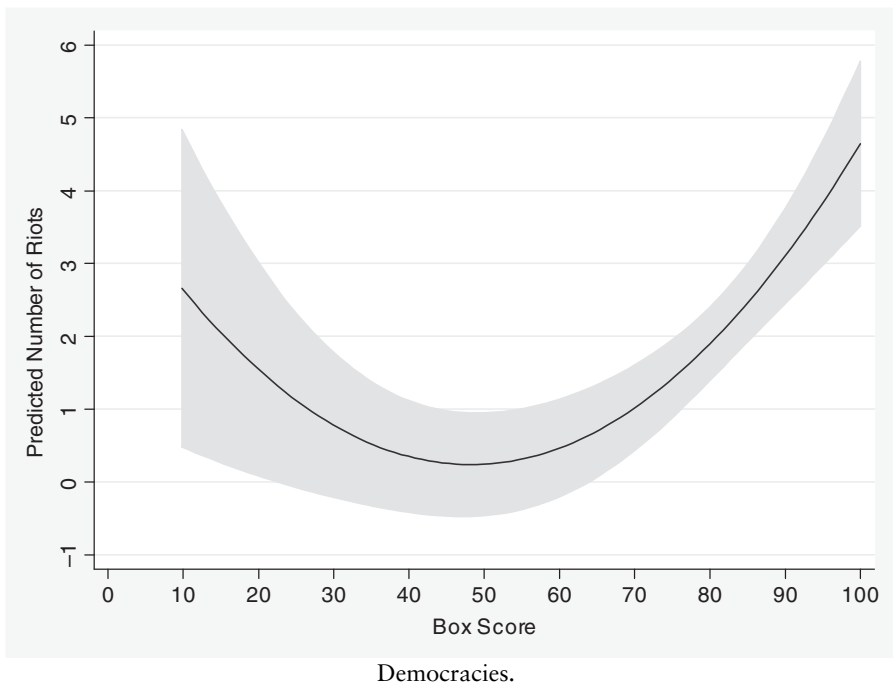
Yet the threat of being removed by force is to some extent endogenous. Competitive elections are a force-avoidance technology: the possibility of voting the incumbents out of office renders the use of force, which is costly, often in lives, relatively less attractive. As expressed by John McGurk, the chairman of the Labour Party in 1919,

we are either constitutionalists or we are not constitutionalists. If we are constitutionalists, if we believe in the efficacy of the political weapon (and we do, or why do we have a Labour Party?) then it is both unwise and undemocratic because we fail to get a majority at the polls to turn around and demand that we should substitute industrial action. (quoted in [Miliband 1975](#), 69)

Moreover, even if the constraints of democratic and authoritarian leaders may be similar, the stakes are different. Losing elections in a democracy is not a great loss (and one can come back), while losing power in an authoritarian one can cost one his life.

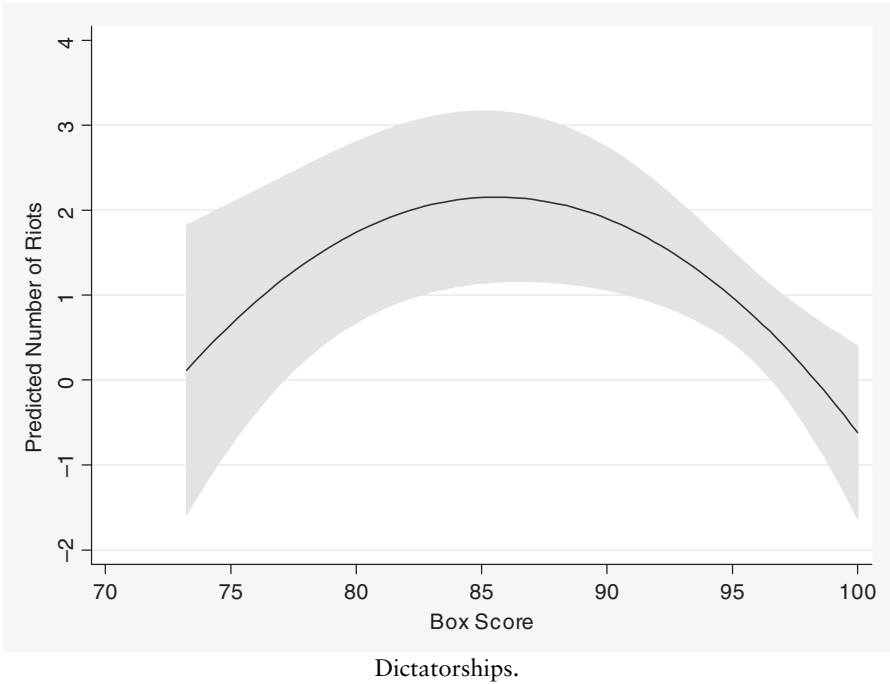
Saiegh (reproduced with his permission) generated interesting information relating the rate at which bills proposed by the executive are approved as laws by legislatures (“Box Score” in the figures) and the incidence of riots. Governments do not always get what they want in the legislatures: according to [Saiegh \(2009\)](#), democratic legislatures approved only 76 percent of bills proposed by the executive during 783 country-years for which these data are available. In turn, they almost always get their way in authoritarian regimes: their average success rate is 96 percent ([Gandhi et al. 2003](#)).

Under democracy (Saiegh’s regime classification is based on ACLP), riots are more frequent when the executive is either not at all effective or when the legislature is just a rubber stamp.



Under dictatorship, however, the U-shape is reversed: riots are more frequent when the grip of the regime is not quite perfect.

I interpret these patterns as saying that under democracy institutions are successful in regulating conflicts when the government is sufficiently effective to be able to govern but the opposition has an important voice in policy making. Under dictatorship, however, any sign that the government does not have full control leads people to the streets. Under democracy, the oppositions abstain from the streets when it can achieve something within the institutional halls; under authoritarianism the opposition reads government defeats within the



institutional framework as a sign of weakness and pushes for more on the streets.

What is different between the two types of regimes is the role of opposition and of repression. If elections are to be competitive, forces opposing the incumbent government must be reasonably free to develop their activities and to seek political support against the government, not only within the parliament but outside of it. In democracies, opposition can speak directly to the people rather than only to the government. This difference must be consequential, although I cannot go beyond speculations in identifying the potential consequences. Note first that it may not be consequential if the opposition invariably criticizes the government while the government always extols its virtues: speech predictable by interests is not credible (Austin-Smith 1993). But if the criticisms by oppositions (deliberately in plural) are at all credible, not only the voters but also the incumbents learn something and perhaps modify their views, perhaps even policies. This is what “the government of public opinion” meant for J. S. Mill. When a million people spill on the streets to protest an educational reform, the government may learn not only that the reform evokes opposition but perhaps also that something is wrong with its design. Manin (1997, 170), for one, argues that

freedom of public opinion is a democratic feature of representative systems, in that it provides a means whereby the voice of the people can reach those who govern....

Representatives are not required to act on the wishes of the people, but neither can they ignore them: freedom of public opinion ensures that such wishes can be expressed and be brought to the attention of those who govern. It is the representatives who make the final decision, but a framework is created in which the will of the people is one of the considerations in their decision process.

But how does opposition to a policy become a consideration in the decision making by governments?

The question is why does the opposition have to speak to the people in order to be heard by the government. If the government is rational and if the opposition says in private something that sounds reasonable, the government should hear it and act on it. The answer may lie in the incentives of the opposition. If the opposition cares foremost about changing the policy, it may inform the government of its errors in private. But informing the government in private about a better course of action makes the government more effective and perhaps more likely to prevail in the next election. Hence, the opposition has incentives to signal what is wrong with government policies in a way that is electorally costly to the government, by going public. The government, in turn, faces a dilemma: acting on the message, it admits having erred; not acting on it results in an inferior policy. Both courses of action may have negative electoral consequences.

In turn, regimes that do not hold competitive elections tend to restrict what can be said in public. While several authoritarian regimes allow public discussions of policy proposals, they still tend to restrict the freedom to criticize the government and the policies already in place. Sometimes they use formal censorship, sometimes only control over the media, sometimes subtler methods. In Mexico under PRI publishing, a scientific article critical of a government policy was likely to result in the author being invited to participate in, sometimes specifically created, Government Advisory Council on this policy, with pay so astronomic that no further criticisms were heard. The extent and the subjects of restrictions vary. It seems that in today's China, for example, there is wide latitude for criticizing some policies but an absolute taboo on criticizing officials (unless they have been already sacrificed). But many, perhaps most, authoritarian regimes do not allow a word of criticism to reach public light.

It is not apparent why governments that cannot be defeated in elections would restrict public debates. What do they have to lose? Something else must be at stake: for some reasons they must appear as infallible. Perhaps the label "authoritarian regime" reveals its nature: the rulers must have authority, must be the authority. Power is not enough: indeed, the program of the Polish Communist (United Workers') Party in the 1970s was to "endow power with authority." Once the authorities pronounce themselves, any polemic, indeed sometimes any variation of the language, appears as contestation of power. This is why authoritarian speech is so wooden. But that is already an effect: had the rulers announced that they could be criticized, criticisms would not be seen as subversive.⁷

It may well be true that rulers facing competitive elections exercise more self-restraint: they steal less, appoint fewer cronies, and so on. But if all rulers are nervous about elections, the electoral constraint alone is not sufficient to account for this difference. Perhaps this is an effect of censorship. In China, only the leaders can say that someone is corrupt. So authoritarian leaders are more corrupt, but they prevent public knowledge of this fact, and it is because they can prevent public accusations of corruption that they are more corrupt. Authoritarian regimes have more to hide, so they must hide it better.

Here, then, is how I see the authoritarian equilibrium, albeit with all the variations and gradations. Any public signal of the weakness of the rulers generates a threat that they could be replaced by means other than elections, a military coup, or a popular mobilization or a combination of both. Because authoritarian rulers treat public criticisms of the regime as subversive, if such criticism were to become public, they would constitute such a signal. Hence, though different groups of the potential opposition may be able to speak to the rulers in private, public criticism are repressed by force. The contrast with regimes that hold competitive elections is thus the freedom of the oppositions to criticize the government in public, with a view of winning the next election.

13.3 DIFFERENT ORDERS

As this discussion indicates, political order can be maintained by different combinations of ideological exhortation, institutional concessions, and repression. Why, then, if some countries are unable to establish any kind of order, a few still maintain order without holding elections, many hold elections in which opposition is either not allowed at all or not given a chance to win, and, finally, some hold elections that are competitive?

Before addressing this question, we must ask why conflicts are processed through elections at all. Fearon (2006) is correct to point out that the desire for peace is not sufficient to justify elections. If everyone knows everything, then they also know the expected value of the policy outcome associated with relative military power of the conflicting parties. Why then hold elections, rather than simply agreeing to this expected value? Moreover, if utility functions are concave in the policy outcomes, agreeing to a fixed policy is superior in welfare terms to policies chosen by alternating parties (Alesina 1988). Hence, additional reasons must be adduced to understand why to be peaceful conflicts must be processed by elections. Przeworski (2005) argues that the policy could not be completely specified and rulers would use their residual power to deviate from any agreement. Fearon (2006) sees elections as a device to coordinate revolt in case the incumbent abuses his power, that is, tilts the policy in his favor. Londregan and Vindigni (2006) think that elections are a cheap way to learn the value of the relative military strength.⁸

Yet one must be careful not to pose this question in functionalist terms. The answer cannot be that we have elections because they are in some way good, because they generate peace or some other efficient outcomes. Elections

occur either because incumbents want to hold them or because those who do not hold them are deposed. Rulers utilize instruments that make their tenure most secure. If they are safest by not holding elections, they do not hold them; if they find sham elections to be safer than reliance on force alone, they hold noncompetitive elections; if they cannot muster sufficient force, they reconcile themselves to risking their tenure in elections.

True, this is a jaundiced view of politicians. One might hope that some of them are true democrats, willing to expose themselves to competition even if they are not compelled to do so by the circumstances (Hyde 2007). After all, the possibility that President Bush or Prime Minister Aznar would not hold a scheduled election or manipulate the rules to make competition impossible or engage in massive vote buying is inconceivable. But is it because they are true democrats or because they have no choice but?

A schematic explanation of the comparative statics of different forms of political order (based on Przeworski 2010b) is that whether elections regulate government change depends on the balance of military force between the contesting sides. Countries suffer from civil strife when the state does not have the capacity to deter armed challenges and political forces are polarized in terms of their policy preferences. In the increasingly rare countries in which no elections are held, limited now to the Middle East, the rulers control powerful repressive forces. Noncompetitive elections, elections in which voting does not serve to select governments, occur when the repressive apparatuses are sufficiently strong to ward off potential oppositions but the rulers fear being held hostage by these apparatuses. Finally, elections are competitive when the polity is not highly polarized and neither the current incumbent nor the potential challengers have an overwhelming military advantage. Their results are obeyed if the military are nonpartisan or if political forces are moderate or if the country has a high income.

One reason rulers may want to hold elections is to gain some autonomy from the armed organizations on which they rely to maintain themselves in power. To conduct noncompetitive elections, incumbents need to rely on the compliance of the state bureaucracy and must be assured of the support by the apparatuses of repressions – secret police, public police, the different branches of the military. But relying exclusively on the support of repressive forces places the incumbents in their hands. Being elected, even in noncompetitive elections, constitutes an autonomous source of power because it places the repressive forces that would want to control or even to depose the ruler in a situation of having to act against an expression of popular support, some of which is genuine. Putin may be a KGB delegate in the government but being able to claim popular support frees Putin from being a mere a tool of the KGB. Playing two sources of support – organized force and elections – against one another gives rulers some autonomy with regard to both.

Partisanship of the coercive apparatus places a wedge between the coercive power of the state and the repressive capacity of the particular incumbents. States may be highly effective in organizing and monopolizing the coercive

force, yet those who wield this force may be nonpartisan, constitutionalist, so that the control over the repressive apparatus rests in the hands of elected civilian governments. For example, General Fidel Ramos in the Philippines supported Corazon Aquino after President Ferdinand Marcos was caught at having committed fraud in the election of 1985 and peaceful competitive elections ensued. In turn, other states may be able to utilize powerful repressive forces for partisan purposes. An example is the battalion of the Russian army that executed the order of President Boris Yeltsin to shell the parliament.

We should thus not be surprised if incumbents repeatedly win elections. Peaceful elections are not necessarily, indeed they are rarely, competitive. Most peaceful elections are neither “fair,” nor “genuine,” nor “democratic,” to use the language of election monitoring agencies.⁹ Although some voices claim that we are currently witnessing an emergence of a qualitatively new phenomenon, “electoral authoritarianism,” such regimes were the prevalent form of political organization throughout history. Indeed, an examination of 2,775 elections in the world since 1788 shows that incumbents (parties or persons or their designated successors) lost only one election in five (PIPE data set).

Thus elections occur in the shadow of violence. The power to use violence is a political power. But the relations of physical force do not uniquely determine the outcomes. What one does with power depends on what one wants to achieve and what one fears from one’s allies and from one’s opponents.

13.4 REGIME DYNAMICS

The literature on transitions to democracy is so enormous that I cannot give it justice within the confines of this essay. Let me just emphasize that the first wave of this literature (O’Donnell et al. 1986) conceptualized regime dynamics in terms of “transition from,” from authoritarianism that is, not “to” anything. Democracy was an absence, what was missing in authoritarianism. As Shapiro (1999, 2) observes, “John Dewey’s comment on older democratic revolutions rings equally true of our own: they aimed less to implement an abstract democratic ideal than ‘to remedy evils experienced in consequence of prior political institutions.’” This formulation was thus not teleological: breakdown of an authoritarian regime was not seen as inevitably leading to democracy. One authoritarian regime can be replaced by another or get stuck in some form that does not easily fall into this dichotomy (see Makarenko and Melville, this volume).

With this caveat, this is how I see the dynamic resulting in breakdowns of particular authoritarian regimes. Though such breakdowns are frequently classified as occurring “from above” or “from below,” from divisions within the regime or from mass mobilization, in my view all breakdowns follow a dynamic that entails an interaction of both. An authoritarian elite divides when some faction within it – and there are always factions – perceives that it can improve its relative position within the regime by appealing to some outsiders. They

advocate within the authoritarian block a strategy of “broadening the bases of the regime.” If this strategy is successful, we experience a “thaw”: the liberalizers take over, the regime becomes somewhat more inclusive, and this becomes the new equilibrium. But if and when such divisions become public, some sectors of the opposition sense blood and seek to push changes further by mobilizing their supporters. Now the divisions within the regime become more profound: threatened with a loss of control, the hardliners within the regime want to revert to repression, liberalizers have committed themselves to reducing repression, and some sectors of the population are visibly mobilized. The outcomes are not predetermined – various authoritarian regimes experienced grim periods euphemistically dubbed “normalization” – but they are open-ended.

While in this account the process begins with divisions within the regime, it may as well be sparked by outbursts of popular unrest, that in turn pose a sharp choice to the elite and generates divisions within it. The same dynamic then ensues, so that the initial impetus may not be important for the subsequent dynamic. The dynamic of regime breakdowns is a spiral of intraregime divisions and of popular mobilization.

A question that remains perplexing is why some authoritarian regimes are replaced by other authoritarian ones, whereas a collapse of other regimes results in democracy. Again, I can only highlight one analytical aspect of this puzzle. What is crucial in my view is whether whoever are the rulers at such moments expect that if they were to hold a competitive election, giving someone else a chance to win, the eventual winner would reciprocate: the current incumbent will administer a competitive election only if it expects that if it loses, it will be given a chance to win in some future. Whether these expectations are a matter of “trust” or of beliefs about the relations of force is not an empirical matter. As the experience of the U.S. elections of 1800 demonstrates (see Dunn 2004), the decision to let go the reigns of power in the hope that they would be or at least may be returned is extremely difficult. And it also crucial: what we do see empirically is that elections that resulted in a peaceful partisan alternation in office tend to be followed by periods during which competitive elections are the norm, coups are less frequent, and elected governments tend to complete their terms.¹⁰ Hence, there is strong evidence of path dependence, with paths diverging depending on the competitiveness of the first election following the breakdown of a particular authoritarian regime. Particularly in the post-Soviet context, those countries in which the first elections after the fall of Communism were competitive continued to hold competitive elections with relatively frequent partisan alternations in office, whereas those countries in which the incumbent rulers conducted a noncompetitive election either persist under the same rule or suffer from episodes of mass protests and violence. Makarenko and Melville (this volume) provide evidence that the difference between these countries is more a matter of leadership than of objective conditions, evidence which is supported by Migranyan’s (this volume) analysis of Yeltsin.

13.5 CONCLUSIONS

I seem to have arrived at the following conclusions:

1. Competitive elections support peaceful order by allowing the conflicting political forces to act strategically over time. Noncompetitive elections, in turn, sustain civil peace by demonstrations that opposition would be futile, either because the rulers are authentically popular or because they can hold to power by force even if they are not popular.
2. Whether elections are competitive or not, rulers face the constraint of maintaining peace on the streets, public order. To prevent unrest, in both regimes, rulers make policy concessions. But in systems with competitive elections, these concessions respond to public opposition to particular policies, whereas under authoritarianism, concessions are made in private and public criticisms of the government are repressed by force. Hence, a major difference between regimes in which elections are competitive and those in which they are not is the freedom of oppositions to address itself directly to the public.
3. Political order is maintained under the shadow of force. Whether the incumbent rulers allow public opposition, whether they hold elections, and whether they risk their tenure in elections depends on the physical force they can muster. Hence, political regimes are endogenous with regard to the relations of physical force. All rulers must be concerned about the support of the repressive apparatuses and if they cannot rely on their support they are compelled to hold competitive elections.
4. Authoritarian order breaks down when divisions within the regime become public, thus opening the space for popular mobilization. Breakdowns are a dynamic process of division and mobilization. Yet breakdowns of particular authoritarian regimes need not lead to democracy: they may result in another authoritarian regime or some intermediate forms.

Notes

1. I share this conception of political order with [Huntington \(1968\)](#), with whom I part ways later.
2. According to [Calvert \(1994, 33\)](#), “should players explicitly agree on a particular equilibrium of the underlying game as an institution, and then in some sense end their communication about institutional design, they will have the proper incentives to adhere to the agreement since it is an equilibrium . . . Any agreement reached is then automatically enforced (since it is self-enforcing), as required for a bargaining problem.”
3. I am grateful to Carlos Acuña for bringing this role of institutions to my attention.
4. Commenting on the experience of mid-nineteenth-century Mexico, [Aguilar \(1998\)](#) points out, for example, that constitutions that make the legislature supreme (“strict separation of powers”) deteriorate into regimes of exception when the institutionally weak presidents command the armed forces.

5. On the difficulties of defining fraud, see [Annino \(1995, 15–18\)](#). On corrupt electoral practices in Latin America, see [Posada-Carbó \(2000\)](#).
6. For example, in Brazil under the presidency of Fernando Henrique Cardoso, most parties were willing to support the government in exchange for pork barrel spending, but the Workers Party invariably voted against the government and won the presidential election.
7. In Communist Poland, jazz was considered as music emanating from the imperialist United States and was treated as subversive until 1954, when it was reinterpreted as a music of the oppressed and allowed to become public.
8. This was already the view of [Simmel \(1950, 241–42\)](#): “because the voting individuals are considered to be equals, the majority has the physical power to coerce the minority. . . . The voting serves the purpose of avoiding the immediate contest of forces and finding out its potential result by counting votes, so that the minority can convince itself that its actual resistance would be of no avail.”
9. European Union observers want elections to be “open and fair,” OSCE wants them to be “genuine,” and the Declaration of Principles for International Elections Observation of the Carter Center and NDI wants them to be “genuine and democratic.” Everyone also wants elections to be nonviolent. See, respectively, [European Commission \(2008\)](#), [OSCE \(2007\)](#), [Carter Center \(2005\)](#).
10. Once the first alternation occurs in a country, about one subsequent election in three (0.35 of 1355 elections) results in peaceful alternations. Before the first alternation, coups occur with annual frequency of 0.0682, after the first alternation with the frequency of 0.0310. Before the first alternation, years of completed constitutional terms constitute 0.63 of 6210 years, after the first alternation they make 0.82 of 4753 years. The effect of first alternation on coups and completed terms survive in probit regressions is controlled for per capita income. Based on the PIPE data set.

How Do Transitions to Democracy Get Stuck, and Where?

Boris Makarenko and Andrei Melville

14.1 THE PROBLEM

As we all may still remember, the early 1990s was a unique period of almost universal “democratic optimism.” Indeed, this was an apogee of the “third wave” of democratization. In the political discourse, there was near dominance of a linear, kind of “vectorial” perception of global political trends: from the breakdown of various forms of autocracy to liberal democracy and market economy. It was as if, with the collapse of Communism, only one universal political goal and one anticipated political end result of global dynamic remained on the agenda – liberal democracy and free market economy.

There seemed to be only one dominant political trajectory of democratization that should be pursued by all nations of the world: Karl Marx “upside down,” or Communist Manifesto *per contra*: all nations sooner or later will become liberal democracies – some earlier, others later.

The world was perceived as flexible and “plastic” – you can “craft” (not “breed”!) democracy (Di Palma 1991) as you know “the” proper institutional design and can master appropriate political engineering. Democracy was perceived as a universal value and model with a specific invariant (though maybe not the concrete form) that would fit all nations despite all their differences in history, culture, levels of development, and so on (Sen 1999).

However, twenty years since then, the world looks very different. As if after a global political “big bang,” we can see and experience an incredible multiplicity of political trajectories – kinds of “receding political galaxies” rushing in all possible directions and defying traditional regime typologies. Hopes or illusions about one single, uniform vector of global political development – from authoritarianism to democracy – are practically forgotten.

There is much talk nowadays about the “democratic rollback” (Diamond 2008a), “authoritarian diffusion” (Ambrosio 2010), “democratic stagnation,”

“postdemocracy” (Crouch 2003), threats of degeneration into ochlocracy, and “audience democracy” (Manin 1997). Democratic accomplishments of previous decades are considered as “lexical victories” of democracy (Dunn 2010). Democracy itself is no longer perceived by many as a universal value and model ready for replication. The argument in favor of “national models” of democracy often serves to justify nondemocratic practices.

Are there indeed grounds for “democratic pessimism”? There is hardly a simple yes or no answer. Some countries explicitly strived to build democracies and succeeded, others hardly had democratization in mind, and if and then its leaders talked about democracy, it was only done to please their Western partners. In between these two extremes, we find various models of transformation with controversial or “hybrid” results. A very preliminary “audit” of the results of the “third wave” reveals a great variety of political regimes – remaining unaffected by this “wave” and as well resulting from it. On one pole of the global spectrum of political regimes, we may place established “old” democracies and successful and consolidated “new” liberal democracies which joined the democratic club. The list of the new “full members” varies from one typology to another (Freedom House, Polity IV, Tatu Vanhanen’s ID, The Economist’ ID, BTI, etc.) but in any case is not overwhelming – just a few of all those who started “the race” are there.

Overall results of the regime transformations of the previous two and a half decades should not be underestimated. After it we can see two continents, Europe and the Americas, inhabited by democracies, with a few enclaves remaining (Belarus, Haiti, arguably Russia and Venezuela) and numerous “flawed democracies.” New democracies emerged in Asia and even in Africa; in fact only the Arab world remains impregnable to democratization (Diamond 2010). But right in front of our eyes, people rebelled against dictatorship and scored a number of successes so far, though it brought about a new threat of Islamic fundamentalism. The main battlefields are non-Arab and non-Soviet parts of Asia and Africa, and the CIS.

Autocratic nondemocratizers form the core of the club of “really existing nondemocracies,” which comprises a large variety of typologically different regimes (Snyder 2006; Brooker 2009; Levitsky and Way 2010; Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Gandhi 2008; Charron and Lapuente 2011) – from the rubbles of totalitarian/posttotalitarian systems to still effectively ruling monarchies, personalistic dictatorships, theocracies and ethnocracies, military regimes, and failed states that may look like autocracies but in fact do not master effective rule at all.

In between the two poles, we may want to place an incredible “nebula” of intermediary regime types that in fact did experience some kind of transition and transformation – however, not toward the expected democratic goal but in some other directions. They did not come anywhere close to becoming even flawed democracies. The questions of where those transformations are leading and do or do they not constitute an inevitable phase on the long and winding

road to would-be democratization remain unanswered by comparative political science and yet have to be conceptualized (a great task for comparative politics!). Among those we may mention an impressive diversity of “democracies with adjectives” as well as “autocracies with adjectives” – “illiberal democracies” (Zakaria 1997), “hybrid regimes” (Diamond 2002), “electoral authoritarianism” (Schedler 2006), “competitive authoritarianism” (Levitsky and Way 2002), and so on.

Very close to “old” autocratic nondemocratizers we may place “new” autocracies of different types, which in essence are particular subproducts of multidimensional political transformations of the last decades. Among those are new “elected monarchies” and “hereditary presidencies,” “clannish” regimes, and so on. Some of them may superficially look like not being in transition at all, but in fact this is not the case. They either got stuck in the transition process or finally drifted back to the authoritarian pole, thus creating new types of autocracies, or got transformed into these new types of autocracies almost directly out of more conventional authoritarian regime types (this political trajectory primarily refers to some of the post-Soviet transformations).

How to explain such a great variety of regime-change outcomes of the last decades? Why did some countries attempt to democratize and others did not? Why did so many transitions fail to develop into democratization? Which factors did play a decisive role in particular regime outcomes – absence or inadequate “objective” (“structural”) preconditions for democracy and democratization or “subjective” policies and “actor-related” factors, like “ill will,” personal ambitions or perceptions, vested interests, mistakes of actors involved in the transformation processes, and so on?

In other words, which factors are responsible for transitions that got stuck, deviated from the expected “route,” or just failed – absent adequate preconditions for democracy or with inadequate particular policies of the key political actors?

14.2 PRECONDITIONS VERSUS POLICIES IN THE STUDY OF DEMOCRACY AND DEMOCRATIZATION

On the basis of existing literature, one may single out two “big” paradigms in democracy and democratization studies – one focuses on preconditions for democracy, another on particular policies and decisions (e.g., Mahoney and Snyder 1995). According to the first approach, democracy emerges “organically” out of a set of particular preconditions (prerequisites): “Democracy emerges successfully only as a capstone to other social and economic achievements” (Kaplan 1997, 60). This approach is particularly relevant to the analysis of the first and second “waves” of democratization, that is, the emergence of democratic polities since the end of the eighteenth century until the period after the second World War, when democracy appeared not so much as a

goal but rather as some sort of organic and collateral result of “objective” socioeconomic transformations (Moore 1966; Rustow 1970).

Even an elementary inventory of all approaches to the analysis of structural preconditions of democracy may become almost endless. However, for the sake of further discussion, we would like to mention at least some major ones.

Undoubtedly, the dominant theme within this context is the level of socioeconomic development with the primary focus on GDP per capita (with all the variations). From Lipset (1959) to Przeworski et al. (2000), there are myriad studies related to the issue, and the literature is almost insurmountable. However, despite some continuing debates over particular details (e.g., Epstein et al. 2006), there seems to be at least a basic consensus – there is a positive relationship between economic growth and democracy and democratization which though is not deterministic, i.e. transition to democracy may actually start at different levels of economic development but the higher GDP per capita – the higher chances for democracy to succeed and not to get reversed into autocracy.¹

Since Rustow (1970), another idea widely accepted in the literature is the thesis that national identity and effective state (stateness) are basic preconditions for democracy (Tilly 2007; Fukuyama 2007; Mansfield and Snyder 2007; Moller and Skaaning 2011). Political culture of the “civic” type is also acknowledged as another important condition for democracy to endure (arguments from Almond and Verba 1965 to Inglehart and Welzel 2005, Fish 2009, and others).

Among other preconditions of democracy, the literature stresses the absence of irreconcilable social, ethnic, religious, and so on, ruptures and cleavages (Chirot 2009), a “non-réntier” economy, that is, “resource curse” arguments (Ross 2001; Treisman 2010); particular religious traditions, that is, arguments in favor of Protestantism and against Islam; ambiguities about Orthodoxy, Confucianism, and Buddhism; and almost complete silence about Judaism (Fish 2002; Diamond 2010). Some other authors would stress international influences, including proximity to established democracies, role of colonial heritage, quality of institutions, and even the role of climate and an average level of the national IQ (Vanhanen 2009).

One should note that almost all of these structural factors (in any combination) are considered, especially in recent literature, as important but not predetermining causes of democracy and democratization. “Initial conditions do significantly affect the survival chances of democratic regimes. Low per capita income, high levels of inequality, high rates of poverty jeopardize the prospects of democratization. Yet these relationships are not deterministic” (Kapstein and Converse 2008, 61–62).

Other structural factors that may complicate democratization (and in any case seriously influence the political mentality of actors) are type of economy and society in which traditional structures and traditional values (as defined,

for example, by Inglehart-Welzel mapping of the world values) remain predominant. Type of economy matters in other aspects, such as degree of dependence on raw material exports (“resource curse”), degree of departure from traditional society; and degree of government (ruling elite) control over the economy and development of private enterprise. The “oil factor” was interpreted by [Huntington \(1991\)](#) as “no representation without taxation” – lack of pressure or stimuli for introducing pluralism in regimes endowed with high export revenues may want further explication. Concentration of economic resources and wealth (particularly export revenues and international aid) in the hands of the ruling class, underdevelopment of private enterprise, and high corruption are all factors impeding democratization.

Another group of structural obstacles to democratization has to do with types of cleavages in the society. Antagonistic types of such cleavages include “conventional” forms, such as ethnic, confessional, or separatist (which is hardly more than geographical incarnation of the same). However, we ought to consider more nuanced forms of cleavages, such as standoffs between secular and religious segments: “milder” European forms of these are wonderfully described in the four basic case studies in [Lijphart’s \(1977\)](#) “Democracy in Plural Societies”; nowadays the potential “suspects” are Moslem, primarily Arab societies ([Diamond 2010](#)), or selected post-Communist states, primarily Russia, where the post-Communist regime faced a threat of antagonistic Communist restoration.

An alternative – policy-oriented – approach refers predominantly to transitions of the “third wave” and is based on the assumption that democracy can be “crafted,” or “engineered,” through appropriate strategies and tactical choices: “There are no preconditions for democracy, other than a willingness on the part of a nation’s elite to attempt to govern by democratic means” ([Diamond 2003](#)). The major themes of this approach are the following:

In the first place are the role of actor’s interactions (“games”), such as configuration of major “players,” types of “exit” from authoritarianism, attitudes toward the opposition (including violence), competition, replacement of elites, rotation of power, conduct and quality of elections, and so on ([O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986](#); [Przeworski 1991](#); [Linz and Stepan 1996](#); [Colomer 2000](#)). Another theme frequently discussed in such contexts is the impact of particular institutional designs for new democracies (presidential – parliamentary, proportional – majoritarian, etc.). Finally, and this becomes one of the key points in recent research on “derailed” and/or failed transitions, is existence or absence of effective institutional constraints on the executive, restricting the chances for abusive rule (irrespective of a particular institutional design) ([Fish 2006](#); [Fish and Wittenberg 2009](#)).

Of course, one should not exaggerate the opposition and the seeming incompatibility of these two approaches. “Objective” structures are largely reproduced through “subjective” actions and policies, while chosen procedures have their specific historical, socioeconomic, political, and so on, grounds.

As Przeworski commented on one of the crucial components of the policy-centered approach: “More than elections are needed for elections to be held” (Przeworski 1999, 24). In the words of Linz (2007, 136),

there is little doubt that structural factors – political, economic, social, and cultural – are of particular relevance in understanding the process of consolidation and the tasks of democrats in that process. Since many of those structural conditions cannot be changed in the short run, we have to focus more on those amenable to political engineering. . . . The renewed attention paid to the social economic conditions, favorable or unfavorable to democracy, on which our knowledge is quite solid, is significant. However, we cannot exclude the possibility of transcending those conditioning factors through political leadership and political engineering

We should also acknowledge the importance of understanding particular “really existing democracies” (as well as “not yet democracies”) through specific “genetic” lenses – not as an attained state but as a process, which is especially relevant to the analysis of “new” democracies and their trajectories. Different polities may find themselves at different stages of their evolutionary development and may face different challenges and tasks. Some may enjoy centuries of gradual and “organic” democratic development, while others just a couple of decades or even years. The latter may simultaneously face incredible challenges of state building and national integration. We believe, however, that history should hardly be regarded as an excuse for evading difficult tasks of democracy building.

Anyway, these two approaches – the first stressing the role of preconditions for democracy and the second underlining the role of policy choices and actions of political actors – present us with alternative explanations of the emergence of democracy. The first one appears to pertain to cases of democratic polities since the end of the eighteenth century until the 1960s, where democratization was a fruit of “organic growth” of endogenous factors and actors. The second approach is dominant in the recent mainstream literature on democratizations of the last decades and seems to better fit the cases normally described as the “third wave.” Now let us look at the issue of preconditions and policies as possible predictors and explanations of the stuck or failed democratizations.

14.3 WHY AND HOW DEMOCRATIZATIONS FAIL

Can structural approach alone predict or explain the fate of democratic transitions? Indeed, on the basis of existing knowledge about “objective” preconditions of democracy, one may argue that some (if not many) nations may lack those today to effectively become (or to be made) democracies.² For example, recent research data seem to confirm the argument that low levels of socioeconomic development correlate positively with unsuccessful transitions to democracy – as well as reliance on oil exports (“resource curse”), predominance of Islam (and Muslim population), and weak traditions of independent stateness

and national identity (Fish and Wittenberg 2009). However, as these authors (and others) demonstrate, structural preconditions alone (or their absence, on the other side) cannot adequately predict the outcome of transition – whether it will lead to consolidated or defective democracy, to some kind of hybrid regime, or to new autocracy. Hypothetically, there may be a “prohibiting threshold” of unfavorable structural preconditions that would render any policy options futile, but it still awaits its empirical study and further conceptualization. The resulting argument is that it is crucially important to concentrate on policy factors to explain successes and failures of democratization.

Furthermore, a recent large-*N* study of 142 countries over the period 1972–2000 by Teorell and Hadenius (2007) to a large extent confirms these general conclusions: higher socioeconomic levels of development do not adequately predict democratization but may prevent authoritarian detours – this finding is similar to Przeworski et al. (2000); abundance of natural resources, oil in particular, has an antidemocratic effect as well as Islam as a dominant religion. Overall, these conclusions lend “strong support to the anti-structural, actor-oriented, ‘no preconditions’-approach to democratization” (Teorell and Hadenius 2007, 69).

The role of other “objective” preconditions and their impact (or lack thereof) upon trajectories of political transformations of the last decades requires further detailed analysis, though at least one conclusion is quite appropriate: stuck and failed democratizations need to be understood largely within the context of “subjective” political decisions and actions. This does not mean to ignore the impact of “structures” at all; however, it does imply a definitive shift in the analytical focus.

Indeed, a growing body of literature focuses on the role of procedural (actor-oriented) factors in explaining successful and failed outcomes of attempts to democratize. Some would blame the actors themselves – “chief executives may bury democratization by engaging in despotic action” (Fish and Wittenberg 2009, 258). Others would stress the perils of excessively strong executive power (Linz 1990; Fish 2004) and the absence of effective institutional constraints on executive power (Kapstein and Converse 2008). Political impacts of particular institutional designs on transition outcomes continue to be debated with somewhat mixed results, however leaning toward the conclusion in favor of positive relationship between parliamentary systems and sustainability of new democracies. Also, analysis of a variety of country-specific (particularly post-Communist) case studies seems to demonstrate that a *de facto* preservation (“mimicry”) of the old elites with their vested interests and patterns of power reproduction may be one of important causes of inhibition of democratization and sliding into nondemocratic outcomes.

Other potential obstacles to democratization are unsolved problems of state and nation building, often characteristic of post-Communist countries. In most “old” democracies, the path of political development followed the same sequence: first, modern European states emerged in wars and violence

(Tilly 1990), and only then democratization occurred, that is, the formation of sound and efficient state institutions preceded the emergence of democratic procedures. This historic trend is often used nowadays as an argument against “hasty” democratization and advocates the following sequencing: strong statehood (or “vertical of power” in Russian political slang) comes before a democratic regime, implying that democratization without sound and efficient institutions would precipitate disorder and chaos (Fukuyama 2004; Polterovich and Popov 2006; Fukuyama 2007; Mansfield and Snyder 2007).

The argument, albeit strong, is not convincing. True, “democracy is a form of governance of a modern state. Thus, without a state no modern democracy is possible” (Linz and Stepan 1996, 17). The real issue, however, is that “a state” is not an abstraction, but in each case a particular form of statehood and political regimes. Different states may have different sets of priorities and perform its functions in different ways. It implies that we need further elaboration on the notion of state as a prerequisite of democracy.³

Is the reference to European historic experience sufficient to extrapolate this sequencing to the entire global context of today? Multidimensional and multidirectional logic of political development necessitates a more nuanced analysis of such sequencing. We can find numerous theoretical and empirical evidence that state-building and democratization can develop in parallel and mutually reinforcing manner. Rose and Shin (2001) and also Elster et al. (1998) analyzing the Central and Eastern Europe experience confirm the feasibility of “[re]building the ship of state at sea”, that is, constructing democratic institutions from scratch in the transition countries of the “third wave.” Bratton and Chang (2006), on the basis of empirical analysis of regime changes in several African states in transition, conclude that state building and democratization are intertwined. Carbone and Memoli (2012) come to a similar conclusion on a broader sample.

What remains unclear is the height of a “minimal threshold” of state capacity that allows democratization to unveil, because it is by definition impossible in “failed states.” The literature raises this question but does not provide an answer or evidence based on empirical studies (Capelli 2008; Fortin 2012).

Neither do we have sufficient clarification on the desirable strategies of key actors in the conditions of deficit of efficient and high quality institutions, a typical situation in the countries in transition. Grzymala-Busse and Luong (2015), basing on comparative analysis of post-Communist transformations, distinguish between two alternative strategies: the first concentrates on the interests of “early winners,” who benefitted from privatization of public assets; they strive to preserve the status quo and minimize competition; the second strategy tends to “protect the losers,” that is, safeguard genuine political and economic competition, under which the “early losers” get a chance of “revenge” under democratic procedures. They effectively elaborate on the arguments of Hellman (1998) about “winners who take all.” In a sense, Hellman challenges the so-called J-curve logic, which asserts that the main obstacle in the way of reforms

in societies in transition is the imminent deterioration of socioeconomic situation in early stages of transition: the reforms undermine economic and political stability, begetting resistance of “early losers” (first and foremost, the “new poor” from various social strata). The problem, therefore, is how to avoid the inevitable descent into the “valley of transition” (the seminal expression from [Przeworski 1991](#) or the “valley of tears” [Schmitter 2005](#)) and how to reach the peak of reforms which would improve the situation for all groups of society in transition. Hellman’s arguments state that the “early winners” have no motivation to continue reforms, once they ensure access to economic rent under “bad” state institutions. Notably, this is a strong argument against advocates of “desirable authoritarianism” in early stages of transition, which presumably facilitates economic and other reforms. It might have been true of 1980s when the transitions constituted a transfer from agrarian to industrial societies (South Korea, Taiwan, etc.), but it has never been true of contemporary transitions from industrial to postindustrial, innovative, high-tech societies.

We would go further and extrapolate this logic from economic to political rent. Such an extrapolation is of particular importance when we look at post-Communist societies we discuss later: at the starting point of transition these countries had no market economy; due to that, in many of them, power and property relations were intertwined, that is, political rent was superimposed over economic. In the “stuck” transitions (or in authoritarian relapses) in the post-Communist world, winning elites ensured the “king of the hill” positions and ensured extraction of political and economic rent. These elites effectively lack any motive or interest to build quality institutions of governance and democratic practices. The institutes they built are “bad” (corrupt, nontransparent, inefficient), yet for their purposes such institutions are “good,” because they perform exactly the functions for which they were created and solidify the “institutional trap” ([Gelman 2010](#)). As a result, the state is “seized,” sometimes by force ([Volkov 2002](#)), and a “big” though “weak” from an institutional point of view state prevails ([Petrov 2011](#)). The main motive that drives resistance to further reforms and fixing the stability of status quo is economic and political rent rather than safeguards of property and economic and political competition; effectively, such a regime becomes an obstacle to democratization.

Figure [14.1](#) illustrates this problem. It demonstrates that the real impediment to reforms is caused not by “early losers” from whom presumably the regime that is growing “reluctantly” or almost “benignly” authoritarian wants to insulate itself, but rather by “early winners” who do their utmost to halt further reforms or devalue its substance and reduce it to an imitation. We further modify Hellman’s “winners’ curve”: his model implies primarily economic rent; we add the factor of political rent, that is, the attempted preservation of political status quo and reduction of political competition, because political rent is equivalent to monopoly of power and constitutes a precondition for extraction of economic rent.

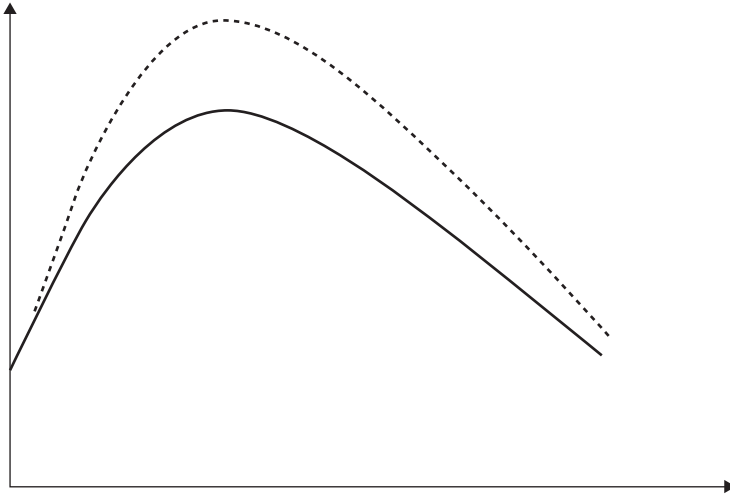


FIGURE 14.1.

The graph displays the “king of the hill” position of those elite groups in post-Communist countries that successfully ensured for themselves political and economic rent, and therefore lack any motive to improve the quality of institutions or political competition (the vertical axis demonstrates levels of extraction of political and economic rent, the horizontal axis, dynamics of quality of institutions). The battle cry of such elites is stability and status quo. They fear to lose their privileged position. Political rent in such a situation becomes a precondition and a *sine qua non* for the extraction of economic rent. The dotted curve demonstrates exaggerated fears of privileged elites: their fear that increased competition in politics and the economy will precipitate not only loss of the “seized privileges” and status, but even criminal prosecution (which really occurred in selected post-Communist and other countries). The graph shows that the dotted “curve of fears” at any given moment raises higher than the actual level of extraction, higher even than the peak of “king of the hill” situation. Even in a hypothetical case of “downhill” movement, that is, a shift toward greater political and economic competition, the level of fears of winning elites for their personal fate and property remains higher anyway. Incidentally, this conclusion is nothing more than a variation of a classic problem raised at earlier stages of transitological studies as applied to Latin American countries and known as the “torturer’s dilemma” (Huntington 1991).

It brings us to an inevitable question: what if anything can stimulate the winning elites, the “kings of the hill” to start reforms that (in case of growing competition) will endanger their status and deprive them at least of a part of “seized” assets? In fact, circumstances may differ. The first scenario is a split in the camp of winners, or emergence of a reformist wing (another immortal theme in transitological literature). Second is the rise of new and

relatively strong elite groups distinct from the early winners and desirous to build new efficient and better quality institutions and economic order. Third is a growing pressure “from below” (primarily in the context of so-called peaceful rallies) that the “kings of the hill” cannot afford to ignore. To borrow from O’Donnell’s description of the evolution of bureaucratic authoritarianism (O’Donnell 1973), the “cost of repression” may prove to be higher than the “cost of toleration” and stimulate change. However, the opposite reaction is also possible: the regime may choose to increase repression and transfer from “moderate” to “tough” authoritarianism. The fourth factor is external pressure, not so much an outright pressure from foreign states or international organizations, from which the “stuck” post-Communist regimes have erected powerful “sovereign” ramparts, but rather the broader context of globalization of economic processes and “transnationalization” of politics and information flow). This factor also includes conditions and limitations imposed by the logic of participation in international economic and political institutions and information exchanges (such as competitiveness in global markets). These issues go beyond the scope of the current article, but demanding more research both for academic and practical purposes.

Based on the preceding discussion, we contribute to this debate with an attempt to analyze the role and impact of preconditions and policies, that is, major structural and procedural factors upon the outcome of unsuccessful, derailed transitions to democracy of the last two decades. Our primary sample consists of twenty-nine post-Communist countries, including Mongolia, all of which during this period pursued different transformation trajectories leading to different regime outcomes.

By all categorizations and expert opinions, Czech Republic and Slovenia led the list, with Hungary, Slovakia, and the three Baltic states running up (not without reservations). Very close to this privileged group, different ratings place those other “really existing” new democracies which for various reasons did not yet fully succeed in consolidation and/or still exhibit certain “birth marks,” particular flaws and defects which prevent them from being in the “first league” – here we find Romania, Bulgaria, Mongolia, most of constituent republics of former Yugoslavia (except Slovenia), and among the ex-Soviet states, Ukraine and Moldova. This “second league” seems to encompass most of those who may not be “perfect” but still are more or less successful democratizers of the “third wave.” They seem to be on the “right track.”

On the other extreme, we find “new nondemocracies,” with varying degrees and flavors of authoritarian rule, some resembling “traditional authoritarianism,” others waiting to be defined in yet uninvented conceptual frameworks. This list includes Kazakhstan, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan.

In between, we find unconventional “hybrids,” which are probably best defined as “stuck in transition,” with incomplete democratization and

persisting or newly emerged authoritarian trends: Russia, Armenia, Georgia, and Kyrgyz Republic.

We are mostly interested in cases that did not result in the emergence of consolidated new democracies but drifted into the so-called gray zone (Carothers 2002) or regressed into new types of autocracies.

14.4 PRECONDITIONS AND POLICIES IN THE OUTCOME OF TRANSITION: FAVORABLE OR UNFAVORABLE?

On the basis of available data and existing literature, we may assume that structural preconditions of democracy did not play a decisive role during the breakdown of Communism and the start of post-communist transformations; however, in certain important respects they either facilitated or impeded transitions to democracy. In fact, if we look at factors that in the existing literature are considered to be preconditions for democracy, none of the post-Communist states was characterized by extremely unfavorable combination precluding success of democratization (though obviously some were better disposed to it than others): even poorer states were not in dire condition; ethnic or other primordial strives led to a state-ruining civil only in one case (Tajikistan), neither external actors nor the “domestic” military imposed overtly authoritarian patterns. Islam, where present, was neither predominant nor fundamentalist or “political” (again, Tajikistan is an exception). Moreover, economic structures were destined to undergo changes from centrally planned segments of the Soviet/Communist “bureaucratic market” to independent market-based economies, and political structures had to develop into independent statehood, hence they were anything but stagnant or immobile (which is sometimes seen as a structural obstacle to democratization).

Contrariwise, policy-related factors (strategic and tactical decisions, institutional choices, politics of the executive, relations between the old and new elites, role of the civil society, conduct of elections, etc.) were critical in determining the political outcomes of particular transformations. In certain cases, decisions of major political actors contributed crucially to the success of transitions to democracy, in others it made them stuck or led to new forms of authoritarian rule. The role of the chosen policies is critical in determining the general trajectory of political transformation, while the democratic consolidation requires at least a minimum of structural prerequisites of democracy.

Thus, to explain the stark differences in the outcomes of post-Communist transformation more than two decades after its launch, we ought to look at agency-driven factors, that is, why, how, and to what extent political actors and societies contributed to its democratization or precluded it. The correlation between favorable and unfavorable structural preconditions will certainly be found but will fail to provide a universal explanation: who could have predicted at the beginning of the transformation that agrarian Moldova and

semi-nomadic Mongolia will advance further on the path of democratization than Kazakhstan or Belarus?

The easiest part of the analysis is the Western segment of the post-Soviet space (including the Balkans) where both preconditions and chosen policies were favorable to democratization. Structurally all of Central European countries were predisposed to democratization. As they went through “shock therapy” or milder versions of structural adjustments of the economy and reoriented their economies to the EU space, their level and type of economy became compatible with the rest of Europe. Its peripheral role in the European market and lower levels of development (only the best of them are on par with the poorer economies of the EU) begets numerous problems in the political domain, particularly in the years of global economic crisis, yet the scope of these difficulties is insufficient to jeopardize the democratic nature of its politics. All of them enjoy proximity to EU countries (by land and/or sea). Neither of these economies suffers from the “oil curse” or from overconcentration of economic assets in one sector (presumably, the presence of such sector may become a power base for the incumbent rulers unwilling to share control over it with challengers). Cultural heritage was European and Christian (in all three major confessions are Catholicism, Protestantism, and Orthodoxy) in most countries. Ethnic differences were either limited or were put under control by the elites everywhere, except several republics of former Yugoslavia, yet, with the exception of Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, which are still struggling to build their statehood, even those ex-Yugoslav states that went through serious civil wars and losses of territorial integrity (primarily Serbia and Croatia) are safely on the path of democratization at the end of the second decade of its post-Communist transformation.

Yet, if we mark the differences mentioned in this brief description, we ought to notice that some of the countries of this domain had relatively small “structural” obstacles: Czech Republic and Slovakia whose divorce was “velvet,” Slovenia, Hungary, Poland, and the three Baltic states (with a footnote about the still noninclusive character of democratic politics in Latvia and Estonia) constituted an almost flawless success story of democratization. As for other western and south western states (except the northwestern “corner” of Slovenia), its success in democratization was by no means predetermined: lower levels of economic development and weaker industrial sectors (everywhere), a higher degree of ethnic tensions (Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia, Bosnia), even civil wars. Yet, with certain lags and higher “transaction costs,” all these countries attained considerable progress in democratization, which has either made them democracies or at least made the trend irreversible. Making this observation, we do not attempt to evaluate the quality of democracy in Central European and Balkan states: it would suffice to quote Konstanty Gebert of Warsaw’s *Gazeta Wyborcza*, who noted that Central Europeans “learned the vocabulary of democracy but did not yet master its grammar.”⁴

Preconditions and policies are considered in our analysis as two independent variables. The third independent variable includes particular regime outcomes of post-Communist transitions of the “third wave” (with the focus on the earlier mentioned twenty-nine post-Communist cases). We operationalize this third variable on the basis of the Economist Intelligence Unit’s Index of Democracy 2010:⁵

1. “Full democracies”: Czech Republic
2. “Flawed democracies”: Slovenia, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Slovakia, Poland, Latvia, Romania, Croatia, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Moldova, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia, Mongolia
3. “Hybrid regimes”: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Russia, Armenia and Kyrgyz Republic
4. “Authoritarian regimes”: Kazakhstan, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan⁶

In this setting, the dependent variable is the impact of preconditions and policies on the outcomes of post-Communist regime change.

In line with the existing literature and available data, we assume that preconditions and policies may be favorable or unfavorable for democratization and democracy. We focus on GDP per capita (PPP) and HDI (of the UNDP) as two parameters that define potentially favorable and unfavorable impacts of preconditions on transformation trajectories. Policy-related factors may also provide favorable or unfavorable effects in terms of regime outcomes. In particular, there is ample anecdotal evidence that the arbitrary rule of poorly constrained – constitutionally and institutionally – post-Communist (especially post-Soviet) executives is a “kiss of death” for aspiring new democracies. This will be considered as one parameter of the favorable/unfavorable impact of the policy variable. Replacement/preservation of old elites in power (albeit in new decorations) is another parameter of this variable. Many other factors influenced the pace, scenario and/or outcomes of transformation: territorial integrity or separatist or civil wars, degree of antagonistic cleavages within the societies, intensity of external influence, patterns of power transfer, and so on.

Some preliminary judgments are in place. First, high levels of socioeconomic development are important factors but not predictive causes in determining the direction of transition. A majority of more or less successful post-Communist transitors (“full democracies” and “flawed democracies” in the Economist ID classification) departed from Communism with a fairly high (PPP) – on the average more than 5,000 USD⁷ – and pretty high levels of HDI.⁸ However, important data contradicts possible generalizations – among democracies (although “flawed”), we find Mongolia and Moldova with fairly lower levels of GDP at the start (Mongolia, 1,556, and Moldova, 2,776) and HDI (in both cases, average). On the contrary, Russia as a “hybrid regime” today started transition with quite favorable “structural” conditions: GDP 8,941 and a high

level of HDI. “Authoritarian” Kazakhstan and Belarus started their transitions with somewhat lower but comparable structural preconditions: Kazakhstan, 4,684 GDP, and Belarus, 4,746, both with high levels of HDI. However, these favorable preconditions did not help. This means that we need to look for other alternative explanations beyond the “objective” factors.

At the same time, we can plausibly argue in favor of the structural factors as important conditions for democratic consolidation – “full democracies” (Czech Republic and Slovenia) departed from impressively higher levels of GDP (11,208 and 11,827, respectively) and high HDI levels. Objective preconditions at the start could only contribute to the mastery and success of appropriate political engineering.

We also may conclude that, judging from our sample and variables, the unfavorable preconditions in certain situations can be overcome by particular policy decisions, chosen strategies, and tactics.

This leads us to the conclusion of crucial importance of the policy factors – political choices and decisions. In fact, in very significant cases, favorable preconditions did not lead at all to successful transitions to democracy. On the contrary, agency was decisive. And vice versa – absence of favorable “objective” conditions was compensated by particular “subjective” decisions.

Several general observations pertaining to policy-related factors also deserve to be noted at this point, as follows.

The pivotal policy factor in many post-Communist countries was a near-consensus of elites about the overall goal of “joining Europe”: elites of these countries were not crafting democracy per se, they were crafting the European character of their polities, transplanting to their national soil values, institutional arrangements, norms, and practices of “old Europe.” Larry Diamond’s “nothing except will” notion does not apply to these cases: as we noted earlier, with all the differences, preconditions were not extremely antagonistic to democratization. Even where “structure” was unfavorable, “agency” undertook consistent efforts to overcome the obstacles to close the distance separating these polities from Western (or EU) standards. Policies toward ethnic minorities and/or deliberate suppression of any attempt to revive territorial claims are a most obvious example of “deliberate Westernization.” A reverse side of this policy factor is the role of Western advisors or consultants, who were welcome to provide advice not only on economic reforms (in this department, Western consultancy played an important part in most post-Communist countries) but also on political designs. In some cases, these “foreign advisors” were in fact members of the diaspora who returned from Sweden, Canada, and other Western states to help their native countries clean the rubbish of Communism.

The last point hints to another factor that seriously divided the post-Communist space on the borderlines of the Soviet Union of 1939. East of that border the reign of Communism lasted one generation (twenty years) longer than in the Western part, and by the time of the collapse of Communism, there were practically no survivors who remembered from their personal experiences

“life before Communism” and could spread oral histories or provide advice and psychological encouragement “to do the right things” to the reformers. To sum up the first two points, “going West” in the Western part of the post-Communist world constituted not a “general slogan” but a business plan backed up by know-how. On the Eastern side, only Moldova (as shown later) made deliberate (not quite efficient) efforts to adopt European institutions and practices.

Finally, the third general observation concerns the choice of institutional design of statehood. The Western (in terms of 1939 borders) part chose parliamentary or premier-presidential models of state institutions (Shugart and Carey 1992), which, according to the common wisdom of comparative politics, is better suited for democratizing states because it disperses power, prevents authoritarian personalistic trends, encourages participation, and so on (Linz 1990; Shugart and Carey 1992; Fish 2006). Significantly, it was the 1990s set of transformations that forced many of these authors to revisit and redefine their approaches, with the added wisdom of closer attention to details of institutional arrangements and practices of interaction (as described in Elgie 2005). The Eastern part chose presidential or presidential/parliamentary models. In the same vein, a proportional (or mixed) electoral system encourages power sharing and compromise in politics and helps avoid “winner takes all” situations (Lijphart 1999), for example, those implied in the Hellman’s J-curve, both in terms of political and economic rent. The impact is shown in Table 14.1. However, while the choice of institutional design is certainly an “agency” factor, it does not mean that political elites (or leaders) are completely free in such choice. In CIS states a preference for a “strong president” model determined not only by traditional inclination of the public to personalized leadership but also by such factors as persistence of antagonistic divides in the society (Russia) or the task of building from scratch national states, which urged for a charismatic (if available) “father of the nation.”

14.5 HOW POLICY CHOICES WORKED

14.5.1 Central Asia

We will start the overview of transformations from the subregion where preconditions for democracy were by any account less favorable than in other parts of the post-Communist world, namely, Central Asia (Kyrgyz Republic, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan). These “prerequisites of non-democracy” included the lowest level of socioeconomic development: GDP at the start of transition in Kyrgyz Republic, 1,678; in Azerbaijan, 3,472; in Tajikistan, 2,080; in Uzbekistan, 1,457; and in Turkmenistan, 2,656; only Kazakhstan was higher with 4,684, and all the countries had very average levels of HDI, with extremely high disparities between well-to-do urban and extremely underdeveloped infrastructure in rural areas.

TABLE 14.1. *Correlation between Political Regimes, Electoral Systems, and Democratization*

Regime type	Electoral system			Total
	Proportional	Mixed	Majoritarian	
Parliamentary	4 democracies: Czech R, Latvia, Estonia, Slovakia 0 hybrid regimes 0 authoritarian	3 democracies: Hungary, Lithuania, Macedonia 1 hybrid regime: Albania 0 authoritarian	0 democracies 0 hybrid regimes 0 authoritarian	7 1 0
Premier/ presidential	7 democracies: Bulgaria, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia 0 hybrid regimes 0 authoritarian	1 democracy: Macedonia 0 hybrid regimes 0 authoritarian	1 democracy: Mongolia 0 hybrid regimes 0 authoritarian	9 0 0
Presidential/ parliamentary	1 democracy: Moldova	0 democracies	1 democracy: Ukraine	2
Presidential	0 democracies 0 hybrid regimes 0 authoritarian	0 democracies 1 hybrid regime Kyrgyzstan 2 authoritarian Azerbaijan, Tajikistan	0 democracies 0 hybrid regimes 3 authoritarian Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan	0 1 5
Total	12	11	5	28

Notes: Political regime categorization, based on [Shugart and Carey \(1992\)](#), describes initial institutional choices of early 1990s; categorization into democracies or nondemocracies is based on the Economist Intelligence Unit's Index of Democracy 2010. Significantly, of the two democracies in regimes with a strong president, Moldova became a parliamentary republic in 2000, and Ukraine several times changed electoral system (fully proportional now) and had a premier-presidential regime in 2006–10.

Ethnic factor deserves a “stereoscopic” evaluation. All these countries had sizable Caucasian (mostly Eastern Slavs) minorities (almost half of the population in Kazakhstan), and the urban (and better educated) Slav population particularly in capitals was particularly large. On one hand, it could have worked as a “liberalizing” factor. On the other hand, it was perceived by the indigenous elite as a threat to pro-Russian irredentism and a possible obstacle for nation building. Minorities of other nations were present almost everywhere (particularly in Uzbekistan) but did not play any major role (except sporadic cases of violence at periods of unrest, such as a “pogrom” of ethnic minorities in recent riots in Kyrgyzstan).

The Islamic factor was also controversial. On one hand, seventy years of secular rule implied that Islam was not deeply rooted, and ruling elites were predominantly secular. On the other hand, fundamentalist terrorist insurgents have always been a “hypothetical threat” for Fergana Valley (goes through Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan).

More important and directly affecting the political transformations was the factor of the traditional (premodern) structure of the society, which does not contribute to democratization. This factor embraces rural overpopulation, clientelist relations at the grassroots level, and the “clannish” structure of the society. Combined with Islamic cultural tradition, it produces the effect described by Ernest Gellner (1994) as “statehood imposed on the city by tribal unions.” Tajikistan’s civil war between various regional clans (superimposed over secular/Islamic divide), Kazakhstan’s three tribal unions (*hordes* or *jüz*), and a standoff between “north” and “south” in Kyrgyzstan are the most salient examples of societal structures shaping national politics.

Another precondition for “nondemocracy” is the “oil curse.” Describing an economically underdeveloped area, it’s hard to say whether abundance of fossil fuel is a blessing or a curse. Two Central Asian states that do not have it, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, remain the poorest among post-Soviet states, with per capita GDP PPP hardly exceeding USD 2000 (143 and 139 place in 2009 IMF hierarchy⁹); such poverty seriously hampers not only economic but also political development. The “abundance” of the remaining three is relative (because of difference in the size of both population and mineral wealth): Uzbekistan is 131st, Turkmenistan 104th, but Kazakhstan makes it to the 70th position in the same hierarchy.

In such a situation, policy decisions had to deal with an overly unfavorable configuration of structural factors. The ruling elites were primarily concerned with building national statehood, which included myths building and ensuring the predominance of the indigenous population, particularly members of the ruler’s “clan” (however defined) in the political domain. The choice of presidential models with minimal or zero checks and balances, and weak or nonexistent multipartism seemed to be predetermined. The official discourse combined the idea of “democracy,” either as a mere declaration or with endless adjectives about a “national model,” need to “breed the tradition,” and so on. It ought to be noted that in Central Asia (with the exception of Tajikistan), elites saw the least degree of rotation (compared to all other parts of the post-Communist world): even now the ruling class largely consists of vintage Soviet elites and their immediate successors.

Two Central Asian states, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, never “played” with the idea of democratization in any serious way, never had a multiparty system, and in the case of Turkmenistan, never even a proper parliament. Kyrgyzstan was long considered as the most liberal of Central Asian states, and president Akaev had an image of a democratizer; Kazakhstan had a certain degree of pluralism in elections and was keen on building a positive image in

the West; Tajikistan succeeded in ending the civil war with a national accord sharing power with the opposition (and that pluralism in a very curtailed form exists in the country even now).

However, the overall trend of policy factors has to be evaluated as negative to democratization. Ruling elites seemed to be preoccupied with fears of not just losing the majority but even facing any serious challenge, which presumably could have destabilized the situation. Those fears included (in any given combination) challenge from the Islamic radicals (which presumably could have gained support in backward rural areas on condition of free competition), competition with the better educated urban Russian (Eastern Slav) population, and fear of populism in a highly stratified society, but more importantly, challenge from clans and groupings other than the ruling elite.

It is to this end that Central Asian states (with the exception of Uzbekistan) went through numerous referenda changing their constitutions and prolonging term of office for their presidents (Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are still ruled by the last Communist republican bosses), reforming parliaments and changing electoral systems – often under pretexts of promoting democracy – but never failing to further strengthen the presidential power. The late Turkmen leader Niyazov received a lifetime presidency (which ended with his death in 2006). Deliberate institutional arrangements were coupled with tight control over independent media and the Internet community and excessive use of “administrative resources,” that is, manipulation of elections. As a result, not only did power in Central Asian states become consolidated but the very notion of political pluralism was reduced drastically.

The only exception to this general trend is Kyrgyzstan. Fearing the expansion of color revolutions, President Akaev excessively controlled parliamentary elections in 2005 and, as a result, faced a coup d'état known as the “tulip revolution”: the new leadership was a de facto coalition of northern and southern clans, which, for a couple of years, practiced a shared-power model; with time, however, new president Bakiev concentrated power and resources to such an extent that opposition (which included figures not only from the “north” but also from his own “south”) rebelled and overthrew Bakiev – interestingly, it happened shortly after the president proclaimed the idea of “consultative democracy” under which opposition consults and argues with the government but does not compete for power. The transitional administration of Kyrgyzstan crafted a new constitution containing power-sharing arrangements – a second attempt in recent Kyrgyz history. Elections in October 2010 produced a fragmented parliament and a three-party government coalition that assumed power at the end of 2010. One other exception, maybe hypothetical, is cautious change in the trend for broadening pluralism in Kazakhstan which has so far proved viable.

Summing up, we may conclude that in Central Asia, the “structural” conditions were most unfavorable for democracy. However, policies of the authorities did little to change this reality and, on the contrary, further aggravated

prospects for democratization. It is not easy for an outside observer to measure the degree of exaggeration in the “fears of pluralism” shared by all the Central Asian ruling elites. One thing that is clear is that practically no progress was made in building conflict-resolution mechanisms within the political class (Kyrgyzstan probably being an exception, but until recently not a very efficient one). At least in “less unfavorable” contexts, a greater degree of pluralism, a more liberal style of politics, appears to have been a realistic possibility, and that alone could have started to produce a less unfavorable set of preconditions.

This model seems to contain an extremely dense correlation of negative structural prerequisites with policies mostly working against democratization. In other geographic domains, we may expect to meet milder versions of inadequate preconditions and greater diversity of policy strategies.

14.5.2 Transcaucasia

The three states of Transcaucasia (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia) have a mixed set of structural preconditions.

Of social-economic conditions, the crucial factor was neither level of economic development nor HDI (lower than the average for the sample anyway) but the devastation of the wars all the three states endured in the early 1990s. Georgia and Azerbaijan lost parts of their territory to separatists, and the trauma of the loss and influx of refugees provided additional difficulties for democratization. Of course, such splits had the by-product of a more ethnically homogeneous nation, but unlike the case of Moldova discussed later, we have no reasonable tools to measure its effects on political development. Armenia as a result of warfare received an unrecognized ally, self-proclaimed Nagorny Karabakh, yet the effect of the war was a predominance of Karabakh war veterans (both from the enclave and Armenia proper) in national politics. With all these differences, Armenia and Georgia had to go through dire economic conditions, and Azerbaijan faced the problem of agrarian overpopulation. Economically motivated out-migration of all the three countries was and remains a major problem.

The Christian background of Georgia and Armenia and its rapprochement with the West served as positive factors for democratization; Azerbaijan built a close relationship with Turkey and also sought rapprochement with the West for the sake of modernizing the country.

The influence of Islam in Shiite Azerbaijan was relatively lower than in Central Asia (at least in the sense of fundamentalist activities), same as the impact of traditional society, but these two factors were nevertheless present in the country's politics. Azerbaijan is also the only of the three states that experiences the “oil curse” in politics but is perhaps a blessing for economic development.

In these circumstances, Georgia and Armenia were predisposed to pursue more pluralistic policies, but unlike the Western part of the post-Communist

world, “Westernization” of domestic politics was only a general concept, often derailed by power struggles. Azeri politics, by contrast, had a smaller “Westernization” dimension, yet all the three countries did not escape violent changes of power: ouster of presidents Gamsakhurdia of Georgia and Mutalibov and Elchibei of Azerbaijan (plus an attempted coup in 1995), a color revolution that dethroned Georgia’s Shevardnadze, an “almost coup” in 1998 in Armenia when the first president Ter-Petrosyan was forced to resign under pressure, and the gunning down of several top Armenian leaders (including a “strong-man” prime minister and former presidential candidate and speaker) in parliament in 1999. In Armenia (1996 and 2008) and Georgia (2008), crowds protested against results of presidential elections, and the quality of all elections was strongly criticized by international observers (who, however, in general certified its results).

Paradoxically, the mass action and color revolution (not the coups) may indicate that the regimes in Armenia and Georgia are not consolidated authoritarian. Pluralism exists in parliaments; lawmakers deliberately amended constitutions to broaden the powers of parliaments. The defeat of the president’s party in parliamentary elections in Georgia in October 2012 and constitutional amendments (become effective in 2013) that de facto turn Georgia into a premier-presidential republic will effectively amount to the first change of power through elections in the nation’s history. Contrariwise, Azerbaijan consistently tightened the legislation pertaining to elections and parties and retains a strong presidency that was transferred by dying president Geidar Aliev to his son Ilham in 2003. Although the latter is approximating “milder” versions of Central Asian authoritarianism, the first two countries are rated as “hybrid regimes.” In this particular case, “hybrid” can be interpreted as “good intentions” of the policy makers intertwined with an adversarial style of politics and inability of the elites to develop and respect “rules of the game” that may help to entrench political pluralism.

14.5.3 Eastern Europe

The four Eastern European post-Soviet states (Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine) from the structural point of view seemed to be better disposed toward democratization, and in fact, Ukraine and Moldova developed into “flawed” or electoral democracies.

On the socioeconomic side, these were the best developed parts of the Soviet Union (excluding Baltics) in all respects, including industrial diversification, living standards, education, urbanization, and so on. Except Moldova (least developed of the four), they were (and still are) well ahead of southeastern Europe, which has turned democratic. The reverse side of the economic development is a much higher weight of power-property relations in the behavior of political elites. In Russia, unlike the other three states, “oil (rather, “oil & gas”) curse” was working in full strength; paradoxically, Ukraine and Belarus

developed a form of “diet oil curse”: the transit of Russian fossils to Europe through their territory developed into a major economic sector.

Culturally, they were predominantly European and Christian (mostly Orthodox). A significant part (living in the Volga basin) of the sizable Islamic segment of the Russian population was “modernized,” while the North Caucasus republics still constituted largely traditional societies where Islam experiences pressure from radical fundamentalist trends competing with “traditional” Islam and intertwined with the persistence of traditional “clannish” structures.

In terms of ethnic fragmentation, Belarus is relatively homogenous: relations between ethnic Russians and Belorussians never posed a problem. In Ukraine, tensions with the Crimean Tatar minority were limited in scope, and Russian-Ukrainian ethnic relations, far from perfect, were sorted put in the political domain, contributing to a deeper “East-West” divide described in the next paragraph. Moldova lost its territorial integrity as Transnistria (with a higher share of an Eastern Slav population) seceded after a short war. However, for Moldova, this secession meant not only a national trauma but also a higher degree of homogeneity, which made the domestic politics less adversarial.

Another structural factor that affected transitions in all the four countries, though in unique configurations, is the issue of national identity. Moldova is still struggling to define to what extent the Moldavian nation is similar or different from the Romanian, and at the same time living with Eastern Slav, Turkic, and Bulgarian minorities. The divide between Eastern and Western Ukraine in terms of the nation’s proximity to Russia or the West retains the utmost significance in national politics (and, in our consideration, provides for “objective pluralism” in the Ukrainian society, which facilitated democratization). In Belarus, the “Western vector” of transformation was probably the weakest of European post-Communist states, and so was the feeling of distinct national identity (pro-Western nationalists remained a marginalized minority). Finally, Russia, the metropolis of the former empire, was the only post-Soviet country where post-Communist development was not perceived as “national renaissance,” but on the contrary, was viewed by many as a national catastrophe.

In addition to that, Russia had the unique burden of a superpower, and a huge nuclear arsenal – a factor that seriously increased risks of any chaotization and indirectly increased authoritarian trends in the mentality of political elites.

Therefore, the “identity” factor played differently in these four countries, boosting the democratization intentions in Moldova and Ukraine and hampering them in Belarus (unequivocally) and Russia (with reservations).

In Belarus, we may get stuck in a chicken-and-egg dilemma: whether it was weakness of the feeling of identity that led the national elite to refrain from privatization and other structural reforms, or whether the egoism of elites drove it to “freezing” the situation and deliberately opposing economic, social, and political reforms – and with time, side effects of Russian oil prosperity and

economic growth reinforced the entrenched Byelorussian regime (which, like in Central Asia, saw quite little rotation). Constitutional reform drastically weakening the parliament, unchecked presidential power, absolutely puppet party system, repressions against opponents (in Belarus they do send losing presidential candidates to jail), manipulation of elections – all that likens the Belorussian regime to those of Central Asia: though the structural factors were significantly more favorable, agency deliberately preserved and reproduced nonpluralistic and antiliberal institutional arrangements.

Moldova is probably the opposite example: agrarian rather than industrial, much lower in living standards (GDP per capita in 1992, 2,776; in 1994, 1,261; and only 2,975 in 2008), but also the only ex-USSR republic that was deliberately modeling its development after the West, more precisely, following the example of neighboring and ethnically close Romania. Whereas in Europe, Romania was long perceived as an outsider of transformation processes, for Moldova, it was a model and target of “Westernization.” Even now PPP in Moldova is 4.5 times lower than in Belarus (it’s by far the poorest democracy in Europe). Privatization in the country was belated, it remains agrarian, and a large part of its population works in Europe and Russia. Settlement of conflict with separatist Transnistria is *de facto* frozen. Yet, the political regime encouraged pluralism at all stages of the country’s development: defeat of the incumbent president under the presidential-parliamentary republic; the constitutional reform of 2000 that changed the country into a parliamentary republic proved controversial and conducive to an overwhelming majority of the Communist Party. However, the regime remained pluralistic and reasonably liberal, and the Communists had to give power away after they lost parliamentary elections in 2009. The example of Moldova signifies that the proper and consistent choice of specific policies can democratize a country with poor and underdeveloped economies, but at the same time confirms that democracy alone does not bring solutions to economic problems. Having gone through three indecisive elections between April 2009 and November 2010, and been deadlocked over election of a president by parliament for two and a half years (until March 2012) and reaching viable power-sharing arrangements, Moldova demonstrates both successes and failures of democratization driven by policy factors.

Ukraine’s success in democratization came in the second decade of post-Communist development after what seemed to be an inefficient presidency with attempted concentration of power. However, the origins of Ukrainian democratization ought to be sought in the 1990s: societal pluralism inherent in the “East-West” divide (described earlier) was coupled with the fragmentation of economic interest groups, often referred to as “regional clans” but having nothing but the name in common with primordial clans and tribes of Central Asia. Ukraine’s original regime was presidential-parliamentary, providing for a certain autonomy of parliament; all that created a “history of success” for

Ukrainian pluralism, which recorded the first defeat of an incumbent president in CIS history. In 2000, by referendum, the Ukrainian president won the right to broaden presidential powers but never dared to implement this power (another important policy factor). It is this pluralism that led Ukraine through the “Orange revolution” and constitutional transition to a premier-presidential republic. Democratic experience acquired in 2004–5 did not bring to the country economic prosperity, nor even democratic stabilization (despite that power changed hands in three out of four presidential elections), but it helped Ukraine develop relatively free and fair elections and first lessons in power sharing and conflict resolution. Unlike Moldova, where the policies of the elites were deliberately crafting pluralism, Ukrainian elites were forced to learn and habituate themselves to coexistence and rules of competition. Which of the two models will prove more sustainable remains to be seen, particularly as Ukraine returned in 2010 to its pre-2006 presidential-parliamentary constitution.

Presumably, such “crafting” permitted the Moldovan elite to sustain the democratic nature of the regime throughout a protracted political crisis. Contrariwise, in Ukraine, Victor Yanukovich (the loser in the 2004 “Orange revolution”), who won the 2010 presidential elections, enforced cancellation of constitutional amendments envisaging sharing of power between president and premier, crafted a loyal majority in the Rada, and forced through a prison term for his main political opponent, ex-premier Julia Timoshenko. Such a straightforward concentration of power provoked a new round of political crisis in Ukraine and strained its relations with the European Union. Parliamentary elections in October 2012 (which for the fourth time in Ukraine’s history changed the electoral system from fully proportional to mixed) did not bring any significant changes in the configuration of political forces. It implies that only the future will answer the question on whether Ukraine’s democratization is reversed infinitely or the new crisis of power will force the Ukrainian elites to adhere to new pluralistic solutions.

The case of Russia is probably the most problematic of the four East European states. Endowed with greater wealth and generally favorable structural preconditions, Russia lived through a threat of disintegration, the attempted secession of Chechnya, and a protracted war and terrorist threats (not extinct even in 2010). Though rotation of elites in Russia was quite significant, and new business elites contributed to formation of the current political class, it is in Russia more than in any other post-Soviet state that members of old Soviet military and security elite joined the new political establishment, and their conservative mentality is still a major factor determining Russian politics.

Therefore, by general predisposition, retrospectively, we may assume that in terms of policy factors, the “Belorussian scenario” was more probable for Russia than the “Ukrainian” and “Moldovan,” except for one other subjective factor: the central role of the new Russian political elite in defeating Communism in the heart of its empire, and the consequent antagonistic split in the elite and

the nation. Pluralism of Russian politics in the 1990s did not constitute democracy, but it helped to overcome antagonism with the ancient regime elites and lay the foundations of a market economy. Presidential-parliamentary republic seemed to be an appropriate institutional arrangement: stronger oppositional parliament would have blocked the reforms; an even stronger presidency would have made the regime almost “Belorussian.”

The reverse tide of the next decade can be explained by a combination of both preconditions and policies: rebuilding the state capacity (which was inevitable after the legitimacy crisis of 1990s), a drastic increase in oil revenues, and persisting phantom pains of lost empire and fears of competition for power and property in a country that went through a controversial privatization of enormous economic assets. These new developments *de facto* meant that a new, much more negative configuration of structural factors emerged in Russia in the beginning of the current century. What further aggravated the antidemocratizing trend was the resentment of “color revolutions”: the reaction of the Russian ruling elite exaggerated both the involvement of the West in those events in “Russia’s backyard” and fears of possible replication of the same events on Russian soil.

Obviously, democratization attempts in Russia had to be more cautious and evolutionary than in other European post-Soviet states, and the concern of Russian political elites over preserving stability and minimizing risks is also quite understandable: both the initial degree of antagonism (symbolized by the shelling of rebel parliament in October 1993) and the fear of chaotization in a nuclear superpower are sufficient to explain the unwillingness of the Russian elites to take risks. However, the degree of pluralism was reduced over the last ten years quite significantly; entry barriers to the market of political completion have grown significantly; quality of electoral procedures receives more and more criticisms. Until recently, this trend seemed almost irreversible, until the agenda of modernization put forward by President Medvedev gave way to a moderate liberal trend and public discussion of the role of politics in this complex process.

The set of preconditions in Russia was too complex and therefore too unique to serve as an example or ground for generalizations. One lesson, however, can be drawn from the Russian experience: negative preconditions may emerge and aggravate over the course of transformation, and the list of such negative developments include not only economic failures, but, on the contrary, economic growth based on the “oil curse.” Russian elites were forced to play by pluralistic rules and seek accommodation when the nation was divided against itself and the transitional economy was in ruins. When the division was overcome and the economy started an assertive growth, the need for reluctant pluralism exhausted itself, and policies became a function of preconditions: the way Russian prime minister Putin put it, “transitional economy is being serviced by transitional political system” (*The Kommersant*, August 30, 2010).

14.6 CONCLUSIONS

Does this analysis provide us with any new knowledge about factors that facilitate or hamper democratization or in any other way influence the fate of transformations in today's world? The answer is probably positive but certainly not deterministic.

If we look at the level of socioeconomic development as the most obvious and most objective precondition, we will find quite few nondemocracies among countries enjoying above the world's average PPP (USD 10,725, according to IMF 2010). Most of them are "resource-cursed" authoritarian regimes of the Gulf and other oil-producing states; also above the level are hybrid regimes of Venezuela, Russia (as we argued, "oil & gas cursed"), Belarus (as we argued, suffering from the "diet oil curse"), and Turkey. This observation leads us to several conclusions:

1. However we define the results of transformations of the late twentieth to early twenty-first centuries, it has made democracy prevailing in the "affluent" parts of the world, albeit with serious reservations, and transgressing the traditional domain of Judeo-Christian civilization. In the post-Communist sample, all countries living above that standard and not "cursed by oil" turned into democracies of varying degrees of perfection (Belarus being an arguable exception).

2. "Resource curse" (in most cases, synonymous with "oil curse") is by far the most important variable explaining why affluent nations stay shy of democratization. As the Democracy Index 2010 testifies, introduction of oil exports as a dummy variable in correlation between democracy level and per capita income doubles the explanatory power of the regression (from one-third to 60 percent). Analytically, effects of the "resource curse" were discussed many times (Huntington 1991; Ross 2001; Diamond 2003; Polterovich et al. 2008; Treisman 2010); we would like to add only one nuance: in transforming societies, the "resource curse" often predetermines policy choices. It not only provides the rulers with resources to sustain security apparatus and redistribute wealth but, significantly, it enables them to avert or postpone change in any sense of the word: it entrenches the incumbent elite, allows building narrow distributive coalitions, to care less about efficiency of governance, and gives vitality to preexisting practices (archaic, traditional, authoritarian). Consequently, elites in these states are motivated to concentrate power rather than encourage its sharing and create mechanisms for compromise: their dominating power is difficult to challenge. In the post-Communist world, no major oil producer scored a success in democratization.

3. Poorer countries in the modern world have a chance not only to democratize but to survive as democracies. In the post-Communist sample, we can find only one, though arguable case when poverty affected a transformation process that potentially could have developed into democratization: Kyrgyzstan (and only in combination with other factors). Moldova and Mongolia, Macedonia,

and Montenegro progressed considerably toward democracy. However, the cases of such democratizations require a more detailed factor-by-factor analysis to explain its success or failure, for example, to compare and contrast sets of preconditions and “history of policies” in those “less-than-affluent” countries, on one hand, and “hybrid cases” with comparable income levels like Georgia and Armenia, on the other.

4. As for other “conventional” preconditions, the post-Communist world adds important nuances to the established wisdom. “Stateness,” defined in terms of territorial integrity and national unity undoubtedly remains a crucial factor but should not be taken as the absolute. Even outbursts of ethnic violence, loss of parts of territory and populace, feelings of national catastrophe (temporary or permanent), do not close the door for democratization, as demonstrated by Croatia, Moldova, and Serbia, not to mention less evident cases. If the policies of the elite are strongly motivated to attain “Europeanization,” if the “hot phase of conflict” is curbed and cleavages between majorities and minorities (ethnic and/or confessional) are brought under control, in some cases (Moldova, Croatia) societies become less heterogeneous, and it all helps to pave a road to democratization (having paid a heavy price for it). However, where “incomplete statesness” overlapped with other negative preconditions, and/or elites’ determination to democratize was absent or weak, no democratization was possible. Extreme poverty (by Eurasian standards) reproduces acute social conflicts (like in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan); “besieged fortress mentality” like in Georgia and Armenia, or exaggerated memories of a weakened state, like in Russia, legitimize authoritarian trends and preclude formation of policies conducive to democratization.

5. If we try to add to these major preconditions other factors, such as political culture or elites’ rotation, the equation will acquire too many variables to allow meaningful analytic solutions. What it implies for comparative political science is the following:

5.1. The general trend in transformations, whether or not it leads to democratization, is a relative decrease of importance of objective preconditions and an increase of discretion for policy factors. This trend is by no means absolute: overlapping negative preconditions may add up to a critical mass prohibiting democratization or making it stuck; “oil curse” may persist infinitely in selected societies. “Agents of change” can “craft” democracies only when the set of preconditions is predominantly favorable, like in most Central European countries described here; however, it broadens the field for the process of “breeding.”

5.2. The overview of political transformations in post-Communist countries demonstrates the role of policy factor in transformations. Democratization advances in cases where elites, willingly or sometimes unwillingly, select institutional arrangements and develop practices that prove conducive to higher and better institutionalized pluralism, conflict resolution, and public participation. Such policy choices may be initially dictated by “external factors” such

as attempted drift toward “Europe,” but with time they take roots and acquire momentum. Success stories of “victory of policy over structure” are Moldova and Ukraine, Serbia, Croatia and Montenegro, and possibly Romania and Bulgaria. This list seems to be long enough to constitute a trend.

5.3. In other cases, elites choose policies precluding development of pluralism and remain hostile to liberalism. Such choice is always made deliberately and willingly to preserve control over the spoils of “resource curse,” monopoly of power, and/or fear of social unrest. Sometimes, however, these choices are presented as “reluctant” and are laced with proclamations of “national ways” to democracy. These cases are best characterized as “stuck in transition”: stalemate may be broken either by a collapse of social model (in poorer societies) or the change in elites under the influence of generational or external factors, requiring a separate analysis.

5.4. Having mentioned once the need for nuanced case-by-case analysis, we can point out one specific dimension of analysis immensely relevant to the further progress of all post-Communist countries. Unlike the rest of the world, they started their transformations from almost zero point in the development of market economies. The post-Communist world already gave examples of democracy emerging parallel to appearance or reappearance of “a bourgeois” (to remember the famous maxim of Barrington Moore Jr. [1966], “no bourgeois, no democracy”). Central and Southeastern Europe not only built market-based democracies but proved them sustainable: although hit with effects of the 2008–10 crisis, these countries survived it without serious damage to its democratic institutions and practices, contrary to many other European democracies (as suggested by the Economist Democracy Index 2010). But this “bourgeois” will continue to develop even in nondemocracies. The recent decade saw the dramatic rise of authoritarian economic growth in China, a role model for many nondemocratic countries in the Third World that looks like a global challenger to democracy as the “only game in town.” Patterns of economic growth in “oil-cursed” countries like Russia, Kazakhstan, or Azerbaijan bring little evidence of rising demand for modernization. In fact, recent studies of the new middle class in Russia (Grigoriev et al. 2010) show that the contemporary Russian “bourgeois” is developing both pro-democratic and pro-authoritarian demands – the former brought about by modernization, the latter by fear of chaos or “revenge” from the new underprivileged classes in case of democratization.

These conclusions are in no way final. Transformation is not over in many post-Communist countries. Structures of all economies, even in nondemocratic countries, are changing, and the overall trend is pro-market. Even nondemocratic rulers have to imitate democratic procedures and hold elections. Democratic values and liberal practices are introducing themselves to post-Soviet citizens though false mirrors of authoritarian regimes. On the other hand, quality of democracy and governance in the established “democratic domain”

is back on the agenda after the crisis of 2008–10. The challenge of Chinese model of development and lingering disappointment of the limits of 1990–2010 democratization will dominate the discourse about democracy in the foreseeable future. Yet, we are entering the next round of debates armed with better knowledge of general trends and feeling a need for a more nuanced study of the interplay of preconditions and policies in each transforming society.

Notes

1. Some authors, however, argue that the type of political regime is largely irrelevant for prospects of economic growth - what matters is the quality of institutions, democratic (individualistic) or autocratic (collectivist). I.e., democratization carried out in a poor rule of law environment often leads to economic downfall. And vice versa – developing countries with authoritarian (to various degrees) regimes that preserved institutional continuity based on some types of “Asian values” (East Asia, Middle East and North Africa, India, etc.) have better conditions for growth than regions where traditional institutions were largely destroyed like in Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, Former Soviet Union, and so on (Popov 2009; Popov 2010). We may want, nonetheless, to pay attention to counterarguments as well: other research indicates a correlation between successful radical economic reforms eventually leading to growth and competitiveness of political regimes rather than the quality of institutions (Hellman 1998). We will show that poor quality of political and economic institutions (such as property rights, rule of law, genuine political and economic competition, participation, etc.) constitutes one of the main obstacles to reforms, deadlocking the transition and provoking a slide toward new forms of authoritarian rule.
2. Vanhanen (2009) argues that whatever the agency is doing or is prepared to do, “structural” limits of democratization (climate and national IQ) exist that leave no chance for particular countries to successfully democratize.
3. We take note of a clarification made by Hadenius (2001): today not every state can be viewed as a prerequisite of democracy or a condition of democratization, but only an “interactive state” that develops ties with the civil society and responds to its demands.
4. As heard by one of the authors in Gebert’s presentation at a seminar in Tallinn, Estonia, in 1998.
5. This index is chosen for its relative simplicity and transparency, as well as higher precision and diversification of country scores (as compared, for example, with Freedom House ratings). Correlation of this index with other measurement, such as Bertelsmann Foundation “Democracy Status” subindex of its Transformation Index, is quite high. In 2011, the index, Ukraine was downgraded to the “hybrid regimes” category, and Russia to “authoritarian regimes,” but in both cases, they became “the best” ranking in the respective categories; therefore, we preferred to analyze these two countries within the categories to which they belonged for several previous ratings.
6. This sample lacks one important category of various nondemocratic political regimes which – for different structural and procedural reasons – during the period of the “third wave” did not attempt any transitions at all. One may argue that

nondemocratizers continued to pursue their autocratic paths because they were either “too poor” or “too rich” and because there was either “too much order” or “no order at all.”

7. According the WB data and in the decreasing of the Economist ID ranking: Czech Republic, 11,208; Slovenia, 10,740; Estonia, 5,010; Hungary, 8,373; Lithuania, 8,774; Slovakia, 7,570; Poland, 5,473; Latvia, 7,097; Romania, 5,316; Croatia, 9,530; Bulgaria, 5,490; Ukraine, 5,620; Macedonia, 5,567.
8. According to UNDP: Czech Republic, Slovenia, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Slovakia, Poland, Latvia, Romania, Croatia, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Macedonia – high levels of HDI at the start of transition.
9. World Economic Outlook Database, April 2010, International Monetary Fund. Accessed on April 21, 2010.

Afterword: Open Issues and Disagreements

INTRODUCTION

The intention of this volume is to understand Russian politics in the light of what we know about “really existing democracies” but also to draw lessons for democratic theory from the particular and peculiar experience of Russia during the past twenty years. Neither task is easy. The volume is replete with controversies about the origins of the current Russian political system, its stability, and its future; about the theoretical principles that best elucidate the evolution of Russian politics; as well as about the norms that should be applied to evaluate the current Russian political regime. Clearly a fall of an authoritarian regime need not result in democracy, but it is far from obvious whether the current Russian regime is transitional or stable, whether it is best seen as a mixture of democratic and authoritarian elements or as some original form of “non-Western democracy,” whether it is a case of a “failed” transition to democracy or a stage of development toward one. In the end, one may question why Russia should be viewed from the perspective of democracy at all or at least whether looking at Russia through the prism of democracy provides an explanatory power or is a purely normative undertaking. But the normative appeal of democracy is sufficiently strong to alone warrant our perspective.

As we warned in the introduction, the volume resolves few issues. But we do hope to have sharpened the questions, to have learned which conclusions are driven by which assumptions, to have come to the limits beyond which facts no longer resolve disagreements, to have bared the role of political and normative commitments in shaping the diagnoses, the prognoses, and the evaluations. At least for the authors of this volume – and many of us had thought about democracy for years – the endeavor turned out to be surprisingly disturbing in baring the inadequacy of democratic theory to guide our understanding of the realities

of Russian politics. Much of the volume consists of polemics with the staunch defense of the Russian political regime by Migranyan, which is a testimony to the power of the arguments he adduces. Much of the volume exhibits a healthy skepticism about really existing democracies. Nevertheless, several contributions offer an equally staunch defense of democracy, despite all its deficiencies. We see virtues in political freedom, in the presence of political opposition, and in competitive elections. Note that Migranyan accepts these virtues: his point is not that democracy is not desirable in Russia but only that Russia is not yet ready for thus understood democracy. Hence, the disagreements focus on the paths rather than the ostensible goal of Russian developments.

OPEN ISSUES

Two questions loom large throughout the volume. One concerns the relation between the state and democracy: is a “strong state,” at least in some sense of this term, a prerequisite of political competition, or does the state become strong only when it functions under the conditions of political competition? The second concerns the stability of the Russian regime and the potential for democratic reforms from above.

The State and Democracy

What comes first: strong state or democracy? This relation has a peculiar history. In the 1970s, the central preoccupation of political science was the state. Yet when the issue of transitions to democracy reappeared on the political horizon, the state had simply disappeared from the intellectual purview. O'Donnell's (1973) reminder that “without the state, there can be no democracy” was salutary, but the topic continued to be neglected. It was revived only recently by Tilly (2007), who did not formulate it in terms of prerequisites but rather in terms of somewhat independent trajectories of “state capacity” and “protected consultation,” with the argument that relation between these two developments determines the form of political regimes. Tilly specifically mentioned Russia: “we may look back to Putin as the autocrat who took the first undemocratic steps toward that [democratic] outcome.”

The conception of “sovereign democracy” is based on the claim that the state must be “strong” before peaceful political competition becomes possible. Migranyan (this volume) argues that “only a strong state can ‘direct’ the process of establishing democratic institutions and values.” Clearly some administrative, bureaucratic capacity is necessary for institutionalized political contestation to be possible, if merely to conduct elections on the national territory. Democracies are hardly viable unless the state has something like the monopoly of force within its territory, the capacity to maintain territorial integrity even in the face of secessionist pressures, and so on. Without such a state, both democracies and dictatorships are brittle. But we do not know what

is needed for a state to be strong: Impotent oppositions? Overwhelming police force? Extensive definitions of political demands as subversive? Repression of any form of resistance to decisions of the executive? Silencing dissent in the media? A state strong in this sense may only ensure the rule of elites and suppress all forms of political activity. Just consider the answer of the Prosecutor General's Office to the official request of the state Duma to identify those who are helping the terrorists in Russia: "Not only radical Islamist organizations, but also alleged 'champions' of human rights, the opposition, the ideologues of 'democratization' of Russia on the Western model, and Russian nationalists contribute to terrorism in Russia."

What sometimes passes as "capacity building" may be no more than "incapacity hiding" (Holmes, this volume). Centralization of political power in the hands of the state apparatus may just signify the rise of unaccountable and uncontested power. The absence of organized opposition need not mean that the state is "strong": it may simply be detached from the society, receiving its revenues from rents derived from natural resources rather than from the efforts of millions. This is one difference between Russia and China. States may appear "strong" just because the civil society is weak. Moreover, state apparatus may deliberately perpetuate the weakness of the civil society, relying on repression and manipulation rather than allowing conflicting interests to be processed within the state institutions. Such a state may simply consist of the monopoly of power by a clique in control of the security forces and the bureaucracy, and an obedient society. As Ferejohn (this volume) points out, the argument about empowering the state forgets the rights of individuals to defend themselves against the state.

A contrasting understanding is that a state is "strong" not only when it has the bureaucratic capacity to maintain order, extract taxes, and allocate them to public uses but also when it successfully structures, absorbs, and regulates most of the conflicts that arise in the society (Przeworski, this volume). A state is strong in this view if it can withstand the presence of organized conflicts, when it offers incentive for powerful interests to process their conflicts within the institutional, including legal, framework. The state is strong when serious conflicts are resolved by elections the results of which are peacefully obeyed by the conflicting parties. This is how the explosion of May 1968 ended in France, how the Spanish general strike in 1988 ended with an election won by the government the following year, how the miners strike in 1974 ended in the United Kingdom with an election lost by the government. The capacity and effectiveness of a regime are determined by the level of support and confidence of the society, and not by the opinion of the ruling elite, of outside observers, or of normative theorists.

Perhaps the litmus test of a strong state, as distinct from a powerful elite, is the capacity of the incumbent rulers to relinquish power without putting at stake their lives or their fortunes. A strong state is one in which an electoral defeat does not affect the chances of the defeated political forces to compete

and to return to power in the same way in the future. And in this sense, the Russian state is weak, and nothing indicates that it is becoming stronger.

In this view, the boat can be – indeed, must be – built at open sea. If the authority of the state requires the cooperation of society, democracy and the state must be built simultaneously. As recent research extensively demonstrates, conscription, taxation, and representation were inextricably related in Western European history. The slogan of “no taxation without representation” captures the quintessence of the relation between state building and political competition.

Regime Stability and Reforms from Above

Another issue about which there are divergent views is whether the current political regime of Russia is a stable system. Migranyan sees it as a stage in the political development, arguing that political evolution will be a result of reforms directed from above. Voskressenski sees it as a stage in the process of modernization. Melville commented during our discussions, “Putinism is a consolidated system with weak institutions.” Solovei also thought that the Russian system is “not intermediate but stable,” attributing this stability to deliberate political demobilization from above. Makarenko thought that the regime is not stable but the state is. Holmes, in turn, observed that any regime that relies on one person is not stable.

Obviously, the concept of stability used in these diagnoses is not the same. Both Migranyan and Voskressenski see the current Russian regime as a stage in some process of development in which the prerequisites for democracy must be established or must emerge spontaneously first and the decision by the authoritarian rulers to abandon their monopoly of power must then follow. Thus, Voskressenski (this volume) observes that “changes in the economic life of societies . . . force sociopolitical institutions to adapt” and “after a certain time it becomes impossible to carry out economic modernization without modernizing politically.” Several others view the modernization theory, with its functionalist logic, as defunct and reject any teleological view of political dynamics. This divergence of views echoes the two central issues of “transitology”: whether democracy requires some economic, social, or cultural prerequisites and whether it emerges spontaneously once these prerequisites are present. This is not the place to address these issues in a general form. The question here is whether it makes sense to ascertain that Russia is in some way “not yet ready” for democracy and whether once it would be “ready,” it would become one by a wise decision of the incumbent rulers. Note that one can accept the modernization framework and disagree with Migranyan by claiming that Russia is ready, perhaps has been for some time. And one can reject the entire prerequisites perspective and question the commitment of the Russian leaders to democracy.¹ Przeworski (Chapter 11) questions the binding force of political traditions, and Makarenko and Melville

(Chapter 14) find that decisions of the incumbent rulers, rather than inherited conditions, have been decisive in shaping the political trajectories of the post-Communist countries. Perhaps the sharpest disagreement with Migranyan is offered by Solovei (in his notes for this epilogue): “Paradoxically, in a certain sense democracy in Russia has not developed, but degraded. Peak of people’s involvement in politics, the rise of mass political activity, the most honest and fair elections in Russia took place in 1990–1991. Afterwards the institutions were formed, procedures improved, electoral legislation was elaborated, but democracy as a participation, as an inspiring myth degraded, and the elections were corrupt. Moreover, the past ten years the Kremlin has pursued a consistent and deliberate policy of alienation of people from politics. And quite succeeded.”

One question is why some kind of a party system did not crystallize during the Yeltsin period. Migranyan (in his chapter) comments that elections in the United States, between Democrats and Republicans, make little difference because the two parties are very close in what they do and do not offer. This is true. Indeed, as Migranyan argues earlier, it may be true that peaceful competitive elections are possible only if parties that have a chance to enter the government do not differ much from one another, if little is at stake. But then the question becomes why Russia did not succeed in developing such a party system: a system of competition that offers little difference but one in which elites, to use Bobbio’s (1987) distinction, *propose* rather than *impose* themselves. Is it because Tweedledee could not trust Tweedledum to hand power back? First alternations in power have been dramatic in many countries, beginning with the United States in 1801. Releasing the reigns of power is not only psychologically hard but risky because it requires the belief that others will be willing to do it as well. This was certainly Yeltsin’s fear, shared by his Western supporters, terrified by the specter of Communists winning elections. In the early phases, cleavages between antagonists in Russia were too deep, and Tweedledum would have most likely sent Tweedledee to the Gulag after electoral victory (and Tweedledee nearly banned Tweedledum in 1996). In turn, when the degree of antagonism declined by the end of the (1990s), a different problem emerged: after different groups acquired in opaque ways formerly public property, a political defeat would have had as a consequence a loss of enormous private fortunes. Hence, to this day, the Russian ruling class prefers a top-down coalition in which each higher level fully controls the lower ones, distributing both the power and property assets.

Leaving prerequisites aside, the question is whether democracy can be constructed by an *ukaz* of a strong state. There is something paradoxical in the argument that current rulers must first consolidate their power so that they could give it up. Why would anyone undertake reforms that may end up with a loss of power? One answer is that they have to because they fear a revolution, uprisings, assassination, or other forms of violent deposition. There are conditions under which losing power by elections is better for the incumbent rulers

than risking to hold it by force. But are declarations of the intention to establish political competition credible in the absence of such a threat? To accept that the passage to democracy is the goal of the present Russian rulers requires faith: faith that their political initiatives, rather than consolidating their monopoly of power, would articulate a strategy of democratization and faith that this strategy would be continued until it is completed. This strategy could be made credible, particularly in the absence of strong demands from below, only by establishing and publicizing a specific agenda of reforms, with steps and dates, the execution of which would be therefore controllable by the Russian people. As Maravall (this volume) reports, such a commitment was made by Adolfo Suarez in Spain. But, at least thus far, no such commitment has been made by Russian leaders.

If not from above, what are the prospects of a democratic movement from below? A question raised by Solovei's contribution is whether there exists in Russia a "latent demand for change." Are the Russian masses demobilized from above, or are they spontaneously apathetic politically? Can one expect political movements to arise spontaneously out of desperate life conditions? Can organized opposition be absent without repression, just because people do not see a possibility of improving their lives by political action? To some extent, the issue is methodological: what can be used as evidence of a latent demand? Surveys are not a reliable guide. Conversations over vodka may be more telling than surveys but reports from such conversations do not necessarily converge. What we do know is that "apathetic equilibria" sometimes turns out to be very brittle: witness the rise of Solidarity in Poland, which grew from nothing to sixteen million members in six weeks of summer 1980.

One way in which apparently apathetic societies exploded in protest were the "color revolutions," studied here by Solovei. One can easily see that competitive elections are dangerous for the rulers if the opposition will seek to conquer office whether it wins or loses, if the opposition uses the ability to organize to proceed from elections to revolutions. Under such conditions, incumbents can only lose by holding contested elections: either they are defeated or they face civil strife. The mechanisms by which elections may provoke a revolution have been specified by Weingast (1997) as well as by Fearon (2006) and applied to colored revolutions by Tucker (2007): unless the incumbent wins an overwhelming proportion of votes, isolated individuals learn that dissatisfaction with the government is sufficiently widespread to make it likely that a coordinated protest would be successful in unseating the government. Elections are a signal by voters to themselves, not only to governments, and although fraud can mask some of this signal, it does not prevent a revolution when everyone believes that it is massive. A controversial question concerns the impact of these revolutions, particularly in Ukraine, on the political strategy of Russian leaders. Again, Migranyan maintains that the Russian leadership was not affected by the Ukrainian events, while Solovei thinks that the specter of Ukraine motivated the strategy of "sovereign democracy."

The notion of being “ready” or “not ready” for democracy is always dubious and often hypocritical. Democracy is born not at the point when an overwhelming majority of elites and most of the society become “civilized,” skilled in tolerance and civil culture: this is the product rather than prerequisite of democracy (Schmitter and Karl 1991, 47). It appears when forward-looking elites wisely recognize the need to elaborate and observe rules of political competition. Their motives are sometimes idealistic, but more often, egoistic: they treat their opponents with dignity, because they want to be treated likewise if they lose.

It does not mean that societal preconditions, level of development, and pattern of political cleavages do not matter. However, many countries that fare worse than Russia in terms of economic prosperity, level of education, social disparity, and many other aspects advanced much further on the path of democratization: Moldova and Mongolia, of Russia’s immediate neighbors, can serve as examples. A litmus test of sincerity of statements that Russia (or, for that purpose, any other country) is not ready for democracy is simple: in most cases, it is clear whether the arguments about preconditions for democracy (or lack thereof) are perceived as a justification of nondemocratization or as obstacles that need to be tackled and overcome.

THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY

The future of democracy in Russia will be undoubtedly influenced by its fates in the rest of the world. Is democracy a universal future of mankind? Is democracy here to stay in the countries that have only recently embraced it? These questions are relevant here because the recent years have witnessed a renewal of doubt about the future of democracy. We increasingly hear the language of “retreat” (Economist Democracy Index) or “erosion” (Freedom House and Bertelsmann Foundation) of democracy. At least three factors can be cited as reasons for being concerned:

1. The global economic crisis cast a serious shade of doubt over the efficiency of the Western capitalist model, and by implication, of liberal democracy. This perception was in itself a severe blow to the “soft power” of democracy, its “ability to shape the preferences of the others,” as defined by Nye (2003). Further damage to its image was inflicted by a stagnation in economic growth, decline in social spending, and reactive public protest and unrest in many European countries. These phenomena are often perceived as a deterioration of the quality of democracy.

2. An even more serious damage to the “soft power” of democracy was caused by the unfortunate effort to “export” democracy by the former U.S. administration. Irrespective of the geopolitical causes and outcomes of military involvements in Iraq and Afghanistan, the hypocritical use of the “democracy promotion” banner in this enterprise undermined the good name of democracy in both democratic and nondemocratic countries.

3. Parallel to that, the authoritarian China continued to demonstrate impressive economic and social development, providing many nondemocratic regimes (particularly in the Third World) with an alternative role model to imitate.

Does it all mean that democracy is in fact eroding? The answer has to be negative. Unlike the first two, the third wave of democracy was not followed by a reverse tide. Although several countries that looked promising for democratization failed to make a consistent progress toward it (Russia included), most of them reached at least a minimal threshold of democracy, and several are making further progress. Some countries that appeared stuck at the turn of the century – in the post-Communist world, this category includes countries as diverse as Croatia, Serbia, and Ukraine – had a reasonably successful “restart” of transition. Perhaps what has eroded are the hopes that the momentum of the “third wave” would continue infinitely, as it will spread to more and more countries: a disillusionment of hopes rather than an actual retreat. But the recent events in the Middle East again renewed this hope.

There is no easy way to predict how these trends will develop in the second decade of the twenty-first century. Democracy certainly retains not only its competitive advantages but also its normative appeal. Yet there is nothing inevitable about the progress toward democracy. Neither economic nor social modernization is sufficient to mechanically secrete democracy. No “preconditions” are sufficient. The controversy in this volume is whether there are some conditions that are necessary for democracy to be established and whether these conditions, if there are any, are present in Russia today. And while all of us agree that democracy is possible in Russia, we still differ sharply about the prospect that this possibility would be realized in the near future. Indeed, if there is one lesson to be drawn from the history of attempts to establish lasting democratic regimes, it is that this process is laden with contingencies and thus uncertainties. We can bemoan, and we can hope, but we must accept that the future of Russia is wide open and that only Russians will determine what it will be.

Note

1. The instrumental use of the language of prerequisites was bared naked by the shameless statement of the British prime minister David Cameron that building democracy took a long time in the United Kingdom and that post-Mubarak Egypt should therefore wait before holding competitive elections. Obviously, in Mr. Cameron’s view, Egypt is not ready for democracy because elections may generate a result he would not like.

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