# THE EVOLUTION OF AUTHORITARIAN ORGANIZATION IN RUSSIA UNDER YELTSIN AND PUTIN*

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper uses the case of Russia in the 1990s to demonstrate the utility of approaching transitional regimes not just as emerging democracies but as failed or unconsolidated authoritarian regimes. Even for many competitive or democratic regimes, it is essential to focus not just on the development of constitutions, civil society, or party systems, but on the success or failure of efforts to build institutions to eliminate opposition and maintain political control. I examine the evolution of state and party organizational strategies by Yeltsin and then Putin to consolidate power and the impact of these strategies on regime competitiveness. First, I demonstrate how state and party weakness under Yeltsin in the early 1990s promoted political contestation in important ways. In turn, stronger state and party organization under Putin undermined political competition. Next, I show how organizational strategies taken reflected a logic of learning by trial and error. The failure of initial organizational forms to reduce contestation led to adoption of new approaches, culminating in Putin's decision to create a highly centralized state structure and single ruling party.


**RESUMEN**

Este artículo usa el caso de Rusia en los 1990s para demostrar la utilidad de abordar a los regímenes en transición no sólo como fueran democracias emergentes sino como regímenes autoritarios fallidos o no consolidados. Aún para muchos regímenes democráticos competitivos, es esencial concentrarse no simplemente en el desarrollo de las constituciones, la sociedad civil o los sistemas de partidos sino en el éxito o fracaso de los esfuerzos para construir instituciones para eliminar a la oposición y mantener el control político. Examino la evolución de las estrategias organizacionales del Estado y los partidos que Yelstin y Putin llevaron adelante para consolidar el poder y el impacto de estas estrategias sobre la competitividad del régimen. Primero, demuestro cómo la debilidad estatal y partidaria bajo Yeltsin en los tempranos 1990s promovió la contestación política de maneras importantes. En cambio, un Estado y organizaciones partidarias más fuertes bajo Putin minaron la competencia política. Luego, muestro cómo las estrategias organizacionales adoptadas reflejan una lógica de aprendizaje por ensayo y error. El fracaso de las formas organizacionales iniciales para reducir la contestación llevó a la adopción de nuevos abordajes, que culminaron en la decisión de Putin de crear una estructura estatal altamente centralizada y un partido gobernante único.

This paper examines the sources of regime competitiveness and closure in Russia since the collapse of Communism. The Russian case reveals problems in how most scholars have approached the study of regimes in the last twenty years. To understand regime dynamics in Russia and other post cold war "fourth wave" transitions (McFaul 2002), we need to move beyond the democracy-building paradigm and to examine not just the process of (failed or successful) democratic institution building but the factors that facilitate or undermine autocratic consolidation and regime closure. Adopting this perspective reveals processes that have hitherto been mostly ignored in the study of competitive regimes. *Even for many competitive or democratic regimes,* it is essential to focus attention not just on the development of constitutions, civil society, or party systems, but on the success or failure of efforts to build institutions to eliminate opposition and maintain political control.

To demonstrate the utility of a focus on authoritarian institution building, I examine the evolution of state and party organizational strategies deployed by Yeltsin and then Putin to consolidate power and the impact of these strategies on regime competitiveness. I make two core arguments. First, I show how Russian state and party organizational capacities have affected autocratic consolidation. State and party weakness under Yeltsin in the early 1990s promoted political contestation in important ways, while stronger state and party organization under Putin undermined political competition. Second, I show how the organizational strategies employed by Yeltsin and Putin reflected a logic of learning by trial and error. The failure of initial organizational forms to maintain political control led to the adoption of new approaches—culminating in Putin's decision to create a highly centralized state and a single ruling party.

## THE NATURE AND PITFALLS OF THE DEMOCRACY-BUILDING PARADIGM

Numerous recent critiques of the post-cold war democratization literature have focused on its democratizing bias and on its tendency to treat nondemocratic regimes as residual categories (Carothers 2002; Diamond 2002; Levitsky and Way 2002; Schedler 2002, 2006; Brown 2005; Snyder 2006). While the original "transitological" work of Schmitter and O'Donnell was extremely careful to avoid teleology, the stunning scale of the third

and fourth waves—including the successful democratization of all cases covered in the series by O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986)—encouraged authors to focus almost exclusively on the democratic end of the transition process. As many recent observers have noted, the nature of authoritarianism has often been ignored, and nondemocracies have often been defined more in terms of what they are *not* than of what they *are* (Levitsky and Way 2002; Snyder 2006; Way 2004).[1] Fortunately, however, many recent studies have been attuned to the diversity of nondemocratic regime outcomes (Brown 2005; Snyder 2006). In particular, fruitful efforts have been made to conceptualize various types of nondemocracies, including "hybrid" regimes that fall somewhere between full-scale authoritarianism and procedural-minimum democracies (Carothers 2002; Diamond 2002; Ottaway 2003; Schedler 2002, 2006; Levitsky and Way 2002; Levitsky and Way 2008). Further, the persistence of authoritarianism in the Middle East and "democratic backsliding" in Africa and the former Soviet Union has led to an explosion of studies of authoritarian durability and dynamics within fully authoritarian regimes (cf. Ross 2001; Bellin 2004; Brownlee 2007; Magaloni 2008; Gandhi and Przeworski 2007).

Despite increased attention to nondemocratic rule, the democratizing bias of the literature remains a problem that is much broader than the influence of the so-called "transitologists" of the late 1980s and early 1990s who have been the focus of most recent critiques (cf. Carothers 2002).[2] The democracy-building paradigm, like other paradigms or "bod[ies] of intertwined theoretical and methodological belief" (Kuhn 1962: 16–17), has fundamentally shaped both the types of questions we ask, and the way we interpret data—in ways that have blinded us to key regime dynamics in the world today.

The democracy-building paradigm takes established Western democratic institutions as the primary reference points for understanding transitional regimes. Democracy building—whether successful or not—is assumed to be the central dynamic in regime transition. Scholars focus on the reasons for the success or failure of democracy rather than consolidation (or not) of authoritarian rule; the large bulk of literature on competitive regimes assumes this paradigm. Thus, since the end of the cold war, regime studies have overwhelmingly concentrated on democracy or democratization. Despite the

fact that about half the world's regimes today are nondemocratic (Diamond 2002, Levitsky and Way 2008), there are over six times as many references to "democracy" or "pluralism" in the titles of political science articles/reviews on JSTOR (1991–2008) as there are to virtually any type of nondemocratic regime one could think of— "authoritarianism," "Communism," "fascism," "dictatorship," "tyranny," "autocracy," "sultanism," "monarchy," "patrimonialism," "totalitarianism," "single party" or "one-party" regime—and if we excluded the articles focusing on transitions from nondemocratic rule, the ratio would be much higher.[3] A closer examination of all articles published in the mid to late 2000s[4] that investigate regime outcomes (based on a list created by the APSA section on regimes) shows that 94 percent of articles focus on the success or failure of democracy while just 24 percent cover the consolidation (or not) of specific authoritarian regime institutions.[5] The dominance of the democracy-building paradigm is also evidenced by the overwhelming use of democracy as the central metric for understanding regime change. Thus, standard quantitative indicators for regime type—such as Freedom House and Polity—measure distance from a well-known set of standard democratic institutional practices. Thus, scholars have a relatively clear and specific idea of what democracy is—but primarily understand authoritarianism in terms of what it is *not*.

This paradigm's most important impact has been to determine a set of questions and research topics as well as specific ways of interpreting available information in the study of transitional and competitive political regimes.[6] First, examining political regimes through the democratizing optic has led to a much greater focus on certain set explanatory variables that are considered key to democratic consolidation—such as civil society and constitutions—than on other factors key to authoritarian consolidation—such as strong repressive capacity or problems of succession.[7] Thus, the last fifteen years have witnessed an explosion of studies focusing on institutional rules covering the balance of power between presidents and parliaments (Fish 2005; Frye 1997; Colton and Skach 2005; Stepan 2005) and electoral rules (cf. Ferrara and Herron 2005; Herron 2004).[8] Similarly, a great deal of attention has recently been focused on civil society, mass mobilization, and opposition strategy (Howard 2003; Howard and Roessler 2006; Beissinger 2007; Bunce and Wolchik 2006; Tucker 2007).[9]

Such enormous focus on the institutions, practices, and sources of democracy has been accompanied by a virtual silence on topics specific to autocratic rule. For example, with just a few exceptions,[10] the role of state coercion in putting down opposition-challenge outcomes has been almost completely ignored. Just 4 percent of articles on regimes in the last four years mention autocratic state institutions as a source of regime outcomes.[11] Similarly, until very recently, studies of post-Communist elections tended to focus on campaigning and public opinion rather than on manipulation and fraud.[12] Finally, there have been extremely few recent cross-case comparisons of problems of nondemocratic succession (especially when compared to the number of articles on electoral turnover).[13]

Like other paradigms, the democracy-building paradigm has also fundamentally shaped how observers interpret data. Most notably, it has guided our understanding of the impact on regimes of state and party weakness, which has overwhelmingly been seen as an obstacle to democratic development. Scholars such as Guillermo O'Donnell (1993, 1999) and Stephen Holmes (1997, 2002) have argued cogently that an effective state, grounded in the rule of law, is essential to protecting basic liberal-democratic rights.[14] Similarly, the literature on political parties in the post-Communist context has almost uniformly focused on the ways in which weak parties hinder democracy (Kitschelt and Smyth 2002; Hale 2006). In particular, analysts of Russian politics have argued that Boris Yeltsin's failure to invest in a governing party weakened democratic forces and contributed to democratic failure in the 1990s (White 1993: 312; McFaul 1994: 312; 2001: 316–17). Both sets of literatures share a generally unquestioned assumption from the democracy-building paradigm that the primary function of states and parties is the maintenance of democratic rule. Thus, close to 80 percent of articles centering on the importance of state institutions focus on the role of the state in promoting democracy rather than authoritarianism. Similarly, most pieces on parties or party systems (70 percent) argue for the democratizing impact of such institutions (see Appendix I).[15]

Yet, an older literature focused on the ways in which states and parties are *also* key instruments of autocratic rule (Huntington 1968, 1970; Huntington and Moore 1970; Skocpol 1979; Geddes 1999). As I show in this paper, states and parties have provided key mechanisms of consolidating power and monopolizing political control. Indeed, the

prevalent weakness of states and ruling parties in the former Soviet Union in the 1990s may have undermined long-term democratic consolidation; but it also provided an important source of regime contestation and hindered the development of autocratic rule (Way 2005a).

In sum, the focus on democracy has created an optic that has blinded us to key regime dynamics in the former Soviet Union. Greater attention needs to be paid to factors and institutions—such as effective coercion and the capacity of leaders to keep their allies in line—that may be relatively unimportant for democratic development but that nonetheless have been key sources of post-cold war regime development.

## EXAMINING REGIME DEVELOPMENT THROUGH AN ALTERNATIVE PARADIGM: AUTHORITARIAN PARTIES AND STATES

For a large number of cases—*even competitive or democratic ones*—it is critical to concentrate not just on the development of constitutions, civil society, or party systems, but on the success or failure of efforts to build institutions to suppress opposition and maintain political control. We need to adopt the perspective of an autocrat by focusing on the development of institutions to limit opposition and control dissent. Specifically, this paper explores the ways in which states and political parties—often viewed as key to democratic consolidation—also provide important tools for autocrats to undermine political competition by increasing incumbent capacity to prevent elite defection, steal elections, and repress opposition. In turn, weak states and ruling parties may promote dynamic political competition by making it more difficult for autocrats to contain opposition, carry out electoral fraud, and keep allies in line.

First, while scholarly discussion of the state now mostly centers on the ways in which state power is key to protecting of individual rights (O'Donnell 1993, Holmes 1997) and providing broad access to health, education, and financial regulation (cf. Fukuyama 2004; Fritz 2007), the literature on the early modern state has focused on the state's coercive role in eliminating rival power centers and centralizing control over territory (cf. Tilly 1985: 182; Tilly 1975). This type of *autocratic state power*—broadly similar to Michael Mann's (1985) notion of "despotic power"—does not include the rule of law but incorporates instead the capacity of the state to maintain control and to

suppress opposition. Here the focus is not on the courts or legitimacy but on the mechanisms of force and coercion[16]—police, local prefects, tax officials and other agents of the state that provide key support for autocratic rule by harassing, monitoring, and infiltrating opposition, facilitating vote fraud, and mobilizing regime support. Autocrats with access to an extensive coercive apparatus under their tight control will have an easier time preventing strong opposition challenges from emerging. By contrast, leaders lacking control of or access to a well-developed security force will have a much harder time eliminating political competition. For example, Theda Skocpol (1973) argues that the strengthening of British parliamentary power over the monarchy in the eighteenth century was rooted not simply in the rise of commerce but also in the fact that the state lacked a centralized standing army. As a result, British monarchs faced greater challenges in monopolizing political control than did their continental counterparts.

Autocratic state power can measured along the dimensions of *scope* and *cohesion*. First, the *scope* of state power refers to the reach of the state coercive apparatus. Cases of high scope possess large well-trained and well-equipped security and police that have the capacity to monitor and infiltrate the population at the neighborhood and village level throughout the country. In cases of low scope, by contrast, police and security forces are small, not well trained and under-equipped. In such cases, as in parts of sub-Saharan Africa, the state often lacks any sort of effective presence in large parts of the country (O'Donnell 1993). High scope gives incumbents key capacity to identify, suppress and preempt opposition challenges before they emerge. Post-Soviet cases are generally characterized by extremely high scope. The Soviet legacy has been key. The Soviet KGB had a staff of roughly 720,000 in the late 1980s (Albats 1994: 23),[17] possessed informants in virtually every apartment block (Waller 2004: 336) and were able to secure some form of cooperation with an estimated 30 percent of the adult population in the USSR (Albats 1994: 68). Such scope gave the regime tremendous capacity to identify emerging discontent and preempt opposition challenges.[18] In the post-Soviet period, leaders in countries such as Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine preserved the security apparatus more or less intact. Thus, following the collapse of Communism, the security services continued to have agents in major public institutions such as radio and TV as well as in many neighborhoods and apartment blocs.[19]

While post-Soviet cases have generally been distinguished by high scope inherited from the old regime, the demise of the Communist Party deprived leaders of a key mechanism of maintaining central control or cohesion. Cohesion refers to the degree to which state subordinates follow the commands of superiors. Cohesion is necessary in order for governments to reliably carry out repression—particularly highly risky acts such as shutting down parliament, stealing elections or assassinating well-known political opponents. It is useful to distinguish between low, medium and high cohesion. Low cohesion exists where there is regular and open rebellion by subordinate officials— expressed in the form of coup attempts, open refusal by local governments to deliver tax revenues to the central government and/or open efforts by local or regional governments to secede.  Such behavior is often motivated by the central government's inability to pay state wages or provide subsidies to local governments. [20] In the post-Soviet context, such insubordination was also promoted by the absence of clear lines of authority in the chaotic and sudden wake of the disappearance of the Soviet center. Agencies such as the KGB that had been under direct control from Moscow were often reluctant to subordinate themselves to new masters in the republican capitals.

Next, medium cohesion refers to cases in which officials receive regular salaries and normally comply with central directives. There is little or no evidence of open defection of the sort described above. Yet in these cases, state officials have not demonstrated a willingness to comply with central commands involving significant risk in the midst of regime crisis—such as orders to engage in large scale violence, or steal elections that would have otherwise been won by opposition. In medium cohesion cases, the state apparatus has not been tested by significant violent struggle, large-scale war, or revolutionary activity. Examples of medium cohesion are Ukraine under Kuchma, and Russia under Putin.

Finally, high cohesion describes states that have been tested by large-scale violence including war, successful revolutionary, liberation, or anti-colonial struggle. Examples include Armenia, which successfully captured 20 percent of Azerbaijani territory in the early 1990s, and the Mugabe regime in Zimbabwe, which was born in violent struggle against Rhodesia in the 1970s. In such cases, state officials are battle tested and have demonstrated the skills and cohesion to engage in large-scale violence

and survive regime crisis. Survival or success in the face of large-scale violence also provides the state with a generation of leaders with sufficient authority to impose elite unity in times of crisis.

Next, as with the literature on states, most recent discussions of parties have focused on the ways in which strong and cohesive parties are essential for democratic consolidation (cf. Kitschelt and Smyth 2002; Hale 2006). But, like states, strong parties can also be tools for autocrats. Parties—or "party substitutes" (Hale 2005, 2006) such as extensive patron-client relationships or large quasi-familial networks—have often provided important mechanisms to reduce defections. Barbara Geddes (1999) argues that parties create predictable patterns of elite interaction that discourage defection by assuring lower-level members that they will continue to get a share of the pie in exchange for their cooperation and executives that their interests will be looked after—i.e., they won't be prosecuted—following their exit from power. Such institutionalized and predictable systems of elite interaction motivate politicians to invest in party success and discourages defections at all levels. By contrast, the absence or weakness of such organizations increases uncertainty within ruling coalitions. The weakness of established party institutions shortens time horizons for both the incumbent and his/her allies—thus increasing the likelihood of defection and authoritarian failure.

Party strength like state strength can be measured along the dimensions of scope and cohesion. Parties with high scope, such as the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union), penetrate significant sections of civil society and have cells in virtually every population center and often at the neighborhood level. Parties with medium scope lack a mass organization but have a presence in most large population centers. Finally, parties with low scope have little or no presence outside the capital. Next, party cohesion refers to the existence of established mechanisms for leaders to secure partisan loyalty of regime elites. In cases of low cohesion, leaders lack a single ruling party or rely on shifting or multiple ruling parties without any institutionalized system of patronage. Examples include Ukraine under Kravchuk and Russia under Yeltsin. In these cases, leaders are likely to suffer from significant elite defection in the face of even modest regime challenges. Cases of high cohesion by contrast have a single ruling party that has a highly institutionalized system of patronage, established party label as well as either (a)

a history of struggle in revolutionary, liberation or underground movements or (b) a highly salient ideology. Examples include the Communist Party in Moldova, ZANU-PF in Zimbabwe and Frelimo in Mozambique. Such parties are likely to remain cohesive even in the face of even significant regime crisis—including a significant decline in the economy or powerful opposition challenge. Finally, cases of medium cohesion are characterized by a single ruling party and a relatively institutionalized system of patronage distribution, but the absence of other sources of cohesion such as history of struggle or highly salient ideology. Examples include Putin's United Russia and Shevardnadze's Citizens Union of Georgia. Such parties are likely to provide strong bases of regime stability during normal times but are vulnerable to defection in the context of serious crisis or powerful challenges to the regime.

To a large extent, state and party strength hinges on institutional inheritance. Clearly, the risks and costs of building new state and party institutions are much greater than those of relying on preexisting ones. In the absence of existing institutions, it will be much harder for leaders to convince subordinates to invest time and energy into organizational maintenance. In such cases, the likelihood of mass defections and insubordination is much higher.

At the same time, leadership strategy also has an impact. Thus, individual autocrats may choose either to invest or not to invest in the building of a powerful party/state apparatus. This choice is particularly evident with regard to party (or party substitute) building. We can identify at least three different organizational strategies that manifested themselves at different points in post-Soviet Russian history. First, there is the "no-organization" option: leaders may decide to forego party and significant state building altogether and rule entirely by divide and rule among individual cadres. Such a strategy is best exemplified by Boris Yeltsin's approach to party building in 1990–93. Rather than investing his popularity in the construction of a pro-presidential party, Yeltsin relied on individual ties among a wide range of officials that were rooted in "personal devotion" (*lichnaia predannost'*) often strengthened by late-night socializing. Such a strategy can be attractive to leaders because it maximizes their personal discretionary power.

A second strategy involves outsourcing organizational strength. Here party/state is strengthened by "renting" organizations (e.g., parties, local governments, patronage networks) controlled directly by others. Leaders draw on the support groups and organizations that have only weak ties to the executive. This strategy allows leaders to quickly abandon older allies while increasing leaders' access to party/state organization. Both the first and second strategies maximize leadership choice but also make it easier for former allies to defect to the opposition. The third and final strategy is to invest in a single vertically integrated party and state organization. Such a strategy—best exemplified in Russia by the tactics of Vladimir Putin—may reduce leadership discretion, but it decreases the likelihood of defections by former allies to the opposition.

As shown below, such strategies are heavily influenced by the availability of organizational resources but can also reflect real choice that is itself the product of an individual leader's history and of what has worked for him/her in the past. In this account, leadership decision-making is constrained but not predetermined.

## INDICATORS OF STATE AND PARTY STRENGTH[21]

Causal claims about the relationship between organizational capacity and regime competition face potentially serious problems of tautology. It might be tempting to assume, for example, that parties that lose elections and states that buckle under opposition pressure are "weak." Thus, in this paper I use indicators of state and party strength that can be clearly separated from measures of political contestation (see Appendix II). State cohesion is measured by examining whether there is a pattern of insubordination *prior to any regime crisis*, and/or significant wage arrears among state officials. Insubordination prior to crisis and/or large wage arrears indicate weak cohesion. In addition, I look for evidence of "something else" to augment patronage as a source of cohesion within states. States with a past history of successful large-scale violent conflict are considered stronger than those that have not survived such tests in battle. Next, party cohesion is measured by the existence of a single ruling party and established patronage network as well as whether the party is founded in violent struggle or has a highly salient ideology. The absence of a single ruling party and established patronage network indicates party weakness. Single ruling parties not grounded in a history of violent

struggle and that lack strong ideology are considered medium strong. A history of violent struggle and/or ideology indicates high party cohesion.

Next, scope is measured by the size and development of party/state organization. Parties that lack organization outside the capital are considered to have low scope. Parties with offices in most major population centers are scored as medium scope; and parties with extensive organization at the neighborhood level are considered to have high scope. Next, state scope is measured by the reach of state. States with small and underdeveloped police and security services or that possess significant territories or "brown areas" (O'Donnell 1993) outside central state control are considered to have low scope. By contrast, states with well-trained and funded specialized security forces, extensive personnel, and the ability to monitor opposition activity at the neighborhood level throughout the country are considered to have high scope.

Finally, I distinguish between three different leadership strategies for maintaining power and concentrating control that rely to varying degrees on organization: the "no-organization/divide-and-rule" strategy involves a resistance to organization building and reliance instead on bilateral personal connections; "organizational outsourcing" suggests a moderate reliance on organization; and the third, "single-hierarchy" strategy involves a more extensive investment in organization building.

## REGIME COMPETITIVENESS AND THE EVOLUTION OF AUTHORITARIAN ORGANIZATION IN RUSSIA, 1991–2008

Since the emergence of overtly coercive autocratic rule under Putin, the importance of examining authoritarian uses of state and party institutions has become obvious (cf. Ross 2005). Yet, such a perspective yields key insights into the Yeltsin era as well. Like Putin, Yeltsin sought to use state and party institutions to maintain political power and demonstrated a clear willingness to both hold onto power and to monopolize control through extra-legal and nondemocratic means—including the implementation of force against the legislature in 1993, the preservation of older KGB structures that were regularly used to harass opposition,[22] the widespread use of electoral manipulation,[23] and efforts to control media—particularly during the 1996 presidential elections (European Institute of Media 1996). Such actions suggest that we need to approach the Yeltsin era

not simply in terms of his success or failure in institutionalizing democracy but also in terms of his very serious efforts to use both legal and illegal means to keep power and monopolize control.

I argue that changes in the degree of regime competitiveness in Russia were an outgrowth of both available organizational resources and strategies of organizational control. Weak state and party power in the early 1990s contributed directly to dynamic political competition in Russia. In turn, increased party and state coherence over the course of the 1990s (caused in part by changes in organizational strategy) helped to promote regime closure.

**Regime Competitiveness in Russia Under Yeltsin and Putin**

I measure competitiveness/closure after the fall of the Soviet Union along four dimensions. The first is the level of pro-incumbent manipulation of the electoral process—the extent to which the incumbent manipulates the vote count, bans opposition candidates, and/or invalidates opposition victories ex post facto.[24] Second, incumbent monopolization of media reflects the extent to which the population has access to anti-incumbent views via large-audience electronic media.[25] The third indicator, opposition weakness, is defined in terms of how much access the opposition has to financial and/or to organizational resources.[26] The final dimension of competition is de facto executive control over parliament.[27]

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**TABLE 1**

**Political Closure in Russia, 1992–2008**

|  | 1992–93 | 1994–99 | 2000– |
|---|---|---|---|
| Government manipulation of elections | Moderate | Moderate | High |
| Incumbent monopolization of media | Moderate | Moderate | High |
| Opposition weakness | Moderate | Moderate | High |
| De facto power of executive over parliament | Weak | Moderate | High |

The evolution of regime competitiveness in Russia since the end of Communism can be broken up into three different stages. In the early period, 1992–1993, the president undertook moderate election manipulation that may have affected the results slightly but that still left room for significant electoral competition (cf. McFaul and Petrov 1998, Fish 2005). Similarly, large-audience electronic media faced governmental pressure at key moments—such as the 1996 presidential election—but still was relatively free to criticize the president (European Institute for the Media 1996). Next, the opposition to Yeltsin, while it had far fewer resources than the president, nonetheless had access to key organizational and financial resources that facilitated real competition. Finally, the most notable aspect of this period was a relatively powerful parliament that was able to mount a serious challenge to executive power (Remington 1996). But the country became less competitive over time. In line with Freedom House scores over this same period, my measure of regime competition/closure reflects increasingly autocratic rule over the course of the 1990s. By the mid-1990s, electoral manipulation, control over the media, and opposition weakness remained relatively constant. However, Yeltsin had successfully reduced much of the legislature's power. In the early 2000s under Putin, the government almost completely monopolized large-audience media, deprived the opposition of any significant resources, and virtually obliterated any serious challenge to the government within the legislature. By 2008, the Putin regime effectively eliminated electoral competition by making it virtually impossible for viable opposition candidates such as Gary Kasparov and Mikhail Kasyanov to compete in the 2008 Presidential elections (Pravda.RU 12/13/2007; BBC 27 January 2008). (Table 1 outlines the level of regime closure in Russia, 1991–2008.)

I argue that this evolution towards greater regime closure can to an important degree be understood in terms of increasingly effective coercive state and party/party-substitute organizations. Weak party and state organization in the very early 1990s generated important room for political competition that was closed off as the state became stronger and as pro-government forces became better organized.

**The Evolution of State and Party Capacity in Russia**

The evolution of state and party capacity in Russia has been shaped both by the availability of economic and organizational resources on one side and by particular strategic responses to organizational challenges on the other. The strength of the coercive state and ruling party gradually increased over time. In 1991, following the collapse of the USSR, the Russian state inherited a massive security apparatus with a broad scope of control over Russian society. Yet available mechanisms of cohesion were extraordinarily weak. Thus, both the Soviet state as well as the Communist Party that had held it together disappeared. Simultaneously, economic decline of about 40 percent in the early 1990s deprived state actors of key economic resources to reward supporters and punish defectors. In addition, the banning of the Communist Party in 1991 deprived leaders of a ruling party or party-substitute organization.

Responses to this organizational deficit evolved over time, reflecting a certain amount of trial-and-error learning on the part of Yeltsin and other state leaders. The failure of initial organizational strategies led to the adoption of new approaches. Each new strategy solved earlier problems but also had its own weaknesses. Thus, Yeltsin's initial organizational strategy (1991–1994) was to not build any single (formal or informal) political organization but to rely mostly on a series of ad hoc, bilateral personal ties. Such an approach was partly motivated by the fact that Yeltsin had gained initial popularity and fame by openly challenging the Communist Party in 1987. However, the spectacular failure of this strategy—evidenced by the rapid defections of large numbers of former allies and by severe disorganization in the early 1990s—led the Yeltsin administration to rely on a new strategy in the mid 1990s of "organizational outsourcing." In essence Yeltsin "rented" organizational capacity from various outside formal and informal groups—oligarchic networks, regional governments, and political parties—who provided support at key moments in exchange for increased autonomy (in the case of regional governments) and for various properties (in the case of oligarchs). While such a strategy created much greater levels of political stability than had existed in the early 1990s, it also generated ultimately unreliable allies who defected en masse when Yeltsin appeared to be weak in 1999. This experience in turn led Yeltsin and then Putin to focus on strengthening the vertical state control and to create a single pro-governmental party. Together with increased economic resources from rising oil prices, such a strategy significantly increased state and party organizational power by the early 2000s.

(Table 2 summarizes my scores for organizational capacity over time. Appendix III provides a more detailed justification of this scoring.)

### TABLE 2

### Party/State Capacity in Russia, 1992–2008[28]

|                  | Party   | State    | Organizational Strategy     | Total     |
| ---------------- | ------- | -------- | --------------------------- | --------- |
| Early 1990s      | Low     | Low      | No organization             | **Low**      |
| Mid- to late 1990s | Med-Low | Med-Low | Organizational outsourcing  | **Med-Low**  |
| 2000s            | Medium  | Med-High | Single hierarchy            | **Med-High** |

Below, I examine each of these three periods in greater detail and show how organizational power affected regime competitiveness.

### Disorganization in the Early 1990s

*[Yeltsin] always came into politics representing not some kind of powerful group but himself personally.*"[29]

*"Yeltsin did not build a state. He led a revolution for 10 years."*[30]

The early 1990s witnessed extreme party and state weakness. First, organization at the top was almost non-existent. In 1991, the Communist Party was dismantled but not replaced by any new governing party. Yeltsin rose to prominence in 1987–1990 by openly rejecting the Communist Party in which he had made his career. Both symbolically and organizationally, Yeltsin was very much "his own man." Like his counterparts in Moldova and Ukraine, Yeltsin chose not to create a pro-presidential party after the collapse of the Soviet Union.[31] Although he was actively supported by various pro-"democratic"/presidential movements in the early 1990s (including "Democratic Russia" in 1990; PRES and "Democratic Choice" in 1993; and "Our Home is Russia" and "Russia's Choice" in 1995), Yeltsin used almost none of his early political capital to bolster these organizations and often openly disparaged them (Filatov 2001: 41; Gaidar 1997: 263; McFaul 2001: 172).[32] Yeltsin considered forming a party at several points in the early 1990s and several of Yeltsin's allies actively advocated such a move yet Yeltsin

ultimately desisted (Baturin et al. 2001: 243). According to officials within the administration at the time, "a naïve idea dominated that once the country became democratic the democrats would succeed automatically and organize themselves spontaneously without any help" (Baturin et al. 2001: 264). In 1995, Yeltsin sought to promote two competing "centrist" parties—one on the left and the other on the right—as a way of reducing the number of parties in Russia and of eliminating, in Yeltsin's words, "the political hullabaloo that makes it difficult to sort things out" (quoted in McFaul 2001: 242).[33]

Instead of building a party, Yeltsin focused on cultivating relationships of "personal devotion" (*lichnaia predannost'*) among a relatively small group of officials and friends.[34] He sought to secure control over key institutions—such as security—by putting in place people with whom he was personally close or who had shown loyalty to Yeltsin in the past (Korzhakov 1997: 118). Loyalty was promoted among many officials by socializing, playing sports, and often drinking to excess together. Yeltsin also expected loyalty from others when he advanced their careers much more quickly than would have been possible under the Soviet system. For example, he chose Viktor Barannikov, a close personal associate with whom he frequently drank and vacationed, to run the security services (Waller 1994: 94; Mlechin 2002: 742, 746). At the same time Yeltsin, according to his own admission, had relatively few close allies when he came to Moscow from Sverdlovsk in 1985.[35]. And because of his anti-communism, he was unable to draw on the Party's organizational culture or cadres to support his rule—quite unlike Putin, who has actively embraced his KGB past and thus has been able to draw on the KGB's organizational and personnel resources. As a result, early personnel decisions often involved a great deal of "chance,"[36] and Yeltsin was often forced by circumstance to appoint officials whom he barely knew (Korzhakov 1997: 118; Morrison 1991: 51). Thus, while Yeltsin was given a tremendous opportunity in the early 1990s to staff the government and state with "his" people, he lacked the formal or informal organization to build reliable and loyal networks. Yeltsin simply had very few officials he could truly call "his."

Yeltsin's choice of organizational strategy was shaped both by the availability of organizational resources as well as by his own personal history and proclivities. First, the

destruction of the Communist Party that Yeltsin had helped to bring about meant that any pro-governmental party would have to be built from scratch. The extensive time and resources that would have been required to create a new organization clearly discouraged reliance on a single party. At the same time, some other post-Soviet leaders faced with a similar dilemma, such as Eduard Shevardnadze, did choose to create a single pro-presidential party. In part, Yeltsin's "no-organization" strategy would seem to have resulted from the fact that Yeltsin gained prominence in the late 1980s by openly challenging the Party leadership and organizational apparatus. Having risen to power almost solely on the basis of his personal appeal, Yeltsin probably saw little reason to change tactics by mobilizing support via a party. Further, reliance on informal alliances built around "personal devotion" had been an extremely common method by which leaders gained power within the Communist Party hierarchy (cf. McCauley 1987: 12). Thus, while Yeltsin rejected the Party he continued to rely on old and familiar organizational tactics.

Simultaneously, while the Russian government inherited an enormous coercive state as well as nominal control over virtually the entire economy, mechanisms of control were extraordinarily weak. In the face of severe economic decline, salaries and almost all other budgetary commitments were severely underfunded by the central government. In the early 1990s, in turn, many republics and regions demanded greater autonomy and even separation from the Russian state (Kahn 2002; Stoner-Weiss 2005, 2006).[37] There was also extremely widespread insubordination within the armed services, as servicemen often did not receive pay, while division at the top undermined the central hierarchy (Moran 1999; Herspring 1998). Thus Yegor Gaidar worried about a "dangerous vacuum in the administration of military and security structures" (1999: 124).

**The Early 1990s: Organizational Failure and Political Contestation**
While such state and party incapacity undermined both economic and political reform, it also generated important levels of contestation in the face of an extraordinarily weak civil society and a nominal state monopoly over the economy and media. First, party weakness greatly enhanced contestation by facilitating the defection of key Yeltsin allies. The importance of disorganization is most striking in Yeltsin's failure to control the Congress

of People's Deputies in the early 1990s despite the fact that Yeltsin had just months before successfully imposed his own chosen successor, Ruslan Khasbulatov, as its head (Filatov 2001: 170; Andrews 2002: 237). In 1992–1993, the Congress openly challenged Yeltsin's rule and nearly toppled his government (Remington 1996; Andrews 2002).

Parliament's serious challenge of the president in the early 1990s cannot be understood in terms of any inherent power of the legislature. While the conflict between the president and legislature has often been portrayed as one between two relatively equal foes (cf. Shevtsova 1999),[38] by almost any measure, Yeltsin had access to *far* greater power resources than did the legislature, including nominal control over security (Mukhin 2002: 148);[39] regional appointments; all major TV stations;[40] KGB archives (Huskey 1999: 63);[41] industrial ministries; the Ministry of Finance; and Western aid. Thus, while most studies of the conflict emphasize Khasbulatov's effective use of "broad patronage powers" (Filatov 2001: 204) to secure the support of deputies,[42] Yeltsin had access—in principle at least—to much greater patronage resources than did Khasbulatov and should therefore have had a relatively easy time consolidating majority support. Further, Yeltsin's consistently higher support in public opinion polls (Baturin et al. 2001: 250) should have facilitated efforts to cope with the legislature.

The relative strength of the legislature in the early 1990s was rooted much less in either the characteristics or the power resources of the parliament itself and much more in the weakness of the executive branch. The absence of party-like organizational mechanisms coupled with a weak state made it much harder for Yeltsin to harness his (nominally) disproportionate access to power resources. Above all, the absence of a pro-presidential party or "party-substitute" organization made it incredibly difficult to cope with dissension within the pro-Yeltsin camp. In the absence of any organization, allies had extraordinarily short time horizons. Thus, losers in leadership battles could easily feel that they had been left completely in the cold and therefore had little reason not to quickly move into opposition. Most momentously, Yeltsin's former ally Ruslan Khasbulatov defected into the opposition literally months after Yeltsin got him elected as head of parliament in late 1991. This action seems to have been rooted in Khasbulatov's frustration that he was not chosen to be either vice-president or prime minister in 1991 (Filatov 2001: 171; Aron 2000: 497).

The legislature's increasing opposition to Yeltsin over the course of the early 1990s was rooted in the same dynamic. Thus, support for democrats fell dramatically because "a number of deputies felt themselves cut off or removed from power after the establishment of presidentialism" (Sobyanin 1994: 188). Sergei Filatov, Yeltsin's main liaison with the legislature in the early 1990s, presents a very similar picture. "A characteristic example," he notes, "was Tatiana Koriagina. Not getting the position of deputy representative of the Supreme Soviet, she asked for a position in government, but did not receive anything. And then she was offended and saw corruption everywhere [within the Presidential administration]. It is possible cite tens of such examples" (Filatov 2001: 70). In the absence of an organization to structure career advancement, "personal devotion" (*lichnaia predannost'*)—rooted either in gratitude for past advancement or close personal relations—provided extraordinarily poor defense against defection in the highly dynamic transition environment.

High contestation and threats to regime stability in the early 1990s were also a direct outgrowth of state weakness. The failure of the "personal-devotion" (*lichnaia predannost'*) strategy as a means of administrative control is best exemplified by the defection of Viktor Barannikov, a drinking buddy Yeltsin had chosen to run the security forces. Despite apparently strong personal ties with Yeltsin, Barannikov openly backed Khasbulatov and the parliamentary opposition in 1993 (Baturin et al. 2001: 252).

Weak cohesion generated default competition by making it impossible for Yeltsin to take full advantage of his disproportionate administrative resources. First, disorganization within the executive branch facilitated greater legislative power. As Eugene Huskey (1999: 41) notes, "the absence of loyal executive agencies prepared to implement the president's will forced Yeltsin into frequent concessions and other political maneuvers to maintain his authority." The stark divisions within the executive branch allowed the legislature to seek informal allies and play off different factions within the executive. At parliament's urging, for example, the Russian prosecutor Aleksandr Kazannik and Russian security director Nikolai Golushko permitted the immediate release of those imprisoned for involvement in anti-Yeltsin actions in 1991 and 1993, despite strenuous objections by Yeltsin (Kostikov 1997: 290–292; Mlechin 2002: 766; Filatov 2001: 342).

Next, weak control over regional governments may have undermined efforts to control the electoral process in the early 1990s. Thus, observers have argued that in the 1993 constitutional referendum Yeltsin had to bargain extensively with regional officials in order to "guarantee" the necessary 50 percent turnout required for ratification of the constitution (*Izvestiia* 4 May 1994: 4; Dunlop 1999; Sobyanin and Sukhovol'skii 1995). As a result, he may have had no choice but to permit anti-Yeltsin forces to gain a significant foothold in the legislature. Finally, police suppression of opposition and dissent in the early 1990s was highly ineffective, and agencies of coercion were extremely unreliable. Yeltsin advisors complained that both the state prosecutor and the police were extremely passive in their efforts to suppress extremist groups:

> It was strange that the President on several occasions gave orders to stop the extremist behavior, to close openly fascist publications. But after his orders, nothing changed … he could not do anything. His strict orders to the power ministries … did nothing but disturb the air" (Kostikov 1997: 115–16; see also Baturin et al. 2001: 265).[43]

This image of the weak autocratic state is partially contradicted by the fact that of course Yeltsin *was* able to impose force through his assault on parliament in October 1993. However, almost all accounts of these events (Yeltsin 1994: 278; Kulikov 2002) demonstrate that Yeltsin faced extraordinary difficulties in gaining compliance from the military and, to a lesser extent, from the police. Thus, Defense Minister Pavel Grachev refrained from bringing troops into Moscow as ordered by the government (Kulikov 2002: 160–70; Yeltsin 1994: 12, 272–78) in part because leaders feared taking responsibility for such a high-risk venture.[44] Grachev only relented after significant personal pressure from the president (Yeltsin 1994: 278).

Overall, then, just as the state was ineffective in the early 1990s at collecting taxes, at controlling corruption and at providing basic public services, it also faced severe difficulties in suppressing dissent. In this sense, the dynamic political competition of the early 1990s was a direct outgrowth of state incapacity.

Most accounts of this period point to Yeltsin's failure to promote a pro-presidential party as a reason for *democratic* breakdown as opposed to *authoritarian*

failure as argued here (cf. Remington 1996; McFaul 1994, 2001; Colton and Skach 2005). Such accounts seem to rest on the assumption that a strong party built by Yeltsin could have provided a more robust bulwark against autocratic forces in the 1990s. Indeed, it seems clear that the conflict between the legislature and executive could have been avoided if the regime had been backed by a well-organized governing party. However, the argument that such a party would have promoted *democracy* rests on a fundamental contradiction. If "democratic" societal forces were so dependent on executive support to create a robust party in the early 1990s, then it seems almost certain (at least in the short term) that any party created by the executive would have been dominated by it and not by (possibly more democratic) societal forces. And as this paper makes clear, strong pro-governmental parties have often been key to autocratic consolidation. A robust governing party would seem all the more dangerous for democracy in a context such as the former Soviet Union (or Africa) where other sources of political competition—such as civil society—are weak. Indeed, this argument is not simply hypothetical: Yeltsin *was* able to promote a successful pro-governmental party in 1999. But (as we see below), this development hardly promoted democracy. Indeed, increased autocracy in Russia was caused not by the victory of apparently anti-democratic opposition to Yeltsin, but by the victory of his allies.

**The Benefits and Limits of "Organizational Outsourcing," 1994–1999**
Problems created by state and party weakness combined with the emergence of increasingly institutionalized parties and informal patronage networks in the early 1990s convinced the administration to adopt a new approach to strengthening Yeltsin's support base by the mid-1990s. Instead of relying on highly atomized personal contacts or *lichnaia predannost'*, Yeltsin increasingly drew on a strategy of "organizational outsourcing" that involved dependence on the assistance of relatively well-institutionalized but autonomous political organizations and networks. Yeltsin essentially "rented" organizational capacity from oligarchic networks, regional governments, and political parties, who provided support at key moments and helped to strengthen Yeltsin's control over the state, parliament and electoral process. Such a strategy promoted greater

political stability in the mid 1990s. Yet, it also left Yeltsin highly vulnerable to defection in the event of crisis.

While the very early 1990s had been marked by extreme organizational fluidity, various political organizations and informal networks had begun to solidify by the mid-1990s. After the 1993 elections, parties emerged—in particular the Communist Party of Russia and Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR)—that had greater discipline than groupings in the previous parliament. Similarly, business actors became better organized with the appearance of highly profitable banking groups (Schroder 1999; Johnson 2000). These developments—combined with the persistence of many tightly organized regional fiefdoms—meant that even if Yeltsin chose not to focus on building "in-house" organizational capacity he could now "rent" outside organizational power. Yeltsin's "organizational outsourcing strategy" can be identified in three areas: electoral politics, center-regional control, and parliamentary relations. Its emergence was less the product of a self-conscious vision and much more the result of frantic and rather ad-hoc efforts to respond to emerging political crises. First, in the run-up to the 1996 presidential elections, Yeltsin initially sought to rely on existing state administrative structures including both sectoral ministries and the police to "win" the election. However, major failures in direct autocratic administrative control in 1996[45] appear to have convinced Yeltsin to rely increasingly on semi-autonomous oligarchic groups to lead and organize his reelection effort (Hoffman 2002: 333; Solovei 1996: 342; Freeland 2000: 208). In particular, the "loans-for-shares" arrangement—whereby a limited number of bankers received access to valuable economic properties in exchange for providing up-front loans to the Russian government—was part of a political "pact" creating a small group of large-scale property holders whose interests were tied directly to Yeltsin's fate in the 1996 election.[46] A broadly similar pattern of organizational outsourcing is evident in center-regional relations in the mid-1990s. Thus, Yeltsin responded to most demands for secession in the early 1990s by essentially giving regional leaders greater autonomy in exchange for their acceptance of Russian territorial integrity and political support of Yeltsin (Huskey 2001: 114; Bahry 2005: 130; Shevtsova 1999: 157; Kahn 2002; Stoner-Weiss 2005). Finally, in contrast to 1992–93, the administration was no longer forced to buy off all deputies individually but could rely on a few relatively disciplined political

structures. Thus, Yeltsin in the mid-1990s frequently "purchased" the largest and most cohesive (and nominally oppositionist) parties: the Communists and the Liberal Democratic Party (Huskey 2001: 122).

**The Impact of the Outsourcing Strategy**

The strategy of organizational outsourcing yielded key benefits but also was a weak basis for a stable regime. First, agreements with the oligarchs in 1996 allowed Yeltsin to reduce state control over the economy in a way that provided him with important organizational bases of support. Such arrangements gave Yeltsin effective mechanisms to finance the campaign, as well as key media support from the major television channels NTV and ORT (Hoffman 2002: 348–350; Freeland 2000). "Without the support of Russian financial interests, it would have been extremely difficult for Yeltsin to have won the presidential election" (Johnson 2000: 183). In return for their support, oligarchic groups received key property rights and became increasingly powerful within the presidential administration in the mid- and late 1990s (Kryshtanovskaia 2005: 333; Schroder 1999: 977–8). Similarly, the strategy of exchanging regional autonomy for the support of regional leaders eliminated an important source of regime opposition. Thus, republican leaders who had opposed Yeltsin early on (Dunlop 1995: 199–200; McFaul and Petrov 1998: 175–181) now used significant administrative resources—including outright vote falsification—to support Yeltsin in 1996 (McFaul 1997: 47, 63, 70; Mlechin 2002: 760; Myagkov and Ordeshook 2001). Finally, the purchasing of "opposition" parties in the legislature allowed the government to pass key legislation. For example, to pass the 1997 budget, "'circles close to the government' channeled US $27 million to the Communist and Liberal Democratic Parties" (Huskey 2001: 122). The legislature did not fundamentally challenge Yeltsin to nearly the same degree as in 1992–1993. The combination of increased political organization and large scale patronage made it possible—in stark contrast to 1992–93—for the executive to gain temporary majorities at key moments in the 1990s.

While this strategy of organizational outsourcing allowed for greater control over the legislature and for the defeat of key opposition challenges, it proved untenable in the medium term. Dominated by highly opportunistic forces with weak organizational or

other ties to the Kremlin, the ruling coalition was highly vulnerable to short-term perceptions of regime weakness among the political elite. Thus, when Yeltsin appeared weak—as during the 1998 fiscal crisis—virtually all his supporters abandoned him, and he was forced to appoint Yevgenii Primakov as prime minister (El'tsin 2000: 226). Next, major defections by state and regional actors in 1998–1999 significantly strengthened the opposition. By trading autonomy for political support in 1994–1996, Yeltsin made it significantly easier for state and other actors to defect. This defection became most directly manifested in the emergence of the Fatherland-All Russia (OVR) alliance in 1999 that brought together Evgenii Primakov, Iurii Luzhkov, and a significant number of regional leaders. The strong support of regional leaders for the opposition in the 1999 elections significantly undermined the Kremlin's control over electoral manipulation. The result was what Steven Fish (2001) has referred to as "pluralism of falsification," whereby competing factions used vote manipulation in different regions to support their candidate (Myagkov et al. 2005: 96). Finally, 1998–1999 also witnessed the defection of a significant number of oligarchs who had backed the Kremlin in 1996. Thus, business networks around Luzhkov—including five major media groups—gave their backing to the opposition (Sakwa 2000). In addition, Gusinsky's NTV, which had strongly backed Yeltsin in 1996, came out against the Kremlin in 1999.

**"The Steel Rod": State Building and the Security Services**
Probably the single biggest factor facilitating greater autocratic control in the late 1990s and early 2000s was the increase in oil prices that gave the Russian government access to the resources necessary to secure greater centralized state power than had existed in the 1990s (Fish 2005). At the same time, an important shift in organizational strategy by Yeltsin and then by Putin played a key role in reducing uncertainty within the system.

The obvious failures of the outsourcing strategy of organization led to the development of a fundamentally new approach to organization that began under Yeltsin and flowered under Putin. First, Yeltsin responded to state weakness by bringing in large numbers of security personnel, thereby grafting what Yeltsin referred to as the "steel rod" of military discipline onto the state. This move was followed by strenuous efforts by Putin to strengthen vertical control over regional governments. Second, in direct response

to the perceived threat of OVR, the Yeltsin administration created a single ruling party.
Under Putin, these strategies—combined with Putin's anti-democratic leanings and
higher oil prices (Considine and Kerr 2002)—yielded both greater incumbent capacity
and significantly reduced political competition.

Yeltsin's concern over the rebellion of governors in 1999 led him to seek a new
strategy of organization that involved embedding the military and security services
directly into the state. Yeltsin argued that the "[c]onflict between governors and President
is extremely dangerous for the country … Having seen in the fall [1998] crisis the
weakness of executive power, the governors tried again and again to test its durability"
(El'tsin 2000: 271–2). Thus he promoted a more effective state hierarchy by creating a
"steel rod that would strengthen the whole political structure of power" (El'tsin 2000:
254). Bringing into the government people from the military and security services
"accustomed to military discipline … seemed like a quick and simple way of reviving
functionally effective government power" (Kryshtanovskaia 2005: 267).

Given the difficulties of creating effective authoritative organization from scratch,
the KGB offered Yeltsin a powerful solution to the problem of state building. The
security services had a belief in hierarchy, an organizational esprit de corps, and a sense
of elite status and mission that made them in many ways ideally placed to bring order to
the Russian state. Thus, Yeltsin both sought a prime minister with a security background
(Baturin et al.2001: 782; Mlechin 2002: 843) and brought a large number of security and
military officials into the government and state as a whole (Kryshtanovskaia 2005: 270).

Once in power, Putin took a fundamentally different approach to state and party
organization than had Yeltsin. Relative to Yeltsin, Putin is very much an "organization
man," having spent most of his career as a low level functionary and—in stark contrast to
Yeltsin's treatment of the Communist Party—remaining loyal to his former place of
employment. Today, the top leadership is often referred to as "the corporation" or
"Kremlin Inc" (Whitmore 2007; Tolstaya 2000; Spector 2007). Putin largely eliminated
the "cadre meat-grinder" that had existed under Yeltsin and has rarely fired personnel
(Kryshtanovskaia 2005: 236, 211)—thus reducing the problem of alienating potentially
powerful actors that had plagued Yeltsin. Putin also sought to reestablish vertical control
over regional governments. He attempted to consolidate regions via the introduction of

seven "super regions"; centralization of the budget; abolition of the series of ad hoc agreements made with separate regions; and elimination of elections for regional heads of government (Stoner-Weiss 2006). In addition, Putin significantly reduced the power of the Federation Council and eliminated its use as a venue for regional lobbying (Remington 2003)—a move that Yeltsin explicitly condoned (El'tsin 2000: 272). Finally, Putin sought to reestablish the former breadth of state control over the economy by destroying the oligarchic privatization pact created in 1996 (see above). Thus, since 2001, 44 percent of Russia's oil sector has returned to state hands (Yassman 2007).

Putin's approach to political parties has also differed from Yeltsin's. In direct response to the challenge posed by OVR, Yeltsin and then Putin promoted the creation of a single party (Smyth 2002; Hale 2004). While Yeltsin actively resisted identifying himself with a particular party, Putin has made a much greater effort to promote a single pro-presidential party: Unity/United Russia. At the end of 2007, Putin demonstrated a further commitment to developing United Russia by topping the party list in the parliamentary elections and in April 2008, he became the chair of the party.

**Organization and Regime Closure**

In conjunction with increased oil prices, the new approach to state and party organization has significantly reduced threats to regime stability. First, Yeltsin's solution to the problem of weak central control had the (perhaps unintended) consequence of bringing in officials who did not value openness. One of the few existing effective hierarchies in Russia, the KGB was also obviously its least democratic. Thus Putin, in contrast to Yeltsin,[47] could not tolerate criticism of his rule and shut down virtually all major independent media.

Second, given that so much regime contestation arose from state and party failure, the creation of more effective state and party hierarchies inevitably led to a reduction in competition. Indeed, most of the institutional reforms discussed above are not inherently undemocratic; cohesive ruling parties and centralized intergovernmental systems obviously exist in many established democracies. In the absence of a strong civil society, however, such measures closed off key sources of pluralism. Thus, Putin's greater attention to the creation of a ruling party led to greater party discipline and much greater

regime closure. In contrast to previous "parties of power," Unity/United Russia "rivaled the Communists" in voting discipline (Remington 2003: 36; Smyth 2002). As one Russian commentator noted, "nothing is decided in Okhotnyy Ryad now without the participation of Kremlin minders" (*Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, April 1, 2005). A cohesive United Russia party "was the end of the independence of legislative power from the executive" (Kryshtanovskaia 2005: 253). A more tightly ruled organization reduced the chances of high-level elite defection that had previously provided an important source of dynamic change.

The creation of a more reliable central state hierarchy also has made it significantly easier for the president to squeeze potential sources of opposition, both major economic actors as well as regional governments. In the early 2000s, Putin used his control over the security forces and courts to restrict the independence of the oligarchs—culminating in the arrest of Mikhail Khodorkovsky and the seizure of Yukos. Further, in 2003, in contrast to 1999, the Kremlin controlled all national television stations as well as regional ones such as Moscow's *TV Tsentr*. Compared with his counterparts in both Moldova and Ukraine, Putin was more successful at limiting oligarchs' contributions to government-sanctioned parties since 2000 (McFaul and Petrov 2004).

It should be emphasized that greater regime cohesion under Putin cannot simply be attributed to increased patronage opportunities that resulted from higher oil prices. While oil prices were relatively low during Yeltsin's tenure, the president still had extremely significant access to elite-level patronage. Thus, in the mid-1990s, Yeltsin directly controlled access to vast state economic resources that he was able to channel into the hands of supporters who in turn became extremely wealthy. Yet, in contrast to the KGB network (*siloviki*) of the 2000s, such oligarchs lacked virtually any organizational ties, formal or informal. Such actors were opportunistic in the extreme and accordingly were ready to defect from the government in the face of any perceived regime weakness.

At the same time, while incumbent capacity is greater in Putin's Russia than it was under Yeltsin, certain aspects of the incumbent party organization and the de facto scope of state control over the economy create points of regime vulnerability. First, while United Russia is much more coherent than any previous governing party in Russia (or in

Belarus or Ukraine, for example), it includes a number of powerful officials with autonomous access to resources—most obviously Moscow Mayor Iurii Luzhkov—who would be in a position to defect quickly from Putin should the president appear vulnerable. Further, given the large amount of oligarchic wealth in foreign bank accounts that the Russian government cannot control, it is not clear how effectively Putin could prevent businesses from giving resources to a credible opposition if such were to emerge.

**CONCLUSION**

This paper has sought to show how reframing our approach to transitional regimes as failed autocracies rather than emerging democracies yields key insights into regime development that have hitherto been ignored. In the post-Soviet Russian context, a focus on problems of authoritarian control reveals ways in which state and party failure that has overwhelmingly been seen as an obstacle to democratic consolidation was also an important source of political competition. Increased autocratic state and party capacity over the course of the 1990s helped to promote increased regime closure.

This analysis of the evolution of authoritarian organization has demonstrated the ways in which state and party capacity are rooted both in structural and voluntarist factors. Thus, Yeltsin in the early 1990s faced key organizational challenges caused by many factors—including economic crisis—largely out of his control. Yet, we see how strategic decisions affected organizational capacity in key ways. Most critically, Yeltsin in the early 1990s chose to refrain from party building—a fact that reduced his ability to confront challenges from the legislature despite key institutional advantages and greater public support. Here, we see how lessons learned from his battle with Gorbachev in the late 1980s undermined state and party building after Yeltsin took executive control in the early 1990s. Then in the late 1990s, Yeltsin responded to political rebellion by Russia's governors by utilizing KGB and military structures as a "steel rod" to promote state building. Together with increased oil prices, this decision promoted greater central control but obviously destroyed key sources of political competition.

## APPENDIX I: SURVEY OF ARTICLES ON REGIMES 2003–2004

### Source of Regime Outcomes

(among 144 articles in which regime type is dependent variable drawn from APSA
list of articles on political regimes mid-2003 through mid-2007)

| | | |
|---|---|---:|
| Leadership | | 15% |
| External environment | | 20% |
| Formal institutions<br>(including inst design or introduction of formal procedures) | | 22% |
| State institutions | | 20% |
| *of which* | State as necessary for democracy | 15% |
| | Anti-democratic coercive state power | 4% |
| Economic development/ structure of economy | | 24% |
| Opposition mobilization/ civil society | | 24% |
| *of which* | Opposition/ civil society promotes democracy | 20% |
| | Opposition/ civil society can undermine democracy | 4% |
| Culture/ identity | | 13% |
| Parties/party systems | | 10% |
| Split elites | | 4% |
| Pacts/nature of transition | | 4% |
| Other | | 6% |

## APPENDIX II: MEASURING ORGANIZATIONAL POWER

### Autocratic State Capacity

<u>**Scope**</u>

**High:**

Large and well-trained, -funded, and -equipped internal security apparatus with clear presence throughout national territory. Existence of specialized intelligence or internal security agencies with demonstrated capacity to monitor and repress opposition activities in all areas of the country.

and/or

Dominant and discretionary control by state over most wealth in society.

**Medium:** Criteria for high scope not met, but security forces maintain at least some presence across the national territory; no evidence of severe deficiencies in resources and equipment.

**Low:** Abnormally small/underdeveloped security apparatus; evidence of a lack of state presence in significant parts of the national territory or severe problems of under-funding, non-payment of salaries, and/or lack of supplies.

<u>**Control**</u>

**High:** Recent history of military conflict (leading security officials must be drawn from the generation that participated in the conflict), including
  (1) External war (without defeat)
  (2) Intense military competition and threat
  (3) Large-scale and successful counter-insurgency campaign
  (4) Successful revolutionary or anti-colonial struggle.

Or

Pervasive ethnic, kinship, institutionalized party, or other ties between incumbent and coercive apparatus

Or

Evidence of successful high-intensity coercion in recent past.

**Medium**: No recent history of serious military conflict or evidence of extensive ethnic, kinship, or party ties

and

No evidence of previous insubordination or military defeat.

**Low:** Previous evidence of serious insubordination by state security officials, including attempted coups, open rebellion, large-scale desertion, and major episodes of refusal to carry out executive orders (excluding cases during regime crisis).

## Party Strength

### Scope

**High:** Large organization that penetrates virtually all population centers, including the countryside. Evidence of significant grassroots activity—during and between elections—throughout the national territory.

**Medium**: Party does not meet criteria for high scope, but possesses a national organization that penetrates most of the national territory, especially major population centers, and is capable of organizing nationwide electoral campaigns.

**Low:** Little or no party organization outside of the capital.

## Control

**High:** Single party with highly institutionalized system of patronage, established party label and a history of demonstrated capacity to win multiparty elections.

Or

Evidence of alternative source of control, including:
- (1) history of shared struggle in revolutionary, liberation, or underground resistance movements;
- (2) highly salient ideology in polarized political context;
- (3) shared ethnicity in context of politicized ethnicity.

**Medium:** single party organization with known party label and established system of patronage, but no long history of winning competitive elections or evidence of alternative source of control.

**Low:** new party or multiple/shifting incumbent parties without any organized system of patronage or any evidence of alternative source of control.

Or

No previously existing party organization.

## Organizational Strategy

**Strong**: Efforts to invest-in and build a single organizational hierarchy. "Divide and rule" strictly within confines of central party/state organization.

**Medium**: "Outsourcing" Reliance on centralized organizations not directly controlled or led by government leadership.

**Weak**: "No organization" Little or no effort at organization building of any kind. Strict reliance on bilateral "divide-and-rule" strategies among individual leaders/subordinates.

**APPENDIX III: SCORING RUSSIAN ORGANIZATIONAL POWER**

"Party" in the early 1990s is scored as "Low" because of the ban against the Communist Party and the virtual absence of a pro-presidential party, as well as the virtual absence of any informal pro-Yeltsin organization (i.e., established patronage network). "State" in the early 1990s is scored as "Low" because of regular evidence of state insubordination prior to the 1993 crisis, inability to pay state wages, and open demands for secession among many republics and even oblasts. "Party" in the mid-1990s (1994–1999) is scored as "Low-Med" because of increased explicit reliance on informal oligarchic patronage networks as well as active reliance on outside party organizational assistance (see description below). "State" in 1994–1999 is scored as "Low-Med" because of significantly reduced secessionist demands but continued inability to pay wages and continued evidence of open insubordination by lower-level state officials. "Party" in 2000–2007 is scored as "Medium" because of reliance on a single pro-presidential organization—but one that lacked "something else" outside of patronage, such as familial ties, history of conflict, or past history of electoral success. "State" in 2000–2007 is scored as "High" because of demonstrably reduced open insubordination and strong informal ties between the executive and agencies of coercion. The total scores are calculated by scoring Low = 0, Med = 1 and High = 2; adding the scores for party scope and control, state scope and control and organizational strategy; and dividing the sum by the highest possible score. Any score below 0.333 = Low; 0.33–0.5 = Med-Low; 0.51–0.666 = Med-High; and 0.666–1.0 = High.

| | State | | Party | | Organizational Strategy | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | control | scope | control | scope | | |
| Early 1990s | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.1 |
| Mid-1990s | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0.4 |
| 2000s | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0.8 |

**ENDNOTES**

[1] Thus, some of the most authoritarian regimes in the world have recently been described by scholars as "democratizing" or as "democracies"—including Putin's Russia (Nichols 2001: v–vii, 2002), Belarus (Korosteleva 2003), and even Myanmar (South 2004).

[2] Gans-Morse (2004) suggests that claims of "transitological" bias are vastly exaggerated.

[3] A search of JSTOR in September 2008 produced 1,143 articles with "democracy" or "pluralism" (including all grammatical forms of these words) in the title, and 169 titles of articles including any of the above-mentioned synonyms for authoritarianism (including all grammatical forms).

[4] Mid-2003 to mid-2007.

[5] Many articles cover both.

[6] Such a bias has *not* necessarily translated into optimism about the success of democracy. As Gans-Morse (2004: 336) has shown in his review of the post-Communist-regimes literature, observers have generally been *pessimistic* rather than *optimistic*.

[7] The central limitation with many studies of democratic phenomena such as public opinion, legislatures, and institutional design is *not* that these phenomena are unimportant. Instead the problem is that most studies are designed in a way that assumes their importance in a highly problematic structural context. The focus is on the *character* of these institutions and processes rather than the *source* of their (often quite real) influence. For example, studies of public opinion need to move beyond explorations of the content of public opinion and to focus more on how and under what conditions public opinion matters in a context of semi-free elections and regular government abuses. Similarly, formal laws often clearly matter even in the absence of a strong rule of law. But the weak institutional context makes it imperative to understand why some rules matter when so many are ignored. Finally, we need to explore why legislatures were so influential in the 1990s in countries such as Russia and Ukraine that lacked any democratic history.

[8] Based on a review of 144 articles—drawn from the APSA Comparative Democratization section's list of articles on political regimes published from mid-2003 through mid-2007—in which regime type is the dependent variable. In the last four years, almost a quarter (22 percent) of all articles on the sources of political regime outcomes have argued that the design and/or the introduction of formal institutions have played a central role in explaining regime type. (See full breakdown of explanatory variables in Appendix I.)

[9] A fifth (20 percent) of all articles on political regimes in the last four years contend that the (strength or absence) of civil society, opposition, or mass mobilization has been central to explaining regime outcome.

[10] See Bellin (2004); Way (2005a); Way and Levitsky (2006) Slater (2003). Another set of exceptions is the extensive, and mostly general-audience, literature on the Soviet and post-Soviet KGB. See for example Knight (2000); Waller (1994).

[11] I have excluded here articles that simply mention coercive agencies in descriptions of violations of democratic norms.

[12] Recent studies that focus on fraud include Allina-Pisano (2005); Way (2005b); Wilson (2005); Myagkov and Ordeshook (2001, 2005); and Herron (2007).

[13] Jason Brownlee's (2007) recent work is an exception.

[14] See also see Linz and Stepan (1996); Sperling (2000); Carothers (2002: 16); and Bunce (2003: 180–81).

[15] In addition, studies focusing on the importance of opposition mobilization and civil society have overwhelmingly (83 percent) argued for their importance in democratization rather than the emergence or maintenance of nondemocratic rule.

[16] As Vladimir Lenin noted long ago, "a standing army and police are the chief instruments of state power" (1975: 52).

[17] This included 47,000 in Moscow alone – more than all of the employees of the FBI and CIA (Kalugin 1994: 109)

[18] Thus, known activists were detained or arrested and students kept in class until late in the evening or taken out of town in the run-up to key anniversaries and known-protest dates (Alexeyeva and Chalidze 1985: 366).

[19] Thus, "the KGB was re-formed by the Russian Federation without being reformed" (Waller 1994: 100).

[20] For example, one former local official in Moldova explained, "During the Soviet era the key to discipline of enterprises [and local governments] was the fact that the government and Party provided the main funds. But by the early 1990s, those funds had completely dried up. Now when they tried to dictate things, we could just ignore them. Under the new conditions they could do little to help us or hurt us." Interview with Vasile Galadi, former deputy head of Nesporene district (1994–96), August 3, 2004, Chisinau, Moldova.

[21] These indicators have been developed in conjunction with Steve Levitsky. See Levitsky and Way (2008).

[22] Yeltsin refused to fundamentally reform the KGB—appointing old-style KGB officials such as Nikolai Golushko who had been the official responsible for suppressing the dissident movement in Ukraine—and regularly relied on the KGB and other agencies to infiltrate and harass the opposition (Kozakavich 1996; Knight 2000; Mlechin 2002: 758; Iarovoi 2001: 115). According to Yeltsin's chief of staff in the early 1990s, Yeltsin felt that "the CPSU had been the country's brain and the KGB its spinal cord: 'And he clearly did not want to rupture the spinal cord now that the head had been lopped off'" (quoted in Colton 2008).

[23] Viacheslav Kostikov reports witnessing Yeltsin alter the final vote tallies in the 1993 referendum (1997: 268). Furthermore, in 1996, Yeltsin came very close to postponing the presidential elections for fear of a Communist victory.

[24] A "high" score indicates that at least one of the activities is sufficiently high to eliminate uncertainty in the electoral process. A "medium" score means that at least one of the activities is widespread enough to tilt the playing field seriously in favor of the incumbent—but not so much as to make the elections noncompetitive. For example, a "medium" score reflects a level of vote stealing in the range of 5–10 percent (as in 1990s Serbia, or in Ukraine under Kuchma) that still leaves important opportunities for regime opponents, as opposed to the 40–60 percent in contemporary Azerbaijan and Belarus that makes elections virtually meaningless.

[25] A "high" score indicates the almost total absence of opposition views in large-audience electronic media; a "medium" score means that most electronic media are incumbent controlled but that there exist significant large-audience media that openly criticize the government.

[26] A "highly" weak opposition is one that has virtually no financing or organizational resources. A "medium" weak opposition is one that has significant financial and organizational resources but is still seriously outmatched by the incumbent. Finally, a "low" score indicates an opposition that has financial and organizational resources roughly equal to or greater than those of the incumbent.

[27] A "high" score indicates that the executive manipulates the legislature at will to the extent that the body provides virtually no source of opposition. A "medium" score means that the balance of power favors the executive, but that parliament is able nonetheless to challenge the executive occasionally in a serious way or to force compromise on important issues such as appointments or key policy decisions. Examples of medium scores include Russia in 1994–99 and Ukraine in 1995–2004, when presidents generally dominated but strong and vocal anti-incumbent parties presented persistent and sometimes effective sources of opposition. Finally, a "low" score indicates that the balance of power favors parliament. Examples include Ukraine in 1992–94, when parliament consistently thwarted presidential initiatives and forced early presidential elections. Moldova in 1993–2000 is another case of low executive control, as evidenced by the

fact that parliament forced important constitutional changes against the will of successive presidents, including a decision in 2000 to abolish the popularly elected presidency.

[28] See Appendix III for a description of how scores were determined.

[29] Poptsov (2001:107).

[30] Gleb Pavlovsky, quoted in Sleivyte (2004: 60).

[31] The closest was Democratic Russia; however, Yeltsin purposely distanced himself from this movement.

[32] For example, just prior to the 1995 parliamentary elections, Yeltsin openly disparaged the government's achievements and predicted a weak showing for the "party of power"—a move that was considered a betrayal by "Our Home is Russia" supporters (Shevtsova 1999: 140).

[33] Yeltsin himself explained this decision not to create a party by the fact that Russian life had been dominated by a single party for so long (McFaul 2001: 155). Yeltsin's Press secretary, Viacheslav Kostikov (1997: 299) argues that Yeltsin also did not want to tie his fate to weak and relatively unpopular organizations and leaders (see also Shevtsova 1999: 36). Yeltsin also apparently did not want to limit his freedom of action on policy issues. Further, Michael McFaul argues that many technocrats in the government at the time felt both that strengthening groups such as Democratic Russia would hamper the implementation of policies and that societal demobilization was key to reform (McFaul 2001: 155). Finally, like his counterparts in Moldova and Ukraine, Yeltsin appears to have thought that both his popularity and formal powers as President would be sufficient to secure his control over the country (Hale 2006).

[34] Numerous memoirs of those close to Yeltsin point to the President's concern with cultivating and supporting this principle (Baturin et al. 2001: 255; Poptsov 2001: 107; Filatov 2001: 166; Korzhakov 1997; Kostikov 1997: 271; see also Rutland 1998, 315; Kulikov 2002: 388–389).

[35] Yeltsin reported that when he came to Moscow, "I did not know the personnel. I had just arrived in Moscow and had to pick new people." Quoted in Morrison (1991: 51).

[36] Korzhakov, for example, argues that "experts and political scientists create whole theories analyzing the mythical chains of Kremlin connections ... But no theories explaining personnel decisions existed now or then. In 1991 and later, people easily fell into power and even more easily fell out of power. Not even the personal whims of Yeltsin … [account] for the choice of candidate. Everything hinged on chance." (Korzhakov 1997: 123).

[37] Simultaneously, fights with parliament generated a "war of laws" with the presidency that opened up tremendous room for maneuver (as well as confusion) among lower level state officials (Bahry 2005; Kryshtanovskaia 2005: 122–3, 124–9).

[38] Parliament had much greater formal power than it would after the introduction of Yeltsin's 1993 constitution. Thus, parliament was in principle able to overrule presidential decrees with a simple majority. In addition, the legislature retained the right to appoint the head of the Central Bank and the state prosecutor.

[39] While Khasbulatov made various efforts to create a military force as well as to establish vertical control over the regions (Filatov 2001: 168, 185; Baturin et al. 2001: 281), such endeavors never yielded significant success.

[40] Thus, Yeltsin had the capacity to appear on TV when and where at will (cf. Baturin et al. 2001: 250: 291).

[41] These could be useful in obtaining compromising material on enemies.

[42] These means of support included committee chairmanships and other paying jobs in the Supreme Soviet, as well as cars, dachas, and special regional funds (Remington 1996: 121–123; Andrews 2002: 101).

[43] In this sense, Michael McFaul (2001: 128) would seem wrong to assert that in the early 1990s Yeltsin "could have disbanded political institutions not subordinate to President's office; suspended political liberties; and deployed police force to implement press decrees." The

difficulties faced by Yeltsin in various measures he *did* attempt suggest that he did not necessarily have such capabilities.

[44] Newspapers at the time played up such fears; *Rosiiskaia Gazeta*, for example, wrote ominously that officers participating in the assault on parliament could "spend the rest of their life in prison after Russia revives constitutional government" (quoted in Kostikov 1997: 220).

[45] First, the initial use of various state agencies such as the railroads by Soskovets to mobilize support failed when he barely collected the million signatures required for candidate registration before the deadline—at the same time that the Communists managed to collect sufficient signatures two months ahead of time (Aron 1999: 580). Second, efforts to shut down parliament ran into serious trouble when the head of the police, Anatolii Kulikov, strongly resisted this action (Kulikov 2002: 394–402).

[46] In Yegor Gaidar's words, "The loans for shares created a political pact. They helped ensure that Zyuganov did not come to the Kremlin. It was a necessary pact" (quoted in Freeland 2000: 171). For detailed descriptions of the loans-for-shares, see Freeland (2000) and Hoffman (2002: chap. 12).

[47] Yeltsin's close aides report that he was willing to allow open criticism in the media "as long as the situation did not become mortally dangerous for him and his power" (Baturin et al. 2001: 504).

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