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The political systems that have replaced communist rule in East-Central Europe and Eurasia are closely associated with their presidents. The first democratically elected presidents of these countries – men like Yeltsin, Havel and Wałęsa – have frequently been viewed as “founding fathers” of their countries’ independence. But were they successful in creating strong presidential systems in these states? Has their unquestioned personal power and charisma been institutionalized in the presidencies? Will executive power in postcommunist states remain the same when the first incumbents of the office are gone?

This book offers the first comparative analysis of the role of presidents in postcommunist states. The countries studied are Russia, Ukraine, Kazakstan among former Soviet republics, and Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary among Central European states. Leading specialists analyze presidential elections in these six states, including the historic 1996 election in Russia. They assess the powers of the president and describe the often-turbulent relations between presidents and parliaments in the 1990s. These experts also examine how the office has been shaped by its first incumbent and the degree to which presidents set “rules of the game” that will be in place long after they have left office.

The book also includes theoretical chapters by distinguished academics on the perils of a strong presidential system, the relevance of the separation of powers doctrine to postcommunist states, and the impact of the region’s democratic breakthrough on the nature of the presidency.

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