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Introduction and Theory

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Introduction

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

Transitions did not always lead to democracy, however. In much of Africa and the former Soviet Union, and in parts of Eastern Europe, Asia, and the Americas, new regimes combined electoral competition with varying degrees of authoritarianism. Unlike single-party or military dictatorships, post-Cold War regimes in Cambodia, Kenya, Malaysia, Mexico, Nigeria, Peru, Russia, Serbia, Taiwan, Ukraine, Zimbabwe, and elsewhere were competitive in that opposition forces used democratic institutions to contest vigorously – and, on occasion, successfully – for power. Nevertheless, they were not democratic. Electoral manipulation, unfair media access, abuse of state resources, and varying degrees of harassment and violence skewed the playing field in favor of incumbents. In other words, competition was real but unfair.¹ We characterize such regimes as *competitive authoritarian*. Competitive authoritarian regimes proliferated after the Cold War. By our count, 33 regimes were competitive authoritarian in 1995 – a figure that exceeded the number of full democracies in the developing and post-communist world.²

The study of post-Cold War hybrid regimes was initially marked by a pronounced democratizing bias.³ Viewed through the lens of democratization, hybrid regimes were frequently categorized as flawed, incomplete, or “transitional” democracies.⁴ For example, Russia was treated as a case of “protracted”

¹ On post-Cold War hybrid regimes, see Carothers (2002), Ottaway (2003), Schedler (2006a), and the cluster of articles in the April 2002 *Journal of Democracy*.

² See, for example, the scoring of Diamond (2002: 30–1) and Schedler (2002b: 47).

³ For a critique, see Carothers (2002).

⁴ See Collier and Levitsky (1997).

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democratic transition during the 1990s,⁵ and its subsequent autocratic turn was characterized as a “failure to consolidate” democracy.⁶ Likewise, Cambodia was described as a “nascent democracy” that was “on the road to democratic consolidation”⁷; Cameroon, Georgia, and Kazakhstan were labeled “democratizers”⁸; and the Central African Republic and Congo-Brazzaville were called “would-be democracies.”⁹ Transitions that did not lead to democracy were characterized as “stalled” or “flawed.” Thus, Zambia was said to be “stuck in transition”¹⁰; Albania was labeled a case of “permanent transition”¹¹; and Haiti was said to be undergoing a “long,”¹² “ongoing,”¹³ and even “unending”¹⁴ transition.

Such characterizations are misleading. The assumption that hybrid regimes are (or should be) moving in a democratic direction lacks empirical foundation. Hybrid regimes followed diverse trajectories during the post–Cold War period. Although some of them democratized (e.g., Ghana, Mexico, and Slovakia), most did not. Many regimes either remained stable (e.g., Malaysia and Tanzania) or became increasingly authoritarian (e.g., Belarus and Russia). In other cases, autocratic governments fell but were succeeded by new authoritarians (e.g., Georgia, Madagascar, and Zambia). Indeed, some regimes experienced two or more transitions without democratizing.¹⁵ As of 2010, more than a dozen competitive authoritarian regimes had persisted for 15 years or more.¹⁶ Rather than “partial,” “incomplete,” or “unconsolidated” democracies, these cases should be conceptualized for what they are: a distinct, nondemocratic regime type. Instead of assuming that such regimes are in transition to democracy, it is more useful to ask why some democratized and others did not. This is the goal of our study.

This book examines the trajectories of all 35 regimes that were or became competitive authoritarian between 1990 and 1995.¹⁷ The study spans five regions, including six countries in the Americas (the Dominican Republic, Guyana, Haiti, Mexico, Peru, and Nicaragua); six in Eastern Europe (Albania, Croatia, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia); three in Asia (Cambodia, Malaysia, and Taiwan); six in the former Soviet Union (Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine); and 14 in Africa (Benin, Botswana, Cameroon, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Senegal, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe).

⁵ This view of Russia was widely shared in the 1990s. This quote comes from McFaul (1999); see also Colton and Hough (1998); Aron (2000); Nichols (2001).

⁶ Smyth (2004).

⁷ Brown and Timberman (1998: 14) and Albritton (2004).

⁸ Siegle (2004: 21).

⁹ Chege (2005: 287).

¹⁰ Rakner and Svasand (2005).

¹¹ Kramer (2005).

¹² Gibbons (1999: 2).

¹³ Erikson (2004: 294).

¹⁴ Fatton (2004).

¹⁵ Examples include Georgia, Haiti, Madagascar, and Moldova.

¹⁶ These include Armenia, Botswana, Cambodia, Cameroon, Gabon, Kenya, Malawi, Malaysia, Mozambique, Senegal, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

¹⁷ Thus, cases of competitive authoritarianism that emerged after 1995, such as Nigeria and Venezuela, are not included in the study.

The book asks why some competitive authoritarian regimes democratized during the post–Cold War period, while others remained stable and authoritarian and still others experienced turnover without democratization. Our central argument, which is elaborated in Chapter 2, focuses on two main factors: ties to the West and the strength of governing-party and state organizations. Where linkage to the West was high, competitive authoritarian regimes democratized. Where linkage was low, regime outcomes hinged on incumbents’ organizational power. Where state and governing party structures were well organized and cohesive, regimes remained stable and authoritarian; where they were underdeveloped or lacked cohesion, regimes were unstable, although they rarely democratized.

This introductory chapter is organized as follows. The first section defines competitive authoritarianism and presents the case for a new regime type. The second section examines the rise of competitive authoritarianism. It attributes the proliferation of competitive authoritarian regimes to the incentives and constraints created by the post–Cold War international environment. The third section shows how competitive authoritarian regime trajectories diverged after 1990 and provides an overview of the book’s central argument and main theoretical contributions.

WHAT IS COMPETITIVE AUTHORITARIANISM?

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

– Daniel arap Moi, President of Kenya¹⁸

Competitive authoritarian regimes are civilian regimes in which formal democratic institutions exist and are widely viewed as the primary means of gaining power, but in which incumbents’ abuse of the state places them at a significant advantage vis-à-vis their opponents. Such regimes are competitive in that opposition parties use democratic institutions to contest seriously for power, but they are not democratic because the playing field is heavily skewed in favor of incumbents. Competition is thus real but unfair.

Situating the Concept

Competitive authoritarianism is a hybrid regime type, with important characteristics of both democracy and authoritarianism.¹⁹ We employ a “midrange” definition of democracy: one that is procedural but demanding.²⁰ Following Dahl, scholars have converged around a “procedural minimum” definition of democracy that includes four key attributes: (1) free, fair, and competitive elections;

¹⁸ Quoted in Munene (2001: 24).
¹⁹ For discussions of hybrid regimes, see Karl (1995), Collier and Levitsky (1997), Carothers (2002), Diamond (2002); Levitsky and Way (2002), Schedler (2002a, 2002b, 2006a, 2006b); Ottaway (2003), and Howard and Roessler (2006).
²⁰ See Diamond (1999: 13–15).

(2) full adult suffrage; (3) broad protection of civil liberties, including freedom of speech, press, and association; and (4) the absence of nonelected “tutelary” authorities (e.g., militaries, monarchies, or religious bodies) that limit elected officials’ power to govern.²¹ These definitions are essentially “Schumpeterian” in that they center on competitive elections.²² However, scholars have subsequently “precised” the concept of democracy by making explicit criteria – such as civil liberties and effective power to govern – that are implicitly understood to be part of the overall meaning and which are viewed as necessary for competitive elections to take place.²³

Although we remain committed to a procedural-minimum conception of democracy, we precise it by adding a fifth attribute: the existence of a reasonably level playing field between incumbents and opposition.²⁴ Obviously, a degree of incumbent advantage – in the form of patronage jobs, pork-barrel spending, clientelist social policies, and privileged access to media and finance – exists in all democracies. In democracies, however, these advantages do not seriously undermine the opposition’s capacity to compete.²⁵ When incumbent manipulation of state institutions and resources is so excessive and one-sided that it seriously limits political competition, it is incompatible with democracy.²⁶

A level playing field is implicit in most conceptualizations of democracy. Indeed, many characteristics of an uneven playing field could be subsumed into the dimensions of “free and fair elections” and “civil liberties.” However, there are at least two reasons to treat this attribute as a separate dimension. First, some aspects of an uneven playing field – such as skewed access to media and finance – have a major impact between elections and are thus often missed in evaluations of whether elections are free and fair. Second, some government actions that skew the playing field may not be viewed as civil-liberties violations. For example, whereas closing down a newspaper is a clear violation of civil liberties, *de facto* governing-party control of the private media – achieved through informal proxy or patronage arrangements – is not. Likewise, illicit government–business ties that create vast resource disparities *vis-à-vis* the opposition are not civil-liberties violations *per se*. Attention to the slope of the playing field thus highlights how regimes may be undemocratic even in the absence of overt fraud or civil-liberties violations.

It is important to distinguish between competitive and noncompetitive authoritarianism. We define *full authoritarianism* as a regime in which no viable

²¹ See Dahl (1971), Huntington (1991: 5–13), Schmitter and Karl (1991), Collier and Levitsky (1997), Diamond (1999: 7–15), and Mainwaring, Brinks, and Pérez-Liñán (2001). Other scholars, including Przeworski and his collaborators (Alvarez et al. 1996; Przeworski et al. 2000), employ a more minimalist definition that centers on contested elections and turnover.

²² See Schumpeter (1947) and Huntington (1989).

²³ On conceptual precisising, see Collier and Levitsky (1997).

²⁴ See Levitsky and Way (2010).

²⁵ Thus, although district-level competition in U.S. congressional elections is marked by an uneven playing field, incumbents of both major parties enjoy these advantages.

²⁶ Greene (2007) describes this as “hyper-incumbency advantage.”

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channels exist for opposition to contest legally for executive power.²⁷ This category includes closed regimes in which national-level democratic institutions do not exist (e.g., China, Cuba, and Saudi Arabia) and hegemonic regimes in which formal democratic institutions exist on paper but are reduced to façade status in practice.²⁸ In hegemonic regimes, elections are so marred by repression, candidate restrictions, and/or fraud that there is no uncertainty about their outcome. Much of the opposition is forced underground and leading critics are often imprisoned or exiled. Thus, in post-Cold War Egypt, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan, elections served functions (e.g., a means of enhancing regime legitimacy, generating information, or distributing patronage) other than determining who governed²⁹; opponents did not view them as viable means to achieve power.

Competitive authoritarian regimes are distinguished from full authoritarianism in that constitutional channels exist through which opposition groups compete in a meaningful way for executive power. Elections are held regularly and opposition parties are not legally barred from contesting them. Opposition activity is above ground: Opposition parties can open offices, recruit candidates, and organize campaigns, and politicians are rarely exiled or imprisoned. In short, democratic procedures are sufficiently meaningful for opposition groups to take them seriously as arenas through which to contest for power.

What distinguishes competitive authoritarianism from democracy, however, is the fact that incumbent abuse of the state violates at least one of three defining attributes of democracy: (1) free elections, (2) broad protection of civil liberties, and (3) a reasonably level playing field.³⁰

Elections

In democracies, elections are *free*, in the sense that there is virtually no fraud or intimidation of voters, and *fair*, in the sense that opposition parties campaign on relatively even footing: They are not subject to repression or harassment, and they are not systematically denied access to the media or other critical resources.³¹ In fully authoritarian regimes, multiparty elections are either nonexistent or noncompetitive. Elections may be considered noncompetitive when (1) major candidates are formally barred or effectively excluded on a regular basis³²; (2) repression or legal controls effectively prevent opposition parties from running public campaigns; or (3) fraud is so massive that there is virtually no observable relationship between voter preferences and official electoral results.

²⁷ Our category of full authoritarianism thus includes a wide range of authoritarian regimes, including monarchies, sultanistic regimes, bureaucratic authoritarianism, and single-party regimes. The differences among these regimes are vast and of considerable theoretical importance (Snyder 2006). For the purposes of this study, however, all of them lack significant legal contestation for power.

²⁸ We borrow the distinction between closed and hegemonic regimes from Schedler

(2002a). See also Howard and Roessler (2006).

²⁹ See Lust-Okur (2007) and Blaydes (forthcoming).

³⁰ For a full operationalization of competitive authoritarianism, see Appendix I.

³¹ See Elklit and Svensson (1997).

³² Effective exclusion occurs when physical repression is so severe or the legal, administrative, and financial obstacles are so onerous that most viable candidates are deterred from running.

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Competitive authoritarian regimes fall in between these extremes. On the one hand, elections are competitive in that major opposition candidates are rarely excluded, opposition parties are able to campaign publicly, and there is no massive fraud. On the other hand, elections are often unfree and almost always unfair. In some cases, elections are marred by the manipulation of voter lists, ballot-box stuffing, and/or falsification of results (e.g., the Dominican Republic in 1994 and Ukraine in 2004). Although such fraud may alter the outcome of elections, it is not so severe as to make the act of voting meaningless.³³ Elections also may be marred by intimidation of opposition activists, voters, and poll watchers, and even the establishment of opposition “no-go” areas (e.g., Cambodia and Zimbabwe). However, such abuse is not sufficiently severe or systematic to prevent the opposition from running a national campaign. In other cases (e.g., Botswana), voting and vote-counting processes are reasonably clean but an uneven playing field renders the overall electoral process manifestly unfair. In these cases, unequal access to finance and the media as well as incumbent abuse of state institutions make elections unfair even in the absence of violence or fraud.³⁴ Thus, even though Mexico’s 1994 election was technically clean, skewed access to resources and media led one scholar to compare it to a “soccer match where the goalposts were of different heights and breadths and where one team included 11 players plus the umpire and the other a mere six or seven players.”³⁵

Civil Liberties

In democracies, civil liberties – including the rights of free speech, press, and association – are protected. Although these rights may be violated periodically, such violations are infrequent and do not seriously hinder the opposition’s capacity to challenge incumbents. In fully authoritarian regimes, basic civil liberties are often violated so systematically that opposition parties, civic groups, and the media are not even minimally protected (e.g., Egypt and Uzbekistan). As a result, much opposition activity takes place underground or in exile.

In competitive authoritarian regimes, civil liberties are nominally guaranteed and at least partially respected. Independent media exist and civic and opposition groups operate above ground: Most of the time, they can meet freely and even protest against the government. Yet, civil liberties are frequently violated. Opposition politicians, independent judges, journalists, human-rights activists, and other government critics are subject to harassment, arrest, and – in some cases – violent attack. Independent media are frequently threatened, attacked, and – in some cases – suspended or closed. In some regimes, overt repression – including the arrest of opposition leaders, the killing of opposition activists, and the violent repression of protest – is widespread, pushing regimes to the brink of full authoritarianism.³⁶

³³ For example, vote fraud in Serbia in 2000 and Ukraine in 2004 accounted for about 10% of the vote, which was large enough to alter the results but small enough to make voting meaningful.

³⁴ See Greene (2007) and Levitsky and Way (2010).

³⁵ Castañeda (1995: 131).

³⁶ Examples include Cambodia, Zimbabwe, and Russia under Putin.

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More frequently, assaults on civil liberties take more subtle forms, including “legal repression,” or the discretionary use of legal instruments – such as tax, libel, or defamation laws – to punish opponents. Although such repression may involve the technically correct application of the law, its use is selective and partisan rather than universal. An example is Putin’s Russia. After Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the owner of Russia’s largest oil company, began to finance opposition groups in 2003, the government jailed him on tax charges and seized his company’s property and stock.³⁷ On a more modest scale, the Fujimori government in Peru “perfected the technique of ‘using the law to trample the law,’”³⁸ transforming judicial and tax agencies into “a shield for friends of the regime and a weapon against its enemies.”³⁹ Rivals – often internal ones – also may be prosecuted for corruption. In Malaysia, Mahathir Mohammad used corruption and sodomy charges to imprison his chief rival, Anwar Ibrahim; in Malawi, President Bingu wa Mutharika had his chief rival, ex-President Bakili Muluzi, arrested on corruption charges; and in Ukraine, Leonid Kuchma used corruption charges to derail Prime Minister Pavlo Lazarenko’s presidential candidacy.⁴⁰

Perhaps the most widespread form of “legal” repression is the use of libel or defamation laws against journalists, editors, and media outlets. Thus, in Malaysia, the Mahathir government entered into a “suing craze” in the wake of the 1998–1999 political crisis, making widespread use of defamation suits to silence critical reporting⁴¹; in Cameroon, more than 50 journalists were prosecuted for libel in the late 1990s and several newspapers were forced to close due to heavy fines⁴²; and in Croatia, independent newspapers were hit by more than 230 government-sponsored libel suits as of 1997.⁴³ In some cases (e.g., Belarus, Cambodia, and Russia), the repeated use of costly lawsuits led to the disappearance of many independent media outlets. In other cases (e.g., Malaysia and Ukraine), the threat of legal action led to widespread self-censorship.

Although “legal” and other repression under competitive authoritarianism is not severe enough to force the opposition underground or into exile, it clearly exceeds what is permissible in a democracy. By raising the cost of opposition activity (thereby convincing all but the boldest activists to remain on the sidelines) and critical media coverage (thereby encouraging self-censorship), even intermittent civil-liberties violations can seriously hinder the opposition’s capacity to organize and challenge the government.

An Uneven Playing Field

Finally, nearly all competitive authoritarian regimes are characterized by an uneven playing field.⁴⁴ Obviously, a degree of incumbent advantage exists in all democracies. Indeed, many new democracies in Eastern Europe and

³⁷ Goldman (2004, 2008).

³⁸ Youngers (2000a: 68).

³⁹ Durand (2003: 459, 463).

⁴⁰ Darden (2001).

⁴¹ Felker (2000: 51).

⁴² Fombad (2003: 324).

⁴³ Pusic (1998).

⁴⁴ For discussions of uneven playing fields in hybrid regimes, see Schedler (2002a, 2002b), Mozaffar and Schedler (2002), Ottaway (2003: 138–56), Greene (2007), and Levitsky and Way (2010).

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Latin America are characterized by extensive clientelism and politicization of state bureaucracies. To distinguish such cases from those of unfair competition, we set a high threshold for unfairness. We consider the playing field uneven when (1) state institutions are widely abused for partisan ends, (2) incumbents are systematically favored at the expense of the opposition, *and* (3) the opposition's ability to organize and compete in elections is seriously handicapped. Three aspects of an uneven playing field are of particular importance: access to resources, media, and the law.

ACCESS TO RESOURCES. Access to resources is uneven when incumbents use the state to create or maintain resource disparities that seriously hinder the opposition's ability to compete.⁴⁵ This may occur in several ways. First, incumbents may make direct partisan use of state resources. In a few cases, this funding is legal. In Guyana and Zimbabwe in the 1980s, governing parties were financed by special public ministries and/or official state subventions to the exclusion of other parties. More frequently, state finance is illicit. In Mexico, for example, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) reportedly drew \$1 billion in illicit state finance during the early 1990s⁴⁶; in Russia, tens of millions of dollars in government bonds were diverted to Yeltsin's 1996 reelection campaign.⁴⁷ Incumbents also may systematically deploy the machinery of the state – for example, state buildings, vehicles, and communications infrastructure – for electoral campaigns, and public employees and security forces may be mobilized en masse on behalf of the governing party. In former Soviet states such as Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine, this mobilization included not only low-level bureaucrats but also teachers, doctors, and other professionals.⁴⁸ In underdeveloped countries with weak private sectors, such abuse can create vast resource advantages.

Incumbents also may use the state to monopolize access to private-sector finance. Governing parties may use discretionary control over credit, licenses, state contracts, and other resources to enrich themselves via party-owned enterprises (e.g., Taiwan), benefit crony- or proxy-owned firms that then contribute money back into party coffers (e.g., Malaysia), or corner the market in private-sector donations (e.g., Mexico and Russia). In Malaysia and Taiwan, for example, governing parties used control of the state to build multibillion-dollar business empires.⁴⁹ The state also may be used to deny opposition parties access to resources. In Ukraine, for example, businesses that financed the opposition were routinely targeted by tax authorities.⁵⁰ In Ghana, entrepreneurs who financed

⁴⁵ For a sophisticated discussion of how incumbent abuse of state resources shapes party competition, see Greene (2007).

⁴⁶ Oppenheimer (1996: 88).

⁴⁷ Hoffman (2003: 348–51).

⁴⁸ See Allina-Pisano (2005) and Way (2005b). In Guyana and Peru, soldiers were mobilized for electoral campaigns; in Serbia, the security apparatus provided logistical support for the “anti-bureaucratic revolution” movement that helped Milošević consolidate power (LeBor 2002: 200–201).

⁴⁹ On Malaysia, see Gomez (1990, 1991) and Searle (1999); on Taiwan, see Guo, Huang, and Chiang (1998) and Fields (2002). Similarly, in Mexico, the PRI raised hundreds of millions of dollars in donations from business magnates who had benefited from government contracts, licenses, or favorable treatment in the privatization process (Oppenheimer 1996; Philip 1999).

⁵⁰ As a former head of Ukraine's security services stated, “If [your business is] loyal to the authorities, they will ignore or overlook

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opposition parties “were blacklisted, denied government contracts, and [had] their businesses openly sabotaged”⁵¹; in Cambodia, the opposition Sam Rainsy Party (SRP) was “starved for funds by a business community told by [the government] that financing SRP was committing economic suicide.”⁵²

In these cases, resource disparities far exceeded anything seen in established democracies. In Taiwan, the \$200 million to \$500 million in annual profits generated by the \$4.5 billion business empire of the Kuomintang (KMT) gave the party a financial base that was “unheard of... in any representative democracy,”⁵³ which allowed it to outspend opponents by more than 50-to-1 during elections.⁵⁴ In Mexico, the PRI admitted to spending 13 times more than the two major opposition parties *combined* during the 1994 election, and some observers claim that the ratio may have been 20-to-1.⁵⁵ In Russia, the Yeltsin campaign spent between 30 and 150 times the amount permitted the opposition in 1996.⁵⁶

ACCESS TO MEDIA. When opposition parties lack access to media that reaches most of the population, there is no possibility of fair competition. Media access may be denied in several ways. Frequently, the most important disparities exist in access to broadcast media, combined with biased and partisan coverage. In many competitive authoritarian regimes, the state controls all television and most – if not all – radio broadcasting. Although independent newspapers and magazines may circulate freely, they generally reach only a small urban elite. In such cases, if radio and television are state-run and state-run channels are biased in favor of the governing party, opposition forces are effectively denied access to the media. Thus, even after the Banda dictatorship in Malawi gave way to elected President Bakili Muluzi, incumbent control of the media was such that one journalist complained, “Before it was Banda, Banda, Banda – every day. Now it is Muluzi, Muluzi, Muluzi.”⁵⁷

In other cases, private media is widespread but major media outlets are linked to the governing party – via proxy ownership, patronage, and other illicit means. In Ukraine, for example, President Kuchma controlled television coverage through an informal network of private media entities. The head of the Presidential Administration, who also owned the popular 1+1 television station, issued orders (“temnyki”) to all major stations dictating how events should be covered.⁵⁸ In Malaysia, all major private newspapers and private television stations were controlled by individuals or firms linked to the governing *Barisan Nasional* (BN).⁵⁹ In Alberto Fujimori’s Peru, private television stations signed “contracts” with the state intelligence service in which they received up to \$1.5 million a month in exchange for limiting coverage of opposition parties.⁶⁰

anything. If you are disloyal, you or your business will be quashed immediately” (Way 2005b: 134).

⁵¹ Oquaye (1998: 109).

⁵² Heder (2005: 118).

⁵³ Chu (1992: 150); see also Fields (2002: 127).

⁵⁴ Wu (1995: 79).

⁵⁵ Oppenheimer (1996: 110); Bruhn (1997: 283–4).

⁵⁶ McFaul (1997: 13).

⁵⁷ *Africa Report*, November–December 1994, 57.

⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch (20030); Kipiani (2005).

⁵⁹ Nain (2002); Rodan (2004: 25–6).

⁶⁰ Bowen and Holligan (2003: 360–1).