Democracy and Authoritarianism in the Postcommunist World

This volume brings together a distinguished group of scholars working on Eastern and Central Europe and the former Soviet Union to examine in depth three waves of democratic change that took place in eleven different former communist nations. Its essays draw important conclusions about the rise, development, and breakdown of both democracy and dictatorship in each country and together provide a rich comparative perspective on the postcommunist world. The first democratic wave to sweep this region encompasses the rapid rise of democratic regimes from 1989 to 1992 from the ashes of communism and communist states. The second wave of democratic change arose through accession to the European Union (beginning in the late 1990s and culminating in 2004 and 2007), and the third, partially overlapping wave of democratic transition came with the electoral defeat of dictators (from 1996 to 2005) in Croatia, Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine. Although these three waves took place in different countries and involved different strategies, they nonetheless shared several overarching commonalities. International factors played a role in all three waves, as did citizens demanding political change. Furthermore, each wave revealed not just victorious democrats but also highly resourceful authoritarians. The authors of each chapter in this volume examine both internal and external dimensions of both democratic success and democratic failure.

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Prologue

Waves and Troughs of Democracy and Dictatorship

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and Kathryn Stoner-Weiss

DIVERSITY AND TYPICALITY

The experiences of postcommunist Europe and Eurasia over the past two decades contain important lessons about democratization – not just the rise, development, and cross-national spread of democratic orders, but also, just as importantly, the limits of democratic change, the sources of democratic breakdown, and the resilience of authoritarianism. This region is ideal for enriching our understanding of both regime stability and change because it provides the ingredients we need to assess hypotheses and draw generalizations. Thus, although this region shares the important commonality of a communist past, it is also composed, at the same time, of an unusually diverse set of countries, and the differences among them relate precisely to the areas that have figured prominently in debates about the rise and sustainability of democracy. For example, the twenty-nine states that compose this region include both old and new states (with the newest recruits being Montenegro in 2007 and Kosovo in 2008); culturally heterogeneous *and* homogeneous societies; states with stable borders and states whose borders have been contested since the transition began; national economies that fall into all four categories of development used by the World Bank (low-income, lower-middle-income, upper-middle-income, and high-income states); and both economic and political regime types that run the gamut from "fully free" to "not free" (to use the designations, respectively, of the *Wall Street Journal* and Freedom House).

At the same time, the postcommunist experience has been typical in many ways of other parts of the world, such as East Asia, Southeast Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa, where regimes have also been in flux over the past twenty years. One similarity is the wavelike character of democratic change in the region – that is, the tendency of democratic transitions to occur in similar ways

while clustering across time and space.[1] Another is that the democratic project has shared the stage often, but not always, with a neoliberal economic project. Although analysts disagree about whether these two ventures are mutually supportive or antagonistic, they nonetheless argue in unison that the double transition generates powerful interactive effects.

Finally, the outcome of the fall of authoritarianism has been very similar in all of these regions. The general rule has not been the rise of democracy, but, rather, the formation of regimes that are located in the middle of a continuum anchored by democracy at one pole and dictatorship at the other. Whether termed competitive or semiauthoritarian regimes, illiberal or electoral democracies, or hybrid or mixed regimes, these melded political orders feature a distinctive profile – in the postcommunist region as elsewhere.[2] They are unusually prone to regime shifts over time, and they are far more likely than other regimes to be failed states.[3]

The purpose of this volume is to take intellectual advantage of the diversity yet typicality of this part of the world to draw some key lessons about the rise, development, and breakdown of *both* democracy and dictatorship. We approach these issues by analyzing three waves of democratic change in the region. The first wave is the one that is the most familiar to our readers: the rapid rise of democratic regimes from 1989 to 1992 from the ashes of communism and communist states. Although this wave of democracy missed most countries in the region, it did not constitute the end of the democratization story. Beginning in the mid-1990s, two more waves of democratic change began. One was associated with accession to the European Union (which finally took place in 2004 and 2007), and the other with the electoral defeat of dictators (the key dates of which are 1996 to 2005).

Although these three waves took place in different countries and involved different strategies, they shared nonetheless several overarching commonalities.

[1] See, for example, Mark Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik, "International Diffusion and Postcommunist Electoral Revolutions." *Communist and Postcommunist Studies,* 39 (September 2006), pp. 283–304; Zachary Elkins and Beth Simmons, "On Waves, Clusters, and Diffusion: A Conceptual Framework." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, No. 598 (2005); Daniel Brinks and Michael Coppedge, "Diffusion Is No Illusion: Neighbor Emulation in the Third Wave." *Comparative Political Studies,* 39, No. 4 (May 2006), pp. 463–89.

[2] Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism." *Journal of Democracy,* 13, No. 2 (April 2002), pp. 51–72; Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: The Origins and Evolution of Hybrid Regimes in the Post–Cold War Era*. Unpublished book manuscript; Larry Diamond, "Hybrid Regimes." *Journal of Democracy,* 13, No. 2 (April 2002), pp. 3–20; Marina Ottaway, *Democracy Challenged: The Rise of Semi-Authoritarianism* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment, 2003).

[3] Marc Howard and Philip Roessler, "Measuring and Analyzing Post-Cold War Political Regimes." Paper presented at the Conference on Democratization by Elections, University of Florida, Gainesville, November 30–December 2, 2007; David L. Epstein, Robert Bates, Jack Goldstone, Ida Kristensen, and Sharyn O'Halloran, "Democratic Transitions." *American Journal of Political Science*, 50, No. 3 (July 2006), pp. 551–69.

International factors played a role in all three waves, as did citizens demanding political change. Further, if each of these waves produced some democratic success stories, each one was also associated with some failures. Each wave revealed not just victorious democrats but also highly resourceful authoritarians. Indeed, the two developments, as we will discover, were closely tied to one another.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

The volume is divided into four parts. The purpose of Part I and the chapters by Michael McFaul and by Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik is to set the stage for the rest of the book in two ways. One is to highlight through comparison the key characteristics of the events of 1989, that is, the fall of communism and communist states and the Cold War international order. The other is to introduce three lines of argument that will appear repeatedly in the chapters that follow: that is, the importance for democratic change of international support, mobilized democrats, and peaceful approaches to regime transition.

In Part II, Alina Mungiu-Pippidi and Milada Anna Vachudova analyze a second wave of democratic change by focusing on interactions between international influences on democratization and domestic struggles for democracy in a group of regimes located in East Central and Southeastern Europe that failed to leap to democracy in the first wave. What these two chapters suggest is that the regional context of democratization is critical. Developments outside the state can go very far to undermine or support both authoritarian and democratic regimes.

In Part III, Tsveta Petrova, Valerie Bunce, Sharon Wolchik, Cory Welt, and Michael McFaul analyze the third wave of postcommunist democratization by focusing on pivotal elections that led to the defeat of dictators and the empowerment of more liberal political leaders. Like the first wave, both popular protests against authoritarian leaders and the cross-national diffusion of challenges to authoritarian rule played key roles. Also striking is a similarity that spans all three waves: the power of transnational coalitions bringing together local democrats and international allies.

In Part IV, however, Lucan Way, Kathryn Stoner-Weiss, Vitali Silitski, and Scott Radnitz all confront directly the other side of our diffusion story, that is, continuing democratic struggles after electoral breakthroughs and the politics of countries where authoritarian leaders succeeded in resisting electoral challenges to their rule. Indeed, just as even the third wave missed some countries in the postcommunist region, so some mixed regimes in the region became more authoritarian over time. Moreover, the international position of states, democratic threats in the neighborhood, and variations in institutions among mixed regimes had the effect in some cases of giving authoritarian leaders both the incentive and the capacity to block threats to their tenure and to the systems they constructed.

DRAWING LESSONS

What lessons about the rise and sustainability of democracy and dictatorship can we draw from our three waves? We would highlight six sets of lessons in particular. One is that, although students of democratization are correct that democracy tends to spread within regions in a wavelike manner, the devil of diffusion is in the details. Thus, we would add several points to these discussions: Diffusion can occur in multiple waves that are both separate from one another and related, with the latter reflecting in part the incomplete character of each wave and a recycling of earlier strategies used to promote democracy. These strategies, however, change both within and across waves, and seemingly similar cases of the diffusion of democracy can mask substantially different dynamics – for example, the considerable power of demonstration effects in the first wave and the role of transnational democracy-promotion networks in the third wave.

We also found support for the argument that mixed regimes are both very common and relatively unstable. It is striking, for example, that each wave was most successful where authoritarianism had been compromised. Here we refer, for example, to the importance of civil society development during communism for the first wave and during postcommunism for the second and third waves. At the same time, legacies of weak civil societies can serve as strong impediments to democratic change – as can well-institutionalized authoritarian orders and vigilant authoritarian leaders. Indeed, mixed regimes with such profiles usually become more authoritarian over time.

A third lesson is that the international system plays a critical role in democratization. However, its role is highly variable – not just in form but also in consequences. The international system can play a permissive role, as well as a very active role, in democratization, and it can support or block democratic change. Thus, powerful states in the international system – whether the Soviet Union during the first wave or the United States during the third wave – can withdraw support from authoritarian regimes, thereby opening up possibilities for regime change and even methods by which authoritarianism is challenged. At the same time, powerful states and ensembles of states, such as the European Union, can encourage democratic change through such mechanisms as supporting transnational networks that invest in democratic development, providing incentives and resources to strengthen local coalitions supporting democratic development, and investing in such building blocks of democracy as free and fair elections and civil society. However, we must also note that the international system, often in alliance with local coalitions, can insulate authoritarian rulers from democratic pressures in the neighborhood. In this sense, the importance of the international system is that it can instigate (with local allies) preemptive strikes against both democracy and dictatorship.

Fourth, the struggle for democracy is the struggle not just of activists and their international partners but also of everyday citizens. If dictatorships often

derive their powers from demobilization of publics, then democratization usually involves their remobilization. What is striking in our comparison of these three waves, for example, is not just the power of publics in these processes, but also the *positive* impact of significant citizen mobilization on the defeat of dictators and the shift in domestic politics in a decidedly more democratic direction. Here, we can point to the striking contrast between Serbia in 2000 and Russia under Putin.

Fifth, to quote Thomas Friedman (who was in turn paraphrasing Donald Rumsfeld, when he was Secretary of Defense): "You go to democracy with the country you have, not the country you wish you had."[4] Although necessary for democratic development, the defeat of authoritarians – whether in the streets, at the ballot box, or through political and economic assistance provided by the European Union – is only the beginning of the democratic story. Even in this instance, the important factors seem to be both international support for democratic development and an active citizenry demanding democracy, with collaboration between the two ideals.

Finally and more generally, we are unlikely to understand democratization without understanding both mixed regimes and full-scale dictatorships. Just as the study of recent transitions to democracy has often been too preoccupied with new democracies, so the analysis of the diffusion of democracy has tended to overlook large gaps in the places democracy has traveled. The fact is that regime stability and change is a story that involves analyzing both the proponents and the enemies of democracy, and, therefore, all the political possibilities, while also recognizing the variability of these possibilities over time, as well as across countries. Indeed, it was precisely the variability of regime stories in the postcommunist region and elsewhere that prompted us to put together the chapters that compose this volume.

[4] Thomas Friedman, "The Country We've Got." *New York Times* (January 6, 2005), p. A27.