Political Preferences and Party Development in Post-Communist States

A New Approach with an Illustration of the Russian Case

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Abstract: In the wake of the collapse of communist regimes between 1989 and 1991, political scientists turned their attention to explaining the variation in the development of political parties and party systems as a means of exploring the variation in regime outcomes. These efforts waned as parties and other representative institutions appeared to be weak and unrelated to patterns of democratic consolidation, backsliding, or a return to authoritarian rule. This article summarizes the progress scholars made in exploring both party and party system development and the link between those developments and regime outcomes and suggests a way forward that highlights the role that parties might play in linking voters and government through their impact on legislative decision-making.

Political party formation emerged as a core element of theories of democratization developed to describe the third and fourth waves of transitions from authoritarian rule. In the first decade of post-Communist cases, party development became a central focus of research.[1] However,

[1] Joshua Tucker. 2002. "The First Decade of Post-Communist Elections and Voting: What

despite both the diverse approaches and sheer volume of work focused on party development, scholarly analyses got bogged down in attempts to understand the mechanisms that drive political party and party system consolidation in new democratic regimes. As a result, students of democratization missed a unique opportunity to clarify the common mechanisms that link partisan development to regime outcomes, including the nature of state-society relations.

As theoretical development stalled, and parties seemingly became marginal for governance, students of party politics adopted new research agendas. The dense cluster of party-based studies conducted in the 1990s gave way to a much more limited set of studies in the next decade. Yet, during this period, party organizations continued to evolve across the region while the relationship between party development (or the lack of party development) and regime outcomes became more evident. The variation in outcomes over this period is remarkable. In East Europe, there was a rise of moderate right parties rooted in nationalist appeals that reshaped the political landscape and a move toward consolidated systems in some states.[2] In 1999, the partisan chaos in Russia gave way to a hegemonic organization, United Russia, an organization that evolved over time.[3] In other states, such as Moldova and Latvia parties systems remained inchoate while in Estonia and Lithuania there were movements toward consolidation by the mid-2000s. Viewed through a longer lens, these developments in parties and party systems map to the variation in regime outcomes—or the level of democratic consolidation—achieved by individual states since the collapse of communist authoritarianism.

Arguably, scholars abandoned the study of parties just as parties became more important political players, shaping both variation in the trajectory of democratic consolidation and variation in the nature of state-society relations across the region. Moreover, the study of parties in the post-Communist context failed to address critical questions defined in the broader literature: how different preference structures influence party development, how elites tap into mass sentiment to define clear policy agendas, and whether or not parties that embody alternative linkage structures can evolve into accountable and responsible representative institutions.

This article draws on both intellectual history and the intersection

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Have We Studied, and How Have We Studied It?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 5:271–304.

[2] Milada Vachudová. 2008. "Centre-Right Parties and Political Outcomes in East Central Europe." *Party Politics* 14: 387-405.

[3] Regina Smyth, Anna Lowry, and Brandon Wilkening. 2007. "Engineering Victory: Institutional Reform, and Formal Institutions and the Formation of a Hegemonic Party Regime in the Russian Federation." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 23: 118-137.

between party development theory and democratic consolidation theory to reconsider why the institutional approach promulgated to study party development in the 1990s fizzled. I argue that in adapting an institutional framework to understand post-communist outcomes, scholars generally failed to accurately assess both the importance and variation in preference structures across these cases. In other words, we failed to understand what voters, politicians, and social actors wanted from their new regimes and how parties come to aggregate individual preferences in order to achieve those goals.

The Roots of the Problem: Disciplinary Evolution and Theoretical Shift

The transition from communism in the former Soviet Union and East Europe coincided with the ascendance of both the economics-based, new institutional approach in the discipline of political science and the rise of democracy assistance as a critical component of foreign policy in the United States and Europe. Policy makers needed good and quick ideas about how to build democracy, and the new institutional approach provided them in the guise of institutional frameworks: election laws, parliamentary regulations, and, above all, political parties. Both camps argued that these rules would provide incentives for individuals to join together to pursue their goals through the new regime, forging stable, programmatic political parties and, from them, stable democracies.

The prescriptions that emerge from this literature are well known. Presidentialism could lead to gridlock but it might also be a mechanism for new regimes to survive the inevitable crises of marketization by concentrating executive power out of the hands of economic losers. Mixed electoral systems could provide the best of both worlds, enabling both district-based representation and a concern with the national agenda through the proportional list side of electoral competition. Proportional rules would create stronger parties. Above all, there was a strong adherence to E.E. Schattschneider's dictum that political parties were essential for the creation of modern democracy.[4]

In short, there was a great deal of confidence that these institutions, put together in constitutional models, might mold democracies from the former communist states through institutional engineering that was both sound and well-suited to the context in which the institutions would operate. Clearly, these efforts have had mixed results, as democratic development either stalled or changed course in a number of regimes.[5]

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[4] E. E. Schattschneider. 1977. *Party Government.* New York: Praeger.

[5] Thomas Carothers. 2006. *Confronting the Weakest Link: Aiding Political Parties in New Democracies*. Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and Marina

Much of the subsequent research on regime outcomes since late 1998 has focused on why our analytic framework failed, emphasizing the role of state structures, legacies, and time. However, few studies directly address why political party development across these states was not consistent with theoretical expectations or policy efforts to strengthen party organizations.

I argue that the predictive weakness of institutional frameworks rests with their inability to consider the role of the raw material of politics, citizens' demands on government. If we borrow the game analogy from political economy, the reasons for some of these analytic difficulties become clear. Regime structures only provide the rules of the game. The outcome of the interactions within those rules—as well as the political groups that might emerge from both coordination and cooperation—is also highly dependent on players' preferences. That is, political outcomes are equally as likely to be shaped by what actors want from the process, as they are from the information that they have about the process, their opponents' preferences, and the likely impact of their preferences on their political activities or strategies. In other words, choosing institutions that were well suited to the context in which they would operate was more complex than scholars acknowledged because it required a very deep understanding of not only broad social groups but also mass and elite preferences about concrete policies. Adopting rules absent this nuanced information spawned a host of what countless scholars referred to as unintended consequences.

As Elster, Offe, and Preuss pointed out, vague ideological orientations and diverse aspirations coupled with stringent policy were the hallmarks of all of the post-Communist transitions.[6] Similarly, David Ost argued, "Post-communist East Europe seems to have a gaping hole right where the class organizations, interest groups, and voluntary organizations of liberal democratic civil society are located."[7] Under these conditions, individual interests may not automatically translate into policy preferences. As a result, there was much to do in these countries and no clear consensus or competing visions of how to do it.

Here, the new institutional framework was of no help. The approach is devoid of a theory of preferences or preference formation. To remedy this theoretical gap, scholars turned to previous theories of democratization or democratic consolidation for relevant assumptions about political preferences. As it turned out, none of these approaches provided consistent guidance about the structure and evolution of preferences in the post-communist cases.

Ottoway. 2003. *Democracy Challenged: The Rise of Semi-Authoritarianism*. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

[6] Jon Elster, Claus Offe, and Ulrich Klaus Preuss. 1998. *Institutional Design in Post-Communist Societies: Rebuilding the Ship at Sea*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[7] David Ost. 1993. "The Politics of Interest in Post-Communist East Europe." *Theory and Society* 4: 453-485.

Political Preferences: Four Waves Yielded Four Theories

Each wave of democratic development, beginning with Europe in the early 19th century, embodied a strong set of assumptions about the source and structure of preferences of both mass and elite actors. In the first wave, Lipset and Rokkan's theory of party formation focused on a core set of social cleavages, a strategy that accurately described most West European states.[8] These cleavages clearly linked large socio-economic structures to individual policy choices and described the dimensions of political competition. For example, economic cleavages created the basis for class compromise over labor conditions and wages, while language or identity-based cleavages provided a basis for redistribution patterns and in doing so forged sustainable support for democratic regimes.[9]

Critically, Lipset and Rokkan adopted very stringent criteria for cleavage structures that included self-identification, shared understanding, and institutional structure, distinguishing them from the broad attitudinal differences identified in the post-communist cases.[10] By and large, scholars of post-communism relaxed this definition, dropping the core assumptions of shared identity and organization in favor of shared attitudes or defined social divisions. Even with this caveat, or perhaps as a result of it, it was difficult to find evidence of these social structures represented in nascent party systems.[11]

Kitschelt offered a twist on this approach, arguing that the great economic transformations created the grounds for economic differentiation among groups consistent with the national and industrial revolutions that shaped the societies of Western Europe.[12] Other scholars embellished this view by focusing on ethnic and national divisions such as those that tore apart the former Yugoslavia and provided the basis for electoral competition in Ukraine and Bulgaria.[13] Yet, even these theoretical innovations

[8] Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan. 1967. "Cleavage Structures, Party Systems and Voter Alignments: An Introduction." in Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan, eds. 1967. *Party Systems and Voter Alignments.* New York: Free Press.

[9] Carles Boix. 2003. *Democracy and Redistribution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[10] Lipset and Rokkan. 1967. "Cleavage Structures…"

[11] Geoffrey Evans and Stephen Whitefield. 1993. "Identifying the Bases of Party Competition in Eastern Europe." *British Journal of Political Science* 23: 521-48; Margit Tavits. 2005. "The Development of Stable Party Support: Electoral Dynamics in Post-Communist Europe." *American Journal of Political Science* 49: 283–298; and Stephen Whitefield. 2002. "Political Cleavages and Post-Communist Politics." *Annual Review of Political Science* 5: 181-200.

[12] Herbert Kitschelt. 1992. "The Formation of Party Systems in East Central Europe." *Politics and Society* 20: 7-50; and Herbert Kitschelt. 1995. "Formation of Party Cleavages in Post-Communist Democracies: Theoretical Propositions." *Party Politics* 1: 447–72.

[13] Geoffrey Evans and Stephen Whitefield. 1998. "The Structuring of Political Cleavages in Post-Communist Societies: the Case of the Czech Republic and Slovakia." *Political Studies*

failed to generate understanding of the social structures that might lead like-minded voters to coordinate support for a particular organization. More recent work by MacAllister and White shows increasingly well-defined cleavages, but underscores the persistent lack of representative capacity of parties that formed on top of those cleavages.[14]

The second wave of democratic transformation, following the collapse of the great European empires, also relied on social and economic structures to forge political preferences. Modernization theories posited a causal link between processes of economic development—urbanization, industrialization, and the growth of mass media—and increased demand for state responsiveness through democratic institutions. Although parties were not directly included in these analyses, the definition of nascent political groupings by class, sector of employment, level of education or technical training, and place of residence—emerged from them. This reasoning provided significant optimism about the fate of post-communist states that exhibited high levels of education, urbanization, and industrialization, since these features might serve as a strong foundation for democratic consolidation. The search for the post-Communist middle class was on, although there was scant evidence of its strength or its support for liberal politics.[15]

The corollary to these arguments posited that these structural changes within developing countries would give rise to a civic culture of attitudes that would support democratic development.[16] A significant literature grew up around the notion of a civic culture in the post-communist space. These studies relied on public opinion polls to explore the relative strength of support for democracy and the market, finding a strong correlation between support for democracy and support for markets.[17] Yet, a number of authors found that democratic support was highly contingent on economic well-being.[18] As such, we might predict that economic crisis would derail popular support for democratic institutions.

46: 115-139.

[14] Ian McAllister and Stephen White. 2007. "Political Parties and Democratic Consolidation in Post-Communist Societies." *Party Politics* 13: 197-216.

[15] Harley Balzer. 1996. *Russia's Missing Middle Class.* Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe; and Ivan Szelenyi and Szonja Szelenyi. 1991. "The Vacuum in Hungarian Politics: Classes and Parties." *New Left Review* 187: 122-37.

[16] Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba. 1963. *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

[17] Raymond M. Duch. 1993. "Tolerating Economic Reform: Popular Support for Transition to a Free Market in the Former Soviet Union." *American Political Science Review* 87: 590-608; and James Gibson, Raymond M. Duch, and Kent L. Tedin. 1992. "Democratic Values and the Transformation of the Soviet Union." *Journal of Politics* 54: 329-71.

[18] Ada W. Finifter and Ellen Mickiewicz. 1992. "Refining the Political System of the USSR: Mass Support for Political Change." *American Political Science Review* 86: 857-74.

The third wave of transitions in Southern Europe and Latin America shifted the grounds of political analysis. For the first time, analysts relied on assumptions of individual agency that are the hallmark of the new institutional economics.[19] In these studies, elites, not potential voters, drive political change from authoritarianism to democracy. Exporting these theories from Latin America to the post-Communist context launched a firestorm of debate over the applicability of core assumptions to the post-communist cases.[20] Notably, the third wave cases already exhibited marketized economies, functioning state structures, and dormant political parties, institutions that created significant structure for elite preference formation. Moreover, the transitions occurred in a sequence that pitted the *ancien regime* against a core of elite liberalizers that had both the time and capacity to organize prior to the collapse of authoritarianism. As such, within these theories, little thought was given to the sources of preferences among these elites or their capacity to attract voter support.

Theorizing about preferences in the fourth wave, independent of these existing models, was relatively limited. Most notably, Przeworski identified a wide swath of potential losers from economic reform (those employed in obsolete state enterprises) and winners (those whose education or skills were well suited to the market).[21] For Przeworski, institutional engineering could most profitably be employed to insulate policy makers from popular unrest during the inevitable economic downturn of regime transition in these states. Yet, the winner versus loser dichotomy provided very little leverage on the demands society might make on the political system.

In the end, few of these previous approaches captured the complex and disorganized structure of preferences across post-communist cases, the changes in preferences since 1989, or the process through which parties might translate popular attitudes, social positions, or education into concrete issue positions or coherent bundles of policies. By the late 1990s this critical contextual difference was clear to most scholars, as was the impact of inchoate preference structures on party and party system

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[19] Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter, and Lawrence Whitehead. 1986. *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

[20] Valerie Bunce. 1995. "Should Transitologists Be Grounded?" *Slavic Review* 54: 111–127; Valerie Bunce. 1998. "Regional Differences in Democratization: The East Versus the South." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 14:187–211; Valerie Bunce. 2003. "Rethinking Recent Democratization: Lessons from the Postcommunist Experience." *World Politics* (55: 167-192; and Philippe Schmitter and Terry Karl. 1994. "The Conceptual Travels of Transitologists and Consolidologists: How Far to the East Should They Attempt to Go?" *Slavic Review* 53: 173-185.

[21] Adam Przeworski. 1991. *Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

development. In response, scholars—sparked by the work of Herbert Kitschelt—turned their attention to explain the emergence of alternative party logics or linkage mechanisms and to explore their impact on regime development.[22]

Finding Solutions: Mapping Preferences, Considering Pressures, and Identifying Substitutes

As it became clear that programmatic—or issue-based—political party competition was not likely to appear quickly if at all in a number of post-communist states, the focus of scholarly study turned to describing and explaining partisan weakness. Cross-national studies focused on party system volatility over time, indicating that few parties had established stable voter support from election to election.[23] Organizational studies revealed a lack of party-based capacity to articulate distinct policy positions or coherent bundles of policies that might serve as the foundation of programmatic competition.[24]

Other studies focused on partisan programs.[25] A number of scholars identified the preeminence of valence issues as a basis for political competition, showing that general agreement on these issues limited parties' capacities to distinguish themselves based on distinct issue positions.[26] These studies revealed a dismal picture of party development across the region, although they did point to important variation in the levels of development across states and with party systems.[27]

The general picture of incoherent party organizations across the region raised a compelling question: if party programs were not the basis

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[22] Kitschelt. 1992. "The Formation of Party Systems…." 7-50; and Kitschelt. 1995. "Formation of Party Cleavages…" 447–72.

[23] Tavits. 2005. "The Development of Stable Party Support…."283–298; and Margit Tavits. 2009. *Presidents with Prime Ministers.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

[24] Herbert Kitschelt, Zdenka Mansfeldovna, Radoslaw Markowski, and Gabor Toka. 1999. *Post-Communist Party Systems: Competition, Representation, and Inter-Party Cooperation.* New York: Cambridge University Press; and Regina Smyth. 2006. "Strong Partisans, Weak Parties? Party Organizations and the Development of Mass Partisanship in Russia." *Comparative Politics* 38: 209-228.

[25] Kenneth Benoit and Michael Laver. 2006. *Party Policy in Modern Democracies.* London: Routledge; Thomas Remington and Steven Smith. 2001. *The Politics of Institutional Choice: The Formation of the Russian State Duma.* Princeton: Princeton University Press; and Frank Thames. 2003. "Same System, Different Outcomes: Legislative Behavior Differences in Ukraine and Russia." *Studies in Public Policy* 373: 2-28.

[26] Abby Innes. 2002. "Party Competition in Post-Communist Europe: The Great Electoral Lottery." *Comparative Politics* 35: 85-104; and Herbert Kitschelt and Regina Smyth. 2002. "Programmatic Party Cohesion in Emerging Post-Communist Democracies: Russia in Comparative Context." *Comparative Political Studies* 35: 1228-56.

[27] Kitschelt et. al. 1999. *Post-Communist Party Systems*….; and Smyth. 2006."Strong Partisans, Weak Parties?..." 209-228.

of linkage between voters and their representatives, then how did voters choose among organizations during elections? In answering this question, post-communist scholars gained significant traction in articulating new theoretical approaches in their efforts to explain the variation in linkage logics across the cases and also in uncovering the mechanisms that link party development with patterns of democratic consolidation.

An important innovation in this wave of work considered the role of external institutions in shaping the policy agendas of post-communist political parties. These studies varied by region. In East Central Europe and the Baltic states, the EU had an intended effect of stifling issue-based competition as it imposed painful policy prescriptions on the electorate through the conditions of the *acquis communautaire*. The reforms outlined in the *acquis* narrowed the policy space and limited the budgetary resources available for redistribution.[28] These constraints led to the concentration of decision-making power within party leaders and limited institutional development.[29] Despite these significant differences, the overall effect of international intervention on both party development and democratic development is mixed. On one hand, in a broad comparative study, Ishiyama concluded that there was no direct empirical evidence of the impact of Europeanization on the nature of party and party system development in the region in terms of linkage structures.[30] However, Ekiert suggests that such findings reflect the differences in effect across the states, arguing that external influence is strongest when there is fierce competition among right and left parties within the same party system.[31] On the whole, this literature argues that it is difficult to impute stable policy preferences to individuals or groups in candidate or member states as a result of accession processes.

In the former Soviet states, there was even less international capacity to influence outcomes because of the presence of Russia, the regional power.[32] However, there is some evidence that the role of US advocacy of rapid privatization severely constrained right parties' positions and established the left parties as catch-all organizations opposed to Western

[28] Anna Gryzmala-Busse and Abby Innes. 2003. "The Great Expectations: The EU and Domestic Political Competition in East-Central Europe." *Eastern European Politics and Societies* 17: 64–73; Innes. 2002. "Party Competition in Post-Communist Europe…"85-104; Jacques Rupnik. 2002. "Eastern Europe: The International Context." *Journal of Democracy* 11: 115-29; and Vachudová. 2008. "Centre-Right Parties…" 387-405.

[29] Tapio Raunio. 2002. "Why European Integration Increases Leadership Autonomy within Political Parties." *Party Politics* 8: 405–25.

[30] John Ishiyama. 2006. "Europeanization and the Communist Successor Parties in Post-Communist Politics." *Politics & Policy* 34: 3-29.

[31] Grzegorz Ekiert. 2008. "Dilemmas of Europeanization: Eastern and Central Europe after the EU Enlargement." *Acta Slavica Iaponica* 25: 1-28.

[32] Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way. 2006. "Linkage versus Leverage: Rethinking the International Dimension of Regime" *Comparative Politics* 38: 379-400.

influence and policy proscriptions—rather than motivating these organizations to function as competitors with clearly differentiated programs of economic development and wealth redistribution. More generally, the literature suggests that while Western influence did shape policy preferences of party and governmental elites, these structures impeded rather than aided policy-based competition, and, in turn, the development of accountable political organizations.

The most dismal finding in the general literature on party linkage was that parties could be replaced by electoral equivalents, enabling a semblance of democracy that was devoid of representative capacity. The transitory nature of these organizations created a vicious cycle in which elites were unwilling to invest in parties that might not survive between election periods. To win election without parties, candidates built personal vote organizations and independent networks within party organizations or joined non-electoral organizations that Henry Hale labeled party substitutes.[33] Since these informal organizations and networks were not forged solely to win elections, they were more durable than nascent parties. While some of them developed temporary parasitic relationships with party organizations, they tended to weaken rather than foster party development.

Yet, the persistent presence of parties on the political landscape demanded a more general explanation for party weakness. Competence, expertise, or just plain preeminence became the first logic of party appeals for organizations that could not articulate a policy niche.

A darker corollary to the notion of expertise was the party capture of state resources, both to build party organizations and attract voter support through the personal or geographic-based distribution of state resources. Conor O'Dwyer referred to this process as "runaway state-building," citing the intermingling of the processes of party-building and state-building to produce rampant growth in the state apparatus.[34] For Anna Gryzmala-Busse, the problem was even more severe as some parties, unconstrained by significant party system competition, generated new mechanisms to extract state resources for personal gain.[35] In the Russian version of this extractive model, the party of power not only used state resources to build parties and run campaigns, they also deployed a strategy of runaway state-building while greatly expanding the capacity of individual leaders to extract personal wealth from the state coffers.[36] While employing these

[33] Henry Hale. 2006. *Why Not Parties in Russia? Democracy, Federalism and the State.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; and Smyth. 2006."Strong Partisans, Weak Parties?..." 209-228.

[34] Conor O'Dwyer. 2006. *Runaway State-Building: Patronage Politics and Democratic Development.* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

[35] Gryzmala-Busse. 2007. op. cit.

[36] M. Steven Fish. 1996. *Democracy from Scratch: Opposition and Regime in the New Russian Revolution.* Princeton: Princeton University Press; and Smyth, Lowry and Wilken-

strategies did not begin with the rise of United Russia, their use certainly intensified throughout the last decade.

A second set of alternative programmatic linkages focus on linkages that are thought to be transitory: personalist, populist, and charismatic ties. The post-communist cases proved to be a critical laboratory to sharpen understanding of the nature of these organizations, and also to explore the conditions that give rise to such parties and also lead to their downfall.[37] Yet, as many scholars noted, a number of questions remain around these alternative linkage mechanisms, focusing on their emergence, stability, and influence on regime outcomes such as governance, effectiveness, and the quality of democracy. A central question in this literature remains understudied: under what conditions would parties and party systems plagued by these pathologies revert to a more programmatic-based linkage structure? The question has significant policy implications regarding the feasibility of democracy assistance programs designed to foster more accountable and responsive party governance.

The Big Question: An Evolutionary Model of Issue-Based Party Competition

Within the approaches discussed here, the role of mass and elite political actors in the process of policy-making were largely considered separately and analyzed in isolation. Yet, political parties are institutions that explicitly link mass and elite actors together in a constantly evolving set of relationships. The very premise of party development is that institutions are successful when elites provide coherent bundles of policy solutions, or clearly defined packages of particularized benefits, that attract the support of voters.

As a result, there are limits to conclusions that can be drawn from studies that either focus solely on party elites or on voters to draw conclusions about the strength of institutions. While elite consistency is a prerequisite for stable party development, it is possible that party elite positions articulated in manifestos or surveys may be both coherent and consistent and not find any traction among voters. Likewise, groups of voters may appear coherent in public opinion polls, but that coherence may not find voice among organizations or leadership. Moreover, parties may articulate clear positions without any capacity to secure policy outcomes through the representative process. As a result, such seemingly stable organizations may quickly lose voter support, or never attract it in the first

ing 2008 op. cit..

[37] Christopher Ansell and M. Steven Fish. 1999. "The Art of Being Indispensable: Noncharismatic Personalism in Contemporary Political Parties." *Comparative Political Studies* 32: 283-312; and Cas Mudde. 2002. "In the Name of the Peasantry, the Proletariat, and the People: Populisms in Eastern Europe." *East European Politics and Societies* 14: 33-53.

place. These trends are clear in the literature where expert evaluations of party positions have been fairly stable in the face of enormous party organization and system instability.

If we look at Russian party development, these issues are clear. Throughout the 1990s, Russian elections prompted repeated reorganizations of the party system marked by the rise and fall of countless organizations, tremendous voter volatility, and organizational weakness. In 1999, Putin's electoral vehicle began its march toward hegemony, a process that appears more volatile than anticipated just three months before the 2012 presidential elections. Yet, at the same time, analyses demonstrate remarkable consistency across parties' issue positions over the post-Soviet period. While the general consensus is that Russian political parties remain extremely weak and under-institutionalized, the conflicting findings across approaches and data do very little to provide a complete explanation for development over time.

Toward a Study of State-Society Formation

To illustrate some of the problems in party development in post-Communist states, I employ a new technology to measure party influence in legislative arenas over time as a first step toward measuring party-voter interactions. This work, relying on roll call voting data, captures the role of voters in choosing partisan and independent candidates in the legislature. While voters may not always get the policies that they thought they chose in the election, their influence can be measured by focusing on the distribution of preferences in the legislature and the resulting set of policies that can emerge from debate and voting. This measure provides insight into internal party coherence or party discipline, the relationships among the positions of party organizations, as well as the impact of particular parties or party groups on policy outcomes. Again, the Russian case provides a significant example.

Specifically, my analysis relies on a theory of majority rule decision-making that uses the game theoretical concept of the uncovered set (UCS). Formally, the uncovered set is the set of outcomes that forward-looking legislators are expected to confine themselves to when voting among alternatives in multi-dimensional policy spaces.[38] In other words, instead

[38] For a formal definition of the uncovered set and a description of how it is estimated and applied, see William Bianco, Ivan Jeliaskov, and Itai Sened. 2004. "The Uncovered Set and the Limits of Legislative Action." *Political Analysis* 12: 256-76; and Christopher Kam, William Bianco, Itai Sened, and Regina Smyth. 2010. "Ministerial Selection and Intraparty Organization in the Contemporary British Parliament." *American Political Science Review* 104: 289-309. For additional applications to Russian politics, see William Bianco, Christopher Kam, Itai Sened, and Regina Smyth. 2011. "Explaining Transitional Representation: The Rise and Fall of Women of Russia." *Journal of East European and Asian Studies* 2: 137-62.

of spiraling off into chaos, the use of majority rule leads forward-looking legislators to select outcomes that lie within a limited area of the policy space, a finding that has been confirmed by analysis of experimental and real-word data.[39] This focusing effect occurs because sophisticated decision-makers do not support proposals that they know cannot win (covered outcomes) and, moreover, because decision-makers can use simple agendas to defend uncovered outcomes against opponents who want something else.[40] Other work shows that a wide range of other legislative decision processes, including bargaining within and between party coalitions, will lead to outcomes in the UCS.[41]

To begin to explore the evolution of preferences within Russia's party system, I used the UCS to map the changes in the legislative party system over time. The two dimensions represented in these figures are the ones common to Russian politics. The horizontal dimension captures legislators' preferences regarding the level of state intervention in the economy, while the vertical dimension measures preferences concerning relations with the West, encompassing policy decisions such as treaties, appointments, and trade regulations.

While the theory and computation of the UCS is complex, the intuition is not. Bargaining outcomes among a group of people with ideas about what should happen are not infinite. The UCS summarizes all of the potential bargains that might emerge, given that in democratic institutions any agreement must receive the support of a majority of decision-makers empowered to participate in the process. Figure 1 shows the initial mapping of the UCS for the first Russian Duma elected in 1993.

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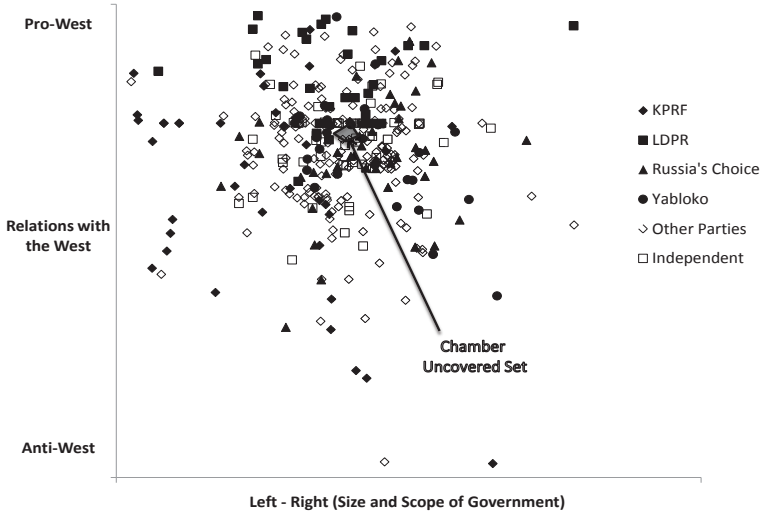
[39] William Bianco, Michael Lynch, Gary Miller, and Itai Sened. 2008. "The Constrained Instability of Majority Rule: Experiments on the Robustness of the Uncovered Set." *Political Analysis* 16: 115-37; and Gyung-Ho Jeong, Gary Miller, and Itai Sened. 2009. "Closing the Deal: Negotiating Civil Rights Legislation." *American Political Science Review* 103:588-606.

[40] Gary W. Cox. 1987. "The Uncovered Set and the Core." *American Journal of Political Science* 31: 408–22; and Kenneth Shepsle and Barry R. Weingast. 1984. "Uncovered Sets and Sophisticated Voting Outcomes with Implications for Agenda Institutions." *American Journal of Political Science* 28: 49–74.

[41] Richard D. McKelvey. 1986. "Covering, Dominance, and Institution-Free Properties of Social Choice." *American Journal of Political Science* 30: 283-314.

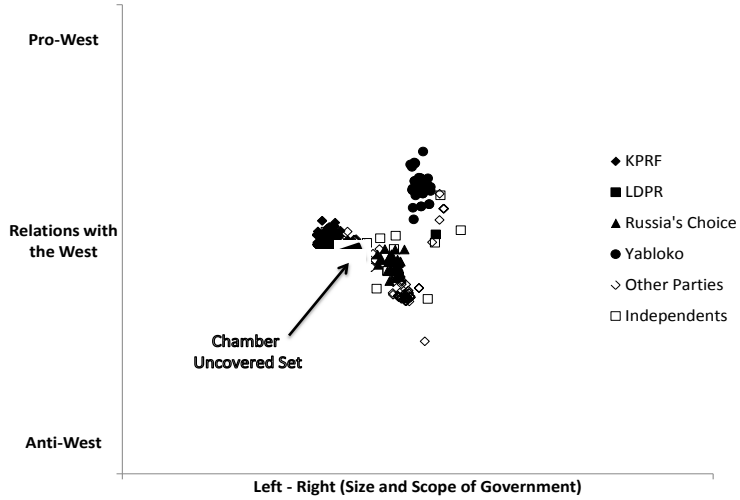
Figure 1. Russian Duma, 1993



This figure illustrates the problems identified by scholars cited in the start of the essay. In the first year after the elections, there is very little agreement among Duma deputies about how to tackle the enormous challenges of transition. Moreover, that disagreement extends to deputies within party organizations. Even the members of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF), often perceived as monolithic supporters of a return to Communist rule, do not vote the same way on the policies that come before the Duma. This finding is also true for all other parties. As a result, as parties face the voters in the election in the next year, they needed to scramble to define their collective positions and also to highlight their successes within the policy process. By any measure this is a difficult task, but in a period of chaos it is even more difficult.

A second problem for parties, and in particular those affiliated with the president and the president himself, is reflected in the size and location of the UCS, indicated in grey in the figure. This grey shape indicating the set of outcomes that might feasibly emerge from this disparate set of positions is both small and oriented in the center-left of the political space. Thus, it would be difficult for President Yeltsin or his partisan contingent to secure outcomes that would support their privatization program or pro-Western agenda. As a result, the Yeltsin administration turned to alternative strategies to make policy and secure future elections. In terms of governance, the president increasingly relied on his decree power, bypassing the legislative process.

Figure 2. Russian Duma, 1995



In contrast, the mapping of political forces in the second convocation of the Duma, elected in 1995, is surprisingly orderly. Figure 2 shows clear party grouping dispersed in the political space but not nearly as polarized as one might imagine from the existing analysis.

Within these party groupings, there is some significant disagreement about policy across the regime divide. Once again, the set of outcomes that might emerge from legislative bargaining are located in the center-left of the space, but have become noticeably less favorable toward the West. This picture of legislative party development presents the possibility of rapid party and party system institutionalization—a picture that maps to some of the contemporary analyses of voting behavior and public opinion that seemingly showed the emergence of stable attachments to parties among voters. Importantly, however, these agreements appear to be forged in very general terms rather than linked to well-articulated policy prescriptions.

Two years later, in the midst of both economic and political crisis, the picture of Russian party development is radically different. Figure 3 shows a dramatic change in the legislative party system as well as a decline in party discipline across all parties. During this period, the second dimension of competition, attitudes toward the West, becomes more salient as political parties differentiate themselves by taking stronger stances on this dimension. Likewise, there is a leftward shift in the party system on the economic governance dimension. Notably, the government party Our Home is Russia, which is preparing for the electoral battle in 1999, takes a strong

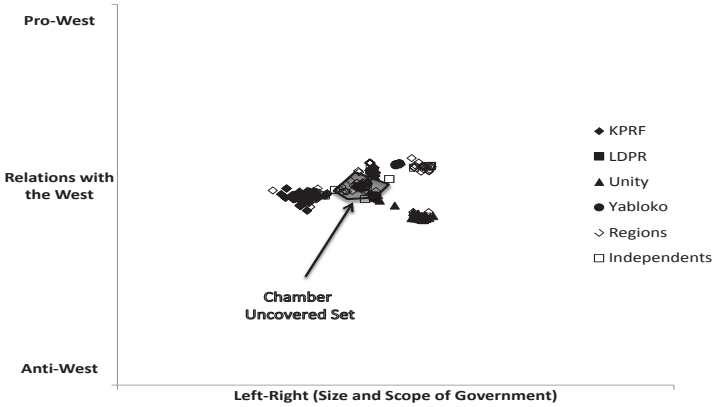
anti-Western position. In contrast, the KPRF does not move much in the political space, continuing to occupy a relatively moderate center-left position.

Figure 3. Russian Duma, 1997

Despite these changes, a number of patterns persist through this first decade of partisan development. Most importantly, the set of possible outcomes that might emerge from legislative bargaining over policy is consistently at odds with the policy preferences of the presidential administration. As a result, the president often ruled by decree, bypassing the legislature and weakening the representative mechanisms in the system. Likewise, throughout the period, only the KPRF has any substantial influence over the location and size of the UCS. In other words, while the combined right parties together with the independent deputies can shape outcomes, individual organizations are not all that influential. For example, were Yabloko to abstain from voting en-masse on any given day, the set of possible outcomes would not change.

Given these rapid changes, it is not surprising that the 1999 electoral cycle yielded significant change in the party system, independent of the electoral manipulation that may have occurred. Figure 4 reflects the legislative party system in 2000, at the point that Putin's party organization, Unity, is beginning to absorb both independent deputies and members of rival factions and transform into its current form, United Russia (UR). In this system, the right has almost entirely disappeared as UR took up their position in the policy space.

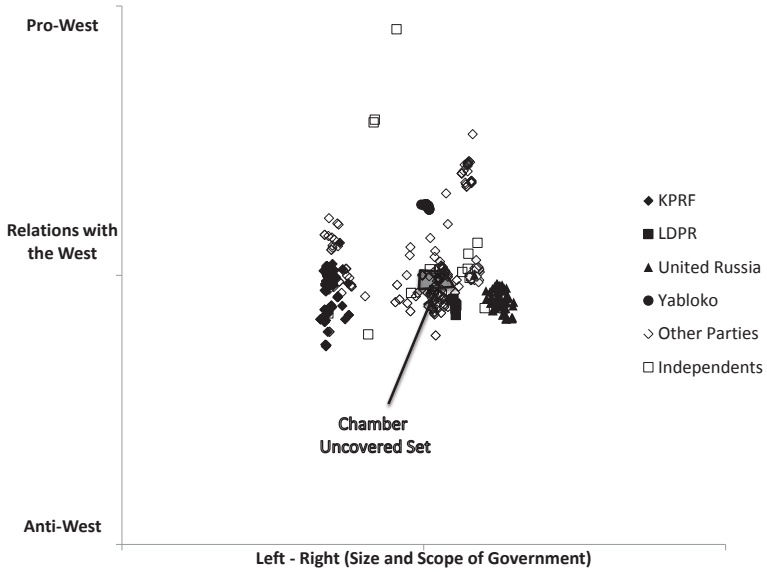
Figure 4. Russian Duma, 2000



The most significant change in the political space during this year is the change in the size and location of the UCS. For the first time, the KPRF shares influence over legislative bargaining with another institution, UR. As a result, the UCS is much larger than it had been in previous sessions. The Kremlin now faced a new problem distinct from the Yeltsin era. While the president and the parliament were now relatively close in their policy preferences, outcomes of legislative bargaining were more unpredictable as the UCS grew in size. Similarly, Putin was faced with a relatively undisciplined organization as it absorbed members from different regions and party organizations. This situation foreshadowed some of the significant changes in electoral laws, Duma structure, and internal party rules that had the effect of creating a much more disciplined party organization.

By 2002, some of these institutional changes had provided new incentives as UR prepared for the elections in the following year. As Figure 5 reflects, UR becomes a more well-defined political organization taking a position in the center right of the political space and articulating an anti-Western stance relative to other parties. Yet, the UCS still reflects a compromise set of possible outcomes between the right and left parties as the KPRF retains significant influence, despite the growing disarray within the organization. Moreover, within the legislative party system, there is significant latent opposition to UR.

Figure 5. Russian Duma 2002

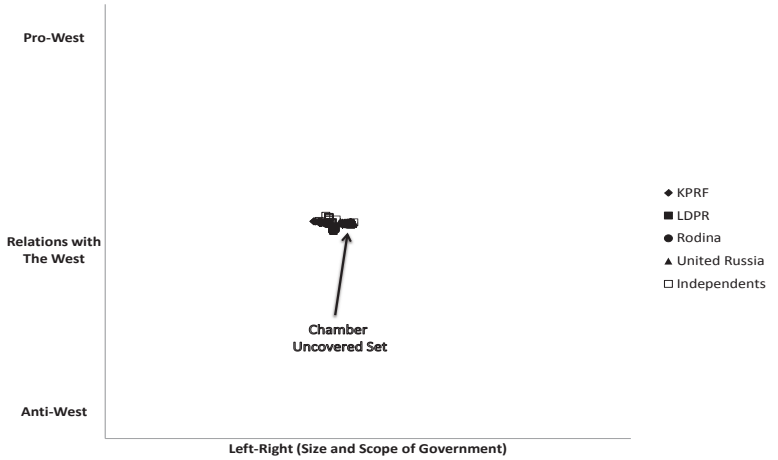


This figure reflects conditions similar to the 1994 Duma. The party system looks poised to offer voters a choice among a few differentiated organizations. However, in this round, one of the two parties that remain relevant in the governance process, UR, has asserted significant control over state resources that could be used both for redistribution and to fund campaign efforts. Voters responded to these choices by overwhelmingly supporting the governing party, although this was by no means a foregone conclusion prior to Election Day.

Figure 6 illustrates the remarkable impact of voter support for UR in the 2003 election. The change in the legislative party system is startling as the UCS collapses directly on top of the UR party faction. In other words, for the first time, a Russian president can be assured of securing legislative support for all proposals emanating from either the Kremlin or the White House. Moreover, the UCS is quite small, eliminating the need for legislative maneuvering of the type the Kremlin engaged in throughout 2000-2003 to secure outcomes. Finally, UR takes up a center-left position, marking a move toward a more redistributive set of politics that challenged the KPRF position. This move represents a shift in linkage logic from a combined set of policy and state resources to a much more significant reliance on runaway state-building and state capture. In other words, the party became a delivery mechanism for the redistribution of wealth—in

this case largely oil wealth—to center-left voters. The set of policies and spending priorities represented by this position remained popular with Russia's working class and non-urban voters, explaining the significant support for the party independent of electoral fraud or other types of coercion. As a result, UR emerged as the only viable alternative in the political process, so it is not surprising that it retained its position in the next election cycle. Nor it is surprising that the greatest voter challenge to the party in 2011 came from large urban centers with the rising middle class and private sector workers coordinated against the party and its leadership.

Figure 6. Russian Duma after 2003 Elections



Conclusions

While this analysis is only suggestive, it illustrates some important patterns and provides a different explanation for the rise of UR and its sustained voter support through three elections. Moreover, the analysis links party system competition with the trajectory of regime development in Russia. First, the process of party system formation proceeded in fits and starts, with periods of significant party structuration and periods of chaos. Moreover, the importance of different issue dimensions also rose and fell throughout this period. These periods of change map to our general assessments of the likelihood of democratic consolidation in Russia.

Perhaps most importantly, the Russian case suggests conditions under which the logic of party linkages to voters might shift over time, influencing the representative capacity of the party system and the direction of regime change, whether it is toward democracy or not. Finally, this method also suggests why UR might be more stable than its current

poll numbers indicate. If competition is introduced into the legislative party system, UR is well positioned to speak to a particular constituency. The party has taken up a series of positions that marginalize the left parties. While the post-election period has focused on the potential for the formation of new right parties, those organizations will need to shift the dimensions of competition in order to attract public support, activating either a new agenda based on individual freedoms or corruption. The first seems unlikely, and these organizations have little claim to the expertise essential to solve the second. Perhaps more significantly, Russian voters have overwhelmingly voiced their skepticism about the formation of new parties, even in the wake of the contentious Duma election of December 2011. As a result, regime change in Russia may demand exactly the "modernization" of society that is the cornerstone of UR and Putin rhetoric and that will shift vote support to center-right and right party organizations that can credibly challenge UR hegemony.

In comparative context, the patterns evident in the Russian case raise questions about the broader picture of party development and the competing logics of party formation in the context of ill-defined policy preferences. First and foremost, the Russian case suggests the difficulty of party-building from above—the difficulty in forging parties in environments devoid of existing institutions that induce aggregated and well-structured voter preferences. In such cases, the legislative arena becomes the venue in which the process of forging these linkages takes place. As a number of scholars argued, parties across the region emerged not from mass society but from contentious parliaments. The UCS technology provides a new method to explore this process of party development over time and across cases, in order to build and test new theories to explain the crystallization of policy preferences, the effects of different preference structures on broader outcomes, and finally, the factors that give rise to different linkage logics.