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## ACCIDENTAL DEMOCRACY. SUCCESS AND FAILURE IN DEMOCRATIC TRANSITIONS IN EAST EUROPE AND FORMER USSR

*This paper examines the process of democratic emergence and consolidation. We claim that balance in structure, organization, and discourse are crucial. A comparison of transition strategies, civil society, and regime type shows that negotiated change and parliamentary systems are more conducive to democracy than power disruption and presidential regimes.*

While the promise of democracy echoed amidst the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the USSR, a decade of social experimentation later democracy's record is mixed: ascendant in Poland and the Czech Republic, nonexistent in Belarus and Kazakhstan, uncertain in Ukraine and Russia. Alongside questions of democratization are issues of economic change, identity and ethnicity, and state capacity. While a total theory on this «quadruple transition» (democratization, market-building, state-building, nation-building) [1] is beyond the scope of this paper, we suggest outlines for a framework on the *process* of change. Here we examine democratization, but the logic applies elsewhere [2; 3] and merges uniquenesses and generalizability. (We define democracy as a polity of political decision-making through representatives selected via contested elections, where the cost of participation is not restrictively high. Democracy entails *turnover* and is consolidated when incumbents lose and turn over power).

A popular approach among research on democracy is «pluralism,» where democracy involves political participation reinforced by values [4; 5]. In pluralism, democracy emerges and survives because of popular (middle-class) pressure for proto-democratic values — deferred gratification, meritocracy, universalism, respect for law. In one variation of this theory, democracy is linked to elites' cost-benefit calculations. Democracy emerges when elites gain by leaving authoritarian rule [6] and collapses if its costs are too great [7]. Democracy's inherent uncertainties may lead certain actors (e.g. officers, bourgeoisie) to abandon democracy for law and order. Democracy can fall if the costs of losing an election — greater in a presidential than parliamentary system [8] — are great.

Unfortunately, this approach does not address *organized power* and democracy. Democracy is assumed emerge from values that automatically shape political structure and procedure. Fortunately, an alternative approach, «managerialism» [9], analyzes democracy through a balance of power between or-

ganized social groups (e.g. aristocrats, segments of the capitalist class, the state, trade unions, parties, etc.). For Barrington Moore [10], democracy emerged when an alliance between aristocracy and bourgeoisie balanced the state (e.g. in England). Where the bourgeoisie was weak (Russia) or subordinate to the state (Germany), democracy emerged with congenital weaknesses facilitating its demise. For Charles Tilly [11], democracy emerges from war. In wars, states require resources from society; a society with developed classes can demand political rights in return for finance. Democracy developed in England because merchants and aristocrats forced the Crown to create Parliament as an oversight commission to control the Crown's use of taxes. Democracy is enhanced by *balance* and competition *between* elite factions that provides citizens a *choice* of elites [12]. Democracy, thus, is not guaranteed by rules and values but by *balance* between competing groups with interests divergent enough to avoid unification against democracy. Democracy can crash when social power goes into disbalance, e.g. by war, emergence of new mobilized forces, or shocks that disrupt social organization.

Not that values — or more broadly, «culture» — should be thrown out. There are potential strengths if insights from combining power and culture. Cross-national research from Europe and Latin America supports managerialism [13]. Yet to begin and end with calculation and power is reductionist; democracy is also an *idea* reverberating in political discourse and organization, constraining some actors (e.g. the state) and empowering others (e.g. working classes) to act within the limits not only of power but also of legitimacy. Working democracies persist not only because of elite balance but because elites view democracy as the only *legitimate* game in town [14]. In historical moments, to speak against democracy may be anathema. (This logic focuses less on «values» than structured discourse and claims, avoiding the thorny issues of just what «democratic» values

are and their link to structural changes.) Following the logic of these approaches (and general insights of political sociology), we can think of the political realm as constituted by *structure* (relations of actors to sources of power and to each other), *institutions* (procedures, categories, and logics of organization), *organization* (specific relations and procedures of concrete groups of agents), and *discourse* (articulated categories, meanings, and the logics linking them). This allows us to suggest the following arrangements as supportive of or inimical to democratic development:

	Supportive of democracy	Inimical for democracy
Structure	Balanced access to/control of resources, forcing interdependency and negotiation	Imbalance: state or elites too strong; lack of state embeddedness or autonomy, incentive to cheat.
Institutions	Access to political arena open; consistent rules of voting; rules support balance, embeddedness.	Blocked access to political arena; no consistent rules of participation; rules support imbalance.
Organization	Organized civil society articulating interests.	Lack of organized civil society or imbalance (only one part organized).
Discourse	Democracy itself frames discourse and debate, taken-for-granted as legitimate and normal.	Democracy framed as risk, source of problems, secondary; framed as one option of many.

Note that the key is balance: balance between organizations; structural relations providing and reproducing balance; institutions that maintain balance, empowering and constraining political actors; and discourse legitimating both that balance and the right of political openness and participation above all else. This suggests that the emergence of democracy involves strategies of political and non-political elites as well as broader culture, but that these are embedded in legacies of both institutions and structures of power. To follow Skocpol's dictum on revolutions [15], democracy is not made, it comes — accidentally.

One problem, however, limits the utility of applying developed insights on democracy to post-socialist systems: these theories grew out of studies of historical cases that *already had some form of capitalism* providing the foundations for balance. England, the United States, and even Latin American «classes» had bases for social power: land ownership, control of capital (shareholding or enterprise ownership), professional organizations, and some history of legitimacy for democracy in place or crystallizing to balance the state. The case of post-socialist East Europe and Eurasia involves creating both

capitalist institutions (e.g. private property) and democratic procedures. *Coevolution* of democracy and capitalism is a new historical phenomenon. Contingent political decisions and their institutional outcomes — and formation of groups, social power, and further institutional development — are crucial in our rudimentary framework. In initial moments of transition (or «transformation»), interests and identities interact, and contingent events lead to an initial set of institutions that structure political power and relations that shape the emergence of organized social groups. Particular important are the arrangements of state structure and political processes of representation and thus of control of the state. These emerge contingently from initial change in power (transfer or breakdown), regime type, and legacies of civil society and how these influenced initial political choices and institutional arrangements, and how these shaped further evolution of political processes and structures.

In this paper we limit our focus to organizational and institutional factors: the impact of the *form* and *tactical choices* during the initial transition; the *legacies* of social organization; and the impact of regime type (parliamentary versus presidential).

#### *Power: Transfer or Disruption*

At the initial moment of change (1989 or 1991), a key factor was whether power and political institutions (especially in state structure) were *transferred* or *disrupted*. In East Europe, communist elites *transferred* power and right of participation to wider bodies (e.g. parliaments), while power of rule was disrupted in the former USSR. A transfer of power involves an exchange of elites at the top of political structures, especially the state; but the machinery of political structures remains intact. Ministries, police and courts, deliberative bodies, and parties continue to function, even if reforms are necessary for a democratic and capitalist transition. In a breakdown of power, political instability results, leading to a scramble to restructure and rebuild political power. In such cases, political power often emerges centralized because of the struggles to rebuild it [16]. In a situation of instability, where political power and the political order must be rebuilt, creating a negotiated balance is more difficult than conquering it (as happens in the aftermath of revolutions and civil wars). A transfer of power need not lead to democracy, but the chances for democracy are higher (unless preexisting structures are highly centralized and inimical to democracy).

#### *Regime Type*

Another important factor is whether a system is «presidential» or «parliamentary» (locating decision-making authority in a single individual or a parliamentary group and ministers answerable to that body). Because parliaments have many people and

parties, more interests can be continuously represented rather than by totally left out of political decision-making. This can facilitate slower polity-making but can also create the incentives to deliberation and negotiation, especially if embedded in an organized civil society. A state with a strong presidency can develop and implement public policy better than a parliamentary system, but also risks confrontations in transfers of power [17]. Presidential systems locate power in a single individual, creating an «all-or-none» logic: the interests of one set of actors supporting the victorious candidate will be represented in the halls of power, while the interests of the losers are left out. The risks of loss are thus greater in a presidential system. If risks to various actors are great in a loss in a presidential system, those actors may decide the rational action is to act against democracy, for example siding with military forces or a corrupt president out to hold on to power. This risk extends beyond the electoral process. Actors who base their power on a president will want that president to stay in power, and while he is in office they will seek to influence him. With a parliament, the method for influence is lobbying, but a large number of people are involved, leading to deliberation and compromise. When a single individual is lobbied, competition becomes fierce for that person's grace. Hence, political influence and favoritism in a presidential system, where power revolves around a central figure and his coterie, takes on the logic of «all-or-none», upping the stakes of the political game. This hinders democracy, as organized interests try to influence and undermine elections and the political process, leading to corruption and conflict informal «clans» form around the president.

#### *Legacies of Civil Society and Social Organization*

It is cliché that democracy requires civil society (even if it is not sufficient for democracy). By «civil society» we mean social spaces beyond control of the state — for example, private organizations and association, private property, and the like. Civil society supports democracy by providing a balance to state organization and power; states have to negotiate with business owners to obtain higher taxes, with parties to obtain votes and political support, with associations to mobilize support for state activities (e.g. war). Two aspects of civil society concern us here. First, civil society is not sufficient for democracy. Industrialists may side with the state against democracy. State institutions may nudge civic organizations towards or away from democracy; as mentioned above, a presidential system with its «all-or-none» logic induces civic organizations (especially elite organizations) to orient themselves to presidents at the expense of the public deliberation and negotiation so important to democracy, whereas parlia-

ments encourage give-and-take. Thus, civil society is necessary for democracy but not sufficient. Second, civil society does not emerge spontaneously; even if humans are social creatures, the art of association has roots in historical practices and habits [18; 19]. Habits of civic association stem from long histories of a primordial balance of power: for example, «republics» of northern Italy forced to negotiate and interact, or American towns free from aristocratic feudalism, industrial domination, or an overpowering state.

This sets out part of the theoretical foundation: legacies of civil society and initial institutional decisions structured incentives and structures, that in turn shaped how that balance that could encourage reciprocity and negotiation — the roots of democracy. How did this work in reality? We now turn to a brief empirical discussion of East Europe versus the former USSR. All cases demonstrate uniqueness and variation but also similarities. By drawing on these we highlight some general factors involved. While a more thorough empirical discussion would provide more flesh, to conserve space we provide a basic empirical overview.

While there was variation in East European countries, there were also similarities relative to the experience of former Soviet republics. In Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, the communist elite transferred political power from the Party to the state in such a way as to channel social mobilization but still maintain some future influence. Democratic procedures were set up so that communists would be represented in the new, seemingly inevitable democratic system; but room was left for contenders as well. Thus, Poland and Czechoslovakia (before the Velvet Divorce) saw political compromises between communists and organized reform movements allowing for a transfer of power. The Polish compromise between Solidarity and the communist regime guaranteed communists some representation but also opened up the polity to democratic competition, supporting a negotiated transfer (especially after Solidarity's overwhelming victory in the first elections). In Hungary, neither communist elite nor reformers sought compromise [20] and turned to parliamentary elections that transferred power to the parliament and away from the Party.

Political change after 1989 was thus a negotiated transfer of power and domination from the Communist Party to elected representatives in the state. States and political institutions did not come crashing down and thus did not have to be rebuilt. This was one part of the story. Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Poland (with its new constitution) were *de facto* or *de jure* parliamentary regimes as a result of this transfer of power. The initial compromises between Party elites and reformers led to power be-

ing located in a parliament, where both sides believed they could gain or maintain power. These negotiated political settlements were institutionalized in constitutions creating *de jure* parliamentary regimes (Czech Republic, Hungary) or *de facto* parliamentary regimes (Poland), where a supposedly central presidential figure is in reality much more powerless in the face of ministers and parliament. The result is that networks and «embeddedness» between state/regime and society have been less disrupted by the «all-or-none» incentives of presidential regimes.

Transfer of power to a parliament is a foundation, but this was also augmented by a civil society that, while nowhere near as organized and institutionalized as in the democratic West, was in Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary organized enough to embed political institutions in webs of networks that were a foundation for non-state organization — hence balancing off the state — and embed state and society within each other, creating the imperative for negotiation, deliberation, and accountability more apparent in East Europe than in the former USSR [21]. These civic roots included various forms of economic autonomy — entrepreneurship, an organized working class or peasantry [22; 23] — as well as political organization. Poland had not only Solidarity but also minor socialist parties that could act as immediate centers for organization. Hungary and the Czech Republic did not enjoy such political organization, but still had organized dissident groups and reformist wings within their communist parties that could emerge rather than become entangled in intra-party politics, as was the case within the Soviet communist party. Further, practices of civic association, often associated with political action, were more predominant in East Europe rather than in the USSR. Political contention broke out at various times — repeatedly in Poland — because of continuing practices of association that were not broken by concerted state power [24; 25].

If the story of Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary was transfer and balance supporting democracy, the stories in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus are less sanguine. In Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, political power was disrupted by the fall of the USSR. Republican political bodies found themselves with political power but often without sufficient political structure to handle new tasks at hand. Political organization was weak at best except for the Communist Party [26], except for Ukraine's Rukh. Political power and organization, located both in the state and polity, had to be created rather than merely transferred. In Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus the communist elite could not so easily transfer political power to itself as in East Europe because, first, communist parties' existence was initially illegal, and second, the machinery of republican states had to be aug-

mented to take over the responsibilities of running a sovereign state. This allowed the potential for breakdown, best seen in the threats of secession (e.g. various autonomous republics, including Chechnia, in Russia and the Crimea in Ukraine). Further, all three countries had stronger parliaments after their initial transitions, but presidentialism soon became the norm — first in Russia, then in Belarus, and finally in Ukraine (which arguably had the strongest parliamentary system of the three). Finally, civil society less well organized than in East Europe. Given the totalitarian legacy of strong state penetration of society (given that the Soviet regime allowed more reforms in East Europe as a means of experimenting and observing results), civil society was weakly organized [27]. Where it did exist was in the shadows of the «black» and «gray» markets and informal social networks (especially of closet reformers and dissidents). Initially power was transferred to the Supreme Soviet and the Russian presidency, but this provided the foundation for conflict and political confusion.

This weak underpinning for democracy was exacerbated by continuing political and economic crises and contingencies over the 1990s. In Russia, where power was not simply transferred (as in from the USSR to the Russian Federation) but also disrupted, economic and political change led to continued economic crises and constant warfare between Yeltsin's executive and Khasbulatov's legislative Supreme Soviet. Because of this, Yeltsin strengthened the presidential system in the 1993 constitution — creating the «all-or-none» incentive mentioned earlier. (This depended on contingency, i.e. military support for Yeltsin in October 1993.) Clans («oligarchs») formed around Yeltsin and his coterie. With power centralized in the Kremlin — e.g. Yeltsin's decree powers over the economy, especially privatization — organized interests shifted to the byzantine halls of the president. «Loans-for-shares» privatization (*zalogovaia privatizatsiia*), a cheap transfer of state-owned assets to Yeltsin allies, is one example of clans politics in action. The 1996 presidential election and 1999 Duma election, where Yeltsin allies used economic muscle and media control to slander Yeltsin's opponents (communists, Luzhkov's Otechestvo-Vsia Rossiia), are another example. While he may have turned against them, Putin owes his rise to power to these clans (especially to Boris Berezovskii), who saw in him support for the status quo.

Belarus shows Tocqueville's wisdom [28] that the state is augmented and centralized in following a revolution, and how the collapse of power and the absence of organized civil society can hinder democracy [29]. Initially, Belarus did not have a presidency. In 1991, in the wake of the failed August coup, Stanislav Shushkevich, the deputy speaker of the

Supreme Soviet, was named «president of the parliament.» After continuing instability, in March 1994 the Parliament created a presidency and called for elections, eventually won by Aleksandr Lukashenko. To enhance his powers, Lukashenko created a «presidential vertical line» of personally appointed officials to oversee regions and districts and to answer directly to him rather than the regional electorate. Lukashenko's constitution altered the legislature, where the Senate (upper house) members became appointed directly by the President and regional authorities (themselves elected or appointed by the president); also, 110 members of the lower house were delegates from the old Supreme Soviet loyal to Lukashenko. Lukashenko's ambitions were met neither by organized political opposition — Belarus' «democratic» forces were far from organized, and weak economic reform not only prevented the emergence of non-state resource control (allowing for state-society balance) but also allowed the state to regain Soviet-type control over the economy.

In its uneasy state-building experience [30; 31], Ukraine initially had a stronger parliament (the Verhovna Rada) and, because of stronger «national» consciousness than in Belarus (where it was not well articulated) or Russia (where it was disputed) and the basis for socio-political organization in the Rukh social movement (which later became a bona fide political party). Both Rada and President weakened and constrained each other. President Kravchuk focused early on building the image of the Ukrainian nation and building executive power through political coalitions. Kravchuk called for Presidential control over local councils and executives, to give him the power to control the country more directly, and also called for the creation of a State Council. As a result of Kravchuk's political games, parliament's conservatism, and the inability of political actors to implement economic reforms, the political atmosphere polarized. Kravchuk's institution- and coalition-building helped him to remain in power but did not prevent confrontations with opponents. Following economic deterioration, strikes, and bickering between president and parliament, Ukrainians went to the polls and elected Leonid Kuchma to the presidency. Kravchuk left office peacefully, offering the hope that democracy was on its way in Ukraine. The political game changed with a new constitution, approved in June 1996, which was to strengthen both president and parliament but in reality helped the presidency [32]. Ostensibly, the reason for increasing presidential power (formally articulated) was to increase the efficacy of policy formation and implementation: with power centralized in the president and ministers, there would be less foot-dragging over economic reforms. However, this has had a potentially negative effect for democracy. With increased

presidential strength, the «all-or-none» incentives increased, leading to clan formation around President Kuchma — and in so doing undercutting democratic procedure of policy-making [33].

#### Conclusion

Type of change in power, regime type, and legacies of civil society are not simply important by themselves but by how they are linked. How power changes — by transfer or breakdown followed by state-building — influences regime type. The greater the political instability (resulting from breakdown), the greater the possibility that a parliamentary regime will give way to elite clans and presidentialism. A transfer of power appears to favor a parliamentary regime that can survive. Yet regime type is not enough for democracy: Ukraine had a *de facto* parliamentary regime that did not survive the multiple impacts of weak civil society, crises, and power-building. Legacies of civil society help maintain parliamentary systems and democracy because they help balance power between state and society, preventing predatory behavior (by state or elites), fostering policies that have a chance of working, and finding broad social support. In Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, regime type emerged from early political choices and interacted with civic association. Communist elites chose a transfer of power to secure a place in the post-socialist regime. The combination of parliamentary systems and networks of civil society facilitated institutionalized negotiation and accountability through «deliberative association» [34]. In those countries where power broke down (and civil society was weak), state elites, especially presidents, could augment power, creating a presidential system with its obstacles to democratic consolidation. Further shocks and crises only enhanced political centralization.

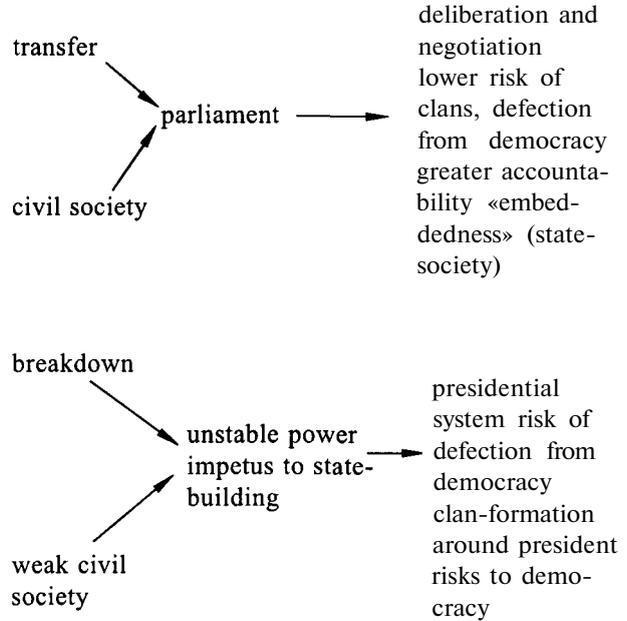
The outcome of initial decisions — whether power was transferred or disrupted, presidential-versus-parliamentary system — can be noticed in the rise of «clans» and degree of centralization or balance in political power. Poland and the Czech Republic both have a weak presidency and a strong parliament; actors are bound in «deliberative associations» embedding state and society and creating the foundations for cooperation and deliberation rather than conflict and dictation. No surprise: power was transferred into parliamentary systems, and a proto-civil society was bequeathed by the past. Following breakdown of power, instability, weak civil society, and continuing crises, power was centralized in presidencies in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, creating the «all-or-none» logic facilitating clans and anti-democratic politics including media abuse, police tactics, and assassinations in the attempt to maintain control of that seat of power and its rewards for that individual and his allies.

Contingent events played a role. Yeltsin argued that a strong presidency was necessary to implement economic reforms. The 1993 constitution followed confrontations between Yeltsin and the Supreme Soviet that Yeltsin's camp claimed stemmed from communist obstructionism. The same scenario was played out in Belarus and Ukraine: Lukashenko campaigning against crime and corruption and calling for a strong presidency to deal with constant crises; Kuchma calling for a stronger presidency to deal with economic decline. That a strong executive deals better with economic reform is problematic [35]; but still this was used to justify augmenting presidential power rather than deliberative bodies and institutions. The «strong hand» beat «deliberation» not because of crises *per se*, but because of how crises were «framed» in political discourse. (Framing and discourse are central to the story of political and economic change, but space does not permit developing this aspect of our framework in our present article.) If crises in Russia or Ukraine led to stronger executives, crises in East Europe did not, given that political institutions were embedded in organization and networks *developed under the parliamentary regime* [36]. Crises *by themselves* did not create stronger presidencies: crises amplified opportunity and justification to augment presidential power.

In short, the two paths to political change and democratization in East Europe and in the former USSR are outlined thus:

*Conduciveness to democracy*

	Initial moment	Regime type	Civil Society
Poland Czechoslovakia Hungary	Transfer: conducive to democracy	Parliamentary: conducive to democracy	Basic organization (pseudo-parties, peasantry or socia- list entrepreneurs): conducive to demo- cracy
Russia Ukraine Belarus	Disruption: problematic to democracy	Russia: increasing presidential power Ukraine: parliament and transfer of power give way to presidency, clans, corruption (Kuchma) Belarus: Lukashenko centralizes power	Less organization, stronger state pene- tration: problema- tic to democracy



While considerations of space prevent more detailed data and theory (forthcoming in our future work), this brief outline and discussion suggest a means to analyze the emergence, consolidation, and development of democracy. Our rudimentary conclusions are:

- Transfer of power is better for democracy than power disruption, because the latter risks centralized power around a president;
- Parliamentary systems, if inefficient in implementing policy, encourage deliberation, negotiation, and pro-democratic practices, while the «all-or-none»

logic of a presidency risks antidemocratic practices;

- Forms of political change, regime type, and civic association are not created outright but are accidental and contingent.

These may not be hoped-for implications for the optimistic reformers, but they do point out the realities of which reformers — and hopeful citizens — must be aware. Democracy is worth the struggle, but to get to sweet waters we must pass through the bitter.

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## ВИПАДКОВА ДЕМОКРАТІЯ. УСПІХ ТА НЕВДАЧА ДЕМОКРАТИЧНИХ ПЕРЕХОДІВ У СХІДНІЙ ЄВРОПІ ТА КОЛИШНЬОМУ СРСР

Стаття аналізує процес виникнення та консолідації демократії. Ми наголошуємо на важливості балансу структури, організації та дискурсу. Порівняння стратегій переходу, громадянського суспільства і типу режиму показує, що зміна за допомогою переговорів та парламентська система є більш сприятливими для демократії, ніж президентський режим та розрив влади.