

Elections Without Democracy

THE RISE OF COMPETITIVE AUTHORITARIANISM

Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way

*Steven Levitsky is assistant professor of government and social studies at Harvard University. His *Transforming Labor-Based Parties in Latin America* is forthcoming from Cambridge University Press. **Lucan A. Way** is assistant professor of political science at Temple University and an academy scholar at the Academy for International and Area Studies at Harvard University. He is currently writing a book on the obstacles to authoritarian consolidation in the former Soviet Union.*

The post-Cold War world has been marked by the proliferation of hybrid political regimes. In different ways, and to varying degrees, polities across much of Africa (Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Zambia, Zimbabwe), postcommunist Eurasia (Albania, Croatia, Russia, Serbia, Ukraine), Asia (Malaysia, Taiwan), and Latin America (Haiti, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru) combined democratic rules with authoritarian governance during the 1990s. Scholars often treated these regimes as incomplete or transitional forms of democracy. Yet in many cases these expectations (or hopes) proved overly optimistic. Particularly in Africa and the former Soviet Union, many regimes have either remained hybrid or moved in an authoritarian direction. It may therefore be time to stop thinking of these cases in terms of transitions to democracy and to begin thinking about the specific types of regimes they actually are.

In recent years, many scholars have pointed to the importance of hybrid regimes. Indeed, recent academic writings have produced a variety of labels for mixed cases, including not only “hybrid regime” but also “semidemocracy,” “virtual democracy,” “electoral democracy,” “pseudodemocracy,” “illiberal democracy,” “semi-authoritarianism,” “soft authoritarianism,” “electoral authoritarianism,” and Freedom House’s “Partly Free.”¹ Yet much of this literature suffers from two important weaknesses. First, many studies are characterized by a democratizing bias. Analyses frequently treat mixed regimes as partial or “diminished” forms of democracy,² or as undergoing prolonged transi-

tions to democracy. Such characterizations imply that these cases are moving in a democratic direction. Yet as both Jeffrey Herbst and Thomas Carothers have recently argued, this is often not the case.³ Although some hybrid regimes (Mexico, Senegal, Taiwan) underwent democratic transitions in the 1990s, others (Azerbaijan, Belarus) moved in a distinctly authoritarian direction. Still others either remained stable or moved in multiple directions (Malaysia, Russia, Ukraine, Zambia, Zimbabwe), making the unidirectional implications of the word “transitional” misleading.

Second, terms like “semidemocratic,” “semi-authoritarian,” and “Partly Free” are often used as residual categories and tend to gloss over important differences among regime types. For example, El Salvador, Latvia, and Ukraine were all hybrid regimes in the early 1990s, and each received a combined political rights and civil liberties score of six—or “Partly Free”—from Freedom House in 1992–93. Yet these regimes differed in fundamental ways. Whereas in Latvia the principal undemocratic feature was the absence of citizenship rights for people of Russian descent, in El Salvador the main undemocratic features included substantial human rights violations and the absence of civilian control over the military. Ukraine possessed both universal citizenship rights and a civilian-controlled military, but civil liberties were frequently violated and incumbents routinely abused or manipulated democratic procedures. Hence, although each of these cases could be categorized as “hybrid,” “semidemocratic,” or “partly free,” such labels obscure crucial differences—differences that may have important causal implications. Different mixes of authoritarian and democratic features have distinct historical roots, and they may have different implications for economic performance, human rights, and the prospects for democracy.

Defining Competitive Authoritarianism

This article examines one particular type of “hybrid” regime: *competitive authoritarianism*. In competitive authoritarian regimes, formal democratic institutions are widely viewed as the principal means of obtaining and exercising political authority. Incumbents violate those rules so often and to such an extent, however, that the regime fails to meet conventional minimum standards for democracy. Examples include Croatia under Franjo Tuđman, Serbia under Slobodan Milošević, Russia under Vladimir Putin, Ukraine under Leonid Kravchuk and Leonid Kuchma, Peru under Alberto Fujimori, and post-1995 Haiti, as well as Albania, Armenia, Ghana, Kenya, Malaysia, Mexico, and Zambia through much of the 1990s. Although scholars have characterized many of these regimes as partial or “diminished” forms of democracy, we agree with Juan Linz that they may be better described as a (diminished) form of authoritarianism.⁴

Competitive authoritarianism must be distinguished from democracy on the one hand and full-scale authoritarianism on the other. Modern democratic regimes all meet four minimum criteria: 1) Executives and legislatures are chosen through elections that are open, free, and fair; 2) virtually all adults possess the right to vote; 3) political rights and civil liberties, including freedom of the press, freedom of association, and freedom to criticize the government without reprisal, are broadly protected; and 4) elected authorities possess real authority to govern, in that they are not subject to the tutelary control of military or clerical leaders.⁵ Although even fully democratic regimes may at times violate one or more of these criteria, such violations are not broad or systematic enough to seriously impede democratic challenges to incumbent governments. In other words, they do not fundamentally alter the playing field between government and opposition.⁶

In competitive authoritarian regimes, by contrast, violations of these criteria are both frequent enough and serious enough to create an uneven playing field between government and opposition. Although elections are regularly held and are generally free of massive fraud, incumbents routinely abuse state resources, deny the opposition adequate media coverage, harass opposition candidates and their supporters, and in some cases manipulate electoral results. Journalists, opposition politicians, and other government critics may be spied on, threatened, harassed, or arrested. Members of the opposition may be jailed, exiled, or—less frequently—even assaulted or murdered. Regimes characterized by such abuses cannot be called democratic.

Competitive authoritarianism must therefore be distinguished from unstable, ineffective, or otherwise flawed types of regimes that nevertheless meet basic standards of democracy, and this includes what Guillermo O'Donnell has called "delegative democracies."⁷ According to O'Donnell, delegative democracies are characterized by low levels of horizontal accountability (checks and balances) and therefore exhibit powerful, plebiscitarian, and occasionally abusive executives. Yet such regimes meet minimum standards for democracy. Delegative democracy thus applies to such cases as Argentina and Brazil in the early 1990s, but not to Peru after Fujimori's 1992 presidential self-coup.

Yet if competitive authoritarian regimes fall short of democracy, they also fall short of full-scale authoritarianism. Although incumbents in competitive authoritarian regimes may routinely manipulate formal democratic rules, they are unable to eliminate them or reduce them to a mere façade. Rather than openly violating democratic rules (for example, by banning or repressing the opposition and the media), incumbents are more likely to use bribery, co-optation, and more subtle forms of persecution, such as the use of tax authorities, compliant judiciaries, and other state agencies to "legally" harass, persecute, or extort cooperative behavior from critics. Yet even if the cards are stacked in favor

of autocratic incumbents, the persistence of meaningful democratic institutions creates arenas through which opposition forces may—and frequently do—pose significant challenges. As a result, even though democratic institutions may be badly flawed, both authoritarian incumbents and their opponents must take them seriously.

In this sense, competitive authoritarianism is distinct from what might be called “façade” electoral regimes—that is, regimes in which electoral institutions exist but yield no meaningful contestation for power (such as Egypt, Singapore, and Uzbekistan in the 1990s). Such regimes have been called “pseudodemocracies,” “virtual democracies,” and “electoral authoritarian” regimes. In our view, they are cases of full-scale authoritarianism.⁸ The line between this type of regime and competitive authoritarianism can be hard to draw, and noncompetitive electoral institutions may one day become competitive (as occurred in Mexico). It is essential, however, to distinguish regimes in which democratic institutions offer an important channel through which the opposition may seek power from those regimes in which democratic rules simply serve as to legitimate an existing autocratic leadership.

Finally, competitive authoritarianism must be distinguished from other types of hybrid regimes. Regimes may mix authoritarian and democratic features in a variety of ways, and competitive authoritarianism should not be viewed as encompassing all of these regime forms. Other hybrid regime types include “exclusive republics”⁹ (regimes with strong democratic institutions but highly restrictive citizenship laws) and “tutelary” or “guided” democracies—competitive regimes in which nondemocratic actors such as military or religious authorities wield veto power.

Four Arenas of Democratic Contestation

Due to the persistence of meaningful democratic institutions in competitive authoritarian regimes, arenas of contestation exist through which opposition forces may periodically challenge, weaken, and occasionally even defeat autocratic incumbents. Four such arenas are of particular importance: 1) the electoral arena; 2) the legislature; 3) the judiciary; and 4) the media.

1) *The electoral arena.* The first and most important arena of contestation is the electoral arena. In authoritarian regimes, elections either do not exist or are not seriously contested. Electoral competition is eliminated either *de jure*, as in Cuba and China, or *de facto*, as in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. In the latter, opposition parties are routinely banned or disqualified from electoral competition, and opposition leaders are often jailed. In addition, independent or outside observers are prevented from verifying results via parallel vote counts, which creates widespread opportunities for vote stealing. As a result, opposition forces do not

present a serious electoral threat to incumbents, and elections are, for all intents and purposes, noncompetitive. Thus Kazakhstani president Nursultan Nazarbayev was reelected in 1999 with 80 percent of the vote, and in Uzbekistan, President Islam Karimov was reelected in 2000 with 92 percent of the vote. (As a rule of thumb, regimes in which presidents are reelected with more than 70 percent of the vote can generally be considered noncompetitive.) In such cases, the death or violent overthrow of the president is often viewed as a more likely means of succession than his electoral defeat.

In competitive authoritarian regimes, by contrast, elections are often bitterly fought. Although the electoral process may be characterized by large-scale abuses of state power, biased media coverage, (often violent) harassment of opposition candidates and activists,¹⁰ and an overall lack of transparency, elections are regularly held, competitive (in that major opposition parties and candidates usually participate), and generally free of massive fraud. In many cases, the presence of international observers or the existence of parallel vote-counting procedures limits the capacity of incumbents to engage in large-scale fraud. As a result, elections may generate considerable uncertainty, and autocratic incumbents must therefore take them seriously. For example, Russian president Boris Yeltsin in 1996 and Ukrainian president Leonid Kuchma in 1999 faced strong electoral challenges from former communist parties. Despite concerted efforts to use blackmail and other techniques to secure votes,¹¹ Kuchma won only 35 percent of the vote in the first round of the 1999 presidential elections and 56 percent in the second round. In Kenya, longtime autocrat Daniel arap Moi won reelection with bare pluralities in 1992 and 1997, and in Zimbabwe, the opposition Movement for Democratic Change nearly won the 2000 parliamentary elections. In several cases, opposition forces have managed to defeat autocratic incumbents or their hand-picked candidates, as occurred in Nicaragua in 1990, Zambia in 1991, Malawi and Ukraine in 1994, Albania in 1997, and Ghana in 2000.

Although incumbents may manipulate election results, this often costs them dearly and can even bring them down. In Peru, for example, Fujimori was able to gain reelection in 2000 but was forced to resign amid scandal months later. Similarly, efforts by Milošević to falsify Serbian election results in 2000 led to a regime crisis and the president's removal. Regime crises resulting from electoral fraud also occurred in Mexico in 1988 and Armenia in 1996.

2) *The legislative arena.* A second arena of contestation is the legislature. In most full-scale authoritarian regimes, legislatures either do not exist or are so thoroughly controlled by the ruling party that conflict between the legislature and the executive branch is virtually unthinkable. In competitive authoritarian regimes, legislatures tend to be

relatively weak, but they occasionally become focal points of opposition activity. This is particularly likely in cases in which incumbents lack strong majority parties. In both Ukraine and Russia in the 1990s, for example, presidents were faced with recalcitrant parliaments dominated by former communist and other left-wing parties. The Ukrainian parliament repeatedly blocked or watered down economic reform legislation proposed by President Kuchma, and in 2000–2001, despite Kuchma’s threats to take “appropriate” measures if it did not cooperate, parliament blocked the president’s effort to call a referendum aimed at reducing the powers of the legislature. Although incumbents may attempt to circumvent or even shut down the legislature (as in Peru in 1992 and Russia in 1993), such actions tend to be costly, particularly in the international arena. Thus both Fujimori and Yeltsin held new legislative elections within three years of their “self-coups,” and Yeltsin continued to face opposition from the post-1993-coup parliament.

Even where incumbent executives enjoy large legislative majorities, opposition forces may use the legislature as a place for meeting and organizing and (to the extent that an independent media exists) as a public platform from which to denounce the regime. In Peru, despite the fact that opposition parties exerted little influence over the legislative process between 1995 and 2000, anti-Fujimori legislators used congress (and media coverage of it) as a place to air their views. In Ukraine in November 2000, opposition deputy Aleksandr Moroz used parliament to accuse the president of murder and to distribute damaging tapes of the president to the press.

3) *The judicial arena.* A third arena of potential contestation is the judiciary. Governments in competitive authoritarian regimes routinely attempt to subordinate the judiciary, often via impeachment, or, more subtly, through bribery, extortion, and other mechanisms of co-optation. In Peru, for example, scores of judges—including several Supreme Court justices—were entwined in the web of patronage, corruption, and blackmail constructed by Fujimori’s intelligence chief, Vladimiro Montesinos. In Russia, when the Constitutional Court declared Yeltsin’s 1993 decree disbanding parliament to be unconstitutional, Yeltsin cut off the Court’s phone lines and took away its guards. In some cases, governments resort to threats and violence. In Zimbabwe, after the Supreme Court ruled that occupations of white-owned farmland—part of the Mugabe government’s land-redistribution policy—were illegal, independent justices received a wave of violent threats from pro-government “war veterans.” Four justices, including Chief Justice Anthony Gubbay, opted for early retirement in 2001 and were replaced by justices with closer ties to the government.

Yet the combination of formal judicial independence and incomplete control by the executive can give maverick judges an opening. In

Ukraine, for example, the Constitutional Court stipulated that President Kuchma's referendum to reduce the powers of the legislature was not binding. In Slovakia, the Constitutional Court prevented Vladimír Mečiar's government from denying the opposition seats in parliament in 1994, and in Serbia, the courts legitimized local opposition electoral victories in 1996. Courts have also protected media and opposition figures from state persecution. In Croatia, the courts acquitted an opposition weekly that had been charged with falsely accusing President Tudjman of being a devotee of Spain's Francisco Franco. Similarly, in Malaysia in 2001, a High Court judge released two dissidents who had been jailed under the regime's Internal Security Act and publicly questioned the need for such a draconian law.¹²

Although competitive authoritarian governments may subsequently punish judges who rule against them, such acts against formally independent judiciaries may generate important costs in terms of domestic and international legitimacy. In Peru, for example, the pro-Fujimori congress sacked three members of the Constitutional Tribunal in 1997 after they attempted to block Fujimori's constitutionally dubious bid for a third presidential term. The move generated sharp criticism both domestically and abroad, however, and the case remained a thorn in the regime's side for the rest of the decade.

4) The media. Finally, the media are often a central point of contention in competitive authoritarian regimes. In most full-blown autocracies, the media are entirely state-owned, heavily censored, or systematically repressed. Leading television and radio stations are controlled by the government (or its close allies), and major independent newspapers and magazines are either prohibited by law (as in Cuba) or de facto eliminated (as in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan). Journalists who provoke the ire of the government risk arrest, deportation, and even assassination. In competitive authoritarian regimes, by contrast, independent media outlets are not only legal but often quite influential, and journalists—though frequently threatened and periodically attacked—often emerge as important opposition figures. In Peru, for example, independent newspapers such as *La República* and *El Comercio* and weekly magazines such as *Sí* and *Caretas* operated freely throughout the 1990s. In Ukraine, newspapers such as *Zerkalo nedeli*, *Den*, and, more recently, *Vicherni visti* functioned as important sources of independent views on the Kuchma government.

Independent media outlets often play a critical watchdog role by investigating and exposing government malfeasance. The Peruvian media uncovered a range of government abuses, including the 1992 massacre of students at La Cantuta University and the forgery of the signatures needed for Fujimori's party to qualify for the 2000 elections. In Russia, Vladimir Gusinsky's Independent TV was an important source of criti-

cism of the Yeltsin government, particularly with respect to its actions in Chechnya. In Zimbabwe, the *Daily News* played an important role in exposing the abuses of the Mugabe government. Media outlets may also serve as mouthpieces for opposition forces. In Serbia, the Belgrade radio station B-92 served as a key center of opposition to Milošević in the second half of the 1990s. Newspapers played an important role in supporting opposition forces in Panama and Nicaragua in the late 1980s.

Executives in competitive authoritarian regimes often actively seek to suppress the independent media, using more subtle mechanisms of repression than their counterparts in authoritarian regimes. These methods often include bribery, the selective allocation of state advertising, the manipulation of debts and taxes owed by media outlets, the fomentation of conflicts among stockholders, and restrictive press laws that facilitate the prosecution of independent and opposition journalists. In Russia, the government took advantage of Independent TV's debts to the main gas company, Gazprom, to engineer a takeover by government-friendly forces. In Peru, the Fujimori government gained de facto control over all of the country's privately owned television stations through a combination of bribery and legal shenanigans, such as the invalidation of Channel 2 owner Baruch Ivcher's citizenship. Governments also make extensive use of libel laws to harass or persecute independent newspapers "legally." In Ghana, for example, the Jerry Rawlings government used colonial-era libel statutes to imprison several newspaper editors and columnists in the 1990s, and in Croatia, the Open Society Institute reported in 1997 that major independent newspapers had been hit by more than 230 libel suits. Similarly, Armenia's government used libel suits to quiet press criticism after the country's controversial 1996 elections.¹³

Yet efforts to repress the media may be costly to incumbents in competitive authoritarian regimes. For example, when in 1996 the Tudjman government in Croatia tried to revoke the license of Radio 101, a popular independent station in the capital, the massive protests that broke out both galvanized the opposition and temporarily split the ruling party. In Ukraine in 2000, charges that President Kuchma had sought the killing of an opposition journalist led to large domestic protests and partial isolation from the West. In Peru, the persecution and exiling of Ivcher provoked substantial protest at home and became a focal point of criticism abroad.

Inherent Tensions

Authoritarian governments may coexist indefinitely with meaningful democratic institutions. As long as incumbents avoid egregious (and well-publicized) rights abuses and do not cancel or openly steal elections, the contradictions inherent in competitive authoritarianism may

be manageable. Using bribery, co-optation, and various forms of “legal” persecution, governments may limit opposition challenges without provoking massive protest or international repudiation.

Yet the coexistence of democratic rules and autocratic methods aimed at keeping incumbents in power creates an inherent source of instability. The presence of elections, legislatures, courts, and an independent media creates periodic opportunities for challenges by opposition forces. Such challenges create a serious dilemma for autocratic incumbents. On the one hand, repressing them is costly, largely because the challenges tend to be both formally legal and widely perceived (domestically and internationally) as legitimate. On the other hand, incumbents could lose power if they let democratic challenges run their course.¹⁴ Periods of serious democratic contestation thus bring out the contradictions inherent in competitive authoritarianism, forcing autocratic incumbents to choose between egregiously violating democratic rules, at the cost of international isolation and domestic conflict, and allowing the challenge to proceed, at the cost of possible defeat. The result is often some kind of regime crisis, as occurred in Mexico in 1988; Nicaragua in 1990; Zambia in 1991; Russia in 1993; Armenia in 1996; Albania in 1997; Ghana, Peru, Serbia, and Ukraine in 2000; and Zambia (again) in 2001. A similar crisis appears likely to emerge in Zimbabwe surrounding the March 2002 presidential election.

In some cases, such as those of Kenya, Malaysia, Russia, and Ukraine, autocratic incumbents weathered the storm. In several of these countries, the regime cracked down and dug in deeper. In other cases, such as Nicaragua in 1990, Zambia in 1991, and Ghana and Mexico in 2000, competitive authoritarian governments failed to crack down and lost power. In still other cases, including Peru and Serbia, autocrats attempted to crack down but, in doing so, were badly weakened and eventually fell.

But succession is not democratization. Although in many cases (Croatia, Nicaragua, Peru, Slovakia, Serbia) incumbent turnover resulted in democratic transitions, in other cases, including Albania, Zambia, Ukraine, and Belarus, newly elected leaders continued or even intensified many of the authoritarian practices of their predecessors. Hence, while the removal of autocratic elites creates an important *opportunity* for regime change and even democratization, it does not ensure such an outcome.

Although it is beyond the scope of this article to explain variations in the capacity of competitive authoritarian regimes to survive crises brought about by episodes of democratic contestation, one pattern is worth noting.¹⁵ In regions with closer ties to the West, particularly Latin America and Central Europe, the removal of autocratic incumbents has generally resulted in democratization in the post-Cold War period. In Latin America, for example, four out of five competitive authoritarian

regimes democratized after 1990 (the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Peru, but not Haiti). Similarly, during the same period four out of five competitive authoritarian regimes in Central Europe democratized (Croatia, Serbia, Slovakia, and Romania, but not Albania). By contrast, the record of competitive authoritarian regimes in Africa and the former Soviet Union is strikingly different. Among former Soviet republics, only one competitive authoritarian regime (Moldova) democratized in the 1990s.

This evidence suggests that proximity to the West may have been an important factor shaping the trajectory of competitive authoritarian regimes in the 1990s. Linkages to the West—in the form of cultural and media influence, elite networks, demonstration effects, and direct pressure from Western governments—appear to have raised the costs of authoritarian entrenchment, making the democratization of competitive authoritarian regimes more likely. Where Western linkages were weaker, or where alternative, nondemocratic hegemons (such as Russia or China) exerted substantial influence, competitive authoritarian regimes were more likely either to persist or to move in a more authoritarian direction.

Paths to Competitive Authoritarianism

Although competitive authoritarian regimes are not a new phenomenon (historical examples include parts of East Central Europe in the 1920s and Argentina under Perón from 1946 to 1955), they have clearly proliferated in recent years. Competitive authoritarianism emerged out of three different regime paths during the 1990s. One path was the decay of a full-blown authoritarian regime. In these cases, established authoritarian regimes were compelled—often by a combination of domestic and international pressure—either to adopt formal democratic institutions or to adhere seriously to what had previously been façade democratic institutions. Yet due to the weakness of opposition movements, transitions fell short of democracy, and incumbents proved adept at manipulating or selectively adhering to the new democratic rules. Transitions of this type occurred across much of sub-Saharan Africa, where economic crisis and international pressure compelled established autocrats to call multiparty elections, but where many transitions fell short of democratization and many autocrats retained power.

A second path to competitive authoritarianism was the collapse of an authoritarian regime, followed by the emergence of a new, competitive authoritarian regime. In these cases, weak electoral regimes emerged, more or less by default, in the wake of an authoritarian breakdown. Although the absence of democratic traditions and weak civil societies created opportunities for elected governments to rule autocratically, these governments lacked the capacity to consolidate authoritarian rule. This

path was followed by such postcommunist countries as Armenia, Croatia, Romania, Russia, Serbia, and Ukraine, as well as by Haiti after 1994.

A third path to competitive authoritarianism was the decay of a democratic regime. In these cases, deep and often longstanding political and economic crises created conditions under which freely elected governments undermined democratic institutions—either via a presidential “self-coup” or through selective, incremental abuses—but lacked the will or capacity to eliminate them entirely. Examples of such transitions include Peru in the early 1990s and perhaps contemporary Venezuela.

The roots of this recent proliferation lie in the difficulties associated with consolidating both democratic *and* authoritarian regimes in the immediate post–Cold War period. Notwithstanding the global advance of democracy in the 1990s (and the democratic optimism that it inspired among scholars), in much of the world democratic regimes remained difficult to establish or sustain. A large number of transitions took place in countries with high levels of poverty, inequality, and illiteracy; weak states and civil societies; institutional instability; contested national borders; and—in parts of the former communist world—continued domination by the state of the economy, major religious institutions, and other areas of social activity.

Yet if the prospects for full-scale democratization remained bleak in much of the post–Cold War world, so too were the prospects for building and sustaining full-scale authoritarian regimes.¹⁶ In large part, this change was a product of the post–Cold War international environment. Western liberalism’s triumph and the Soviet collapse undermined the legitimacy of alternative regime models and created strong incentives for peripheral states to adopt formal democratic institutions. As Andrew Janos has argued, periods of liberal hegemony place a “web of constraints” on nondemocratic governments that seek to maintain international respectability and viability. Thus, during the brief period of liberal hegemony that followed World War I, relatively authoritarian governments in Central Europe faced strong pressure to tolerate a semi-free press, regular scrutiny from opposition members of parliament, and a quasi-independent judiciary.¹⁷ When Western liberal states are challenged by authoritarian counter-hegemonic powers, however, these “webs of constraints” tend to disappear. Counter-hegemonic powers provide alternative sources of legitimacy and military and economic assistance, thereby weakening the incentive for governing elites to maintain formal democratic institutions. Thus the emergence of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia as regional powers contributed to the collapse of Central European hybrid regimes in the 1930s, and the strength of the Soviet Union facilitated the establishment of Leninist dictatorships across much of the Third World during the Cold War. When Western powers face a challenger to their hegemony, they are more likely to tolerate autocracies that can present themselves as buffers against their rivals.

The 1990s marked a period of Western liberal hegemony similar to that of the 1920s but much broader in scope. International influences took many forms, including demonstration effects, conditionality (as in the case of European Union membership), direct state-to-state pressure (in the form of sanctions, behind-the-scenes diplomacy, and even direct military intervention), and the activities of emerging transnational actors and institutions. In this new context, the liberal democratic model gained unprecedented acceptance among postcommunist and Third World elites. Perhaps more importantly, the absence of alternative sources of military and economic aid increased the importance of being on good terms with Western governments and institutions. Although the effect of international pressure varied considerably across regions (and even across countries), for most governments in most poorer and middle-income countries, the benefits of adopting formal democratic institutions—and the costs of maintaining overtly authoritarian ones—rose considerably in the 1990s.

Emerging and potential autocrats also confronted important domestic impediments to the consolidation of authoritarian regimes. To consolidate a fully closed regime, authoritarian elites must eliminate all major sources of contestation through the systematic repression or co-optation of potential opponents. Such action requires both elite cohesion and a minimally effective—and financially solvent—state apparatus. Resource scarcity has made it more difficult for leaders to sustain the patronage networks that previously undergirded authoritarian state structures. In addition, uncertain hierarchical control over repressive organs, while heightening the risk of civil war, has also increased the difficulty of consolidating authoritarian rule. Finally, in many postcommunist regimes the dispersal of control over different state and economic resources among different groups made it difficult for any single leader to establish complete control, resulting in a kind of pluralism by default.

A substantial number of regimes *were* able to overcome the domestic and international obstacles to authoritarian rule in the 1990s. Some benefited from pockets of permissiveness in the international system, due in large part to economic or security issues that trumped democracy promotion on Western foreign policy agendas. Others benefited from state control over revenues from valuable commodities (such as oil), which undermined the development of an autonomous civil society and gave rulers the means to co-opt potential opponents, and still others took advantage of quasi-traditional elite networks that facilitated the establishment of neopatrimonial regimes (as in Central Asia).

Yet in much of Africa, Latin America, and postcommunist Eurasia in the 1990s, emerging or potential autocrats lacked these advantages. Due to a combination of international pressure, state weakness, and elite fragmentation, many incumbents found the cost of co-opting or repressing opponents to be prohibitively high. As a result, even some highly auto-

cratic leaders were unable to eliminate important arenas of contestation. The sources of authoritarian weakness varied across cases. In Albania and Haiti, for example, international factors were probably decisive in preventing full-scale authoritarian rule. In Africa, a contraction of resources caused by the end of Cold War sponsorship and the conditionality imposed by international financial institutions left some governments too weak to co-opt or repress even relatively feeble opposition challenges.¹⁸ In post-Soviet countries such as Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine, the fragmentation of control over state and economic resources generated political competition even where civil society remained weak. What is common to virtually all of these cases, however, is that pluralism and democratic contestation persisted less because elites wanted them than because elites simply could not get rid of them.

In the 1990s, then, competitive authoritarian regimes were most likely to emerge where conditions were unfavorable to the consolidation of either democratic or authoritarian regimes. It must be noted, of course, that such conditions do not necessarily result in competitive authoritarianism. In some cases, including El Salvador, Mali, and Mongolia, democracy may take hold in spite of highly unfavorable conditions. In other cases, the breakdown of authoritarian rule may result in state collapse and civil war, as occurred in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Somalia.

Conceptualizing Nondemocracies

We conclude by echoing Thomas Carothers' call to move beyond what he calls the "transition paradigm."¹⁹ It is now clear that early hopes for democratization in much of the world were overly optimistic. Many authoritarian regimes have survived the "third wave" of democratization. In other cases, the collapse of one kind of authoritarianism yielded not democracy but a new form of nondemocratic rule. Indeed, a decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the majority of the world's independent states remained nondemocratic. Yet whereas an extensive literature has emerged concerning the causes and consequences of democratization, emerging types of democracy, and issues of democratic consolidation, remarkably little research has been undertaken on the emergence or persistence of nondemocratic regimes.

The post-Cold War Western liberal hegemony, global economic change, developments in media and communications technologies, and the growth of international networks aimed at promoting democracy and human rights all have contributed to reshaping the opportunities and constraints facing authoritarian elites. As a result, some forms of authoritarianism, such as totalitarianism and bureaucratic authoritarianism, have become more difficult to sustain. At the same time, however, several new (or partially new) nondemocratic regime types took on greater importance in the 1990s, including competitive authoritarian-

ism. A range of other nondemocratic outcomes also gained in importance, including other types of hybrid regimes, postcommunist patrimonial dictatorships, and cases of sustained state collapse (“chaosocracy”).²⁰ Research on these nondemocratic outcomes is critical to gaining a better understanding of the full (rather than hoped for) set of alternatives open to post–Cold War transitional regimes.

NOTES

The authors thank Jason Brownlee, Timothy Colton, Michael Coppedge, Keith Darden, Jorge Domínguez, Steve Hanson, Marc Morjé Howard, Rory MacFarquhar, Mitch Orenstein, Maria Popova, Andreas Schedler, Oxana Shevel, and Richard Snyder for their comments on earlier drafts of this article.

1. Terry Lynn Karl, “The Hybrid Regimes of Central America,” *Journal of Democracy* 6 (July 1995): 72–87; William Case, “Can the ‘Halfway House’ Stand? Semidemocracy and Elite Theory in Three Southeast Asian Countries,” *Comparative Politics* 28 (July 1996): 437–64; Richard A. Joseph, “Africa, 1990–1997: From *Abertura* to Closure,” *Journal of Democracy* 9 (April 1998): 3–17; Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Fareed Zakaria, “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy,” *Foreign Affairs* 76 (November–December 1997): 22–41; Thomas Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999); Gordon P. Means, “Soft Authoritarianism in Malaysia and Singapore,” *Journal of Democracy* 7 (October 1996): 103–17; Andreas Schedler, “Mexico’s Victory: The Democratic Revelation,” *Journal of Democracy* 11 (October 2000): 5–19; and M. Steven Fish, “Authoritarianism Despite Elections: Russia in Light of Democratic Theory and Practice,” paper prepared for delivery at the 2001 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, 30 August–2 September 2001.

2. See David Collier and Steven Levitsky, “Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research,” *World Politics* 49 (April 1997): 430–51.

3. See Jeffrey Herbst, “Political Liberalization in Africa after Ten Years,” *Comparative Politics* 33 (April 2001): 357–75; Thomas Carothers, “The End of the Transition Paradigm,” *Journal of Democracy* 13 (January 2002): 5–21.

4. Juan J. Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2000), 34.

5. See Scott Mainwaring, Daniel Brinks, and Aníbal Pérez Linan, “Classifying Political Regimes in Latin America, 1945–1999,” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 36 (Spring 2001). This definition is consistent with what Larry Diamond calls “mid-range” conceptions of democracy (Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy*, 13–15).

6. Obviously, the exact point at which violations of civil and political rights begin to fundamentally alter the playing field is difficult to discern and will always be open to debate. However, the problem of scoring borderline cases is common to all regime conceptualizations.

7. Guillermo O’Donnell, “Delegative Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy* 5 (January 1994): 55–69.

8. Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy*, 15–16; Richard Joseph, “Africa, 1990–1997”; Jason Brownlee, “Double Edged Institutions: Electoral Authoritarianism in Egypt

and Iran,” paper presented at the 2001 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, 30 August–2 September 2001.

9. Philip G. Roeder, “Varieties of Post-Soviet Authoritarian Regimes,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 10 (January–March 1994): 61–101.

10. In Kenya, government-backed death squads were responsible for large-scale violence, particularly in ethnic minority areas. See Joel Barkan and Njuguna Ng’ethe, “Kenya Tries Again,” in Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, eds., *Democratization in Africa* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 185. Substantial violence against opposition forces was also seen in Serbia and Zimbabwe in the 1990s.

11. See Keith Darden, “Blackmail as a Tool of State Domination: Ukraine Under Kuchma,” *East European Constitutional Review* 10 (Spring–Summer 2001): 67–71.

12. *The Economist*, 14 July 2001, 37.

13. H. Kwasi Prempeh, “A New Jurisprudence for Africa,” *Journal of Democracy* 10 (July 1999): 138; Nebojsa Bjelakovic and Sava Tatic, “Croatia: Another Year of Bleak Continuities,” *Transitions-on-Line*, <http://archive.tol.cz/countries/croar97.html> (1997). Mikhail Diloyen, “Journalists Fall through the Legal Cracks in Armenia,” *Eurasia Insight* (June 2000).

14. These dilemmas are presented in an insightful way in Andreas Schedler, “The Nested Game of Democratization by Elections,” *International Political Science Review* 23 (January 2002).

15. For a more developed explanation, see Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, “Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regime Change in Peru and Ukraine in Comparative Perspective,” Studies in Public Policy Working Paper No. 355 (Glasgow: University of Strathclyde Center for the Study of Public Policy, 2001).

16. On obstacles to authoritarianism in the former Soviet Union, see Philip G. Roeder, “The Rejection of Authoritarianism,” in Richard Anderson, M. Stephen Fish, Stephen E. Hanson, and Philip G. Roeder, *Postcommunism and the Theory of Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

17. Andrew Janos, *East Central Europe in the Modern World: The Politics of Borderlands From Pre- to Postcommunism* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000), 97–99.

18. Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 100.

19. Thomas Carothers, “The End of the Transition Paradigm.”

20. See Richard Snyder, “Does Lootable Wealth Breed Disorder? States, Regimes, and the Political Economy of Extraction,” paper presented at the 2001 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, 30 August–2 September 2001. See also Juan J. Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*, 37.