

Nationalism and the Transition to Democracy: The Post-Soviet Experience

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Abstract: The political trajectories of the post-Soviet states are varied, with democracy being the outcome in only a minority of these countries. The different outcomes are striking, given the similarity of starting points. The key to understanding a democratic outcome lies in the different relationships between old regime elites and civil society-based opposition forces, and the ethnic balance in the country. Nationalism, reflected in the popular front movements, was crucial for a democratic outcome.

Key words: democracy, mobilization, nationalism, popular front, post-Soviet, stateness

The collapse of the USSR resulted in the emergence of fifteen new, independent states on the territory of the former Soviet Union. This development was widely heralded at the time as constituting a major surge in the broader wave of democratization that had been sweeping the world in the last quarter of the twentieth century. But the disposition of the post-Soviet regimes does not represent a clear and unambiguous strengthening of global democratic ranks; the overwhelming majority of regimes to emerge from the Soviet carapace have domestic political arrangements that fall significantly short of what would be considered a democratic system. A democratic system is defined in terms of the existence of the procedural minima for democracy, essentially competitive elections that are free and fair, plus recognition of civil and political rights.¹

By the mid to late 1990s, the former Soviet republics, despite starting from a situation in which they shared similar political institutional structures, exhibited a range of regime types. Some (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) were democracies² characterized by a widespread observance of civil and political rights. Some (Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, and Georgia) were façade democracies,³ (competitive elections were not free and fair) and observed some civil and polit-

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ical rights, but the latter were denied either to a section of the population or perhaps to the whole population for a limited time. Others (Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) were non-democracies (usually elections were noncompetitive), with, at best, limited observance of civil and political rights.

Although views may differ about the precise characterization of the regime in each country and, over time, political change can bring about a change in regime type, on the Freedom House indices there are clear and sustained differences between the three democracies, the five façade democracies, and the seven non-democracies. Given the similarity of institutional starting points, the early diversity of outcomes is striking. How can these different initial outcomes of regime change be explained?

Democratization

One of the most prominent themes in political science writing in recent decades is democratization, or the way authoritarian regimes give way to democratic regimes. While there is much controversy about this process and about how relevant the literature devoted to regime change in Latin America and southern Europe is to the former Communist world,⁴ virtually all explanations both of regime transition and of particular regime trajectories start from that existing literature. Although some argue that the postcommunist experience cannot easily be accommodated within the earlier paradigms and that crucial aspects of those paradigms must be changed,⁵ the explanations that emerge usually remain deeply influenced by this past scholarship. This is as evident in the explanation of the differences in regime trajectory as it is in the more general discussions of the determinants of regime change.

The differences in regime trajectory, and particularly the emergence of democratic regimes in some of the former Soviet republics but not in others, have been a matter of scholarly concern for some time.⁶ Most of the explanations for these different trajectories focus on the same variable at the center of the earlier transition literature, the central role of elites.⁷ This is the principal focus of the transition literature dealing with Latin America and southern Europe, and it has been the main explanatory variable used by scholars in looking at post-Soviet regime development and type. The fundamental assumption here is that it is the decisions of elites that both structure the process of transition and the construction of the new political system. Issues such as whether to have a parliamentary or a presidential system,⁸ the degree to which constitutional power is concentrated or dispersed,⁹ and the timing, sequence, and nature of economic reform¹⁰ have all been seen as central to the shaping of the political outcome of the process of regime change. All represent decisions taken by the elites concerning the structure of public life, and all have significant implications for the long-term political trajectory of a new regime. Even when explanations focus on factors other than the elite—for example, the presence of a residual set of democratic values stemming from an earlier experience of democracy,¹¹ or the strength, density, and differentiation of civil society organizations (especially political parties)¹²—

the explanations usually fall back on “leadership decisions” as a primary explanatory factor.

Such a focus is justified because elites play a leading role in shaping political outcomes. But they do not act in a vacuum. The environment and situations in which they find themselves shape their decisions. It is only by reference to this context that we can explain why some elites favor a democratic outcome, while others do not. If the key variable in determining regime outcome is the disposition of the elites, this is clearly a central question. Not all elites will favor the establishment of a democratic regime; most cases of regime change, both in the former USSR and elsewhere, have resulted in nondemocratic regimes, meaning that if the crucial variable is elite choice, most elites have chosen the nondemocratic path. Is there anything that can help to explain why some elites make a prodemocratic choice and others do not? The answer lies in the elite’s relationship with civil society forces, those organized groups and movements that have their roots in the populace at large and that seek to play a role in the political sphere. Such organizations often take the form of political parties, but other types of organizations such as trade unions and broader social movements can also play a role.

But what is important here is not just that political elites look to such organizations for support; if the only relationship between the elites and the organizations was one of support by the latter for the former, then it may be the case that civil society forces exercise no effective influence on the elites. But if the elites are responsive, perhaps even accountable, to their civil society supporters, and those civil society organizations seek to open up the system to their participation, it is likely that the elites will press for some form of democratic system. This is not inevitable. Some civil society forces may not be of a democratic disposition, and some elites may not feel bound by the views of their mass-based supporters.

However, a survey of the cases of democratization since the 1970s¹³ suggests that what is crucial to a democratic outcome is that the potential counter elite to the ruling authoritarian elite is embedded in civil society forces, and that the elite acts essentially in the name of broader-based organizations seeking a more open political system.

The particular circumstances of a transition do not determine the whole future course of the regime. This is always subject to the vagaries of political life. But the circumstances of the transition and the political actors and structures that come to the fore during that transition do play an important part in shaping subsequent developments. At least the starting point for the consolidation of the new regime is a direct result of the circumstances of the transition and, as the trajectories of the post-Soviet states show, most trajectories have remained broadly consistent with the sorts of regimes that emerged at the time of the Soviet Union’s collapse. In this sense, the post-Soviet regime trajectories have been largely set by the circumstances of regime change.

Democracy and Nationalism

Historically, many have seen nationalism and democracy going together, with the former being the means of the nation exerting its independence and sovereignty

and thereby establishing the principle of the people ruling themselves, which is at the heart of democracy. But more recently, nationalism is seen as having a negative influence on the prospects for democratization.

Two aspects of this have been identified. First, nationalism raises the question of the state and its boundaries (i.e., national unity), a question that is believed to be more fundamental than that of regime type and that can derail debate about appropriate political forms.¹⁴ As Linz and Stepan argue, the issue of “stateness” is logically prior to questions about political institutions.¹⁵ The “stateness” question, which often manifests itself in terms of defining citizenship and who is a citizen, usually means the absence of a complete coincidence between the territory of a state and the national identity of those who live in that state.

The principal form this takes is the presence of national minorities within the borders of a state, although it can also appear in the form of the presence outside the state’s borders of significant concentrations of people of the same national group as those within the state. These divisions are manifested in the form of the rise of questions concerning things that particular communities hold dear—language, religious beliefs, and customs—as well as issues of discrimination in more mundane areas such as employment and living conditions. In such circumstances, nationalism is a disruptive force.

Second, nationalism is seen as being potentially disruptive to the achievement of a democratic outcome because it stimulates mass mobilization. Because of the way in which nationalism taps into values, sentiments, and assumptions that resonate deeply with significant sections of the population, it can be a potent force in mobilizing both civil society organizations and the population at large.

Part of the orthodoxy regarding the creation of conditions to facilitate a democratic transition is the exclusion of the public from this process, leaving it up to negotiations between the elites. Mass mobilization is seen as being antithetical to an ordered shift toward democracy for a number of reasons. First, such mobilization frightens authoritarian rulers and causes them to suppress activities that, if successful, may halt the whole process of political change. Second, mobilization injects mass actors into the dynamic of negotiation between incumbent and oppositionist elites, and thereby makes a negotiated outcome more difficult because there are more actors to satisfy. Third, it can lead to a loss of focus by bringing a range of issues into the negotiations that may interfere with the basic question, regime forms.

These arguments are logical and are validated by the experiences examined in the literature on Latin America and southern Europe. The breakup of all of the federal Communist states along republican lines adds force to this argument.¹⁶ However, in the post-Soviet experience, it is not as clear-cut as this. Analysis of the post-Soviet regimes in the former USSR, a decade after the collapse of communism shows that only three of the fifteen former republics are democracies—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.¹⁷ The other republics are under regimes that are either nondemocratic or façade democracies. The question is, what distinguishes these democracies from those countries that took another path? Recognizing the importance of the elites and the context in which they operated, was there some-

thing about these countries and the circumstances of their regime changes that distinguished them from those that took another path? In light of the comments above about the importance of the connection between elites and civil society, it is to the latter and their mobilization that we must look. The best insight into this comes from the 1990 republican elections.

The results of these elections were shaped in part by the different forms of popular mobilization that emerged during perestroika. Initially, mass-based politics took the form of the development of voluntary autonomous organizations within Soviet society. The so-called “informals”¹⁸ began to emerge in 1986, but really blossomed and expanded during 1987 and 1988. By February 1988, there were about thirty thousand and by

February 1989 sixty thousand existed across the USSR.¹⁹ Initially, most of these were small groups focused on the common concerns of their members, which were largely apolitical. In another sense, they were highly political; as the first forms of independent organization permitted by the Soviet state since the end of the 1920s,

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they constituted a sharp break with the past and a recognition that the interests of Soviet society needed a more varied array of channels of representation than the Communist Party alone could offer. As time passed, increasing numbers of informals began to shift away from the club form of organization they had initially employed to take up a conscious political stance. In particular, in 1989 and 1990, self-styled political parties began to emerge.²⁰ Many of these were larger than the clubs that had preceded them, but they were often still comparatively small bodies and they generally lacked a clearly defined program and a set of policies. Many of the parties seemed to overlap and to be pale replicas of one another.

The other type of organization that emerged in 1988 was the popular, or national front.²¹ A number of such front organizations emerged within the Russian Republic, including a Russian Popular Front established in late 1989, but the most important were formed outside of Russia: popular fronts were formed in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine, and Armenia in mid to late 1988, and in Moldova,²² Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Georgia in mid-1989. The popular fronts were broad umbrella organizations that united a range of bodies in the republic.

The basis of their unity was a broad commitment to increased national autonomy, although in some cases this was soon transformed into a demand for independence, and they gained strength from their ability to mobilize significant sections of the population around their aims. They had an important impact on the shape of the government following the republican elections.

There is a relationship between the emergence of a post-Soviet democratic regime and nationalist movements, in the form of the popular fronts, playing an

important transitional role. All the states that are classified as full democracies began the post-Soviet period with governments dominated by popular front movements. However, some of the countries that are classified as façade democracies also had prominent popular fronts in their domestic politics when the USSR collapsed. To explore the link between nationalism and a democratic outcome, we need to look at the individual cases of regime change in the Soviet republics and the implications this had for future regime trajectory.

One way of evaluating the strength of nationalist movements in the different republics is by looking at the results of the republican elections held in 1990. The electoral results are not a precise measure of nationalist strength because nowhere was the vote fully free or were nationalist forces able to organize without official harassment. In some republics the level of official opposition to the emergence of autonomous organization was much more extensive than in others.

Nevertheless, the elections do provide an approximate snapshot of relative nationalist strength at that time. The 1990 republican elections produced a number of distinct patterns in the different republics:

1. Election of noncommunist nationalist governments: Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Armenia, and Moldova.²³
2. Election of noncommunist governments in which nationalists played a role: Georgia.
3. Election of a government of reformists and noncommunists: Russia.
4. Election of Communist governments with substantial opposition, including nationalists: Ukraine, Belarus, and Azerbaijan.
5. Communist control remains unshaken: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan,²⁴ Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan.

Given the multinational character of the USSR, it is not surprising that the “stateness” issue was present in a number of these republics. The potential for this to become an issue is suggested by the size of the minority nationalities in each republic. In 1989,²⁵ the titular nationality comprised the following: Armenia 93 percent, Russia 82 percent, Azerbaijan 82 percent, Lithuania 80 percent, Belarus 79 percent, Ukraine 73 percent, Turkmenistan 73 percent, Uzbekistan 71 percent, Georgia 70 percent, Moldova 64 percent, Estonia 62 percent, Tajikistan 62 percent, Kyrgyzstan 54 percent, Latvia 52 percent, and Kazakhstan 43 percent. Logically, it might appear that those republics in which the titular nationality constituted the greatest share of the population would be the most immune to “stateness” problems, while those with the lowest would be the most vulnerable. But this was not the case.

The republics can be divided into three categories:

1. Those in which the “stateness” problem was characterized by large-scale mass mobilization and armed conflict. This will be termed a severe “stateness” problem, and it existed in the following republics: Moldova, where the minority Russian and Gagauz populations sought to secede in 1990 and 1991, which resulted in armed conflict (there was also an issue of whether Moldova should

become independent or unite with Romania); Georgia, where the Abkhaz and South Ossetian legislatures declared their own sovereignty in 1990, precipitating attempts to suppress this by the Tbilisi government; and Armenia and Azerbaijan, between whom there was continuing tension and armed conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.

2. Those republics in which there was significant nationalist mass mobilization, but the “stateness” issue did not descend into armed conflict when the USSR fell. In the Baltic republics—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—the minority Russian populations organized through their own political parties and movements, seeking to gain minority nationalist goals ranging from continued close association with Russia to special representation in the republican legislature and privileges for Russian language and culture. Such mobilization was extensive and peaceful, but was widely interpreted as posing a real threat to the state’s integrity. In Russia, non-Russian nationalist mobilization occurred through the federal system, with the declaration of independence/sovereignty by a range of autonomous regions within the Russian republic. However, these issues were resolved through negotiation between the central and regional elites, with the important exception of Chechnya where armed conflict broke out in 1994.²⁶ In Ukraine, the broad correspondence between ethnic identity and geographical location, and the extent of mobilization among the minority Russian population seemed to pose a significant threat to national unity, but this did not result in armed confrontation.

3. Those republics where mass mobilization was much less extensive than in the republics discussed above, and where nationalism did not appear as a major issue. This was the situation in Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

Combining these dimensions, the strength of the nationalist movement and the severity of the “stateness” problem as a political issue produce the following six-part structure shown in table 1.

What is striking about this is that democracy has been associated with the establishment of a nationalist government at the time of the 1990 elections and by the “stateness” problem being relatively uncontested, in the sense that it did not result in armed conflict. Other combinations produced a nondemocratic outcome.

How are these correlations to be explained?

The Role of Nationalism

Nationalism played a diverse role in these countries. In the states that achieved a democratic outcome, the popular front movements and the mobilization they encouraged prior to the 1990 elections played a positive role in a number of respects. Popular mobilization was important because it demonstrated the power, and, over time, the growth in this power of the nationalist movement. Increasingly large street demonstrations heartened the opponents of communism and may have persuaded some of those who were sitting on the fence to desert the local regime, which helped to destabilize the ruling Communists.²⁷

TABLE 1. Nationalism and “Stateness”

	Strong nationalism	Weak nationalism
Severe “stateness” problem	Armenia Moldova	Georgia Azerbaijan
Significant “stateness” problem	Lithuania Latvia Estonia	Russia Ukraine
Weak “stateness” problem	None	Belarus Kazakhstan Kyrgyzstan Tajikistan Turkmenistan Uzbekistan

The extent of popular support effectively gave the opposition an aura of legitimacy that it formerly did not have, and thereby strengthened its hand in the negotiations with the ruling Communists. For the Communists, the extent of popular mobilization could be unnerving. It pushed them into negotiations and concessions that they otherwise might have been unwilling to give, and in all three countries it led to splits in the Communist Party as a reformist wing took up a cooperative, pronationalist stance against their more conservative party colleagues. In this way, nationalist mobilization could sideline regime hardliners and promote those more willing to seek a compromise solution.

The fact that this mobilization was on a national basis was crucial. Being umbrella organizations, the popular front united under its wings a broad range of more ideological groups, subsuming the differences between those groups within the broader commitment to the national goal. In this way, potential disputes could be avoided because their resolution was unnecessary to the successful achievement of the task at hand; nationalism could unite the diverse elements of emergent civil society and thereby defuse the ideological and political differences that were inevitably present. Not only did this strengthen the oppositional pressure against the incumbent regime, but it also created a broad ideology of consensus and unity that could constitute a framework from which a multiparty system could develop. This is what happened after the fall of the USSR. Popular front movements split, leading to the first post-1991 election, which generated a range of political parties that were committed to the existing national framework and to the emergent rules of the political game. After all, these rules were usually overwhelmingly worked out by or within the popular fronts, or between the popular fronts and the reformers, so the new parties entered political life already committed to the nascent democratic rules of the game they had established. The popular front was thus the means

of linking political elites with the civil society organizations that underpinned the nationalist movement, and involving them all in the negotiations regarding the future rules of the game.

The tactics pursued by both majority and minority nationalists were also important. Where the latter eschewed the use of armed force, room was provided for negotiation and compromise, and as long as the majority nationalists were willing to adopt such an approach, a compromise between competing nationalisms was possible. This sort of dynamic, based on negotiation, compromise, and the peaceful resolution of differences, created a perfect intellectual and practical basis for the construction of a democratic polity.

This sort of argument applies most strongly to Lithuania, where it was played out in its classic form, with that country being characterized by democracy in both substance and form from the time it achieved independence. It also applies to Latvia and Estonia, although in both cases the “stateness” issue meant that both countries were initially a form of façade rather than a genuine democracy. The “stateness” issue was resolved in 1998 with the withdrawal of the initial illiberal measures (including discriminatory citizenship provisions) that had been applied to the mainly Russian minorities in both countries. The resolution of this issue was facilitated by two main factors. First, the Russian minority did not seek to mobilize militarily against the titular nationality and its rule. Certainly, the Russians sought to mobilize through predominantly ethnic parties and sought moral support from the Russian Federation, but they did not seek to go outside the emergent rules of democratic politics. Second, the governments of these republics sought entry to the European Union, and this was a source of significant pressure on them to abandon their discriminatory policies. In Latvia, the resolution of this issue was also aided by the general dispersion of the Russian people throughout the country, rather than being concentrated in one particular region.²⁸

The experience of the Baltic republics shows that where nationalist governments came to power and the “stateness” problem was not severe, democracy was the outcome. However the fate of two other former republics, Moldova and Armenia, shows that where there was a severe “stateness” problem reflected in the outbreak of armed conflict, having a nationalist government did not ensure a democratic outcome. In Moldova, the situation differed considerably from that in Latvia and Estonia. The dissident minorities in Moldova were geographically concentrated in clearly defined areas and mobilized to press their demands. The most serious problem was in Transdnestr, where fighting broke out in 1992 and Russian peacekeepers became involved. This question could ultimately be resolved constitutionally because the sharpest manifestation of it, military conflict, ended quickly, and because the pronationalist Moldovan government was not intent on pursuing an ethnically-based policy. In February 1992, it adopted a liberal citizenship law that made all residents eligible for citizenship.²⁹ The danger posed by minority nationalism could thus be cauterized relatively quickly, but not before it injected into the polity a sense of vulnerability that promoted sentiments antithetical to democracy.

In Armenia, the “stateness” question took on a different form. Instead of national minorities within the state’s borders, the issue was the primarily ethnic Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan. This issue had been at the top of the agenda in both countries since 1987.

In Armenia, where the popular front and its allies won a majority in 1990, the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh and especially the economic difficulties this created stifled the development of liberal forces, with the popular front movement spawning a party that used electoral manipulation and force to maintain power. The continuing nationalist conflict thus created the sort of economic conditions that enabled strong men to successfully appeal for a strengthening of central power and authoritarian controls.

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Nor was democracy the result where weak nationalism confronted a severe “stateness” problem. In Georgia, although the new government was not formally a popular front government but united a diverse array of opposition groupings on the basis of both nationalism and opposition to the Soviet order, irredentist

ethnic movements in Abkhazia and South Ossetia sought to use military means to press their demands. The inability of the Georgian authorities to resolve these conflicts (which were complicated by Russian involvement on the side of the Abkhaz and Ossetes), either militarily or through constitutional concessions, helped to drive the political situation in Georgia toward an antidemocratic outcome. The effect of this national conflict was exacerbated by the collapse of unity within the new ruling coalition, a development that in part reflects the fact that, unlike those countries where a true popular front came to power, Georgia’s ruling coalition was much more a coalition based on ideological compromise than national commitment.

Therefore, there was much weaker unity than in those countries where nationalist sentiment was the predominant basis of the ruling coalition. The breakdown of this unity combined with nationalist irredentism led to authoritarian rule. In Azerbaijan, the conservative Communist regime used the Nagorno-Karabakh issue to strengthen its position, such that when the popular front began to mobilize, it was unable to generate sufficient electoral support to oust that regime. After the collapse of the USSR, there was a period of instability during which the Azerbaijan Popular Front was able to replace the Communist regime temporarily, but following a coup in mid-1993, the Communists were able to reconsolidate themselves in power and repress opposition forces.

Democracy was also not the outcome where weak nationalism was accompanied by a significant “stateness” problem. In Russia, titular Russian nationalism was not a major force. The election produced a legislature split between reformist

and conservative Communists, and neither sought to use nationalism as a political weapon. Without a broadly conceived nationalist movement, there was little to unite the forces on the political spectrum, which resulted in ideological disputes, reinforced by institutional and personal ambitions, leading to the breakdown of order in 1993 with the president unconstitutionally dismissing the legislature. The new constitution had many democratic trappings, but it was a democracy with severe limitations. The “stateness” issue and the outbreak of the war in Chechnya reinforced the general drift toward authoritarianism. In this regard the regime used nationalism to reinforce its authority, and thereby the façade democratic structure was entrenched. In Ukraine, local Communist control remained much less impaired than it was in the republics discussed above. In 1990 reformist Communists were able to maintain Communist rule. Nationalist mobilization had occurred on the basis of both ethnic Ukrainian and Russian nationalism, and the combination of these was sufficient to push the Communist government in a Ukrainian nationalist direction, thereby taking some of the force out of anticommunist nationalism. The result was ideological fragmentation, underpinned by the differing ethnic nationalisms of the Ukrainian and Russian parts of the population. This came to a head with the so-called Orange Revolution of 2004–05.

Democracy was also not the outcome where there was weak popular mobilization and therefore the potential “stateness” problem did not become a major issue. In the Central Asian republics—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—popular mobilization during the perestroika period was generally much lower than the rest of the country, in large part³⁰ because local Communist parties never lost their grip on power to the same extent as elsewhere. The elections in all republics were virtually uncontested. This means that the old regime was able to stabilize itself, albeit under a new, noncommunist guise.

The continuing capacity of the local authorities to maintain their control, including the use of force to do so, prevented popular, including nationalist, mobilization on a large scale and therefore hindered the emergence of popular democratic sentiments. There was a higher level of nationalist mobilization in Belarus, but this was unable to prevail over the old style Communist authorities. Despite the accession to the effective presidency of a member of the popular front with the support of reformist Communist elements (the moderate liberal Stanislau Shushkevich was a compromise figure minimally acceptable to both moderate and hard line elements), the nationalist leader was never able to overcome the opposition of conservative elements in the Communist Party and was soon replaced by them. Nationalism was not a major political issue in Belarus.

Thus the unifying effect of the nationalist popular front movement was able to play itself out in those cases where the mobilization it had fostered had been sufficiently powerful to overthrow conservative Communist rule, and where irredentist nationalist movements did not take up arms against the new government (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia). It was the weakness of this crisis of “stateness,” something achieved principally as a result of the tactics adopted by both majority and minority nationalists, which enabled liberal nationalism to triumph and to cre-

ate the conditions for democracy.³¹ Wherever such a popular front was in power and ethnic conflict did not take a military form, a democratic party system emerged and became consolidated. This was because, by its nature, the popular front embraced a diversity of political positions within an overall consensus on national independence based on strong roots in emergent civil society.

Accordingly, once independence was achieved, the front could break up into constituent party units without losing connection with civil society more broadly and without rejecting the rules of the game they had already designed while parts of the front. In contrast, in those countries where popular front or other noncommunist governments were able to come to power but irredentist national movements sought to pursue their aims militarily, a façade democracy emerged (Armenia, Georgia, and Moldova). In those cases where the “stateness” problem did not take a military form but a popular front did not provide an initial sense of unity to diverse party groups (Russia and Ukraine), façade democracy again was the result. Where nationalist mobilization was insufficient to displace Communist rule, elements of the old regime were able to consolidate themselves in power (Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan).

Conclusion

The trajectories of the post-Soviet states were clearly shaped by nationalism and its manifestations. Where strong majority nationalism came to power and minority nationalism sought the peaceful achievement of its aims, democracy could emerge. Where minority nationalism sought to use military means, a façade democracy emerged regardless of whether majority nationalism was in power. There was a similar nondemocratic outcome in those countries where majority nationalism did not have a stabilizing effect on an emergent multiparty system, even though minority nationalism was not militarily active, while in those countries where popular mobilization could not develop at all, authoritarian politics was the result. The post-Soviet experience confirms the complex relationship between nationalism and democracy. Nationalist mobilization can contribute to the fall of an authoritarian regime and the subsequent emergence of a democratic successor. Furthermore, the “stateness” issue need not disrupt that process. Where minority nationalities do not seek to mobilize militarily to press ethnic demands, the issues surrounding “stateness” may be worked out politically.

However, if nationalist mobilization is insufficient to displace conservative incumbent rulers, or if national minorities (or their supporters outside) seek military redress to their grievances, the course of democratic development can be derailed and result in an authoritarian outcome. Thus, while the post-Soviet experience confirms the view that nationalism can be antithetical to a democratic outcome of regime transition, it also provides evidence for the view that such an outcome may be facilitated by nationalism.

NOTES

1. For a classic discussion, see Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971).

2. This is based chiefly on the Freedom House indices for these characteristics, <http://www.freedomhouse.org>. These have been widely used for the analysis of the nature of the postcommunist regimes. For example, see Graeme Gill, *Democracy and Post-Communism: Political Change in the Postcommunist World* (London: Routledge, 2003), and Adrian Karatnycky, Alexander Motyl, and Boris Shor, eds., *Nations in Transition 1997: Civil Society, Democracy, and Markets in East Central Europe and the Newly Independent States* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1997).

3. On the question of such qualified democracies, see David Collier and Steven Levitsky, "Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research," *World Politics* 49, no. 3 (April 1997): 430–51.

4. For example, see Valerie Bunce, "Can We Compare Democratization in the East Versus the South," *Journal of Democracy* 6, no. 3 (July 1995): 87–100; Valerie Bunce, "Regional Differences in Democratization: The East versus the South," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 14, no. 3 (1998): 187–211. For a sophisticated attempt to use a common framework, see Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

5. For example, see M. Steven Fish, "Postcommunist Subversion: Social Science and Democratization in East Europe and Eurasia," *Slavic Review* 58, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 794–823; Michael McFaul, "The Fourth Wave of Democracy and Dictatorship: Noncooperative Transitions in the Postcommunist World," *World Politics* 54, no. 1 (January 2002): 212–44; and Valerie Bunce, "Rethinking Recent Democratization. Lessons from the Postcommunist Experience," *World Politics* 55, no. 1 (January 2003): 167–92.

6. For the earliest systematic study of different regime trajectories, focusing on non-democratic regimes, see Philip G. Roeder, "Varieties of Post-Soviet Authoritarian Regimes," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 10, no. 1 (January–March 1994): 61–101.

7. For example, see McFaul, "Fourth Wave," 212–44. For an argument about the importance of the background and psychology of individual leaders, see Fredo Arias-King, "The Centrality of Elites," *Demokratizatsiya* 11, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 150–60. Also, see David C. Brooker, "Founding Presidents of Soviet Successor States," *Demokratizatsiya* 12, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 133–45.

8. For example, see Gerald M. Easter, "Preference for Presidentialism: Postcommunist Regime Change in Russia and the NIS," *World Politics* 49, no. 2 (January 1997): 184–211. For an argument about the importance of strong legislatures, see M. Steven Fish, "The Hazards of Half-Measures: Perestroika and the Failure of Post-Soviet Democratization," *Demokratizatsiya* 13, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 241–53.

9. See the discussion of this in Fish, "Social Science," 803–8.

10. M. Steven Fish, "Democratization's Requisites: The Postcommunist Experience," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 14, no. 3 (July–September 1998): 212–47.

11. For example, see Nicolai N. Petro, *The Rebirth of Russian Democracy: An Interpretation of Political Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

12. Fish, "Postcommunist Subversion," 800–3. Both of these assume another kind of explanation, that of path dependence and differing sociopolitical legacies in the post-Soviet republics.

13. See Graeme Gill, *The Dynamics of Democratization: Elites, Civil Society and the Transition Process* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).

14. This view has been evident from the very beginning of the study of democratization. See Dankwart A. Rustow, "Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model," *Comparative Politics* 2, no. 3 (April 1970): 350–52. Also see Linz and Stepan.

15. Linz and Stepan, 26.

16. See the excellent study by Valerie Bunce, *Subversive Institutions. The Design and the Destruction of Socialism and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

17. McFaul, "Fourth Wave," 212, and the argument in Gill (*Democracy and Post-Communism*).

18. On the informals, see S. N. Yushenkov (compiler), *Neformaly: Sotsial'nye Initsiativy: Sbornik* (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1990) and M. Maliutin, *Neformaly v Perestroike: Opyt i Perspektivy*, Iu. N. Afanasiev, *Inogo ne Dano* (Moscow: Progress, 1988), 210–27.

19. O. Shenin, "Za Steklianoi Stenoi," *Pravda*, February 5, 1988 and *Pravda*, "Demokratiaa ne Terpit Demagogii," February 10, 1989.

20. For a survey, see V. N. Berezovskii, N. I. Krotov, and V. V. Cherviakov, *Partii, Assotsiatsii, Soiuzy, Kluby, Spravochnik* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo RAU-PRESS, 1991).

21. For studies that deal with nationalist mobilization, including the popular fronts and their role, see Mark R. Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) and H el ene Carr ere d'Encausse, *The End of the Soviet Empire: The Triumph of the Nations*, trans. Franklin Philip (New York: Basic Books, 1993). On the Baltics, Rasma Karklins, *Ethnopolitics and Transition to Democracy: The Collapse of the USSR and Latvia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), and Walter C. Clemens, *Baltic Independence and Russian Empire* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991).

22. The Moldovan Popular Front was officially formed in June 1989, mainly by leaders of the Democratic Movement in Support of Perestroika, which had been formed in 1988. Beissinger, "Nationalist Mobilization," 82, and William Crowther, "Moldova: Caught Between Nations and Empire," in *New States, New Politics: Building the Post-Soviet Nations*, ed. Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras, 319 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

23. In Lithuania the popular front Saj udis won 70 percent of the seats, in Latvia the Popular Front of Latvia won 65 percent of the seats, in Estonia the Popular Front of Estonia won about 46 percent of the seats but was supported by the Free Estonia movement with a further 27 percent of the deputies, and in Moldova the Popular Front of Moldova won 40 percent of the seats and was supported by a further 30 percent of the deputies. In Armenia, the Armenian National Movement won 45 percent of the seats and was supported by a large number of other noncommunist deputies.

24. Although in Kyrgyzstan a figure not emanating from the highest rungs of the Soviet nomenklatura, Askar Akayev, was elected president in October eight months after the parliamentary election, but this had little effect on the trajectory of the regime.

25. The figures, which are rounded, come from Karatnycky, Motyl, and Shor.

26. By which time the regime trajectory was set.

27. In his study of Russia, Gordon Hahn, using the classic terminology of the transition literature, noted the importance of the interaction between regime hardliners, regime softliners, opposition moderates, and opposition radicals, with the last group also called "revolutionaries from below." But even while acknowledging the important role of this last group, for Hahn "The essence of the Soviet/Russian transformation has been bureaucratic, state-led revolution from above." Gordon M. Hahn, *Russia's Revolution from Above, 1985–2000: Reform, Transition, and Revolution in the Fall of the Soviet Communist Regime* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2002), 2, 23–27.

28. In contrast, in Estonia the Russian population was mainly concentrated in the northeast around Narva.

29. This also seemed to resolve the issue of reunification with Romania.

30. Although not exclusively. The historical legacy meant that the basis for the emergence of civil society was much weaker here than in most of the other republics.

31. Valerie Bunce argues that the timing of nationalist mobilization was important, with those places where such mobilization occurred under the Soviet regime producing an illiberal variant, while those emerging at the time of the Soviet regime's fall were able to benefit from the coincidence of a national and a liberal agenda. Bunce, "Rethinking Recent Democratization," 177–78. But this does not explain the Baltic republics, where there were nationalist manifestations during Soviet times. For discussions that include some details of pre-1985 nationalist manifestations in the Baltic states, see David J. Smith, Artis Pabriks, Aldis Purs, and Thomas Lane, *The Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania* (London: Routledge, 2002).