BEYOND THE DEMOCRATIZATION PARADIGM:
ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY AND POLITICAL CONTESTATION IN RUSSIA 1992-2007

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This paper examines the sources of regime competitiveness and closure in Russia from 1991 until 2005. The Russian case reveals fundamental problems in how most scholars have approached the study of regimes in the last 20 years. To understand regime dynamics in Russia and other “fourth wave” transitions, we need to move beyond the democracy building paradigm and to examine not just the process of (failed or successful) democratic institution building but the factors that facilitate or undermine autocratic consolidation and regime closure. Adopting this perspective reveals processes that have hitherto been mostly ignored in the study of competitive regimes. Even for many competitive or democratic regimes, it is essential to focus not just on the development of constitutions, civil society or party systems, but on the success or failure of efforts to build institutions to eliminate opposition and maintain political control.

To demonstrate the utility of a focus on authoritarian institution building, I examine the evolution of state and party organizational strategies by Yeltsin and then Putin to consolidate power and the impact of these strategies on regime competitiveness. I make two core arguments. First, I show how state and party organizational capacity have affected autocratic consolidation. State and party weakness under Yeltsin in the early 1990s promoted political contestation in important ways. In turn, stronger state and party organization under Putin undermined political competition. Second, I show how organizational strategies taken reflected a logic of learning by trial and error. The failure of initial organizational forms to reduce contestation led to adoption of new approaches – culminating in Putin’s decision to create a formal state vertikal and single ruling party.

The Nature and Pitfalls of the Democracy Building Paradigm

Numerous recent critiques of the post-cold war democratization literature have focused on the literature’s democratizing bias and its tendency to treat non-democratic regimes as residual categories (Carothers 2002; Diamond 2002; Levitsky and Way 2002; Schedler 2002, 2006; Brown 2005; Snyder 2006). While the original “transitiological” work of Schmitter, O’Donnell and Whitehead was extremely careful to avoid teleology, the stunning scale of the Third and Fourth waves – including the successful democratization of all cases covered in the series by O’Donnell and Schmitter – encouraged authors to focus almost exclusively on the democratic end of the transition process. As many recent observers have noted, the nature of authoritarianism was largely ignored and non-democracies have often been defined more in terms of what they are not than what they are (Levitsky and Way 2002; Snyder 2006; Way 2004). Thus, even today, some of the most authoritarian regimes in the world have recently been described by scholars as “democratizing” or “democracies” – including Putin’s Russia (Nichls 2001: v-vii), Belarus (Korosteleva 2005), and even Myanmar prior to the 2007 protests (South 2004). Fortunately, however, many recent studies have been attuned to the diversity of non-democratic regime outcomes (Brown 2005; Snyder 2006). In particular, fruitful efforts have been made to conceptualize various types of non-democracies including “hybrid” regimes that fall somewhere between full scale authoritarianism and procedural minimum democracies (Carothers 2002; Diamond 2002; Ottaway 2003; Schedler 2002, 2006; Levitsky and Way 2002). Yet, the precise impact of the post-Cold War literature’s focus on the democratic end of the transition spectrum has not been fully understood. Indeed, some observers have suggested that the recent critiqu...
no more than calling glasses half empty that others used to call half full while others suggest that claims of “transitiological” bias are vastly exaggerated (Gans-Morse 2004).\(^1\)

Yet, the democratizing bias remains a problem that goes far beyond half-empty glasses, inadequate conceptualizations or incorrect predictions. The problem is much broader than the influence of the so-called “transitiologists” of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Instead, this democratizing bias has had a much broader, more subtle and ultimately more profound impact on regime studies. The democracy building paradigm, like other paradigms or “bod[ies] of intertwined theoretical and methodological belief” (Kuhn 1962: 16-17) has fundamentally shaped the types of questions we ask, and the way we interpret data – in ways that have blinded us to key regime dynamics in the world today.

The democracy building paradigm takes established Western democratic institutions as the primary reference points for understanding transitional regimes. Democracy building (be it successful or failed) is assumed to be the central dynamic in regime change. Scholars focus on the reasons for the success or failure of democracy rather than consolidation (or not) of authoritarian rule. The large bulk of literature on regimes assumes this paradigm. Thus, the APSA annual meeting division on regimes is called “Comparative Democratization.” Since the end of the Cold War, studies of regimes have been overwhelmingly dominated by one focusing on democracy or democratization. Despite the fact that about half the world’s regimes today are non-democratic (Diamond 2002, Levitsky and Way 2007), there are over six times as many references to “democracy” or “pluralism” in titles of political science articles/reviews on JSTOR 1990-2007 as to virtually any type of non-democratic regime one could think of – “authoritarianism”, “Communism,” “fascism,” “dictatorship,” “tyranny,” “autocracy,” “sultanism,” “monarchy,” “patrimonialism,” “totalitarianism,” “single party” or “one-party” regime, (and if we excluded the latter articles focusing on transitions from non-democratic rule, the number would be much lower).\(^2\)

A closer examination of all articles that investigate regime outcomes from mid 2003 to mid 2007 (based on a list created by the APSA section on regimes) shows that 94% of articles focus on the success or failure of democracy while just 24% cover the consolidation (or not) of specific authoritarian regime institutions.\(^3\) The dominance of the democracy building paradigm is also evidenced by the overwhelming use of democracy as the central metric for understanding regime change. Thus, standard quantitative indicators for regime type—such as Freedom House and Polity—measure distance from a well-known set of standard democratic institutional practices.\(^4\) Thus, scholars have a relatively clear and specific idea of what democracy is – but only a negative conception of authoritarianism.

What impact does such a democratizing bias have on our understanding of political regimes? Such a bias has not necessarily translated into optimism about the success of democracy. As Gans-Morse (2004: 336) has shown in his review of the post-Communist regimes literature, observers have generally been pessimistic not optimistic.

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1 Personal communication Joel Barkan, Cambridge, MA May 2002.
2 A search in October 2007 showed 2,784 articles and reviews with “democracy” or “pluralism” (including all grammatical forms of these words) in the title, and 451 titles of articles and reviews including any of the above mentioned synonyms for authoritarianism (including all grammatical forms).
3 Many articles cover both.
4 Cite Burawoy verdery etc.
Contrary to Carothers’ (2002) famous critique of the transitions paradigm, such a bias has also not generally translated into assumptions about specific stages of democratization (Gans-Morse 2004). 5

Instead, I argue that this paradigm’s most important impact has been to determine a set of questions and research topics as well as specific ways of interpreting available information. First, examining political regimes through the democratizing optic has led to a much greater focus on certain set explanatory variables that are considered key to democratic consolidation – such as civil society and constitutions – than on other factors key to authoritarian consolidation – such as strong repressive capacity or problems of succession. 6 Thus, the last 15 years have witnessed an explosion of studies focusing on institutional rules covering the balance of power between presidents and parliaments (Fish 2005; Frye 1997; Colton and Skach 2005; Stepan 2005); and electoral rules (cf. Ferrara and Herron 2005; Herron 2004). 7 Similarly, a great deal of attention has recently been focused on civil society, mass mobilization, and opposition strategy (Howard 2003; Howard and Roessler 2006; Beissinger 2005; Bunce and Wolchik 2005; Tucker 2007). 8

Such enormous focus on the institutions, practices, and sources of democracy has been accompanied by a virtual silence on topics specific to autocratic rule. For example, with just a few exceptions (cf. Bellin 2004; Way 2005a; Way and Levitsky 2006; Slater 2005), the role of state coercion in putting down opposition challenges has been almost completely ignored. Just 4% of articles on regimes in the last four years mention autocratic state institutions as a source of regime outcomes. 10 Similarly, until very recently, studies of post-Communist elections tended to focus on campaigning and public opinion rather than manipulation and fraud. 11

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5 Carothers’ critique is based mostly on readings of USAID and other reports by development agencies. Such reports would seem very different from scholarly treatments that are the focus here.

6 The central limitation with many studies of democratic phenomena such as public opinion, legislatures, and institutional design is not that these phenomena are unimportant. Instead the problem is that most studies are designed in a way that assumes their importance in a highly problematic structural context. The focus is on the character of these institutions and processes rather than the source of their (often quite real) influence. For example, studies of public opinion need to move beyond explorations of the content of public opinion and to focus more on how and under what conditions public opinion matters in a context of semi-free elections and regular government abuses. Similarly, formal laws often clearly matter even in the absence of a strong rule of law. But the weak institutional context makes it imperative to understand why some rule matter when so many are ignored. Finally, we need to explore why legislatures were so influential in the 1990s in countries such as Russia and Ukraine that lacked any democratic history.

7 Based on a review of all articles in which political regime is the dependent variable – from the list of articles on democracy compiled by the Comparative Democratization section of the American Political Science Association. In the last four years, almost a quarter (22%) of all articles on the sources political regime outcomes has argued that the design or introduction of formal institutions has played a central role in explaining regime type. (see full breakdown of explanatory variables in appendix).

8 A fifth (20%) of all articles on political regimes in the last four years contend that the (strength or absence) of civil society, opposition, or mass mobilization has been central to explaining regime outcome.

9 Another set of exceptions is the extensive, and mostly general audience, literature on the Soviet and post-Soviet KGB. See for example Albats 1994; Knight 1988; 1996; Waller 1994.

10 I have excluded here articles that simply mention coercive agencies in descriptions of violations of democratic norms.

11 Recent studies that focus on fraud include Allina-Pisano 2005; Way 2005b; Wilson 2005; Myagkov and Ordeshook 2001, 2005; Herron forthcoming.
few recent cross-case comparisons of problems of non-democratic succession (especially when compared to the number of articles on electoral turnover).\textsuperscript{12}

Like other paradigms, the democracy building paradigm has also fundamentally shaped how observers interpret data. Most notably, the democracy building paradigm has guided our understanding of the impact of state and party weakness on regime development. Thus, state and party weakness has overwhelmingly been seen as an obstacle to democratic development. Scholars such as Guillermo O'Donnell (1993, 1999) and Stephen Holmes (1997, 2002) have argued cogently that an effective state, grounded in the rule of law, is essential to protecting basic liberal-democratic rights.\textsuperscript{13} Similarly, the literature on political parties in the post-Communist context has almost uniformly focused on the ways in which weak parties hinder democracy (Kitschelt and Smyth 2002; Hale 2006). In particular, analysts of Russian politics have argued that Boris Yeltsin’s failure to invest in a governing party weakened democratic forces and contributed to democratic failure in the 1990s (White 1993: 312; McFaul 1994: 312; 2001: 316-17). Both sets of literatures share a generally unquestioned assumption from the democracy building paradigm that the primary function of states and parties is the maintenance of democratic rule. Thus close to 80\% of articles centering on the importance of state institutions, focus on the role of the state in promoting democracy rather than authoritarianism. Similarly, a large majority (70\%) of pieces on parties or party systems argue for the democratizing impact of such institutions (see Appendix I).\textsuperscript{14}

Yet, an older literature focused on the ways in which states and parties are also key instruments of autocratic rule (Huntington 1968, 1970; Huntington and Moore 1970; Skocpol 1979; Geddes 1999). As I show in this paper, states and parties have provided key mechanisms of consolidating power and monopolizing political control. Indeed, the prevalent weakness of states and ruling parties in the former Soviet Union in the 1990s may have undermined long term democratic consolidation; but it also provided an important source of regime contestation and hindered the development of autocratic rule (Way 2005a).

In sum, the focus on democracy has created an optic that has blinded us to key regime dynamics in the former Soviet Union. Greater attention needs to be paid to factors and institutions—such as effective coercion and the capacity of leaders to keep their allies in line—that may be relatively unimportant for democratic development but nonetheless have been key sources of post-Cold War regime development.

Examining regime development through an alternative paradigm: authoritarian parties and states

To better understand regime development, scholars need to adopt the perspective of an autocrat. For a large number of cases – even competitive or democratic ones – it is critical to focus not just on the development of constitutions, civil society or party systems, but on the success or failure of efforts to build institutions to suppress

\textsuperscript{12} Jason Brownlee’s recent work is an exception.

\textsuperscript{13} Also see Linz and Stepan (1996); Sperling (2000); Carothers (2002: 16); and Bunce (2003: 180-81).

\textsuperscript{14} In addition, studies focusing on the importance of opposition mobilization and civil society have overwhelmingly (83\%) argued for their importance in democratization rather than the emergence or maintenance of non-democratic rule.
opposition and maintain political control. An authoritarian perspective on regime evolution focuses on the development of institutions to limit opposition and control dissent.

Specifically, I contend that autocratic state and party strength in many cases act to reduce regime competition. Party and state strength directly affect regime competitiveness by increasing the ability of leaders to weaken the legislature; suppress independent media; undermine elections, and thwart opposition by suppressing protest and/or preventing elite defection. While the literature on regimes has overwhelmingly focused on the role of states and parties in promoting democratic consolidation, both have also been key sources of autocratic closure. First, while scholarly discussion of the state now focuses on its liberal guise as protector of individual rights (O’Donnell 1993, Holmes 1997), a more traditional view focused on the state’s coercive role in eliminating rival power centers, and centralizing of control over territory (cf. Tilly 1985: 182; Tilly 1975). This type of autocratic state power — broadly similar to Michael Mann’s (1985) notion of “despotic power” — does not include the rule of law but incorporates instead the capacity of the state to maintain control and suppress opposition. Here the focus is not on the courts or legitimacy but on more direct mechanisms of force and coercion. Police, local prefects, tax officials and other agents of the state of course provide key support for autocratic rule by harassing, monitoring, and infiltrating opposition, facilitating vote fraud, and mobilizing regime support.

State coercive capacity has been key to authoritarianism. Thus Theda Skocpol (1973), in her critique of Barrington Moore, argues that the English Monarchy’s diminution of power in the 18th century was rooted not simply in the rise of commerce but also in the fact that the state lacked a centralized standing army. As a result, British monarchs faced greater challenges monopolizing political control than their continental counterparts. More recently, Eva Bellin (2004) has argued that strong repressive capacity of Middle Eastern States — funded through oil money — help to explain the stability of autocracy in that region.

Next, as with states, most recent discussions of parties have focused on the ways in which strong and cohesive parties are essential for democratic consolidation (cf. Kitschelt and Smyth 2002; Hale 2006). But, like states, strong parties can also be tools for autocrats. Parties or “party substitutes” (Hale 2005, 2006) such as extensive patron-client relationships, or large quasi-familial networks—have often provided important mechanisms to reduce defections. Barbara Geddes (1999) argues that parties create predictable patterns of elite interaction that discourage defection by assuring lower level members that they will continue to get a share of the pie in exchange for cooperation; and executives that their interests will be looked after (i.e. they won’t be prosecuted) following their exit from power. This motivates both groups to invest in party success and discourages defections at all levels. By contrast, the absence or weakness of such organizations increases uncertainty within ruling coalitions. The weakness of established party institutions shortens time horizons for both the incumbent and his/her allies — thus increasing the likelihood of defection and authoritarian failure.

Autocratic state and party power can both be measured along the dimensions of control and scope. First, the scope of state and party power refers to the reach of the

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15 As Vladimir Lenin noted long ago, “a standing army and police are the chief instruments of state power” (Lenin 1975: 52).
party/state and (for states) the number of issues areas over which state leaders have control. Parties with extensive scope have functioning organizations in virtually every population center as well as civil society organizations. States with wide scope of power have extensive coercive apparatuses that infiltrate all parts of the country as well as major enterprises and potential sources of opposition. Such states also control a large share of wealth production in society. Where states control most means of production or monopolize the main sources wealth, private sectors will be small and civil societies will be poor (Dahl 1971: 48-61; Fish 2005: 156-157; Greene forthcoming), leaving “no conceivable financial base for opposition” (Riker 1982: 7). Where vast discretionary power allow governments to punish businesses in the economic arena for their behavior in the political arena, opposition parties, independent media, and other civil society groups will have few reliable channels of finance.\(^{16}\) States with wide scope are better able to monitor, preempt and suppress emerging sources of opposition before they become major regime challenges. Such states also have the capacity to starve opposition of resources necessary for survival.\(^{17}\)

Next, control refers to the degree to which state subordinates or rank and file party members follow the commands of superiors. When ordered, do police suppress opposition, local officials steal votes, heads of state controlled enterprises intimidate employees into voting for the incumbent? Governments that face a history of insubordination from lower level state officials should face greater difficulties avoiding and/or weathering regime crises than those who maintain tight central control. Control becomes particularly important during crisis periods when subordinates may be required to engage in risky behavior such as large scale violence and/or vote stealing. In such cases, subordinates may fear future retribution for such actions and therefore use various strategies to avoid compliance. Governments with weak control are likely in such cases to face open rebellion – leading to regime collapse. Examples include Georgia in 2003 and Serbia in 2000. Within parties or party substitutes, the question of control reflects the extent to which parliamentarians follow the lead of leaders in key votes in parliament, or lower level party activists support central initiatives.

The strength of the autocratic party and state is a function of both existing organizational resources and—to a lesser extent—the leader’s willingness to invest in organization building. The first important resource is economic. Within states, unpaid officials are less likely to follow orders and even less likely to act vigilantly to protect the regime. Thus, the severe economic collapse that attended the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s profoundly reduced the central state’s capacity to pay subsidies and state wages, which in turn undermined central control.\(^{18}\) Similarly, the lack of resources

\(^{16}\)By contrast, where economic liberalization shifts resources into the private sphere and strips governments of tools of economic coercion, as in much of Central Europe and the Americas during the 1990s, entrepreneurs often play a major role in financing opposition. Limits on state economic power may also be \textit{de facto}. In countries with large informal economies, states may possess vast economic power on paper but exercise little in practice. Such \textit{de facto} weakness was widespread in Sub-Saharan Africa (Boone 1992: 352-353; Bierschenk et al. 2003: 162).

\(^{17}\)Examples of states with broad state scope include Russia under Putin, Malaysia, and Zimbabwe. In these cases, an extensive and powerful coercive apparatus is combined with relatively broad state powers over the economy.

\(^{18}\)For example, one former local official in Moldova explained, “During the Soviet era the key to discipline of enterprises [and local governments] was the fact that the government and Party provided the main funds.
makes it more difficult for party leaders to maintain patronage networks that facilitate control. Yet, economic resources provide only one source of organizational power. In fact, incumbents who exclusively rely on instrumental exchange of resources to gain cooperation are likely to be more vulnerable to economic and other types of crisis (Levitsky and Way 2007). While patronage is almost always a core part of any non-democratic system, states and parties differ dramatically in terms of the extent to which such patronage is augmented by “something else” that complements resource exchange, lengthens time horizons and thus may immunize regimes from crisis. Probably the oldest mechanism of securing loyalty is the appointment of family members or fictive kin to important positions in the state and government (or party). Contemporary regimes that heavily rely on such ties include monarchies, and neo-patrimonial/Sultanistic regimes. In such regimes, affective ties discourage defection by increasing trust that both sides will remain loyal over the long-term (Chehabi and Linz 1998).

A further source of party/state strength is successful past experience with violent conflict and struggle. Such struggle (successful war, revolution) provides an important source of organizational unity and coherence. Thus, different literatures on the origins of both states and parties have long emphasized the important role played by histories of conflict in generating strong and cohesive state and party organizations (Tilly 1975, 1992; Huntington 1970; Shefter 1994; Hale 2006; Smith 2005). Successful past experience with severe conflict promotes strong social bonds among elites as well as a confidence, based on past success, to take risks to preserve the regime. Regimes grounded in violent struggle are able to survive even in the face of the most severe economic crisis. Thus contemporary regimes in Armenia (founded in a successful war with Azerbaijan) and Zimbabwe (founded from a military struggle against white rule in Rhodesia) have been able to withstand enormous economic crises (including an economic collapse of over 60% in Armenia in the early 1990s).

Finally and most obviously, a key resource is the preexistence of a powerful party and state. Clearly, the risks and costs of building new state and party institutions are much greater than those of relying on preexisting ones. In the absence of existing institutions, it will be much harder for leaders to convince subordinates to invest time and energy into organizational maintenance. In such cases, the likelihood of mass defections and insubordination is much higher.

The availability of these resources has made it significantly easier for autocrats to reduce political competition by sidelining opposition and maintaining political control. At the same time, leadership strategy may also have an impact. Thus, individual autocrats may choose to invest or not invest in the building of a powerful party/state apparatus. This is particularly evident with regard to party building. We can identify at

But by the early 1990s, those funds had completely dried up. Now when they tried to dictate things, we could just ignore them. Under the new conditions they could do little to help us or hurt us.”Lucan Way interview with Vasile Galadi, former deputy head of Nesporene district (1994-96), August 3, 2004, Chisinau, Moldova.

19 In addition, ideology and identity are also likely to discourage defection. Such appeals provide reason for cooperation beyond instrumental exchange. Strong association with a particular ideology or group also discourages defection by creating obstacles to cooperation with ideological or ethnic opponents. Theda Skocpol (1979, 169) and Philip Selznik (1960) argue that revolutionary ideologies contributed to the cohesion of revolutionary leaderships.
least three different organizational strategies. Each of these strategies manifested themselves at different points in post-Soviet Russian history. First, there is the “no organization” option. Leaders may decide to forego party and significant state building altogether and rule entirely by divide and rule among individual cadres. Such a strategy is best exemplified by Boris Yeltsin’s approach to party building in 1990-1993. Rather than investing his popularity in the construction of a pro-Presidential party, Yeltsin relied on individual ties among a wide range of officials rooted in personal devotion (lichnaia predannost’) often strengthened by late-night socializing. Such a strategy can be attractive to leaders because it maximizes their personal discretionary power. A second strategy involves outsourcing organizational strength. Here party/state is strengthened by ‘‘renting’’ organizations (parties, local governments, patronage networks) controlled directly by others. Here, the ability to easily go against older allies preserves leadership discretion while increasing leaders’ access to party/state organization. Both the first and second strategies maximize leadership choice but also make it easier for former allies to defect into the opposition. The third and final strategy is to invest in a single vertically integrated party and state organization. Such a strategy may reduce leadership discretion but decreases the likelihood of defections by former allies into the opposition. Such a strategy has been best exemplified in Russia by Vladimir Putin.

**Indicators of State and Party Strength**

Causal claims about the relationship between organizational capacity and regime competition face potentially serious problems of tautology. It might be tempting to assume, for example, that parties that lose elections and states that buckle under opposition pressure are “weak.” Thus, in this paper I use indicators of state and party strength that can be clearly separated from measures of political contestation (see Appendix II). State and party control is measured in several ways. First, I look at whether there is a pattern of insubordination prior to any regime crisis. Next, I include in my measure the types of available organizational resources and strategies discussed above. While such indicators are not directly equivalent to organizational strength/weakness, they are most clearly distinguishable from the outcome I seek to explain. Thus, I look at whether the state/party faces severe fiscal problems. In particular, are there large wage arrears for police, army and other officials? In addition, I look for evidence of “something else” to augment patronage as a source of control within parties and states. States and parties held together by quasi-familial networks, and/or past history of successful conflict are considered stronger than are those that lack such attributes.

Next, scope is measured by the size and development of party/state organization. Do parties or party substitutes have well-established (formal or informal) organizations or does the ruling coalition lack any formal or informal organization? Is there a single ruling party or does the ruling coalition consist of many competing organizations? Within states, how developed and well trained is the coercive apparatus? Are there special units for suppressing opposition? Second, I look at the size of the party/state. Do parties have extensive organizational reach or are they isolated in the capital? Within states, do coercive agents encompass the whole country or are there large sections of territory in which the state has little or no presence? I also look at the number of issue

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20 These indicators have been developed in conjunction with Steve Levitsky. See Levitsky and Way 2006.
areas over which states have control. Scope is high where state leaders have formal or de facto control over large parts of wealth generation in a society.

Finally, I measure organizational strength through an examination of leadership organizational strategy discussed above. The “no organization”/”divide and rule” strategy reflects a weak organization. The “organizational outsourcing” suggests a medium organization, and the third, “single hierarchy” strategy suggests a strong organization.


Since the emergence of overtly coercive autocratic rule under Putin, the importance of examining authoritarian uses of state and party institutions has become more obvious. Yet, such a perspective also yields key insights into the Yeltsin era as well. Yeltsin like Putin sought to use state and party institutions to maintain political power and demonstrated a clear willingness to use extra-legal and non-democratic means to hold onto power and monopolize control through extra-legal means – including the implementation of force against the legislature in 1993, the preservation of older KGB structures that were regularly used to harass opposition21, widespread use of electoral manipulation22, and efforts to control media – particularly during the 1996 Presidential elections (European Institute of Media 1996). Such actions suggest that we need to approach the Yeltsin era not simply in terms of his success or failure in institutionalizing democracy but also in terms of his very serious efforts to use both legal and illegal means to keep power and monopolize control.

I argue that changes in the degree of regime competitiveness in Russia were a direct outgrowth of both available organizational resources and strategies of organizational control. Weak state and party power in the early 1990s contributed directly to dynamic political competition in Russia. Increased party and state coherence over the course of the 1990s (caused in part by changes in organizational strategy) contributed directly increased regime closure.

Regime Competitiveness in Russia 1991-2005

I measure competitiveness/closure after the fall of the Soviet Union along four dimensions. The first is the level of proincumbent manipulation of the electoral

21 Yeltsin refused to fundamentally reform the KGB – appointing old style KGB officials such as Nikolai Golushko who had been the official responsible for suppressing the dissident movement in Ukraine21 – and regularly relied on the KGB and other agencies to infiltrate and harass opposition (Kozakavich 1996; Knight 2000; Mlechin 2002: 758; Iarovoi 2001: p. 115). According to Yeltsin’s chief of staff in the early 1990s, Yeltsin felt that “the CPSU had been the country’s brain and the KGB its spinal cord: ‘And he clearly did not want to rupture the spinal cord now that the head had been lopped off’ (quoted in Colton ms chap 5). Thus, “the KGB was re-formed by the Russian Federation without being reformed” (Waller 1994, 100).

22 Thus, Viacheslav Kostikov reports witnessing Yeltsin alter the final vote tallies in the 1993 referendum (Kostikov 1997: 268). Further in 1996, he came very close to postponing the Presidential elections for fear of a Communist victory.
process—the extent to which the incumbent manipulates the vote count, bans opposition candidates, and/or invalidates opposition victories post facto.次， incumbent monopolization of media reflects the extent to which the population has access to anti-incumbent views via large audience electronic media. The third indicator, opposition weakness, is defined in terms of how much access the opposition has to financial and/or organizational resources. The final dimension of competition is de facto executive control over parliament.26

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<td>Government manipulation of elections</td>
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The evolution of regime competitiveness in Russia can be broken up into three different stages. In early period, 1992-1993, the President undertook moderate election manipulation that may have affected the results slight but still left room for significant electoral competition. Similarly, large audience electronic media faced governmental pressure at key moments such as the 1993 Presidential election but still was relatively free to criticize the President. Next, the opposition to Yeltsin – while it had far fewer resources than the President – nonetheless had access to key organizational and financial resources that facilitated real competition. Finally, the most notable aspect of this period

23 A “high” score indicates that at least one of the activities is sufficiently high to eliminate uncertainty in the electoral process. A “medium” score means that at least one of the activities is widespread enough to tilt the playing field seriously in favor of the incumbent—but not so much as to make the elections noncompetitive. For example, a medium score reflects a level of vote stealing in the range of 5–10 percent (as in 1990s Serbia, Ukraine under Kuchma) that still leaves important opportunities for regime opponents—as opposed to the 40–60 percent in contemporary Azerbaijan and Belarus that make elections virtually meaningless.

24 A “high” score indicates the almost total absence of opposition views in large audience electronic media; a “medium” score means that most electronic media is incumbent controlled but that there exist significant large audience media that openly criticize the government.

25 A highly weak opposition is one that has virtually no financing, and/or organizational resources. A “medium” weak opposition is one that has significant financial and organizational resources but is still seriously outmatched by the incumbent. Finally, a low score indicates an opposition that has roughly equal or greater financial and organizational resources than the incumbent.

26 A high score indicates that the executive manipulates the legislature at will to the extent that the body provides virtually no source of opposition. A medium score means that the balance of power favors the executive—but parliament is able nonetheless to challenge the executive occasionally in a serious way or force compromise on important issues such as appointments or key policy decisions. Examples of medium include Russia in 1994–99 and Ukraine in 1995–2004, when presidents generally dominated but strong and vocal anti-incumbent parties presented persistent and sometimes effective sources of opposition. Finally a low score indicates that the balance of power favors parliament. Examples include Ukraine in 1992–94, when parliament consistently thwarted presidential initiatives and forced early presidential elections. Moldova in 1993–2000 is another a case of low executive control—as evidenced by the fact that parliament forced important constitutional changes against the will of successive presidents—including a decision in 2000 to abolish the popularly elected presidency.
was a relatively powerful parliament that was able to mount a serious challenge to executive power. But the country became less competitive over time. In line with Freedom House scores over this same period, my measure of regime competition/closure reflects increasingly autocratic rule over the course of the 1990s. By the mid 1990s, electoral manipulation, control over the media, and opposition weakness remained relatively constant. However, Yeltsin had successfully reduced much of the legislature’s power. And by the early 2000s under Putin, the government almost completely monopolized large audience media, deprived opposition of any significant resources, and virtually obliterated any serious challenge to the government within the legislature. (Table 1 outlines the level of regime closure in Russia, 1991-2007.)

I argue that this evolution towards greater regime closure can to an important degree be understood in terms of increasingly effective coercive state and party/party substitute organizations. Weak party and state in the very early 1990s generated important room for political competition that was closed off as the state became stronger and pro-government forces became better organized.

**The Evolution of State and Party Capacity in Russia**

The evolution of state and party capacity in Russia has been shaped both by the availability of economic and organizational resources on one side and particular strategic responses to organizational challenges on the other. The strength of the coercive state and ruling party gradually increased over time. In 1991 following the collapse of the USSR, the Russian state inherited a massive security apparatus with a broad scope of control over Russian society. Yet available mechanisms of control were extraordinarily weak. Thus, both the Soviet state as well as the Communist party that had held it together disappeared. Simultaneously, economic decline of about 40% in the early 1990s deprived state actors of key economic resources to reward supporters and punish defectors. In addition, the banning of the Communist Party in 1991 deprived leaders of a ruling party or party-like organization.

Responses to this organizational deficit evolved over time reflecting a certain amount of trial and error learning on the part of Yeltsin and other state leaders. The failure of initial organizational strategies led to adoption of new approaches. Each new strategy solved earlier problems but also had its own weaknesses. Thus, Yeltsin’s initial organizational strategy (1991-1994) was to not build any single (formal or informal) political organization but rely mostly on a series of ad hoc of bilateral personal ties. Such an approach was partly motivated by the fact that Yeltsin had gained initial popularity and fame by openly challenging the Communist Party in 1987. However, obvious failures of this strategy – including rapid defections of large numbers of former allies and severe disorganization in the early 1990s – led the Yeltsin administration to rely on a new strategy in the mid 1990s that might be called “organizational outsourcing.” In essence Yeltsin “rented” organizational capacity from various outside formal and informal groups – oligarchic networks, regional governments, and political parties – who provided support at key moments in exchange for increased autonomy (in the case of regional governments) and various properties (in the case of oligarchs). While such a strategy created much greater levels of political stability than in the early 1990s, it also generated ultimately unreliable allies, who defected en-mass when Yeltsin appeared to be
weak in 1999. This experience in turn led Yeltsin and then Putin to focus on strengthening the state vertical and to create a single pro-governmental party. Together with increased economic resources from rising oil prices, such a strategy significantly increased state and party organizational power by the early 2000s. (Table 1 summarizes my scores for organizational capacity over time. Appendix III provides a more detailed justification of this scoring.)

Table 2: Party/State Capacity in Russia 1992-2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Organizational strategy</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early 1990s</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>No organization</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid to late 1990s</td>
<td>Med-Low</td>
<td>Med-Low</td>
<td>Org outsourcing, single hierarchy</td>
<td>Med-Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000s</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Med-High</td>
<td>Med-High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Below, I examine each of these three periods and show how organizational power affected regime competitiveness.

Disorganization in the Early 1990s

“[Yeltsin] always came into politics representing not some kind of powerful group but himself personally.”

“Yeltsin did not build a state. He led a revolution for 10 years.”

The early 1990s witnessed extreme party and state weakness. First, organization at the top was almost non-existent. In 1991 the Communist Party was dismantled but not replaced by any new governing party. Yeltsin rose to prominence in 1987-1990 by openly rejecting the Communist Party in which he had made his career. Both symbolically and organizationally, Yeltsin was very much ‘his own man.’ Like his counterparts in Moldova and Ukraine, Yeltsin chose not to create a pro-President party after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Although he was actively supported by various pro “democratic”/Presidential movements in the early 1990s (including “Democratic Russia” in 1990; PRES and “Democratic Choice” in 1993, and “Our Home is Russia” and “Russia’s Choice” in 1995), Yeltsin used almost none of his early political capital to bolster these organizations and often openly disparaged them (Filatov 2000: 41; Gaidar

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27 See appendix III for description of how scores arrived at.
29 Gleb Pavlovsky, quoted in Sleivyte 2004: 60.
30 The closest was Democratic Russia. However, Yeltsin purposely distanced himself from this.
In 1995, Yeltsin even came up with the idea to promote two competing “centrist” parties – one on the left and the other on the right – as a way of reducing the number of parties in Russia and of eliminating, in Yeltsin’s words “the political hullabaloo that makes it difficult to sort things out” (quoted in McFaul 2001: 242).

Instead of building a party, Yeltsin focused on cultivating relationships of “personal devotion” (lichnaia predannost’) among a relatively small group of officials and friends. He sought to secure control over key institutions – such as security – by putting in place people with whom he was either personally close or who had shown loyalty to Yeltsin in the past (Korzhakov 1997: 118). Loyalty was promoted among many officials by socializing, playing sports, and often drinking to excess together. Among others, Yeltsin expected loyalty in return for providing rapid career advancement (much faster career advancement than would have been possible under the Soviet system). For example, Yeltsin chose Viktor Barannikov, a close personal associate with whom he frequently drank and vacationed, to run the security services (Waller 1994: 94; Mlechin 2002: 742, 746). At the same time Yeltsin, according to his own admission, had relatively few close allies when he came to Moscow from Sverdlovsk in 1985 (Morrison 1991: 51). And since Yeltsin had gained fame by rejecting the Communist Party, he was unable to draw on the Party’s organizational culture or cadres to support his rule (quite different from Putin who has actively embraced his KGB past and has thus been able to draw on the KGB’s organizational and personnel resources). As a result, early personnel decisions often involved a great deal of “chance” and Yeltsin was often forced by circumstance to appoint officials whom he barely knew (Korzhakov 1997: 118). Thus, while Yeltsin was given a tremendous opportunity in the early 1990s to staff the government and state with “his” people, he lacked the formal or informal organization to build reliable and loyal networks. Yeltsin simply had very few officials he could truly call “his.”

31 For example, just prior to the 1995 parliamentary elections, Yeltsin openly disparaged the government’s achievements and predicted a weak showing for the “party of power”—a move that was considered a betrayal by “Our Home is Russia” supporters (Shevtsova 1999: 140).

32 Yeltsin himself explained this decision not to create a party by the fact that Russian life had been dominated by a single party for so long (McFaul 2001: 155). Yeltsin’s Press secretary, Viacheslav Kostikov (1997: 299) argues that Yeltsin also did not want to tie his fate to weak and relatively unpopular organizations and leaders (see also Shevtsova 1999: 36). Yeltsin also apparently did not want to limit his freedom of action on policy issues. Further, Michael McFaul argues that many technocrats in the government at the time felt that strengthening groups such as Democratic Russia would hamper the implementation of policies and that societal demobilization was key to reform (McFaul 2001: 155). Finally, like his counterparts in Moldova and Ukraine, Yeltsin appears to have thought that both his popularity and formal powers as President would be sufficient to secure his control over the country (Hale 2006).

33 Numerous memoires of those close to Yeltsin point to the President’s concern with cultivating and supporting this principle (Baturin et al. 2001: 255; Poptsov 2001: 107; Filatov 2001: 166; Korzhakov 1997; Kostikov 1997: 271; see also Rutland 1998, 315; Kulikov 2002: 388-389).

34 Korzhakov, for example argues that “Experts and political scientists create whole theories analyzing the mythical chains of Kremlin connections. .. But no theories explaining personnel decisions existed now or then. In 1991 and later, people easily fell into power and even more easily fell out of power. Not even the personal whims of Yeltsin… accounts for the choice of candidate. Everything hinged on chance” (Korzhakov 1997: 123).
Simultaneously, while the Russian government inherited an enormous coercive state as well as nominal control over virtually the entire economy, mechanisms of control were extraordinarily weak. In the face of severe economic decline, salaries and almost all other budgetary commitments were severely under-funded by the central government. In the early 1990s, in turn, many republics and regions demanded greater autonomy and even separation from the Russian state (Kahn 2002; Stoner-Weiss 2001). There was also extremely widespread insubordination within the armed services as servicemen often did not receive pay while division at the top undermined the central hierarchy (Moran 1999; Herspring 1998). Thus Yegor Gaidar worried about a “dangerous vacuum in the administration of military and security structures” (Gaidar 1999: 124).

The Early 1990s: Organizational Failure and Political Contestation

While such state and party incapacity undermined both economic and political reform, it also generated important levels of contestation in the face of an extraordinarily weak civil society and nominal state monopoly over the economy and media. First, party weakness greatly enhanced contestation by facilitating defection of key Yeltsin allies. The importance of disorganization is most striking in Yeltsin’s failure to control the Congress of People’s Deputies in the early 1990s despite the fact that Yeltsin had successfully imposed his own chosen successor, Ruslan Khasbulatov, as its head (Filatov 2001: 170; Andrews 2002: 237). In 1992-1993, the Congress openly challenged Yeltsin’s rule and nearly toppled his government.

Parliament’s serious challenge of the President in the early 1990s cannot be understood in terms of any inherent power of the legislature. While the conflict between the president and legislature has often been portrayed as one between two relatively equal foes (cf. Shevtsova 1999; McFaul 2001), by almost any measure, Yeltsin had access to far greater power resources than the legislature: including nominal control over security (Mukhin 2002: 148); regional appointments; all major TV stations, KGB archives (Huskey 1999: 63); industrial ministries, the Ministry of Finance, and Western aid. Thus, while most studies of the conflict emphasize Khasbulatov’s effective use of “broad patronage powers” (Filatov 2001: 204) to secure support of deputies, Yeltsin had access – in principle at least – to much greater patronage resources than did Khasbulatov and should therefore have had a relatively easy time consolidating majority support.

The relative strength of the legislature in the early 1990s was rooted much less in the characteristics or power resources of the parliament itself and much more in the

35 Simultaneously, fights with parliament generated a “war of laws” with the Presidency that opened up tremendous room for maneuver (as well as confusion) among lower level state officials (Bahry 2005; Kryshtanovskaja 2005: 122-3, 124-9).
36 Parliament had much greater formal powers than it would after the introduction of Yeltsin’s 1993 constitution. Thus, parliament was in principle able to overrule Presidential decrees with a simple majority. In addition, the legislature retained the right to appoint the head of the Central Bank and the State Prosecutor.
37 While Khasbulatov made various efforts to create a military force as well as vertical control over the regions (Filatov 2001: 168, 185; Baturin et al. 2001: 281), such endeavors never yielded significant success.
38 Thus, Yeltsin had the capacity to go on TV when and where at will (cf. Baturin et al. 2001: 250, 291).
39 These could be useful in obtaining kompromat against enemies.
40 These included committee chairmanships and other paying jobs in Supreme Soviet, as well as cars, dachas, and special regional funds (Remington 1996: 121-123; Andrews 2002: 101)
weakness of the executive branch. The absence of party-like organizational mechanisms and a weak state made it much harder for Yeltsin to harness his (nominally) disproportionate access to power resources. Above all, the absence of a pro-presidential party or “party substitute” organization made it incredibly difficult to cope with dissension within the pro-Yeltsin camp. In the absence of any organization, allies had extraordinarily short time horizons. Thus, losers in leadership battles could easily feel that they had been left completely in the cold and therefore had little reason not to move into opposition. Most momentously, Yeltsin’s former ally, Ruslan Khasbulatov defected into the opposition literally months after Yeltsin got him elected as head of parliament in late 1991. This action seems to have been rooted in Khasbulatov’s frustration that he was not chosen to be either Vice President or Prime Minister in 1991 (Filatov 2001: 171; Aron 2000: 497).

The legislature’s increasing opposition to Yeltsin over the course of the early 1990s was rooted in the same dynamic. Thus, support for democrats fell dramatically because “a number of deputies felt themselves cut off or removed from power after the establishment of presidentialism” (Sobyanin 1994: 188). Sergei Filatov, Yeltsin’s main liaison with the legislature in the early 1990s, presents a very similar picture. “A characteristic example,” he notes, “was Tatiana Koriagina. Not getting the position of deputy representative of the Supreme Soviet, she asked for a position in government, but did not receive anything. And then she was offended and saw corruption everywhere [within the Presidential administration]. It is possible cite tens of such examples” (Filatov 2001: 70). In the absence of an organization to structure career advancement, “personal devotion” (lichnaia predannost’) – rooted either in gratitude for past advancement or close personal relations – provided extraordinarily poor defense against defection in the highly dynamic transition environment.

High contestation and threats to regime stability in the early 1990s were also a direct outgrowth of state weakness. The failure of the personal devotion (lichnaia predannost’) strategy as a means of administrative control is best exemplified in the defection of Viktor Barannikov, a drinking buddy Yeltsin had chosen to run the security forces. Despite apparently strong personal ties with Yeltsin, Barannikov openly backed Khasbulatov and the parliamentary opposition in 1993.

Weak vertical control generated default competition by making it impossible for Yeltsin to take full advantage of disproportionate administrative resources. First, disorganization within the executive branch facilitated greater legislative power. As Eugene Huskey (1999: 41) notes, “[t]he absence of loyal executive agencies prepared to implement the president’s will forced Yeltsin into frequent concessions and other political maneuvers to maintain his authority.” The stark divisions within the executive branch allowed the legislature to seek informal allies and play off different factions within the executive. For example at parliament’s urging, the Russian Prosecutor Aleksandr Kazannik and Russian security director Nikolai Golushko permitted the immediate release of those imprisoned for events in 1991 and 1993 in the face of strenuous objections by Yeltsin (Kostikov 1997: 290-292; Mlechin 2002: 766; Filatov 2001: 342).

Next, weak control over regional governments may have undermined efforts to control the electoral process in the early 1990s. Thus, observers have argued that in 1993 Yeltsin had to bargain extensively with regional officials in order to “guarantee” that the
Constitution won (Izvestiia 4 May 1994: 4; Dunlop 1999; Sobianin and Sukhovol’skii 1995). As a result, he may have had no choice but to permit anti-Yeltsin forces from gaining a significant foothold in the legislature. Finally, police suppression of opposition and dissent in the early 1990s was highly ineffective and agencies of coercion were extremely unreliable. Yeltsin advisors complained that both the state prosecutor and the police were extremely passive in their efforts to suppress extremist groups.

It was strange that the President on several occasions gave orders to stop the extremist behavior, to close openly fascist publications. But after his orders, nothing changed ... he could not do anything. His strict orders to the power ministries ... did nothing but disturb the air” (Kostikov 1997: 115-116; see also Baturin et al. 2001: 265).

This image of the weak autocratic state is partially contradicted by the fact that of course Yeltsin was able to impose force through his assault on parliament in October 1993. However, almost all accounts of these events (Yeltsin 1994: 278; Kulikov 2002) demonstrate that Yeltsin faced extraordinary difficulties gaining compliance from the military and to a lesser extent the police. The military initially resisted cooperating with Yeltsin in his fight against parliament in large part because leaders feared taking responsibility for such a high risk venture.

Overall, then, just as the state was ineffective in the early 1990s at collecting taxes, controlling corruption or providing basic public services, it also faced severe difficulties suppressing dissent. In this sense, the dynamic political competition of the early 1990s was a direct outgrowth of state incapacity.

The benefits and limits of “organizational outsourcing,” 1994-1999

Problems created by state and party weakness in the early 1990s convinced the administration to adapt a new approach to strengthening Yeltsin’s support base by the mid 1990s. Instead of relying on highly atomized personal contacts or “lichnaia predannost”, Yeltsin increasingly sought to control the state, elections and to a lesser extent parliament through a system that can best be described as “organizational outsourcing.” In essence Yeltsin “rented” organizational capacity from various outside formal and informal groups – oligarchic networks, regional governments, and political parties – who provided support at key moments. While such a strategy created much greater levels of political stability than in the early 1990s, it also generated ultimately unreliable allies who defected en-mass in 1999.

The “organizational outsourcing strategy” can be identified in three areas: electoral politics, center-regional control, and parliamentary relations. First, in the run up to the 1996 Presidential elections, Yeltsin initially sought to rely on existing state

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41 In this sense, Michael McFaul (2001: 128) would seem wrong to asset that in the early 1990s Yeltsin “could have disbanded political institutions not subordinate to President’s office; suspended political liberties, and deployed police force to implement pres decrees.” The difficulties faced by Yeltsin in various measures he did attempt suggest that he did not necessarily have such capabilities.

42 Thus, despite repeated assurances, Grachev refrained from bringing troops into Moscow (Kulikov 2002: 160-170; Yeltsin 1994: 12, 272-278).

43 Papers at the time played up such fears. Thus, Rosiiskaia gazeta wrote ominously that officers participating in the assault on parliament could “spend the rest of their life in prison after Russia revives constitutional government” (quoted in Kostikov 1997: 220).
structures to “win” the election. However major failures in direct autocratic administrative control in 1996\(^{44}\) appear to have convinced Yeltsin to rely increasingly on semi-autonomous oligarchic groups to lead and organize his reelection effort (Hoffman 2002: 333; Solovei 1996: 342; Freeland 2000: 208). In particular, the “loans-for shares” arrangement—whereby a limited number of bankers received access to valuable economic properties in exchange for providing front loans to the Russian government – was part of a political “pact” creating a small group of large scale property holders whose interests were tied directly to Yeltsin’s fate in the 1996 election.\(^{45}\) A broadly similar pattern of organizational outsourcing is evident in center-regional relations in the mid 1990s. Thus, Yeltsin responded to most demands for secession in the early 1990s by essentially trading regional autonomy for Russian territorial integrity and political support of Yeltsin (Huskey 2001: 114; Bahry 2005: 130; Shevtsova 1999: 157; Kahn 2002; Stoner-Weiss 2001). Finally, in contrast to 1992-93, the administration was no longer forced to buy off all deputies individually but could rely on a few relatively disciplined political structures. Thus, Yeltsin in the mid 1990s frequently “purchased” the largest and most cohesive (and nominally oppositionist) parties – the Communists, and the Liberal Democratic Party (Huskey 2001: 122).

**The impact of the outsourcing strategy**

The strategy of organizational outsourcing yielded key benefits but also was a weak basis for a stable regime. First, agreements with the oligarchs in 1996 allowed Yeltsin to reduce state control over the economy in a way that provided him with important organizational bases of support. Such arrangements gave Yeltsin effective mechanisms to finance the campaign as well as key media support from NTV and ORT (Hoffman 2002: 348-350; Freeland 2000). “Without the support of Russian financial interests, it would have been extremely difficult for Yeltsin to have won the presidential election” (Johnson 2000, 183). In return for their support, oligarchic groups received key property rights and became increasingly powerful within the presidential administration in the mid and late 1990s (Kryshtanovskaia 2005: 333; Schroder 1999: 977-8). Similarly, the strategy of exchanging regional autonomy for the support of regional leaders eliminated an important source of regime opposition. Thus, republican leaders who had opposed Yeltsin early on (Dunlop 1995: 199-200; McFaul and Petrov 1998: 175-181) now used significant administrative resources – including outright vote falsification—to support Yeltsin in 1996 (McFaul 1997: 47, 63, 70; Mlechin 2002: 760; Myagkov and Ordeshok 2001). Finally, the purchasing of “opposition” parties in the legislature allowed the government to pass key legislation. For example, to pass the 1997 budget, “circles close to the government’ channeled US$ 27 million to the Communist and Liberal Democratic Parties” (Huskey 2001: 122). The legislature did not

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\(^{44}\) First, the initial use of administrative resources by Soskovets failed when he barely collected the million signatures required for candidate registration before the deadline – at the same time that the Communists managed to collect sufficient signatures two months ahead of time (Aron 1999, 580). Second, efforts to shut down parliament ran into serious trouble when the head of the police – Anatolii Kulikov – strongly resisted this action (Kulikov 2002: 394-402).

\(^{45}\) In Yegor Gaidar’s words, “The loans-for shares created a political pact. They helped ensure that Zyuganov did not come to the Kremlin. It was a necessary pact” (quoted in Freeland 2000: 171). For detailed descriptions of the loans for shares, see Freeland 2000; Hoffman 2002, chapter 12.
fundamentally challenge Yeltsin to nearly the same degree as in 1992-1993. The combination of increased political organization and large scale patronage made it possible – in stark contrast to 1992-93 – for the executive to gain temporary majorities at key moments in the 1990s.

While this strategy of organizational outsourcing allowed for greater control over the legislature and defeat of key opposition challenges, it proved untenable in the medium term. Dominated by highly opportunistic forces with weak organizational or other ties to the Kremlin, the ruling coalition was highly vulnerable to short-term perceptions of regime weakness. Thus, a large number of powerful state actors and oligarchs abandoned Yeltsin in 1998-1999 even though they depended on the Kremlin for material support – a fact that should have made them extremely loyal.

First, weak ties between parliamentary organizations and the executive meant that erstwhile allies were extremely disloyal in the face of crisis. Thus, when Yeltsin appeared weak – as during the 1998 fiscal crisis – virtually all supporters abandoned him and Yeltsin was forced to appoint Yevgenii Primakov as Prime Minister (El’ltsin 2000: 226). Next, major defections by state and regional actors in 1998-1999 significantly strengthened the opposition. By trading autonomy for political support in 1994-1996, Yeltsin made it significantly easier for state and other actors to defect. This defection became most directly manifested in the emergence of OVR alliance in 1999 that brought together Evgenii Primakov, Iurii Luzhkov and a significant number of regional leaders. The strong support of regional leaders for the opposition in the 1999 elections significantly undermined the Kremlin’s control over electoral manipulation. The result was what Steven Fish (2001) has referred to as “pluralism of falsification” whereby competing factions used vote manipulation in different regions to support their candidate (Myagkov et al. 2005: 96). Finally, 1998-1999 also witnessed the defection of a significant number of oligarchs who had backed the Kremlin in 1996. Thus, business networks around Luzhkov – that included five major media groups – gave their backing to the opposition (Sakwa 2000). In addition, Gusinsky’s NTV that had strongly backed Yeltsin in 1996 came out against the Kremlin in 1999.

“The Steal Rod”: State Building and the Security Services

Probably the single biggest factor facilitating greater autocratic control in the late 1990s and early 2000s was the increase in oil prices that gave the Russian government access to the resources necessary to secure greater centralized state power than had existed in the 1990s. At the same time, an important shift in organizational strategy by Yeltsin and then Putin played a key role in reducing uncertainty within the system.

The obvious failures of the outsourcing strategy of organization led to the development of a fundamentally new approach to organization that began under Yeltsin and flowered under Putin. First, Yeltsin responded to state weakness by bringing in large numbers of security personnel – thereby grafting the “steal rod” of military discipline onto the state. This was followed by strenuous efforts by Putin to strengthen vertical control over regional governments. Second, in direct response to the perceived threat of OVR, the Yeltsin administration created a single ruling party. Under Putin, these strategies – combined with Putin’s anti-democratic leanings and higher oil prices (Considine and Kerr 2002) – yielded both greater incumbent capacity and significantly reduced political competition.
Yeltsin’s concern over the rebellion of governors in 1999 led him to seek a new strategy of organization that involved embedding the military and security services directly into the state. Yeltsin argued that the “[c]onflict between governors and President is extremely dangerous for the country … Having seen in the fall [1998] crisis the weakness of executive power, the governors tried again and again to test its durability” (El’tsin 2000, 271-2). Thus he promoted a more effective state hierarchy by creating a “steal rod that would strengthen the whole political structure of power.” (El’tsin 2000, 254). Bringing into the government people from the military and security services “accustomed to military discipline … seemed like a quick and simple way of reviving functionally effective government power” (Kryshtanovskaia 2005: 267).

Given the difficulties of creating effective authoritative organization from scratch, the KGB offered Yeltsin a powerful solution to the problem of state building. The security services had the belief in hierarchy, organizational esprit de corp, sense of elite status and mission that made them in many ways ideally placed to be the “steal rod” that Yeltsin hoped would bring order to the Russian state. Thus, Yeltsin both sought a Prime Minister with a security background (Baturin et al.2001: 782; Mlechin 2002: 843) and brought a large number of security and military officials into the government and state as a whole (Kryshtanovskaia 2005: 270).

Once in power, Putin took a fundamentally different approach to state and party organization than had Yeltsin. Relative to Russia’s first President, Putin is very much an “organization man” – having spent most of his career as a low level functionary and (in stark contrast to Yeltsin’s treatment of the Communist Party) remaining loyal to his former place of employment. Today, the top leadership is often referred to as “the corporation” or “Kremlin Inc.” Putin largely eliminated the “cadre meat-grinder” that had existed under Yeltsin. Putin has rarely fired personnel (Kryshtanovskaia 2005: 236, 211) – thus reducing the problem alienating potentially powerful actors that had plagued Yeltsin. Putin has also sought to reestablish the center-regional vertical of power. He has attempted to consolidate regions via the introduction of seven “super regions,” centralized the budget, abolished the series of ad hoc agreements made with separate regions, and attempted to take back a number of agencies – including tax and police – from local control (Gel’man 2006; Petrov and Slider 2005). In addition, Putin has significantly reduced the power of the Federation Council and eliminated its use as a venue for regional lobbying (Remington 2003) – a move that Yeltsin explicitly condoned (El’tsin 2000: 272). Finally, Putin has sought to reestablish the breadth of state control over the economy by destroying the oligarchic privatization pact created in 1996 (see above). Thus since 2001, 44 percent of Russia’s oil sector has returned to state hands (Yassman 2007).

Putin’s approach to political parties has also differed from Yeltsin’s. In direct response to the challenge posed by OVR, Yeltsin and then Putin promoted the creation of a single party (Smyth 2002; Hale 2004). While Yeltsin actively resisted identifying himself with a particular party, Putin has made a much greater effort to promote a single pro-Presidential party – Unity/Unified Russia. Most recently, Putin has demonstrated a commitment to developing “Unified Russia” by deciding to top the party list in the winter 2007 parliamentary elections.
Organization and Regime closure

In conjunction with increased oil prices, the new approach to state and party organization has significantly reduced threats to regime stability. First, Yeltsin’s solution to the problem of weak central control had the (perhaps unintended) consequence of bringing in officials who did not value openness. One of the few existing effective hierarchies in Russia (the KGB) was also obviously its least democratic. Thus Putin, in contrast to Yeltsin\(^{46}\), could not tolerate criticism of his rule and shut down virtually all major independent media.

Second, given that so much regime contestation arose from state and party failure, the creation of more effective state and party hierarchies inevitably led to a reduction in competition. Indeed, most of the institutional reforms discussed above are not inherently undemocratic (cohesive ruling parties and centralized intergovernmental systems obviously exist in many established democracies). However in the absence of a strong civil society, such measures closed off key sources of pluralism. Thus, Putin’s greater attention to the creation of a ruling party led to greater party discipline and much greater regime closure. In 2000–2003 and in contrast to previous “parties of power,” Unity “rivaled the Communists” in voting discipline (Remington 2003: 36; Smyth 2002). As one Russian commentator noted, “nothing is decided in Okhotny Ryad now without the participation of Kremlin minders” (Nezavisimaya Gazeta, April 1, 2005). A cohesive United Russia party “was the end of the independence of legislative power from the executive” (Kryshtanovskaia 2005: 253). A tighter ruling organization reduced the chances of high level elite defection that had previously provided an important source of dynamic change.

The creation of a more reliable central state hierarchy also has made it significantly easier for the President to squeeze potential sources of opposition – both from major economic actors as well as regional governments. In 2000–2003 Putin used his control over the security forces and courts to restrict the independence of the oligarchs—culminating in the arrest of Mikhail Khodorkovsky and the seizure of Yukos. Further, in 2003, in contrast to 1999, the Kremlin controlled all national television stations as well as regional ones such as Moscow’s TV Tsentr. Relative to his counterparts in both Moldova and Ukraine, Putin was more successful at limiting oligarchs’ contributions to government sanctioned parties since 2000 (McFaul and Petrov 2004).

It should be emphasized that greater regime cohesion under Putin cannot simply be attributed to increased resources from higher oil prices. Thus in the mid 1990s, Yeltsin directly controlled access to vast state economic resources that he was able to channel into the hands of supporters who became extremely wealthy. Yet, in contrast to the KGB network (siloviki) of the 2000s, such oligarchs lacked virtually any (formal or informal) organizational ties. Such actors were opportunistic in the extreme and thus ready to defect from the government in the face of any perceived regime weakness.

At the same time, while incumbent capacity is greater in Putin’s Russia than under Yeltsin, certain aspects of the incumbent party organization and the de facto scope of state control over the economy create points of regime vulnerability. First, while Unified Russia is much more coherent than any previous governing party in Russia (or in

\(^{46}\) Boris Yeltsin’s close aids report that Yeltsin was willing to allow open criticism in the media “as long as the situation did not become mortally dangerous for him and his power” (Baturin et al. 2001: 504).
Belarus or Ukraine for example), it includes a number of powerful officials with autonomous access to resources—most obviously Moscow Mayor Iurii Luzhkov—who would be in a position to defect quickly from Putin should the president appear vulnerable. Further, given the large amount of oligarchic wealth in foreign bank accounts that the Russian government cannot control, it is not clear how effectively Putin could prevent businesses from giving resources to a credible opposition if such were to emerge.

**Conclusion: Interaction of Structure and Agency**

This paper has sought to show how reframing our approach to regimes away from democracy yields key insights into regime development that have hitherto been ignored. Many transitional cases are better understood as failed autocracies rather than emerging democracies. In the post-Soviet Russian context, a focus on problems of authoritarian control allows us to see how state and party failure that has overwhelmingly been seen as an obstacle to democratic consolidation was also an important source of political competition. Increased autocratic state and party capacity over the course of the 1990s led to increased regime closure.

This paper reveals how both more structural factors (economic decline and state/party collapse) as well as specific strategic responses to organizational challenges had important effects on regime outcomes. In particular, this paper shows how organizational strategies have been shaped by leaders’ previous successes and failures. Thus, Yeltsin’s early rejection of formal or informal party building can probably be attributed to the fact that his initial emergence resulted from his open defection from the Communist Party. Yeltsin was initially popular because he acted alone rather than remaining loyal to the Party. Next, the evolution of the “organizational outsourcing” strategy was a direct result of the failure of bilateral connections alone to assert his power. Finally, his decision to build a single state and party hierarchy was – according to his own memoirs – a direct result of the mass defection of previously pro-Yeltsin groupings in 1998-1999. Such learning appears to have contributed in important ways to increased closure and regime stability in the 2000s under Putin.

**Bibliography**


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47 At the same time, party and state collapse in Russia was to an important extent the result of voluntarism. In particular, Gorbachev’s decision to dismantle the Party is hard to attribute solely to any larger structural factors.


Korosteleva in 05 book


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Appendix I: Survey of articles on regimes 2003-2004

Source of Regime Outcomes
(among 144 articles in which regime type is dependent variable
drawn from APSA list of articles on political regimes mid 2003
thru mid 2007)

Leadership 15%
External environment 20%
Formal institutions
(including inst design or introduction of formal
procedures) 22%
State institutions 20%
of State as necessary for
democracy 15%

Anti-democratic coercive state
power 4%
Economic development/ structure of
economy 24%
Opposition mobilization/ civil society 24%
of Opposition/ civil society
which promotes democracy 20%
Opposition/ civil society can
undermine democracy 4%
Culture/ identity 13%
Parties/party systems 10%
Split elites 4%
Pacts/nature of transition 4%
Other 6%

Appendix II: Measuring Organizational Power

Autocratic State Capacity
Scope

High:

Large and well-trained, funded, and equipped internal security apparatus with clear presence throughout national territory. Existence of specialized intelligence or internal security agencies with demonstrated capacity to monitor and repress opposition activities in all areas of the country.

and/or

Dominant and discretionary control by state over most wealth in society.

Medium: Criteria for high scope not met, but security forces maintain at least some presence across the national territory; no evidence of severe deficiencies in resources and equipment.

Low: Abnormally small/underdeveloped security apparatus; evidence of a lack of state presence in significant parts of the national territory or severe problems of under-funding, non-payment of salaries, and/or lack of supplies.

Control

High: Recent history of military conflict (leading security officials must be drawn from the generation that participated in the conflict), including

(1) External war (without defeat)
(2) Intense military competition and threat
(3) Large-scale and successful counter-insurgency campaign
(4) Successful revolutionary or anti-colonial struggle.

Or

Pervasive ethnic, kinship, institutionalized party, or other ties between incumbent and coercive apparatus

Or

Evidence of successful high intensity coercion in recent past,

Medium: No recent history of serious military conflict or evidence of extensive ethnic, kinship, or party ties

and

No evidence of previous insubordination or military defeat.
**Low:** Previous evidence of serious insubordination by state security officials, including attempted coups, open rebellion, large-scale desertion, and major episodes of refusal to carry out executive orders (excluding cases during regime crisis).

**Party Strength**

**Scope**

**High:** Large organization that penetrates virtually all population centers, including the countryside. Evidence of significant grassroots activity—during and between elections—throughout the national territory.

**Medium:** Party does not meet criteria for high scope, but possesses a national organization that penetrates most of the national territory, especially major population centers, and is capable of organizing nationwide electoral campaigns.

**Low:** Little or no party organization outside of the capital.

**Control**

**High:** Single party with highly institutionalized system of patronage, established party label and a history of demonstrated capacity to win multiparty elections.

Or

Evidence of alternative source of control, including:

1. history of shared struggle in revolutionary, liberation, or underground resistance movements;
2. highly salient ideology in polarized political context;
3. shared ethnicity in context of politicized ethnicity;

**Medium:** single party organization with known party label and established system of patronage, but no long history of winning competitive elections or evidence of alternative source of control.

**Low:** new party or multiple/shifting incumbent parties without any organized system of patronage or any evidence of alternative source of control.

Or

No previously existing party organization.

**Organizational Strategy**
Strong: Efforts to invest-in and build a single organizational hierarchy. “Divide and rule” strictly within confines of central party/state organization.

Medium: “outsourcing” Reliance on centralized organizations not directly controlled or led by government leadership.

Weak: “No organization” Little or no effort at organization building of any kind. Strict reliance on bilateral “divide and rule” strategies among individual leaders/subordinates.

Appendix III: Scoring Russian organizational power

Party in the early 1990s is scored as “low” because of banning of the Communist Party and the virtual absence of a pro-Presidential party as well as the virtual absence of any informal pro-Yeltsin organization (i.e. established patronage network). State in the early 1990s is scored as low because of regular evidence of state insubordination prior to the 1993 crisis, inability to pay state wages and open demands for secession among many republics and even oblasts. Party in the mid 1990s (1994-1999) is scored as “Low-Med” because of increased explicit reliance on informal oligarchic patronage networks as well as active reliance on outside party organizational assistance (see description below). State in 1994-1999 is scored as “Low Med” because of significantly reduced secessionist demands but continued inability to pay wages and continued evidence of open insubordination by lower level state officials. Party in 2000-2007 is scored as “medium because of reliance on single pro-Presidential organization – but one that lacked “something else” outside of patronage such as familial ties, history of conflict, or past history of electoral success. The state in 2000-2007 is scored as “high because of demonstrably reduced open insubordination, and strong informal ties between the executive and agencies of coercion. The total scores are calculated by scoring low = 0, Med = 1 and high = 2 and adding the scores up (for party scope and control, state scope and control and organizational strategy) and dividing that score by the highest possible score. Any score below .333 = low; .33-.5 = med-low; .51-.666 = med-High; .666-1 = High.

<table>
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<th>Party control</th>
<th>Org strategy</th>
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