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## **Making Sense of the History: How Pre-Soviet Legacies of Competitiveness Contribute to the Collapse of the USSR, and Emergence of Competitive Regimes in the Aftermath**

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### **Abstract**

*The paper bridges the scholarship on regime collapse with the literature on legacies and aims at explaining different political regime outcomes 20 years after the break-up of the Soviet Union. It asks and aims to find an answer to the question: how do the legacies of the past matter for regime transformations in the countries that once constituted the Soviet Union? It argues that experience with democratic practices traced in the independent states and grounded in nationalist mobilization at the dawn of the century stirred up the levels of opposition penetration at the dusk of the Soviet times, contributing to the break-up of the USSR. To support the argument, configurational comparative analysis is conducted on the universe of fifteen cases that were members of the Soviet Union, followed by a detailed analysis of the cases of Georgia and Ukraine. The argument is tested against three sets of data: factual electoral data of pre-Soviet states, electoral and survey data that reflect polarization around identity issues, and the results of interviews conducted with political elites and international actors in the Fall of 2008 in Georgia and Ukraine. Finally, the paper connects legacies and oppositions penetration with regime outcomes in the independent countries 20 years after the break-up of the USSR.*

### **Introduction**

Two decades ago, the Soviet Union peacefully dissolved into fifteen independent states. This event, largely perceived as improbable by scholars stroke as a surprise. It resulted in inductive, a posteriori reasoning on why it had happened. After about a decade many (Beissinger, Suny, Kitschelt, etc.) agreed that under simultaneous political and economic reforms, initiated by Gorbachev in his 'Perestroika, Democratia, Glastnost' set of measures, the growth of ethnic (soon to be national) consciousness, ethnic mobilization in the republics played a crucial role in the collapse of the USSR. However after 20 years, scholars still strive to understand what the origin of this mobilization was and in which way it was rooted in the legacies of the previous states that were established in the territories of what are now 15 states.

This paper is an attempt to look into a distant past to explain a more proximate event. Its main purpose is to pinpoint a relation between two political events and to develop a causal mechanism that runs from the experience with independent statehood and democratic institutions in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to nationalist mobilization in the end of the century. The paper argues that disposition of political forces in a country

determined competitiveness of its political system. Competitiveness of the system, either exercised through elections during the years of independence, or latent while a part of the Soviet Union, reemerged with introduction of perestroika determined the further regime trajectories that the countries took after regaining independence.

To begin with fulfilling the stated task, the first part of the paper synthesizes the theories that look at different causes of the collapse of the USSR and addresses importance of pre-Soviet legacies of statehood grounded in nationhood that experienced political contestation. It proceeds with discussing embodiment of competition in a polity during Soviet times in the forms of mass and elite levels mobilization of opposition. Competitiveness of regimes that emerged after independence was regained is the matter of further discussion. To assess empirically the main argument, fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis is used with 2 cases examples to specify the results.

### **The USSR collapse: why did it occur?**

A massive and global in its scale as well as ‘smooth and nonviolent’ (Kalyvas 1999: 323), is the way to describe the break-up of the Soviet Union in its core. It does not come as a surprise that the reasons of the USSR collapse are various and it is hard, if not impossible, to single out the most important one that contributed to the event. In order to understand this causal complexity and to single out causal mechanisms the competing or complementary explanatory factors need to be arranged according to several axes. To begin with, it is possible to differentiate between the causes by dividing them into the ones that provide a supply based, or elite-side explanation (for example, simultaneity of economic and political reform) and demand-side, or mass-based explanations (street opposition mobilization). The causes can be also divided into the ones that operated at all-union level (such as general economic decay, ideological delegitimation<sup>1</sup>, etc.) and the ones that came from periphery, or ethno-federal units (‘regional disparities in wealth and income, regional distribution effects of disruptive... economic reforms, incentives for political elites to seek popular support by ‘playing the ethnic card’’<sup>2</sup>). Another dimension, along which potential causal explanations can be aligned, is time, or better to say a temporal distance of explanatory factors from what is being explained. Here, what we have is a conformation to one of essential criteria in causal analysis that the cause should occur temporally prior to the outcome. Building on Kitschelt (2003), a causal mechanism should go into temporal depth instead of shortening the temporal distance between the independent and dependent variables. Thus, events that contribute to the outcome are arranged into more proximate (ethnic mobilization, opposition penetration of the parliament) and more distant (pre-Soviet experiences with democratic institutions in the framework of nationhood and statehood) in time, and both groups of factors are used as a building stones in construction of the causal mechanism. Another divisive line between the factors is their embodiment of structure (ethnic heterogeneity, diversity in economic performance and industrial production between the republics) or agency (perestroika related reforms, ethnic mobilization, opposition penetration).

Supply-side	Demand-side
Elites-based	Masses-based
All-union (center)	Ethno-federal units (periphery)
Temporal proximity	Temporal distance
Structure-based	Agency-based

<sup>1</sup> Kalyvas 1999: 330

<sup>2</sup> Walker 2003: 4

Despite the general agreement among scholars that many factors, among the listed above, mattered for the collapse of the Soviet rule, a general theory that explains why the Soviet block collapsed is not developed yet<sup>3</sup>. The uniqueness of the issue, however, presupposes emergence of the studies that focus deeply on one or another aspect that contributed to the collapse of the Soviet State. The distinctiveness of the Soviet Union break-up also predetermines which methods are used when analyzing it – deep in case analysis based on descriptive and narrative methods with a limited use of statistics. What is missing from the picture is how various factors from defined above clusters act together and what can be learned about the regimes that are established in the successor states today.

This paper by no means aims at formulating a general theory of Soviet (or one-party) regime break-up. Yet, it strives to understand whether causes from the levels defined above that brought the collapse of the USSR have implications for the polities that emerged in the successor states. Therefore, this paper contributes to the literature on regime emergence and legacies in a number of ways. First, it brings in the pre-Soviet experiences of the republics and highlights the variation between them, as a potential for explanation of diversity among regime outcomes. Secondly, it focuses on factors from each of the defined above group (elites and masses, temporal proximity and distance, etc.), and merge them into one explanatory mechanism that passes through the event of the dissolution of the USSR and stretches into the today's regime types.

The connection between the defined above clusters of factors that can be assembled along the same chain of events is grounded in nationalist based competitiveness that operated on both demand and supply side, through elites and masses, at all-union as well as at ethno-federal levels, in the form of structure (ethnic make-up) and action (opposition mobilization). Therefore, I agree with those scholars and practitioners that granted the break-up of the Soviet state largely to the mobilization of ethnic forces and national movements that started in the periphery of the Soviet Union, manifested mass level mobilization that in its turn triggered competitive electoral process.

I build on Mark Beissinger's view of nationalist mobilization coming in tides and cycles and argue that elites' and masses' mobilization on nationalist ground encouraged emergence (or revival) of competing ideas about what the striving for independence republics should look like as states and nations, before the Soviet Union ceased to exist. Needless to say that these forces originated from liberalizing reforms of the Soviet system introduced by Gorbachev and after a certain cycle of events, led to the collapse of the same system<sup>4</sup>. Yet, pushing an argument one step forward, figuratively speaking, or literally back in time, to understand a connection (if it exists) between the disposition of forces in the beginning of the century in republics that came to constitute the USSR, and today's political regimes. Mechanisms that connect the legacies of experience with democratic institutions during independent statehood are grounded in competition. This

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<sup>3</sup> This is not to forget the immense attempts of the scholars to emphasize importance of one factor and building micro-theories (Beissinger, Suny, Walker) or attempts to build a theory of decays of one-party regimes (Kalyvas)

<sup>4</sup> There appears to be some evidence that indicates that nationalism movements were present sometimes openly, and sometimes in the 'underground' form in the early 80s', even before the perestroika reforms started.

competition has different manifestations and patterns but its relevance for the question at hand can be summarized in a temporal order.

During the times of independent statehood, those in power, by holding elections allowed for a channeling of competing views of the elites and masses on the future of their countries. Such experiences apart from constructing memories associated with democratic electoral participation, formed certain group interests and created precedents of familiarity with democratic practices, plurality of opinions and tolerance of the opposition. Experience with campaigning around certain issues (usually related to nation and state building, and geopolitical orientation) that were not solved but rather got frozen, if not intensified during the Soviet period, reemerged during every nationalist mobilization cycle (as shown by Beissinger). Previously latent actors received resources (or a possibility of getting resources in the future), which urged them to mobilize and to move to the streets in order to make their interests heard and demands met. Electoral reforms, conducted by Gorbachev that allowed non-affiliated with the Communist Party candidates to run for office created an institutional window of opportunity for mobilization from the streets to move to the parliaments. The paper therefore, argues, that connection between opposition mobilization on the streets and opposition penetration in the parliaments of the Republic Soviets, common origin of the two evolving from independent statehood prior to becoming a part of the Soviet Union and their ability to shed the light at the reason of diversity among political regimes that are established in the countries 20 years after the dissolution of the USSR.

### **Pre-Soviet Legacies: Statehood, Nationhood, and Democratic Intuitions**

It is commonly acknowledged that no democratic regime is possible without a state<sup>5</sup> and without any doubts, the sense of a shared belonging (common national identity usually based on a shared ethnicity, language, religion) by the people facilitates greatly the state-building process, reduces pressure from the nation-building and builds a ground for elites' and masses convergence on the state's future<sup>6</sup>. The quintessential embodiment of such sense of a shared identity is a nation-state. Given that even out of the old European democracies less than a half is approximating the situation of one nation – one state, and using Stein Rokkan's terms 'Europe does not offer one model..., but several', the nation- and state-building that bloomed after the fall of Berlin Wall is not offering completely exceptional problems to the scientific community (Rokkan 1973: 31). However, some issues are of a unique challenge and are worth to be addressed specifically in a comparative perspective. One such issue is experience with independent statehood grounded in commonly shared ideas of nationhood. This kind of experience is traditionally regarded as a favorable condition for a nation- and state-building once independence is regained and the country is expected to have greater prospects for establishing a democracy. The absence of such an experience is considered to be a less favorable factor for establishment of a democratic polity, but can bring various positive or negative aspects for the state and nation-building. An experience with a statehood that did not result in a consensus on what constitutes a nation is the most problematic one.

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<sup>5</sup> Linz/Stepan1996:17

<sup>6</sup> I agree with constructivists, that a nation is a synthesized by intellectuals, artists, political activists ideas of a shared language, culture, religion, ancestry that endows the people with a right to self-determination over a certain territory.

Although most of the former Soviet republics that are now independent states had to build their states and nations from a scratch, some had a privilege to rely on previous experiences of independent nation-statehood, and to some extent on the support from some layers of population. To be a nation state insinuates according to Linz and Stepan that ‘...the dominant nation’s language becomes the only official language and occasionally the only acceptable language for state business and for public (and possibly private) schooling, the religion of the nation is privileged..., and the cultural symbols of the dominant nation are also privileged in all state symbols (such as flag, the national anthem, and even eligibility for some types of military service) and in all state-controlled means of socialization such as radio, television and textbooks’ (Linz/Stepan 1996: 25). The picture becomes complicated when more than one nation is embodied into one state and the two or more nations are competing whose ideas of what constitutes a nation should be laid as a baseline in the constitution.

In the same vein, competing groups can ground their arguments for a nation building project in experiences with democratic institutions, such as universal suffrage and access to power exercised through a contestation process during the times of independent statehood. These experiences are believed to determine the course of electoral process during the striving of a country for independent statehood and after independence is achieved in a number of ways. First and foremost, it may be ‘... allowing for at least some voters with memories of free elections...’ or their followers to influence the situation in the favorable to democratization direction (Pop-Eleches 2007: 912). Secondly, there might be an institutional memory involved that revives the pre-Soviet democratic parties (Pop-Eleches 2007: 912) that become a stronghold of anticommunist opposition before the fall of the Soviet Union and during independence.

Therefore, such sort of experience is much more valuable for a country's future prospects for a consensus-based polity than experience with statehood, working bureaucracy, etc.: in addition, it brings to the united by common myths population understanding of the right to exercise self-determination over the certain territorial boundaries. In simple terms it states that we, the nation, were capable of ruling ourselves, and in some cases even democratically. Memories over such a 'glorious' period were used in the Baltic states just after regaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 and were conducive to creating democratic institutions from the beginning. However, the rest of the FSU states in their quest for unifying national ideas had either to refer to pre-modern myths of medieval nationhood, or were confronted with a choice between pre-Soviet and Soviet identities<sup>7</sup>.

### **Competitiveness On The Streets And In The Parliaments**

It would be a simplification to suggest that Soviet politics was void of competition. Yet, the contestation for the power-holding positions usually took place outside the public domain, in the so-called ‘under the carpet political struggle’ sphere. Thus, the issue of ‘who will become the next chief or the Communist Party’ was decided in a competition that has nothing to do with contestation (or political struggle) at the ballot boxes. Similarly, elections were taking place regularly in the Soviet Union, but were lacking competitiveness: characterized as ‘elections without a choice’ (Hermet, Rose, Rouquie

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<sup>7</sup> In some cases, identity issues were intensified by territorial disputes according to the same patterns: Soviet vs. pre-Soviet

1978), these events were actually featuring a single candidate on the ballot. Yet, in a democratic sense, '[c]ontestation occurs when there exists an opposition that has some chance of winning office as a consequence of elections' (Przeworski et.al. 2000: 16). Therefore, electoral reform as a part of perestroika that allowed independent candidates, i.e. non-affiliated with the Communist Party to run for the representative organs was a crucial cornerstone that in a bigger picture of things contributed to the alternation of the political map of the world. In a narrower sense, it opened a possibility for new elites to enter the political arena that were previously informally striped for different reasons of their right to participate<sup>8</sup>. This process commonly known as elite transformation has a special connotation for the opposition forces as they had received an institutional opportunity to enter the political picture. This is the moment of a critical juncture under which the protests from the streets moved into the parliament and the protest demands started to take shape of policy debates.

While the phenomenon of opposition mobilization on the streets received an overwhelming attention among students of democratization, the kind of mobilization that induced opposition to join parliaments was not that much discussed in the literature<sup>9</sup>. Yet, the connection between the two is not properly explored. Although the two incidents are similar in their origins, each has a potential to contribute in a different way to the various aspects of emergence or collapse of a political regime. Intuitively thinking, street-level mobilization can contribute to regime collapse, even though mass protests are a part of democratic practice. It might be the case that the mobilization experience on the streets is less important for competitiveness of a regime, but rather for other aspects of a governing arrangement, such as level of political participation or civil rights<sup>10</sup>.

Therefore, experience that each Soviet republic had with competitive elections is a crucial one, especially if one considers the linkage between competitiveness before becoming the member of the Soviet Union, during the critical reform process it went through and afterwards, when the republics received their independence.

Thus, competition during the 1990 elections to the Republic's Supreme Soviets in which on average 5 candidates aspired for one deputy position<sup>11</sup> is a crucial break-through point for the analysis of the legacies of competitiveness. A uniquely high for the usual single candidate on the ballot situation in the previous electoral cycles, this contestation reflected a diversification of opinion and possible link between the opposition groups in the past and in the present.

### Competitiveness of regimes after regained independence

Given the diversity in the levels of experience with democratic institutions prior to becoming a part of the USSR, it is not surprising that political regimes of today exhibit a variation in their respective degrees of competitiveness. Notwithstanding a homogenizing effect that being a part of Soviet Union might have on certain structural factors (the argument of modernization theory), the legacies of the more distant past are not that

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<sup>8</sup> Being a member of the Communist Party was a major requirement for running for office and holding any high position. Therefore, restrictions on the membership in the party, such as nationality/ethnicity quotas were automatically translated into restrictions on being elected.

<sup>9</sup> An exception is the study conducted by Montgomery and Remington in 1994 that uses parliamentary opposition penetration (and regime toleration of the opposition) to explain what they claim to be the process of regime transition but is rather dissolution of the Soviet Union.

<sup>10</sup> These dimensions are not considered in this paper. A more extended analysis is a matter of chapter 3 of the author's dissertation project

<sup>11</sup> Estimated from the Keesing's Record of World Events, 1990.

likely to be bypassed by the Soviet experiences as was initially thought (Pop-Eleches 2007). What begs for a greater investigation is a question of continuity between the issues that the competitors organize around, i.e. what initiates different positions once broader rules for participation are guaranteed.

The focus on competitiveness of political regimes implies the use of a narrowly defined concept of regime. This concept concentrates on how the rulers get to power by assessing whether the accession took place in the framework of competitive elections. At the same time it allows to conduct a cross-regime comparison of the levels of competition that takes place at times of elections. The use of this measure is fruitful when cases in the sample belong to different types of regimes, such as autocracies, democracies or some mixture of the two.

Competitiveness of a regime is a feature that is naturally associated with democracy and is equated to one of the narrowest definitions of the latter introduced by Adam Przeworski, for whom ‘...democracy is a system in which parties lose elections’ (Przeworski 1991:10). Yet, proliferation of academic works on different regime forms shows that contestation can be a characteristic feature of certain autocratic forms of rule as well as of democratic ones. One such example is the notion of electoral authoritarianism elaborated by Andreas Schedler which he considers to ‘... play the game of multiparty elections by holding regular elections for the chief executive and a national legislative assembly. Yet they violate the liberal-democratic principles of freedom and fairness so profoundly and systematically as to render elections instruments of authoritarian rule rather than ‘instruments of democracy’’. (Schedler 2006: 3). In the same vein, ‘competitive authoritarianism’ is a regime type in which ‘...formal democratic institutions are widely viewed as the principal means of obtaining and exercising political authority. Incumbents violate those rules so often and to such an extent, however, that the regime fails to meet conventional minimum standards of democracy’ (Levitsky/Way 2002: 51). The definition implies the presence of opposition groups that are participating in elections. The chance of winning, however, belongs to the incumbent. Nevertheless, such regime types can be still assessed on their level of competitiveness for the purpose of this paper.

The mere presence of elections is not a sufficient factor to judge upon whether a regime is a democracy or not. Political regime in my understanding, is a wider concept than minimally defined one by Przeworski and includes, beyond the ways to get into power the ways in which this power is exercised. Electoral regimes have also proven to be rather volatile constructions and have chances of turning into liberal democracies, or to authoritarian regimes as well as maintain a balance of their persistently competitive nature throughout several electoral cycles without sliding into either democracy or autocracy. However, what competitiveness of political regimes today can demonstrate is a systematic, persistent competitiveness of polities that runs through almost a hundred year time period in the same countries and connects legacies of pre-Soviet experience with electoral reforms under umbrella of Perestroika with political regimes that emerged today.

## **Analysis**

The argument of the paper links together in simple terms competitiveness during the pre-Soviet rule, with competitiveness during the late days of the Soviet regime, and with

post-Soviet contestation politics. To tap into the main argument of the paper, I suggest testing the following hypotheses:

H1: a political regime is competitive today if it has exhibited competitiveness in a historical perspective

H2: legacies of competitiveness of the past are more conducive to bringing opposition into parliaments than into street protests

These hypotheses are going to be tested on the universe of fifteen cases that constituted fifteen Soviet republics and further became fifteen sovereign, independent states. As each of the explanatory factors are involved in the analysis only in one point of time, there are 45 data points on the 'explanatory side' and fifteen on the outcome side. This number of cases and qualitative nature of the factors are prerequisites to the use of the Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) or fuzzy sets QCA (fs/QCA).

In the essence of the methodology lies the set logic: causal conditions and outcomes are involved in set-theoretic relationships (for example, competitive legacies of pre-Soviet statehood are a subset of competitive elections during Perestroika). The subset logic, the simplest visualization of which is a cross-tabulation, is not based on the median values (as statistical techniques) but is grounded in case knowledge which is transformed into carefully calibrated crisp or fuzzy set scores<sup>12</sup>. Crisp sets analysis stipulates full inclusion (a score of 1) or full exclusion (a score of 0), whereas fuzzy sets allow for 'shades of grey' or partial inclusion or exclusion with scores taking values on the scale from 0 to 1.

The method itself combines the best of the informed case studies and medium-n analysis that allows to tap into patterns, and thus puts a handful of cases into a systematized comparison. The developed software allows to deal with the number of causal conditions larger than one (as in cross-tabulation) and allows for 'direct connections' among cases, causal conditions and outcomes (Ragin 2008). This implies that an outcome can be assessed as a result of intersection of several explanatory factors (causal complexity) and each of the factors is assumed to equally contribute to the outcome (equifinality).

As the hypotheses suggest, there are three causal conditions to be tested: legacies of per-Soviet competitiveness, competitiveness during the last Soviet elections, and opposition mobilization on the streets. The outcome variable is competitiveness of political regimes that emerged in the FSU states by today.

In what follows I suggest operationalization of the three conditions and of the outcome variable that is employed in the study.

## **Operationalization**

### **Legacies**

Although not numerous, the literatures on the link between legacies of nation/statehood, democratic institutions and regime outcome provide a fruitful starting point for conceptualization and measurement (Kitschelt, Pop-Eleches, Merkel). Using different methods to support their point, the above mentioned authors agree that having some experience is better than not having any. However, each of the authors relies in his judgement on a larger number of cases that includes Central and Eastern European

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<sup>12</sup> For more information on the method read Ragin 1987, 2000, 2008, 2009



countries aside from the FSU which allows for a greater variation in these experiences as well as for a better differentiation among them. For example, Pop-Eleches conducts a quantitative investigation of the impact that legacies have on a regime change and uses three variables to capture institutional legacies that are proxies to what I call here 'experiences with independent nationhood': the first is 'Interwar statehood' operationalized as a dummy, the second is 'Prewar Soviet Republic' – also as a dummy, and the third – 'Prior democracy' operationalized as an average Polity Regime score 1920-39 (Pop-Eleches 2007: 911). Although very profound, such differentiation would not be sufficient to capture all types of experiences in the FSU sample because, basically, all of the variables will divide my sample into two groups – the first group, consisting of the three Baltic states having experience of interwar statehood, not being prewar Soviet Republic and having a prior democracy experience; and the second group – all of the rest, with the single exception of Moldova, which is similar to the Baltic states only in its not being a prewar Soviet Republic, as the state itself was formed in 1939 by Ribbentrop-Molotov pact. Though some scholars emphasize that prior experience with democracies or rule of law is vital for the prospects of establishing a democracy (Merkel 2004, Kitschelt 2006), again only Baltic nations can be taken as examples of an electoral regime according to criteria used in this paper. In all three Baltic states there was a short period of rulers, that were elected in free and fair elections in the period between 1918 and 1934 in Estonia and Latvia, and between 1922 and 1926 in Lithuania. Nonetheless, these democratically elected governments were overthrown by coup d'état that brought authoritarian rulers to power in all three countries. Crucially, however, in all three cases there was an agreement of what is a nation and population had a sense of common belonging during the 22 years of independence period. It is worth mentioning that this period of independence was still in the memories of generations that formed elites during the collapse of the Soviet Union. Therefore the Baltic States receive the full membership score in the variable 'elections of the past'.

The clear-cut criteria of holding elections during independent statehood separates the experienced countries, like the Baltic states and Georgia from the countries with the absence of such an experience as in the Central Asian countries (a membership score of 0). But there remains a number of countries, that either had elections in some parts of the territories that are now integral parts of the state (Western lands of Ukraine, Romanian part of Moldova), or where independence was too short and not a viable experience for elections to take place (Armenia, Azerbaijan). The operational criteria suggested by Pop-Eleches, that I was using so far despite separating democracies from other types failed to provide a threshold between autocracies and hybrid regimes. This threshold is a matter of qualitative assessment especially in the countries with the same duration of their respective independent republics. More important, as discussed above, is a question of whether a country under investigation while being independent had experience with democratic institutions, especially with the narrowly defined representation based electoral democracy.

Table 1. Legacies of Independent Statehood

	Independent State/Length of the rule	Elections
Estonia	yes 22 years	yes
Latvia	yes 22 years	yes
Lithuania	yes 22 years	yes
Georgia	yes 2 years	yes

Moldova	no	yes, in Romanian parts
Ukraine	yes 18 months, Polish lands	yes
Kyrgyzstan	no	no
Russia	yes	yes
Armenia	yes 18 months	no
Azerbaijan	yes 20 month	no
Belarus	yes 6 month	no
Kazakhstan	no	no
Tajikistan	no	no
Turkmenistan	no	no
Uzbekistan	no	no

### **Street mobilization by 1990**

Although the range of appeals during the street protests prior to dissolution of the Soviet Union varied from ecological issues to labor policy, it is the nationalist-related ones that are in the focus of this analysis. Not only initial claims to sovereignty within republics were versed during the process, but they also paved a way for new elites to compete in an institutionalized way and contributed to the voters' mobilization.

The most commonly used dataset for measurement of ethnic/nationalism mobilization Minority at Risk (MAR) ethnic protest and rebellion score has a selection bias, firstly, as it concentrates only on minorities that are in fact at risk, i.e. demographic minorities that suffer discrimination relative to other groups or that are disadvantaged from past discrimination (Fearon and Laitin 2003, Alonso and Ruiz-Rufino 2007). Secondly, MAR is interested in minorities and does not take into account mobilization against the foreign domination or the center of the ethno-federation, when majorities mobilize themselves, as was the case in the late 80s' early 90s' in the Soviet Union. But the data collected by Mark Beissinger for his book *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State* in 2002 seems to address these issues as it concentrates on nationalist movements in the mentioned above period in the USSR. I will use the ethno-nationalist mobilization data to approximate the measure of competitiveness on the level of the masses (see appendix for the coding rules).

### **Opposition penetration of the parliament**

The challenge of measuring parliamentary representation of opposition movements and opposition-backed candidates is twofold. The first one is in the relative autonomy that the Republics had in setting the date of elections (between December 1989 and November 1990). The second has to do with the electoral formula used in the Soviet Union that called for the second round each time a candidate failed to secure 50% plus one vote, meaning that in most of the cases there was a second round. Such a constellation scatters the data points in time and the final results are not merged into a single dataset. I have attempted to construct one by using the data from Keeing's World Archives and from Elections Watch Vol. 1 of Journal of Democracy. The coding rules and fuzzy set scoring is provided in the appendix.

## **Competitiveness of regimes today**

The outcome variable is competitiveness of polities today. The fuzzy set scores are assigned based on answers given to the following questions:

- 1) What is the share of votes received by the largest party (candidate)?
- 2) Was the party/candidate winning the largest share of votes an incumbent party/candidate?
- 3) Even if the challenger won, was he known for being a hand-picked successor of the incumbent?

To have a thicker and more encompassing picture of elections, one needs to conduct second test to ensure credibility of electoral process, which is to check how competitive these elections are. Scholars use different indicators to assess competitiveness of elections, for example, by setting 70% of votes cast for one candidate or a party as a cut-off point that indicates lack of competition and manipulation of the elections outcome (Way 2004:147). This indicator, however, is not capturing the situation that occurred in a sequence of re-election events that took place after the ‘colored revolutions’ where the popular candidate sometimes received an overwhelming support that exceeded the set-above threshold. Important caveat here is to look at whether it was an incumbent chief executive or party that received the number of vote higher than 70% or whether it was a challenger, in which case the additional information is needed. Another important point that needs to be considered is whether the transition of power was a Russian-type one: a choreographed by incumbent and wrapped into a formal electoral process nomination of a successor that is widely supported by the population. In this case, even if the incumbent was formally alternated, the situation is treated as if no transition in power from one ruler to another took place.

I use the raw elections results data from Database ‘Parties, Elections, and Governments’ of WZB Research Unit: ‘Democracy: Structures, Performance, Challenges’.

In addition, I check whether there was a meaningful alternative on the ballot or it was a case of ‘elections without a choice’ by looking at the voting results as well as at the OSCE pre-election discussion on restriction of participation and candidate’s withdrawal on a demand in favor of the running incumbent as well as whether an incumbent excessively used administrative resources for campaigning.

## **Results and preliminary conclusions**

Running fs/QCA on the data collected returned curious results. First of all, legacies of having experience with elections in the past have a very strong connection to the competitiveness of a regime that emerged after a country reinstalled its independence. This factor appears in the most parsimonious solution recipe with very high coverage (.87) and consistency (.88) indicators. Such a high scoring on both consistency and coverage stands for the relevance of the condition to the analysis in general and for regularity of this legacy with both occurrence (competitiveness of today’s regime) and non-occurrence (non-competitiveness) of the outcome. This returns at least a partial confirmation to the first hypothesis that competitiveness of a polity is a historical matter.

Secondly, there are two major recipes to competitiveness of a regime in a more complex solution formula. The first is associated with the presence of experience with elections in

the past and absence of intense levels of mass protests. One such example is Ukraine. The second links the three electoral experiences together and returns experience with elections in the past in a combination with the high levels of opposition penetration in Republic parliaments in the early 90s' to contribute to emergence of a competitive governing arrangement during post-Soviet independence period. This renders a confirmation to the third hypothesis that in this context, mass level opposition mobilization is less conducive for a competitiveness of a polity that elite level opposition penetrations into parliaments.

Thirdly, a relatively strong correlation score between mass mobilization and elite mobilization (.7) did not appear in the same causal recipe for the competitiveness of a regime today.

### **Case study: a closer look at the causal recipes**

This section incorporates analysis of two cases from the two different causal recipes suggested above. The first is presence of legacies and opposition penetration to be demonstrated on the example of Georgia and the second, absence of mobilization on the streets and presence of the legacies of the past – in the case of Ukraine.

To recall the leading argument of the paper, unresolved polarizing issues that divided opinions and created competition channeled in electoral politics during the first experience with independent (pre-Soviet) statehood, re-appeared once the independence was regained. Being present during the initial grasp on democratic institutions that the countries experienced, the issues concerning what is the nation, and where do the state borders go, were conserved and not resolved at a time of autocratic governance of the Soviet Union. Yet, after the latter ceased to exist, these issues polarized a society, once again, induced a competitive element into politics, mobilized population but did not guarantee emergence of a democratic polity. A disposition of political forces during the first period of independence that came from conflicting views of nationhood, stateness and geopolitical orientation is a standpoint that I will use to investigate into a distant historical past in order to explain the hybrid regime outcome of today.

Before engaging into demonstration of the argument in each of the instances of competitive but not fully democratic (hybrid) regimes, I highlight the starting points that Georgia and Ukraine share.

First of all, the two instances share their respective geographical positions while belonging to different empires: they were situated at the peripheries of both Russian Empire and later of the Soviet Union, had some parts of their territories being claimed by neighboring to Russia empires, i.e., Ottoman, Austro-Hungary and were persistently forced to make their way by choosing between a rock and a hard place.

Secondly, the two countries had representative bodies that proclaimed independence and were responsible for further decision-making. These embryos of representative democracy left different traces in the memories of people and can be pin-pointed in political regimes of today. The continuity in disposition of political opinions between the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the late decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century provides a mechanism through which legacies of the past shape the regime outcomes of today.

Thirdly, despite of being jeopardized by both nation-building and state-building processes, the countries differ in the level of success of either project. Nation-building is regarded by many scholars as a crucial pre-condition for successful stateness and democratization (Roeder 1999: 856).

Following Roeder's claim that '...a consolidated nation as the core of the state is a precondition as well as a parsimonious predictor of successful democratization in the first decade of postcommunist politics' (Roeder 1999: 863), it is important to zoom into the cases that are unsuccessful in Roeder's terms both in nationhood project and establishing of a democratic polity. As Linz and Stepan argue, '... agreements about stateness are prior to agreements about democracy' (Linz/Stepan 1992: 124). The issue of stateness sharpens up particularly when the population is electing its rulers, because if a large part does not agree with what constitutes a state they would first question the legitimacy of the current government and second, seek to create a state of their own. These two considerations beg a question: are the experiences with the two processes equally crucial or, prioritizing nation-building in the past can give a country a greater push when independence is re-established? In what follows I will assess Georgian and Ukrainian experiences through these lenses.

## Georgia

As Charles King noticed, the short-lived independent state of Georgia, apart from being the first experience with a modern statehood, contributed to creating 'rivalries... that would return to haunt the new, post-Soviet countries some seventy years later' (King 2008: 161). Yet, the three year of independence is the longest between the two countries that are under consideration.

During this time Georgia held competitive elections, voted on constitution, and initiated series of land reforms<sup>13</sup>. The majority in the parliament was constituted from social-democrats that received 109 of 130 parliamentary seats, with national-democrats scoring the second place<sup>14</sup>. The mere fact that a plurality of views was present in the republic attributes to two developments.

First, is that the independence was not regarded in ethno-nationalist terms '...of the historic destiny and national self-determination' (King 2008: 163) and the nation-building project was conducted in civic not ethnic terms. It is not to assume that there were no occasional ethnic tensions<sup>15</sup>. Yet, as the data on ethnic composition of the first elected parliament shows that out of 130 MPs, 10 were Armenians, 3 Azerbaijani, 3 Abkhazians, 2 Russians, 2 Ossetians, 1 Jew, 1 Greek, 1 German, indicating that most of the minorities had at least one representative in the parliament and had the right to speak in their own language<sup>16</sup>. Therefore, according to several sources, the nation-building process reached a rather high level of development in a sense that there were no divisions among the population on what constitutes Georgian nation.

Second, is the history of the rulers to accept and tolerate rather than oppress the opposition and absence of the left in the spectrum of political parties in Georgia<sup>17</sup>. The rationale for the first is that the first independent republic is regarded with the high respect by the majority of Georgian society and is a model that people look back to. The multipartism is an accepted norm which was re-instituted in the 1991 and is followed up until today. But, the idea that the social-democrats with their preoccupation with ideology 'had lost' this independence serves as rationale for the absence of a viable left,

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<sup>13</sup> Robert Parsons *Georgian Republic: These not full three years*. Vecherniy Tbilisi, February 21, 1991

<sup>14</sup> The first multiparty parliament of independent Georgia. *Svobodnaya Gruziya*, November 2, 1999, p. 6

<sup>15</sup> Robert Parsons *Georgian Republic: These not full three years*. Vecherniy Tbilisi, February 21, 1991

<sup>16</sup> The first multiparty parliament of independent Georgia. *Svobodnaya Gruziya*, November 2, 1999, p. 6

<sup>17</sup> I am grateful for this insight to Gia Gotua from Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development (CIPDD) shared in one of the interviews in October, 2008, in Tbilisi.

because it seems to have lost the trust of the population not only during the years of the Soviet rule, but the one preceding it as well.

It is much more challenging than it seems to pinpoint the dividing issues that Georgia was coping with back in the first Republic and after the 1991. One aspect that most of observers agree upon is that Georgia was successful in building a functioning state between 1918 and 1921 (King, Parsons, Nodia). A fruitful way to look at it is, however, embedded in the specific nature of Georgian nationalism and its view on the role that international players have in the sustainability of the Georgian state. As mentioned above, nationalists were the second large party in the parliament, yet, their ideas lacked overwhelming popularity. This was mainly due to the radical ideas of nationalists that Georgia does not need support from any other state in order to maintain its own statehood<sup>18</sup>. These ideas were spread predominantly among urban dwellers and upper class intellectuals that constituted minority. The majority was able to assess the danger that came from the Turks and saw Russia as a window to Europe and the European values<sup>19</sup>. Nationalists were as well in the opposition to the new independent state created with the help of the Germans: they were far-sighted enough to see that such a state is not fully independent. But as long as they were in minority, the socialist government headed by Noe Jordania managed to consolidate a nation and close the question of nation-formation for the next 70 years. Therefore, nationalists were present as an immanent force that had its supporters, enhanced a competition and were waiting for the right time to act. Building a functioning state was the main priority and consolidation of the nation in civic terms came as a side-effect to the state-building.

Nonetheless, the question was re-opened in the late 80s with President Gamsakhurdia introducing an ethnic-based view of Georgian nation. According to him, mixed marriages are ‘...fatal to the Georgian family and the Georgian language...’ (quoted from Linz/Stepan 1992: 134). There were never an ethnic minority party in Georgia, but the identity of the majority was easy to mobilize votes around, after the years of Soviet rule. This explains high level of opposition penetration into the Georgian parliament during the pre-dissolution period of the USSR. In this striving to build strong democratic Georgia, this time with the help of the West directly, and not through Russia, nationalists remained loyal to the tradition of tolerating opposition<sup>20</sup> by this preserving a degree of competitiveness in the polity but erasing achievements of the previous generations on the nation-building process. The loss of control over seceding territories and the need to renew the state-building was partly a cost to be paid for prioritizing ethnic nationhood. Remaining competitive, political regime in Georgia based on the concept of ethnic nationalism displayed both continuity and discontinuity with the previous experience with independence. The new Georgian state is continuously persistent in its relying on foreign help to maintain the independent statehood. It discontinued with the past experience in the sense of shifting from civic to ethnic nationalism, prioritizing nation-building over state-building, and on connecting with the West for international assistance.

Yet, what Georgian experience demonstrates, is the continuity between legacies of competitive past, opposition mobilization and parliament penetration and competitiveness of regime nowadays – the causal recipe suggested by the comparative analysis.

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<sup>18</sup> Robert Parsons, Georgian Republic: These not full three years. *Vecherniy Tbilisi*, February 21, 1991

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, M. Svanidze, The First National Congress in Georgia, *Svobodnaya Gruzija*, November 9, 1991

<sup>20</sup> According to some sources, Gamsakhurdia was criticized by his supporters for being very soft and tolerant to opposition (Nodia 1995: 15)

## Ukraine

The Ukrainian example presents both similarities and differences with the case of Georgia. The leaders of the first Ukrainian independent state, created in 1918 was focusing on state-building and assumed that there is a degree of consensus on what constitutes the nation. This is a similarity with the Georgian case. However, unlike in Georgia, people in the lands that were united were diverse in their language, religion, traditions and as some would notice, ‘...[t]he Ukrainian people did not yet exist and could not act as a single entity’ (Wilson 2009: 122).

In general, the republic was even more short-lived than the Georgian and was torn apart by greater forces. Brought to existence during the German occupation (similar to Georgia), Ukrainian state had deeper divisions for a competition to derived from. The urban population was mainly Russian speaking and rural was Ukrainian-speaking peasants that could relate more to the ideas of the Bolshevik revolution, the waves of which were seen in Ukrainian territory, than to the bourgeois - intelligentsia leadership of the Ukrainian Republic.

Thus, four identities were interplaying in the Ukrainian scene: Ukrainian-speaking peasants from all regions, Russian-speaking urban population from Eastern, Central, and Southern Ukraine, Ukrainian-speaking intelligentsia (the strong but not numerous support for the leadership) and the Ukrainian nationalists from the Western Ukraine. These diverse holders of political opinions were united into one functioning state, which served as a basis for creation of the Soviet Ukraine (Wilson 2009: 124). Nation-building project was, therefore, postponed until the next opportunity, which only came along after 70 years of Soviet rule. Yet, what enhances competitiveness of a political regime on contemporary Ukraine is, among others, the return to the symbols of power of the Ukrainian People’s Republic, such as national anthem, coat of arms, national flag, national currency, as well as re-established institution of the president.

It is true that these identities never met at the ballot box<sup>21</sup>, and different relationship to the republic brings up different memories in the bearers of these identities and their descendants. Yet, the fact that the western lands had experience with democratic institutions but were parts of Austro-Hungary and then Poland makes this legacy particularly crucial as it is capable to be preserved and cultivated in the nationalist movements for independence. Still, as the comparative analysis suggested, the combination of legacies and absence of mass protest are parts of the same chain: nationalist protests in Ukraine were strong, but when the total population is accounted for, the mere number is not catching the substance<sup>22</sup>. These irreconcilable differences that were present almost a century ago in the political landscape of the country are now serving as a good point to mobilize around: every elections in the independent Ukraine since 1991 sees a confrontation along with empty campaign promises on the issue of language and the view of history. However, special relationship that Ukraine has with Russia and strivings of some part of the elites to make a choice towards Europe at the cost of good ties to Russia only play to the hands of pro-Russia oriented population and elites.

To sum up, divisive issues that polarize Ukrainian political regime and enhances its competitiveness are continuous with the ones that existed in the times of the first

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<sup>21</sup> According to Wilson, who is basing his analysis on the findings of historians from different country, although elections were scheduled to take place in 1918, the Germans, under whose protectorate the Republic existed, prevented it from happening, fearing any complications to already complex and poorly manageable status quo.

<sup>22</sup> This is particularly why Orange Revolution is an interesting example: the whole country stood up, but the East and the West for different vision of the same country.

republic. Ukrainian case demonstrates that experience with statehood which was transformed into Soviet statehood resulted in a solid statehood after 1991; nation-building received less attention in the past and results in polarized, competitive polity.

## Conclusion

This paper aimed to tap into the continuity of competitiveness of political systems that in different points in time were independent states as well as parts of the same supra-entity. It argued that competitiveness is a historical matter and disposition of political forces in the past can be linked to the levels of competition a country exhibits today. The analysis demonstrated that legacies are indeed a strong and solid predictor what kind of political system a country ends up installing. Exercised through experience with mechanisms of contestation, legacies are paving a way to how the rulers in the states under consideration are getting to power today. However, there are at least two ways in which legacies are interconnect with other factors in order to bring the outcome. The first, as the case of Georgia demonstrated, with the presence of high levels of opposition penetration into parliament during the last Soviet elections. As the country was united against one 'enemy' it was not difficult to organize against external threat. The second way was taken by the case of Ukraine: presence of legacies and absence of mass protests. Again, internal division that drive competitiveness within the country are not a good constellation for unifying mass protests.

Further research should include a case that has both internal and external divisions and similar levels of competitiveness in order to assess a separate path to the same outcome.

## Appendix

### Fuzzy-set membership relations

Elections during the pre-Soviet experience with statehood (electionspast)

(electionspast) = 1, when experience with one or several cycles of elections during independent statehood

= 0.8, when elections took place once in the independent state

= 0.7, when elections took place several times in some parts of the state

= 0.2, when elections were scheduled to take place, but failed because the

country lost its independence

= 0, when no experience with elections or statehood.

Mobilization on the streets in 1990 (massprot)

(massprot) = 1 when  $100 \leq \text{massprot}$

= .8 when  $80 < \text{massprot} < 100$

= .6 when  $50 < \text{massprot} < 70$

= .4 when  $30 < \text{massprot} < 50$

= .2 when  $10 < \text{massprot} < 20$

= .1 when  $5 < \text{massprot} < 10$

= 0 when  $0 < \text{massprot} < 5$

Opposition penetration of the parliament in 1990 Supreme Soviets of Republics (oppos)



(oppos) = 1 when  $50 \leq \text{oppos}$   
= .8 when  $35 < \text{oppos} < 50$   
= .6 when  $20 < \text{oppos} < 35$   
= .3 when  $10 < \text{oppos} < 20$   
= .2 when  $5 < \text{oppos} < 10$   
= 0 when  $0 < \text{oppos} < 5$

Competitiveness of elections in today's regimes (competoday)

(competoday) = 1, when elections take place regularly and are competitive  
= .8, when elections take place regularly and there are instances of rulers curbing competitiveness, or when there is no viable opposition to the popular candidate  
= .4, when there are regularly held elections with some instances of competitiveness which are in general irrelevant for the outcome  
= .3, when there are elections that feature opposition mobilization, but electoral rules prevent participation and competition.  
= 0, when there is no competitiveness in electoral process and elections are not held regularly

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