Patterns of Stability and Performance in Post-Communist Hybrid Regimes

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First draft. Please do not cite without authors’ permission.

Uppsats för presentation vid Statsvetenskapliga förbundets årsmöte i Göteborg,
30 september–2 oktober 2010.
Introduction

Summing up the political developments in Central and Eastern Europe – including the territory of the former Soviet Union – since 1989, one striking feature is the diversity of contemporary political regimes. We have countries in Central and Eastern Europe, formerly a part of the “Eastern bloc”, and countries in the Baltic Sea region, formerly parts of the Soviet Union, all nowadays member of the EU and more or less stable democracies. Further to the east, we have outright dictatorships, like in Belarus as well as in a number of former Soviet states in Euro-Asia. However, one of the most distinct characteristics of the post-communist region is the development of “mixed” regimes, i.e. regimes “caught” in a grey zone between democracy and autocracy. In such regimes, we typically find multiparty electoral competition combined with e.g. disrespect for human rights and civil liberties, notable levels of corruption, instances of harassment of the political opposition, as well as press freedom restrictions. In some ways, such grey zone regimes are close to (flawed) democracies, and in other ways, they resemble outright authoritarian systems more than anything else. In this chapter, we thus examine the occurrence of three types of regimes in the post-communist region: democracies, hybrid regimes, and autocracies.

In the first part of the chapter, we describe the global emergence of grey zone or “hybrid” regimes, and touch upon conceptual issues and the development of the academic debate on hybrid regimes. In the second part, we turn to a descriptive analysis of regime changes in the post-communist region. To this end, we utilize a comparative data set comprising 29 post-communist countries (1992–2008). The descriptive spatial and temporal analysis demonstrates the frequent instances of the “hybrid regime” in this part of the world. In the third part, we turn to an analysis of the distinguishing features of the three regimes types, looking specifically at political outcomes, in terms of state capacity, regime performance, and corruption. In this way, we are able to point to crucial differences between the three regime types, but also to the actual performance of hybrid regimes. In the concluding section, we address the issue of the potential stability of hybrid regimes.

The recent trend of hybridization

By the mid 1990s, the share of electoral democracies in the world was more than 60 percent, compared to only less than 30 percent in 1974, when the “third wave” took off (Diamond 2005). Since then, however, the spread of democratic governance has slowed down significantly. Summing up the democratic development during the last decade, two broad
trends may be identified (Diamond 2005). The first trend is that there has been a relative stability regarding democracy as a system of government throughout the world. This has been the case in two ways. First, the number of liberal democracies has been relatively stable since 1995. Second, although many democracies perform poorly, few outright democratic breakdowns have occurred.

The second trend is that a significant number of the countries that in the past decade have moved away from different types of authoritarianism have not transformed into democracies, but rather descended into ambiguous regimes that combine democratic and non-democratic characteristics, where formally democratic political institutions, such as multiparty electoral competition, masks the reality of authoritarian domination and informal practices (Diamond 2002; 2005; Reich 2002). Some of the most obvious examples of this regime type may be found among the post-communist countries. After a short period of democratic optimism following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, countries like Russia, Ukraine and Belarus transformed from fledging new democracies to increasingly authoritarian political systems. This tendency is not a unique post-communist feature, however. Under the demagogic leadership of Hugo Chavez, Venezuela has been heading in the same direction during the 2000s. Numerous other examples might be found in Africa and Asia as well (cf. Morlino 2009; Roessler & Howard 2009; Ekman 2008; Ottaway 2003; Diamond 2002; Van de Walle 2002; Levitsky & Way 2002; Carothers 2002).

Transitions to democracy and autocracy
The third wave of democratization did not only result in a worldwide spread of liberal democracy, but also in the growth of a seemingly new form of government, an intermediate regime category which today represent the modal type of political regime in the developing world (Schedler 2006b, 3). In fact, the most frequent type of regime transition in the period 1945 to 1998 was not from authoritarianism to democracy – which might be an impression one gets when consulting the massive literature on democratization – but from authoritarian rule to semi-democracy of some kind (Reich 2002). It is also noticeable that transitions from semi-democracy to authoritarianism have been almost as frequent as transitions from authoritarianism to democracy, but have not received much attention within the field of comparative democratization. Table 1 also to some extent indicates the “messiness” of reality compared to our theoretical models that tend to conceptualise democratization and regime change in singular terms: a country moves from one type of political regime to another. However, as highlighted by Lindberg (2009, 14–15) reality is much complex, especially in
the post-cold war era. Many countries do not make just one regime transition but several, sometimes within only a couple of years’ time (cf. Roessler & Howard 2009).

Table 1. Regime transitions, 1945–98

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of transition</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authoritarian rule to democracy</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-democracy to democracy</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authoritarian rule to semi-democracy</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>30.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy to semi-democracy</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-democracy to authoritarian rule</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy to authoritarian rule</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Reich (2002, 12).*

The number of hybrid regimes in the world escalated in the early 1990s as a consequence of the demise of Soviet style communism. During the Cold War many governments rejected liberal democracy in the name of “people’s democracy” or in the name of cultural traditions that precluded the egoistic individualism they saw liberal democracy based on. The end of the Cold War meant a dramatic change in this outlook. In the post Cold War era, even old autocrats feel the need to at least pretend devotion to the concept of democracy, often for the sake of international legitimacy and the possibility to receive economic support from the advanced democracies. Many governments, however, are not willing to totally accept the limitations on the extent and duration of their power imposed by democracy. As a result, an increasing number of governments have established formally democratic institutions, which the incumbents often try to circumvent in their efforts to remain in power from one election to another (Ottaway 2003, 4).

**Democracy and authoritarianism with adjectives**

As noted, many new democracies and post-transitional states have been unable to make a clean break with the authoritarian post. However, in most previous studies of regimes that combine democratic and authoritarian features, such regimes have been perceived not as semi-authoritarian but as partial, or diminished, forms of democracy, moving towards democratic consolidation. Recent developments in many parts of the world show that this is indeed not always the case. Instead, a short period of optimism and democratic progress has
been followed by an authoritarian backlash, where “democracy” in reality has been reduced to a set of formal institutions without true democratic substance (Levitsky & Way, 2002: 51–2; McFaul, 2002: 232–4). It makes little sense to analyze such countries from a transitional perspective. Indeed, in the early 2000s, some scholars started to argue that the “transition paradigm” of the 1990s incorrectly assumes that democratizing states are always moving in a linear direction, from authoritarian rule to democracy (Carothers, 2002; McFaul, 2002: 242–4). Table 1 shows that transitions from semi-democracy made up some 28 percent of the total number of regime transitions between 1945 and 1998. Of those 57 regime changes, only a fourth was a transition to democracy. Thus, historically, the most common pattern of regime change in semi-democracies has been further democratic erosion and movement towards full-fledged authoritarianism.

In general, two conclusions may be drawn from the recent development of “hybridization” of political regimes during the last two decades. The first is that it is inappropriate to view post-transitional regimes as flawed democracies. They should rather be seen and understood as weak forms of authoritarianism. Unfortunately, however, this has resulted in an ever-growing number of adjectives to describe those forms of authoritarianism, such as “semi-authoritarianism”, “competitive authoritarianism”, “electoral authoritarianism”, “hegemonic electoral authoritarianism” and “liberalized autocracy” (cf. Ottaway 2003; Levitsky & Way 2002; Brumberg 2002; Guliyev 2005; Diamond 2002). Second, the “democratic bias” that has dominated the field runs the risk of overlooking the potential stability and sustainability of hybrid regimes (cf. Ekman 2009; Morlino 2009).

**The crucial issue of stability**

As noted above, the literature on semi-democracies/semi-autocracies has expanded in recent years. Still, mixed or hybrid regimes – as such – are not really new. As noted by Larry Diamond: “Hybrid regimes (combining democratic and authoritarian elements) are not new. Even in the 1960s and 1970s, there existed multiparty, electoral, but undemocratic regimes” (Diamond 2002, 23). Historical examples include Singapore, Malaysia, South Africa and Mexico, as well as a number of other countries in Latin America. It is telling that the contemporary discussion about hybrid regimes – despite the explicit criticism of “the transition paradigm” (cf. McFaul 2002; Carothers 2002) that has been an integral part of the discussion – actually has its intellectual foundation in precisely the transition paradigm. What the transitologists told us, analyzing seemingly drawn-out democratization processes in Latin America, was basically that transitions could produce a democracy, but also end with a
“softer” authoritarian regime (*dictablanda*) or a restrictive, illiberal democracy (*democradura*) (O’Donnell & Schmitter 1986). In this context, already in the early 1990s, scholars like Philippe Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl wrote about hybrid regimes in Central America, as well as in Africa (Schmitter 1994; Karl 1995).

However, the current debate on electoral authoritarianism is linked to recent empirical observations of authoritarian backlashes in countries where democratization was expected or at least hoped for, i.e. in the post-communist part of Europe and Eurasia. The notion of electoral authoritarianism and “mixed” systems slowly gained recognition among scholars of Eastern Europe. In 2001, Lilia Shevtsova explicitly identified Russia under Putin as a hybrid regime:

In sum, Russia has a hybrid regime, founded on the principle of weakly structured government and relying on both personalistic leadership and democratic legitimation. This combination of incompatible principles enables the regime to develop simultaneously in various directions: toward oligarchy, toward authoritarianism, and toward democracy as well. Yet such a regime can hardly be consolidated; its contradictory tendencies are a sure recipe for instability (Shevtsova 2001, 67).

Thus, Shevtsova ultimately saw a “hybrid regime” as something essentially unstable or contradictory.

The real breakthrough for the concept of hybrid regimes was in 2002 when the *Journal of Democracy* published a topical issue on elections without democracy, including Diamond’s often cited piece “Thinking About Hybrid Regimes” (2002). The same issue included Levitsky and Way’s “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism” (2002), thus suggesting another buzzword. Still, the label “hybrid regime” – meaning competitive or electoral authoritarianism – seems to have stuck, as it is short, simple and snappy. In recent years, we have seen work on “hybrid regimes” in Southeast Asia (Case 2005; Wang 2009; Alexander 2008), in the Middle East (Ryan & Schwedler 2004), in the Caucasus (Wheatley & Zürcher 2008), and in Africa and South America (Ekman 2009). In 2006–2007, the *Economist Intelligence Units Index of Democracy* included the “hybrid regime” into its classification of regimes in the world. Furthermore, we have seen more general attempts to map out hybrid regimes in the world (Wigell 2008; Boogards 2009; Ekman 2009). As for longer works, Schedler’s edited volume on *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition* (2006a) and Levitsky and Way’s monograph *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War* (2010) are probably the best works to date. However, there are as of yet only rather few works that explicitly address the issue of
stability. In particular, there is a lack of actual empirical assessments of the stability and performance of hybrid regimes.

One notable exception is Morlino’s (2009) recent article in which he points to the fact that surprisingly many hybrid regimes have shown a great potential when it comes to persistence of the “hybrid” political order. Analyzing continuity and change among hybrid regimes during the time period 1989–2007, he found no less than 26 regimes that he classified as “stable hybrid regimes”, i.e. regimes that had been “partially free” for 15 years of more, and nine cases of “less persisting hybrid regimes” where the regime had survived for more than ten years without any change of regime. Among the 45 hybrid regimes identified, only ten made transitions to democracy (7) or authoritarianism (3). Thus, although recent studies (Hadenius & Teorell 2007; Howard & Roessler 2006; Roessler & Howard 2009) show that hybrid regimes that employ more or less competitive elections are more likely to make transitions than other regimes, it should be clear that hybrid regimes are by no means necessarily transitional regimes. As noted by Merkel (2004), hybrid regimes, or “defective democracies” as he labels them, are able to form stable links to their environment and are often accepted by both elites and the publics as adequate solutions to the manifold problems that are present in post-authoritarian societies. In the remaining parts of this paper, we will leave the conceptual debate that has characterized most work on hybrid regimes and take an explicitly empirical stance. The focus will be on post-communist regimes.

Post-communist regime trajectories
To begin with, we need an instrument to sort out the different types of regimes in the post-communist world. Our operationalization of political regimes is straightforward and relies on secondary data provided by the Freedom House ratings of civil liberties and political rights. Freedom House rates countries on a scale from 1 (most free) to 7 (least free) on both dimensions. The two scores are added and divided by two in order to come up with a mean rating including both civil liberties and political rights for each country and year. In this study, countries with a score between 1 and 2 are classified as “democracies”. Countries with scores from 2.5 to 5 are labelled as “hybrid regimes” and countries with scores of 5.5 or higher are assigned “autocratic”.

Of course, this is a very crude classification, relying only on one source of data. One possible alternative would have been to combine the Freedom House data with another index of democracy, such as Polity, as done by Roessler & Howard (2009) and Hadenius & Teorell
(2007). We believe, however, that the Polity index could be criticized for relying on a too minimalist definition of democracy, resulting in overestimations of the “democraticness” in such countries that are our main interest in this paper. For example, Russia receives the score +6 (on a scale from -10 to +10) from 2000 to 2006, i.e. during a period that many scholars perceive of as a period of quite dramatic authoritarianization (cf. Shevtsova 2010; Carothers 2006; Hassner 2008). In the Polity index, Russia receives better democracy ratings under Putin’s rule (6 from 2000 to 2006, and 4 in 2007-2008 than during Yeltsin’s presidency (5 in 1992, and 3 from 1993-1999). Freedom House presents a totally different picture of the political development in Russia since the fall of the Soviet Union, where the ratings continuously have become higher and higher (thus, less democratic). A correlation analysis of the Polity and FH scores for Russia during the period from 1992 to 2008 shows an almost extreme discrepancy in the ratings ($r = -.77, p<.001$). Another option could have been to use the Nations in Transit (NiT) index, which is a special index tapping the political development in post-communist countries. However, the NiT index is available only from 2001, which means that we lose the whole first decade of post-communism. That would be more than imperfect considering our aims, especially since the 1990s were a period of dramatic and rapid transformation in all post-communist countries. Thus, however imperfect, we believe that the Freedom House index of civil liberties and political rights constitutes the best choice for our purposes. Overall, the outcome of our classification overlaps to a large extent with other regime classifications such as those found in indexes such as Nations in Transit and The Economist Intelligence Unit’s Index of Democracy, and in various typologies constructed by scholars (cf. Diamond 2002; Morlino 2009).

Our universe of cases then includes all political regimes in 29 post-communist countries. It begins in the year 1992 and extends until 2008. The unit of analysis is the type of political regime in any given country-year. The total number of cases is 460. Thus, applying the classification described above (democracies, hybrid regimes, and autocracies) we end up with 460 instances of post-communist regimes (country-years).

Figure 1 illustrates the development of post-communist regimes over time. As we can see, most countries embarked on their post-communist journey as hybrid regimes. Due to the relatively rapid democratization in Central and Eastern Europe, the number of hybrid regimes decreased substantially during the 1990s. The last decade has seen a stable pattern in all three regime types when it comes to the actual number of regimes. It may be noted that this pattern is consistent with analyses of regime changes on a global scale (cf. Roessler & Howard 2009).
Table 2 presents all countries included in the analysis and the number of “regime years” for each country. In total, hybrid regimes have been the most common type of government in the post-communist countries. The 195 country-years constitute 42 percent of the total regime-years of the region. 22 countries have been a hybrid regime at some point in time, according to our classification. 11 countries are or have been democratic, for a total of 152 years (33 percent). The 113 years of autocratic rule are distributed between 10 countries, making up a fourth of the total number of regime-years.

The data presented in Table 2 reveal some interesting patterns. In 15 countries – 13 if we exclude the recently independent states of Montenegro and Serbia, for which only three years are counted – there has been no change of regime during the time period covered by our data. Only four countries (The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia) have been democracies throughout the whole period. In six countries (excluding Montenegro and Serbia) hybrid regimes have been in place for the whole post-communist period. The Central Asian republics of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan show a continuous period of autocratic rule.
### Table 2. Years of democratic, hybrid and autocratic regimes, 1992–2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Democracy (years)</th>
<th>Hybrid regime (years)</th>
<th>Autocracy (years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenia</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azerbaijan</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belarus</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia and Herzegovina</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macedonia</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moldova</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montenegro</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia and Montenegro</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tajikistan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkmenistan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>152 (33 %)</strong></td>
<td><strong>195 (42 %)</strong></td>
<td><strong>113 (25 %)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the 14 countries in Table 2 where a regime change has actually taken place, seven of these have been movements between the two categories “hybrid regime” and “democracy”. In the remaining seven countries the corresponding transitions have been between “hybrid regimes” and “autocracy”. Since the time series starts in 1992, no country has experienced a change directly from autocracy to democracy, or from democracy to autocracy. However, the data in Table 2 show only the total years of a regime for any given country, not directions or the frequency of changes, thus making it hard to dig any deeper into the dynamics of stability and change in post-communist countries. Taking a closer look at the time-series data, we see that regime transitions have taken place 21 times in 14 countries between 1992 and 2008. These instances of regime change are presented below.

Table 3 reveals that the most common direction of regime change is democratization of a hybrid regime (nine times in seven countries). Two thirds of these transitions took place in the 1990s. The first decade of the 2000s only saw three instances of transition from hybrid regime to democracy, and two of these happened in 2000-2001. Thus, it seems that
democratization of post-communist regimes to some extent has been a regional phenomenon. The democratizing countries are found in the Balkans and in the Baltics, i.e. in regions with close ties to the West and the European Union. Apart from the Baltic states, no post-Soviet country have experienced a transition to a lasting democracy. Of course, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine is often highlighted as a case of successful post-Soviet democratization. However, the trend toward a pluralistic democracy based on the rule of law and respect for political and civil rights has been constantly challenged in the years following the political turmoil in Ukraine.

Table 3. Instances of regime change in post-communist countries, 1992–2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change from hybrid regime to democracy</th>
<th>Change from hybrid regime to autocracy</th>
<th>Change from autocracy to hybrid regime</th>
<th>Change from democracy to hybrid regime</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Romania 1996-97</td>
<td>Kyrgyzstan 1999-2000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia 1997-98</td>
<td>Russia 2003-04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia 2000-01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria 2000-01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania 2004-05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second column of Table 3 provides strong empirical evidence to the fact that hybrid regimes should not be seen as transitional regimes heading towards democracy. In the post-communist period we have seen regime changes from a hybrid regime to autocracy at six times (in five countries). Here a regional pattern is also present, since all regime changes to authoritarianism have taken place in former Soviet republics, and most frequently during the 1990s. There has been in total six instances of regime change to hybrid regimes; in four cases a liberalization of autocratic regimes and two cases of transition from democracy to hybrid regimes.

At a first glance, it would thus seem that in the post-communist area hybrid regimes seem to be relatively unstable political entities. However, it is important to keep in mind that the post-communist democracies that were autocracies before 1989-90 and made quite rapid transitions from Soviet style communism to democracy are not included in our selection of
cases. Also, it is important to recognise the six countries (Albania, Armenia, Georgia, Macedonia, Moldova and Ukraine) that have been classified as hybrid regimes during the entire time span under investigation here.

Regime stability and performance

We now turn to a descriptive analysis of the distinguishing features of the three regime types. The focus will be on political outcomes, in terms of stability and the extent of corruption. In the former section we saw that during the period 1992 to 2008, most regime transitions took place in countries classified here as hybrid regimes. This could be seen as empirical support for the notion that hybrid regimes are inherently unstable political entities. The coexistence of formal democratic rules and authoritarian practices aimed at keeping power in the hands of the rulers could arguably constitute an inherent source of instability (cf. Schedler 2002):

The presence of elections, legislatures, courts, and an independent media creates periodic opportunities for challenges by opposition forces. Such challenges create a serious dilemma for autocratic incumbents. On the one hand, repressing them is costly, largely because the challenges tend to be both formally legal and widely perceived (domestically and internationally) as legitimate. On the other hand, incumbents could lose power if they let democratic challenges run their course. Periods of serious democratic contestation thus bring out the contradictions inherent in competitive authoritarianism, forcing autocratic incumbents to choose between egregiously violating democratic rules, at the cost of international isolation and domestic conflict, and allowing the challenge to proceed, at the cost of possible defeat. The result is often some kind of regime crisis /…/ (Levitsky & Way 2002, 59).

It is of course not an easy task to measure political stability in any political regime. And dealing with 29 countries over a course of 17 years does not make it easier. We are thus depending on some kind of quantitative measure that covers all our countries over a reasonable period of time. A possible place to start is the indicator of political stability provided by the World Bank’s *Worldwide Governance Indicators*. This measure combines a number of indicators which measure perceptions of the likelihood that the government in power will be destabilized, or overthrown, by possibly unconstitutional and/or violent means (Kaufmann et al. 2009). However imperfect and subjective (it does not account for the possibility of regime crisis/change by constitutional or “electoral” means), it is a comparative measure with good coverage in both space and time, and could at least provide us with a general assessment of political stability in different types of regimes. Figure 2 presents the mean levels of political stability in the three different regime types from 1996 to 2008. A
simple inspection of the data gives at hand that democracies are in general considerably more politically stable than hybrid regimes and authoritarian regimes.

*Figure 2. Regime types and political stability*

![Bar Chart](chart.png)

*Note:* The *Worldwide Governance Indicators* are originally measured on a scale from -2.5 (worst) to +2.5 (best). Here the scale has been transformed to a scale from 0 to 10.

The pattern is quite consistent with mean values around 6 on the 0-10 scale during the period of measurement. There is no pronounced difference between hybrid regimes and autocracies, although in general hybrid regimes show somewhat higher stability ratings than autocracies, and the mean level of stability has increased somewhat from 2005 and onwards. It is possible, however, that the three broad regime categories disguises a certain amount of variation within the regime types. We have seen that while some hybrid regimes have transformed to democracy and authoritarianism, others have persisted for long periods of time (Table 3). Figure 3 presents a scatterplot of the relationship between the scores on the political stability indicator and the level of democracy for each country-year. As expected, we find a more nuanced picture of the relationship between regime type and political stability.
Figure 3. Level of democracy and political stability (1996-2008)


Note: The Worldwide Governance Indicators are originally measured on a scale from -2.5 (worst) to +2.5 (best). The Freedom House index is originally measured on a scale from 1 (most democratic) to 7 (least democratic). Here the scale has been reversed and transformed to a scale from 0 to 10.

The relationship is clearly positive, but not linear. A quadratic function provides the best fit ($R^2 = .60$), suggesting that, in general, autocracies at the lower end of the democracy scale are more politically stable than countries with a slightly higher degree of democracy, i.e. countries here labeled as hybrid regimes. Thus, autocratic regimes that liberalize initially tend to become more politically unstable during the process. On the other hand, a continued process of deeper democratization pays off in terms of increased political stability, especially in countries that manage to leave the “grey zone” and make a transition from hybrid regime to liberal democracy.\(^1\)

Recent research has shown that this non-linear pattern also is evident when it comes to central performance-related outcomes of the political system. For example, comparative studies – using different indicators of democracy and corruption/administrative capacity – have pointed towards a J-shaped relationship between level of democratization and control of corruption (Montinola & Jackman 2002; Sung 2004), and state/administrative capacity in

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\(^1\) The relationship is still curvilinear in a multivariate regression analysis controlling for economic development (GDP/capita).
Bäck and Hadenius (2008) argue that this is due to two forms of steering and control: one exercised from above (in authoritarian regimes) and the other one from below (in democracies). In liberalizing and/or democratizing authoritarian regimes, the authoritarian structures are relaxed but means for effective democratic control from below are not in place. Thus, the administrative capacity declines.

When a state has just begun its democratization, then many of the institutional requisites for democracy are still lacking. Competition between parties, for example, is still highly restricted as a rule. The governing side may still be greatly favored in respect of economic and organizational resources, and it may yet be able to influence the electoral process to its own advantage. Freedom of assembly and of the press may also be highly restricted. At this stage, the effects conducive to state capacity that democratization can yield do not appear. The administrative capacity accordingly falls (Bäck & Hadenius 2008, 17).

We should thus expect to find slightly higher levels of corruption in hybrid regimes than in autocracies, and lower levels in countries with functioning democratic institutions. The data presented in Figure 4 provide support to the results of the earlier research discussed above. Again, the two variables are associated in a curvilinear manner in the shape of a J-curve.\(^2\)

**Figure 4. Level of democracy and control of corruption (1996-2008)**

\(^2\) The curvilinear relationship also holds when controlling for GDP/capita.
In general, democracies seem to be much more successful when it comes to clean
government. There is however a great deal of variation within the group of democratic
countries, with some democracies – most notably Bulgaria and Romania – receiving very
poor ratings from Transparency International. Among the non-democracies, Belarus has
received rather good ratings while corruption has been thriving in the most autocratic
countries, like Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Concluding remarks
In this chapter, we have addressed the issue of stability of post-communist hybrid regimes.
Despite a vivid discussion about grey zone regimes, less attention has been paid to the
relative stability of hybrid regimes. As noted above, this issue has been addressed by Morlino
(2009) and Merkel (2004; 2006), both demonstrating the ability of various kinds of “mixed
systems” to survive over time. But there is no consensus on this issue either; other recent
studies have rather indicated that most electoral authoritarian regimes eventually tend to
transform into something else, i.e. move either towards democracy or towards autocracy (cf.
Hadenius & Teorell 2007; Howard & Roessler 2006; Roessler & Howard 2009).

Instability would in many ways seem to be an inevitable outcome in hybrid or mixed
regimes. The problem may be captured in three simple points:

1. The incumbents in “hybrid regimes” are forced to accept relatively free and fair
elections, as a source of legitimacy. This means that the elections must be democratic
enough to appear legitimate, while at the same time ensure that the incumbents retain
power.

2. If in fact the elections are won by legitimate means, or close enough, and appear
acceptable to the domestic and international publics, the incumbents remain in power,
which entail hybrid regime continuity. But it also means that there is a potential risk
that the elections become “too democratic” and the election is lost.

3. Alternatively, elections are manipulated too heavily, and exposed as fraudulent. The
incumbents are forced out of office, like in Ukraine (during the Orange Revolution).
Or, if it comes to that, the old incumbents may stage a coup in order to stay in power,
thereby exposing the true nature of the regime, and the democratic façade crumbles
altogether.
In that way, Shevtsova (2001) correctly identifies the weakness that lies in the heart of the hybrid regime, i.e. the insecurity of elections. Consequently, some scholars have argued that hybrid regimes are particularly democracy prone for that very reason.

In this chapter, we thus end up in an intermediate position, between on the one hand the conclusions presented in Merkel (2006) and Morlino (2009) about the relative stability of hybrid regimes, and on the other hand the notion of the relative instability of hybrid regimes advocated by Shevtsova (2001) and suggested by Roessler and Howard (2009). We have demonstrated that the relative share of hybrid regimes in post-communist Europe has remained pretty stable over the last decade (Figure 1). Moreover, looking at the entire post-communist era, hybrid regimes have been the most common form of government in this part of the world (Table 2). While this is one way of thinking about “stability”, it is of course not necessarily the same thing as hybrid regime continuity, in single countries. Rather, when looking specifically at the trajectories of post-communist regimes, the most common regime change we have witnessed is in fact a transition from hybrid regimes to democracy (Table 3). Also, we have demonstrated some interesting regional patterns. The democratization of hybrid regimes is something we encounter in Central and Eastern Europe; whereas transitions from hybrid regimes to authoritarian regimes is exclusively a phenomenon found in the post-Soviet states (Table 3).

Still, as a rule, most post-communist countries that in some point in time have fitted the “hybrid regime” category have not really stayed hybrid regimes in the period under review. In this sense, the notion of stability finds little support in our analysis. Only six countries in our sample have in fact remained “hybrid” over the entire period under review: Albania, Armenia, Georgia, Macedonia, Moldova and Ukraine.

Another way of thinking about stability is related to regime performance and political outcomes. In this chapter, we have demonstrated that as a rule, hybrid regimes are in terms of political outcomes not necessarily superior to autocracies. These tentative descriptive analyses indicate that, if it is stability that matters, both democracies and autocracies are both preferable to hybrid regimes (Figure 3). Furthermore, in general, a movement from authoritarianism to a hybrid status comes with a price: increased levels of corruption (Figure 4). In order to improve the quality of government in this respect, nothing less than a full regime change to democracy seems necessary. Future research endeavours could add further to our understanding of the stability, as well as the dynamics, of post-communist hybrid regimes. As we have seen, there has been a lot of conceptual discussion in recent years (cf. Diamond 2002; Schedler 2006a; Munck 2006; Wigell 2008; Boogards 2009; 2010).
However, a more urgent task would be to provide empirical assessments of the way hybrid regimes actually work in practice. Presently, we are in need of better knowledge about what makes hybrid in general tick; in what ways they are able to produce legitimacy, or to satisfy the relevant groups in society, in order to safeguard regime continuity.

To paraphrase Leonardo Morlino (2009), hybrid regimes are not optical illusions. It would seem that most contemporary authoritarian regimes have to use a more or less democratic facade, in order to legitimize themselves in the eyes of the international community. *Ideology*, used by authoritarian regimes in the past, has been replaced by *elections* as a source of legitimacy. In that sense, hybrid regimes (or whatever label we prefer) will probably not go away; they may even become more common in the world.
References


