

SUPPORT FOR POLITICAL SYSTEM AND DEMOCRACY IN NEW INDEPENDENT STATES

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The paper analyses core elements of political culture in post-Soviet Eurasia in the two decades between 1991 and 2010. It compares political transformations in transition countries along the continuum between authoritarian and democratic regimes in the years since the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991. The conceptual framework of the paper is based on the concept of political support by Easton and its further development by Norris, Klingemann, Dalton, Rose, Mishler and Haerpfer. The conceptual lineage overlaps with the distinction between 'realist' and 'idealist', as well as 'intrinsic' and 'instrumental' forms of political support. The paper provides a general overview of findings on political support across certain post-communist nations by ordering them from most basic to more specific form of support. The broadest base of support is support for the political community; the next considered level is support for the democratic regime. The last two more specific levels are confidence in parliaments and confidence is expressed for political parties. Post-Soviet countries considered in the paper are Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova and Georgia. World Values Survey 1995, 2005 and European Values Study 2000, 2008 surveys are used as empirical basis of the analysis.

Keywords: political community, national pride, support for democracy, democratic regime, level of support, confidence in parliament, confidence in political parties

У статті проаналізовано основні елементи політичної культури країн пострадянської Євразії та їхню динаміку у період з 1991 по 2010 роки. Проведено порівняльний аналіз політичних перетворень у країнах з перехідною економікою між авторитарними та демократичними режимами у зазначений період. Наведено огляд форм політичної підтримки в Росії, Україні, Білорусі, Вірменії, Азербайджані, Молдові та Грузії. Теоретичним підґрунтям аналізу виступає концепція політичної підтримки Д. Істона та її подальші розробки в роботах П.Норріс, Х-Д.Клінгеманна, Р.Далтона, Р.Роуза, В.Мішлера та К.Херпфера. Авторська концепція включає шість рівнів політичної підтримки, чотири з яких розглянуто у статті. Наведені рівні політичної підтримки охоплюють різні типи та виміри форм політичної підтримки – «реальні» та «ідеальні», а також «внутрішні» та «інструментальні». В якості початкових рівнів розглядаються підтримка політичної спільноти та підтримка демократичного режиму; останні два рівні, що характеризують більш конкретні форми політичної підтримки, виражені в ступені довіри політичним інститутам – парламенту і політичним партіям. Емпіричною базою аналізу є масиви даних WVS 1995, 2005 («Світові цінності») та EVS 2000, 2008 («Європейські цінності»).

Ключові слова: політична спільнота, національна гордість, підтримка демократії, демократичний режим, рівень підтримки, довіра парламенту, довіра політичним партіям.

В статье анализируются основные элементы политической культуры стран постсоветской Евразии и их динамика в период с 1991 по 2010 год. Проводится сравнительный анализ политических преобразований в странах с переходной экономикой между авторитарными и демократическими режимами за указанный период. Приводится обзор форм политической поддержки в России, Украине, Беларуси, Армении, Азербайджане, Молдове и Грузии. Теоретическим основанием анализа выступает концепция политической поддержки Д.Истона и ее дальнейшие разработки в работах П.Норрис, Х-Д.Клингеманна, Р.Далтона, Р.Роуза, У.Мишлера и К.Херпфера. Авторская концепция включает шесть уровней политической поддержки, четыре из которых рассмотрены в статье. Приведенные уровни политической поддержки охватывают различные типы и измерения форм политической поддержки – «реальные» и «идеальные», а также «внутренние» и «инструментальные». В качестве начальных уровней рассматриваются поддержка политического сообщества и поддержка демократического режима; последние два уровня, характеризующие более конкретные формы

политической поддержки, выражены в степени доверия политическим институтам – парламенту и политическим партиям. Эмпирической базой анализа являются массивы данных WVS 1995, 2005 («Мировые ценности») и EVS 2000, 2008 («Европейские ценности»).

Ключевые слова: политическое сообщество, национальная гордость, поддержка демократии, демократический режим, уровень поддержки, доверие парламенту, доверие политическим партиям

Post-communist Eurasia experienced the greatest and most dramatic surge in new democratic states in history, providing a massive and compact 'fourth wave' of democratization (McFaul 2002). During the 'Cold War' the region was regarded as the 'Second World': the camp of one-party-states with a dictatorial communist political system and a centrally planned economy. This 'Second World' group of communist nations in Eastern Europe and Eurasia took its final shape with the erection of the 'Iron Curtain' in 1948. The 'First World' of liberal democracies with market economies in the West developed a culture of participant liberalism, whereas the Second World bred a culture of authoritarian statism. The culture of authoritarian statism shaped the 'Homo Sovieticus' for over 70 years in the Soviet Union and for over 40 years in its 'satellite states' in CEE.

Between 1991 and 1999, there was a rapid triple transformation of the political system, the economic system and the social system in all post-communist countries. One might quickly conclude that the general direction of the transition is predestined: it is moving from a totalitarian regime to a pluralistic democracy; from a planned command economy towards a free market one; and from a commanded society forced into machine-like organizations to a civil society of free associations. Yet, the more eastward we look, the more thwarted – and in parts even reverted – these transitions appear to be.

The transition process is plagued by severe problems: the post-communist societies have suffered considerable economic hardship, loss of security and social benefits and a collapse of order and institutions around them. Indeed, the whole process has been more problematic than many had at first assumed. Furthermore, political democratization may not develop in tandem with economic marketization whilst civil society is far from being well developed in many of the countries considered here. Nevertheless, there are also indications of success that defy a view of the transition countries as being mired in an inevitable and insurmountable backwardness (Longworth 1992; Chirot 1989). Thus, one should see transformation as an open ended process.

This paper contributes to the current scholarly debate about the concept of 'support for democracy'. The conceptual framework of the paper is based on the concept of political support by Easton (1975) and its further development by Norris (1999; 2011), Klingemann (1999) and Dalton (2004). This conceptual lineage overlaps with the distinction between 'realist' and 'idealist' forms of political support of Rose, Mishler and Haerpfer (1998), as well as the distinction between 'intrinsic' and 'instrumental' support by Bratton and Matthes (2002) and Inglehart and Welzel (2005).

The evidence is assembled from the World Values Surveys (WVS) and European Values Study (EVS) in these nations. The WVS examined public opinions in many post-communist nations around 1995, soon after the beginning of the democratic transition, and then again in 2005, and 2011. In addition, the EVS interviewed respondents in many of these countries in 2000 and 2008, using the same questions on political support. These five waves provide unique evidence to describe the evolution of the political culture in this region – and thus their cultural transition towards democracy.

Support for the Political Community

The most encompassing and basic level of political support according to the Easton's framework is support for the national community in a broad sense and the nation-state in a narrow sense of the conceptual definition. Easton (1965; 1975) noted that such national identities are essential for the endurance of a nation state, and could provide a reservoir of diffuse support in time of political stress. Similarly, Almond and Verba (1963) emphasized the importance of national pride as part of the civic culture, especially as it involves pride in the political accomplishments of the nation. They contrasted the relatively high levels of national pride in the United States and Britain, to the low levels of pride in Germany and Italy as evidence of this linkage.

The existence of national pride in post-soviet states could be considered highly uncertain. The rhetoric of communist allegiance to the Soviet Union and a socialist brotherhood should have undercut feelings of nationalism in many communist states in Eastern Europe. And in the wake of democratization, this led to fragmentation of some previous post-soviet. The difficult task for the post-communist states is to create a new political community, to commence the process of nation-building. In such countries like Belarus or Moldova the process of nation-building had to start from a scratch. This process of nation-building included rewriting of a national history by post-communist historians, creation of national symbols and creation of new narratives. The

process of nation-building was easier in those countries, where it was possible to re-connect with a previous nation that existed before the communist take-over in that specific country.

The WVS/EVS measures diffuse support for the national community by asking respondents whether they are very proud to not at all proud of their nation . Table 1 shows that popular support for the nation is relatively stable across time and across post-communist countries. A full 77% of all post-communist citizens express pride in their nation in 1995 – a time-point 3 years after the December 1991 transition in the USSR. Across all these nations combined, feelings of national pride by 2008 increased to 81%.

Table 1.

Country	1995	2000	2005	2008	Change
Moldova	74	62	66	76	+2
Ukraine	61	57	67	70	+9
Belarus	74	66	*	80	+6
Russia	69	68	81	87	+18
Georgia	93	*	97	94	+1
Armenia	80	*	*	87	+7
Azerbaijan	94	*	*	76	-18
Post-soviet countries	77	79	77	81	+4

Source: World Values Surveys 1995, 2005; European Values Study 2000 and 2008.

Note: Table entries are the percentage feeling 'very proud' and 'proud' of their nation.

Great increase of national pride occurred in Eastern Europe region which includes Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. The rise of national pride was particularly strong in the Russian Federation (+18%), average in Ukraine (+9%) and smaller in Belarus (+6%). In terms of international law, the Russian Federation is the successor state of the Soviet Union, which caused the end of Soviet identity and the complicated rebirth of a Russian national identity. Russia as the successor of the USSR was also the biggest loser of the post-communist revolution, which caused a tremendous turmoil regarding support of the new political community in Russia. The transition from a 'homo Sovieticus' to a post-Soviet Russian citizen was painful and complicated, full of uncertainty and socio-psychological stress, which caused – among other public health factors – a dramatic decline of life expectancy, especially among Russian men, between 1992 and 2000. Marketization produced widespread suffering among the public at large. At the beginning of transition, during the turbulent era of President Yeltsin, only 69% of Russians were proud of the new Russia, which means one third of all Russians had limited identification with their nation three years after the beginning of the nation transformations. In 2008, after eight years of Putin's presidency, a strong majority of Russians were proud of the new Russian state.

Within the Eastern Europe, the lowest level of support of the new nation-state has been found in Ukraine. Due to peculiarities of its historical and cultural development, Ukrainian society is deeply divided into the Western part with Ukrainian language spoken and Ukrainian national identity widespread and the Eastern part with Russian language being most spoken and the Russian cultural identity. As a consequence of these deep cultural divisions, only 61% expressed pride in the new Ukrainian state in 1995. The support for the new Ukraine increased slowly to 70% in 2008, but one third of people living in Ukraine still do not support the political community and are hence not fully integrated in the new independent Ukraine.

National identity in Belarus after the end of the Soviet Union was quite modest in 1995, 3 years after gaining national independence in January 1992. The long-lasting electoral autocracy of President Lukashenka resulted in an increase of Belarusian national pride to 80% in 2008. Again, this underlines the inherently ambiguous status of national pride with respect to a democratic culture.

The end of Soviet Union created a unique opportunity in the South Caucasus to transform Soviet Republics, such as Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, into new and independent states. This constitutes a major difference in historical opportunities between the South Caucasus, which had the chance of freedom and independence, and the North Caucasus with territorial units like Chechnya, Ossetia, Ingushetia, and Dagestan, which remained sub-national and regional units within the Russian Federation. The local conflicts and regional wars during the last 15 years in the North Caucasus, for example in Chechnya, have been an expression of these unequal historical opportunities for national liberation between North and South Caucasus.

By far the highest level of national pride exists in Georgia, where 93 percent of population expressed support for the political community in 1995. This high level of support can be explained by the wave of national

pride after Georgia was ‘reborn’ as an independent state in 1992. Support for the nation-state went even higher in 2008 during the conflict between Georgia and the Russian Federation. The new state of Armenia also found wide support, probably linked to wars and conflicts with neighbouring states, either between Russia and Georgia or between Armenia and Azerbaijan about the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. Similarly, nearly all Azerbaijanis supported their new nation-state in response to the military attacks from Russia at the end of the Soviet Union and the beginning of the independent existence of Azerbaijan.

In summary, we find a mixed pattern of national pride across post-communist and post-Soviet states. National identity is usually weaker in ethno-linguistically and religiously divided societies where various parts of the population want to pull the country into different directions – the decisive conflict mostly focusing on a Western vs. non-Western course. This would reinforce the general theory that ethnic/religious diversity can be an impediment for developing democracy in new states. In contrast, national pride tends to be higher in countries where national independence represents successful resistance against Russian dominance.

Support for Democratic Values and Principles

The second level of political support for democracy focuses on general support for democratic principles and values. Among the various elements of the democratic political culture, the attitude that democracy as a regime is more preferable than any of its alternatives seems fundamental to a stable democratic system (Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer 1998; Diamond 1999, 2008; Linz and Stepan 1996). This is because commitment to democracy as the best form of government likely means rejection of anti-democratic movements to overthrow the new democratic regime. Democracy is more deeply rooted when the citizenry embraces it as “the only game in town” (Diamond 1999, 2008; Linz and Stepan 1996).

The collapse of the communist one-party states bereaved the communist culture of its official ideological and institutional frame. But the communist value system did not disappear overnight and from all social groups; instead, it survived in form of an emerging nostalgia for communism among the population and within the communist parties, for example, in the Communist Parties in the Russian Federation or Ukraine. The task of the new political systems was to introduce democratic values and principles in the emerging systems in the aftermath of the collapse of communism. This diffusion and dissemination of new democratic ideas was taken care of by domestic and international political actors.

We measure general support for democratic values and principles with a question on approval of democracy as a political system. There are alternative measures of democratic values, but this item has the advantage of being included in multiple waves of WVS/EVS.

In the combined set of all post-soviet nations, expressed support for democratic political system is rather constant with 70% support in 1995 and 70% in 2008 (Table 2). If we consider regional patterns, the countries which are characterized by biggest increase of the level of support for democratic system are Russia, Ukraine and Belarus.

Table 2.

Support for Democratic System

Country	1995	2000	2005	2008	Change
Moldova	78	59	83	68	-10
Ukraine	55	64	66	56	+1
Belarus	66	67	*	73	+17
Russia	45	46	67	62	+17
Georgia	85	*	92	82	-3
Armenia	76	*	*	84	+8
Azerbaijan	82	*	*	62	-20
Kazakhstan	*	*	*	*	*
Post-soviet countries	70	59	77	70	+0

Source: World Values Surveys 1995, 2005; European Values Survey 2000 and 2008.

Note: Table entries are the percentage saying that having a democratic system is ‘very good’ and ‘fairly good’.

The longitudinal pattern in Belarus, which some scholars describe as the ‘last dictatorship’ in Europe, is rather interesting. Belarussians’ support for a democratic political system increased over time. This suggests that the autocratic President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenka, is ruling a society that favours a more democratic system. In terms of congruence theory, Belarus is a case of increasing demand for democracy by the population with a parallel decreasing its supply by the autocratic government. We can hence speak of an increasing political dis-equilibrium between supply of and demand for democracy in Belarus. Alternatively, more people may believe

the government's propaganda and think that their country is fairly democratic. The future will show which of these two interpretations holds true. Support for democracy in Russia was constantly weak during the political transformations since 1992, when Russia was formed as a new state. During the 1990s less than half of Russians supported the democratic system: only 45 percent during the first term of Yeltsin as the President. This changed a little after his resignation in 1999. Support for democracy rose to 73% in 2008, after two terms of office of President Putin. The ambivalent view of democracy as a form of political regime within the Russian population is reflected by the third of all Russians who think that it is *not good* to have a democratic system (in 2008).

Ukraine displays the lowest support for a democratic system; only 55 percent of Ukrainians supported democratic principles in 1995. Support for democracy increased by 2000 and culminated during the so-called 'Orange Revolution' of President Yushchenko and Prime Minister Timoshenko (with 66 percent supporting democracy). The failure of the Orange Revolution and the subsequent authoritarian political change under President Yanukovitch resulted in significant decrease in support for democracy.

In Southern Caucasus support for democratic system was very strong in 1995 and is still strong in 2008. It found its political expression in the Rose Revolution in Georgia and active political debates and high levels of political participation in this country ever since. For example, Georgia is an outstanding example of a successful fight against corruption at the elite level and the level of the mass public amongst the post-Soviet new political systems. Azerbaijan is another interesting case: movement towards a more autocratic political regime over time correlates with decreasing citizen support for a democratic system. Support for a democratic system decreased by 20 percentage points from 82 to only 62 percent in 2008.

In addition, we find a healthy combination of strong national identification with widespread and stable support for democracy only in parts of post-communist Europe. Typically the individual-level correlation between these two levels of political support is quite weak, especially in West European democracies where a democratic political culture is more deeply rooted. In post-Soviet Eurasia, even the aggregate levels of both measures seem independent, strongly confirming the hypothesized East-West division of ex-communist political cultures. The democratic culture in post-Soviet nations appears weak and fragile, reflecting the resilience and revival of authoritarianism in much of the region.

Trust in Political Institutions

Trust in the political institutions that exists in democracies and other types of regime is a more specific level of political support than preferences for different regime types. This section examines trust in the national government, the parliament, and political parties.

National Government

The broadest measure of institutional support is to ask about confidence in the government in general. Across all post-communist states, Table 3 finds that nearly half of the public had confidence in the national government at the beginning of the time series as new political and economic institutions were being established. This rather strong support for the first post-communist governments was likely part of the post-revolutionary euphoria that spread across the whole 'Eastern Bloc'. Many post-communist citizens initially hoped that things will get better more or less overnight and that there would not be a long wait to enter the world of prosperous democracies. This initial and wide-spread optimism faded quickly away during the transition and was replaced by increasing scepticism in almost all post-communist societies and decreasing trust to national government. Only about a third of all Eastern European citizens show confidence in their national governments in 2008.

Trust in government is quite high in the post-Soviet countries of Eastern Europe, mainly because Belarus and Russia as electoral autocracies have very high levels of support for their autocratic governments. The Russian government in the Yeltsin era was only supported by 25 percent of the population; this grew to 43 percent at the end of Putin's first term and to 58 percent in the last year of his second term. This is a sign of consolidation of governmental institution-building in the new Russia between 1995 and 2008. A similar pattern exists in Belarus during the era of President Lukashenka. At the beginning of institution-building in Belarus in 1995, 48 percent of all Byelorussians showed confidence in the new national government. Confidence increased to 58 percent in 2008, which is exactly at the same level as in neighbouring Russia.

The figures about support for democracy in these two countries have to be interpreted in this context: when support for democracy allies with trust in a basically autocratic government, it is highly doubtful that we really measure support for democracy. Lukashenka, Putin, and other autocrats get their way because they meet no powerful resistance in a culture whose enthusiasm for true democratic principles is modest at best.

The chronic and structural political crisis in Ukraine is clearly visible at this level of political support. Almost 41% of Ukrainians expressed trust in the first national government in 1995 after becoming an independent state, but this indicator decreased by nearly half by 2008.

Different trends could be observed in other post-Soviet countries comprising the Caucasus region. Confidence in National Government in Georgia correlates with the modern political history of this state. Thus, due to population's high expectations and euphoria it was quite high at the beginning of transitional process in 1995 (50%), decreased essentially by the mid of 2000th to the times of political crisis and Rose Revolution (31%), and increased almost to the initial level (45%) in 2008 – several years after the ruling of the Government of President Saakashvili. Armenia is characterized by slow but stable increase of trust in national government in 1995-2008, while situation in Azerbaijan during the last 20 years caused some decrease of confidence in the government.

Table 3.

Country	1995	2000	2005	2008	Change
Moldova	57	36	32	33	-24
Ukraine	41	*	24	23	-18
Belarus	48	*	*	58	+10
Russia	25	*	43	58	+33
Georgia	50	*	31	45	-5
Armenia	41	*	*	52	+11
Azerbaijan	86	*	*	59	-27
Post-soviet countries	50	*	33	47	-3

Source: World Values Surveys 1995, 2005; European Values Survey 2000 and 2008.

Note: Table entries are the percentage 'very confident' and 'fairly confident' in the national government.

Trust in Parliament and Political Parties

While trust in government might tap elements of specific support for the incumbents of government and their policies, images of the institutions of government should involve more diffuse feelings of political support. And in a democracy, trust in parliaments and political parties should reflect support for representative government through its key institutions. While citizens might become dissatisfied democrats criticizing the incumbent government, political culture theory would hope that institutional support increases with democratic experience.

Trust in parliaments and trust in political parties follow similar patterns over time (Table 4 and Table 5). Both show slight declines for the combined set of nations at the beginning and end of the survey time series. This is probably natural because parliaments consist of parties.

Table 4.

Country	1995	2000	2005	2008	Change
Moldova	40	33	28	35	-5
Ukraine	34	25	17	14	-20
Belarus	26	33	*	52	+26
Russia	21	18	28	39	+18
Georgia	39	*	23	33	-6
Armenia	29	*	*	39	+10
Azerbaijan	67	*	*	71	+4
Post-soviet countries	36	27	24	40	+4

Source: World Values Surveys 1995, 2005; European Values Survey 2000 and 2008.

Note: Table entries are the percentage 'very confident' and 'fairly confident' in the national parliament.

The following discussion focuses on political parties because this institution highlights the particular difficulties of trust-building in the institutional vacuum left behind by the collapse of the previous order. One of the major problems of post-communist political systems was and still is the creation of an open, pluralistic and competitive party system, which has to replace the one-party system and one-party state of the previous communist regime. The emphasis in many post-communist countries at founding and early elections was on politicians, personalities, and public figures with reputation and esteem within the population. The communist

regime destroyed or transformed all elements of other parties, which made it very difficult to reconstruct a strong and embedded party system in many post-communist countries.

Few people even in established democracies have much confidence in parties as political institutions (Norris 2011). Across all the post-communist nations combined, about a quarter of all post-communist citizens trusted the new political parties in 1995 (Table 5). This figure remained more or less the same in 2008. The highest level of support for political parties was in Azerbaijan (66 percent in 2008). Even in 1995 Azerbaijanis were likely to trust parties, so this seems particular to this nation.

The low level of support for political parties in the post-Soviet countries is relatively constant. The Russian party system, which is actually under almost complete control of the central power structure in Moscow rather than being a pluralist system, is supported by only 24 percent of the population. Such low levels of support for key institutions of the democratic electoral process suggest a limited belief in electoral politics, which is also reflected in the other nations of this region like Ukraine and Belarus.

Table 5.

Confidence in Political Parties					
Country	1995	2000	2005	2008	Change
Moldova	17	23	21	18	+1
Ukraine	17	*	15	16	-1
Belarus	14	*	*	26	+12
Russia	18	*	21	24	+6
Georgia	33	*	16	21	-12
Armenia	15	*	*	30	+15
Azerbaijan	46	*	*	66	+20
Post-soviet countries	23	*	18	29	+6

Source: World Values Surveys 1995, 2005; European Values Survey 2000 and 2008.

Note: Table entries are the percentage 'very confident' and 'fairly confident' in political parties.

Conclusions

The post-communist nations of Europe were the major contributors to the fourth wave of democratization, and their political and economic transformations reshaped the map of Europe and the world. From the outset, however, there has been widespread concern about whether the political culture of these nations would sustain these new democracies (Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer 1998; Diamond 1999, 2008; Linz and Stepan 1996; Rohrschneider 1999). Generations of socialization under authoritarian regimes must be overcome for a democratic culture to take root.

This paper provides a general overview of our findings on political support across certain post-communist nations by ordering them from most basic to more specific form of support. The broadest base of support is support for the political community, with nearly 80 percent of post-communist citizens expressing pride in their nation. A slightly smaller percentage says they approve the democratic regime. Slightly fewer parts of post-communist citizens have confidence in parliaments, and the least confidence is expressed for political parties.

At the same time, one of our main findings is that the transformation from communist one-party states to multi-party democracies is not a linear transition with identical longitudinal patterns in all countries. We find a wide variety of different forms and sequences of political transformations in these countries, all starting from communist regimes, but ending in sometimes very different political regimes. Consequently, the public's images of democracy and political institutions are also quite varied across nations and across time. We found electoral autocracies in Ukraine, Russia, Belarus and Azerbaijan. In these countries the contemporary political culture often display levels of support for democracy, but high levels of national pride. And when citizens in autocracies are supportive of their political institutions, this further erodes the democratic elements of the culture.

None of the ex-communist countries, whether in the eastern or western camp, meets the conditions for an allegiant political culture described in the original Almond/Verba model. The reason is that support for political institutions is nowhere strong. But from the perspective of an assertive political culture this weak support for specific institutions is not necessarily detrimental to democracy – provided it is support with solid support for democracy in principle. Such an assertive political culture seems to take shape in most of the western camp of the ex-communist world – very much in line with patterns known from Western Europe and the United States.

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