

Russia in the 1990s: Democratization, Postcommunism, or Something Else?

ANDREI MELVILLE

Democratic Transitions, Not Transitions to Democracy

There are several problems that are especially relevant to the current state of the art of comparative politics, problems that today attract the attention of transitologists and consolidologists as well as comparativists and area specialists.

First, is there sufficient ground for seeing specific cases of transition from non-democratic rule to a (relatively) greater degree of democracy in different countries and regions (including Russia) as part of one democratic wave?

Second, is it possible to analyze the processes of postcommunist transformation (in Russia and in other newly independent states) using the general methodological framework developed for postauthoritarian democratizations or is the phenomenon of postcommunism so specific that it is inappropriate to draw any parallels between them?

Third, which factors most influence the outcomes of democratizations: structural—socioeconomic and cultural prerequisites and conditions that facilitate or impede the establishment and consolidation of democratic institutions—or procedural—particular features and sequences of specific decisions and actions that are taken by a relatively narrow number of initiators and direct participants in the process of democratization?

Fourth, is at least a preliminary methodological synthesis of various research approaches (structural and procedural) to the phenomenon of modern postauthoritarian and posttotalitarian transformations possible?

Comparative methodology in political science requires that the elements of commonality and difference, including those between different types of postauthoritarian and posttotalitarian transformations, be revealed. Having this in mind, one may attempt to answer the first question by pointing out the following objective and subjective factors common to all cases of political transformations under comparison:

Andrei Melville is professor, dean of the School of Political Science, and chair of the Department of Comparative Politics at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations. He is also vice president of the Russian Political Science Association.

- Normative attitude toward the democratic ideal
- Massive (with few exceptions, primarily in the Muslim world and in the few residual communist enclaves) appeal of democratic models and delegitimization of authoritarianism
 - Real, though discrete, expansion of democratic norms and rights, institutions, and procedures
 - Economic ineffectiveness of authoritarianism as a model of modernization (which became clear in the 1990s) (Geddes 1994; Maravall 1997)
 - Emergence of an international context (institutional and cultural, such as *Zeitgeist*) that is particularly favorable to national efforts of democratization (Markoff 1994)

These common factors make it possible to generalize and to include various cases of transitions with different nondemocratic departure points and their unpredictable outcomes into the general rubric of the “democratic wave.” To what extent this “wave” is “democratic” is a question that needs special analysis because in many cases today transitions result in various degrees of democracy combined with substantial degrees of illiberalism and authoritarianism (Zakaria 1997).

As soon as one leaves the level of generalization, one is bound to answer another, more concrete question: to what extent can the logic of transitions from right-wing authoritarianism be applied to postcommunist transformations? This question is especially difficult because until now what has been missing in the methodological arsenal of both comparativists and area specialists is an integrated theory capable of conceptualizing the multitude of political, social, economic, psychological, ideological, and other phenomena that have emerged from the rubble of communism.

On one hand, there are attempts to conceptualize postcommunism along the lines of transition theories that reveal the general logic and pattern of transitions from various types of authoritarianism to democracy (DiPalma 1990; Bova 1991; Przeworski 1991; Huntington 1991–92; Schmitter with Karl 1994; O’Donnell 1994; Linz and Stepan 1996; Reisinger 1997). On the other, it is such a specific phenomenon (in regard to initial conditions, tasks, political actors, and the like) that there is no reason for comparing it with postauthoritarian processes of democratization characteristic of Southern Europe and Latin America (Terry 1993; Bunce 1995, 1998). There is also an understanding of postcommunism as a “peaceful revolution” (McFaul 1995; Fish 1995), a “revolution” that cannot be compared to other processes of democratization because of the political and socioeconomic tasks it introduces. According to this understanding, the complexity of these tasks makes postcommunist transitions fundamentally different from the mainly political transitions from right-wing authoritarianism to democracy.

Postcommunism is a multidimensional phenomenon, and its various aspects can be conceptualized in different models—democratization of the posttotalitarian (left-wing authoritarian) regime and the metamorphosis of the Soviet political system with the preservation of many of its features; marketization of the command economy and the collapse of the last empire in the world; nation-

al self-determination and the new nation-building and state-building, and so forth. The models may intersect because various aspects of postcommunism belong to different types of phenomena and postcommunism itself is still in a process of change and has not yet acquired complete and crystallized features. Postcommunism as a metaphor still needs to develop into a comprehensive theory to provide a conceptual tool to analyze a full variety of transformations in former Soviet-type societies.

Those who stress the specific nature of postcommunism point to some of its features that are not present in most other types of postauthoritarian transitions—the simultaneous tasks of political democratization and economic marketization; the need for dismantling a large part of existing production capacities for the sake of modernization and restructuring of others; the appearance of a nationalist (and in essence nondemocratic) reaction to the communist collapse; the lack of a civil society constituting a system of ties within civil society itself and between civil society and the state; and the absence (in most cases) of an initial pact among reformers, conservatives, and opposition outside of the system.

“Recent studies show that there is no direct connection between democratization and the level of economic development or modernization.”

One should add to this list the profound differences not only in the departure points and important immediate tasks of transitions but also in their results. With some exceptions, postcommunist transitions result not in consolidated democracies or democracies in the process of self-consolidation but in various types of hybrid regimes that often use the democratic rhetoric as a smokescreen for a *de facto* restoration of various, even pre-communist, forms of authoritarianism. Let me emphasize two points: first, hybrid regimes may under certain conditions evolve in democratic directions; and second, specific “hybridization” seems to be if not a norm then an important trend (related not only to postcommunist regimes) worthy of special attention and consideration.

In a recent survey undertaken by Freedom House that rates countries according to evaluations of political processes—including free and fair elections; the evolution of civil society; the status of independent media; rule of law, including constitutional, civil, and criminal law reform; governance and public administration, including transparency and government accountability; privatization; and economic reform—only seven newly independent states (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia) are considered to be consolidated democracies, fourteen (Russia, Moldova, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Macedonia, Croatia, Albania, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan), transitional, and four (Belarus, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan), consolidated autocracies (Karatnycky 1997).

One may have serious reservations about classifying regimes with significant elements of ethnocratic rule (such as Estonia and Latvia) as consolidated democracies; however, the very idea of diversifying postcommunist regime types, including nondemocratic ones, in principle seems to be most useful. The unpredictability of such transitions—the unpredictability not only of results of a democratic process (Przeworski 1991) but of results of transition itself—is widely recognized. Democratic transition would reflect the variety of circumstances, features, and options that present themselves for the transformations under review.

It is important to emphasize that democratic transitions are not guaranteed to be successful. There are a number of diversified processes of transition of non-democratic regimes to sociopolitical types that, while extensively using the democratic rhetoric, may seldom be a democracy even in a minimum procedural sense of the word. Consolidated democracy (or, as was emphasized above, even democracy in the process of consolidation) is seldom the final result of such a process.

Another point worth mentioning is that democratic transitions of the third wave demonstrated that formal inauguration of a democracy—the formal democratic institutions and procedures of “electoral democracy” (or “illiberal democracy”) but not “liberal democracy” (Diamond 1996; Diamond, Plattner, Chu, and Tien 1997; Zakaria 1998)—in no way guarantees the outcome of the transition itself. There are two major phases in the practice of democratic transition: transition in the narrow sense (formal inauguration of democracy) and its consolidation (Mainwaring, O’Donnell, and Valenzuela 1992; Gunther, Diamandourosk, and Puhle 1995; Linz and Stepan 1996; Merkel 1998).

This raises the question, Do transitions that are generalized as a “democratic wave” really have one predominant vector (or direction), such as through the stage of nonconsolidated democracy to consolidated democracy? That question implies that different types of illiberal democracies may emerge and some of them may represent a different phenomenon: a transition from one type of nondemocracy to another type of nondemocracy.

Structural vs. Procedural Approaches to Democratic Transitions

The subjective and objective factors that make it possible to draw parallels between various ongoing processes of democratic transitions cannot explain the differences between them. Why do efforts of democratization begin earlier and proceed more smoothly in some countries than in others? Why do some non-democratic regimes initiate a gradual democratization themselves, while others resist it until they collapse? In an effort to answer these questions some political scientists (Almond and Verba 1963, 1980; Inglehart 1977, 1988; Rustow 1970; Lipset 1959, 1996; Pye 1990; Huntington 1991–92) emphasize structural factors—statehood, national unity, and identity—as well as particular socioeconomic conditions (sufficiently high level of economic development) and cultural-normative conditions (specific cultural norms and values that recognize democratic norms, tolerance, trust, and civic duty) as prerequisites of democracy and democratization. Others (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986; Linz 1990; Di Palma 1990; Przeworski 1991; Schmitter with Karl 1994; Karl and Schmit-

ter 1994) stress procedural factors—the sequence of specific choices, decisions, and actions taken by the political actors who are carrying out the process of democratization.

The first structural condition does not seem to cause much doubt. The problems of national unity and identity should (ideally) be solved before the process of democratic transition begins. Acute national conflicts, which lead to a rise in various forms of nationalism and nationalist movements, make democracy practically unachievable. However, the theory of “consociational democracy” (Lijphart 1977), which presents a model of democratic accord between elites representing contradictions within plural societies, presents a different model of democratization. Empirical data presented by Fish (1998) adds doubt as to how much ethnic homogeneity should be considered to be a precondition for democratic transition.

The second type of correlation—between democracy and the level of socioeconomic development and the modernization of society—causes even more doubt today than a few decades ago, when a hypothesis about the connection between the well-being of a nation and the likelihood of it becoming a democracy (Lipset 1959) was formulated. These doubts are both theoretical and actual.

From a theoretical point of view, it is at least questionable whether it is correct to interpret democracy on the basis of economic determinism—as a rectilinear consequence of certain socioeconomic conditions. From the data available, it seems that economic development and the achievement of well-being are not important for democracy. What is vital is the creation of prerequisites by socioeconomic factors, prerequisites that will help create a mass middle class as the social base of a future democracy—something Moore (1966) spoke about long ago. However, that factor alone does not guarantee democracy (as the Weimar lessons teach us).

Examples from real life do not confirm that democracy is necessarily determined by socioeconomic development. It is well known that there are nondemocratic regimes with a high level of economic development (for instance, Singapore). On the other hand, India, with a sufficiently stable democratic order, is one of the poorest and least-developed countries of the world. Recent studies (Przeworski and Limongi 1997) show that there is no direct connection between democratization and the level of economic development or modernization. Democratization can be initiated in economically underdeveloped societies, even though democracy has more chance of survival in a modern, developed society. This, of course, does not contradict the finding of Fish (1998) that a strong relationship exists between democratization and the extent of economic reform.

There is a thesis that democracy and the level of social modernization are mutually conditioned, which discourages those who do not want to wait passively for the results of an “objective” development. The thesis states that efforts aimed at the democratization of societies that have not achieved a certain level of development (and such societies are a majority in the present democratic wave) are doomed to failure. That argument certainly narrows the field of countries that could attempt democratic transition with some chance of succeeding.

Certain cultural conditions in a society, especially the diffusion of values associated with a “civic culture” and Protestant (and to a certain extent Catholic) reli-

gious traditions, are also often referred to as structural prerequisites of democratization. Modern democracy originated in Protestant countries and the diffusion of democratic values in the Catholic world was not a simple matter. (It is still to be demonstrated that democracy in its present form has acquired deep roots in Orthodox, Moslem, or Confucian cultures.) There is no doubt that norms and values such as acceptance of pluralism, tolerance, mutual trust, and the recognition of democratic rights and freedoms—together with a relatively high level of economic development and well-being—create a climate favorable for democracy. There is a correlation between democracy on the one hand and economic development and political culture on the other, and the supporters of a structural approach are quite right to emphasize this.

Nevertheless, noting the existence of certain correlations is not the same as stating that there are preliminary structural conditions without which it is impossible to initiate a democratic transition. First, such correlations do not present obligatory prerequisites but only indicate factors that facilitate or impede democratization. Second, what is considered by some authors to be the prerequisites and conditions of democracy can prove in reality to be the results and consequences of the process of democratization itself. And third, most democratic transitions of recent decades have demonstrated that the breakdowns and collapses of authoritarian regimes and the subsequent attempts to craft democracies did not result from supposed preconditions but were much more endogenous in their character.

Doubts about the universal and substantial nature of the thesis about common structural prerequisites of democracy led to the emergence of another methodological approach to the problems of democratic transitions. This approach focuses on endogenous factors of democracy and democratization—that is, not on prerequisites but on specific processes, procedures, and political decisions made by the agents of democratization. From this point of view, the sequence and mutual conditions of specific political decisions and actions, and the tactics chosen by those actors who initiate and carry out democratic transitions, are more important for their outcome than the prerequisites of democracy that exist (or do not exist). The main element of such an approach is to focus on the interaction of competing elites and the elites' deliberate choices of organizational forms and institutions as parts of a new political set-up.

The second approach applies particularly well to third wave democratic transitions of recent decades, which are extremely diverse in points of departure, political trajectories, agendas of transformation, and strategies. But is it true that these two approaches—the structural and the procedural—are mutually exclusive, as is generally believed?

It appears that there is no insurmountable contradiction between the two methodological approaches and that they can even complement each other. They actually deal with different aspects of the same type of phenomena—democratic transitions. Theoretically, nothing, at least not *a priori*, impedes a synthesis of the two methodologies. However, even a preliminary synthesis of the methodologies is a goal not yet achieved. Such a synthesis would be equally important for the elaboration of an integrated theory of contemporary postcommunism, the lack of

which has been described above. Defining what is general and what is particular in various types of democratic transitions (including those in Russia) can provide the additional data needed to solve this theoretical puzzle.

The “Funnel of Causality” as an Analytical Model

Advocates of the procedural approach stress the fact that specific decisions and actions of political actors in many crucial moments determine the course of both a democratic transition and the social transformations connected with the transition. Actors choose their actions, strategies, tactics, and the procedures and institutions to be established. However, they do so under circumstances that they did not create and that affect the choices made. In other words, the choice is not absolutely arbitrary, not completely uninfluenced by objective prerequisites, and not made in the conditions of a social *tabula rasa*. The choice is determined not only by procedures, that is, by specific political actions, but also by structural factors—above all the burden of the past—by tradition and by the broad social context in which the choice is made. It is possible to begin crafting a democracy without waiting for the right structural conditions, but the traditions and the general context in which a choice is made influence the progress and the results.

“In creating a stimulus for perestroika type reforms in the Soviet Union, the influence of external/international factors was neither crucial nor determining.”

To a large extent, tradition and context determine how the chosen procedures and the established institutions work. Structural factors, by their existence and character, affect formal procedures and institutions. That explains, for example, why in one case elections become important for the emerging democracy and in another they are used by a new oligarchy as a mechanism of self-preservation. Democracy as an institutionalized uncertainty (Przeworski 1991) presupposes a choice between options that are determined both by the procedures that are used in the process and by conditions and traditions already in existence.

Thus, we assume that the synthesis of both methodological approaches to democratic transitions is not only possible but also desirable because we will be in a position to take into account a larger group of factors and variables and create multidimensional models of the objects under analysis. We also believe that for these purposes and as a preliminary stage in a search for a synthetic methodology we may turn to the methodological model that was used for the first time in the classic study *The American Voter* by Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes—the so-called funnel of causality:¹

We wish to account for a single behavior at a fixed point in time. But it is behavior that stems from a multitude of prior factors. We can visualize the chain of events with which we wish to deal as contained in a *funnel of causality*.

The notion of a funnel is intended merely as a metaphor that we find helpful up to a certain point. . . . Let us imagine that the axis of the funnel represents a time dimension. Events are conceived to follow each other in a converging sequence of causal chains, moving from the mouth to the stem of the funnel. The funnel shape is a logical product of the explanatory task chosen. Most of the complex events in the funnel occur as a result of multiple prior causes. Each such event is, in its turn, responsible for multiple effects as well, but our focus of interest narrows as we approach the dependent behavior. We progressively eliminate those effects that do not continue to have relevance for the political act. Since we are forced to take all partial causes as relevant at any juncture, relevant effects are therefore many fewer in number than relevant causes. The result is a convergence effect. (24)

The funnel of causality methodology has been successfully used in the analysis of electoral behavior. But I believe that its heuristic potential is broader than that. It seems that the use of this methodology in the analysis of democratic transitions could provide us with a multi-factor approach that would progressively converge our analysis from the following factors of the macro-level to those of the micro-level:

- International context (economic, political, strategic, ideological, and so forth)
- State-building and nation-building (integrated territory and state, identity, and so forth)
- Economic and social level of development and modernization
- Social stratification, social classes, and groups
- Culture and values
- Political processes (parties, organized groups, new political institutions and procedures, political strategies and tactics)
- Individual factors (decisions and actions of the key political actors)

Each of these factors plays a role in determining the conditions, the process, and ultimately the outcome of the democratic transition, but none is sufficient to explain it in full. In the gradual movement from the macro- to microfactors one could structure the analysis in a way that permits a move to a “lower” level of the “funnel” after the explanatory potential of the “higher” level is exhausted. This narrowing of focus is the basis of the funnel of causality methodology. In our case, it will permit us to move from the accounting of structural factors of the democratic transition to the procedural ones. Thus, one could combine both structural and procedural approaches in one analytical model.

Is the funnel of causality methodology best suited for the analysis of democratic transitions, and can it be considered the first step toward elaboration of the theory? These questions probably do not have obvious answers. In the first place, ideal methodologies do not exist and the funnel of causality methodology is only one possibility. It may be useful in putting together in a systematic way the factors that are related to a democratic transition. It is one possible route in the search for explanations of the “mystery” of birth (or inauguration) of democracy, but not the explanation. Taking this into account, I believe that a modified funnel of causality methodology may be useful in the analysis of the process of consolida-

tion of democracy (as well as of the factors that prevent it). But in this particular context, the logic of the analysis should be reversed. To systematize and understand the factors that influence democratic consolidation, we need to start from the micro-level and gradually move to the macro-level.

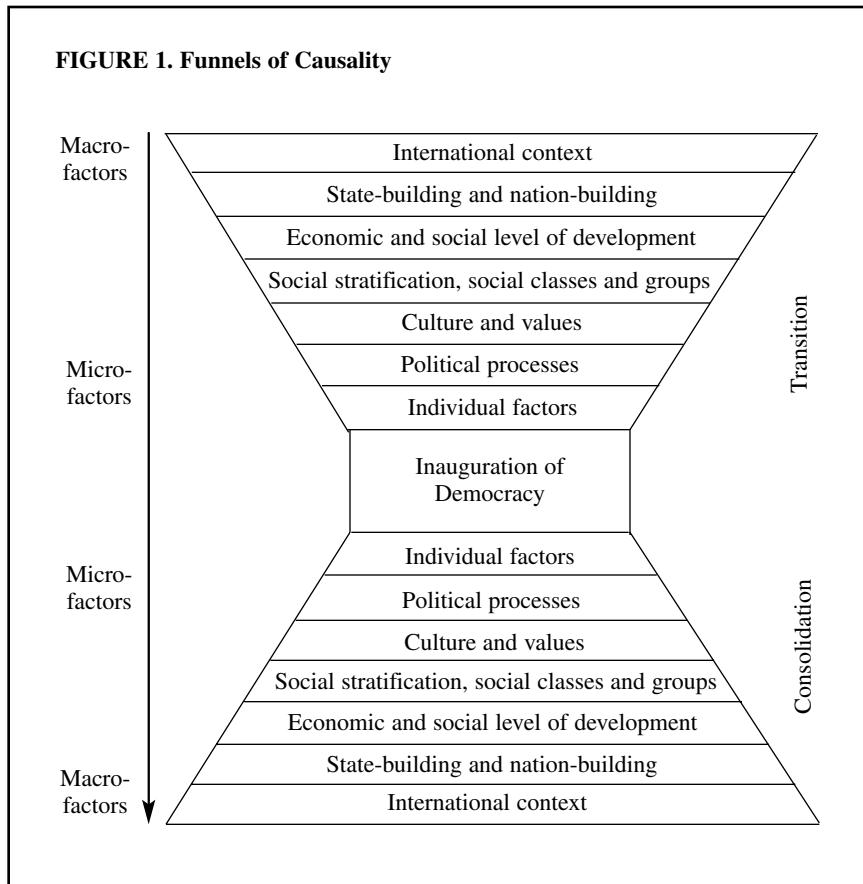
We may assume that in this case the logic of the analysis reflects the logic of the process of democratic consolidation (although this assumption needs additional augmentation and proof). Indeed, we begin our analysis with the variables and factors of the lower micro-level and proceed to those of the higher macro-level because democratic consolidation involves a process that leads from individual decisions and actions of political actors to interactions between non-individual political actors and political institutions; to establishment of particular political cultures, values, and orientations; to social changes that are connected to the process of economic development and modernization; to state-building and nation-building; and finally to the development of the international context that would be favorable to preservation of consolidated democracy. This would involve an inversion of the vector of our analysis from procedural to structural factors of democratic transitions.

Because in our analysis we use the same general methodology that attempts to combine procedural and structural approaches, we would end with a funnel of causality that is inverted in a specific way. This inversion represents the following logic: We begin our analysis of the process of democratic consolidation at the level of individual decisions and actions. The individual choices in no way can guarantee the consolidation of democracy. Our next analytical step brings us to the level of political factors and processes, to the analysis of the role of political strategies, tactics, and interactions among political parties, social movements, organized groups, and newly established political institutions. However, for democratic consolidation, the level of political interactions (even in cases when formal institutions and procedures of democracy acquire adequate substance) needs to be supplemented by the factors of a larger scale. Durability of a democratic polity rests on social and class factors (such as the existence of a massive middle class, a rather low level of social conflicts, and so forth). As we start to analyze those factors, we gradually move from predominantly procedural to predominantly structural factors.

However, this level of analysis is also insufficient for final judgments about the level of democratic consolidation. Thus we move to a broader context of structural factors of a socioeconomic and sociocultural nature (such as the level of social development, economic modernization, and cultural values and orientations) and finally to the level of state-building and nation-building and to an international context. A methodological model of the analysis of structural and procedural factors that influence the process of a democratic transition and consolidation is presented with the help of two inverted funnels of causality, as shown in figure 1.

Russia's Transformation: A Methodological Approach

The funnel of causality may be helpful in the analysis of concrete case studies of democratic transitions (or, to be more precise, of sociopolitical transforma-

FIGURE 1. Funnels of Causality

tions that appear to begin as democratic transitions) such as the one in Russia. Starting our analysis at the macro-factor level and using the methodology of the funnel of causality, we should first consider the international (geopolitical, strategic, economic, political, cultural, and so forth) factors that stimulated reform in the USSR in the 1980s. In creating a stimulus for perestroika type reforms in the Soviet Union, the influence of external/international factors (in contrast to a variety of democratic transitions of the second wave) was neither crucial nor determining. However, the issue of external factors may become important when discussing conditions and obstacles to democratic consolidation (or nonconsolidation) in Russia.

At a lower level of state-building and nation-building, we should mention that in the Soviet/Russian case the basic precondition for democracy—the existence of the state integrity and national identity—is missing. A specific feature of Russia's democratic transition is the polyethnic composition of the USSR and Russian Federation and the rise of the centrifugal forces of nationalism under the slogans of democracy—factors that led to the disintegration of the USSR and that

continue to be a threat to Russia. During the progressive disintegration of the Soviet Union, national and nationalistic ideas were used to give meaning and substance to the program of anticommunism. However, in the postcommunist context, the understandable desire for national revival began to assume forms incompatible with democracy. Nationalism assumed the features of openly ethnocratic and imperial forms.

Attention should be drawn to a crisis of national identity, which is clearly felt today in postcommunist Russia and which confronted the authorities with the task of ensuring national unity. That crisis is quite specific to Russia. From a long-term perspective it may prove to be the most difficult task because there is no clear answer to a seemingly self-evident question, What is today's Russia like? Did it really inherit the status of the USSR? Is it a successor to the last great empire of the world? Or is it only one of the empire's fifteen splinters? Is it true that postcommunist Russia represents a fundamentally new type of statehood that emerged, as it were, out of the rubble of the empire's collapse? Or is today's Russia a continuation of the framework of the Eurasian geopolitical entity, which is huge and unique in the history of civilizations and which existed first in the form of the Russian Empire and then in the form of the USSR? There is still no answer to the question of whether it is possible to achieve a democratic and nonimperial regime that could govern and organize these giant territories that have historically been structured in an autocratic and imperial paradigm. Until answers to these questions are found, until the problem concerning territorial integrity within the framework of a voluntary federation is solved, and until the new national identity of postcommunist Russia is established, it is difficult to predict Russia's democratic transit.

The inadequacy of preconditions to democracy may help to explain additional obstacles to democratization in Russia. However, it can hardly give insight into the departing point and the beginning of the process of democratic transition in the Soviet Union and in Russia. That is why our attention should shift lower—to the level of structural socioeconomic factors. As in most cases of democratic transitions of the third wave, attempts at democratization in the USSR and Russia did not result from a high level of economic development. Quite the opposite. Reforms initiated in the perestroika era were attempts to get out of a stagnated economy. However, in the Soviet Union, unlike classic cases of postauthoritarian transitions to democracy, there were no elements or even embryos of a market economy, which complicated and continues to complicate transformation processes.

In addition, some authors (Starr 1988; Lapidus 1989; Lewin 1991) argue that behind the facade of the Soviet regime, along with its immobilism and delegitimization, there gradually emerged the forces of modernization that resulted from accumulated social change—urbanization, professional differentiation, increases of educational level, and a middle class that was the carrier of new values and attitudes. Although this is a powerful argument indeed, there is yet another argument, according to which transformation processes initiated by perestroika were results not of the gradual modernization of the Soviet society but of its decay and devolution (Malia 1990; Janos 1991; Jowitt 1992; Malia 1992).

Making the focus of our analysis even more narrow, we reach the structural level of socio-class factors. From the standpoint of political democratization and its tasks, the transition to a market economy is not an end in itself but a means of creating a middle class as a mass basis for democracy. The processes of transformation in the Soviet society, at least from the 1960s, created a kind of embryonic analog of a middle class. However, as distinct from the middle class associated with Western societies, it was exclusively its professional and institutional position in the state system and not its property that shaped the Soviet "old middle class."

With the disintegration of the Soviet state, the deepening economic crisis, and the initiation of market economy reforms, this embryonic Soviet "old middle class" was actually washed away as society split into two poles (a process also typical for Third World countries)—a zone of mass poverty and a narrow stratum of wealth with socially amorphous elements between them. As for a "new middle class," it has not yet appeared in Russia. Consequently, the problem of shaping an adequate mass social basis of democracy, based on private property relations as opposed to attitudes toward the state, remains unsolved in postcommunist Russia.

Another specific feature of Russia's transition is that of keeping groups of the old ruling class in power. In cases of successful transition, a pact between competing parties during the process of democratization provided guarantees of political and economic security for the old ruling class. As a result, the old ruling class could take part in the democratic political process. In Russia, however, there was no social agreement or pact, but nonetheless the old nomenklatura retained its political and economic security and was included in the new political system as a legitimate part of the democratic process. The nomenklatura was not only saved by the camouflaging administrative changes made by the new democratic authorities (for instance by relabeling official positions, while filling the positions with the same officials as before, both in the center and in the provinces); it also remained in power as one of the central components of the new authority. It is partly for this reason that the uncompleted democratic transition in Russia became not so much a radical break with the past Soviet system as a particular metamorphosis of it.

As a result, the nucleus of the old nomenklatura, which includes the old party apparatus and economic pragmatists and new career professionals from democratic ranks, was preserved as part of the renewed ruling class under slogans of democracy and anticommunism (Shevtsova 1995). This renewed ruling class held on to power and acquired property. It became the winner of the large-scale processes of redistribution of state property and of the transfer of this property to private ownership. All of this took place between clans and cartels that were and still are part of the ruling class, behind a smoke screen of so-called public privatization. As a result, corporate interest groups created a base for the oligarchic political system that is presently being established in Russia. At the same time, the interests of the masses are still poorly articulated and the lower layers of society do not have adequate political representation.

The present oligarchy in Russia is a method for managing big organizations, a method based on power. The oligarchic principles of the postcommunist structure in Russia date back to the understanding of plutocracy as a regime under which power and privileges are based on wealth. The interests of property and one's own material benefit, rather than the organization of power, are the main elements in the present plutocratic regime of Russia—a regime under which not only does wealth engender power, but where power itself gives rise to the wealth of those who are party to it.

Taking the above into account and making use of the two main dimensions of the process of democratization analyzed by Robert Dahl—contestation and participation—the direction of Russia's postcommunist transit can be conditionally described as going from “inclusionary authoritarianism” to “exclusionary democracy.”

The present situation is shaped by an elitist rule that makes use of the formal institutions of democracy for nondemocratic purposes. It is the result of a superficial democratization that provides no mechanisms of democratic control over the actions of the authorities (Shevtsova 1997). It should be noted that unequivocal categories are hardly applicable to the present political regime in Russia. It is a hybrid and mixed regime—according to the terminology of Schmitter and Karl (1994) a kind of “democradura,” a regime that drastically limits the possibilities for effective mass participation in politics, but at the same time allows competition for power at the elite level. The “democradura” in Russia is a relative one because at the elite level the rules of the game are not those of open political competition, but consist of clan and corporate laws structuring the “under-the-carpet” struggle for power. Characteristics such as “delegated democracy” (O'Donnell 1994), “authoritarian democracy” (Sakwa 1997), or “hybrid regime” (Shevtsova 1997) can also be applied to the key features of the regime. However, the present hybrid regime in Russia inherited much of the old Soviet political genotype; it resembles the closed corporate structures of Latin America.

The current political regime in Russia is related to a more general methodological problem of the minimal and what may be called extended attributes of democracy. This problem arises in many postauthoritarian (including postcommunist) regimes, which often are referred to as “democracy with adjectives”—“authoritarian democracy,” “neopatrimonial democracy,” “military-dominated democracy,” “protodemocracy,” “illiberal democracy,” “electoral democracy,” and so forth. Collier and Levitsky believe that this issue still needs conceptual clarification: “Diminished subtypes are useful for characterizing hybrid regimes, but they raise the issue of whether these regimes should in fact be treated as subtypes of democracy, rather than subtypes of authoritarianism or some other concept” (1997, 450).

At the lowest cultural level of structural factors (political values and orientations) we need to address the following problem: In the USSR and in Russia, as in other cases of the third wave, democratic transition was not preconditioned by a spread of values and orientations of the “civic culture” type. Instead, embryonic elements of democratic values and political attitudes emerge in the public mind

as a specific reflection of some very real political processes. This seems to contradict some basic assumptions of classical political theory and democratic theory in particular. A somewhat different pattern of relationship between democratic political values and procedures and institutes of democracy emerges in Russia as well as in most other third wave countries.

According to public opinion polls, normative support of democracy is lower and normative support of authoritarianism is higher in Russia than in many other countries in transition to democracy. However, there is empirical evidence that proves the tendency toward consolidation of some dispersed and uncoordinated democratic values and practices in the Russian mass consciousness (Melville 1998a). Determining the cultural and value-attitudinal dimension of transition processes in Russia and in other countries of the third wave remains a challenging task for political scientists and comparativists because the role of political culture as a factor of democratic transitions remains unknown.

Because we are unable to develop a comprehensive explanatory model of Russian democratic transition at the level of structural factors, we must descend to a lower level of procedural factors. Here we are concerned with such issues as the choice of political strategies and tactics, relationships and interactions between political parties and movements, organized interest groups, and political institutions.

Taking into account some specific features of democratic transition in Russia, we are confronted with the interrelated task of political and economic reforms. It has become commonplace to speak about the unprecedented task of carrying out both a democratic transformation of the political system and reforms aimed at creating a market economy in postcommunist Russia. The latter presupposes dismantling the command economy and creating new foundations for market economy relations. Ideally, these tasks should not only condition but support each other. Democratization facilitates advancement toward the market, while the market creates the economic and social basis of democracy. In classical postauthoritarian transitions, the problem concerning the simultaneous nature of political and economic reforms does not arise, because a market economy already exists in some form. In the Soviet Union and then in Russia, however, these two tasks proved in many respects to create obstacles for each other.

This is not to claim that economic structural transformations, including the detatization of property, were not on the agenda of other democratic transitions. But successful political and economic reforms, including those taking place in the countries of central and Eastern Europe, were not carried out simultaneously. And they were not carried out the way they are in China, where economic reforms not only precede but actually replace political reforms.

In successful democratic transitions, a consistent political democratization was carried out first, then effective democratic institutions were built and consolidated, and then came the establishment of what Linz and Stepan (1996) call an "economic society," that is, a system of social guarantees and mediating institutions between the state and the market. Others (Brzezinski 1993; McFaul 1995) also draw attention to this circumstance. Following such a sequence of events,

persistent political democratization helped to ensure mass support for democracy during heavy economic reforms, and a social contract was provided to facilitate the economic transition.

In Russia, building democratic institutions was impeded. The state, which partly disintegrated and was partly destroyed, was not restored. Yeltsin created neither democratic political institutions that could support the economic reforms nor institutions to support the market economy and the social security system. Extremely painful economic reforms, which were not accompanied by any social contract and were not supported socially or politically, fell upon the unprotected population.

For theoretical and comparative purposes, one should go beyond the framework of the market's opposition to the command administrative system. In none of the countries that have successfully undertaken democratic transition during the last two decades was the market in its pure form. Here lies one of the fatal errors of the early strategists of

“The privatization of the state, with the help of state mechanisms, turned out to be a mere ‘grabization’ with the subsequent flow of capital out of the country.”

Russia's transit, who acted out of the belief that a “wild” market is enough to provide the economic and social basis needed for political democracy.

A fatal economic collapse on 17 August 1998 signaled the end of the era of political and economic reforms of Russia's postcommunist years, creating a “virtual economy” (Gaddy and Ickes 1998), conducted only formally and superficially according to monetarist models. In fact, the privatization of the state, with the help of state mechanisms, turned out to be a mere “grabization” with the subsequent flow of capital out of the country. This strategy was based on a false premise that the most important thing for successful marketization is appropriation of big capital by whatever means possible.

A comparative analysis of what actually happened in cases of successful democratic transitions shows that nowhere—not in Southern Europe, Latin America, or central and Eastern Europe—did the transition to democracy rely solely on the reconstruction of the classic ideal of the free market under a state functioning as a “night watchman.” Contrary to widespread misconception, the logic and actions of successful democratizers were quite opposite: first a radical political transformation (building effective institutions of democracy), then social reforms, which provide some sort of a social safety net and a social basis of support for democracy, to be followed by profound structural transformations of the economy (the establishment of a modern social market).

The ideological opposition of the market to state intervention does not work when applied to the present situation in Russia. The former administrative system of economic management, which already had disintegrated by the end of the

Gorbachev era, was completely crushed through the efforts of the reformers. But at the same time, many key administrative levers of influence continued to exist. I wish to emphasize once again that the previous economic system had broken down before an effective democratic power was created. As a result, there has appeared not so much an economic as a political market (which is semi-criminal), a market where bargaining between political and economic clans in key positions, combining power and property, takes place. Today, as distinct from the recent past, the cartels have become more vigorous and powerful. They no longer enter politics by delegating the representation of their interests to authorized persons, but are themselves becoming major and influential political players.

The players do not need a free market economy competition. They have adjusted themselves well and have also adjusted the state they privatized to their personal and corporate needs. It is the state, now upheld by shadowy political bargains, and the state subsidies, no matter how insubstantial, that are needed to preserve the monopoly of and the domination by certain cartels of the economy.

Another important element is that there is no full agreement between these cartels. On one hand, the ruling economic powers (in the sectors of finance and banking, fuel and energy, and other raw materials monopolies) are apparently ready for a new re-division of property and influence. On the other, the technological and production sectors of the military-industrial complex, which are not favored by the present economic policy and which will not survive without a change in the priorities of the state's economic policy, can prove to be quite ready for a revanche. The struggle between these forces goes on not in the economic but in the political sphere. It is a struggle for influence and control over the state's economic policy.

Presently in Russia, economy and politics are no less merged than they were in the Soviet era. The economy is actually a mixed one—although dominated by monopolies in the financial and raw materials sectors that rely on state support. It also contains a service sector large enough to have an impact on the criminalized market. The impact of this social segment is not so much economic as socio-psychological. In this segment, a stratum of active people oriented toward independent and individual goals is gradually emerging. This stratum can gradually become a social basis for real rather than declared market economy relations.

Analysis at the level of procedural factors also points to the traditional administrative method of carrying out political and economic reforms, a method that preserves and deepens the split between the authorities and society. The subordination of social groups, classes, and strata to the paternalistic vertical arrangement of state power was always characteristic of pre-Soviet Russia and the USSR. It was not society that created the state, but the state that shaped society. Social groups emerged not on the basis of articulation of manifest socioeconomic interests, but as bureaucratic creations (such as the nobility under Peter the Great). In post-Soviet Russia the embryonic democracy and its representative institutions began to emerge in a flat social landscape in which there were few signs of a differentiated social structure, of diverse socioeconomic interests, and of organizations to express them (McFaul 1993).

Moreover, the new authorities in Russia followed the tradition of carrying out reforms and transformations in an arbitrary way, according to a top-down power structure. In most successful democratic transitions, the reform initiative comes from above. However, an important and fundamental difference between Russia and others is that in the latter reforms from above develop in society as a whole. After society's involvement in the process, the functions of the authorities are usually reduced to providing institutional support for the processes in accordance with generally accepted democratic procedures.

Things are different in Russia. Here the new authorities' approach to reform was consistent with traditional administrative methods (mainly because of the new power-holders' ties with the old nomenklatura) throughout the postcommunist period. This created a split between the authorities and the society, a split that is pernicious for democracy and leads to a growing alienation of society from the authorities. According to sociological data, there is a growth of political indifference, a discreditation of authorities and political leaders, and a move from public interests to private ones. Certainly, positive factors can also be observed in these data: the "privatization" of one's personal sphere is about to replace a sense of traditional statism according to which an individual is subordinate to the state. However, private interest is perceived not merely as independent of the state and the authorities, but also as in direct contradiction to them. This does not provide favorable conditions for the development of the forms of political participation needed for a normal functioning of democratic institutions.

The democratic movement in Russia differed from other cases of democratic transit. Unlike the small movement of dissidents among the intelligentsia in the 1960s and 1970s, which was almost completely crushed during the Brezhnev period, the democratic movement at the beginning of perestroika was the product of communist reforms and had numerous ties to the Soviet system. As distinct from opposition movements in Eastern European socialist countries, it was engendered not by the civil society but by the state; it emerged within the Soviet system itself and was initiated by the system's most far-sighted and capable segments. By the mid-1980s, they came to the conclusion that liberalization was needed to preserve the foundations of the system.

For this reason, the sociopsychological basis of the democratic movement that emerged in the favorable atmosphere of perestroika did not have its roots in the dissident traditions of resistance to the regime (as was the case, for example, in Poland and Hungary), but was to a great extent shaped by a specific conformism and special kinds of career orientations. This in no way belittles the invaluable contribution of the democrats to the perestroika wave of democratization. Unlike many other democratic transits, the democratic opposition outside of the regime, to which centrist reformers and Gorbachev himself began to appeal for the purpose of expanding their social base, was created by the authorities. The fact that the democratic movement, which was initially controlled from above, eventually entered into a real confrontation with centrist reformers can be explained by various circumstances, including the institutionalization of political poles on each side of a split that go in opposite directions after the collapse of the political center.

In the consciousness of the democratic movement and also in mass consciousness, the idea of democracy initially assumed the character of an amorphous myth containing a general ideal image of the desired future. Because of this, in the early stages of the development of the democratic movement, both the myth of democracy and the myth of the market existed in a kind of symbiosis, as a magic means of solving all economic problems and achieving mass well-being at Western levels. However, in mass consciousness, this ideological symbiosis proved to be short-lived.

The destructive social consequences of the first economic reforms put an end to the idealization of the market in 1992. The dramatic political crisis and the shooting down of parliament in 1993 dealt a heavy blow to the illusions of democracy in Russia. Both circumstances led to the emergence of a profound ideological crisis, to a value vacuum in mass consciousness, and eventually to a crisis in the democratic movement. The crisis was predetermined by another circumstance—the betrayal of the democratic movement by the new regime that it had helped to establish. The Yeltsin regime, which put much emphasis on the personal charisma of the leader, did not follow a path that could have led to any real reforms. It neither built up effective institutions of democracy, nor reestablished the system of tough authoritarian power.

After renouncing the compromises that were sought, albeit inconsistently, by Gorbachev, and as part of the bid for a full and unconditional victory over the Soviet regime, Yeltsin and the radicals supporting him deliberately dismissed the possibility of achieving compromises. In other cases, pacts helped to formulate the rules of the democratic game, rules that were subsequently adhered to by the main political forces of the system. Because there was no such pact in Russia, a large segment of society was excluded from the democratic process until the 1993 elections that legalized the opposition.

It should be noted that the lack of a formal pact in no way prevented the second and third echelons of the Soviet nomenklatura from successfully “parachuting” and becoming part of the new system of authority and property. Today, however, there is reason to believe that a pact did take place *de facto*—at least some of its elements came into existence, but in a specific and distorted form.

One of the elements of this partial pact was the recognition by the political forces of Russia of formal elections as the only acceptable method of legitimization of power. However, as distinct from the logic of classic transitions to democracy, the pact was not a phase that preceded the democratization of an authoritarian regime. It was a stage of postcommunist transformation at which a new ruling class had already emerged and at which the different ruling groups had already sufficiently adjusted themselves to each other, found a common language, determined their interests and zones of intersection, and agreed on the rules of the game at the expense of the overwhelming mass of the population. As a result, the pact, which appeared *de facto* but in a limited form and among the most influential groups within the Russian elite, only deepens the gap between the authorities and the society and keeps society away from real politics.

Relying on his charisma as a leader who enjoys the support of everyone, Yeltsin deliberately ignored the need to carry out the subsequent phase of the classic model of successful democratization. He refused to hold the first free “founding” elections, which could have laid the foundations for a legitimate democratic power and facilitated a smooth and gradual development of a multi-party system in the country. It should be noted that Yeltsin refused to hold these first free elections in a situation when, according to the general logic of democratic transits and because of the particular situation that arose in Russia after the victory over the putschists in August 1991, radical democrats would have had the best chances of obtaining a vast majority in the parliament and initiating radical economic reforms supported by such a majority.

The lack of this most important initial institutional phase in the process of Russia’s democratic transit largely explains (or at least makes less unexpected) the results of the parliamentary elections in December 1993, which shocked most observers. The important thing to note is that the parliamentary elections were only formally and chronologically the “first” and founding ones. If held up against the general logic of democratic transits, a logic confirmed in most cases by historical fact, the 1993 elections were more reminiscent of “second” elections—that is, of “elections of disappointment.”

The initial shock stage of market economic reforms, a stage that lasted for a short time only, was forced on the population by an executive power that was already associated in mass consciousness with the radical democrats. The result of this very short and agonizing stage of shock therapy was the growth of mass discontent with the democratic authorities and their policies. This was the case in practically all similar phases of democratic transitions. Reforms have inevitably caused a public reaction—the pendulum of mass sentiment has swung to the left. It also happened in Russia during the first free parliamentary elections in December 1993.

When dealing with the characteristics of Russian democratic transition we have almost accomplished our methodological descent to the lowest level of microfactors, which relate to personal, individual factors. Only one factor can explain Yeltsin’s refusal to hold free parliamentary elections in the autumn of 1991: his reluctance to share the laurels of victory with persons who only recently had become his close associates in the democratic movement. As a result, some of the Russian democrats were co-opted into the new structures of authority, but a large section of the democratic movement remains “out of business,” in a position of disappointed observers who are becoming ever more critical of the status quo.

At the same microfactor level, we should also address the issue of the continued influence of authoritarian forces and tendencies. Against the background of disappointment with democracy and democrats in Russia, authoritarian tendencies manifest themselves clearly. These tendencies can be observed in the actions of both the authorities themselves and other forces. The authoritarian inclinations of President Yeltsin not only are visible in the directive and voluntarist style of his rule, but also are expressed in the constitution. It might be even more dangerous (especially in a situation where the president himself becomes a prism of

influence for groups and interests close to him) that there is no democratic control of the actions of the authorities.

Finally, I would like to refer to what Breslauer outlines as a fundamental contradiction in Yeltsin's approach to managing the transition: a contradiction between his personalism (patriarchal familism), on the one hand, and the need for institution building, on the other. "Yeltsin put far more energy into establishing and developing the formal structures of a capitalist democracy than he did into creating the regulatory institutions and organizational infrastructure required to make such a system function effectively" (Breslauer 1998, 6).

Conclusion

Can the above sketch of some specific features of Russian postcommunist transformation be useful for clearing up methodological and theoretical problems that relate to the phenomenon of democratic transitions? I have argued that specific conditions, departing points, and paths for transition (including the Russian democratic transition) can be considered as part of the current global democratic wave.

Because of its multidimensional character and its ongoing evolution, postcommunism can be conceptualized in various theoretical models. Among other things, we can find in postcommunism some of the elements identified with democratic transitions of the third wave. Given the specific features of postcommunism, there are nevertheless theoretical and practical reasons for considering the present sociopolitical dynamics in Russia as part of the context of democratic transition (which seldom leads to consolidated democracies) and for using the methodological and theoretical tools offered by transition theories to analyze it.

Examining some peculiarities of the transformation processes in postcommunist Russia allows us to outline their specific nature and draw some parallels with democratic transition in other countries. Exposition of what is common and what is specific as a result of a comparative analysis of different case studies (including the case of postcommunist Russia) may eventually contribute to development of a general integrated theory of postcommunism.

I do not see any insuperable contradiction between the structural and procedural approaches to the analysis of democratic transitions. A methodological synthesis of the approaches that focus on structural and procedural factors may be possible as a result of different research approaches, including comparative analysis of the conditions, context, and processes of democratic transitions. I also believe that the methodological model of the analysis of democratic transitions using the funnel of causality approach suggested above may be helpful in the analysis of concrete case studies and present a step toward systematization and consolidation of knowledge necessary for the development of a theory.

During the early stages of democratic transitions, endogenous (procedural) factors of democracy and democratization—such as the choice of strategies and tactics by major political actors—are of crucial importance. However this choice is in many ways conditioned by structural factors—cultural and political traditions, socioeconomic and external context, and so forth. These deep structural fac-

tors of democratization and democracy start to play a more important role at the later stages of democratic transition, especially at the stage of democratic consolidation. In the final analysis, these structural factors may explain why many countries that start the democratic transition may not reach its final stages.

NOTE

1. This idea in a most general form was suggested to me by Stein Larsen during a private discussion in September 1997. Later I found a reference to the “funnel of causality” methodology in a manuscript by James Mahoney and Jack Snyder (1995).

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