

Are Elections Mechanisms of Authoritarian Stability or Democratization?  
Evidence from Postcommunist Eurasia

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**Abstract**

Since the end of the Cold War, comparativists have radically reexamined the role that elections play in authoritarian contexts. One group argues elections are congruent with authoritarianism and actually help to stabilize non-democratic forms of rule. A second group has challenged this reasoning by arguing that elections can function as a mechanism for democratization of authoritarian regimes. In this paper we test whether elections have functioned as a mechanism of change or of neo-authoritarian stability in the postcommunist world. We generally find that elections neither promote democracy nor strengthen authoritarianism. However, we do find that in energy-rich states elections promote authoritarianism, though of a somewhat more benign sort. We also find that the mechanisms of electoral competitiveness thought to promote democracy function differently in the postcommunist context and explore this in greater detail through a paired case study of electoral mobilization in Slovakia and Belarus.

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## Introduction: The Meaning of Elections

There was a time in political science when the meaning of elections seemed pretty unambiguous. For Schumpeter (1947) *competitive* elections were the sine qua non of democracy. For Huntington (1991), elections, with a high degree of contestation and participation in a Dahlian sense (1971) were sufficient to mark the transition from autocracy to democracy. And non-competitive elections were seen as “window-dressing,” as inconsequential for the substance of rule. This assessment was based on observed practice in many authoritarian regimes.

For instance, in communist regimes across the world there were regular elections. However, the modal voting procedure was for there to be a single list of candidates. Voters were asked to vote up or down for that list. Those who either wanted to vote “no” or, when possible, to strike off individual candidates, faced the prospect of leaving the line of those dropping their ballot into an urn of affirmation, and depositing their ballot into a different urn altogether. And the legislatures that were elected under such procedures, convened only several days a year and were little more than rubber stamp bodies, rarely conducting debates or changing the substance of the legislation they ratified. Soviet-type elections were either seen as a means of legitimizing non-democratic regimes through rituals of pseudo-democracy (Fainsod 1963) or rituals of compliance that demonstrated subordination to non-democratic practices (Zaslavsky and Brym 1978).

Within the discipline, this simple dichotomy in the understanding of elections began to breakdown with the third wave of democratization. Authoritarian incumbents, particularly in Latin America, attempted to hold elections to ratify schemes of liberalized authoritarianism (i.e.

Brazil, Chile, Uruguay). For those studying these events this bred some skepticism over whether elections in themselves were constituent of democracy. Free and fair elections were qualified as only a necessary condition for democracy, and a number of prominent observers cautioned against engaging in the “electoralist” fallacy of assuming competitive elections are sufficient for declaring a country in transition to democracy (Linz 2000, O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986, Linz and Stepan 1996). Others also discussed how shortcomings in other political subsystems could pose hindrances to the emergence of full-blown democracy despite competitive elections (O'Donnell 1994, Valenzuela 1992).

Since 2000 or so, the importance of elections under authoritarian rule in the post-Cold War period has been conceptualized in two different and contradictory fashions. We will label these approaches “electoral authoritarianism” and “democratization by elections.” The former sees elections and the representative institutions they spawn as a stabilizing mechanism for authoritarian regimes. The latter argues that elections are dangerous for authoritarian leaders, and proposes that once introduced, can become a path to incremental democratization. Both of these streams challenge the notion that elections are sufficient for democracy, and that elections are inconsequential under authoritarian conditions. Of the earlier understandings about the place of elections in different regime types, the only one that these new lines of research leave intact is the notion that free and fair elections are a necessary condition for democracy.

One finds arguments concerning the stabilizing effect of elections on authoritarian rule both in the literature on regime change and in the study of more stable authoritarian regimes. In the former case this grew out of the failures of the transition paradigm in its more

teleological versions. As many countries, particularly in Africa and Eurasia, failed to consolidate democratic rule or backslid in a more authoritarian direction, while holding onto electoral institutions, a number of observers discussed the emergence of “hybrid” or “competitive authoritarian” regimes (Diamond 2002; van de Walle 2002, Schedler 2006, Levitsky and Way 2002, and Schedler 2002). The most comprehensive treatment of the phenomenon to date defines competitive authoritarian rule as “civilian regimes in which formal democratic institutions exist and are widely viewed as the primary means of gaining power, but in which incumbents’ abuse of the state places them at a significant advantage vis-a-vis their opponents” (Levitsky and Way 2010, 5). Through a combination of unfair competition, stilted media coverage, harrassment of political opponents, and irregularities in the voting process, competitive authoritarian rulers attempt to diminish the probability that they will lose elections. Under competitive authoritarianism rulers can reap at least some of the benefits of democratic elections (legitimation, coalition building, international recognition) while diminishing their prospects of losing power.

Parallel to the literature on competitive authoritarianism, there is a second literature that reevaluated the importance of elections in existing authoritarian regimes. This is the new institutionalist literature on authoritarian stability which argues that elections and the representative institutions they generate help to explain the persistence of authoritarianism. Whereas the “window-dressing” thesis was defensible in the context of communist monopartism and its monopoly on political institutions, this literature showed that in authoritarian contexts that permit greater degrees of social and institutional pluralism such claims were not sustainable (e.g. Mubarak’s Egypt, Mexico under the PRI). For instance, Gandhi

and Przeworski argue that dictatorships that hold undemocratic elections are more durable because they use legislatures as a forum to devise policy concessions (2007). Lust-Okar sees such institutions as a means to distribute patronage and other spoils (2009), whereas Magaloni touts their utility in signaling and sustaining credible commitments to supporters (2008).

In contrast to these theories of electoral authoritarian stability, a smaller number of authors have also argued that elections can become a mechanism for the democratization of authoritarianism. The idea of “democratization through elections” is associated with the work of Staffan Lindberg (2006). He has sought to demonstrate that elections are not just an end of democracy but can be a means of democratization. He makes his case in a study that examines the democratizing effect of elections in 44 African nations in 232 elections over 15 years. He finds that repeated multiparty elections facilitate the initiation of democracy and bring improvement in civil liberties and the quality of democracy. Marc Howard and Phillip Roessler (2006) have done important cross-national work on how elections in authoritarian contexts create opportunities to challenge dictatorship and initiate democracy. They also map out the dynamics of this process pinpointing situations which lead to “liberalizing electoral outcomes.”

With the shattering of the consensus of the meaning of elections for regime type in the discipline over the last ten years, we will try to understand the role of elections in the postcommunist context. Given the diverse outcomes in the region (classical transitions, neo-authoritarian outcomes, and color revolutions) it is a ripe testing ground to understand whether elections are mechanisms of authoritarian stabilization or democratization. In the next section we will discuss the theoretical reasons, given the contingent nature of cross-national findings and the contradictory nature of regional findings, why a new regional test is a

fruitful way to assess these competing theories and move the debate forward. We will then outline our hypotheses, present our research design, and our results. Overall, we find little evidence in the region that supports the idea of elections as democratizing mechanisms, but that there does seem to be a particular context in which elections reinforce authoritarianism. Ironically though, they reinforce a more moderate form of authoritarianism.

### Cross National and Regional Findings

A handful of researchers have now run large-scale cross-national tests to see if elections have an impact on the quality of democracy. Teorell and Hadenius (2009) find a positive correlation between the number of elections held and the Freedom House civil liberties score in a sample of 150 countries over a thirty year period. They note however that the substantive effect is quite modest requiring an out of sample election frequency to move the score one point on the scale in fully specified models. Roessler and Howard (2009) show that in the period at the end of the Cold War all types of authoritarian regimes (electoral or otherwise) exhibited the same propensity to undergo democratic transition. About five years after that historical juncture though, competitive authoritarian regimes have begun to exhibit a greater propensity to make transitions to democracy than other types of authoritarianism. Jason Brownlee (2009b) does not find evidence of vulnerability of electoral authoritarian regimes but does find that when they fail robust electoral competition enhances their prospects of being succeeded by electoral democracies. However, in a follow up study (2009a) he finds that competitive forms of electoral authoritarianism are more prone to make a transition to electoral democracy, but that non-competitive electoral authoritarianism exhibits greater stability.

All of these findings are somewhat contingent in their conclusions.<sup>1</sup> Teorell and Hadenius acknowledge that the effect they uncover is quite weak. Roessler and Howard show different effects in different time periods, and in their design, as countries democratize, the regional composition of the sample changes as well. We thus are confronted with the dilemma of whether it is time or sample composition that produces this finding. Brownlee's work presents evidence that is supportive of the notion of elections as a democratizing mechanisms for some forms of authoritarianism, while promoting survival in others.

There have also been studies that examine these questions in regional contexts. These provide more definitive findings. Lindberg (2009a) has updated his earlier analysis of Africa and confirmed his initial finding on the democratizing effects of elections. However, McCoy and Hartlyn did not uncover a similar effect in Latin America (2009). Had they found support there, in a region marked by classic transitions to democracy with founding elections, this would have represented strong confirmation of Lindberg's views. However, since a negative finding was to be expected in this context, the question remains whether Lindberg's findings are a case of African exceptionalism. Lust-Okar (2009) writing on the Middle East also does not find much evidence of elections as a mechanism for democratization. Given that the recent challenges to regimes in the Middle East have been mounted by protest campaigns unlinked to elections, the logic of her argument is by no means undermined by recent events.

The significance of elections in electoral authoritarian postcommunist countries has also drawn substantial attention because of the "color revolutions" -- the Bulldozer Revolution in Yugoslavia (2000), the Rose Revolution in Georgia (2003), the Orange Revolution in Ukraine

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<sup>1</sup> For an account that examines the contingent nature of findings on elections and authoritarianism in greater detail, see Schedler 2009a.

(2004), and the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan (2005). There have also been abortive attempts to use elections and protest to bring down authoritarian regimes in several other states. This combination of success and failure has allowed small-n analysts to investigate the sources of success in such challenges to postcommunist authoritarianism. Different authors highlight somewhat different factors (Beissinger 2007, Bunce and Wolchik 2009, McFaul 2005, Moraski 2009) but all situate the possibility for change within electoral challenges to authoritarian incumbents. One such example is the “electoral model,” a package of organizational strategies and political responses, comprised of the formation of a united opposition party political bloc, strong mobilization of civil society in support of democratization, pressure on the regime for free and fair elections, and strong voter mobilization. There also have to be means in place to independently monitor voting outcomes independent of official results and a willingness to engage in extensive popular counterdemonstration in the case of electoral fraud by the incumbents (Bunce and Wolchik 2011, 332-3; also see Beissinger 2007, 61).

The general understanding of the literature on postcommunist Eurasia is that elections have been an important instrument of democratization, and thus is seen as a region which is generally supportive of the Lindberg thesis. The color revolutions, celebrated as successful cases of revivification of stalled transition processes or redemocratization, were seen as strong evidence of this. With hindsight however, the results have been ambiguous. Table 1 below presents democracy scores from Freedom House’s *Nations in Transit* series for the successful electoral challenges to postcommunist dictatorship as outlined in Bunce and Wolchik (2011).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Nations in Transit* looks at democratic progress over several dimensions in a select group of democratizing countries, and thus goes into more depth than normal Freedom House scores. The democracy score is a mean of rankings in all dimensions.

[Table 1 here]

The effect of electoral confrontations with authoritarian incumbents shows a mixed record of improvement in quality of democracy. Curiously, while the color revolutions dislodged incumbent authoritarian leaders, the only unambiguous case of democratic progress would seem to be Serbia/Montenegro. Other “non-revolutionary” cases of substantial improvement include Slovakia and Croatia. The overall impact on the level of democracy in the other three color revolutions, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine is negligible, even slightly negative in the first two cases. Overall, some cases seem to provide evidence of the potential democratizing effect of elections, whereas others have seem to have returned to their starting points following brief more democratic interregna.

#### Framing Hypotheses

So where does this leave us? Given the somewhat contradictory and contingent findings of the large-n literature, the differences between studies that concentrate on single regions and the seemingly mixed record of the color revolutions, what would be the utility of reexamining the impact of elections in postcommunist Eurasia? The region provides a diverse sample to test the impact of elections. On the one hand there is a smaller group of states in Central Europe and the Baltics that are seen as having made relatively smooth and rapid transitions to democracy. However, many successor states of the former Soviet Union, and some of the countries in the Balkans have either exhibited unstable regime trajectories or have installed more or less competitive forms of electoral authoritarianism (Levitsky and Way 2010).

Unlike earlier studies on the region that have concentrated on understanding the causal logic of color revolutions, our approach includes a strong large-n, cross-national, and

quantitative component. We will try to ascertain whether elections serve as a mechanism for authoritarian stability or for a more protracted process to democratization, akin to what Lindberg has uncovered in Africa. While we will perform a replication of Lindberg's study for the region, our intention in doing so is broader. This replication is nested within a field of other large-n findings, both global and regional as discussed above. The additional "observation" provided by our replication will allow us to use a small-n comparison of results, where regions are the units of observation, to generalize about the role of elections in regime trajectories since the end of the Cold War.

As we have noted, earlier studies tried to find a democratizing impact of elections in Latin America and the Middle East and North Africa. Whether we duplicate Lindberg's result or not we will have new evidence on whether the democratizing impact of elections is confined to Africa. If the democratizing effect of elections holds in the postcommunist sphere, then we can conclude that democratization by elections is not an instance of African exceptionalism. Failure to find a democratizing impact would not be tantamount to evidence of the stabilizing impact that theories of authoritarian institutions and competitive authoritarianism posit for elections. For that to be the case we would need to produce findings that elections promote authoritarian stability.

Variability in regional findings can also help us to understand why large-n research with global samples has been so inconclusive. If our study also finds that elections have unique causal effects in yet another region, we need to reconsider whether global level research is the best way to understand the role that elections are coming to play in the post-Cold-War world.

This is precisely why duplication of a study nested within a comparable set of results can provide new theoretical insights.

The logic of our testing is a least similar systems design. This would mean that if we confirm Lindberg this will be a strong test. However because of the radical differences between postcommunist Eurasia and sub-Saharan Africa, it is important for us to frame our tests in a way that accounts for essential differences between the two. The first hypothesis that we frame is an explicit test of Lindberg. The other three are generated by important region-specific factors that need to be accounted for in any consideration of democratic quality in the region.

The first test tries to replicate Lindberg's major finding for Africa on our sample of postcommunist countries. Lindberg showed that sequential elections (whether legislative or presidential) improved the quality of democracy as reflected in enhanced civil liberties scores (2006, 2009a). Thus we expect that, *uninterrupted sequences of elections should improve the protection of civil liberties* (H1).

Given the use of electoral means to remove or provoke showdowns with dictators in competitive authoritarian regimes in a number of cases in the postcommunist space, we would also expect that competitiveness of elections would be an important factor in the improvement of the quality of democracy. Thus we expect to find that *more competitive elections should enhance the protection of civil liberties* (H2).

Given the role that popular and electoral mobilization has played in the weakening of competitive and electoral authoritarian regimes in the region as well as other parts of the world, we would also expect electoral participation to enhance the quality of democracy. However, we do not believe that we will find a pattern that conforms to the widespread

expectation that higher participation will enhance the quality of democracy (Lijphart 1999). Lindberg finds this to be the case in Africa (2006), but we believe that a very different historical pattern of development will yield different results in postcommunist Eurasia.

The conventional association of participation and quality of democracy is based on the experience of the longstanding democracies of North America and Western Europe where barriers to participation was the essential roadblock to full democratization. Lindberg's findings on Africa are based on a regional pattern where postcolonial experiments with democracy gave way to an authoritarianism that triggered a wave of "departicipation" following an upsurge of popular mobilization in the struggle for independence (Kasfir 1974). Communist regimes on the other hand mobilized their populations in shows of support at election time. Such plebiscitary exercises in obedience led to near 100 percent turnout. In the postcommunist era it is important not to interpret turnout as a sign of democratic exuberance. On the contrary it may well represent the retention of authoritarian mobilization capacities by less than fully democratic successor regimes.

Still, we do not claim that higher levels of participation should always inhibit civil liberties. Our expectation is that higher levels of participation should have a positive effect on democratic quality up to point in line with the logic of those who see higher levels of voluntary involvement by citizens as good for democracy. However, exceedingly high levels of turnout, which are common enough in the region, are more likely to be the product of mobilization by the authoritarian state apparatus or even outright fraud.<sup>3</sup> Thus we expect that *increases in*

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<sup>3</sup> There is widespread reporting of the continued practice of forced turnout, ballot box stuffing, and fraudulent reporting in some postcommunist countries (Herron 2011, Altstadt 1997, JEOMT 2000, OSCE/UN 1996). Examples would include the 98 percent turnout in the

*electoral turnout will have a positive effect on the protection of civil liberties, until a threshold, when it will begin to have a negative effect (H3).*

Finally, given the centrality of the “resource curse” in explaining poor democratic performance of the countries in the sample selected here (Fish 2005), this paper will also test whether elections have a contingent effect based on level of energy production. Similar tests in Lindberg’s work (2009a) did not yield significant findings for Africa. Early work on the resource curse and regime presented contradictory findings with Karl (1987) arguing that oil could strengthen democracy, and subsequent investigators like Ross (2001) and Herb (2005) showing a negative effect. More recent work on the effect of oil on regime argues for contingent impacts based on context (Smith 2004, 2007; Dunning 2008; Luong and Weinthal 2010). In the postcommunist context, the replacement of bureaucratic allocation by markets open to the world economy provoked sharp contractions in manufacturing. In energy producing and exporting countries this enhances the importance of the energy sector in the economy. Thus based on Dunning’s expectation that energy sector domination of the economy hurts prospects for democracy, we do not expect elections to have a democratizing effect in countries with energy intensive economies.

Such a finding, too, would be congruent with the latest version of Lindberg’s theory on elections as a democratizing mechanism (2009b). One of the factors that he highlights as central is the costs of repression for authoritarian incumbents. We believe that if they possess the ample resources of a rentier state, it will be easier to forgo extensive repression through material incentives for political supporters. Thus, *in countries with high degree of resource*

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1993 Azerbaijani presidential elections, and the 100 percent turnout in the Turkmen elections of 1992, 1994, and 1999.

*dependence elections will not have a democratizing effect but will instead work to stabilize authoritarianism* (H4). We now turn to our research design.

### Research Design

#### *The Sample*

Our unit of analysis is the country-election cycle. In order to test whether the Lindberg thesis travels beyond Sub-Saharan Africa we replicate his coding (2006) for the postcommunist countries. Our sample includes all thirty three Eurasian postcommunist countries which became independent, held elections, and/or attempted transitions to democracy in the early 1990s (see Appendix 1). We include all elections in the period up to 2011, both the direct election of executives and legislative elections. Following Lindberg we exclude referenda, partial elections, and the first rounds of presidential elections. Parliamentary and presidential elections are coded separately even if they are held the same day. For countries that elect presidents directly, there are two types of “first” election, presidential and parliamentary.

The dataset includes 257 elections. On average, the countries in the sample held 4.9 parliamentary and 2.9 presidential elections between 1990 and 2011. Bulgaria, Latvia, Moldova, and Poland held the highest number of parliamentary elections -- seven, whereas Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Romania each held 6 presidential elections in the same period. Newly independent Kosovo and the short-lived Union of Serbia and Montenegro held the fewest number of elections, only 1 each, whereas Georgia, Poland, and Romania have experienced 12 in total, since the fall of communism.

### *Dependent Variable*

Our main dependent variable is the quality of democracy and following the previous literature we measure it using Freedom House's Civil Liberties scores (CL). The CL index ranks the protection of civil liberties on a 1-to-7 scale with 7 representing the lowest level of protection. The index takes into account freedom of expression, conscience, association, and assembly, as well as rule of law and individual autonomy (Freedom House 2011a). It is available since 1972 for a broad cross-section of countries and thus covers our whole sample.

We chose to use the civil liberties score for three reasons. First, because the literature which tries to assess the impact of elections on democracy uses it and we want our findings to be comparable. If we were to use a different operationalization, any difference between our findings and the extent ones could be attributed to measurement.

Second, if we used a more holistic measure like the combined freedom house score, polity, or other less frequently used graded measures, we would create endogeneity problems. Such measures often include voting rights. The utility of the Freedom House scores is that they separate political and civil liberties.

Third the civil liberties scores are particularly useful in this context because they are an attribute of democracy that is substantially weaker in hybrid regimes. By looking at civil liberties scores one can gauge whether the quality of democracy is improving. In this way the use of the index allows us to move away from a minimalist procedural understanding of democracy to a thicker rights based conceptualization (Coppedge 1999, 468).<sup>4</sup>

### *Independent Variables*

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<sup>4</sup> In cases in which the election falls in the first two months of the year, we use the CL scores for the previous year.

Our main independent variables are the number of uninterrupted elections in each country as well as several attributes of electoral quality. We code the total number of uninterrupted elections in each country. Some countries have two separate electoral sequences, because they held both parliamentary and presidential elections. Parliamentary regimes have a single sequence. Three countries, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, have two first presidential elections because Nursultan Nazarbayev, Islam Karimov, and Saparmurat Niyazov either postponed elections to an unspecified time in the future or held uncontested plebiscites rather than competitive elections.

To measure participation, we look at voter turnout in each election (IDEA 2011). The average turnout in all elections in the sample is 69 percent. The lowest level of turnout, a mere 32 percent, was registered in the Lithuanian parliamentary election of 2008. The maximum was one hundred percent, which was reported in the 1992 presidential, and the 1994 and 1999 parliamentary elections in Turkmenistan.

To measure the competitiveness of elections, we use the relative vote shares of the winners and the first runner up. A decrease in the winner's vote share or an increase in first runner up's vote share represents an improvement in competitiveness. When parties contest elections as coalitions or as identified groupings of pro-government parties, we coded the share of the coalition or the party group, rather than simply assigning the second party as opposition.

No one source contained the electoral data that we needed for this project, thus we compiled the data from several sources. These included data handbooks (Nohlen et al. 2001, 2010; Rose and Munro 2003), websites (IFES 1992, 2010; Popescu and Hannavy 2002; OSCE/UN 1996, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2004, 2009; IPU 2011; Regan, Dowling, and Clark 2011; Carr 2011),

the New York Times archive, and the websites of the Central Election Committees of various countries.

Finally, we use Smith and Smith's (2011) measure of fuel income per capita to test for evidence of the resource curse. It includes both petroleum and natural gas income. It has several advantages over competing measures including not only taking account of exports, and being widely available and easily reproducible for a large number of countries over long periods of time.

### *Control Variables*

To control for the impact of development on democracy (Lipset 1959; Boix and Stokes 2003; Przeworski and Limongi 1997) we include the natural log of GDP per capita in our regressions (World Bank 2010). We also include two variables to control for the polarization of important social cleavages and how this might affect the quality of democracy. We capture the potential for ethnic polarization by including a measure of ethnic fractionalization (Alesina et al. 2003). We also include the percentage of urban population in all countries to control for potential social polarization because of the salience of urban-rural divide in the postcommunist context (Whitefield 2002). These data also come from the World Bank (2010).

Several studies on postcommunist transformation (Kopstein and Reilly 2000; Smyth 2006; Pop-Eleches 2009) found that connection to the EU had a positive effect on the quality of democracy. Therefore we have included a binary variable for EU membership as a control. Another potential explanatory variable is presidential power. Several authors have found a significant negative relationship between strong presidential powers and the quality of democracy in postcommunist countries (Fish 2005, Smyth 2006, Pop-Eleches 2009). We used

the latest version of Frye's presidential powers index (ppi) to control for the potential negative impact of strong presidents on the quality of democracy (1997).

### *Methods*

To establish base-line similarities in the differences between the functioning of electoral mechanisms in Postcommunist Eurasia and Africa, we present a descriptive analysis of the data and run a variety of simple statistical procedures to examine the level, development and direction of the main variables over time in a fashion comparable to Lindberg (2006). ANOVA tests evaluate the overall democratic qualities of elections and civil liberties of countries by using the FH electoral democracy score to differentiate elections according to their fairness. Spearman's correlations are used to examine the variation of civil liberties and the quality of elections over electoral cycles, including levels of participation and political competition.

Our main multivariate statistical tests use ordered probit regressions to test the effect of uninterrupted electoral cycles, the energy curse and a range of other electoral and control variables on CL scores.<sup>5</sup> We use ordered probit regressions because CL scores are essentially categorical, Likert-like scales (Thames and Robbins 2007). The index has multiple levels and the distance between different values is not necessarily equivalent. Though we believe that the ordered probit is a more appropriate procedure, we also ran OLS regressions as a robustness check, following the earlier literature in this vein (Lindberg 2006, 2009a; Pop-Eleches 2009). The results generated were quite similar.

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<sup>5</sup> Clustered-robust standard errors and log pseudo likelihood values are reported.

Descriptive Results: Change in Competitiveness, Participation, and Civil Liberties over Time

This section examines whether the patterns of change in the quality of democracy over continuous electoral cycles identified in Africa hold in our postcommunist sample. If the patterns Lindberg (2006) observed hold in the postcommunist context, we should observe improvements in electoral competition and participation levels, as well as civil liberties over cycles of consecutive elections. In addition if elections are free and fair, we should observe higher levels of competition, participation, and civil liberties. Failure to observe such patterns of improvement would alert us to potential differences in the impact of repeated elections across the regions.

Table 2 displays how the vote shares of winners and losers, voter turnout, and CL scores change over electoral cycles. We observe that there are stark differences between countries that hold flawed as opposed to free elections. The mean levels of all these indicators differ significantly between the two ( $p < .001$ ). Our discussion compares the levels of competitiveness, participation, and civil liberties in our sample, as well as patterns of change across elections for all three.

[Table 2 here]

We begin with a discussion of competitiveness. In more competitive systems we would expect the gap in vote shares between winners and losers to be narrower. In free elections the mean vote share of the winner is 44 percent whereas it goes up to 64 percent in flawed elections. In a similar vein, the losing party (or candidate) receives an average of twice as many votes (26 percent) in free elections compared with flawed elections (13 percent).

However, when we focus on change in vote share across electoral cycles, the findings do not show radical differences between the two groups. In free and fair systems the winner's share does not really change across elections and in flawed elections it fluctuates but moves in a downward direction. The aggregate trend over both sets is slightly negative but the correlation coefficient falls below normal levels of statistical significance ( $p=.209$ ). The loser's vote share, on the other hand, increases over both free and flawed elections, with a higher pace for free elections. In the first competitive election, a losing candidate wins on average 22 percent of the vote, whereas in the fourth and beyond this increases to 28 percent. Similarly, there is a slight increase (2 percent) in flawed elections. The aggregate improvement in loser's share of the vote is statistically significant ( $p<.01$ ) across all elections. Overall, free elections remain more competitive than flawed elections, but both subsamples demonstrate increased competitiveness, consistent with what Lindberg shows in Africa.

The results on electoral participation are in line with the differences we hypothesized for our postcommunist sample. Average turnout levels are lower in free elections -- 66 percent, compared to 76 percent in flawed ones. Participation diminishes over time in both free and flawed elections. In flawed elections, mean participation levels peak at the first election at 82 percent and drop down to 69 percent by the fourth and higher elections. In free elections, the decline in participation is similar, about 13 percent, decreasing from 73 to 60 percent from first to fourth and higher number of elections. The drop in turnout across all observations is statistically significant ( $p<.001$ ). Again this is starkly at odds with Africa, where Lindberg observes increasing turnout both in free elections and across all elections (2006, 57, 76).

Unlike the differences we see in competitiveness and turnout in the postcommunist sample, CL scores, as in Africa, improve (go down) over elections. Looking at the bottom of Table 2, we see how with free and fair elections average CL scores improve from a value of 2.9 in the first election to 2.2 in the fourth and later. However, even when elections are flawed, CL scores do improve modestly, from 5 at the first election to 4.7 at fourth election and beyond ( $p < .001$ ). Thus, regardless of the nature of the election, the descriptive data suggest that successive elections help to improve the quality of democracy across the region, especially in electoral democracies.

Although we observe improvements in CL scores across electoral cycles, such descriptive findings are only tentative must not be treated as definitive. Until we control for those factors that may also affect the quality of democracy, we cannot assume this holds for postcommunist Eurasia. Thus in the next section we report the results of a series of ordered probit models.

### Multivariate Results

The results of the analysis we present below do not provide evidence that uninterrupted electoral cycles improve civil liberties scores and by extension promote democratization. Nor do our results confirm that electoral institutions stabilize authoritarian regimes, except under very specific conditions and those results are not fully congruent with what the literature on authoritarian institutions tells us. In the models where other important independent variables are controlled for, elections do not have a significant effect on civil liberties, nor is the direction of the variable's effect stable over the models. This supports neither the electoral authoritarianism nor the democratization by elections thesis, but rather contributes to the literature on the role of elections in a nuanced way.

In contrast, when interacted with resource income, elections slightly improve civil liberties, as we shall see; only mediating the negative effect of resource income on civil liberties. This finding only conditionally supports the contentions of the democratization by elections literature. The direction of the change under these circumstances is partly congruent with Lindberg's expectations for improvements in civil liberties in terms of the expected difference between resource rich and resource poor countries. It seems elections, per se, do not improve civil liberties in postcommunist countries, but only mitigate the negative effect of resource income by promoting milder forms of authoritarianism in resource rich contexts.

Model 1 in Table 3, a minimalist specification that includes our four main electoral variables -- turnout and electoral competitiveness (the vote shares of the winner and the runner up), and the number of uninterrupted elections -- seems on the face of it generally to support the idea that elections promote the stronger protection of civil liberties. As expected the number of elections, decreasing vote shares by winners, and increases in the loser's vote also improve civil liberties (lower scores in the CL index). The one finding that does not fit with the African results is that higher turnout is significantly related to less protection of civil liberties.

[Table 3 here]

In Model 2 when we control for other possible explanatory variables, the effect of elections on CL scores disappears and the direction of the effect changes. The impact of winner's vote share also disappears, though the impact of loser's share and turnout remain consistent. It is important to point out how loser's share remains essential for promoting the protection of civil liberties across all models, thus providing strong support for the second

hypothesis. More specifically, compared to a country where the loser of an election receives only negligible votes, a country with a relatively strong opposition (with a share of 34 percent of votes, a standard deviation over the average) will have .32 higher probability of having CL scores of 3 or better. The change of probabilities is largely due to the decrease in CL scores of 4 and 5, where most of the competitive authoritarian countries lie. Thus, especially in competitive authoritarian settings, for the competitiveness of elections and its effect on civil liberties, the strength of opposition is critical. A vibrant, mobilized opposition is essential for the protection of civil liberties, controlling for all other factors (see the casework below on Slovakia and Belarus). Finally, as expected, national income and EU membership also have a positive effect on CL scores, whereas a greater degree of presidential power has a negative impact. When we incorporate resource dependence in Model 3, it has a significant effect on diminishing civil liberties. Substantively, the effect is strong -- compared to a country with negligible resource income, a country with a \$1,000 per capita resource income share has an increased probability of having civil liberties score of five or higher by about .11, holding other variables at their means.

Although we did not find a significant or even a consistent directional effect of uninterrupted electoral cycles on civil liberties scores, hypotheses 4 predicted that the impact of uninterrupted elections would be blunted by resource production. Thus, we interacted the number of elections with per capita resource income to see if there is a conditional impact of energy income on whether elections promote authoritarian or democratic outcomes. In both models 5 and 6 we observe a significant interaction effect between the number of elections and energy income per capita.

In order to understand the interaction effect of elections and resource income, we need to compare probabilities of civil liberties across the number of elections, per capita resource income, and their interaction (Long 2009). This allows us to gauge the effects of elections between resource rich and resource poor countries. In Figure 1 we display differences in the probabilities of attaining different CL scores of resource rich and resource poor (no resource income) countries.<sup>6</sup> When we gauge the effect of the interaction, it is generally supportive of what we theorized. The four panels plot the differences in the probability of attaining specific CL scores for countries that are resource rich and resource poor along with 90 percent confidence intervals. We omit the panels for those scores where the interaction effect is insignificant.<sup>7</sup> These panels both demonstrate the negative impact of resource income on the protection of civil liberties but also show how elections reduce the gap between resource rich and resource poor countries. Finally, the decreasing gap between the probabilities across the number of elections hints at why elections on their own are not statistically significant.

[Figure 1 here]

Panels 1 and 2 show how resource rich countries have a lower probability of strongly protecting civil liberties. Compared to a resource rich country, a resource poor country has a .59 higher probability to have better CL scores (2 or 3) at the first election. The trend across panels shows the gap in civil liberties protection between the two decreasing. By the sixth

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<sup>6</sup> High resource income countries include Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Turkmenistan. These countries have capita resource income of at least \$1834 per year for at least one election-year in the sample.

<sup>7</sup> We only display probability difference panels for CL scores of 2, 3, 5, and 6. Parallel trends exist for the other three. But, the probability changes for CL score of 4 are insignificant, whereas the changes for 1 and 7 are both negligible and insignificant ( $p > .1$ ). Therefore, we omit those panels.

election a resource poor country would only have a .25 lower probability of having better CL scores (2 or 3). Despite the continued underperformance, this decreasing gap between resource rich and resource poor countries, as well as the absolute probabilities for each, could be read as a kind of tentative support for Lindberg as resource-rich countries with a greater number of elections exhibit marginally stronger protection of civil liberties compared to elections earlier in their cycles. However, in the context of our sample, this improvement translates into less harsh forms of authoritarianism, not democratic regime change in a classical sense.

Although holding successive elections seems to promote somewhat less authoritarian political development at high levels of resource income, by the sixth election, such countries are still predicted to be more authoritarian (panels 3 and 4) than resource poor countries over all electoral cycles, despite the downward trend ( $p < .1$ ). Looking at the absolute probability changes for resource rich contexts (rather than relative comparisons with resource poor counterparts), holding elections only increase the probability of a CL score of 4 thus promoting a milder form of authoritarianism. The CL score of 4 become .25 more likely, largely at the expense of scores of 5 and 6. Thus elections in high resource income countries on balance mitigate the harshness of authoritarianism primarily within the range of CL scores that we normally associate with authoritarianism. This finding suggests that when a country possesses substantial resource income, this presents the authoritarian leadership with the option of pursuing a form of rentierism (Ross 2001), where they can buy political support and forgo full blown repression of the population. This is an unexpected finding in that elections move the civil liberties scores in the direction anticipated by Lindberg, but most notably within the

confines of the range of authoritarian political outcomes. Thus the impact is to stabilize authoritarianism in line with the expectations of theories of electoral authoritarianism.

We now return to our findings on turnout, and how in models 1-3, electoral turnout was a significant predictor of higher (more repressive) CL scores. This confirms our expectation that participation would not operate according to conventional expectations in the postcommunist region. However, we do not trust these particular findings given our expectations of a curvilinear, inverted U, relationship. In order to model our expectations, we introduced a quadratic term in models 4 and 6. The quadratic term should not only correct for the association between authoritarianism and high turnout, but will also test if low turnout is dangerous for democracy. This is precisely what we see.<sup>8</sup>

Figure 2 explicitly contrasts the findings for the models that include only turnout and those which include the quadratic term. The figure shows how the cumulative probabilities of different levels of civil liberties change with levels of turnout. Here, it is necessary to look at the distance between the curves at specific values of turnout, to understand the specific probability values for certain CL scores. As expected from the turnout only models, the first panel shows how an increase in the levels of turnout decreases the probability of observing a CL score of 2 or better. Starting with a probability of .65 at around 20 percent turnout, the probability of observing a CL score of 2 or better decreases to .02 at 100 percent turnout. Conversely, the probability of observing a CL score of 4 or worse steadily rises from .08 to .87 when turnout increases from 20 to 100 percent.

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<sup>8</sup> In addition to the significance levels of the individual variables in the ordered probit regression models, we also employed an LR test to test the joint significance of both turnout and the squared turnout variable. The test rejects the null hypothesis that the effects of turnout and squared turnout variables are simultaneously equal to zero ( $LR\chi^2=3.68$ ,  $p < .1$ ).

[Figure 2 here]

When we plot the effect of the quadratic term on CL scores in the second panel of Figure 2, we see in contrast that the turnout has a positive effect on CL scores up until around the fifty percent level. At this point the probability of having a CL score of three or lower hits its maximum and then begins to decline. Higher (authoritarian) CL scores (above 3) start with a probability of about .61 at low levels of turnout, fall to .38 in the middle range and begin to grow especially after 60 percent turnout.

This finding supports our theory on how participation should work differently in postcommunist contexts. It also shows that elections can function as tools of authoritarian control when dictators can mobilize populations to participate in plebiscitary approval-type voting. This is very consistent in what we see in the cases in our dataset. Elections, in countries like Azerbaijan, Czechoslovakia, Mongolia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan have reported 95 percent turnout or higher in at least one of their elections. These, except for the founding first elections in Czechoslovakia and Mongolia, include some of the least competitive, authoritarian cases in the dataset.

Finally, our data are ambiguous with regard to the claim that a surge of opposition mobilization is crucial to liberalization in the postcommunist context and beyond (Bunce and Wolchik 2009, 2011; Schedler 2009a; Howard and Roessler 2006). In the six cases covered in table one above, the four color revolutions as well as Slovakia and Croatia, turnout only went up in two elections: in Slovakia from 75 to 84 percent from 1994 to 1998 and in Croatia from 69 to 77 from 1995 to 2000. Yet in the other four elections turnout stayed the same or even dropped a little in comparison to the previous election. In the Georgian parliamentary election

of 2003 turnout fell to 60 percent from 68 percent in 1999. The corresponding figure in Kyrgyzstan is a drop from 64 to 57 percent from 2000 to 2005. Both Ukraine, from 75 to 77 percent turnout in the presidential election of 2004, and Yugoslavia from 63 to 64 percent in the parliamentary contest of 2000, stayed essentially the same.

However, we do not think the idea that change is predicated on civil society mobilization around elections in the postcommunist case is refuted by this finding. It is possible that this would not lead to an absolute increase in *electoral* participation given the understanding of turnout that informed our hypotheses. If the issue of democratizing change in postcommunist societies is decided by the strength of the authoritarian state's mobilization capacities vis-à-vis an insurgent civil society, then it makes sense to think in terms of the relative mobilization/demobilization of supporters of different camps. Autonomous mobilization of civil society may well impede the ability of the authoritarian leadership to mobilize the apathetic to the polls to signal their acquiescence to dictatorship, while at the same time emboldening potential opponents of the regime to turn out and vote. This could well change the balance between regime supporters and opponents in elections. This is consistent with our statistical findings on both loser's share and turnout.

To both provide more concrete evidence on the importance of relative mobilization capacities of the authoritarian state and its political opposition, and to understand if the causal logic provided by the literature on the color revolutions holds water, we next turn to a paired comparison of two cases where the opposition pursued a strategy of electoral democratization, Slovakia and Belarus. We choose these two cases because the first is a success which has served as a model for the electoral route to democratization and the second has been a

repeated failure in its attempts to soften entrenched dictatorship (Bunce and Wolchik 2011). The Slovak opposition confronted an elected leader, Vladimir Mečiar, who attempted to install a competitive authoritarian regime and failed, whereas the authoritarian Lukashenka regime in Belarus has been successful in defending its rule despite repeated electoral challenges.

### Relative Mobilization Capacity and Electoral Change in Slovakia and Belarus

Inherent in any authoritarian electoral situation is the prospect of defeat for the incumbents. However, the degree to which competition remains under the control of the incumbents, the smaller the prospect of such a defeat remains. In the electoral model of change, the success of democratic challengers is predicated on a broad mobilization of the political opposition and previously depoliticized civil society groups. In cases where the opposition can effectively turn out voters, win elections, and make them stick via social mobilization if necessary, democratization via elections is possible.<sup>9</sup>

In the postcommunist world, authoritarian incumbents have a number of tools at their disposal to block such effective democratic mobilization. Resort to violence and repression are tools of last resort, but are not preferred given that a wide application is likely to undermine the notion that the regime is truly competitive and the benefit this conveys (Schedler 2009b). Communist regimes were quintessential mobilization regimes where the official public space was monopolized by mass transmission-belt organizations under monoparty control. Especially in those cases where local communist leaders were able to maintain themselves in power by

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<sup>9</sup> Possible but not inevitable – in a number of cases successful electoral challengers have not been able to institutionalize democracy (e.g. Ukraine) or have established their own competitive authoritarian regimes (e.g. Armenia or Georgia).

donning the mantle of reform or nationalism, both the apparatuses of the state and regime-sponsored mass organizations remained at their disposal. However, with the waning of ideological fervor bureaucratic compliance became to a greater extent dependent on satisfying the material interests of the bureaucracy, though that process was clearly underway in the late communist period (Jowitt 1993). Thus postcommunist apparatuses of power had to be cultivated and maintained through more extensive networks of patronage. Depending on the successor state of the former Soviet Union in question the transformation from state socialism to neopatrimonial dictatorship was not particularly sharp (Darden 2001, 2008; Collins 2004; Radnitz 2010; McGlinchey 2011; Zon 2001).

State apparatuses and residual mass organizations became the means by which authoritarian incumbents could both mobilize voters in plebiscitary elections, and continue to dominate the public space. Here the use of the fruits of privatization are quite useful in maintaining control of subordinates and keeping the public sphere and public space firmly under regime control. In particular the control of major forms of media and of organizations with protest capacity, such as trade unions, has remained quite useful. In the latter case Robertson (2011) and Radnitz (2010) have shown in some contexts that protest can be as much as about elite manipulation as mass discontent. An illustration of the former would be Vladimir Putin's exile or arrest of several oligarchs who have crossed him (Berezovsky, Khodorkovsky, Gusinsky), which has both silenced critical voices in the print or broadcast media and closed off sources of funding to oppositional political parties. One other effective countermeasure that does not rely on the conversion of old regime resources is the creation of Potemkin village civil society organizations (or what Robertson calls ersatz social movements

[194]) that attempt to crowd out real grass roots organizations. Another textbook case of this is to be found in Russia, where Putin's supporters created a pro-regime youth movement "Ours" to counter the possible threat of the sort of youth mobilization that lay at the center of several of the color revolutions.

In the following two case studies we look at the mobilization and countermobilization efforts of the regime and the opposition in Slovakia (1998) and Belarus (2001, 2006, 2010) both before and during moments of electoral contestation. Even when overall turnout numbers may not change in such moments, what is crucial is the relative balance of the two competing forces. Specifically, both sides will try to turn out their own supporters and demobilize those of the other. In the case of turnover, we would expect to see the opposition perhaps successfully mobilize new voters into the electoral contest, but also to dissuade those who have in the past turned out for the regime to stay at home or change their vote. The latter seems more important given that elections in competitive authoritarian regimes are often high turnout events. Where authoritarian incumbents maintain their ability to use state and mass organizational assets to deter and isolate the opposition and its potential electorate, they will continue to be able to turnout the masses necessary for plebiscitary approval.

### **Slovakia**

Slovakia achieved independence in 1993. It emerged from Czecho-Slovakia with a political structure that was electoral in form, but which Levitsky and Way classify as competitive authoritarian from 1993 to 1998, the period of rule by Prime Minister Vladimír

Mečiar (2010, 91).<sup>10</sup> Mečiar was a founder of the political party Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS). It emerged in 1991 as a more openly nationalistic successor to Public Against Violence (VPN), the movement that led the Gentle (i.e. Velvet) Revolution in Slovakia.

HZDS emerged as the most powerful party in Slovakia, winning a plurality of votes and seats, in the election of 1992 both in the Slovak National Council and among Slovak parties to both houses of the National Parliament. It was the Slovak party most strongly behind the push for separation, and when it found a willing Czech partner in Václav Klaus and the Civic Democratic Party (ODP), the two negotiated the separation.

Mečiar became the first Prime Minister of Slovakia and his fellow HZDS politician Michal Kováč, the first president. Defections from the parliamentary delegation of the HZDS and a growing rift with Kováč led to the fall of his government in early 1994 and its replacement by an opposition-led government under Jozef Moravčík. In elections that fall the HZDS again won a plurality (35 percent) of the vote, and formed an improbable coalition government under Mečiar which included the far right National Party and the leftwing Union of Slovak Workers.

There are several reasons why many, though not all, observers saw Slovakia under Mečiar as less than fully democratic. There was substantial state control of the mass media and the HZDS used it aggressively as a political tool to serve its ends. Independent media on the other hand was harassed by the government, which cancelled the broadcasting licenses and pursued trumped up libel suits against critics (Levitsky and Way 2010, 93). While not the only government in Slovakia to suffer from corruption problems, the privatization program under

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<sup>10</sup> Some prominent authors consider Slovakia in this period more of an illiberal, unconsolidated, or delegative, somewhat defective (but still a) democracy. See Deegan-Krause and Haughton 2009, Deegan-Krause 2006, O'Dwyer 2006, and Leff 1996.

Mečiar was highly politicized with many of the most lucrative firms channeled to party loyalists (Frydman et al. 1998, 55-56; Leff 1996).

As the falling out between Mečiar and Kováč intensified over time, Mečiar began to act in ways that broke the law. This included an incident where the Slovak security services kidnapped the president's son (no angel himself) and deposited him across the border in Austria. In 1997 Mečiar defied a successful petition drive to include a ballot question on the direct election of the presidency on a scheduled referendum. The Constitutional Court ordered him to comply but he refused anyway (Haughton 2003 276-7, 287-8). And when Kováč's presidential term expired in 1998 and the parliament deadlocked over who should succeed him, Mečiar himself assumed many of the responsibilities of the office on an "acting" basis. Generally speaking in the last period of Mečiar's rule when the conflict over the presidency sharpened there seemed to be an increase in the use of violent sanctions as well as widespread illegal wiretapping against his opponents (Bunce and Wolchik 2011, 62; Deegan-Krause 2006; Leff 1996).

Faced with the growing threat from Mečiar and the disappointing results in the previous election (1994), the leaders of opposition parties agreed to cooperate more closely and forged an electoral alliance. The core of this coalition was the center-right "blue coalition" composed of the Christian-Democrats (KDH), the Democratic Party (DS), and the Democratic Union (DU). This group had been cooperating since 1996 and was the force behind the ballot initiative on the direct election of the president. In 1997 both the Greens and Social-Democrats (SDSS) joined in and the group was renamed the Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK). In 1998 the

Hungarian Party (SMK), the Party of Civic Understanding, and the Party of the Democratic Left (SDL) pledged to cooperate with the SDK (Bunce and Wolchik 2011, 64-5).

The parliamentary elections of 1998 became a showdown between Mečiar and the SDK. Though not usually counted as one of the color revolutions, Bunce and Wolchik (2011) consider it one of the important precursor cases. In their efforts, the party-based opposition was supported by a broad-based mobilization in civil society, notably youth movements, trade unions, and independent think tanks. Turnout in Slovakia had been relatively high in 1994 (75.41%), and the campaign had the effect of boosting it (84.25%) (IDEA 2011). In these efforts the organization Civic Campaign 98 (OK98) was particularly important because of its focus on youth and new voters. Whereas only twenty percent of first time voters turned out in 1994, eighty percent turned out in 1998, and only eleven percent of these voted for Mečiar's HZDS (Bunce and Wolchik 2011, 69).

Unlike some of the color revolutions, the Slovak case did include an increase in turnout in this watershed election. Nonetheless we also see a demobilization effect on support for the incumbent which made the turnover much more likely. It is important to remember that HZDS won both elections with a plurality. However in 1994 it won thirty five percent of the vote and carried 61 out of 150 seats in the parliament. Its two coalition partners, the Union of Slovak Workers and the Slovak National Party won 13 and 9 seats respectively to constitute the governing majority. The opposition result was much more defuse with four parties taking places two to five, all taking around ten percent of the vote and only 67 of the 150 seats (Nohlen and Stöver 2010, 1747).

In 1998 the HZDS only took 43 seats (27 percent of the popular vote), where the Slovak Democratic Coalition took 42 (26.3 percent). The HZDS lost close to 100,000 or about ten percent of its voters between 1994 and 1998. Its coalition partners had very mixed results which resulted in fewer mandates in total. The Union of Slovak Workers fell from over 200,000 votes to less than 45,000. It secured no mandates because it failed to exceed the five percent representation clause. The SNS on the other hand saw its vote almost double and its representation increase from nine to fourteen mandates. Overall, Mečiar's coalition saw a drop in voter support from 47 to 37 percent. This meant a loss of over 100,000 votes for the three parties in an electorate that grew by over 150,000. The combined effect of the mobilization of new voters and the demobilization of Mečiar's support carried the opposition to victory. A new government was formed under Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda, the leader of the SDK, including the SDL, SOP, and SMK. The four allies took almost sixty percent of the vote and 80 of the 150 seats in the parliament (Nohlen and Stöver 2010, 1747).

Slovakia thus represents a strong confirmation of our arguments on relative mobilization capacities. Not only did the opposition and civil society turnout new voters but they substantially depressed turnout for the incumbent. It is important to note that the increase in turnout was not sufficient in itself to guarantee a change of governments. Demobilization not only changed the balance of forces in the legislature but also denied Mečiar the possibility of finding coalition partners. As the winner of the electoral contest by plurality, had the opposition not also weakened his allies, the results might have been less fortuitous for the opposition and the regime trajectory of Slovakia might have been different.

## **Belarus**

One of the fifteen successor states to the USSR, Belarus formally gained independence in 1991. It was led to independence by Stanislau Shushkevich, Chairman of the country's Supreme Soviet. Initially independent Belarus had a relatively politically open environment, though reforms were slow to come. The country's only election that was close to being free and fair was held in 1994. After an initial round in which Shuskevich was eliminated, a run-off election was held between two candidates. The establishment candidate and favorite was Viachaslau Kebich, who was the last premier of the Belarusian Soviet Republic (1990-91) as well as the first prime minister of the Republic of Belarus (1991-94). He came in second in the first round, only polling 18 percent of the vote.

The winner of the first round with 46 percent of the vote was Aliaksandr Lukashenka, a former collective farm chairman and member of parliament who ran on a populist anti-corruption platform. Lukashenka had gained notoriety in the past on more than one occasion. He was the only member of parliament who voted against independence in 1991 and was head of a parliamentary anticorruption committee that had accused Shuskevich and dozens of other high state officials of embezzling state funds (Silitski 2005, 85-6). Despite using state media to promote his candidacy, Kebich lacked strong control over state resources and neither contender was able to rig the elections (Levitsky and Way 2010, 201-3). Lukashenka won the second round in a landslide, capturing 80 percent of the vote.

There were vague hopes that the elections of 1994 might lead to democracy. Freedom House called the country partly free until 1996 (Nations in Transit 2009). Yet just two years after winning the election against Kebich, Lukashenka worked quickly to establish his

dictatorship with the strong diplomatic and economic backing of Russia (Levitsky and Way 2010, 201). He overcame his lack of strong ties with the state apparatus whose representatives he had just accused of corruption and dispatched electorally, and used his popular mandate to take charge of the state and eliminate competition (Silitski 2005, 86). Despite strong opposition from the head of election commission, Viktor Hanchar, and parliament's head, Semyon Sharetskii, he curtailed the powers of the constitutional court and parliament and shut down several media outlets, including an independent radio station (Bunce and Wolchik 2011, 199; Levitsky and Way 2010, 204).

The coup d'grace was delivered by the referendum of November 1996 which expanded presidential power at the expense of the parliament and other countervailing institutions. The overwhelming verdict on the fairness of the voting that sanctioned Lukashenka's preferred outcome by a margin of 88 to 12 percent is that it was rigged (Silitski 2005, 88). After 1996, Lukashenka fully consolidated his rule and created tight control over the state apparatus and utilized its ability to mobilize the population in an electoral authoritarian fashion. Prominent opposition figures have been arrested or disappeared, opposition candidates in parliamentary elections have been disqualified, and NGOs were closed. Lukashenka ended term limits for the president and was elected a fourth time in 2010 (Levitsky and Way 2010, 203-5).

With the consolidation of his rule and control of the state, Lukashenka has consistently been able to mobilize the masses and win elections by overwhelming majorities. Like Putin, Lukashenka has learned the lessons of the color revolutions and has worked hard to maintain the support of the population, especially by attracting youth, denying the opposition this potential source of support crucial in many electoral breakthroughs in other postcommunist

countries (Bunce and Wolchik 2011, 204). In terms of such authoritarian mobilization, the Belarusian case is highly consistent with the findings in the regressions with regards to losers' share and turnout. Since Lukashenka came to power, turnout has increased over both the presidential and parliamentary electoral cycles and the quality of civil liberties has deteriorated. Since 2000, turnout levels have reached Soviet proportions (90 percent) (Hutcheson and Korosteleva 2006, 33-4). Whereas Lukashenka continues to win presidential elections with a more than comfortable 80 percent of the votes, the percentage of support for the main oppositional presidential candidate has declined from 16 to a record low of 3 percent in 2010. This decline, along with increasing turnout levels from the 1994 presidential election (70 percent) to 2010 (91 percent), not only shows the increasing mobilization capabilities of the Lukashenka regime, but also the failure of the opposition to effectively countermobilize.

In Belarus, there are three critical reasons for the consistent failure of the opposition. First, unlike in successful cases of mobilization and democratic breakthrough, the Belarusian opposition has usually failed to agree on a single candidate or to mobilize a substantial segment of civil society against Lukashenka's authoritarian administration. And in the 2006 presidential election in which the political opposition achieved its highest level of unity, it did not manage either to effectively coordinate with civil society groups or to find a way to get its message out due to regime control of the major news outlets (Bunce and Wolchik 2011, 207-8). The official results showed that Lukashenka won 84 percent of the vote, with the highest turnout (93 percent) in Belarusian history.

Following the election of 2006, there were protests in the capital including a tent city that echoed the Orange Revolution in Ukraine. The regime easily dispersed such mobilization

efforts and has continued to harass the opposition and silence troublesome NGOs. The climate has become so harsh that many organizations have disbanded rather than trying to continue to operate (Zhuchkov 2004, Sannikov and Kuley 2006). This is the second reason for the failure of the opposition, the effective deployment of state coercion and repression by the Lukashenka regime. Attempts to organize protest of the presidential election results in 2001, 2006, and 2010 were all met with harsh repression. The police have beaten and arrested Lukashenka's competing presidential candidates. Aliaksandar Kazulin was arrested and imprisoned for two years following the electoral campaign of 2006. This is mild in comparison to others who have crossed Lukashenka such as Viktor Hanchar and Jury Zacharanka, whose bodies have never been found (Markus 2010, 124-126; Lenzi 2002). Even after his overwhelming victory in 2010 the Lukashenka regime saw fit to arrest over 700 oppositionists including 7 of the 9 competing presidential candidates (Freedom House 2011b).

Finally, Lukashenka's success in part has been predicated on the fact that Belarusians show a sharp preference for strong leadership and economic success over a desire for a more democratic politics (Haerpfer 2002). According to the Eurobarometer surveys, trust in the government and legislature has increased since Lukashenka assumed power in 1994 (Hutcheson and Korosteleva 2006, 30). This level of public support has made it possible for Lukashenka to legitimize his dictatorial rule, consistently mobilize the masses, and increase turnout over the electoral cycle, while isolating the opposition and disabling its capacity for countermobilization. In stark contrast to what we observed in Slovakia, the dictator has consistently won the battle of relative mobilization capacity, enhancing his own ability to control the electoral space while enfeebling that of the opposition.

## Conclusions

In this paper we have attempted to contribute to the literature on the role that elections have come to play in new forms of post-Cold War authoritarianism. The literature to date has not provided unambiguous findings. Most of the large-n work has provided weak support for the idea that elections promote democracy, but the findings have varied according to specification, sample, and time frame. The regionally focused literature has produced contradictory findings. Lindberg's positive findings on Africa and McCoy and Hartlyn's, as well as Lust-Okar's negative findings on the democratizing potential of elections in Latin America would seem to argue for the exploration of the dynamics in other regions. By nesting our results in this pattern of regional variation, we have contributed to understanding the weakness and inconsistency in research based on global samples and add further evidence that Lindberg's findings are a case of African exceptionalism.

We have turned up little evidence that elections serve as a catalyst for democracy. By the same token, we have not found direct evidence that elections serve as a mechanism for authoritarian institutionalization on their own. We do find however certain circumstances under which elections serve authoritarian ends in the region. Our most consequent finding is that while energy production promotes more authoritarian conditions in general, the holding of elections seems to promote a moderate form of authoritarianism. Specifically the resources at the disposal of the regime allow them to pursue a strategy of buying support rather than relying on repression. This form of rentierism produces improvements in civil liberties scores with repeated elections but within the range of authoritarian outcomes. As Luong and Weinthal, Smith, and Dunning argue, oil does not always prove to be a curse. This is tied to the

other major region-specific finding in the paper, the role of relative mobilization capacity. It is our belief that the additional resources that energy rich regimes possess allow them to rely more on material, rather than coercive, incentives to win the battle of relative electoral mobilization.

We find that electoral turnout does not promote more democratic civil liberties in a simple linear fashion. On the contrary we found a curvilinear relationship with the impact of additional electoral mobilization only to have a positive impact statistically up to a fifty percent turnout threshold. This is at odds with what we would expect from the experience of Africa or Western Europe. This curvilinear relationship as well as the observation that many color revolutions did not bring an increase in electoral turnout leads us to believe that theories on how mobilization affects electoral challenges in the region need some reconceptualization.

Both our large-n cross-national work and the paired case comparison we performed in this paper are consistent with the claim that mobilization against authoritarian incumbents can play an important role in liberalizing and even democratizing electoral authoritarian regimes when there is coordination and unification within the opposition. Our finding that loser's share of the vote leads to better protection of civil liberties is supportive of this. However, we argue that an absolute mobilization of voters is less important than the relative mobilization of voters. Our case studies lead us to believe that the ability to demobilize supporters of the incumbent, to negate both the residual organizational advantages incumbents may have preserved from the old regime as well as more contemporary neopatrimonial sources of support is equally important. Even in the Slovak case where new mobilization was important, the demobilization of voters who supported Mečiar and his allies was equally important to removing him and

blocking the institutionalization of a competitive authoritarian regime. In Belarus, despite repeated attempts to remove Lukashenka, we see that his authoritarian establishment is consistently capable of bringing voters to the polls to the detriment of attempts of the opposition and independent NGOs to coordinate and mobilize civil society.

Finally, we close with a consideration on voting and its changing role in our understandings of regime in the post-Cold War period. Not since the age of Wilsonian democracy at the end of the First World War has democracy been as powerful a legitimizing principal for holders of political power globally. And despite a general adoption of democratic institutions by many new or transformed states after World War I, the experiment was not fully successful. Reflecting on the interwar era Gale Stokes has written:

But it is a fact than when the East European countries came to political consciousness they had very little choice as to the style of organization their new nations would adopt—it would be the modern state, with its legislature, courts, centralized bureaucracy and intrusive mentality. By the time Czechs were able to establish such an entity, their long socioeconomic development had prepared them for bringing the state’s power under the control of a pluralist democracy... In the Balkans, however, introduction of a state on the European model occurred in a social situation that was almost completely unprepared for it. The state, being the most developed institution... became also the dominant element, but whereas it operated using the same forms as its models in the West, the actual content of political activity was more consistent with traditional status societies than with the more legalistic societies from which the state form was copied (1989: 245).

It is reasonable twenty years after the demise of Soviet-type communist regimes in Eurasia to question whether that experience had differential effects across space and time and whether some areas were not better prepared to fully embrace democracy. For others, while the institutions of democracy were adopted, elites have found ways to use those forms as Stokes puts it “in ways more consistent” with their own interests. Such a view is more

structural and domestic as an explanation compared to Bunce and Wolchik who seem to favor agency over structure, as well as Levitsky and Way who favor international explanations (linkage and leverage) over domestic conditions and actors as the ultimate arbiter of outcomes.

Authoritarian leaders continue to sponsor votes because of the legitimacy they confer both on a popular level and among the very elites they rely on to rule. The danger to democracy in all this is not only in how its very forms can become consistent with authoritarian rule. It is also troubling that politicians in democratic countries, who in their desire to reduce uncertainty about their tenure in office or preferred policy outcomes have begun to use some of the tricks from the competitive authoritarian arsenal. And here we need not confine our fears to color revolutions that did not provide lasting improvements. One only need think of the changes introduced in Hungary under the present Prime Minister, Viktor Orban, who has used an outsized legislative victory, to adopt measures that may well grant his party greater control of the agenda of the legal system, a greater say in the control of the media, and a series of changes to the electoral system that may privilege his party in future electoral contests (Kornai 2012, Scheppele 2012, Freedom House 2012). All this has occurred in a country which is a member of the EU and NATO, and which for a long time was considered a most successful case of consolidated democracy in the postcommunist world. The greatest threat to democracy may not be an overt series of spectacular regime changes as in earlier eras, but a stealth hollowing out of its content while maintaining its form. Such fears need not be confined to only postcommunist Eurasia.

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## Are Non-Democratic Elections Mechanisms of Authoritarian Stability or Democratization?

### Appendix 1: Presidential and Legislative Elections in Postcommunist Countries (1990-2011)

Country	Presidential Election Years	Legislative Election Years
Albania	N/A	1992, 1996, 1997, 2001, 2005, 2009
Armenia	1991, 1996, 1998, 2003, 2008	1995, 1999, 2003, 2007
Azerbaijan	1991, 1992, 1993, 1998, 2003, 2008	1996, 2000, 2005, 2010
Belarus	1994, 2001, 2006, 2010	1995, 2000, 2004, 2008
Bosnia and Herzegovina	N/A	<b>1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2006, 2010</b>
Bulgaria	1992, 1996, 2001, 2006, <b>2011</b>	1990, 1991, 1994, 1997, 2001, 2005, 2009
Croatia	1992, 1997, 2000, 2005, 2010	1992, 1995, 2000, 2003, 2007, <b>2011</b>
Czech Republic	N/A	1996, 1998, 2002, 2006, <b>2010</b>
Czechoslovakia	N/A	<b>1990, 1992</b>
Estonia	N/A	1992, 1995, 1999, 2003, 2007, <b>2011</b>
Georgia	1991, 1992, 1995, 2000, 2004, 2008	1992, 1995, 1999, 2003, 2004, 2008
Hungary	N/A	1990, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006, <b>2010</b>
Kazakhstan	1991, 1999, 2005, <b>2011</b>	1994, 1995, 1999, 2004, 2007
Kosovo	N/A	<b>2010</b>
Kyrgyzstan	1991, 1995, 2000, 2005, 2009, <b>2011</b>	1995, 2000, 2005, 2007, 2010
Latvia	N/A	1993, 1995, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010, <b>2011</b>
Lithuania	1993, 1998, 2003, 2004, 2009	1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008
Macedonia	1994, 1999, 2004, 2009	1994, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2008, <b>2011</b>
Mongolia	<b>1993, 1997, 2001, 2005, 2009</b>	<b>1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008</b>
Moldova	1991, 1996	1994, 1998, 2001, 2005, 2009, 2009, 2010
Montenegro	<b>2008</b>	<b>2006, 2009</b>
Poland	<b>1990</b> , 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010	1991, 1993, 1997, 2001, 2005, 2007, <b>2011</b>
Romania	1990, 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2009	1990, 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008
Russia	1996, 2000, 2004, 2008	1993, 1995, 1999, 2003, 2007, <b>2011</b>
Serbia	<b>2008</b>	<b>2007, 2008</b>
Serbia and Montenegro	N/A	2003
Slovakia	1999, 2004, 2009	1994, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010
Slovenia	1992, 1997, 2002, 2007	1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, <b>2011</b>
Tajikistan	1991, 1994, 1999, 2006	1995, 2000, 2005, 2010
Turkmenistan	1992, 2007	1994, 1999, 2004, 2009
Ukraine	1991, 1994, 1999, 2004, 2010	1994, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2007
Uzbekistan	1991, 2000, 2007	1995, 1999, 2005, 2010
(Former Republic of) Yugoslavia	2000	<b>1992, 1992, 1996, 2000</b>

Election years in bold are only used in descriptive statistics.

Table 1: Impact of the Electoral Showdowns in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes (Freedom House Democracy Scores)

Country	Year of Showdown	Democracy Score in Prior Year	Democracy Score in 2011	Improvement
Slovakia	1998	3.80	2.54	1.26
Croatia	2000	4.46	3.64	0.82
Yugoslavia	2000	5.67	--	--
<i>Serbia</i>		--	3.64	2.03
<i>Montenegro</i>		--	3.82	1.85
Georgia	2003	4.58	4.86	-0.28
Ukraine	2004	4.71	4.61	0.10
Kyrgyzstan	2005	5.67	6.11	-0.44

Sources: Freedom House, Nations in Transit (1997, 2005, 2011).

**TABLE 2: Competition, Participation, and Civil Liberties in First, Second, Third, and Later Elections**

Indicator	Electoral Democracy?	First	Second	Third	Fourth+	ALL	no of poll	free& fair
winning candidate's (or party's) share of votes	YES	0.43	0.44	0.43	0.44	0.44	-0.079	57.3
	st. dev.	(0.19)	(0.17)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.209)	(0.000)
	N	34	38	29	70	171		
	NO	0.69	0.58	0.68	0.60	0.64		
loser's (or 2 <sup>nd</sup> party's) share of votes	st. dev.	(0.27)	(0.25)	(0.29)	(0.25)	(0.26)		
	N	27	14	17	28	86		
	YES	0.22	0.25	0.28	0.28	0.26	0.191	77.40
	st. dev.	(0.12)	(0.13)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.12)	(0.002)	(0.000)
voter turnout	N	34	38	29	70	171		
	NO	0.11	0.18	0.12	0.13	0.13		
	st. dev.	(0.10)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.08)	(0.10)		
	N	27	14	17	28	86		
civil liberties (mean)	YES	0.73	0.71	0.66	0.60	0.66	-0.44	31.63
	st. dev.	(0.14)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.12)	(0.000)	(0.000)
	N	34	38	29	70	171		
	NO	0.82	0.79	0.75	0.69	0.76		
civil liberties (mean)	st. dev.	(0.15)	(0.14)	(0.17)	(0.13)	(0.15)		
	N	27	14	17	28	86		
	Free and Fair	2.9	3.1	2.8	2.2	2.6	-0.277	281.1
	Flawed	5	5.6	5.3	4.7	5.1	(0.000)	(0.000)
civil liberties (mean)	All	3.9	3.8	3.7	2.9	3.5		
	N	61	52	46	98	257		

\*Spearman's Correlation values and significance for ordinal variables, and ANOVA F-values and significance for the interval variable.  
 Note: The CL scores are coded from 1-to-7. "7" demonstrates the worst condition and "1" demonstrates the best conditions for civil liberties.

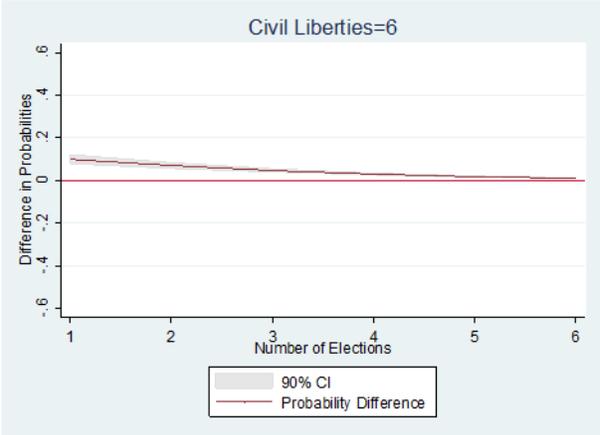
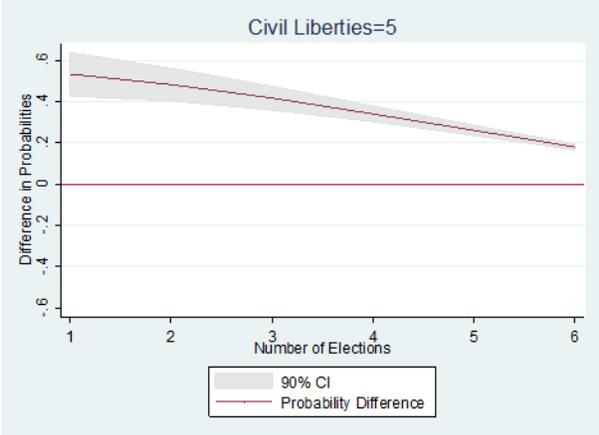
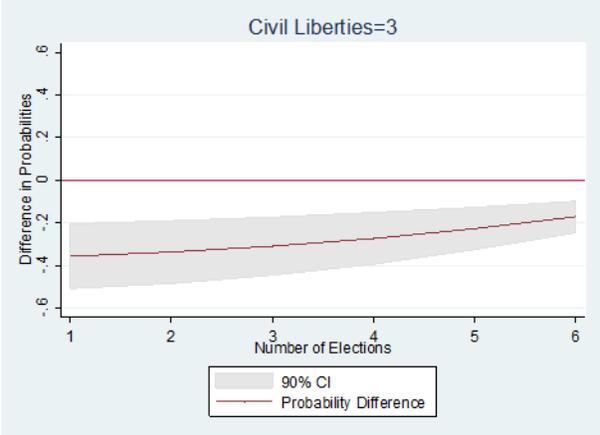
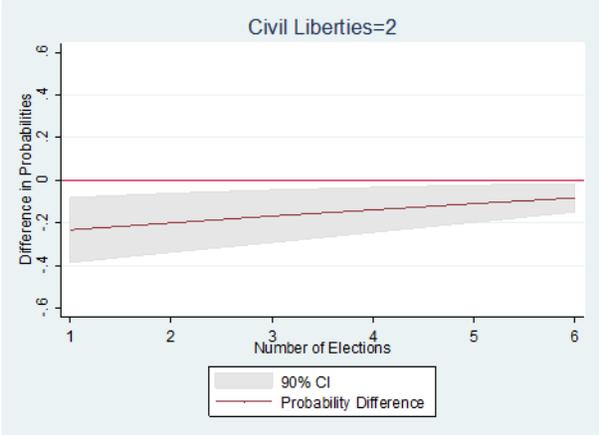
**Table 3: Ordered Probit Regressions on the Effect of Uninterrupted Electoral Cycles on Civil Liberties Scores**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Elections	-0.102** (0.044)	0.091 (0.081)	0.054 (0.091)	0.070 (0.092)	0.106 (0.094)	0.112 (0.095)
Winner's Vote Share	1.522*** (0.563)	0.768 (0.637)	0.367 (0.582)	0.152 (0.606)	0.277 (0.592)	0.099 (0.615)
Loser's (or 2nd party's) Vote Share	-3.778*** (0.534)	-2.525*** (0.664)	-1.991*** (0.662)	-1.701** (0.703)	-1.974*** (0.677)	-1.725** (0.705)
Electoral Turnout	2.144** (1.079)	3.118*** (1.021)	3.083*** (1.139)	-8.911 (5.525)	3.202*** (1.137)	-7.260 (5.627)
Log of GDP Per Capita		-0.535*** (0.192)	-0.836*** (0.230)	-0.835*** (0.226)	-0.845*** (0.232)	-0.843*** (0.229)
Urbanization (%)		0.056 (1.493)	0.335 (1.503)	0.820 (1.571)	0.312 (1.487)	0.733 (1.562)
Ethnic Fractionalization		0.310 (0.937)	0.556 (0.959)	0.794 (0.913)	0.500 (0.947)	0.714 (0.903)
EU Membership		-2.326*** (0.579)	-2.211*** (0.580)	-2.251*** (0.543)	-2.186*** (0.595)	-2.295*** (0.556)
Presidential Power Index		0.115*** (0.022)	0.109*** (0.026)	0.112*** (0.026)	0.108*** (0.027)	0.110*** (0.027)
Per Capita Resource Income (thousands)			0.756*** (0.203)	0.774*** (0.206)	1.599*** (0.481)	1.532*** (0.480)
(Electoral Turnout)^2				8.797** (4.123)		7.670* (4.252)
(Resource Income) * (Elections)					-0.200** (0.082)	-0.180** (0.082)
N	257	211	211	211	211	211
LL	-388.651	-227.839	-208.210	-205.679	-205.391	-203.548

Clustered robust standard errors reported in parentheses

\* p<0.1, \*\*p<0.05, \*\*\* p<0.01, two tailed tests

Figure 1. Probability Differences for CL Scores for Energy Rich and Energy Poor Countries



Are Non-Democratic Elections Mechanisms of Authoritarian Stability or Democratization?

Figure 2: Cumulative Probability of Civil Liberty Scores by Turnout and Turnout<sup>2</sup>

