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McKensie Diver

*College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University*

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### Recommended Citation

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Post-Soviet Hybrid-Regimes:  
Elements of Stability

McKensie Diver

Comparative Politics  
Dr. Christi Siver  
May 10, 2014

## **Abstract**

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 gave birth to many new independent states. Many of these states have developed regimes with both democratic and authoritarian elements, but they are not transitional democracies or transitional authoritarian regimes. Many scholars look at how to classify these regimes, but not at how the elements of the regime lead to its stability. Why are post-Soviet regimes stable? Discovering what makes these regimes stable can help us establish behavioral norms and aid us in future political and economic endeavors with the country in question. Although evaluating each element of hybrid-regimes would be ideal due to the current lack of information on hybrid-regimes in general, I would look at three main elements to determine their link to stability: civil society, effective (internal) governance, and international power. This study would help future policy makers and scholars alike to form opinions about, make decisions about and plan interactions with hybrid-regimes with solid information at their disposal.

## **Introduction**

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 gave birth to a plethora of newly independent states. Many of these states developed regimes with elements found in democratic and authoritarian regimes. They are not democratic or authoritarian, however, but rather have some elements from each in addition to other elements. Why do post-Soviet regimes remain stable? Most scholars expected these regimes to democratize or turn fully authoritarian. Some believe they are caught in transition between the two.<sup>1</sup> Either way, these regimes are fairly stable and have been since independence. In an attempt to answer the question of why these regimes are stable, I would examine the level of development and the size of civil society within each regime. I would observe the effectiveness of internal governance, and I would evaluate the power of each government with respect to security, alliances, etc. within the international arena. The countries I would examine are Russia, Ukraine, and Georgia.

## **Why Hybrid-Regimes?**

These regimes warrant significant and detailed study for two major reasons. The first is that the predictions that highly educated scholars and theorists made twenty years ago proved to be incorrect. They predicted that these regimes would transition fully into authoritarian or democratic regimes—not stop halfway between the two and definitely not

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<sup>1</sup> Matthijs Bogaards, "How to Classify Hybrid Regimes? Defective Democracy and Electoral Authoritarianism." *Democratization* 16, no. 2 (April 2009): 399-423.  
doi:10.1080/13510340902777800

become their own type of regime. The second reason is that these regimes could last for a long while. If we are to interact with them politically and economically, we need to understand how they behave, their level of stability, and the probability of their survival no matter the classification of the regime.

I will begin by presenting the current debate amongst scholars within the discipline. Next, I will present the literature that led me to my hypotheses. Following my literature review, I will identify my dependent and independent variable(s). Finally, I will provide the cases that I would review, and will conclude with my final remarks and observations.

### **Background: The Scholars' Debate**

There is very little research on the actual institutions of each individual post-Soviet hybrid-regime and even less on the way they function to promote or deter stability. There is, however, a lot of literature on how to define a hybrid-regime and speculation about where they fall on the political spectrum. In an effort to best guide my research design, I have looked at a number of scholars and theorists who have attempted to define hybrid-regimes as well as other regimes that look similar to hybrid-regimes. I will use the literature that defines these regimes to demonstrate the uniqueness of the hybrid-regime and perhaps specific elements critical to its stability and its classification.

Many scholars call attention to the use of language to describe hybrid-regimes such as a partial democracy (also known as a semi-democracy, illiberal democracy, transitioning democracy, etc.) or an electoral authoritarian regime (other names include: competitive

authoritarian regime, semi-authoritarian regime, etc.).<sup>2</sup>The regime that these words try to describe is in fact nondemocratic and not authoritarian, ergo the word “hybrid” is used as a broad term for a different type of regime. I will give definitions of both democracy and types of authoritarianism to better demonstrate the differences between hybrids, democracies, and authoritarian regimes.

Democracy is, “a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens, acting independently through competition and cooperation of their elected representatives.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, a government that maintains the following: free, fair, competitive, regular elections; transparency and accountability; a developed civil society; rule of law; and protection of civil rights and civil liberties, is a democracy. Therefore, according to this definition, any regime that demonstrates a few of the following could be a semi, illiberal, transitioning, or partial democracy. However, the assumption with all of these labels is that the regime is moving toward a consolidated democracy and for some reason or another was arrested in this transition.

In 1996, Juan J. Linz coined the term “authoritarianism” to identify a form of polity that existed outside the traditional spectrum of democracy to totalitarianism. He defined authoritarianism as “political systems with limited, not responsible, political pluralism, without elaborate and guiding ideology, but with distinctive mentalities, without extensive nor intensive political mobilization, except at some points in their development, and in which a leader or occasionally a small group exercises power within formally ill-defined

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<sup>2</sup> Matthijs Bogaards, "How to Classify Hybrid Regimes? Defective Democracy and Electoral Authoritarianism." *Democratization* 16, no. 2 (April 2009): 399-423. doi:10.1080/13510340902777800

<sup>3</sup> Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl, "What Democracy Is . . . and Is Not." *Journal of Democracy* 2, no. 3 (1991): 75-88. doi:10.1353/jod.1991.0033

limits but actually quite predictable ones.”<sup>4</sup> Linz and Stepan broadened the political categorization spectrum with their book, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, 1996, more specifically the chapter titled *Modern Nondemocratic Regimes*, from three paradigm typologies to five paradigm typologies—democracy, authoritarianism, post-totalitarianism, totalitarianism, and sultanism. They argue that although the tripartite typology was once very useful, it is now an obstacle to categorizing and recognizing regimes that do not fall within one of the three categories or that are mistakenly placed within the three.<sup>5</sup> As sultanism is not present within the post-Soviet states that I plan to research, I will not include commentary on this section of their work.

Linz and Stepan define post-totalitarianism as a paradigm of three sub-categories: early post-totalitarianism, frozen post-totalitarianism, and mature post-totalitarianism. Each differs from one another in at least one key element, but they all possess, for the most part, the elements of post-totalitarianism, which are: limited, but not responsible social, economic and institutional pluralism; almost no political pluralism, presence of “second economy”, guiding ideology still present and part of social reality, progressive loss of interest by leaders and non-leaders involved in organizing mobilization, and growing emphasis on personal security within the political elite.<sup>6</sup> Linz and Stepan argue that the

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<sup>4</sup> Juan J. Linz and Alfred C. Stepan, "Modern Nondemocratic Regimes." 1996. In *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-communist Europe*, 38-54 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996)

<sup>5</sup> Juan J. Linz and Alfred C. Stepan, "Modern Nondemocratic Regimes." 1996. In *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-communist Europe*, 38-54 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996)

<sup>6</sup> Juan J. Linz and Alfred C. Stepan, "Modern Nondemocratic Regimes." 1996. In *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-communist Europe*, 38-54 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996)

growing pluralism within post-totalitarian regimes makes them vulnerable while it gives strength to the “second culture” of democratic opposition.

Their division of the traditional tripartite typology allows for easier classification and identification of institutions within regimes or of regimes themselves. Their work is crucial to understanding and identifying the contributors to stability within post-Soviet states. It also opened the door to identifying regimes as something other than democratic or authoritarian. Many scholars still use a spectrum where democracy falls on one end and authoritarian on the other. By shoving regimes into categorizations in which they do not fit, such as post-Soviet, and even post-Communist, hybrid-regimes, we set ourselves up for ignorant behavior. Classification of a regime allows us to be familiar with the behavior of a regime, which in turn enables us to make policy regarding that regime, to interact with that regime, and to make guided and knowledgeable assumptions about that regime. When we try to fit a regime into a category in which it does not belong, we eliminate the opportunity to make the best decision with the most information.

Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way look at the way in which regimes are defined. They note that there is a distinct democratic bias in how we classify regimes, for example “partial democracy, illiberal democracy, transitional democracy, semi democracy, pseudo democracy, etc.” These labels assume that the regime in question is a “diminished” form of democracy.<sup>7</sup> Matthijs Bogaards stated, “Current approaches to the study of hybrid regimes are limited by their focus on a single root concept.... one takes democracy as the root

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<sup>7</sup> Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way. "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism." *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 51-65. doi:10.1353/jod.2002.0026



concept, the other authoritarianism.”<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the study always maintains one bias or the other. Terms such as “hybrid”, “semi-authoritarian”, or “partly-free” brush over important aspects and differences between regimes. By pushing regimes into residual categories, we limit our understanding of them as well as the potential to interact with them. Levitsky and Way propose the term “competitive authoritarianism” as a subcategory for “hybrid-regimes” implying that there are multiple types of hybrid-regimes.

Competitive authoritarianism is defined as the following: formal democratic institutions are the widely recognized means of exercising political authority, incumbents often violate these rules so often, though, that the regime cannot meet the required standard for democratic recognition.<sup>9</sup> Levitsky and Way claim that Russia under Vladimir Putin, Ukraine under Leonid Kravchuk and Armenia through the 90s were competitive authoritarian regimes.<sup>10</sup> They agree with Linz in that these states seem to be more of a diminished authoritarian regime than a diminished democratic one.

Much of this literature deals with how to classify these regimes. But, in the meantime, these regimes continue to rule and exist despite their lack of “democratic institutions” or “authoritarian elements.” We must begin to think of these elements such as competitive electoral processes, presidencies, civil society, etc. as components that happen to be in a democracy or an authoritarian regime or a hybrid-regime. But, the presence of these elements does not make a regime a diminished form of regimes that have similar

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<sup>8</sup> Matthijs Bogaards, "How to Classify Hybrid Regimes? Defective Democracy and Electoral Authoritarianism." *Democratization* 16, no. 2 (April 2009): 399-423. doi:10.1080/13510340902777800

<sup>9</sup> Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way. "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism." *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 51-65. doi:10.1353/jod.2002.0026

<sup>10</sup> Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way. "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism." *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 51-65. doi:10.1353/jod.2002.0026

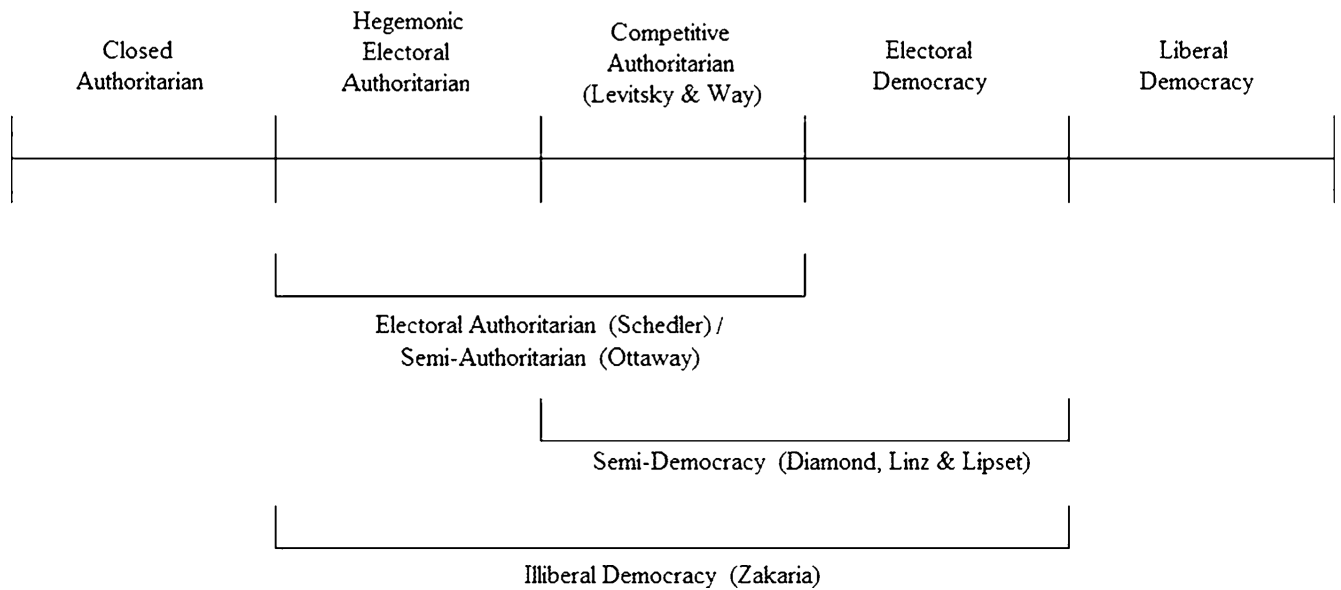
elements. Perhaps it is the various combinations of these features that determines the stability or success of a regime. The combination of institutions that we label as democracy seems to do well, but so too does other regimes.

## **Literature Review**

Looking at post-Soviet hybrid-regimes based on their components, not based on other regimes, is one of the main purposes of Leah Gilbert and Payam Mohseni's research. "Rather than place regimes on a single continuum from authoritarianism to democracy, a configurative approach provides scholars with an alternative view of political systems by highlighting the multiple dimensions of regimes."<sup>11</sup> They evaluate hybrid-regimes based on competitiveness, civil liberties, and tutelary interference. Gilbert and Mohseni are some of the first scholars to look at hybrid-regimes based on their components and not on their likeness to another regime. Below is a visual aid to demonstrate the continuum about which they speak.

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<sup>11</sup> Leah Gilbert and Payam Mohseni. "Beyond Authoritarianism: The Conceptualization of Hybrid Regimes." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 46, no. 3 (July 28, 2011): 270-97. doi:10.1007/s12116-011-9088-x

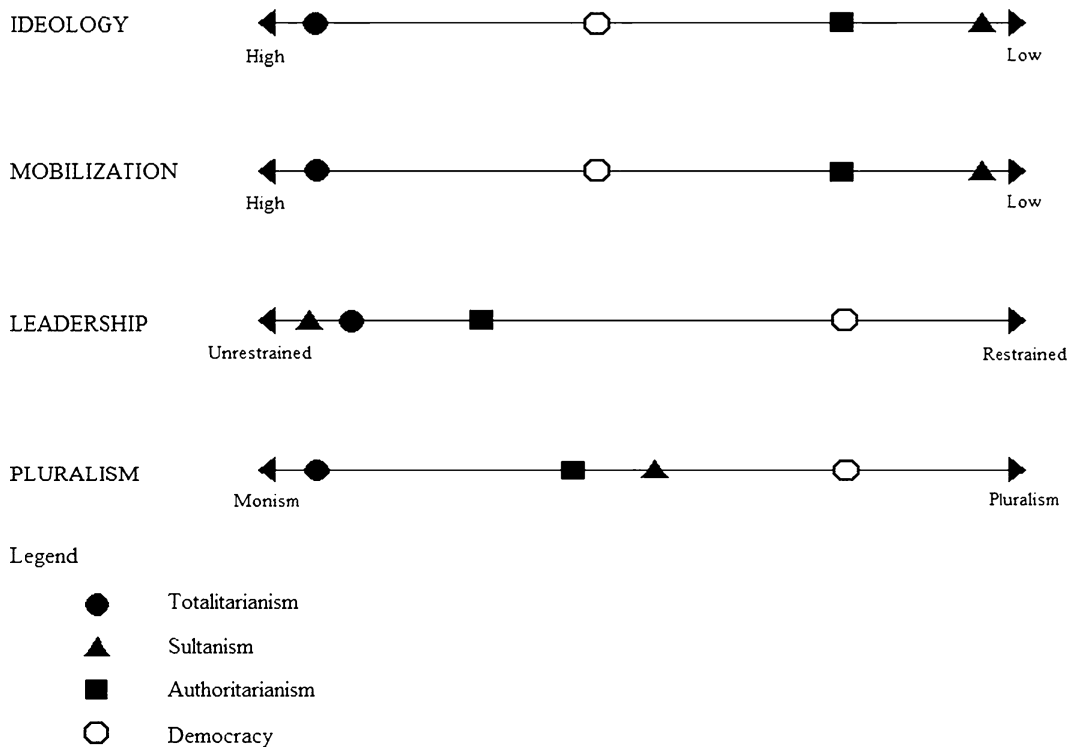


**Fig. 1** Conceptual map of the current field of regime types (Gilbert and Mohseni, 2011)

Regimes have many dimensions and many components. The concept of putting all regimes into a few defined categories, although ideal, is not possible nor is it responsible. We inevitably overlook critical aspects of regimes when we attempt to push them into categories in which they do not belong. Gilbert and Mohseni provide a list of all hybrid-regimes singled out based on a nuanced framework that uses the three concepts mentioned above: competitiveness, civil liberties, and tutelary interference. I will attempt to approach hybrid-regimes in a similar way by looking at the components within them, but to help determine why they are stable rather than to classify them.

Linz and Stepan on the other hand used a framework based on ideology, mobilization, leadership, and pluralism. Their study led me to the selection of my variables. I continue with their variables in my own study by grouping ideology, mobilization and pluralism within the realm of civil society. I look at leadership within the variables of

effective, internal governance and international power. Although they used these four concepts to place all regimes within one of four main categories (see **Fig. 2**), their idea to use concepts, rather than the regimes themselves to categorize regimes should be continued with slight alterations. Instead of using the concepts to place a regime into one of four preconceived categories, it should be used to create new categories that truly define the dimensions of the regimes in question. If I were to continue to study hybrid-regimes, I would delve into the classification argument using a similar approach. For this study, I will simply take inspiration from their variables and methods to help form my own research design.



**Fig. 2** Property concept continuums for regime types (Linz 2000; Linz and Stepan 1996)

Another author whose work prompted me to look more closely at civil society is Olena Nikolayenko. She writes about youth movements in Serbia, and post-Soviet Georgia and Ukraine. Her study examines the cross-national similarities apparent in each. She argues that one of the main factors of the similar behavior of youth movements in each country can be explained by the similar history of each country and the similar governments now found in these three post-Soviet countries. Elaborating on the type of regime, she writes about the hybrid-regime manifesting in each. She concludes that within these hybrid-regimes, one can find a certain type of protest strategy different from those found in other current regimes. The difference lies in that autocratic states do not typically allow for protest (or pluralism as a form of opposition), and youth protest in democracy is rarer today. These youth movements utilize media (social and traditional) and technological communication (Facebook, Twitter, text messaging, etc.) in conjunction with avenues particular to youth such as music (rock concerts), art distribution (stickers and posters) and street performances to transmit their message to the government.<sup>12</sup> Their behavior demonstrates a semi-permissive or completely permissive attitude of the government toward opposition groups and protest as well as mobilization of a young age group. Her work is crucial to understanding the behavior of hybrid-regimes and the response of society toward these new regimes. The type of protests found in these regimes sheds light on the types of protests allowed by the government and the level of freedoms permitted. The government's response to these protests reveals the type of relationship the government has to the people. Her work has led me to believe that the presence of civil

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<sup>12</sup> Olena Nikolayenko, "The Revolt of the Post-Soviet Generation: Youth Movements in Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine." *Comparative Politics* 39, no. 2 (January 01, 2007): 169-88. Accessed January 28, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/20434032?ref=search-gateway:2abb3a48343d012fe19b1d310ce83927>

society as a whole leads to a more stable government because it can allow for pluralism, mobilization and healthy opposition (competition).

Much of the literature on hybrid-regimes or competitive authoritarian regimes, has looked at how to classify the regime, what led to its evolution, or why it is more or less democratic than the scholar would like the country in question to be. But there is very little literature on the actual institutions of these hybrid-regimes and how well they function. In addition to this, there is very little information on these new institutions and how they contribute to their stability. Many scholars look at these regimes either expecting them to be democratic with some authoritarian elements, or authoritarian with some democratic elements. Either way, they are only one of two preconceived regimes and therefore seem doomed to fail if success is defined as full transformation. The assumption is often that if they fall somewhere in between the two ends of the spectrum, they are unstable. Scholars have conducted little research on the concepts and institutions within the hybrid-regime and even less on how they affect stability within the hybrid-regime.

### **My Hypotheses and Methodology:**

The dependent variable in my study is stability in post-Soviet hybrid regimes. My independent variables are civil society, effective (internal) governance, and international power. I plan to look at these three elements within each regime to see how it connects to the stability of the regime and the state as a whole. I use the word stability in the sense that the state is not failing or failed, no violent regime changes have occurred since the dissolution of the USSR, and basic functions of the state are carried out.

I hypothesize that post-Soviet hybrid-regimes with civil society are more stable than those without. By civil society, I mean the generally accepted concept of citizen participation in groups in and outside of government from local to national level. States that allow civil society permit participation in and paths for protest, for mobilization, and for coalition amongst citizens. Influential groups such as youth leagues, adult leagues, women's groups, national associations, etc. lead to a feeling of involvement and act as a kind of pressure valve for dissent. The presence of a civil society demonstrates a tolerance for mobilization and for dissidence or possible opposition within the country on the part of government.

I will measure the presence of civil society through the use of both quantitative and qualitative data. The number of registered legitimate organizations and groups within the country will provide a base number of associations from which to begin measuring the civil society present in the country in question. Next I will evaluate the quality and level of government interference within a set number of randomly selected groups. Using literature about the groups specifically, interviews with members of the groups and members of society outside of the groups (to gain a better understanding of how others look at the groups in question), I would try to define the behavior of these groups. If these groups seem to act like a pressure valve as well as an avenue through which to oppose or promote certain political and moral beliefs, they could help lead to the stability we find within these regimes.

I hypothesize that post-Soviet hybrid-regimes with effective, internal governance are more stable. In other words, an effective government can and will, ideally, provide necessary services for its people such as security and protection, provision and

enforcement of laws, some form of welfare system, and protection of civil rights and civil liberties. Not all of these elements are required for effective governance, but the presence of at least security, protection and a set of codified laws (constitution) must be present to qualify for the definition of effective I will use. The ability of a government to provide these services, such as security and protection, means that the government maintains the monopoly on violence. Citizens who feel protected by there government will not turn to local or regional leaders such as gang leaders for protection. An easy way to prevent threats to the government's internal sovereignty is to provide forms of protection that deter citizens from seeking it elsewhere. Forging a dependent relationship with the people of a country allows a government to stay in power and remain relatively stable.

I would measure effective internal governance in a few ways. I would look at the levels of political efficacy by evaluating attitudes of the media towards the government. An issue I could run into is government-controlled media, but I would try to look at non-government-controlled media including opinions and attitudes expressed through social media. To add to my study of political efficacy, I would conduct a random survey of attitudes toward the government and its ability to govern (provide necessary services). I would evaluate reported civil rights abuses if such information is available, keeping in mind that many instances often go unreported. On my survey, I would ask if people feel protected by police and military or threatened by them. I would ask about taxation levels and reciprocity of government services for the level of taxes paid. Finally, I would evaluate the constitution, if one is present, and ask in my survey if people feel that the government acts in accordance with the law set forth by the government. To avoid democratic bias, I would not compare the ability of a government to be transparent but act according to the



law set forth. If a law gives most of the power to one position, and the person in that position exercises those powers, he or she acts according to the law. If no checks and balances exist within the constitution or in codified law, a lack of checks of balances in the government demonstrates adherence to the document. It does not necessarily demonstrate instability.

Finally, I hypothesize that post-Soviet hybrid-regimes with power in the international arena are more stable. Power at the international level encompasses the ability to provide security from international forces and threats, to advocate for a country's rights, and to pursue the countries interests abroad. Protecting a country's sovereignty while pursuing membership in international organizations such as NATO and the European Union requires a good level of stability as well as an adept leader. If a country can navigate within and prosper from the international economic arena, its own economy must have some sort of stability to attract international business.

The way in which I would measure a country's power at the international level is by looking at current trade agreements, imports and exports, membership (or lack of) in international organizations, the presence of multinational corporations, and the presence of an effective military. The presence of current trade agreements signifies that another country has faith in the stability of the country and in the power of the government to follow through with an agreement. If a country mostly imports goods, it is highly dependent on other countries, which could result in a threat to sovereignty. A high number of exports could signify exploitation of resources at the hands of another country. It could also signify a high demand for certain products. A balance between the two demonstrates that the government possesses the ability to protect the country from external exploitation

as well as unwanted dependency on other countries. If a country belongs to an international group or organization, it means they qualify for membership requirements. It also means that other countries believe in and depend on the continuation of a country and more specifically, the continuation of a regime. However, should a country not belong to an international organization (perhaps it failed to meet certain qualifications), it could signify a lack of faith in the international community in the country in question. It could also mean that the country failed in its pursuit of interests on an international scale. Multinational corporations tend to extend and expand their business to countries where they will gain the most business. If a country is unstable, multinational corporations will steer clear of that country seeing it unsuitable to their interests. Finally, the presence of an effective (well-trained and well-armed) military within a country signifies that the government has the ability to protect their country from foreign invasion. I could also look for any alliances with other countries. Their presence would demonstrate, again, faith in a country's stability and ability to be a strong ally against an enemy.

### **Case Selection: Russia, Ukraine, and Georgia**

For this study, I would select Russia, Ukraine and Georgia. I selected these countries due to their similar history, their close relationships with each other, and their close proximity. Each country is, of course, a post-Soviet country, but also shared similar experiences during the rule of the Soviet Union. Each country gained their independence at relatively the same time. All three have had the same amount of time to develop and evolve. The difference in these three countries is size and their relations with the West. In an

attempt to control for location, I selected close countries. I also selected these countries due to their similar culture and political structure, so that I could look at the differences between them to determine if my variables do indeed contribute to their stability. With the recent tension between Ukraine and Russia over the territory of Crimea, it would be interesting to see how well each country can navigate the international playing field as well as maintain a stable internal state.

## **Conclusion**

My research would contribute to hybrid-regime research in that it would provide detailed information about the components within three major hybrid-regimes. We would be able to see trends and similarities between the regimes, which could mean that they are commonly found within them. Or perhaps the components of each regime will differ greatly meaning that the elements within the regime are particular to certain ones and not others. We will find out if civil society, effective governance and international power do, in fact, contribute to hybrid-regime stability. Completing this study is incredibly important if we are to have future relations with these countries. Policy makers and government officials cannot do their job effectively if they lack crucial details about what makes a state “run” and what keeps it running well. As these systems develop and grow, the potential to learn also grows, as does the need for information. How can people, from diplomats to travelers, know how to recognize a state as volatile or stable if we have no idea what makes that state stable? My research would lay important groundwork for further study of these regimes’ institutions and behavior.

When designing this study, I ran into many other potential areas of scholarship such as how to define hybrid-regimes, if there are different types of hybrid-regimes such as subcategories, how relations between post-Soviet states compare to relations between post-Soviet and Western states, and how to potentially restructure the way in which political scientists categorize regimes. Truly, the potential for further study in this area is endless and would be invaluable to future political and economic relations with these countries.

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