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Post-communist regime types: Hierarchies across attributes and space

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Abstract

In this article we order the 28 post-communist countries in a theoretically informed typology of political regime forms. Our theoretical expectation is that a hierarchy exists in the extent to which the post-communist countries fulfill democratic criteria concerning electoral rights, civil liberties, and the rule of law. More particularly, we expect that the countries are doing better with respect to electoral rights than civil liberties and that they fare worst regarding the rule of law. The analyses confirm three – ever stricter – versions of this hypothesis, in the end establishing the presence of an almost perfect hierarchy across the attributes in the form of a Guttman scale. Furthermore, a systematic cross-spatial distribution is identified, which lends support to the notion that the present political differences must be traced back to structural constraints and are, therefore, likely to persist.

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The study of regime change teems with new and ever-more elaborate typologies of democracy and non-democracy (e.g., Zakaria, 1997; Diamond, 1999; Schedler, 2002;

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Howard and Roessler, 2006). However, a systematic and encompassing ordering of post-communist political regime forms has not been carried out yet. Scholars have either confined their attention to the singular construction of autocratic subtypes, such as competitive or electoral authoritarianism (Levitsky and Way, 2002; Schedler, 2002), or they have simply used the Freedom House's *Freedom in the World Survey* to make one-dimensional distinctions between post-communist regime forms (Kitschelt, 1999; Fish, 2001; Kuzio, 2005).¹

We argue that the overviews provided using the Freedom House-scores and/or classifications are unsatisfactory (see Appendix 1). Instead, we propose a systematic and multi-dimensional ordering of the 28 post-communist countries in a typology that extends from the polar type of liberal democracy to that of illiberal autocracy. This conceptual scheme rests on a two-fold premise. First, that it is appropriate to establish the entire spectrum between the democratic and undemocratic poles before introducing new concepts in the intermediate terrain.² Second, that any such encompassing typology should be embedded in democratic theory.

The focal point of the consequent typology is to be found in the Schumpeterian 'realistic' notion of democracy as a *political regime form* (Diamond, 1999: 8; Linz, 2000: 57–58). All of the various types of democracy and autocracy that we construct depart from this background concept (Adcock and Collier, 2001), which is basically defined by its emphasis on procedures rather than substance.

More particularly, based on a careful review of democratic theory, we make a distinction between three different attributes of democracy. This tripartite division resonated strongly in democratic theory as it embraces the distinctions between the electoral core (free elections) described by Joseph A. Schumpeter (1974 [1943]), the freedom rights elaboration (freedom of speech, assembly, and association) of Dahl's (1989) concept of polyarchy, and O'Donnell's (2001, 2004) rule of law addition. Concerning nomenclature, the first attribute is named 'electoral rights', the second 'civil liberties', and the third 'rule of law'.

This simple property space allows us to distinguish between thinner (having relatively few defining attributes) and thicker (having relatively many defining attributes) types of democracy and autocracy, respectively. Suffice is to say at this point that this provides for several tests, according to ever stricter criteria, of our theoretical expectation that *in the post-communist setting the level of election quality is higher than the level of civil liberty which is higher than the level of rule of law*.

¹ One partial exception is Merkel et al. (2003) who include the post-communist countries in a more general classification, emphasizing different types of 'defective democracies'. However, in an earlier article (Møller and Skaaning, 2009a) we have shown that this typology – though quite impressive – is burdened by some important inductive problems.

² Cf. also Sartori (1970: 1042) who emphasizes that even at the most abstract level there must be a contrary to a concept.

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