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Historical Legacies and Post-Communist Regime Change

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This article shows that post-communist regime trajectories have been largely circumscribed by historical legacy differences, but the question about which particular legacy matters most is much harder to answer, since statistical results are sensitive to model specification and to the choice of democracy indicator. While some of these discrepancies reflect the inherent limitations of traditional statistical methods, others reflect the different dimensions of democracy captured by different indicators. Therefore, the article contributes to a more nuanced explanation of post-communist democratization by showing that different legacies drive different aspects of democratization. Finally, the results demonstrate that several prominent alternative explanations—initial election outcomes, institutional choices, geographic diffusion, and external conditionality—played a relatively modest role in explaining democratization patterns beyond the constraints imposed by historical legacies.

The collapse of communism in 1989–91 represented a unique opportunity for the countries of the former Soviet bloc to join the global democratization wave in what was originally envisioned as a common transition from communist one-party regimes to liberal democracies. Instead, the political developments of the last 17 years have produced a variety of divergent political trajectories with endpoints ranging from authoritarian regimes in Belarus and Central Asia to relatively well-functioning democracies in East-Central Europe. What accounts for this dramatic divergence among the erstwhile communist comrades?

To answer this question, this article analyzes the stark cross-country historical legacy differences at the outset of the transition and demonstrates the powerful and temporally resilient influence of these overlapping social, economic, and political legacies on post-communist regime trajectories. While the joint effect of legacies has greatly circumscribed post-communist democratic prospects, the question of which particular type of historical inheritance matters most is much harder to answer with any degree of confidence. In part, these difficulties reflect the limitations of the standard methods through which the legacy-reform link has been analyzed so far and this article suggests a few alternative approaches to this question.

However, the article also shows that some of the statistical discrepancies in the legacy-democracy link are due to the fact that different regime indicators capture distinctive aspects of democracy. This point suggests a more nuanced explanation of how legacies shape regime trajectories: thus, some legacies (such as membership in the pre-war Soviet Union and Muslim religious majorities) primarily affect the post-communist institutional configurations, while other legacies (e.g., ethnic fragmentation and Western Christianity) are more useful in explaining the gap between political institutions and actual rights or between basic rights and genuine democratic governance. The final section demonstrates that several prominent alternative explanations—initial election outcomes, institutional choices, geographic diffusion, and external conditionality—played a relatively modest role in explaining democratization patterns beyond the constraints imposed by historical legacies.

The existing academic literature provides few clear answers about the role of legacies in post-communist democratization. Even though Jowitt (1992) predicted that Leninist legacies would decisively shape post-communist trajectories and Janos (1994, 2000) argued that pre-communist cross-country differences would continue to be salient despite five decades of communist regional equalization attempts, much of the early

academic literature on the subject downplayed the role of initial conditions. In the early 1990s, the predominant theoretical approach to the study of democratization focused primarily on proximate explanations, such as elite politics and democratic crafting (Di Palma 1990; Huntington 1991; Karl and Schmitter 1991; Linz and Valenzuela 1994; O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead 1986; Przeworski 1991). A second group of studies focused on the initial post-communist power balance (Fish 1998a, 1998b; McFaul 2002; Roeder 1994) or on the effects of institutional choices such as presidential versus parliamentary systems (Ishiyama and Velten 1998). A third group of explanations analyzed the international dimension of post-communist regime change in the broader context of the third wave of democratization (Diamond and Plattner 1996; Grugel 1999) and highlighted the role of geographic diffusion (Kopstein and Reilly 2000) and European integration incentives (Kurtz and Barnes 2002; Pridham and Ágh 2001; Vachudova 2004; Whitehead 1996).

While these explanations tend to downplay the role of historical legacies, the past has not been completely neglected by scholars of post-communism. Some of the above authors acknowledge the influence of certain legacies on regime change (Fish 1998b; McFaul 2002), but they only consider a small set of legacy indicators, which are basically treated as control variables. Other studies focus more directly on the effects of specific historical legacies on post-communist democratization (Bunce 2005; Kurtz and Barnes 2002; Roeder 1999), political party development (Grzymala-Busse 2002; Ishiyama 1997; Kitschelt et al. 1999; Pop-Eleches 1999), initial election outcomes (Darden and Grzymala-Busse 2005), and voting behavior (Wittenberg 2006). However, these studies emphasize a relatively small number of legacies at the expense of a more comprehensive discussion of the implications of the region's multiple and overlapping legacy differences.

More recently, a few studies have tried to tackle the empirical and theoretical complexity of legacy effects. Kitschelt (2003) provides an important step towards a more integrated theoretical understanding of the post-communist legacy-regime link, but then focuses almost exclusively on bureaucratic legacies in his empirical analysis. Horowitz (2003) captures the effects of cultural legacies and agricultural employment on post-communist regime change but his decision to combine a number of pre-communist and communist economic and political legacies into a "frustrated national ideals" index makes it difficult to disentangle the contribution of individual legacies.

Crawford and Lijphart (1997) discuss six broad legacy types affecting post-communist politics, but their primary emphasis is on how transition countries differ from other regions rather than on legacy differences between ex-communist countries. De Melo et al. (2001) and Katchanovski (2000) survey a large number of legacy indicators but their primary focus is on post-communist growth variation, and they employ factor analysis to extract legacy indices rather than focusing on individual indicators. Ekiert's (2003) analysis of post-communist transformations in Central and Eastern Europe also emphasizes the importance of historical legacies, but he focuses primarily on Communist-era institutional legacies and argues that their effect declines over time. Not surprisingly, Kopstein (2003) concludes his review of the literature on the relationship between democracy and legacies with a call for a more nuanced treatment of the mixed communist legacy and for a more careful analysis of the interplay between domestic and international legacies.

The present article argues that historical legacies have to constitute the starting point for any systematic analysis of democratization in the post-communist context. Obviously, this argument does not imply that regime trajectories were predetermined by initial structural conditions; indeed, the analysis shows that no single legacy was either sufficient or necessary for post-communist democracy. Nor were the political preferences and choices of post-communist elites and citizens irrelevant. However, I claim that the stark cross-national differences in the region's overlapping cultural, socioeconomic, and institutional legacies significantly shaped the preferences of political actors and the constraints on their choices. As a consequence, the prospects for democratization and democratic deepening were significantly better in countries with favorable legacies (such as the relatively developed, ethnically homogeneous countries of East Central Europe with their longer histories of statehood, democracy, and bureaucratic competence) than in many of the fledgling new states emerging from the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia.

This article contributes to the post-communist democratization literature in a number of ways. First, it covers a broader range of legacy and democracy indicators than previous statistical analyses on the subject and illustrates both the importance and the complexity of the relationship between structural conditions and democratization. Second, the article demonstrates the importance of taking historical legacies seriously, not only because their influence on

post-communist democratization has been large and remarkably resilient, but also because their systematic incorporation in statistical analyses of democracy undermines some of the earlier claims about the importance of more contingent factors, such as initial elections outcomes, institutional choices, and geographic diffusion. Third, unlike most previous work, this analysis addresses the methodologically crucial—and frequently ignored—issue of the overlap between cultural, economic, institutional, and social legacies in the post-communist context and suggests possible solutions for addressing these problems. Finally, this paper shows that the importance of legacies varies as a function of the particular dimension of democracy captured by different democracy indicators, and therefore calls for a more nuanced approach to the statistical study of democratization in the post-communist context and beyond.

The article starts with an overview of legacies, followed by a discussion of democracy scores from several sources. The second section presents cross-country statistical evidence to show that initial conditions heavily influence regime trajectories and that their effect does not diminish (but actually increases) over the course of the transition. The third section deals with the methodological difficulties inherent in the study of the post-communist legacy-reform link and identifies some solutions and a future research agenda for overcoming these difficulties. The final section shows that alternative explanations such as institutional choices, initial election outcomes, geographic diffusion, and Western integration provide only limited explanatory leverage beyond the combined effect of legacies. The conclusion summarizes the findings and discusses their implications for democracy in the region.

Legacies and Democracy—Concepts and Measures

For the purpose of this analysis, legacies are defined as the structural, cultural, and institutional starting points of ex-communist countries at the outset of the transition. Even though these transitional starting points have deep and complicated historical roots in the region's *pre-communist* and communist past, this article does not attempt to retrace these roots. Instead, this section sets out to capture a statistical snapshot of the complex differences in initial conditions in the 28 countries of Eastern Europe and Eurasia, which abandoned Communism as an official doctrine between

late 1989 and late 1991.¹ This overview is not simply a descriptive exercise but rather a theory-driven attempt to systematize those aspects of the region's historical baggage which can be expected to have affected the democratic prospects of the former communist countries. In doing so, I focus on both structural *longue durée* factors and more recent institutional features rooted in the communist period (Ekiert and Hanson 2003).

To help organize the broad array of legacies, the discussion distinguishes between five key legacy dimensions for ex-communist countries. A detailed description of the variables can be found in Table 1. Several recent studies have emphasized the importance of **geography** in explaining political development (Bloom and Sachs 1998; La Porta et al. 1999; Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson 2001). In the East European context, the most important aspect of a country's geographic location is its proximity to Western Europe, measured by two indicators: the existence of a *border with an EU-member country* and the *distance from the closest EU capital*. Western proximity should promote democratization by facilitating the diffusion of Western values and political institutions to ex-communist countries (Kopstein and Reilly 2000). Moreover, proximity to Western Europe should be beneficial to democracy by providing more credible European integration prospects and hence stronger democratization incentives to the countries on the Western fringe of the former Communist bloc.²

The importance of **cultural/religious heritage** in explaining political development has received a fair amount of attention in the East European context,³ as well as in more recent debates about the compatibility of Islam and democracy (Fish 2002; Stepan and Robertson 2003). Two straightforward measures in the

¹This case universe, which is used by most statistical studies of post-communist reforms, consists of 12 East European countries (including the five initial Yugoslav successor states but not Kosovo and Montenegro) and all 15 former Soviet republics and Mongolia. I have decided against including other former communist countries, since China, Cuba, North Korea, and Vietnam are not technically post-communist yet, whereas other Marxist regimes in the developing world were of a sufficiently different nature so as to make their inclusion problematic.

²In a strict sense geographic location is not a historical legacy. However, it is a structural factor with significant implications for democracy prospects and is therefore treated as a legacy in this analysis. Moreover, while geographic location is time invariant, the political implications of location are certainly time dependent.

³Janos (1989) discusses the different foundations of political authority (legal-rational in Western Christianity versus traditional in Eastern Orthodoxy), and Lal (1998) points to the higher degree of separation between church and state in Western Christianity.

TABLE 1 Overview of Variables

Variable name	Coding/measurement	Source(s)
EU border	1 = yes, 0 = no	Author
Distance to West	Log (Distance to Helsinki, Vienna, Rome or Berlin in km)	Author
Western Christian	Western Christian majority? 1 = yes, 0 = no	Author
Muslim	Muslim majority? 1 = yes, 0 = no	Author
Minority share	Log (percentage ethnic minorities ^a)	Author using data from CIA World Factbook (1992)
Energy intensity	(GDP per unit of energy use) ⁻¹ / (% industry/total GDP)	Author using data from <i>World Development Indicators</i> (2001)
Natural resources	2 = resource rich, 1 = moderate resources, 0 = resource poor	de Melo et al. (2001)
Non-CMEA Exports	Non-CMEA exports/Total exports	de Melo et al. (2001)
EBRD Economic Reform score 1989	1 = none—4 = highest	EBRD (2001)
GDP/capita 1989	GDP/capita in 1989 at PPP	de Melo et al. (2001)
% Urban 1989	urban population/total (in %)	<i>World Development Indicators</i> (2001)
% High Education 1989	% higher education enrollment in 19–24 age group	UNICEF (2001)
Communist bureaucratic legacy	bureaucratic-authoritarian = 3 national-accommodative = 2 mixed = 1.5 patrimonial = 1 patrimonial/colonial periphery = 0	Kitschelt (2001)
Interwar statehood	1 = yes, 0 = no	Author
Prewar Soviet Republic	1 = yes, 0 = no	Author
Prior democracy	Average Polity Regime score 1920–39	Author calculations based on Polity
Imperial legacy	2 = Western, 1 = mixed 0 = Russian/Ottoman	Author
FH political and civil rights	0 (least free) to 12 (most free) ^b	Freedom House (2005a)
NIT democratic reform	0 (lowest) to 6 (highest) ^c	Freedom House (2005b)
WB Voice and Accountability (VOA)	–2.5 (lowest) to 2.5 (highest)	Kaufman et al. (2005)
Polity IV Regime	–10 (autocracy) to 10 (democracy)	Marshall & Jaggers (2005)

a. Does not include the Roma population both because official censuses are biased and because Roma have not been organized politically along ethnic lines to the extent of other ethnic minorities.

b. Obtained by adding the scores for political and civil liberties, and then subtracting the sum from 14.

c. The scores were inverted so that higher scores indicate better performance. Also, given the uneven temporal spacing of the surveys, I created yearly scores by using weighted averages where necessary.

post-communist context are whether the predominant religion in a given country is *Western Christianity* or *Islam*, thus leaving Eastern Orthodoxy as the excluded category.⁴ Additionally, I consider *imperial legacy*, since it is likely that centuries of different imperial influence affected not only religion but also institutions, civic values, and national ideas (Bunce 2005) differently in countries in the Central European sphere of influence compared to regions dominated by the Russian or the Ottoman Empires.

Given the painful process of post-communist economic adjustment, **economic legacies** are likely to impose significant constraints not only on economic reforms but also on democratization. Because the existing literature offers little help in this respect,⁵ I use an indicator of the *energy intensity* of the communist economies to capture Soviet-style structural economic

⁴The only exception is Mongolia, where Buddhism is the primary religion.

⁵Kitschelt (2001) uses the FSU dummy as a proxy for economic distortions but such a measure glosses over important differences between former Soviet republics, as well as between East European countries.

distortions.⁶ Since prior work has identified a “natural resource curse” effect on democracy (Barro 1999), the analysis also includes an indicator of *natural resource endowment*⁷ to address the possibility that post-communist regime transformations were affected by the political repercussions of natural resource wealth. Since closer economic integration with the West prior to the collapse of communism should make a country more receptive to Western democratic conditionality, I include a measure of the *exports to non-CMEA countries*. Finally, to capture the possibility that post-communist democratization is affected by differences in *pre-1989 economic reforms*, I used the EBRD economic reform index for 1989.

Despite intense communist efforts to erase large pre-communist differences in **social conditions/modernization**, transition countries nevertheless differed in terms of socioeconomic development levels, which, according to modernization theorists,⁸ should have predicted differential readiness for democracy. The present analysis focuses on *GDP/capita*, *urbanization* and *education* levels,⁹ all of which reflect the large developmental gap between East-Central European countries on one hand, and parts of the Balkans and the former Soviet Union on the other. Despite the obvious theoretical shortcomings of the classical modernization hypothesis, its predictions receive individual-level support from public opinion surveys, which confirm that urban and educated voters are generally more exposed to Western influences and, therefore, more supportive of democracy (Clem and Craumer 1997).

Despite their common history of de facto one-party rule, the transition countries exhibited considerable **institutional legacy** differences, traceable not only to late-communist reforms but also to older historical legacies. Following Kitschelt (2001), I distinguish between five types of *bureaucratic legacies*, ranging from bureaucratic-authoritarian (the

Czech Republic) to patrimonial/colonial periphery (Caucasus and Central Asia). The institutional penetration of Communism is measured by two straightforward if somewhat blunt measures—*years under communism* and *prewar membership in the Soviet Union*—with longer communist spells presumably complicating democratization. Along similar lines, one would expect *pre-communist democratic experience* in the interwar period¹⁰ to facilitate democratization by allowing for at least some voters with memories of free elections and by strengthening anti-communist forces in cases where prewar democratic parties were revived following the collapse of Communism (e.g., Romania, Hungary, Czech Republic). The last two variables in this category address even more fundamental political challenges: the limited prior *statehood experience* of many transition countries,¹¹ and the challenges of high *ethnic fragmentation*, which has significantly complicated democratization efforts in large parts of the Balkans and the former Soviet Union (Roeder 1999).

Dependent Variables—Democracy Scores

Of the large and growing variety of democracy measures, this paper focuses on four of the most widely used indicators for the ex-communist countries, described in Table 1. Even though much of the democratization literature (as well as studies using democracy as an independent variable) tend to use only one of these measures, thereby implicitly assuming them to be equivalent measures of the same concept, the current discussion suggests that their different conceptualization approaches actually produce different empirical results and therefore warrant closer scrutiny than they usually receive. *Freedom House (FH) political and civil rights* scores are the most widely used democracy measure in cross-national research and have the benefit of the most extensive temporal and geographical coverage for my sample. Compared to the narrower rights-based FH democracy measure, *Nations in Transit (NIT) democratization* scores attempt to capture the quality of democracy by evaluating countries along four dimensions since 1996: the competitiveness of the political process, the degree of development of civil society, the existence of an inde-

⁶The measure uses the inverse of GDP per unit of commercial energy use, normalized for the share of industrial output in total GDP (in order to avoid the risk of scoring a country with a large but relatively energy-efficient diversified industry the same as a country with a smaller but heavily distorted industrial sector.)

⁷The measure, based on de Melo et al. (2001), codes countries on the basis of the abundance of natural resources, rather than on the share of natural resources in exports. (The latter measure runs the risk of endogeneity since it is affected by institutional features and political decisions).

⁸See Lipset (1959) but also the findings in Przeworski et al. (2000).

⁹While Communism eroded the large pre-communist literacy differences, enrollment in higher education in 1989—the measure used in this paper—still differed significantly across countries.

¹⁰The linkage between interwar and post-communist democracy has been explored before (e.g., Wittenberg 2006) but it has not been tested in cross-country statistical tests.

¹¹Indeed, the settlement of statehood and border issues was the one prerequisite for democratization acknowledged even by transitologists.

pendent media, and the quality of governance and public administration. The third measure, Kaufman, Kraay, and Mastruzzi's (2005) *Voice and Accountability* (VOA) score, aggregates democracy indicators from as many as 11 different surveys through an unobserved components methodology. A fourth widely used democracy indicator is the *Polity IV Regime* score, measured as the difference between its democracy and its autocracy scores, each of which are based on the weighted aggregation of three components: competitiveness of political participation, openness and competitiveness of executive recruitment, and constraints on the chief executive's power.

The Persistent Link between Legacies and Post-Communist Democracy

Despite their common past as one-party states and their almost simultaneous abandonment of communist ideology, the transition countries did not experience the kind of uniform regime trajectory predicted by the transitologists' tabula rasa vision of democra-

tization. Instead, the high and statistically significant correlations between legacies and democracy scores in Table 2 confirm that post-communist democratization was deeply imbedded in historically rooted cross-country differences. Moreover, judging by the over-time change in the correlations between legacies and democracy, modernization is the only legacy cluster whose effect weakened over the course of the transition. For other legacy dimensions—especially cultural and institutional factors—the cross-country explanatory power of legacies *increased over time* across different democracy measures.

Table 2 reveals important differences in the correlation between democratization and different legacy types. Three highly correlated legacy clusters—geography, religious-cultural, and institutional—appear to be the strongest correlates of political trajectories. The two religious variables emerge as powerful predictors in the hypothesized direction, suggesting that predominantly Western Christian countries were more democratic than average, whereas Muslim countries were more likely to be authoritarian. Contrary to some earlier claims (Fish 1998a; Kitschelt 2003), ethnic diversity displays a

TABLE 2 Bivariate Pairwise Correlations between Legacies and Reform Scores

	Geography		Culture/Religion		Economy				Modernization		Institutions/Statehood						
	EU border	Distance W	W Christian	Muslim	Imperial legacy	Energy intensity	Natural resources	EBRD Reforms 1989	W exports 1989	GDP/cap 1989	% Urban 1989	% High Educ 1989	Comm bur legacy	Interwar Statehood	Prewar Soviet Republic	Prior democ	Minority share
FH Democracy 93	.51	-.65	.62	-.64	.46	-.61	-.37	.07	.36	.61	.48	.27	.75	.57	-.58	.46	-.61
FH Democracy 96	.49	-.69	.68	-.66	.54	-.57	-.31	.05	.33	.57	.50	.29	.78	.61	-.66	.59	-.51
FH Democracy 00	.44	-.73	.76	-.73	.65	-.66	-.45	.21	.44	.50	.51	.26	.82	.57	-.81	.70	-.49
FH Democracy 04	.41	-.74	.71	-.64	.66	-.72	-.50	.33	.56	.38	.41	.23	.82	.56	-.86	.68	-.48
NIT Democracy 96	.59	-.78	.80	-.66	.60	-.60	-.37	.17	.33	.58	.63	.33	.84	.57	-.68	.68	-.53
NIT Democracy 00	.51	-.73	.80	-.66	.64	-.67	-.43	.19	.42	.48	.51	.25	.84	.59	-.78	.70	-.52
NIT Democracy 04	.46	-.82	.78	-.60	.68	-.68	-.52	.33	.53	.38	.48	.25	.86	.58	-.85	.73	-.47
WB VOA 96	.65	-.71	.68	-.47	.69	-.53	-.32	.21	.54	.28	.40	.06	.72	.44	-.70	.55	-.68
WB VOA 00	.55	-.86	.86	-.52	.71	-.54	-.47	.27	.37	.41	.62	.33	.84	.47	-.64	.67	-.50
WB VOA 04	.54	-.88	.87	-.60	.74	-.61	-.51	.32	.43	.46	.66	.38	.86	.49	-.74	.73	-.47
Polity Democracy 93	.47	-.47	.44	-.72	.38	-.52	-.39	-.03	.28	.62	.47	.30	.65	.48	-.53	.41	-.39
Polity Democracy 96	.49	-.45	.50	-.65	.45	-.52	-.24	.03	.40	.48	.53	.22	.70	.54	-.65	.52	-.35
Polity Democracy 00	.50	-.55	.49	-.78	.47	-.73	-.46	.32	.59	.43	.53	.23	.70	.47	-.78	.49	-.47
Polity Democracy 03	.45	-.54	.52	-.78	.50	-.72	-.44	.30	.58	.44	.55	.25	.71	.45	-.75	.47	-.49

Note: Bolded coefficients are significant at .05 (two-tailed).

strong negative correlation with democracy, particularly with respect to FH civil and political rights in the early transition period. While it is hardly surprising that state- and nation-building imperatives initially delayed democratization, the data in Table 2 suggest that the negative effects of weak statehood and democratic traditions persist over time, a persistence that runs counter to the transitologists' "learning-by-doing" expectation. The two remaining indicators in the "institutional legacy" cluster—*bureaucratic legacies* and *imperial legacies*—also emerge as consistently strong statistical correlates of democracy.

The high predictive power of the strongest economic legacy predictor—*energy intensiveness*—confirms the deleterious effects of uncompetitive, energy-intensive industries on not only economic reforms but also democratization. This correlation is consistent with the strong support for reform opponents in regions dominated by Stalinist-style heavy industry in Slovakia, Romania, Russia, and the Ukraine and reveals a potential causal link between energy intensiveness and democracy, in the sense that areas with hard-to-reform industries became crucial political constituencies for parties opposed to both economic and political liberalization. The effects of other economic legacy indicators were less conclusive: thus, countries with stronger communist-era trade links to the West and weaker natural resource dependence made faster progress towards democracy, but the relationship was statistically weaker than for other indicators. Finally, the 1989 *EBRD economic reform index* emerges as the weakest predictor of political reforms, suggesting that the pre-transition economic reform headstart of several countries (most importantly Hungary and Poland) provides little analytical leverage for understanding broader post-communist reform patterns. The final legacy cluster—modernization—displayed rather consistent moderate-to-high correlations between reforms and two of the three modernization indicators: *GDP per capita* and *urbanization*.¹²

Multiple Regressions and the Legacy-Regime Link

However, even strong correlations tell us little about causal links, especially since different historical legacies are highly correlated. The most widely used

statistical method for analyzing the drivers of post-communist democracy has been cross-sectional regressions (Fish 1998a, 1998b; Horowitz 2003; Katchanovski 2000; Kopstein and Reilly 2000). Nevertheless, as Kitschelt (2003) has forcefully argued, the primary reliance on goodness-of-fit criteria unwittingly favors proximate causes and may result in shallow explanations. In this section, I briefly discuss what multiple cross-sectional regressions can and cannot tell us about the relationship between legacies and post-communist reforms.

Table 3 presents cross-sectional OLS regressions, which illustrate the effect of legacies on different democracy measures in 1993, 1996, and 2003/2004, to capture regime patterns at the start, the midpoint, and the most recent available data point of the transition. The model specification is primarily for illustrative purposes and makes no claim to include all the potentially relevant variables (which is precluded anyway by sample size limitations). Nevertheless, the five explanatory variables—*Western Christian* and *Muslim*, *Interwar Statehood*, *Energy Intensity*, and *Prewar Soviet Republic*—represent three of the legacy clusters discussed earlier.¹³

The first striking finding is the extremely high joint explanatory power of the five legacy indicators, which capture more than three-quarters of the cross-country variation in seven of the 10 models. Moreover, comparing Models 3–6 to Models 7–10, respectively, it appears that regardless of the choice of democracy measure, legacies were stronger predictors of regime patterns after 15 years of post-communist transformations than in the mid-1990s, with *R*-squared statistics of around 90% for three of the four democracy indexes. In light of these results—all of them obtained without recourse to what Kitschelt calls temporally proximate, "shallow" variables—it is hard to deny that post-communist political reforms have been largely circumscribed by the long shadow of the past.

In terms of the effects of individual variables, however, the statistical results in Table 3 reveal the significant analytical limitations of cross-sectional OLS regressions. Thus, none of the individual legacy indicators were consistently statistically significant across the different statistical models, making it difficult to claim robust links and, therefore, lay the foundation for establishing credible causal links between

¹²The prevalence of higher education turns out to be the weakest indicator in the group, possibly due to cross-national measurement differences.

¹³The missing clusters are geography and modernization, whose indicators are not significant once we control for other legacies.

TABLE 3 Legacies and Democracy: Cross-Sectional Regression Results

	(1) Polity regime 1993	(2) FH democ 1993	(3) Polity regime 1996	(4) FH democ 1996	(5) WB democ 1996	(6) NIT democ 1996	(7) Polity regime 2003	(8) FH democ 2004	(9) WB democ 2004	(10) NIT democ 2004
Western Christian	1.309 (2.117)	2.417* (1.026)	.944 (2.446)	2.635** (.932)	.733** (.139)	1.753** (.391)	-.525 (1.600)	2.259** (.698)	.864** (.117)	1.343** (.328)
Muslim	-8.22** (2.333)	-2.595* (1.148)	-5.035* (2.697)	-2.406* (1.044)	-2.89# (.155)	-.841# (.438)	-6.598** (1.764)	-1.639* (.782)	-.297* (.131)	-.640# (.351)
Interwar statehood	4.85* (2.167)	2.903** (1.024)	5.187* (2.505)	3.246** (.930)	.130 (.138)	1.192** (.390)	1.861 (1.638)	1.262# (.697)	.164 (.117)	.699* (.325)
Energy intensity	-.589 (.669)	-.670* (.313)	-.588 (.773)	-.407 (.284)	-.030 (.042)	-.193 (.119)	-.989* (.506)	-.475* (.213)	-.033 (.036)	-.166# (.095)
Pre-war Soviet Rep.	2.13 (2.89)	1.429 (1.305)	-2.220 (3.347)	.630 (1.185)	-.080 (.176)	.275 (.497)	-4.193* (2.189)	-3.163** (.888)	-.214 (.149)	-1.264** (.398)
Constant	4.526# (2.311)	6.886** (1.134)	4.590 (2.671)	6.50** (1.030)	-.48** (.153)	2.71** (.432)	1.389** (1.747)	9.45** (.772)	-.45** (.130)	3.645** (.351)
Obs.	27	28	27	28	28	28	27	28	28	27
R ²	.64	.72	.62	.77	.80	.81	.82	.90	.90	.90

Standard errors in parentheses—#significant at 10%; *significant at 5%; **significant at 1%.

individual legacies and democratization on the basis of cross-sectional regressions.¹⁴

Two inherent limitations of cross-sectional regressions—small sample sizes¹⁵ and impracticality for dealing with over-time regime change patterns¹⁶—can be addressed at least in part through the use of panel data.¹⁷ Table 4 presents the results of Prais-Winsten regressions with panel-corrected standard errors based on the longest available time coverage for each of the four democracy indicators discussed above. The basic model specifications include not only a broader set of legacies than the cross-sectional models in Table 3 but also a measure of the logged duration of the transition to capture the temporal dimension of democratization. Since the initial conditions at the outset of the transition do not vary over time, Models 2–4 include interaction terms between the transition duration and key historical legacies in order to capture the relative predictive power of legacies as the transition unfolded.

Even though the overall explanatory power of the panel regressions is weaker than in the cross-sectional counterparts (since legacies do not vary temporally), the results in Models 1 and 6–8 confirm the statistical and substantive importance of a wide range of historical legacies for post-communist democratization. According to Model 1, even controlling for differences in socioeconomic development and ethnic diversity, Western Christian countries with a legacy of independent statehood in the interwar period (such as Poland, Hungary, or the Baltics) had a predicted democracy advantage of more than 5 points on the 12-point *Freedom House* scale compared to predominantly Muslim former Soviet republics such as Azerbaijan or Kazakhstan.

Nor is there any evidence that the effect of legacies faded away as the transition took its course. Instead, the interaction terms in Models 2–4 show that the predictive power of historical legacies increased over

¹⁴None of the other legacies discussed earlier fared any better—in fact most of them were statistically insignificant when added to the current specifications (which is why they were omitted from the current models.)

¹⁵One standard solution to this problem—expanding the sample size—is of limited use for the study of post-communist democratization, for the reasons discussed in footnote 1.

¹⁶Thus, one could extend the approach in Table 3 and run cross-sectional regressions over a wide range of years but the interpretation of coefficients across a large number of models is cumbersome, makes inefficient use of the data, and ignores serial correlation.

¹⁷This approach has been used at least in part by Kopstein and Reilly (2000) and especially Kurtz and Barnes (2002).

TABLE 4 Legacies and Democracy: Panel Regression Results

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
	FH democ	FH democ	FH democ	FH democ	WB democ	NIT democ	Polity regime	FH democ	NIT democ
Western Christian	2.06** (.407)	2.05** (.416)	2.09** (.422)	2.09** (.435)	.726** (.101)	1.02** (.343)	-.112 (1.230)	1.885** (.298)	.964** (.188)
Muslim	-.483 (.584)	-.513 (.583)	-.473 (.605)	-.439 (.622)	-.213* (.129)	-.812 (.892)	-4.221* (1.670)	.451 (.495)	.109 (.153)
Interwar statehood	1.25** (.350)	-1.18# (.605)	1.26** (.368)	1.23** (.382)	.088 (.083)	.330 (.311)	2.520* (1.045)	.667* (.260)	.083 (.140)
Energy intensity	-.467** (.121)	-.467** (.122)	-.467** (.125)	.320# (.184)	-.011 (.021)	-.076 (.169)	-1.002** (.248)	-.199* (.104)	-.061* (.027)
Minority share	-.282* (.147)	-.313* (.152)	.456 (.289)	-.302# (.160)	-.147** (.039)	-.056 (.087)	-.753 (.534)	-.079 (.117)	-.039 (.036)
%Urban 1989	.065** (.018)	.062** (.019)	.065** (.019)	.064** (.020)	-.002 (.004)	.006 (.029)	.098* (.043)	.043** (.015)	.009* (.005)
Pre-war Soviet Republic	-1.40* (.596)	-1.37* (.614)	-1.39* (.620)	-1.43* (.644)	-.266* (.112)	-1.42** (.524)	-1.563 (1.881)	-.873* (.443)	-.239* (.119)
Transition year (log)	.647** (.143)	.113 (.203)	1.74** (.337)	1.89** (.261)	.055 (.068)	-.324 (.245)	.654* (.333)	.407** (.124)	-.167# (.097)
Interwar state		1.33** (.268)							
*Transition year			-401 (.132)**						
Minority share*									
Transition year									
Energy intensity									
*Transition year									
Polity regime								.256** (.024)	.266** (.021)
FH democracy									
Constant	3.77** (1.03)	5.07** (1.10)	1.80 (1.20)	1.55 (1.16)	-.072 (.297)	4.31** (1.468)	-.355 (2.25)	3.47** (.761)	3.78** (1.330)
Observations	400	400	400	400	278	272	357	357	269
R ²	.60	.61	.60	.60	.60	.52	.29	.75	.89

Standard errors in parentheses—#significant at 10%; *significant at 5%; **significant at 1%.

time: according to Model 2, *interwar statehood* was a much stronger predictor of civil and political rights in 2004 (when it accounted for a 2.4-point democracy gap, significant at .001) than during the early transition years, when its effect was statistically insignificant (and even negative). Similarly, the negative interaction terms in Models 3 and 4 indicate that the adverse regime effects of ethnic fragmentation and distorted, energy-intensive economies manifested themselves much more clearly later in the transition. These findings suggest that whereas the chaotic early transition period had produced a number of deviations from the “iron law of history,” many of these deviations were eventually “corrected” over time. This return to history may help explain the belated democratic progress of Slovakia, Croatia, and Serbia, countries whose regime trajectory until the late 1990s was modest compared to their relatively favorable legacies, as well as some of the democratic slippage in erstwhile democratic over-achievers, such as Kyrgyzstan and Moldova. The trajectories of these countries suggest that even significant positive or negative leadership “shocks” do not usually produce lasting deviations from the broad parameters of legacy-based regime predictions.¹⁸

Nonetheless, a closer comparison of the legacy coefficients in Models 1 and 5–7 in Table 4 reveals that even panel data fails to produce a single “foolproof” legacy, which emerges as statistically significant regardless of the choice of model specification and democracy indicator. For example, *Western Christianity* is a statistically and substantively powerful predictor of democracy according to *Freedom House*, *Nations in Transit*, and the Kaufman et al. measures but is relegated to insignificance when using *Polity* regime scores. Since similar fates befall indicators for other potential theories—including modernization, ethnic diversity, and Islam¹⁹—these findings should serve as a call for extreme caution for anyone attempting to provide monocausal explanations of post-communist democracy. Even though plausible theoretical argu-

ments backed by suggestive correlational and case study evidence can be made on behalf of a variety of legacies (or—as we will see—nonlegacy accounts), none of the findings are sufficiently robust to confirm them conclusively in a cross-country context once other legacies are taken into consideration.

What are the roots of this remarkable instability of the legacy-reform link and what are its implications for our understanding of post-communist democratization? The next two sections focus on two possible answers: the intertwined nature of different types of historical legacies in the post-communist space and the different dimensions captured by different the democracy indicators.

Methodological Concerns and Solutions: Analyzing Intertwined Legacies

A Romanian proverb tersely states that “money attracts money, and fleas attract fleas,” which aptly describes the relationship between different types of legacies in ex-communist countries. The countries of East Central Europe were not only geographically, historically, and culturally closer to the West than their Eastern and Southern brethren, but were also richer, more modern, less ethnically diverse, with longer histories of democracy and statehood, and relatively less distorted economies at the outset of the transition. While high correlations between indicators within the same “legacy family” are reassuring about the reliability of the measures, the high correlation between indicators of different legacy types—such as between religion and statehood—create significant difficulties for interpreting the role of individual factors.²⁰

From a statistical point of view, the high correlations of the different legacy indicators (many correlated at or above .5) can lead to high multicollinearity, which produces unstable coefficients and inflated standard errors, and, therefore, undermines the utility of multiple regressions in adjudicating debates between competing explanations. Under such circumstances, classical regression analysis is limited to telling us that the variables matter jointly but the method is less useful for identifying individual effects.²¹ This will

¹⁸Thus, the initial underperformance of Slovakia, Croatia, and Serbia was undoubtedly due to a great extent to the personalities and leadership styles of Meciar, Tudjman, and Milosevic but democracy improved almost immediately after these leaders left power. Lukashenka’s Belarus is still an outlier in this respect but I would argue that the country’s more favorable legacies nevertheless make democracy there more likely than in similarly authoritarian countries, such as Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

¹⁹The weaker effect of the “Muslim” variable compared to Table 3 is due the fact that the panel regressions control for several other legacy variables (e.g., urbanization and ethnic diversity), which are strongly correlated with both regime and “Muslim majority” but which were excluded from the regressions in Table 3 due to concerns about degrees of freedom.

²⁰For an overview of these correlations, see Table A in the online appendix at <http://journalofpolitics.org/articles.html>.

²¹Similarly, the use of F-tests to assess the significance of blocks of variables can help us establish the joint importance of legacies but it obviously cannot adjudicate between individual legacies.

be true even if some variables do better than others in what Kitschelt (2003) terms “the statistical tournament”—such outcomes are not only sensitive to model specification and the addition/deletion of a few data points,²² but they may merely reflect differences in measurement error between variables rather than real differences in substantive effects. In the current case, regression diagnostics clearly indicate that a statistical model including all legacy indicators discussed in the first section would suffer from rather severe multicollinearity problems.²³ Meanwhile, the base models (1 and 5–7) in Table 4 stayed within the conventional boundaries of multicollinearity²⁴ but did so at the cost of excluding a number of potentially relevant explanatory variables, thereby risking biased estimates due to incorrectly specified models.

One popular approach to cut through this complexity has been the use of factor analysis to reduce the large number of initial conditions to one or two indices. The approach was pioneered in the post-communist context by de Melo et al. (2001). Their analysis yields two main components, which the authors interpret as “macroeconomic distortions” and “over-industrialization.” Such an approach is attractive considering the limited degrees-of-freedom in cross-sectional regressions, and the two factors have in fact been used quite extensively in the literature (see, e.g., Falcetti, Raiser, and Sanfey 2002; Havrylyshyn and van Rooden 1998). However, a number of drawbacks limit the analytical utility of this approach. First, the small number of observations in the sample questions the applicability of factor analysis, especially with a large number of variables.²⁵ Second, even if such an approach were statistically acceptable, the difficulty of interpreting

the meaning of these factors critically constrains our substantive understanding of legacies.

An alternative approach would be to dispense with regressions altogether and focus instead on case studies. While such an approach is undoubtedly an important complement to statistical work, since it facilitates the detailed tracing of causal mechanisms, it ultimately does not really sidestep the problematic nature of intertwined historical legacies. Since countries rarely differ substantially along only one of the legacy indicators, it is extremely difficult to identify cases for which the *ceteris paribus* assumption underlying structured case comparisons is actually fulfilled. Nonetheless, such comparisons, as long as they are carefully selected along a most-similar cases design, can provide valuable help with untangling the complex effects of the region’s intertwined historical legacies.²⁶ In addition to their inherent case-based insights, structured case comparisons could be used as the first stage in the Bayesian statistical modeling approach advocated by Western and Jackman as a potentially promising alternative to multiple regressions when dealing with small sample sizes and highly correlated explanatory variables.²⁷

Different Conceptions and Measures of Democracy

The instability of regression estimates across different measures of democracy is not a purely post-communist phenomenon (Casper and Tufis 2004). The findings in Tables 3 and 4 add further support for Casper and Tufis’ call for a more self-conscious use of democracy indicators by political scientists. However, the present discussion goes one step further in that it links these discrepancies to the different dimensions of democracy captured by the different indicators used in this article. *Nations in Transit* uses the broadest—and most demanding—conception of democracy, which requires not only a competitive political process but also an independent media, a vibrant civil society, and a well-functioning system of governance and public administration. By comparison, the other two mea-

²²For example, the negative effect of ethnic fragmentation on FH democracy in Model 1 of Table 4 disappeared when Latvia and Estonia were excluded from the analysis. In the same model, the negative effect for *Muslim* approached statistical significance (.1 one-tailed) if Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan were excluded. However, most other results were less affected by such changes, and no single country appears to significantly affect the overall findings.

²³Thus, several of the indicators—including *Western exports*, *Communist bureaucratic legacies*, *Western Christian*, and *Prewar Soviet Republic*—had variance inflation factors (VIF) above the critical value of 10, and the condition number for the model was extremely high at 97.4.

²⁴All of the independent variables had variance inflation factors (VIF) below 4 and the condition number was around 30.

²⁵The statistical literature tends to place the lower bounds for sample size significantly above the 28 countries in de Melo et al.’s (2001) sample. See Cattell (1978) and Tabachnick and Fidell (2001).

²⁶Another promising possibility for dealing with overlapping legacies is to focus on subnational variation but such an approach suffers from the smaller variation of subnational democracy and the paucity of subnational democracy indicators.

²⁷The approach uses similar case comparisons to obtain the starting values for the relevant coefficients and improve the likelihood of adjudicating between two or more competing hypotheses measured by highly correlated indicators (Western and Jackman 1994).

asures²⁸ have a narrower scope but differ in their emphasis: thus, Freedom House emphasizes political outcomes (civil and political rights), whereas the Polity regime score has a strong institutional and procedural emphasis, thereby reflecting a different understanding of democracy.²⁹

Since different indicators measure distinctive facets of democracy, their different legacy correlates can offer a more nuanced, multistage interpretation of the regime implications of historical legacies. At the most basic level, democratic countries need institutional arrangements compatible with genuine democratic rule (as tracked by *Polity*). Because the effects of formal institutions are filtered by informal local norms and practices, the adoption of “good” institutions does not necessarily translate uniformly into civil and political rights (as coded by *Freedom House*). Similarly, the quality of democratic governance (captured by *Nations in Transit*) hinges on the vitality of civil society and the competence of the public administration, and should, therefore, not be expected to flow automatically from the mere absence of formal restrictions on civil and political rights. Seen from this perspective, the achievement of high-quality democracy requires three distinct steps, each of which may be affected by different facets of a country’s historical inheritance.

The legacy correlates of the first step—the adoption of democratic institutions—are reflected in Model 7 of Table 4 and suggest that institutional choices were more conducive to democracy in urbanized, non-Muslim countries with longer statehood traditions and less distorted economies. These correlates reflect the inauspicious institutional choices of the Central Asian republics, particularly Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Other legacies, such as Western Christianity, ethnic diversity, and prewar membership in the Soviet Union, mattered much less at this stage.

To assess the legacy impact on the second step—from institutions to civil and political rights—Model 8 in Table 4 includes the Polity regime score as an independent variable in addition to the legacy indicators

used in Model 7.³⁰ The results suggest that several legacies turn out to play a significant role in understanding the gap between institutional arrangements (captured by *Polity*) and actual freedoms (captured by *Freedom House*). The substantively large and highly significant coefficient of Western Christianity confirms the importance of cultural differences to the functioning of formal institutions: thus, holding institutions constant, civil and political rights in Western Christian countries were significantly higher than in other ex-communist countries. This finding suggests that the great democracy boost associated with Western Christianity occurs at the “implementation” rather than the institutional choice stage of political reforms. The gap between formal institutions and real-life freedoms is also closely related to the ethnic and state-building challenges that many transition countries have confronted. Thus, the greater incidence of rights violations in countries with larger ethnic minorities (see Model 1) also appears to be mainly a function of a shortfall between the promises of institutional design and the actual functioning of these institutions: thus, the coefficient for *Minority share* is moderately large and statistically significant in Model 8 but was a weak predictor of *Polity* regime scores in Model 7. Meanwhile, based on the comparison of the same two models, countries with memories of interwar statehood benefited at both the institutional choice and the implementation stage, arguably because the travails of state-building gave strong leaders more leeway to design favorable (and generally undemocratic) institutions, while their image as “fathers” of the country gave them more leeway for arbitrary measures even within the already loose institutional constraints on their powers. Finally, countries with higher urbanization levels at the outset of the transition also appear to have benefited in terms of both better formal institutions and superior outcomes within a given set of institutions, as illustrated by the significant positive effect of *%Urban 1989* in Models 7 and 8.

The final model in Table 4 address the challenges of democratic deepening, namely the transition from basic political and civil rights to a well-functioning,

²⁸This discussion excludes the fourth measure—Kaufman, Kraay, and Mastruzzi’s (2005) *Voice and Accountability*—since its aggregation of up to 25 different sources makes it significantly harder to interpret substantively.

²⁹Marshall and Jagers acknowledge the importance “of civil liberties to all citizens in their daily lives and in acts of political participation,” but add that “we do not include coded data on civil liberties” (2000, 12).

³⁰This specification does not address the endogeneity of these theoretically prior democracy measures. However, instrumental variable specifications (using the lagged average in democracy of a country’s neighbors as an instrument for theoretically prior democracy) suggest that the overall findings of these regressions with respect to legacy differences are not affected by endogeneity. However, the instruments are not extremely powerful, leading to high multicollinearity and inflated standard errors, and, therefore, the results are omitted here.

democratic society with vibrant intermediary institutions and a capable and responsive bureaucratic apparatus (as captured by the *Nations in Transit* indicator). The results in Model 9 show that once we control for basic freedoms, predominantly Western Christian countries received a large and statistically significant democratic quality boost compared to other transition countries. The only other statistically significant legacy indicator in Model 9 was *Minority share*, which suggests that ethnically diverse countries had a harder time translating basic freedoms into well-functioning democratic governance. While the mechanisms behind these links require further research, these findings suggest that the higher quality of democracy in East-Central Europe may have been due to the fact that their Western Christian religious/cultural heritage and their greater ethnic homogeneity contributed to more effective civil societies.

Finally, the comparison between the coefficients for the logged transition year in Models 8 and 9 adds an interesting nuance to the temporal dynamics of post-communist democratization. The fairly large positive effect of time in Model 8 suggests a gradual democratic learning process that allows for greater political and civil rights to be achieved within a given set of institutional arrangements. Further research will be necessary to determine whether this boost is primarily due to the increasing ability of pro-democracy political forces to take advantage of formal rules to pursue their goals, or whether the progress reflects the increasing willingness of the authoritarian camp to abide by formal democratic constraints. On a less optimistic note, the negative effects of *transition year* in Model 9 suggest that progress in democratic quality has lagged behind the significant increase in basic rights.

These findings suggest that the search for a set of silver bullet explanations of post-communist democracy is likely to remain elusive for two reasons. First, the high empirical correlation between analytically distinct historical legacies is likely to produce unstable statistical estimates, which make it difficult to draw definitive conclusions about the importance of individual legacies without engaging in multimethod work. Second, given the conceptualization differences of different democracy indicators, it should come as no great surprise (despite the relative neglect of this insight in much of the democratization literature) that different facets of democracy should correlate more strongly with certain legacies than with others. While such differences may preclude general statements about the drivers of Democracy, this discussion has shown that the variation in correlational patterns for

analytically distinct democracy indicators can actually be used to achieve a more nuanced understanding of the political dynamics of the democratization.

Alternative Explanations

Having established the strong and lasting effect of historical legacies on post-communist political reforms, I now briefly address the implications of these findings for other explanations of democratization. I find that legacies remain powerful predictors of regime type even when we control for several prominent alternative explanations such as initial election outcomes, institutional choices, geographic diffusion, and external conditionality. Meanwhile, the explanatory power of these alternative theories is substantially diminished—and in some cases disappears altogether—once legacy differences are taken into account.

One alternative explanation focuses on the regime effects of institutional choices in the period immediately after the collapse of Communism. One of the central post-communist institutional design dilemmas—the choice between presidential and parliamentary systems—can serve as a lens for understanding the relationship between historical legacies, institutional choice and post-communist democracy. While several authors have explored the determinants of institutional choice (Bunce 1997; Frye 1997; Luong 2000), few have employed large-N methods to assess the relationship between presidential powers and post-communist democracy.³¹ However, the potential pitfalls of presidentialism for democracy have been extensively discussed in the broader democratization literature (Linz and Valenzuela 1994; Mainwaring 1993; Stepan and Skach 1993).

Another prominent theoretical approach for understanding post-communist regime variation focuses on the initial power balance between the communists and their democratic challengers. Thus, Fish (1998a, 1998b) argues that the extent of the political displacement of the former communists in the first post-communist elections sets in motion a path-dependent economic and political reform process, which eventually yields regime outcomes closely related to the outcome of the initial elections. Similarly, McFaul (2002) argues that the power balance between democrats and authoritarians at the outset of

³¹Two exceptions are Ishiyama and Velten (1998) and Horowitz (2003), who conclude that presidential powers had a negligible effect on democratization.

the transition determines future democracy prospects, as the stronger party imposes its will on the political losers.

A third alternative explanation focuses on Western conditionality. The history of the last decade abounds with instances of democratic reforms initiated in response to external incentives ranging from economic incentives to diplomatic pressures, and even military force. Due to space constraints, the current analysis focuses on the most prominent and most unevenly distributed potential benefit of policy compliance with Western conditionality: EU accession. Kurtz and Barnes (2002) have argued that the prospects of EU accession were an important predictor of post-communist regime type across their sample of 28 countries, even after controlling for several legacies. Moreover, analyses of the democratization trajectories of individual East European countries have identified numerous instances in which EU conditionality has significantly shaped specific political decisions on issues pertaining to civil rights and better governance.³²

Finally, Kopstein and Reilly (2000) have focused on the role of geographic diffusion and have argued that in addition to domestic factors, post-communist regime trajectories were affected by cross-national influences. The authors use the distance from the West and the lagged degree of democracy in neighboring countries as a proxy of geographic diffusion and found it to be a powerful predictor of democratization even when controlling for initial election outcomes and bureaucratic rectitude.

While all of the alternative explanations discussed above are theoretically plausible and are in fact highly correlated with the different democracy indicators, the crucial question is how these explanations fare when pitted against the temporally and theoretically prior historical legacies discussed in the first part of the article. Table 5 answers this question by testing these alternative theories against the “standard battery” of legacy indicators used in the earlier sections.³³

Before discussing the predictive power of alternative theoretical explanations, it is worth noting the remarkably stable coefficients of the different legacy indicators in Table 5, most of which remained significant predictors of democracy irrespective of the other variables introduced in Models 2–8. Similarly, except

for a noticeable (but moderately sized) boost in Model 2, the overall explanatory power of Models 3–8 increased only minimally compared to the baseline legacy specification.³⁴

Turning to the individual theoretical alternatives, Model 2 suggests that higher presidential powers had deleterious consequences for civil and political rights even once we account for the important legacy differences between ex-communist regimes: thus, a one standard deviation increase in presidential powers³⁵ was equivalent to a 1-point decline on the 12-point *FH* scale.³⁶ Models 3 and 4 tested the two versions of the initial elections hypothesis, using Fish’s (1998a) six-point *initial election* score and McFaul’s (2002) three categories of initial power balance, respectively. While the initial election explanation has come under attack for focusing on proximate causes (Kitschelt 2003), this criticism can be taken a step farther considering that, once we control for legacies in Models 3 and 4, the two power-balance indicators are substantively and statistically insignificant, while coefficients of the legacy indicators are virtually unchanged compared to the base model. These findings suggest that rather than being critical junctures in the democratization process, initial elections may be *signals* about the nature of historical legacies, which drive the long-term prospects of democracy in the region.

Using Kurtz and Barnes’ (2002) *potential EU candidate* indicator, Model 5 in Table 7 confirms the importance of EU accession incentives, which were associated with a 1.3 point democracy increase even after we control for legacies. However, Model 6 raises some questions about the robustness of the finding: thus, by simply recording Croatia from a non-candidate to a potential candidate at the outset of the transition,³⁷ the size of the coefficient is reduced by

³⁴The R-squared jump in Model 7 is simply an artifact of the smaller sample size in that model.

³⁵The measure used here is Frye’s update of the Tucker-Hellman index of presidential powers, which had a 1–21 range for the countries in the present sample. Similar results were obtained using a dichotomous super-presidentialism measure.

³⁶These statistical results are confirmed by the surprisingly democratic trajectories of Moldova and Mongolia, two countries whose rejection of presidentialism appears to have helped them overcome otherwise unpromising legacies.

³⁷This recoding is not merely idle speculation: as Kurtz and Barnes (2002, fn4) acknowledge, “Croatia was also in position to join these negotiations in 1991 but the war in the former Yugoslavia intervened.” However, one can argue that the Yugoslav war would not have changed Croatia’s medium-term integration prospects if it had not also created a semiauthoritarian, and nationalist regime under Tudjman (in which case coding Croatia as a non-candidate amounts to posthoc reasoning.)

³²See e.g., Vachudova’s (2004) discussion of EU integration in six East European countries.

³³Model 1 presents the basic legacy specification for reference purposes. The tests in this section used *Freedom House* democracy scores, but the results were remarkably similar for other measures of democracy.

TABLE 5 Legacies and Alternative Explanations: Panel Regression Results

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	FH democracy	FH democracy	FH democracy	FH democracy	FH democracy	FH democracy	FH democracy	FH democracy
Western Christian	2.060** (.407)	2.134** (.402)	1.969** (.518)	1.596** (.517)	1.366** (.453)	1.632** (.484)	1.569** (.599)	1.969** (.421)
Muslim	-.483 (.584)	-.796 (.576)	-.410 (.674)	-.116 (.678)	-.468 (.591)	-.458 (.574)	.020 (.743)	-.284 (.605)
Interwar statehood	1.253** (.350)	1.288** (.335)	1.234** (.363)	1.272** (.343)	.851* (.369)	1.123** (.352)	1.653** (.474)	1.440** (.375)
Energy intensity	-.467** (.121)	-.252* (.123)	-.456** (.125)	-.481** (.120)	-.484** (.123)	-.467** (.120)	-.574** (.173)	-.465** (.121)
Pre-war Soviet Republic	-1.400* (.596)	.573 (.751)	-1.355* (.599)	-1.446* (.588)	-1.241* (.624)	-1.319* (.617)	-1.253# (.737)	-1.062# (.625)
%Urban 1989	.065** (.018)	.043* (.019)	.065** (.019)	.068** (.018)	.059** (.019)	.064** (.019)	.111** (.021)	.059** (.018)
Minority share	-.282# (.147)	-.492** (.143)	-.287# (.152)	-.250# (.144)	-.196 (.156)	-.260# (.148)	-.450* (.212)	-.197 (.151)
Transition year (log)	.647** (.143)	.783** (.140)	.648** (.144)	.644** (.142)	.645** (.143)	.647** (.143)	.748* (.352)	.553** (.152)
Presidential powers		-.219** (.042)						
Initial election outcome		.069 (.182)						
Initial power balance				.423 (.301)				
Potential EU candidate (1)					1.325* (.569)			
Potential EU candidate (2)						.627 (.625)		
Distance to West							.228 (.289)	
Openness							.012 (.093)	
Avg. neighbor FH democracy								.136* (.066)
Constant	3.773** (1.030)	5.984** (1.169)	3.544** (1.289)	3.154* (1.134)	3.779** (1.038)	3.691** (1.011)	-.138 (2.920)	2.974** (1.102)
Observations	400	400	400	400	400	400	167	400
R ²	.60	.64	.60	.61	.60	.61	.76	.60

Standard errors in parentheses—#significant at 10%; *significant at 5%; **significant at 1%.

half compared to Model 5 and no longer even approaches statistical significance. Of course, it is conceivable that a more fine-tuned measure of the overtime variation in EU accession incentives would produce stronger results but analyzing such a measure would have to deal with significant endogeneity problems (as discussed below).

Finally, Kopstein and Reilly's (2000) geographic diffusion explanation also receives mixed support once pitted against historical legacies. On one hand Model 7 shows that the effect of geographic distance from the West³⁸ and the country's international openness³⁹ are statistically and substantively negligible once other legacies are taken into account. This finding suggests that the international openness index, which Kopstein and Reilly interpret as a mechanism for the cross-border diffusion of the democratic norms, does not appear to have an independent effect beyond the role of domestic legacies, thereby raising the possibility that the high correlation between openness and democracy is merely a reflection of the index's strong modernization dimension.⁴⁰ On the other hand, Model 8, which uses the average prior year democracy of a given country's neighbors as a geographic diffusion proxy, indicates that the regime type in neighboring countries matters for democracy even once we account for the powerful (and geographically correlated) domestic structural conditions: thus, Model 8 predicts a 1.3-point civil and political rights difference between the country with the least and the most democratic neighbors in 2004, which represents a reasonably large substantive effect, but one that is nonetheless smaller than that of key domestic legacies. This finding suggests one possible mechanism for overcoming unfavorable domestic legacies; however, even the benefits of diffusion are ultimately unevenly distributed, as countries fortunate enough to have democratic neighbors are much more likely to adopt outside democratic practices than countries stuck in the "wrong" neighborhood.

³⁸These results are not affected by the fact that I used the log instead of the absolute distance (as Kopstein and Reilly do) from a country's capital to Vienna, Berlin, or Helsinki (whichever is closest).

³⁹I would like to thank the authors for sharing their data. The four-year lag in the openness measure is in accordance with the authors' expectation that learning due to openness would take three to four years to show its full effects (Kopstein and Reilly 2000, fn 30). While the current analysis does not replicate the spatial lag statistical tests of the original paper, I believe that the average neighbors' score captures their logic.

⁴⁰For example, the openness index is correlated at .73 with GDP/capita.

So far, the statistical evidence has provided mixed support for nonlegacy explanations of post-communist regime change, whereas the explanatory power of legacies was only minimally affected by the inclusion of alternative explanations. Furthermore, except for geographic diffusion, these explanations have to cope with a serious endogeneity problem due to the fact that presidentialism, initial power balance, and potential EU membership were all highly correlated with a variety of historical legacies. These high correlations confirm the anecdotal evidence about the high prevalence of superpresidential regimes in the former Soviet Union, as well as about the much better European integration prospects of the more developed Western Christian countries.⁴¹ Similarly, the correlations suggest that initial elections did not occur in a vacuum, but were considerably influenced by systematic cross-country legacy differences, which explains the much greater resilience of unreformed or minimally reformed Communists in the former Soviet Union and parts of the Balkans, whereas in East-Central Europe the "change of guard" had happened in the first election.⁴²

The endogeneity suggested by these correlations makes it very difficult to determine what—if any— independent democratization effects can be attributed to institutional choice, initial elections, or European integration incentives. Since historical legacies seem to drive both these intermediary factors and regime outcomes, it cannot be ruled out that the correlation between these factors and democracy could be entirely spurious (merely reflecting their common correlation with legacies.) Under such circumstances it is not sufficient to simply include legacy controls in the regression models that analyze the effect of such endogenous variables. Instead, one would have to resort to instrumental variable regressions, which would require finding adequate instruments, i.e., variables which are strong predictors of institutional choice, initial elections, or European integration but which only affect democracy through this channel. However, such instruments are extremely difficult to find in the current context and are therefore beyond the scope of the present analysis. Absent such instruments, it is

⁴¹For example Prewar Soviet Union membership was correlated at .89 with presidential powers, while Potential EU membership was correlated at .76 with Western Christianity. For a more detailed overview see Table C in the online appendix.

⁴²Both McFaul (2002, 238) and Fish (1998a) acknowledge this potential endogeneity but neither author pursues the issue in more detail, and Fish points out that "the outcome of the initial elections certainly cannot readily be traced to a particular structural, cultural, or institutional factor" (78).

impossible to determine the precise contribution of such explanations to our understanding of cross-country democracy differences but it is highly likely that the relatively modest effects revealed in Table 5 constitute an upper bound of this influence. Either way, this analysis has demonstrated that historical legacies need to be taken seriously not only because of their own intrinsic importance in post-communist democratization but also because our understanding of alternative explanations has to be embedded in the complicated reality of the region's intertwined historical legacies.

Conclusion

This article has provided a systematic analysis of the effect of historical legacies on post-communist democratization. Contrary to early optimistic expectations, democracy has not become “the only game in town” among the ex-communist countries, and the patterns underlying this wide variety of outcomes were shaped to a remarkable degree by the past. History matters not only because some countries had a democratic headstart, but because countries with different legacies experienced *divergent* trajectories over the course of the post-communist transition. In other words, historical legacies seem to matter more rather than less as the post-communist transformation takes its course.

The analysis does not provide a definitive answer to the question of which structural conditions matter most for the establishment of democracy in the region. Indeed, the analysis of different democracy indicators suggests that the search for such “universal” explanations is likely to be misguided. Instead, the article has shown that different facets and dimensions of democracy are affected to different degrees by the various legacies. Thus, the institutional dimension of democracy, reflected by *Polity* regime scores, suffered primarily in *Muslim* countries with no *prior statehood* experience, *energy intensive economies* and low *urbanization*. Meanwhile, the political and civil rights measured by *Freedom House* were also affected by *Western Christianity*, *prewar Soviet Union membership*, and *ethnic fragmentation*, which account for much of the gap between formal political institutions and the actual freedoms granted to citizens. The challenge of overcoming the second important gap—between formal rights and democratic quality (as measured by *Nations in Transit*)—was easier for ethnically homogenous and predominantly Western Christian countries.

The high correlation between different historical legacies suggests that post-communist regime outcomes were overdetermined, in the sense that the region's democracy gradient coincides with overlapping legacy differences in geographical and cultural proximity to the West, state- and nation-building challenges, and socioeconomic development/distortions. The analytical difficulties arising from this legacy overlap should caution us against excessively confident causal claims about the importance of individual variables. These difficulties emphasize the need for methodological pluralism through the combination of theoretical/conceptual work, statistical analysis, and in-depth case studies/small N comparisons. In particular, much important work remains to be done on establishing the mechanisms for the legacy-reform link. Nonetheless, this article has established the extremely powerful joint influence of historical legacies and post-communist political transformations and has shown that prominent theoretical alternatives—such as institutional choice, initial election outcomes, and European integration—have played a much more modest role and need to be analyzed in the context of these legacy differences.

The specter of determinism raised by these findings should be carefully weighed in both theoretical and practical terms. On one hand, the last 17 years have not produced a Fukuyama-style “end of history,” but rather a return to historically rooted differences. But while historical legacies have largely circumscribed the degree of democratic progress in ex-communist countries, this does not mean that outcomes were predetermined or that there was no room for agency or constructive institutional choices. Some countries—such as Moldova, Mongolia, and for a while the Kyrgyz Republic—were more democratic than their legacies would have predicted, whereas others—such as Belarus, Croatia, and Yugoslavia performed below legacy-based expectations. Moreover, a variety of subtypes have developed among both democratic and authoritarian regimes in the region,⁴³ suggesting that countries do not simply follow a deterministically preordained path towards a uniform endpoint. Finally, the recent events in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan serve as reminders that the post-communist transition is not yet finished, which means that the correlational patterns between legacies and reforms could change significantly in the not too distant future.

What the close link between historical legacies and reforms does suggest, however, is that countries trying

⁴³See, for example, Roeder (1994) and Comisso (1997).

to escape their past face an uphill battle in trying to develop well functioning democratic institutions. The optimistic “possibilism” of the early transition should be replaced by a more historically grounded realism about the prospects of political liberalism in the former Leninist countries. An analytical emphasis on legacies should not be construed as a fatalist acceptance of the status quo or as an alternative to searching for institutional or international solutions to the region’s political challenges. However, unless these solutions are grounded in a thorough understanding of the relationship between legacies, institutions, and reform outcomes, such efforts are likely to perpetuate the uneven success of democracy in the region by focusing on the wrong questions.

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