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# *A Mile Wide But an Inch Deep(?): The Structure of Democratic Commitments in the Former USSR\**

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*Theory:* Cultural theories argue that the beliefs, values, and attitudes of ordinary citizens are important for processes of democratization. In order for mass political culture to influence politics, citizens must hold views toward democracy that are temporally stable, impervious to short-term economic failure, and connected to actual political behavior.

*Hypotheses:* 1) To the degree that attitudes toward democracy represent a coherent belief system, there will be a tendency toward attitudinal stability. 2) If support for democracy is instrumental—the primary value being economic prosperity—then economic failure and malaise will cause support for democracy to wither. 3) Based on protest activity taking place during the failed Putsch of 1991, I test the hypothesis that democratic political values are associated with resistance to the coup.

*Methods:* The analysis is based in part on a panel survey, with interviews conducted in 1990 and 1992, and in part on a large-scale 1992 survey in Russia and Ukraine.

*Results:* I find that attitudes toward democratic institutions and processes are reasonably stable, are little affected by perceptions of economic decline, and are connected to protest against the anti-democratic coup. While democracy is far more than the beliefs and values of ordinary citizens, this analysis suggests that there is room for some optimism regarding the creation of stable democracies in the states of the former Soviet Union.

Evidence has accumulated over the past several years demonstrating that the mass public of the former Soviet Union (FSU) held unusually favorable attitudes toward democratic institutions and processes at the beginning of the democratic transition (e.g., Hahn 1991; Finifter and Mickiewicz 1992; Gibson, Duch, and Tedin 1992; Miller, Reisinger, and Hesli 1993;

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Gibson and Duch 1993a; Bahry 1993).<sup>1</sup> These findings are surprising in the sense that they were not anticipated by most Sovietologists. They are inconsistent, moreover, with the view that totalitarian socialization under the Soviet regime was effective at inculcating (or reinforcing) authoritarian values in the mass public. When the spate of Western-sponsored survey research began in the late 1980s and early 1990s, few anticipated that the political culture of the FSU would be as hospitable to democratic institutions and processes as in fact the data suggest.

Not all researchers wholly accept these findings and conclusions, however. One line of argument goes to changes in mass attitudes during later periods of the political transformation in the former Soviet Union, arguing that attitudes during the initiation phase changed subsequently. Others focus their attack more directly on the early survey data, claiming that the expressed attitudes were ill-informed, subject to strong social desirability influences, unstable, and generally of little consequence for the respondent or perhaps even the larger political system. In short, one important critique of the early survey findings is that commitments to democracy were “a mile wide, but an inch deep.” While most Soviet people might have espoused democratic platitudes, in reality support for democratic institutions and processes was newly-found, ephemeral, and not the result of realistic calculations of the costs and benefits of democracy. Like religion, Levis, and Snickers, democracy became fashionable in the USSR. Many fear that, ultimately, such shallow and faddish support for democracy is unlikely to withstand the test of time, especially the hard times that regimes inevitably encounter during processes of rapid political transformation.

There are few effective rejoinders to this sort of argument when one is confined—as is typically the case—to cross-sectional analysis. Of course, it is possible to consider the interconnectedness of different beliefs as evidence of their centrality, but even then inter-belief consistency may be a function of the diffusion of packages of beliefs rather than of some sort of cognitive or even emotive belief integration. Even the best arguments of the earlier research leave important room for doubt as to the significance of the attitudes for the respondents.

The importance of this research problem demands additional investigation of the significance of mass commitments to democratic institutions and processes. My purpose in this article is therefore to evaluate the “mile wide/inch deep” hypothesis, focusing on three distinct questions:

—Are attitudes toward democratic institutions and processes stable

<sup>1</sup>I refer to these processes as “democratization” even though I do not believe that “democratization” necessarily leads to democracy, either ever or even in a linear or monotonic fashion. “Democratization” means movement along a continuum, not the creation of a democratic polity.

over time? One of the most telling ways in which this hypothesis can be assessed is to consider the temporal stability of attitudes. The availability of *panel* survey data from the period 1990 to 1992 allows me to determine whether individual citizens hold steady views toward democratic institutions and processes. To the extent that there is temporal consistency, these attitudes are more likely to be politically meaningful.

—Has support for democratic institutions and processes been eroded by the economic malaise that Russia and the successor states continue to experience? Many argue that commitments to democracy are incapable of withstanding economic crisis, that, at some point, the mass public will abandon democracy because a) it has failed to produce satisfactory economic results, and/or b) alternative (and authoritarian) political arrangements are believed to yield better economic results. To the extent that people maintain their support for democratic institutions and processes even in the face of unfavorable economic conditions, democracy is likely to be more secure.

—Does attitudinal support for democratic institutions and processes have any behavioral consequences? One of the most damning critiques of cultural research such as this is that “only” attitudes are investigated, with little attention being given to actual political behavior. Fortunately for our research (although unfortunately for the Russians), an opportunity to express behavioral support for democracy presented itself in the Putsch of August, 1991. Did the democrats act to defend democracy? To the extent that there are behavioral consequences flowing from attitudinal support for democratic institutions and processes, then attitudes certainly matter for politics. Thus, to the extent that democratic attitudes are stable over time, resistant to economic pressures, and connected to political behavior, I am entitled to conclude that the attitudes are more than “an inch deep.”

This analysis is drawn from surveys of mass opinion conducted in the former Soviet Union over the period from 1990 to 1992. This investigation focuses on Russia and Ukraine, where full representative samples were employed. It is perhaps useful to begin with a discussion of what earlier research has discovered about support for democratic institutions and processes in the FSU.

### **Earlier Thinking on Support for Democratic Institutions and Processes in the Former Soviet Union**

Simply put, a democratic citizen is one who believes in individual liberty and who is politically tolerant, who holds a certain amount of distrust of political authority but at the same time is trustful of fellow citizens, who is obedient but nonetheless willing to assert rights against the state, who

views the state as constrained by legality, and who supports basic democratic institutions and processes (cf. Dahl 1971, 1989; Dalton 1991). A democratic political culture is a set of norms that encourages the formation of individual and collective preferences, and the submission of those preferences to the political arena for satisfaction, within the context of support for a set of institutional arrangements for political decision making that is responsive to these preferences.

We tested this conceptualization of support for democratic institutions and processes in three earlier surveys (see for example Gibson, Duch, and Tedin 1992; Gibson and Duch 1992; Gibson and Duch 1993a; Gibson 1994) and were surprised to discover such widespread enthusiasm for most aspects of democracy. Yet we also found variability in the degree ordinary citizens supported the various components of democracy. Regarding majoritarian democratic institutions, we found far more support for democratic values than most had anticipated, including widespread support for the institution of competitive elections, significant levels of attachment to many democratic rights and liberties, and at least some evidence of support for norms of democratic political participation. Where minoritarian institutions and processes are concerned, however, support weakened substantially, and indeed on the acid test of whether to tolerate one's political enemies, the Soviet people rejected democratic values altogether (Gibson and Duch 1993b; see also Hough 1994, 19). In most other respects, we unearthed few cultural impediments to the further democratization of the USSR.

Others have reported similar findings. For instance, the earliest notable attempt to assess support for democratic institutions and processes is the work of Finifter and Mickiewicz (1992). Based on a 1989 survey conducted in many areas throughout the Soviet Union, Finifter and Mickiewicz discovered that support for some democratic institutions was quite strong. For instance, 95% of the respondents expressing an opinion supported competitive elections (1992, 859). When asked to choose between free speech and social order, fully 58% expressed a preference for free speech. At the other extreme, nearly two-thirds of the respondents with an opinion favored traditional methods of solving social conflicts rather than strikes, spontaneous demonstrations, political meetings, and other forms of social protest. Thus, their findings offer some grounds for optimism for democrats. Other related research draws generally similar conclusions (Hahn 1991, 1993a, 1993b; Miller, Reisinger, and Hesli 1993; Dobson and Grant 1992; see also Hough 1994).

We have also made some inroads into the question of what sort of processes have led to the development of support for democratic institutions

and processes.<sup>2</sup> Most importantly, we conclude that democratic values stem from a breakdown in confidence in the government, perhaps fueled by the diffusion of Western political ideas. We argue that processes of modernization have taken place in the USSR, setting the conditions for the development of value structures that are receptive to democratic institutions and processes. Economic discontent seems to have been the catalyst for the breakdown of confidence; modernization probably provided the means of communication, etc.; and for many Soviet people the West has provided a powerful alternative political model.

In general, then, the recent survey evidence is in broad agreement on several matters. First, there is fairly widespread support for democratic institutions and processes when they are defined in terms of the political rights and activities of the majority. Second, where the political rights and activities of unpopular political minorities are concerned, there is considerably less support for—indeed, often widespread opposition to—democracy. Third, most research agrees that more modern segments of the Soviet populations are more likely to support democratic reforms. Thus, most contemporary survey research identifies few obstacles in the mass political culture to further democratization of the political system.<sup>3</sup>

### *Caveats*

These findings are not without frailties, and indeed there are three major lines of attack:

—Support for democratic institutions and processes may be ephemeral (e.g., Whitefield and Evans 1994). Most of the survey evidence was collected during the initial period of democratic reform, a time of wild optimism about the possibilities of democracy. As the often distasteful realities of democratic politics became recognized, disillusionment set in and the traditional Russian desire for authoritarianism and social order reasserted itself (Reisinger et al. 1994).

—A major impetus for the rejection of democracy is the continuing economic failure of regime. The people of Russia and the successor states want a prosperous economy, and initially perceived democratic reform as a

<sup>2</sup>While Finifter and Mickiewicz were not very successful at modeling Soviet attitudes (their equation explained only 15% of the variance in their dependent variable), the best predictors of support for political change (democratic reforms) were Central Asian ethnicity (beta =  $-.200$ ), age (beta =  $-.182$ ) and education (beta =  $.127$ ). Similarly, Bahry (1993) points to age and education as crucial components of change in the political culture of the former Soviet Union. On this point see also Reisinger et al. (1994).

<sup>3</sup>For a strong dissenting view see Whitefield and Evans (1994).

means toward that end. As it soon became apparent that democratic reform resulted in little improvement of economic conditions, the fever for democracy subsided. People want *any* style of political organization that will generate economic prosperity (e.g., McIntosh et al. 1993; Miller, Hesli, and Reisinger 1994).

—Finally, support for democratic institutions and processes was not staunch even in the early days of political reform. People embraced the symbols of democracy with little understanding of their practical implications. One consequence of the weak attachments to democratic institutions and processes was temporal instability. Another consequence was that support for democracy was “only” attitudinal. Indeed, little research has demonstrated that behavioral consequences flowed from popular attachments to democratic institutions and processes. Since it is behavior that matters, democracy is far from secure from threats from the mass publics of Russia and the successor states.

Thus, there is ample reason to reconsider the earlier findings of mass support for democratic institutions and processes in order to assess the character, durability and political relevance of such support.

### Research Design

This research is based on a survey of mass opinion carried out in the former Soviet Union in the Spring of 1992. This was a large, complicated survey, conducted with a myriad of research objectives, and consequently considerable detail about the survey design is available from the author. To summarize, 4,309 people, selected through a multi-stage probability sampling method, were interviewed face-to-face by trained interviewers. The sample was designed to support inferences to 1) the USSR as it was constituted in December, 1991 (that is, the sample is representative of the 11 republics that in 1992 comprised the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) plus Georgia); 2) Russia, including, due to special oversamples, Moscow and Leningrad; 3) Ukraine, due to a special oversample; 4) Soviet Central Asia; and 5) with much less confidence, the remaining territory in the European portion of the former Soviet Union. Because the USSR became extinct at the close of 1991 (or at least dormant), I report the results here from the Russian and Ukrainian data. These samples were designed to be representative of each of the republics (now nation-states), so it is entirely proper to draw inferences from these data to the larger populations of residents of Russia and Ukraine.

This survey included a panel. Approximately 700 of the 1992 respondents had been interviewed earlier in our 1990 survey of the European portion of the Soviet Union. I will rely on these respondents in assessing

how individuals have changed their political and economic views over the nearly two years between the interviews.

### **The Stability of Attitudes Toward Democratic Institutions and Processes<sup>4</sup>**

We have devoted considerable effort to measuring democratic values in the USSR, and some basic results have been reported for earlier surveys conducted in 1990 in the Moscow oblast (Gibson, Duch, and Tedin 1992), the European portion of the USSR (Gibson and Duch 1992), and in 1992 in Russia and Ukraine (Gibson 1994). Instead of conceptualizing support for the norms of democracy as a generalized commitment to democratic values (e.g., Sullivan, Piereson, and Marcus 1982), I have taken a somewhat different and broader tack, using a more variegated set of political values. The subdimensions of democratic values include: 1) the value the respondent attaches to liberty; 2) support for competitive elections; 3) support for a multi-party system; 4) support for pluralistic media; 5) rights consciousness; 6) support for dissent and opposition; and 7) political tolerance. Each of these concepts is measured by multiple items, and an index, usually based on factor analysis, was created for each of these subdimensions of democratic values.

Descriptive data from the 1992 survey has been reported elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> In general, the data reveal a mixed pattern of support for democratic institutions and processes. In some areas, there is strong and widespread support for democratic institutions and processes, as for instance in the willingness to assert a panoply of political, social, and economic rights against the major institutions of society. There is fairly broad support for dissent, moreover, at least in the abstract, and strong support for the pluralistic media. Competitive elections and a multi-party system seem to be coming under increasing scrutiny, however, with a concomitant rise in ambivalence. The weakest evidence of the emergence of a nascent democratic political culture

<sup>4</sup>The data upon which this analysis is based are archived at the ICPSR. The data sets are "Cultural Democratization in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR): Moscow Oblast Survey, 1990." ICPSR 9726; "Survey of Soviet Values, 1990." ICPSR 6099; and "Panel Study of Political Values in the Former Soviet Union, 1990-1992." The statistical routines for all analyses presented in this paper (conducted with SPSS) are available from the authors. Those who make use of these data should cite this paper and should acknowledge as well the support of the National Science Foundation (SES-9023565), the Advanced Research Program (003652-164), the College of Social Sciences and the Limited-Grant-in-Aid program at the University of Houston, and the USSR Academy of Sciences. Copies of all papers written on the basis of these data should be sent to the author.

<sup>5</sup>See Gibson (1994). A summary of this now familiar conceptual and operational approach, as well as the frequencies on the various indicators, is available from the author.



in Russia and Ukraine may be found in the measures of political tolerance—the overwhelming response of ordinary people to their most hated political enemies is to support repression against them. Though these data are surely subject to more than a single interpretation, the general conclusion I draw is that majoritarian institutions receive relatively strong support, while the more difficult minoritarian institutions and processes have yet to receive widespread acclaim from the mass public in Russia and Ukraine. At the level of the aggregate percentages, *there is very little evidence of a systematic erosion of support for most democratic institutions and processes*. There are no large (greater than 10 percentage points) shifts in opinion, and generally the percentages of respondents expressing support for democratic institutions and processes are similar in 1990 and 1992. The data do not support those who proclaim a diminution of support for the key elements of democracy; there were just as many democrats in 1992 as in 1990.

The central question of this research, however, is whether those who tended to support democratic institutions and processes in 1990 maintained their support in 1992. Aggregate data are, of course, inadequate to answer this question; only panel data can tell us whether individual citizens changed or maintained their views. Figure 1 provides evidence on the temporal stability of commitments to democracy among ordinary Russians and Ukrainians.<sup>6</sup> Following the measurement strategy used in earlier investigations of mass political culture in the Soviet Union (e.g., Gibson, Duch, and Tedin 1992; Gibson and Duch 1993a), this figure reports the factor analyses of the various subdimensions of support for democratic institutions and processes, separately for 1990 and 1992.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup>In a separate analysis, I have demonstrated that a) the 1992 panel respondents appear to be quite similar to the larger 1992 samples of Russians and Ukrainians, and b) the 1990 panel respondents differ insignificantly from the larger 1990 samples of Russians and Ukrainians. Thus, there is no evidence that the panel respondents upon whom I focus in this analysis of change are unrepresentative of the larger samples from which they are drawn. I will consequently use the panel data to draw inferences to the larger populations of Russians and Ukrainians. See Gibson (1994).

<sup>7</sup>Care must be exercised in interpreting Figure 1 since the measures of support for democratic institutions and processes are not identical in 1990 and 1992. Since the most useful analytical strategy is to investigate the stability of the summary measure of the attitudes, I do not focus on individual items. Cross-time measurement is like a cross-cultural measurement—the key criterion for assessing the validity of the measures is not that the items be identical, but rather that each be appropriate to the particular sociopolitical context.

I have decided not to use LISREL to analyze these data for several reasons, ranging from small but significant issues of weighting (LISREL requires integer weights) to middle-level concerns (such as the ad hoc assumptions LISREL typically requires about the correlation of measurement errors) to large issues of measurement theory (should the structure of *measurement* be dependent upon a particular set of structural equations or should it be indepen-

In both years, multidimensional solutions emerged from the Common Factor Analysis,<sup>8</sup> and the structures are generally comparable (see Figure 1). Generally, the various attitudes fit together within what might be loosely called a democratic belief system. The most problematical loading is political tolerance, which is only weakly related to the second factor. In the former Soviet Union (like elsewhere), the majoritarian institutions of democracy are more widely accepted than their minoritarian counterparts. Since I conceptualize support for democratic institutions and processes as a syndrome of attitudes, with distinctive but not independent sub-dimensions, and since the two factors extracted are moderately intercorrelated, I created a summary measure of support for democratic institutions and processes that is the mean of the two factor scores. Figure 1 reports the factor analysis results, as well as the correlation between democratic values in 1990 and 1992.

*Support for democratic institutions and processes is moderately correlated over time*— $r = .41$  (which is highly statistically significant). Those who supported democratic institutions and processes in 1990 tended also to exhibit support in 1992. When corrected for attenuation due to unreliability, the correlation increases to  $.65$ . Being supportive of democratic institutions and processes in 1990 predicts reasonably well being a democrat in 1992.

How strong is this correlation of  $.41$ ? It is always difficult to evaluate correlations based on survey data.<sup>9</sup> In survey data, one rarely finds a great deal of stability in attitudes, in part because the indicators of our concepts are not terribly reliable. To attribute all temporal instability to substantive change is mistaken, since random measurement error behaves very much like change, pushing bivariate cross-time correlations downward.<sup>10</sup> While this problem is tractable with three waves of panel data, the only simple remedy with only two waves of data is to lower one's expectations about

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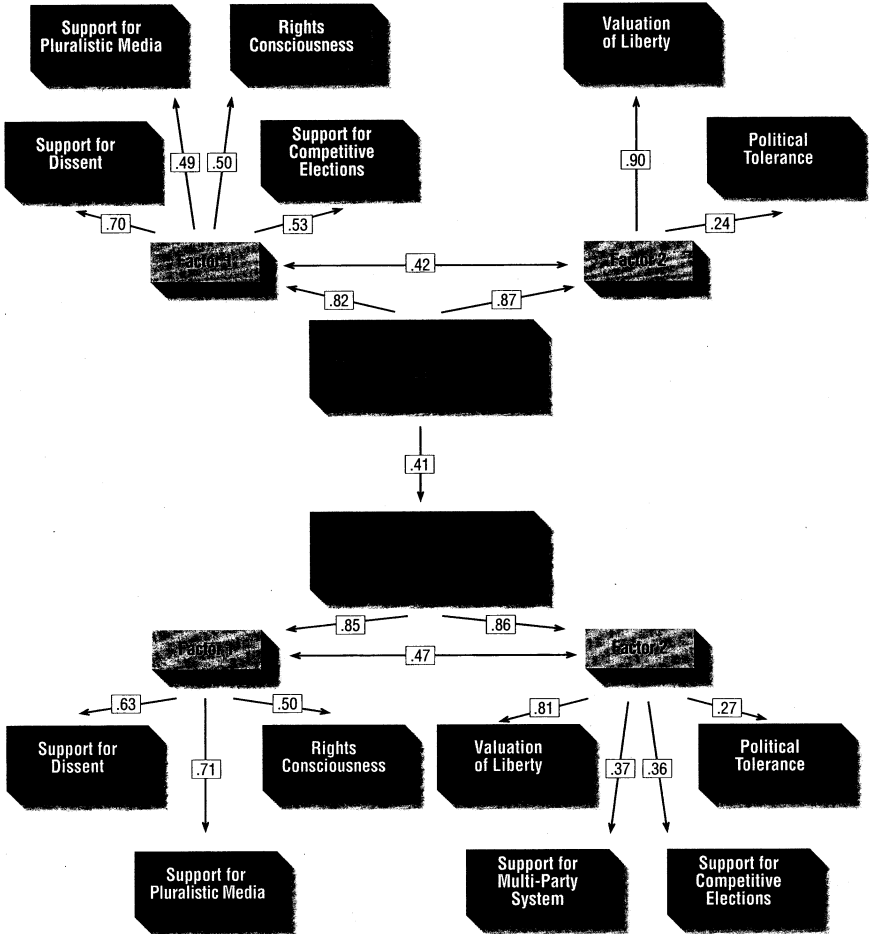
dent of how the concept is used within a particular model?). For those who believe in such coefficients, I have reported the correlation coefficient between the attitude measures corrected for attenuation due to measurement error. Finally, the data, of course, are publicly available so alternative methodological techniques can be applied to these data by other investigators.

<sup>8</sup>In 1990, the eigenvalues (and percentage of variance explained) of the first two extracted were 2.21 (36.8%) and 1.12 (18.7%). In 1992, they were 2.34 (33.4%) and 1.19 (17.0%). A third factor emerged in 1992 with an eigenvalue slightly greater than 1.0 (eigenvalue = 1.04), but since it only marginally met the traditional criterion for factor extraction, and since it was not substantively interpretable, I have used the two-dimensional solution.

<sup>9</sup>For instance, Miller, Hesli and Reisinger characterize standardized regression coefficients ranging from  $.10$  to  $.14$  as "relatively strong" (1994, 403).

<sup>10</sup>As Markus (1979, 55) notes: ". . . the OLS estimate will be biased toward zero by an amount directly proportional to the degree of unreliability in the regressor."

**Figure 1. The Interrelationship of Sub-Dimensions of Democratic Values. Russia and Ukraine. 1990–1992**



Note: Entries are pattern loadings from a Common Factor Analysis with oblique, bi-quartimin rotation, except for italicized entries, which are bivariate correlation coefficients.

what constitutes weak, moderate, and strong correlations. From this perspective, there is considerable stability in attitudes toward the institutions and processes of democracy.

There are a few other ways in which this correlation can be assessed. In similar analysis of attitudes toward market-based institutions and processes, I discovered that the temporal stability of economic attitudes in Russia and Ukraine was much weaker (Gibson 1993). On the other hand, I reported a quite similar level of stability in political tolerance, based on a panel study in the United States (see Gibson 1992). While other United States data report greater stability in attitudes like party identification, these data on democratic attitudes must be treated as showing an impressive level of consistency over time. To the extent that temporal stability implies more profound attitudes, then it is quite likely that support for democracy is more than an inch deep.

### **The Impact of Economic Pessimism on Support for Democratic Institutions and Processes**

The argument is sometimes made that the controlling impetus for change in the countries of the former USSR is economic—people are motivated most by a desire for a productive economic system. Observers often comment on the degree to which attitudes toward democratization reflect economic concerns, especially economic instrumentalism. Perhaps the peoples of the former Soviet Union want political change, *any sort of political change*, that will make the economy function again. After all, for many, the most serious problems the country faces are not the absence of political freedom and opportunities for political expression, but rather the lack of affordable goods, the spiraling inflation, and the unprecedented unemployment in the country. Democratic reform may be little more than a means of managing these problems, just as mechanisms of democratic accountability are means of holding the directors of the economy answerable for the mess that has befallen the country. Exacerbated by the demands for political reform as a condition for foreign economic aid, there may be a strong tendency to value democracy primarily as an instrument for economic reform. Thus, democracy may be supported mainly for its instrumental economic value (see McIntosh et al. 1993).

Adherents to this view fear that support for democracy may weaken if economic prosperity does not emerge soon. If commitments to democracy are only instrumental, then failure to turn the economy around in the short-term may have disastrous political consequences. Without intrinsic support for democracy, the political future of the states of the former USSR is precarious, or so the argument goes.

It would not be surprising to find that economic experiences, including self interests, influence economic and political attitudes. Beginning their article with the pithy assertion "Economics moves political behavior." MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson (1992, 597) argue for the primacy of economic factors in politics. But there are two types of *homo economicus*—they posit that citizens may be thought of as either judging the government by their present personal experiences, eschewing abstraction and, instead, relying on direct personal experience, or judging the government by its ability to shepherd the future, ignoring current conditions and attending to matters of systemic consequences (MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson 1992, 597). Substituting "the political system" for their "the government," it is reasonable to hypothesize that support for political reform is a function of a) one's personal economic well-being ("pocketbook perceptions"), and/or b) one's perception of the performance of the more general national economy ("sociotropic economic perceptions").

Also important in times of rapid economic and political change is whether citizen attitudes toward the political system are a function of retrospective or prospective economic attitudes (Kiewiet 1983; Lewis-Beck 1990; MacKuen, Erikson, and Stimson 1992). Following this literature, I hypothesize that prospective sociotropic perceptions have the strongest impact on attitudes toward democracy.<sup>11</sup> Generally, those who perceive themselves and their country as having suffered under recent economic changes are expected to have abandoned democratic institutions and processes.

Table 1 reports the relationships between economic perceptions and support for democratic institutions and processes in both 1990 and 1992. A few prefatory comments about the variables are necessary. Because I do not necessarily hypothesize linear relationships between economic perceptions and support for democratic institutions and processes, I have nominalized the categorical variables and analyze them as a set of dummy variables.<sup>12</sup> There are several reasons why one might suspect curvilinear relationships, but, at a minimum, the sizable proportion of respondents which is unable to assess the future cannot safely be scored on even an ordinal scale of economic pessimism or optimism. Since I have used perceptions of "no change" as the excluded category, the regression coeffi-

<sup>11</sup>Indeed, there is large body of literature connecting economic malaise with the failure of democracy. See for example, Londregan and Poole (1990). For one of the rare optimistic voices on this issue see Remmer (1990, 1991). Empirical tests of this hypothesis at the micro-level are rare (but see Clarke, Dutt, and Kornberg 1993).

<sup>12</sup>On nominalization in general see Cohen and Cohen (1983). For an application see Erikson, McIver, and Wright (1987).

**Table 1. The Impact of Economic Perceptions on Support for Democratic Institutions and Processes, Russia and Ukraine, 1990-1992**

	1990			1992				
	R <sup>2</sup>	b	(s.e.)	Beta	R <sup>2</sup>	b	(s.e.)	Beta
<i>Prospective Change in Personal Living Standard<sup>a</sup></i>	.02				.03*			
Live much worse		.18	(.09)	.10		-.11	(.09)	-.06
Live a little worse		.07	(.08)	.04		.06	(.09)	.03
Live much/a little better		-.11	(.11)	-.05		.25	(.09)	.14*
Don't know/uncertain		-.11	(.09)	-.05		-.11	(.09)	-.05
Intercept		-.03	(.06)			-.02	(.06)	
<i>Retrospective Change in Personal Living Standard<sup>a</sup></i>	.00				.01			
Living much worse		.13	(.09)	.06		-.09	(.08)	-.06
Living a little worse		.04	(.07)	.02		-.04	(.08)	-.03
Living much/a little better		.11	(.10)	.05		.18	(.12)	.07
Intercept		-.04	(.05)			.03	(.07)	
<i>Prospective Evaluation of the Economy<sup>a</sup></i>	.03*				.05*			
Worsen, worsen considerably		.21	(.07)	.13*		-.00	(.07)	-.00
Improve, improve considerably		-.08	(.09)	-.04		.29	(.08)	.18*
Don't know/uncertain		-.14	(.09)	-.07		-.17	(.10)	-.07
Intercept		-.04	(.05)			-.06	(.06)	

<sup>a</sup>The excluded category is: "Nothing will change."

\* $p < .01$ .

cients indicate increments or decrements in support for democratic institutions and processes in relationship to those perceiving stasis.<sup>13</sup> The  $R^2$  for the set of dummy variables indicates the total contribution the variable makes to explaining democratic attitudes.

The data in Table 1 reveal few significant differences between economic pessimists and optimists in attitudes toward democratic institutions and processes. Whether one lives better than in the past, or expects to live better in the future, has little impact on democratic attitudes in either survey, with the possible exception that those who were optimistic about the future in 1992 are slightly more likely to support democratic institutions and processes. Prospective evaluations of the economy have a slightly greater impact on attitudes, although their total effect is still weak. I find, however, an interesting reversal in the effect of optimism. In 1990, those who were optimistic about the future were little different in their attitudes than those who expected little or no change. Indeed, though the coefficient was statistically indistinguishable from zero, its sign was negative. By 1992, however, economic optimism was at least modestly (and statistically significantly) associated with *greater* support for democratic institutions and processes. Thus, by 1992, those who expected the economy to improve were more likely to favor democratic politics.

It is significant to note that only one of the coefficients reflecting the impact of economic pessimism is statistically significant (and its magnitude is quite small). This means that those who expect the economy to deteriorate further differ little in their attitudes from those who expect no change. Hope seems to have become a slight ally of the democrats, while strong pessimism seems not to undermine support for democratic institutions and processes. To reiterate, though, the overall weakness of these equations suggests that democracy in Russia and Ukraine will not rise or fall according to whether citizens perceive the economy as functioning well. Democratic attitudes seem impervious—at least in the short term—to the failures of the Russian and Ukrainian economies.

### **Behavioral Support for Democratic Institutions and Processes**

On August 19, 1991, a band of eight men attempted to seize control of the Soviet government.<sup>14</sup> Their “State Committee for the State of Emergency in the USSR,” headed by Vice President Yanaev, claimed that the

<sup>13</sup>I have collapsed categories whenever fewer than 10% of the respondents selected a particular response. It is perhaps not surprising that, in these data, this rule only applies to the relative scarcity of extreme optimists.

<sup>14</sup>This account of the coup relies heavily on the chronicling of events of Teague, Wise, and Girnius (1991).

then-president Gorbachev was ill, unable to govern, and that a state of emergency existed. The initial radio announcement to the Soviet people began "Fellow Countrymen! . . . Mortal danger hangs over our great homeland! The policy of reform initiated by M. S. Gorbachev . . . has, for a number of reasons, come to a dead end" (Teague, Wise, and Girnius 1991, 36). It is fair to characterize the coup and its leaders as strongly anti-democratic. Tanks appeared on the streets of Moscow, but, led by Boris Yeltsin, many people resisted the Putsch. Protesters began to assemble around the Russian "White House," the seat of the parliament of the RSFSR. The mayor of Leningrad challenged the coup and began to organize resistance. Demonstrations broke out throughout the country. On August 20, 200,000 people demonstrated outside the Moscow City Soviet; 50,000 outside the Russian White House; 200,000 rallied in Leningrad's Palace Square; and 50,000 protested in Kishinev (Moldavia). By August 21, 1991, the turning point in the coup, even the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) had spoken out against the seizure of power. The leaders of the plot tried to flee Moscow, but were apprehended and arrested. On August 22, 150,000 people celebrated "a Rally of Victors" outside the Russian White House. By the end of this extraordinary week, democratic government had been restored in the USSR.

The coup of August, 1991, was of immense practical importance for the transformation of the Soviet Union. The coup and its failure ended the reign of Mikhail Gorbachev; consolidated the growing political power of Boris Yeltsin; exacerbated and accelerated the dissolution of the Soviet Union, resulting in the emergence of each republic as a sovereign nation state; and, among many other things, resulted in the banning of the Communist Party within Russia. Indeed, the coup may well have been the single point in the process of democratization when the political system emerged from a fragile and hesitant initiation of democratic reform to a process of consolidation of democracy.

The failure of the August Putsch surprised many observers, especially those who had long and consistently argued that the order-loving Soviet people would welcome attempts to restore the political and social orders that seemed to have crumbled under *perestroika* and *glasnost*. Legions of experts on the Soviet Union predicted that, when forced to choose, the Soviet people would opt for order instead of liberty. One of the most important reasons for the failure of the coup (although by no means the only important reason) was the failure of the Soviet people to mobilize in support of the GKChP.

In addition to testifying generally to the significance of political culture for democratization, the coup also allows the testing of some important hypotheses about individual political behavior, and the larger political cul-



ture within which that behavior is embedded. In particular, the week of August 19 provided the opportunity for the democrats of the Soviet Union—those supporting democratic institutions and processes—to *act on behalf of democracy*. Mass surveys conducted prior to the coup suggested that strong *attitudinal* support for democracy could be found in the USSR; evidence of *behavioral* support, however, was, until the putsch, deficient. The coup provided the opportunity to act, allowing the testing of several hypotheses about who did and did not take advantage of the chance to express meaningful support for the political transformation of the country. Thus, the events of August 1991 offer just one more illustration of the beautiful, quasi-experimental nature of political reality.

The purpose of this section then is to explore the connection between attitudinal support for democratic institutions and processes and behavior in defense of the emerging Soviet democracy. The central hypothesis is that *the active defense of democracy was a function of political values supportive of democratic institutions and processes*. On its face, popular reaction to the coup seems to be *prima facie* evidence of behavioral commitments to democracy, but this is a question that needs to be explored much more systematically.<sup>15</sup>

### *Connecting Democratic Attitudes and Protest Behaviors*<sup>16</sup>

Table 2 reports the frequency of various sorts of protest activity in response to the coup.<sup>17</sup> With the exception of following the events in the media—which large majorities reported doing—most of the activities are

<sup>15</sup>There have been few systematic examinations of the public attitudes or behaviors in connection with the August Putsch. *USA Today*, however, commissioned Vladimir Andreenkov to conduct telephone polls in Moscow and St. Petersburg shortly after the coup. Andreenkov discovered that 87% of the respondents supported “those who protested the coup; 92% believed that the actions of Boris Yeltsin and the Russian government were “completely correct;” but that 55% were “more worried about the future” as a result of the coup attempt (all percentages omit “don’t know” responses). Beyond journalistic accounts of the coup, however, few systematic analyses have been published.

<sup>16</sup>In much of the analysis that follows, I focus on the Moscow and Leningrad oversamples. While there has been little systematic evidence on the extent of opposition to the coup throughout the country, it is clear that these two cities were hotbeds of resistance, and that behavioral opposition to the coup was probably considerably less common in other parts of the Soviet Union. When analyzing data on these two cities, the responses are unweighted. When my analyses refer to Russia, I have weighted the Moscow and Leningrad data appropriately.

<sup>17</sup>The question stem read: “For the majority of people it was difficult to do anything to show their attitude toward the coup because it lasted only three days. We are interested if you, personally, did anything to express your attitude toward the coup and its leaders. On these days did you . . .” The question was followed by a query about recruitment to protest activity: “During the coup, did anyone ask you to . . .”

**Table 2. Protest Behavior During the August Putsch, Russia and Ukraine**

Activity	Percent Engaging in Activity		
	Total	Moscow	Leningrad
Followed the events in the media	85.0	88.2	87.3
Participated in discussion groups	12.8	22.9	17.8
Tried to persuade others	10.9	18.6	17.2
Prayed	4.3	6.2	3.3
Expressed views to political officials	3.7	7.4	5.3
Signed a petition	3.6	6.0	8.4
Participated in demonstrations	2.1	6.2	7.0
Stayed away from work	1.7	8.5	6.1
Distributed leaflets & letters	1.1	2.5	2.3
Expressed views to the mass media	1.0	1.2	2.3
Percentage none	4.1	4.5	6.3
Average number of activities	1.3	1.7	1.6
Standard deviation	.87	1.18	1.30
<i>N</i>	3,218	515	511

quite rare indeed. About 13% of the respondents participated in discussion groups and/or tried to persuade others how to react to the coup, but other sorts of behavior were uncommon. For instance, only 2.1% of the respondents claimed to have participated in a demonstration. Virtually everyone engaged in some coup-related activities (only 4.1% undertook none of the actions), but high levels of activity were rare, with an average of only 1.3 actions undertaken. These figures are of course not atypical, since protest behavior of any sort in virtually all polities is confined to a narrow slice of the population.

Table 2 also reveals that protest activity was considerably more commonplace in Moscow and Leningrad. For instance, 6.2% of the respondents in Moscow and 7.0% of the respondents in Leningrad reported participating in a demonstration during the period of the coup. Nearly all of the activities were more prevalent in these two leading Russian cities than elsewhere.

The activities listed in Table 2 reflect varying degrees of activism, as well as varying degrees of public commitment to the behavior. For instance, praying requires little effort and is not typically done in public. In order to devise an index of coup behavior, the activities shown in Table 2 were categorized according to the intensity of the behavior. Those most actively protesting during the coup were those who engaged in one or more of the following activities: participation in a demonstration; boycotting work; signing a petition; expressing one's views to political officials; expressing

**Table 3. Behavioral Reactions to the August Putsch**

Protest Activity	Russia	Moscow	Leningrad	Ukraine
<i>Pro-Coup Action</i>				
Completely Inactive	89.1	91.3	90.2	88.8
Low Activity	8.6	5.4	6.1	8.7
Medium Activity	1.2	1.6	2.2	2.0
High Activity	1.1	1.7	1.6	.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	2,376	515	511	842
<i>Anti-Coup Action</i>				
Completely Inactive	42.1	31.8	34.2	40.9
Low Activity	37.4	33.4	38.6	41.7
Medium Activity	11.2	16.1	9.4	11.8
High Activity	9.3	18.6	17.8	5.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	2,376	515	511	842

one's views to the mass media; and distributing leaflets and letters. Each of these activities requires a public expression of one's point-of-view, as well as considerable personal effort. Moderate degrees of activism are demonstrated by participating in discussion groups or trying to persuade others how to react to the coup. Low levels of activity are found among those who only prayed or followed the events in the media. Finally, those who engaged in none of the above activities are considered to be inactive. The respondents were scored according to their highest level of activity.

This analysis differs from earlier studies of protest behavior in that the ideological objectives of the activists are heterogeneous. Unlikely a study of protesters against, say, nuclear energy, in which protest occurs only among those opposing nuclear plants, this study involves protest both in favor of and in opposition to the coup. It is quite possible that the determinants of these two sorts of behavior differ, and, at a minimum, we would not want to prejudge this issue. Consequently, I have created two indices of protest behavior, one measuring activity in support of the coup and the other measuring activity in opposition to it. There is of course a strong negative correlation between the two variables (although it is far from 1.0), and each of the measures is strongly correlated with attitudes toward the coup (by definition). Table 3 reports the regional distributions of these two measures.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this table. First, political activism was more common among those who opposed the coup than among those supporting the coup. While this is not surprising, it is noteworthy

that many citizens took action *in support of the coup*. Second, rates of activism were indeed higher in Moscow and Leningrad than in Russia or Ukraine. Roughly one-quarter to one-third of those opposing the coup in Moscow and Leningrad engaged in a moderate or high degree of behavioral activism (and the differences between residents of the two cities are small). Conversely, only a relatively small proportion of the respondents remained inactive. Even among those supporting the coup, activism was higher in Moscow and Leningrad than elsewhere. Finally, political activity was not confined to Moscow and Leningrad, even if the proportions of citizens elsewhere engaging in political protest were smaller.

The correlation between support for democratic institutions and processes and behavioral opposition to the coup is  $.27^{18}$ —*those more strongly committed to democratic institutions and processes were more likely to have engaged in active protest of the coup*. The relationship is not stronger because many of the strongest opponents of the coup took no action. Table 4 reports the bivariate relationship between protest activity and support for democratic institutions and processes (categorized according to one-half standard deviation units). There is clear tendency in this table for anti-coup activism to increase with greater support for democratic institutions and processes—inactivity declines from 60.4% among the least supportive of democracy to only 10.1% among those most supportive. Indeed, roughly 40% of those with strongly democratic attitudes took action against the coup, with 15 to 20% of the citizens engaged in high levels of opposition. Though the statistical relationship is not particularly strong—it is depressed by the low levels of activity among nearly all of those who do not support democratic institutions and processes—clearly, there are important behavioral implications of democratic values for a significant portion of the population.<sup>19</sup>

The table also reveals some relationships between opposition to democratic institutions and processes and *pro-coup* activism, although the strong anti-democrats were much more likely to remain inactive than the strong pro-democrats (76.9% versus 10.1%). Even those least supportive of democratic institutions and processes took little action in support of the coup. The coup most likely failed in part due to the *lack* of support among those *opposing* democratization.

Thus, beliefs about democratic institutions and processes were indeed

<sup>18</sup>The correlation in the Moscow subsample is  $.25$ ; in the Leningrad subsample, it is  $.30$ .

<sup>19</sup>A meta-analysis of 88 attitude-behavior correlations reported in social scientific papers concluded that the median correlation is  $.33$ , only slightly higher than the correlation reported here. See Kraus (1995, 63).

**Table 4. Support for Democratic Institutions and Processes and Behavioral Reactions to the August Putsch**

	Support for Democratic Institutions and Processes <sup>a</sup>									
	Least Supportive	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Most Supportive
<i>Pro-Coup Activists</i> <sup>b</sup>										
Completely Inactive	76.9	82.5	79.5	83.2	80.7	83.6	90.1	92.7	90.1	98.5
Low Activity	16.6	12.3	17.9	15.7	15.4	13.9	8.0	4.6	7.8	1.5
Medium Activity	4.2	1.5	1.0	.8	2.6	2.0	1.1	1.8	.9	0.0
High Activity	2.3	3.8	1.6	.2	1.2	.5	.9	.9	1.2	0.0
N	87	136	340	512	666	717	497	323	160	74
<i>Anti-Coup Activists</i> <sup>c</sup>										
Completely Inactive	60.4	39.4	48.3	41.8	42.5	34.9	27.8	23.0	20.3	10.1
Low Activity	35.7	51.5	45.0	47.4	42.1	41.5	44.7	37.1	41.0	45.2
Medium Activity	3.9	6.6	3.6	4.4	9.0	15.1	15.8	21.9	20.5	27.8
High Activity	0.0	2.5	3.0	6.4	6.4	8.5	11.7	17.9	18.3	16.9
N	87	136	340	512	666	717	497	323	160	74

Note: Columns total to 100%, except for rounding errors.

<sup>a</sup>The continuous index of support for democratic institutions and processes has been categorized on the basis of one-half standard deviation units.

<sup>b</sup>Gamma = -.21.

<sup>c</sup>Gamma = .28.

connected to protest in support of democracy during the August Putsch. Though it is certainly true that a large proportion of those favoring democracy did little during the days of the coup, many “democrats” took to the streets, boycotted work, and made their protests known to their fellow citizens, political leaders, and even to the plotters themselves. Perhaps it is not entirely true that ordinary citizens saved democracy in the USSR during August of 1991. But had citizens mobilized in support of the coup—as some had predicted—or had they passively accepted the seizure of political power, there is little doubt that the outcome of that crucial week would not have been the consolidation of democratic power. Attitudes toward democracy mattered during the August Putsch.<sup>20</sup>

### Conclusion

Though I have addressed several seemingly disparate topics in this paper, the central question of the analysis is coherent and simple—does the approval of democratic institutions and processes expressed by many Russians and Ukrainians have any substantial implications for the process of democratization that is underway? Though no definitive answer to this query is possible, I have adduced three separate bits of evidence all suggesting that democratic commitments are not shallow and ephemeral. To summarize that evidence:

1) Support for democratic institutions and processes was fairly widespread in 1992, and there is little evidence of a substantial diminution of support for democracy from 1990 to 1992.

2) Attitudes toward democratic institutions and processes were reasonably stable over time, with those favoring democracy in 1990 tending strongly to favor democracy in 1992.

3) Preferences for democracy are relatively insulated from the economic experiences and aspirations of most people. Severe economic malaise seems not to have weakened enthusiasm for democracy, even if, in recent times, economic optimism seems to have strengthened support a bit.

4) When confronted with a crucial opportunity to *act* in defense of democracy—during the August 1991 Putsch—many democrats did indeed mobilize. Though the effects are not especially strong (for a variety of reasons), those most strongly supporting democratic institutions and processes were likely to have taken action to defend democracy against the plotters.

Thus, the evidence seems to entitle me to claim that support for demo-

<sup>20</sup>As Dobson and Grant (1992, 302) noted: “The attempted coup of Soviet hard-liners in August 1991, which precipitated the breakup of the Soviet Union, might never have occurred if the conspirators had a better understanding of public opinion.”

cratic institutions and processes in Russian and Ukraine is a mile wide and more than an inch deep!

What of the prospects for further democratization in the republics of the former Soviet Union? There are certainly encouraging signs in this analysis. Yet few would argue that mass attitudes, values, and even behaviors are determinative of the course of political development of a society. The August Putsch failed in part due to the ineptness of the plotters, in part due to the role of the military, and in part as a function of systemic variables that had little to do with the preferences of the mass public. Institutional structures have changed dramatically since the coup, especially the emergence of relatively homogeneous, independent nation states. Institutions and structures matter, perhaps even as much as or more than the political culture.

It is not clear, moreover, that ordinary people in the successor states will maintain their commitments to democracy indefinitely. The economic chaos of the post-command economy era is surely exacting a perilous toll on the patience of the Soviet peoples. While the evidence from 1992 is that economic perceptions did not undermine support for democracy, it is certainly not my contention that the lack of relationship will persist indefinitely. The living conditions of ordinary Russians and Ukrainians must improve at some point in order to consolidate and normalize the democratic polity.

Some argue that the elections of December 1993 signaled the demise of support for democratization among ordinary Russians, and my analysis cannot, of course, speak to these more recent events. It is beyond the scope of this paper to present full analysis of the election of 1993. I must note, nonetheless, that the election results have not been uniformly interpreted as a vote against democracy (e.g., Hough 1994; but see Whitefield and Evans 1994 for a contrary view). It is important to remember, moreover, that the election was conducted under a number of anti-democratic constraints. It took place within just a few months of the outbreak of civil war at the Russian White House; the free flow of communications during the election was severely restricted; and Zhirinovsky, while certainly difficult to mistake for a liberal democrat, was able to attract voters on the basis of a limited number of demagogish appeals. After the election passed, and Zhirinovsky was subjected to the glare of publicity and an unconstrained marketplace of ideas, support for him quickly dissipated.<sup>21</sup> Thus, one important lesson of the December elections was that restricting the free flow of

<sup>21</sup>For instance, a Russian Center for Public Opinion and Market Research poll in the Spring of 1994 reported that 63% of the Russian sample did not trust Zhirinovsky at all (Bohlen 1994).

political information can have dangerous consequences, even where many citizens are generally supportive of democratic institutions and processes.

Finally, the anti-democratic values of many Russian and Ukrainian *leaders* should not be discounted or ignored (see Miller, Hesli, and Reisinger 1995). While my focus in this article has been on ordinary citizens, the actions of elites can obviously have a tremendous impact on the politics of these two countries. Threats to democracy in Russia and Ukraine proliferate daily, and that which has been stable to date can easily become volatile. Thus, it is imperative that future research be conducted that continues to assess the dynamics of *change* in the processes of democratization that are emerging.

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