

IDENTITY AND INTERNATIONAL LINKAGE
IN POST-SOVIET REGIME TRAJECTORIES:
UKRAINE AND BELARUS IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE



ENES SÖNMEZ

BOĞAZİÇİ UNİVERSİTY

2024

IDENTITY AND INTERNATIONAL LINKAGE
IN POST-SOVIET REGIME TRAJECTORIES:
UKRAINE AND BELARUS IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Thesis submitted to the
Institute for Graduate Studies in Social Sciences
in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of
Master of Arts
in
International Relations: Turkey, Europe, and the Middle East

by
Enes Sönmez

Boğaziçi University

2024

Identity and International Linkage in Post-Soviet Regime Trajectories:
Ukraine and Belarus in Comparative Perspective

The thesis of Enes Sönmez

has been approved by:

Assoc. Prof. Murat Akan
(Thesis Advisor)

Assist. Prof. Mert Arslanalp

Prof. Evren Balta
(External Member)

August 2024

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Enes Sönmez, certify that

- I am the sole author of this thesis and that I have fully acknowledged and documented in my thesis all sources of ideas and words, including digital resources, which have been produced or published by another person or institution;
- this thesis contains no material that has been submitted or accepted for a degree or diploma in any other educational institution;
- this is a true copy of the thesis approved by my advisor and thesis committee at Boğaziçi University, including final revisions required by them.

Signature.....

Date

ABSTRACT

Identity and International Linkage in Post-Soviet Regime Trajectories: Ukraine and Belarus in Comparative Perspective

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine and Belarus's trajectories diverged considerably. This research examines the determinants underlying these divergent paths, with a specific emphasis on the interaction among identity, international linkage, and consequently the influence of domestic factors. The pro-Western and pro-Russian schism that divides Ukraine from east to west generates a battleground for external influence. This dissonance within oneself impedes the consolidation of democracy and autocracy. In contrast, the Soviet-influenced homogeneity of Belarusians' identity renders it vulnerable to Russian influence, which has strengthened the authoritarian regime of President Lukashenko. Significantly, domestic actors assume a pivotal role. They utilize external connections to galvanize support for their preferred political course in Ukraine. Those in Belarus who are in alliance with Russia exploit the common identity as a means to amass public support for the regime led by Lukashenko. This study illuminates how post-Soviet political development is influenced by a combination of internal and external factors, as well as the endeavors of domestic actors vying for public support, through an examination of these contrasting cases.

ÖZET

Sovyet Sonrası Rejim Yörüngelerinde Kimlik ve Uluslararası Bağlantılar:

Ukrayna ve Belarus Karşılaştırmalı Bir Bakış

Sovyetler Birliği'nin 1991'de dağılmasından sonra Ukrayna ve Belarus'un izledikleri yol önemli ölçüde farklılaşmıştır. Bu araştırma kimlik, uluslararası bağlantılar ve haliyle yerel faktörlerin etkisi arasındaki etkileşime özel bir vurgu yaparak bu farklı yolların altında yatan unsurları incelemektedir. Ukrayna'yı doğudan batıya bölen Batı yanlısı ve Rusya yanlısı ayrımı, dış etkiler için bir savaş alanı yaratmaktadır. Bu içsel uyumsuzluk demokrasinin ve otokrasinin pekişmesini engellemektedir. Buna karşın, Belarusluların kimliğindeki Sovyet etkisindeki homojenlik, onu Rus etkisine karşı savunmasız hale getirmiş ve bu da Başkan Lukaşenko'nun otoriter rejimini güçlendirmiştir. Hakeza yerel aktörlerin aldığı rolün ehemmiyeti de es geçilemez. Ukrayna'da tercih ettikleri siyasi rotaya destek toplamak için dış aktörler ile çıkar birliği yapmaktan geri durmamışlardır. Belarus'ta ise Rusya ile çıkar birliğinde olanlar da Lukashenko liderliğindeki rejime kamuoyu desteği toplamak için ortak kimliği bir araç olarak kullanmaktadır. Bu çalışma Sovyet sonrası siyasi gelişimin, iç ve dış faktörlerin yanı sıra kamuoyu desteği için yarışan yerel aktörlerin çabalarının bir kombinasyonundan nasıl etkilendiğini, bu farklılaşan vakaları inceleyerek aydınlatmaktadır.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION & LITERATURE REVIEW.....	1
1.1 Democracy and electoral authoritarianism.....	4
1.2 International factors: Linkage, leverage, authoritarian and democratic engagement.....	9
1.3 Historical legacies and national identity.....	14
1.4 Economic factors and development.....	19
1.5 Theoretical framework.....	22
1.6 Conclusion.....	26
CHAPTER 2: UKRAINE.....	28
2.1 Ukraine's post-Soviet regime trajectory.....	30
2.2 The contested terrain of Ukraine's identity.....	45
2.3 International linkages with the West and Russia.....	55
2.4 Conclusion.....	66
CHAPTER 3: BELARUS.....	70
3.1 Belarus post-Soviet regime trajectory.....	73
3.2 Transformation of Belarus's identity.....	84
3.3 Belarusians and international linkage.....	91
3.4 Conclusion.....	100
CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION.....	102
REFERENCES.....	108

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Ukraine's score on the Economist Intelligence Unit's democracy index in 2006–2017 years.....	39
Figure 2. Distribution of Ukrainian, Russian, and Surzyk languages in Ukraine.....	46
Figure 3. Percentage of Ukraine's population (by region) that voted for Yanukovych or Yushchenko in the 2004 presidential elections, final round.....	48
Figure 4. Post-Soviet Belarus's year-on-year progress in alternative source information, civil liberties, liberal democracy, election free and fair.....	76
Figure 5. Which geopolitical alliance is better for the Belarusian state to be in?.....	87
Figure 6. Which side do you think would be more beneficial for Belarus?.....	98

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Which Path Should Ukraine Follow?	51
Table 2. Systematic Values Ukrainians Choose to Support by Demographic Groups in 2014.....	53
Table 3. Regional Participation and Support for the Orange Revolution.....	60
Table 4. Ukrainians' Views Of Russia and Its Leader Over the Years.....	66
Table 5. Is It Important to Have Good Relations with the Countries Concerned?....	99



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION & LITERATURE REVIEW

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 prompted a surge of political transformation across the recently sovereign nations of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. This significant event marked the beginning of different paths taken by states adopting democratic changes and aligning with Western organizations, while others underwent different levels of authoritarian consolidation or ended up in hybrid regimes that combined democratic and authoritarian characteristics.

Despite their shared history of Soviet control and comparable beginning circumstances upon gaining freedom, Ukraine and Belarus are two former Soviet states that followed separate political trajectories. Since 1994, Belarus has been under the leadership of Alexander Lukashenko, who has effectively maintained a strong hold on power. This has resulted in the establishment of an authoritarian system that is marked by limited political liberties, repressed opposition, and a lack of diverse media outlets. In contrast, Ukraine has experienced a tumultuous trajectory, alternating between phases of democratic advancement and authoritarian regressions, characterized by mass protests, disputed elections, and geopolitical tensions. This thesis examines why they followed divergent trajectories.

The choice of Belarus and Ukraine as case studies is grounded on several persuasive rationales. The various paths of these events provide a unique chance to compare and analyze the elements that have either helped or hampered the process of democratic consolidation in the post-Soviet era. The geopolitical importance of

Belarus and Ukraine is of great magnitude. Located at the intersection of Europe and Eurasia, these nations have emerged as key areas of geopolitical rivalry between the Western powers and Russia. For instance, the European Union has aimed to expand its influence and advocate for democratic principles in Belarus and Ukraine via efforts like as the Eastern Partnership program, while Russia has tried to retain its control in both nations through economic incentives, political coercion, and cultural linkages. The differing perspectives and approaches of these outside players have had a substantial influence on the internal political situations of Belarus and Ukraine.

Moreover, the national identities of Belarus and Ukraine have been essential in influencing their reactions to external influences and their interactions with both Russia and the West. Distinct identity narratives have emerged in each nation as a result of the historical legacies of Soviet and pre-Soviet imperial influences. In Belarus, the government often uses a common Slavic ancestry and longing for the Soviet era to justify its authority. In contrast, significant segment of the population in Ukraine places more importance on Ukrainian identity and desire for integration with Europe. The identity dynamics have had a significant impact on the political decisions and preferences of the populace in both nations enabling and constraining the ruling elites' relations with outside actors, consequently shaping the conditions stabilizing or undermining regime trajectories.

In the post-Soviet space, it was seen that the legacy of the past and the identity formed by that legacy set an example for the post-independence alignment of that country towards the West and towards Russia. Ukraine and Belarus are two East Slavic countries, their cultures are mostly similar, their languages are mutually intelligible and have a high degree of similarity, but their legacies are different and

this has led to different outcomes. Since they are the same in many areas, it is easier to analyze the differences in identity stemming from their legacies and the resulting trajectories.

Besides, the case studies of Belarus and Ukraine provide a unique chance to analyze the processes of linkage and leverage, which have been recognized as crucial variables in determining the paths of regimes in post-Soviet countries. Linkage refers to the extent of economic, political, social, and organizational connections with the West, while leverage represents the West's capacity to exert pressure on governments via methods like economic sanctions or diplomatic isolation. This research seeks to enhance understanding of how foreign entities might impact domestic political processes and results by examining the interaction between linkage and leverage in these two scenarios.

The understanding of political mobilization and regime legitimacy in post-Soviet republics relies heavily on the idea of national identity, which includes historical legacies, cultural values, and social ambitions. Global connections, including economic, political, and social relationships with foreign entities like Russia and the European Union, have a pivotal influence on determining domestic policies and power dynamics.

This research aims to analyze the impact of the interaction between national identity and international linkage on the political development of Belarus and Ukraine. The analysis will examine the interplay between historical legacies, geopolitical influences, in relation to external pressures and engagement techniques used by both democratic and authoritarian players. The aim of this analysis is to show that the use of identity as a policy tool in both internal and international affairs

affects the inclination to participate in foreign relations, therefore impacting regime change. This research seeks to enhance understanding of the elements that either support or hinder the establishment of democracy in post-Soviet republics by examining intricate dynamics.

To be more clear, the comprehension of political mobilization and regime legitimacy in post-Soviet republics is greatly enhanced by considering the idea of identity, which includes national, ethnic, and cultural aspects. According to Bunce (2005), the concept of a country has had a significant impact on the political and economic changes in the area. Historical influences and the reign of empires have played a vital part in the formation of national identities. On the other hand, international linkage is a crucial factor shaping regime trajectories. The notion of international linkage encompasses the economic, political, and social connections between states and foreign players. These connections may provide both advantages and limitations for local participants, molding their decision-making on policies and impacting the distribution of influence across various political entities. The European Union and Russia have had significant influence as foreign players in the post-Soviet zone, with their conflicting goals and methods playing a crucial role in influencing the political trajectory of several governments in the region.

1.1 Democracy and electoral authoritarianism

To comprehend the rationales behind diverging regime trajectories, it is crucial to initially establish a straightforward description of democracy. The prevailing viewpoint posits that contemporary democracy encompasses a broader scope beyond the mere conduct of competitive elections (Schmitter & Karl, 1991, p. 85).

Consequently, a state that conducts elections does not inherently meet the criteria for being considered democratic. The assertion that the mere conduct of competitive elections can equate to democracy is a perspective that has predominantly been employed by authoritarian regimes subsequent to the third wave of democracy (Haggard & Kaufman, 2016). Besides, following the third wave of democracy worldwide, certain long-standing notions of democracy as a straightforward advancement have been disrupted (Levitsky & Way, 2002).

In this context, procedural definition of democracy underscores the importance of competitive elections, universal suffrage, and fundamental political liberties as the distinguishing characteristics of a democratic system. This framework has been further developed by some scholars such as Robert Dahl, who have underscored the significance of the rule of law, institutional constraints on executive power, and political contestation in assuring democratic stability and accountability.

To clarify, it is key that all adults in a democracy possess the right to exercise their right to vote and be provided with alternative media platforms and information sources allowing unrestricted expression. As well, the establishment of civil society organizations ought not to be constrained in any capacity (Dahl, 1982, p. 11). This necessitates that all individuals be permitted to join one at their preference.

Therefore, the establishment of a free, competitive, and inclusive environment from the bottom up is an essential prerequisite for success for democracy.

Nevertheless, since the collapse of the bipolar era, the world has witnessed the consequences that can arise when democracy is primarily confined to electoral processes. Consequently, the emergence of electoral authoritarian regimes has ensued. Therefore, this paper will refrain from delving into minimalist definitions

and does not assert that elections on their own are paramount for the establishment of democracy. The democratic regime must possess an internal capacity for responsiveness. Regarding this matter, Robert Dahl posits that a collection of conditions must be fulfilled before a country can be classified as democratic. In this regard, it is expected that there will be no significant infringements of the democratic stipulations (Dahl, 1982, p. 11).

However, the procedural definition of democracy has been further complicated by the emergence of electoral authoritarianism, a hybrid regime type that is distinguished by the presence of multiparty elections and significant restrictions on political freedoms and civil liberties. The strategies employed by electoral authoritarian regimes to maintain power, such as the co-optation of the opposition, control of the media, and manipulation of electoral processes, have been analyzed by scholars such as Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way.

At this point, it would be logical to adhere to Dahl, Schmitter, and Karl's delineation instead of a definition that just concentrates on elections. Levitsky and Way demonstrate that following the Cold War, there has been a rise in competitive authoritarian regimes and authoritarian regimes that hold elections. Therefore, a definition that solely emphasizes the presence of elections is problematic both from a normative standpoint and in terms of accurately distinguishing between different types of regimes.

Electoral authoritarianism, a form of government defined by the simultaneous presence of multiparty elections and systematic breaches of democratic principles, has emerged as a significant subject of study in the field of comparative politics. Andreas Schedler (2002) used the term 'electoral authoritarianism' to describe

political regimes that conduct regular elections but manipulate the procedures in order to guarantee the success of the current ruling party or leader. Researchers have identified numerous crucial characteristics of these governments, which include limitations on political liberties, partial election regulations, and inadequate enforcement of rule of law.

Expanding upon Schedler's research, some academics have created classifications of electoral authoritarianism, highlighting the different levels of competition and transparency. Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way (2010) have defined competitive authoritarianism as a political system in which opposition parties have a possibility of winning, but the conditions are biased in favor of the current ruling party. These political systems have a higher level of intense political rivalry, more robust and well-structured opposition parties, more room for independent media and civil society, and elections that are often hotly fought but tainted by deceit and manipulation.

Competitive authoritarianism is a kind of hybrid political government whereby aspects of democracy and authoritarianism are combined. Under such systems, formal democratic institutions such courts, legislatures, and elections exist but they are controlled to keep the authority of the ruling class. Operating notwithstanding major challenges like state control over media, harassment, and uneven access to resources, opposition parties and civil society encounter severe difficulties. Competitive authoritarian systems permit some degree of competition, unlike pure authoritarian governments, although the playing field is much slanted in favor of incumbents. Often explored by academics like as Levitsky and Way, this theory emphasizes how such governments preserve a front of democracy while

methodically erasing it, hence producing a political system neither totally democratic nor totally autocratic.

Also, Levitsky and Way (2010) defined a variant of electoral authoritarianism called hegemonic electoral authoritarianism. In this subtype, the governing party continuously wins elections by large majorities, typically surpassing two-thirds of the vote. These regimes exhibit restricted political opportunities for opposition, weak and divided opposition parties, substantial state dominance over resources and media, and formidable obstacles for new political participants to enter the political arena.

Other than that, Beatriz Magaloni (2006) examines closed authoritarian countries characterized by non-competitive elections that mainly serve to legitimize the governing party. These regimes are often marked by stringent limitations on political freedoms and civil rights, absence of significant opposition parties or independent media, pervasive repression and intimidation of dissent, and elections that are mostly symbolic and devoid of actual competition. Larry Diamond (2002) also defends that elections held in authoritarian settings may provide legitimacy to authoritarian authority, discourage resistance, and impede the advancement of democracy. However, Staffan Lindberg (2006) puts forward that elections, despite their imperfections, may provide chances for the mobilization of opposition groups, involvement of citizens in public affairs, and the gradual implementation of democratic changes.

1.2 International factors: Linkage, leverage, authoritarian and democratic engagement

Various scholars examine the role of transnational connections within the framework of post-Soviet political developments. In this point, Levitsky and Way (2006) have been instrumental in the examination of the external influences on regime change through the use of the concepts of linkage and leverage. The West's capacity to exert pressure on governments is referred to as leverage, while linkage is the density of economic, political, social, and organizational connections to the West. Influenced by changes in global norms, changes in regime types, and varying incentives and sanctions, the mechanisms of linkage and leverage have undergone a significant evolution.

The focus of linkage mechanisms has shifted from traditional diplomacy and economic aid to more intricate interactions that involve transnational networks, media, and civil society. Economic aid and political diplomacy were the primary methods employed by Western countries to promote democratization during the early post-Soviet period. Nevertheless, the nature of linkage expanded to encompass cultural and societal connections, such as student exchanges, media penetration, and NGO activities, as globalization intensified. These broader linkages established a more complex network of influences that transcended government-to-government interactions (Levitsky & Way, 2010).

Leverage has also undergone a transformation in response to the evolving geopolitical environment. Conditional economic assistance and diplomatic pressure were the initial methods of exerting leverage. Nevertheless, leverage has evolved to encompass a combination of soft power strategies, political isolation, and economic

sanctions in response to the emergence of global interdependencies (Levitsky & Way, 2010). For example, the European Union's Eastern Partnership program employs conditionality to link economic and political incentives to specific reforms, thereby effectively leveraging its influence to promote democratic governance (Börzel, 2015).

In his study, Cameron (2007) examines the correlation between EU membership and the advancement of democracy. He asserts that the desire to join the EU, among other factors, has had a substantial impact on fostering democratization in the area. He highlights the EU's political conditionality and 'passive leverage' as crucial processes that influence political change. Besides, Sasse (2013) analyzes the range of international connections in the EU's eastern neighbors and their impact on domestic politics. She contends that a variety of connections, when firmly rooted in internal political rivalry, might enhance the emergence of democratic opportunities. On the other hand, when there is little competition inside a country's political system, connections with other countries might protect a government from internal demands for change. This emphasizes the interaction between global connections and internal political forces in influencing the results of a political system.

Nitoiu (2018) presents a comprehensive analysis of the existing body of literature about the impact of external players, with a specific focus on the United States, Russia, and the European Union, on the foreign policy of countries that emerged after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The author emphasizes the significance of these players in advancing their interests and perspectives on global politics in the area, while also acknowledging the difficulties experienced by post-Soviet governments in managing conflicting foreign influences. Nitoiu highlights the

need of comprehending the precise tactics and instruments used by external entities to augment their sway, together with the internal elements that moderate the effects of external influences. He contends that while the EU aims to present itself as a champion of democracy and human rights, post-Soviet governments often use the EU for their own practical advantages.

For instance, the geopolitical circumstances, including the impact of Russia and the EU, have played a crucial role in determining the paths of governance in Ukraine and Belarus. Russia has always sought to preserve its influence in the area by using several strategies, such as providing economic and military assistance to certain governments, and advocating for a unique concept of regional integration (Nitoiu, 2018). The European Union, in contrast, has played a crucial role in advocating for democratic changes via its European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership program.

The opposing influences of Russia and the EU have had a considerable impact on Ukraine's political evolution. The Orange Revolution, such as it was, represented Ukraine's geopolitical power struggle, with the European Union and the United States backing the pro-Western opposition, while Russia stood behind the authoritarian ruler (McFaul, 2007). In the years that followed, there has been an ongoing conflict between these opposing forces, with Russia using economic coercion and military action to weaken Ukraine's independence and democratic goals (Way, 2015).

On the other hand, Belarus has maintained its position within Russia's sphere of influence. In order to preserve its authority and withstand Western pressure for democratization, the Lukashenko regime has depended on Russian economic and

political assistance. Belarus's exposure to alternative governance models has been restricted by the absence of a robust countervailing force from the EU, which has exacerbated the persistence of authoritarian rule.

However, the engagement strategies of authoritarian and democratic regimes with other states are essentially different as a result of their divergent political structures and objectives. In this respect, economic incentives, military support, and political alliances are frequently implemented by authoritarian regimes, including Russia and China, in order to sustain and broaden their influence. These regimes frequently endorse administrations or movements that are consistent with their interests, as they prioritize stability and control over democratic reforms.

In this aspect, Tansey (2016) conducts a thorough analysis of the authoritarian engagement, advocating for a more stringent definition that requires a distinct intention from an external actor to support autocracy as a political system, together with a fundamental reason rooted in an intellectual dedication to authoritarianism. He proposes that several actions categorized as autocracy promotion could be more accurately interpreted as democracy resistance, or endeavors to hinder the adverse consequences linked to the process of democratization. Also, Von Soest (2015) highlights the self-serving aspect of authoritarian collaboration, asserting that it is primarily motivated by the goal of ensuring regime survival and safeguarding against negative consequences of democratization, rather than a sincere ideological dedication to advancing authoritarianism. In his examination of Russia's activities in the former Soviet Union,

In this regard, post-Soviet nations are ideal examples of Russia's engagement. Russia endeavors to maintain its influence over many of the post-Soviet nations by

means of economic dependency, political pressure, and cultural connections. The propagation of pro-Russian media narratives, direct financial assistance to supportive regimes, and the use of energy supplies as a weapon of economic coercion are common tactics (Ambrosio, 2016; Tsygankov, 2015).

Conversely, democratic nations foster economic development, human rights, and political reforms in their interactions with other nations. These engagements frequently involve financial assistance, institutional support, and diplomatic initiatives that are designed to promote market economies and democratic governance. The Eastern Partnership initiative of the European Union is a prime example of this approach, as it provides economic incentives and political association agreements to promote democratic reforms in Eastern Europe. Conditionality, which involves the allocation of incentives contingent upon specific political or economic reforms, is a critical approach to democratic engagement (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005).

The mechanisms of linkage and leverage are considerably different depending on the type of regime, which is indicative of the distinct approaches of democratic and authoritarian regimes. In order to facilitate reforms and exert influence, democratic nations implement a variety of strategies. In order to encourage political and economic reforms, democracies utilize economic assistance and preferential trade agreements. For instance, the European Union grants access to its single market in exchange for compliance with democratic norms and standards (Börzel, 2015).

Besides, diplomatic pressure and sanctions are employed to exert pressure on governments that are not compliant. Targeted sanctions are frequently implemented against entities and individuals who are implicated in corruption or human rights

violations (Levitsky & Way, 2006). However, democracies offer assistance in the formation of civil society organizations and democratic institutions. This encompasses the provision of funding for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), the facilitation of political leader training programs, and the provision of support for the establishment of transparent governance structures (Levitsky & Way, 2010). Authoritarian regimes frequently employ cultural ties and media influence to reinforce their narratives and affect public opinion. Key examples include Russia's dissemination of pro-Russian propaganda through state-controlled media and its advocacy for the 'Russian world' concept (Feklyunina, 2016).

More than that, it is evident that Russia specifically exploits its influence in international trade to affect ex-Soviet countries. Robert Horvath (2011), in this subject, asserts that Russia used this tactic to thwart democratization after the Color Revolutions. As a result of the military might it had lost with the fall of the Soviet Union, it attempted to minimize the West's influence in these nations, even economically. For instance, that is why, even the proponents of closer links with the West acknowledged the necessity to maintain good relations with Russia. In Ukraine, this agreement remained mostly intact until the oblasts of Luhansk, Donetsk, and Crimea were occupied as a violent reaction of Russia to the Euromaidan protests, sparked by Viktor Yanukovich's preference for the Eurasian Economic Union over the European Union-Ukraine Association Agreement.

1.3 Historical legacies and national identity

Identity plays an important role in decision-makers' decision-making when orienting the direction of the country. In the post-Soviet space, the role of identity in

influencing the country's trajectory is critical. The national identities and political cultures of post-Soviet states have been significantly influenced by the historical legacies of Soviet domination and imperial rule (Bunce, 2005). These legacies have influenced the extent to which democratic values and practices have taken root in these societies. Bunce underscores the importance of national identity in the context of post-communist regime transition, emphasizing the influence of imperial rule and historical legacies on the development of national identity.

Bunce (2005) argues that the Soviet paradigm of ethnofederalism, which was designed to foster a shared ideological identity, facilitated the resurgence of nationalism and the dissolution of the Soviet Union and other ethnofederal states. The extent to which democratic values and practices have become ingrained in these societies has been influenced by these legacies. For example, nations that had previously implemented somewhat 'democratic' governance, such as Baltic states, were considerably more susceptible to successfully transitioning to democracy than those that had not (Fish, 1998).

More than that, according to Valerie J. Bunce and Sharon L. Wolchik (2009), prolonged exposure to authoritarian rule can erode democratic traditions by eradicating independent media, firmly established political parties based on socioeconomic divisions, a robust civil society, strong political institutions, and a mass political culture that can embrace democracy surprisingly quickly but exhibit some ambivalence toward liberal values. Additionally, it may sprout an opposition that is inflexible with the government's commitment to liberal values. This would account for the distinction between the former Soviet states—which have been long ruled by Russia since Tsarist Russia—and the Baltic States and Western Ukraine,

which were occupied by the Soviet Union relatively recently. Former cultural ties played a role through other mechanisms.

White (2010) investigates the complexities of identity in the post-Soviet era by analyzing Soviet nostalgia in Russia. He contends that it has significant political ramifications due to its association with support for particular economic and political policies. He discovers that a substantial number of Russians, particularly those who are elderly and less affluent, harbor sentiments of nostalgia for the Soviet Union and its perceived economic security, social equality, and stability. Individuals with a strong sense of nostalgia were significantly more inclined to support left-wing parties, or at the very least, those that advocated for public ownership, a Soviet-style government, and closer ties among the former Soviet republics. Conversely, they were considerably less likely to support parties that endorsed a "civilised divorce," a completely market-based economy, or Western-style democracy.

White (2010) observes that remnants of Soviet identity persist and exert a significant effect on the level of popular backing for Putin's autocratic governance. For example, in Belarus, the Lukashenko regime has exploited this nostalgia for the Soviet past, which was perceived as stable and socially egalitarian, to legitimize its authoritarian rule. Nevertheless, the legacy of Soviet control in Ukraine is more contentious, as a substantial portion of the population, particularly in the western regions, is plagued by negative memories of Soviet repression, such as Holodomor, and Russification policies.

The significance of identity construction in shaping Russia's actions in the post-Soviet space is emphasized by Valenza (2022), who challenges realist explanations of Russian foreign policy. He contends that Russia's actions in the

region are significantly influenced by the development of a new hegemonic identity that is rooted in traditional values. The author discovers that the post-Soviet cultural space has been the subject of a deliberate and systematic endeavor to reproduce a 'new' identity through frontier creation and counter-discourse since 2012. This identity contradicts the identity that "the West is endeavoring to disseminate globally".

More than that, although there are many who claim that strong ethnic identities and nationalism are necessarily harmful to the progress of democracy (Kohn, 1945; Plamenatz, 1973; Lipset, 1963), the truth is far more intricate, at least with the third wave of democratization (Beissinger, 2008). Ethnic nationalism has the potential to effectively rally populations against oppressive rule. A collective cultural identity and a shared aspiration for self-governance may foster a feeling of cohesion and resolve, inspiring individuals to topple tyrannical governments. The movements in the former Soviet Union during the 'third wave of democratization' serve as a prominent illustration.

Ethnic nationalism had a crucial role in bringing together diverse groups and eventually leading to the downfall of the authoritarian state (Beissinger, 2008, p. 86). Countries with a strong sense of distinct national identity, rather than embracing a supranational identity mainly, like those in the Baltics, were more successful in establishing democracies after the Soviet collapse (Wolczuk, 2000; Abdelal, 2002; Beissinger, 2008). Here, national identity served as a unifying force, fostering a sense of solidarity and purpose essential for democratic movements.

More than that, nationalism and democracy possess many fundamental concepts in common. Both ideologies prioritize popular sovereignty, which asserts

that ultimate authority resides with the people. In addition, the principle of self-determination, which is a fundamental aspect of nationalism, corresponds with the democratic concept of self-rule (Beissinger, 2008, p. 93). From this perspective, a substantial amount of nationalism may exist alongside, and even strengthen, democracy.

However, the connection between these notions might sometimes be unpredictable and unstable. In other words, when ethnic nationalism adopts an exclusionary approach, prioritizing the domination of other ethnic groups within a state, it has the potential to undermine democratic norms. The pursuit of self-determination has the potential to transform into a quest for ethnic dominance, resulting in the oppression of minority rights and eventually impeding the progress of a genuinely inclusive democracy (Beissinger, 2008).

On the other hand, weak ethnic ties might impede the formation of a cohesive democratic movement in some instances. In addition, A weak national identity can pave the way for authoritarianism to flourish. This can be seen in Belarus under Alexander Lukashenko, where he capitalized on weak national identity to consolidate power (Beissinger, 2008). On the other hand, having strong ethnic identities may serve as a crucial basis for confronting and opposing a repressive government, as seen in the post-Soviet context, such as Ukraine (Beissinger, 2008; Wolczuk, 2000).

The influence of ethnic nationalism on the process of democracy is ultimately determined by several elements, including the particular historical circumstances, the strength of ethnic identities, and the characteristics of the nationalist movement. Nationalism may have a beneficial impact on the fight for a fair and representative government when it acts as a uniting force against tyranny and prioritizes democratic

values such as self-determination. Nevertheless, when it transforms into a practice that deliberately excludes or incites violence against marginalized groups, it presents a substantial impediment to the advancement of democracy (Beissinger, 2008).

As an another view, Linz and Stepan (1996) contend that achieving a successful transition to democracy involves more than just a bureaucratically efficient governmental apparatus capable of effectively executing a program with authority. The idea of 'stateness' is crucial in this context. The uniting symbols are deeply rooted in the collective psyche of the majority of people and are widely accepted as genuine and mostly undisputed.

1.4 Economic factors and development

Economic growth and development have been recognized as essential elements in the regime trajectories of post-Soviet regimes. According to Fish (1998), countries that enacted significant economic reforms and had greater levels of economic growth were more inclined to transition to a democratic system. Nevertheless, the correlation between economic development and democracy is not consistently direct, as shown by the example of Russia. In this instance, the period of economic growth under Putin's leadership corresponded with a rise in authoritarianism (Colton & McFaul, 2007).

For instance, the economic legacy of Soviet authority and the ensuing routes of economic transition have had a substantial influence on the political development of Ukraine and Belarus. Ukraine, due to its more varied economy and increased receptiveness to global trade and investment, has seen phases of economic expansion and liberalization that have aligned with enhanced political openness. Nevertheless,

the nation's reliance on Russian energy supplies and its susceptibility to economic coercion from Moscow have hindered its progress in establishing a democratic system (Cameron & Orenstein, 2012).

Contrarily, Belarus has upheld a mostly state-controlled economy and maintained strong connections with Russia. The economic model described not only offers a certain level of stability and social welfare, but it also restricts economic diversity and innovation, which in turn contributes to the continued existence of authoritarian government (Pop-Eleches, 2014). The Belarusian government has used economic subsidies and advantageous trade deals with Russia as a means to retain control and oppose demands for political change.

Other than that, the consequences of natural riches, in particular resource rents, are the subject of another political economics theory of democracy. It has long been believed that the so-called 'resource curse', which is primarily the richness in oil and/or other minerals, impedes the growth of democracy since it gives rulers a revenue stream independent of popular approval (Ross, 2001). In this sense, it has been popularly demonstrated in academics that heavy reliance on these natural resources is damaging to the flourishing of democracy in a democratizing country since many studies have claimed that there is a general adverse relationship between democracy and natural resources (Oskarsson & Ottosen, 2010).

Considering the point, upon their independence in 1991, the former Soviet nations proceeded to establish their own institutional frameworks. Also, these dates correspond to their embracing of democracy and the free market economy. At the same time, these countries had the ability to manage their own resources without being subjugated by a big brother for the first time. In this context, Gubad Ibadoghlu

and Rashad Sadigov (2023) put forward that economic growth has only resulted in a fall in democracy in oil-rich post-Soviet nations. However, there should be typically a correlation between democracy and economic growth. In the former Soviet nations with natural resources, economic growth has brought growing authoritarianism on the contrary.

Not only that, but also they assert that oil-rich post-Soviet nations have been spending money on government initiatives specifically aimed at preventing the rise of democracy. To explain, growing natural resource earnings free governments from the constraints of fiscal policy to consolidate their authoritative power. This has been noted in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Russia. Further, it is also seen that, as Ibadoghlu and Sadigov (2023) find, real government investment has hindered the growth of democracy throughout all the post-Soviet sphere. In nations with abundant natural resources, it has become a curse with far more detrimental repercussions.

Regarding the point, it is demonstrated that problematic issues with public investment arise when a nation lacks responsible, transparent institutions that are also not subject to both horizontal and vertical oversight. Besides, in certain situations, like Norway, the fact that the country's institutions predate the discovery of natural resources made it more difficult for them to democratically deteriorate; however, this was not the case in the former Soviet sphere of influence, which had an adverse effect on newly democratizing nations.

Besides, according to Anastassia Obydenkova and Alexander Libman, commerce with authoritarian nations has a significant influence on the change of governments of trading partners, notably reducing the likelihood of areas to embrace democratic political systems (2012, p. 357). They also highlight that trade with non-

democratic countries aids in the maintenance of authoritarian governments. However, interdependency with democratic countries may be detrimental to autocratic rule, too. Knowing this unique truth all along, in Belarusian example, Alexander Lukashenko increased the state's reliance on Moscow, which is where his regime's future rests (Obydenkova & Libman, 2012, p. 379).

In another words, if an economy is completely reliant on another in terms of commerce, it can be persuaded to some level in order to maintain its interest in that country. This power might be mutual or unilateral. As an instance, recognizing this, China and Russia have been attempting to form an authoritarian fraternity and trade in their respective currencies through this channel.

1.5 Theoretical framework

The interplay between identity, linkage, and leverage is essential for comprehending the trajectories of regimes in post-Soviet states. Although linkage and leverage offer a framework for examining external influences, identity determines the degree to which societies are susceptible to these pressures and their alignment with various political models.

Further, the efficacy of linkage mechanisms is significantly influenced by identity. The identity terrain of Ukraine is complex, with varying degrees of receptivity to Western linkage efforts, as a result of a diverse set of historical, cultural, and political factors. This has been demonstrated by the extensive public support for EU integration and the resistance to Russian influence among specific segments of the population (Feklyunina, 2016).

Conversely, Belarus's identity, which is shaped by historical connections and political narratives, has established a distinct dynamic in its interactions with external actors. The preservation of Soviet-era symbols and the propagation of a shared Slavic heritage are indicative of a specific orientation in its identity (Bekus, 2010).

Moreover, identity also influences the efficacy of leverage mechanisms. Ukrainians have responded to Russian leverage in a variety of ways, despite their economic dependence, as a result of their diverse identity narratives. The intricate interplay of identity and external pressure is underscored by the Maidan protests and the subsequent political and military struggle against Russian-backed separatists (Tsygankov, 2015).

Russian leverage has been facilitated in Belarus by the identity dynamics, which are influenced by both historical and contemporary factors. The identity considerations of the population are reflected in their response to Russian subsidies and political support for Lukashenko's regime (Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2013).

The choice to prioritize linkage and leverage as key components in understanding the processes of democracy and autocratization is based on their significant importance in both theoretical and empirical studies on regime transition. Linkage and leverage refer to the external factors that impact and shape internal political dynamics. By examining these elements, we may get insight into the influence of transnational players and networks on the political development of post-Soviet republics.

Linkage and leverage provide a thorough framework for examining the external factors that affect the paths of political regimes. They include a broad spectrum of contacts, including economic and political relationships as well as social

and cultural links, offering a comprehensive view of external influences (Levitsky & Way, 2006). Multiple studies have shown the substantial influence of linkage and leverage on regime results. Empirical data from different areas and time periods confirms that strong international connections and external pressure may either promote the establishment of democratic systems or strengthen authoritarian regimes, depending on the specific circumstances (Levitsky & Way, 2010; Börzel, 2015).

Identity plays a pivotal role in comprehending the internal mechanisms that facilitate the impact of linkage and leverage. The perception and response of societies to external pressures are greatly influenced by it, making it an essential factor to consider while analyzing regime trajectories. The constructivist approach in international relations highlights the significance of identity and norms in influencing the actions of states. Identity has a crucial role in determining how external forces are understood and responded to, making it an essential aspect in mediating the results of linkage and leverage (Wendt, 1999). Further, identity has had a substantial influence on political events in the post-Soviet era. The varied historical, cultural, and political identities in Ukraine and Belarus have shaped their reactions to outside influences, underscoring the need of taking identity into account alongside linkage and leverage (Feklyunina, 2016).

The selection of Ukraine and Belarus as case studies was based on their distinct political trajectories and the substantial impact of external actors on these trajectories. Ukraine and Belarus have undergone divergent political developments, despite their comparable starting positions as former Soviet republics. While Belarus has maintained authoritarian prominence, Ukraine has implemented substantial

democratic reforms. This contrast offers a comprehensive framework for investigating the variables that affect these disparate results (Tsygankov, 2015; Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2013). Ukraine and Belarus are both strategically located in Eastern Europe and have been the focal points of geopolitical competition between the West and Russia. These countries are optimal cases for investigating the effects of identity, leverage, and linkage due to their significant external interest and involvement (Ambrosio, 2016).

In this regard, in their pursuit of power, political elites frequently alter the narrative around national identity. They strategically highlight or modify historical events to advance their own ends, a tactic referred to as memory politics. The impact of external influences, whether democratic or authoritarian, can be either facilitated or impeded by this reconstructed identity, contingent upon its alignment with the objectives of rival domestic groups. Crucially, the effectiveness of this is not contingent upon the homogeneity or diversity of the identity. Rather, it concerns how that constructed identity affects the capacity of other entities to project an influence in the country. Fundamentally, this interaction may greatly shape the course of a country's political system.

Ukraine stands as a clear and striking illustration. In that context, particular social groupings and their corresponding political elites, whose identities were fundamentally hostile to Russian influence, vigorously rejected any efforts made by Russia to acquire leverage. Although Russians backed pro-Russian politicians, these elites encountered significant resistance from Ukrainians who formed a stronger identification with the Western countries. This effectively obstructed Russia's consolidation in Ukraine. Concurrently, pro-Western elites faced challenges in

solidifying their authority as a result of the persistent Russian influence and the widespread support it received from some sectors of the public. This persistent power struggle resulted in instability, reaching its peak with Russia's direct military intervention in 2014.

Conversely, Belarus acquired a national identity that is closely connected to its Soviet history and that reflects a strong feeling of 'Great Russianness'. Lukashenko further reinforced this identity, strategically using it for his benefit. Consequently, when he formed an alliance with Russia to strengthen his government, he encountered reluctant resistance from the wider population. Also, competing political groups struggled to rally against him because of the dominant national attitude. Regrettably, Belarus's dominant national identity enabled the establishment of an autocratic regime.

Ultimately, these instances demonstrate how political elites tactically employ identity as a means to pursue power. Political instability, the repression of democratic movements, and the emergence of authoritarianism are among the potential outcomes of this. A thorough grasp of this phenomenon is essential for understanding the intricate interaction of national identity, external influence, and the course of political regimes.

1.6 Conclusion

The scholarly literature on the trajectories of post-Soviet regimes provides a comprehensive and sophisticated comprehension of the intricate interaction of many elements that have influenced the varied political results witnessed in the area. This statement emphasizes the significance of historical legacies, economic

considerations, geopolitical effects, internal variables, and the involvement of foreign players in determining the paths of democracy and autocratization in these countries. The literature also highlights the need for more study to enhance our understanding of the processes by which these elements interact and influence the continuing political changes in the post-Soviet region.

Ultimately, the body of scholarship on post-Soviet regime trajectories offers useful insights into the interaction between identity and international connections in influencing political results. The instances of Ukraine and Belarus exemplify the contrasting trajectories that post-Soviet governments might pursue, since Ukraine has had alternating periods of democratic advancement and regression towards authoritarianism, whilst Belarus has always stayed under authoritarian governance.

Through an analysis of historical legacies, economic variables, political institutions, geopolitical impacts, civil society, and leadership, we may develop a more comprehensive comprehension of the obstacles and possibilities for democracy in the post-Soviet region. The objective of this investigation is to demonstrate that the utilization of identity as a policy instrument in both domestic and foreign affairs influences the predisposition to engage in foreign relations, thereby influencing regime change. Belarus and Ukraine are two states situated between the West and Russia. They have previously been under the same roof and have been significantly influenced by these cultural spheres, which is why they were employed.

CHAPTER 2

UKRAINE

Following the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine faced a challenging phase of nation-building. This included the difficult work of creating a unified national identity in a country that was divided by regional, linguistic, and historical differences. The emerging and uncertain character of Ukraine has significantly influenced its external relations and its strategic alliances on the global stage. This chapter explores the complex connection between Ukraine's identity and its international linkages, namely with Russia and the West. It aims to reveal how these interactions have influenced Ukraine's regime path since the post-Soviet era. Thus, the instability in Ukraine's regime will be examined.

The national identity of Ukraine is not a uniform entity, but rather a collection of many geographical, linguistic, and cultural associations. The western areas, due to their historical connections with Austria-Hungary and Poland, exhibit a greater affinity towards Europe and mainly adopt a pro-Western stance. Conversely, the eastern and southern areas, due to their stronger historical, linguistic, and cultural ties to Russia, often have a greater inclination towards supporting Russia. The presence of internal disintegration in Ukraine has provided an advantageous environment for foreign players, namely Russia and the West, to exercise influence and engage in a competition for Ukraine's loyalty.

Regarding the point, Russia considers Ukraine to be an important part of its historical sphere of influence and has actively worked to retain strong connections with the nation. This has been achieved by using common cultural and linguistic

heritage, economic interdependence, and historical narratives. Moscow has used several tactics to exert influence on Ukraine's political environment, such as using economic inducements, leveraging energy resources, and providing assistance to pro-Russian political factions and groups. The multidimensional strategy has been implemented with the objective of keeping Ukraine closely aligned with the 'Russian World', and preventing it from becoming closer to Western countries.

In contrast, the Western countries, notably the European Union and the United States, have seen Ukraine as a prospective ally in their efforts to contain Russia throughout the region once under Soviet influence. Western nations have provided Ukraine with several types of aid, including as financial assistance, technical knowledge, and political backing, in order to promote its integration into Euro-Atlantic organizations. The objective of this involvement has been to enhance pro-Western democratic institutions of Ukraine, broaden its economic connections, and cultivate a pro-Western mindset among its population, thus containing Russia.

The interaction between Ukraine's developing national identity and these conflicting foreign pressures has led to an intricate and sometimes unstable political environment. Ukraine's foreign policy decisions have alternated between favoring Russia and favoring Western countries, reflecting the internal differences within the nation and the differing levels of influence from outside forces. Ukraine's changing relationships, involvement in regional organizations, and reactions to global crises have shown this dynamism.

The influence of Ukraine's national identity on its international linkages is especially apparent in its association with the European Union. The signing of the Association Agreement with the EU in 2014, despite significant Russian pressure,

was a crucial turning point in Ukraine's path beyond the Soviet era. The deal not only strengthened economic and political connections with the EU, but also represented Ukraine's dedication to European principles and its aspiration to merge with the wider European society. The decision to make this move was partly influenced by the pro-European ambitions of a substantial portion of the Ukrainian populace. This action also heightened the geopolitical competition between Russia and the Western countries about the future of Ukraine.

Ultimately, Ukraine's identity has been crucial in influencing its linkages with other countries and its path after the Soviet era. The country's divided identity has made it susceptible to opposing pressures from Russia and the West, leading to highly complex and often unforeseeable political environment. To fully grasp Ukraine's international linkages, its geopolitical alignment, and the difficulties it encounters in managing its numerous connections with neighboring countries, it is essential to know the nuanced interplay between identity and international linkages. These two factors give us important explanations for the instability of the Ukrainian regime. By using Ukrainian case, this chapter will analyze the connection between identity and international linkages, asserting that a nation's self-perception has a substantial impact on its international linkages and regime's stability.

2.1 Ukraine's post-Soviet regime trajectory

The Ukrainian government has alternated between exhibiting competitive authoritarianism and displaying characteristics of a flawed democracy. Prior to the Orange Revolution in 2004, the political system was characterized as a competitive authoritarian administration. Following the revolution, a process of relative

democratization was place until Viktor Yanukovych assumed power in 2010. During Yanukovych's rule, there was a process of authoritarian consolidation, which ultimately came to an end with the triumph of the Euromaidan uprising in 2014. Subsequently, Ukraine has been subjected to a state of occupation by Russia and its proxies, and is now facing challenges in determining its path forward. Therefore, it is important to look at the oscillation in Ukraine's regime trajectory.

For some years, Ukrainian regime serves as one of the important examples of the electoral authoritarian regimes. However, at this point, Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way (2002) contend that the idea of electoral authoritarianism is insufficient to characterize some hybrid countries, emphasizing the importance of a competitive authoritarian regime definition. Nonetheless, it should be obvious that Ukraine, with its general features, notably since its independence to the Orange Revolution in 2004, merits this label. In countries that are strictly authoritarian, elections are held solely to validate the authoritarian government in the eyes of the outside world, and there is no space for competition (Levitsky & Way, 2002). In Ukraine, nevertheless, this is not the situation. It differs from fully authoritarian governments. Oligarchs from the Soviet era had tremendous economic and political power, stifling reforms, in the country. The first leader of newly independent Ukraine, Leonid Kravchuk was also a member of the Communist party in the Soviet Union.

At the first place, former Soviet republics suddenly gained freedom in the 1990s. Ukraine had no governmental organization, having inherited only the communist state's legacy from the already-defunct Soviet Union (Way, 2005, p. 223). The post-Soviet republics were mostly governed by former high-ranking Soviet

officials eager to employ anti-democratic methods in order to maintain power.

However, Ukraine's east-west divides, resulting weak governing party institutions and a weak authoritarian state, have hampered efforts to consolidate and entrench the regime in both ways (Nalbandov, 2014; Way, 2005).

Leonid Kravchuk, between 1991 and 1994, concentrated authority in the executive branch, bypassing parliament and suppressing dissent. He did not join or run a political party, but detractors accused him of forming a 'party of power' that employed nationalist slogans instead of communist ones (Kubicek, 2023). More than that, by enveloping himself in Ukrainian sovereignty, he deflected criticism and made anyone who would disagree with him fear being called unpatriotic (Kubicek, 2023, p. 160). However, during his presidency, there was minimal media monopolization of power, minimal opposition strength, and minimal de facto executive dominance over parliament by the government (Way, 2005). Nonetheless, corruption, a persistent budget deficit, and shattered command and control economy tentacles prevented the administration from governing effectively. Then came major economic problems, including hyperinflation and a sharp decline in gross domestic product (Nalbandov, 2014, p. 57).

In particular, the Ukrainian legislative strongly stood up to Kravchuk and restricted him on several authoritarian decisions. Not only this but also, they compelled him to hold early elections (Way, 2004, p. 148). For this reason, one cannot speak of complete autocracy since the government was not in total repressive control, and the elections still had significance. Other than that, since there were not many TV stations during Kravchuk's administration, most people watched the official state channel, which was strongly pro-Kravchuk. Nevertheless, publications

like *Sil'ski Visti*, *Dzerkalo Tizhnya*, and *Vichirni Visti* were used to successfully criticize the administration (Way, 2004).

According to Andrew Wilson (1997), Kravchuk's approach to governance is reminiscent of the old Soviet system, which is a prescription for stagnation, corruption, and further abuse of state authority. However, on the other side, the elections were meaningful and Kravchuk was ousted by Leonid Kuchma with 52.2% of the vote in 1994 (Kubicek, 2023). Nevertheless, following that, Ukraine saw a rising authoritarianism that continued until the November 2004 start of the Orange Revolution. However, a multi-vector and pragmatic policy towards both Russia and the West was implemented during this period. To clarify, mutually beneficial ties between Russia and the West become increasingly vital. Besides, ties between the West and Russia were not as strained at this time (Riabchuk, 2023).

Moreover, during the period of 1994-2004, the Leonid Kuchma government attempted to suppress the media, although their efforts were not completely effective in silencing dissent. Despite there were several opposition television networks, the Kuchma government's allies and supporters managed to acquire the bulk of the media via force and intimidation (Way, 2005b, 132). Further, it is important to acknowledge the presence of contrasting media outlets under competitive authoritarian regimes; yet, they are often subjected to suppression. Most of the media is aligned with the regime, and any sources that have opposing views may encounter intimidation, persecution, or even be accused of treason (Levitsky & Way, 2002). Compared to fully authoritarian regimes, it is possible to publish alternate viewpoints, but it is difficult to publish with an oppositional perspective in this

atmosphere. In this sense, even if the opposition is intimidated, it can still find a space to speak in Ukraine (Way, 2004).

However, Leonid Kuchma skillfully attempted to utilize state power to repress the opposition, continuously grew his influence in the parliament, and expedited the process of intimidating the opposition by different abuses of authority (Kubicek, 2005). One of the instances of his actions was the state's inadequate investigation into the kidnapping and murder of Kuchma's adversary, journalist Georgiy Gongadze (Kubicek, 2005, p. 279). This especially lowered Kuchma's approval ratings (Kubicek, 2023). In his administration, the numerous abuses of human rights, the repression of the media, and the unexplained death of a journalist, Georgiy Gongadze, make it impossible to argue that Ukraine is a democracy. However, media censorship on this issue was openly discussed and emphasized in parliament. Kuchma's opponents were able to keep the Gongadze controversy alive (Way, 2004; Riabchuk, 2023).

Leonid Kuchma's rising authoritarianism affected the relationship with the West. Kuchmagate, the murdering of Georgiy Gongadze, brought to light the assassination and intimidation tactics employed by Kuchma against his political adversaries (Way, 2004). Therefore, his relationship with Western nations experienced a drastic breakdown, leading to boycotting of his regime by the European Union and the United States (Way, 2005). At the NATO Summit, Western leaders boycotted Kuchma and the names of countries were read aloud in French for the first time in NATO history. Consequently, the United States and the United Kingdom abstained from being side by side with Ukraine at the summit.

As a consequence, Kuchma attempted to fortify his regime by aligning himself with Russia, amidst an upsurge in authoritarianism, in his final years. To ensure the election of his successor Viktor Yanukovich, he orchestrated a grand commemoration of the liberation of Kiev from the occupation of Nazi Germany in 2004, involving Russian president Vladimir Putin and the Russian Orthodox Patriarch. Further, memories of the Soviet era highlighted in the event. The special emphasis was placed on fraternal relations with Russia. The objective was to unite the populace of eastern Ukraine for the elections (Riabchuk, 2008).

Despite the fact that the event's date did not align with the actual date of Kiev's liberation, Kuchma's intention was to secure the regime with Russia's support and the consolidation of Eastern Ukraine's population, that value the Soviet past and relations with Russia, and most of them speak Russian. In particular, he was afraid that if Yushchenko, pro-European integration, won he would be prosecuted because of his actions, such as the murdering of Georgiy Gongadze (Riabchuk, 2023). This event serves as an illustration of the way of authoritarian consolidation through Russian linkage, which may mitigate the effects of Western leverage, with the consolidation Eastern Ukraine's population, who prefer to the Russian World, rather than Western World.

Besides, under totally authoritarian regimes, legislators are extremely weak and have no purpose other than to carry out what is imposed on them (Levitsky & Way, 2002). Although they were not as effective as before, the post-Kravchuk legislature was never fully controlled by the Kuchma administration. Moreover, the parliament had rejected a plan to amend the constitution, therefore disallowing Kuchma to seek a third term. For this reason, Kuchma wanted his hand-picked

successor Yanukovych to win the elections. He tried to rig the elections in many places. There were many cases of bribery and open voting and secret counting in favor of Yanukovych in locations including jails, military posts, and hospitals. Strong opposition monitoring, and widespread media coverage stopped him from rigging the election in some public areas. Yet this did not prevent Yanukovych from winning the elections. However, this caused a popular outcry, especially in Western Ukraine, and led to a revolution (Way, 2005).

At the end of the day, the Orange Revolution was a consequence of Kuchma's escalating authoritarianism and his actions to convert the competitive authoritarian government into a firmly established authoritarian regime. Therefore, Viktor Yanukovych, his successor who succeeded him, was removed from office owing to questionable elections (Kuzio, 2010). In relation to this matter, Lucan A. Way (2004) argues that within competitive authoritarian regimes, there exists a constraint on the quantity and proportion of votes that the government may directly steal. This aligns well with the Ukrainian governance. Therefore, the Orange Revolution, a significant protest movement, emerged in Ukraine as a result of massive popular dissatisfaction from the government since the decision to take action was prompted by the intensity of the demonstrations (Kuzio, 2010).

However, the desired outcomes in the Orange Revolution were successfully attained by demonstrators through the European Union's engagement in the political affairs of Ukraine (Kubicek, 2023). Due to the strong reaction from the people, the regime was persuaded by the European Union's written and verbal severe warnings; furthermore, the repetition of the elections had to be caused by the regime's communication with the demonstrators via the European Union (Tolstrup, 2014b).

In this way, the Supreme Court and the Parliament rendered the election results null and invalid within a span of less than two weeks, so enabling a fair re-election. On December 26, Viktor Yushchenko, a proclaimed democrat, emerged victorious in a later repeat, leading to the appointment of Yulia Tymoshenko as prime minister. Tymoshenko played a significant role in the Orange Revolution (D'Anieri, 2019). Therefore, it can be asserted that the Orange Revolution was a significant turning point in the democratic trajectory of Ukraine. Many citizens engaged in nonviolent protests for an extended period, constructing barricades and erecting tents. Protests were orchestrated in several significant urban centers, particularly in Kiev. Individuals who were unable to physically participate in the demonstrations also shown their support by providing assistance to the protestors, including provisions of food and equipment (D'Anieri, 2019).

In particular, the Orange Revolution effectively undid a deceitful election and shown a significant dedication to democratic principles. The Ukrainian public gradually witnessed a shift from a competitive authoritarian system to a flawed democracy, resulting in elections that were characterized by increased freedom and equity. Substantial democratization reforms were implemented, like the 2004 amendment. One of the objectives of the amendment was to curtail the president's authority and sharing the authority with the parliament. The administration led by Viktor Yushchenko adopted a stance that was favourable to the political goals of the integration with the European Union (Turchyn et al., 2020; Way, 2020).

Nonetheless, the path ahead continued to provide challenges. Ukraine faced obstacles in implementing reforms due to political infighting and widespread corruption, which hindered the establishment of democratic institutions. The Orange

Revolution proved the might of popular determination, however Ukraine's journey towards democracy remains incomplete. The potential for a more democratic Ukraine, as promised by the Orange Revolution, was promptly greeted by political conflicts. Ironically, the constitutional amendment of 2004, reducing the power of the presidency and sharing it with the prime minister, was an important reason for this. In 2006, with the rise of the Party of Regions, this strategy, aimed at promoting democratization, ultimately yielded the contrary outcome (D'Anieri, 2019).

A significant power of the President was transferred to the Prime Minister by the 2004 amendment. However, the constitutional amendment of 2004 instigated a power struggle subsequent to the victory of Yanukovych's party in the parliamentary elections of 2006. Thus, Yanukovych, Kuchma's successor in the 2004 elections, ascended to a position of prominence as the Prime Minister during a period of diminished leadership under President Yushchenko. Consequently, this uneasy distribution of power between President Yushchenko and Prime Minister Yanukovych did not endure (Kubicek, 2023; Dabrowski et al., 2020; Turchyn et al., 2020; D'Anieri, 2019).

In 2007, Yushchenko dissolved the parliament, hence requiring the conduction of new elections. While the party led by Yanukovych continued to exert influence, the bloc led by Yulia Tymoshenko emerged as a noteworthy player. Therefore, Tymoshenko assumed the position of Prime Minister with a narrow majority. However, these political unrests, coupled with the financial crisis of 2008-2009 and the 15% decline in Ukraine's gross domestic product, placed the country in a precarious position. Due to this, the political downfall of Yushchenko culminated in a resounding failure during the 2010 presidential election (Kubicek, 2023). In

other words, after the Orange coalition-led government's attempts were unsuccessful, the coalition dissolved in the election in 2010.

As a result, Viktor Yanukovych brought the allegedly pro-Russian Party of Regions back to power, reversing Ukraine's previous shift away from the West and toward Russia (Kuzio, 2015). The trajectory of democratization, which gained momentum after the 2004 revolution, saw a decline in confidence with the election of Viktor Yanukovych, a pro-Russian figure, in 2010 (Kubicek, 2023; Dabrowski et al., 2020). During his presidency, the Ukrainian Constitutional Court rendered the 2004 constitutional modifications null and void in 2010 subsequent to the victory of Yanukovych through a process of free and fair elections. Therefore, the consolidation of Yanukovich's regime undermined the intended influence of the Orange Revolution. In a sense, the democratic accomplishments of the Orange Revolution were weakened by conflicts over power, changing alliances, and legal obstacles. The pursuit of a more stable and democratic Ukraine continued to be a challenging endeavor (Turchyn et al., 2020; D'Anieri, 2019).

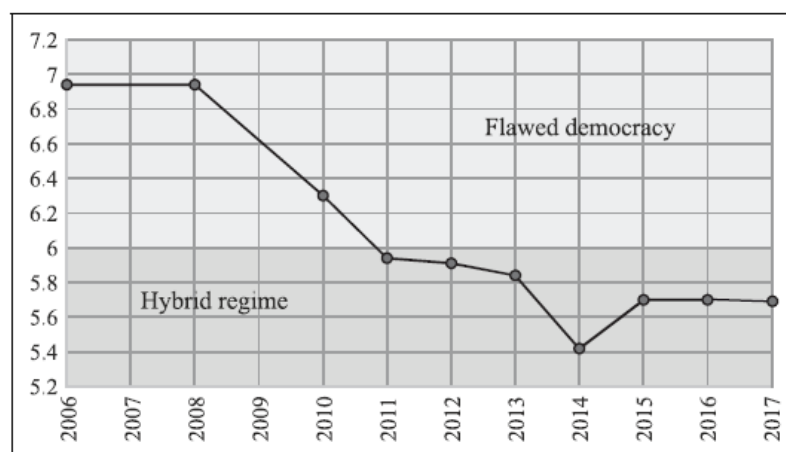


Figure 1. Ukraine's score on the Economist Intelligence Unit's democracy index in 2006–2017 years (Turchyn et al., 2020, p. 153)

Furthermore, according to Andrew Wilson, the reinstatement of the 1996 constitution may be characterized as a constitutional coup (2014, p. 50). More than that, Many dissidents began to be intimidated for their political preferences. For instance, Yanukovych detained his political opponent, Yulia Tymoshenko, on charges of corruption. Courts generally began to rule in favor of the government. Therefore, Ukraine exhibited characteristics of a competitive authoritarian system once more (Riabchuk, 2023). According to Figure 1, the political unrest, financial crisis of 2008-2009, and, consequently, the assumption of authority by Viktor Yanukovych had a detrimental impact on democracy. Moreover, the reinstatement of the 1996 constitution resulted in the reversal or cessation of measures that were undertaken during the Orange Revolution.

Nonetheless, Yanukovych's ascendancy can be attributed to the worsening economic conditions and the ongoing economic leverage exerted by Russia (Bloom & Shulman, 2011; Nalbandov, 2014). Russia has usually used its gas reserves and large trade area as an economic leverage on its influence zone. Furthermore, upon assuming power, Yanukovych expeditiously augmented his political influence. Reverting to the 1996 constitution, he repealed all post-revolutionary legislation, like the 2004 amendment, that restricted the president's authority under the constitution. He took on the responsibility of appointing ministries and the prime minister in his own capacity. Owing to his parliamentary majority, he successfully implemented a significant number of his initiatives (D'Anieri, 2019; Dñabrowski et al., 2020).

More than that, Yanukovych proceeded to detain his political adversary, Yulia Tymoshenko, on charges of purported corruption following his electoral victory in 2010 (Haesebrouck & Taghon, 2022). Consequently, the signing of the

European Union-Ukraine Association Agreement, which Ukraine tried to sign for many years, was contingent upon the release of Tymoshenko by Ukraine (D'Anieri, 2019; Kubicek, 2023). Here, the West employed its leverage in order to force Ukraine to meet democratic requirements.

However, in an effort to secure Russia's backing and facilitate the further consolidation of the regime, a decree was enacted by Yanukovych in 2012 that, in a sense, designated Russian as the de facto official language to some extent. the legislation granted permission for the utilization of 'minority' languages in judicial systems, educational institutions, and other government services situated in regions where national minority populations exceed ten percent of the overall populace. Consequently, in this way, Yanukovych exploited the regional differences within the nation and made sure that the country's underlying issues were disregarded (D'Anieri, 2019). Ukraine seemed to be heading in a different direction, and the shady 2012 elections were one of the endpoints.

Freedom House's report (2013, p. 11) highlighted the growing autocracy:

Ukraine suffered a decline for a second year due to the politically motivated imprisonment of opposition leaders, flawed legislative elections, and a new law favoring the Russian-speaking portion of the population.

In addition, Human Rights Watch issued a scathing assessment on Ukraine in 2013. Unlike the 2010 election, the 2012 election was fraught with injustice. Many parties stated that they would not accept the election (D'Anieri, 2019, p. 140).

Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (2013, p. 1) reports commented on the elections as follows,

These elections were characterized by the lack of a level playing field, caused primarily by the abuse of administrative resources, lack of transparency of campaign and party financing, and the lack of balanced media coverage. While the voting and counting processes on election day were assessed positively overall, the tabulation of results was negatively assessed in nearly

half of the electoral districts observed. Post election day, the integrity of the results in some districts appeared to be compromised by instances of manipulation of the results and other irregularities, which were not remedied by the Central Election Commission (CEC) or the courts.

Also, the attempts of Ukraine to achieve an equilibrium with both Russia and the European Union has become increasingly arduous (Menon & Rumer, 2015, p. 51). To be more clear, for instance, in an attempt to pressure Ukraine into joining the Eurasian Economic Union, a trade embargo was implemented by Russia. On the other side, the European Union had conditioned the signing of the Association Agreement on Tymoshenko's release, but in order to find a common ground with Yanukovich's government, the EU lowered the condition to medical support (D'Anieri, 2019).

Therefore, these pressures prompted the former President Yanukovich to withdraw from the European Union agreement and instead more align himself with Russia. Also, Yanukovich was cognizant that he could not sustain his corrupt rule amongst the European Union reforms; he had to find a way out, regardless of Ukraine's desires. To address this issue, Yanukovich, unwilling to take the risk of releasing his political enemy, traveled to Russia to engage in negotiations for accession to the Eurasian Customs Union. Yanukovich held the belief that this course of action would enable him to rid himself of Western leverage on this issue. Yanukovich acted on the assumption that if he could get significant Russian support, he could mitigate Western leverage and the Western Ukrainian population that was acting as a barrier (Kuzio, 2015; Riabchuk, 2023).

After that, Ukraine ceased the negotiations and announced its intention to enter into a formal agreement with the Eurasian Customs Union, led by Russia. Therefore, that event elicited strong disapproval from pro-European integration

Ukrainians, who has been utilized to counteract Russian influence by the European Union. The streets of Ukraine became the site of a violent clash between demonstrators and government forces backed by Russia, ultimately leading to the overthrow of the government by the revolutionaries of Euromaidan (D'Anieri, 2019).

Nevertheless, widespread dissatisfaction in November 2013 when President Yanukovych declined an agreement with the European Union and instead opted for stronger connections with Russia (D'Anieri, 2019; Riabchuk, 2023). Many Ukrainians desiring a future characterized by democracy and prosperity, as well as an opportunity to address corruption, saw the European Union agreement as a means to achieve integration with the Western world away from Russian influence (Kuzio, 2015). Nonviolent demonstrations emerged, but a harsh suppression by the government escalated them into a complete revolution. The demonstrators confronted security forces in violent battles on Maidan, the principal center of Kyiv (Riabchuk, 2023).

In particular, the Berkut force, which were the riot police under Yanukovych's leadership, exerted a substantial influence on the occurrence of the violent street fights that ultimately transpired as a consequence of the demonstrations. The forceful involvement of the government played a significant role in the transformation of the demonstrations from a peaceful to a violent state. The response of law enforcement was characterized by the use of force, leading to the occupation of government buildings and the subsequent downfall of the state apparatus, particularly by individuals from Western and Central Ukraine. Yanukovych deemed the situation an illicit coup and sought refuge with his associates in Russia (D'Anieri, 2019).

Ultimately, the escape of Yanukovych in February 2014 created an opportunity for new administration and a different trajectory for Ukraine. In other words, the occurrence of the Euromaidan Revolution resulted in the complete collapse of Yanukovych's government. Nevertheless, subsequently, Russia responded by occupying certain regions and territories in eastern Ukraine, as well as the Crimean Peninsula. Ukraine has since been entangled in conflict (Oliynyk & Kuzio, 2021).

Nonetheless, the intervention carried out by Russia in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine has brought to light the constraints of Western influence and the susceptibility of a fragmented national identity. The aftermath highlighted the intricate dynamics between internal divides and foreign players in molding the trajectory of Ukraine's government. The conflict with Russia has had a substantial influence on this trend. This has propelled Ukraine towards a trajectory that is more associated with the West. As Beissinger argues that in the USSR, robust ethnic identities, driven by the aspiration to escape Moscow's control, played a crucial role not only in instigating transitions, but also in ensuring that they ultimately resulted in democratic outcomes (2008, p. 94).

However, since 1995, rapprochement with the European Union requires certain democratic reforms according to the 'democratic clause' (Knodt & Jünemann, 2007). The possibility that the West will grant Ukraine membership in the European Union and NATO continues to be a significant incentive for many Ukrainians. On the other side, the fact that Ukraine is now a country that completely prioritizes European integration and has completely broken with Russia and gone to war does not mean that Ukraine will become a democratic country. It is not yet known what

the war will bring in terms of the regime trajectory. For example, following the 2014 revolution, Petro Poroshenko led Ukraine through a difficult period of postwar change. While his government imposed extensive restrictions to figure out Russian information warfare, notably in the Russian language and media coverage of Russia, this policy limited some democratic liberties. Such limitations alienated Russian-speaking Ukrainians in the east (Way, 2019).

However, one important factor to examine is the involvement of Ukraine's parliament. This body served as a check on Poroshenko's power and continues to do so under the current president, Volodymyr Zelensky. This indicates a degree of democratic resilience inside the Ukrainian system (Way, 2019). As argued, following the country's complete break with Russia in 2014, Ukraine's trajectory is now aligned with the European integration, which does not mean directly democratization. Nonetheless, the future remains shrouded in many uncertainties. The full consequences of Russia's aggression in 2022 for Ukrainian democracy in the future remain unclear.

2.2 The contested terrain of Ukraine's identity

The national identity of Ukraine is multifaceted and ever-changing, under the influence of a long and nuanced history of fluctuating boundaries, rival empires, and regional differences. This complex tapestry has been created over many centuries, with unique patterns appearing in various sections of the nation. These regional identity differences have influenced many of Ukraine's choices. This section explores the contested terrain of Ukraine's identity, with a focus on the differing experiences of Western and Eastern Ukraine.

The national identity of Ukraine exhibits a significant division along the east-west lines. Western Ukraine exhibits a notable inclination towards Europe, owing to its robust Ukrainian language and cultural identity. Eastern Ukraine, due to its stronger historical and cultural linkages with Russia, exhibits a propensity towards a pro-Russian stance (Riabchuk, 2008; Shulman, 2005). The distribution of languages in Ukraine shows the difference clearly in the map below. Surzyk is a mixture of Russian and Ukrainian.

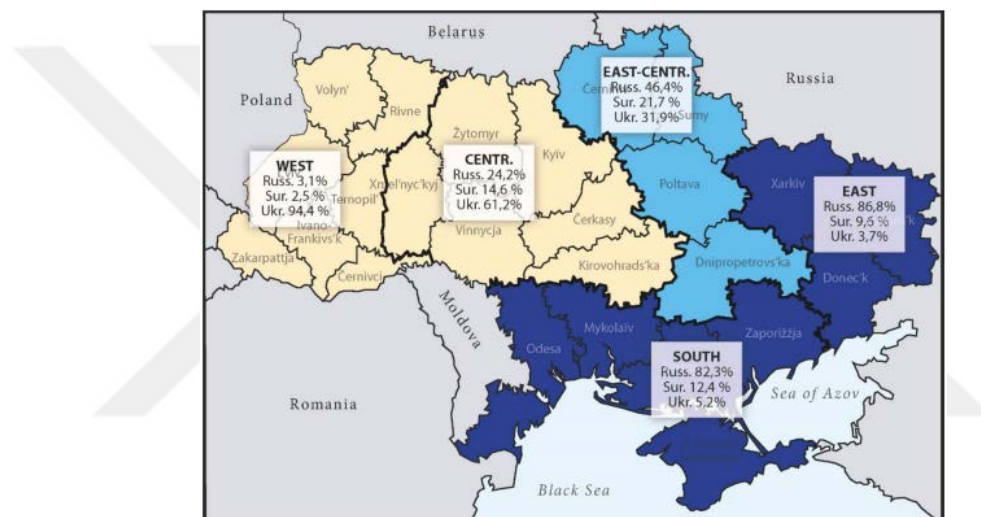


Figure 2. Distribution of Ukrainian, Russian, and Surzyk languages in Ukraine (Map by: Hentschel & Taranenko, 2021, from Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, 2003)

The path of Ukraine has been further complicated by external influences from both Russia, which aims to maintain control, and the West, which promotes European integration. Progress towards a stable democracy has been impeded by internal challenges such as east-west divides. Prominent occurrences such as the Orange Revolution and Euromaidan protests represented endeavors to liberate oneself from Russia-oriented inclinations; nevertheless, the complete establishment

of a resilient democracy continues to elude. It is an important fact that Western Ukraine and Eastern Ukraine have divergent perspectives on the future due to their differing identities. This also impacts their choices. Undoubtedly, the individuals they elect also have significant influence in shaping the trajectory of the government.

Eastern Ukraine has a stronger affinity for Russia owing to historical and cultural links. Of course, it does not mean that western parts of Ukraine is more 'democratic'. It is not the case, but the fact that they have chosen the Western world for mitigating Russian influence. In particular, eastern Ukrainians were less enthusiastic about implementing market reforms or building connections with the West. The population in Eastern Ukraine tends to support groups and people that are skeptical of the European Union and emphasize engaging in dialogue with Russia (Kravchuk & Chudowsky, 2005, p. 133). For example, the Party of Regions, former President Yanukovych's party, which was banned in 2023 after some of its members defected to the Russian side, used to enjoy considerable support in eastern Ukraine. The party is still present in the occupied territories of Ukraine.

On the other hand, there is a sharp disparity in the view of Western Ukrainians that a strong Ukrainian identity is intrinsically linked to a decisive break with Russia and full integration into Europe. In this sense, rapprochement with the West, according to Kataryna Wolczuk (2000), has been essential to the eradication of the Russian sphere of influence. To be more precise, it helps the formation of distinct national identities, apart from the Russian World, among independent post-Soviet states.

In this respect, Lucan A. Way claims that Western Ukraine's strong anti-incumbent national identity has always exerted pressure on Russia-centered

leadership. Therefore, incumbents who derive their repressive power from Russia have been hindered by strong anti-Russian sentiments, which limit their ability to govern the state excessively and gain access to foreign resources. This has shattered their dreams of consolidating the regime with Russian support (Way, 2005, p. 239). They have proven to be fairly successful in opposing pro-Russian incumbents' attempts to utilize arbitrary, excessive authority and to bind Ukraine closer to Russia. Participation from these regions in the Orange Revolution and the Euromaidan demonstrations demonstrated this in practice (Stepanenko, 2006; D'Anieri, 2019).

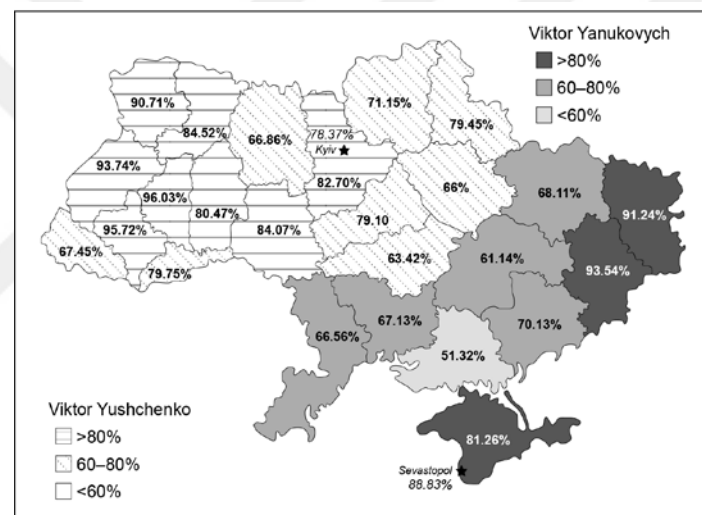


Figure 3. Percentage of Ukraine's Population (by Region) That Voted for Yanukovich or Yushchenko in the 2004 Presidential Elections, Final Round (Kubicek, 2023, p. 186)

On the other side, Eastern Ukraine show a complete different story. A deep historical and cultural connection to Russia has developed a more complex notion of national identity. This geographical disparity resulted in divergent political preferences. Ukrainian nationalist parties, with their mainly sharp 'anti-Russian and

pro-European' attitude, had less success in the east (Kuzio, 2015). Instead, Eastern Ukrainian voters chose parties such as the Communists and Socialists, who undoubtedly supported a more integrated relationship with Russia. The mentality prevails that the history and heritage of East Slavic culture is an important unifying element. In those regions, the main 'other' is not Russia, but the West (Shulman, 2005).

To explain, this might entail maintaining stronger economic and cultural links while also seeking a Ukrainian national identity that is not defined only in contrast to their Slavic 'brother', Russia. Paul S. Pirie (1996) asserts that Ukrainians from the east and south remained somewhat attached to the Soviet past, and felt a powerful connection to their Slavic background. Russia is not the 'other'. In other words, in this schism, some focus on their common Eastern Slavic roots, painting a more positive picture of past connections. Others prioritize European integration and their 'roots' without Russian past, considering the shared history more as a period of repressive 'colonial' past than a friendly or brotherly interaction (Onuch & Hale, 2018).

For example, a study performed in March 1994 found that 62% of East Ukraine supported reunification with Russia, while just 17% of Western Ukraine agreed (Kravchuk & Chudowsky, 2005, p. 136). Roman Solchanyk asserts that the situation that the eastern and western regions have different visions of the future, with the eastern region more leaning towards 'Russia and communism', and the western region more favouring 'capitalism and democracy' (1995, p. 47). In the light of this, Mykola Riabchuk puts forward that, "The level of Russification/Sovietization might be a very important determinant of voting patterns and political behavior in a

country that strives for decolonization and detotalitarization.” (2008, p. 21). This difference between the regions was most evident in 2004.

According to Rawi Abdelal (2002), present regional inequalities may be traced back to historical differences. Eastern Ukraine is mostly influenced by Russia and tends to vote for people who are seen to be capable of fostering strong connections with Russia. In contrast, Western Ukraine has different characteristics and tends to support politicians that advocate for diverging from Russia's trajectory, and the West is seen as a power that can confront Russia and support Ukraine (Wolczuk, 2000).

Historically, in the first place, the area of Galicia in Western Ukraine plays a crucial role in the development of Ukrainian national identity. During the Austro-Hungarian Empire's comparatively liberal administration, Ukrainians in Galicia had a level of self-governance and cultural liberty that encouraged the development of a growing national awareness. This stands in sharp contrast to the oppressive Russification tactics enforced on Ukrainians under the rule of Tsarist Russia (Abdelal, 2002; Subtelny, 1988).

The Habsburg monarchy, driven by its own geopolitical considerations, unintentionally played a pivotal role in fostering Ukrainian nationalism. The Habsburgs fostered the development of Ukrainian nationality by providing Ukrainians with some self-governance and backing its cultural organizations. According to historian Orest Subtelny, the Habsburgs played a significant role in strengthening the national identity of Ukrainians by acknowledging them as a separate nationality and granting them a certain level of self-governance (Subtelny, 1988, p. 241).

Even today, the historical events in Western Ukraine have deeply ingrained a strong feeling of its own identity and a profound desire for stronger connections with Europe (Kuzio, 2015). The pro-European stance of Western Ukraine is evident in its unwavering support for Ukraine's integration with the European Union, as well as its active involvement in civil society initiatives that promote democratic reforms and stronger connections with Western nations. The Euromaidan demonstrations of 2013-2014, triggered by the government's choice to halt the negotiation of an association agreement with the EU, were notably fervent in Western Ukraine. This was a manifestation of the region's strong European identity and its refusal to accept Russian influence (Wilson, 2015). The 2013 survey in Table 1 clearly highlights this situation.

Table 1. Which Path Should Ukraine Follow? (Zolkina, 2013)

(%)	West	Centre	South	East	Total
Entering the EU	72,2	48,8	32,9	20,7	41,7
Entering the Customs Union of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan	7,4	21,9	39,5	50,4	31
Entering neither the EU, nor the Customs Union	10,2	15,3	13,8	13,5	13,5
It is difficult to say	10,2	13,9	13,8	15,5	13,7

On the other hand, Eastern Ukraine, during the time it was under Tsarist and subsequently Soviet control, experienced a deliberate and organized effort to impose Russian culture and impede Ukrainian identity. The goal was to assimilate Ukrainians into a unified "Great Russian" people (Kubicek, 2023). For instance, Ukrainian language use was limited, Ukrainian cultural groups were oppressed, and

Ukrainian elites were assimilated into the imperial system. The historical heritage has had a long-lasting influence on Eastern Ukraine, molding its identity and its perspective towards Russia. On the one hand, although a significant number of Eastern Ukrainian citizens consider themselves as Ukrainian, they still preserve strong cultural and linguistic connections with Russia. The intricate nature of this identity is evident via the extensive use of the Russian language, the dominance of the Russian Orthodox Church, and a political leaning towards forging stronger connections with Russia (Bernsand, 2001; Kuzio, 2015).

In particular, the pro-Russian feeling has materialized by backing political parties that advocate for more collaboration with Russia. In some instances, it has also led to separatist movements aiming to secede from Ukraine and unite with Russia. The Donbas war, which began in 2014 after Russia's annexation of Crimea, vividly demonstrates the profound differences inside Ukraine and the significant impact of historical memory and identity on current political circumstances (Plokhyy, 2015). The Party of Regions is a significant example. Many members of the party expressed support for the Russian occupation in 2022 and then defected to the Russian side. As a result, Russia named several of its members as administrators of the provinces under Russian control. The party garnered substantial support from Eastern Ukraine in past elections.

Central Ukraine is situated in a position that is intermediate between the western and eastern areas, displaying a combination of influences from both. Although the eastern area has a greater share of ethnic Ukrainians compared to other regions, it has also been subjected to Russification and policies influenced by the Soviet period. The coexistence of both the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kiev

Patriarchate and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) highlights the religious variety and intricate character of the area.

The political terrain of Central Ukraine is similarly intricate, with voting tendencies differing based on the particular oblast and its closeness to either the western or eastern regions. Kataryna Wolczuk notes that Central Ukraine is an area of dispute where various perspectives on national identity and Ukraine's global position continue to vie for dominance (Wolczuk, 2000, p. 683). In a sense, Central Ukraine is a significant battlefield for exerting influence, with pro-Western and pro-Russian factions vying for control, both domestically and via other sources. The competition to win the support and loyalty of the people in Central Ukraine plays a crucial role in shaping the country's foreign policy and its interactions with both Russia and the Western countries.

The many regional manifestations of Ukrainian identity have significant ramifications for the nation's its interactions with neighboring nations. The Western region of Ukraine, due to its pro-European stance, has actively sought to establish stronger connections with the European Union. Conversely, the Eastern region of Ukraine, influenced by pro-Russian sentiments, has expressed a desire for further collaboration with Russia and has even seen separatist activities.

Table 2. Systematic Values Ukrainians Choose to Support by Demographic Groups in 2014 (Shulga, 2014)

System of values (%)	Respondents by age			By education		By region		By ethnicity		By native language	
	younger	middle	older	lower/middle	higher	West/Center	East/South	Ukrainian	Russian	Ukrainian	Russian
Western	23	51	26	70	30	79	21	95	4	85	15
East Slavic	15	49	36	76	24	34	66	80	17	53	45

Ukraine's identity plays a vital role in promoting cohesion, countering foreign influence, and establishing a collective vision for the nation. In this regard, in 2014, Shulga (2014) performed a research whereby individuals were surveyed on their chosen values. The survey found that those who are young, well-educated, and from Western and Central Ukraine are more inclined to favor Western values. Of those who choose Western values, 79% are located in Western and Central Ukraine. 66% of those who choose East Slavic values are located in Eastern and Southern Ukraine. While 85% of those who choose Western values say that Ukrainian is their mother tongue, only 53% of those who choose East Slavic values say that Ukrainian is their mother tongue, even though 80% of them are Ukrainians (Shulga, 2014, p. 131). Here, East Slavic refers to the cultural sphere covered by the 'Russian World' sphere, *Russkiy mir*, and Western refers to the sphere offered by the West, such as the European Union and other international organizations. People were also asked questions in this context.

The internal division inside Ukraine has posed difficulties in the establishment of a cohesive and united policy. Ukraine's susceptibility to foreign meddling has been heightened due to the exploitation of its regional disparities by Russia. Russia has leveraged these differences to its benefit by backing separatist groups in the eastern part of Ukraine and seeking to undermine Ukraine's desire to align with Western nations. In other words, the divergent experiences of Western and Eastern Ukraine underscore the lasting impact of historical influences and the continuous endeavor to establish the essence of Ukrainian identity. The variations in identity among different regions of Ukraine have a significant influence on its

international relations, influencing its decisions and its contacts with neighboring nations.

2.3 International linkages with the West and Russia

The Ukrainian regime's post-Soviet oscillation between a flawed democratic system and a competitive authoritarian government especially can be attributed to external influence that is supported by identity differences along the country. Regarding the point, Levitsky and Way (2010) have posited the concepts of Western linkage and leverage as mechanisms through which external influence can exert democratization if their levels are high. Therefore, it is indeed accurate to state that Western linkage and leverage played a pivotal role in the process of democratizing Ukraine. However, it is important to note that these mechanisms can be employed not only by democratic powers, such as Western nations, but also by other authoritarian powers, as Ukrainian case shows, like Russia (Shykhutsina, 2023).

In other words, there are also instances of autocratic linkage and leverage mechanisms. It is employed to elucidate the phenomenon of endorsing autocracy and to evaluate the external impact experienced by nations situated in close proximity to regional autocratic hegemony (Tolstrup, 2014). That is to say, there exists an inverse relationship between the degree of autocratic linkage and leverage and the likelihood of an authoritarian regime's collapse (Tansey et. al., 2016, p. 1254). The prevalence of political, social, economic, and various other linkages among autocratic regimes tends as a buffer against the pressures towards democratization and generates influence on the formation of domestic factions that have been driven by the upkeep of authoritarianism (Schmotz & Tansey, 2017, p. 662).

In that point, Ukraine serves as a battleground for the engagement of these two mechanisms. Occasionally, one party emerges victorious over the other, thereby exerting influence at different times over Ukraine. That is why, examining each country solely through the lens of Western linkage and leverage may be an erroneous approach. As in Ukraine, there could be factors that mitigate or strengthen the different linkage and leverage. It can be argued that identity is an important factor in determining this. In this sense, one significant consequence of Western linkage is its influence on the conduct of autocratic leaders operating within these political systems.

According to Levitsky and Way (2010), a robust connection with the Western world increases the global expenses associated with repression. In other words, the utilization of aggressive strategies against the opposing party presents a more precarious proposition. The prospect of global censure and possible repercussions acts as a deterrent, dissuading leaders from employing explicit repression. At least, the case of Ukraine demonstrates that the opposition, mostly composed of Western Ukrainians, has successfully hindered the increase of authoritarianism among pro-Russian leaders like in 2004 and 2014. This has provided an opportunity for the West to exert influence on Ukrainian administrations, encouraging them to behave democratically in response to autocratic tendencies (Way & Tolvin, 2023).

Therefore, authoritarian leaders encountered difficulties in solidifying their authoritarian rule due to concerns about potential backlash in Ukraine, especially in Western and Central Ukraine. In this perspective, Mark R. Beissinger (2008) claims that the fervor of liberation evoked by ethnic nationalism may also serve as an

impetus to contest autocratic governance and a cohesive force in the formation of stable political communities (p. 93).

In the aftermath of the independence, Ukrainian officials, many of whom had a common Soviet background, endeavored to carefully navigate the relationship between Russia and the Western countries. In the first place, the multi-vector approach employed entailed obtaining concessions from Western nations while concurrently upholding sincere relations with Russia. However, as the West and Russia moved further away, the multi-vector approach became more difficult to execute, and sometimes more clear choices had to be made (Way, 2005; Kubicek, 2023; Riabchuk, 2023).

On the one hand, Russia continuously provided economic and political assistance to Ukraine in return for their allegiance (Bloom & Shulman, 2011), taking advantage of their shared historical and cultural linkages. Ukrainian opposition forces, comprising nationalists and pro-Western groups, have predominantly garnered substantial public backing from mainly Western Ukrainians for their endeavors to diminish Ukraine's dependence on Russia and foster closer ties with Europe (Tolstrup, 2014).

In particular, Ukrainian nationalists regarded national identity from a strategic perspective. They believed that Ukraine's economic dependency on Russia represented a substantial threat to its security (Abdelal, 2002, p. 469). They argue that economic weakness towards Russia undercut actual national sovereignty. In this regard, they put forward that Europe offers a more sovereign future than Russia. Therefore, they assert for a significant shift - a 'reorientation' toward Europe. In return, the West offered assistance for the implementation of reforms and advocated

for the integration of the government with European institutions, so facilitating a shift towards a more 'democratic' and Western-centric path. In addition, it will enable Ukrainians to liberate themselves from Russian influence, which nationalists believe will enable them to engage in Ukrainian nation-building and construct a more sovereign future for Ukraine (Riabchuk, 2023; Kubicek, 2023).

On the other side, these novel advancements demonstrated a delicate nature. The pro-Russian factions that retained control within the government persisted in exerting another significant Russia influence. That is to say, it is imperative to underscore that Russia also maintains substantial linkages in Ukraine, especially Eastern Ukraine (Kuzio, 2010; 2015). For example, the lack of active participation in protests against pro-Russian Yanukovich among Ukrainians residing in the Eastern and Southern regions was evident. However, a complete shift to the Russian World would entail a substantial audience cost for Ukrainian elites, too, as it would necessitate confronting a sizable Western Ukrainian population (Tolstrup, 2014b).

However, despite these difficulties, Ukraine pursued a direction by establishing connections with Western countries. Ukraine made history by being the first post-Soviet nation to formally sign the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the European Union in 1994. The handshake was symbolic, signifying the start of a formal connection with the EU and facilitating cooperation in areas like as commerce, political discourse, and human rights. Nevertheless, Ukraine did not cease its actions at that point.

In 1997, Ukraine began its first efforts to join NATO by signing the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership. This document went beyond being a mere piece of paper; it officially solidified Ukraine's affiliation with the alliance and created a

specialized commission. Ukraine's unambiguous statement indicated its aim to strengthen its security by establishing stronger connections with Western countries. The statement was highlighting the nation's strong will to control its own future, while actively pursuing alliances that may provide stability and security in an evolving global landscape. However, it lasted until the Kuchmagate scandal, the murdering of Georgiy Gongadze, and when Russia's relations with the West began to deteriorate, Kuchma started to lean towards Russia.

Nevertheless, the Orange Revolution of 2004 is a significant turning point in Ukraine's history after gaining independence, especially in regards to its connection with Western countries. Prompted by numerous allegations of electoral manipulation in favor of the candidate Viktor Yanukovych, which was a member of pro-Russian Party of Regions, the subsequent large-scale demonstrations, organized by a coalition of opposition factions and civil society, ultimately led to a repeat of the election. In this new election, the pro-Western integration candidate Viktor Yushchenko emerged as the winner.

Moreover, it is significant to highlight that Western organizations provided substantial support to the pro-democracy movement in Ukraine in 2004, which was crucial to the Orange Revolution's success. NGOs, including PORA and OPORA, were instrumental in mobilizing the populace and overseeing the elections, with funding from organizations such as the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and USAID (McFaul, 2007). In addition to financial support, these organizations offered training in nonviolent resistance, which was invaluable in challenging the initial election results that favored the pro-Russian candidate Viktor Yanukovych. The preponderance of participants were Western Ukrainians. The West's perspective

on the Ukrainian political landscape was significantly impacted by Western Ukrainians. Their efforts guaranteed that the West supported the pro-Western candidate Viktor Yushchenko, which resulted in a substantial change in Ukraine's foreign policy, as it shifted toward closer connections with the EU and NATO. Kuzio (2005) posits that the Western-supported NGOs were instrumental in the development of a dynamic civil society that was capable of organizing large-scale protests and advocating for democratic governance.

Nonetheless, the Orange Revolution of 2004 was a significant manifestation of the Ukrainian people's strong desire for a future away from Russia. The magnitude of this mass movement was emphasized by desiring independence from Russia's influence. Mark R. Beissinger puts forward that a significant factor behind the Orange Revolution is not just the last straw against the unlawful actions of the Kuchma administration, but also the disparities in identity (2011, p. 40). This is also related to the fact that Kuchma's strategy of seeking support from Russia for strengthening his authoritarianism (Riabchuk, 2023) faced opposition from those who had anti-Russian nationalist sentiments (Shraibman, 2018; Way & Tolvin, 2023). Rawi Abdelal (2002) also points to these identity differences in Ukraine even before the revolution took place.

Table 3. Regional Participation and Support for the Orange Revolution (Stepanenko, 2006).

%	West	Center	South	East
Participated in Kiev	8.9	9.3	0	1.2
Participated locally	31.1	11.5	3	7.4
Supplied goods	13.9	5.8	1.9	1.2
No participation	51	76.7	95.6	90.6

The revolution was significantly influenced by Western Ukraine, which had a strong inclination towards Europe. The demonstrations were mostly led by those people, with Kyiv as the main hub and significant support from key cities in Western Ukraine, including Lviv and Ivano-Frankivsk. For a significant number of individuals in Western Ukraine, the Orange Revolution symbolized a fight for Ukraine's desire to align with Europe. Also, the revolution served to enhance the leverage of the West over the Ukrainian government. As seen in Table 3, this achievement was made feasible solely due to the inhabitants residing in parts of Western and Central Ukraine. It is also known that most people in this region prefer Western values.

After that, Yushchenko pursued a robust pro-European agenda, with a particular emphasis on fostering closer integration with the European Union and NATO. The Orange Revolution marked a significant shift in Ukraine's foreign policy, firmly directing the country towards the Western countries. A pivotal step was Ukraine's active involvement in the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) initiated by the EU in 2004. The ENP sought to foster stronger ties between the EU and its neighbors, offering a closer political and economic relationship conditional on reforms and alignment with EU norms (Emerson, 2006). For Ukraine, the ENP represented a pathway, though perhaps a long one, towards potential EU membership. However, this aspiration was tempered by the EU's hesitancy to provide a concrete timeline for accession (Kaczmarek, 2012).

Nonetheless, the ENP offered a framework for Ukraine to embark on vital reforms in areas like governance, human rights, and the rule of law, all critical for deeper European integration (Delcour & Wolczuk, 2015). The backing from Western

Ukraine was indispensable in maintaining the momentum for these reforms (Wilson, 2021). The region's inhabitants perceived the ENP as a crucial stride in Ukraine's journey towards European integration, and actively supported efforts to bring the country's political and economic systems in line with European standards (D'Anieri, 2019).

More than that, discussions began for a more extensive Association Agreement between the European Union and Ukraine. The purpose of this agreement was to supersede the Partnership and Co-operation Agreement and establish a more ambitious framework for political and economic collaboration between Ukraine and the EU. The Association Agreement included clauses for a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), which would facilitate the integration of Ukraine's economy into the EU single market. This would undoubtedly have been an important milestone between the EU and Ukraine. The negotiating process, however, was characterized by a slower pace and encountered substantial obstacles, including as resistance from pro-Russian factions inside Ukraine and concerns within the EU over Ukraine's preparedness for such an accord (D'Anieri, 2019; Kuzio, 2015; Kubicek, 2023).

On the one hand, Yushchenko endeavored to fortify Ukraine's connections with NATO in order to safeguard against potential Russian aggression. During his tenure, Ukraine made quite significant strides in NATO collaboration and military reform. In 2008, Ukraine proposed a NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP), which was a critical step toward NATO membership. The NATO nations, particularly Germany and France, were divided on the MAP proposal, with some individuals

expressing concern about the potential for Russia to become more aggressive (D'Anieri, 2019; Kubicek, 2023).

In return, they were right, Russia responded to such a westward shift by using its economic and energy influence. The gas conflicts of 2006 and 2009 demonstrated this approach, as Russia used its influence over gas pipelines as a political tool. The conflicts resulted in periodic interruptions in gas deliveries to both Ukraine and Europe, highlighting Ukraine's vulnerable reliance on Russian energy and the extensive geopolitical consequences of its relationship with Moscow. The gas wars had notable domestic consequences for Ukraine, intensifying internal differences between those who favored stronger connections with Russia and others who campaigned for more energy autonomy and integration with Europe. The energy issues underscored the difficulties Ukraine had in managing its relations with Russia while simultaneously pursuing its desire to align with Western countries (D'Anieri, 2019; Kuzio, 2022).

In these circumstances, Viktor Yanukovych won the presidency of Ukraine in 2010, which resulted in a significant shift in the country's policy toward Russia. Yanukovych, who was well-liked by the Russian-speaking population of Eastern and Southern Ukraine, recognized the necessity of maintaining Ukraine's commitment to European integration while also fostering economic and political relations with Russia. Therefore, Ukraine started negotiations to become a member of the Eurasian Customs Union, which is a Moscow-led initiative that aims to enhance economic integration among the former Soviet Union's member states. The decision spurred opposition, particularly in Western Ukraine, as it was an explicit threat to the country's EU ambitions (D'Anieri, 2019; Kuzio, 2015; Kubicek, 2023).

In November 2013, Yanukovych abruptly ceased negotiations for the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement in order to forge stronger ties with Russia, which represented a significant shift in his presidency. The Euromaidan protests were initiated in response to Moscow's pressure on Ukraine, which the protesters perceived as a betrayal of Ukraine's aspiration to become a member of the EU. In this aspect, the Association Agreement was renounced as a result of Russian economic coercion, which included trade barriers and financial aid. The lesson that this affair conveys is the inconceivable of an independent foreign policy in the face of strong Russian pressure and Ukraine's economic dependence on Russia (D'Anieri, 2019; Kubicek, 2023).

On the other hand, the Euromaidan protests illustrated the substantial impact that Western support can have on Ukraine's civil society. The protests were overwhelmingly supported by civil society organizations that had received funding from Western countries. One notable example is Hromadske TV, which significantly contributed to the protests by providing 'independent' news coverage that differed from that of state-controlled media. Hromadske TV was privileged to receive funding from the Dutch Embassy, USAID, and the International Renaissance Foundation (IRF), which allowed it to establish itself as a reliable source of information for both Ukrainian citizens and the international community. The Euromaidan movement's momentum was significantly sustained by the platform's capacity to provide real-time coverage of the protests and circumvent government censorship. Furthermore, the Center for Civil Liberties (CCL), a non-governmental organization (NGO) that received funding from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), documented instances of human rights violations during the

protests and urged international attention to the situation in Ukraine (Leshchenko, 2014; Korolkova, 2016; Klarenberg, 2022).

The Euromaidan protesters' main objective was to eradicate corruption and authoritarianism of Yanukovich. It was headquartered in Kyiv and received support from the western region of the country. Yanukovich was removed from office as a consequence of the protests. Revolutionaries who desired a different conception of Ukraine's past and future and a national identity that placed greater emphasis on 'Ukrainian' nationality and Western-oriented affiliations rather than the East Slavic world emerged victorious. Russia has thus resolved to extend the conflict beyond the realm of politics and diplomacy subsequent to its defeat in the latter domain (Kuzio, 2022).

In February 2014, Russia responded promptly and forcefully to the Euromaidan and Yanukovich's removal. Crimea was occupied by Russia. Following the occupation of Crimea, Russia initiated assistance to separatists in eastern Ukraine, which resulted in a protracted and violent conflict. This conflict has resulted in significant suffering and has compelled many people to evacuate their residences. It is a lamentable consequence of the intricate relationship between Ukraine and Russia, as well as the broader power conflict between Russia and Western countries regarding Ukraine's future. The period of collaboration and mutual reliance that followed the Soviet era, lasting from the 1990s to the 2000s, has been permanently broken. It has been replaced by a situation of clear rivalry and increasing geopolitical divide (D'Anieri, 2019; Kuzio, 2015; Kubicek, 2023).

Table 4. Ukrainians' Views Of Russia and Its Leader Over the Years (Institute of Sociology of NASU, 2018; Rating Sociological Group, 2019; Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, 2021)

Positive / Negative (%)	1998	2012	2013	2015	2017
What is your attitude toward the Russian Federation?	No Data	85/9	82/10	34/51	37/46
What is your attitude toward Vladimir Putin?	No Data	53/32	47/40	16/75	10/81
Would you like Ukraine to join the union with Russia and Belarus?	61/21	56/25	49/29	22/62	20/62

The war has acted as a catalyst, leading Ukraine to adopt a clear Western orientation. The administration of Kiev, supported by a population that is becoming more hostile towards Russia, has started a path of stronger collaboration with the European Union and NATO. The above table reveals a highly unfavorable situation towards Russia. Also, Ukraine achieved visa liberalization in the EU and the Associate Agreement was successfully signed. In 2019, it was enshrined in the Constitution of Ukraine that governments should prioritize accession to the EU and NATO. In other words, cooperation with the West continued unabated. The Ukrainian government see this as a necessary step to protect Ukrainian independence and geographical boundaries. Nevertheless, in 2022, a more aggressive iteration of the invasion launched, and Russia was able to approach Kiev before being repelled. However, the conflict remains stalled in the southern regions of Ukraine (D'Anieri, 2019; Kuzio, 2022; Kubicek, 2023).

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has conducted an examination of Ukraine's path after the Soviet Union to the Russian Invasion, with a specific emphasis on how identity and international

linkages have significantly shaped its political and social environment. This chapter has shown, by carefully examining Ukraine's historical and cultural background, how these elements have combined to create a distinctively unstable political path that poses ongoing challenges for both local and foreign stakeholders.

A key discovery is the crucial influence of regional identities, namely in Western Ukraine, on the formation of Ukraine's foreign policy and its interactions with Western countries. The robust pro-European feeling in Western Ukraine, stemming from a longstanding opposition to Russian dominance, has been a significant factor pushing Ukraine's desire for stronger connections with the European Union and NATO.

The alignment of Ukraine with the West based on identity has not only impacted political discussions inside the country but has also become a central focus for international involvement. The chapter emphasizes how this regional dynamic has served as a basis for Ukraine's alignment with the West, while also exacerbating internal tensions, particularly with the parts of the nation that tilt towards Russia. The existence of this division has led to a consistent and fluctuating interplay in Ukraine's internal politics, which mirrors the continuing conflict between the eastern and western regions of the country.

The chapter has also analyzed in a critical manner the direct influence of Ukraine's identity politics on its foreign connections. The Euromaidan demonstrations exemplify how identity can function as both a catalyst for action and a cause of discord. The demonstrations demonstrated a significant communal desire to bring Ukraine into closer alignment with European principles and institutions. However, they revealed significant divisions among society that have now been

evident in the continuing crisis in Eastern Ukraine. The division based on identity has not only shaped Ukraine's domestic political situation but has also determined the conditions of its interactions with other countries, compelling Ukraine to negotiate an intricate network of alliances and hostilities.

Furthermore, the chapter has emphasized the close relationship between Ukraine's unstable regime trajectory and its international connections. The Western reaction to Ukraine's political issues, ranging from imposing economic sanctions on Russia to providing financial and military assistance to Ukraine, highlights the geopolitical importance of Ukraine's challenges rooted in its identity. The international reactions have played a vital role in strengthening Ukraine's defenses against foreign threats and upholding its sovereignty. Nevertheless, the chapter also acknowledges the inherent hazards linked to this dependence on Western assistance. The possibility of being reliant on foreign players is a substantial obstacle to Ukraine's long-term stability, as it might restrict its capacity to autonomously manage its political and economic trajectory.

One important observation from this chapter is the wider significance of Ukraine's experience for countries that were once part of the Soviet Union. The history of Ukraine exemplifies the issues that several post-Soviet republics encounter in managing their identity and international involvement. The Ukrainian story demonstrates that robust international linkages may provide crucial assistance during times of turmoil, but if not handled with caution, they can also intensify internal rifts. To summarize, this chapter has shown that Ukraine's path after the Soviet era cannot be comprehended without taking into account the significant influence of identity and international connections. The interaction of regional identities and foreign

influences has resulted in a very unstable political climate that continues to influence Ukraine's future trajectory.



CHAPTER 3

BELARUS

Belarus has often been referred to as the last dictatorship in Europe (Marples, 2005; Rice, 2005; Rudling, 2008; Wilson, 2021). The transformation of Belarus into its current state was a gradual process that took time. Alexander Lukashenko has effectively and intentionally consolidated his authoritarian government via a systematic and deliberate procedure. However, following the breakup of the Soviet Union, Belarus, like other post-Soviet states, initially experienced a mostly authoritarian system with some aspects of competition (Way, 2005). Consequently, the first elections performed in Belarus were seen to be carried out in a way that was both free and fair (Kazharski, 2021; Wilson, 2021)

However, Alexander Lukashenko won Belarus's first and only undisputed democratic elections with relatively high turnout, 45% in the first round and 85% in the second round, over his challenger Vyacheslav Kebich. Nonetheless, once Lukashenko took office in 1994, the regime's authoritarian grip on power was gradually strengthened, leading to the establishment of a stable authoritarian administration. Also, it is worth noting that Russia's backing has had a significant impact on the stability of the Belarusian authoritarian regime. In this sense, the survival of the authoritarian regime mainly lies on authoritarian linkage and leverage mechanisms. In particular, the undeniable significance of Russia and the favourable historical relationship between Belarus and Russia in shaping the Belarusian identity significantly aids the country's efforts to forge convergent relations with Russia. Consequently, Lukashenko, bolstered by Russia, has been able to more easily

consolidate his regime and reduce the influence of the West as a consequence of these relations.

To explain, the majority of Belarusians have no deep-seated antipathy against Russia like Ukraine's some parts. They usually value nostalgia for the Soviet past and close connections with Russia, rather than Europe. Belarus has strong historical connections with Russia and the Soviet Union, which have had a lasting impact on its national identity and its relationship with its bigger neighboring country (Shraibman, 2018; Rudkouski, 2021; Way & Tolvin, 2023). Over the course of centuries, the considerable mixing of the two populations resulted in the development of strong linguistic and cultural ties, leading to the dominance of the Russian language in many elements of Belarusian society. Belarusian perseverance and courage were crucial in defending Moscow, in the fate of the Soviets, during the Second World War, further connecting the fates of the two countries. Belarus's complex position within the wider Russian and post-Soviet milieu is influenced by this common past (Rudling, 2008; White et al., 2014; Fedor et al., 2017).

In some surveys, a significant number of Belarusians see themselves as an important part of the Russian World's, *Russkiy mir*, sphere of influence and are more skeptical of the West in comparison. For example, according to Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies (2012), at a minimum of 68% of the Belarusian people see Russia as being closer to them than 'Europe'. Consequently, it generally results that the Western linkage and leverage were mainly rendered futile when contrasted with the autocratic linkage and leverage of Russia. As a consequence, it has led to the West's diminished leverage strength in comparison to Russia's leverage on Belarus. The limited presence of a populace that is somewhat

favorable to European integration results in Western initiatives towards Belarus often yielding minimal positive outcomes.

Therefore, the consolidation of authoritarianism in Belarus serves as a significant illustration of how external influences facilitated by domestic identity-based dynamics can impact the trajectory. Furthermore, it offers a crucial lens through which to comprehend the way in which the identity of the populace affects external forces and the country as a whole, as well as the consequences that ensue. Furthermore, it is apparent that the governing authorities may utilize this circumstance to safeguard their regime, as the Belarusian case shows.

In other words, understanding the impact of international linkages on regimes is significantly dependent on identity. Identity has a crucial role in shaping how societies perceive and respond to external influences. It is a key factor in understanding the paths that regimes take. The constructivist approach in international relations emphasizes the significance of identity and norms in influencing state conduct, emphasizing their role in molding the understanding and response to external pressures. That is to say, the Belarusian reaction to Russia may not be the same as the Western Ukrainian reaction to Russia. The same may be true for the Belarusians' reaction to the West. In this sense, inherited path-dependent identity formation is not immutable, but it plays a significant role in elucidating the current state of affairs. It is manifested in the current trajectory of a nation, thereby demonstrating the influence of path dependence.

In this chapter, the political development of post-Soviet Belarus is examined. Its trajectory, I will contend, can be explained by the complex interplay between international linkage and identity. It will be examined the origins of identity

development in the nation and analyze its resulting implications. Also, it will be demonstrated how the Belarusian regime successfully established a close relationship with Russia, so strengthening its own rule.

3.1 Belarus's post-Soviet regime trajectory

A comprehensive understanding of the enduring authoritarian system in Belarus can be achieved through an analysis of the regime's political trajectory. Undoubtedly, Alexander Lukashenko has exerted a substantial effect on the present condition of the government. Therefore, Belarus is ultimately ruled by a stable authoritarian regime that disregards virtually all democratic principles in a systematic manner. Nevertheless, it is indisputable that the influence of external factors is a substantial element in this circumstance. A consideration should be given to evaluating the consequences of this external impact. To facilitate comprehension, this section is going to examine the course of Belarus's autocratic regime.

Belarus's political development can be classified into distinct phases. Firstly, the period of liberalization and the establishment of democratic national institutions from 1991 to 1994. Secondly, the period of conflict between the president and parliament, which resulted in the consolidation of presidential powers and the weakening of democratic institutions and independence from 1994 to 1996. Lastly, the current phase characterized by one-man authoritarian rule and strong leverage from Russia with the Union State Foundation treaty since 1997 (Rudling, 2008).

In the first place, multiple significant circumstances contributed to Lukashenko's rise to power. For most Belarusians, he was seen as a youthful and energetic populist capable of reinstating stability, reestablishing connections with

Russia, and replacing all the individuals tainted by corruption in positions of power (Rudling, 2008; Shraibman, 2018, p. 4). More than that, he advocated for modest economic reforms and a reinstated role for the government in the post-Soviet economy to protect disadvantaged segments of the population (White & Korosteleva, 2005).

After Lukashenko won the election, his leadership underwent a significant shift in the late 1990s and early 2000s, as authority became more centralized and Belarus shifted from a hybrid regime to a system where presidential power prevailed (Frear, 2018). Besides, in contrast to numerous post Soviet regimes, the Belarusian regime implemented the nation-building process by employing a Soviet nostalgia (Rudkouski, 2021). For instance, the 1995 referendum resulted in the reinstatement of a version of the Soviet era flag, as opposed to the pre-Soviet national flag, white-red-white flag. Also, Russian has been designated, in addition to Belarusian, as the national language (Wilson, 2021).

On the one hand, the elections, which were once considered to be fair, gradually became more manipulated. In 1996, a highly debated constitutional referendum was held, which resulted in Lukashenko being awarded extensive powers. As a consequence, the old system of checks and balances was virtually dismantled (Wilson, 2021). For instance, the 1996 referendum greatly enhanced Lukashenko's individual authority while simultaneously reducing the power of other parts of government. To clarify, this significant change transformed the government of Belarus, shifting from a semi-presidential system to more presidential system. The Supreme Council of Belarus, the only part of the unicameral system, was dissolved

and a bicameral system was introduced by Lukashenko (Nalbandov, 2014; Frear, 2018).

In the aftermath of the referendum, Lukashenko strategically implemented measures to establish direct authority over critical establishments, such as the media, electoral processes, local governance structures, and the judiciary. That is to say, the consolidation of power by Lukashenko was not coincidental. The process proceeded systematically, following a sequence of well planned and deliberate phases. He suppressed the press and rendered political adversaries ineffective. Independent media organizations under increasing pressure, as closures and the apprehension of journalists became routine. Opposition figures were subjected to social exclusion, imprisonment, or compelled to leave their country (Beichelt, 2004). Therefore, the re-election of Lukashenko in 2001 signified the formation of a prevailing authoritarian leadership subsequent to the outcome of two constitutional referendums (Wilson, 2021).

More than that, his consolidation of power was bolstered by subsequent measures, Belarus held another referendum aimed at amending the constitution to remove the limitation on the president's ability to serve just two terms in October 2004, so firmly cementing his powerful grip on the government. As a consequence, Lukashenko retained the presidency indefinitely due to this amendment (Marples, 2008).

Concurrently, dissenting voices and opposition factions saw an increasing marginalization within the realm of politics. Civil society organizations and independent media saw escalating restrictions, which exemplified a broader trend of authoritarianism throughout Lukashenko's time in office (Shraibman, 2018). Figure 4

shows the regime's democratic decline in every sense. It can be seen that 1996, 2001 and 2004 were milestones and that the 2020 demonstrations led to a further tightening of the regime.

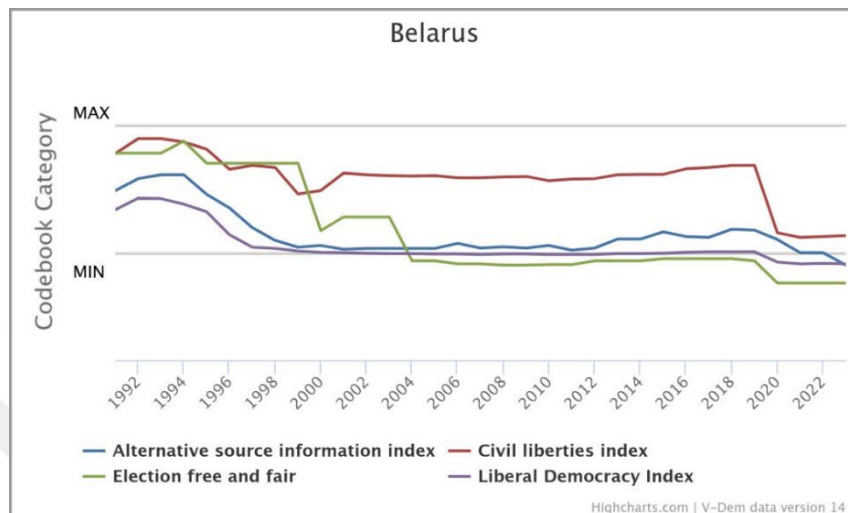


Figure 4. Post-Soviet Belarus's year-on-year progress in alternative source information, civil liberties, liberal democracy, election free and fair. Source: V-Dem (Varieties of Democracy)

Nonetheless, despite the system's adoption of authoritarianism, pragmatism and adaptation have interacted in a complex manner. That is to say, the government has a propensity to adjust its authoritarian stance, either by easing or intensifying control measures in response to significant developments in international politics. This flexible strategy emphasizes an authoritarian responsiveness that is deliberate in order to maintain power (Shraibman, 2018, p. 4). However, the country permits opposition parties and civil society groups to function to some extent with a certain degree of transparency. Even though it may seem paradoxical, there is a deliberate rationale behind this. The Belarusian leadership permits opposition, not due to a

dedication to democracy, but as a means of exercising authority (Beichelt, 2004; Shraibman, 2018, Wilson, 2021).

In this aspect, these permitted organizations serve several essential roles for the government. The initial one serves as a kind of political embellishment. That is to say, a limited number of opposition parties provide the false impression of a functional democracy. This little resistance appeases some foreign critics and gives the dictatorship a facade of legitimacy (Shraibman, 2018; Wilson, 2021). Another function is similar to a pressure valve (Shraibman, 2018). Having just a few avenues for criticism may serve as a mechanism for releasing pent-up dissatisfaction, enabling the people to express their discontent before it escalates into a complete uprising. The government strategically determines that allowing some forms of disagreement is more advantageous than the possible risks associated with a populace that is entirely deprived of the ability to express their opinions (Wilson, 2021).

In 2008, the government established exclusive control over political, social, and economic information by enacting new media legislation. Mainstream media is subject to rigorous regulation, and libel is punishable by both civil and criminal penalties. Additionally, high-ranking officials are protected from defamation by additional legal safeguards. The state also maintains complete control over the country's sole internet service provider, employing a combination of legal powers and technological capabilities to regulate online content. This enables the government to obstruct specific websites, limit social media access, and even disrupt internet services throughout the majority of the country when necessary (Freedom House, 2024).

Additionally, via the surveillance of opposition activities, the government is able to detect possible dangers (Shraibman, 2018). These permitted organizations function as a kind of surveillance list, enabling the government to monitor prospective dissidents and promptly suppress them before they gather support. By using this strategy, the administration is able to retain authority and swiftly suppress any significant opposition (Terzyan, 2019; Wilson, 2021). Even though the regime makes concerted efforts to suppress dissent, certain avenues for opposition persist. Despite their limitations, non-state media, electoral campaigns, and demonstrations provide a forum for opposition viewpoints. Nevertheless, these approaches demonstrate their inadequacy in surmounting widespread detachment and skepticism (Wilson, 2021; Shykhutsina, 2023).

However, Shraibman (2018) asserts that a significant number of Belarusians have the belief that they lack the agency to effectuate a change in the political system, seeing its authority as insurmountable. In other words, although they may harbor disapproval of its policies, the majority of individuals lack confidence in the ability of opposition movements (Shraibman, 2018, p. 10). Way and Tolvin explain that this is one of the reasons why the 2020 demonstrations, despite their extent, failed to produce results (2023). Further, Belarus's electoral history indicates that elections are premeditated 'contests' entirely controlled by the governing elite, as opposed to significant struggles between the opposition and the regime (Terzyan, 2019, p. 3).

Due to this characteristic, it is difficult to discuss a competitive authoritarian system in Belarus, since elections have no significance and the populace lacks confidence in the possibility of change. Conversely, one may argue that these

characteristics are exactly what make it an authoritarian state (Levitsky & Way, 2002; Way, 2004). According to Aram Terzyan, Belarus can be characterized as an authoritarian police state, where political dissent is largely repressed through the absence of democratic assemblies, open media outlets, and equitable electoral processes. Belarus has not undergone a democratic transition of power, thus genuine opposition candidates face an almost nonexistent chance of securing power via electoral processes (2019, p. 4).

In this context, Freedom House's report comments on the functioning of the Belarusian government (2024),

The state controls at least 70 percent of the economy, and graft is encouraged by a lack of transparency and accountability in government. There are no independent bodies to investigate corruption cases, and graft trials are typically closed. Presidential clemency has been issued occasionally to free convicted corrupt officials, some of whom Lukashenka has returned to positions of authority. Spurious bribery and tax evasion charges have been used against Lukashenka's political opponents and human rights activists.

Furthermore, Belarus lacks the necessary infrastructure to sustain extensive social movements. Ukraine's media climate is generally independent, whereas Belarus has limited access to non-state television networks (Shraibman, 2018, p. 26). This impedes the ability of the opposition to reach the general public and spread their message. Conversely, due to a lack of privatization, Belarus is devoid of influential oligarchs who might potentially challenge the government or financially support opposition activities (Karbalevich, 2010, p. 664). Additionally, in contrast to Ukraine's parliament, which has diverse members who may possibly endorse reform, the Belarusian parliament lacks any provision for resistance or dissent (Shraibman, 2018, p. 27).

On the other hand, Belarus, in contrast to Ukraine, does not exhibit regional disparities. A significant discrepancy can be observed in the future perceptions of

different regions in Ukraine. However, this does not apply to Belarus. A shared vision exists in Belarus. They are mostly supportive of Belarus's independence (Shraibman, 2018; Kazharski & Makarychev, 2021; Wilson, 2021), however, they also attach significant significance to preserving ties with Russia, leading to generally positive relations with them (White et al., 2014). This usually provide major challenges in the organization and maintenance of substantial demonstrations in Belarus against the regime's autocratic consolidation with the help of Russia.

On the one hand, the regime ensures its authority in the eyes of the populace based on performance legitimacy, particularly in providing tangible economic and social advantages to the populace (Frear, 2018). This establishes an implicit agreement, known as a social contract, between those in power and those being governed. The social contract is predicated on a reciprocal exchange. The government offers stability, improved living conditions, and maybe a feeling of security in return for the populace's acquiescence to its ongoing governance, irrespective of its lack of democratic election (Balmaceda, 2014).

Nevertheless, this paradigm has encountered difficulties in recent years. The 2020 demonstrations brought attention to a possible rupture in the social contract, as people saw a failure on the part of the government to fulfill its commitments. The validity of performance may be delicate. This demonstrates that the government's legitimacy may be compromised if there is a decline in economic performance or an increase in social unrest. However, Belarus is a resilient authoritarian regime, and despite occasional economic challenges, it has managed to endure largely to both economic and political support from Russia (Way & Tolvin, 2023).

Moreover, the majority of the demonstrations were limited to the capital and a specific audience. The military, the government, and the police continue to be trusted by the majority of Belarusians (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2024). Besides, Belarus has the greatest police officer-to-citizen ratio in Europe. With that, the security forces pledge allegiance not to the state, but specifically to Lukashenko (Terzyan, 2019, p. 5). Hence, the success of the demonstrations becomes arduous. On the other side, Russia plays a crucial role in ensuring this. Belarus obtains subsidized gas and oil from Russia in return for its cooperation in the region and its ongoing reliance on the country (Ambrosio, 2013). In this aspect, the state significantly depends on Russia for cheap imports of oil and gas, which are used for internal consumption and re-export. Reduced energy expenses enable state-owned firms in Belarus to manufacture items at a competitive price. The affordable energy ensures that domestic prices remain at a low level, so contributing to the preservation of social stability (Shykhutsina, 2023).

Nonetheless, the economic model of Belarus is susceptible to fluctuations in Russian policy or pricing. The economic model in question has been characterized as a kind of ‘state capitalism’ due to the prominent involvement of state-owned firms. Therefore, it differs from the market-oriented reforms implemented by the majority of post-Soviet governments. The dependence on inexpensive Russian resources raises concerns over the long-term sustainability of the strategy, particularly if subsidies are decreased. In addition, Shraibman puts forward that the absence of any change in Russia is a challenge for achieving change in Belarus (2022).

However, The Belarus-Russia relationship is intricate and has a significant impact on economic connections. In general, the Belarusian economic model is a

distinctive illustration of a post-Soviet economy characterized by a strong governmental presence and reliance on a neighboring power. The strong commercial connections between Russia and Belarus, along with financial assistance from Russia, serve as a safeguard against any sanctions from Western European countries. This helps to preserve the current status quo of Belarus (Ambrosio, 2013; Nalbandov, 2014; Wilson, 2021, Way & Tolvin, 2023; Shykhutsina, 2023).

Also, in order to deter Russia from considering any notions of regime change, Lukashenko prevents the formation of any pro-Russian opposition. Only pro-European opposition, which cannot dissent under state control, is allowed (Shraibman, 2018, p. 8). Consequently, in an effort to bolster its regional influence and maintain security in its territory, Russia is gaining Lukashenko's allegiance by assisting him in maintaining stability (Shykhutsina, 2023).

More than that, Thomas Ambrosio (2006) puts forward that Belarus's possible progress towards democracy has been hindered by its strong linkages with Russia, which have both diminished and subverted external influences that promote democratization. Russian authorities, including Vladimir Putin, have persistently supported Lukashenko's power, providing diplomatic and political support, most obvious in their defense of Belarus's malfunctioning election procedures.

Since Lukashenko prohibited a pro-Russian opposition, he ensures his survival by maintaining positive relationships with Russia, which he achieves through the provision of prosperity through the subsidies he receives. Perhaps we could discuss a different narrative if there were a pro-Russian opposition; however, it appears that a pro-European opposition is not currently popular. To consolidate his

own mass, Lukashenko employs this opposition as an instrument, as he is aware of this.

In a survey, a maximum of 19% of respondents disagreed with the assertion that the West is exploiting Ukrainians to incite Russia and that Ukraine is thereby a hostage to the Nazis. The majority of the populace believes these assertions or do not reject the possibility of their validity (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2024). Despite the demonstrations in 2020 showed resentment against Lukashenko, they were very limited to the capital (Way & Tolvin, 2023). As of December 2023, a survey of people with a wide range of views and ideologies showed that at least 68% of people still trust the government (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2024).

However, the cementing of Lukashenko's power has had repercussions. Belarusians encounter curtailed liberties, constrained political engagement, and a suppressed civil society. The suppression of opposition has also tarnished Belarus's global standing and impeded its own economic development. In particular, the lack of strong anti-Russian Belarusian nationalism has hindered the opposition's ability to gain popular backing and a group of opposition members who are willing to participate in dangerous protest actions to the regime.

That is to say, Belarus lacks a fair and transparent legal system, with its judiciary often subjected to arbitrary decisions and political interference. According to the OSCE (2020), the country's legal framework is better described as one governed by 'rule by law' rather than adhering to the principles of the rule of law. According to Amnesty's report (2024), in Belarus, even following Telegram groups that the government considers 'extremist' is grounds for arrest. As the V-Dem graph

in Figure 4 shows, the situation for civil liberties has been deteriorating further since 2020.

In conclusion, the long-lasting authoritarian authority of Alexander Lukashenko in Belarus is an intricate network formed by internal consolidation, a well managed appearance of opposition, and steady backing from Russia. Although there are fractures in the social contract and difficulties arising from economic adversity, the prospects of the regime's future are ambiguous. In the regime interests of the Belarusian ruling elite, the state of Belarus continues under the shadow of Russian power.

3.2 The transformation of Belarus's identity

After the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991, Belarus had a tremendous task to establish an independent national identity. However, according to researchers like David Roger Marples, Belarus did not have a clear and distinct identity, and was even referred to as 'denationalized nation' (1999). Therefore, this provided President Alexander Lukashenko, who was legitimately elected in 1994, with an advantageous situation (Kazharski, 2021). However, it is important to understand how he was in an advantageous situation.

In this context, Lukashenko has made deliberate efforts to establish strong relationships with Russia. Common interests with Russia played an important role here. He consolidated his regime with significant political and economic aid in exchange for an acknowledgment of Russian influence in the region vis-à-vis the West (Hancock, 2006). However, in Ukraine, the issue of aligning closely with Russia posed challenges for a certain segment of the people, but Belarusians did not

possess anything to worry about with forging strong ties with Russia (Shraibman 2018; Terzyan, 2019; Way & Tolvin, 2023). That is one of the factors why Lukashenko consistently directed his attention towards Russia.

More than that, Lukashenko has successfully employed narratives of identity and historical events to strengthen Belarus's authoritarian rule (Fedor et al., 2017). This has increased Belarus's vulnerability to Russian influence, creating a perception of reliance on Russia for security and economic stability. However, the Ukrainian regime was unable to establish such a close proximity to Russia, but the Belarusian regime was able to do so. Therefore, in order to comprehend this, it is necessary to examine the historical context. The purpose of this section is to analyze the historical development of Belarusian identity.

To begin with, the Belarusian language and cultural identity have encountered marginalization for many years. During the period of Tsarist Russia, the Belarusian language was commonly considered to be a dialect used by peasants, while Russian held dominance in official domains. As a consequence, the Belarusian language generally had challenges in gaining acceptance among the upper echelons of society (Rudling, 2008, p. 56). For this reason, Belarus, being situated between Poland and Russia, often saw governing elites adopting the languages of the dominating nations in order to enhance their social status. In addition, during the early Soviet period, the marginalization of the Belarusian identity persisted, with only a faint emergence of a fledgling Belarusian identity (Rudling, 2008).

Nonetheless, throughout Stalin's autocratic regime, this sense of identity was intentionally repressed via the implementation of 'Russification' efforts. This harsh procedure not only imposed the Russian language but also eradicated Belarusian

cultural figures. For instance, the killings of 370 prominent intellectuals, mostly the nationalists, in Belarus and the incarceration of 90% of the country's authors are clear evidence of a cultural cleansing taking place (Rudling, 2008, p. 57). Apart from that, Belarus exhibited a limited sense of national identity in the early stages of the Soviet era. During the seventy years of communist rule, the leadership, controlled by Moscow, seldom felt obliged to recognize or accommodate the aspirations for national autonomy in Belarus (Fedor et al., 2017, p. 20). Besides, Belarus saw the greatest number of deaths per person in Europe during World War II, with almost one-third of its population being lost. The collective memory of Belarusians has a major place for this experience of great sacrifice that was shared. Therefore, this created a communal memory of shared sacrifice throughout the Soviet Union (Fedor et al., 2017).

More than that, the post-war concept of Belarus known as a 'partisan republic' significantly contributed to the development of loyalty towards the Soviet Union. In this point, the phrase 'partisan republic' emphasizes the crucial contribution made by Belarusians to the Soviet triumph. The loss of thousands of young individuals, who were destined to shape the destiny of the nation, in the defence of Minsk and Moscow against Nazi Germany, and their major and essential contributions, played a part in cementing the allegiance of the Soviet Union (Fedor et al., 2017).

However, despite achieving independence, Belarus had challenges in formation of an independent national identity. According to surveys performed in 1992, just 35.9% of Belarusians expressed a sense of belonging to Belarus as their country to call home (Marples, 1996). In addition, in the late 1980s, an impressive

69% of Belarusians self-identified as ‘Soviet’. The historical inclination towards a more encompassing Soviet identity, *Homo Sovieticus*, elucidates the difficulties that Belarus has in establishing a unique national identity (Rudling, 2008).

This strong Soviet belonging was displayed Other than that, in March 1991, when an astonishing 82.7% of Belarusians casted their votes in favor of maintaining the Soviet Union (Marples, 2003, p. 21). The enduring consequences of Russification and a collective Soviet history are intertwined with the desire for more autonomy in Belarus (Kazharski & Makarychev, 2021). Despite the passage of 33 years following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, a recent study conducted in December 2023 revealed that 37% of respondents still self-identify as only Soviet, they are equally happy about any success of Belarusians and Russians and see no difference. Those who define themselves as a Soviet person by also mentioning their other affiliations are 41%. (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2024).



Source: Answers to the question "Which geopolitical alliance is it better for the Belarusian state to be in?"

Figure 5. "Which geopolitical alliance is better for the Belarusian state to be in?" (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2024, p. 53)

Regarding the point, Belarusians' strong feelings to their Soviet history and lack of seeing Russians as ‘other’ has enabled the governing elites to establish

considerable ties with Russia and pursue their interests in alignment with this trajectory without facing considerable obstacles. In a recent survey, 43% of people favor continued alliance only with Russia, without the EU (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2024, p. 53). Therefore, the governing elites have successfully solidified their authoritarian rule by establishing strong alliances with Russia. Also, the fact that the Russians were not seen as outsiders made it relatively simple to counter the leverage of the West by virtue of Russia. In this respect, one of the main aspects that has hindered a breakdown of the political order is the common interests between the Belarusian ruling elite, who want to keep their authoritarian prominence, and Russia, who wants preserve its grip in the region in against to the West.

Besides, Mark R. Beissinger (2008) contends that minimizing ethnic identification may have adverse effects on the foundation of democracy. Indeed, ethnic nationalism may effectively contribute to the advancement and strengthening of democracy as long as it does not result in the marginalization of minority groups. On the other hand, the absence of active participation by citizens in civic affairs provides a favorable environment for the establishment of authoritarian governance.

For this reason, it is important to highlight that a ethnic nationalism has the potential to cultivate a feeling of national cohesion and direction, motivating individuals to engage in public affairs and demand accountability from their leaders. However, undermined civil society enabled a social basis for Lukashenko's autocratic government to strengthen its linkages with Russia, while simultaneously marginalising Belarusian democrats. In this, the absence of a robust national identity countering Soviet control undermined the civil society in Belarus (Beissinger, 2008,

p. 95). According to Beissinger (2008), ethnic feelings to end the foreign rule lead to the mobilisation of society and pave the way for civil society.

Further, in this context, it should be regarded that history is not just confined to the past. It has the potential to be a potent instrument in the present. Political leaders often attempt to manipulate the collective memory of historical events, strategically using these recollections to influence public sentiment and reinforce their own political objectives. The phenomenon of ‘memory politics’ poses considerable obstacles for opposition organizations seeking to contest the established narrative (Fedor et al., 2017). Therefore, Lukashenko has taken advantage of this status quo by developing a narrative that emphasizes a common past and a sense of security with Russia. He has established stronger diplomatic relations with Russia in order to safeguard his narratives. This further solidifies his role as the protector of stability and national security, thereby ‘justifying’ his authoritarian inclinations (Fedor et al., 2017).

For instance, as one of the aspects, the recollections of World War II serve as a contentious arena in Ukraine. The prevailing Soviet narrative highlights the triumphant victory over Nazi Germany. Nonetheless, opposition factions emphasize the conduct of Ukrainian nationalist militias throughout the conflict, presenting a distinct viewpoint from the Soviet narrative. This enabled them to question the perspective of the old administration and gather backing (Fedor et al., 2017). However, while opposition factions in Ukraine have the ability to use a contrasting storyline, Belarus does not own a comparable alternative. The lack of an easily accessible alternative narrative poses a greater barrier for the Belarusian opposition

in contesting the prevailing perspective of the state about World War II (Fedor et al., 2017).

The persistent division between the authoritarian administration of Lukashenko and the democratic opposition since 1994 has been primarily rooted in identity conflicts, namely related to language and the nation's historical narrative. However, the ongoing influence of Russification continues to impact modern-day Belarus. Although Belarusian is recognized as a co-official language alongside Russian, the latter has significant influence in the realms of education, media, and government. The current state of dominance may be seen as a long-lasting result of the strategies implemented by the Soviet Union, which sought to cultivate a populace that is at ease with, or even has a preference for, the Russian language (Rudling, 2015).

This prevailing tendency may also be associated with Belarus's 'neo-Communist' ideology, which emphasizes centralized control and a dominating language that reminds people of its Soviet history. This concentration on centralized governance and the use of a language evocative of the Soviet era prevent the complete development of Belarusian identity. For this reason, Stanislau Shushkevich describes Belarus under Lukashenko as a 'neo-Communist' society, motivated by an anti-democratic passion and a desire to revive 'Communist' principles, with the goal of consolidating the population behind an authoritarian regime (Shushkevich, 2002, p. 27-28; Rudling, 2008, p. 71). Besides, Shushkevich (2002) contends that the Lukashenko administration effectively accomplishes its goals by impeding the shift towards a market-based economy, limiting individual liberties, and advancing the notion of equality via the dissemination of propaganda. This strategy is characterized

by a strong opposition to Western influence and a deliberate rejection of liberal democratic values.

The fact that the majority of Belarusians nostalgically recall their Soviet past is a significant component of their identity. Aspects contributing to this include the suppression of the Belarusian language in opposition to Russian language, the execution of Belarusian cultural figures, and Belarus's pivotal role in the war against Nazi Germany. In this regard, it is evident that Lukashenko is utilizing this background to construct Belarusian identity and consolidate his regime with the assistance of Russia. The Soviet Union collapsed, but its cultural space continues to exist through the Russian World, *Russkiy mir*, in a different form.

3.3 Belarusians and international linkage

Since Lukashenko assumed power in 1994, the Belarusian government has consistently become more autocratic, resulting in a certain level of stability. The government has a notable level of autocratic endurance. Undoubtedly, Russia's political and economic support of the government across every field is a significant contributing element in this situation. In return, Belarus has given Russia a sphere of influence, an area of trust in the neighborhood. Nevertheless, as a consequence, Russia has provided significant support to the Lukashenko regime, ensuring the strengthening and consolidation of its authoritarian rule.

On the other hand, identity has a crucial part in the rapprochement between Belarus and Russia. That is to say, the historical connection between the Soviet Union and the belief that Russia and Belarus are indistinguishable has had a significant impact. However, this phenomenon has also been driven by the absence

of a substantial group of people who are willing to develop a future that is not closely aligned with Russia and who want to construct a national identity independent of the past with Russia.

As different example, in Ukraine, the tendency to disregard the historical relationship with Russia is rampant some parts of the country due to being regarded as a 'colonial' history. However, the process of Russia becoming more authoritarian and Belarus becoming more authoritarian are closely linked, since the Belarusian regime relies on Russia for its continued existence in the face of their common interests. Consequently, the strategies used by the West to connect and exert influence on Belarus have mostly failed to produce significant results. The interaction between these factors will be examined in this section.

Initially, Belarus has been an important stage for autocracy and democracy promoters (Yakouchyk, 2015). Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the European Union assumed a prominent role in facilitating the democracy process in Eastern Europe (Tungul et. al., 2022). For instance, the European Council unequivocally declares that the affirmation of human rights and the promotion of democracy are fundamental tenets of European cooperation, both within the union and in its interactions with other countries (Yakouchyk, 2015, p. 198). Therefore, the European Union's dedication to this cause is evident in the 'democracy clause', which has been an obligatory component of all trade and cooperation accords with non-member states since 1995 (Knodt & Jünemann, 2007).

However, due to its failure to comply with the European Union's criteria for human rights and the rule of law, Belarus did not get a comprehensive cooperation agreement with the European Union, unlike neighboring countries. These agreements

usually facilitate the development of stronger commercial ties with the intended nations (Cameron & Orenstein, 2012, p. 4). Veranika Shykhutsina (2023) asserts that “EU’s efforts to expand different types of linkages have not resulted in their sufficient levels to create leverage capable of neutralizing a significant Russian influence.”. Today, with a score of 1.99 out of 10 on the Economist Intelligence Unit’s democracy index (2023), Belarus continues to have the lowest score in its history.

Nevertheless, Belarus was a participant of the EU's Eastern Partnership initiative in 2009 in response to the 2008-2009 global financial crisis and the intensification of political and economic disputes with Russia. Belarus was presented with the opportunity to direct its foreign policy in a more European path as a member of this collection of six nations (Wieck, 2011). Significantly, the EU's prominence in Belarus seems to have significantly increased between 2015 and 2020 compared to previous periods (Shykhutsina, 2023). For instance, by providing financial assistance in the form of grants, the European Union has bolstered the economy, governance, and connectivity of Belarus. The annual funding for these grants increased significantly, from €30 million in 2016 to €135 million by 2020 (Shykhutsina, 2023).

Also, in recent years, the volume of commerce between Belarus and the European Union has consistently increased. The trade of commodities saw a 13.3% growth between 2011 and 2021 (Shykhutsina, 2023). By 2021, the European Union had emerged as Belarus's second-largest trading partner, with an aggregate bilateral trade in commodities amounting to €12.9 billion, or for almost 20% of Belarus's total goods trade. Furthermore, the European Union emerged as the frontrunner in trade within the service industry, as shown by the bilateral trade in services amounting to

€4.2 billion, which represents 31% of Belarus's overall service trade (Shykhutsina, 2023).

Nonetheless, the situation worsened considerably after the effects of the controversial 2020 elections are seen and the subsequent enforcement of sanctions, which led to the expulsion of Belarus as a guest member of the Council of Europe. After that, Belarus has severed its ties with Western countries. For example, Belarus compelled a Ryanair aircraft to make an emergency landing and detaining a dissident journalist, Roman Protasevich, who was on board. Additionally, the Belarusian government decided to withdraw from the Eastern Partnership program without consulting other parties (Przetacznik & Russell, 2021).

On the other hand, Russia's foreign policy has a significant influence on the nations that were once part of the Soviet Union, especially in relation to democracy. Advocating and bolstering authoritarian governments has emerged as a fundamental approach, with Belarus serving as a prominent example. This strategy originates from a profound apprehension, the emergence of democracies in close proximity. That is to say, this approach is characterized by its multidimensional logic. First and foremost, Russia considers a group of obedient, authoritarian nations as an essential security barrier against perceived dangers from the Western countries, namely the enlargement of North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Also, democratic regimes, due to their potential for establishing stronger connections with Western nations, are seen as a possible threat to security (Manaev, 2015; Schmotz & Tansey, 2017).

To clarify, the Kremlin is concerned about the potential domino effect. The presence of a thriving democracy in close proximity has the potential to stimulate comparable movements inside Russia. Enhancing authoritarian governments in

nearby countries helps to reinforce the legitimacy of Russia's own authoritarian governance by establishing a perception of 'normalcy' and suppressing any prospective opposition (Manaeu, 2015; Schmotz & Tansey, 2017).

In this regard, economy is a significant influence tool. Authoritarian governments, which sometimes lack strong internal institutions, are more prone to relinquishing economic authority to Russia in return for political backing. This enables Russia to wield enhanced economic influence on these nations, establishing a sphere of influence. Valerie J. Bunce and Sharon L. Wolchik claim that "There is some support for the argument that strong economic performance protects dictators from defeat, as Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Belarus all experienced relatively strong economic growth in the years leading up to their key elections." (2009, p. 96). This provides insight into how Lukashenko prevailed over the protests that posed a threat to his electoral 'triumphs' (Bunce & Wolchik, 2009, p. 98). In the case of Belarus, Russia undoubtedly played a big role in this.

In this context, Lukashenko also was able to take advantage of the concerns of disorder and establish himself as the protector of order due to a weak opposition, as well as a people that desired stability after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Consequently, the desire of stability has also increased Russian influence by forging more economic ties (Shraibman, 2018; Shykhutsina, 2023). Therefore, Belarus's faltering economy has become highly dependent on Russian subsidies, thereby increasing Russia's leverage on the country. The processing and sale of Russian subsidized gas emerged as a critical sector of the Belarusian economy, serving as a pillar of the regime (Karol, 2006). In the first decade of the independence, it accounted for at least 20% of the entire economy (Way, 2004).

In this regard, Veranika Shykhutsina contends that external actors, like Russia, have the ability to deliberately resist and undermine international attempts (2023, p. 17). An exemplary instance of Russia's backing for Belarus. In particular, following the European Union's imposition of sanctions on Belarus due to irregularities in the 2006 election, since then Russia openly committed to assisting the regime in mitigating the impact of sanction-concerned limitations. Concurrently, the assistance to Belarus from Russia has persisted (Tansey, 2016, p. 98). Even after the demonstrations in 2020, Russia stood firmly behind Belarus. Russian investments comprising 38-42% of the total foreign investments between 2018 and 2021. Russia is Belarus's primary creditor, in addition to being the major investor. Belarus had received roughly \$8 billion in financing from Russia by March 2020. A \$1.5 billion loan in September 2020 and an additional \$630 million loan in 2021 are among the more recent agreements (Shykhutsina, 2023, p. 19-20).

Throughout the region, Russia employs a variety of approaches, including providing economic assistance, engaging in military operations, and exerting political influence. However, it is now functioning in Belarus. In Belarus, the implementation of this has been more efficient compared to other instances due to a substantial level of popular backing, or at the very least, the absence of any counterproductive public opposition, beginning with the country's independence (Shraibman, 2018; Rudkouski, 2021; Way & Tolvin, 2023).

Nonetheless, it is the because of the fact that the intimate bond between Belarus and Russia is a complex phenomena that transcends the domain of politics. Due to the deep historical and cultural ties between the two countries, it may be difficult to clearly distinguish their limits. The complex and interconnected identities

of Belarusians have been further strengthened by their substantial contributions to both Soviet and Russian history. It is important to acknowledge that Russia exerts a significant linguistic and cultural impact on its neighboring country, Belarus, as seen by the strong presence of the Russian language there. The particular global position of Belarus is shaped by its delicate connection with Russia, which distinguishes it from many other former Soviet countries (Rudling, 2008; White et al., 2014; Fedor et al., 2017;

As of December 2023, at least 55% of Belarusians see Belarus only as part of a triune Slavic state, comprising Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. For these people, Belarus is more of a region than a nation. Only 41% see Belarus as a distinct nation. 68% of these people prefer to identify themselves as Slavs (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2024). This triune narrative fits perfectly with the tsarist concept of Great Russia.

Piotr Rudkouski (2021) contends that the '*Ruskiy mir*', which refers to the Russian world, has influenced the formation of Belarusians' national identity by embracing a supranational identity rather than one based on ethnicity or citizenship. The strong linkages with Russia facilitated being incorporated in Russia's leading sphere of influence. Further, he proposes that Belarusians possess a predisposition towards euroscepticism, a characteristic deeply ingrained in this particular circumstance. As an outcome of this verdict, the regime has been able to establish greater proximity with Russia effortlessly.

This orientation, according to Artyom Shraibman (2018), did, in fact, contribute to Lukashenko's ascent to power. Indeed, in 1995, pre-Soviet national flags, that embraced after the independence in 1991, were lowered all over the country and replaced with flags reminiscent of the Soviet period. The close economic

connections between Belarus and Russia, the predominance of the Russian language in both official and informal communication, and the informational and cultural influence of Russia in Belarus all serve to bolster the Russkiy mir as a viable cultural alternative for Belarusians (Rudkouski, 2021, p. 104).

In this perspective, a significant number of Belarusians hold the belief that maintaining strong ties with Russia is of utmost importance. As in Figure 6, the number of individuals who regard Russia with humility is almost three times more than those who hold the European Union with profound importance (Astapenia, 2020). In the survey conducted in December 2023, we see that the warmth towards Russia has increased even more and is four times higher than the EU (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2024).

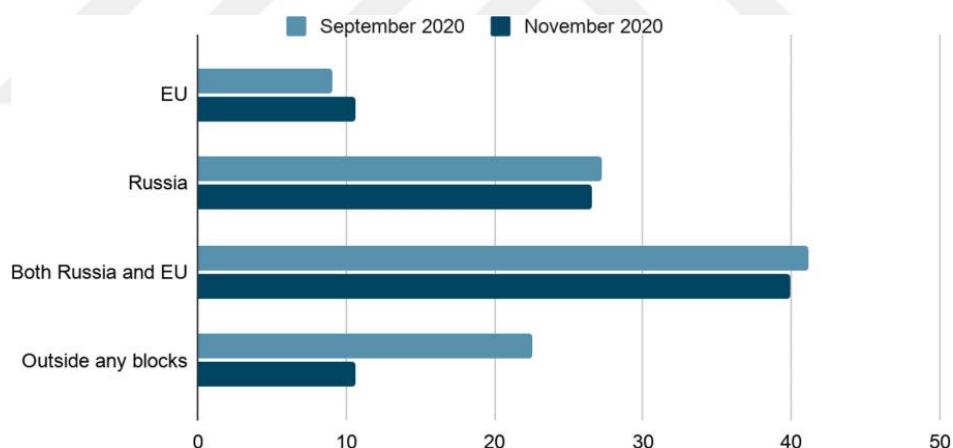


Figure 6. Which side do you think would be more beneficial for Belarus? (Astapenia, 2020),

To further, Belarus distinguishes itself from its former Soviet counterparts by its strong affinity for historical icons. The national flag and emblem remain almost unaltered from their Soviet equivalents, in sharp contrast to most of other post-Soviet

governments (Rudkouski, 2021, p. 103). Their selected day of independence, July 3rd, is closely connected to the Soviet narrative. The event commemorates the Red Army's liberation of Minsk, which also symbolized the restoration of Soviet authority. However, this distinctive association with Soviet symbols goes beyond official emblem. Street names, roads, and squares persist in commemorating heroes and events from the Soviet period, so reinforcing its enduring influence on the collective awareness of the country (Rudkouski, 2021, p. 103). Therefore, Lukashenko was able to capitalize on and exploit this situation. Former head of state Stanislav Shushkevich (2002) even characterized Belarusians as more ultra-Soviet than Russians. With the backing of Russia, Lukashenko constructed his regime around this with the help of Russia and thereby paved the way for authoritarianism.

Table 5. Is It Important to Have Good Relations with the Countries Concerned? (White et al., 2014, p. 23)

Yes (%)	2000	2004	2006	2011
Russia	69	63	65	67
European Union	37	43	34	38
Poland	No Data	38	28	33
Germany	36	33	30	27
United States	32	28	21	19
United Kingdom	25	23	20	16
China	21	22	29	32
<i>N</i>	1090	1599	1000	1000

In Belarus, the Western influence and control have considerably waned due to their persistent alignment with Russia. Thus, Russia readily backed the regime's

autocratic consolidation. In this sense, approximately 76% of Belarusians express support for a powerful Russia that eradicates Western influence, according to the Pew Research Center (2017). As Table 5 shows, when questioned about the significance of strong connections, Belarusians most highlighted the need of maintaining favorable relations with Russia.

In conclusion, in Belarus, the lack of a distinct national identity leaves room for a great longing for the Soviet era and a deep cultural connection with Russia. Consequently, Lukashenko's autocratic governance is strengthened by the steadfast political and economic backing from Russia. Western attempts to foster democracy have been hindered by their reliance on Russia and the absence of a strong domestic opposition movement. Democratic changes in Belarus are becoming limited.

Consequently, the situation in Belarus highlights the complex interplay between internal identity conflicts, foreign pressures, and the trajectory of a nation's political system. While Belarus continues to struggle with these challenges, the prospect of achieving a more democratic future seems distant without a change in Russia. Gaining a comprehensive understanding of this delicate interaction is essential for effectively addressing the difficulties of promoting democracy in an area where historical, cultural, and geopolitical factors still hold significant sway.

3.4 Conclusion

Providing a nuanced comprehension of the persistent authoritarian regime in Belarus, the chapter explores the complex relationship between identity and international linkages. The narrative emphasizes that the stability of the Belarusian regime is not

exclusively due to President Lukashenko's political maneuvering, but is profoundly entangled with the country's dense historical and socio-political context.

Belarus's historical trajectory, which is characterized by Russification and a shared Soviet past, has fostered a sense of national identity that is firmly linked to Russia. The adoption of a supranational identity such as the "Russkiy Mir" has been facilitated by the absence of a distinct Belarusian identity and a persistent nostalgia for the Soviet period. This phenomenon has facilitated Belarus's incorporating into Russia's sphere of influence, thereby limiting Western leverage and rendering it susceptible to external influence.

The Belarusian regime has strategically capitalized on this socio-political landscape, as the chapter further elucidates. The regime has effectively neutralized opposition and solidified its authority by leveraging the population's affinity towards their shared past and nurturing close ties with Russia. The regime's power has been further solidified by the absence of a resilient domestic counter-narrative and its control over information and civil society.

It also emphasized that the role of Russia in supporting the Belarusian regime. The status quo has been maintained and any prospective democratic transitions have been thwarted by Russia's economic and political support. The Belarusian regime's dependence on Russia has established a symbiotic relationship in which both parties benefit from the maintenance of authoritarian rule. In a nutshell, the chapter presents a multifaceted image of Belarus's political landscape, in which a resilient authoritarian regime has been established as a result of the convergence of internal identity struggles, external influences, and strategic political maneuvering.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 initiated a time of significant alteration for the countries that were formerly part of it. Although Ukraine and Belarus once shared a desire for democratic institutions, their political paths have now diverged considerably. Ukraine alternates between a flawed democracy and competitive authoritarianism, seeing periods of decline in democratic values interspersed with European integration reforms. In contrast, Belarus has established a stable authoritarian regime led by Alexander Lukashenko, which is marked by restricted political liberties and strict control over the political environment.

An essential factor influencing these divergent trajectories is the internal conflict around the concept of national identity. Ukraine is struggling with a clear and significant division between its eastern and western regions. The western oblasts, which have historical connections to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and inner Europe, have a significant inclination towards the Western world. In contrast, the eastern oblasts have a stronger historical and cultural affiliation with Russia, that aligns more closely with the Soviet and Tsarist period. The conflicting views on national identity prevent the development of a unified national story and obstruct the establishment of a system where consensus has been reached. Political parties and social organizations often associate themselves with these regional divisions, so complicating the process of establishing a national consensus.

On the other hand, Belarus has a mostly uniform national identity, which is strongly shaped by its Soviet history. Russia has taken advantage of the status quo

created by the common history and euroscepticism to strengthen Lukashenko's authoritarian authority. In this context, the lack of a strong pro-European integration inclination diminishes the resistance inside the country against Russia's influence, hence enabling Lukashenko to use a collective historical narrative to justify his governance. In Ukraine, national identity is a source of conflict, but in Belarus it provides an important foundation for the current administration.

Another critical component is the interaction between internal dynamics and external links. Ukraine and Belarus both have a significant geopolitical position, located between the European Union and Russia. Due to their strategic position, these entities are used as pawns in a broader geopolitical strategy, with many external actors actively attempting to influence their political paths. Russia endeavors to maintain its sphere of influence in the area, often pushing for a course of authoritarian consolidation that accords with its own objectives. This is seen in Russia's endorsement of pro-Russian political factions in Ukraine and its continuing invasion in 2014 and 2022.

On the other side, the Western countries actively advocate for democratic changes and strive for tighter integration with European institutions. The European Union's Association Agreement with Ukraine and its backing for pro-democracy groups inside the nation demonstrate this. The West donates millions of dollars to NGOs, mostly supported by Western Ukrainians against the government. It gave them significant leverage on Ukraine, perhaps to prevent Ukraine from becoming another Belarus in 2004 in the Orange Revolution. This is clear from surveys conducted to determine participation in past demonstrations. The cities of Lviv and Ivano-Frankivsk played important roles in these demonstrations. It is no coincidence

that Lviv was one of the most important cities in Central Europe during the Austro-Hungarian period.

Nevertheless, the manner in which domestic actors interact with these foreign entities influences the political environment. In Ukraine, there are groups that want greater links with Europe against Russia, which align with the interests of the West. Pro-Russian elements, on the other hand, support *Russkiy mir*, where Russia has increased authoritarian sphere of influence. The provision of foreign assistance to domestic objectives exacerbates the continuing political conflict, impeding the formation of a durable system.

However, the situation in Ukraine serves as a prime example of the difficulties involved in reconciling a fragmented national identity. The lack of capacity for either pro-Western or pro-Russian forces to win a definitive triumph results in a continuous struggle for dominance. Although both factions use foreign allies to further their objectives, none is able to achieve enduring supremacy, resulting in the nation's fluctuation between democracy and authoritarianism. The fractured structure of Ukrainian identity contributes to the political instability, so hindering the formation of a comprehensive national agreement on the way ahead.

On the other hand Belarus, in contrast to Ukraine, has a more uniform national identity and lacks a prominent pro-Western group, which renders it more open to Russia's influence. In this context, local entities closely cooperate with Russia to actively support and strengthen the government. Conversely, Russia bolsters its stance by offering economic and political assistance to the state, so reinforcing the autocratic system. A significant part of Belarus calls itself a Soviet person. Most of them do not see Russia as different from themselves.

In other words, Belarus's common identity, which does not have a significant pro-Western influence, makes it easier for Lukashenko's authoritarian rule to strengthen its power. In this context, governing elites inside the country who are connected with Russia take advantage of the common identity to gain support from the general public, while the lack of a clear alternative that supports the West undermines any internal opposition. In addition, Russia's backing of the dictatorship enhances its standing, so consolidating the authoritarian system even more. The convergence of domestic players and Russia, driven by a common national identity, fosters a comparatively more stable political milieu in Belarus as opposed to the current turmoil in Ukraine.

For instance, with Lukashenko's assumption of power, the Soviet-era flag was restored, and the Red Army's liberation of Minsk from Nazi Germany was declared as the day of independence. The significance of the Soviet past has regained prominence, although it had previously diminished. In addition, Russian was restored as the official language, therefore continuing a significant component of both governmental and private spheres. All this did not provoke a significant reaction from the grassroots. A significant part of the population still embraces Soviet identity. These people are part of a structure called *Russkiy mir*, which maintains the old Soviet sphere of influence.

The divergent political paths of Ukraine and Belarus illustrate the intricate interaction between internal and external factors in creating the political evolution of post-Soviet states. The manner in which domestic entities interact with foreign counterparts, guided by common interests and national identity, significantly influences the trajectory of the nation's political framework. Gaining a

comprehensive understanding of these intricate relationships is crucial for shaping policies that seek to foster stability and democratic progress not just inside the area but also on a broader scale.

In conclusion, depending on the inclination of the identity and the prevailing geopolitical context, a stable national identity can contribute to both authoritarianism and democracy. The consolidation of authoritarian rule in Belarus has been facilitated by a homogenous national identity that is deeply rooted in Soviet nostalgia and has strong connections to Russia. The regime has been able to legitimize its authority by leveraging a shared historical narrative, as the absence of a strong pro-Western identity has limited internal resistance to Russian influence. However, even in the face of division, a robust national identity can serve as a protective barrier against authoritarianism. Resistance to Russian influence and a desire for closer connections with the West have been fueled by the prevalence of a distinct Ukrainian identity, particularly in the western regions of Ukraine. This pro-Western stance has been crucial in the mobilization of civil society against authoritarian tendencies and the promotion of democratic reforms.

However, this relationship is not deterministic; it can create conditions that are conducive to authoritarianism when a stable identity is combined with close ties to Russia. The consolidation of authoritarian control in Belarus has unquestionably been facilitated by the close relationship with Russia. It is crucial to acknowledge, however, that this relationship is also influenced by strategic calculations and shared interests between the Russian and Belarusian administrations. In its geopolitical competition with the West, Russia obtains a loyal ally, while the Belarusian regime benefits from Russian economic and political support. In other words, the content

and orientation of a stable national identity can contribute to both authoritarianism and democracy. That is to say, the political trajectory of a nation can be significantly influenced by external actors; however, their impact is frequently mitigated or amplified by domestic factors, such as national identity. The political outcome is ultimately determined by the choices and actions of local actors, who use national identity tendencies to legitimize their actions and may be supported by external actors.



REFERENCES

- Abdelal, R. (2002). Memories of nations and states: Institutional history and national Identity in Post-Soviet Eurasia. *Nationalities Papers*, 30(3), 459–484. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0090599022000011714>
- Ambrosio, T. (2006). The political success of Russia-Belarus relations: Insulating Minsk from a Color Revolution. *Demokratizatsiya (Washington, D.C.)/Demokratizatsiya (Washington, D.C. Online)*, 14(3), 407–434. <https://doi.org/10.3200/demo.14.3.407-434>
- Ambrosio, T. (2007). Insulating Russia from a Colour Revolution: How the Kremlin resists regional democratic trends. *Democratization*, 14(2), 232–252. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510340701245736>
- Ambrosio, T. (2010). Constructing a framework of authoritarian diffusion: Concepts, dynamics, and future research. *International Studies Perspectives*, 11(4), 375–392. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1528-3585.2010.00411.x>
- Ambrosio, T. (2013). Authoritarian Belarus between Europe and Russia: Four scenarios. In *International Dimensions of Authoritarian Persistence* (pp. 193–217). Lexington Books.
- Ambrosio, T. (2016). *Authoritarian backlash: Russian resistance to democratization in the Former Soviet Union*. Routledge.
- Amnesty International. (2024). *The state of the World's human rights: April 2024*. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/7200/2024/en/>
- Balmaceda, M. M. (2014). *Living the high life in Minsk: Russian energy rents, domestic populism and Belarus' impending crisis*. Central European University Press.
- Beichelt, T. (2004). Autocracy and democracy in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine. *Democratization*, 11(5), 113–132. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510340412331304615>
- Beissinger, M. R. (2008). A new look at ethnicity and democratization. *Journal of Democracy*, 19(3), 85–97. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.0.0017>
- Bekus, N. (2010). *Struggle over Identity: The Official and the Alternative "Belarusianness."* <https://doi.org/10.7829/9789639776685bekus>
- Bernsand, N. (2001). Surzhyk and national identity in Ukrainian nationalist language ideology. *Berliner Osteuropa Info*, (17), 38–47. Retrieved from https://www.oei.fu-berlin.de/media/publikationen/boi/boi_17/11_bernsand.pdf

- Bloom, S., & Shulman, S. (2011). Interest versus Identity: Economic voting in Ukrainian Presidential Elections. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 27(4), 410–428. <https://doi.org/10.2747/1060-586x.27.4.410>
- Bogaards, M. (2009). How to classify hybrid regimes? Defective democracy and electoral authoritarianism. *Democratization*, 16(2), 399–423. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510340902777800>
- Bogdanov, A. (2020). Contested “Logic of Anarchy” in the post-Soviet space: The “Near Abroad” faces Russia’s power. *Problems of Post-communism*, 68(6), 487–497. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2020.1845211>
- Börzel, T. A. (2015). The noble west and the dirty rest? Western democracy promoters and illiberal regional powers. *Democratization*, 22(3), 519–535. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2014.1000312>
- Bunce, V. (2005). The national idea: Imperial Legacies and Post-Communist pathways in Eastern Europe. *Eastern European Politics and Societies/East European Politics and Societies*, 19(3), 406–442. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325405277963>
- Bunce, V., & Wolchik, S. L. (2009). Defeating dictators: electoral change and stability in competitive authoritarian regimes. *World Politics*, 62(1), 43–86. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0043887109990207>
- Cameron, D. R. (2007). Post-Communist democracy: the impact of the European Union. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 23(3), 185–217. <https://doi.org/10.2747/1060-586x.23.3.185>
- Cameron, D. R., & Orenstein, M. A. (2011). Post-Soviet authoritarianism: The impact of international actors and alliances. *APSA 2011 Annual Meeting Paper*.
- Cameron, D. R., & Orenstein, M. A. (2012). Post-Soviet authoritarianism: The influence of Russia in its “Near Abroad.” *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 28(1), 1–44. <https://doi.org/10.2747/1060-586x.28.1.1>
- D’Anieri, P. (2019). *Ukraine and Russia*. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108657044>
- Dąbrowski, M., Domínguez-Jiménez, M., & Zachmann, G. (2020). Six years after Ukraine’s Euromaidan: reforms and challenges ahead. *Bruegel Policy Contribution*, (14). Retrieved from <http://aei.pitt.edu/103259/>
- Dahl, R. A. (1982). *Dilemmas of pluralist democracy: Autonomy vs. control*. Yale University Press.
- Delcour, L., & Wolczuk, K. (2015). The EU’s unexpected ‘Ideal Neighbour’? The perplexing case of Armenia’s Europeanisation. *Journal of European Integration*, 37(4), 491–507. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2015.1004631>

- Dembińska, M., & Smith, D. (2021). Navigating in-between the EU and Russia. *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 62(3), 247–263. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2021.1932544>
- Diamond, L. (2002). Thinking about hybrid regimes. *Journal of Democracy*, 13(2), 21–35. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2002.0025>
- Dñabrowski, M., Domínguez-Jiménez, M., & Zachmann, G. (2020). Six years after Ukraine's Euromaidan: Reforms and challenges ahead. *Policy Contributions*. Retrieved from <https://publications.hse.ru/mirror/pubs/share/direct/412064166.pdf>
- Dragneva, R., & Wolczuk, K. (2013). Commitment, asymmetry and flexibility: Making sense of Eurasian economic integration. In *Edward Elgar Publishing eBooks*. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781782544760.00022>
- Fedor, J., Kangaspuro, M., Lassila, J., & Zhurzhenko, T. (2017). *War and Memory in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus*. Springer.
- Feklyunina, V. (2016). Soft power and identity: Russia, Ukraine and the 'Russian world(s)'. *European Journal of International Relations*, 22(4), 773–796. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066115601200>
- Fish, M. S. (1998). Democratization's requisites: The postcommunist experience. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 14(3), 212–247. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586x.1998.10641453>
- Frear, M. (2018). *Belarus under Lukashenka*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203737910>
- Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (2024) *Belarusian Identity In 2023: A Quantitative Study*. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/belarus/20889.pdf>
- Haesebrouck, T., & Taghon, S. (2022). Russia's invasion in Ukraine: What happened before? Retrieved from <https://biblio.ugent.be/publication/8751756>
- Haggard, S., & Kaufman, R. R. (2016). *Dictators and Democrats: Masses, elites, and regime change*. <https://muse.jhu.edu/chapter/1987899/pdf>
- Hale, H. E. (2017). Response to Lucan Way review of Patronal Politics: Eurasian Regime Dynamics in Comparative Perspective. *Perspectives on Politics*, 15(2), 582–583. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1537592717000615>
- Hancock, K. J. (2006). The semi-sovereign State: Belarus and the Russian Neo-Empire. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 2(2), 117–136. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1743-8594.2006.00023.x>

- Hentschel, G., & Taranenko, O. (2021). Bilingualism or tricolism: Ukrainian, Russian and “Suržyk” in Ukraine. Analysis and linguistic-geographical mapping. *Die Welt Der Slaven*, 66(2), 268–299.
<https://doi.org/10.13173/ws.66.2.268>
- Horváth, R. (2011). Putin’s ‘Preventive Counter-Revolution’: Post-Soviet Authoritarianism and the Spectre of Velvet Revolution. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 63(1), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2011.534299>
- House, F. (2013). *Freedom in the World 2013: The Annual Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- House, F. (2024). *Freedom in the World 2023: The Annual Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Ibadoghlu, G., & Sadigov, R. (2023). The economics of petro-authoritarianism: Post-soviet transitions and democratization. *Resources Policy*, 85, 103752.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resourpol.2023.103752>
- Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies. (2012). Ambivalent geopolitical choice. Retrieved May 1, 2024, from <http://www.iiseeps.org/?p=2874&lang=en>
- Institute of Sociology of NASU (2018). Українське суспільство: моніторинг соціальних змін [Ukrainian society: monitoring of social changes].
- Jonavičius, L. (2010). Structural Influence of External Factors on the Transformation of Post-soviet Regimes: Cases of Ukraine and Georgia. *Vilniaus Universitetas*. <https://epublications.vu.lt/object/elaba:1973681/1973681.pdf>
- Jünemann, A., & Knodt, M. (2007). Externe Demokratieförderung durch die Europäische Union European external democracy promotion. *Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG eBooks*.
<https://doi.org/10.5771/9783845204215>
- Kaczmarek M. & Wschodnich O. S. (2012). *The prospects for the EU-Ukraine free trade agreement - The DCFTA as an instrument of EU policy*. Policy Commons. <https://coilink.org/20.500.12592/f8bw5g>
- Kazharski, A. (2021). Belarus’ new political nation? 2020 anti-authoritarian protests as identity building. *New Perspectives*, 29(1), 69–79.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2336825x20984340>
- Kazharski, A., & Makarychev, A. (2021). Belarus, Russia, and the escape from geopolitics. *Political Geography*, 89, 102377.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2021.102377>

- Klarenberg, K. (2022). Anatomy of a coup - how CIA front laid foundations for Ukraine war. *Australian Socialist*, 28(2/3), 23–27.
<https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.818801620940997>
- Korolkova, Maria (2016) *Hromadske TV: A new kind of media, a new form of accountability*. Global Information Society Watch 2016: Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCRs) and the Internet. Association for Progressive Communications (APC) and Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (Hivos), pp. 242-245. ISBN 978-92-95102-69-9
- Kravchuk, R. S., & Chudowsky, V. (2005). Ukraine's 1994 elections as an economic event. *Communist and Post-communist Studies*, 38(2), 131–165.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2005.03.001>
- Kubiček, P. (2005). The European Union and democratization in Ukraine. *Communist and Post-communist Studies*, 38(2), 269–292.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2005.03.003>
- Kubicek, P. (2023). *The history of Ukraine*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA.
- Kuzio, T. (2010). Nationalism, identity and civil society in Ukraine: Understanding the Orange Revolution. *Communist and Post-communist Studies*, 43(3), 285–296. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2010.07.001>
- Kuzio, T. (2015). Competing nationalisms, Euromaidan, and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 15(1), 157–169.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/sena.12137>
- Kuzio, T. (2018). Russia–Ukraine crisis: the blame game, geopolitics and national identity. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 70(3), 462–473.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2018.1443643>
- Kuzio, T. (2022). Why Russia invaded Ukraine. *Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development*, 21, 40–51.
- Kuzio, T. (2024). Historical preparation and ideological legitimisation of the Russian invasion of Ukraine: a critical discourse. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2024.2310026>
- Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (2021). Ставлення населення України до Росії [The attitude of Ukraine's population toward Russia]. Retrieved from <http://kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukrampcat=reports&id=1015&page=1>
- Lebanidze, B. (2019). Direct external influence: Elections in the post-Soviet states. In *Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft* (pp. 191–245).
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-26446-8_9
- Leshchenko, S. (2014). The Maidan and beyond: The media's role. *Journal of Democracy*, 25(3), 52-57.

- Levitsky, S., & Way, L. A. (2002). The rise of competitive authoritarianism. *Journal of Democracy*, 13(2), 51–65. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2002.0026>
- Levitsky, S., & Way, L. A. (2006). Linkage versus leverage. Rethinking the international dimension of regime Change. *Comparative Politics*, 38(4), 379. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20434008>
- Levitsky, S., & Way, L. A. (2010). *Competitive authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War*. Cambridge University Press.
- Levitsky, S., & Way, L. A. (2023). Democracy's surprising resilience. *Journal of Democracy*, 34(4), 5–20. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2023.a907684>
- Libman, A., & Obydenkova, A. (2018). Understanding authoritarian regionalism. *Journal of Democracy*, 29(4), 151–165. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2018.0070>
- Lindberg, S. (2006). *Democracy and elections in Africa*. JHU Press.
- Linz, J. J., & Stepan, A. (1996). *Problems of democratic transition and consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*. JHU Press.
- Lipset, S. M. (1963). *Political man: The Social Bases of Politics*.
- Magaloni, B. (2006). *Voting for autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and its Demise in Mexico*. Cambridge University Press.
- Manaev, O. (2015). Peculiarities of Belarusian authoritarianism and its influence on the regime dynamics in Russia and Ukraine. *Acta Slavica Iaponica*, 35(35), 55–86. Retrieved from https://eprints.lib.hokudai.ac.jp/dspace/bitstream/2115/60016/1/ASI35_003.pdf
- Marples, D. R. (1996). *Belarus: From Soviet Rule to Nuclear Catastrophe*. Springer.
- Marples, D. R. (1999). *Belarus, a denationalized nation*.
- Marples, D. R. (2003). History and politics in post-Soviet Belarus. In *Contemporary Belarus* (pp. 21–35). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203220399-7>
- Marples, D. R. (2005). Europe's last dictatorship: The roots and perspectives of authoritarianism in 'White Russia.' *Europe-Asia Studies*, 57(6), 895–908. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1080/09668130500199509>
- Marples, D. R. (2008). The failed revolution: reflections on the 2006 elections in Belarus. In *Europe's Last Frontier?* (pp. 175–194). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-10170-9_10

- Mattes, M., & Rodríguez, M. (2014). Autocracies and international cooperation. *International Studies Quarterly*, 58(3), 527–538.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/isqu.12107>
- McFaul, M. (2007). Ukraine imports democracy: External influences on the Orange Revolution. *International Security*, 32(2), 45–83.
<https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.2007.32.2.45>
- Menon, R., & Rumer, E. B. (2015). *Conflict in Ukraine: the unwinding of the post-Cold War Order*. MIT Press.
- Merkel, W., & Weiffen, B. (2012). Does heterogeneity hinder democracy? *Comparative Sociology*, 11(3), 387–421.
<https://doi.org/10.1163/156913312x638606>
- Nalbandov, R. (2014, June). *Democratization and instability in Ukraine, Georgia, and Belarus*. <https://doi.org/10.21236/ada603628>
- Nitoiu, C. (2018). The influence of external actors on foreign policy in the Post-Soviet space. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 70(5), 685–691.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2018.1480924>
- O'Donnell, G. (1998). Horizontal accountability in new democracies. *Journal of Democracy*, 9(3), 112–126. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.1998.0051>
- Obydenkova, A., & Libman, A. (2012). The impact of external factors on regime transition: lessons from the Russian regions. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 28(3), 346–401. <https://doi.org/10.2747/1060-586x.28.3.346>
- Obydenkova, A., & Libman, A. (2016). *Autocratic and democratic external influences in Post-Soviet Eurasia*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315568492>
- Oliinyk, A. F., & Kuzio, T. (2021). The Euromaidan Revolution, reforms and decommunisation in Ukraine. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 73(5), 807–836.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2020.1862060>
- Onuch, O., & Hale, H. E. (2018). Capturing ethnicity: The case of Ukraine. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 34(2–3), 84–106.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586x.2018.1452247>
- Oskarsson, S., & Ottosen, E. (2010). Does oil still hinder democracy? *The Journal of Development Studies*, 46(6), 1067–1083.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00220380903151058>
- Pew Research Center. (2017). Религия и национальная принадлежность в Центральной и Восточной Европе. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2017/05/CEUPOverview-Russian-FOR-WEB.pdf>

- Pirie, P. S. (1996). National identity and politics in Southern and Eastern Ukraine. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 48(7), 1079–1104.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09668139608412401>
- Pisareva, D. (2016). *Russian-Ukrainian crisis, national identity and democratic consolidation in Ukraine* (MA thesis). University of Helsinki.
- Plokhyy, S. (2015). *The last empire: The final days of the Soviet Union*. Simon and Schuster.
- Pop-Eleches, G. (2014). Communist development and the postcommunist democratic deficit. In *Historical Legacies of Communism in Russia and Eastern Europe*, eds. Mark Beissinger and Stephen Kotkin (pp. 28–51).
<https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9781107286191.002>
- Pop-Eleches, G., & Tucker, J. A. (2012). Associated with the past? *Eastern European Politics and Societies/East European Politics and Societies*, 27(1), 45–68. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325412465087>
- Rating Sociological Group (2019). Attitudes of Ukrainians towards world leaders. Retrieved from
http://ratinggroup.ua/en/research/ukraine/dinamika_otnosheniya_ukraincev_k_miro_vym_lideram.html
- Riabchuk, M. (2008). Cultural fault lines and political divisions. In *Contemporary Ukraine on the cultural map of Europe*. Routledge.
- Riabchuk, M. (2023). Invented ‘Europeanness’ versus residual slavophilia: Ukraine as an Ideological battlefield. In *Pan-Slavism and Slavophilia in Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe* (pp. 231–257).
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-17875-7_12
- Rice, C. (2005). Russia’s future linked to democracy. *Interview With J. Dougherty*. 20 April, Moscow.
- Ross, M. L. (2001). Does oil hinder democracy? *World Politics*, 53(3), 325–361.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/wp.2001.0011>
- Rudkouski, P. (2021). Russia’s cultural leverage in Belarus. *New Perspectives*, 29(1), 102–108. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2336825x20984331>
- Rudling, P. A. (2008). Belarus in the Lukashenka era: National identity and relations with Russia. In *Europe’s Last Frontier?* (pp. 55–77).
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-10170-9_4
- Rudling, P. A. (2015). The beginnings of modern Belarus: identity, nation, and politics in a European borderland. *The Journal of Byelorussian Studies*, 7(3), 115–127. <https://doi.org/10.30965/20526512-00703008>

- Russell, M., & Przetacznik, J. (2021). EU-Belarus relations: State of play - human rights situation. *EPRS: European Parliamentary Research Service. Belgium*. Retrieved April 23, 2024, from <https://www.europarl.europa.eu>
- Sasse, G. (2013). Linkages and the promotion of democracy: the EU's eastern neighbourhood. *Democratization*, 20(4), 553–591. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2012.659014>
- Schedler, A. (2002). Elections Without Democracy: The Menu of Manipulation. *Journal of Democracy* 13(2), 36–50. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jod.2002.0031>.
- Schedler, A. (2006). *Electoral authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition*. L. Rienner Publishers.
- Schimmelfennig, F., & Sedelmeier, U. (2005). *The europeanization of Central and Eastern Europe*. Cornell University Press.
- Schmitter, P. C., & Karl, T. L. (1991). What Democracy Is. . . and Is Not. *Journal of Democracy*, 2(3), 75–88. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.1991.0033>
- Schmotz, A., & Tansey, O. (2017). Regional autocratic linkage and regime survival. *European Journal of Political Research*, 57(3), 662–686. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12243>
- Schumpeter, J. A. (1942). *Capitalism, socialism and democracy*. Harper & Brothers.
- Shraibman, A. (2018). Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, & Carnegie Moscow Center. *House That Lukashenko Built: The Foundation, Evolution, and Future of the Belarusian Regime*.
- Shraibman, A. (2022). We can't expect a dramatic change in Belarus until changes come in Russia. *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review*, 41, 10–14.
- Shulga, O. (2014). *Кінець вакууму легітимних цінностей в українському суспільстві? Українське суспільство: моніторинг соціальних змін*. http://nbuv.gov.ua/UJRN/ukrsoc_2014_1%281%29__14
- Shulman, S. (2005). National identity and public support for political and economic reform in Ukraine. *Slavic Review*, 64(1), 59–87. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3650067>
- Shushkevich, S. (2002). *Неокоммунизм в Беларуси: идеология, практика, перспективы*. Smolensk, Russian Federation: Skif.
- Shykhutsina, V. (2023). Unlocking the puzzle of authoritarian persistence in Belarus: The role of the EU and Russia. *IPE Working Papers*, (218/2023).

- Solchanyk, R. (1995). Ukraine: the Politics of Reform. *Problems of Post-communism*, 42(6), 46–51. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.1995.11655649>
- Stepanenko, V. (2006). How Ukrainians view their Orange Revolution: Public opinion and the national peculiarities of citizenry political activities. *Demokratizatsiya the Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, 13(4), 595–616.
- Subtelny, O. (1988). *Ukraine: a History*. Retrieved from <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA07528591>
- Suny, R. G. (1993). The revenge of the past. *Stanford University Press eBooks*. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780804779265>
- Tansey, O. (2015). The problem with autocracy promotion. *Democratization*, 23(1), 141–163. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2015.1095736>
- Tansey, O. (2016). *International politics of authoritarian rule*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199683628.001.0001>
- Tansey, O., Koehler, K., & Schmotz, A. (2016). Ties to the rest: autocratic linkages and regime survival. *Comparative Political Studies*, 50(9), 1221–1254. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414016666859>
- Terzyan, A. (2019, December). *Explaining Post-Soviet authoritarianism in Belarus: Sources and perspectives*. <https://doi.org/10.47669/ihprd-2-2019>
- Tolstrup, J. (2013). When can external actors influence democratization? Leverage, linkages, and gatekeeper elites. *Democratization*, 20(4), 716–742. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2012.666066>
- Tolstrup, J. (2014a). Black knights and elections in authoritarian regimes: Why and how Russia supports authoritarian incumbents in post-Soviet states. *European Journal of Political Research*, 54(4), 673–690. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12079>
- Tolstrup, J. (2014b). Gatekeepers and linkages. *Journal of Democracy*, 25(4), 126–138. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2014.0076>
- Tsygankov, A. (2015). Vladimir Putin's last stand: The sources of Russia's Ukraine policy. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 31(4), 279–303. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586x.2015.1005903>
- Tsygankov, A. P. (2006). If not by tanks, then by banks? The role of soft power in Putin's foreign policy. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 58(7), 1079–1099. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668130600926355>

- Tungul, L., Hlaváček, P., Soušková, T., & Ženíšek, M. (2022). Democratisation in EU foreign policy: the cases of Belarus, Turkey and Ukraine. *European View*, 21(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/17816858221087509>
- Turchyn, Y., Sukhorolskyi, P., & Sukhorolska, I. (2020). Marking time on the way to democracy in Ukraine: A causal layered analysis. *New Perspectives*, 28(2), 150–178. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2336825x20911287>
- Valenza, D. (2022). Russia's cultural diplomacy in post-Soviet space: The making of "one people." *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 64(4), 399–430. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2022.2025880>
- Von Soest, C. (2015). Democracy prevention: The international collaboration of authoritarian regimes. *European Journal of Political Research*, 54(4), 623–638. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12100>
- Way, L. A. (2004). The sources and dynamics of competitive authoritarianism in Ukraine. *The Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 20(1), 143–161. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523270410001687145>
- Way, L. A. (2005a). Authoritarian state building and the sources of regime competitiveness in the fourth wave: the cases of Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine. *World Politics*, 57(2), 231–261. <https://doi.org/10.1353/wp.2005.0018>
- Way, L. A. (2005b). Kuchma's failed authoritarianism. *Journal of Democracy*, 16(2), 131–145. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2005.0037>
- Way, L. A. (2015). The limits of autocracy promotion: The case of Russia in the 'near abroad.' *European Journal of Political Research*, 54(4), 691–706. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12092>
- Way, L. A. (2019). Ukraine's Post-Maidan Struggles: II. Free speech in a time of War. *Journal of Democracy*, 30(3), 48–60. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2019.0041>
- Way, L. A., & Casey, A. (2018). The structural sources of postcommunist regime trajectories. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 34(5), 317–332. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586x.2018.1494959>
- Way, L. A., & Levitsky, S. (2007). Linkage, leverage, and the Post-Communist divide. *Eastern European Politics and Societies/East European Politics and Societies*, 21(1), 48–66. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325406297134>
- Way, L. A., & Tolvin, A. (2023). Why the 2020 Belarusian Protests Failed to Oust Lukashenka. *Nationalities Papers*, 51(4), 787–802. <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2023.6>

- Wendt, A. (1999). *Social Theory of international politics*.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511612183>
- White, S. (2010). Soviet nostalgia and Russian politics. *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 1(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.euras.2009.11.003>
- White, S., & Korosteleva, E. (2005). Lukashenko and the postcommunist presidency. In *Postcommunist Belarus*.
- White, S., Biletskaya, T., & McAllister, I. (2014). Belarusians between East and West. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 32(1), 1–27.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586x.2014.986872>
- White, S., McAllister, I., & Feklyunina, V. (2010). Belarus, Ukraine and Russia: east or west? *British Journal of Politics and International Relations/British Journal of Politics & International Relations*, 12(3), 344–367.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-856x.2010.00410.x>
- Wilson, A. (1997). *Ukrainian nationalism in the 1990s: A Minority Faith*. Cambridge University Press.
- Wilson, A. (2015). *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation*. Yale University Press.
- Wilson, A. (2021). *Belarus: The Last European Dictatorship*. Yale University Press.
- Wolczuk, K. (2000). History, Europe and the “National Idea”: the “Official” narrative of national identity in Ukraine. *Nationalities Papers*, 28(4), 671–694. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905990020009674>
- Yakouchyk, K. (2015). The good, the bad, and the ambitious: Democracy and autocracy promoters competing in Belarus. *European Political Science Review*, 8(2), 195–224. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1755773914000459>
- Zolkina, M. (2013). *European Integration of Ukraine: Experience of yesterday for development of tomorrow*. Informational & Analytical Bulletin. Public Opinion.