# CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Overview

Many contemporary autocracies display all the institutional trappings of democracy—parties, legislatures, elections, and courts—but these institutions often fail to serve as mechanisms of representation and accountability. Under dictatorship, institutions of majority rule can become institutions of authoritarian rule. In fact, many authoritarian regimes fail to democratize, at least in part, because their leaders appropriate nominally democratic institutions and use them to entrench their rule. Elections provide dictators with much-needed information about opponents and allies. Legislatures provide forums for cooptation. Pliant courts legitimate arbitrary political decisions.

But the nominally democratic institution that many autocrats find most useful is the political party. In many non-democracies, regime leaders share power with a ruling party, which can help generate popular support and reduce conflict among key elites. Such ruling parties are often called dominant parties. In other authoritarian regimes, leaders prefer to rule solely through some combination of charisma, patronage, and coercion, rather than sharing power with a dominant party. This book explains why dominant parties emerge in some non-democratic regimes, but not in others.

Regimes that rule with the aid of a dominant party are now the most common type of authoritarian polity. As Figure 1.1 shows, they have existed consistently in about half of all non-democracies since 1946.

[Figure 1.1 Here]

The *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) in Mexico, United Malays National Organization (UMNO) in Malaysia, the National Democratic Party (NDP) in Egypt, the National Resistance Movement (NRM) in Uganda, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in Nigeria, and United Russia in Russia are just a few of the 128 dominant parties that have existed since 1946 in 96 countries.

Yet, the puzzling thing about dominant parties is not their prevalence but rather their nonexistence in so many non-democracies. After all, dominant parties are institutions—bundles of rules and norms—that reduce elite conflict by institutionalizing the distribution of careers and spoils among elites. In regimes with dominant parties, the distribution of spoils is determined, at least in part, by regularized norms and procedures embedded within the party. If party cadres remain loyal and serve the party, they have good reason to believe that they will continue to share in the benefits of office. This gives party cadres a vested interest in the regime. Indeed, many political scientists believe that dominant parties extend the lifespan of authoritarian regimes (Geddes 1999, Brownlee 2007, Magaloni 2008, Levitsky and Way 2010, Svolik 2012). And yet, in just over half of all authoritarian regimes—in settings as diverse as Libya under Muamar Gadaffi, Belarus under Aleksandr Lukashenko, Brazil under Getulio Vargas, and Ukraine under Leonid Kuchma—regime leaders fail to construct dominant parties. If dominant parties fortify authoritarian rule, why do many leaders eschew building them? Why do dominant parties emerge in some non-democracies, but not in others?

Dominant party formation is often stymied by a series of commitment problems between leaders and elites. In non-democracies, leaders—i.e. dictators, presidents, prime-ministers, juntas, and the like—would like to keep important elites loyal. Such elites may include powerful regional governors, caciques, warlords, strongmen, nobles, chiefs, bosses, landlords, or the

directors of economic enterprises, among others. Leaders could achieve this goal by promising elites some share of the spoils from governing, but leaders have no way to make those promises credible. Leaders may announce that they will promote certain cadres or give elites special privileges, but dictatorships lack third-party institutions that can enforce these promises. Without a constraint on the arbitrary authority of dictators, elites can never be certain that leaders will not abuse them.

Elites face a similar commitment problem vis-à-vis leaders. Elites want to gain dependable access to spoils and career advancement. Leaders might be persuaded to give them these things if elites pledged their loyalty to the regime, but elites have no way of making this pledge credible. Elites may promise to support the regime's policy initiatives, mobilize votes for the regime, or quell social protest, but without a third party institution that can monitor and enforce these commitments to the regime, leaders can never be sure that elites will remain loyal.

Mutual investment in a dominant party, with its institutional mechanisms for governing the distribution of spoils and monitoring behavior, could help ameliorate these commitment problems. But it is only part of the explanation for why dominant parties emerge, because it still does not explain why actors would chose to solve their commitment problem with a dominant party institution in some settings, but not in others. After all, these commitment problems are ubiquitous, but dominant parties are not.

To explain why dominant parties emerge in some settings but not others, I focus on how the relative balance of political resources between leaders and elites affects each side's incentives to cooperate with the other and invest in an institutional solution to the commitment problem. When leaders are very strong in resources—relative to elites—their incentives to seek the cooperation of elites are diminished and they are tempted defect from any bargain with elites

that would limit their freedom of maneuver. On the other hand, if elites are strong in autonomous resources-—relative to leaders—they may be able to achieve their political goals on their own, and they will have strong incentives to defect from any agreement that would require them to relinquish their own autonomy. *Thus, dominant parties are most likely when elites hold enough independent political resources that leaders need to coopt them, but not so many autonomous resources that they themselves are reluctant to commit to any dominant party project.*

Much of the book examines this argument and its implications in the context of post-Soviet Russia. In a span of just over twenty years, post-Soviet Russia has witnessed the failure of two ruling party projects and the emergence of a dominant party. In the 1990s, Russia's powerful regional elites—in particular, governors—eschewed any real commitments to the various pro-presidential parties of the time, preferring instead to focus on the cultivation of their own political machines and clientelist networks. In turn, apparently fearing the costs of supporting a party that could not be sustained, President Boris Yeltsin undermined his own pro-presidential parties.

By contrast, in the early 2000s rising oil revenues, sustained economic growth, and the attendant popularity of Yeltsin's successor, Vladimir Putin, changed the balance of power between the Kremlin and regional elites. This readjustment in the balance of resources gave elites more incentive to cooperate with the Kremlin than they had in the 1990s. And yet, regional elites were still strong enough that the Kremlin would need to coopt them if it wanted to win elections, pass legislation, maintain social quiescence, and govern cost-effectively. After all, the political machines that elites had built in the first decade of post-communism still provided them with ample levers of influence over other elites and society. Because the Kremlin needed

to coopt these elites and elites were no longer so strong that they would necessarily be unfaithful partners, Putin could feel comfortable investing his own resources in a dominant party that could be used to coopt them. In turn, the signals of commitment sent by the Kremlin emboldened elites to make their own commitments. This dynamic led both sides to invest their resources in a dominant party, United Russia.

Through an analysis of United Russia's rise, this book tells the story of how the current regime in Russia was built. It addresses questions such as why elites affiliate with the regime, what keeps elites loyal and how the regime wins elections. I argue that United Russia has been an important, and often overlooked, pillar of regime stability. And by demonstrating the party's institutional role in perpetuating the regime, this study demonstrates some of the limits of personalism in contemporary Russia. In turn, by identifying the conditions that lead to the creation of such dominant parties this book enriches our understanding of why some countries transition to democracy, but others do not.

**1.2 What are Dominant Parties?**

A dominant party is a political institution that has a leading role in determining access to many important political offices, shares powers over policymaking and patronage distribution, and uses privileged access to state resources to maintain its position in power. Indeed, during elections dominant parties exploit state resources to such an egregious extent that one cannot speak of free and fair political competition. This distinguishes these regimes from democracies in which one party governs for long periods of time—such as Japan under the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), Italy under the Christian Democrats, or Sweden under the Social Democrats—regimes

that Pempel (1990) calls 'uncommon' democracies. Thus, dominant parties are institutions that exist in *non-democratic* regimes.

Of course, long-lived governing parties in democracies often bolster their position with patronage distributed via clientelist linkage mechanisms (cf Scheiner 2006). Indeed, the disbursement of state resources in order to forestall alternation in office places these regimes in a true 'gray area' between democracy and authoritarianism. The list of states that complicate the efforts to code regime type is full of such one-party dominant anomalies: Botswana under the Botswanan Democratic Party (BDP), South Africa under the African National Congress (ANC), Namibia under the Southwest Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), India under Congress, and Guyana under the People's National Congress (PNC) are only a few. The best one can do in discriminating between one-party dominant democracies and dominant party regimes is to assess the degree to which state resources are used to create an unbalanced playing field in elections. In well-known dominant party regimes the state places severe constraints on the ability of opposition parties to challenge the dominant party. Opponents may be jailed or repressed. Electoral fraud may be employed. State-controlled media determine the type of information that voters receive. State resources (contracts, subsidies, favors, and the like) are illegally deployed to favor incumbent politicians.

Dominant parties serve as institutions that organize political exchange among elites. The dominant party also regularizes the flow of patronage, careers, and spoils that runs from leaders to elites. Importantly, dominant party institutions ensure that these goods are distributed in a regularized fashion that is, at least to some degree, determined by norms or rules. Party loyalty is, more often than not, dependably rewarded with career advancement. A classic example of this can be found in the world's communist regimes, where career advancement was determined

by the nomenklatura system in which prospective candidates to political office were ranked according to seniority, qualifications, and ideology (Harasmyiw 1984). In personalist regimes, by contrast, dictators are not constrained by any rules or norms embedded within party institutions; rather, spoils and careers are distributed arbitrarily at the behest of the leader.

Dominant parties serve as forums where leaders can broker policy compromises with prominent elites and the opposition (Gandhi 2008). As institutions with some control over policy, dominant parties can promise influence over the national agenda. For example, Brownlee (2007, 130-137) describes how elite conflict in Mubarak-era Egypt was mitigated because the ruling NDP could credibly promise policy access to potential defectors. In 2000, when prominent business leaders led by President Hosni Mubarak's own son, Gemal, threatened to start their own party, the NDP placated them with plum positions in parliament. While rewarding a group of upstarts left party stalwarts dissatisfied, the party successfully ameliorated potential conflict by informally increasing the number candidates that would be elected to parliament with regime support.

Dominant parties also help the regime generate political support in society. As the site of coordination for many important elites, dominant parties bring together power-holders and opinion leaders with the resources necessary to drum up support for the regime, whether at the ballot box or on the streets. Elites lend the party the use of their organizations, political machines, clientelist networks, economic leverage, and/or traditional authority. In electoral authoritarian regimes, a primary function of the dominant party is to coordinate the resources of elites towards the goal of winning elections.

In such regimes, dominant parties also help serve the vital function of coordinating expectations on the part of voters and candidates. Much of the literature on electoral coordination failures under authoritarianism focuses on the opposition; when two or more opposition candidates with similar political positions run against one another, they risk dividing the anti-regime vote and losing a contest that they might have won had they remained united.

Authoritarian incumbents also confront such problems and must ensure that pro-regime candidates do not compete and risk dividing the pro-regime vote. In Russia's 1993 and 1995 parliamentary elections, pro-regime candidates from competing pro-presidential parties often divided the vote between them opening space for Communist candidates to win in districts that they would not otherwise win. Dominant parties solve such coordination problems by coordinating elite and voter expectations about which pro-regime candidate or party will receive state support.

This definition of dominant party does not require that the party oversee an all-encompassing party-state, in which all, or even most, political decisions are made collectively by the party. Such an ideal type is approximated by few if any dominant parties in world history. Dominant parties exert some modicum of institutional influence. The extent of their institutional influence is a matter of degree, such that some parties exhibit more institutional control over policy, patronage, and careers than others. In Chapter 2 of this book, I discuss in greater detail the ways that dominant parties exert institutional control over these spheres, and, in Chapter 5, I discuss the extent of United Russia's role in Russian politics.

Nor does this definition require that dominant parties persist in power for long periods of time (Greene 2010). While institutional strength and duration may often be correlated, strong dominant parties may be short-lived for reasons that are unrelated to their organizational capacity, just as weak dominant parties may be long-lived for reasons that are unrelated to their institutional capacity. After all, the factors that lead to the formation of dominant parties may not be the same as the factors that cause their failure. Party strength and party duration are different concepts. Moreover, even if duration were a perfect indicator of dominant party strength, selecting a long duration criterion for defining dominance effectively truncates the dependent variable, preventing the analyst from utilizing (or analyzing) variation in the duration of one-party dominance. Studies that posit a link between authoritarian regime survival and the

presence of dominant parties should not make party duration a criterion for identifying dominant parties. If they do, their models will be biased in favor of finding that dominant party regimes are more durable. All this is not to mention the fact that such a rule would disallow analysis of dominant parties that have emerged recently.

To be sure, many of the world's most prominent dominant parties have been long-lived. In Central America, the PRI ruled Mexico from 1929 to 2000. In South America, the Colorado Party helped Alfredo Stroessner govern Paraguay from 1954 until his death in 1989. In East Asia, the KMT led Taiwan from the state's inception in 1947 until 2000. In the Middle East, the Ba'ath party has ruled Syria since 1963, much of that time in conjunction with the Assad political dynasty. In Africa, the Kenya African National Union ruled Kenya from independence in 1963 until the defeat of its candidate, Uhuru Kenyatta, in the 2002 presidential elections. One quarter of all the world's dominant parties survived in power for more than 28 years.

At the same time, just under 24% persisted for fewer than ten years including: the Democratic Party (DP) in Turkey, which ruled that country from 1950 until it was dislodged by a coup in 1960; the Citizens Union of Georgia (CUG), which served as President Eduard Shevardnadze's ruling party from 1995 until 2003 when it collapsed amidst massive elite defections; and the Socialist Party of Yugoslavia which served as Slobodan Milosevic's electoral vehicle until he was dislodged amidst anti-regime protests in 2000. As of 2006, there were 22 dominant parties in existence that emerged after 1990. Examples of recently emerged dominant parties include the PDP in Nigeria (1999), the Rwandan Patriotic Front (FPR) (2003), and Fatherland (Nur-OTAN) in Kazakhstan (1999).[1] Figure 1.2 shows the distribution of dominant parties in the world as of 2006.

[1] All facts and figures on dominant parties in this chapter are derived from an original operationalization of dominant parties that is discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

[Figure 1.2 Here]

The dominant party concept, as I have described it here, subsumes what scholars call hegemonic parties (e.g. Sartori 1976, Magaloni 2006, Reuter and Gandhi 2011). Hegemonic party regimes are regimes in which a dominant party competes in elections against opposition parties. Historically, 53% of the dominant parties existing in any given year have been hegemonic parties. Hegemonic parties have been key institutions in some of the 20th century's most prominent authoritarian regimes. In Latin America, the world's most studied hegemonic party, Mexico's PRI, won regular, semi-competitive elections for almost 70 years (Magaloni 2006, Greene 2007). In North Africa, the NDP helped Egypt's presidents win elections for nearly four decades (Blaydes 2010). In Southeast Asia, the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) has dominated Malaysia's multiparty parliamentary elections since independence in 1957.

More recent examples can be found across the world as well. In Africa, the Ethiopian People's Democratic Revolutionary Front (EPRDF) has won elections for Ethiopia's ruling elite since 1995 and facilitated the transfer of power to Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegnhas after the death of long-serving prime minister Menes Zelawi in 2012. In the Middle East, Yemen's presidents have relied, until recently, upon the General People's Congress (GPC) to help them win elections and manage elite conflict since unification in 1990. In Southeast Asia, Cambodia's former Communist party reformed itself into the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) and has handily won all elections in that country since 1998. In post-communist Europe,

Russian presidents Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev have depended on the United Russia (2001-) party to help manage relations with elites. These are just a few of the 37 hegemonic parties existing in the world as of 2006. This represents 84% of the world's dominant parties.

The dominant party concept also subsumes what some call single parties: ruling parties in regimes that only allow one party to exist and/or compete in elections. Such parties are now rare. As of 2006, only six single party regimes existed in the world—the Communist Parties in Laos, Cuba, North Korea, China, Vietnam, and the Democratic Party in Turkmenistan—and since 1980, only one new single party regime has emerged in the entire world (the Democratic Party in Turkmenistan after the fall of the Soviet Union). Well-known historical examples single-party regimes include: KANU in Kenya which barred all opposition parties from 1969 until 1992; the National Liberation Front (FLN) in Algeria from 1962-1991; and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), which ruled that country from 1917 until 1991.

Figure 1.3 lays out the terms and classifications used in the book.

[Figure 1.3 Here]

I use the term 'ruling party,' somewhat loosely, to refer to the largest pro-regime party in an autocracy, dominant or otherwise. Thus, in my terminology, all dominant parties are ruling parties, but not all ruling parties are dominant. There are, of course, many authoritarian regimes without any ruling party. Saudi Arabia since independence, Chile under Augusto Pinochet, and Myanmmar under the military junta are examples of regimes without any sort of ruling party. In many electoral authoritarian regimes, meanwhile, regime leaders support multiple or weak regime parties that never become dominant—e.g. Ukraine under Kuchma, Uzbekistan under

Karimov, Pakistan under Musharraf, or Morocco since 1977. By examining the conditions under which dominant parties emerge, this book also seeks to understand why dominant parties do *not* emerge, both in regimes without any ruling party and in regimes that support non-dominant, pro-regime parties.

### 1.3 Authoritarian Survival and the Puzzle of Dominant Party Formation

Dominant party regimes defy popular stereotypes of authoritarian regimes as highly personalized political systems. In contrast to personalist dicatorships, where all political decisions are subject to the arbitrary will of a single despot, dominant party regimes are characterized by the presence of party institutions that regulate certain types of political exchange. The first scholarship on dominant party regimes in political science described how these party institutions operated in equilibrium. Scholars of communist systems, to take but one world region, devoted enormous energy to understanding the workings of these parties. Through the *nomenklatura* system, communist parties routinized political recruitment and advancement (on the Soviet Union, Hough 1969, Harasmyiw 1984, Daniels 1976; on China, Barnett 1968, Schurmann 1968, Burns 1989). Volumes of literature examined the communist party's other roles in mobilizing ideological support, (Hough 1969, Remington 1988), socialization (e.g. White 1979), interest articulation (Hill and Frank 1981), and patronage distribution (e.g. Urban 1989). The party's central role in formulating and implementing policy, internal party decision-making processes, and the operative tenets of democratic centralism were also fleshed out in detail (e.g. Hough and Fainsod 1979).

Though less in number, some works also detailed the workings of dominant parties in developing countries. Smith (1979) described how elections served to facilitate elite circulation in the PRI in Mexico. Others detailed the important role the PRI played in monitoring patronage

exchanges (Ames 1970). Zolberg (1966) highlighted the role that West African dominant parties played in mobilizing support for incumbents, coordinating voters, and facilitating inter-ethnic alliances. Party cooptation was also explored. Bienen (1967) outlined how the Tanganyikia African National Union (TANU) in Tanzania incorporated labor unions and business elites into its structures, buying off their support with institutionalized political privilege.

Much of this early literature on dominant parties, though rich in detail and immensely valuable for the amount of factual knowledge it generated, failed to develop a comparative, theoretical perspective on dominant party rule. In other words, early scholarship failed to transform observations about what dominant parties did into theories about why dominant parties did them. The lack of comparative perspective prevented scholars from pinpointing when and where such parties might flourish (see Kalyvas 1999)

Recognizing this lacuna, political scientists have recently begun the task of constructing testable theories about dominant party rule. Much of this work has been, implicitly or explicitly, situated within the theoretical framework that political scientists call neo-institutionalism—a school of thought which argues that institutions have effects on the behavior of actors. Scholars have argued persuasively that dominant party institutions entrench authoritarian rule by ensuring elite cohesion. (Geddes 1999, Brownlee 2007, Magaloni 2008,Levitsky and Way 2010 Svolik 2012). Party cadres in dominant party regimes are "anchored in an institutional setting that generates political power and long-term security…"(Brownlee 2007, 33). Dominant parties reward loyal elites with spoils—policy influence, career advancement, or rents—in an institutionalized, rule-governed fashion. In dominant parties, senior cadres are retired and younger cadres are promoted through the ranks in a regularized manner (Reuter and Turovsky 2014, Svolik 2012). Party cadres have a vested interest in remaining loyal to the regime

because norms and rules embedded within the party generate reasonable expectations that loyalty will be rewarded with spoils and career advancement in the future.

By contrast, elites in regimes without such institutionalized means of spoil distribution have no credible guarantees that they will receive access to spoils in the future. This reduces their time horizons and gives them more incentive to challenge the leader for control of spoils. Since elite defections are known to be one of the primary drivers of authoritarian breakdown (Haggard and Kauffman 1996, Reuter and Gandhi 2011), and dominant parties ensure elite cohesion, dominant parties are said to extend the lifespan of authoritarian rule.

These arguments are backed by an impressive array of empirical findings. Using slightly different measures, both Geddes (1999) and Svolik (2012) find evidence that dominant party regimes are more durable than forms of authoritarian regimes. Gandhi and Przeworski (2007) show that autocrats who govern in the presence of partisan legislatures survive longer than those without such institutions.[2]

Qualitative studies come to similar conclusions. In an in-depth analysis of divergent democratization outcomes in four cases, Brownlee (2007) finds that strong ruling parties successfully mitigated elite dissention in Malaysia and Egypt, while weak party institutions contributed to factionalism in the Philippines and Iran. And, in a wide-ranging study of regime trajectories in 35 competitive authoritarian settings, Levitsky and Way (2011) find an association between robust authoritarianism and the presence of strong ruling parties.

These findings help explain the puzzle of why an autocrat might consider creating a parallel dominant party institution that constrains his arbitrary will. Leaders have an interest in creating dominant parties because these institutions generate elite cohesion and facilitate

[2] For a dissenting perspective see Wright and Escriba Folch (2012).

cooptation. Once a dominant party is established the dictator refrains from disrupting the regularized distribution of spoils to party elites, because such an infringement would lead to elite defections that could bring down the regime. Yet this begs a crucial question when viewed in light of the substantial variation in the formation of dominant parties. Namely, if dominant parties are known to entrench authoritarian rule, then why do so many authoritarian leaders eschew building them? More than half of authoritarian regimes do not feature dominant parties. Given that dominant parties can limit elite defections and stabilize the regime, why would power-maximizing leaders refrain from building such a party? The remainder of this book attempts to solve this puzzle.

### 1.4 Alternative Explanations of Dominant Party Emergence

The most prominent theories of dominant party rule focus not on the origins of dominant parties but on the conditions that lead to their collapse. Some attribute dominant party survival to the monopoly on state resources that dominant parties enjoy (Greene 2007, 2010). Whether it is via patronage, unequal access to state-controlled media, or state resources available for campaigning and communicating with voters, dominant parties use their special advantages to marginalize opposition parties. When privatization removes patronage opportunities from the hands of incumbents, dominant parties lose their resource advantage and are prone to collapse (Greene 2007, 2010). Brownlee (2007) argues that long-lived dominant parties are those where elite factionalism is decisively put to bed within the confines of the dominant party. In an influential study of the PRI hegemony in Mexico, Magaloni (2006) offers an account of party

dominance that rests on three pillars: elite unity, opposition coordination dilemmas, and manufactured electoral support.[3]

These studies have advanced our understanding of dominant party regimes, but they all take the emergence of a dominant party as exogenous and proceed to examine the conditions that lead to the demise of already established dominant parties. Thus, we know much more in political science about the equilibrium characteristics of dominant parties and the threats to that equilibrium than we do about how these equilibria come to be established in the first place.

Nonetheless, scholars operating in several research traditions have, implicitly or explicitly, addressed the question of dominant party emergence. In the 1950s, political historians devoted significant attention to analyzing the Bolshevik seizure of power in Russia (e.g. Fainsod 1953, Schapiro 1964, Daniels 1960). These studies focused primarily on gathering information on the period and described the unfolding of events in an atheoretical way. Influenced as they were by the 'old institutionalism' and the prerogatives of the other subfields (primarily, history), these works refrained from developing or testing theory about the factors that contributed to the transformation of the revolutionary Bolshevik party into the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

The first political theories about dominant party origins were developed to explain the proliferation of dominant parties in Africa after decolonization. These accounts were heavily influenced by the dominant paradigm in comparative politics at the time, modernization theory. According to these accounts, parties—including dominant parties—were necessary agents of mobilization and representation that emerged as society shed traditional authority structures and participation became mass-based (Schachter 1961, Lapalombara and Weiner 1963, Apter 1965).

[3] Chapter 2 discusses the drawbacks of using society-based arguments to explain dominant party origins.

Just as parties were thought to be the only modern form of political organization in democratic societies, dominant parties were thought to be the only modern form of authoritarian government (Huntington and Moore 1970). The national integrating functions of these parties were also trumpeted. Dominant parties, it was said, fostered national integration by reducing the "cultural and regional tensions and discontinuities" with the goal of "creating a homogenous territorial political community" (Coleman and Rosberg 1964, 9). Dominant parties, it was thought, brought citizens of newly independent countries into the political process by fostering a participant political community (Schachter 1961, Weiner 1968).

Modernization inspired accounts were intuitively appealing but ultimately fell short of convincingly explaining dominant party origins. First, modernization theorists were unsure about the direction of causality. Many thought that parties themselves were agents of modernization and national integration (Apter 1965, Coleman and Rosberg 1966). Second, by positing that dominant parties should exist and play certain roles because these roles needed to be filled, modernization-inspired theories were hobbled by a functionalist bias. Third, their focus on mobilization and linkage ignored the fact that most dominant parties in authoritarian regimes were crafted as authoritarian patronage machines, not linkage mechanisms (Bienen 1978). Finally, as Smith (2005) has noted and the data in Chapter 8 show, dominant parties have emerged across countries with similar levels of development and ethnic diversity.

A slightly different modernization-inspired account of dominant party origins was offered by Huntington (1968, 1970). According to Huntington, one-party systems grow out of processes of modernization which open up cleavages and conflict in society. Societies that produce complex patterns of cross-cutting cleavages, so the argument went, tend to develop into multi-party democratic systems, whereas "one-party systems tend to be the product of either the

accumulation of cleavages leading to sharply differentiated groups within society or of the ascendancy in importance of one line of cleavage over all others. A one-party system is, in effect, the product of the efforts of a political elite to organize and to legitimate rule by one social force over another in a bifurcated society" (1970, 11). Ruling parties were thus created when conflict—especially revolutionary conflict—erupted between opposing forces in a bifurcated, modern society (Huntington 1968).

Huntington's insights were groundbreaking, but they suffered from several faults. First, as Huntington himself acknowledged—and Lenin averred—political leaders could foster antagonistic group consciousness through agitation. In other words social bifurcation was endogenous. Second, arguing that dominant parties emerge when a dominant social force organizes to repress another social force does not explain how a party would come to be constituted as the instrument of that repression. Organization may be called for by a competitive threat, but it may not always be possible. Internecine struggles among leaders of one ethnic group, recalcitrant regional elites, or a rebellious military may stymie efforts to organize a party on behalf of a class or ethnic group.

Third, as Chapter 2 and Chapter 8 make clear, most of the world's dominant parties, emerged in situations that could hardly be described as revolutionary or as arising from a process of social bifurcation resulting in the repression of one social class by another. Most contemporary dominant parties—including many of those with origins in the mid-20$^{th}$ century—were not Leninist-style parties engaged in thoroughgoing social transformation via coercion, but rather were tools of authoritarian cooptation.

For nearly 35 years after Huntington, there was little effort to build a comparative theory of dominant party emergence. Only with the recent emergence of neo-institutional approaches to

authoritarianism has the topic received some attention. The most general of these is Gandhi's (2008) model of institutional genesis under dictatorship, which posits a set of costs and benefits that face a ruler that is deciding whether to grant policy concessions to an opposition. Concessions come in the form of access to policy influence and rents, both of which can be provided through legislatures and parties. Dictators with the financial means necessary to make side payments to supporters on an ad hoc basis—e.g. significant rent revenues—and/or those who face a weak opposition are expected to make fewer concessions to the opposition. The model recognizes that there are costs from sharing control over policy and spoils. Dictators will only share when they must; i.e., when they face a tight fiscal situation that precludes ad hoc patronage distribution and/or when they face a strong opposition.

Smith (2005) takes a similar tack on the problem arguing that robust dominant parties emerge when incumbent leaders face a social opposition that needs to be coopted or confronted with organization or lack resource rents that can be used to buy off supporters. Leaders have no need to broaden party coalitions when there are no demands for policy influence from an organized opposition. Smith also argues that leaders with ready access to rents can buy off potential supporters rather than sharing access to policy with a party organization.

### 1.5 The Setting of the Argument: Leaders and Elites

This scholarship on dominant parties has advanced our understanding of their origins, but these recent accounts suffer from several shortcomings. First, these explanations focus only on the incentives that *leaders* face in deciding over whether to invest in a dominant party. These accounts mostly discount other elite actors as conscious political actors that choose whether to cast their lot with a dominant party project. In existing accounts, elites may benefit from a

dominant party, but this is typically a post hoc assertion, dependent on the existence of the party in the first place.

By elites I mean individual actors outside the central leadership of a country who exercise influence over and demand loyalty from other political actors. They may be landowners, caciques, kulaks, bosses, chiefs, local warlords, nobles, clan leaders, firm managers, regional governors, influential politicians, opinion leaders in society or, as Joel Migdal calls them, strongmen (1988). Such elites control important political resources, such as political machines, clientelist networks, hard-to-tax economic assets, or positions of traditional authority. Elites may be capable of mobilizing citizens in elections, on the street, or on the battlefield. They may command the loyalties of important sub-elites, such as military officers, landowners, administrators, or enterprise directors. Elites are strong to the extent that they control such resources because these resources give them power over citizens that central rulers covet.[4] Indeed, leaders must sometimes gain the acquiescence of these elites in order to extract revenue, mobilize votes, and implement policy—in short, to govern.

Introducing elite incentives to the equation helps make sense of many instances of dominant party emergence that appear puzzling in light of existing explanations. Take, for example, the case of contemporary Russia. In the mid 2000s, the Kremlin was awash in oil revenues and, with a growing economy, the Communist opposition had lost much of its vim and vigor. In this setting, some of the theories cited above predict that Putin would have little reason to build a dominant party and would instead use rent revenues to buy cooperation in society (e.g.

[4] See Kern and Dolkart 1973, Schmidt 1980, Duncan Baretta and Markoff 1987, and Hagopian 1996, on Latin America; Powell 1970, Lemerchand 1972, Clapham 1982, Herbst 2000, and Koter 2013 on Africa; Van Dam 1979 on the Middle East; Chubb 1982 on Southern Europe; Cappelli 1989, Matsuzato 2001, Hale 2003 and Alina-Pisano 2010 on the Soviet Union and the post-Soviet states; Weiner 1967 on South Asia; Geertz 1965, Scott 1972 and Sidel 1999 on Southeast Asia.

Smith 2005, Boix and Svolik 2013). Indeed, Putin employed rent revenues to buy cooperation, but contrary to some existing predictions, he also invested in the creation of a dominant party, United Russia.

This decision contrasted sharply with the mid-late 1990s when the Russian economy was in a state of decay and oil prices were at record lows. Partially as a result of these economic dislocations, a strong and well-organized Communist opposition emerged to challenge the Kremlin in the 1995 parliamentary elections and 1996 presidential elections. Some existing theory predicts that this competitive threat would force the Kremlin to invest in a pro-presidential party that could be used to coopt important elites and create a united front against the Communist opposition (e.g. Gandhi 2008, Huntington 1968). Instead, however, Yeltsin had difficulty securing the commitments of important elite actors and regional governors opted instead to pursue individual strategies of self-promotion. Fearing the costs of supporting a pro-presidential party when such a party could not be sustained, Yeltsin undermined his own party and opted to employ a divide and rule strategy against the country's powerful regional governors.

Other important historical and contemporary examples of dominant parties emerging despite impuissant social opposition and ample rent revenues include the PDP in Nigeria, the Botswanan Democratic Party in Botswana, and OTAN in Kazakhstan are prominent examples. Similarly, dominant parties have failed to emerge in countries with relatively strong social oppositions and few rent revenues (e.g. Ukraine under Kuchma, Brazil under Vargas, Madagascar in the 1990s). How can we make sense of United Russia and other such puzzling cases? I argue that we must consider elite incentives, particularly the incentives of regional elites, when building an explanation of dominant party emergence. As I elaborate below, elites must have an incentive to cast their lot with a dominant party, just as leaders must have an

incentive to invest in a dominant party.

To be sure, not all accounts of ruling parties omit elites from the equation. Brownlee (2007) suggests that dominant parties emerge and thrive when elite factionalism is put to bed within the confines of the party. This is an important observation, but such an account begs the question of why elite factionalism was put to bed within the confines of the party. Slater (2010) also highlights the importance of elite collective action in the construction of a ruling party and further posits that elites will engage in this party-based collective action when they feel threatened by endemic contentious politics.

The account offered here shares this emphasis on elites, but also differs in important ways. Namely, I cast the problem of dominant party formation as a two-sided commitment problem whereby elites are engaged in a strategic interaction with regime leaders. In addition, I specify the incentives that elites have to invest in a dominant party and argue that these incentives emanate from elites' relative strength vis-à-vis leaders. Importantly, I theorize both the factors that make elites important in the decision over whether to form a dominant party and the factors that make them more likely to cast their lot with an emergent dominant party.

A second shortcoming of many existing explanations is their lack of attention to the commitment problems inherent in the process of spoil distribution under autocracy (e.g see Magaloni 2008 and Svolik 2012). Such transfers involve time-consistent exchanges whereby elite loyalty is rewarded with spoils. But after a given elite actor demonstrates his/her loyalty, what is to prevent the dictator from reneging on his/her offer of spoils? In a dictatorship without institutions, there is nothing to constrain a leader to fulfill his past promises. Magaloni (2008) proposes that by delegating these appointments to a parallel, independent party organization, leaders place constraints on their ability to abuse the terms of the spoil-sharing bargain.

Unfortunately, this insight about how dominant parties constrain leaders in equilibrium is not an answer to the question of how such parties come to be established in the first place. In fact, this observation makes variation in dominant party formation all the more puzzling; dominant parties can help dictators commit to not abusing elites, and yet, they emerge in some settings, but not others. Thus, a theory of dominant party formation must move beyond demonstrating that dominant parties *can* solve the leader's commitment problem and posit the conditions under which leaders (and elites) *will choose* to solve their commitment problem by investing in a dominant party.

On the other side of the coin, no existing work addresses the commitment problem of elites. If the dictator offers spoils to elites in exchange for loyalty in a later period, what prevents elites from reneging on their promise of loyalty by running their own candidates in elections, voting against regime-sponsored bills in legislatures, undermining government policy initiatives, appointed non-approved cadres, or otherwise working against the regime. In Chapter 2, I lay out a theory of dominant party formation that 1) incorporates the incentives of elites (as well as leaders), 2) considers the commitment problem facing elites and leaders as they decide whether to invest in a new dominant party, and 3) identifies the conditions under which the two sides will seek to overcome their commitment problem through investment in a dominant party.

### 1.6 The Argument in Brief

In contrast to most existing works, I argue that dominant parties are the product of conscious decisions by *both* leaders *and* other elites in a strategic setting. Leaders are chief executives. They are presidents, dictators, monarchs, military leaders, or, sometimes, prime ministers. Elites

are the aforementioned opinion leaders in society: landowners, chiefs, warlords, governors, bosses, and so on.

In non-democracies, leaders and elites face a series of commitment problems when it comes to cooperating with each other over the distribution of spoils, policy, and careers. The essence of this commitment problem is similar to commitment problems in many other political settings (e.g. North and Weingast 1989, Shepsle 1991, Greif, Milgrom, and Weingast 1994, Sanchez-Cuenca 1998, Myerson 2008): mutually beneficial cooperation depends on promises about future actions, but the inability of actors to make credible promises to each other stymies such cooperation.

Leaders would like to secure the loyalty of elites and ensure their support in various governing tasks, such as winning elections, managing legislatures, or controlling social unrest. Elites can help with these tasks because they control autonomous resources—e.g. political machines, clientelist networks, traditional authority—that give them power over citizens. This approach assumes that repression of elites is costly and that the cost of repression varies with the power of those elites. Leaders could secure the assistance of elites if they could credibly promise elites a fair share of spoils. But such an agreement entails that leaders relinquish some of their decision-making autonomy; leaders must support agreed-upon bills, distribute rents in a pre-determined way, and promote pre-agreed cadres. But leaders value their autonomy and given the absence of a third-party institution that can monitor and enforce this agreement, they may be tempted to defect from the bargain by shirking their promises and ruling arbitrarily. Due to their short-sightedness, they may defect from any agreement ex post. Examples of such defections might include decisions to support a different policy, withhold perks, pass over certain elites for

promotion, or support an alternative candidate for office. In sum, they cannot make credible promises to reliably distribute spoils to elites.

For their part, elites would prefer to receive guarantees that leaders will channel careers, perks, and policy to them now and in the future. They could achieve this if they could credibly pledge their loyalty to a leader through an ex ante agreement that required them to prioritize the political goals of the regime over their own—e.g. supporting regime candidates in elections, mobilizing voters on behalf of the regime, supporting regime legislative initiatives, extracting revenue for the regime, quelling anti-regime protest and the like. But elites value their autonomy to bargain with opponents, make side payments to supporters, and control their own clientelist networks. Thus, short-sighted elites may be tempted to defect ex post from any ex ante agreement, and without a third-party institution to enforce and monitor their commitments, their promises to cooperate may not be credible.

For leaders and elites, the benefits of cooperation are only realized if both sides sign on to the collusive agreement. The ruler is unwilling to commit himself to any such agreement unless he can be sure that other elites will be loyal. For their part, elites will not tie their fates to the party project unless they can be sure that the leader will make it a mechanism for guaranteeing the supply of careers and resources. In sum, each side would be better off if it were to collude in the division of spoils, perks, and policy, but neither can credibly assure the other that it will be a faithful partner in this collusion.

Leaders and elites might be able to ameliorate their bilateral commitment problem through mutual investment in a parallel party organization—a dominant party—that governs and monitors the distribution of spoils (Magaloni 2008). A dominant party can help mitigate the leader's commitment problem if it is granted some modicum of independence to make decisions

about the distribution of policy, perks, and privileges; that is, if leaders limit their ability to interfere in the party or increase the costs of doing so. One way that leaders can increase the costs of abusing the dominant party bargain is by relinquishing to the dominant party their ability to gather information on key political decisions. In this way, the creation of dominant party institutions increases the costs of reneging on the bargain.

Another way that a leader can use the dominant party as a commitment device is by linking his name, reputation, and/or personal brand to the party. To the extent that the leader's own authority is tied to a reputation for resolve the leader can tie his hands by making verbal commitments to or investments of symbolic resource in the party—e.g. include public endorsements, speaking at party functions, allowing one's image to be used on campaign materials. Moreover, the linkage between a leader's personal brand and the party is likely to be sticky, such that it is difficult to quickly decouple the two in the minds of voters.

Dominant party institutions can also solve elite collective action problems vis-a-vis the leader. Gehlbach and Keefer (2011) argue that authoritarian legislatures can enforce bargains between leaders and elites by providing an institutional forum that helps elite coordinate to defend their interests. A similar argument may be applied to dominant party institutions.

Finally, the party helps elites monitor agreements and thus reduces the temptation of the leader to sporadically abuse them (e.g. see Svolik 2012). Enshrined in the party arrangement are rules, parchment or implicit, specifying what constitutes compliance on the part of the leader (e.g. only supporting party candidates in elections, granting preference to party supporters in personnel, granting the party control over nominations, and certain areas of policy formulation). When the terms of the spoil-sharing agreement are formalized, then a transgression against the party's sphere of authority is easier to identify and punish (via defection, perhaps).

The dominant party can make elite commitments credible if elites give it the power to sanction them for reneging. The dominant party leadership is given the authority to punish individual elites with exclusion from benefit streams. Elite commitments are also made credible if elites place their own machines, political parties, legislative organizations, and/or lobbying networks under the control of the party leadership. By transferring these resources, elites tie their hands. In addition, much like leaders, elites make a symbolic transfer of reputational resources when they make a public commitment to one political party—the dominant party. Finally, dominant party institutions establish clear rules about the nature of the spoil-sharing bargain, which helps elites monitor the leader's level of commitment.

Unfortunately, positing an institutional solution to this commitment problem does not help us explain why dominant parties exist in some authoritarian regimes, but not in others. Such commitment problems are likely present in almost all authoritarian regimes, but we only observe dominant parties in some of those regimes. Scholars of political institutions know that efficient institutions are not always created, even if their creation would benefit both contracting parties (Moe 1990, Knight 1992). Any theory of dominant parties that seeks to explain variance in the emergence of those institutions across countries must move beyond simply describing the institutional solution to the commitment problem.

The argument here focuses on how the relative balance of political resources between leaders and elites affects each side's incentives to cooperate and invest in an institutional solution to the commitment problem. When leaders are very strong in resources (relative to elites) their incentives to defect from any bargain are high and thus it is particularly difficult for them to commit to cooperating with elites. Strong leaders have less incentive to coopt weak elites. And any change in circumstances or the balance of resources might leave them with no rational

incentive to cooperate. Thus, credible commitments are infeasible. In addition, because nascent dominant party institutions will have trouble keeping leaders from reneging when their commitment problem is severe, elites will be unlikely to trust the institutional commitments of leaders when leaders are strong in resources. This can make elites less willing to cooperate. Indeed, the limited ability of nascent dominant party institutions to place binding constraints on leaders underscores the need for the commitment problem to be mitigated before it can be solved. As Sanchez-Cuenca (1998) puts it, "the more you need a commitment, the less useful it is to solve your problem (85)."

On the other side of the equation, when elites are strong relative to leaders they have especially strong incentives to defect from any agreement and find it hard to commit to cooperation with leaders. Elites are strong when they sit atop networks that embed the loyalty of sub-elites and citizens. When elite networks form the basis of social control and/or economic management in a polity, then elites have significant bargaining power vis-a-vis leaders.[5] I assume that leaders can, at some cost, repress any given elite at any given time. But, importantly, repressing all elites collectively may be cost-prohibitive if it undermines the ability of leaders to achieve key governing tasks such as controlling unrest, winning elections, passing legislation, and collecting revenue. When elites are strong, their political machines allow elites to achieve many of their political goals without relying on the leader. Thus, they have strong incentives to shirk, which they will often do, and the smallest shift in resources could leave them with no rational incentive to cooperate. Moreover, when elites are strong, leaders will not trust

[5] When elites are strong relative to leaders, there is the danger that elites will capture the state, but this frequently does not happen because elites face collective action and coordination problems among themselves (e.g. Shvetsova 1999, Solnick 2000). Thus, an authoritarian state with strong elites and weak leaders is not necessarily an oxymoron (Migdal 1988).

elites to be constrained by nascent dominant party institutions, so they will be reluctant to relinquish their own autonomy to a dominant party.

Thus, dominant parties are unlikely to emerge when the commitment problem of leaders is severe. But they are also unlikely when the commitment problem of elites is severe. In this way, these predictions concord with a tradition of work in political science which argues that commitment problems are less likely to be solved when they are severe (e.g. North and Weingast 1989, Sanchez-Cuenca 1998, Svolik 2012).[6] The two sides are more likely to invest in a dominant party when both see that there are significant gains to be made from cooperating and when each side has less incentive to defect. Incentives to defect from the ex ante agreement are hard to eliminate, but they can be reduced. Neither side can ever be sure that the other will hold up its end of the bargain, but they will be more likely to risk cooperation when they need that cooperation more and when there is common knowledge that mutual incentives to renege are reduced. Or, as I frame it, the commitment problem can be mitigated.

Nascent dominant party institutions are still necessary at this point in order to monitor commitments and enforce the bargain. But when the commitment problem is attenuated because neither side holds a preponderance of resources, leaders and elites are more likely to trust these nascent institutions to help constrain both sides. A solution to the commitment problem becomes feasible. Put simply, dominant parties emerge when elites hold enough independent political

[6] Svolik (2012) convincingly argues that authoritarian power-sharing is more likely when there is a balance of power within the ruling coalition. Svolik's work, which became available after this project was underway (Reuter and Remington 2009, Reuter 2010), is concordant with the approach offered here, but also differs significantly. As I discuss in Chapter 2, Svolik's model addresses power-sharing as a general phenomenon, while I focus on the specific dilemmas of forming a dominant party. This leads to differences in how the commitment problem is specified and, potentially, solved. I also focus on elites, and in particular, regional elites who are not part of the 'ruling coalition'. In contrast to Svolik, I argue that elites can threaten not just armed rebellion, but also defection or non-cooperation. I show how institutionalized power-sharing in a dominant party may be unattainable when dictators are weak because elites refuse to place themselves under the control of the party. By contrast, Boix and Svolik (2013) predict that institutions (legislatures) become more likely as the dictator weakens (e.g. loses access to rent revenues).

resources that leaders need to coopt them, but not so many autonomous resources that they themselves are reluctant to commit themselves to cooperation by investing in a dominant party.

[Figure 1.4 Here]

The argument is depicted graphically in Figure 1.4. On the left side of the figure, elites are weak relative to leaders and a dominant party is unlikely because leaders have less reason to coopt elites. On the right side of the figure elites are very strong in resources and have little reason to relinquish their autonomy to a dominant party. Thus, leaders will not risk investment in a party and a dominant party is unlikely. In the middle of the figure, when the resources of elites and leaders are relatively balanced, a dominant party is more likely.

**1.7 Why Russia? The Origins of United Russia**

Much of this book examines the implications of the above argument in the context of contemporary Russia, one of the world's most prominent autocracies. One of the main reasons that Russia is a good case for studying dominant party emergence is that there is significant variation in the dependent variable over a short span of time. In the 1990s, then Russian president Boris Yeltsin eschewed investment in a powerful pro-presidential party. But in the 2000s, Vladimir Putin chose to sanction the creation of a dominant party, United Russia. Importantly, this variation in the dependent variable is puzzling in light of some existing explanations, and it unfolded recently, which permits the collection of data on the dominant party formation process.

For over 70 years, the Soviet Union was ruled by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. In 1991, one-party rule ended and was replaced by its opposite—a hyper-fractious political system in which parties played little role and powerful elites pursued uncoordinated strategies of political advancement. The size of Russia, the dispersion of economic production within its borders, its decentralized state structure, ethnic divisions, and the political imperatives of the transition combined to make regional elites especially strong in post-Soviet Russia (e.g. Hale 2003, Treisman 1997, Stoner-Weiss 1999, Slider 1994). By the mid-late 1990s, the strength of regional elites vis-a-vis the Kremlin had been amplified by Yeltsin's unpopularity, weak state capacity, historically low oil prices, and economic crisis. In this setting, Yeltsin (and, for some time after taking office, his immediate successor, Vladimir Putin) looked upon other elites as a threat. For their part, Russia's regional elites had little incentive to link their fates to a Kremlin-controlled ruling party and opted instead to pursue individual strategies of self-promotion. Regional elites built powerful local political machines, created their own parties, and clashed with Yeltsin over legislation. Russia's presidents feared the costs of supporting a pro-presidential party that could not be sustained, or worse, that could unite powerful elites against them. Thus, even though faced with a strong Communist opposition and a paucity of rent revenues—which existing theories predict would compel the construction of a dominant party—the Kremlin opted for a divide and rule strategy with respect to regional elites, securing their cooperation through ad hoc deal-making and bilateral accommodation. The result was that Russia's first 'party of power,' Our Home is Russia, never became a major political force.[7] In Chapter 3, I describe this process and show how the decisions made by actors were motivated by the balance of resources between leaders and elites and the two-sided commitment problem.

[7] 'Party of power' is a term used by post-Soviet area specialists to describe pro-presidential parties (Khenkin 1996).

In 1999, regional elites reached the apex of their power. In this setting, the Kremlin allowed Our Home to whither and, by mid 1999, had still not identified a party of power that it would back in the December 1999 parliamentary elections. The Kremlin played a divide and rule strategy by sending mixed signals about which, if any, of several parties it would support and, then, at the last moment, endorsing its own skeletal movement, Unity, to secure the support of a plurality of unaffiliated governors.

But Unity was a campaign strategy, not a party. After the elections, elites continued to rely on their own autonomous resources to win elections and bargain for spoils with the Kremlin. They showed no interest in linking their fates to a centralized ruling party. And, as a result, the Kremlin did not make serious commitments to it. The 1999 elections had demonstrated just how powerful Russia's governors were, and the Kremlin feared these elites. In particular, Putin feared that a strong party could become a platform for challenges from either Moscow Mayor Yury Luzhkov or former Prime Minister Yevgenii Primakov. And if elites were not already wary enough, President Putin's reluctance to turn Unity into a dependable arena for securing access to spoils and careers left them with even less reason to make their own commitments.

Only after 2002 did United Russia, Unity's organizational successor, become a dominant party by attracting the unequivocal support of the Kremlin and across the board commitments from regional elites. United Russia's emergence as a dominant party occurred precisely because the resource balance had shifted in favor of the Kremlin. Sustained economic growth, windfall oil revenues, and the precipitous rise of President Putin's approval ratings all combined to strengthen the Kremlin's bargaining position with regional elites. This allowed Putin to push through centralizing reforms, such as the cancellation of gubernatorial elections that weakened—but did not eliminate—elites' political machines. The Kremlin had wanted to centralize

authority since the mid-1990s, but powerful regional elites used their formal and informal resources to prevent the passage of such reforms.

This readjustment in the balance of power gave elites more reason to cooperate with the center than they had had in the 1990s. And yet elites were not so weak that the Kremlin could ignore or purge them. It needed to work with them in order to win elections, pass legislation, and maintain social quiescence. The political machines they had built over the past decade still provided them with ample levers of political influence. Supplanting these machines would be exceedingly costly. Rather, it was more cost-effective to coopt and govern through these political machines. Indeed, the regime's electoral strategy in the 2000s was predicated on coopting powerful elite governors, who then put their political machines to work for United Russia and the Kremlin.

Because elites were not so strong that they would shirk any obligations laid out for them in a dominant party arrangement, Putin could feel comfortable investing his own resources in such a party. By publicly endorsing the party, speaking at party conferences, heading the party list, and eventually becoming party chairman, Putin associated himself much more closely with the party than Yeltsin had ever done with his parties of power. In turn, Putin's signals of support emboldened elites to make their own investments. This dynamic led both sides to invest more in the ruling party than ever before. The result was a dominant party. In Chapter 4, I expand on this discussion, describing United Russia's emergence and situating its rise as a dominant party within the leader-elite commitment framework.

### 1.8 United Russia as a Dominant Party

United Russia's role as a dominant party is surprisingly understudied. Its control over elections and legislatures is well-known (Gel'man 2008, Smyth, Urasova, and Wilkening 2007, Ivanov 2008, Colton and Hale 2009, Reuter and Remington 2009, Makarenko 2011, Golosov 2011, Roberts 2012, Reuter 2013), but theory-driven studies of its political role are lacking (see Gill 2012 and Roberts 2012 for exceptions). Since 2003, the party has held a majority in the State Duma, Russia's lower house, and by 2010 it controlled 75% of the seats in the Federation Council, Russia's upper house. The party dominated regional legislative elections in the 2000s, and by 2010 it held majorities in 82 of 83 regional legislatures. Almost all of Russia's governors had joined the party by 2007 (78 of 83 gubernatorial posts were held by United Russia in 2011). Most of Russia's mayors also joined the party over the course of the 2000s. In 2012, United Russia members held mayoral posts in 86% of Russia's 186 largest cities, and majorities in 92% of the city councils in Russia's 186 largest cities.[8] The party also built a hegemonic presence in organs of local government, and, with 56,330 regional, local, and primary branches, the party's organizational reach is extensive.[9] The party's domination of legislatures means that spoils and rents distributed in those forums are channeled by the party to its members. Particularly in the regions, the party has been a forum for rent distribution and the making of careers over the last decade.

However, the party did not come to exert collective control over the federal executive branch. Neither President Putin nor President Medvedev worked their way up through the party to become president. President Putin did not formally join the party in the 2000s, although he did tightly link himself to the party by heading its party list in the 2007 parliamentary elections and becoming party-chairman. In 2012, then-Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev formally joined

[8] Authors' database.

[9] Accessed on UR website, November 8, 2010. http://www.edinros.ru/rubr.shtml?110103#2.

the party, but only 29% of his government were formal members of the party. Party penetration also appears to be low in the federal bureaucracy, military, and security services.

Given its lack of direct control over the executive branch, many descriptive studies of the party downplay its role as a political institution and seek to treat it as a *sui generis* phenomenon that should not be compared to other dominant parties (e.g Bader 2011, Whitmore and Isaacs 2014, Roberts 2012) To be sure, United Russia's state supervisory role pales in significance to that of the CPSU. In the Soviet Union, decisions on policy formulation and, often, implementation were made in autonomous party organs and formally enacted by state structures. United Russia does not do this, except perhaps in legislatures. Nor does the party control careers at the top levels of the executive branch or in the federal bureaucracy.

Nonetheless, even though United Russia never approximated the 'ideal-type' state party with direct control over all political decisions, it has been something more than an institutional shell and has much in common with other dominant parties. Chapter 5 uses a combination of interviews with federal and regional elites, primary and secondary sources, and original quantitative data to show how United Russia has shaped actors' behavior and had substantive effects on political outcomes in Russia. Importantly, the party has served as a credible commitment device for both the Kremlin and regional elites, allowing them to enjoy the benefits of mutual cooperation. In turn, once United Russia was created, it became a 'sticky' institution because dismantling it would have been costly to both the Kremlin, regional elites, and party cadres. Russia's presidents and elites adapted their expectations about how the other side would behave and both preferred to continue reaping the benefits of mutual cooperation under the aegis of the dominant party.

Elites made a number of investments in the new party that constituted credible commitments. Regional governors relinquished their control over their own regionally based parties and instead linked them to the ruling party. This hand-tying move made it difficult for them retract their commitment and, for instance, run their own slates of candidates in regional elections. Elites also delegated to the party leadership the ability to sanction them for indiscipline. Indeed, the creation of United Russia party organizations in legislatures significantly increased the level of voting discipline among pro-Kremlin legislators.

In return, United Russia membership provides elites with a number of significant benefits, including access to rents, policy influence, and career advancement opportunities. From 2003 onward, almost all legislative bargaining has run through United Russia legislative factions. Legislative seats also provide party members with immunity from criminal prosecution and a platform for lobbying their own business interests. In elections, United Russia membership provides access to a valuable party brand, ballot access, and state administrative support.

Importantly, the party also reduces uncertainty about how the benefits of cooperating with the regime will be distributed. In legislative arenas, for example, the party has a near monopoly on legislative advancement opportunities, and appointment to these positions is based in large part on loyalty to the party.

The creation of United Russia also helped elites monitor the commitment of Russia's presidents to share spoils with elites, and, thus, reduced the temptation of the Kremlin to abuse those elites. Enshrined in the party arrangement are rules and norms, specifying what constitutes compliance on the part of the Kremlin (e.g. only supporting party candidates in elections, granting preference to party supporters in appointments, granting the party control over

legislative nominations, and certain areas of policy formulation). If all elites contracted with the Kremlin via some unwritten agreement, then violations of those agreements could easily go unnoticed, especially if it is not clear what constitutes violation of the agreement. Under a dominant party system, it is clear that legislative spoils should be channeled, first and foremost, to members of the dominant party. Breaches of this norm are easy to observe. Thus, for example, when Russian governors were appointed (2005-2012), the largest party in regional parliaments was, according to the letter of the law, given the authority to nominate candidates for regional governor. When the Kremlin intervened in this process and asked the party leadership to nominate non-partisans, these deviations from the spoil sharing bargain could be easily identified by other United Russia partisans, because the new appointee lacked a ruling party affiliation. It did this rarely.

Investing in United Russia has also helped the Kremlin make its commitments to elites credible. Although he did not join the party, President Putin attached his name and reputation to the party by becoming party chairman, speaking at party events, and heading the party list. Prime Minister Medvedev joined the party and became its chairman. By delegating to the party some modicum of control over law-making in the legislative arena, the Kremlin limited its ability to deviate from the spoil-sharing bargain with elites. The Kremlin also delegated parts of the process of managing elections and candidate selection to United Russia. By relinquishing the ability to control the information necessary to making such key political decisions, the Kremlin limited its ability to micromanage politics in these spheres. If the Kremlin were to haphazardly dismantle United Russia, it would lack the organizational and information resources necessary to manage these political tasks effectively.

United Russia also helps make Kremlin commitments to spoil-sharing with elites credible by solving collective action problems among Russia's key elite groups. The sanctioning mechanisms that rest in the hands of the party leadership give the party the ability to enforce discipline among its members. Should Russia's leaders attempt to abuse ruling elites (perhaps by initiating a purge or channeling privileges away from stakeholders) then elites could use the party to threaten the president. Such a scenario seems far-fetched in the environment that existed for much of the 2000s when Putin's personal brand was more popular than that of the party; United Russia would surely have been the loser in any confrontation with Putin. But this particular set of circumstances was not foreordained. If Putin's popularity had fallen a rival might have sought to use UR as a platform to challenge Putin. Indeed, as I discuss in Chapters 3 and 4, the possibility that a rival might use the ruling party to challenge the leader was one of the primary reasons that Yeltsin eschewed investment in a dominant party in the 1990s and one of the reasons that Putin initially equivocated about the creation of United Russia in the early 2000s.

The mere act of creating the party also helped Russia's presidents monitor elite commitments to the spoil-sharing bargain. In legislative, regional, and local politics, membership in United Russia constitutes a dividing line between regime supporters and opponents. Leaving the dominant party constitutes defection. If a governor supports non-partisan candidates, this can be interpreted as a sign of disloyalty. Thus, the Kremlin knows whom to punish (or reward) and can clearly see when it is being abused by elites.

Finally, the role of United Russia as a commitment device for leaders and elites was strengthened because its place in the political system was nested in other institutional constraints. Fixed election cycles mean that United Russia majorities elected in one election would, at least

according to the letter of the law, be stable until the next election. This stickiness was reinforced by imperative mandate laws, instituted in the 2000s, which forbade regional legislators from switching parliamentary parties. The introduction of proportional electoral rules for the 2007 elections made it impossible for the Kremlin or powerful governors to renege on support for the dominant party in order to support individual candidates and the introduction of high thresholds for representation removed the temptation to support multiple small parties.

In return for these investments, Russia's presidents have reaped significant benefits from the dominant party system. By dependably distributing spoils to elites, United Russia serves as a tool of cooptation that ensures elite loyalty to the regime. Although sporadic defections have occurred, the ruling elite in Russia has remained remarkably united through several major economic and political crises. The institutional bonds created by United Russia are one of the main reasons for this cohesion.

The party also reduces the transaction costs associated with forming stable legislative majorities. Before the creation of United Russia, Russia's presidents expended an inordinate amount of effort, time, and pork patching together ad hoc coalitions of legislators from various factions and groupings (Remington 2006). The creation of United Russia as a majority pro-presidential party helped the Kremlin pass legislation more easily.

United Russia also plays a key role in helping Russia's presidents win elections. The party brings together Russia's most important regional elites—governors, enterprise directors, mayors, prominent legislators, and other opinion leaders—who put their political machines to work for the regime at election time. The party also helps the regime coordinate pro-regime candidates. Russia's presidents, rather than having to bargain with thousands of individual elites to orchestrate strategic withdrawals in each election, can rely on United Russia to coordinate

strategic withdrawals so that a single pro-regime candidate is put forward in each electoral contest.

Thus, mutual commitments made cooperation under the aegis of United Russia possible because they increased the credibility of each side's promises to cooperate. In turn, the pattern of mutual cooperation regulated by the dominant party provided significant benefits to both leaders and elites. United Russia helps leaders win elections, secure the loyalty of elites, and maintain stable legislative majorities. In turn, United Russia provides elites with access to patronage and reduces uncertainty about how that patronage will be provided.

Over the course of the 2000s, the Kremlin came to depend on United Russia for the maintenance of elite cohesion. Elites, meanwhile, came to rely on United Russia for the provision of spoils, especially in legislatures. The Kremlin did not want to provoke elite discord by dismantling the party, and elites did not want to jeopardize their access to spoils by defecting. And neither felt confident that one-time defections would go unpunished. Thus, both sides developed mutually shared expectations about how the other would behave under the dominant party system.

The extent of United Russia's institutional significance should not be overstated, however. As Chapters 5 and 9 demonstrate, United Russia's independence remains limited in many areas. It does not exert collective control over the executive branch, although advancement through the party ranks does represent one of several paths to power in the federal government. Moreover, to this point in history, Russia's presidents have not emerged from within the party ranks. President Putin remains Russia's most important political figure and is not directly subordinate to party decisions.

United Russia's institutional strength is also limited by the fact there still exist alternative paths to career advancement in Russia. Patron-client ties coexist alongside partisan ties as a means of political advancement. Moreover, the continued existence of a cadre reserve system within the executive branch, separate from the dominant party's own cadre reserve system, works to undermine elite beliefs in the role of United Russia as a purveyor of careers.

This does not mean that United Russia should not be studied as a dominant party. To be sure, United Russia does not oversee an all-encompassing party-state, in which all political decisions are made collectively by party organizations outside government structures. But, this is an ideal type that few, if any, dominant parties approximate. For example, even in the Soviet Union, personnel decisions were based as much on patron-client ties as they were on institutionalized performance criteria or party loyalty (e.g. Rigby and Harasmyiw 1980). Scholars of Mexican politics meanwhile have noted that the perceived overlap between the PRI and government was an "illusion" and that the party had little autonomous influence on policy-making in the executive branch (Rodriguez and Ward 1994). The Mexican presidency, it was argued, dominated all other political institutions in the country, leading scholars to characterize the PRI as "merely the electoral ministry of the presidency" (Weldon 1997, 226). Indeed, Castaneda's (2000) insider account of presidential succession in Mexico describes the process as a highly personalistic ritual in which the President selected his successor without consulting the party collective.

Still, the PRI and CPSU are dominant parties with high levels of institutional strength. It is peculiar, then, that most of our knowledge of dominant parties comes from studies of these parties, even though they are clear outliers in the extent to which they held a monopoly over political life. United Russia has less institutional significance than these paradigmatic dominant

parties; rather, it is like most of the world's dominant parties in that it structures political exchange in some arenas, but not in others. Ultimately, United Russia's institutional significance should be judged not just against those rare examples of highly institutionalized dominant party regimes, but also against the weak or non-existent party organizations that exist, or do not exist, in many personalist autocracies. In the post-Soviet region, United Russia exhibits much more institutional significance than the fly-by-night parties of power that existed in Russia in the 1990s, Ukraine's weak parties of power under Kuchma, or the non-existent ruling party organizations in Belarus under Lukashenko.

Most dominant parties constrain key actors in some areas, but are still dependent on them in others. They share influence with other actors and institutions. United Russia falls into this category. Even while it constrained Putin in some areas, it remained dependent on him in others. It makes loyalty incentive compatible for elites in some areas, but sometimes fails to constrain elite discord in others.

### 1.9 Post-Soviet Russia and Authoritarian Institutions

Scholars of Russian political institutions have fruitfully engaged with debates in political science about economic reform (Schleifer and Treisman 2001, Frye 2010), party development (Smyth 2006, Hale 2006), electoral systems (Moser 2001), legislative organization (Remington and Smith 2001) and democratization (Fish 2005, McFaul 2001, Bunce 2003, McCann 2006) to name just a few. Most of this work focused on Russia's post-communist development in the 1990s and viewed Russia through the lens of literature on emerging democracies. But as Russia became more autocratic in the 2000s, scholars were slow to apply recently developed theories of authoritarian institutions. Most analyses of Russia's Putin-era political institutions continue to

compare these institutions to democratic institutions. Invariably, and unsurprisingly, these analyses conclude that Russia's elections, parties, and legislatures do not fulfill the same functions as their counterparts in democracies (e.g. White 2011, Golosov 2011, Whitmore 2010, March 2009).

But there are few studies analyzing Russia's political institutions as *authoritarian* institutions. Neo-institutional studies of elections, parties, and legislatures in modern authoritarian regimes have argued that these nominally democratic institutions help dictators gather information, coopt elites, and mitigate social opposition. To be sure, much recent scholarship views Russia's regime as a hybrid or authoritarian regime (e.g. Fish 2005, Ross 2005, Way 2005, Colton and Hale 2009, Kryshtanovskaya and White 2003), and post-Soviet area specialists have, in fact, contributed to the fine-tuning of those conceptual categories (Levitsky and Way 2010, Balzer 2003). But, we still know very little about how the Kremlin manages elites and gathers information through elections.[10] We also know little about how legislatures and parties are used for cooptation and spoil distribution.[11]

I do not deny that models of democratic institutions yield insights into the operation of Russia's political institutions. It is clear that they do. Rather, I simply argue that analyses of contemporary Russian politics can be improved by also considering Russia's parties, elections, and legislatures in light of the recent neo-institutional literature on authoritarian regimes. In turn, the study of Russia's authoritarian institutions can contribute to the appraisal and refinement of theory on the operation of institutions in modern authoritarian regimes. This study seeks to advance both those goals.

[10] See Treisman (1999) and Reuter and Robertson (2012) for exceptions.
[11] See Remington (2008), March (2009), and Reuter and Robertson (2015) for exceptions.

Studying United Russia's emergence also offers insights into the underpinnings of regime stability in Putin-era Russia. United Russia's primary function is to coopt and control Russia's traditionally unruly elites. In the early 2000s, President Putin initiated a series of federal reforms aimed at recentralizing state authority and reducing the autonomy of powerful regional governors. These reforms culminated in the cancellation of direct gubernatorial elections in 2004. Yet, even after the cancellation of direct gubernatorial elections it was clear that Putin still depended on these elites to help him win elections and quell social unrest.

This balance of power resembles the situation that Migdal found to be characteristic of many African countries in the post-colonial period, where central state leaders could remove any one local strongman at any time, but "the pattern of social control" that they represented was difficult to displace (Migdal 1988, 141). Putin could deploy his resources to have any one governor removed, but he needed the totality of the governors' political machines in order win elections and govern cost-effectively.

Putin wanted to reduce the independence of Russia's regional elites. And so, he took measures, such as the cancellation of governors' elections, to chip away at their autonomous resources. But he also knew that weakening them too much would strip away the regime's ability to govern the country. This is an enduring dilemma for authoritarian leaders. How can a leader coopt the resources of an elite actor without destroying them? If the Kremlin were to remove all governors, the clientelist networks of the old governors would be disrupted and newly appointed officials might lack authority among voters and local elites. On the other hand, granting full independence to governors would maximize their vote-mobilizing ability, but then the Kremlin would not be able to depend on the support of those autonomous governors. The

solution was to weaken them as much as possible and then coopt them with carrots—spoils and promises of career advancement—that could be distributed through the dominant party.

Putin needed the cooperation of Russia's elites just as those elites need his personal and political resources to maintain their careers. He was—and remains—dependent on them as much as they are dependent on him. There is no doubt that repression, coercion, fraud and patronage are common tactics that the regime employs to maintain control. But it is also clear that elite cohesion, facilitated by United Russia, both enables the regime to use these tactics and shores up regime stability on its own.

Thus, the picture of Russia's authoritarian regime that emerges in this book is one that is more institutionalized than what most existing accounts allow. Regime stability in Russia is founded not just on natural resource rents (Fish 2005), economic growth (Treisman 2011), coercion (Taylor 2007), or Putin's personality cult (Judah 2014). It also depends on elite cohesion, which is secured, in large part, by the dominant party institution, United Russia.

Between 1999 and 2015, Russia's authoritarian regime displayed more durability than many expected. After the 'colored' revolutions unseated long-serving incumbents in Ukraine and Georgia in 2003 and 2004, respectively, some observers thought Russia would be next.[12] But Russia somehow managed to avoid the large-scale elite defections that had precipitated regime change in those countries. In the wake of the 2008-09 global financial crisis observers again predicted that popular dissatisfaction with the regime would lead to elite defections, and yet these predictions proved incorrect as the ruling group remained remarkably cohesive during this period. Most recently, in 2011-13, as the regime's popularity declined and mass protests rocked large cities, many predicted the downfall of the regime. And yet, as Chapter 5

[12] See for example "The Cracks Appear" *Economist.* 10 December 2011 and Judah (2013).

demonstrates, large-scale elite defections did not materialize and the regime persisted. I attribute much of this stability to the strength of Russia's dominant party institutions.[13] In sum, the story of United Russia's emergence tells us a lot about how the current regime was built.

### 1.10 Dominant Parties and the New Institutionalism

This book borrows from the new-institutionalism in political science and economics. In turn, it also seeks to contribute to that theoretical framework. In keeping with the main tenet of neo-institutionalism, this study holds to the notion that institutions influence actors' behavior. Dominant party institutions coordinate the expectations of leaders and elites, solve monitoring problems associated with power-sharing, and act as third-party enforcement mechanisms. But this study moves beyond illustrating how institutions influence actors' behavior to examine the conditions that lead actors to create the institutions that influence their behavior. In other words, this is a study of endogenous institutions.

In line with rational choices approaches to endogenous institutions, this study holds to the premise that institutions are the product of decisions by self-interested actors. Institutions emerge because they improve the welfare of individual actors. Much of the 'rational choice' literature on institutions sees institutions as solutions to problems of coordination or collective action. This book takes a similar approach. Dominant parties are solutions to problems of collective action and mutual commitment. In this way, this work shares much in common with rational choice works on the origins of parties in democracies, which tend to view parties as solutions to a series of collective action problems (Shwartz 1989, Aldrich 1995).

[13] See Levitsky and Way (2010) for a similar interpretation.

Also in line with rational choice approaches to institutions, this study highlights the importance of strategic interaction between these self-interested actors. When deciding whether a dominant party is in their interest, leaders and elites not only consider their own preferences and constraints, but also the preferences and expected behavior of the other party.

But in contrast to much of the early work within "rational choice institutionalism," this study does not attribute the origins of institutions solely to the "value that institutions have for the actors affected by those institutions." (Hall and Taylor 1996, 1945). Early works in the new institutionalism made major contributions by showing that institutions benefited actors by allowing them to cooperate, reap gains from trade, or reduce transaction costs. In turn, self-interested actors created institutions because those institutions helped them realize these benefits (e.g Shepsle and Weingast 1981, Milgrom, North, and Weingast 1990). But these accounts of institutional origins were sometimes perceived as functionalist. Institutions emerged because they were called for. Accounts of institutional origins focused on stylized descriptions of the immediate decisions made by self-interested actors and the subsequent effects of the resultant institutions on actors' behavior.

Such accounts have difficulty explaining variation in institutional emergence. To say that actors would benefit from an institution does not explain why the institution is supplied in some cases, but not in others (Bates 1988, Ostrom 1990). Indeed, such approaches generate a puzzle: if institutions improve the welfare of actors, why do actors fail to create them in some settings (Bates 1988, Moe 1990)? Take for example Aldrich's (1995) account of why political parties emerge. Parties help solve collective action problems associated with voting.[14] They provide organizational and financial resources that help mobilize voters, which reduces the physical costs

[14] Parties also solve collective action problems in legislatures where a centralized party leadership with the ability to sanction non-compliance helps legislators reduce uncertainty and achieve the public good of party discipline.

of voting, and a party label provides voters with information on candidates, which reduces the costs of acquiring information. The puzzle, then, is why parties remain so weak in much of the world; after all, if strong parties provide such benefits to candidates, then why do actors fail to create strong parties? In an analogous fashion, some of the best recent work on dominant parties suffer from a similar functionalist drawback. Dominant parties are viewed as institutions that solve problems of credible commitment for leaders, allowing them to credibly promise spoils to elites which increases the chances that elites will remain loyal to the leader (Magaloni 2008). But again, this generates a puzzle: why is there variation in the emergence of dominant parties? If they generate such benefits then it seems strange that many authoritarian leaders would eschew building them.

The most illuminating recent work on party development in democracies embraces the rational choice view of parties as solutions to collective action problems and retains a focus on individual candidates as the key actors; but, crucially, this work seeks to identify the meso-level structural factors that affect the incentives of candidates to seek invest in party building (Hale 2006, Smyth 2006). Smyth (2006) shows that candidates with significant personal resources (such as wealth or a business that can serve as an organizational base) may eschew partisan affiliation because they have less need of the mobilizational resources that parties can provide. Hale (2006) highlights how candidates with ties to "party substitutes" such as regional political machines or prominent financial-industrial groups have less need to invest in party building, because these "substitutes" provide many of the same benefits that a party would provide.

My approach is similar in spirit. It melds a rational choice approach to endogenous institutions with social-structural variables that affect the incentives of actors to invest in dominant party institutions. Specifically, like rational choice approaches, I take dominant parties

to be the immediate result of decisions made by individual actors, engaged in strategic interaction. Dominant party institutions help solve problems of commitment, coordination, and cooperation. But moving beyond 'shallow' rational choice accounts of institutions my theory focuses on how meso-level, socio-structual variables affect the extent to which actors demand solutions to these problems.

### 1.11 Dominant Parties and the Study of Democratization

This study helps explain why some countries democratize, but others do not. It does so by illuminating the origins of one institution—dominant parties—that fortifies authoritarian rule. In recent years, much of the research on democratization has focused on how characteristics of the authoritarian regime itself affect its propensity to break down. Transitologists and their heirs highlighted splits within the authoritarian regimes as a precipitating cause of authoritarian breakdown (Przeworski 1991, Burton, Gunther and Higley 1992). On its own, however, elite cohesion is of limited utility as an explanatory factor. Its proximity to the outcome of regime breakdown makes it border on tautology. To say that strong authoritarian regimes are those that command the support of those within the regime edges close to restating the definition of a strong regime. From an empirical estandpoint, elite cohesion was often seen to melt in the face of contextual circumstances, which made it difficult to make predictions about regime trajectories on the basis of arguments about elite splits. Moreover, identifying periods of elite splits that are separate from their alleged effects on regime durability proved difficult.

Those who have endogenized elite cohesion are able to provide a more compelling account. Attempts to endogenize elite cohesion come in two varieties: structural and institutional. Those who take a structural approach posit economic and macro-social variables,

such as economic growth (Haggard and Kaufman 1995) or social opposition (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006) as determinants of elite cohesion.

Those who take an institutionalist view argue that dominant parties foster elite cohesion by providing institutional guarantees about the benefits of regime loyalty and creating incentives for otherwise fractious elites to cooperate in the perpetuation of the regime. Geddes (1999) was the first to make this point and noted that regimes with party regimes survived for much longer than personalist or military dictatorships. This view of dominant parties as stabilizers of authoritarian rules has since been refined and extended in a number of works (Brownlee 2007, Slater 2011, Levitsky and Way 2010).

This literature advances the notion that dominant parties extend authoritarian rule by ensuring elite cohesion, but it does not provide a clear view of how that cohesion is established in the first place. Most starkly, these works fail to lay out the factors that make elites, both in the aggregate and at the individual level, more or less likely to commit themselves to dominant parties. This is important for causal inference. One of the key stumbling blocks in the new institutionalism is endogeneity. The primary difficulty is that institutions may be endogenous to a set of social conditions that abet the creation and maintenance of the institution (Rodden 2007, Przeworski 2007). Since we cannot randomly assign institutions to social settings, it is difficult to know whether institutions have causal effects or whether their existence masks the underlying social dynamics that actually determine outcomes.

In the case of dominant parties' effects on democratization, we cannot know for certain whether dominant party institutions stabilize authoritarian regimes or whether the social conditions that bring about and sustain these institutions actually forestall democratization (Pepsinsky 2013). What is needed in order to improve causal claims about the effects of

dominant parties is an empirically robust explanation for dominant party emergence. Identifying the causes of dominant party emergence will help analysts sweep out the effects of social conditions in empirical analyses.

### 1.12 Research Design, Methodology, and the Plan of the Book

Concerns about causal inference have animated some of the most productive debates in comparative politics in recent years. But the question is not just about causal inference; it is also about what "makes a good cause" (Kitschelt 2003). Scholars have warned against constructing causal arguments on the basis of independent variables that are far-removed from outcomes of interest (Elster 2005). These scholars advocate specifying a chain of causal mechanisms explicitly linking cause and effect. On the other hand, scholars have also cautioned against "shallow" explanations, which focus on factors so proximate to the outcome of interest that they are not illuminating (Kitschelt 2003, Rodden 2007).

This book takes seriously issues of both causal inference and causal depth. My argument specifies both exogenous structural factors that affect the balance of resources between leaders and elites and a chain of reasoning linking those structural changes to changes in the behavior of actors. In turn, my argument specifies how individual, strategic actions taken by actors translate into the creation of a dominant party.

I then take a multi-method approach in order to examine both the internal and external validity of my arguments. Qualitative case studies excel at establishing internal validity. Case studies are also advantageous because they permit valid, low-level measurement of variables—elite and leader resources—that are difficult to measure for a large cross-national sample. At the

same time, cross-national statistical analyses help to establish external validity. It is hoped that consistent results across multiple streams of evidence will prove more persuasive.

The empirical portions of the book begin with two qualitative case studies of dominant party emergence and non-emergence in Russia: Chapter 3 examines the non-emergence of strong ruling parties in Yeltsin era-Russia, while Chapter 4 examines the gradual rise of United Russia and its transformation into a dominant party. As noted above, the existence of a strong social opposition and a paucity of rent revenues would lead existing theory to predict that Yeltsin would be forced to buy the cooperation of social forces by coopting (or confronting) them with a strong dominant party. But this is not what we observe. By contrast, my argument predicts that a dominant party would not emerge because elites were too strong. This is what we observe.

Chapter 4 is a least-likely "crucial" case (Eckstein 1975, Gerring 2007). . A least-likely case is the obverse of a most-likely case. It is one that is predicted to *not* achieve a certain outcome on competing theoretical dimensions, but is expected to achieve the outcome on the theoretical dimension of interest (Gerring 2007). Some existing theory would predict that Putin would not invest in a dominant party in the mid-2000s, because windfall oil revenues would allow him to buy cooperation without institutions and a weak social opposition posed no threat that needed to be coopted (e.g Gandhi 2008, Smith 2005). Again, this is not what we observe. My argument predicts that the relative balance of resources between the Kremlin and regional elites would lead to the creation of a dominant party, which is what happened.

Thus, as in Chapter 3, congruence between independent variables of interest and the dependent variable in Chapter 4 provides some evidence in favor of the argument. In addition, these paired, longitudinal case studies come from the same country, which permits us to hold

constant some national-level macro-historical factors such as history (i.e. the legacy of the CPSU), culture, and levels of modernization.

Yet, demonstrating the congruence of independent and dependent variables in two-paired longitudinal case studies only takes us so far. So rather than conceive of these chapters purely as cross-case comparisons, I prefer to treat each of these chapters as within-case analyses. Within-case analysis is aided by the simple fact that the emergence of a dominant party is not a dichotomous event. These chapters endeavor to construct an analytic narrative that "identifies the actors, the decision points they faced, the choices they made, the paths taken and shunned, and the manner in which their choices generated events and outcomes" (Bates et al, 1998, 14). Recognizing the enormous variation in the actions and choices of both the Kremlin and regional elites as well as the variation in the final outcome of interest (dominant party formation), these chapters examine how the Kremlin and regional elites responded to shifts in the resource balance by reinforcing or undermining their own investments in the pro-regime party. In turn, the sum total of these decisions is related to the emergence or non-emergence of a dominant party. These chapters demonstrate the internal validity of the argument not just by demonstrating a correlation between within-case values of the independent variables (resource ownership) and dependent variables (individual commitment to the party project), but also by providing evidence that actors made their decisions for the reasons posited in the theory and that those decisions had real consequences for the success or failure of the regime party. Chapter 5, with its emphasis on how United Russia structures actor incentives, also serves this role.

The empirical material in these chapters draws heavily on 18 months of fieldwork carried out in 10 Russian regions and Moscow. During this time, I conducted scores of interviews with regional elites, party leaders, legislators, and local experts. These interviews provided invaluable

insight into the process of dominant party building and the role of United Russia in Russian politics.

Chapters 6 and 7 examine the individual-level causal mechanisms of the argument using quantitative data. Although my theory is ultimately concerned with the macro-outcome of dominant party emergence, its implications concern the behavior of individual actors. In these chapters, I endeavor to show that elites have interests in retaining their own autonomy and make dominant party affiliation decisions on the basis of those interests. If elites, as a whole, are less likely to join a dominant party when they control significant autonomous resources, then the same should hold true of individual elites in a dynamic process of dominant party formation. I test this hypothesis with original data on when 121 of Russia's regional governors joined United Russia from 2003-2007. Event history models are employed to show that governors with strong political machines were more likely to postpone joining United Russia. Chapter 7 extends testing of this hypothesis to another elite group in Russia: regional legislators. Using original data on the party affiliation of over 2,000 Russian regional legislators this chapter shows that legislators whose careers are built on the basis of business enterprises that are difficult to tax or control by the Kremlin were less likely to join United Russia.

Chapter 8 presents a series of cross-national statistical tests that probe the generalizability of my arguments. Are my arguments applicable outside post-Soviet Russia? In this chapter I develop an original, cross-national measure of elite strength based on historical patterns of political decentralization, geographic distributions of human population, and territorial concentrations of ethnic groups. I then use original data on 128 dominant parties and to test the main argument. I find that dominant parties are most likely to emerge in countries when resources are balanced between leaders and elites. When elites, especially those on the

periphery, control access to regional political machines and clientelist networks, they may need to be coopted into a party, but if these resources give elites too much autonomy, then elites will not commit to a leader's party project and a dominant party will not emerge.

Chapter 9 concludes the book, highlighting both the comparative and Russia-specific implication of the study. I discuss the how the theoretical framework in the book can help us understand the evolution of United Russia and conclude by offering some thoughts on the future of the dominant party system in Russia.

**Figure 1.1 Proportion of Authoritarian Regimes with Dominant Parties: 1946-2006**

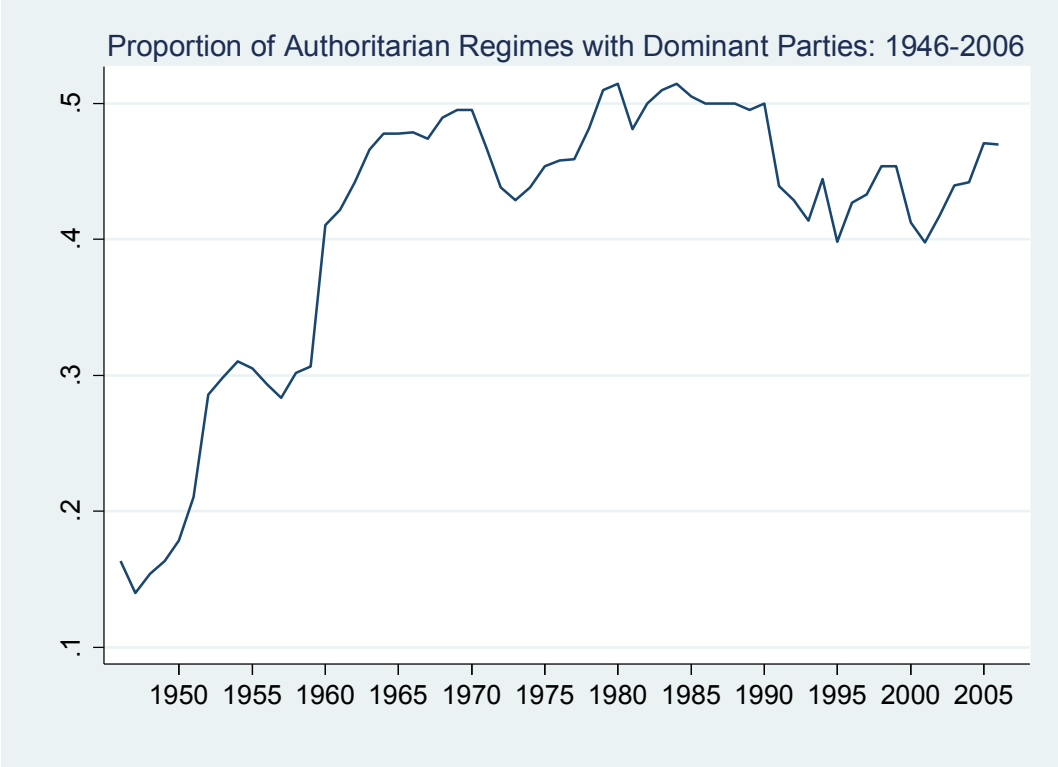


**Figure 1.2 Dominant Parties Around the World in 2006**

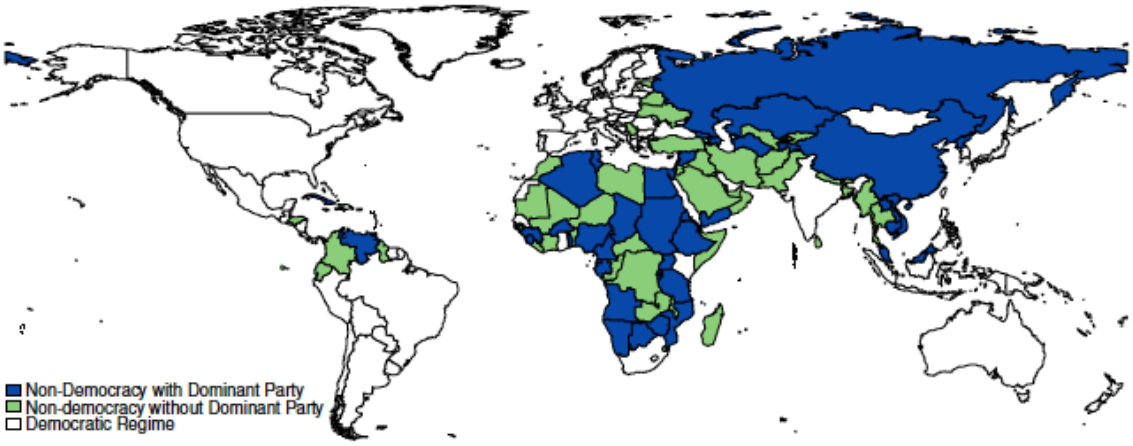


**Figure 1.3 Conceptual Map of Terms**

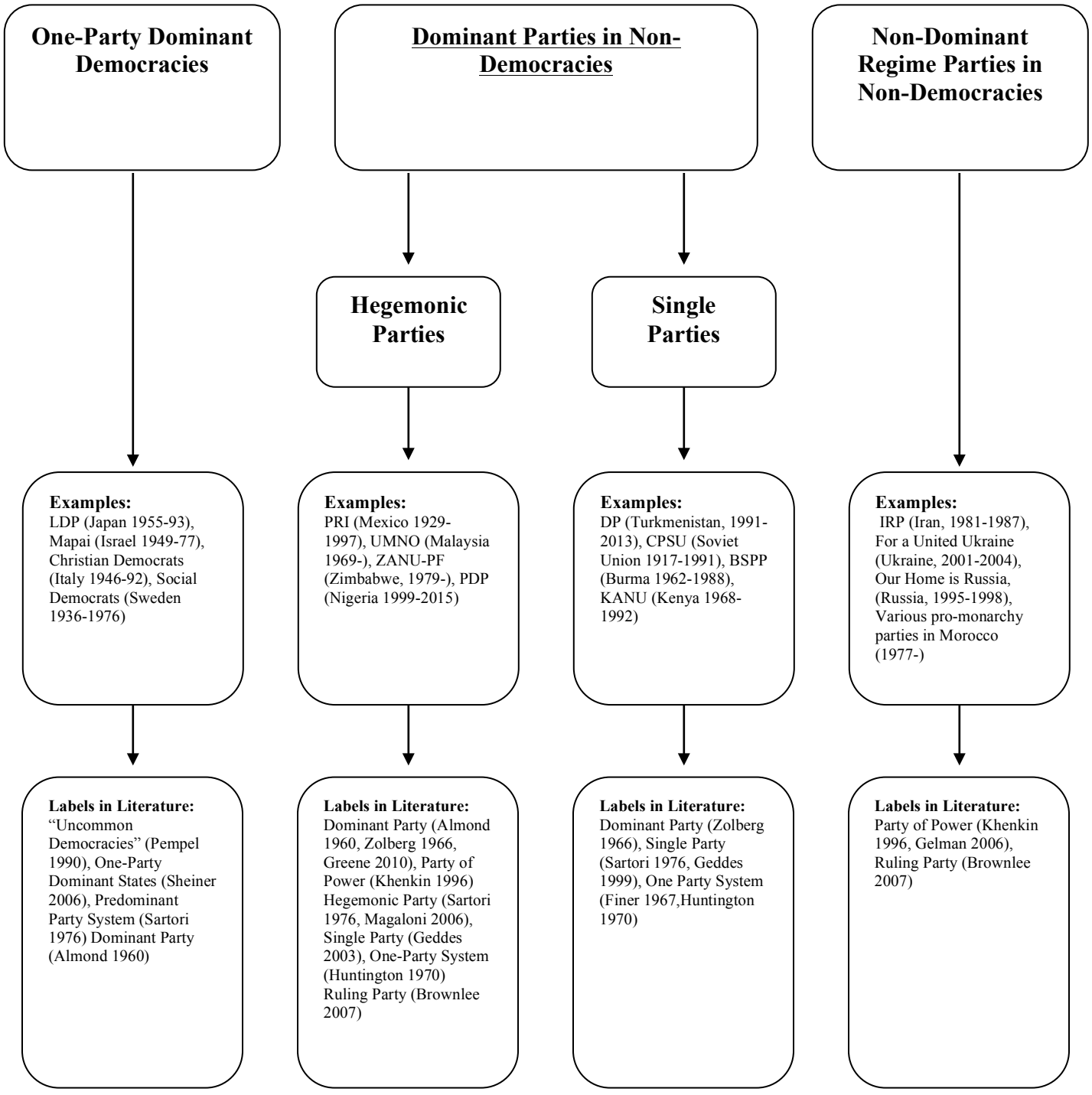
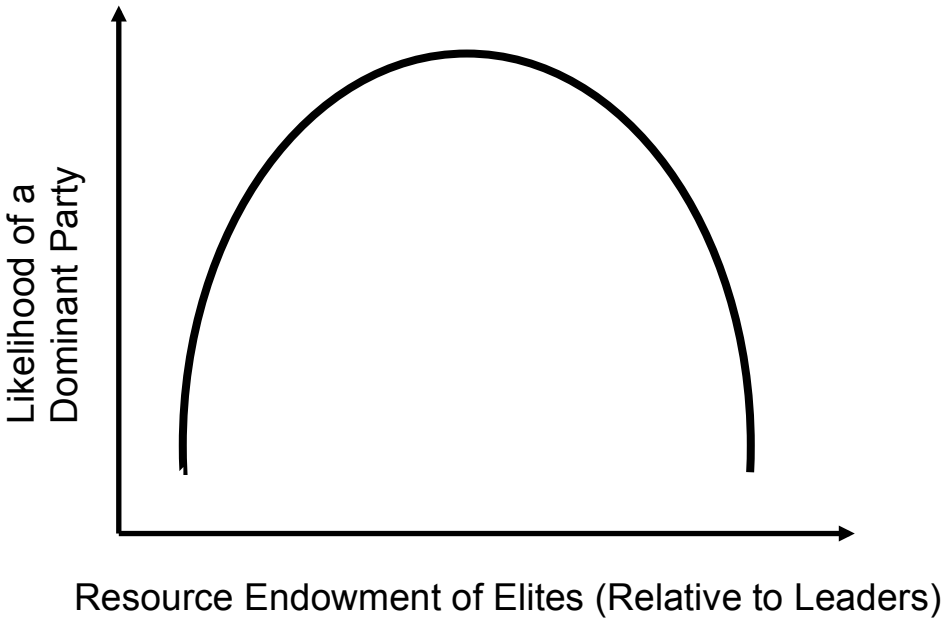


**Figure 1.4**


Likelihood of a Dominant Party
Resource Endowment of Elites (Relative to Leaders)