Against all odds: aiding political parties in Georgia and Ukraine
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Characterizations of political parties in Georgia mention ‘a lack of clear ideology, values or vision; excessive role of leaders’ personalities; heightened degree of political opportunism and populism; lack of internal democracy’ (Tarkhan Mouravi 2006: 243). Instead of broad-based, institutionalized organizations with a serious degree of political clout, parties in Georgia have been ‘more like political clubs with loose organizational structures, small memberships and no real influence’ (Dolidze 2005: 2).

During the 2003-2004 parliamentary elections, ‘none of the political parties presented a meaningful or more-or-less comprehensive election program’ (Usupashvili 2004: 98). Wheatley argues that parties were all ‘highly centralized, top-down organizations’, ‘elite-led and leader-driven’, with a ‘complete subordination of ordinary party members to the leadership’, lacking ‘a clear policy profile’, and failing to ‘forge links with Georgian society’. In sum, ‘Georgian political parties were fundamentally different sorts of organizations from their Western counterparts’ (Wheatley 2005: 155-9).

Authors speak of the ‘weakness of political parties’ both at the outset of Ukraine’s ‘transition’ in 1993 and fourteen years onwards (Wilson and Bilous 1993: 693; D’Anieri 2007: 43), and in 2008 still, ‘Ukraine’s party system is undeveloped and fluid’ (Slomczynski et al. 2008: 93). Indeed, ‘the parties’ status and role have been persistently and deliberately undermined for more than a decade and a half’ (Riabchuk 2008: 44). Parties in Ukraine are ‘of marginal importance in Ukraine’ and ‘often vehicles for oligarchic interests’ (Van Zon 2005: 17). Also, ‘most parties’ “ideologies” are very similar and ideology does not play a decisive role. Ukrainian parties are for the most part of the clientelistic leadership type that relies on other mechanisms for electoral success than on representing and aggregating voters’ preferences and societal interests.’ (Zimmer 2003: 11). Finally, ‘[p]arties, as it has turned out, are short of a broad social base, their ideology and program inadequately reflect current problems, they do not have a vision on the development of society, and they lack the capacity to function properly.’

The above characterizations suggest that providers of assistance in Georgia and Ukraine have a formidable job at hand in helping parties transform into more democratic and representative organizations. Providers of assistance face an uphill struggle in which they can expect to achieve modest results at best. In any event, the
state of party development in Georgia and Ukraine at different moments has important implications for what types of assistance programs are called for, as well as for the potential effectiveness of these programs. This chapter looks into the material with which providers of assistance have worked in Georgia and Ukraine - political parties during the second decade of multi-party politics, from the late 1990s until 2007-2008. The first section identifies the defining outcomes of party politics in Georgia and Ukraine over the course of this period - an extraordinary degree of volatility in party politics, and the impact on party politics of (semi-)authoritarianism - and sets these off against the outcomes of party politics in Western half of the post-communist world, Central and Eastern Europe,. The second section explores the extent of volatility in party politics in Georgia and Ukraine, and discusses the difficulties of studying party politics in conditions of ‘fluid’ party politics. The following three sections explicate three variables that have enabled the particular outcomes of party politics in Georgia and Ukraine - elite ‘ownership’ of parties, undemocratic practices in party creation and operation, and the limited leverage of parties. Starting from the observation that party creation and operation are almost exclusively led by elite actors, the sixth section sheds light on party politics in Georgia and Ukraine by looking into the incentive structures of political party ‘entrepreneurs’. The following two sections, which move away from theory to a more empirically grounded discussion, review the dynamics of party politics in Georgia and Ukraine in the second decade of multi-party politics, and argue for a classification of parties in these countries on the basis of variables – foremost incentive structures and party origin – that have been most distinctive for these cases. The chapter concludes with a summary of the key implications for party assistance which flow from the analysis in previous sections.

4.1. DIVERGENT TRAJECTORIES

In most countries that were once part of the ‘third wave of democratization’, political parties are subject to a ‘standard lament’ (Carothers 2006a: 3-21). According to this lament, parties lack programmatic distinction, do not genuinely represent people’s interests, spring into action only around election time, are leader-centric, and are ill-prepared to take up the responsible task of governing. These defects, unsurprisingly, are rife throughout both halves of the post-communist world. A diverse and sophisticated body of literature details the deep-seated shortcomings and growing pains of parties in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). A frequent theme in this literature is the difference between party politics in CEE and in older democracies (Innes 2002; Toole 2003; Webb and White 2007). The gap between Western and
Eastern Europe, however, appears to have narrowed somewhat: a number of party systems in CEE have stabilized (Bakke and Sitter 2005; Lewis 2006), electoral volatility has gradually dwindled (Lane and Ersson 2007), and voters have turned out not be less versatile than may once have been expected (Kitschelt et al. 1999). Much less analysis has been directed to party politics in the former Soviet Union (FSU). A large share of the available literature centers on individual countries, mostly Russia, and has a limited focus, while few studies engage in cross-national comparison.

When viewing party politics in the FSU in a wider perspective, the closest point of reference, naturally, remains the other, more democratic half of the post-communist world. In many former Soviet republics the party landscape changed radically from election to election since independence was gained, and on average more so than in CEE states. Whereas in the majority of CEE countries one can reasonably speak of the gradual emergence of party systems, whatever was there in terms of parties at random moments in FSU states by and large constituted a loose collection of transient political forces which failed to develop patterns of interaction. As Sanchez (2008a) argues, these loose collections of parties should not be referred to as ‘inchoate’ or ‘weakly institutionalized’ party systems, but rather as party ‘non-systems’. Changes in the supply of parties in these non-systems were less the outcome of changes in voters’ preferences, as electoral volatility is often understood, than of the creation of new forces and abandonment of existing forces by political ‘entrepreneurs’, who tended to view parties as disposable ‘projects’ which had been designed to satisfy short-range objectives. Parties mostly remained utterly weak institutions, more so than in CEE countries, where in most cases a core of stable parties over time has become visible and has started to interact according to more or less understandable patterns - the hallmark of a party system (Mainwaring and Scully 1995: 4).

Party politics in the FSU over the post-communist period has been most obviously distinct from party politics in the democratic states of CEE primarily in two respects: first, the more volatile nature (a difference in degree) of party politics in the FSU, expressed by higher levels of electoral volatility (Bielsa 2005: 341) and a higher replacement rate of parties (Birch 2001: 17), but also by other factors; and second, the impact of authoritarian practices (a difference in kind), a direct correlate of the political context of (semi-)authoritarianism in most of the FSU. As will be argued in the following sections, these two outcomes, in the cases of Georgia and Ukraine, have been foremost conditioned by three explanatory variables. Volatility is explained by the circumstance that parties have only very limited leverage over the political process in Georgia and Ukraine, which in turn is an outcome of institutional factors - mainly executive-legislative relations and electoral legislation - as well as by the fact that
party operation is driven almost exclusively by elites. The elite-led nature of party politics is a proximate cause of volatility, in that the actions of the elite (party ‘entrepreneurs’) have a direct impact on party politics. The limited leverage of parties, on the other hand, has an indirect, albeit very powerful impact on party politics, and is therefore a remote cause of volatility. The uneven playing field in party politics is a direct consequence of the political context of (semi-)authoritarianism.

The enabling conditions of the outcomes of party politics in Georgia and Ukraine have constrained the development of a stable, democratic party system and, as will be argued later on in this chapter, have presented major dilemmas for the party assistance effort. The next four sections discuss the specific outcomes of party politics in Georgia and Ukraine over the post-communist period and the impact of the variables which explain these outcomes. After the extent and impact of fluid party politics in Georgia and Ukraine are laid out (4.2), it is argued why elite behavior rather than sociological factors shapes party operation in Georgia and Ukraine (4.3). Next, the impact of the political context of authoritarianism on party politics is demonstrated (4.4). Finally, arguments are put forward why specific elements of institutional arrangement in Georgia and Ukraine have bred party system volatility (4.5).

4.2. STUDYING FLUID PARTY POLITICS

In his classic treatise, Sartori (1976) reserves the term ‘fluid polities’ for ‘polities whose political process is highly undifferentiated and diffuse’ (idem: 244). Party politics in these states is formless, unstructured, not yet institutionalized, and therefore excluded by Sartori from his categorization of party systems (idem: chapter 8). It only takes a look at election results to get an idea of the low level of party system institutionalization in Georgia and Ukraine. The election results in appendices one and two display the turnover of political forces between elections and reveal the instability of electoral coalitions in Georgia and Ukraine over the course of the most recent four parliamentary elections.

It is widely acknowledged that some degree of party system institutionalization is imperative for the consolidation of democracy (e.g. Diamond and Linz 1989: 21; Mainwaring and Scully 1995). Quantitative studies accordingly point to a correlation between levels of democracy and levels of party system institutionalization (Casal Bértora 2008). Thames and Robbins (2007) find that ‘the highest levels of democracy’ do not go together with ‘low levels of institutionalization’. Whether party system institutionalization is a necessary prerequisite for democratic consolidation or not, it
has at least several important positive consequences for the performance of democratic rule (Powell 1982; Tóka 1997). Weak party system institutionalization is believed to undermine democratic consolidation in a number of ways. In the absence of strong and stable parties, it is impossible for voters to hold parties accountable for their actions in government or in the legislature, to develop a relationship with a party, and to engage in strategic voting based on available knowledge of party behavior, while for parties it is difficult to strategically position themselves vis-à-vis political opponents (Birch 2001; Mainwaring and Zoco 2007; Thames 2007). Also, more institutionalized parties are in a better position to aggregate and channel citizen’s demands and to interact in a constructive manner in the legislature (Siaroff 2006: 198).

Since most parties in Georgia and Ukraine have shallow organizational structures and lack deep-reaching roots in society, they can be easily dissolved by their leaders when they do not bring in anticipated benefits. Party turnover has been accompanied by fractionalization. Relatively permissive laws on political parties in both Georgia and Ukraine have allowed for the proliferation of parties: 183 parties were registered with the Ministry of Justice in Georgia in 2006 (Nodia and Pinto Scholtbach 2006: 152) against 138 in Ukraine in 2007 (Golubitskii 2007). Party system fractionalization in Georgia and Ukraine is fed by personal ambitions, as party leaders have been rarely willing to give up their organizations, no matter how insignificant, in favor of a merger with other parties (Boyko 2005).

Rapid changes in the supply of parties are the clearest indicator of the fluid nature of party politics in Georgia and Ukraine. Individual parties, however, have been unstable in more respects. Parties have been subject to far-reaching internal change resulting from defections or the arrival of new leadership. The degree of change could be such that the affected party should be regarded as a different entity. Furthermore, parties often did not compete as independent political forces, but as constituents of larger electoral alliances, that almost invariably proved to be short-lived. Sometimes, the line between parties and blocs became difficult to draw, contributing to the low profile of parties as autonomous political forces. Also, once parties got into parliament, they tended to disintegrate into several rivaling factions from which new parties were sometimes formed (e.g. Herron 2002). As with electoral coalitions, the distinction between parties and factions often became blurred.

As will be argued in subsequent sections, a compelling explanation for the weakness and instability of parties lies in the limited relevance of parties in Georgian and Ukrainian political life, providing potential political party ‘entrepreneurs’ with
insufficient incentives to invest in the development of viable parties. Volatility has been a continuous feature of party politics in Georgia since independence. Both under Shevardnadze and under Saakashvili, a more or less dominant party of power was surrounded by a large number of weak and unpopular opposition parties, which in many cases enter and leave the fray fast and without trace. Whereas volatility was similarly marked in Ukraine until the 2002 parliamentary elections, since that moment a number of political forces, for the time being at least, have appeared to be sustainable. Some of these forces, however, are blocs which display a large degree of intra-bloc volatility and are not likely to prove sustainable in the longer run.

Political parties in Georgia and Ukraine, unlike long-standing parties in Western Europe but like parties in large parts of the world outside Western Europe, by and large have not grown out of social cleavages, do not represent large segments of society (though they may articulate their sentiments) and are often difficult to identify on the left-right, or conservative-progressive, spectrum of classical political ideologies. For these and other reasons, concepts from the study of parties in Western societies often travel poorly to non-Western contexts, as Erdmann (2004) has cogently demonstrated in relation to sub-Saharan Africa. As noted, a significant literature has appeared on party politics in Central and Eastern Europe, while little attention has been directed at political parties in the former Soviet Union, where the level of party system institutionalization is even lower than in Central and Eastern Europe, and party development mostly takes place under (semi-)authoritarian regimes or in a context of uncertain democratization at best. Understandably, it has been asked whether it is of much use to study parties in a political system as volatile and a party system as unstructured as that of Georgia and Ukraine during most of the post-communist period.51

No systematic analysis of party politics in Georgia exists in the academic literature, and, except from large-n quantitative studies, Georgian political parties are left out of cross-national comparative studies. The limited number of studies on parties in Ukraine have a narrow focus and mostly do not take on comparison with party politics in other (post-communist) countries. The difficulty of studying parties in circumstances of fluid party politics becomes evident when we attempt to apply common analytical concepts to party development in Georgia and Ukraine. Three basic characteristics of any party system are its size plus shape (or fragmentation), its degree of ideological polarization, and its degree of institutionalization (Mainwaring 1998; Siaroff 2005: 184-5). The first two of these form the basis of Sartori’s influential classification of political parties, while the third characteristic features more often in more recent studies of party systems.52
The most widely applied indicator for party system institutionalization is Pedersen’s (1983) index of electoral volatility, which primarily seeks to reveal aggregate changes in support levels for parties between subsequent elections. Any discussion of electoral volatility in Georgia and Ukraine, however, would have to start with the observation that the volatility score of the Georgian and Ukrainian party systems, considering that party creation and dissolution are almost exclusively elite-driven, is more a function of the ‘whim of elites’ than of changes in voters’ preferences (Birch 2001: 3; Neff Powell and Tucker 2008: 3). The high turnover rate of parties as well as incessant fluctuations within parties and electoral alliances pose challenges to coding and therefore render calculating electoral volatility for Georgia and Ukraine since independence a very complicated and ultimately futile undertaking.53 Moreover, official elections results may not reflect the actual relative strength of parties (as expressed by voters’ preferences) given credible allegations of fraud in most elections in Georgia and Ukraine since 1991. This straightforward realization is too easily overlooked or ignored in many studies.54 Those who do calculate scores of electoral volatility in Georgia for the purposes of large cross-national studies of post-communist countries find that it is either average (Tavits 2005: 85) or one of the highest in their sample (Bielasiak 2005: 341). Electoral volatility scores for Ukraine range from one of the lowest in post-communist Europe (Tavits 2005: 85) to one of the highest (Lane and Ersson 2007: 99; Bielasiak 2005: 341; Mainwaring and Zoco 2007: 60). Difficulties in calculating electoral volatility in inchoate party systems can, in theory, be overcome by looking separately at volatility of a stable core of parties on the one hand, and volatility from party entry and exit on the other (Neff Powell and Tucker 2008), or by calculating bloc volatility instead, whereby blocs are put together from ideologically akin parties (Bartolini and Mair 1990). In the absence of even a core of stable political parties, such strategies are bound to be problematic with regard to the Georgian and Ukrainian party universes. If one moreover wants to assess party system institutionalization in Georgia and Ukraine by applying other popular indicators instead, such as party age or stable roots in society,55 then this would ex ante lead to the conclusion that the level of party system institutionalization in both countries is extremely limited due to the only brief existence of multi-party politics and the elite character of party creation.

While political polarization, primarily around a pro-regime/anti-regime fault line, tends to be high in Georgia, ideological polarization is not. Most relevant parties define themselves as centre-right, speak out in favor of pro-market reforms, and consider Euro-Atlantic integration a top priority of foreign policy. Only the Labor Party defines itself as left-of-centre, while the ruling United National Movement purports to be ‘non-
ideological’ and to ‘represent the whole population’ (IDEA 2006: 7). Evidently, differences between parties in Georgia do not hinge on different ideological positions, and, to the extent that differences in ideological positions are discernable, are they of secondary importance in shaping voters’ choices.

Polarization over policy-related issues, such as pro-reform versus reform-averse, has been more readily discernable in Ukraine, particularly during the 1990s. Dividing Ukrainian political forces into three ideological blocs (left, centre, right), as Wilson and Birch (2007) have attempted, however, overstates the weight of programmatic positions in interparty competition. In the years leading up to the Revolution, the anti-regime contra pro-regime stance of parties was a more important signpost shaping voters’ preferences. The two most popular electoral blocs since the 2006 parliamentary elections - Party of Regions (PR) and Yulia Timoshenko Bloc (BYuT) - have moved to the center in what may be called a catch-all electoral strategy and correspondingly lack a clearly identifiable ideological position. Both parties are said to contain within them political groups with diverging ideological outlooks. The foremost cleavage in Ukrainian politics, in terms of electoral effects, is regionally defined and related to questions of identity and value systems (Shulman 2004; Wilson 2002a). People in southern and eastern regions of the country view the Soviet past and the historical ties with Russia in a positive light, while voters in Western and eastern regions are more likely to adhere to the idea of Ukrainian (ethnic) nationalism. Although this cleavage is seldom openly alluded to in electoral campaigns, it does have a crucial impact on electoral behavior (Barrington 2002).

The degree of party system fragmentation is most commonly assessed by computing Laakso and Taagepera’s (1979) Effective Number of Parties (ENP) score, in which the strength of parties is either determined by their vote share or by the percentage of seats they occupy in the legislature. As with electoral volatility, it is not obvious what the best strategy is to calculate the ENP for Georgian and Ukrainian parties due to, among other things, the high turnover of parties, the abundance of unstable electoral coalitions, the incongruence of parliamentary factions and political parties, and the high number of independent MPs. The effective number of parties in Ukraine has steadily been very high until 2006 among different samples of post-communist states (Dawisha and Deets 2006: 692; Wilson and Birch 2007: 57). Bielasiak (2005: 336) finds that that the Effective Number of Parliamentary Parties in Georgia between 1992 and 2004 on average was 4.5. This however conceals major fluctuations over the time period in question, from a high point of 21.16 in 1992 to a low point of only 2.60 in 1999 (Dawisha and Deets 2006: 691). More crucially, as Bogaards (2000: 165) has demonstrated, “different party constellations can hide behind the same effective
number of parties’. With regard to the Georgian party system, then, it seems more appropriate to identify the constellation of the party system, determined by the shape of the system and mode of competition within the party system, which over the last fifteen years almost continuously has been that of a dominant ruling party versus a fragmented opposition.

4.3. ELITE OWNERSHIP

The classic sociological account of party politics explains the origin of parties from societal cleavages (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). According to the cleavage hypothesis, social conflict is translated into party alternatives, i.e. different political parties essentially represent different groups in society (Mair 2006). The cleavage hypothesis presumes the existence of definable cleavages, e.g. along religious, class, ethnic, or linguistic lines, which split up separate electorates. Together with institutionalist explanations, sociological explanations, of which the cleavage hypothesis is the best-known representative, are dominant in theory on the origin of parties and party systems (Gel’man 2006: 548; Mainwaring 1998; Tavits 2008a; Ware 1996). A number of authors have argued that the cleavage hypothesis also holds up to a considerable extent in the case of CEE countries (McAllister and White 2007; Toole 2007; Whitefield 2002), while others exclusively stress the weight of institutional factors (Bielasiak 2002; Fesnic and Ghindar 2004). With respect to Georgia and Ukraine, there is less reason to take cues from the cleavage hypothesis. At the outset of party politics in the post-communist world, it was hypothesized that as a result of the ‘leninist legacy’, no immediately identifiable cleavage structures would be present that could serve as the foundation of strong interest-based parties (Geddes 1995; Lewis 2006: 565). Moreover, post-Soviet states like Georgia and Ukraine contained a weak, embryonic civil society (Howard 2003), a political culture un conducive to the development of programmatic parties (Kitschelt 2001), and lacked meaningful experience with pre-communist multi-party politics, which in some CEE countries has contributed to structure the relaunch of political competition (Toole 2007). For these reasons, the emergence of broad-based political parties with deep roots in society did not appear likely. The political party landscape in post-Soviet states would presumably resemble a tabula rasa on which a wide variety of different players would try their luck to catch the votes of a floating electorate. At the end of the first post-communist decade there were signs in CEE (Kitschelt et al. 1999) as well as in some FSU states (Korasteleva 2000; Miller et al. 2000; Miller and Klobucar 2003) that the electorate was no longer adrift. During these years, at least two types of programmatic parties with well-definable and more or less stable constituencies - namely communist successor parties
and liberal-democratic parties - were still viable forces in Ukraine. Since then, however, these parties have lost much of their clout.

The disattachment of the Georgian and Ukrainian societies from political parties is reflected in membership figures of parties and in levels of popular identification with parties. Membership of political parties has been recorded at 1% of the adult population in Ukraine in 1999. $^{56}$ 63% of respondents did not perceive ideological attachment to any of the political parties, and slightly more than half at the time thought that political parties are necessary institutions for democracy (Kubicek 2001: 126). According to a different survey, less than twenty per cent of respondents deem a ‘multi-party system as “absolutely necessary” for the functioning of democracy in Ukraine’ (Walecki and Protsyk 2007: 26). At 10-15% of eligible voters in the early 1990s, Ukraine has recorded the lowest level of party identification in the whole of post-communist Europe. By 1998, this number had risen to barely 25% (Birch 2000b: 32). According to one survey, only one out of twenty respondents believed that parties serve the interests of the people, while more than half of respondents were convinced that parties instead serve economic interests, and close to half that parties exist the careers of their leaders (Yakimenko and Zhdanov 2003). Party membership rates in Georgia were higher, and according to one survey stood at 4.4% in 2001 (Nodia 2003: 30), against 2.6% in 2004 according to another survey (Nodia and Pinto Scholtbach 2006: 105). The exact number of party members in Georgia is difficult to measure because, first, most parties do not maintain a computerized database of their membership, and second, because parties tend to overstate their membership figures (idem: 152). Positive identification with parties is limited: in 2007, 58% of survey respondents had an unfavorable view of all political parties (IRI et al. 2007: 67) The leader-centric nature of parties in Georgia is to some degree vindicated by popular attitudes: more than half of voters admit to vote primarily for a party because of its leader, and only one quarter think a party’s program is more important than its leaders (idem: 28).

The disattachment of society from parties in Georgia and Ukraine goes hand in hand with the absence of meaningful mechanisms of internal democracy within parties. In Georgia, ‘Across the political spectrum, political parties lack internal democracy and meaningful distribution within the party’ (Black et al. 2001: iii). With regard to Ukrainian parties it has been remarked that ‘all serious decisions are often made by ‘a “club” of about one or two dozen individuals’ (Barca et al. 2006: 25). Consequently, as has been noted with respect to Georgian party politics, ‘competition remains largely confined to elite circles’ (ARD, Inc. 2002: 13). In terms of organizational strength, regime-initiated parties tend to be somewhat more full-fledged relative to opposition
parties, which, according to a USAID publication, ‘in countries undergoing democratic transitions are often little more than a handful of leaders in search of a constituency’ (USAID 2000: 45). It was found in 2001 in Georgia that the ruling CUG ‘is the only party that has chapters throughout the country and is likely to field candidates in each district’ (Black et al. 2001: 15). Despite its apparent organizational strength, CUG disappeared overnight following the Rose Revolution.

While cleavages may explain voters’ preferences even in Georgia and Ukraine, they do not account for the rapid and frequent changes in the supply of political parties. Partly as a result of the pro-active interference by the executive branch in party politics, the creation of parties in Georgia and Ukraine was increasingly less driven by societal factors than it was by the interests of political and economic elites. Especially as the regimes sought to consolidate their rule, did they interfere in the electoral arena by creating and sustaining support parties and loyal satellite parties and by blocking off unwelcome contenders. For the regimes, this became one element in their strategy to predetermine the outcome of elections and, with that, to strengthen their hold on power.

It had been anticipated by Kitschelt (2001) that the legacy of the type of communist rule that was characteristic of the Soviet Union - what Kitschelt has called ‘patrimonial communism’ - would be less conducive to the emergence of programmatic parties than the types of communist rule that had existed in CEE. The reappearance, or continuation, of authoritarianism in the region would further constrain the prospects of programmatic, cleavage-based parties that truly represent the interests of societal groups, because the regimes had an interest and the means to check these parties’ standing. The impact of the legacy of patrimonial communism on party development in FSU states, therefore, can barely be isolated from other elements in the political trajectory of these states. Irrespective of whether there are cleavages or issues in Georgia and Ukraine on the basis of which viable parties can be built, regimes and regime-proximate elites have acted to reduce the likelihood that these cleavages and issues would come to dominate party politics. The regimes, in other words, have intently reduced the weight of sociological factors in party politics. Furthermore, as the next section will outline, regimes in Georgia and Ukraine have taken the initiative to create different types of parties which have crucially altered party politics.

Once we realize that the operation of parties is led by elite actors, much insight can be gained from studying the motives of these elites. As Tavits (2008b: 549) notes, ‘much more emphasis should be put on understanding the incentive structures of elites that encourage or discourage stability on their part.’ Section six in this chapter will take up
this challenge to help explain the dynamics of party creation and disintegration in Georgia and Ukraine.

4.4. PARTY POLITICS IN AN UNEVEN PLAYING FIELD

The (semi-)authoritarian political regime context has affected interparty competition and party development in Georgia and Ukraine (until 2005) in a profound manner. By focusing on the types of parties that have been at the forefront in Georgia and Ukraine, this section demonstrates how the political party landscape is to a large extent shaped by the impact of authoritarian practices. Party politics in a less-than-democratic setting should be expected to display a different dynamic from settings in which fair competition can be taken for granted. This straightforward but crucial assumption is insufficiently appreciated in studies of party politics in ‘third wave’ states. In less-than-democratic settings, executive authorities often intentionally distort the electoral playing field in order to tighten their grip on power or to extract the rents that are accessible to regime actors by virtue of holding office. Distortion of the playing field is achieved both by checking the opposition and by becoming involved in party-building. Some regimes opt to establish a ‘party of power’ that towers over other parties in terms of financial and personnel resources and exposure. As will be demonstrated below, regimes may also deploy other types of parties, including satellite parties and spoiler parties, to keep a check on genuine pluralism.

Competition between parties in less-than-democratic conditions is often less about policies than about the rules of the political game. Elections may become ‘nested games’: ‘At the same time as incumbents and opponents measure their forces in the electoral arena, they battle over the basic rules that shape the electoral arena’ (Schedler 2002: 110). Moreover, the decisive fault line in electoral competition is that of support for the regime versus opposition to the regime, with little room for political accommodation. Opposition parties will often declare democratic convictions an important motive in their struggle against incumbents, and organize protests to voice their opposition to the regime. In the process, issue-based appeals, which are believed to better structure electoral competition in democracies (Croissant 2002: 346), are pushed to the background. Finally, the party system configuration under (semi-)authoritarianism often lasts only as long as the regime lasts, since regime change often brings about a radical shake-up of the party landscape. Party system change in less-than-democratic settings is therefore conditioned upon the regime’s capability of survival.
Under each of the three Georgian presidents’ regimes since 1990 have there been serious restrictions on the observance of full political rights. Leaders in Georgia have tended to tilt the political playing field in their favor by abusing their executive powers, though hardly ever to such an extent that pluralism and competitiveness were entirely thwarted. Although little consensus exists over the nature of the political regimes under Shevardnadze and Saakashvili, in part due to the dearth of scholarship on modern Georgia, it is clear, and corroborated by democracy indices such as Freedom House’s, that they should be regarded as highly defective democracies in terms of the degree to which full political competition was inhibited. The Kuchma regime in Ukraine also, and increasingly, impeded fair political competition, as was particularly noticeable in the 2004 presidential election which triggered the Orange revolution. Ukraine under Kuchma is located in the less-than-democratic group of regimes, sometimes termed ‘competitive authoritarian’ regimes (Levitsky and Way 2002), with obvious authoritarian leanings but meaningful, contested elections at the same time. The Orange Revolution was widely perceived as a democratic breakthrough. Several years into the Orange Revolution, incessant political struggles notwithstanding, the democratic gains appear to have been sustained, with two parliamentary elections, in 2006 and 2007, held in a fair and competitive atmosphere.

**Parties of power**

Parties of power are created at the instigation of the executive branch of government, benefit extensively from state resources, are affiliated with the president - irrespective of whether the president does or does not have a formal role in the party - and, unlike other regime-initiated parties, are created with the purpose of becoming a dominant force in party politics. Parties of power for various reasons do not always succeed in becoming dominant forces, as the example of the National Democratic Party (NDP) in Ukraine shows. It is assumed here that the dominant position of a party in the party system is reflected in the control of more than half of seats in the legislature. Parties of power sometimes fail to get more than half of the vote but still succeed in becoming a dominant force because they attract ‘independent’ deputies or win most contests in single-member districts (SMDs). The key functions that parties of power are designed to fulfill are to amass popular support, primarily in the form of raw votes, and to bind elite actors to the regime. When they are successful in elections, parties of power send a signal of regime strength, which has the dual effect of seemingly conferring legitimacy on the regime and deterring possible contenders from attempting regime change (Geddes 2005). Binding elite representatives to the regime through a party of power has the effect of curbing the ambitions, which may be against the interests of the regime, of these elites, and of mitigating possible conflict between elites and the
groups that these elites may represent (Geddes 2005: Gel’man 2008). In order to bind elites to a party of power, the party assumes the features of a patronage network; in this patronage network, jobs, economic gains, and other benefits are distributed in return for loyalty to the party and, by extension, the regime (Greene 2007; Resende and Kraetzschmar 2005). By uniting otherwise disparate elites, deterring potential contenders, and conferring legitimacy, parties of power can make a crucial contribution to regime survival (Brownlee 2007; Gandhi and Przeworski 2007).

Because they purposefully benefit from state resources in electoral campaigns, the operation of a party of power, as understood here, implies an uneven electoral playing field. In a description of the less-than-democratic aspects of the Georgian regime, Freedom House, for instance, notes ‘a markedly uneven playing field in favor of the ruling United National Movement party’ (Puddington 2009: 16). Concurrently, it has been found that UNM ‘has not taken adequate steps to ensure a fair opportunity for the opposition’ (Mitchell 2008: 91). State resources can range from ‘administrative resources’ (offices, supplies, mobilization of public servants, etc.) to direct monetary transfers from state coffers to the party budget, to the distribution of government jobs and other perks to loyalists (Greene 2007). Mostly, but not necessarily, parties of power do not propagate a distinct political ideology. The existence of a party of power is common in (semi-)presidential regimes with authoritarian leanings, and is especially common for former Soviet republics. In Georgia, parties of powers have dominated legislatures both under the Shevardnadze (Citizens’ Union of Georgia) and Saakashvili (United National Movement) presidencies.

Over the course of the second half of Shevardnadze’s presidency a second dominant party of power was present, pointing to the existence of an alternative centre of executive power outside Tbilisi, in casu in the autonomous region of Adjara, ruled by strongman Abashidze, and in many ways until 2004 a de facto independent entity which unlike Abkhazia and South Ossetia did not seek full secession. Regime change in authoritarian states is often brought about by splits within political elites (Geddes 2004). Around the turn of the century, the Citizens’ Union of Georgia lost its ability to unite the political elite, when influential young politicians like Saakashvili, Zhvania and Burjanadze defected and started setting up their own opposition parties. The political forces of these politicians subsequently were at the forefront of the Rose Revolution. Attempts by Kuchma’s administration to establish a ‘party of power’, uniting a large share of the country’s political elites, have repeatedly fallen through, which can be partly explained by the same societal (geographical) divisions that have determined party system development in Ukraine as a whole. Arguably the most concerted effort at creating a nationwide ruling party, the People’s Democratic Party (NDP) in the
1990s, garnered a paltry five per cent in the PR section of the ballot in the 1998 parliamentary elections. A partial explanation of the failure of parties of power in Ukraine, in addition to the geographical cleavage, indicates the existence of alternative forms of interest aggregation of Ukrainian elites. These ‘substitutes’ (Hale 2005) to parties, most notably financial-industrial groups and regional political machines, were better positioned to defend the interests of elite actors, who may otherwise have joined a party of power. The phenomenon of parties of power has not entirely gone past Ukraine, as in some regions parties, often connected to the economic interests of local elites, have been relatively successful in monopolizing power and aggregating popular support. The failure to unite political elites under one umbrella on a nationwide scale ensured that Ukraine’s party system has always maintained a great deal of pluralism. Parliamentary elections, equally, have always been highly competitive and bitterly fought.

Other undemocratic party types
The mobilization of ‘virtual parties’ has been testimony to the authoritarian leanings of the Kuchma regime. Wilson (2002b) contends that from the ten most successful parties in the 2002 elections, no less than six were virtual projects. The ‘virtual’ in virtual parties refers to the shallowness of their organizational structure and support base. Virtual parties pursue specific short-range objectives which typically do not extend beyond the next elections. Two types of virtual parties in Ukraine can be distinguished (Wilson and Birch 2007: 72-3). First, ‘spoiler’ parties were created to drain away votes from political opponents. The 2002 parliamentary elections in Ukraine, for instance, witnessed the sudden appearance of the Rukh for Unity party, which copied the Rukh party, and a ‘renewed’ communist party, which, so it was hoped by its creators, would drain away support from the major communist successor party (Birch 2003: 526). Even when spoiler parties receive decimals of percents of votes, their mission of draining away votes and stirring confusion in a specific segment of the party landscape is successful.

Second, ‘façade parties’ concealed the actual, primarily economic interests of the party leadership under a programmatic shell. In Ukraine, façade parties, which were particularly widespread until at least 2004, acted as vehicles for individual ‘oligarchs’ or groups of businessmen, also called ‘financial-industrial groups’ (FIGs), that were often regionally based. Electorally, these parties benefited from the funds that their wealthy sponsors would contribute. Some parties that were not primarily oligarchic façade parties were equally associated with particular oligarchs whose sponsorship was sought. The involvement of oligarchs and business groupings in party politics
corrupted legislative politics. It was widely believed that parliamentary seats could be bought and individual parliamentarians bribed. Parties, once elected in parliament, would often make way for factions whose primary purpose similarly was to promote the interests of a business grouping. Åslund (2006: 16) counted nine such ‘oligarchic factions’ in the parliament of late 2002. Sometimes, façade parties had once been more or less serious programmatic parties before at some point they were ‘captured’ by oligarchic groups (Protsyk 2002). The women’s party ZPU, for instance, from a ‘normal’ party had turned into a vehicle for business interests by the 1998 elections (Kuzio 2003: 43); similar takeovers were carried out at the expense of the Social Democratic Party of Ukraine (united) and the Green Party. There is little evidence that virtual parties, of the types that were common in Ukraine, have been employed on a significant scale in Georgia, although many parties have been rumored either to pose as an opposition party while being loyal to the regime, or to serve as a front for American or Russian interests.

Parties of power and virtual parties are outgrowths of authoritarian politics. Since pluralism was far from entirely eliminated in Georgia and Ukraine, there has also been some room for other types of parties, including programmatic, policy-seeking parties, which correspond to an image of what parties should be like in a liberal democracy (Wolinetz 2002: 150), and that are deemed to be more readily compatible with democratization than other types of parties that are widespread in young party systems (Croissant 2002: 346). A significant presence on the party landscape in Georgia and in Ukraine until 2005, nonetheless, has been taken by parties that worked to distort the level playing field and that were not interested in reforming to become democratic forces.

4.5. THE LIMITED LEVERAGE OF PARTIES

Volatility in party supply and volatility within parties, which together determine the fluid nature of party politics in Georgia and Ukraine, hinge on the lack of incentives for political actors to invest in the formation and development of viable parties. The absence of strong enough incentives stems from the limited role of parties in policy-making, in elections, and even in legislation. As will be argued in this section, the limited role of parties, in turn, is largely predicated on the institutional make-up of the political systems of Georgia and Ukraine. The elements of institutional design that are most often considered to have an impact on party (system) development, and that will be consecutively discussed here, are executive-legislative relations and the electoral
system (Croissant 2002; McFaul 2001; Meleshevich 2007). This section additionally discusses the impact of parliamentary rules on party cohesiveness.

Executive-legislative relations

Until the Rose Revolution, Georgia was a purely presidential republic, with the popularly elected president heading the executive while not being subject to the confidence of the legislative assembly. Ukraine has had a semi-presidential arrangement throughout the post-communist period, while Georgia turned semi-presidential shortly after the Revolution as a result of the introduction of a second locus of executive power in the person of a prime minister. Until 2006, the semi-presidential system in Ukraine heavily favored the president, putting Ukraine in the class of ‘highly presidentialized semipresidential regime’ (Elgie 2005: 102-5). Highly presidentialized semipresidential regimes ‘often suffer the same problems as their purely presidential counterparts’ (idem: 102), and may even be more ‘presidentialized’ than some purely presidential regimes, a state of affairs which, with regard to the FSU, is sometimes captured by the term ‘superpresidentialism’ (Fish 2005: 224-244; Herron 2004; Ishiyama and Kennedy 2001). The introduction of the post of prime minister in Georgia was accompanied by a simultaneous increase in presidential powers, so that, despite the fact that executive power was now formally shared, Georgia became even more ‘presidentialized’ (Fairbanks 2004) after the Revolution.

There is a reasonable consensus that presidential, or highly presidentialized, systems are less conducive to democratic consolidation than arrangements with strong legislatures in states moving away from authoritarianism (Bunce 2000; Frye 1997). Among other things, the ‘perils of presidentialism’ include the personalization of power, the often limited checks on executive authority, the blurring of prerogatives and spheres of accountability of the executive vis-à-vis parliament, and the lack of accountability of presidents due to their fixed terms of office (Fish 2006; Linz 1990). With regard to political parties specifically, it is argued that there is an ‘inverse relationship’ between presidentialism and party strength (Shugart 1998; Shugart and Carey 1992: 177). From the wealth of arguments linking presidentialism to problems with stable, democratic party development, four arguments with particular relevance to Georgia and Ukraine are highlighted here.

First, under presidentialism, the relevance of political parties is diminished as a direct consequence of the way powers are distributed. Most importantly, with the presidency being the main prize of competition, political actors will be inclined to place their bets on securing the presidency (Croissant and Merkel 2001: 7; van de Walle 2003: 310-1). In doing so, they often circumvent parties, especially in places where association
with a political party is regarded a liability. Furthermore, while a parliamentary
majority, typically consisting of one or more parties, is central in forming the
government in parliamentary regimes, it is mostly the president, with or without ad
hoc approval by a parliamentary majority, who is in charge of forming government
cabinets under presidentialism. Particularly in countries where parties are unpopular,
presidents prefer nonpartisan, technical cabinets. None of the ten cabinets formed in
Ukraine between 1991 and the Orange Revolution, for instance, had a genuine party
affiliation (Protsyk 2003: 1079). This circumstance exacerbates the situation by
prompting ambitious, careerist politicians who are interested in assuming government
posts not to join parties. Last, given that parliament is the main platform for parties to
manifest themselves, especially when parties are not involved in cabinet formation,
the weakness of the legislature reinforces the image of parties as inconsequential
organizations.

Second, because of the centrality of the presidency, presidential regimes are more
characterized by the ‘politics of personality’ than are parliamentary regimes, in which
parties rather than persons - partisan or not - take center stage (Ishiyama and
Kennedy 2001; Samuels 2002). The personalization of politics, where it affects
parties, works at the expense of the development of viable party organizations. Most
party organizations in FSU countries are dominated by ‘big men’ (rarely women) who
personify their parties. Concomitantly, only few parties have experienced leadership
succession. Outside of parties, most of the highest-ranking politicians, including
presidents and presidential candidates, often eschewed to affiliate with a party.
Kuchma, for instance, in 1994 after his first election victory, declared: ‘[T]his is good
that not a single political party supported me during the election, as I am going to
serve people and not the party’ (cited in Meleshevich 2007: 151). Following in part
from the personalization of politics, parties in presidentialized regimes are less often of
the programmatic type and tend to have a stronger electoral focus than in
parliamentary regimes. Taking on Kitschelt’s (1995: 449) distinction between the
broad categories of programmatic, charismatic, and clientelist parties, under
presidentialism the two latter types are more widespread (Croissant 2002: 355).
Although neither charismatic nor clientelist parties necessarily obstruct the
consolidation of democracy, the effective interest aggregation and larger degree of
institutionalization of programmatic parties go together with democratization more
readily.

Third, related to the diminished leverage of parties under presidentialism, parties tend
to be less cohesive (Carey 2002; Croissant 2002: 354; Kitschelt and Smyth 2002),
lending support to the suggestion that parties in presidential systems are differently
organized than in parliamentary systems (Samuels 2002). In non-programmatic parties, leaders and activists are quicker to abandon their party when the expected benefits of party affiliation are not met. Their excessive focus on elections and lack of cohesiveness obstruct the institutionalization of parties under presidentialism (Croissant and Merkel 2001). Finally, executive authorities in presidential regimes may have an interest in checking the development of strong (opposition) parties which potentially pose a challenge to the regime. Especially in a less-than-democratic setting, the regime may be tempted to block parties from becoming too influential, for instance by amending legislation, detaining party leaders, or rigging elections.

**Electoral Legislation**

The impact of electoral laws on political parties and party systems is extensively studied. Following Duverger (1959), a distinction is commonly made between mechanical and psychological effects of electoral laws. While the mechanical working of electoral formulae translates votes into seats in a specific way, the psychological element prompts voters and parties to rethink the possible consequences of their actions and to adapt their voting and electoral strategy to fit anticipated outcomes. As in the relation between strong legislatures and democracy, there is much evidence, from both case-oriented and large-n studies, that proportional representation (PR) is more conducive to democratization than single member districts (SMDs) in states moving away from authoritarianism (Hoffman 2005; Moser 1999; Norris 2008).

All parliamentary elections in Georgia and two in Ukraine (1998 and 2002) have been conducted according to a mixed electoral system, combining PR and SMDs in different proportions - equally divided in Ukraine and two-thirds to one-third in favor of SMDs in Georgia until 2008. The 1994 elections in Ukraine were all-majoritarian, while party list voting in a single nation-wide district was applied in the 2006 and 2007 parliamentary votes. The main reason why SMDs have a depressing effect on viable party development is straightforward: individuals are elected rather than parties. In the 1994 Ukrainian parliamentary elections, in which all seats were filled from single-member districts, only one fourth of candidates were members of a party, and only half of those were backed by their parties (Birch and Wilson 1999: 277). Especially when parties are unpopular forces, as is the case in Georgia and Ukraine, candidates in majoritarian races have weak incentives to join a party, contributing to the limited visibility and significance of parties. Party development in Ukraine received a considerable boost with the introduction of PR for half of the seats in parliament. A second reason why SMDs, either in combination with PR or not in combination with PR, has the ability to stem the development of a pluralist and competitive party landscape lies in its propensity to sustain and strengthen regionalized political bases. In the less-
than-democratic conditions of Georgia and of Ukraine until 2005, however, regimes are reluctant to allow alternative power bases which potentially challenge central authorities. A more serious threat is the emergence of one-party dominance (Birch 2005). In mixed electoral systems, the party list result for a party of power is often inflated by the outcome of SMD elections. Particularly state-sponsored parties of power, or otherwise parties with more resources than their competitors, are disproportionately successful in SMD elections. While the ruling United National Movement in Georgia, for instance, won close to sixty per cent of the party list vote in the 2008 parliamentary elections, the party received eighty per cent of seats in parliament because it won almost all SMDs races.

Two arguments why the mixed electoral system, which ‘involves the combination of different electoral formulas (plurality or PR; majority or PR) for an election to a single body’ (Massicotte and Blais 1999: 345) has been detrimental to the development of viable parties in Georgia and Ukraine, are singled out here. The first argument is similar to the one already mentioned in relation to SMDs. Candidates in the majoritarian section of the vote often refrain from joining parties. As a result, a large ratio of MPs is likely to be nonpartisan, a situation which decreases the leverage of parties and can augment the creation of unstable factions in parliament, which sometimes draw (former) members from party factions. Secondly, the SMD section provides an alternative route for parties and individuals into parliament (D’Anieri 2007: 159), holding back parties from merging into bigger, more viable forces, and individuals from seeking party affiliation. Individuals with no interest in joining one of the existing parties, as well as parties that see no chance in gaining representation in parliament independently or for whatever reason refrain from joining electoral blocs, have the opportunity to try their luck in the SMD section of the ballot (Ferrara and Herron 2005). Since small parties out of strategic calculation often concentrate much of their effort on winning seats through SMDs, do they not spend as much time and effort on national campaigning, developing a platform and a party organization as they may otherwise. These arguments make clear that mixed electoral systems in Georgia and Ukraine have not turned out to deliver the ‘best of both worlds’ (Shugart and Wattenberg 2001) of the proportional and majoritarian principles, that has been anticipated by proponents of the mixed system. In the ‘best of both worlds’ scenario, ‘the PR system would channel activity into the parties, and the majoritarian section would create strong incentives to party consolidation’ (D’Anieri 2007: 159). Instead, the mixed system has in most cases revealed itself to be, in Sartori’s (1997: 74-5) formulation, ‘a bastard-producing hybrid that combines their defects’.
Besides SMDs, a second alternative route for small parties and for individuals to gain representation has in Georgia and Ukraine been provided by the opportunity to form electoral coalitions (alternatively, blocs or alliances). The fact that parties often team up with other parties in electoral coalitions has been a major driver of party fragmentation. Parties with no chance of getting into parliament on their own still have the chance to jump on the bandwagon of more prospective parties and by doing so win a small number of seats, despite their lack of an autonomous support base. For these weak parties, winning a few seats is enough of an incentive not to disband their organizations. Electoral coalitions furthermore work against viable party development by allowing movements (instead of parties) and non-partisan individuals on their lists. A final manner in which electoral laws could have a negative impact on party development was when they were frequently amended or replaced. In both Georgia and Ukraine, electoral legislation has been subject to several major amendments. Consistent with the hypothesis that electoral laws are amended to benefit those who control the legislative process (Andrews and Jackman 2005; Colomer 2005; Ishiyama 1997), amendments to electoral legislation in the FSU has been often driven by the intention of regimes to skew party competition in their favor. The awareness among parties that electoral laws are not fixed and may be subject to amendment in the near future heightens insecurity about the electoral prospects of parties, which could induce them to focus on more immediate goals and put off organizational development. Furthermore, changes in electoral legislation should also be expected to cause shifts in voting behavior, contributing to even greater party system volatility (Remmer 2008).

In addition to executive-legislative relations and electoral laws, parliamentary rules have had distinct effects on party (system) development. Rules pertaining to the creation and operation of parliamentary factions and to the status of individual mandates have often undercut party discipline and consequently party consolidation. The relative ease with which deputies have been able to establish factions separate from parties has decreased the salience of parties in parliament. In an extreme example, only four out of a total of fourteen parliamentary factions in the Ukrainian parliament in 2001 coincided with parties that had been elected to parliament three years earlier (Wilson 2001: 62). The widespread ‘floor-crossing’ (switching between factions), which is seen as an inhibition to party system institutionalization (Shabad and Slomczynski 2004) has triggered the adoption of an imperative mandate, which assigns seats in parliament to parties instead of individual MPs, in Ukraine. MP mobility has also provided an additional opportunity for political corruption: it is widely believed that MPs in Ukraine were offered large sums of money for joining a certain faction.
The overarching effect of the institutional framework in Georgia and Ukraine on party politics has been to diminish the ‘positions of leverage’ of political parties. Parties have often been irrelevant, or at best not crucial, in the presidential contest and in government formation; presidentialism and electoral laws encourage a focus on persons rather than on issues in both presidential and parliamentary elections; electoral laws provide alternative routes for non-party actors and weak parties to gain parliamentary representation; and a number of party functions are substituted by electoral coalitions and factions in parliament. In the next section it will be argued how the diminished leverage of parties has played out on party development by looking at the incentive structures of party actors.

Constitutional amendments enforcing a more balanced power equilibrium between president and parliament, as well as the introduction of party list voting for all seats in parliament in 2006 have brought Ukraine closer to the kinds of institutional arrangements that are believed to be more conducive to party development. Crucially, as a result of the reforms the role of parties in Ukraine has been significantly enhanced. Georgia has so far retained its ‘superpresidential’ system and a mixed electoral system.

4.6. INCENTIVE STRUCTURES AND MODELS OF PARTY BEHAVIOR

It has been noted that parties in Georgia and Ukraine states seldom have a societal origin. Among the explanations for this are the absence of clear-cut cleavages in post-Soviet societies (Lewis 2006), the weakness of civil society (Howard 2003), as well as the fact that party system development to varying degrees is steered by the post-communist (semi-) authoritarian regimes. As is to some extent true for the entire post-communist world, the creation and subsequent development of parties are typically instigated by elite actors without an immediate grassroots constituency (van Biezen 2005: 155; Birch 2001: 2; Tavits 2008b; Toole 2003). Since these elite actors ‘owned’ their parties entirely, studying their incentives should provide insight into the dynamics of party creation and operation.

Especially in the initial stage of multiparty politics, party-building in Georgia and Ukraine involved much ‘small-scale political vanity, fanaticism, and whimsy, which have generated a penumbra of tiny “divan” or “taxi” parties’ (Wilson and Birch 2007: 54). These mostly irrelevant small parties, which are typically headed by a self-interested leadership and of which there are still dozens in Georgia and Ukraine, may defy classification. Considering the meager electoral prospects and the very limited
leverage over politics of these parties, their prolonged existence is not easily explained from an inquiry into their incentives. It is assumed here, nonetheless, following a key premise in rational choice approaches, that the more relevant political party actors by and large behave purposefully (Hershey 2006: 75). The principal rationale underlying the activity of these actors is the benefits that they anticipate receiving from electoral success; borrowing from political economy terminology, they may be thought of as political party ‘entrepreneurs’ (Strom 1990). These entrepreneurs can be divided into those who operate separately from the regime and do not have access to state resources, and those who belong to the inner circle of the regime and therefore do have access to state resources that can be employed in party-building.

Because of the limited leverage, conditioned by elements of institutional design, of political parties in FSU states, nonregime actors have had few compelling incentives to invest in party-building. Parties have remained weak institutions, with the exception of a number of parties of power whose ultimate purpose was to entrench a consolidated authoritarian regime. Weak parties were prone to be abandoned by their leaders at some point. Many of them had been launched as not much more than ‘projects’ that had to satisfy short-range objectives. As soon as they failed to deliver, these parties were discarded by the leadership. A considerable number of weak parties have been sustained despite their failure to deliver: often, however, did these forces continue to exist merely in name, without a leadership willing to invest in them, and without any serious degree of leverage. Incentives to create and sustain viable parties, to the extent that they did exist, moreover, have been offset by a number of other factors that have discouraged political actors to invest in parties. At different times potential party entrepreneurs have anticipated repression from the authorities when they would engage in opposition activity. In effective authoritarian systems, party entrepreneurs may furthermore refrain from party-building because they do not expect to gain electoral success in an uneven playing field. Also, alternative types of organization, such as financial-industrial groups or clan structures based on kinship, may substitute parties with respect to aggregating and defending the interests of elites. Political parties traditionally carry out a number of functions which, at the risk of oversimplification, can be divided in procedural functions (nominating candidates for office, legislative tasks, forming government) and representative functions (aggregating interests, issue formulation, mobilization) (Bartolini and Mair 2001: 332; Erdmann 2004; Gunther and Diamond 2001). Parties are indispensable for the fulfillment of at least a minimum of procedural functions, but can be substituted regarding their representative functions. Hale (2005), in a highly insightful account of party politics in Russia before the emergence of the One Russia ruling party, argues
that on the ‘marketplace’ where political interests are ‘traded’, parties were outflanked by ‘substitutes’ for parties, most notably financial-industrial groups and regional political machines, that were more effective in aggregating and defending the interests of elite groups. To the extent that these groups engage in electoral competition, do they merely employ parties as ‘vehicles’ to secure parliamentary representation. After this narrow goal has been achieved, the party is readily abandoned. In other FSU states besides Russia where regimes have not been able to direct party system development, and where elites were disunited, the party universe was fragmented and individual parties were weak, alternative forms of organizations have also operated as networks that aggregated interests of elite actors, who otherwise would likely have been drawn to parties or would have created parties. Wheatley (2005: 218) has identified four such interest-based networks of elite actors in Shevardnadze-era Georgia. Similar to Russia, financial-industrial groups in Ukraine, mostly with a regional origin, wielded much influence and were involved in politics (Puglisi 2003).

Taken together, a wide range of factors hold back individual actors - likely party entrepreneurs under different conditions - from joining parties or from engaging in party-building: the limited leverage of parties in the overall political process; the poor career prospects in political systems in which executive posts flow to non-partisan actors only; the poor electoral prospects for partisan candidates in single-member constituencies where parties are unpopular; the availability of ‘substitute’ organizations with more effective mechanisms of interest aggregation; the likelihood of repression; and the limited chance of electoral success in an uneven playing field. Despite the generally weak incentives to invest in parties for actors not intimately connected to the regime, parties have fulfilled if not the representative, then at least the procedural functions which make parties indispensable in elections with more than one party.63 Some parties were steered by the executive powers in the FSU states or by oligarchic forces and were driven by stronger and more specific incentives, and incentives of a different type, than those of actors from outside the regime. Parties of power mainly served the purposes of checking the opposition and providing a patronage network for elite actors. Satellite parties equally served to pull in elite actors and keeping the opposition small by winning as large a share of the vote as they could, while spoiler parties, a subtype of the satellite party, singularly served to drain away votes from the opposition. A more remote intended effect of these regime-initiated parties was to contribute to regime survival. Next to the regime-initiated parties, self-interested businessmen in some countries created ‘oligarchic parties’ to win office in order to then reap the benefits related to holding office.
A way to picture the incentives that drive party creation and operation in Ukraine and Georgia is by extending Strom’s ‘three models of party behavior’ (Strom 1990) - policy-seeking, vote-seeking, and office-seeking - to the less-than-democratic context of Ukraine (before 2005) and Georgia. According to Wolinetz (2002: 149-50), ‘a policy-seeking party is one which gives primary emphasis to pursuit of policy goals, a vote-seeking party is one whose principal aim is to maximize votes and win elections, while an office-seeking party is primarily interested in securing the benefits of office - getting its leaders into government, enjoying access to patronage, etc.’.

Figure 4. Incentives, party types and party origins. Adapted from Wolinetz (2002: 161)

Figure four depicts how the incentives for party-building in Georgia and Ukraine are related to the types of parties that have been prevalent in these states. Naturally, the three types of incentives are ideal-types: real-life political parties are functional hybrids whose leaders can be driven by intricate combinations of incentives. Rather than laying a claim on precise classification, the above figure for that reason primarily serves a heuristic purpose.

The dominant parties of power of Georgia and the frequent spoiler parties of Kuchma-era Ukraine have been first and foremost interested in securing as many votes as
possible, in the case of the parties of power mostly to signal regime strength and derive legitimacy from elections, and in the case of spoiler parties to spoil the chances of anti-regime forces. Virtual ‘façade’ parties, common in Ukraine under Kuchma, sought office more than anything else in anticipation of receiving the (economic) benefits that were associated with office. With the disappearance of virtual parties after the Revolution, fewer parties in Ukraine are ostensibly office-seeking. A large number of mostly not so relevant, small, personalist political parties in Georgia and Ukraine are neither clearly policy-seeking, nor clearly office-seeking. Often, these parties are sustained for many years, without enjoying any prospect of electoral success or gaining access to office, except when they become part of an electoral coalition. Finally, a number of parties in Ukraine, and arguably a few in Georgia, have primarily pursued policy goals. These parties, however, have almost invariably been kept outside of executive power, and have lost much of their clout over the years. Of all these party types, only some of the policy-seeking parties can boast a credible degree of organization, societal rootedness, and internal democracy. More importantly, only few parties in Georgia and Ukraine have been seriously interested in developing their parties into democratic, stable and representative forces, and future constituents of a democratic, stable and representative party system in a consolidated democracy. The majority of parties, therefore, would be dubious recipients of party assistance, a conclusion with important implications regarding the efficacy of party assistance in Georgia and Ukraine.

4.7. The second decade of multi-party politics

This thesis studies political party assistance over the course of roughly one decade, spanning four parliamentary elections in both Georgia (1999, 2003, 2004 and 2008) and Ukraine (1998, 2002, 2006, 2007). Considering that multipartism commenced in the two former Soviet republics near the end of the 1980s within the framework of the political reforms of perestroika, the time period under investigation here comprises, roughly, the second decade of multipartism. During this second decade of multipartism, party politics in Georgia and Ukraine has remained highly volatile. In Georgia, both before and after the Rose Revolution, and even more so than in Ukraine, voters have been confronted with a radically different set of parties and electoral blocs from one election to the next (see appendices one and two). In the 2002 parliamentary elections in Ukraine, similarly, only 4 out of 33 forces that competed had been at the ballot in 1998 in the same form (Birch 2003: 530). Results from elections since 2002 suggest some degree of continuity. Intra-bloc volatility, in the form of frequent changes in the composition of electoral blocs, however, has been
substantial. Moreover, previously successful parties (in electoral terms) have lost much of their clout, and by 2008 one of the major parties of previous years, People’s Union Our Ukraine, was seemingly in a process of dissolution.

As noted in section 4.5, the strengthening of the role of parliament and the cabinet of ministers after the Orange Revolution, and new electoral legislation according to which all MPs are now elected from party lists, have created more fruitful conditions for stable party development in Ukraine. In Georgia, on the other hand, factors which are considered to have a negative impact on stable party development have remained in place. The shape of Georgia’s party ‘system’, characterized by a dominant ruling force surrounded by a flurry of small and weak opposition parties, has equally remained unchanged. The only notable change after the Revolution in this area has been the disappearance of a second party of power, previously signifying the existence of a second locus of executive power in the autonomous republic of Adjara. As much as before the Revolution, the main fault line in electoral competition has revolved around whether parties do or do not support the ruling forces: besides the charisma of party leaders, the stance of parties’ vis-à-vis the regime has defined their identities. Electoral competition has not been strongly marked by geographical cleavages. The most significant geographical factor in elections has been the generally greater support for the regime outside the capital Tbilisi, as suggested by official election results, than in the capital.

Compared to Georgia, electoral competition in Ukraine has been more multidimensional, with a slightly bigger role for substantial issues, a still notable but less overpowering pro-regime/anti-regime divide (mainly before the Revolution), and a much greater weight for geographical differences in voting patterns. In the absence of successful ruling parties, party politics in Ukraine on a national level has been more pluralist than in Georgia, reflected in, among others, a larger number of parties in the legislature. It has also been somewhat easier to tell Ukrainian parties apart on the basis of programmatic issues, although the election campaign for the 2002 parliamentary elections, for instance, was said to be ‘virtually policy-free’ (Birch 2003: 527). Arguably the most defining aspect of electoral competition in Ukraine has been the geographical voting patterns. Although the actual picture is a bit more complex, a distinction if commonly made between, on the one hand, the southern and eastern regions of the country, and the Western regions on the other, with central Ukraine occupying, literally, a middle ground between the two. In the Western half of the country, the Lviv region embodies Western Ukrainian voting behavior. There, president Yushchenko’s party Our Ukraine came in first at the parliamentary elections of 2006. The Party of the Regions, which won the national race with one third of the
vote, garnered only three per cent of the vote in the Lviv region. The east is most vividly represented by the Donetsk region, considered to be the home base of the Party of the Regions (PRU), led by former prime minister and losing candidate in the 2004 presidential elections Yanukovich. PRU received 74% of the vote in the Donetsk region in 2006, while the parties that occupied second and third place in the national vote received a scant 1–3% per cent of votes in the Donetsk region, according to official data. In parliamentary elections before the Orange Revolution, the electoral schism between regions was equally clear-cut. In 2002, the Our Ukraine bloc won 75% in the Western Ivano-Frankivsk region, against less than 3% in the Donetsk region. The Communist Party of Ukraine won 40% in the Luhansk region, and less than two per cent in some Western regions. Geographical concentration of party support has in some cases been limited to one city, typically the home city of a certain party leader. In the 1998 parliamentary elections, the Hromada party scored 35% in Dnipropetrovsk, with a second best result of 6% in the city Kirovograd, and 5% of the overall national vote. These figures invite the observation that ‘there is no real national party system in Ukraine, only a series of (partially) interlocking regional subsystems’ (Wilson and Birch 2007: 74).

4.8. COMMONALITY AND VARIATION IN PARTY DEVELOPMENT

The bulk of political parties in Georgia and Ukraine have shared a number of characteristics which more generally are rather common for political parties outside Western democracies and which make up much of the ‘standard lament’ about parties. First, parties in Georgia and Ukraine were poorly institutionalized, as has been most apparent in the high turnover rate of parties. Further manifestations of weak party institutionalization have been the lack of dense organizational structures, the failure to forge links with society and to attract active members, and shallow organizational capacity outside the capital. Partial exceptions to this have been the Communist Party and Rukh in Ukraine, and arguably also the Republican Party and the Labor Party in Georgia. During the 1990s, the Communist Party and Rukh were often held to be the only true parties on the Ukrainian party landscape (Wilson and Birch 2007: 53). The Communist Party of Ukraine, however, has been kept out of executive power with rare exceptions in southern and eastern regions, and lost most of its support base after 2000, while Rukh, one of the biggest forces in the first years of multi-party politics in Ukraine, suffered a split in the late 1990s after which its two successors were unable to become as influential and popular as Rukh before. In Georgia, the Republican Party and Labor Party have never taken part in government and moreover have never been very successful in electoral terms. Besides these parties, other parties that have
proven durable generally did not have credible organizations: most of them are small ‘sofa’ parties that, facilitated by low maintenance costs, have continued to exist rather out of inertia than out of purpose. Second, parties have been dominated by one leader or, more rarely, a small clique of leaders. The most obvious indication of personalism in parties is that hardly any of them has experienced leadership succession. One exception among currently existing parties is the Republican Party of Georgia, whose former leaders, however, still wield much power within the party. The strong position of a party leader sits uneasily with internal democracy. Parties typically do have the trappings of internal democracy, but lack the content: as noted with respect to Georgian parties, ‘their structures are democratic, yet this merely hides the real distribution of power inside the parties (Dolidze 2005: 8). Third, most parties in Georgia and Ukraine are indistinguishable in terms of political program. Especially the more influential parties often do not bother to define a program. Party names in many cases do suggest an ideological orientation, but the actual weight of ideology is small. In Georgia, the remarkable situation exists that a large majority of opposition parties define themselves as ‘centre-right’ (IDEA and CSS 2006: 7). The reason people vote for a party rarely reflects a programmatic linkage between them and the parties: more often, personal reputation, and sometimes clientelistic practices, shape voters’ choices (Kitschelt 2000). To be sure, some relevant parties, particularly in Ukraine, do have a distinct ideological profile: for Ukraine these are mainly the Communist Party, the Socialist Party, People’s Union Our Ukraine, and the successors of Rukh. In Georgia, the Labor Party and the Republican Party, not by chance also parties with relatively strong organizations, enjoy some recognizability as ideological forces.

Meaningful variation between parties as organizations is to a large degree captured by two factors: the primary incentive driving parties’ operation and continued existence, and secondly, their origin. As noted in section six of this chapter, authoritarian practices in party politics in Georgia and Ukraine translate into vote-seeking and office-seeking incentives in party operation against program-seeking incentives, which are more commonly associated with party development in democratic societies. Strom’s tripartite division of program-seeking, office-seeking, and vote-seeking models of party behavior provides a useful framework to understand the different incentives that drive party operation in Georgia and Ukraine. Second, three types of origins of parties can be distinguished: parties may be initiated at the direct instigation of the executive branch; actors from within the regime or with close ties to the regime, such as ‘oligarchs’, may engage in party-building; and parties may originate entirely from outside the regime. Party origin, conceived in this way, is indicative of whether parties turn out to be pluralistic (as against proto-hegemonic) and of the
incentives which drive their operation. Purely program-seeking parties in Georgia and Ukraine, for instance, are invariably created from outside the regime, while parties that are created at the instigation of the executive branch work to distort the electoral playing field and by doing so thwart pluralism.

A more circumstantial feature of parties is their political relevance. Relevant are those parties which possess, in Sartori’s well-known formulation, ‘blackmail potential’ and ‘coalition potential’ (Sartori 1976: 122-3). Broadly interpreted, parties are relevant when they have some stake in how the country is governed, either by being in government or being seen as a possible future coalition partner, or by presenting an influential force in the legislature. Of the 100-200 parties that are registered with the Ministry of Justice in Georgia and Ukraine, only 10-20 at any moment are said to be truly functional, and have some prospect of winning representation in parliament. A much smaller number of parties still, sometimes only one, has actual leverage over how the country is ruled. Finally, parties vary according to their ideological self-positioning, or, if no explicit ideology is proclaimed, the type of policy that is consistently advocated. The ideological self-positioning of parties, obviously, does not necessarily reflect the true objectives of those parties. As noted, policy and ideology are often largely absent in electoral races. Parties with clear ideological profiles, as much as parties which do not reveal an ideological position, may not give precedence to emphasizing programmatic issues.

Tables three and four list the most prominent parties in Georgia and Ukraine during the period under investigation, and score these parties on the variables of variation between parties identified above. Because of their relative prominence, the parties listed in these tables have been the primary material with which providers of assistance have worked. Some of the parties no longer exist; others have surfaced only in recent years.
These tables demonstrate that, in both Georgia and Ukraine, political parties with a more pronounced ideological position tend to be less relevant. Formulated reversely, the most relevant parties in both countries are not primarily driven by the incentive to implement a specific set of policies, and in addition, and relatedly, fail to associate with a definable political ideology. The only parties with a serious degree of leverage in Georgia, before and after the Rose Revolution, have been the parties of power. As auxiliary organizations of the regime, these parties of power are ideologically diffuse and are driven primarily by a vote-seeking incentive. The wide range of small opposition parties which have been somewhat more explicit ideologically, have
invariably remained inconsequential forces. Unlike in Georgia, there have been no dominant parties of power in Ukraine. Most of the parties that have been highly relevant in Ukraine, however, have, with the partial exception of People’s Union Our Ukraine, equally been short on ideology and a program-seeking incentive. The parties that have been most consistent in advocating a coherent program, particularly the Communist Party and Rukh, have become less relevant over time. The greater degree of pluralism and competitiveness of the Ukrainian party system, relative to the Georgian party system, is demonstrated by the fact that more parties that have their origins outside the regime have gained some degree of relevance.

4.9. IMPLICATIONS FOR POLITICAL PARTY ASSISTANCE

The implications for party assistance that follow from the discussion on the domestic constraints on party development in Georgia and Ukraine in this section, are simple. Most evidently, the effectiveness of party assistance has been impaired by the large degree of volatility in party politics in Georgia and Ukraine. Parties that were assisted were likely either not to survive or to become subject to far-reaching internal change. Indeed, most parties that have been assisted over the years subsequently withered. The Georgian party landscape in 2009 is still highly in flux. New parties, led by former regime actors, have recently presented themselves, and the survival of the ruling United National Movement seems to hinge solely on the survival of the regime. In Ukraine, a modicum of continuity has become discernable in recent years. Within-bloc volatility, however, is considerable. Moreover, the party that has by far has received most attention from providers of assistance, People’s Union Our Ukraine, in 2009 is near extinction.

Even more crucially, a substantial share of the more relevant Georgian and Ukrainian parties that have received assistance were really unsuitable to receive assistance because the operation of these parties was driven by incentives that were incompatible with the norms and values that party assistance sought to infuse in party politics. This applies foremost to the regime-initiated vote-seeking parties (parties of power and spoiler parties) and to office-seeking ‘oligarchic’ parties. These parties were not interested in becoming constituents in a future stable and democratic party system, an observation that was echoed, for instance, in a USAID-commissioned assessment of political parties in Georgia in 2001 which found that ‘limited interest exists within the major political parties to transform themselves into well-structured democratic organizations presenting the public with credible, differentiated policy platforms’ (Black et al. 2001: iii).
Finally, even if parties would be receptive to assistance, as a form of democracy promotion party assistance would still have been unlikely to be particularly effective given the limited leverage of parties in political life and as vehicles of representation. To really make a difference, providers of assistance not only would have needed to work with parties, they also would have had to address the structural constraints on the development of stable and democratic parties. Addressing these structural domestic constraints, including institutional arrangements and the unevenness of the electoral playing field, however, goes beyond the capabilities and the mandate of party assistance.