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When Opportunity Structure Knocks: Social Movements in the Soviet Union and Russian Federation

GREGORY P. WILLIAMS
Department of Political Science, University of Connecticut, USA

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ABSTRACT *The notion of an opportunity structure has become both popular and confusing for social movement research. This paper attempts to clarify how opportunity structures are understood through a discussion of separatism in two cases: the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation. Instead of being treated as a collective whole, opportunity structures are broken into three factors: A) constitutional rules and rights; B) elite control; and C) the state's capacity and propensity for repression. Factor A represents formal restrictions on potentially insurgent groups while factors B and C are informal restrictions. In the Soviet and Russian settings, four distinct opportunity structures are identified. The first, established under Stalin, was narrow, constraining potentially insurgent groups. But the second, which emerged under Gorbachev, was relatively wide and contributed to the willingness of various republics to declare independence. The third, established at the founding of the Russian Federation, was medium in width, but did not permit the types of activity found in the second. And lastly, the fourth can be dated to Putin's reforms of the early twenty-first century, and is narrow in character. Although future research is necessary for confirmation, this disaggregated model is intended to be generally applicable in other contexts.*

KEY WORDS: Opportunity structure, political process model, Russia, separatism, social movement theory, Soviet Union

Man is in chains, and yet everywhere there is an opportunity structure. Many social movement theorists believe that groups excluded from the political process face both structural limitations and structural freedoms that affect their behavior. These scholars imagine a collection of various constraints and opportunities to form an opportunity structure.[1] Far from being fixed, opportunity structures may open or close over time as formal and informal rules change. There are times when an opportunity structure may be narrow, which reduces the likelihood of a successful social movement; there are also times when an opportunity structure may be wide, which increases the likelihood of success.[2]

Social movements are political phenomena with a lifespan. Movements form, rise, and collapse. Movement collapse occurs when the movement achieves its goals or when conditions that originally gave rise to the movement have changed. This study is valuable because it unpacks the opportunity structure concept to better specify its size at a given time.

Correspondence Address: Gregory P. Williams, Department of Political Science, 341 Mansfield Rd U-1024, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT, 06269-1024, USA. Email: gregory.williams@uconn.edu

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I apply this new understanding of opportunity structures to document three movements: the secession of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR) from the Soviet Union; then, Chechnya and Tatarstan's unsuccessful separatist movements, first from the Soviet Union and then from the Russian Federation. I show how opportunity structures account for both the timing and the ability of these regions to secede.

I begin by disaggregating the concept of an opportunity structure and offer guidelines for its operationalization.[3] I apply this disaggregated model to the Soviet and Russian settings by showing four phases (I, II, III, and IV) of opportunity structure change from the early 1930s to the twenty-first century.[4] I will first measure the Stalin (I) opportunity structure that prevailed over most of the Soviet period, and show how it afforded only a narrow range of political freedom for the regions. Next, I compare this old structure to the wider Gorbachev (II) opportunity structure of the 1980s, and describe how this allowed for multiple declarations of sovereignty in 1990. Thirdly, I demonstrate how this new opportunity structure was not the same for all regions, and that the success or failure of the regions was determined by opportunity structure size. Finally, I explain how the opportunity structure for Chechnya and Tatarstan narrowed slightly under Yeltsin (III) and considerably more under Putin (IV).

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Modeling Movements: Disaggregating Opportunity Structures

An opportunity structure is simultaneously liberating and enslaving: it permits certain actions and outlaws others. This section outlines the political process model of social movements and disaggregates the concept of an opportunity structure.

McAdam's model of social movements challenges previous models that emphasize 'elite control over the political system and the insurgent capabilities of excluded groups' (1999 [1982], p. 37). McAdam emphasizes the interplay of three main kinds of factors relevant to the development of a social insurgency and its success or failure. These factors are political opportunity structure, group leadership, and framing (or, cognitive liberation).

Political process scholars have a particular understanding of structural power. McAdam borrows from Schwartz, who writes, '*any system contains within itself the possibility of a power strong enough to alter it*' (Schwartz, 1976, p. 173, original emphasis). For Schwartz, systems consist of a push and pull between two groups:

> This relationship ... is what we called a *contradiction*. A structure or system creates two antagonistic groups (say, landlords and tenants) and each is necessary for the continued functioning of the system. One group (the merchant – landlords) exercises routinized power. The other group (the tenants) posseses [sic] the possibility of refusing to accept this authority, and therefore possesses the possibility of calling the existence of the system into question. This possibility constitutes a lever against the system – the lever which can force the system to change in order to preserve itself (Schwartz, 1976, p. 173, original emphasis).

These levers, for Schwartz, push and pull against one another. In cases of separatism, the relevant antagonistic groups are the state and its competitors (which are the regions desiring independence). A state must have a monopoly of social control to maintain its dominance over competing organizations, such as chiefs, bosses, or other 'strongmen' (Migdal, 1988, p. 33). For survival, states try to minimize the social control of rival

organizations. States facing secessionism (or potential secessionist groups) try to maintain control by limiting the range of acceptable political behavior through both formal and informal rules. For McAdam, 'challengers are excluded from routine decision-making processes precisely because their bargaining position ... is so weak' (1999 [1982], p. 40). The structure of political opportunities, therefore, is the set of institutional parameters that define the range of a group's political mobility. And, once established, this structure is routinely reinforced through action.

Changes to the opportunity structure can raise or lower movement activity (McAdam, 1999 [1982], pp. 40–41). What causes these structural changes? McAdam writes that the possible instigators of change are numerous: 'The point is that *any* event or broad social process that serves to undermine the calculations and assumptions on which the political establishment is structured occasions a shift in political opportunities' (1999 [1982], p. 41, original emphasis). In short, anything from international realignment to unemployment could qualify as a structural change (McAdam, 1999 [1982], p. 41).

Mere structural change, however, is in itself insufficient for a social movement. Leadership within a group must capitalize on structural change. The significance of organizations, for McAdam, 'largely [appear to be] a function of four crucial resources they afford insurgents' (1999 [1982], p. 44). These resources are members, solidarity incentives, a communication network, and leadership (1999 [1982], pp. 44–48). Movement leadership, in particular, is important for McAdam, 'for in the context of political opportunity and widespread discontent there still remains a need for the centralized direction and coordination of a recognized leadership' (1999 [1982], p. 47).

Structural change and strong organizations are, for McAdam, necessary but not sufficient conditions for a social movement. Framing, originally called cognitive liberation by McAdam, is also necessary: it affects not only how excluded group members perceive changes in political opportunities and their own organization (1999 [1982], p. 51), but how they portray their message to the outside world. As McAdam claims, 'favorable shifts in political opportunities decrease the power disparity between insurgents and their opponents and, in doing so, increase the cost of repressing the movement' (1999 [1982], p. 48). These changes alter how members of excluded groups perceive themselves and their ability to succeed. McAdam invokes Pivan and Cloward's (1979) discussion on three phases of cognitive liberation: in phase one, group members begin to distrust the legitimacy of rulers and institutions that surround them; in phase two, excluded groups, 'begin to assert "rights" that imply demands for change'; and lastly, phase three consists of a new-found efficaciousness – (group members who originally did not believe in the possibility of change now both believe and actively work towards that goal) (McAdam, 1999 [1982], p. 50; Piven & Cloward, 1979, pp. 3–4). This step is vital to the start of any social movement. Before a social insurgency can begin, members must first recognize the injustice before them and believe that action can change their circumstances; the development of what McAdam calls 'actionable' emotions is a large part of the process (1999 [1982], p. x).

McAdam describes each of these types of factors as necessary for social movement formation. Once generated, the same conditions that were necessary to create the movement now impact on its success or failure: 'Once under way ... the pace and character of insurgency come to exercise a powerful influence on the development of the movement through the effect they have on the other factors' (1999 [1982], p. 53).

I focus exclusively on the opportunity structure concept. The political process literature, according to McAdam, views 'the timing and fate of movements as largely dependent

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upon the opportunities afforded [to] insurgents by the shifting institutional structure and the ideological disposition of those in power' (1996, p. 23). Did a shift in political opportunities precede change X or Y in movement activity? How did it change? What actions are allowed that were not before? In the Soviet and post-Soviet setting, many scholars focus on opportunity structures specifically (e.g. Oberschall, 1996; Zdravomyslova, 1996). This is not to suggest that other factors (such as leadership or framing) are unimportant, but that structural changes often precede other developments, and therefore serve as a guide for understanding movements as a whole. My study illustrates that a change between one opportunity structure and another are critical to the timing and success of social movements.

Opportunity structures may be important for the study of movements, but there is no consensus as to how they should be measured. How does one know if structural constraints have widened? Or narrowed? For McAdam, a change in opportunity structure results from a fundamental change in the political system – so fundamental, in fact, that it undermines the assumptions from which the political establishment is based (1999 [1982], p. ix). Beyond this basic requirement, however, McAdam does not provide much guidance for his readers. Subsequent studies have used the concept in many different ways: as an independent variable, as a dependent variable, or as type of intervening variable.[5] In Gamson and Meyer's assessment, opportunity structures have been over-utilized, and are now in danger of becoming 'an all-encompassing fudge factor for all conditions and circumstances that form the context for collective action. Used to explain so much, it may ultimately explain nothing at all' (1996, p. 275). But this criticism does not warrant moving away from opportunity structures altogether. On the contrary, the fact that opportunity structures have been employed so much is a testament to their attractiveness and potential for social science. And by pulling apart opportunity structures into smaller pieces, the whole may become less ambiguous, and therefore more manageable.

What makes up an opportunity structure? What are its basic parts? Although used in diverse ways, opportunity structures nonetheless have common characteristics. Any operationalization of an opportunity structure, for instance, must involve a combination of formal and informal rules. The relationship between political elites and outsiders is defined not only by formal rules, but also the informal or customary practices of policymakers (Kriesi *et al.*, 1992; Foweraker & Landman, 1997, p. 49; Hooghe, 2005, p. 985). Considered in this way, three factors comprise an opportunity structure. I have listed them here as research questions:

A. *What is the formal constitutional structure of the state?*
Specifying an opportunity structure begins with the formal rules that govern acceptable political behavior. A state's constitutional structure shows which behaviors are permitted and which are prohibited exclusive of any particular informal procedures. In Soviet and Russian movements for territorial separatism, the right to secede (possessed by only a few regions) plays an important role.

B. *To what degree do centralized elites control the state?*
Beyond constitutional restraints, potentially insurgent groups are further constrained by informal elite controls. In the Soviet and Russian cases, elite control takes the form of single-party dominance.

C. *To what degree does the state repress potentially insurgent groups?*
The state can use repression as an informal mode of control. In the Soviet Union and

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Russia, this takes the form of suppressing minority nationalities beneath the majority, or through banning the legal existence of minority nationalities.[6]

These three factors – A, B, and C – represent how states control the range of acceptable political behavior for potentially insurgent groups. Table 1 shows their relevance for the Soviet and Russian cases.[7]

By identifying the disaggregated components of an opportunity structure, one can determine its overall width at any given time. The impact of each factor can be measured as 'weak', 'moderate', or 'strong'. A factor has a 'weak' impact when the rules it represents are diminished by other factors or by economic or political conditions. A factor has a 'moderate' impact when its status is uncertain, or when the rules it represents are neither diminished nor enlarged by other factors or by economic or political conditions. And lastly, a factor has a 'strong' impact when the rules it represents are enlarged by other factors or by economic or political conditions.

The relative strength of each factor, in turn, contributes to the overall character of an opportunity structure, designated simply as 'narrow', 'medium', or 'wide'. A 'narrow' opportunity structure allows for very little political activity, and is not likely to witness a social movement. A 'medium' opportunity structure, on the other hand, is more likely to witness a social movement, but not as likely to witness a successful social movement. And finally, a 'wide' opportunity structure is likely to witness successful social movements. In short, by determining the relative width of an opportunity structure, researchers can reasonably determine a movement's likelihood for success, however defined.[8] Table 2 shows the impact of opportunity structure size on social movements.

Four main opportunity structures can be found in the time between Stalin and Putin. Opportunity Structure I begins with Stalin in the 1930s and lasts until the early 1980s. Opportunity Structure II starts with Gorbachev in 1985 and lasts until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Opportunity Structure III takes effect under Yeltsin, and ends with the transfer of power at the end of 1999. Lastly, Opportunity Structure IV can be marked from Putin's ascension to power until today.

As this paper will show, factors B and C tend to co-vary in the Soviet and Russian worlds.[9] When informal rules (factors B and C) are strong, a narrow opportunity structure forms. When informal rules are weak, a wider opportunity structure forms. Formal rules are embodied by factor A, the presence or absence of a constitutional right of secession. Since factor A does not treat all regions equally, it has a different impact on union republics than on autonomous republics. For union republics like the RSFSR, when informal rules are weak, a wide opportunity structure forms. For autonomous republics such as Chechnya or Tatarstan, when informal rules are weak, a medium opportunity structure forms. Table 3 displays these findings.

In each instance of separatism, opportunity structure size represents the state's ability to constrain the occurrence and success of separatist movements. I will first compare two opportunity structures during the Soviet period, and then I will compare two opportunity structures in the Russian Federation.

Opportunity Structures I and II: Stalin, Gorbachev, and the USSR

For much of the Soviet Union's life, the state imposed a narrow opportunity structure over the regions. This section demonstrates the two phases of opportunity structures in the

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Table 1. Disaggregated opportunity structure

	Rule	Description	Rule Type	Indicator
A)	Constitutional Design	Theoretical rights of potentially insurgent groups	Formal	Whether regions possess constitutional rights to secession
B)	Centralized Elite Control	Ability of elites to control society	Informal	Degree to which Stalin, Gorbachev, Yeltsin or Putin are able to determine a region's policies through one-party rule
C)	Capacity and Propensity for Repression	Ability of the state to repress potentially insurgent groups	Informal	Degree to which USSR or Russian Federation can forcibly subjugate or deny recognition to a region (nationality)

Table 2. Effects of opportunity structure size

Opportunity Structure Width	Likelihood of Social Movement	Likelihood of Success
Narrow	Not Likely	. . .
Medium	More likely	Not Likely
Wide	Likely	Likely

USSR, and shows how Opportunity Structure I differs from Opportunity Structure II. While the first structure was extremely narrow, it was displaced by a second structure that was wide for union republics but only medium for autonomous republics. This section is divided into two subsections, one for each Soviet opportunity structure.

Stalin and Opportunity Structure I (1930s – 1985)

Opportunity Structure I, which came to fruition under Stalin, relied primarily on informal components: factor B manifests in the USSR as the ability of the Communist Party (CPSU) to determine regional politics, and factor C manifests as the suppression of minority national identity.[10] As will be shown, factor A, the constitutional right of union republics to secede, plays only a minor role.

Factor A, the formal component of Opportunity Structure I, is the Soviet Union's federal arrangement. Soviet leaders had many options to choose from when deciding how newly-freed nationalities would be structured around the central Soviet government. Lenin and the Bolsheviks had promised self-determination institutionalized through federalism, but in the end, it was Stalin who carved the former Russian Empire into sub-units, ensuring that the reality would be very different (Pearson, 1991, p. 17).

There are three main types of federal systems: unitary, federal, or semifederal. Federalism is a division of power between central and regional levels, defined by Lijphart as 'a spatial or temporal division of power in which the component units are geographically defined' (1999, p. 187). The Soviet Union, through all of its constitutions (in 1924, 1936, and 1977) structured its federal regions asymmetrically: constituent units were not held by the state at equal status to one another.[11] Like other federal structures, situations of asymmetrical federalism occur when sovereign power is divided between the central government and its regions. But unlike other federal structures, asymmetrical

Table 3. Findings from the Soviet Union and Russian Federation

			Formal Rules	
			(Factor A: Right of Secession)	
			Yes	No
Informal Rules	(Factors B and C: Elite Rule and Repression)	Weak	RSFSR (II)	Chechnya, Tatarstan (II)
				Chechnya, Tatarstan (III)
			Wide Structure	*Medium Structure*
		Strong	RSFSR (I)	Chechnya, Tatarstan (I)
				Chechnya, Tatarstan (IV)
			Narrow Structure	*Narrow Structure*

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federalism does not grant the same sovereign rights to all regions. What makes this concept important for separatist movements of the late 1980s and early 1990s is that regional units were defined predominantly along ethnic lines. This hierarchy created a federal system that did not treat all nationalities equally.

Soviet ethnofederalism had three levels. At the top were union republics (SSRs), which as Hale describes, 'were subordinate only to the central Soviet government' (2000, p. 48). Next in line were the autonomous Soviet socialist republics (ASSRs), which were constituent units of union republics. The bottom level contained oblasts and autonomous oblasts (AOs) that were subordinate to autonomous republics. Of all federal units, only the union republics retained this guaranteed right of secession.

Soviet federalism comprises only one part of the opportunity structure imposed on the regions. In Opportunity Structure I, factors B and C weakened the Soviet federal system, rendering its hierarchy meaningless. Instead, informal rules ensured that the theoretically federal Soviet system became effectually autocratic. Kahn writes, 'the Soviet Union was a federal façade that hardly masked the most centralized state in modern history' (2002, p. 1). While union republics theoretically retained the right of secession, they could not practically consider sovereignty within the realm of available options (Suny, 1998, p. 284). This was the great equalizer for the regions: massive theoretical differences defined Soviet federalism, but realistically all were subjugated to an autocratic state.

The theoretical structure of the Soviet Union, according to Suny, 'was potentially one of the most democratic in history .... But very rapidly democratic forms became the foundation stones of a dictatorial state' (1998, p. 123). For Suny, this reversal came about in successive steps:

> The exclusion from the political arena of propertied classes, the establishment of one-party government, the elimination of rival political parties and the monopolization of politics by the Communist Party [CPSU], the suppression of dissent and factions within the Communist Party, and finally the rise of a single faction dominated by Stalin (1998, p. 123).

Once in power, Stalin further solidified vertical authority in Russia through his Revolution From Above, which had five major components: rapid industrialization; collectivization of agriculture; a social revolution aimed at creating a modern, literate society; a political revolution that consolidated Stalin's rule; and a cultural revolution that elevated Russian identity above others (Suny, 1998, pp. 218–268). This program contrasted sharply with Soviet federal theory and largely shaped the opportunity structures of potentially insurgent groups.

After Stalin's death, the CPSU retained its tight control over the regions. One way that it maintained its autocratic arrangement was through its manipulation of elections. Voters in the Soviet Union selected from a list, which often only contained one name, and chose the candidates they *did not* support. Most citizens opted not to exercise their veto right. In fact, Marsh writes, 'from 1961 to 1975 only between 0.11 and 0.82 per cent of the electorate, reportedly, cast negative votes' (2002, p. 34). This arrangement did not allow citizens to elect regional candidates, but instead candidates supported by the CPSU.

Factor C also informally, but no less dramatically, constrained separatist nationalities during Opportunity Structure I. Stalin's authoritarianism and the federal framework created antagonistic groups that pushed and pulled and against each other. Kahn writes:

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> The Soviet façade, for all its faults, was *crucially* important in the way that it framed conflict within particular institutional constraints, influenced the development of political agendas at different levels of government, and provided ready-made templates for political (and sometimes ethnic) mobilization that could be used by different elites for difference objectives (Kahn, 2002, p. 3, original emphasis).

By design, the Soviet system positioned conflict around territoriality and deliberately over-emphasized Russian nationality above other nationalities. The Communist Party de-emphasized national identity in its over-emphasis of the RSFSR. As Suny notes, 'the government promoted Russian language instruction throughout the Union', and identified it as the language of higher culture (1998, p. 287). In fact, 'Russian culture was elevated to the first among a family of cultures' (1998, p. 288). And as World War II drew to a close, Stalin celebrated by toasting the Russian, not the Soviet, people (d'Encausse, 1992, p. 91).

These attempts at elevating Russian identity at the expense of other nationalities are overshadowed by a more overt persecution of minority groups. According to d'Encausse, 'between October 1943 and June 1944, the peoples of six small nations were accused of treason, ripped from their native soil, and deported to Central Asia or Siberia' (1992, p. 91). Entire peoples – Chechens, Karachays, Balkars, Kalmyks, Crimean Tatars, and Volga Germans – were accused of crimes and punished. d'Encausse writes:

> In 1946 a decree would specify that these measures called for the dissolution of national territories of the Chechens, the Ingush and Tatars. And for ten years these national groups would have no legal existence, no representative to the Soviet of Nationalities, and no mention anywhere. (1992, p. 91)

The state's capacity for repression – that is, its ability to subjugate titular nationalities – also had the effect of solidifying what were initially arbitrary ethnic divisions. It was Stalin and other Soviet policymakers who constructed national divisions in the Soviet Union. In general, each constituent unit is named after the predominant nationality or ethnic group in the region, but as Sheehy (1991) comments, territorial divisions were not precise. Sheehy explains,

> Since the various nationalities had either never enjoyed independent national statehood or had only done so in the fairly distant past, the boundaries of the republics and autonomous entities had little historical sanction and were inevitably somewhat arbitrary. (1991, p. 67)

These republics are frequently called titular republics because they are artificial constructs of Soviet planners (Kahn, 2002, p. 12). It is prudent, however, to categorize separatist groups according to titular identity. According to Hale, ethnic Russians during the parade of sovereignties in 1990 primarily identified themselves according to their assigned titular, not ethnic, identity. Hale comments:

> It does not appear to matter whether a region contains an extremely large ethnic Russian population. This is quite unexpected, since it would be anticipated that a large Russian population would slow down or discourage attempts to distance a region from the Russian 'motherland'. Instead, it appears that regions with large numbers of Russians tended to be just as separatist as those dominated by the titular group (2000, p. 50).

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The Soviet Union's capacity to repress titular nationalities contributed to the narrowing of their opportunity structure, and at the same time, to the reinforcement of titular national identity. Together, the strength of factors B and C made certain that the theoretical right of secession was not among the options available to *any* region, regardless of status. Opportunity Structure I, then, is defined by its narrowness.

Gorbachev and Opportunity Structure II (1985 – 1991)

The opportunity structure remained narrow until the mid 1980s, when it experienced a sudden and massive change. Until then, centralized elite control, along with the state's capacity for repression, ensured that federalism as constitutionally outlined would not take effect in reality. The 1980s, however, were a new period of upheaval. This section describes how factors B and C decline in importance under Gorbachev and cause a new opportunity structure to take effect for the regions.

Opportunity Structure II begins with the Gorbachev reforms of 1985. The Soviet Union as inherited by Gorbachev in March was economically stagnant. The economy had not grown in five years and was less than one-half the size of the United States'. Agricultural production, for example, was one-fourth of US production, and much of what the Soviet Union did produce eventually spoiled (Nogee and Donaldson, 2002, pp. 103–104). Gorbachev soon implemented democratic reforms for two purposes: one, to force conservative CPSU bureaucrats to be more responsive to new economic policies (Nogee and Donaldson, 2002, p. 105); and two, to better solidify his position as general secretary over conservative anti-reformers (Marsh, 2002, p. 36). The Soviet Union soon took a more tolerant stance on religious expression, cultural experimentation, and historical revisionism (Nogee and Donaldson, 2002, p. 106). These changes effectively weakened factors B and C to fundamentally shift the Soviet opportunity structure.

Gorbachev's electoral reform, for example, is perhaps the clearest sign of factor B's demise.[12] Previous reformers had massively restructured the CPSU, yet Gorbachev is different in that he did not attempt to use the party to solidify his control (Fairbanks, 1990). In 1988, multiple candidates competed for open seats, and citizens were required to enter a private booth to vote. According to Marsh, 'the wording of the new laws did not differ drastically from the previous Soviet electoral laws, but voters would now be offered a choice of candidates, and elections were to be free, fair and secret' (2002, p. 36). Ultimately, the CPSU would lose its monopoly on power, though this was not Gorbachev's intention (Nogee and Donaldson, 2002, p. 105; Marsh, 2002, p. 36). As a consequence, 'democratic institutions and principles that had existed on paper for decades were thus beginning to be realized' (Marsh, 2002, p. 36). In February 1990, the CPSU dropped its claim to a monopoly on power.

Factor C, the Soviet state's capacity for repression, also diminished considerably. Titular nationalities in the late 1980s were no longer subjugated beneath the Russian or Soviet people, but courted by both the separatist RSFSR and central Soviet government. Beginning in June 1990, Gorbachev attempted to undermine Yeltsin's authority by promising more rights to autonomous republics, while Yeltsin made similar promises for a new Russian state (Giuliano, 2006, pp. 282–284).

Opportunity Structure II is defined by the strength of factor A (formal federalism). With the collapse of informal modes of control (factors B and C) the initial hierarchy of Soviet federalism suddenly became important. Constitutionally, union republics were contained only within the overarching Soviet government in Moscow, while lower autonomous

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republics were constituent units of union republics. If the central Soviet government were to disappear, union republics would have no higher authority than their own government, while autonomous republics would still be operating within the federal framework of the RSFSR. Factor A's strength has important conceptual ramifications too: in the Soviet setting, asymmetrical federalism translates into asymmetrical opportunity structures. The reduced impact of informal rules meant that formal rules, described in terms of Soviet federalism, now mattered more. And since the Soviet federal structure granted more rights to union republics, Opportunity Structure II is thus wider for union republics than for lower republics. In short, although the opportunity structure widened considerably, it did not widen equally for potentially insurgent groups.

Gorbachev, in loosening those informal rules which had dominated Soviet society, invited the regions to challenge the state.[13] Unlike state leaders, Migdal explains, 'leaders of many other social organizations in an environment of conflict have not shared the belief that the state should be predominant in the entire society, and they, too, have desperately sought social control' (1988, p. 33).

Among those separatist regions, of course, was the dominant Russian republic. In the years leading up to secession, the RSFSR and its leader, Boris Yeltsin, competed for control against Gorbachev's Soviet Union. Due to the weakness of factors B and C, Yeltsin's position as parliament chairman of the RSFSR allowed him to act more as a rival to Gorbachev than as a subordinate. Although Yeltsin was essentially powerless in the structure of Soviet decision-making, his popularity helped to overcome Gorbachev's nominally powerful position (Hewett, 1990, p. 148). Yeltsin's ability to criticize the Gorbachev government also demonstrates the weakness of informal rules. Soviet Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov, for example, struggled in 1990 against an increasingly frustrated Supreme Soviet on the state's economic plan; Yeltsin, by contrast, was free to appeal directly to the Russian public, and promised to install a market economy within 500 days (Hewett, 1990, p. 148). These and other public statements emboldened the insurgent republic. By November 1991, the RSFSR was able to declare itself distinct from the Soviet Union.

But this experience was hardly unique. Several other regions successfully pushed for secession, and by December 1991 the Soviet Union had been replaced by fifteen separate states. Kahn notes that they asserted their independence in rapid succession:

> On 21 December [four days before Gorbachev resigned in 1991], … eleven former Soviet Republics had signed the founding documents of the Commonwealth of Independent States – a loose-knit, hardly confederal assemblage of fully sovereign states (2002, p. 101).

When the Soviet Union finally fell apart, it had fifty three ethnofederal regions at various levels. Why did only fifteen become independent states? The answer, simply, is that all fifteen were republics of the highest federal status and were imparted with the right to secede. Why were none of the thirty eight remaining ethnic regions as successful as union republics? Why did so few ethnic groups even attempt to secede? Although a region's degree of autonomy in the Soviet Union strongly correlates with its propensity for separatism (Hale, 2000, p. 48), it is unlikely that only fifteen territorial units desired sovereign statehood. Given the reduced impact of informal rules, and given the asymmetrical character of Soviet federalism, Opportunity Structure II was wider for union republics than it was for autonomous republics

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and oblasts. This narrower structure dissuaded other ethnic territories from seeking independence.

Opportunity Structures III and IV: Yeltsin, Putin, and the Russian Federation

As the Soviet Union fell, the status of its titular nationalities became uncertain. Autonomous republics experienced the Soviet collapse differently than did union republics, adjusting not only to the demise of the Soviet Union, but also to the rise of fifteen new states. The RSFSR's separatist movement ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union; lower republics like Chechnya and Tatarstan, however, were contained within an emerging Russian state. With this containment came a new opportunity structure.

In this section, I first outline Opportunity Structures III and IV, and then demonstrate their characteristics through two examples, Chechnya and Tatarstan. If Opportunity Structure II can be characterized by its width, then Opportunity Structures III and IV, under Yeltsin and Putin, respectively, can be characterized by their increasing narrowness. After the Soviet Union's collapse, the opportunity structure (for groups who had not yet seceded) began to close again under a new state system, with new formal and informal rules.

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Opportunity Structures III (1991–1999) and IV (1999–present)

Marking the start of Opportunity Structure III is no easy task. After the Soviet Union fell apart in 1991, Russia went through two years of turmoil before its constitution was ratified in December 1993. Between 1993 and 1999, however, factors A, B, and C remained relatively the same.

Factor A, Russia's federal system, remained hierarchical but differed structurally in one important respect: Russia did not grant its regions the constitutional right to secession they had, if only theoretically, enjoyed as part of the Soviet Union. Yeltsin and other policymakers feared that the Russian Federation might splinter apart in the same fashion (Trenin & Malashenko, 2004, p. 18). To maintain territorial integrity, Yeltsin instead promised the regions unprecedented levels of freedom with instructions like, 'take all the autonomy you can swallow' (Kahn, 2002, p. 70).[14]

Factors B and C remained relatively weak. Although Russia's semi-presidential system is often called 'superpresidential' because of the presidency's disproportionate power, Yeltsin's Russia contained little elite dominance. The new Russian state began to hold multi-party elections, and after a brief surge in party representation, four clear contenders passed the five per cent threshold: Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), Russia is Our Home, and 'Yabloko' (Bacon, 1998, p. 206). Although the numerous parties who fell below five per cent hardly gave proportionality to Russia's 'proportional' system, the lack of a single dominant party did not allow for any kind of CPSU-style rule to emerge. On factor C, the Russian state did not have a strong capacity or propensity for repression. Yeltsin did prosecute two wars in Chechnya, but the relationship between Moscow and the regions was not one of identity discrimination. In fact, according to Kahn, 'contrary to most theories of federalism ... the Russian Federation is not judged by many of the leaders of its republics to be greater than the sum of its parts' (2002, p. 11).

Overall, Opportunity Structure III is similar in character to Opportunity Structure II in that weak informal rules were coupled with strong formal rules. Indeed, Opportunity Structures II and III might appear identical: both had a strong factor A and weak factors B and C. But since

the very nature of factor A changed (most notably, on the right to secession), the opportunity structure changed as well. Opportunity Structure III is different in its formal language (on secessionism), but weak informal rules (elite control and repression) provided for regional autonomy. Opportunity Structure III did not allow for full independence, but Yeltsin's inability to dominate the regions ensured political breathing space for the regions.

The Putin reforms of the early twenty-first century strengthened informal rules and lead to the formation of Opportunity Structure IV. Arriving at the presidency after Yeltsin's resignation in late 1999, Putin came to power with the intention, as he described, of 'restoring effective vertical power in the country' (Petrov & Slider, 2003, p. 204). Putin advocated what he called 'the dictatorship of law', blurring conceptions of the rule of law and state rule through laws (Kahn, 2002, p. 239).

On factor B, Putin's United Russia party has become increasingly more dominant in the Duma. Between 2000 and 2003, Putin took a series of steps to win control of the State Duma as well as regional parliaments. The 2003 Duma elections elevated Putin's United Russia Party to control two-thirds of its seats, and afterwards, Putin began instructing parliamentarians on how to vote (Remington, 2007, p. 66).

Putin has also strengthened factor C in his approach to the regions. While Yeltsin was more accepting of regional national diversity, Putin has been less accepting. Putin first divided Russia's regions into seven federal super-districts to achieve greater control. Putin also allowed some of Yeltsin's bi-lateral treaties to expire, and pressured the Constitutional Court to declare the constitutions of seven republics to be in violation of the Russian Federation's constitution. Putin demanded a 'harmonization' of regional laws and constitutions with that of the central government (Kahn, 2002, p. 239). Under Putin, Russia's regions were no longer free to make policy decisions that did not meet Moscow's approval.

In short, Opportunity Structure IV contains strong informal rules and no constitutional right of secession for regions. This has resulted, once again, in a narrow opportunity structure for potentially insurgent groups. The transition from Opportunity Structure III to IV can perhaps be best illustrated with examples. Here, I draw on the experiences of Chechnya and Tatarstan to show this change.

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Chechnya, Tatarstan, and Opportunity Lost

Both Chechnya and Tatarstan desired independence. Their attempts at sovereign statehood, however, failed because of structural limitations. Their opportunity structures were simply not permissive of secessionism. While Chechnya's movement was met with military force, Tatarstan was made economically dependent on the Russian state.

The Chechen ASSR declared independence in a manner, as Kahn describes, as 'one of the most belligerent declarations of the "Parade of Sovereignties" ' (2002, p. 15). With the same fervor as other nationalities that declared independence, Chechnya quickly capitalized on the shift in opportunity structure. Chechnya organized itself under General Major Dzhokar Dudaev and, on 27 November 1990, declared itself separate from the Chechen-Ingush Republic and the Soviet Union (Kipp, 2003, p. 184). The Chechens experienced a shift away from their narrow opportunity structure with the dissolution of CPSU one-party dominance, and quickly seized on the chance to secede under Dudaev's leadership, who was elected president by a sizeable margin (Kipp, 2003, p. 184).

After the RSFSR's seceded from the Soviet Union, however, Chechnya's ability to secede narrowed under Opportunity Structure III. Even though no single party came to

dominate Russian politics, and even though Yeltsin emphasized negotiation in his relationship with the regions, the Russian Constitution still did not allow secessionism under any conditions. The weakness of factors B and C may have encouraged separatist tendencies, but the strength of factor A made Opportunity Structure III medium-sized overall. Yeltsin promoted regional autonomy, but he would not give in to secessionism.

In 1994, Yeltsin ordered the military in Chechnya to secure a quick victory, but as Petrov and Slider comment, 'the army was ill-prepared for a guerilla war and suffered many casualties while directing much of its military might against the civilian population' (2003, p. 207). For this reason, there has been intermittent conflict since the collapse of the USSR. Although the Chechens have successfully bribed Russian soldiers, built roadside bombs, and have acquired surface to air missiles, Chechnya's population has shrunk and tens of thousands have been killed or been forced to live as refugees (Kramer, 2004). In short, despite its strong attempt at sovereignty, Chechnya has been unable to establish itself as an independent state.

In this case, the question is not, *why has Chechnya been unable to secede?* But, *why did Chechnya face Russian opposition, while, say, Armenia and Azerbaijan did not?* All were territories within the Soviet Union who declared independence. The answer may seem simple but it illustrates an important point: Russia did not attack Armenia because it was not a constituent unit of the former RSFSR and lay outside his administrative control. Although Russia has always been interested in the affairs of its neighbors, Yeltsin did not worry about Armenian separatism because Armenia was never a part of the RSFSR, and therefore, never a part of the Russian Federation. But Chechnya, given its federal position within the RSFSR, did not have the right to secede, and posed a danger to the new Russian state's stability.

In the years following Chechnya's first claims to sovereignty, its secessionist movement has diminished. The Russian Federation has been unwilling to grant independence. Russia has become more inflexible under Putin's leadership. In autumn 1999, after being appointed prime minister, Putin built his reputation on prosecuting the war in Chechnya. And once he won the presidency, Putin placed the Chechen republic under direct federal control. Actions like this signal a new centralization of Russian authority on the regions.

After Putin assumed power, political mobility once again narrowed, forming Opportunity Structure IV. This in turn has altered the Chechen's ability to mobilize. Since the assassination of President Dudaev, for example, Chechens have been unable to establish an effective system of leadership. 'After General Dudayev was killed,' according to Trenin and Malashenko, Chechnya 'was consistently unable to reach a consensus choosing a new national leader who enjoyed unquestionable authority and could represent Chechen society as a whole' (2004, p. 29).

Chechnya began its push for independence with the same audacity as others who were successful, but has failed to achieve sovereign statehood. If Chechnya held the status of a union republic, the Russian Federation would not have been in a position to oppose (or even desire to oppose) its claims of sovereignty.

Tatarstan also faced structural limitations even though its aggression is like that of union republics, moving towards independence early and quickly. In Giuliano's assessment, separatism in Tatarstan developed 'along a trajectory similar to that of the most aggressive union republics' (2000, p. 295). In September 1990, the Tatar Soviet Socialist Republic (TSSR) declared its status to be that of a union republic. Then, the following spring, protesters demanded full sovereignty. These actions, by citizens and the government, reflect the Tatars longstanding desire to be independent. According to Sheehy:

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> The Tatars ... outnumber several Union republic nationalities, and they have never accepted Stalin's argument that, if the constitutional right of a union republic to secede was to have any meaning, only republics that bordered on a foreign country could be union republics (1991, p. 67).

These actions signal not only a desire for independence, but also an acknowledgment of larger structural changes in the Soviet, and then Russian, systems. And for a while, Tatarstan's push for sovereignty gained momentum. Stern notes that in June 1993, Deputy Prime Minister Boris Fedorov 'conceded that he is more worried about separatist Tatarstan than he is about Ukraine, despite Ukraine's reluctance to relinquish the former Soviet nuclear weapons on its soil' (1994, p. 40). Indeed, Giuliano's index of autonomous republics ranks Tatarstan as the most 'secessionist' between 1989 and 1994 (2006, p. 283).

Like Chechnya, however, Tatarstan's social insurgency declined over time. The Soviet federal structure contained Tatarstan within the RSFSR, which in turn produced only a medium opportunity structure. All claims to sovereignty had to be granted by a higher federal authority (Graney, 1999, p. 611). Graney writes, the 'Russian republic's efforts to project sovereignty therefore are ... carried out simultaneously in three arenas: the international community, the Russian Federation and the domestic realm' (1999, p. 611). Popular protests and elite declarations of autonomy soon diminished as Moscow negotiated terms and integrated Tatarstan into its economy. Tatarstan is now heavily dependent on Russia's military industry for employment. This integration produced a dependent relationship and reduced its desire for secession. Political leadership shifted in a more pro-Russia direction.

In both instances above, a medium opportunity structure initially held the insurgent ASSRs at a lower level than the union republics. Chechnya and Tatarstan declared sovereignty in the same manner as union republics, but the Russian Federation denied their claims for independence. In Chechnya, independence was blocked through military action, while in Tatarstan, independence was suppressed by establishing a situation of dependency. If Chechnya and Tatarstan had been ranked as union republics, the Russian Federation would not have had the authority to deny their sovereign claims.

My emphasis on federalism might lead skeptical readers to assume that informal variables are less important for analyzing social movements. Federalism may explain why Chechnya's independence movement was unsuccessful, but it does not explain the timing of its revolt. To explain both, the discussion must be rooted within the language of opportunity structures. In the Soviet and Russian contexts, successfully separatist republics must face weak formal rules *and* weak informal rules. Without a discussion of the latter, a discussion of the former is incomplete. Federalism alone cannot account for *when* groups attempt to secede. Otherwise, it seems merely coincidental that Russia, Chechnya, and Tatarstan all declared themselves independent at the same time. The timing and uneven success of these movements can be due to nothing else than opportunity structure.

Conclusion: Chains and Opportunities

Examples from the Soviet Union and Russian Federation help illustrate a new understanding of opportunity structures. By imagining such structures as the sum of their parts, their overall width can be better specified. I have primarily addressed three movements: the RSFSR's breakaway from the Soviet Union, and Chechnya and Tatarstan's unsuccessful bids for independence. During Opportunity Structure I, which

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lasted from the 1930s until the 1980s, groups were constrained to a narrow range of political activity, and formal constitutional rights mattered very little. In the 1980s, reforms gave birth to the more permissible Opportunity Structure II. This new opportunity structure, however, was not equally wide for all regions: unequal formal rules suddenly began to play an important role in determining political behavior. The theoretical right of secession for union republics had, until this point, existed only on paper. Autonomous republics like Chechnya and Tatarstan did not have any right of secession, and therefore did not have a wide opportunity structure. Opportunity Structures III and IV, characterized separately by Yeltsin and Putin, have become increasingly narrow. Although executed in different ways, the two regions today have been suppressed by the Russian Federation.

This study might contribute to future research as a model for specifying the size of an opportunity structure for other cases in other settings, although more research remains necessary. However specified, opportunity structures remain important for expressing the relationship between groups included in politics and those who have been excluded. The Soviet and Russian experiences teach that chains of exclusion do not all constrain in the same way: even groups with nothing to lose but their chains must still operate within an opportunity structure.

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Notes

1. McAdam *et al.* refer to the wide range of material published on the structure of political opportunities. For their list, see 'Toward an Integrated Perspective on Social Movements and Revolution' (1997, p. 152).
2. Insurgent groups often have different goals, that is, different understandings of 'success'. For secessionist movements of the late Soviet period, success is understood as sovereign statehood.
3. Examples of attempts to operationalize opportunity structure are Hooghe (2005), Foweraker and Landman (1997), Kitschelt (1986), Mello (2007), and Muñoz (2006).
4. This paper conflates different phases of an opportunity structure with different opportunity structures. Because one structure always displaces the next in this setting, no effort is made to distinguish between the two conceptualizations.
5. Gamson and Meyer (1996, p. 275) offer several examples of opportunity structures understood as independent variables (e.g. Jenkins & Perrow, 1977; McAdam, 1982; Meyer, 1990) and as dependent variables (e.g. Burstein, 1991; Freeman, 1975). They also point to other studies that employ opportunity structures as a 'holder for *intervening variables* such as institutional structures or rules of representation' (e.g. Amenta & Zylan, 1991; Eisinger, 1973; Kitschelt, 1986; Tilly, 1978). I treat opportunity structures as independent variables, although I see no reason why my disaggregated model should be excluded from studies that treat them as dependent or intervening variables.
6. Previous studies have focused on similar components. McAdam (1996, p. 27) synthesizes various conceptions of opportunity structure to comprise a list of four dimensions of political opportunity, drawing from Brockett (1991), Kriesi *et al.* (1992), Rucht (1996), and Tarrow (1994). Tilly and Tarrow (2007, p. 57) offer a list of six dimensions.
7. I have classified factor B (centralized elite control, as indicated by the dominance of a single party) as 'informal'. Although the CPSU's monopoly on power is formally outlined in article six of the 1977 Soviet Constitution, nothing of the sort exists in the 1936 'Stalinist' Constitution, which only mentions the CPSU tangentially (in article 126). For this reason, the CPSU's control must be classified as informal.
8. To function properly, these categories must be applied to potentially insurgent groups. In the Soviet and Russian cases, these are groups desiring secession. There might be an impulse to apply the vocabulary of social movements to a non-social movement setting, but this would, in Sartori's (1970) terms, result in conceptual stretching: without being *potentially insurgent*, a group does not have any opportunity structure to specify, nor does it have a specifiable likelihood of success.

9. I treat B and C separately because it is possible for a state with centralized elite control to *not* have a capacity or propensity for repression, and vice versa. Since it is my intent to create a model application to the non-Soviet and Russian contexts, I leave them as distinct categories in my analysis.
10. Some might claim that there could not be a 'Stalinist' opportunity structure, since excluded groups had no real potential for collective action, and that it might be more applicable to begin examining the Soviet Union after Stalin. Although the Soviet Union after Stalin was very different in many respects, the mobility of the regions was a direct result of Stalin's policies. The defining characteristics of Opportunity Structure I were established under Stalin, and remained in place long after his death.
11. Changes were made to the structure of the Soviet Union regarding its position towards the equality of nationalities during this time, but, as Kahn writes, 'little was changed from Stalin's Constitution regarding the limited rights of "sovereign" union republics and autonomous republics' (2002, p. 81).
12. Zdravomyslova (1996) identifies Gorbachev's perestroika as an expansion of political opportunities, focusing on the use of symbols in social movements.
13. Migdal writes that social control can be diminished through a variety of 'cataclysmic events': 'Natural disaster, war, and other extraordinary circumstances can greatly decrease the overall level of social control in societies by taking rewards and sanctions out of the hands of leaders of social organizations or by making the strategies of survival they offer irrelevant to the new exigencies people face' (1988, p. 35).
14. Center-periphery relations were negotiated bilaterally, but were modeled on the hierarchical Soviet system: Russia's federal regions, known as 'subjects,' were divided into twenty one republics, six territories (or *krais*), ten autonomous districts, one autonomous oblast, and two cities of federal significance.

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Gregory P. Williams is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Political Science at the University of Connecticut. His research interests include social movements, ecological world politics, international relations theory, and comparative public intellectuals. His dissertation compares the writings of Perry Anderson and Immanuel Wallerstein.

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