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# REGIME CYCLES

## Democracy, Autocracy, and Revolution in Post-Soviet Eurasia

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THE post-Soviet world has taken theorists of regime change on a roller-coaster ride of expectations ever since Gorbachev launched his political reforms in the late 1980s. The breakdown of the USSR's communist regime initially led social scientists to consider it a case of "transition to democracy" or "transition from authoritarian rule" and to debate commonalities with democratization processes in Latin America and Southern Europe.<sup>1</sup> Subsequent constriction of the democratic space in almost all post-Soviet states except the Baltics, however, soon spawned at least three new directions in the scholarship regarding these countries. First, many began to put less emphasis on democratization and more on why some countries were more successful than others at democratic "consolidation."<sup>2</sup> A second group argued that a shift in fo-

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<sup>1</sup> Valerie Bunce, "Should Transitologists Be Grounded?" *Slavic Review* 54 (Spring 1995); Timothy J. Colton, "Politics," in Colton and Robert Legvold, eds., *After the Soviet Union* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992); M. Steven Fish, *Democracy from Scratch* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991); Terry Lynn Karl and Philippe C. Schmitter, "Modes of Transition in Latin America, Southern and Eastern Europe," *International Social Science Journal* 43 (June 1991); Michael McFaul, *Russia's Unfinished Revolution* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001); Guillermo O'Donnell, "On the State, Democratization, and Some Conceptual Problems: A Latin American View with Some Glances at Post-communist Countries," *World Development* 21 (August 1993). More recently, see Andrei Shleifer and Daniel Treisman, "A Normal Country," *Foreign Affairs* (March–April 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Valerie Bunce, "Rethinking Recent Democratization: Lessons from the Postcommunist Experience," *World Politics* 55 (January 2003); Stephen E. Hanson, "Defining Democratic Consolidation," in Richard D. Anderson, Jr., M. Steven Fish, Stephen E. Hanson, and Philip G. Roeder, eds., *Postcommunism and the Theory of Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Juan J. Linz and

cus was warranted: what should be explained was not transitions *from* authoritarian rule but transitions back *toward* it.<sup>3</sup> A third school advocated a more radical response. Eschewing the transition paradigm altogether, it called instead for exploring the properties of “hybrid regimes” that might not be adequately conceived as “unconsolidated democracies.”<sup>4</sup> But just as these less sanguine approaches to postcommunist regime change were coming to predominate, scholars witnessed a “rose revolution” in Georgia in 2003, an “orange revolution” in Ukraine in 2004, and then, most surprisingly, a “tulip revolution” in 2005 in Kyrgyzstan, part of the supposed Central Asian bastion of postcommunist authoritarianism. Suddenly, treating these events as democratic breakthroughs, scholars began to speculate about a new democratic ascendancy.<sup>5</sup> While observers should be expected to update their theories in light of new evidence, social science as a whole strongly appears to be chasing events in the postcommunist world as much as explaining or anticipating them.

The present article argues that comparative political science has underexplained and failed to anticipate important postcommunist dynamics in part because it tends to interpret almost all such dynamics as evidence of a “trajectory” toward or away from ideal-type endpoints like democracy or autocracy. The discussion that follows augments the aforementioned calls to question this transition paradigm and to focus on elaborating key properties of hybrid regimes. In particular, it argues for devoting more attention to specific institutional features of these regimes and the patterns of elite interaction they engender. Such an approach helps us see how certain types of institutions can in fact lead to regular and reasonably predictable cycles of movement *both toward and away from* ideal types of democracy or autocracy. What may appear to be a country’s strong shift from autocracy toward democracy at a given

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Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); and Gerardo L. Munck, “The Regime Question: Theory Building in Democracy Studies,” *World Politics* 54 (October 2001).

<sup>3</sup> M. Steven Fish, “The Dynamics of Democratic Erosion,” in Anderson et al. (fn. 2); Philip G. Roeder, “Varieties of Post-Soviet Authoritarian Regimes,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 10 (January 1994).

<sup>4</sup> Something like a manifesto for this school is Thomas Carothers, “The End of the Transition Paradigm,” *Journal of Democracy* 13 (January 2002). Other work on hybrid regimes includes Larry Diamond, “Thinking about Hybrid Regimes,” *Journal of Democracy* 13 (April 2002); Jeffrey Herbst, “Political Liberalization in Africa after Ten Years,” *Comparative Politics* 33 (April 2001); Terry Lynn Karl, “The Hybrid Regimes of Central America,” *Journal of Democracy* 6 (July 1995); and Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism,” *Journal of Democracy* 13 (April 2002).

<sup>5</sup> Adrian Karatnycky, “Ukraine’s Orange Revolution,” *Foreign Affairs* (March–April 2005); Michael McFaul, “Transitions from Communism,” *Journal of Democracy* 16 (July 2005); and Vitali Silitski, “Beware the People,” *Transitions Online*, March 21, 2005.

moment, therefore, may not be part of a “transition” or “trajectory” at all, because the observed shift may simply be just another swing in a fairly regular cyclical process.

The promise of this approach is demonstrated through a study of one set of institutions, dubbed *patronal presidentialism*, with reference to post-Soviet cases. Such institutions tend to generate cyclical phases of elite contestation and consolidation that are defined by elite expectations about the future, in particular, a “lame-duck syndrome” that precipitates elite defection from the incumbent president’s team when elites believe the incumbent may leave office. A large reason why “revolutions” occurred after controversial elections in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan but not after controversial elections in Armenia, Russia, and Uzbekistan between 2003 and 2005, then, is that the two sets of countries were in different phases of a cyclical process of elite contestation and consolidation as defined by expectations as to when the incumbent would leave office. Key factors inducing the lame-duck syndrome and determining who wins resulting contests are found to include formal presidential term limits and public opinion as well as such variables as international intervention. This logic generates new expectations regarding future regime change and fresh insights into the effects of international democracy-promotion efforts. It also suggests a promising comparative research program into the nature of regime cycles and how they are impacted by institutions like political parties and state-economy relationships both within and beyond Eurasia.

#### INSTITUTIONS AND REGIME CYCLES: THE DYNAMICS OF PATRONAL PRESIDENTIALISM

Scholars have long recognized that political change can be cyclic rather than purely progressive or regressive.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, some have observed that certain countries have seemed to display cycles in regime type, oscillating between democracy and dictatorship.<sup>7</sup> “Regimes” are understood here, following Higley and Burton, to be “basic patterns in the organization, exercise, and transfer of government decision-mak-

<sup>6</sup> In political economy, see Alberto Alesina, Nouriel Roubini, and Gerald Cohen, *Political Cycles and the Macroeconomy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> For example, Huntington (fn. 1); Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Crisis, Breakdown, and Reequilibration, An Introduction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); and Alexander Motyl, “Communist Legacies and New Trajectories,” in Yitzhak Brudny, Jonathan Frankel, and Stefani Hoffman, eds., *Restructuring Post-Communist Russia* (New York: Cambridge, 2004).

ing power.”<sup>8</sup> Any change in these patterns, however small, represents a change of regime, although some changes are more important than others. Here we are most interested in changes whereby a regime comes more or less closely to resemble ideal types of autocracy or democracy. Since these latter concepts have themselves proved slippery, this article follows Dahl in looking primarily at more readily observable phenomena that capture much of what we have in mind: the levels of *contestation* and *participation* involved in political decision making.<sup>9</sup> Participation can be measured by observing the degree and decisiveness of mass input into political outcomes, and contestation can be detected by looking at the relative balance of political forces and the intensity with which the main actors engage each other. When this article refers to regime cycles, therefore, it has in mind regime change that involves cyclic increases and decreases in a country’s level of contestation and/or participation.

While most scholarship noting regime oscillations has tended to treat them as highly contingent phenomena, at least two bodies of work have begun to flesh out our understanding of these oscillations. The first follows Pareto and Mosca in looking at how relationships among elites<sup>10</sup> shape a country’s regime type, arguing that polities experiencing regime oscillations tend to be those whose elites are “disunified.”<sup>11</sup> Higley and Burton write that an elite is disunified to the extent that its members “(1) share few or no understandings about the proprieties of political conduct and (2) engage in only limited and sporadic interactions across factional or sectoral boundaries.”<sup>12</sup> This constitutes an advance but explains only why some countries experience oscillations (characterized as “instability”) while others do not, shedding little light on the oscillations themselves. Furthermore, by considering elite unity to be the primary explanatory variable, this school does not account for why elites may appear highly unified at one point in time and quite disunified at the next, as appears to have been the case in the post-Soviet world.

<sup>8</sup> John Higley and Michael G. Burton, “The Elite Variable in Democratic Transitions and Breakdowns,” *American Sociological Review* 54 (February 1989), 18.

<sup>9</sup> Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971).

<sup>10</sup> Slightly modifying Higley and Burton’s (fn. 8) definition of “national elite,” the simple term “elite” is defined here as “persons who are able, by virtue of their authoritative positions in powerful organizations and movements of whatever kind, to affect . . . political outcomes [at the local or national level] regularly and substantially” (p. 18).

<sup>11</sup> Vladimir Gel’man, “Regime Transition, Uncertainty and the Prospects for Redemocratisation,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 51 (September 1999); idem, “Uroki Ukrainskogo,” *Polis* (January–February 2005); Higley and Burton (fn. 8); Gaetano Mosca, *The Ruling Class* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1939); Vilfredo Pareto, *The Mind and Society: A Treatise on General Sociology* (New York: Dover, 1935).

<sup>12</sup> Higley and Burton (fn. 8), 19.

A second body of work suggests how we might fill gaps left by the elite theorists: by studying the impact of institutions on elite behavior and regime dynamics. A voluminous literature has explored how institutions like presidentialism or parliamentarism influence elites and regime stability or change.<sup>13</sup> O'Donnell has gone a step further, though, to develop a theory of how particular presidential institutions can generate important regime *cycles*. He elaborates the concept of "delegative democracy," characterized in part by a directly elected president who is not checked and balanced by other organs of state power and to whom constituents consciously delegate the authority to tackle major economic ills. Since the measures necessary to treat the ills are inevitably unpopular, these countries feature certain cyclic dynamics: a phase of near dictatorial presidential power and high popular hopes, a phase of disillusionment, a phase of elite defection (contestation) and presidential weakness, and finally the election of a new president and the start of a new cycle.<sup>14</sup> While this is intuitively plausible and certainly affords great insight into the Latin American cases on which the theory was built, it does not much help us sort out why some post-Soviet cases (like Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan) would experience revolutionary dynamics in 2003–5 but others (like Russia and Armenia) would not.

The present article extends regime-cycle research by introducing a logic of collective action to the institutional analysis of elite behavior and focusing on the effects of one particular set of institutions common in the post-Soviet world. We begin the theoretical treatment with an assumption that key political elites are motivated primarily by career security, the desire to maintain or advance their positions. The institutional framework of interest here is what might be called *patronal presidentialism*, defined by two key components. First, a directly elected presidency is invested with great formal powers relative to other state organs. Second, the president also wields a high degree of informal

<sup>13</sup> See the famous debate on presidentialism and parliamentarism involving Donald Horowitz, Arend Lijphart, Juan Linz, Seymour Martin Lipset, and others, reprinted in Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner, eds., *The Global Resurgence of Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); and also Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Gerald M. Easter, "Preference for Presidentialism: Postcommunist Regime Change in Russia and the NIS," *World Politics* 49 (January 1997); M. Steven Fish, *Democracy Derailed in Russia: The Failure of Open Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Juan Linz and Arturo Valenzuela, *The Failure of Presidential Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); Scott Mainwaring and Matthew S. Shugart, "Juan Linz, Presidentialism, and Democracy," *Comparative Politics* 29 (July 1997).

<sup>14</sup> Guillermo O'Donnell, "Delegative Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 5 (January 1994); also O'Donnell (fn. 1). For a discussion of Russia in light of these ideas, see Henry E. Hale, Michael McFaul, and Timothy J. Colton, "Putin and the 'Delegative Democracy' Trap: Evidence from Russia's 2003–04 Elections," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 20 (October–December 2004).

power based on widespread patron-client relationships at the intersection of the state and the economy. The term “patronal” thus refers to the exercise of political authority primarily through selective transfers of resources rather than formalized institutional practices, idea-based politics, or generalized exchange as enforced through the established rule of law.<sup>15</sup> It is very important to recognize that this is an ideal type: societies can approach the ideal to a greater or lesser degree, but no state has a pure patronal presidential system. Thus the dynamics described below as effects of patronal presidentialism can be expected to manifest themselves more strongly when the clientelistic or presidential elements are stronger in a polity. To provide some grounding for a later discussion of the theory’s domain, however, we note here that the extent and form of patron-client politics capable of generating the proposed dynamics include (but are not necessarily limited to) what are described by Kitschelt, Mansfeldova, Markowski, and Toka as typical legacies of “patrimonial communism.”<sup>16</sup>

In practice, this means that a patronal president wields not only the powers formally invested in the office but also the ability to selectively direct vast sources of material wealth and power outside of formal institutional channels. Importantly, this authority can be used not only to accomplish policy goals but also to preserve the president’s own power by rewarding political allies and punishing or co-opting enemies.

The dynamism produced by such a system derives primarily from the relationship between the president and key elites in the state and in the economy. The president and elites are mutually dependent in that the president depends on elites for implementing decisions and delivering votes while elites depend on the president for resources and/or continuation in their posts. The patronal president has a decided advantage in that the elites must act collectively if they are to use the president’s dependence on them to challenge that president. The presidency, by contrast, is an institutionalized focal point for collective elite

<sup>15</sup> The term “patronal” is used instead of the common “patrimonial” or “neopatrimonial” since the latter frequently connote authority not only by selective material exchange but also by strong attachments rooted in extended kinship, territory, or tradition. Networks based on the latter attachments might be expected to be more stable than purely patronal networks and less susceptible to the dynamics described here, though this deserves further exploration. On these concepts and implications for regime change, see Bratton and van de Walle (fn. 13); and H. E. Chehabi and Juan J. Linz, *Sultanistic Regimes* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

<sup>16</sup> Herbert Kitschelt, Zdenka Mansfeldova, Radoslaw Markowski, and Gabor Toka, *Post-Communist Party Systems: Competition, Representation, and Inter-Party Cooperation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).



action that can be directed against those elites who might stick their necks out in order to organize a collective challenge to the president. Officials in lower-level state positions of authority, for example, will be reluctant to use these positions to challenge the president for fear that they could lose their jobs (or worse) if not enough other elites go along with them. Leaders in the business community also have incentives to use their financial or media assets to support (or at least not undermine) the president's political agenda so as to avoid the risk that presidential resources will be directed against their business interests in retaliation. A proactive president may also use the office's resources to co-opt some potential troublemakers in order to prevent coordinated elite opposition. The patronal president, then, is in an excellent position to divide and rule the elites and thereby to dry up political opportunities and resources available to opponents. Whenever the president is firmly in control, one can expect to see a relatively high degree of elite cohesion and a political system gutted of much real democratic content.

Elite calculations change considerably, however, near potential points of presidential power transfer.<sup>17</sup> Such points can arise for a number of reasons. Most obviously, the patron-president may die, fall gravely ill, or simply convince elites that s/he will not run for reelection. A president can also suffer a massive drop in popularity (due to a severe economic crisis, a highly damaging scandal, or major political missteps) that fosters a widespread perception of failure, leading elites to increasingly expect that the president might not continue in office beyond a certain point or might be unable to keep meting out rewards and punishments effectively. Military defeat at the hands of a foreign power can have a similar effect on elite perceptions of a president's power to remain a potent patron. Very importantly, points of presidential power transfer can also derive at least partly from formal term limits introduced during the initial creation of presidential institutions. This is not due to any inherent legal power of term limits over presidents. But formal presidential

<sup>17</sup> This argument builds on several important theoretical works addressing the role of expectations about the future in stabilizing or destabilizing elite coordination around authoritarian or patronal leaders: Timur Kuran, "Now Out of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989," *World Politics* 44 (October 1991); Luis Fernando Medina and Susan C. Stokes, "Monopoly and Monitoring: An Approach to Political Clientelism," in Herbert Kitschelt and Steven Wilkinson, eds., *Patrons or Policies? Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming); Mancur Olson, "The Logic of Collective Action in Soviet-type Societies," *Journal of Soviet Nationalities* 1 (Summer 1990); and Olga Shvetsova, "Resolving the Problem of Pre-Election Coordination: The 1999 Parliamentary Election as Elite Presidential 'Primary,'" in Vicki Hesli and William Reisinger, eds., *Elections, Parties and the Future of Russia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).



term limits can serve as “focal points” around which elites coordinate their expectations as to when precisely a highly unpopular president is most likely to leave office or be most vulnerable to ouster.<sup>18</sup> These sorts of factors can create a certain lame-duck syndrome by which elites who once backed the president begin looking beyond that president to a future in which he or she is no longer in a position to punish defectors or reward those who remain loyal.

When faced with such a point of anticipated power transfer, the elites want most of all to wind up on the side of the person who wins the ensuing presidential election and succeeds the president, but they now face two complicating considerations. First, it may not be clear which side will win. If they can successfully coordinate their actions, elites can themselves determine who will win and who will lose a succession struggle. But prior to the actual election it may be far from obvious whether sufficient coordination will take place to put any particular side over the top. The very fact of uncertainty can itself then have a major impact, raising the possibility that defection from the incumbent team may not bring lasting punishment. The likelihood of such defection is thereby increased, and the more defection occurs the more others perceive some safety in numbers, resulting in still more defection.

An outgoing incumbent may try to put an end to such uncertainty by anointing a successor, but this brings into play the second complicating consideration for elites: there is no guarantee that the hand-picked successor will honor the coalitional deal made by his or her predecessor, the old president. Some of the elites in the outgoing president's coalition could be left out by the anointed successor and perhaps even persecuted as the new president attempts to establish his or her authority. This is especially likely to be the case if the successor comes, as frequently happens, from one of several rival factions of propresidential loyalists who have competed over the years for presidential favor and consequent shares of state resources. Rival groups may attempt to coordinate in support of alternative succession candidates so as to maximize their chances of being on the winning side. Midterm parliamentary elections can take on importance as crucial tests of elite strength (“elite primaries”)<sup>19</sup> prior to these presidential contests. In considering how to act, then, potential elite challengers must weigh the possibility of punishment in the event of a loss against the possibility that they would

<sup>18</sup> On focal points, see Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).

<sup>19</sup> Shvetsova (fn. 17) coined this term.

be punished even if they remained loyal (as the new president consolidates power), as well as against the possibility that they could defeat the anointed one and claim a greater share of state spoils for themselves.

The stakes in such struggles can be great indeed due to the fierce, winner-take-all nature of the contests. While the least popular incumbents are likely to resort to all manner of machine politics, including the squelching of free media and electoral manipulation, such lame-duck presidents tend to face defection from within their very own machines, reducing the effectiveness of these policies. Indeed, elites controlling mass media and even the very courts that are necessary for consummating electoral fraud can also be among the defectors. The opposition, benefiting from such defections, is also likely to pull out all available stops, including the use of machine tactics where available. Such political contestation can even be relatively fair in the sense that both sets of elites have significant resources at their disposal.

This elite contestation can involve the masses in important ways.<sup>20</sup> If elections are in fact free and fair, mass involvement will be direct and feature genuine democratic competition. But the masses can play influential roles even in election processes that are widely perceived to be unfair, fraudulent, or completely dominated by machine politics. To win such elections, competing sides have incentives to mobilize every resource available to them. Popular appeal is one such resource. Indeed, if the opposition can mobilize genuine support among the population, this raises the cost of incumbent attempts to perpetrate fraud, making it less likely that the fraud will succeed and perhaps even deterring the incumbent from attempting it in the first place. Massive street rallies are costly to suppress, and the more blood that will likely be shed in doing so, the more likely it is that the military will hesitate to engage in violence on behalf of a lame-duck leader or an unpopular would-be successor. Moreover, relative levels of popular support before an election can serve as signals to elites as to whom to rally around: if an opposition is found through surveys or informal polling techniques to have mass appeal sufficient to pose a real challenge to authorities, elites are more likely to join the challenge. Elite competition, then, can open up political space for mass preferences to matter.

<sup>20</sup> The general insight that elite contestation can promote influence by the masses has been voiced in a host of works, including Easter (fn. 13); Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Philip G. Roeder, *Red Sunset: The Failure of Soviet Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

Once elites form clear expectations as to who will win the struggle, however, they again have an incentive to fall into line behind the new patron, even where the masses had a very prominent role in determining who that is and even when that new patron previously opposed "autocratic methods." Some political contestation is likely to remain and perhaps even intensify in the period immediately after a transfer of power if the new authorities (as is highly likely) move to strip rival groups (sometimes including their own former coalition allies) of power and assets—this is often done, sincerely or not, under the banner of "rooting out corruption." But those elites whose interests are not initially singled out for postturnover prosecution (or persecution) have a great incentive to avoid offending the new leadership for fear of finding themselves on such a blacklist. Moreover, an incoming president has typically won in part with the support of at least some unsavory forces known for machine tactics. Such forces can be hard to expel from the winning team and are likely to try to expand their fortunes in the new administration by using just such questionable methods in support of "their" president. Indeed, old institutions are almost never completely eliminated in a transfer of presidential power, and thus continuing with old, comfortable, and self-serving methods can be an attractive option. This process produces a new constriction of the space available for political contestation, as fewer and fewer elites are willing to direct their resources to activities that the new patron does not like.

The personal convictions of the patrons as to whether "democracy" is desirable will certainly influence the degree to which opportunities for political opposition are curtailed.<sup>21</sup> But few presidents actually like to have their policies opposed, especially when they see these policies as vital for their country's future and view their opponents as corrupt, illegitimate, unpatriotic, or otherwise unworthy of treatment as a true democratic opposition. Thus even well-intentioned democrats can see advantages in exploiting a period of political consolidation to push through difficult reforms, even reforms that they might actually see as promoting democracy in the long run.<sup>22</sup> In this way a new phase of political consolidation starts in the country, which can then easily come to resemble a classic authoritarian regime before the next point of expected power transfer ushers in the next contestation phase.

<sup>21</sup> Michael McFaul, "The Fourth Wave of Democracy and Dictatorship: Noncooperative Transitions in the Postcommunist World," *World Politics* 54 (January 2002).

<sup>22</sup> Robert K. Christensen, Edward R. Rakhimkulov, and Charles R. Wise, "The Ukrainian Orange Revolution Brought More Than a New President: What Kind of Democracy Will the Institutional Changes Bring?" *Communist & Post-Communist Studies* 38 (June 2005).

Along with predicting regime cycles and their general timing in countries with patronal presidential institutions, this logic generates some additional expectations about the amplitude of these cycles. For one thing, given the importance of public opinion as a political resource in such systems, we would expect that consolidation phases under particularly popular incumbents are likely to involve especially high degrees of elite consolidation and therefore low levels of political contestation. Such popular leaders are also likely to be able to cast a more positive glow on a chosen successor, increasing the likelihood of a successful succession. Likewise, if an incumbent is widely seen to be doing an extremely poor job or to be incapable of managing the resources necessary to punish or reward elites effectively, the result might be a reduction in the amplitude of a consolidation phase. Conversely, the presence of at least one challenger widely believed by elites to be popular is likely to increase the amplitude of a contestation phase, increasing elite defection and opposition coordination and thereby raising the chances that the incumbent will be defeated. As noted above, incumbents with strong democratic or autocratic beliefs may actively encourage or discourage the rally-round-the-leader effect during consolidation phases. Another factor that affects the amplitude of patronal presidentialism's cycles of contestation and concentration might be derived from Hanson's insight that actors' adherence to ideology serves to lengthen their time horizons in calculating the value of payoffs.<sup>23</sup> When elites and masses have strong ideological convictions, they are likely to be less willing to accept short-term payoffs and more willing to endure the material punishments that incumbent authorities can direct against them in hopes of achieving longer-run goals. By implication, greater commitment to rival ideologies in a society can reduce cyclical swings toward consolidation and heighten cyclical swings toward contestation.

### POST-SOVIET CASES

This theoretical logic provides excellent intellectual leverage for understanding cross-national and intertemporal variation in political contestation in post-Soviet countries. This is shown in the three following subsections, each of which considers a set of former Soviet states that illustrates one of the distinct patterns of patronal presidential behavior

<sup>23</sup> Stephen E. Hanson, "Instrumental Democracy: The End of Ideology and the Decline of Russian Political Parties," in Hesli and Reisinger (fn. 17).

anticipated by the theory.<sup>24</sup> The first set consists of states (Russia and Azerbaijan) where incumbent presidents entered lame-duck periods but where their teams successfully installed hand-picked successors. Russia, as the set's main illustrative case, is discussed in the most depth. The second set contains countries (Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan) where the incumbent presidents experienced the lame-duck syndrome and whose teams were ousted in the process. Ukraine is considered most thoroughly as this set's main illustrative case. The third set includes those states (Belarus, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) that appear not to have demonstrated any competitive phase since the establishment of superpresidential institutions. It is shown that what distinguishes the countries that have so far displayed the regime cycles from those that have not is largely a lame-duck syndrome connected with an incumbent's failure to run for another term in office, collapsing popularity, and/or formal presidential term limits. Among the countries that have experienced the predicted cycles, what crucially distinguishes successful successions (set 1) from unsuccessful ones (set 2) is found to be public opinion, although there is also a role for incumbent strategy. The conclusion then considers how one post-Soviet case (Ukraine) has moved to weaken its patrimonial presidential system and notes that political contestation there, as expected, has remained high.

#### THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AND AZERBAIJAN: SUCCESSFUL SUCCESSION

It is uncontroversial to assert that Russia has displayed the institutional features of patrimonial presidentialism as defined above. Russia's presidency is invested with a high degree of formal power and also enjoys vast informal, clientelistic control over immense resource flows.<sup>25</sup> The Kremlin's "administrative resources" have consistently included majority shares of the two largest television networks and the ability to use such critical institutions as police, secret services, courts, and myriad licensing and inspection authorities as means to reward loyal elites and punish disloyal ones.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> The core logic was initially developed with reference to the Russian case and to certain of the theories cited above. Thus to some extent the analysis of the other post-Soviet cases does constitute a test. For present purposes, however, the case narratives that follow are presented not as an explicit test but as useful illustrations of the theory's potential. This will hopefully spawn further research and more precise and thorough testing than is possible in the scope of a journal article.

<sup>25</sup> On the origins of this sort of clientelism in the former USSR and in other countries with legacies of patrimonial communism, see Kitschelt et al. (fn. 16).

<sup>26</sup> George W. Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Fish (fn. 13); Eugene Huskey, *Presidential Power in Russia* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1999).

Two of the most important sets of elites in Russia have been the heads of the executive branch (called “governors” here for the sake of simplicity) in Russia’s eighty-nine provinces<sup>27</sup> and the owners and chief officers of Russia’s largest corporations (often dubbed “oligarchs”) at both the national and the provincial level. While the ultimate impact of Putin’s federal reforms is yet to be seen, Russia’s governors throughout the 1990s and early 2000s typically wielded vast administrative resources based on local patron-client relationships, resources quite analogous to those at the Russian president’s disposal.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Russia’s presidents have generally counted on these regional political machines to deliver the vote for them.<sup>29</sup> Russia’s oligarchs have also played major roles in presidential politics, notably in mobilizing their media and material resources for preferred candidates.<sup>30</sup> Both sets of elites, however, have always been quite vulnerable to Russian presidential authority. Regional machines can be starved of federal subsidies, denied economic opportunities, or challenged in provincial elections. Indeed, Putin had secured the elimination of gubernatorial elections as of 2005. Oligarchs can be stripped of economic concessions on which their wealth depends or they can simply be prosecuted, as the Putin administration did in 2003 with Russia’s then-richest man, Yukos chief Mikhail Khodorkovsky.<sup>31</sup>

Russia’s two incumbent presidents have brought very different personal assets to the patronal presidency, however. Yeltsin was extremely unpopular throughout the period after the 1993 “superpresidential” constitution was adopted, with approval ratings generally in the low single digits. Additionally, it was under Yeltsin that the patronal presidential system was initially constructed out of the ruins of the Soviet Union, with regional political machines and oligarchic structures reaching their current peak of effectiveness only by the mid- to late 1990s.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>27</sup> As counted throughout most of the 1990s and early 2000s.

<sup>28</sup> M. N. Afanas’ev, *Klientelizm i Rossiiskaia Gosudarstvennost’* (Clientelism and Russian statehood) (Moscow: Moscow Public Science Foundation, 1997); Kimitaka Matsuzato, ed., *Regiony Rossii: Khronika i Rukovoditeli* (The regions of Russia: Chronicle and leaders) (Sapporo, Japan: Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University, 2003).

<sup>29</sup> On different presidential elections, see Daniel Treisman, “Why Yeltsin Won: A Russian Tammany Hall,” *Foreign Affairs* 75 (September–October 1996); Henry E. Hale, “The Origins of United Russia and the Putin Presidency: The Role of Contingency in Party-System Development,” *Demokratizatsiya* 12 (Spring 2004a); idem, “Russia’s Presidential Election and the Fate of Democracy: Taking the Cake,” *AAASS NewsNet* 44 (May 2004b).

<sup>30</sup> Juliet Johnson, *A Fistful of Rubles* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000); and Michael McFaul, *Russia’s 1996 Presidential Election: The End of Polarized Politics* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution Press, 1997).

<sup>31</sup> On the oligarchs and their relationship to central authority, see Jerry F. Hough, *The Logic of Economic Reform in Russia* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 2001); and Johnson (fn. 30).

<sup>32</sup> Henry E. Hale, “Explaining Machine Politics in Russia’s Regions: Economy, Ethnicity, and Legacy,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 19 (July–September 2003); Johnson (fn. 30).



We would thus expect a less pronounced swing to consolidation on his watch. Putin, by contrast, inherited a developed patronal presidential system and has been extremely popular throughout his tenure, with approval ratings consistently above 60 percent. We might thus expect the Putin-era cycle of consolidation to involve a much greater deviation from ideal-type democratic norms, particularly since Putin himself has shown few signs that liberal democracy is a top-priority goal for his time in office.

A look at post-Soviet Russian history does in fact reveal the anticipated cycles of consolidation and contestation as defined by elections and points of power transfer. Yeltsin in the mid-1990s is a tough case for the theory because he had virtually no personal appeal upon which to rely. Indeed, his near-zero approval ratings in late 1995 led key top advisers to urge him to cancel the 1996 presidential election. Moreover, Yeltsin faced an ideological opposition, the Communist Party, whose credibility largely derived from the enduring loyalty to leftist ideas and networks in the face of what was widely perceived to be the economic collapse wrought by Yeltsin's marketizing reforms. Additionally, the administrative resources of the patronal presidency were still largely untested as of 1996, generating even more uncertainty about Yeltsin's ability to survive the election. Many regional and even business elites thus initially backed the Communist Party's candidate, Gennady Zyuganov, figuring simply that he would win and so calculating that their best option was to curry favor with him. These challenges, however, largely drove Yeltsin to first mobilize the vast "electoral" powers available to him as patronal president. Significantly, Yeltsin's campaign effort was run by Anatoly Chubais, the architect of the privatization plans that essentially created Russia's oligarchs. He quickly rallied them to his patron's side, raising immense sums of cash and generating disproportionately favorable coverage on oligarch-controlled media in return, effectively, for plum Russian assets such as oil and metals companies that were being privatized.<sup>33</sup> Once Yeltsin was able to force a runoff against Zyuganov and to even report a slight lead in the first round of voting, the campaign pulled out all of its sticks and carrots to get key regional political machines to deliver the vote for Yeltsin. Thus many provinces that initially produced Zyuganov pluralities in the first round generated Yeltsin majorities in the second.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Johnson (fn. 30).

<sup>34</sup> On these elections, see McFaul (fn. 30); Peter Reddaway and Dmitri Glinski, *The Tragedy of Russia's Reforms* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 2001); and Treisman (fn. 29).



With Yeltsin's second and final term scheduled to end in 2000, Russia went from the highly unfair election of 1996 to a period of great political contestation in 1999 that gave a large role not only to elites but also to the masses. Facing constitutionally embedded term limits and then illness, Yeltsin announced in August 1999 that his chosen successor would be his newly appointed prime minister, Vladimir Putin. Putin, however, was a political unknown with only 2 percent support in presidential polls immediately after his appointment.<sup>35</sup> Anticipating a point of patronal presidential power transfer, Russia's regional and business elites feverishly jockeyed to pick the "winning horse," and only some initially bet on Putin. A formidable opposition quickly emerged from this elite activity, the Fatherland-All Russia coalition led by Russia's most powerful regional boss (Moscow mayor Yury Luzhkov) and a widely liked former prime minister sacked by Yeltsin earlier in 1999 (Yevgeny Primakov). Primakov's great popularity sealed the coalition, which boasted many of Russia's most influential provincial machines and the active support of key oligarchic concerns, such as Vladimir Gusinsky's Most Group that owned one of Russia's top three television networks, NTV. The result was a strikingly balanced competition for parliamentary office in 1999, with each side possessing major administrative assets, including mass media and regional political machines.

Remarkably, it was public opinion that tipped the scales of this elite struggle to the incumbents' side. For one thing, pro-Kremlin media proved more effective in using slanted news and analytical coverage than did media that favored Fatherland-All Russia. Most important, however, was Prime Minister Putin's aggressive and highly popular response to the savage bombings of two apartment buildings in Moscow and to two bombings in other cities that terrorized the Russian population in September 1999. By sending the military into Chechnya, his standing in the presidential polls soared close to the critical 50 percent mark by November. With no one else at even half this level, oligarchic and regional elites who had previously backed the Primakov-Luzhkov tandem began to back off. Ultimately, Fatherland-All Russia received a disappointing 13 percent of the vote in the 1999 parliamentary elections while the pro-Putin Unity bloc surged from nonexistence to 23 percent in less than three months.<sup>36</sup> Yeltsin dealt the coup de grâce on

<sup>35</sup> According to an August 20–24, 1999, nationwide survey by the VTsIOM agency, reported in *Russian Election Watch* 2, no. 2 (September 1999), 1, [http://bcsia.ksg.harvard.edu/publication.cfm?program=CORE&ctype=paper&item\\_id=276](http://bcsia.ksg.harvard.edu/publication.cfm?program=CORE&ctype=paper&item_id=276) (last accessed February 19, 2006).

<sup>36</sup> Hale (fn. 29, 2004a).

New Year's Eve 1999 by resigning, bestowing the prestige and powers of the patronal presidential office on Putin, who became acting president pending early elections scheduled for March 2000. As all indicators pointed to a resounding Putin victory, virtually every major elite group fell firmly into his camp, which then waltzed to an easy victory.<sup>37</sup> With Putin's approval ratings consistently between 60 and 80 percent during his first term, elites again fell into line for the 2003–4 national elections, stifling almost all semblance of political competition.<sup>38</sup> With his second term slated to end in 2008, the highly popular Putin took advantage of the elites' need to please him by pushing through a series of political reforms designed in part to constrain elites from launching future challenges to incumbent authorities. His actions included prosecuting the most prominent oligarchs, building up a propresidential party (United Russia), and replacing gubernatorial elections with presidential nominations subject to legislative ratification. The "high Putinism" seen at the time of this writing can thus be understood as a particularly strong consolidation phase in Russia.

Azerbaijan represents a similar case in that its longtime leader also successfully navigated a lame-duck situation, securing the election of a designated heir in 2003. Its patronal presidential system became firmly established under Heidar Aliiev, the erstwhile Azerbaijani Communist Party boss who reinvented himself as president of independent Azerbaijan in 1993.<sup>39</sup> Aliiev soon emerged as the consummate patron, controlling the country's oil-related wealth, brooking no serious challenge to his rule, reestablishing political stability, and winning reelection handily in 1998. As with Yeltsin, Aliiev fell gravely ill and ultimately declined to seek a third term in 2003 while a popular opposition candidate angled for the presidency (Isa Gambar) and was judged by some to have a real chance of inducing sufficient elite defections to win. Aliiev's successor, formerly the state oil company chief, was not as popular as Putin but enjoyed roughly as much public support as did Gambar. Three factors tipped the scales toward the successor in this contest. First, the outgoing Aliiev remained quite popular, with a large number of loyalists expected to back his political heir. Second, the longtime president kept his own candidacy alive until just two weeks before the election so as to deter

<sup>37</sup> On these elections, see Timothy J. Colton and Michael McFaul, *Popular Choice and Managed Democracy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003); Hale (fn. 29, 2004a); and Shvetsova (fn. 17).

<sup>38</sup> Hale (fn. 29, 2004b).

<sup>39</sup> Audrey L. Altstadt, "Azerbaijan's Struggle toward Democracy," in Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott, eds., *Conflict, Cleavage, and Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

elites from defecting until it was effectively too late. Third, the chosen successor was none other than Heydar Aliiev's own son, Ilham Aliiev. This minimized the fears of rival elites about a postsuccession change in coalition and thus defused one of the most powerful precipitants of elite contestation in patronal presidential systems. Thus while opposition-led protests erupted after what was widely believed to be a falsified "succession election" in October 2003, the bulk of the political elites continued to toe the Aliiev line, putting down demonstrations and punishing opposition leaders.<sup>40</sup> The younger Aliiev then survived the first parliamentary elections on his watch, in late 2005, despite widespread condemnation of the elections as fraudulent and opposition attempts to mimic the revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan.

#### UKRAINE, ARMENIA, GEORGIA, AND KYRGYZSTAN: UNSUCCESSFUL SUCCESSIONS

The successful popular uprisings observed in the post-Soviet countries between 2003 and 2005 first and foremost represent popular intervention made possible by elite competition that emerged in response to anticipated changes in who would occupy the presidency—anticipation that was frequently related to formal presidential term limits. Turning first to Ukraine, it was characterized throughout most of the 1990s and the first half of the 2000s by a presidency that was strong in terms of both formal powers and informal, clientelistic authority. In some ways, Ukrainian presidents have had more power at their disposal than their Russian counterparts because they have long possessed the right to appoint regional governors and because Ukraine's more gradual privatization process left big business more directly under the influence of the state for much of the post-Soviet period.<sup>41</sup> As in Russia, strong regional political machines and oligarchic groups capable of influencing elections were not simply inherited from the communist past but were constructed and mobilized by political leaders. In the face of a sharp economic decline, Ukraine's first president, Leonid Kravchuk, was challenged as early as 1994 by a popular prime minister from the

<sup>40</sup> This paragraph draws on Svante E. Cornell, "Democratization Falters in Azerbaijan," *Journal of Democracy* 12 (April 2001); Jean-Christophe Peuch, "Azerbaijan: Aliiev's Withdrawal Marks End of Political Era," *RFE/RL News & Analysis*, October 3, 2003, <http://www.rferl.com/features/2003/10/03102003170908.asp> (last accessed February 19, 2006); "Opposition Gains Confidence as Azerbaijan's Presidential Election Approaches," *EurasiaNet*, October 6, 2003, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav100603.shtml> (last accessed February 19, 2006); and Alec Rasizade, "Azerbaijan after Heydar Aliiev," *Nationalities Papers* 32 (March 2004).

<sup>41</sup> On Ukrainian privatization, see Robert Kravchuk, *Ukrainian Political Economy: The First Ten Years* (New York: Pallgrave MacMillan, 2002).

state-owned business community, Leonid Kuchma. Critically, this took place before Kravchuk had been able to demonstrate a capacity to mobilize regional political machines for delivering the vote and so there was no clear, prior expectation that Kravchuk would win. After Kuchma won a close race, with regional elites dividing roughly along east-west lines, he aggressively fired and appointed governors primarily on the basis of their effectiveness in delivering the vote for his preferred candidates.<sup>42</sup> Through a managed privatization process and other economic policies, Kravchuk's successor also helped spawn a class of Ukrainian "oligarchs" who controlled key media and who could be counted on to support central political interests. Kuchma successfully demonstrated this power with his lopsided 1999 reelection.<sup>43</sup> Ukraine's president, much like Putin, invested great effort in strengthening state control over regional and business elites, especially those controlling mass media. One oligarch, Viktor Pinchuk, even became Kuchma's son-in-law. Kuchma's team also systematically used state surveillance organs to blackmail key elites so as to ensure their loyalty or, failing that, to punish them.<sup>44</sup> All this led many to decry what they saw as increasingly consolidated authoritarianism in Ukraine.<sup>45</sup>

After Kuchma entered his constitutionally final second term, however, his opponents were emboldened by a subsequent major drop in his popularity.<sup>46</sup> The central event was the leaking of covert surveillance tapes (almost certainly originating from an elite source intent on damaging Kuchma's team) linking the president to the murder of journalist Grigory Gongadze. While Kuchma did get a Constitutional Court ruling that he could seek a third term in 2004 on the basis of a technicality, this was controversial and occurred only in December 2003, after many elites had come to suspect that the unpopular president might not be

<sup>42</sup> Kimitaka Matsuzato, "All Kuchma's Men: The Reshuffling of Ukrainian Governors and the Presidential Election of 1999," *Post-Soviet Geography and Economics* 42 (September 2001); Lucan Way, "The Sources and Dynamics of Competitive Authoritarianism in Ukraine," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 20 (March 2004).

<sup>43</sup> Matsuzato (fn. 42); Mikhail Pogrebinsky, "Kak Ukraina Shla k 'Oranzhevoi' Revoliutsii," in Pogrebinsky, ed., "Oranzhevaia" *Revoliutsiia: Versii, Khronika, Dokumenty* (The "Orange" Revolution: Versions, chronicle, documents) (Kyiv: Otima, 2005).

<sup>44</sup> Keith Darden, "Blackmail as a Tool of State Domination: Ukraine under Kuchma," *East European Constitutional Review* 10 (Spring-Summer 2001). See also Dominique Arel, "Kuchmagate and the Demise of Kuchma's 'Geopolitical Bluff,'" *East European Constitutional Review* 10 (Spring-Summer 2001).

<sup>45</sup> Some of the best such arguments include Darden (fn. 44); Levitsky and Way (fn. 4); Way (fn. 42). An exception is Taras Kuzio, "The 2002 Parliamentary Elections in Ukraine: Democratization or Authoritarianism," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 19 (June 2003).

<sup>46</sup> As of the start of 2004, some 80 percent of citizens did not want Kuchma to continue as president. See Dmitry Vydrin and Irina Rozhkova, *V Ozhidanii Geroia: Yezhenedel'nik Goda Peremen* (While awaiting a hero: A weekly of the year of changes) (Kharkiv: Kankom, 2005), 19.

able to make another successful run and after many had come to expect at least some coordinated elite defection in 2004.<sup>47</sup> Thus during the year before the vote Kuchma repeatedly stated he would not seek reelection, and in fact did not run.<sup>48</sup>

Despite the fact that Kuchma tapped a successor (incumbent prime minister Viktor Yanukovych) and devoted the entire might of the paternal presidential office to securing his victory, a formidable rival emerged from within the Ukrainian state elite. This rival, Viktor Yushchenko, had built up significant popularity as a supporter of market reform and Westernization while head of Ukraine's National Bank (1993–99) and prime minister (1999–2001). Yushchenko was removed from office in 2001. With Kuchma appearing vulnerable, however, Yushchenko formed an opposition group for the 2002 parliamentary (Rada) elections—widely seen as an elite primary for the 2004 presidential contest. After winning a significant minority of seats and assuming a clear lead in reliable presidential polls, Yushchenko established himself as the most credible opposition “horse” to back for elites looking beyond the Kuchma era.<sup>49</sup> He was thus the obvious candidate for nonleftist opposition parties (including the bloc of Yulia Tymoshenko) determined to unite their forces to oust the Kuchma team.<sup>50</sup>

While the Kuchma-Yanukovych team deployed a massive arsenal of “administrative resources” to acquire votes and sought to rally all major elites to their side as they had done in 1999, many elites who had been loyal to Kuchma in 1999 were now fearful of being left out of a Yanukovych Ukraine. Yanukovych was associated with one particular pro-Kuchma oligarchic group. This was the Donetsk-based “clan” informally led by Ukraine's richest man, Rinat Akhmetov, and represented in Kuchma's inner circle by Viktor Medvedchuk, the head of Kuchma's administration during the campaign period. Some elites who had long supported Kuchma but had competed with the Donetsk group for influence thus began to support Yushchenko, supplying him with resources that would prove critical to his victory. A few business “oligarchs” were so bold as to back Yushchenko openly from the start, including, most notably, Petro Poroshenko.<sup>51</sup> Tymoshenko herself had also initially achieved prominence in big business. While most media

<sup>47</sup> Sergei Danilochkin, “Ukraine: Kuchma Cleared to Run for Third Term,” *RFE/RL Features*, December 30, 2003.

<sup>48</sup> Vydrin and Rozhkova (fn. 46), 193–94, 200, 220, 257.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>50</sup> Kuzio (fn. 45).

<sup>51</sup> See Serhii Leshchenko, “Petro Poroshenko v Inter'eri Kartyn i Kartynok,” *Ukrains'ka Pravda*, [www2.pravda.com.ua](http://www2.pravda.com.ua), January 11, 2005, 19:36.

treated Russian business as unanimously backing the more pro-Russian Yanukovych, several major Russian financial groups associated with liberal leanings were reported to favor Yushchenko, including Alfa group and the conglomerates of Aleksandr Lebedev and Konstantin Grigoriushin.<sup>52</sup>

Excluding Yanukovych's own Donetsk clan, the dominant business elite behavior, however, was at first to hedge bets. This category of elite tended to think that Yanukovych might win and feared Kuchma's powers of reprisal, but additionally calculated that Yushchenko also had a chance to win due to his popularity, his modicum of open elite support, and his suspected backing by the Western international community. They thus placed their eggs in both baskets in hopes of avoiding a Yanukovych victory while not completely alienating his team in case it should win. Two such oligarchic groups were Pryvat and the team of Leonid and Andrei Derkach. Most surprisingly, an influential insider in the Medvedchuk-Yanukovych camp reports that even the president's son-in-law cum oligarch, Pinchuk, was in fact covertly providing support to Yushchenko at the same time that he was overtly working for Yanukovych. This, the insider reports, was understood in the Yanukovych camp as Kuchma's personal effort to hedge his own bets, hoping thereby to avoid threats to his own family's material and physical position in the event that Yanukovych lost.<sup>53</sup> The United States government accentuated the interest that some big business representatives had in bet hedging: reports circulated during the campaign season that Pinchuk and several other major elites associated with Yanukovych would be denied visas to the U.S. because of their alleged corruption.<sup>54</sup> Even in Russia's business community, purportedly pro-Yanukovych conglomerates frequently played both sides in an effort to safeguard their interests regardless of which way the election went.<sup>55</sup>

Among the resources that two of these oligarchic groups brought was television coverage. Poroshenko controlled the small opposition-oriented Fifth Channel network and Andrei Derkach owned the Era television and radio networks. While Poroshenko's feisty Fifth Chan-

<sup>52</sup> Viacheslav Nikonov, "Oranzhevaia' Revoliutsiia v Kontekste Zhanra," in Pogrebinsky (fn. 43), 100; author interview with Pogrebinsky, Kyiv, August 12, 2005; author interview with Dmitry Vydrin, Kyiv, August 12, 2005.

<sup>53</sup> Pogrebinsky (fn. 43), 116. Also author interview with Pogrebinsky (fn. 52); Vydrin and Rozhkova (fn. 46), 227; author interview with Vydrin (fn. 52).

<sup>54</sup> Vydrin and Rozhkova (fn. 46), 387; Daniil Yanevsky, *Khronika "Oranzhevoi" Revoliutsii* (Chronicle of the "Orange" Revolution) (Kharkiv: Folio, 2005), 76.

<sup>55</sup> Nikonov (fn. 52), 100.



nel got most of the attention from outside observers, Era television was also very important because it broadcast on a widely available channel (the First National channel) at times when many people watched, in the morning and later evening. While Era did not blatantly support Yushchenko as did the Fifth Channel, it provided relatively objective information during the course of the orange revolution, giving people access to an opposition point of view.<sup>56</sup>

With Kuchma's heir designate so clearly tied to the interests of Donetsk and other parts of Russian-oriented "eastern" Ukraine, elites divided heavily along regional lines. Thus, those based in the more European-oriented western provinces feared their interests would be trampled in the event of a Yanukovych win.<sup>57</sup> Ukraine's elected regional legislatures were one such category, tending to rally behind Yanukovych in the East whereas those in the West were often fiery supporters of Yushchenko. The country's religious establishment was similarly divided: representatives of the eastern-based Ukrainian Orthodox church subordinate to the Moscow patriarchate made some strong pro-Yanukovych statements, while Yushchenko found friendly attitudes among representatives of the more western-oriented Ukrainian Orthodox church subordinate to the Kyiv patriarchate and of the western-based Ukrainian Greco-Catholic church.<sup>58</sup> Ukraine's governors were a somewhat different story, as they were appointed by Kuchma everywhere except Kyiv and Crimea and were tasked by the administration with backing Yanukovych. But so strong was popular and legislative support for Yushchenko in many western Ukrainian regions that a pro-Yanukovych insider reports that no serious attempts were made to use the governors there to win votes for him. The situation was seen as hopeless. Many regional administration officials were even believed to be covertly sympathetic to Yushchenko or co-opted.<sup>59</sup> This helps explain how Yushchenko was able to achieve massive majorities of the vote in many western regions even in the first round of presidential balloting,

<sup>56</sup> Taras Kuzio, "Yushchenko Victory to Speed Up Ukraine's Democratization and Europeanization," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, December 17, 2004; Yanevsky (fn. 54).

<sup>57</sup> Dominique Arel has powerfully argued that the regional differences at work in the Orange Revolution most fundamentally reflect differences in national identity. See Arel, "Ukraina Vybyraet Zapad, No Ne Bez Vostoka," *Pro et Contra* (July–August 2005); an English-language version, "The Orange Revolution: Analysis and Implications of the 2004 Presidential Election in Ukraine," February 25, 2005, is available at [http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/grad-etudesup/ukr/pdf/Arel\\_Cambridge.pdf](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/grad-etudesup/ukr/pdf/Arel_Cambridge.pdf) (last accessed February 20, 2006).

<sup>58</sup> Aleksandr Litvinenko, "Oranzhevaia Revoliutsiia: Prichiny, Kharakter i Rezultaty," in Pogrebinsky (fn. 43), 13; Yanevsky (fn. 54), 58, 64.

<sup>59</sup> Author interview with Pogrebinsky (fn. 52).



including an astonishing 89 percent in Ivano-Frankivsk.<sup>60</sup> This is especially striking, given that many of these same western elites had backed Kuchma in the 1999 presidential election.

The elite standoff gradually began to resolve itself after the first and second rounds of the election took place, giving elites who were hedging their bets more information about who was likely to win. While Yushchenko gained a few new allies after the first round, which resulted in a runoff with Yanukovych, it was this second round that generated the most decisive moments. The Central Election Commission (CEC) declared Yanukovych the winner by a narrow margin (and reported the results after great delay and in an irregular manner) at the same time that exit polls showed a decisive Yushchenko victory and many observers reported rampant fraud.<sup>61</sup> One of the first key elite groups to “defect” to Yushchenko was the Kyiv city administration—a critical blow to Yanukovych because it effectively enabled the massive popular demonstrations that ultimately did in the incumbents. Mayor Oleksandr Omelchenko had a long history of rivalry with Kuchma’s chief of staff Medvedchuk and the oligarch Hryhory Surkis, both of whom were positioned to reinforce their leading roles should Yanukovych win. Thus the city boss had at first hedged his bets during the campaign, avoiding support for Yushchenko but also finding ways to avoid helping Yanukovych too much. In a creative move, he declared his own candidacy for president. Omelchenko’s candidacy was not a major concern for Yanukovych, since Kyiv city voters were seen to be largely pro-Yushchenko. Yanukovych thus hoped that Omelchenko would use his political machine to win for Omelchenko votes that would otherwise go to Yushchenko in Kyiv, and that the Kyiv mayor would then back Yanukovych in the anticipated runoff.<sup>62</sup> Omelchenko did not, however, deploy his political machine this time; rather, he effectively let the city’s majority vote its conscience for Yushchenko. Moreover, as the runoff approached, the mayor’s campaign office announced that it would support Yushchenko.<sup>63</sup>

The Kyiv mayor’s most important act of defection, however, came after the first results of the runoff were out, when it was obvious that falsi-

<sup>60</sup> Table of official election results in Central Election Commission of Ukraine, *Vybory Prezydenta Ukraïny 2004 Roku: Elektoral’na Statystyka* (Elections for the president of Ukraine 2004: Electoral statistics) (Kyiv: Central Election Commission, 2005), 496–97.

<sup>61</sup> Maksim Strikha, “Ukrainskie Vybory: Do i Posle,” in Pogrebinsky (fn. 43), 155. Exit poll results can be found in Vydrin and Rozhkova (fn. 46), 391.

<sup>62</sup> Mykhailo Slaboshpyts’kyi, *Peizazh dlia Pomaranchevoui Revoliutsii* (A landscape for the Orange Revolution) (Kyiv: Yaroslaviv Val, 2005), 84, 86–88.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 86–88; Yanevsky (fn. 54), 55–56.

fication had influenced them and that popular outrage was widespread. Omelchenko signed a decision of the Kyiv legislature appealing to the CEC to revoke its count.<sup>64</sup> Shortly thereafter, as pro-Yushchenko demonstrators were converging in massive numbers on Kyiv's central square and government buildings, the capital's administration and legislature ordered city agencies and companies to supply various kinds of support to the protesters. This included mobile toilets, medical care, hot drinks, meeting premises, and even many of the tents used by the demonstrators during their weeks of activity in the bitter cold.<sup>65</sup> Very critically, the city also intentionally took measures to undercut the possibility of a violent crackdown by the central authorities. Having received a direct order from Kuchma's administration shortly before the runoff to ban all demonstrations, the city administration did not immediately carry the order out. But nor did it directly defy the order. Instead, the city approached a court to sanction the order. The choice of court, however, was calculated: the Shevchenkiv's'kyi district court was known to city officials to have bucked subordination to Kuchma's authorities. As expected, the court ruled that the demonstrations could not be banned and that police or other authorities would be violating the law to try to do so. This eliminated "enforcing the law" as a legitimate pretext for an early crackdown.<sup>66</sup> City authorities also removed "traffic flow" as a possible pretext for a forceful dispersion of the crowds by banning all motor transport in central Kyiv, leaving the city streets available for use by the protesters.<sup>67</sup>

As the crowds in Kyiv swelled to unprecedented levels (and counts range anywhere from one hundred thousand to upwards of a million at the peak), other elite groups began to sense the increased likelihood of a Yushchenko victory and the concomitant reduction in the likelihood that they would be punished for their insubordination. This sense of se-

<sup>64</sup> Kyiv State Rada, Rishennia 733/2143, "Pro Zahostrennia Suspil'no-Politychnoi Sytuatsii v Misti Kyevi, Iaka Sklalas'ia Pislia Proholoshennia Tsentral'noiu Vyborchoiu Komisiei Rezultativ Povtor-noho Holosuvannia po Vyborakh Prezydenta Ukrainy," November 22, 2004, reprinted in Kiev State Administration, *Pomarancheva Revoliutsiia i Kyiiv's'ka Vlada: Pohliad Kriz' Pryzmu Faktiv* (The Orange Revolution and Kyivan power: A look through the prism of the facts) (Kyiv: Kyiv State Administration, 2005), 4–5; Yanevsky (fn. 54), 97.

<sup>65</sup> Kyiv State Administration, Rozporiadzhennia no. 2132, "Pro Zakhody Shhodo Zabezpechennia Hromads'koho Poriadku v Stolytsi Ukrainy—Misti-Heroi Kyevi," November 24, 2004, reprinted in Kiev State Administration (fn. 64), 9–11; author interview with Oleksandr Petik, head of the Kyiv city administration's main directorate for internal politics, August 11, 2005; Slaboshpyts'kyi (fn. 62), 88–89.

<sup>66</sup> Author interview with Petik (fn. 65); author interview with Pogrebinsky (fn. 52); Yanevsky (fn. 54), 82, 88.

<sup>67</sup> Kyiv State Administration, Rozporiadzhennia no. 2132, in Kyiv State Administration (fn. 64); author interview with Petik (fn. 65).

curity in opposition grew as more elites joined in. Two key elite groups are worth mentioning. The first was the most surprising to many: the security services, the military, and the police. Some contend that Kuchma was simply too soft to order a crackdown, but in truth some in Ukraine's force agencies were highly sympathetic to Yushchenko while others simply started to anticipate that pro-Yushchenko forces might eventually prevail. The latter feared being punished later for shedding blood in the interests of a patron who was on his way out. Such forces were very unlikely to have implemented an order to crack down, especially once the crowds grew to such an immense size and once potentially legitimizing pretexts for state violence were removed.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, a Kyiv city administration official reports that the administration knew through regular contacts with military and police that the latter were wavering as to whether to obey a potential crackdown order and that the city's appeal to the Shevchenkivs'kyi court was intended in part to encourage them to decide against violent intervention.<sup>69</sup>

As it turned out, the Shevchenkivs'kyi court was just the tip of the judicial iceberg for the Yanukovych camp. The biggest part of the iceberg proved to be the Supreme Court, long considered to be in Kuchma's pocket. Seeing the proverbial writing on the wall, it invalidated the second round of elections and ordered yet another runoff. The third round ultimately took place under fairer conditions on December 26 and was won by Yushchenko. While a series of other factors converged to help convince such Ukrainian elites that Yanukovych would not win this struggle after the second round took place, at least one is worth singling out here: the strong condemnations of this round of elections from international observers (in particular the OSCE) and the U.S. government, which let it be known that it was now unlikely to consider a Yanukovych government to be legitimate. Overall, we see how an elite split, coming at a point of anticipated power transfer in Ukraine's patronal presidential system, generated a major opening for mass input in a country that just a few years earlier had been consigned by many to the camp of the hopelessly "autocratizing."

The same logic underlay the "revolutions" in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan. The victory of charismatic opposition politician Mikheil Saakashvili in Georgia was set in motion by unpopular incumbent president Eduard Shevardnadze's April 2002 announcement that he would abide

<sup>68</sup> Arel (fn. 57); Taras Kuzio, "Did Ukraine's Security Service Really Prevent Bloodshed During the Orange Revolution," *Eurasian Daily Monitor*, January 24, 2005.

<sup>69</sup> Author interview with Petik (fn. 65).

by the constitution's two-term limit and leave office by 2005. This heralded the onset of a lame-duck syndrome that led many formerly pro-Shevardnadze elites to back Saakashvili (himself formerly a minister in Shevardnadze's government) as the most likely future president when he called supporters to the streets to challenge Shevardnadze over a fraudulent 2003 parliamentary election widely seen as an early test of strength for the post-Shevardnadze succession.<sup>70</sup> Shevardnadze failed to get the military or police to crack down on protesters despite reports that he made such a request.<sup>71</sup> By 2005, not only had Saakashvili won his first presidential election with an astounding vote of nearly 96 percent, but his administration had also been accused of using some of its predecessor's machine tactics against certain opponents. In addition, it is reported that he even suggested banning parties opposing his pro-Western stance.<sup>72</sup>

The tulip revolution in Kyrgyzstan followed a remarkably similar pattern. An unpopular authoritarian president, Askar Akaev, declared he would not attempt to amend the constitution so as to make it possible for him to seek a third term in the anticipated October 2005 presidential contest; at the same time his team attempted to engineer an improbably large victory for itself in the February 2005 "elite primary" parliamentary elections.<sup>73</sup> In the throes of this lame-duck syndrome, Akaev was unable to stem mass elite defection that began in the part of Kyrgyzstan where his own ties were weakest (the South) after international and other observers branded the parliamentary vote unfair.<sup>74</sup> Even as Akaev warned that he would punish protesters, his threats rang hollow as elites of various stripes poured into the opposition camp, including police, those in charge of mass media, and members of the Supreme Court.<sup>75</sup> Tellingly, in a later interview, Akaev blamed his

<sup>70</sup> *RFE/RL Newsline*, April 11, 2002.

<sup>71</sup> Charles H. Fairbanks, Jr., "Georgia's Rose Revolution," *Journal of Democracy* 15 (April 2004).

<sup>72</sup> *RFE/RL Newsline*, February 11, 2005. On the revolution and reconsolidation, see also Georgi Derlugian, "Georgia's Return of the King," Working Paper no. 22, Program on New Approaches to Russian Security (Washington, D.C.: CSIS, 2004), [http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/ruseur\\_wp\\_022.pdf](http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/ruseur_wp_022.pdf) (last accessed February 20, 2006); and Fairbanks (fn. 71), who notes that Saakashvili has effectively replaced Georgia's "superpresidential" constitution with a stronger "hyperpresidential" one.

<sup>73</sup> *RFE/RL Newsline*, February 28, 2005; Aaron Rhodes, "Akaev's Acrid Legacy," *Transitions Online*, February 23, 2005, [www.tol.cz](http://www.tol.cz); TOL, "A Second Round Beckons," *Transitions Online*, February 28, 2005; Erica Marat, "Mass Protests, Little Change after Kyrgyz Parliamentary Runoff," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, March 15, 2005.

<sup>74</sup> Nur Omarov, cited in *Kabar* (Kyrgyzstan), <http://www.kabar.kg/rus>, June 30, 2005, 09:40.

<sup>75</sup> *RFE/RL Newsline*, March 16, 2005; *RFE/RL Newsline*, March 22, 2005; "Kurmanbek Bakiyev becomes Kyrgyz Prime Minister and Acting President," *Times of Central Asia*, March 25, 2005, 01:40, <http://www.times.kg/news/Protests/Kyrgyzstan/2005/03/25/0068147>; Erica Marat, "Kyrgyz Crisis Reaches Bishkek—Rumors Suggest Akayev Has Fled Country," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, March 21, 2005.

ouster in part on “collusion” between the opposition and the leadership of his own police and security forces.<sup>76</sup> The revolutionary leaders also had achieved initial prominence in Akaev’s own elite, including the man who assumed the presidency after Akaev’s departure, former prime minister and southerner Kurmanbek Bakiev. Bakiev soon struck a power-sharing deal with the most prominent opposition northerner, Feliks Kulov,<sup>77</sup> and proceeded to win nearly 90 percent of the vote in the postrevolution presidential election (moved up to July 2005) with the benefit of disproportionate television coverage and little elite support for any other (potential) candidate.<sup>78</sup>

While Armenia is frequently considered a “nondemocratizer” because its controversial elections of 2003 did not precipitate a revolution, what really distinguishes it from Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan is that it was in a consolidation phase during 2003. The relatively popular incumbent Robert Kocharian was not a lame duck that year and was running for a constitutionally sanctioned second term. In fact, Armenia had already experienced the predicted contestation phase in 1997–98—this was what had brought Kocharian to power. When the first Armenian president Levon Ter-Petrosian was reelected to a second (and constitutionally final) term in 1996, the vote was widely considered fraudulent but he, like Kocharian in 2003, was able to keep key elites in line to forcibly put down protests.<sup>79</sup> Shortly after his last term began, however, Ter-Petrosian’s popular support plummeted when he agreed under international pressure to make concessions to bitter rival Azerbaijan so as to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. To shore up his administration’s nationalistic credentials, he named the former leader of Nagorno-Karabakh, Kocharian, to be his prime minister in 1997. But this only sealed the incumbent’s lame-duck status, making the popular Kocharian the obvious leader for elites thinking beyond the Ter-Petrosian era. Kocharian wasted little time in using a series of events to induce mass elite defection, forcing Ter-Petrosian’s untimely resignation in 1998.<sup>80</sup> Kocharian became acting president and won the early presidential election that followed later that year.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>76</sup> *RFE/RL Newsline*, July 12, 2005.

<sup>77</sup> Kurmanbek Bakiev, “Kurmanbek Bakiev,” interview, *Gazeta.Kg* (Kyrgyzstan), June 28, 2005, 21:06.

<sup>78</sup> While the author was an observer for the OSCE in the Kyrgyzstan presidential election, the views expressed in this paper are those of the author only and not necessarily those of the OSCE. The OSCE final report on the election can be found at [http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr-el/2005/12/17585\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr-el/2005/12/17585_en.pdf) (last accessed February 19, 2006).

<sup>79</sup> Liz Fuller, “Democracy or Oligarchy?” *RFE/RL Newsline*, v.1, no.122, pt. I, September 22, 1997.

<sup>80</sup> Paul Goble, “Why Ter-Petrosyan Fell,” End Note, *RFE/RL Newsline*, February 6, 1998; Emil Danielyan, “Armenian President’s Resignation Likely to Cause Policy Changes,” *RFE/RL Newsline*, February 5, 1998; *RFE/RL Newsline*, November 3, 1997.

<sup>81</sup> This case shows that the elite contestation phase does not necessarily play out in the electoral arena.

## NO SUCCESSION: BELARUS, KAZAKHSTAN, TAJIKISTAN, TURKMENISTAN, UZBEKISTAN

A final set of patronal presidential cases includes those having experienced no significant contestation phase since the establishment of patronal presidential institutions. The leaders of these countries, including Belarus, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, have one important trait in common: they have never encountered the lame-duck syndrome since their patronal presidential systems were firmly established. In fact, in each case, the incumbent presidents secured the elimination of term limits or significant extensions of their legal time in office through one method or other well in advance and consistently made clear that they had no plans to leave office. They have also remained relatively healthy and avoided precipitous drops in their popularity. Accordingly, elites saw defection as very risky, and few of them dared take a chance challenging these presidents. Indeed, this is one critical reason why security forces in Uzbekistan did not waver when Uzbek president Islom Karimov ordered them to fire on hundreds of demonstrators in Andijon. By contrast, the reported or rumored intentions of Shevardnadze, Akaev, and Kuchma to stay in power by relying on the wielders of force were met at critical moments with bet hedging or outright defection to the opposition, who the force wielders thought might be the authorities of the future.

Tajikistan, emerging from its long civil war with patronal presidential institutions, merits special attention because of how it contrasts with Kyrgyzstan. Indeed, Tajikistan held parliamentary elections on the same day as did Kyrgyzstan (February 27, 2005), and both elections were judged unfair by the international community.<sup>82</sup> But while the Kyrgyz election triggered mass unrest, Tajikistan's president Imomali Rakhmonov remained firmly at the helm, and little popular protest followed the voting. A key difference, it is argued, is that Akaev had announced he would abide by constitutional term limits and leave office later that year, whereas Rakhmonov had made clear he intended to remain in power and, trading on his relative popularity, had secured an early amendment to his country's constitution (in 2004) that eliminated his own two-term constraint and enabled him to run again in late 2006.<sup>83</sup> To be sure, Rakhmonov was generally regarded as having much

<sup>82</sup> On the Tajikistan election, see Zafar Abdullaev and Kambiz Arman, "To the Rulers, Victory," *Transitions Online*, February 28, 2005; and the OSCE's final report, available at [http://www.osce.org/documents/html/pdf/html/14852\\_en.pdf.html](http://www.osce.org/documents/html/pdf/html/14852_en.pdf.html) (last accessed February 19, 2006).

<sup>83</sup> TOL, "Sidelineing the Opposition," *Transitions Online*, February 26, 2005.



greater popular support than did Akaev.<sup>84</sup> Tajikistan's elites, expecting to have to contend with Rakhmonov as president long into the future, had a much greater incentive to toe the presidential line and not defect, leaving the opposition and masses few resources and little opportunity to challenge the incumbent.

## CONCLUSION

An institutional logic of elite collective action proves very useful in understanding the pattern of regime change observed in post-Soviet Eurasia in the 1990s and 2000s, a pattern in which some states have seemed to oscillate between democracy and autocracy while others have appeared fairly stably authoritarian. Building on theories of presidentialism and hybrid regimes that do not assume an underlying trajectory toward autocracy or democracy, we see that much of this change is not simply random "instability" but is part of reasonably predictable regime cycles produced by a particular institutional framework, patronal presidentialism. This has important implications for understanding the colored revolutions of 2003–5, for assessing the relationship between these countries and democracy/autocracy, and for determining how best to conduct future regime research on the postcommunist world and beyond.

Table 1 is a stylized summary of the preceding empirical discussion as to why colored revolutions occurred in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan in 2003–5 but not in other post-Soviet countries with patronal presidential institutions: the revolutionary countries were the ones with unpopular, lame-duck presidents who, if they attempted to anoint a successor, failed to find someone with sufficiently high personal popularity. That is, these countries all entered elite contestation phases at a time when their incumbent presidents and any designated heirs were significantly unpopular; the nonrevolutionary countries did not.<sup>85</sup>

Clearly other factors were involved in the revolutions, including the nongovernmental organizations that brought masses to the streets and oil wealth that greased some presidents' patronage machines. But while we must leave a full-fledged test for future work, Table 2 shows that

<sup>84</sup> On Rakhmonov's perceived popularity, see Freedom House, *Nations in Transit 2004*, <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/NISPAcee/UNPAN017051.pdf> (last accessed February 20, 2006).

<sup>85</sup> Thus, while nearly all unpopular leaders in Eurasia's patronal presidential countries attempted repressive behavior in order to win elections, we see that they were successful in doing so (maintaining the necessary elite loyalty) only when they were not lame ducks or when the chosen successor was broadly popular in his own right (for example, Putin in Russia).



TABLE 1  
 PATTERNS OF LEADERSHIP CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN POST-SOVIET  
 COUNTRIES WITH PATRONAL PRESIDENTIAL INSTITUTIONS  
 (2003–5)

<i>Country</i>	<i>Incumbent Lame Duck?</i>	<i>Incumbent Very Unpopular?<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Outcome</i>
Georgia	yes	yes	revolution
Kyrgyzstan	yes	yes	revolution
Ukraine	yes	yes	revolution
Azerbaijan	yes	no	successful succession
Armenia	no	no	incumbent stays in power
Belarus	no	no	incumbent stays in power
Kazakhstan	no	no	incumbent stays in power
Russia	no	no	incumbent stays in power
Tajikistan	no	no	incumbent stays in power
Turkmenistan	no	?	incumbent stays in power
Uzbekistan	no	no	incumbent stays in power

<sup>a</sup> And designated successor not broadly popular enough on own to counteract this factor.

these other factors do not distinguish nearly so cleanly the revolutionary from the nonrevolutionary countries. Armenia, for example, was resource poor with the strongest Freedom House civil society rating prior to this period, which would seem to have made it a stronger candidate for “revolution” in 2003–5 than the actual revolutionary countries. Yet its leader was not a lame duck then and thus easily quashed civic protests against the unfair elections it held during 2003–5. Similarly, first-hand accounts make clear that the initial revolutions served as models and inspiration for later revolutionaries, but Table 2 also makes clear that this is far from the whole story. The present article suggests that such demonstration effects will be most powerful in those countries already in or entering contestation phases with unpopular incumbents/successors. This explains why Kyrgyzstan but not neighboring Tajikistan experienced revolution even though both countries held flawed elections on the very same day and were therefore equally “exposed” to the precedents of Ukraine and Georgia.

What of the relationship of the revolutions to democracy and autocracy? One major implication is that the colored revolutions *in and of themselves* may be better understood not as “democratic breakthroughs” but as contestation phases in regime cycles where the opposition wins. The importance of public opinion in deciding whether the opposition wins reveals that patronal presidentialism is not generally devoid of democratic content, as some observers would have it. Nevertheless, this

TABLE 2  
ALTERNATIVE HYPOTHESES AND OUTCOMES

<i>Country</i>	<i>Prior Civic Impulse (2002 Freedom House Civil Society Rating)<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Oil/Gas Wealth (High Patronage Access)?</i>	<i>Demonstration Effects: Number of Post-Soviet "Revolutions" <sup>a</sup> Country Was Exposed to by Time of Own Most Recent Election or Revolution 2003–5</i>	<i>Demonstration Effects: Neighbor Experienced Revolution by Time of Own Most Recent Elections 2003–5?</i>	<i>Outcome 2003–5</i>
Georgia	4.0	no	0	no	revolution
Kyrgyzstan	4.5	no	2	no	revolution
Ukraine	3.75	no	1	no	revolution
Azerbaijan	4.5	yes	3	yes	successful succession
Armenia	3.5	no	0	no	incumbent stays in power
Belarus	6.25	no	1	no	incumbent stays in power
Kazakhstan	5.5	yes	3	yes	incumbent stays in power
Russia	4.0	yes	1	yes	incumbent stays in power
Tajikistan	5.0	no	2	no	incumbent stays in power
Turkmenistan	7.0	yes	2	no	incumbent stays in power
Uzbekistan	6.75	yes	2	no	incumbent stays in power

<sup>a</sup>Freedom House, *Nations in Transit 2005*, Table "Civil Society: Ratings History By Region," <http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/nattransit.htm> (last accessed November 30, 2005).

is far from the democratic ideal, as the political contestation is at root an elite affair where powerful groups compete to manipulate mass opinion through biased media and machine politics. That the masses are not infinitely manipulable, however, gives them an independent and often important role in deciding outcomes.

None of this is to say that net "progress" toward democracy or autocracy cannot be made in countries with patronal presidential institutions—it is only to argue that we are unlikely to fully understand such progress without understanding the cyclic dynamics that may also be at work. In fact, the logic of this article gives us greater insight into how

more lasting regime change is likely to occur and how countries might escape the cyclical patterns. For one thing, presidents (especially popular ones) might use their consolidation phases to eliminate elections altogether as a constitutional principle. Turkmenistan has come closest to this in Eurasia, with its leader becoming president for life, but elections are still formally upheld as the legitimate way to choose the next president. The consolidation phase is thus extended, but a contestation phase is still possible whenever the incumbent does in fact leave the political scene, if only through death. Ukraine may in fact point to a “democratic” exit from the cycles: when the Yushchenko-Yanukovych standoff was at its peak in late 2004 and neither side was sure of a clear victory in the power struggle, the Yanukovych team agreed to let the final elections decide the outcome in return for a major political reform.<sup>86</sup> This reform aimed to reduce the winner-take-all nature of Ukraine’s presidency, shifting some powers to parliament and potentially creating a balance of power that could give opposition forces and independent media greater political cover even when the president is not a lame duck. Political contestation in Ukraine has thus remained intense since 2004, especially heating up for the 2006 parliamentary and local elections.<sup>87</sup>

This harks back to a long-standing political insight: movement toward liberal democracy is more likely to emerge from political stalemate than from the victory of one side.<sup>88</sup> To be sure, leaders during the

<sup>86</sup> Christensen, Rakhimkulov, and Wise (fn. 22).

<sup>87</sup> Not just any dispersion of power will have a long-run democratizing effect, of course, since a badly designed division of authority or a muddling of authority could produce instability and a reversion to autocracy; see Paul D’Anieri, “What Has Changed in Ukrainian Politics? Assessing the Implications of the Orange Revolution,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 52 (September–October 2005). In Ukraine, President Yushchenko has hinted that he would like to alter the deal struck in late 2004, and many of his present and former associates have made even stronger statements to this effect, although for now elites generally expect power to be divided in the future. As D’Anieri points out, however, it is unclear at the time of this writing exactly how power will be divided. The case of Moldova’s parliamentary system represents a sort of middle-ground case: its parliament elects the president. This gives the opposition greater opportunity to gain a stake in power and hence increases scope for contestation: the incumbent party lost the first parliamentary election under these rules in 2001 and the new incumbent party, seeking reelection in 2005, had to strike a deal with members of another party to stay in power. But once installed, the president has a great deal of authority to exercise power and constrain opposition, much like the Westminster system whose potentially antidemocratic effects are ably described by Horowitz, in Diamond and Plattner (fn. 13). Kyrgyzstan is presently in something of a limbo, with Bakiev having promised a diminution of presidential authority in favor of the prime minister (Kulov), but so far without this being institutionalized in an amended constitution. On these cases and issues, see Henry E. Hale, “How the Mighty Fall: The Colored Revolutions and Eurasia’s Democratic Prospects” (Paper presented at the 11th annual world convention of the Association for the Study of Nationalities, New York City, March 23–25, 2006).

<sup>88</sup> Dankwart Rustow, “Transitions to Democracy: Towards a Dynamic Model,” *Comparative Politics* 2 (April 1970). On postcommunist cases, see Timothy Frye, “A Politics of Institutional Choice: Post-Communist Presidencies,” *Comparative Political Studies* 30 (October 1997); McFaul (fn. 1).

consolidation phase have a great deal of power to impose what they want to impose, so a victory from democrats may at times produce a lasting democratic advance. But we must also remember that institutional incentives and the urge to wield power are strong. Indeed, the “decrepit autocrats” of the colored revolutions (especially Shevardnadze and Akaev) were once seen as democratizing heroes.

Another advantage of this approach is that it frames a somewhat new research agenda. For one thing, the regime cycles described here are far from uniform. One direction of research, therefore, will be to flesh out factors that influence the amplitude of the predicted cycles of contestation and consolidation. As noted above, this might include leaders’ personal characteristics and preferences, the prevalence of ideological commitment in society, and institutional reforms presidents may undertake during consolidation phases so as to better guarantee their successors’ victories, such as Putin’s elimination of gubernatorial elections and his clampdown on independent television. The origins and nature of the lame-duck syndrome could also be explored more deeply, including the degree to which international factors can induce or prevent it. Just as we learn by studying, so must we study the ways in which incumbents and (potential) oppositions learn from the history of the colored revolutions. And as it was shown that strategy mattered in how Yeltsin and the elder Aliev managed their succession processes, we should be aware that future actors may learn in new ways that could alter the sorts of dynamics described above.<sup>89</sup>

While this logic applies most directly to countries with patrimonial communist legacies, as specified above, it will also be important to study more closely the differences between this set of cases and others in different parts of the world. One factor that may generate important differences between the postcommunist cases and other cases could be political parties, widely regarded to have weakly penetrated the political arena of Russia and many other post-Soviet states but seen as strong in many countries outside the postcommunist world.<sup>90</sup> Opposition parties with large cadres of loyalists, immune by virtue of ideological commitment to government co-optation or punishment, might serve to dampen consolidation phases by guaranteeing a large anti-incumbent vote. Likewise, dominant propresidential parties (like Mexico’s PRI was for many years) could help incumbent presidents solve the succession problem by making the hand-picked successor (the party’s nominee)

<sup>89</sup> I explore some of the latter issues in Hale (fn. 87).

<sup>90</sup> On Russia, see Henry E. Hale, *Why Not Parties in Russia? Democracy, Federalism, and the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

automatically become the overwhelming favorite, thereby raising the expected costs of defection for other elites.<sup>91</sup> Also important to study will be variation in the kinds of formal and informal relationships between the economy and the state. One might hypothesize, for example, that countries with more diversified economies or more sharply defined bounds between the state and economy might be less susceptible to the regime cycles described here than are countries with patrimonial communist legacies.<sup>92</sup> Accordingly, we must also keep in mind that at least some of the countries studied in this article may change in ways that eventually let them “grow out of” the cycles, for example, through economic growth, state withdrawal from the economy, or party formation; this should also be a subject of future study.<sup>93</sup> Overall, this research program represents a way to better understand regime change—change that may not be purely progressive, regressive, or random, but may be at least partly cyclic in nature.

<sup>91</sup> On how parties (among other things) can stem elite defection, see Barbara Geddes, “What Do We Know about Democratization after Twenty Years?” *Annual Review of Political Science* 2 (June 1999); and Lucan A. Way, “Authoritarian State-Building and the Sources of Regime Competitiveness in the Fourth Wave: The Cases of Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine,” *World Politics* 57 (January 2005).

<sup>92</sup> That economic liberalization and diversification might dampen “consolidation” phases even in countries with patrimonial communist legacies is suggested in Barbara Junisbai and Azamat Junisbai, “The Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan: A Case Study in Economic Liberalization, Intraelite Cleavage, and Political Opposition,” *Demokratizatsiya* 13 (Summer 2005).

<sup>93</sup> On how clientelism might decline in a country, see Kitschelt and Wilkinson (fn. 17).