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Comparative Perspective

Henry E. Hale

Excerpt

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I

Introduction

Elections are civil war fought by nonviolent means. If some countries resolve their domestic disputes on the battlefield, others wage their wars on the stump and through the ballot box. The latter wars are no less real. Campaigns are launched, battle lines drawn, foot soldiers mobilized, flags flown, allies sought, passions inflamed, and victories won. Elections in many countries often have a special whiff of war, sitting precariously near the wrong end of the continuum between violence and nonviolence. There, tanks may not roll and guns may not fire, but other means of coercion replace them as keys to victory, frequently finding their way into the arsenals of at least one side.

This is not the face of “democracy” as typically depicted in American textbooks, but the United States’ own history illustrates the point quite well. Early American elections – especially with the advent of industrialization – were as much the preserve of the political machine as issue politics, of the company town as the town assembly. Large segments of the population were denied the vote one way or another straight through to the Civil Rights Act of 1965 in some places, while in others even the dead lingered long on voter lists, post-humously casting ballots for those who controlled the rolls. In Frank Capra’s famous 1939 film, the upright Mr. Smith who went to Washington was the exception to the Taylor machine’s sorry rule. Taylor was fictional, but characters ranging from William (“Boss”) Tweed to Huey Long to the senior Richard Daley were decidedly not. In fact, it might be fair to say that the most common world historical experience with elections has been of this more coercive sort, not the idealized version taught in schools and fought for by student activists.

As the twenty-first century approached, however, Western citizens, analysts, and leaders had largely come to see the “messiness” of elections as a political disease that is unusual and alien to the body politic, something unnatural to be exorcised. On one hand, this is a good thing, testimony to how far we have come as societies. And surely we should strive to eliminate coercion from

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democratic practice. On the other hand, the focus on the ideal has often come at the expense of understanding and anticipating the real, especially when it comes to countries newly emerging from autocratic rule. Nowhere is this more clear than with the demise of the USSR's totalitarian system, an event that arguably freed more states from dictatorship than any other of the twentieth century. At least, initially.

The region increasingly referred to as Eurasia¹ has taken Western observers on a roller-coaster ride of expectations ever since Mikhail Gorbachev launched his political reforms in the late 1980s. As the Berlin Wall fell, as the USSR's own constituent republics held free and competitive elections, and as newly elected leaders throughout the region declared and won independence from the Soviet Union, Western thinkers widely proclaimed the triumph of democracy and even the "end of history."² Political scientists classified these new countries as cases of "transition to democracy," the culmination of what Samuel Huntington labeled history's great "third wave" of democratization that had begun with Southern Europe in the 1970s before spreading to Latin America, Africa, and Asia.³

Disillusionment grew as the 1990s progressed, however. Authoritarian tendencies reappeared in almost all post-Soviet states except the Baltics, consternating Western policy makers and helping spawn at least three new directions in scholarship. One school deemphasized democratization and stressed instead democratic "consolidation," a task that increasingly appeared Sisyphean.⁴ A

¹ The rest of this book, unless otherwise specified, will use this term to refer to the territory that was once part of the USSR.

² Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History and the Last Man," *National Interest*, Summer 1989, pp. 3–18.

³ Valerie Bunce, "Should Transitologists Be Grounded?" *Slavic Review*, v. 54, no. 1, Spring 1995, pp. 111–27; Timothy J. Colton, "Politics," in Colton and Robert Legvold, eds., *After the Soviet Union: From Empire to Nations* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), pp. 17–48; M. Steven Fish, *Democracy from Scratch* (Princeton, NJ: 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*, v. 43, June 1991, pp. 269–84; Michael McFaul, *Russia's Unfinished Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001); Guillermo O'Donnell, "On the State, Democratization, and Some Conceptual Problems: A Latin American View with Some Glances at Postcommunist Countries," *World Development*, v. 21, no. 8, August 1993, pp. 1355–69. More recently, see Andrei Shleifer and Daniel Treisman, "A Normal Country," *Foreign Affairs*, v. 83, no. 2, March–April 2004, pp. 20–38.

⁴ Valerie Bunce, "Rethinking Recent Democratization: Lessons from the Postcommunist Experience," *World Politics*, v. 55, no. 2, January 2003, pp. 167–92; Stephen E. Hanson, "Defining Democratic Consolidation," in Richard D. Anderson Jr., M. Steven Fish, Stephen E. Hanson, and Philip G. Roeder, *Postcommunism and the Theory of Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Juan J. Linz and 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*, v. 54, no. 1, October 2001, pp. 119–44.

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second group argued for a shift in focus: What should be explained was not transition *from* authoritarian rule but transition back *toward* it, a process they saw as the new norm.⁵ A third cohort proposed a more radical response: Eschewing the “transition paradigm” altogether, it posited that these countries could long remain in a “twilight zone” between democracy and dictatorship, governed by “hybrid regimes” that that might not be adequately characterized as “unconsolidated democracies” yet are not transitioning to anything else.⁶

But just when democratic pessimism seemed to have won the day, Westerners witnessed a “Bulldozer Revolution” topple Serbian nationalist strongman Slobodan Milosevic in 2000, a “Rose Revolution” unseat Georgia’s weary Eduard Shevardnadze in 2003, an “Orange Revolution” upend former “red director” Leonid Kuchma’s attempt to hand power to an anointed successor in Ukraine in 2004, and a “Tulip Revolution” overthrow the jaded Askar Akaev in Kyrgyzstan in 2005 – all in the name of democracy and with the backing of Western democracy advocates.⁷ The Kyrgyz revolution was particularly stunning, a crack in the Central Asian bastion of postcommunist authoritarianism. Democracy, the cry went out, was again on the march! A slew of quick studies emerged to explain these “democratic breakthroughs,” as they were almost universally received by Western scholars and policy makers, and to speculate on just how far the wave would go and how best to coax it along.⁸

As of 2014, however, most observers consider these post-Soviet “color revolutions” disappointments.⁹ Georgia’s revolutionary leader, the Columbia-

⁵ M. Steven Fish, “The Dynamics of Democratic Erosion,” in Richard D. Anderson Jr., M. Steven Fish, Stephen E. Hanson, and Philip G. Roeder, *Postcommunism and the Theory of Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Philip G. Roeder, “Varieties of Post-Soviet Authoritarian Regimes,” *Post-Soviet Affairs*, v. 10, no. 1, January 1994, pp. 61–101.

⁶ Something like a manifesto for this school is Thomas Carothers, “The End of the Transition Paradigm,” *Journal of Democracy*, v. 13, no. 1, January 2002, pp. 5–21. Other prominent work in this vein includes Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Larry Diamond, “Thinking about Hybrid Regimes,” *Journal of Democracy*, v. 13, no. 2, April 2002, pp. 21–35; Jeffrey Herbst, “Political Liberalization in Africa after Ten Years,” *Comparative Politics*, v. 33, no. 3, April 2001, pp. 357–75; Terry Lynn Karl, “The Hybrid Regimes of Central America,” *Journal of Democracy*, v. 6, no. 3, July 1995, pp. 72–86; and Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism,” *Journal of Democracy*, v. 13, no. 2, April 2002, pp. 51–65.

⁷ Some trace this wave of ousted autocrats back even further, to Romania, Bulgaria, and Slovakia in the mid- to late 1990s. See Valerie J. Bunce and Sharon L. Wolchik, “Favorable Conditions and Electoral Revolutions,” *Journal of Democracy*, v. 17, no. 4, October 2006, pp. 5–18.

⁸ E.g., Adrian Karatnycky, “Ukraine’s Orange Revolution,” *Foreign Affairs*, v. 84, no. 2, March–April 2005, pp. 32–52; Michael McFaul, “Transitions from Communism,” *Journal of Democracy*, v. 16, no. 4, July 2005, pp. 212–44; and Vitali Silitski, “Beware the People,” *Transitions Online*, March 21, 2005.

⁹ For example, Katya Kalandadze and Mitchell A. Orenstein, “Electoral Protests and Democratization: Beyond the Color Revolutions,” *Comparative Political Studies*, v. 42, no. 11, November 2009, pp. 1403–25; Taras Kuzio, “Ambiguous Anniversary,” *Business Ukraine*, November 24–30, 2008, pp. 12–16; Lincoln Mitchell, *The Color Revolutions* (Philadelphia:

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educated Mikheil Saakashvili, found himself cracking down violently on peaceful demonstrators in November 2007, came under fire from democracy advocates for political strong-arm tactics and the constriction of independent mass media, and ultimately lost power in the wake of a major scandal involving prison torture. Kyrgyzstan's democratic hope, President Kurmanbek Bakiev, also restored the practices of his predecessor. Accused of corruption and media suppression, his overwhelming ballot box victories (including his 2009 reelection with 80 percent of the vote) failed to impress monitors as democratic and he himself was overthrown in the name of democracy in 2010. In fact, according to Freedom House's *Nations in Transit* study, both Kyrgyzstan and Georgia were less democratic in 2007 than they had been during the year prior to their "color revolutions."¹⁰ Ukraine initially fared better in democracy ratings under "Orange" President Viktor Yushchenko, but after he lost in 2010 to the man he defeated in 2004, Viktor Yanukovich, observers once again began consigning Ukraine to the dedemocratizing camp.¹¹ Then in 2014, Yanukovich was again overthrown, perhaps the first man in history unseated *twice* by revolution. His successors once again promise a new, democratic, "European" beginning.

Stepping back for a moment, two observations seem appropriate. One is that both social scientists and policy makers appear to be chasing events in the post-communist world as much as explaining or anticipating them. There would thus seem to be strong grounds for us to reconsider the basic assumptions and models that we use, consciously or unconsciously, to interpret and anticipate political events in Eurasia.

A second observation is that there is indeed a great deal to be understood, that in fact a great puzzle of post-Soviet regimes now begs scholars for an explanation. If we step back a moment from our gyrating hopes and expectations, we are likely to be struck immediately by the extremely wide range in how the fragments of the former USSR look at any given moment after emerging from a single Soviet system two decades ago. On one extreme lies Turkmenistan, a land where the dictator abolished elections, renamed the month of January in his own honor, and erected a golden statue of himself that rotated so as always to face the sun.¹² The death of the self-proclaimed Turkmenbashi ("head of the Turkmen") in 2007 has so far produced little

University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Scott Radnitz, *Weapons of the Wealthy: Predatory Regimes and Elite-Led Protests in Central Asia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).

¹⁰ Jeannette Goehring, ed., *Nations in Transit 2008: Democratization from Central Europe to Eurasia* (New York: Freedom House, 2008), p. 44.

¹¹ Alexander J. Motyl, "The New Political Regime in Ukraine – toward Sultanism Yanukovich-Style?" Cicero Foundation Great Debate Paper, no. 10/06, July 2010; Christopher Walker and Robert Orttung, "From Revolution to Democracy," *Wall Street Journal*, March 7, 2011, online version, wsj.com.

¹² A colorful portrait can be found in Paul Theroux, "The Golden Man: Saparmurat Niyazov's Reign of Insanity," *New Yorker*, May 28, 2007, pp. 56–65.

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change other than a new personality cult surrounding his successor, a former dentist who has rechristened himself Arkadag (“the protector”).¹³ Uzbekistan is similar, but with a slightly less vainglorious autocrat. At the other extreme sits Lithuania, a stable democracy comfortably nestled in the European Union. Latvia and Estonia also remain democratic and in the EU but face more questions than Lithuania due to reluctance to endow their larger local Russian populations with civic power.

Far more interesting, however, are the polities in between, the countries and unrecognized statelets that allow some real freedom for opposition politics – even in elections – but whose authorities also employ coercive methods to stack the deck in their own favor for any contest that matters. This indeed, is the vast bulk of the post-Soviet space: For much of the 1990s and 2000s, this has been a reasonably accurate description of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, all of the Caucasian states (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia), most of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan), and all four of the separatist territories that have de facto broken away from their host countries (Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Transnistria). In some sense, then, initial observers were right in expecting American democracy to take root after the demise of the USSR. They just got the American democracy of Boss Tweed rather than that of the New England town meeting.

Most striking of all, however, is the *dynamism* of post-Soviet regimes. And virtually all of this dynamism has come precisely from the hybrid polities. Since 1992, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have been quite stably autocratic while the Baltic countries have steadily sustained democratic regimes. It is the hybrid regimes that have so inspired and so frustrated Western onlookers, alternately moving toward or away from democracy and autocracy while never quite seeming to make a decisive leap to one or the other. It is the hybrid regimes that gave rise to the color revolutions as well as to the most potent attempts to replicate them, though here again, the result has not generally been an actual transition to democracy.

The lone exception for a time was Ukraine. For the period 2005–10, it became the *only* post-Soviet country to experience a real breakthrough to democracy, being rated fully “free” by Freedom House, since the Baltic countries first did it in the early 1990s.¹⁴ But even Ukraine’s democracy during this period was extraordinarily messy, a highly corrupt form of political competition that spawned seemingly permanent government instability and policy deadlock even in the face of economic calamity, the global financial crisis that wracked the region starting in 2008. Rather than the genteel public debates that Westerners have often seemed to expect, Ukraine’s politics sometimes had the feel of the pitched, no-holds-barred battles that Martin Scorsese depicts

¹³ RFE/RL, March 8, 2012.

¹⁴ Christopher Walker, ed., *Nations in Transit 2011: The Authoritarian Dead End in the Former Soviet Union* (New York: Freedom House, 2011).

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between rival political machines in his 2002 epic *The Gangs of New York*. This is not your grandfather's democracy. Or then again, maybe it is.

What we have in the former USSR, then, is what social scientists frequently call a grand natural laboratory, a large set of polities (fifteen countries and four unrecognized statelets) that emerged from a single starting point (Soviet rule) but were exposed to different "treatments" over the course of twenty years and wound up looking different at some points in time and similar at others. The fifteen East and Central European countries freed from communist regimes during 1989–91 and Mongolia might also be considered part of this same "experiment," giving us a total of thirty-five "cases" to work with. This situation affords us a chance to see precisely which treatments – and which preexisting conditions – are associated with which patterns. And now that nearly a quarter of a century has passed since each of these countries first held competitive nationwide elections, the time would seem ripe for drawing larger conclusions from all of the laboratory work that the field's leading scholars have been doing.

Making sense of these patterns requires shedding two comfortable Western assumptions about how politics works. First, it means replacing a theory of the ideal with a theory of the real. Virtually all of the most prominent textbooks in comparative politics and post-Soviet (mostly Russian) politics reflect the focus on the ideal, by which I mean Westerners' sense of how a democracy should work and what its central elements therefore are. Chapters on these political systems typically sport titles like "political participation," "political beliefs and culture," "parties and electoral politics," "associational groups," "the judiciary," "constitutional design," "public policy making," and sometimes "state building."¹⁵ Surely this underlying conception of how politics is supposed to work, and what is likely to get in the way, also has something to do with Western comparative political science's overwhelming focus on these same topics, especially elections, political economy, ethnic politics, and state

¹⁵ For example, leading comparative textbooks in recent years include Gabriel A. Almond, G. Bingham J. Powell Jr., Russell J. Dalton, and Kaare Strom, *Comparative Politics Today: A World View* (New York: Pearson, 2008); Michael Sodaro, *Comparative Politics: A Global Introduction* (Columbus: McGraw-Hill, 2007); Lowell Barrington, *Comparative Politics: Structures and Choices*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Cengage, 2012). Textbooks on the former Soviet countries include Vicki L. Hesli, *Governments and Politics in Russia and the Post-Soviet Region* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007); Thomas F. Remington, *Politics in Russia*, 6th ed. (Boston: Longman, 2010); Richard Sakwa, *Russian Politics and Society*, 4th ed. (London: Routledge, 2008); Eric Shiraev, *Russian Government and Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Stephen White, *Understanding Russian Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). The organization around formal institutions is only somewhat and inconsistently reduced in edited volumes intended for the classroom, such as Stephen K. Wegren, ed., *Return to Putin's Russia: Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012); and Stephen White, Richard Sakwa, and Henry E. Hale, eds., *Developments in Russian Politics*, 8th ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

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building, as indicated by the content of the field's major journals regardless of geographic area.

All this is fine and well when analyzing the United States or France. It may also be appropriate if one is primarily interested in why Russia, Georgia, or Kazakhstan is not becoming the United States or France. Indeed, virtually all of these publications do a fine job of documenting how each of these countries deviates from Western norms of policy making, participation, or what have you, and they ably communicate a great deal of information about each country. This approach can also be very useful for comparative scholarship that is primarily interested in local variations on a cross-national theme regardless of whether the theme is locally important. For this reason, such works are still very useful; I assign them in my own classes and have even written or edited some of them.

But the real stuff of politics in countries like Russia, Georgia, or Kazakhstan is not truly captured by topics like “participation,” “parties and elections,” “the judiciary,” or “constitutional design” – at least, not in the straightforward way often assumed. Local politicians, the ones who actually exercise power, would surely emphasize other things if asked in private. That is, standard textbook chapters and many “normal science” publications on these themes in post-Soviet politics do not today give us a good sense of the distinct political *system* that functions in these polities, and of the logic that makes this system a system. Moreover, by breaking off different elements of this system and forcing each into its own Procrustean bed in our books, articles, and policy papers – a bed designed by research agendas originating in the West – we not only overlook but actively distract readers from this locally powerful logic. Without a well-articulated alternative framework for organizing all of these elements, Western observers are unlikely to come up with it on their own. We thus remain likely to continue chasing events in the post-Soviet world rather than truly explaining – not to mention anticipating – them. And this is a problem not only for policy makers and area specialists, but for comparativists seeking to develop the most potent and parsimonious theories.

Making sense of post-Soviet regime change also requires parting with a second assumption that is widespread in policy making and academic circles: that regime types are best identified in snapshots rather than dynamic patterns. Analysts typically consider where a country lies on the continuum between democracy and dictatorship at a given moment, defining that positioning as its current regime type, and then try to explain how it got there. This approach is typified by high-profile organizations (including Freedom House) that give each country a discrete “democracy rating” every year.¹⁶ When this

¹⁶ Many other such year-by-year ratings exist and are widely used by scholars. See especially Michael Coppedge and John Gerring, with David Altman, Michael Bernhard, Steven Fish, Allen Hicken, Matthew Kroenig, Staffan Lindberg, Kelly McMann, Pamela Paxton, Holli A. Semetko, Svend-Erik Skaaning, Jeffrey Staton, and Jan Teorell, “Conceptualizing and Measuring

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same country changes position, moving toward democracy or autocracy, it is typically considered either to be on a “trajectory” toward democracy/autocracy or to be displaying instability. Meeting a certain standard makes it a “democracy” for that year.

But much of what we have seen in the post-Soviet world over the past two decades, as described earlier, is movement *back and forth*. It may be that all this is simple instability, in which case there is no need for reconceptualization or further explanation of this movement. But it may also be that regime equilibria can be dynamic, that what we might be witnessing is regular, *cyclic* behavior characteristic of a certain underlying type of regime. What is most interesting and important about Georgia, for instance, might not be that it meets a standard for authoritarianism or is moving toward it in a given year, but precisely that it has displayed a pattern of moving back and forth between more democratic and more autocratic conditions. If this turns out to be a regular process underpinned by a systemic logic, we gain the power to anticipate a new round of “democratization” in the future, though also the perspective not to become too excited by it when it arrives. We need to augment the study of regime *change* with a science of *regime dynamics*.¹⁷

This book argues that such a regular process is in fact often at work, that much of what has been described as the “change” of a regime into something else actually reflects predictable dynamism within a single regime type. It can be discerned by systematizing insights from a large volume of important inductive studies – those seeking to characterize politics as it is understood locally – and infusing the result with a powerful logic of collective action to form a theory with broad practical and comparative application. Making this possible is an exciting, growing body of social science research that has pioneered our understanding of large patterns in how politics really works outside the West (and sometimes within it). These studies – usually grounded in strong and detailed knowledge of particular countries or regions – have tended to point to the importance of *informal politics*, the ways in which politics is often not what it

Democracy: A New Approach,” *Perspectives on Politics*, v. 9, no. 2, June 2011, pp. 247–67; Monty G. Marshall, *Polity IV Project: Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions 1800–2010* (2011), www.systemicpeace.org; Gerardo L. Munck, *Measuring Democracy: A Bridge between Scholarship and Politics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Adam Przeworski, Michael E. Alvarez, Jose Antonio Cheibub, and Fernando Limongi, *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950–1990* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000). On broader issues concerning the measurement of democracy and regime types more generally, see David Collier and Robert Adcock, “Democracy and Dichotomies: A Pragmatic Approach to Choices about Concepts,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, v. 2, 1999, pp. 537–65.

¹⁷ Prominent among existing studies of “regime dynamics,” though in a sense somewhat different from the one in mind here, is Ruth Berins Collier and David Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena: Critical Junctures, the Labor Movement and Regime Dynamics in Latin America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

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seems to outsiders.¹⁸ There are formal laws on the books, but they are selectively or differentially enforced according to more fundamental unwritten (informal) rules of the game.¹⁹ Market reforms are formally adopted under international pressure, but often remain on paper, masking new (informal) forms of state involvement in the economy.²⁰ Political parties formally appear on the ballot, but really (informally) serve a variety of purposes for the authorities, including acting as decoys, backups, or attack dogs.²¹ This is the politics of the Potemkin village, the locally erected facade that threatens to fool the itinerant social scientist who does not stop to look deeper.²²

What is hidden, or “the way things really work,” is usually what will be called here the *patronalistic* dimension of politics. *Patronal politics* refers to politics in societies where individuals organize their political and economic pursuits primarily around the personalized exchange of concrete rewards and

¹⁸ This theoretical tradition has roots in foundational insights of 1970s social science, many key contributions to which are collected in Steffen W. Schmidt, James C. Scott, Carl Lande, and Laura Guasti, *Friends, Followers, and Factions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977). Some breakthrough conceptual works in the more recent wave of scholarship include Michael Bratton and Nicholas Van de Walle, “Neopatrimonial Regimes and Political Transitions in Africa,” *World Politics*, v. 46, July 1994; Georgi Derluguian, *Bourdieu’s Secret Admirer in the Caucasus: A World Systems Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Gerald M. Easter, *Restructuring the State: Personal Networks and Elite Identity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Venelin I. Ganey, *Preying on the State: The Transformation of Bulgaria after 1989* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007); Anna Grzymala-Busse, “The Best Laid Plans: The Impact of Informal Rules on Formal Institutions in Transitional Regimes,” *Studies in Comparative International Development*, v. 45, no. 3, September 2010, pp. 311–33; Herbert Kitschelt and Steven I. Wilkinson, eds., *Patrons, Clients, and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Steven Levitsky and Gretchen Helmke, *Informal Institutions and Democracy: Lessons from Latin America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006); Ellen Lust-Okar, *Structuring Conflict in the Arab World: Incumbents, Opponents, and Institutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); William Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States* (Boulder, CO: Lynn Rienner, 1998); 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*, v. 57, January 2005, pp. 231–61.

¹⁹ Paul D’Anieri, *Understanding Ukrainian Politics: Power, Politics, and Institutional Design* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2007); Vladimir Gel’man, “The Unrule of Law in the Making: The Politics of Informal Institution Building in Russia,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, v. 56, no. 7, November 2004, pp. 1021–40; Stephen Holmes, “Introduction,” *East European Constitutional Review*, v. 11, nos. 1–2, Winter/Spring 2002, pp. 90–1; Alena V. Ledeneva, *How Russia Really Works* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

²⁰ Jerry F. Hough, *The Logic of Economic Reform in Russia* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2001); David Woodruff, *Money Unmade* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).

²¹ Henry E. Hale, “The Origins of United Russia and the Putin Presidency: The Role of Contingency in Party-System Development,” *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, v. 12, no. 2, Spring 2004, pp. 169–94; Andrew Wilson, *Virtual Politics: Faking Democracy in the Post-Soviet World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005).

²² Jessica Allina-Pisano, *The Post-Soviet Potemkin Village: Politics and Property Rights in the Black Earth* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

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punishments through chains of actual acquaintance, and not primarily around abstract, impersonal principles such as ideological belief or categorizations like economic class that include many people one has not actually met in person. In this politics of individual reward and punishment, power goes to those who can mete these out, those who can position themselves as *patrons* with a large and dependent base of *clients*.

The sinews of power in post-Soviet countries, therefore, tend to be roughly hierarchical *networks* through which resources are distributed and coercion applied. These can exist outside formal institutions, such as parliament or the presidency, and they do not usually overlap with professional societies, issue advocacy groups, business associations, or even political parties. Instead, in post-Soviet Eurasia, networks rooted in three broad sets of collective actors typically constitute the most important building blocks of the political system, the moving parts in its regime dynamics:²³ (1) local political machines that emerged from reforms of the early 1990s, (2) giant politicized corporate conglomerates, (3) various branches of the state that are rich either in cash or in coercive capacity. Whoever controls these bosses, “oligarchs,” and officials controls the country. And the most important function of a constitution in post-Soviet societies is arguably not to undergird the rule of law, which does not much exist, but to signal who (if anyone) is most likely to be patron-in-chief and to provide other focal points that help structure the way all these networks arrange and rearrange themselves – often in violation of the formal norms the constitution itself contains.

The most important distinction among patronalistic polities is whether these patronal networks are arranged in a single pyramid or multiple, usually competing pyramids.²⁴ Constitutions that declare a single dominant chief executive (sometimes a president, but sometimes also the head of a parliamentarist system) tend to tip systems toward the former. This is because such constitutions, even when their legal stipulations are not actually followed, shape expectations as to who wields ultimate power in a country. And ultimate power in patronalistic societies can be used not only to push for policies one supports, but also to direct favors to allies and to target opponents for punishment. Understanding

²³ Their formal bases are not necessarily essential to the existence of the network, however.

²⁴ The use of the terms “single-pyramid” and “competing-pyramid” to refer to the author’s conceptualization is from Graeme Robertson and Matthew Green, personal communication. This echoes James C. Scott, who discusses different “pyramid” arrangements, though he also writes of “patron monopolies”; see James C. Scott, “Patron-Client Politics and Political Change in Southeast Asia,” *American Political Science Review*, v. 66, no. 1, March 1972, pp. 91–113. Others have used terms like “centralized caciquismo,” “bureaucratic neopatrimonialism,” and “centralized cronyism”; respectively, see Kimitaka Matsuzato, “All Kuchma’s Men: The Reshuffling of Ukrainian Governors and the Presidential Election of 1999,” *Post-Soviet Geography and Economics*, v. 42, no. 6, September 2001, pp. 416–39; Aleksandr A. Fisun, *Demokratia, neopatrimonializm i global’nye transformatsii* (Kharkiv: Konstanta, 2007), p. 176; and Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, *Political Consequences of Crony Capitalism inside Russia* (South Bend, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2010).