

Caucasian Regime Dynamics in Comparative Perspective

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Abstract

This essay examines post-Soviet Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia to show that one can understand much about regime change by not taking democracy, itself, as the starting point for analysis. This perspective explains cycling patterns of political opening and closure as the result of coordination problems facing powerful political-economic networks that tend to be the most important political actors in societies sharing a context of “patronalism” (of which patrimonialism is one manifestation). Of the three South Caucasian states, prospects for sustained political opening are greatest in Georgia and least in Azerbaijan, due primarily to key factors influencing these coordination problems, especially constitutional design and leadership age.

Keywords: Caucasus, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, political regimes, patrimonialism, revolution, networks.

All three South Caucasus states emerged from the ruins of the USSR embroiled in war, each experiencing what Thomas Carothers has dubbed a “feckless pluralism” that reflected state weakness far more than true democratic institution-building.¹ But while these countries’ regimes looked broadly similar in the early 1990s, they appear quite different a quarter century later. Azerbaijan’s political system has been steadily closing. Georgia’s has featured remarkable tumult, standing out as one of the most open in the post-Soviet space. Armenia has charted a course in between, though closer to Azerbaijan than Georgia in terms of political competitiveness and media freedom.

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¹ Thomas Carothers, “The End of the Transition Paradigm,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 1 (January 2002): 10. Lucan Way dubs this phenomenon “pluralism by default”; see his *Pluralism by Default: Weak Autocrats and the Rise of Competitive Politics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015).

How can we explain the divergence in terms that also make sense for patterns we observe elsewhere in the post-communist world? In explaining Azerbaijan's authoritarianism, some cite its oil wealth, branding it a willing victim of a resource curse that sustains autocracy and corruption.² Although oil is certainly important for Azerbaijan, it does not explain why resource-poor Armenia is closer to Azerbaijan than resource-poor Georgia, and it cannot account for cases of even greater political closure in countries such as Tajikistan that have virtually no oil or gas to export. Some might suppose religion explains the difference, yet Islamic Kyrgyzstan is far more open than Islamic Azerbaijan, and Orthodox Russia is far more closed than Orthodox Georgia. Nor does economic development appear to be the story: Azerbaijan is the most developed economy in the region, and other relatively developed countries such as Belarus and Russia are also among the post-communist world's more politically closed systems.³ Perhaps Georgia simply has a more democratic political culture, but this leaves the phenomenon of Joseph Dzhugashvili a great mystery, and, in any case, history is filled with examples of supposedly authoritarian cultures becoming democratic and unruly (e.g., Germany or Bulgaria) and supposedly unruly cultures (e.g., Russia in the 1990s) turning authoritarian.

This essay argues that we can gain more understanding of Caucasian regimes by focusing on a particular political context they share, one that the present author has elsewhere called *patronal politics* and that tends to feature *patrimonial* forms of domination.⁴ This perspective directs scholarly attention not so much to the determinants of regime change as to the driving forces behind *regime dynamics* that can involve cyclic movement between more open and more closed political states, without a change in the fundamental nature of the regime actually occurring. Three of the most important such forces are presidentialist constitutions, succession politics, and public opinion. By these lights, Azerbaijan is an excellent example of what tends to happen in presidentialist countries when the leadership wields significant public support; the Georgian case, until 2010-2013, reflects a pattern common to presidentialist countries where presidents regularly manage to lose public support. During 2010-2013, Georgia shifted to a non-presidentialist constitution and, accordingly, regularly has sustained much more open (though still quite unruly)

² Scott Radnitz, "Oil in the Family: Managing Presidential Succession in Azerbaijan," *Democratization* 19, no. 1 (February 2012): 60-77.

³ On development and democratization, see, for example, Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes, "Endogenous Democratization," *World Politics* 55, no. 4 (2003): 517-549; Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991); and Daniel Treisman, "Income, Democracy, and Leader Turnover," *American Journal of Political Science* 59, no. 4 (October 1, 2015): 927-942, doi:10.1111/ajps.12135.

⁴ Henry E. Hale, *Patronal Politics: Eurasian Regime Dynamics in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

politics. Armenia has followed a path not dissimilar to that of Azerbaijan, though it is currently in a period during which presidential succession is on the table, which could lead to a new (if perhaps temporary) political opening.

Patronalism

Patronalism is a social equilibrium in which people organize their collective political and economic pursuits far more through concrete rewards and punishments meted out via actual networks of personal acquaintance than by way of abstract ideologies, ideas, or other things people who are not actually connected through some chain of personal relationships might have in common.⁵ This is not to say, of course, that ideas or beliefs do not motivate people at all in such countries, but rather that there is a widely shared assumption (largely unquestioned) that practices such as nepotism, patronage, clientelism, and individualized coercion are often necessary in order to realize these ideas or beliefs in practice, regardless of whether one likes it. Highly patronalistic societies thus tend to be characterized by weak rule of law, high levels of corruption, and low social capital in the sense described by Robert Putnam.⁶

Highly patronalistic societies also tend to feature what Max Weber called *patrimonial* rule, understood as a form of legitimate domination based on “kin ties, patron-client relations, personal allegiances, and combinations thereof, with few formal rules and regulations.”⁷ It is important to keep in mind, though, that these terms are distinct: patronalism is a particular pattern of social relations, whereas Weber defined patrimonialism specifically to refer to a form of *rule or domination*, and even more specifically as a form of *legitimate* rule (a way in which domination is legitimated). Thus, all patrimonialism is patronalism, but not all patronalism is patrimonialism. Indeed, patronalism can involve forms of rule that are illegitimate as well as legitimate, and patronalism refers to broader patterns of social relations that do not necessarily involve domination. When it comes to the specific topic of this essay and its companion pieces in this issue of the journal, however, the two concepts largely overlap so long as one sets aside the question of legitimacy. That is, these pieces examine variation precisely in patterns of domination (political regimes) in the Balkans, Central Asia, and the South Caucasus. Thus, the terms patronalism and patrimonialism can be used essentially interchangeably, here. Nevertheless, I use the terminology of patronalism because my explanation of

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

⁷ Mounira M. Charrad and Julia Adams, “Introduction: Patrimonialism, Past and Present,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (July 2011): 7, and Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978), 231-232.

regime dynamics in these regions derives specifically from the broader logic of patronalism that transcends the case of patrimonialism. In particular, I have in mind patronalism's emphasis on actual personal acquaintance as the central organizing feature of large-scale collective action in society, in general.

Indeed, a crucial implication of patronalism is the following: political struggles tend not really to be struggles between formal institutions such as parties or even individuals per se, but instead battles among extended political-economic networks that often pervade state, social, and economic institutions and are not limited to any one of them. To take one of the best known examples in the post-communist world, the "oligarch" Mikhail Khodorkovsky was powerful in the late 1990s and early 2000s not because he had particular charisma as an individual and not even because he had large business holdings in his corporation, Yukos, but because he led an extensive network of actual personal acquaintance that included not only massive business structures throughout the country but also individuals holding senior state posts and high positions on political party lists, or were activists in civil society organizations. He was brought down in the mid-2000s not so much by state institutions or even by Vladimir Putin in his capacity as Russian president, but by Putin's own extensive *personal* network that had by that time penetrated organs of law enforcement as well as business that could be counted on to serve the interests of the network and its chief patron, even when this violated the formal principles upon which state or business institutions were supposed to work.

Of course, patronal networks can come in myriad forms and be based on myriad organizational principles that grow out of various structural, historical, or ideational features of a given society. Thus, no claim is made that all patronal networks are the same. But what can be said is that a key first step in understanding politics in patronalistic societies is to identify their most important patronal networks.

Patronalism in the South Caucasus

It is uncontroversial to describe the South Caucasus countries as featuring high levels of patronalism and patrimonialism. Documenting this nicely is a study by four leading scholars finding that the South Caucasus states are among those post-communist countries with the strongest "patrimonial" legacies. This set also includes all of the Central Asian states plus the Balkan countries of Albania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Romania. In the Balkans, Croatia and Slovenia count among the least patrimonial, with Serbia belonging to an in-between category.⁸ Accordingly, in each South Caucasus country, one can identify a set of leading patronal networks that are quite arguably the

⁸ Herbert Kitschelt et al., *Post-Communist Party Systems: Competition, Representation and Inter-Party Cooperation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

most central collective political actors in the country. Of course, describing a country's patronal networks inevitably involves oversimplification due to their real-world complexity and shifting quality. But their core features can be usefully captured with reference to certain organizational features, and it turns out that there is a good deal of commonality in this regard across the Caucasus. Here, we focus on four types of organizational principles and describe how they characterize the most important networks in each country.

One key organizing principle involves the continued relevance of power networks from the Soviet period. The Soviet-era power network that would become most important was that of Heydar Aliyev, the long-time boss of the Azerbaijan branch of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and Politburo member. CPSU general secretary, Mikhail Gorbachev, had removed Aliyev from the Politburo shortly after coming to power in the mid-1980s and attacked his network through corruption charges, ushering in a period of competition among different Azerbaijani networks. Aliyev retreated to his native Nakhichevan and managed to retain a small foothold in politics by becoming the chair of the Azerbaijani exclave's legislature in 1991. With the Aliyev network's grip on the rest of Azerbaijan broken, the USSR collapsing, the Soviet military moving in 1990 to temporarily crush Azerbaijan's nationalist movement, and war breaking out as Azerbaijan's Armenian-dominated separatist enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh sought to secede with Armenian support, the new country essentially descended into state failure, with no network able to gain control. The communist leader installed by Gorbachev was quickly driven from power, and the victor in the ensuing presidential election just as quickly fled presidential office, as disastrous losses mounted in the Nagorno-Karabakh war. With no one network able to reassert control and with the results so clearly disastrous for all, the competing networks in the capital, Baku, agreed to invite Aliyev to reclaim leadership of the whole country and sealed the deal by orchestrating his win in a 1993 presidential election. Returning to Baku, Aliyev also brought back a core group of people with whom he had strong personal ties from his days as Azerbaijan's chief Soviet-era patron. Soviet-era power networks did not wind up playing a major role in the other South Caucasus countries after independence, however. Georgia's equivalent of Aliyev, long-time Georgian CPSU boss, Eduard Shevardnadze, had been appointed Gorbachev's foreign minister and essentially faded from local relevance as his network fragmented and was overtaken by others. In Armenia, the old CPSU power networks were overwhelmed by their rivals as the USSR dissolved, with no one in position to reassemble the parts well enough to make them central to local politics again.

A second network organizing principle that has been important in the South Caucasus is business, producing a set of figures that have often been called "oligarchs" in each country. This term is used, here, to describe people who wield prominent and extensive business holdings as a major part of their political power. In Georgia (as in Russia with Khodorkovsky), the most

important oligarchs tended to emerge from entrepreneurship or privatization (though usually in collusion with connections in the state). Prominent examples included not only home-grown oligarchs (such as Levan Gachechiladze, who converted his Soviet commerce background into an alcoholic beverage empire) but also figures who had accumulated massive resources primarily in Russia and had them at their disposal for Georgian politics later on (most noteworthy, here, were Badri Patarkatsishvili and banker Bidzina Ivanishvili). Similarly, in Armenia, Khachatur Sukiasian created the broad-reaching SIL Concern (banking, alcohol, manufacturing, and restaurants), in large part by taking advantage of privatization opportunities, while Gagik Tsarukian rose from the agricultural sector to doing business in alcohol, chemicals, and services. Azerbaijan's most important oligarchs emerged in a somewhat different pattern, however, getting their rise mainly by working through state positions that they occupied and transferring this into control over large swaths of the economy. One important example was Kamaladdin Heydarov, who was appointed head of the Customs Committee by Aliyev, and who, on this formal institutional basis, established his own "subnetwork" that was reputed to wield vast economic holdings, with particular dominance in the region of Qabala, where he had a family connection. Similarly, Rasul Guliyev, the head of Azerbaijan's largest oil refinery, used this position to accumulate both wealth and political supporters. Some Georgian oligarchs emerged from state structures as well, such as Kakha Targamadze, reputed to run a massive shadow-economy empire from his position as chief of police in the 1990s.

A third network organizing principle is geographic region. The most important example of such a network in the South Caucasus is likely Aliyev's Nakhichevan network. While Aliyev drew from a wide range of connections throughout the republic that he had built as local CPSU boss, the core of his personal network came from Nakhichevan. Alongside the Nakhichevanis, Aliyev relied heavily on another regional network known locally as the "Yeraz" (Yerevan Azerbaijanis), or "Western Azerbaijanis," individuals with family origins in the Armenian capital of Yerevan (or other parts of Armenia), but who now mostly lived in Baku. Other prominent networks were based in Baku and its surrounding region. Importantly, it would be a mistake to consider that Azerbaijani regions constitute homogenous networks. Not everyone from Nakhichevan belongs to Aliyev's political-economic network, for example. This is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that the president who fled just prior to Aliyev's taking power was also from Nakhichevan. Georgia did not feature the kind of regional networks that pretended to power at the national level in Azerbaijan. Instead, it had several noteworthy local political machines, including in the autonomous republic of Ajara, in southern regions populated mostly by Azerbaijanis and Armenians but not having formal autonomous status, and in western territories populated by the Mingrelian and Svan peoples. Peculiar to Armenia was the role of a powerful "regional" network actually based outside Armenia itself, the group of a prominent coalition of fighters and

former Komsomol officials that rose to power in Nagorno-Karabakh during its war to separate from Azerbaijan. Particularly noteworthy figures in this network were its chief patron, Robert Kocharian, head of the de facto republic as it emerged from the war, and Serge Sargsyan, his associate from their Communist Youth League days (reflecting the secondary importance, here, of old CPSU ties as an organizing principle).

Fourth, in these war-torn societies, it is not surprising that warlords occasionally emerged with their own networks capable of influencing national political outcomes, at least marginally. This was most pronounced initially in Georgia, where, curiously, such warlords often tended to be academics who took their nationalist cause to the streets and created small armies that then extended into economic activities, such as art historian Jaba Ioseliani, founder of the infamous *Mkhedrioni* (which means “horsemen”).⁹ In Armenia, a network of Nagorno-Karabakh war veterans emerged connected to security structures. Warlords never achieved the prominence in Azerbaijan that they did in Georgia, with those who aspired to autonomy being quickly marginalized by Aliyev.

Largely absent were networks that were based primarily on actual kinship (clan in the narrow sense). To be sure, the first Armenian president’s brothers occupied important positions at the intersection of the state and the economy, and thus formed a core of his political machine, as will be noted below. Certain Aliyev relatives also came to play major roles in the economy, especially in the latter 2000s and during the 2010s. But family was not the primary principle by which the most important networks of these countries were organized and delimited.

The Dynamic Logic of Patronal Politics

Because politics is primarily about personal connections, networks typically require some personal relationship to the country’s political leadership in order to ensure continued access to resources. The best form of connection, of course, is to be the patron oneself, or at least to have one’s own patron be the country’s chief patron. And, to become the leader requires being strong. But, here, we run into an interesting problem for politicians in highly patronalistic societies. Because the strength of one’s own network depends on how many other networks support it, the key challenge for such networks is to identify which potential patron is likely to get the most support from other networks. Still, the very fact of joining a network makes that network stronger. All networks considering whom to join face this same problem simultaneously.

In short, the problem networks face is one of *coordination*. If a network

⁹ Georgi Derluguian, *Bourdieu’s Secret Admirer in the Caucasus: A World Systems Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 61.

concludes that it does not have the power to wind up on top, it must try to coordinate its actions with enough other networks to ensure that it is at least in the winning coalition and not excluded from power. Once one patron is clearly the winner, of course, all networks in society have at least some interest in coordinating their activities around the winner to the extent that the winner demands it (or allows it), so as not to lose access to state resources. When all major networks coordinate their actions around the chief patron, which can mean not only active support but also simply a refusal to risk supporting opposition forces without the sanction of the leader, the result can look very authoritarian. In such cases, the president usually does not actually have to outlaw opposition parties, since these parties are likely to be unable to get the kind of business and state support (not to mention media coverage) they would need to mount any kind of challenge to the chief patron.

Politics, then, is largely about managing expectations within the system. Factors that reinforce the belief that a patron will remain powerful tend to encourage the country's networks to continue to coordinate their activities around the chief patron. Yet, factors that tend to undermine such suppositions can disrupt the coordination of a country's major political-economic networks. This is what can give patronal politics its cyclic character, as certain factors shift expectations in ways that periodically reinforce or undermine power network coordination around a chief patron.

What sorts of factors can influence expectations in this dynamic way? For the purposes of understanding Caucasus regime dynamics, this essay highlights three. One is the type of constitution a country has. In particular, *ceteris paribus*, a presidentialist constitution (one that formally endows the holder of the presidency with far more authority than the holders of other posts) tends to encourage network coordination around a single chief patron (the president), by endowing that person with the focal symbolism of supreme power and by effectively communicating to networks that the fact someone occupies the presidential office reflects the occupant's victory in prior battles against other networks, signaling real power. A constitution that establishes two formally independent executive offices with roughly equal power, a type that has elsewhere been called a *divided-executive constitution*, can complicate or even disrupt the coordination of networks around a single patron in the country, because the constitution signals that power is held not by one person but by two, meaning that a network dissatisfied with, say, the president, can go over to the prime minister or vice versa and find protection or support.¹⁰ This can happen when, for example, a constitution provides not only for a president, but also for a prime minister who has formal powers roughly equal to the president's and who also is not formally dependent on the president for nomination or staying in office. An example of such a divided-executive

¹⁰ Hale, *Patronal Politics*, 77.

constitution is the basic law that Ukraine adopted in the aftermath of the Orange Revolution, though such constitutions also exist in other highly patronalistic countries, including Bulgaria and Macedonia, among others.

A second major factor that can influence expectations of future power and, hence, the coordination of political-economic networks around a single patron is, to put it simply, succession politics. Even the tightest of closed presidentialist systems can be torn asunder when networks begin to anticipate that the incumbent president is likely to leave office soon. Such expectations can arise from many sources, ranging from constitutional term limits and physical illness, to a president's simple decision not to run for reelection. When networks in a system start to anticipate that the president is likely to leave office, they also come to understand the president might not be in place in the future to enforce promises or threats he or she made today; presidential authority tends to wane, creating what has been called elsewhere a "lame duck syndrome." Competition can break out among networks as they try to coordinate around a new patron, while also making sure that this new patron is not one of their chief rivals and, in some cases, trying to seize the opportunity to capture the presidency for themselves. Such situations, consequently, can involve an unexpected outbreak of political pluralism.

The third factor emphasized, here, that can influence expectations and hence political opening and closure is the level of public support for the chief patron or would-be patrons. While it might seem odd that mass opinion can matter in a context where personal connections are everything, it turns out to be an important source of expectations for the future. In contexts in which elections are at least still formally on the books as the mechanism by which the chief patron (president) is chosen, a network chief who wields significant public support gains significant advantages. For one thing, less election falsification or pressure is necessary to produce a winning vote. For another, it becomes less expensive to rally supporters to the streets and more likely that such supporters will actively resist attempts by other power networks to quash such rallies. This means that when networks are attempting to identify the individuals who have the greatest chance of becoming (or remaining) chief patron in the future, they are more likely to single out those who have significant levels of public support. Presidential public support thus diminishes the incentives for a network to break with the president, even when the president is outgoing, because the president will be in a strong position to lend enough support to a successor to make that successor seem like the inevitable victor in a future power struggle. Unpopular presidents become very vulnerable during lame duck phases, however, and are particularly likely to suffer breakdowns in their authority as well as mass opposition mobilization, as more popular would-be patrons rally their supporters against the incumbent. Revolution or another form of political ouster is frequently the result. The remaining pages show how this logic can account for regime dynamics in the South Caucasus since the USSR's demise.

Azerbaijan: One Long Phase of Closing

Azerbaijan represents a case where a single political network has dominated a presidentialist system with substantial public support relative to alternatives, resulting in a political system that has steadily become more closed during the first quarter century of independence. Assuming the presidency in a lopsided 1993 victory, Aliyev began the arduous process of coordinating the country's unruly political-economic networks around his authority. Indeed, he started from too weak a position to immediately challenge all other centers of power; he had, after all, been invited in by the other networks—not to eliminate them—but to establish a peace among them and to stop the series of losses in the war with Armenians over Karabakh. So, he had to move gradually, stealthily either co-opting or eliminating one or two networks at a time on pretexts that could be found acceptable and non-threatening to the others. The oligarch Guliyev's network, for example, was targeted in 1996 on embezzlement charges, upon which Guliyev fled the country. Aliyev also selectively promoted individuals from his core Nakhichevan networks to key posts, where they would gain not only political but also economic power, as in the case of Heydarov mentioned above. Indeed, the system that Aliyev built essentially allocated certain regional fiefdoms to particular figures in his government, who would then manage them in addition to their formal duties as state officials; Heydarov's, for example, was in Qabala, where he had a family connection. Such posts were by no means given to Nakhichevanis alone. Aliyev ushered many Yeraz representatives into lucrative patronage posts, such as Ali Insanov's appointment as health minister, which effectively meant control over the country's array of medical facilities and the commercial business supporting them.

The early Aliyev political machine, therefore, was very much a coalition of various networks constructed through co-optation and coercion, and one that was only very gradually narrowed in scope as Aliyev systematically marginalized the most vulnerable potential rivals outside his core network. Politics during this period (the 1990s) was relatively open, with a wide range of political views available to be read in newspapers and even seen on television, which had not yet been fully brought under the president's control. Accordingly, electoral victory was not a foregone conclusion, helping lead Aliyev to pay significant attention to public opinion. His chief claims to public support were two. First, he managed to stanch the republic's bleeding in the war over Karabakh, concluding a cease-fire in 1994 that has held more or less effectively through the present day. While Azerbaijanis, of course, would have preferred a victory, it is clear that he won a great deal of support for simply ending the bloodshed and refocusing the attention of the newly independent country on the process of rebuilding both the state and—especially—the economy. His landmark achievement is widely known in Azerbaijan as the “Deal of the Century,” the first major international contract signed to develop and export Azerbaijan's extensive Caspian Sea hydrocarbon resources. This

not only laid the foundation for economic growth that, in fact, followed, but also inspired ordinary Azerbaijanis to expect that a brighter future lay ahead, a future that Aliyev made sure was associated with him personally and his regime. Symbolically, he even oversaw the appointment of his own son, Ilham Aliyev, to the post of vice president of the country's national oil company, SOCAR, in 1994. This provided a foundation for promoting his son to ever more prominent political posts.

To be sure, Aliyev faced significant opposition. Not everyone was convinced a former Politburo official was the right choice for a new independent Azerbaijan, and some politicians who had prominent roles in Azerbaijan's Soviet-era national independence movement (some of whom had served under the president who fled power just before Aliyev's arrival) retained significant popular support. The Yeraz network, while in Aliyev's informal coalition, was also still powerful enough not to feel very vulnerable, and a prominent politician linked to this network (Etibar Mamedov) even challenged Aliyev for the presidency in the 1998 election. But with the peace and economic recovery still seen as fragile, and with Aliyev wielding a growing arsenal of weapons to use against the opposition (such as influence over key media and the ability to economically pressure would-be opposition forces and those who administer elections), he was able to engineer an impressive victory in the official vote count in 1998. The election monitors of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) thus noted significant contestation in this election, but a heavy tilting of the electoral playing field toward the incumbent.¹¹

While Aliyev formally possessed the right to run for reelection in the 2003 presidential contest, he would be eighty years old by voting day and was in declining health, effectively bringing on a lame duck syndrome, as the question of succession became an obvious concern for insiders. While Aliyev's successful decision to pass the reins to his son, Ilham, is sometimes cited as an easy way for patronal presidents to escape a succession crisis, comparative experience shows that this is far from the case. Indeed, presidential relatives often have been some of the post-communist world's worst political liabilities, frequently disrupting presidential coalitions because they are seen as economic predators who threaten key coalition members and engage in lavish spending, blatant corruption, or other arrogant behavior that undermines support for the incumbent. While in-laws are a particular problem, as illustrated by the informal exile of Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev's son-in-law, Rakhat Aliev (who was then divorced by the President's daughter), Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov even allowed his own daughter's political-economic network effectively to be shut down by her political rivals after her presidential

¹¹ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), "Presidential Election in the Republic of Azerbaijan (October 11, 1998), <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/azerbaijan/14329?download=true> (accessed June 19, 2015).

ambitions and high public profile stirred up too much trouble, including a rift within his own family.

In this light, it is important to understand how cautiously Heydar Aliyev, in fact, managed the succession to his son, Ilham. Carefully keeping Ilham out of corruption scandals and maintaining an image for him as a technocratic manager rather than an oligarch, Aliyev gradually expanded his son's role and made him prime minister only on the eve of the 2003 presidential election, minimizing the chances that something could go wrong under his watch that could hurt his presidential chances. Cleverly foreclosing the possibility of a massive elite split in the election itself, Heydar registered *himself* as a candidate, too (even being presented as the main candidate), and pulled out in favor of his son only at the last minute, leaving little time for members of his own coalition to challenge his choice of successor. The main networks in the Aliyev machine generally stayed together, reportedly including the Yeraz, even though Mamedov ran again (he gained very little support). Ilham accordingly promised to continue the deal among elites that his father had arranged. While Ilham was not particularly popular, he also was not particularly unpopular, and the political machine functioned about as smoothly as before in delivering the younger Aliyev the victory and putting down subsequent protests, his father's death being announced shortly thereafter.

With no major opening occurring during the succession, Ilham Aliyev then moved decisively to consolidate his own dominance and continued the process of tightening the power pyramid. Wielding the authority of a fresh victory, Ilham shocked the political establishment by dramatically arresting key members of the Yeraz network, including Health Minister Insanov. He kept on, however, the Nakhichevani core of his father's network, including Heydarov, though the latter was shifted to head the Emergencies Ministry, which included its own troops that could be an additional political-economic asset. It was during Ilham's period in power that the oil-driven growth reached truly impressive proportions, leading to a transformation of the capital city and many of the country's other regions. During 2006 through 2010, about half the population believed that the country's situation was on track to improve, and between a third to a half thought that their own material position would improve soon, with most of the rest expecting no change rather than deterioration.¹² With opposition increasingly squeezed out of politics and the last independent television channel being "reprogrammed" in 2006, Ilham Aliyev—elected at only age forty-two—won reelection in 2008. He also managed to escape presidential term limits through a highly complex 2009 referendum that resulted in a new norm by which term limits would not apply during war, and, of course, Azerbaijan was at war with Armenia over Karabakh, and this did not

¹² Rasim Musabayov and Rakhmil Shulman, *Azerbaijan in 2006-2010: Sociological Monitoring* (Baku, Azerbaijan: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and Puls, 2010), 8 and 38.

appear to be ending anytime soon.

The story of Azerbaijan's political system between the 2009 referendum ending term limits and the time of this writing (2016) was one of continued tightening of the coordination of the country's networks around the president, with the leadership showing diminishing tolerance even for critics whose reach into the population was quite limited. Protests breaking out in the cities of Quba and Ismayilli in 2012 and 2013, largely linked to unpopular oligarch fiefdoms, accelerated this trend toward closure. Tensions also remained among the networks within Aliyev's power pyramid, especially as the position of the Nakhichevani network was increasingly seen to be challenged by a network centered around the president's in-laws. This was the extended Pashayev family network, whose position in the economy and polity greatly strengthened under Ilham Aliyev (perhaps becoming the most prominent power network, with actual kinship at its core, in the South Caucasus). This was symbolized by the president's wife's growing formal political role, which included serving as deputy chair of the dominant Yeni Azerbaijan Party and as a member of parliament. This reputed rivalry between the Nakhichevan and Pashayev networks, however, by no means involved opposition to the president, only competition for his favor and for position in his political system.

While the opposition managed to unite around historian Camil Hasanli, who was allowed on the ballot and given time on television to air criticism of the leadership, his campaign was harassed and achieved minimal traction, with efforts at post-election rallying generating little resonance in the population at large. Pressing their advantage, the authorities accelerated pressure on opposition activists and journalists, with the jailing of the muckraking Radio Azadliq journalist, Khadijah Ismayillova, perhaps being the most prominent such event. With a relatively young president and no term limits, Azerbaijan looked as of 2016 to be on the path of continued gradual political closure for the foreseeable future, barring some sort of catastrophe or massive miscalculation by the regime. Some signs emerged of serious economic problems, including a dramatic devaluation of the Manat in 2015-2016, but as of mid-2016, these had not become so acute as to override the other factors working in the rulers' favor.

Georgia: Multiple Regime Cycles and a Democratic Breakthrough?

Georgia represents a case where unpopular ruling networks in a presidential system have been ousted repeatedly when facing succession, but where significant changes have occurred both in the level of patronalism and in the constitution, making a sustained political opening possible (though not inevitable or permanent). While Georgia resembles Azerbaijan in that its former longtime CPSU party boss returned to power as president after the USSR dissolved, called in by stalemated warring networks alarmed at the cost of the ongoing struggle, Eduard Shevardnadze's network had largely been left

uncultivated during the many years he had served as Soviet foreign minister under Gorbachev. Not having a personal regional stronghold of the type Aliyev had in Nakhichevan, Shevardnadze assumed the presidency in Georgia in 1992 in a much weaker position than Aliyev. Indeed, he was invited to return to his country in what the country's most important networks thought would be a largely figurehead role, perhaps like the Queen of England, representing the country abroad while not capable of exercising much power, though serving to prevent any one of the existing power networks from gaining the presidency and threatening the others.

What Shevardnadze had, though, were three noteworthy assets. Perhaps most important were his high personal popularity (he was the country's most famous native son and a star on the world diplomatic stage) and his outstanding skills in the practice of patronal politics, honed during his period as Georgian party boss (and republic KGB chief before that). Shevardnadze also retained a core personal set of ties with relatives and people with whom he served in the Communist Youth League (Komsomol). Thus, much like Aliyev, from his position as president, the new Georgian leader cautiously plied his skills in co-opting, dividing-and-conquering, and bringing in his own people to establish himself as the country's dominant patron. His nephew, Nugzar, became a prominent businessman, and his in-laws (in particular the Jokhtaberidze and Akhvlediani families) established strong positions in other economic spheres, ranging from trade to telecommunications. Allowing Targamadze to build his illicit empire as police chief, Shevardnadze gained an ally highly invested in keeping his post. He bestowed a strong role in central politics on the Ajara political machine in return for its loyalty, and pointedly allocated significant central posts to Svan and Mingrelian networks. Already in mid-1993, he was able to remove one of the most notorious warlords from office, and, in 1995, the latter was jailed after trying unilaterally to reconquer Abkhazia with disastrous effect.

Since the presidentialist constitution was abolished after Zviad Gamsakhurdia was widely seen as discrediting the office (he was the first directly elected president of Georgia, chosen shortly before the USSR collapsed), Shevardnadze had to reestablish it, which he did in 1995, facilitating his ability to coordinate the country's disparate networks around this authority. After winning presidential elections that same year, Shevardnadze arrested the country's other major warlord, Ioseliani. Now atop what was clearly the dominant political network in the country, Shevardnadze brought in new allies, in particular, a group of "young reformers" that included one Mikheil Saakashvili, soon to become justice minister. Avoiding using with the same intensity the full array of heavy-handed methods that Aliyev employed, but still with significant popular support as the man who had saved the Georgian state from near complete collapse, Shevardnadze was able to successfully coordinate most of the important remaining oligarchs and regional machines around his authority and win reelection handily in 2000.

As time wore on, however, events started to work in combination against the chief Georgian patron. For one thing, his popularity sank as the economy stagnated, electricity blackouts became a regular feature of life, and the state remained unable to regain the wayward territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Dealing a special blow to the president's popular support was the shocking murder of a well-liked independent journalist, Georgy Sanaia. While the president was not linked personally to this apparent murder, he was widely blamed for the circumstances surrounding it and for not adequately responding. At this point, in 2001, Shevardnadze also effectively confirmed to his country's power networks that he was a lame duck, announcing that he would not try to escape presidential term limits by changing the constitution so that he could seek reelection. As an ITAR-TASS analyst wrote at the time, this announcement "resounded like a gong for politicians: It is time to prepare."¹³ Shortly thereafter, Saakashvili abandoned Shevardnadze's sinking ship to lead the opposition, taking with him a number of networks previously in Shevardnadze's coalition.

The battle, while looking ahead to the expected 2005 presidential elections, actually came to a head earlier in the 2003 parliamentary elections, which were effectively seen by elites as a sort of "primary election" that they could use to determine their expectations as to who would likely win the anticipated succession struggle. Understanding the importance of this, Shevardnadze's team evidently attempted to falsify the election results when they performed poorly, upon which Saakashvili's forces took to the streets to claim (based on parallel vote counting and exit polls) that they, in fact, had won the most votes. While the 27 percent that Saakashvili claimed would not seem to many outsiders enough to crown Saakashvili the ruler, the crucial point is that this result signaled he was likelier than any other politician to become the next president. This induced a tipping effect, with the country's power networks cascading to his side and Shevardnadze's coalition dissolving quickly. By early 2004, Saakashvili had organized a new presidential election in which he won well above 90 percent of the vote, a result demonstrating the speed and thoroughness with which the country's dominant networks had rallied around his rising star.

Saakashvili promised a breakthrough, and he delivered in many ways, but not in the ways that many expected. The 2003 Rose Revolution was not a democratic breakthrough. While the old political machine was smashed, creating a temporary political opening, Saakashvili actually strengthened the formal powers of the presidency. As the patronal politics perspective would anticipate, the result was steadily increasing coordination of the country's

¹³ Aleksei Aleksandrov, "Nasledstvo politicheskogo dolgozhitelia" [The legacy of a long-lived politician], *Ekho Planeta* (August 31-September 6, 2001), <http://www.explan.ru/archive/2001/36/s1.htm> (accessed February 7, 2008).

main political networks around his authority. This coordination did not have to involve outright loyalty, but for those actively supporting opposition politics, the result could be prosecution, takeover, or liquidation. One of the signal moments in Saakashvili's new patronal presidentialism came in late 2007, when massive protests erupted against his rule and were ended dramatically by state violence that even included the shutting down of media. One of the country's most prominent television channels, Imedi, was wrested from the control of oligarch Patarkatsishvili, whose influence was dramatically reduced in the country. In the wake of this crackdown, Saakashvili called a snap election and won it handily as the opposition was reeling.

Two Saakashvili initiatives worked in the direction of a possible longer-term democratic breakthrough, however. The first is the best known: his efforts to break the influence of criminal authorities on politics and to eliminate corruption in parts of the state that interacted most directly with the public. The most famous reform was the complete transformation of the traffic police, which went from one of the most notoriously corrupt institutions in the country to a clean institution that even his political enemies acknowledged now generally did not take bribes from drivers at all. This, and other reforms strengthening the state, won Saakashvili a great deal of public support. At the same time, most observers agree that other forms of corruption remained integral to the system, including the use of indirect measures to tame mass media and the use of a financial police to pressure business that might be engaged in opposition politics. Thus, as the Saakashvili presidency went on, its ratings on the most prominent democracy indices declined, reflecting its trend toward political closure. By the end of his term, Georgia had become more politically closed than it was in the final years of Shevardnadze's rule. Nevertheless, the elimination of much of the corruption in the system laid at least some groundwork for the possible future democratization of the country, through the reduction in patronal practices and the establishment of stronger rule of law.

The reform of Saakashvili's that is most likely to result in a sustained political opening receives less attention: the constitutional reform of 2010-2013. Starting in 2010, in his constitutionally final term in office, Saakashvili set in motion a process of constitutional reform that would end Georgia's presidential system and create a divided-executive constitution, effective upon Saakashvili's successor taking office after the regularly scheduled 2013 presidential election. Speculation abounded as to his motives, with some expecting him to seek the prime-ministership for himself and install a weak and loyal president, a move that many believed would allow him to escape the term limits on the presidency while remaining effectively in power, much as Putin did in Russia during 2008-2012. His move, however, is also consistent with a logic whereby an outgoing president does not fully trust his likely successors and therefore has incentive to weaken their powers so as to ensure his own legacy and protect himself against the possibility that his heir might turn on

his former patron. This move, however, had the dramatic effect of opening the political system: not only was Saakashvili a lame duck because he was in his final constitutional term in office, but also the new constitution meant that the country's networks could expect that, in the future, there might not be only one, but as many as two main patrons (a president and a powerful, potentially independent, prime minister). This increased the chance that a challenge would result in the capture of at least one of these positions.

It was thus during this period that the oligarch, Ivanishvili, at the time the richest person in Georgia, announced he would anchor a major opposition coalition to bring Saakashvili's team down. Ivanishvili previously had kept a very low political profile, though was widely regarded in the past as tacitly supporting Saakashvili, at least by staying largely out of opposition politics. Pouring his vast resources into the campaign, Ivanishvili managed to unite nearly all of the political forces that had either opposed Saakashvili from the beginning and remained marginalized or that had defected during Saakashvili's second term, perhaps anticipating a succession struggle. While the 2012 parliamentary campaign is deserving of a separate essay in itself, it suffices to say, here, that the oligarch's Georgian Dream coalition managed to decisively defeat Saakashvili's United National Movement, after circulating shocking videotapes of prison torture, using the limited freedom it had during the campaign to get its message out. These videos crystallized a sense that had been brewing in the country—especially as economic growth slowed—that Saakashvili's strengthening state had overreached and was capable of dastardly acts. Saakashvili's "political machine in a velvet glove" thus quickly collapsed, as his popularity plummeted at the same time he was becoming a lame duck. His party's loss in the 2013 presidential election then became a foregone conclusion, as no one else in his network had the popular support to challenge Ivanishvili, who became so celebrated that his mere endorsement was enough to essentially deliver the election to whomever he picked.

Starting in 2013, then, the patronal politics perspective leads us to see Georgia as being in prime position to sustain a real breakthrough to open politics. For one thing, with a divided-executive constitution now formally fully in force, an attempt by any one patron to tightly coordinate the country's disparate networks around his authority would be much more complicated than before. In addition, Ivanishvili's Georgian Dream coalition was extremely diverse, without a single dominant organizational core, and, instead, consisted of multiple parties and movements, each of which obtained some kind of foothold in the executive or legislative branches. Thus, even if "Georgian Dream" as a whole could attempt to consolidate complete control over the country, there still would be a major question of who would dominate within Georgian Dream. The highly popular Ivanishvili might have had a chance to accomplish this had he tried, but he surprised most observers by actually resigning as prime minister right after reaching the pinnacle of power, effectively withdrawing from full-time efforts to control the political

system. While he would weigh in from time to time with weighty comments, he installed relatively inexperienced and lesser-known figures from distinct networks (though all connected to Ivanishvili) to be prime minister (first Irakli Garibashvili and then, in late 2015, Georgi Kvirikashvili) and president (Georgi Margvelashvili), and essentially let them do the work of governing on their own. Thus, Georgian politics between 2013 and 2016 regularly featured tension between the prime minister and president, and this has helped keep the political space open for third networks to operate and compete for influence.

Of course, because patronalism has not been eradicated, political competition continues to work largely through personalistic connections and corrupt ties. Ivanishvili was thus thought by many to be behind Garibashvili's unexpected resignation as prime minister at the end of 2015, replaced by Kvirikashvili, a former manager of Ivanishvili's Cartu Bank, who talked of ending political infighting.¹⁴ But of the three South Caucasus states, Georgia would still seem best positioned for a sustained period of political pluralism.

Armenia: Presidentialism Punctuated by Succession Crises

If Azerbaijan exemplifies the steady political closing characteristic of popular patronal presidents, and if Georgia currently represents the political opening that can be obtained and sustained with a divided-executive constitution in a highly patronalistic polity, then Armenia lies somewhere in between these poles. With a presidentialist constitution throughout its post-Soviet period, Armenia's leaders have had a somewhat more difficult time sustaining public support than have Azerbaijan's, with succession-related crises resulting in one overthrow and one near-overthrow (when the designated heir of the incumbent wound up winning). These periodic tensions and transitions in leadership have interrupted the process of tight coordination of the country's main power networks around the president, as each new president has had to deal with difficulties posed by the preceding president (even when that president was endorsing the new one). Armenia has thus remained significantly more closed politically than Georgia, but a bit more open than Azerbaijan, though a new constitutional change may push the country closer to Georgia's path.

While the philologist Levon Ter-Petrossian had the strong democratic credentials of being a Soviet-era dissident when he became Armenia's first post-Soviet president, he turned out to combine great oratorical skills with the instincts of a machine politician. This involved building his own network of supporters among the emerging oligarchs who profited from privatization (such as Sukiasian) and other opportunities his government provided, and securing the loyalty of police (interior) and defense ministries through massive

¹⁴ "Kvirikashvili Confirmed as New Prime Minister," *Civil Georgia* (December 30, 2015), 01:24, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=28892> (accessed January 2, 2016).

rackets and schemes they were reputed to run. He also was not above using force against the opposition, as police crushed protesters claiming that his 1996 reelection had been fraudulent, and ushered in a state of emergency in which protests were banned.

With observers noting the growing political closure of the Armenian political system after his 1996 reelection, Ter-Petrosian had entered his constitutionally final (second) term in office, exposing him to lame-duck status. The succession battle was resolved before it ever had a chance to become a public struggle. Attempting to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in 1997 negotiations with Azerbaijan, the Armenian president gave the green light to what proved a very unpopular concession proposal, pulling troops out of the “buffer” territories around the separatist enclave as a good-will gesture. His ratings in opinion polls sank like a lead zeppelin to below 15 percent. At this point, Ter-Petrosian’s prior decision to shore up his nationalist credentials by naming the de facto Nagorno-Karabakh leader, Kocharian, his prime minister, backfired: Kocharian, widely regarded in Armenia as a hero for leading the separatist struggle against Azerbaijan, suddenly became the natural focal point for networks dissatisfied with the incumbent Ter-Petrosian, who already was in his constitutionally final term. The incumbent’s parliamentary coalition defected en masse to a coalition led by Karabakh war veterans, and the coup de grâce was delivered by the defections of the defense and interior ministers (the latter being Serzh Sargsyan). Seeing the proverbial writing on the wall, Ter-Petrosian resigned in early 1998, and Kocharian slipped into the presidency, winning an early election.

While these events resulted in a new opening in Armenia’s political system that registered in democracy ratings such as those of Freedom House, it was not long before the president was able to coordinate the bulk of the country’s power networks around his authority. At first working by building a broad coalition of networks, his authority was aided when multiple gunmen walked into parliament and assassinated some of his most powerful potential rivals, including the prime minister and chairman of parliament. These and other posts were soon filled by figures more closely linked to Kocharian; people connected to the Karabakh struggle made impressive gains in business ventures; and the media space began to close, a milestone being the shuttering of the independent A1+ television channel in 2002.

The 2008 succession in Armenia proved far more eventful than the 2003 succession in Azerbaijan, though it did not quite become a revolution as in Georgia in 2003. Upon entering his final term in office after his 2003 reelection, Kocharian made clear that he would not seek a way to stay in office and, instead, eventually ushered his fellow Karabakh-Komsomol associate, Serzh Sargsyan, into the prime-ministership, effectively designating him his chosen successor. Also during this period, however, the oligarch Tsarukian founded a new Prosperous Armenia Party that rapidly gained support, and that some observers interpreted as having been quietly sanctioned by Kocharian to secure

some influence in the parliament that could be wielded after Sargsyan became president. Making things even more interesting, Ter-Petrosian became the first ousted post-Soviet president to try to regain his post through elections, launching a vigorous campaign that implicitly branded the Karabakh-based leadership outsiders and explicitly aimed at inducing defections from the Kocharian political machine. Some who had previously backed Kocharian defected as the elections approached, including the parliamentary speaker in 2006 and Sukiasian, the oligarch. These defections were sufficient to create a significant moment of intense political contestation. While it was clear that the Kocharian-Sargsyan tandem had the upper hand, the election was not considered a foregone conclusion. Ter-Petrosian's ultimate failure had as much to do with his continuing unpopularity as with machine politics; those who backed him did so mainly because his status made him the primary common focal point for opposition against the incumbents. Thousands of protesters took to the streets when Sargsyan's victory was announced, and a wild eight days of clashes ensued that was eventually won by the authorities—but only when Ter-Petrosian called on his supporters to stop, after his bodyguards informed him they would no longer protect him if he appeared again at the protests.

Sargsyan's presidency thus began under a state of emergency that saw the jailing of many opposition figures, though he allowed Ter-Petrosian to lead a series of opposition protests during the next two years and to contest local elections, though without winning. Wielding substantial public support, Sargsyan handily won reelection with broad elite backing in 2013, with Raffi Hovannisian taking over as opposition focal point after Ter-Petrosian declared himself too old to try again. With these elections, though, Sargsyan entered into his constitutionally final term in office. Intriguingly, during his final term, in late 2015, Armenia changed its constitution to a parliamentary system, whereby the president not only would be limited to a single seven-year term but also elected by parliament rather than directly by the people.¹⁵ While this arrangement likely does not do as much to complicate network coordination around a single patron as does a divided-executive constitution,¹⁶ by rendering the president a lame duck from the start by limiting him or her to a single term, it arguably will make pluralism more likely than under a presidentialist system in the patronal politics context, perhaps cementing Armenia's position "in between" the more open Georgia and the more closed Azerbaijan.

Conclusion

In summary, the logic of patronal politics provides a useful framework for

¹⁵ Liz Fuller, "How Democratic Are Proposed Armenian Constitutional Amendments," *RFE/RL Caucasus Report* (December 5, 2015), <http://www.rferl.org/content/caucasus-report-armenia-constitutional-referendum/27408756.html> (accessed January 2, 2016).

¹⁶ Hale, *Patronal Politics*, 372-421.

understanding regime dynamics in the South Caucasus, in a way that is also consistent with developments in other post-communist countries, including the Balkan and Central Asian states that also are the subject of this issue. These dynamics are typical of highly patronalistic societies and governed to a significant degree by shifts in expectations that, in turn, are driven by constitutional arrangements, succession politics, and the relative public support of different networks as moments of succession approach.

While this approach is not based on concepts such as “democracy” or “authoritarianism,” it certainly can shed light on why some countries appear more or less democratic at any given moment, though it cautions us not to presume that such conditions are anything more enduring than phases in longer-term regime dynamics that could see sudden reversals as expectations shift. Azerbaijan is currently authoritarian today not because it has oil or comes from an Islamic political tradition, but because it has had a presidentialist constitution and leaders who have managed to retain popular support (having oil and gas largess to dole out helps in this regard, of course, but does not guarantee popularity). Georgia is more democratic today not because it is Western-oriented or inherently a weak state, but because (most fundamentally) it has a divided-executive constitution, with different networks controlling different chief executive posts, and, secondarily, because its previous presidents experienced unpopularity during lame duck periods that resulted in the collapse of their political machines, setting back the presidentialist tendency toward political closure in patronalistic societies. Armenia is in between because it has had a presidentialist constitution, but its first president’s unpopularity hampered the tightening of network coordination around the president, though a change to a form of parliamentarist constitution in late 2015 may cement this in-between status.

How does this perspective fit with patterns witnessed in Central Asia and the Balkans? To begin, the most open and contested politics over the last quarter century have tended to be visible in precisely those Balkan countries that have had only moderate levels of patronalism, according to the categorization reported above, and that have had non-presidentialist constitutions: Croatia, Serbia, and Slovenia. Among the Balkan countries with levels of patronalism roughly on par with the Caucasus, Macedonia, Bulgaria, and Albania all have non-presidentialist constitutions, which the logic of patronal politics leads us to expect would produce more pluralistic outcomes, though also highly corrupt and unruly forms of pluralism. Of course, the Balkans also benefit democratically from stronger European Union influence than the Caucasus, providing incentives that tend to work against the coordination of networks around the authority of any single patron. The four enduringly authoritarian Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) are all presidentialist and have not faced a significant lame duck syndrome since the mid-1990s, with two possible exceptions. One is Tajikistan, where the president as of early 2016 was in the initial stages of his constitutionally

final term and working to escape term limits, and the other is Turkmenistan, where the leader's death led to a quick coordination around a new leader, without leading to a regime opening and where there were no elections in place to translate any kind of power struggle into political openness. The only Central Asian country that features a vibrant, open competition of political forces as of 2016 is Kyrgyzstan, which has followed a path remarkably like that of Georgia: two ousters of unpopular lame duck presidents since the mid-1990s, followed by a shift to a divided-executive constitution that for the first time underpinned a sustained period of political pluralism, albeit unruly and tinged with ethnic conflict. One larger argument to emerge from this essay, then, is that we can actually understand much about democracy by not taking democracy itself as the starting point for our analysis.