

## REVOLUTIONS AS NORMAL POLITICS IN PATRONAL PRESIDENTIAL SYSTEMS

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In late 2003, a dashing young Mikheil Saakashvili held high a red rose as he and a mass of followers chanted democratic slogans and stormed the parliament during an address by President Eduard Shevardnadze, who resigned the next day as a disgraced autocrat. A year later, it was the star turn of Ukrainian opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko, his once handsome face now green and pockmarked from eating a would-be assassin's dioxin-laced soup during the presidential campaign. Backed by nearly a million orange-clad supporters camped for weeks in the winter cold of Kyiv, he railed against the authoritarianism of President Leonid Kuchma and forced him to allow an unprecedented "repeat runoff" presidential election, which ultimately made the victim the victor. Lost in this drama was a contemporaneous event that was equally stunning: Opposition leader Sergei Bagapsh rallied supporters to snatch power from an incumbent leadership backed by Vladimir Putin in this de facto Russian protectorate in Georgia, forcing them to recognize him as winner of the 2004-05 presidential election. Most amazing, though, was the downfall of Kyrgyzstan's Askar Akaev, a president in a region widely considered an impenetrable, culturally fortified bastion of authoritarianism. Demonstrators wielding tulips and yellow placards defied stereotypes of Central Asian docility and swelled up against him, bursting into his "White House" in the name of democracy in March 2005 and forcing the hapless "dictator" to flee to Moscow.

Observers in the West quickly dubbed the events in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan "color revolutions" and leapt to brand them "democratic breakthroughs."<sup>1</sup> Democracy, rang out the refrain, was now again "on the march" in a chain of events that many traced back to the 2000 election defeat of Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic (dubbed by many the "Bulldozer Revolution") or even to the earlier defeats of incumbent presidents in Croatia, Slovakia, and Romania.<sup>2</sup> Local democracy activists and their Western supporters were quick to claim credit. Scholars generated long laundry lists of purported causes, and Western policymakers debated how they could best keep the new "democracy wave" going.<sup>3</sup> Russia's increasingly fretful leadership tried in vain to salt Westerners' heady drink, depicting instead a highly organized and well financed CIA plot to dislodge inconvenient leaders and replace them with pro-American ones, a view that did take root among many Eurasian analysts.<sup>4</sup>

The notion of color revolutions as democratic breakthroughs, however, was quickly dashed against the hard rocks of subsequent post-Soviet events. Not only did the wave mysteriously fail to catch on in other countries where both foreign governments and civic activists tried hard, as in Belarus and Russia, but democracy quickly faltered in the post-Soviet revolutionary countries themselves. Freedom House's *Nations in Transit* ratings reflect this all too clearly: both Georgia and Kyrgyzstan were less democratic in 2007 than they were the year

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<sup>1</sup> Cites

<sup>2</sup> Cites, including Bunce and Wolchik.

<sup>3</sup> McFaul 2005 etc.

<sup>4</sup> Cites. Narochnitskaia etc.

before their revolutions.<sup>5</sup> While Ukraine registered significant democratic improvement, as will be discussed in detail in Chapter 8, outside observers (and even more so domestic ones) by 2010 widely considered the Orange Revolution to be a failure as well, leaving in place massive corruption, incessant self-serving political infighting, and policy paralysis.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, the notions that these revolutions reflected no genuine public outpouring and that the protesters were all paid off also strains credulity and flies in the face of a reality known by those whose friends or relatives took part in these events.

In fact, the post-Soviet color revolutions were neither democratic breakthroughs nor foreign plots, but instead a natural and predictable product of patrimonial presidential systems as described in Chapter 3, systems that combine a pervasively clientelistic context with a directly elected presidency wielding great formal and informal powers. More specifically, the color revolutions were the outcomes of succession struggles where popular opinion decided a contest among competing “pyramids” of informal elite networks in favor of an opposition network. In fact, just two factors--public opinion and succession politics--go a surprisingly long way in determining not just whether, but when, where, and how a color revolution would occur among the patrimonial presidential polities of Eurasia that Chapter 4 discussed. In each case, the regime change (revolution or ouster) took place during what was *already* expected to be an incumbent president’s final term in office and when that president (or his heir apparent, if there was one) was highly unpopular. In each case, the supposedly democratic victor was a former high official in the old president’s administration, usually a prime minister. In each case, it was only a matter of time before the new revolutionary leadership returned to old methods of machine politics, the result typically being a more authoritarian regime than those it replaced. Importantly, this logic explains all ousters of presidents in patrimonial presidentialist systems straight through fall 2010, including not only the color revolutions but the palace coup that displaced Armenia’s President Levon Ter-Petrossian in 1997-98, the power turnover in Abkhazia in 2004-05, and the downfall of Kyrgyzstan President Kurmanbek Bakiev.

### **The Orange Revolution in Ukraine**

This process can be illustrated in great detail in Ukraine. The previous chapter described how Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma successfully built a patrimonial presidentialist system in Ukraine, dominating politics and marginalizing opposition by 1999, when he easily manipulated his way to reelection. After this election, however, he experienced two developments that ultimately undermined the elite coordination underpinned the power of his presidential machine: A sharp decline in popularity and a succession struggle brought about by the widespread expectation that he personally would not run for reelection again.<sup>7</sup> The central event was the leaking of covert surveillance tapes (almost certainly originating from an elite source intent on damaging Kuchma’s team) linking the president to the murder of journalist Hryhory Hongadze. While Kuchma did get a Constitutional Court ruling that he could seek a third term in 2004 on the basis of a technicality, this occurred only in December 2003, after many elites had come to suspect that the unpopular president might not be able to make another successful run and after

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<sup>5</sup> Jeannette Goehring, ed., *Nations in Transit 2008: Democratization from Central Europe to Eurasia* (New York: Freedom House, 2008): 44.

<sup>6</sup> Cite.

<sup>7</sup> As of the start of 2004, some 80 percent of citizens did not want Kuchma to continue as president. See Dmitry Vydrin and Irina Rozhkova, *V ozhidanii geroia: Yezhenedel'nik goda peremen* (Kharkiv: Kankom, 2005), 19.

many had come to expect at least some coordinated elite defection in 2004.<sup>8</sup> More importantly, of course, Kuchma repeatedly stated he would not seek reelection, and in fact did not run for president, effectively rendering himself a lame duck.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the fact that Kuchma tapped a successor (incumbent prime minister Viktor Yanukovych) and devoted the entire might of the patronal presidential office to securing his victory, a formidable rival emerged from within the Ukrainian state elite. This rival, Viktor Yushchenko, had been head of Ukraine's National Bank (1993–99) and prime minister (1999–2001) under Kuchma and had built up substantial popular support during his time in office through his public efforts aimed at fighting corruption and promoting market reform and a generally more Western orientation for Ukraine. It is important to realize that prior to his removal, Yushchenko was decidedly not seen as an opposition figure but instead was a key part of the Kuchma team. In fact, when his future partner in the Orange Revolution Yulia Tymoshenko teamed up with other opposition in 2000-01 to hold a series of “Ukraine without Kuchma” protests, Yushchenko joined Kuchma and the speaker of parliament in not only condemning the actions, but comparing the opposition to fascists.<sup>10</sup> As Kuchma's public opinion ratings dropped, however, Yushchenko increasingly used his post as prime minister to blast official corruption, making him a special threat to Kuchma in the wake of the Gongadze tapes. Kuchma thus fired him, after which point Yushchenko formed an opposition group for the 2002 parliamentary (Rada) elections—widely seen as an “elite primary election” for the 2004 presidential contest, a test of strength for elites to determine who had the best chance to be the future president. After winning a significant minority of seats and assuming a clear lead in reliable presidential polls, Yushchenko established himself as the most credible opposition “horse” to back for elites looking beyond the Kuchma era.<sup>11</sup> He was thus the obvious candidate for nonleftist opposition parties determined to unite their forces to oust the Kuchma team, even winning the backing of Tymoshenko, whose earlier opposition efforts Yushchenko had himself condemned while prime minister.<sup>12</sup>

While the Kuchma-Yanukovych team deployed a massive arsenal of “administrative resources” to acquire votes and sought to rally all major elites to their side as they had done in 1999, many elites who had been loyal to Kuchma in 1999 were now fearful of being left out of a Yanukovych Ukraine. Yanukovych was associated with one particular pro-Kuchma oligarchic group. This was the Donetsk-based “clan” informally led by Ukraine's richest man, Rinat Akhmetov, and represented in Kuchma's inner circle by Viktor Medvedchuk, the head of Kuchma's administration during the campaign period. Some elites who had long supported Kuchma but had competed with the Donetsk group for influence thus began to support Yushchenko, supplying him with resources that would prove critical to his victory. A few business “oligarchs” were so bold as to back Yushchenko openly from the start, including, most notably, Petro Poroshenko.<sup>13</sup> Tymoshenko herself had also initially achieved prominence in big business. While most media treated Russian business as unanimously backing the more pro-Russian Yanukovych, several major Russian financial groups associated with liberal leanings

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<sup>8</sup> Sergei Danilochkin, “Ukraine: Kuchma Cleared to Run for Third Term,” *RFE/RL Features*, December 30, 2003.

<sup>9</sup> Vydrin and Rozhkova (fn. 46), 193–94, 200, 220, 257.

<sup>10</sup> Kost' Bondarenko, *Leonid Kuchma: Portret na fone epokhi* (Kharkiv: Folio, 2007) p.422; Heorhii Kas'ianov, *Ukraina 1991-2007: Narysy novitn'oi istorii* (Kyiv: Nash Chas, 2008) p.259.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>12</sup> Kuzio (fn. 45).

<sup>13</sup> See Serhii Leshchenko, “Petro Poroshenko v Inter'eri Kartyn i Kartynok,” *Ukrains'ka Pravda*, [www2.pravda.com.ua](http://www2.pravda.com.ua), January 11, 2005, 19:36.

were reported to favor Yushchenko, including Alfa group and the conglomerates of Aleksandr Lebedev and Konstantin Grigorishin.<sup>14</sup>

Excluding Yanukovich's own Donetsk clan, the dominant business elite behavior, however, was at first to hedge bets. This category of elite tended to think that Yanukovich might win and feared Kuchma's powers of reprisal, but additionally calculated that Yushchenko also had a chance to win due to his popularity, his modicum of open elite support, and his suspected backing by the Western international community. They thus placed their eggs in both baskets in hopes of avoiding a Yanukovich victory while not completely alienating his team in case it should win. Two such oligarchic groups were Pryvat and the team of Leonid and Andrei Derkach. Most surprisingly, an influential insider in the Medvedchuk-Yanukovich camp reports that even the president's son-in-law cum oligarch, Pinchuk, was in fact covertly providing support to Yushchenko at the same time that he was overtly working for Yanukovich. This, the insider reports, was understood in the Yanukovich camp as Kuchma's personal effort to hedge his own bets, hoping thereby to avoid threats to his own family's material and physical position in the event that Yanukovich lost.<sup>15</sup> The United States government accentuated the interest that some big business representatives had in bet-hedging: Reports circulated during the campaign season that Pinchuk and several other major elites associated with Yanukovich would be denied visas to the U.S. because of their alleged corruption.<sup>16</sup> Even in Russia's business community, purportedly pro-Yanukovich conglomerates frequently played both sides in an effort to safeguard their interests regardless of which way the election went.<sup>17</sup>

Among the resources that two of these oligarchic groups brought was television coverage. Poroshenko controlled the small opposition-oriented Fifth Channel network and Andrei Derkach owned the Era television and radio networks. While Poroshenko's feisty Fifth Channel got most of the attention from outside observers, Era television was also very important because it broadcast on a widely available channel (the First National channel) at times when many people watched, in the morning and later evening. While Era did not blatantly support Yushchenko as did the Fifth Channel, it provided relatively objective information during the course of the orange revolution, giving people access to an opposition point of view.<sup>18</sup>

With Kuchma's heir designate so clearly tied to the interests of Donetsk and other parts of Russian-oriented "eastern" Ukraine, elites divided heavily along regional lines. Thus, those based in the more European-oriented western provinces feared their interests would be trampled in the event of a Yanukovich win.<sup>19</sup> Ukraine's elected regional legislatures were one such category, tending to rally behind Yanukovich in the East whereas those in the West were often fiery supporters of Yushchenko. The country's religious establishment was similarly divided:

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<sup>14</sup> Viacheslav Nikonov, "'Oranzhevaia' Revoliutsiia v Kontekste Zhanra," in Pogrebinsky (fn. 43), 100; Author interview with Pogrebinsky, Kyiv, August 12, 2005; author interview with Dmitry Vydrin, Kyiv, August 12, 2005.

<sup>15</sup> Pogrebinsky (fn. 43), 116. Also author interview with Pogrebinsky (fn. 52); Vydrin and Rozhkova (fn. 46), 227; author interview with Vydrin (fn. 52).

<sup>16</sup> Vydrin and Rozhkova (fn. 46), 387; Daniil Yanevsky, *Khronika "Oranzhevoi" Revoliutsii* (Kharkiv: Folio, 2005), 76.

<sup>17</sup> Nikonov (fn. 52), 100.

<sup>18</sup> Taras Kuzio, "Yushchenko Victory to Speed Up Ukraine's Democratization and Europeanization," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, December 17, 2004; Yanevsky (fn. 54).

<sup>19</sup> Dominique Arel has powerfully argued that the regional differences at work in the orange revolution most fundamentally reflect differences in national identity. See Arel, "Ukraina Vybraet Zapad, No Ne Bez Vostoka," *Pro et Contra* (July–August 2005); an English-language version, "The Orange Revolution: Analysis and Implications of the 2004 Presidential Election in Ukraine," February 25, 2005, is available at [http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/grad-etudesup/ukr/pdf/Arel\\_Cambridge.pdf](http://www.uottawa.ca/academic/grad-etudesup/ukr/pdf/Arel_Cambridge.pdf) (last accessed February 20, 2006).

representatives of the eastern-based Ukrainian Orthodox church subordinate to the Moscow patriarchate made some strong pro-Yanukovich statements, while Yushchenko found friendly attitudes among representatives of the more western-oriented Ukrainian Orthodox church subordinate to the Kyiv patriarchate and of the western-based Ukrainian Greco-Catholic church.<sup>20</sup> Ukraine's governors were a somewhat different story, as they were appointed by Kuchma everywhere except Kyiv and Crimea and were tasked by the administration with backing Yanukovich. But so strong was popular and legislative support for Yushchenko in many western Ukrainian regions that a pro-Yanukovich insider reports that no serious attempts were made to use the governors there to win votes for him. The situation was seen as hopeless. Many regional administration officials were even believed to be covertly sympathetic to Yushchenko or co-opted.<sup>21</sup> This helps explain how Yushchenko was able to achieve massive majorities of the vote in many western regions even in the first round of presidential balloting, including an astonishing 89 percent in Ivano-Frankivsk.<sup>22</sup> This is especially striking, given that many of these same western elites had backed Kuchma in the 1999 presidential election.

The elite standoff gradually began to resolve itself after the first and second rounds of the election took place, giving elites who were hedging their bets more information about who was likely to win. While Yushchenko gained a few new allies after the first round, which resulted in a runoff with Yanukovich, it was this second round that generated the most decisive moments. The Central Election Commission (CEC) declared Yanukovich the winner by a narrow margin (and reported the results after great delay and in an irregular manner) at the same time that exit polls showed a decisive Yushchenko victory and many observers reported rampant fraud.<sup>23</sup> One of the first key elite groups to “defect” to Yushchenko was the Kyiv city administration—a critical blow to Yanukovich because it effectively enabled the massive popular demonstrations that ultimately did in the incumbents. Mayor Oleksandr Omelchenko had a long history of rivalry with Kuchma's chief of staff Medvedchuk and the oligarch Hryhory Surkis, both of whom were positioned to reinforce their leading roles should Yanukovich win. Thus the city boss had at first hedged his bets during the campaign, avoiding support for Yushchenko but also finding ways to avoid helping Yanukovich too much. In a creative move, he declared his own candidacy for president. Omelchenko's candidacy was not a major concern for Yanukovich, since Kyiv city voters were seen to be largely pro-Yushchenko. Yanukovich thus hoped that Omelchenko would use his political machine to sap votes that would otherwise go to Yushchenko in Kyiv, and that the Kyiv mayor would then back Yanukovich in the anticipated runoff.<sup>24</sup> Omelchenko did not, however, deploy his political machine this time; rather, he effectively let the city's majority vote its conscience for Yushchenko. Moreover, as the runoff approached, the mayor's campaign office announced that it would support Yushchenko.<sup>25</sup>

The Kyiv mayor's most important act of defection, however, came after the first results of the runoff were out, when it was obvious that falsification had influenced them and that popular outrage was widespread. Omelchenko signed a decision of the Kyiv legislature

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<sup>20</sup> Aleksandr Litvinenko, “Oranzhevaia Revoliutsiia: Prichiny, Karakter i Rezultaty,” in Pogrebinsky (fn. 43), 13; Yanevsky (fn. 54), 58, 64.

<sup>21</sup> Author interview with Pogrebinsky (fn. 52).

<sup>22</sup> Table of official election results in Central Election Commission of Ukraine, *Vybory Prezydenta Ukrainy 2004 Roku: Elektoral'na Statystyka* (Kyiv: Central Election Commission, 2005), 496–97.

<sup>23</sup> Maksim Strikha, “Ukrainskie Vybery: Do i Posle,” in Pogrebinsky (fn. 43), 155. Exit poll results can be found in Vydrin and Rozhkova (fn. 46), 391.

<sup>24</sup> Mykhailo Slaboshpyts'kyi, *Peizazh dlia Pomaranchevii Revoliutsii* (Kyiv: Yaroslaviv Val, 2005), 84, 86–88.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 86–88; Yanevsky (fn. 54), 55–56.

appealing to the CEC to revoke its count.<sup>26</sup> Shortly thereafter, as pro-Yushchenko demonstrators were converging in massive numbers on Kyiv's central square and government buildings, the capital's administration and legislature ordered city agencies and companies to supply various kinds of support to the protesters. This included mobile toilets, medical care, hot drinks, meeting premises, and even many of the tents used by the demonstrators during their weeks of activity in the bitter cold.<sup>27</sup> Very critically, the city also intentionally took measures to undercut the possibility of a violent crackdown by the central authorities. Having received a direct order from Kuchma's administration shortly before the runoff to ban all demonstrations, the city administration did not immediately carry the order out. But nor did it directly defy the order. Instead, the city approached a court to sanction the order. The choice of court, however, was calculated: the Shevchenkiv's'kyi district court was known to city officials to have bucked subordination to Kuchma's authorities. As expected, the court ruled that the demonstrations could not be banned and that police or other authorities would be violating the law to try to do so, thereby eliminating "enforcing the law" as a legitimate pretext for an early crackdown.<sup>28</sup> City authorities also removed "traffic flow" as a possible pretext for a forceful dispersion of the crowds by banning all motor transport in central Kyiv, leaving the city streets available for use by the protesters.<sup>29</sup>

As the crowds in Kyiv swelled to unprecedented levels (and counts range anywhere from one hundred thousand to upwards of a million at the peak), other elite groups began to sense the increased likelihood of a Yushchenko victory and the concomitant reduction in the likelihood that they would be punished for their insubordination. This sense of security in opposition grew as more elites joined in. Two key elite groups are worth mentioning. The first was the most surprising to many: the security services, the military, and the police. Some contend that Kuchma was simply too soft to order a crackdown, but in truth some in Ukraine's force agencies were highly sympathetic to Yushchenko while others simply started to anticipate that pro-Yushchenko forces might eventually prevail. The latter feared being punished later for shedding blood in the interests of a patron who was on his way out. Such forces were very unlikely to have implemented an order to crack down, especially once the crowds grew to such an immense size and once potentially legitimizing pretexts for state violence were removed.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, a Kyiv city administration official reports that the administration knew through regular contacts with military and police that the latter were wavering as to whether to obey a potential crackdown order and that the city's appeal to the Shevchenkiv's'kyi court was intended in part to encourage them to decide against violent intervention.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Kyiv State Rada, Rishennia 733/2143, "Pro Zahostrennia Suspil'no-Politychnoi Sytuatsii v Misti Kyevi, Iaka Sklalas'ia Pislia Proholoshennia Tsentral'noiu Vyborchoiu Komisieiu Rezultativ Povtornooho Holosuvannia po Vyborakh Prezydenta Ukrainy," November 22, 2004, reprinted in Kiev State Administration, *Pomarancheva Revoliutsiia i Kyiivs'ka Vlada: Pohliad Kriz' Pryzmu Faktiv* (Kyiv: Kyiv State Administration, 2005), 4–5; Yanevsky (fn. 54), 97.

<sup>27</sup> Kyiv State Administration, Rozporiadzhennia no.2132, "Pro Zakhody Shchodo Zabezpechennia Hromads'koho Poriadku v Stolytsi Ukrainy—Misti-Heroi Kyevi," November 24, 2004, reprinted in Kiev State Administration (fn. 64), 9–11; author interview with Oleksandr Petik, head of the Kyiv city administration's main directorate for internal politics, August 11, 2005; Slaboshpyts'kyi (fn. 62), 88–89.

<sup>28</sup> Author interview with Petik (fn.65); author interview with Pogrebinsky (fn. 52); Yanevsky (fn. 54), 82, 88.

<sup>29</sup> Kyiv State Administration, Rozporiadzhennia no.2132, in Kyiv State Administration (fn. 64); Author interview with Petik (fn.65).

<sup>30</sup> Arel (fn. 57); Taras Kuzio, "Did Ukraine's Security Service Really Prevent Bloodshed During the Orange Revolution," *Eurasian Daily Monitor*, January 24, 2005.

<sup>31</sup> Author interview with Petik (fn.65).

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

### **The Rose Revolution in Georgia**

Georgia's "Rose Revolution" followed a remarkably similar pattern, with a succession struggle combined with low leadership popularity driving the process. Against a background of economic stagnation, sustained regular electricity blackouts, and the continued failure to regain control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia, incumbent President Eduard Shevardnadze's popularity was on the wane as he entered his constitutionally final second term after his relatively easy 2000 reelection to the presidency. This strongly appears to have led some of Shevardnadze's own most ambitious allies to start planning to succeed him. Chief among these was the leader of Shevardnadze's own "party of power," Mikheil Saakashvili, whose wife writes that after the 2000 election he "became more and more focused on the media, on communication, and that he couldn't live without his mobile phone anymore."<sup>32</sup> It is crucial to note that Saakashvili at this time was, like Yushchenko, anything but an opposition force. Not only had he campaigned for Shevardnadze's reelection as head of Shevardnadze's Citizens' Union, but he then accepted appointment as Shevardnadze's Justice Minister in October 2000. But as Shevardnadze's popularity crumbled, Saakashvili's continued to rise on the strength of his strong public relations work, anti-corruption campaigning, and some major reforms he led, including prison reform.

Interestingly, as in Ukraine, it was also the murder of a popular independent journalist that dealt a critical blow to the incumbent president's popularity. In this case the unfortunate media figure was opposition television personality Georgy Sanaia.<sup>33</sup> While no tapes linked Shevardnadze to this event (unlike in Ukraine), it shocked the public and contributed to his decline in popularity. Shevardnadze was blamed at a minimum for not responding adequately, and shortly after this, in mid-2001, he announced that he would not change the constitution so that he could seek reelection in 2005, effectively rendering himself a lame duck and setting in motion the same kind of succession dynamics among elites that had undermined Kuchma. The news of Shevardnadze's announcement, according to one ITAR-TASS analyst writing at the

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<sup>32</sup> Sandra Elisabeth Roelofs, the First Lady of Georgia, *The Story of an Idealist* (Tbilisi: LINK, 2010) p.200.

<sup>33</sup> Host of the current events program Kurieri on Rustavi-2, a leader among a new breed of young journalists. (Roelofs p.210). Roelofs also notes that Saakashvili had long angled to become president and that this was a "very conscious process," though it "went faster than we had expected" (p.9). This strongly indicates that the political opportunity served up by Shevardnadze's unpopularity and lame duck status was crucial to Saakashvili's decision during Shevardnadze's final term that his presidential ambitions were no longer best served by aligning with Shevardnadze, but instead by entering into opposition.

time, “resounded like a gong for politicians: It is time to prepare.”<sup>34</sup> It was thus shortly after this that some of Shevardnadze’s most popular elite allies began to turn to the opposition, including most momentarily parliamentary speaker Zurab Zhvania and Justice Minister Mikheil Saakashvili, who came to work together as the most popular alternative to Shevardnadze. Saakashvili’s own resignation was a carefully planned media event for which he had arranged live coverage on the Rustavi 2 television channel. He had also timed it well: the parliamentary district that he had once represented was holding a by-election that month, allowing him to re-enter parliament, this time clearly in opposition to the ruling authorities.<sup>35</sup>

In this context, the 2002 nationwide local elections and the 2003 parliamentary elections became seen as crucial tests of strength in the battle to succeed Shevardnadze, making them familiar “elite primary elections” that gave them far more significance than the actual offices at stake--that is, they became more about the future presidency than about regional legislatures or parliament themselves. Business elites, uncertain about the future, placed “eggs” in different baskets. One of the wealthiest, for example, the Russian citizen of Georgian origin Badri Patarkatsisvili, was reported to have primarily backed Shevardnadze but to have also provided support to Zhvania (considered a safer opposition figure since business largely feared Saakashvili).<sup>36</sup> In the first of these two primaries, the nationwide local elections, Saakashvili’s new National Movement performed well, enabling him to become chair of the Tbilisi city council atop an alliance with another opposition party, the Labor Party.<sup>37</sup> This gave the young firebrand significant influence over events in the capital city as well as a prominent position from which to campaign for the next round of elite primary elections, the parliamentary contest of 2003.

It is precisely the parliamentary elections’ status as a crucial elite primary that led to the revolution. After a campaign in which incumbent authorities mobilized strongly against the opposition, official results held that the highly unpopular Shevardnadze’s movement had won. This result, however, was contradicted by a parallel vote count and an exit poll. Importantly, even the latter did not declare the Saakashvili to be the overwhelming winner. Instead, the parallel vote count showed that his party had won just 27 percent of the ballots. What mattered, though, was that this was enough to put him in first place, and this was something that Shevardnadze’s regime had tried to avert through falsification in order to maintain its position as the dominant force going into the presidential contest. But with Saakashvili clearly emerging as the most popular figure in the country and demonstrating that he could win a significant share of the votes even against the will of the Shevardnadze machine, he emerged as the one considered by elites to be the *most likely* to win the upcoming presidential election.

The parliamentary election, therefore, resolved the coordination problem faced by elites who wanted to ensure that they wound up on the winning side in the succession struggle. Thus when Saakashvili, Zhvania, and Burjanadze mobilized at most about 100,000 people (a much smaller number than in Ukraine even by participants’ accounts) to protest the falsified results and led them in a takeover of the parliament building, Shevardnadze’s former loyalists were quick to give in lest they alienate the expected incoming patron any further. It was at this point that the

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<sup>34</sup> Aleksei Aleksandrov, “Nasledstvo politicheskogo dolgozhitel’ia,” *Ekho Planeta*, August 31-September 6, 2001, online, <http://www.explan.ru/archive/2001/36/s1.htm>.

<sup>35</sup> Sandra Elisabeth Roelofs, the First Lady of Georgia, *The Story of an Idealist* (Tbilisi: LINK, 2010) pp.219-20, 224.

<sup>36</sup> Ghia Nodia, author’s interview, Tbilisi, July 26, 2010.

<sup>37</sup> Roelofs, p.238-9.

defection of some major elites and the bet-hedging of others (especially business) turned into a cascade. Crucially, this included even security forces, who, being unwilling to shed blood and risk their own futures for what they now saw as a likely losing cause, reportedly disobeyed Shevardnadze's instructions to stop the uprising.<sup>38</sup> With his political machine disintegrating around him, Shevardnadze had no choice but to resign. Saakashvili confirmed his victory in early presidential elections in 2004, now winning an overwhelming majority of votes with almost universal elite support.

### The Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan's "Tulip Revolution"<sup>39</sup> was fundamentally the same class of event, a natural punctuation in regime dynamics defined by the combination of low presidential popularity with widespread elite expectations of upcoming presidential succession. A number of excellent accounts based on primary research have illuminated the Tulip Revolution, variously explaining it as a product of Kyrgyzstan's relatively liberal political environment, the economic autonomy of local patrons-client networks, a rivalry between northern and southern elites, and incumbent President Askar Akaev's own weakness, softness, or unpopularity.<sup>40</sup> What has yet to be adequately explained, however, is precisely how and when the revolution occurred, something the logic of patronal politics accomplishes quite nicely.

Akaev fell victim to a cascade of defections from his own power vertical that took place after his popularity dropped and as he fell into a lame duck syndrome. The decline in Akaev's popularity gained steam toward the end of the 1990s after long years of economic difficulties and perceived corruption. While the economy experienced growth in 2001, unemployment remained high, as did inequality.<sup>41</sup> There was no major killing of a journalist to consolidate public opinion against Akaev, but a similar effect was had by Akaev's decision to crack down on protesters in 2002 in the Aksy district, killing five. These "Aksy events," as they came to be known, dealt a severe blow to his legitimacy.<sup>42</sup> Another crucial moment came in early 2005, when a local newspaper reported on construction of a massive villa said to be for his own personal use, a charge with dramatic visual imagery that crystallized perceptions of his corruption.<sup>43</sup>

On top of this, after his 2000 presidential victory, Akaev entered what the Constitutional Court had ruled must be his final term in office. Rather than attempt to orchestrate a referendum to try to extend his term or eliminate term limits, as some of his neighbors had done, Akaev announced in mid-2004 that he planned to leave office.<sup>44</sup> While some worried that he intended to

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<sup>38</sup> Charles H. Fairbanks, Jr., "Georgia's Rose Revolution," *Journal of Democracy*, v.15, April 2004; Georgi Kandelaki, "Georgia's Rose Revolution: A Participant's Perspective," *United States Institute of Peace Special Report*, no.167, July 2006; OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission, Georgia, Parliamentary Elections 2003, *Post-Election Interim Report*, November 3-25, 2003.

<sup>39</sup> There was initial disagreement on how to "name" this revolution, with some early accounts dubbing it the "Yellow Revolution" after the colors borne by some of the protesters involved.

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, Kevin D. Jones, "The Dynamics of Political Protests: A Case Study of the Kyrgyz Republic," Ph.D. dissertation in Public Policy, University of Maryland, August 31, 2007, <http://www.lib.umd.edu/drum/handle/1903/7431>; Scott Radnitz, *Weapons of the Wealthy: Elite-led Mobilization in Central Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011) and contributors to a special issue of *Central Asian Survey*, December 2008.

<sup>41</sup> Transitions Online (editorial), "Kyrgyzstan's Dorian Gray," *Transitions Online*, March 25, 2002.

<sup>42</sup> Olcott 2005, p.134.

<sup>43</sup> Get citation. *Vecherny Bishkek?*

<sup>44</sup> Osmonakun Ibrahimov, *Ispytanie istoriei: Razmyshleniia i esse o sud'be Kyrgyzstana* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniia, 2008), p.64.

find a way to stay on and wanted more frequent and categorical declarations, Akaev reiterated his intention to retire very publicly as he cast his vote in the February 27, 2005, parliamentary elections, stating unambiguously that he would not change the constitution in order to extend his stay in office.<sup>45</sup> Aggressive accumulation of private resources for his family members also alienated not only the public, but increasingly also the increasingly wide circle of elites cut out of crucial patronage networks.<sup>46</sup> Over the first years of the 2000s, all this created the expectation among growing numbers of elites that Akaev himself would not be around much longer to punish those who defied him. And this meant that the risks for elites of opposition activity got lower at the same time that the chance they could wind up on the winning side by going into the opposition grew.

Accordingly, one can observe increasingly brazen challenges to Akaev's authority develop during the years leading up to the time when he was scheduled to leave office. One of the most prominent was the uprising in the southern raion of Aksy in 2002 that parliamentarian Azimbek Beknazarov mobilized to counter his arrest, the move that Akaev crushed in a bloody crackdown that helped cement his increasingly negative reputation.<sup>47</sup> While Akaev suppressed the revolt, the show of force did not have the intimidating effect that is typical when people expect a leader to remain in continued control over such power. Instead, Akaev's own prime minister, Kurmanbek Bakiev, resigned two months later and reemerged as a leading opposition figure, eventually emerging as the coordinator of a coalition of largely southern-based elites seeking to replace Akaev in an increasingly open fashion. Many believe Bakiev had been forced out by Akaev as a scapegoat for the Aksy tragedy, though Bakiev himself claimed to have resigned in protest and gained support in Aksy itself for this public stance.<sup>48</sup> As with Yushchenko and Saakashvili, Bakiev was certainly not regarded as being an opposition figure prior to his removal in 2002, but instead (also like Yushchenko and Saakashvili) moved into opposition politics during his president's expected final term in office and as that president was suffering a major decline in his public opinion standing. He did not play a major role in public politics between 2002 and 2005, but crucially during this time established himself behind the scenes as the informal leader of some of the most influential local business and political networks (often called "clans," though not restricted to kinship ties) in Kyrgyzstan's South.

In this situation, with the presidential election that would choose Akaev's successor slated for fall 2005, the February 2005 parliamentary elections became an elite primary much as the 2003 parliamentary elections had been in Georgia, an event that would help elites decide both how much strength Akaev actually retained and who the real pretenders to the presidency were.<sup>49</sup> Thus when the first round of voting indicated that Akaev's supporters were winning far more seats than the regime's popularity level made credible, when major opposition figures like Roza

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<sup>45</sup> RFE/RL *Newsline*, February 28, 2005; Ibraimov 2008, pp.63-64.

<sup>46</sup> Barbara Junisbai, *Market Reform Regimes, Elite Defections, and Political Opposition in the Post-Soviet States: Evidence from Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan*, dissertation in Political Science, Indiana University, December 2009; Eric McGlinchey, *Blood, Chaos, and Dynasty: Islam and Patronage Politics in Central Asia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, forthcoming 2011).

<sup>47</sup> Eurasia Insight, "Beknazarov Released from Custody, as Calm Reported in Kyrgyzstan," *EurasiaNet*, March 19, 2002, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav031902.shtml>, access date October 7, 2009.

<sup>48</sup> See: RFE/RL, "Kyrgyz President Implicated in Aksy Killings," September 14, 2007, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1078671.html>, access date October 7, 2009; Azimbek Beknazarov, interview, translation in *Ferghana.ru*, March 12, 2008, 11:10, <http://enews.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=2340>, access date October 7, 2009.

<sup>49</sup> Olcott (2005), for example, describes these elections as "Akaev's testing ground" (p.136).

Otunbaeva were disqualified, and when Akaev's own relatives (including son Aidar and daughter Bermet) appeared to be headed to parliamentary seats and possibly even dynastic succession, losers of the formal counts rallied their forces and quickly joined efforts, with southern forces leading the way.<sup>50</sup> While Bakiev did not actually control each local initiative, he played a significant role coordinating them as they occurred and positioned himself as the chief southern-based politician who could claim to represent them in presenting demands to the authorities.<sup>51</sup> Protesters in the South soon overran government buildings and announced plans to move the movement to Bishkek. With the southern administrations in opposition hands, local media stopped toeing the Akaev line and began to engage in more neutral reporting or to effectively defect to the opposition.<sup>52</sup> A cascade of elite defections from the Akaev regime had thus overtaken much of the South and increasingly spread to Akaev's native North.

Each new defection made it more and more clear to all that Akaev's days were numbered, thereby inducing more defections from people closer and closer to Akaev's most inner circle of supporters. Akaev's state secretary and "one of the president's closest allies,"<sup>53</sup> Osmonakun Ibraimov, later wrote explicitly of a "syndrome of the leaving of power" setting off a succession struggle within Akaev's own elite during early 2005, including that "many members of [Akaev's] team had secretly agreed with the opposition so as to join with it and secure for themselves a place under the new authorities." In fact, he went on to say that an internal analysis conducted by Akaev's inner circle in early 2005 showed that "almost the entire composition of the government and the whole governor-akim corpus" was ready to abandon their government responsibilities to join the elections.<sup>54</sup> Importantly, these elite defections did not depend on any agreement as to who the alternative to Akaev would be; there were a large number of pretenders to this status. Strikingly, however, nearly all of the major pretenders had been former key parts of Akaev's own teams who had broken with him earlier, including not only Bakiev but former Vice President Feliks Kulov (whom Akaev had jailed) and former Foreign Minister Roza Otunbaeva. Bakiev, however, remained a first among equals as a popular former prime minister with strong influence in the South. This status gained him recognition by most major opposition figures as leader of the People's Movement of Kyrgyzstan, a loose organization created in September 2004 to coordinate opposition forces from North and South.<sup>55</sup>

The most momentous defections strongly appear to have been those of key Kyrgyz armed services. Akaev now claims the high ground, presenting himself as a peaceful figure who chose to sacrifice his own political career by leaving the country so as to avoid bloodshed.<sup>56</sup> Many others, including leaders in Russia and Kazakhstan, have essentially concurred, stating publicly that one of Akaev's biggest mistakes was not acting tough enough, not ordering troops to fire on the crowd in order to restore order.<sup>57</sup> But there is substantial evidence, including from within Akaev's very innermost circle, that his decision not to order troops to fire on the crowds around key state buildings in Bishkek during the decisive days in March 2005 was not any principled

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<sup>50</sup> Radnitz 2011; TOL, "A Second Round Beckons," *Transitions Online*, February 28, 2005.

<sup>51</sup> Sariiev 2008, p.11.

<sup>52</sup> Hamid Toursunof, "Tsunami in the Mountains," *Transitions Online*, 25 March 2005; Hamid Toursunof, "Celebrating, Not Looting," *Transitions Online*, 29 March 2005.

<sup>53</sup> Erica Marat, *The Tulip Revolution: Kyrgyzstan One Year After* (Washington: Jamestown Foundation, 2006), p.7.

<sup>54</sup> Ibraimov 2008, p.64.

<sup>55</sup> Marat 2006, p.3.

<sup>56</sup> *RFE/RL Newslines*, April 8, 2005.

<sup>57</sup> See the report on comments by Russian President Vladimir Putin and Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbaev in *RFE/RL Newslines*, March 25, 2005.

pacifism, but instead the knowledge (or at least a very strong sneaking suspicion) that he had effectively lost control over the military and could no longer count on it to obey him unquestioningly. For one thing, the 2002 events in Aksy show that Akaev was not averse to applying force to suppress a revolt. Moreover, as crowds descended upon Bishkek, he appointed a new Interior Minister with the status of Vice Prime Minister, Keneshbek Diushebaev, who then warned the opposition that force would be used if the demonstrators attacked more state buildings.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, the argument given to justify the decision to avoid the use of force--the argument cited by Akaev himself, his daughter Bermet, as well as his close associate and state secretary Ibraimov--was *not* that restoring order was not worth bloodshed. Instead, they each argued that ordering troops to fire on the crowd would have caused “civil war,” an outcome that one might well fear when one is aware that the military may no longer be counted on to take the side of the president in a unified and decisive manner.<sup>59</sup>

Surprisingly, the most direct evidence that the military itself ultimately defected from Akaev comes from his own daughter, Bermet. In her account of why the President opted to flee the country, she writes:

During the night of March 23-24, a report came in that the leaders of the opposition had reached agreement with almost everyone responsible for law enforcement that there would be no resistance to the opposition forces. Knowing that the organizers of the coup made his physical elimination from the political scene their goal, my father took the only right decision in such circumstances: to temporarily leave the country.<sup>60</sup> [Italics added]

That is, Akaev knew before he fled that those responsible for preserving order were now quite unlikely to follow his orders, that they had effectively determined that Akaev could not win and had thus thrown in their tacit support for the opposition. This also enables us to explain Akaev's otherwise puzzling statements after the revolution, including his remark to the Russian newspaper *Kommersant* that he believed key figures in the police and security forces had been “in a plot with the opposition” (*v sgovore s oppositsiei*).<sup>61</sup>

With the cascade of defections reaching key armed services and culminating in Akaev's own flight to Moscow, the opposition easily overran government buildings, freed Kulov from jail, and established its own power, completing the “Tulip Revolution.” Akaev resigned effective April 5. Bakiev maneuvered to become acting president until new presidential elections could be held, coordinating closely with other opposition leaders, especially Feliks Kulov, who represented support from Kyrgyzstan's North that complemented Bakiev's own great authority in the South.<sup>62</sup>

### The Preemptive Revolution in Armenia

The coup that removed Armenia's first president, Levon Ter-Petrossian, in 1998 should be considered fundamentally part of the same class of event as the color revolutions, representing

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<sup>58</sup> Osmonakun Ibraimov, *Ispytanie istoriei: Razmyshleniia i esse o sud'be Kyrgyzstana* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniia, 2008), pp.43-8; Toursunof, March 25, 2005.

<sup>59</sup> Bermet Akaeva, *Tsvety zla: O tak nazyvaemoi “tiul’panovoi revoliutsii” v Kyrgyzstana* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniia, 2006) p.35; Ibraimov 2008, pp.43-8; *RFE/RL Newslines*, April 8, 2005.

<sup>60</sup> Akaeva 2006, pp.35, 48.

<sup>61</sup> Askar Akaev, interview, *Kommersant*, July 11, 2005, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc.aspx?fromsearch=6ff3b72c-d49f-472e-becd-9f7f9a18d253&docid=589869>, access date October 7, 2009.

<sup>62</sup> Scott Radnitz, “What Really Happened in Kyrgyzstan?” *Journal of Democracy*, v.17, no.2, April 2006, pp.132-46, p.134.

an instance where a president facing low popularity and a looming succession struggle lost control of his political machine as key elites defected--the primary difference was that the struggle did not quite reach the realm of electoral politics. As described in Chapter 4, Ter-Petrosian successfully constructed a patronal presidential system in the early 1990s and mobilized the resulting political machine to secure reelection in 1996. This vote was widely considered fraudulent but he was able to keep key elites (including those wielding control of the means of force) in line to forcibly put down protests, as would be expected for a patronal president not expected to be imminently leaving office.<sup>63</sup>

After 1996, however, Ter-Petrosian came to face two problems that proved to be his political undoing. The first was that by winning, he also entered his second and constitutionally final term in office, which opened up anticipation of a future succession struggle. The second was the most fateful: Under international pressure to make concessions to bitter rival Azerbaijan so as to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Ter-Petrosian agreed to unilaterally pull Armenian forces out of occupied buffer regions around the disputed territory as a confidence-building measure.<sup>64</sup> His public support plummeted. To shore up his administration's nationalistic credentials prior to making this move, he had named the former leader of Nagorno-Karabakh, Robert Kocharian, to be his prime minister in 1997. But this only wound up worsening the situation: It brought some of the sharpest opposition to the concessions into the government, which roundly condemned them. Even more fatefully, making Kocharian prime minister sealed the latter's position as the obvious leader for elites thinking beyond the Ter-Petrosian era once Ter-Petrosian's elite and mass support disappeared. This combination of events effectively undermined the ability that patronal presidents typically have to divide and conquer elites or otherwise prevent them from coordinating strongly against the regime: The incumbent had provided both a personal focal point (Kocharian) and temporal focal point (the Karabakh concession) around which elites could quickly coordinate to resolve the uncertainty surrounding the expected succession struggle.

Striking before his own popularity and likely successor status could be challenged, Kocharian wasted little time in using a series of events to induce the defection of key elites to his side against the president.<sup>65</sup> One of the most dramatic was what one observer called the "mass defections" from Ter-Petrosian's majority parliamentary coalition to a coalition representing veterans of the Karabakh war led by Defense Minister Vazgen Sarkisian.<sup>66</sup> The most important defections following Kocharian, however, came from those elites who controlled the means of force, especially the Defense Minister himself and the Minister of Interior and National Security, Serzh Sarkisian.<sup>67</sup> The latter even intimated that these ministers would not obey any orders from Ter-Petrosian that they be removed from office.<sup>68</sup>

Ter-Petrosian, recognizing his lack of both elite and mass support, ultimately resigned in 1998 rather than bother to bring the battle to voters by attempting to fire Kocharian or promoting a successor other than Kocharian in the next elections through election falsification or other

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<sup>63</sup> Liz Fuller, "Democracy or Oligarchy?" *RFE/RL Newslines*, v.1, no.122, Part I, September 22, 1997.

<sup>64</sup> Emil Danielyan, "Armenian President's Resignation Likely to Cause Policy Changes," *RFE/RL Newslines*, February 5, 1998; *RFE/RL Newslines*, November 3, 1997.

<sup>65</sup> *RFE/RL Newslines*, v.2, no.23, Part I, February 4, 1998.

<sup>66</sup> Emil Danielyan, "'Velvet Coup' promises sweeping changes in Armenia," *Jamestown Foundation Prism*, v. 4, no.4, February 20, 1998.

<sup>67</sup> Emil Danielyan, "Armenian President's Resignation..."

<sup>68</sup> Emil Danielyan, "'Velvet Coup'..."

machine political methods.<sup>69</sup> Ter-Petrosian, in effect, recognized the inevitability of Kocharian's victory and defected from himself, and this was in essence all that kept Armenia from becoming the first post-Soviet electoral or color revolution. With Ter-Petrosian resigned, the speaker of parliament, in line to be acting president in such an event, himself then stepped down as acting president to pave the way for Kocharian to assume that status.<sup>70</sup> Acting President Kocharian then won the early presidential election that followed later that year.<sup>71</sup> Here we have a case, then illustrating that mass opposition mobilization, youth movements, and other features frequently said to be linked to the color revolutions are in fact not essential for removing unpopular dictators from office in the post-Soviet space and are not fundamental to the causes of the color revolutions.

### The Hidden Revolution in Abkhazia

The extensive literature on the color revolutions has generally neglected another important case, the ouster of the incumbent team in Abkhazia through elections in late 2004 and early 2005.<sup>72</sup> Partly these events were simply overshadowed by the largely contemporaneous Orange Revolution, but it is also likely that they have been overlooked because they did not feature that outward trappings of prominent youth movements and pro-democracy rhetoric that so many analysts held to be central to the color revolutions. Yet this is precisely why the case of Abkhazia must not be overlooked: Here we have an instance of a successful electoral revolution that required none of these things, thus revealing that they are not essential causes. There was no significant borrowing of tactics from prior revolutions, no prominent pro-democracy activists or organizations leading the charge and promoting non-violent resolution of the dispute, and no Western role supporting the opposition. Instead, what we find is the same sets of factors that this chapter has shown have been central to all of the other ousters of patronal presidents in the post-Soviet space: expectations of a presidential succession combined with the low popularity of the incumbent regime, in this case catalyzed by an election.

The previous chapter described the construction of a single-pyramid system in Abkhazia in the 1990s under President Vladislav Ardzimba, who had led his territory to de facto independence from Georgia with Russian help in the early part of the decade. The single pyramid started to break down when three developments converged. First, with his uncontested reelection in 1999, Ardzimba entered his second and constitutionally final presidential term, with elections for a successor required in 2004. Second, Ardzimba fell seriously ill, leading him to conclude and elites to understand that he could not well run for a third term even if he wanted to.<sup>73</sup> According to one top Abkhaz leader, during the last couple years of his term Ardzimba did not even come into his office, meeting with top officials at his home when business had to be done.<sup>74</sup> Third, his own popularity and that of his close associates suffered a serious drop. There were several reasons for this decline. For one thing the economy continued to suffer, isolated from most of the world with basic infrastructure remaining unrepaired from its separatist wars with

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<sup>69</sup> Paul Goble, "Why Ter-Petrosyan Fell," End Note, *RFE/RL Newslines*, February 6, 1998; Emil Danielyan, "Armenian President's Resignation Likely to Cause Policy Changes," *RFE/RL Newslines*, February 5, 1998; *RFE/RL Newslines*, November 3, 1997.

<sup>70</sup> *BBC World Service*, WBUR Boston, February 4, 1998, 9am broadcast.

<sup>71</sup> This case shows that the elite contestation phase does not necessarily play out in the electoral arena.

<sup>72</sup> The most prominent exception is Kimitaka Matsuzato, "Patronnoe prezidentstvo i politika s identichnostiami v nepreznannoi Abkhazii," unpublished paper.

<sup>73</sup> *Polit.Ru*, March 4, 2010, 10:56, <http://www.polit.ru/news/2010/03/04/Ardzinba.popup.html>.

<sup>74</sup> Nugzar Ashuba, Speaker of Parliament of Abkhazia, author's interview, Sukhumi, July 29, 2010.

Georgia. There was also a belief among some elites that Ardzimba's own inner circle had been taking advantage of their president's illness to effectively rule the country themselves so as to make themselves rich. Others reported that a kind of fatigue with Ardzimba had set in, a feeling that he had fulfilled his national duty well by winning the war with Georgia but that he was inadequate to the crucial economic and state-building tasks that lay ahead.<sup>75</sup>

Ardzimba moved to designate a successor well before the 2004 election by tapping former first deputy prime minister and defense minister Raul Khadzhimba his prime minister, but the latter had not been well known in the republic before being appointed, was not regarded as a strong politician, and did not possess any particular charisma, though he was seen as modest and honest.<sup>76</sup> Khadzhimba himself refused to confirm his presidential ambitions until the campaign period had officially started just months before the election.<sup>77</sup> In short, Ardzimba lacked the public opinion standing to make his chosen heir the unquestioned favorite in the succession struggle, and the heir lacked the personal qualities to accomplish this.

This combination of the lame duck syndrome and low regime popularity engendered a steady rise in the willingness of political elites to contest the Ardzimba regime's authority as they were compelled to envision a future when Ardzimba himself would not be in place to reward or punish them for what they did now. As one observer wrote in an Abkhaz newspaper as the 2004 presidential elections approached, "Literally before our eyes over the last five years, Abkhaz politics has been turned into an arena for an uninterrupted struggle for power and personal attacks"<sup>78</sup> One particularly important moment came in 2002, when parliamentary elections returned a much less cooperative parliament than Abkhazia had ever before experienced, even to the point of electing an opposition oriented candidate (big businessman Nugzar Ashuba) to the speakership. Ashuba by his own account had had "difficult" relations with Ardzimba ever since the early 1990s, when he had resigned as Culture Minister, and in 2002 had defeated Ardzimba's sitting Minister of Justice to win his parliamentary district seat.<sup>79</sup> After this election, there were frequent clashes between president and parliament on legislation.<sup>80</sup> In spring 2003, the Amtsakhara Party representing veterans of the war with Georgia (a group previously loyal to the president who won them that war) moved into radical opposition, first launching protests that forced out the president's prime minister Gennady Gagulia and then openly calling for Ardzimba to resign.<sup>81</sup> Its offices were bombed in April 2003.<sup>82</sup>

This process culminated in a dramatic wave of open defections of major elites to open opposition as the election neared in 2004. The most dramatic was the emergence of the new United Abkhazia Party, which grew out of a preexisting "Unity" faction in the parliament and held its founding congress on March 25, 2004.<sup>83</sup> This party initially positioned itself as a coalition of influential Abkhazia elites concerned about the future and interested in influencing

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<sup>75</sup> This was the reason given by Sergei Shamba, Foreign Minister of Abkhazia at the time he started opposing the president's political ambitions. Shamba, author's interview, Sukhumi, July 29, 2010.

<sup>76</sup> *Ekho Abkhazii*, April 23, 2003, p.1. Khadzhimba served in the KGB then FSB during 1986-93, then in the Abkhaz SGB in 1993-5 before occupying government posts.

<sup>77</sup> See his interview in *Ekho Abkhazii*, February 11, 2004, p.2, where he says it is "hard to judge" whether he will be the successor.

<sup>78</sup> Tomaz Ketsba, professor at Abkhaz State University and an NGO leader, "V situatsii 'mnimogo konstitutsionalizma,'" *Ekho Abkhazii*, May 26, 2004, pp.1,6.

<sup>79</sup> Nugzar Ashuba, Speaker of Parliament of Abkhazia, author's interview, Sukhumi, July 29, 2010.

<sup>80</sup> *Ekho Abkhazii*, February 4, 2004, p.3.

<sup>81</sup> *Ekho Abkhazii*, February 4, 2004, p.3; *Ekho Abkhazii*, March 17, 2003, p.4; *Ekho Abkhazii*, April 23, 2003, p.1.

<sup>82</sup> *Ekho Abkhazii*, April 23, 2003, p.1.

<sup>83</sup> *Ekho Abkhazii*, April 1, 2004, p.1.

who became president, but not yet as an openly opposition force.<sup>84</sup> The impressive list of members who joined by summer 2004 included a huge share of the republic's power elite: parliamentary speaker Ashuba, former prime minister (until 1999) and current General Director of the major State Corporation Chernomorenergo Sergei Bagapsh, sitting Foreign Minister Sergei Shamba, parliamentarian and local corporate "oligarch" and media magnate Beslan Butba, and former Sukhumi Mayor Nodar Khashba, among others.<sup>85</sup> While Ashuba and some of the parliamentarians had been in conflict with President Ardzimba over various points of policy over the previous two years, many of the other leading members had been decidedly loyal to the president or at least neutral, including Shamba, Bagapsh, and Khashba.

United Abkhazia quickly radicalized, however, spurred on by the shocking June 2004 murder of the Amsakhara Party's Executive Secretary, Garri Aiba, large protests by his relatives and supporters, and the authorities' (including Khadzhimba's) weak response.<sup>86</sup> This, according to United Abkhazia's informal leader, parliamentary speaker Ashuba, was the crucial event leading the previously highly cautious industrialist and former prime minister Bagapsh to join United Abkhazia and for the party to move to radical opposition.<sup>87</sup> Thus shortly after this murder, United Abkhazia joined with the Amsakhara Party in declaring no-confidence in Khadzhimba's government and demanding its resignation, citing a litany of grievances ranging from its inability to reduce crime to its failure to normalize relations with Georgia.<sup>88</sup> President Ardzimba's own chief of administration, former prime minister Gagulia, then resigned, declaring that the President and his circle were planning a succession in which the next president would be a marionette in the hands of a mysterious "those who today rule the country."<sup>89</sup> In July, a coalition of United Abkhazia and the Amsakhara Party agreed to back Bagapsh for president, choosing history professor and former parliamentarian Stanislav Lakoba (Amsakhara's favorite) to be his running mate.<sup>90</sup> This led Shamba, who had his own presidential ambitions, to leave the coalition and launch his own campaign for Abkhazia's top job, though this obviously meant that he too remained in opposition to Ardzimba.

The result was a pitched battle for the presidency in which both the main candidates, the opposition champion Bagapsh and the hand-picked presidential heir apparent Khadzhimba, had significant administrative resources (including media) with which to fight their battles due to the elite status of their coalitions. The opposition blasted Khadzhimba on the issues already mentioned and accused him of being a puppet for Ardzimba's circle. Khadzhimba, often appearing on the defensive, felt compelled to deny this repeatedly, denying that he would be a "plastilene" president and that he was a member of any "clan" other than the Khadzhimbas.<sup>91</sup> In a major campaign move, Khadzhimba went to Russia and secured a widely publicized meeting with Putin, which was widely interpreted (and advertised by Khadzhimba's supporters) as

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<sup>84</sup> *Ekho Abkhazii*, June 30, 2004, p.1.

<sup>85</sup> *Ekho Abkhazii*, April 1, 2004, p.1.

<sup>86</sup> *Ekho Abkhazii*, July 7, 2010, p.7.

<sup>87</sup> Nugzar Ashuba, Speaker of Parliament of Abkhazia, author's interview, Sukhumi, July 29, 2010.

<sup>88</sup> *Ekho Abkhazii*, June 30, 2004, pp.1,3; Artur Mikvabiia, chair of the Council of the United Abkhazia movement, interview, *Ekho Abkhazii*, June 30, 2004, p.3.

<sup>89</sup> *Ekho Abkhazii*, July 7, 2004, p.7.

<sup>90</sup> *Ekho Abkhazii*, July 21, 2004, p.1. The Abkhaz constitution enshrines the post of vice president, for which candidates run in tandem with presidential candidates much like in the United States.

<sup>91</sup> *Ekho Abkhazii*, September 7, 2004, pp.1-2.

Putin's implicit endorsement.<sup>92</sup> Khadzhimba also argued that Bagapsh would be soft on Georgia due to the fact that his wife was an ethnic Georgian.<sup>93</sup>

Election day, October 3, unleashed a standoff in the streets that lasted for over two months. The preliminary results gave Bagapsh a narrow majority of the votes, with particularly large majorities in the Gali district (where significant numbers of ethnic Georgians still remained despite a massive ethnic cleansing in the 1990s) and the Ochamchyrsky district, where he had once lived and worked.<sup>94</sup> Substantial irregularities, however, were reported in Gali, leading Khadzhimba to file for invalidation of the results and a repeat election on the grounds that no candidate got the majority of valid votes necessary to avoid a runoff. Bagapsh claimed victory outright. The Central Election Commission (CEC) initially tried to strike a compromise, ordering a recount only in Gali. Predictably, this satisfied neither of the principal candidates. Khadzhimba, with President Ardzimba's backing, challenged the CEC's ruling and organized a series of protests in the capital Sukhumi.<sup>95</sup> Bagapsh then also challenged the CEC's ruling, calling on it to recognize his victory.<sup>96</sup> While the Supreme Court appeared to stall for time while under pressure from both sides, the CEC declared Bagapsh the winner with 50.08 percent of the votes cast, and Khadzhimba called on the Prosecutor's office to investigate this decision and announced a street protest that would not end until a "lawful, legal decision" was adopted. Bagapsh supporters organized counter-rallies, leading to a true standoff in the streets.<sup>97</sup> President Ardzimba himself then issued a decree condemning the CEC decision, warning of a coup in the works.<sup>98</sup> Parliament responded by issuing what it said was a legally binding interpretation of the law on presidential elections that would give the victory to Bagapsh.<sup>99</sup> The chairmen of both the Supreme Court and CEC resigned, and the Court complained that it could not find members of the CEC to provide the necessary information for a ruling.<sup>100</sup>

When the Supreme Court finally rendered a ruling and found in favor of Bagapsh at 9:30pm on October 28, Khadzhimba came out of the Court building crying that this was "bespredel." His supporters let out a roar and stormed the building, marauding it.<sup>101</sup> Just five and a half hours later, at 3:00am, the Supreme Court then issued a new ruling that directly contradicted the previous one: The CEC ruling declaring Bagapsh the winner was invalid, and new elections must be held within two months. President Ardzimba quickly followed up this second ruling with a decree requiring repeat presidential elections. One Supreme Court judge publicly declared that this second ruling was made under pressure, and Bagapsh refused to

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<sup>92</sup> *Ekho Abkhazii*, September 7, 2004, p.6; Aslan Avidzba, "Vstrecha s V. Putinym -- priznanie vyborov," *Respublika Abkhaziia*, September 25-26, 2004, no.110, p.5.

<sup>93</sup> Daur Arshba, Member of Parliament, Deputy Chair of FNEA (Forum of National Unity of Abkhazia), author's interview, Sukhumi, July 29, 2010; Sergei Shamba, Prime Minister of Abkhazia and Foreign Minister and presidential candidate in 2004, author's interview, Sukhumi, July 29, 2010.

<sup>94</sup> Kimitaka Matsuzato, "Mezhpravoslavnye otnosheniia i transgranichnye narodnosti vokrug nepriznannykh gosudarstv. Sravnenie Pridniestrov'ia i Abkhazii," in Matsuzato, ed., *Pridniestrov'e v makroregional'nom kontekste chernomorskogo poberezh'ia* (Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, 2008), pp.192-224, pp.214-5; Daur Arshba, Member of Parliament, Deputy Chair of FNEA (Forum of National Unity of Abkhazia), author's interview, Sukhumi, July 29, 2010; *Respublika Abkhaziia*, October 7-8, 2004, no.115, p.1.

<sup>95</sup> *Respublika Abkhaziia*, October 9-10, 2004, no.116, p.1.

<sup>96</sup> *Respublika Abkhaziia*, October 12-13, 2004, no.117, p.1.

<sup>97</sup> *Respublika Abkhaziia*, October 16-17, 2004, no.119, p.1.

<sup>98</sup> *Respublika Abkhaziia*, October 14-15, 2004, no.118, p.1.

<sup>99</sup> *Respublika Abkhaziia*, October 14-15, 2004, no.118, p.2.

<sup>100</sup> *Respublika Abkhaziia*, October 21-22, 2004, no.121, p.1.

<sup>101</sup> *Ekho Abkhazii*, November 2, 2004, pp.1-2.

recognize it.<sup>102</sup> Crowds from both sides gathered around the building containing the president's offices until negotiations got them to go home, though street protests from each side resumed as the crisis remained unresolved.<sup>103</sup> Battles to control major media ensued, with Bagapsh forces appearing to have taken over the primary government channel that had been backing Khadzhimba.<sup>104</sup> A huge rally of Bagapsh supporters ultimately stormed and seized the state building that contains the offices of president, parliament, and government on November 12, overpowering Khadzhimba supporters in what President Ardzimba called an "armed coup d'etat" that killed one person.<sup>105</sup>

With his supporters refusing to give up, Khadzhimba finally agreed to a deal that Bagapsh would accept as December 6, the day Bagapsh would be officially scheduled to take the oath of office under the original CEC ruling, approached.<sup>106</sup> While some attribute a Moscow role in this compromise, and while Putin's government notably did not oppose the settlement, the two leaders' well publicized trip to Moscow took place on November 1, before the battle reached its head with Bagapsh storming presidential offices on November 12.<sup>107</sup> Instead, the key role seems to have been played by backroom deal making facilitated by an informal council of elders (*sovet stareishin*), a traditional meeting of network leaders that met, convinced the two sides to compromise so as to avoid bloodshed (especially worrisome since Abkhazia's population was highly armed), and lobbied Moscow to accept the deal.<sup>108</sup> A repeat election would be held, but this time Khadzhimba would run only as Bagapsh's running mate, for vice president. This "tandem" handily won the contest and Bagapsh was sworn in as president, and Khadzhimba as vice president, in February 2005. An opposition had defeated a patronal presidential team in Abkhazia despite Putin's support for the regime. Moreover, no media account of these events or interview with participants revealed any significant role whatsoever for youth activists, non-government democracy-promotion organizations, learning from previous revolutions (even the one in Georgia), special opposition strategies for defeating dictators, or Western support (the Russians having backed the incumbents). Openly asking if such factors played roles evoked a bemused smirk in Sukhumi.<sup>109</sup>

## Still to Come: brief sections on

Kyrgyzstan 2010

Conclusion

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<sup>102</sup> *Ekho Abkhazii*, November 2, 2004, pp.1-2; *Respublika Abkhazii*, October 30-31, 2004, no.125, p.1.

<sup>103</sup> *Respublika Abkhazii*, November 2-3, 2004, no.127, p.1.

<sup>104</sup> *Ekho Abkhazii*, November 2, 2004, pp.1-2.

<sup>105</sup> *Respublika Abkhazii*, November 16-17, 2004, no.131, p.1.

<sup>106</sup> *Ekho Abkhazii*, December 7, 2004, p.1.

<sup>107</sup> *Ekho Abkhazii*, November 2, 2004, pp.1-2.

<sup>108</sup> Nugzar Ashuba, Speaker of Parliament of Abkhazia, author's interview, Sukhumi, July 29, 2010; Sergei Shamba, Prime Minister of Abkhazia, author's interview, Sukhumi, July 29, 2010.

<sup>109</sup> Aleksandr Ankvab, Vice-President of Abkhazia, author's interview, Sukhumi, July 28, 2010.

