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How Do Non-Democratic Regimes Claim Legitimacy? Comparative Insights from Post-Soviet Countries

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Abstract

The analysis using the new Regime Legitimation Expert Survey (RLES) demonstrates that non-democratic rulers in post-Soviet countries use specific combinations of legitimating claims to stay in power. Most notably, rulers claim to be the guardians of citizens' socio-economic well-being. Second, despite recurrent infringements on political and civil rights, they maintain that their power is rule-based and embodies the will of the people, as they have been given popular electoral mandates. Third, they couple these elements with input-based legitimation strategies that focus on nationalist ideologies, the personal capabilities and charismatic aura of the rulers, and the regime's foundational myth. Overall, the reliance on these input-based strategies is lower in the western post-Soviet Eurasian countries and very pronounced among the authoritarian rulers of Central Asia.

Keywords: authoritarian regimes, claims to legitimacy, adaptation, expert survey, Post-Soviet countries

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1 Introduction

In contrast to hopes that the post-Soviet countries would liberalise politically as part of "democracy's third wave" (Huntington, 1991), various regimes in the region have regressed into authoritarianism, while others have remained in a hybrid state between democracy and authoritarian rule or have never undergone any form of democratisation.[1] Over the course of changes in rulers, socio-economic crises, and even so-called colour revolutions, non-

democratic arrangements of political rule have emerged and persisted – a phenomenon by no means limited to the post-Soviet space (Schedler, 2006; Levitsky and Way, 2010; Bunce and Wolchik, 2011). Recent research on authoritarian regimes seeking to account for these developments has provided new insights into the inner workings of non-democratic polities (for recent overviews, see Köllner and Kailitz, 2013; Pepinsky, 2014). However, despite widely held views that a regime's claim to legitimacy is an important factor in explaining its means of rule, and ultimately its persistence (Easton, 1965; Weber, 1980; Wintrobe, 1998), current studies have largely overlooked the effect of different legitimation strategies on authoritarian power relations (Burnell, 2006; Gerschewski, 2013; Kailitz, 2013).

In order to address this gap, we focus on post-Soviet regimes' claims to legitimacy as a means of securing authoritarian rule at home. While studies examining the determinants of political support often analyse democracies (e.g. Almond and Verba, 1989; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005), we argue that legitimation strategies are also carefully employed by regimes with democratic deficits. We focus on legitimation as the strategy by which legitimacy is sought rather than on legitimacy itself, following recent demands to take regimes' claims to legitimacy seriously (e.g. Brusis, 2015). In doing so, we distinguish between six different dimensions of legitimacy claims and present the results of a new Regime Legitimation Expert Survey (RLES) for non-democratic regimes in the post-Soviet region for the 1991–2010 period. Our analysis begins with an introduction of the RLES, which is followed by a discussion as to why expert assessments of a regime's claims to legitimacy are helpful in addressing the fuzzy notion of legitimation, particularly with regard to authoritarian and hybrid regimes. We then compare and contrast the most commonly used claims to legitimacy in post-Soviet countries before turning to "shifts" between and within these modes. Finally, in our conclusion, we discuss these findings in relation to the persistence of individual regimes, suggesting potential avenues for further research.

2   Claiming Legitimacy in Authoritarian Regimes

Every political system – irrespective of whether it is democratic or authoritarian – must attain a certain level of legitimacy in order to ensure its persistence in the long term (Graf Kielmansegg, 1971; Schmidt, 2003). A regime's claim to legitimacy is important for explaining its means of rule and, in turn, its durability (Easton, 1965; Brady, 2009), because relying on repression alone is too costly as a means of sustaining authoritarian rule. As a bare minimum, even autocrats need the support of a praetorian guard in order to stay in power (Burnell, 2006, p. 546). In the tradition of Weber (1980), who introduced an empirical concept of legitimacy, we adopt here an understanding of legitimation that refers to the process of gaining support.

We distinguish claims to legitimacy "made by virtually every state in the modern era" about their "righteous" political and social order (Gilley, 2009, p. 10) from legitimacy itself,

understood as "the capacity of a political system to engender and maintain the belief that existing political institutions are the most appropriate or proper ones for the society" (Lipset, 1959, p. 86). In contrast to much of the existing literature on this subject, which focuses on the popularity enjoyed by a regime, we analyse the different foundations on which various regimes claim legitimacy. Such claims to legitimacy have fundamental political repercussions as regards elite cohesion, opposition activity, and potential regime popularity (Grauvogel and von Soest, 2014). First, strong claims to legitimacy enhance elite cohesion (Barker, 2001; LeBas, 2011). The more pronounced the process of legitimation, the more likely it is to create collective identification, which in turn increases cohesion among the ruling elite (Cummings, 2006). Such elite-binding narratives are also enhanced by other legitimation strategies – for example, the use of certain performance goals (Alagappa, 1995). Second, the respective legitimation strategies determine who can criticise the regime and in which ways (Alagappa, 1995, p. 4). This agenda-restricting function may serve to marginalise anti-government actors and their criticism (Thompson, 2001). Third, well-crafted claims to legitimacy can make it more likely that an authoritarian regime will successfully steer perceptions of legitimacy of the broader population (Case, 1995, p. 104). Claims to legitimacy hence enable a regime to maintain its entitlement to rule, particularly when facing periods of economic decline (see, for instance, Magaloni, 2006, p. 151–74). They therefore shape the means by which a regime implements its rule, and ultimately its susceptibility to internal crises and external pressure (Burnell, 2006, p. 545).

While many states in post-Soviet Eurasia rely on elections as their key legitimation strategy, this form of political participation cannot be the only source of legitimacy claims, not least because many elections in the region fall short of adhering to democratic standards. Many studies on legitimation strategies have underlined the concept's multidimensional nature (Alagappa, 1995; Burnell, 2006). Based on a distinction between input-[2] and output-based legitimacy claims (Easton, 1965, 1975; Weber, 2004), as well as procedural and international dimensions (Burnell, 2006; Kneuer, 2013; Scharpf, 1999; Schatz, 2006), we argue that a regime's legitimation strategy can be built upon six dimensions – namely, (1) ideology, (2) foundational myth, (3) personalism, (4) international engagement, (5) procedural mechanisms, and (6) performance (i.e. claims to success in producing desirable political, social, or economic outcomes) (see Table 1). These six dimensions represent potentially interlinked but functionally different mechanisms. It is widely accepted that real-world cases feature "highly complex variations, transitional forms and combinations of these pure types" (Weber, 2004, p. 34). In the following, we explain these six dimensions in more detail.

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2   Charisma, ideological credentials, and historical narratives are used as key input-based narratives (Alagappa, 1995; Weber, 2004).

Table 1: Summary of Claims to Legitimacy

Types of claims
Input-based:
(1) Foundational myth
(2) Ideology
(3) Personalism
(4) International engagement
(5) Procedures
Output-based:
(6) Performance

Note: Overall period of assessment: 1991–2010.

Foundational myth: As Beetham (1991, p. 103)[3] has stressed, "historical accounts are significant and contentious precisely because of their relationship to the legitimacy of power in the present." Incumbents, ruling elites, and parties all refer to their role in the state-building process in order to legitimate their rule. Particularly strong solidarity ties and claims to legitimacy are forged during periods of violent struggle such as war, revolutions, and liberation movements (Levitsky and Way, 2013, p. 5). Moreover, parties that emerge from a successful revolutionary or liberation struggle regularly claim (particularly as long as the founding generation is in power) that they embody the will of their people (Clapham, 2012).

Ideology: In line with Easton (1975), we understand ideology-based legitimacy claims – that is, general narratives regarding the righteousness of a given political order – in broad terms. These claims or narratives may therefore include references to nationalism, societal models, and religion. Nationalism functions as an exclusive narrative that stresses the special stance of the nation vis-à-vis other countries (Anderson, 2006, p. 17). Post-independence regimes often rely strongly on nationalism as a legitimation strategy (Linz, 2000, p. 227). Likewise, nationalism can be particularly pronounced following a change of government, with the new leadership seeking to strengthen national consciousness, or in electoral autocracies where leaders seek to garner support at the ballot box (Krastev, 2011).

Personalism: Weber (1968) refers to charisma as an important source of legitimacy. According to him (Weber, 1980, p. 133–4, 136), charismatic authority stems from the "extraordinary personality" and leadership qualities of an individual. A charismatic leader portrays himself or herself as chosen "from above" to fulfil a certain mission (Fagen, 1965, p. 275–7). Personalism-based claims may also represent a discursive mechanism that emphasises the ruler's centrality to certain achievements such as the nation's unity, prosperity, and stability (Isaacs, 2010). Personalist legitimacy claims can therefore rely both on the leader's populist charisma and on extraordinary leadership capabilities and expertise (Nelson, 1984).

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3   Beetham (1991) criticises the empirical understanding of legitimacy advanced by Weber (2004) and instead examines the moral justifiability of power relations. Despite these differences, both authors understand legitimacy as a multifaceted concept, on which we build in our analysis.

International engagement: While the literature on authoritarian regimes' legitimation strategies usually focuses on their domestic dimension, authoritarian regimes also use international engagement to bolster their domestic legitimacy. In contrast to "external legitimacy," which is understood as recognition by other states (Jackson and Rosberg, 1982; Burnell, 2006), we focus on the extent to which a regime refers to its international role in order to legitimate its rule domestically. A prominent role in international negotiations, for instance, may serve to strengthen legitimation for regimes that have little ability to draw on domestic sources of legitimation (Schatz, 2006). Using the term "externalization," Dzhuraev (2012, p. 2) describes how political leaders can use their country's role in international debates and arenas "as tools in manufacturing domestic legitimation" (see also Koesel and Bunce, 2013).

Procedures: Attempts to create (procedural) legitimacy can be based on elections and other rule-based mechanisms for handing over power or on mechanisms for the implementation of policies. In his discussion of bureaucratic–military authoritarian regimes, Linz (2000, p. 186) stresses that these regimes go to considerable lengths to operate within a legalistic framework, despite the many arbitrary elements in their exercise of authority. Similarly, electoral authoritarian regimes use their electoral processes, deeply flawed as they might be, as a means to enhance the regime's political legitimacy (Schedler, 2002).

Performance: Easton's notion of specific support (1965) refers to regime legitimacy that stems from success in satisfying citizens' needs. While specific or performance-based support can be measured using proxies such as economic growth, inflation, and unemployment, we focus on the extent to which the regime either deliberately uses its achievements in fulfilling societal demands such as material welfare or security or, alternately, employs claims of achievements in the absence of real improvements in order to back up its claims to legitimacy (see Dimitrov, 2009 on economic populism).

Finally, it is important to identify the target groups for each of these strategies. In our analysis, we follow Gilley (2009, p. 9), who – despite acknowledging the existence of so-called salient citizens – ultimately suggests focusing on all citizens as the referent objects, though he acknowledges that certain groups might be addressed in particular by claims to legitimacy. Based on insights that "no single resource appears adequate in itself" (Alagappa, 1995, p. 50), we argue that regimes need to simultaneously invoke various legitimation sources to build a robust legitimation strategy (Grauvogel and von Soest, 2014).

3 Assessing Claims to Legitimacy: The Regime Legitimation Expert Survey

Assessing legitimacy is a notoriously difficult undertaking, particularly in the case of authoritarian regimes. The opaque and often repressive nature of authoritarian systems renders it extremely difficult to conduct representative public-opinion surveys, to pick random samples, or to conduct qualitative interviews with the aim of assessing a regime's legitimacy

(Schedler, Diamond, and Plattner, 1999, p. 20).[4] Moreover, citizens in authoritarian contexts have strong incentives to engage in "preference falsification" (Kuran, 1991, 1995). To account for these challenges, scholars use proxy data on behaviours such as corruption, election turnout, protests, or crime to estimate a regime's legitimacy. However, the relationship between these observable outcomes and the regime's legitimacy is not clear cut (Gilley, 2009, p. 12). For instance, the extent of mass protests is not necessarily indicative of regime discontent, but may instead be influenced by the degree of repression exercised by the regime.

In response, Gerschewski (2013, p. 20–1) suggests taking the ruling elite's claims to legitimacy seriously and making use of country experts' qualitative assessments of those claims. Following this suggestion, we have combined both strategies by conducting an expert survey examining the legitimation strategies employed by non-democratic regimes. Using a six-point scale, the experts were asked to provide an assessment of the most recent non-democratic regime in the countries examined. The selection of the most recent non-democratic regime (see Table 2) was made using the Authoritarian Regime Dataset (Wahman, Teorell, and Hadenius, 2013) and – if necessary – adjusted on the basis of the country experts' assessments. The following analysis of legitimacy claims in the 12 post-Soviet countries is thus based on detailed evaluations contained in a total of 40 expert assessments. Each country assessment is based on at least three expert responses with a confidence level of at least three on a scale from zero to five, with five indicating the highest level of confidence (with the exception of Armenia, Moldova, and Turkmenistan, which are each based on two responses). While claims to legitimacy have in some cases changed over time, research shows that a reserve of strategies tends to accumulate over the course of years, leaving a regime's fundamental claims intact (Easton, 1965; Lipset, 1959). For this reason, the expert assessments contained in the RLES focus on authoritarian regimes' core claims to legitimacy.

Table 2: Regime Dates Assessed by Experts

Country	Time period assessed by experts
Armenia	1994–2010
Azerbaijan	1993–2010
Belarus	1994–2010
Georgia	2004–2010
Kazakhstan	1991–2010
Kyrgyzstan	2005–2010
Moldova	2001–2009
Russia	2000–2010
Tajikistan	1992–2010
Turkmenistan	1991–2006
Ukraine	2010
Uzbekistan	1991–2010

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4   Accordingly, approximately 20 per cent of the country experts who assessed claims to legitimacy for the RLES (Dodlova, Grauvogel, and von Soest, 2014) stated that it was impossible for them to determine the degree of actual legitimacy or genuine acceptance accorded to the regimes in question.

4   Legitimation Strategies of Post-Soviet Regimes

In analysing rulers' legitimation strategies in post-Soviet countries, we follow the established practice of differentiating between (1) Russia and the western successor states of the former Soviet Union, (2) the Caucasus, and (3) Central Asia.

4.1   Russia, Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine

In this subsection, we discuss the RLES results regarding legitimation strategies among the four westernmost post-Soviet Eurasian (PSE) countries: Russia, Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine. The political trajectories and the degrees of authoritarianism of these four countries since the overthrow of communism in 1991 have varied widely. To begin with, Russia's post-communist regime between 1992 and 2003 was characterised by limited but real pluralism and competition, though at no point in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse could it be said to have been a liberal democracy. The regime's authoritarian properties increased particularly in the course of Vladimir Putin's first term as president (2000–2004), with the 2004 elections constituting a key turning point (Feklyunina and White, 2011; Koesel and Bunce, 2012). In Belarus, Alexander Lukashenka has dominated the political landscape since his election in 1994. His rule has been the most authoritarian and most repressive among the four western PSE countries (Silitski, 2005). Moldova, on the other hand, is characterised among the four by the lowest degree of authoritarianism and the broadest extent of political competition (Way, 2005; Mcdonagh, 2008). Ukraine's political trajectory has by contrast been unsettled. Along with Georgia's 2003 Rose Revolution, Ukraine's 2004 Orange Revolution was among the most prominent anti-incumbent protest events within the post-Soviet sphere (see McFaul, 2007; Kuzio, 2010; Bunce and Wolchik, 2011) and sent shockwaves rippling through other governments in the region.

   Apart from Belarus's Lukashenka, with his significant additional use of input strategies, all four of these regimes have focused prominently on procedures and performance in their claims to legitimacy. Russia stands out for making particularly strong additional reference to its international engagement (see Figure 1).[5]

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5   As outlined above, the figures are based on a minimum of three expert assessments per country (with the exception of Armenia, Moldova, and Turkmenistan, which are each based on two responses). For each country and dimension, the average of the experts' assessments was taken. Smaller polygons that are closer to the center indicate weaker claims to legitimacy, whereas bigger polygons indicate stronger claims to legitimacy.

Figure 1: Legitimation Strategies in Russia and the Western PSE States

Russia, Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine

Foundational myth
Ideology
Personalism
International engagement
Procedures
Performance

—◆— Belarus   —■— Moldova   —▲— Russia   --✕-- Ukraine

There is no consistent *foundational myth* in the post-Soviet regimes of Russia, Ukraine, and Moldova. Ukraine's political elites have been divided between "pro-Western" and "pro-Russian" conceptions of national identity (Way, 2005). In Lukashenka's Belarus, on the other hand, the October 1917 revolution and the liberation from Nazi occupation are referred to extensively, whereas other possible foundational myths (such as the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth or independence from the Soviet Union in 1991) "are consistently ignored" (RLES).[6]

The extent to which the regimes base their legitimation strategies on a specific ideology also differs significantly. In Ukraine, it has proved difficult to create a uniting *ideology* based on nationalism – not necessarily defined in an ethnic sense – or religious underpinnings due

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6   We present the main findings of the RLES with regard to the regimes' legitimation strategies here; only verbatim quotes and major points of information from the survey are explicitly referred to as stemming from the RLES.

to the country's stark regional differences. Likewise, ideological legitimacy claims have been modest in Moldova. Although President Voronin (2001–2009), the country's first head of state from the Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova, recurrently referenced socialist and communist ideology, ideological underpinnings were not a central component of his legitimation strategy. In contrast, ideology-based claims to legitimacy have played a major role in Belarus. The focus here rests on the Belarusian (economic) model, which includes state-managed "market socialism" and is referred to as "the third way" or "the unique Belarusian model" (RLES). In a similar manner, nationalism plays a central role in Russia. President Putin has frequently referred to the notion of "making Russia great again" (Holmes, 2010, p. 122), while the Russian Orthodox Church is often seen as the "backbone" of Russian nationalism (see Koesel, 2014, p. 144–7).

Among the three input-legitimation strategies, *personalism* has been most pronounced in Belarus and Russia and has existed to some extent in Moldova and Ukraine. In Moldova, President Voronin was depicted as a strong leader and a fatherly figure. Ukraine's Leonid Kuchma (1994–2005) and Viktor Yanukovych (2010–2014) repeatedly referred to their personal achievements in securing stability and fostering economic growth (see below). However, this did not rise to the level of creating a personalist cult. In contrast, Belarus's President Lukashenka is unofficially nicknamed "Bat'ka" (father) and consistently depicts himself as the incarnation and uncontested leader of the Belarusian nation. His carefully crafted image contains both strong patriarchal and charismatic elements. Russia's regime has also taken a very strong populist approach, and President Putin has been termed "leader of the nation." He has portrayed himself as a determined ruler who has worked hard for the good of his people and who has "succeeded in giving [the Russian people] back a sense of pride and identity" (Holmes, 2010, p. 112). The iconography of his leadership has become a central component in the regime's claim to legitimacy, particularly after the 2004 election and since the economic crisis of 2008.

While *international engagement* has not been used as a significant legitimating device for regimes in Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus, the extent to which it has been invoked in Russia stands out. After the humiliating Yeltsin years, the Putin government pursued a distinct strategy aimed at regaining the country's international status, subsequently using this as a means of boosting domestic legitimacy. The list of initiatives in this regard is comprehensive: aside from its traditional role as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and a major nuclear power, Russia has increasingly leveraged its position as a leader of the Commonwealth of Independent States (which currently includes 9 out of the 15 ex-Soviet republics), has created several further integration projects in the post-Soviet region, and is a prominent member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (founded in 2001) and the newly created BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) grouping.

While Belarus's international engagement has been limited to supporting the recent (Russia-led) Eurasian Union project and participating in the Union State with Russia, using

this primary alliance as a resource for domestic legitimacy, the country's relationship with its bigger neighbour has by no means been entirely amicable, and Lukashenka's regime has in consequence "desperately tried to diversify its foreign-policy alliances" (RLES). Ukraine's and to some extent Moldova's international postures have been directed more towards establishing a national identity than to supporting an outright and coherent legitimation strategy. Torn between West and East, Ukraine's President Yanukovych returned to the "multi-vector foreign politics" (RLES) pursued by President Kuchma during his tenure from 1994 to 2005. In the end, this proved to be one factor in the production of the crisis between Russia and the West over the future of Ukraine, as well as in Yanukovych's removal from power in February 2014.

All of the western post-Soviet Eurasian regimes have made strong reference to the legality of their rule and the *procedures* that brought them to power. Even when there have been widespread allegations of electoral misconduct and vote rigging, elections have been a constant point of discursive reference for the current electoral authoritarian regimes (Kaya and Bernhard, 2013). When Putin was first elected president in 2000, he announced that he would establish a "dictatorship of law" (Taylor, 2011). Terms such as Putin's "guided democracy" (Sil and Chen, 2004) or "sovereign democracy" (Silitski, 2010) exemplify the way that legal and electoral legitimacy is routinely claimed in Russia. Similarly, Ukrainian leaders, including Kuchma, Yanukovych, and prominent representatives of the Orange Revolution such as Viktor Yushchenko and Yulia Timoshenko, have made use of procedural legitimacy claims, positioning themselves as "democratic forces." In Belarus, national presidential or parliamentary elections have taken place on average every two years since 2000, and plebiscite-type referendums were also used extensively in the past. Even though these electoral campaigns have never complied with international standards of democracy, and the results have been systematically rigged, they have been an important point of reference within the Lukashenka regime's official discourse.

These procedural claims have been recurrently invoked in conjunction with claims related to performance. Each of these four regimes has fundamentally grounded its legitimating narratives in its *performance* with regard to securing stability – for instance, in fighting "terrorism" and preserving socio-economic well-being in the country. This legitimating strategy within the post-Soviet Eurasian countries broadly echoes that employed by most current-day non-democratic regimes (Feklyunina and White, 2011; see also Holmes' concept of eudaemonism, 2010). For instance, the so-called Belarusian miracle and the provision of social benefits to that country's population are depicted as demonstrations of the regime's alleged social and economic performance. Yet in fact Belarus's socio-economic model has faced serious challenges, which have in turn fuelled rising distrust in the regime's capacity to keep its populist promises to provide social benefits, free healthcare, and high levels of economic growth. Similarly, Moldova's Voronin government claimed that it had stabilised the country and ensured steady pension payments (RLES). In the same vein, Ukraine's President Yanu-

kovych stressed his contribution to economic growth and especially to political stabilisation, drawing a deliberate contrast to the years that followed the Orange Revolution (end of 2004 to January 2005). Russia's strong economic growth in the first decade of this century, averaging 7 per cent annually from 2000 to 2008, was a key driver in Putin's claims to legitimacy (see also Feklyunina and White, 2011). The financial and economic crisis that hit Russia in late 2008 therefore represented a major challenge for Putin's and then-president Dmitrii Medvedev's output-based narrative.
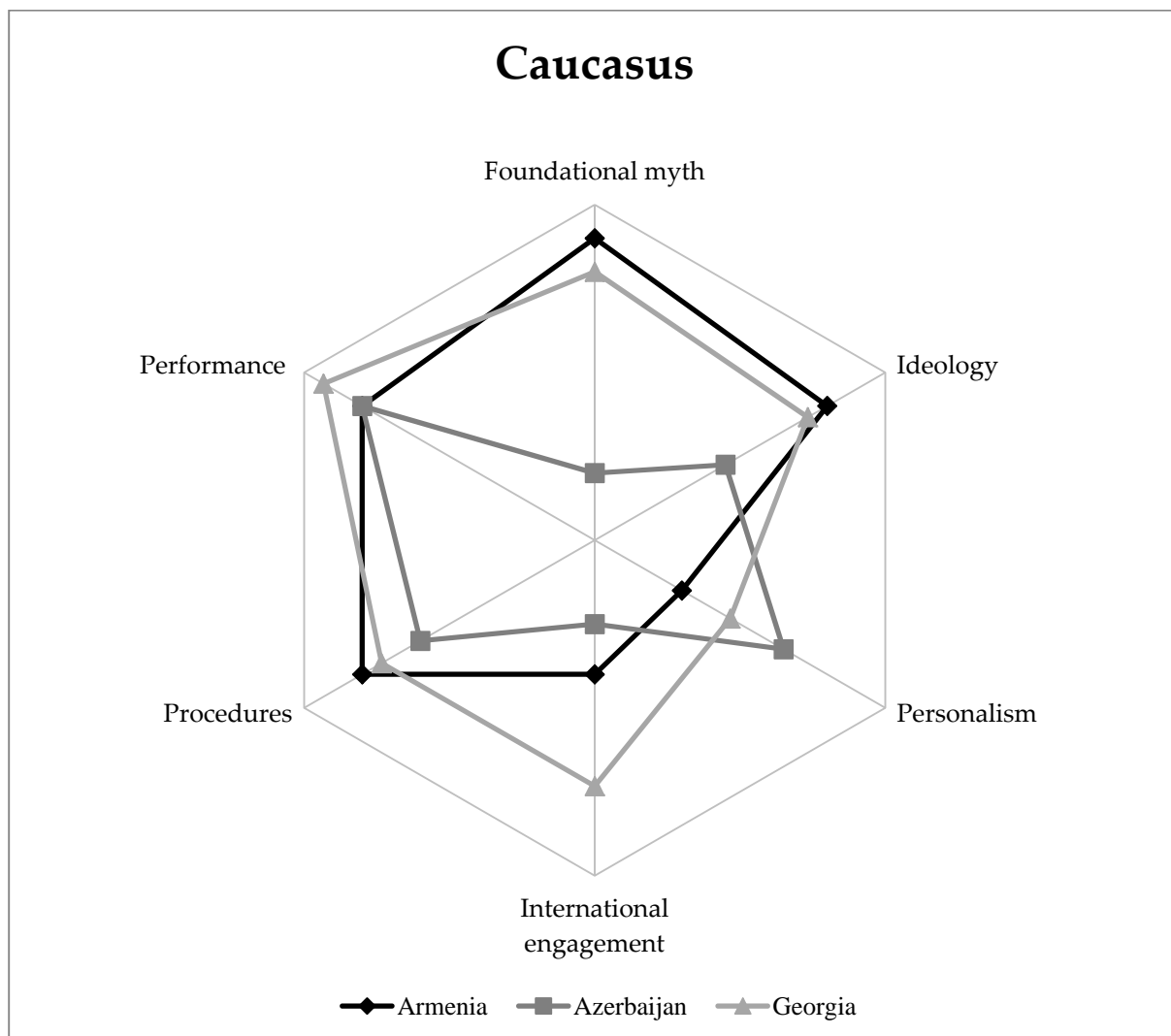
4.2 Caucasus

The three independent post-Soviet Caucasian states, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, have been characterised by varying degrees of authoritarianism. If we combine the regime-analysis metrics produced by Freedom House and Polity IV (Wahman, Teorell, and Hadenius, 2013), Georgia has had the highest democracy scores among the post-Soviet countries overall (excluding the Baltic states), closely followed by Moldova. Armenia and in particular Azerbaijan, on the other hand, have exhibited very high levels of electoral misconduct, as well as a lack of respect for civil and political rights.

All three independent Caucasus countries experienced a tumultuous independence process and, subsequently, a conflict-ridden post-independence trajectory. Georgian president Eduard Shevardnadze (1992–2003) conceded to widespread protests over disputed elections and resigned in November 2003 (Radnitz, 2012). Even more important was the Russian–Georgian war in 2008, which strongly influenced the Georgian regime's legitimation strategies. In Armenia, it was the conflict with neighbouring Azerbaijan over the largely Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh that shaped the regime's claims to legitimacy: after fighting over the area ended in May 1994, "Soviet Armenia's national heroes became independent Armenia's autocrats" (Welt and Bremmer, 1997, p. 78). Conversely, Azerbaijan consistently had to defend its territorial integrity following independence, including in the civil war with Armenian secessionists in Nagorno-Karabakh (Radnitz, 2012).

As can be seen in Figure 2, the regimes in all three countries have strongly invoked performance- and process-related claims to legitimacy. In Armenia and Georgia, this has been coupled with prominent references to a foundational myth and ideology, whereas Azerbaijan's regime has focused on the personal appeal of President Heydar Aliyev. The regime in Georgia has also used its international engagement and rapprochement with the West as a domestic legitimating resource.

Figure 2: Legitimation Strategies in the Caucasus

Even though the ruling regime in Azerbaijan has its roots in a national independence movement and has created a myth depicting strongman Heydar Aliyev as having saved the country from chaos in the wake of the USSR's collapse, it has referred to a *foundational myth* less systematically than its peers in neighbouring Georgia and Armenia. By contrast, all Armenian leaders have repeatedly invoked the historical conflict with Turkey leading to the genocide of 1915, as well as the Karabakh liberation war, as a source of legitimacy (RLES). Bolstering the generally strong sense of national identification in Georgia, the Saakashvili regime (2004–2013) made consistent reference to the Rose Revolution (2003) as a foundational myth that to some "marks the date for the rebirth of the free and independent Georgia" (RLES).

While rulers in each of the Caucasus countries have invoked *nationalism*, this reference has been tied to a specific ideology in Azerbaijan. Against the backdrop of strong and long-enduring secessionist forces in the de facto state of Nagorno-Karabakh (Kolstø and Blakkisrud, 2012; Smolnik, 2012), Azeri rulers have tried to foster Azeri nationalism, though to a lesser extent than in Armenia (Radnitz, 2012). In Armenia, the first post-independence

president, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, consciously employed nationalist symbols and slogans. To strengthen his nationalistic credentials, Ter-Petrosyan even appointed Nagorno-Karabakh's elected leader, Robert Kocharyan, to the post of Armenian prime minister; Kocharyan went on to serve as Armenia's second president between 1998 and 2008 (Hale, 2005). In post-Rose Revolution Georgia, nationalist elements were also a prominent aspect of government discourse. Yet President Saakashvili's "state-making nationalism" (Siroky and Aprasidze, 2011) also included the quest for radical modernisation and a distinctly (neo-)liberal agenda.

The extent to which legitimation claims have focused on the person of these country's heads of state has differed significantly. In line with his broader modernising narrative, Georgia's President Saakashvili portrayed himself (and was portrayed) as a technocratic leader. But as Georgia "is far away from having a father or mother of the nation" (RLES), the extent of *personalism* in this country has been comparatively low, particularly if compared with regimes like that in Turkmenistan. Despite the fact that the Armenian constitution assigns significant powers to the president, making him or her "the controlling force in Armenian politics, by virtue of his authority to dissolve parliament, appoint all judges, and declare martial law" (Hyde, 2007), the personalist element has played a comparatively minor role for Armenia's presidents as a discursive strategy for securing power. In contrast, Azerbaijan's regime consistently sought to enhance its legitimacy by casting the country's third president, Heydar Aliyev (1993–2003), as the "father of the nation" and a charismatic leader. Aliyev was one of the leading functionaries of the Soviet Communist Party and was later depicted as an Azerbaijani Bonaparte and as "father of the Azeri nation" (RLES). His personality cult continued even after his death in 2003, when his son, current president Ilham Aliyev, succeeded him (Franke, Gawrich, and Alakbarov, 2009).

All three regimes refer extensively to their electoral legitimacy. Elections might be seen as "a necessary evil" (RLES) in Georgia, but they are a key means of legitimising the regime. Moreover, the regime has used administrative and police reforms to strengthen *procedures* and reduce corruption. This policy has been portrayed as a clear contrast to the kleptocracy of the previous Shevardnadze era (Timm, 2015). In Azerbaijan, elections, though fraudulent, have also been a cornerstone of rulers' claims to legitimacy. Likewise, Armenian president Heydar Aliyev and his successor and son Ilham Aliyev have referred repeatedly to the elections that are regularly conducted on every level (communal, parliamentary, and presidential). Each has claimed that the will of the people brought him to office and kept him there.

The regimes in all three Caucasian countries have also focused strongly on their positive socio-economic and political *performance* in order to substantiate their rule. Oil wealth, its distribution, and the country's economic growth are portrayed as the primary achievements of the Azerbaijani government. In addition, President Aliyev has presented his regime as a guarantor of stability and state-building after years of turmoil (Radnitz, 2012). Against the backdrop of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, political stability and the promise to safeguard Armenian interests against neighbouring Azerbaijan have been core legitimating resources

for leaders in Armenia. Armenia's first president, Ter-Petrosyan, and his successor, Kocharyan, each made the promise to safeguard Armenian interests in the conflict a key part of their agendas. In addition, they claimed to have raised the country's standard of living (see also Hale, 2005).

A distinct legitimation path has been taken in Georgia. Here, achieving strong socio-economic performance and securing political stability as well as territorial integrity have been among the most important claims employed to enhance legitimacy. Indeed, President Saakashvili's government managed to transform Georgia's economy from a purely rent-based economy to one that was economically growing and liberalised. The success of these economic and administrative reforms has been mirrored by spectacular improvements in the country's perceived business climate (Timm, 2015). However, the war with Russia, which effectively led to the breakaway of two separatist Georgian regions, undermined the strong promises to secure national unity that Saakashvili made in 2004 (Siroky and Aprasidze, 2011).
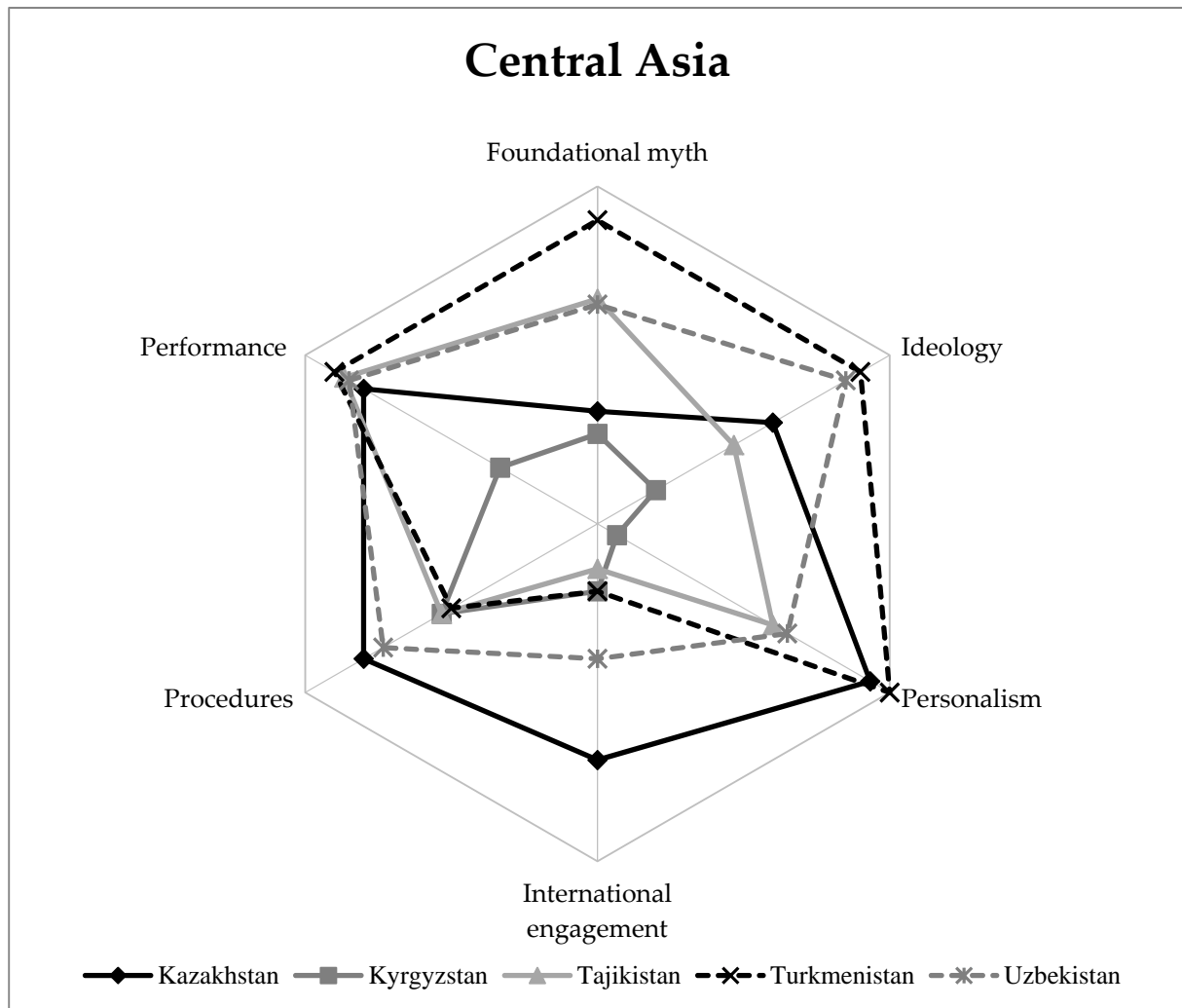
With the exception of Georgia's active promotion of its foreign-policy agenda, *international engagement* does not play a major role in the Caucasus countries' efforts to claim legitimacy on the domestic level. Azerbaijan's "pro-Western bent" (Yan, 2014) is not systematically used as a domestic legitimating device. Georgia's government, in contrast, actively promotes its pro-Western discourse, particularly since the 2008 war with Russia, which was interpreted as a threat to the country's independence. The country has sought to deepen its relationships with the United States, the European Union, and NATO, while engaging far less with its regional neighbours. The international profile of Armenia's regime, on the other hand, is relatively low. The conflict with neighbouring Azerbaijan is still a point of reference, and the country is engaged in the Russian-led Commonwealth of Independent States and the Eurasian Customs Union, but the regime does not invoke this purely defensive engagement as a central legitimating resource.

4.3   Central Asia

In this subsection, we present the results of the RLES concerning the legitimation strategies pursued by the five post-Soviet Central Asian states: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. Even though these countries are characterised by different degrees of authoritarianism, they employ comparable legitimacy claims. Across all these Central Asian states, different forms of nationalism have replaced communism, which no longer serves as an ideological reference point for the regimes' legitimating claims (Mellon, 2010). As shown in Figure 3, most of the five regimes draw on legitimation strategies that emphasise a particular ideology, which broadly speaking combines a pronounced nationalism and a specific developmental model. In addition, the regimes base their legitimacy claims on the person of the president and on the particular government's ability to satisfy citizens' needs

with regard to socio-economic indicators and/or peace and stability. In contrast, the regimes rely comparatively less on procedural mechanisms and their international stances to legitimise their rule domestically.

Figure 3: Legitimation Strategies in Central Asia

In all the Central Asian states aside from Kyrgyzstan, the regimes base their legitimation strategies on a pronounced foundational myth and/or ideology. These *foundational myths* construct a link between the ancient, pre-colonial empires that existed on the current state territories and the incumbent regimes' ability to safeguard this heritage, with this latter capability exemplified by their having led the country into post-Soviet independence. For example, the Tajik regime casts itself as the guardian and legitimate successor of the Samanid emirate – despite contradictions between the current regime's secular stance and the emirate's Islamic heritage – but also stresses its accomplishments with regard to the rebuilding of the country after the civil war. Likewise, the Turkmen regime has actively invented a tradition through the selective construction of continuities with the past; for example, it refers to the Altai nomadic Turks (see also Backes, 2009, p. 281) as well as its own key role in founding

independent Turkmenistan in 1991. The Uzbek historical narrative looks back to the pre-Soviet empire of Timur Lenk while also glorifying the current regime's contribution in the post-Soviet independence process. In contrast, the Kazakh regime does not appeal to a foundational myth, something which is attributed to the fact that the country came into being "almost accidentally" (Olcott, 1997, p. 201).

These founding narratives, if present, are often closely related to specific *ideologies*, as in the case of Uzbekistan, where the "ideology of national independence" (Rasanayagam, 2014, p. 11) draws heavily on the idea of an Uzbek authenticity rooted in the golden heritage of Amir Temur. More generally, ideology-based legitimacy claims in these countries combine a vocal nationalism with references to a particular (Uzbek) model or (Kazakhstani) mode of democratisation that prioritises stability and development over political liberalisation. This nationalism, which posits the resurgence of great ancient civilisations through the newly founded nations (Liu, 2005), may either be ethnically based or aim at least partially at a more broad-based state-building process able to encompass multiple ethnic groups, as, for example, in Kazakhstan (Ó Beacháin and Kevlihan, 2013; Del Sordi, 2015).

These ideologies tend to be closely intertwined with the *rulers*, who personify the new countries. In Kazakhstan, for instance, the national ideology relies on and at the same time enforces the position of the president, who has been in power since 1990. After independence, Nursultan Nazarbayev, called Elbasy (father of the nation), wrote a number of books to promote the national ideology (Ó Beacháin and Kevlihan, 2013). Even though his leadership style does not, according to some scholars (Isaacs, 2010), entirely fit the notion of charisma developed by Weber, Nazarbayev is considered to have been a key factor in leading the country through the post-independence period towards stability and development. In a similar manner, Turkmen nationalism is intimately related to the figure of the first post-independence president, Saparmurat Niyazov, also called Turkmenbashi ("Father of all Turkmen"). Niyazov also wrote the *Ruhnama*, a two-volume collection of spiritual advice and national history that has left a strong stamp on public life. Likewise, the "Uzbek president's statements on state-building are obligatory literature at public schools" (RLES).

In a slightly different manner, President Emomalii Rakhmon of Tajikistan personally claims legitimacy on the basis of having fought in the civil war. However, he is not presented as a father figure to the same extent as other Central Asian presidents. And belying the common wisdom that all Central Asian states are ruled by strongmen, the emphasis on personalism-based legitimation strategies is weaker in Kyrgyzstan. Even though the president sits at the core of the power structure, the system is highly fragmented (Cummings and Nørgaard, 2004), and unlike the case in Turkmenistan, President Askar Akayev's successor was not hand-picked by the former ruler but assumed power after the forceful overthrow of the incumbent political regime in 2005.

In nearly all countries, *performance-based claims* are a centrepiece of the regime's legitimation strategies, even though the precise accomplishments emphasised in presidential speech-

es and officials campaigns differ. In both Kazakhstan (solidly ranked 68th in the Human Development Index) and Uzbekistan (whose economic development has been described as an outright "performance puzzle" (Ruziev, Ghosh, and Dow, 2007)), the regimes refer extensively to their respective country's socio-economic development. Consequently, Kazakhstan is nicknamed "the snow leopard," in a conscious echo of the Asian tiger countries (RLES). However, the extent to which performance-related legitimation strategies are employed in the face of real-world problems varies. Turkmenistan is presented as the only country in the world that provides its people with water and electricity free of charge, even though these goods are rationed regularly (Schmitz, 2004, p. 74), whereas performance-based strategies in Kyrgyzstan have been complicated by the fact that its crippled economy became the top recipient of international aid among the post-Soviet states in the 1990s (Cummings and Nørgaard, 2004). Finally, such output-based legitimation strategies are not limited to a focus on growth and development. Both the Tajik and Uzbek regimes also frame their countries as islands of stability and emphasise their ability to secure peace and continued stability.

While some Central Asian regimes invoke *procedure-based legitimacy claims*, the reference points for these arguments vary. On the one hand, procedural mechanisms such as elections are explicitly used to legitimise regimes – for example, in Kyrgyzstan, which is the only central Asian state where opposition parties are allowed to participate in elections and where President Akayev initially tied his assertions of legitimacy to the carrying out of political reforms (Murzakulova and Schoeberlein, 2009). On the other hand, procedure-based claims are also integrated into regimes' broader ideological narratives. In Kazakhstan, where "every move toward autocracy was covered by procedural mechanisms – mostly elections linked with referenda on specific power issues" (RLES), this was underpinned by a broader discourse that promoted a Kazakhstani mode of democratisation. In a similar manner, the references to institutions and electoral procedures in Uzbekistan were deemed to form part of the "Uzbek model." Procedure-based legitimation strategies are of limited importance in both Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, where national propaganda downplays the role of elections with a variety of justifications – for instance, by asserting that the Turkmen people are not yet mature enough for democracy.

With the exception of Kazakhstan, Central Asian regimes refer to their *international engagement*, recognition, or accomplishments to only a modest degree in seeking to legitimise their rule domestically. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have formulated policies of "permanent neutrality" and "neutrality and sovereignty" (RLES), respectively. In contrast, Kazakhstan regards itself as the region's leading country, and accordingly strives to dominate regional organisations and treaties such as the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) and the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS). It additionally seeks to play a key role in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and the Kazakhstani elite actively claims that its legitimacy is bolstered by this international commitment (see also Schatz, 2006).

5 Adapting Legitimation Strategies

In this section, we examine shifts between and within the various modes of legitimation. On the one hand, regimes decreased or increased the extent to which they invoked certain legitimation strategies over time – for example, in the case of Azerbaijan, where references to the oil- and gas-driven economic growth became more important. On the other hand, the mix of legitimation strategies employed also changed, with certain narratives gaining in importance and others being "downgraded," as in Kyrgyzstan (RLES). This mix of strategies also changed in Russia, where the personal factor has become far more pronounced under President Putin. The Putin government has also stepped up attempts to regain the country's international status as a superpower and to use this position to improve domestic legitimacy in the face of recent socio-economic declines.

As previously noted, the RLES survey addresses the legitimation strategies pursued by each country's most recent authoritarian regime (see Table 2 for the time period covered), but also included questions regarding how legitimacy claims changed over time with reference to the six strategies assessed. Drawing on these insights as well as secondary literature, we identify three major patterns in the alteration of post-Soviet countries' legitimation strategies over time.

First, the 12 regimes examined adjusted their legitimation strategies against the backdrop of different post-1990 trajectories, and in response to different events. Broadly speaking, three major types of incidents resulted in reactive shifts in legitimation strategies; these include civil wars, mass protests that prompted regime change, and successions in which the basic authoritarian regime structure was retained. In a number of countries (Georgia, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Armenia), civil wars affected the development of regimes' legitimation strategies. The ongoing conflict with Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region has been considered the single, most important, post-independence issue in Armenian politics (Hyde, 2007) and therefore also a key reference point for Armenia's rulers, as the country now controls the territory. In order to strengthen his domestic stature in this conflict, Armenian president Ter-Petrosyan attempted "to divert local discontent by recharging the nationalist agenda" (Welt and Bremmer, 1997, p. 89) and hardened his position on Nagorno-Karabakh.

Shifts also occurred after the regime-changing mass protests against governments in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and later Ukraine, with the new post-protest regimes in each case departing from previous legitimacy discourses. After the street protests that forced former Kyrgyz president Akayev to flee the country, his successor, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, referred extensively to the Tulip Revolution as the foundation myth for his rule – a narrative that could not have been invoked before the popular uprising. Moreover, Bakiyev subsequently placed more emphasis on procedural mechanisms than did his predecessor and was more oriented towards Kyrgyz nationalism (RLES). Alongside Kyrgyzstan's 2005 Tulip Revolution, Georgia's 2003 Rose Revolution and Ukraine's 2004 Orange Revolution feature as the most prominent and successful pro-democracy protests against incumbent governments in the post-

Soviet sphere (see, e.g., McFaul 2007; Kuzio 2010; Bunce and Wolchik 2011). Georgia's President Saakashvili and Ukraine's Yushchenko, each of whom rose to head their respective states as a consequence of mass protest, both promoted distinct pro-democracy, anti-corruption, and rule-of-law agendas, and portrayed their programmes as clear breaks with the past. Conversely, in February 2010, newly elected Ukrainian President Yanukovych won the presidential election with an explicitly restorative agenda, promising to overcome the "chaos" of the post-Orange-Revolution years.

Finally, when the rule of the first post-Soviet presidents in Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan ended, each of these regimes' legitimation strategies underwent transformations. After the unexpected death of Turkmen president Niyazov, his successor, Berdimuhamedov, moved from strongly personalism-based legitimation strategies towards a more pronounced emphasis on other legitimacy claims. In order to stabilise his rule, he not only enhanced the previous president's performance-related narrative by retracting some of his predecessor's unpopular decisions, such as the closure of public hospitals (Nazar, 2010), but also legitimised his rule with reference to procedural mechanisms, in particular his selection as president in a multi-candidate election. Moreover, the cult of personality centred on the former president was preserved until Berdimuhamedov had stabilised his rule. Subsequently, his writings and portraits became more important in the official discourse (Horák and Šir, 2009, p. 38–9) and the state-owned television service began to refer to Berdimuhamedov as "the great leader" (Saidazimova, 2008). A similar process has been observable in Azerbaijan. Even after Heydar Aliyev's death in 2003, his image as "father of the nation" continued to be widely propagated within the public sphere. It was only as his son Ilham's rule settled into stability that the father's symbolic role became less central to the regime's narrative (Franke, Gawrich, and Alakbarov, 2009).

Second, these adaptation processes also took place proactively. For example, in Uzbekistan, where "democratic" institutions such as the parliament have gained in importance – in the official discourse as well as in reality – in what appears to be a "potential transition strategy for when Karimov leaves the political scene" (RLES). Soon after his election in 1994, Belarusian president Lukashenka held a referendum to promote a distinctively pro-Russian agenda, giving the Russian language the same recognition as Belarusian and adopting a new state flag as well as a new, Soviet-style coat of arms so as to draw on pro-Russian sentiment (Wilson, 2012). In the subsequent period, he consistently adjusted his claims to legitimacy to invoke pro-Russian feelings, as well as employing process- and output-based claims. Increasingly, President Lukashenka has also used personalist claims to safeguard his rule, focusing on his role as "father of the nation."

In some cases, however, there is no clear-cut distinction between pre-emptive and reactive shifts, with a combination of the two types of adjustment evident. The Uzbek regime, which as noted above has proactively stressed the importance of procedural legitimation with a view to a potential ruler change, also reactively moved towards a legitimation strate-

gy emphasising its ability to guarantee stability in the face of external threats, particularly after the Tashkent bombings in 1999 and the beginning of the Afghan war in 2002 (Liu, 2005). In a similar manner, the Kazakh regime progressively compensated for declines in electoral support by placing more emphasis on ethno-based nationalism, in what appears to be a blend of a carefully crafted process and ad hoc responses (RLES).

Third, regimes have adjusted their output-based legitimation strategies in response to socio-economic or political crises. Legitimation claims based on performance criteria have been characterised as a "high-risk strategy" (Cummings, 2004, p. 15), particularly if this emphasis is not supplemented by other strategies such as procedure-based narratives. Most fundamentally, socio-economic crises have led to declines in the importance of output claims. For example, Russia's strong economic performance was for years the Putin government's most important asset with regard to claiming legitimacy. The economic crisis that hit Russia in 2008 therefore posed a major threat to the Russian government's output-based narrative. The regime's promises of modernisation could not be fulfilled, particularly for the well-educated, mobile, successful, and generally young urban professionals. Accordingly, beginning in 2008, "reference to performance went out of fashion" (RLES). It was supplanted by increasingly authoritarian tendencies, a growing personality cult, and references to the country's status as a superpower.

In Belarus, the "Belarusian miracle," which included the provision of extensive social benefits to the population, served to stabilise President Lukashenka's rule in the first decade of this century. Yet focusing the discourse on Belarus's socio-economic model has been a double-edged sword for Lukashenka and his government. The country's economic crisis has severely undermined the foundations of Lukashenka's social contract, under which people were expected to surrender civil freedoms in exchange for economic welfare in what resembles classical communist legitimation strategies. In the course of economic downturn, Belarusians have increasingly come to regard this system as unsustainable. Finally, the use of national development as the centrepiece of an overarching narrative made Uzbek president Karimov vulnerable to people's expectations that their living standards would rise (March, 2003). In response, the regime moved increasingly towards a threat-based legitimation strategy, emphasising its ability to ensure order and stability rather than promising to reduce poverty and inequality at a time when claims based on the state's ability to steer the economy were increasingly at odds with the realities on the ground (Liu, 2002). Since all regimes examined here have shown declining socio-economic performance, which has in turn challenged their "social contract" with their citizens, their emphasis on the performance aspect of legitimation has also fundamentally decreased across the region.

However, prominent claims to preserve national stability and integrity may also render a regime vulnerable. According to Mansfield and Snyder (2005, p. 11), "[p]olitical leaders may become entrapped in their own swaggering rhetoric, their reputations mortgaged to their nationalistic commitments they have made." This is particularly relevant for Georgia, Azerbai-

jan, Armenia, Moldova, and most recently Ukraine, all of which have been forced to deal with "de facto states" such as Transnistria, Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, or South Ossetia, as well as with varying degrees of Russian intervention (Kolstø and Blakkisrud, 2012; Smolnik, 2012). This was of particular relevance to Georgia's President Saakashvili when arguments over that country's two breakaway regions Abkhazia and South Ossetia escalated into a war with Russia. Scholars have even argued that "Saakashvili's strong promise on national unity in 2004 became his political fate in 2008" (Siroky and Aprasidze, 2011, p. 1237–8), as he was unable to replace his claim with a compelling alternative narrative and thus felt forced to confront Russia aggressively.

6   Regime Persistence and Different Legitimation Strategies: A Future Research Agenda

Our analysis using the newly established RLES demonstrates that regimes in post-Soviet countries use specific combinations of legitimating claims in order to stay in power. Most notably, rulers in the 12 post-Soviet countries examined have made prominent claims to be the guardians of high levels of economic growth and citizens' socio-economic well-being. Second, despite recurrent infringements on political and civil rights, they maintain that their power is rule-based and embodies the will of the people, as they have been given popular electoral mandates. Third, these elements are coupled with input-based legitimation strategies that focus on nationalist ideologies, the personal capabilities and charismatic aura of the head of state, or on the regime's foundational myth. Overall, the reliance on these input-based strategies seems to be lower than average in the western post-Soviet Eurasian countries and, by contrast, higher under the authoritarian rulers of Central Asia.

After often-strong economic growth in the early and middle years of this century's first decade, the post-2008 economic slowdown in countries including Russia, Uzbekistan, and Belarus undermined the prominent reference to socio-economic output, in some cases to the point of threatening regime survival. It is now widely held that economic downturns tend to destabilise authoritarian regimes by inducing regime splits and popular uprisings (see, e.g., Gasiorowski, 1995; Ulfelder and Lustik, 2007). Based on claims that their rule was the best and most successful model for their societies, post-Soviet leaders found themselves trapped repeatedly by their own discourse. Faced with socio-economic crisis, they were forced either to upgrade their framing efforts – for example, by stepping up propaganda – or to downgrade and find substitutes for their output-based claims.

Against this backdrop, the new RLES highlights the fact that output-based claims have often extended beyond socio-economic well-being, invoking the power to maintain stability and territorial integrity within the governed countries. Particularly within the Caucasus and western post-Soviet Eurasia, this strategy has in turn posed a particular challenge for rulers in the long run. To start with, the nation-building process has been protracted in several of the newly independent states. For example, the "de facto states" such as Transnistria, Na-

gorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia have undermined regime claims to preserve national integrity in the countries from which they have sought to withdraw. Second, while the colour revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan ushered in new governments with new legitimating discourses, they also placed considerable stress on other incumbent post-Soviet governments. These upheavals and internal conflicts represented a challenge for these countries' leaders, but they also constituted a resource exploitable by "strong" leaders such as Belarusian president Lukashenka and Russia's Putin.

Of the six legitimating strategies, using international engagement to stabilise domestic rule has been employed the least. However, the former superpower stands out in this regard: Russia's President Putin has pursued an active strategy to reclaim the country's prominent role on the international stage. Input-based strategies are far less important today than was the case in the Soviet Union, with its communist ideology. However, nationalist ideologies and legitimation strategies that centre on a "father of the nation" remain prominent, particularly in Central Asia, Belarus, Azerbaijan, and increasingly Russia.

Our analysis of post-Soviet countries, based on the data provided by the RLES, has demonstrated the fruitfulness of systematically reintroducing questions of legitimation into the analysis of authoritarian regimes (see also Gerschewski, 2013; Kailitz, 2013; Grauvogel and von Soest, 2014). Based on these results, we see the following avenues for further research. First, carrying out more detailed case studies using a common analytical structure would be useful, as it would provide a more comprehensive insight into the use of legitimation claims to solidify non-democratic rule and would illuminate the relationship between different legitimation strategies in post-Soviet countries and beyond. Second, systematic cross-country comparison by means of the RLES would also allow a useful analysis of similarities and differences between the way rule is exercised in post-Soviet countries and in other world regions. Third, the relationship between different legitimation profiles and the various means by which rule is implemented – for example, repression – along with their outcomes, should be systematically explored. Finally, we propose an investigation of the durability of authoritarian regimes making varying claims to legitimacy. This would shed more light on regimes' legitimation strategies as domestic factors fundamentally able to influence autocratic persistence and breakdown.

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