Beyond the Transition Paradigm: A Research Agenda for Authoritarian Consolidation

Thomas Ambrosio
North Dakota State University

Abstract: The transition literature is insufficient to understand the political developments in several states of the former Soviet Union. Instead, it is perhaps best to explore these regimes in terms of autocratic systems which are both politically stable and increasingly resistant to domestic and external pressures for political change. The emerging literature on authoritarian consolidation takes autocracy seriously by rejecting teleological assumptions about the power of democracy and seeks to understand the foundations of political stability in authoritarian countries. However, this concept remains underexplored. This article presents the foundation of a research agenda on authoritarian consolidation by reviewing the prior literature, identifying key concepts, and outlining possible theoretical dynamics.

As we move further from the twenty-year anniversary of the collapse of the Soviet Union, it is increasingly clear that the framework of "transition" is less and less applicable to much of the region. While this literature has often served as a straw-man for critics, and has had its assumptions and conclusions consistently mischaracterized,[1] Carothers was correct in arguing that scholars and policymakers should "discard the transition paradigm," given that democratization has stalled in many countries and

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[1] Jordan Gans-Morse. 2004. "Searching for Transitologists: Contemporary Theories of Post-Communist Transitions and the Myth of a Dominant Paradigm." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 20:4 (October-December): 320-349.

Thomas Ambrosio is Professor of Political Science at North Dakota State University, Dept. 2315, PO Box 6050; Fargo, ND 58108-6050, E-mail: Thomas.Ambrosio@ndsu.edu.

several early democratic openings have been reversed.[2] For the Baltic region, it is better to analyze these countries in terms of "integration," given that they have completed their transition to well-entrenched, liberal democracies and have joined the European Union. In other cases, such as Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, and Armenia, the language of transition might still apply, given that the fundamentals of their political systems remain unsettled.[3] However, for the remaining ex-Soviet republics, our understanding of their political dynamics is not well-served by looking for cracks in their authoritarian edifice.

Although Carother's article was released in 2002, "it clearly failed to bring about [the transition paradigm's] demise" and "with the 'color revolutions'…and more recently and even more dramatically with the regime changes associated with the 'Arab Spring' and the political opening in Burma, the question of democratic transitions has returned to center stage."[4] During the 2011-2012 protests in Russia following the questionable parliamentary elections, there was far too much speculation by those looking for signs of the end of Putin's regime and the possibility of democratic opening. For example, a Chatham House report declared that the protests marked "the beginning of the end of the Putin regime;"[5] a sentiment echoed in *The Economist*.[6] As seen in the Arab Spring, political change is always possible, but an attraction to the transition paradigm may blind us to more important dynamics occurring within these countries. Instead, it would be better to approach them as autocratic regimes, which are both politically stable and increasingly resistant to internal and external pressures for political change.

If we shift away from the transition paradigm and accept author-itarianism on its own terms, we can utilize two literatures that appear more appropriate to these countries, consolidology and authoritarian persistence. In many ways, these literatures deal with a similar issue: the conditions under which a certain regime type is likely to continue into the future. In fact, a literature is emerging which combines the two and seeks to understand the nature of *authoritarian consolidation*[7]– the process

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[2] Thomas Carothers. 2002. "The End of the Transition Paradigm." *Journal of Democracy* 13:1 (January): 5-21 (17).

[3] See the articles in the special issue on "Post-Soviet Political Systems" in 2012. *Russian Politics and Law* 50:4 (July-August).

[4] Marc Plattner, et al. 2014. "Reconsidering the Transition Paradigm," *Journal of Democracy* 25:1 (January): 86-100 (87, 86).

[5] Philip Hanson, et al. 2012. "Putin Again: Implications for Russia and the West," Chatham House Report (February): 6.

[6] "The Beginning of the End of Putin," *The Economist*, 3 May 2012. Available online at http://www.economist.com/node/21548941.

[7] Christan Göbel. 2011. "Authoritarian Consolidation," *European Political Science* 10:2 (June): 176-190; Christian Göbel and Magnus Andersson. 2011. "Authoritarian Institution

by which authoritarianism is solidified and entrenched within a political system to the extent that expectations for democratic regime change in the short-to-medium term are consistently pessimistic. However, the idea of authoritarian consolidation – its connections to prior literature, theoretical concepts, and conceptual bases – remains underdeveloped at the present time.

This approach integrates some of the insights of the authoritarian persistence literature, but goes a step farther. Authoritarian persistence has traditionally been concerned with identifying those structural or institutional factors which are associated with regime survival, as well as authoritarian preconditions and the lack of democratic "requisites." For example, several works on the pre-2011 Arab world as an exemplar of authoritarian stability fit into this category.[8] However, there is a tendency within this literature to see authoritarianism as too static. As Croissant and Wurster defined it, "[p]ersistence is understood as the absence of change, e.g., the continuance or permanence of authoritarian subtypes."[9] By contrast, authoritarian consolidation seeks to understand the maturation of authoritarianism within a polity. As seen below, authoritarian consolidation is interested in *how* authoritarianism comes to be embedded in these societies and the effects of this process.

This approach is likewise distinct from the research agenda on "competitive authoritarian" and "hybrid" regimes,[10] which has told us a great deal of the inner-workings of certain post-Soviet states, but is primarily talking about a particular *form* of authoritarianism, rather than authoritarianism as such. This literature is useful for its insights into the ways in which certain institutional frameworks, as well as international factors, may help or hinder authoritarian consolidation. Moreover, by arguing that certain states are not moving toward democracy, but have settled into a pattern of long-term authoritarianism, this literature has proved to be a necessary corrective to democratization optimists. Nonetheless, there has been a tendency within this particular subfield to focus on terminology (i.e., how to define these regimes) as well as to

Building and the Quality of Democracy in Taiwan and Thailand." Paper presented at the IPSA/ECPR Joint Conference, Sao Paulo, Brazil, February.

[8] For articles that review this literature, see: Eva Bellin. 2004. "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East." *Comparative Politics* 36:2 (January): 139-157; Raymond Hinnebusch. 2006. "Authoritarian Persistence, Democratization Theory and the Middle East: An Overview and Critique." *Democratization*. 13:3 (June) 373-395. This is particularly true in regard to studies of the Arab monarchies. See Victor Menaldo. 2012. "The Middle East and North Africa's Resilient Monarchs." *The Journal of Politics* 74:3 (July): 707-722.

[9] Aurel Croissant and Stefan Wurster. 2013. "Performance and Persistence of Autocracies in Comparison: Introducing Issues and Perspectives." *Contemporary Politics* 19: 1 (March):1-18.

[10] Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way. 2010. *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

attempt to carefully define their "conceptual boundary with authoritarianism" by insisting that these regimes are somehow different.[11] The taxonomy question had led to numerous debates about how best to describe these regimes, whereas the boundary seeking has proven elusive because of theorists' emphasis on trying to understand the democratic elements (and sometimes democratic potential) within a system that is clearly non-democratic. In both cases, this had led to conceptual stretching regarding the degree of competitiveness within these systems. This is not to say that there are not gradations of authoritarianism or that one should adhere to a solely bifurcated view of political systems as democratic or authoritarian. However, classification and categorization of these non-democratic, but supposedly also non-authoritarian, regimes has led to confusion. One example is Gilbert and Mohseni's piece, which explicitly sought to move beyond the "conceptual difficulties of regime classification" engendered by the hybrid regimes literature, but simply added additional layers of typology onto this concept.[12] This hybrid regime research agenda comes at the expense of understanding the processes which make political change unlikely. To modify Linz and Stephan's oft-quoted phrase, we should be more concerned with how authoritarianism becomes "the only game in town."[13]

This article presents the foundation of a research agenda on authoritarian consolidation by reviewing the prior literature on political consolidation, identifying key concepts, and outlining possible theoretical dynamics. It utilizes the former Soviet Union as a starting point to explain this concept, but is intended to spark a larger conversation applicable outside of this particular region. Section one briefly outlines the development of the democratic transition literature in order to build a foundation for the rest of the paper. The following section briefly reviews the current conditions within the former Soviet Union. It argues that although the transition literature may be appropriate in certain cases, it fails when applied to countries with stable, autocratic systems, where the emerging literature on authoritarian consolidation would be more appropriate. Section three explores the concept of political consolidation and identifies some of the flaws in past approaches, as well as an alternative formulation which has served as an improvement. Moreover, it argues that, despite flaws, the consolidation concept is still a viable way to look at the political dynamics within stable authoritarian regimes. Section four covers four areas of

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[11] Leah Gilbert and Payam Mohseni. 2011. "Beyond Authoritarianism: The Conceptualization of Hybrid Regimes." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 46:3 (September): 270-297.

[12] Gilbert and Mohseni, "Beyond Authoritarianism." 271.

[13] Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan. 1996. *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins: 5.

authoritarian consolidation: institutional, attitudinal, economic, and international. Section five provides a possible research agenda which looks at this region in terms of authoritarian consolidation. Again, although the discussion here is focused on a particular region, its implications are much broader and applicable elsewhere.

The Development of the Transition Paradigm

Transition theory developed in an effort to explain the process by which autocratic regimes move toward democracy and has consisted mostly of post hoc explanations tied to specific times and contexts.[14] For example, the Latin American and Southern European transitions of the 1970s gave rise to a highly actor-oriented model with elite division and elite pacts being seen as able to overcome what had traditionally been considered key impediments to democratization, such as socio-economic or societal factors.[15] Just a few years later, the fall of communism in Eastern Europe challenged scholars to explain these democratic revolutions. The degree to which the O'Donnell-Schmitter brand of transitology was blindly adopted within the East European context is exaggerated,[16] but some early champions of original transitology did in fact attempt to link Southern Europe and Latin America to Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.[17] A central problem with this approach was the important role that mass mobilization, and especially changes in the external environment, played in bringing about democratic openings, which seemed to make the earlier conceptualization of transition less relevant.[18] In the post-Soviet transitions of the Color Revolutions, the role played by democratic diffusion (especially transnational assistance between pro-democracy activists) and active democracy promotion by the West figured prominently.[19] Even in failed

[14] The problems associated with those Arab countries where the overthrow of autocrats took place in 2011, as well as the seeming resistance of certain countries (particularly in the Arab monarchies), to this anti-regime wave has meant that the initial euphoria over the prospects for democratization in that region have given way to substantial pessimism. Thus, the 2011 events did not engender as fully developed a literature on "transition" in the Middle East as that seen in the previous three waves of the transition literature. Howard Wiarda. 2012. "Arab Fall or Arab Winter?" *American Foreign Policy Interests* 34:3 (June): 134-137.

[15] Guillerno O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, 1986. *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

[16] Gans-Morse, "Searching for Transitologists."

[17] Philippe Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl. 1994. "The Conceptual Travels of Transitologists and Consolidologists: How Far to the East Should They Attempt to Go?" *Slavic Review* 53:1 (Spring): 173-185.

[18] Michael McFaul. 2010. "The Missing Variable: The 'International System' as the Link between Third and Fourth Wave Models of Democratization," in Valerie Bunce, et al., eds., *Democracy and Authoritarianism in the Postcommunist World.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

[19] Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik. 2006. "International Diffusion and Postcommunist

color revolutions, such as the abortive "Blue Jeans" Revolution in Belarus, the explicit attempt to emulate previous electoral revolutions lent credence to the importance of diffusion in these cases.

In each generation of the transition literature, however, there has been a general bias toward seeing authoritarianism through those factors or forces which precipitate a change to democracy, rather than those factors or forces which keep authoritarianism stable. McFaul offered an important corrective to this approach in his argument about post-communist "transitions" to both democracy and dictatorship – although this, too, was problematic.[20] There remains a tendency within the democratization literature to "[select] on the dependent variable…[by] analyzing cases that have succeeded in becoming democratic, ignoring those that have failed."[21] Pro-democracy bias is evident in the names of some of the important journals in this subfield: *Journal of Democracy*, *Democratization*, and *Demokratizatsiya*. Even as the study of authoritarian regimes "has recently become one of the hottest subfields in comparative politics,"[22] it lags noticeably behind its democratic counterparts both in terms of its scope and theory-building. There is far more work that needs to be done.

Authoritarianism in the former Soviet Union

The transition literature identified a number of forces or factors which appear to be responsible for democratic openings: divisions within the ruling class and pacts between regime and non-regime elites; mass mobilization occurring within the context of an external environment which does not actively support authoritarianism; active diffusion amongst pro-democracy activists and overt support by democratic states and nongovernmental organizations. This section explores whether we see

Electoral Revolutions." *Communist & Post-Communist Studies* 39:3 (September): 283-304; Mark Beissinger. 2007 "Structure and Example in Modular Political Phenomena: The Diffusion of Bulldozer/Rose/Orange/Tulip Revolutions." *Perspectives on Politics* 5:2 (June): 259-276.

[20] Although McFaul sought to engage the transition literature in this way, his title is somewhat misleading since he is actually attempting to explain the variation between those states that moved toward democracy, on the one hand, and those that remained autocratic or slipped back into authoritarianism. In other words, in these latter cases there was a "transition" from communism to another form of dictatorship, but not a true transition as understood by the transitologists. Saying that there was a "transition" in places like Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, or Turkmenistan would constitute conceptual stretching. Michael McFaul. 2002. "The Fourth Wave of Democracy and Dictatorship: Noncooperative Transitions in the Postcommunist World." *World Politics* 54:2 (January): 212-244.

[21] Daniel Lynch. 2004. "International 'Decentering' and Democratization: The Case of Thailand." *International Studies Quarterly* 48:2 (June): 339-62.

[22] David Art. 2012. "What Do We Know About Authoritarianism After Ten Years?" *Comparative Politics* 44:3 (April): 351-373 (351). Also see the chart in Croissant and Wurster, "Performance and Persistence of Autocracies in Comparison," 2.

these factors operating within the former Soviet Union at the current time. In some cases, the language of transition still applies: the political systems of Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, and Ukraine are still unsettled. However, in the remaining post-Soviet countries (excepting the Baltic states, of course), authoritarianism appears to be well entrenched.

Going back ten or even fifteen years, we see little evidence of divisions amongst the ruling elites of these authoritarian countries. During the initial period after the collapse of the Soviet Union, there were elite divisions that brought about regime changes or open conflict in a limited number of countries such as Tajikistan, Georgia, and Azerbaijan.[23] However, in a broader and more recent view, elites have either been in office since independence (Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan), have been able to manage the transition from one autocrat to another absent open conflict following the death or resignation of the president (Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan,[24] Russia), have maintained control for an exceptionally long time after a brief period of liberalization (Belarus), or have ensured stability following a civil war (Tajikistan). Granted, length of time in office is no guarantee of future survival, as the history of past revolutions has demonstrated. Nonetheless, there does not appear to be a pattern of serious intra-elite conflict – as least not of a nature of the crucial division between "hard-liners" and "soft-liners" which could lead to a democratic transition. In the recent cases of political crises in the former Soviet Union, the only evidence of such an obvious split is Kyrgyzstan. And, Kyrgyzstan's political system remains unsettled after the Tulip Revolution and the subsequent intra-elite conflict in 2010. The development of a democratic political system seems highly unlikely.

The mass protests against communist regimes in Eastern Europe were replicated in the former Soviet Union before that country's collapse and, later, during the Color Revolutions. However, following the initial wave of successful Color Revolutions and attempts by pro-democracy activists to emulate this pattern elsewhere, mass protests have been relatively rare and ineffective. (Again, Kyrgyzstan is an exception.) Silitski referred to this as a form of political Darwinism in which those regimes that were less capable of surviving mass protests were overthrown, and those which survived are likely to continue.[25] These governments have been able to adopt successful strategies of either preventing these protests before they begin or shutting them down before they threaten the regime. The violent response to protests in Andijan, Uzbekistan, is a prominent

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[23] In the last case, this resulted in the overthrow of Abulfaz Elchibey in 1993.

[24] This refers to the succession from father to son in 2003.

[25] Vitali Silitski. 2010. "'Survival of the Fittest': Domestic and International Dimensions of the Authoritarian Reaction in the former Soviet Union Following the Colored Revolutions." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*. 43:4 (December): 339-350.

example of the latter. Moreover, these regimes have adopted a series of policies to insulate themselves against mass mobilization.[26] For example, the Russian government established its own youth organizations to siphon young people away from leading anti-government protests, as they did in previous Color Revolutions. While anti-Kremlin protests following the 2011 parliamentary elections and the January 2012 protests against the Nazarbayev regime in Kazakhstan illustrate that even in highly managed political systems, grassroots mobilization is still possible. It remains to be seen whether these protests will have a substantive political effect.

In previous clusters of democratic transitions, the external environment played an important role in promoting democratization. However, exactly the opposite conditions apply in the former Soviet Union. As the dominant state in the region, an autocratic Russia plays a significant role in advancing the cause of authoritarianism. Silitski cited the "conviction" by Russian officials "that the restoration of Russia's great power status and its dominant position in the former USSR was contingent upon the curtailment of the wave of democratization."[27] Moscow has offered direct assistance to like-minded governments (the most obvious example is Moscow's support for the Lukashenka regime in Belarus) and sought to undermine governments in transition (policies adopted to isolate and punish Georgia and Ukraine after the Rose and Orange revolutions, respectively). These authoritarian pulls coming from the international level will only be strengthened by the increasing Chinese influence in Central Asia. Furthermore, autocratic states have shown a willingness to work together in mutual defense of their political systems. Countering these external authoritarian advantages are the extremely weak forces in favor of democracy. Democratic states have far less influence to affect the politics of Central Asia, where Russian influence has been particularly harmful to pro-democracy trends.[28] Amongst the western-most former Soviet states and the Caucasus, the prospects of EU association agreements may have an impact on political developments, as they have in Ukraine. However, this is not a legitimate option for the authoritarian states of the Soviet Union, which are involved in the development of transnational frameworks meant to ensure that states are better able to defend themselves from democratic pressures. These include the various post-Soviet regional organizations, such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Eurasian Economic Union, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

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[26] Abel Polese and Donnacha Ó Beacháin. 2011. "The Color Revolution Virus and Authoritarian Antidotes." *Demokratizatsiya* 19:2 (Spring): 111-132.

[27] Silitski, "Survival of the Fittest," 341.

[28] Nicole Jackson. 2010. "The Role of External Factors in Advancing Non-Liberal Democratic Forms of Political Rule: A Case Study of Russia's Influence on Central Asian Regimes." *Contemporary Politics* 16:1 (March): 101-118.

Thus, the prior transition literature envisioned a far more receptive external environment than that which exists in much of the former Soviet Union. Certainly it did not envision one in which states indirectly or directly supported autocracy. Even in those cases where the international level was consequential in promoting democracy, such as Ukraine, the backsliding evident under Viktor Yanukovych's presidency reinforces the perception that the balance between the external promotion of democracy and authoritarianism is shifting to favor the latter.[29]

Nongovernental organizations were also cited by the transition literature as crucial for precipitating the democratic openings of the Color Revolutions. NGOs are vital in creating linkages between democratic activists in a variety of countries and establishing an institutional framework for challenging regimes after elections. These can be private organizations or funded (in whole or in part) by outside governments. Even before the Color Revolutions, the Lukashenka regime took the lead in cracking down against these organizations in an effort to undermine civil society.[30] Afterward, this practice became more aggressive and widespread. For example, Russian President Vladimir Putin verbally attacked NGOs in his 2004 address to the Duma and introduced legislation the following year to severely limit their ability to function within the country.[31] Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan adopted similar measures, illustrating not only a realization of the danger these organizations posed to their political survival, but also demonstrating the ability of autocrats to learn from the mistakes and successes of others. Coinciding with these moves was a policy of restricting domestic organizations and opposition political parties that posed a potential threat to these regimes. One of the reasons why the Color Revolutions did not spread any further is because the surviving authoritarian regimes found an effective "antidote" to the democratization "virus."[32]

Given that the precursors of democratization identified by the transition literature do not appear evident in these firmly authoritarian states, the transition literature is likely not going to help our understanding of their political dynamics. Instead, we need to deal with them as stable, autocratic regimes whose survival appears to be relatively certain in the short-to-medium term. Rather than looking for weaknesses in these systems, we need

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[29] The 2014 popular overthrow of Viktor Yanukovych has led to a pro-Western, pro-democracy government in Kiev, but the de facto loss of Crimea as well as pro-Russian separatism in eastern Ukraine. Thus, the future of Ukraine's political stability remains unclear, especially in the shadow of a resurgent, authoritarian Russia.

[30] Vitali Silitski. 2005. "Preempting Democracy: The Case of Belarus." *Journal of Democracy* 16:4 (October): 83-97.

[31] Thomas Ambrosio. 2009. *Authoritarian Backlash: Russian Resistance to Democratization in the Former Soviet Union*. UK: Ashgate: 45-53.

[32] Polese and Ó Beacháin, "The Color Revolution Virus and Authoritarian Antidotes."

to explore how they have been able to consolidate their rule and what it means for the future of their region.

The Concept of Political Consolidation

The application of authoritarian consolidation theory to the former Soviet Union and beyond requires a firm grasp of its theoretical and operational foundations. Although our understanding of authoritarian consolidation should not be taken as merely the opposite of democratic consolidation, the earlier literature is a good place to start. Unfortunately, the study of "consolidology" has been pointedly criticized by scholars as being problematic in terms of definitional and conceptual clarity.[33] The central division within consolidology is between whether consolidation should be seen as a "threshold" or a "process."

Early work on democratic consolidation tended to view this concept as a dependent variable which resulted from a variety of independent variables, such as popular or elite legitimacy, institutionalization of certain behaviors, etc. In this way, democratic consolidation was a threshold which states reached – it was, in effect, a state of being or a condition of a democracy. This was the point at which democrats could relax, to para-phrase Di Palma.[34] Consequently, the goal of this line of research was to determine a threshold past which one could say that a particular country was reasonably safe from a political reversal. Huntington's "two-turnover test"[35] and Schmitter's "rotation or major realignment of party in power"[36] were representative of what can be termed an event-based approach: once a certain event has taken place, we can be comfortable that a democracy is consolidated. An attitudinal perspective, advanced by Linz and Stepan[37] and Schmitter,[38] argued that a democracy was consolidated once either elites or the population (though, most likely, both) accepted democracy as the only legitimate form of government for their polity. Moreover, certain other

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[33] See: Andreas Schedler. 1998. "What is Democratic Consolidation?" *Journal of Democracy* 9:2 (April): 91-107 (92); Göbel and Andersson, "Authoritarian Institution Building and the Quality of Democracy in Taiwan and Thailand," 3; Steven Friedman. 2011. "Beyond 'Democratic Consolidation': An Alternative Understanding of Democratic Progress." *Theoria* 58:126 (March): 27-55 (29).

[34] Guiseppe Di Palma. 1990. *To Craft Democracies: An Essay in Democratic Transition*. Berkeley University of California Press: 141.

[35] Samuel Huntington. 1991. *The Third Wave*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press: 266-267.

[36] Philippe Schmitter. 1995. "The Consolidation of Political Democracies." In Geoffrey Pridham, ed., *Transitions to Democracy: Comparative Perspectives from Southern Europe, Latin America, and Eastern Europe*. UK: Darmouth, 1995: 543.

[37] Göbel and Andersson, "Authoritarian Institution Building and the Quality of Democracy in Taiwan and Thailand," 6.

[38] Schmitter, "The Consolidation of Political Democracies," 546-550.

conditions could stand as thresholds themselves, such as the economic perspective which holds that once a polity reaches a certain income level or stage of economic development, they are considered immune to political reversals.[39] Alternatively, certain conditions could evidence the passage of other thresholds, such as the elimination of substantive violence within the political system, the irrelevance of anti-democratic parties, or the absence of open rejection of the rule of law serving as proxies for the legitimization of democracy.[40] A similar notion was the "shock" theory of democratic consolidation: a democracy is consolidated once it can survive a serious crisis, such as a severe economic downturn or attempted coup.[41] Once a government maintained power after such an event, its regime type was seen as secure.

The most obvious problem with the threshold approach is knowing when a country has reached it. For example, what proportion of the elite class or the general population must support democracy before it can be said to be consolidated? How much political violence or rule-breaking is acceptable in a country before we begin to doubt its consolidated nature? How big of a crisis is necessary to indicate that democracy is fully entrenched in a society?

Another problem is that, if the bar for consolidation is set too high (e.g., the two-turnover test), then some seemingly stable democracies, such as Japan, Italy, and India, would not be considered as consolidated for much of the period during which they had a democratic form of government. Looking toward the future, how do we know that anti-democratic forces will not emerge out of a seemingly consolidated democracy? For example, political shifts in present-day Hungary, though not fully authoritarian, have undermined faith in the stability of that country's post-communist, democratic consolidation.

Finally, some of the reasons for the collapse of a democracy are only known after the fact. This can be valuable for explaining why a particular democracy or a set of democracies survived or failed, and for identifying important factors which are needed for democratic survival.[42] However, post hoc explanations, especially when they deal with a democracy thought to be consolidated, only highlight the problems associated with the threshold approach. Similarly, some "thresholds," such as the "shock" theory of democratic consolidation, can only really be known after the

[39] Andreas Schedler. 2001. "Measuring Democratic Consolidation." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 36:1 (Spring): 66-92 (80-81).

[40] Schedler, "Measuring Democratic Consolidation," 70-72; Friedman, "Beyond 'Democratic Consolidation'," 30-31.

[41] Andreas Schedler. 2001. "Taking Uncertainty Seriously: The Blurred Boundaries of Democratic Transition and Consolidation." *Democratization* 8:4 (Winter): 1-22.

[42] Mark Chou. 2011. "When Democracies Fail." *Political Studies Review* 9:3 (September): 344-356.

fact and tend toward tautology: we know a democracy is not consolidated because a crisis caused it to fail and the democracy failed because it was not consolidated. Thus, while the threshold approach can identify several factors important for democratic survival, it is not a sufficient basis upon which to build a theory of regime type consolidation.

The alternate approach considers consolidation to be an ongoing process which leads to the dependent variable of regime-type persistence or survival. A number of factors have been identified which seemingly reduce the chances of regime change. Schmitter noted a complex relationship between numerous "partial regimes" (different and overlapping areas of the formal and informal governing structure) within which the process of consolidation takes place.[43] In the same volume, Morlino conceptualized democratic consolidation as a process of legitimization occurring on different "levels," such as institutions, within the regime itself, and amongst parties, interest groups, and civil society.[44] The relationships, which develop between these levels, are seen as leading to a greater or lesser chance of democratic survival. Similarly, Merkel proposed his own four-level schema, which is more chronological in nature and begins with the embedding of constitutional or structural authority, then spreading this authority among parties and interest groups, informal political actors, and finally political culture.[45] Merkel based his levels in part upon Pridham's earlier distinction between "negative" (the absence of anti-democratic forces) and "positive" (legitimization of democracy) processes of consolidation. This is not altogether different from Schedler's identification of processes of avoiding democratic breakdown and erosion, as well as completing, deepening, and organizing democracy.[46]

Considering consolidation as a process, rather than as a threshold, has advantages beyond correcting for the weaknesses evident in the latter approach. The primary advantage is in the manner by which it views future political arrangements. A consolidation-as-threshold approach goes too far in asserting a binary set of predictions: either a democratic future is assured (if consolidated) or not (if not consolidated). Moreover, it misses the importance of changes over time, such as the decay in sources of regime type stability and its likely impact on future political arrangements. By contrast, the consolidation-as-process approach allows for more gradations of expectations about future conditions and focuses

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[43] Schmitter, "The Consolidation of Political Democracies," 556-558.

[44] Morlino, "Democratic Consolidation," 574-577.

[45] Wolfgang Merkel. 2008. "Plausible Theory, Unexpected Results: The Rapid Democratic Consolidation in Central and Eastern Europe." *International Politics and Society* 2: 11-29.

[46] However, he argued that only the first two (breakdown and erosion) properly belong under the rubric of democratic consolidation. Schedler, "What is Democratic Consolidation?" 94-100.

attention on the importance of continued change within our analysis of political systems. It also stresses the need to explore a variety of factors which make regime continuity more or less likely and to understand how changes to those factors introduce certainty or uncertainty into the political system.[47] Although including a large number of possible influences on regime continuity makes predictions and theory-building more difficult, it better represents the complex environment within which regimes function. Finally, identifying a neutral term such as "regime continuity" as the dependent variable allows us to apply this conceptual framework to both democratic and non-democratic regimes since both democracies and autocracies face similar problems overcoming challenges and ensuring their survival.[48] Therefore, we need a foundation to discuss consolidation more than just in terms of democracies. Returning to the above paraphrasing of Di Palma, we need to know when autocrats can relax too.

Before moving on to discussing the processes of an authoritarian consolidation, a legitimate question is why, given the problems evident in the consolidation literature, is the concept still viable? In general terms, consolidation is about the process by which regimes become relatively stable. This is not to say that they are incapable of change or that they reach some final point in their political development – every regime evolves in some way, even toward regime collapse. Even if the notion of relative stability is difficult to define or predict, it is one within which comparative politics constantly treats. Consolidation provides a more formal framework for understanding how and why our expectations about the survival of a particular political system or regime type come to be formed, as well as identifying specific factors and issues for further and more focused investigation. Additionally, it takes a broader perspective than just examining limited issues such as institutional effectiveness or regime performance, which, while important to understanding regime stability and survival, can be restrictive in terms of understanding the larger patterns occurring within a political system.

In fact, the concept of consolidation may be more applicable to authoritarianism than democratization. In addition to preventing challenges from fellow, illiberal elites, a central component of political life within a non-democracy is the manner by which autocrats close off alternative paths of political development and fortify their rule within the political system. Of course, democrats seek to ensure that democracy will become well-established within their political systems, but this is often a more deliberate and overt strategy for autocrats and one that may be easier to observe. This is especially true and relevant in cases like the former Soviet Union, where a polity emerges from a condition of political

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47 Schedler, "Taking Uncertainty Seriously."
48 Göbel, "Authoritarian Consolidation," 2.

instability.[49] In these situations, the line between a policy of state-building and authoritarian consolidation may blur and possibly reflect a conscious strategy to obfuscate the leader's plans of self-entrenchment. Therefore, understanding the process of authoritarian consolidation can place us in a better position to manage our expectations about future political develop-ments as well as deepen our understanding of what political dynamics are actually occurring within these regimes.

The Foundations of Authoritarian Consolidation

The literature on democratic consolidation identifies a variety of factors which are linked to regime survival. This section introduces the authori-tarian persistence literature into this discussion in order to identity some of the principal factors which affect authoritarian consolidation and help to determine the likelihood of regime survival. These will be divided into four categories: institutional, attitudinal, economic, and external.

Both the democratic consolidation and authoritarian persistence literatures agree that the structures of state, the government, and its abil-ities or effectiveness are central in determining regime survival. Gandhi and Przeworksi argued persuasively that previous attempts to dismiss these institutional factors as being "of very little importance" to authori-tarian regimes were misguided.[50] Formal and informal arrangements were central to the study of democratic consolidation, and it is appropriate to include them here. In the most general terms, the level of state capacity through which an authoritarian government can entrench itself in office is key to resisting attempts at regime change. The "quality of authoritarian regimes," referring to "infrastructural power" and "state power," is import-ant.[51] For Slater, the strength of state institutions in Southeast Asia was a product of the nature of and responses to the "contentious politics" of the past.[52] In terms of post-communist countries, weak state capacity played a crucial role in permitting autocrats to be ousted by the color revolutions.[53] Governments with the ability to call upon substantial coercive power have a better chance of remaining in power. However, open coercion itself can backfire and possibly spark greater opposition and can also be seen as a sign of the weaknesses within the state structure if a regime needs to

[49] Levitsky and Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism*, 358.

[50] Jennifer Gandhi and Adam Przeworski. 2007. "Authoritarian Institutions and the Survival of Autocrats." *Comparative Political Studies* 40:11 (November): 1279-1301 (1292).

[51] Göbel, "Authoritarian Consolidation," 177; Dan Slater and Sofia Fenner. 2011. "State Power and Staying Power: Infrastructural Mechanisms and Authoritarian Durability." *Journal of International Affairs* 65:1 (Fall-Winter): 15-29.

[52] Dan Slater. 2010. *Ordering Power: Contentious Politics and Authoritarian Leviathans in Southeast Asia*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

[53] Lucan Way, "The Real Causes of the Color Revolutions," *Journal of Democracy* 19:3 (July): 62-64.

resort to violence. Therefore, an ability to utilize effective or "calibrated" coercion is just as important.[54] However, coercion is only one item in the autocrat's repertoire and other institutional capacities are crucial as well, such as the ability to extract and distribute revenues, keep tabs on the population in order to exert social control, weaken or eliminate alternative power bases in subnational political units, and establish dependence upon the government amongst politically relevant portions of society.[55]

In addition to these factors, regime stability and survival also relies on a series of institutions designed to manage conflicts amongst elites and between elites and the people. Democratic governments do this through constitutions, the rule of law, elections, political parties, and interest groups. Democratic consolidation is strengthened once these processes become embedded in everyday politics. Authoritarian governments have similar tools to manage these conflicts. While the accumulation of power by the dictator may make a mockery of formal institutions,[56] autocracies must manage power-sharing relationships amongst regime elites, as well as between the dictator and his "ruling coalition." This can be done informally, but in many cases, some sort of institutional structure is necessary. For example, autocracies must have a structure in place to deal with leadership succession or else they may fracture once the leader dies or is removed from power internally.[57] The ability of the Communist Party of China to institutionalize procedures for leadership changes is a crucial foundation of its continued rule.[58] This can be facilitated by a dominant, ruling party which not only manages elite conflicts internally, but also integrates elites into the regime, prevents regime defections, and forms the ideological basis of regime legitimacy.[59] During the color revolutions, the existence of such a

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[54] Cherian George. 2007. "Consolidating Authoritarian Rule: Calibrated Coercion in Singapore." *The Pacific Review*. 20:2 (June): 127-145.

[55] Dan Slater. 2009. "State Power and Staying Power: Institutional Origins and Durable Authoritarianism in Malaysia and Singapore." Paper presented at the American Sociological Association Conference, Berkeley, CA, August.

[56] Milan W. Svolik. 2012, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

[57] Of the 340 authoritarian leadership successions between 1946 and 2009, nearly half (forty-seven percent) resulted in the fall of the regime. Natasha Ezrow and Erica Frantz. 2011. "State Institutions and the Survival of Dictatorships," *Journal of International Affairs* 65:1 (Fall/Winter): 1-13 (6).

[58] Andrew Nathan. 2003. "Authoritarian Resilience." *Journal of Democracy* 14:1 (Januray): 6-17.

[59] Barbara Geddes. 1999. "What Do We Know about Democratization after Twenty Years?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 2:1 (June): 115-144; Brian Lai and Dan Slater. 2006. "Institutions of the Offensive: Domestic Sources of Dispute Initiation in Authoritarian Regimes, 1950-1992." *American Journal of Political Science* 50:1 (January): 113-126; Max Bader. 2011. "Hegemonic Political Parties in Post-Soviet Eurasia: Towards Party-Based Authoritarianism?" *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 44:3 (September): 189-197.

party structure helped to preserve autocracies.[60] Similarly, having inclusive institutions in place to respond to the needs and interests of societal forces creates a more stable foundation for any regime's continued rule – something just as true in autocracies as it is in a democracy.[61] For example, the Chinese government has created local institutions to "absorb and process demands, expand the consultative capacities of their systems, give a stake in the system to various sections of their populations, and perhaps preempt demands for more far-reaching and anti-systemic change."[62] Similarly, the Chinese communists' grip on power has been sustained by co-opting subnational regional leaders.[63] The use of legislative bodies, even ones that include opposition figures, can be effective in co-opting non-regime forces. These bodies are more than mere "window dressing." They can play an actual, important role in ensuring autocratic stability by, for example, creating a forum for policy compromises amongst those within the regime and the opposition forces allowed to exist, but not substantively challenge, the regime.[64] In the absence of these mechanisms, autocrats are more likely to be forced to rely on outright coercion, which may keep a government in power but creates a weaker foundation for continued rule.

In addition to institutions, research into democratic consolidation is also firmly rooted in the beliefs of major political actors, under the category of attitudinal approaches. The attitudes of political actors are widely considered to be crucial in the consolidation of democracy.[65] According to this formulation, only when there seems no legitimate alternative could we say that democracy is firmly established in a society. Democratic values become embedded in the political culture of a society, thus maintaining its political system in the face of domestic and international crises. Although many early works saw this in light of a threshold, those considering consolidation as a process can make use of its insights: as democratic values become more substantively embedded in the attitudes of elites and the population at large, it is more likely that a democratic regime will be sustainable.[66] The application of an attitudinal approach to the

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[60] Way, "The Real Causes of the Color Revolutions," 62-64.

[61] Although, obviously, the population's voice is far more restricted in the former.

[62] Xiaojun Yan. 2011. "Regime Inclusion and the Resilience of Authoritarianism: The Local People's Political Consultative Conference in Post-Mao Chinese Politics." *The China Journal* 66 (July): 53-75.

[63] Yumin Sheng. 2009. "Authoritarian Co-optation, the Territorial Dimension: Provincial Political Representation in Post-Mao China." *Studies in Comparative International Development*. 44:1 (Winter): 71-93.

[64] Jennifer Gandhi. 2008. *Political Institutions Under Dictatorship*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

[65] Friedman, "Beyond 'Democratic Consolidation'," 29-30.

[66] It is possible to identify an additional "foundation" of consolidation: behavioral. This considers a democratic regime consolidated "when no significant national, social, economic, political, or institutional actors spend significant resources attempting to achieve their ob-

consolidation of autocracies is relatively easy since studies of authoritarian persistence have long considered values, legitimacy, and political culture to be crucial in underpinning such regimes. While it is certainly true that "arguments [which] see political cultures as essentially fixed and uniform... are fundamentally misleading," conceptions of regime legitimacy are, at least in part, mediated by political culture.[67] Similarly, individual or group attitudes on the legitimacy of authoritarian regimes have been shown to be important in establishing autocratic stability in Latin America and China.[68]

Arguments in favor of the economic foundation for democratic consolidation have also been associated with the threshold approach to consolidation. However, it is easy to reconceptualize economics in line with a process-oriented approach. For example, rather than putting an actual dollar amount below which a political system was seen as "extremely fragile" and above which they are "impregnable,"[69] an alternative could chart economic development and growth as crucial to furthering the process of ensuring regime survival, as the population begins to associate their own well-being with the stability offered by the government. The literature on autocratic "ruling bargains" or "social contracts" fits into this category.[70] The ability to extract and distribute rents, as well as to maintain patron-client networks, has been cited to explain the survival of authoritarian regimes rich in natural resources or other sources of rent-based income.[71] Along similar lines, state control over economic resources was

jectives by creating a nondemocratic regime or turning to violence or foreign intervention to secede from the state." Taken more broadly than Linz and Stepan, this approach can also include the use of violence to achieve political aims, rejection of free and fair elections, and transgressions of the rule of law. In addition to being closely linked to the threshold approach to democratic consolidation, and therefore suffering from similar problems, it is questionable whether it should be a separate foundation of consolidation. Instead, these behaviors may be more accurately described as evidence of the attitudes and values of political actors or the relative legitimacy of the regime. Therefore, it is not included in this article as a separate category of explanations for regime consolidation. Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*. 6.

[67] Hinnebusch, "Authoritarian Persistence, Democratization Theory and the Middle East," 375.

[68] Daniel Stevens, et al. 2006. "Authoritarian Attitudes, Democracy, and Policy Preferences among Latin American Elites." *American Journal of Political Science*. 50:3 (July): 606-620; Jie Chen and Chunlong Lu. 2011. "Democratization and the Middle Class in China: The Middle Class's Attitudes toward Democracy." *Political Research Quarterly*. 64:3 (September): 705-719.

[69] Adam Przeworski, et al. 1996. "What Makes Democracies Endure?" *Journal of Democracy* 7:1 (January): 39-55 (40).

[70] See Kamrava's contribution in Mehran Kamrava, ed. 2014. *Beyond the Arab Spring: The Evolving Ruling Bargain in the Middle East*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

[71] For a good overview of the rentier approach to authoritarian survival, see Anne Peters and Pete Moore. 2009. "Beyond Boom and Bust: External Rents, Durable Authoritarianism, and Institutional Adaptation in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 44:3 (August): 256-285.

crucial in staving off the color revolutions in the former Soviet Union.[72]
For those countries where this was lacking, autocrats were confronted with
alternative sources of economic power and were overthrown.

The international level has been seen as important for democratic
consolidation[73] and some of these insights can be easily applied to author-
itarian consolidation. For example, membership in liberal-democratic
international organizations, such as the European Union, can strengthen
democratic institutions, help internalize democratic attitudes amongst
elites and the population at large, and promote economic well-being – all
of which are already seen as key to democratic consolidation.[74] Similarly,
the formal and informal "density of a country's economic, political, orga-
nizational, social, and communication ties to the West" constitute one half
of Levitsky and Way's argument explaining the differing political trajec-
tories of the post-communist states.[75] There is an increasing awareness
that the international level can also further the process of authoritarian
consolidation. For example, those states without Western connections
were better positioned to resist the democratic pressures emanating from
the wave of Color Revolutions.[76] Also, authoritarian states which receive
foreign economic assistance have been able to maintain regime stability
despite substantial challenges to their rule.[77] In some cases, autocrats in
one country may provide political, economic, or diplomatic assistance to
like-minded leaders elsewhere in order to ensure that the recipient regime
remains in power.[78] Moreover, autocratic regimes struggling with achieving
or maintaining control over their populations will look to other countries
which have achieved this goal more effectively or efficiently. Lessons
learned from others may significantly reduce a regime's vulnerability to
democratic pressures. Thus, the diffusion of autocratic methods and strat-
egies can also facilitate the process of authoritarian consolidation. [79]

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[72] Way, "The Real Causes of the Color Revolutions," 64-66.

[73] Jan Zielonka and Alex Pravda, eds. 2001. *Democratic Consolidation in Eastern Europe: Volume 2*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[74] Jon Pevehouse. 2002. "With a Little Help from My Friends? Regional Organizations and the Consolidation of Democracy." *American Journal of Political Science* 46:3 (July) 611-626.

[75] Lucan Way and Steven Levitsky. 2007. "Linkage, Leverage, and the PostCommunist Divide." *East European Politics & Societies* 21:1 (Winter): 48-66 (50).

[76] Way, "The Real Causes of the Color Revolutions," 59-60.

[77] Sean Yom and Mohammad Al-Momani. 2008. "The International Dimensions of Authoritarian Regime Stability: Jordan in the Post-Cold War Era." *Arab Studies Quarterly* 30:1 (Winter): 39-60.

[78] Rachel Vanderhill. 2012. *Promoting Authoritarianism Abroad*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Reinner.

[79] Thomas Ambrosio. 2011. "Constructing a Framework of Authoritarian Diffusion: Concepts, Dynamics, and Future Research Framework of Authoritarian Diffusion." *International Studies Perspectives* 11:4 (November): 375-392.

A Research Agenda for Authoritarian Consolidation

If we were to consider the seemingly stable, autocratic states of the former Soviet Union in terms of authoritarian consolidation, rather than through the lens of transition, our understanding of the political dynamics of this region, as well as the prospects for both democratic and authoritarian diffusion, would be significantly strengthened. At the very least, we should not assume that change is likely, that these regimes are somehow living on borrowed time, or that if political instability does occur a democracy will be the end result. The very focus of our research agenda must be reconsidered: rather than searching for sources of regime weakness or the likelihood of a democratic opening, the sources of regime strengths and the likelihood of authoritarian survival should be explored. This work has already begun, as an increasing number of scholars are investigating the ways in which states have constructed domestic and regional environments conducive to authoritarianism. Several of these have been cited in this article. However, more needs to be done. This section identifies some of the areas in which this should occur.

Given the importance that institutional factors play in our under-standing of political consolidation, this is an obvious place to start. Research which directly links the post-Soviet state-building projects to the construction of stable authoritarian regimes would provide insights into the ways in which autocracy is embedded into the very structure of political life in these countries. Putin's purposeful construction of the "power vertical" in Russia is an obvious example of this and has received significant attention. How this has occurred in other post-Soviet republics and the implications for the future of politics in these countries, are questions that also need to be considered in greater depth. Similarly, the other institutional capacities of these states identified in the previous section need to be explored in more detail. These include the ability of regimes to regulate elite replacement or leadership succession, monitor populations, develop and entrench a "party of power," and use specific institutions, such as legislatures to co-opt elites or other bodies to manage demands from the population. The overt and mass use of coercion is quite rare in the former Soviet Union, as the exceptions of the northern Caucasus and Andijan illustrate. Why is this the case? Research into preventing the rise of anti-regime forces was cited above, lending credence to the ability of these governments to use more subtle means of keeping control over polit-ical challenges. This pre-existing literature should serve as the foundation for a broader research agenda.

The attitudinal and economic foundations of authoritarian consol-idation should also be further explored. Survey data of elites and the population about their views toward their governments in particular and

politics in general have already been conducted, especially in Russia. While this has provided important insights, there tends to be a pro-democracy bias in many of these studies, looking for democratic attitudes in the abstract rather than investigating a willingness amongst the respondents to change their current political system.[80] Given the widespread, rhetorical strength of democracy in the international system, in which even those governments which are fully autocratic feel the need to pay lip service to democratic ideals, it is not surprising that support for "democracy" is found in many of these surveys. However, there is a significant difference between support for democracy as a concept and a willingness to oppose the current regime in power: one can be pro-democracy in theory but pro-autocracy in practice. More subtle measures are needed to understand the true basis of support for, or opposition to, the current authoritarian regimes.[81] Furthermore, the links between a purposeful government policy, on the one hand, and the construction of a national identity conducive to regime stability, on the other, has already been explored in several post-Soviet cases,[82] though there is room for further research on this topic, especially as these regimes become more entrenched over time. Similarly, the ways in which these governments utilize economic resources to co-opt elites and the population, as well as the effects of economic growth and decreases in relative income inequality on regime stability, are also important. Research into how countries such as Russia, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan resemble other rentier states is well underway and should be expanded, integrating the economic foundation of authoritarianism into our understanding of the politics of this region.[83]

There has been far more research on the domestic sources of authoritarian persistence in the former Soviet Union than on international factors.

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[80] In making the argument that support for democracy within Central Asia is strong, Nikolayenko used survey data in which the questions are very general and demonstrate this pro-democracy bias. Olena Nikolayenko. 2011. "Support for Democracy in Central Asia." *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 23:2 (Summer 2011): 191-204 (200).

[81] Henry Hale. 2011. "The Myth of Mass Russian Support for Autocracy: The Public Opinion Foundations of a Hybrid Regime." *Europe-Asia Studies* 63:8 (October): 1357-1375; Ellen Carnaghan. 2011. "The Difficulty of Measuring Support for Democracy in a Changing Society: Evidence from Russia." *Democratization*. 18:3 (June): 682-706.

[82] Anna Matveeva. 2009. "Legitimising Central Asian Authoritarianism: Political Manipulation and Symbolic Power." *Europe-Asia Studies* 61:7 (September): 1095-1121; Charles Ziegler. 2010. "Civil Society, Political Stability, and State Power in Central Asia: Cooperation and Contestation." *Democratization*. 17:5 (October): 795-825; Oleg Manaev, et al. 2011. "More State Than Nation: Lukashenko's Belarus." *Journal of International Affairs*. 65:1 (Fall-Winter): 93-113.

[83] Ahmet Kuru. 2008. "The Rentier State Model and Central Asian Studies: The Turkmen Case." *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*. 7:1 (Spring): 51-71; Anja Franke, et al. 2009. "Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan as PostSoviet Rentier States: Resource Incomes and Autocracy as a Double 'Curse' in PostSoviet Regimes." *Europe-Asia Studies* 61:1 (January): 109-140.

This is not surprising, given the domestic focus in comparative politics. However, because the international environment within which these countries find themselves is so unlike that of previous cases of democratic transition, in which there was at the very least a permissive acceptance of democracy and in some cases its active promotion, this level needs to be considered. Within the former Soviet Union, we see an international environment which appears highly resistant to democratic diffusion and quite supportive of autocratic diffusion. Again, some of this research has been cited above and fits into a larger trend of exploring the ways in which democracy promotion is being challenged by the promotion of autocracy.[84] However, far more work needs to be done in demonstrating the means by which international factors advance the process of authoritarian consolidation. Three areas in particular should be considered: learning behavior, linkages, and direct aid.

There is clear evidence of learning behavior during and after the color revolutions as anti-regime activists sought to apply the lessons of successful revolutions to their own countries. This diffusion of pro-democracy methods has been countered by autocratic leaders who have taken lessons from the failures of overthrown regimes as well as from the successes of like-minded leaders who survived. The proliferation of policies against nongovernmental organizations within the region further represents autocratic learning and the diffusion of authoritarian methods.[85] An expanded research agenda to trace these policies from country to country is needed. By connecting learning behavior to policies which increase the probability of regime survival, we can better understand how authoritarian consolidation within the region becomes self-reinforcing.

Research into how the absence of linkages to the democratic West made authoritarian regimes less vulnerable to the color revolutions could go further by establishing how linkages amongst authoritarian regimes can both positively promote autocratic diffusion and make regimes more resistant to democratic diffusion. Within the larger European context, international organizations have traditionally been seen as transmitters and defenders of democratic values. However, this has not been the case in the former Soviet Union where there is evidence of international organizations serving as the transmitters and defenders of autocratic values. Not only can these organizations serve as a conduit for information exchanges about "best practices" of regime survival, but they can also offer institutional

[84] Peter Brunell and Oliver Schlumberger. 2010. "Promoting Democracy – Promoting Autocracy? International Politics and National Political Regimes." *Contemporary Politics* 16:1 (March): 1-15.

[85] Paul Kubicek. 2011. "Are Central Asian Leaders Learning from Upheavals in Kyrgyzstan?" *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 2:2 (July): 115-124; Polese and Ó Beacháin. "The Color Revolution Virus and Authoritarian Antidotes."

cover for concrete assistance amongst authoritarian governments. One key example of the latter is the election monitoring system created by the Commonwealth of Independent States, which provides a veneer of legitimacy for unfair electoral practices and helps to counter criticism of electoral fraud. These organizations can also play an important part in delegitimizing the idea of regime change, as represented by the rhetoric of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization that stresses "stability" over all other values. Moreover, these bodies can serve as alternatives to linkages to democratic states. For example, the Eurasian Economic Union will create the benefits of a common market without the necessity of deepening economic ties to similar, preexisting organizations associated with Western democracies. Thus, these international bodies, which are often explored from realist or geopolitical perspectives, should also be understood as playing an important political role in the region by furthering the consolidation of authoritarianism.

The issue of direct assistance by authoritarian governments to fellow autocrats has already been examined in terms of Russia's consistent (and expensive) aid to Belarus. Expanding on insights from prior research, which explained the logic behind authoritarian regimes promoting autocracy within their immediate neighborhood,[86] it is important to explore how the former Soviet republics directly aid each other. This will highlight the ways in which the regional environment is especially nonconducive to democratic openings by adding another layer to our understanding of the connections between domestic political survival and interstate relations. It is in the interests of these regimes to ensure that their neighbors are able to consolidate their authoritarian regimes as well.

Although this article has focused on the former Soviet region, the concept of authoritarian consolidation has obvious implications elsewhere. This is most clearly evident in the fact that several of the works cited above, which dealt explicitly with authoritarian consolidation, came from case studies outside of this area – in particular, from East and Southeast Asia. In the Arab world, Heydemann referred to this general applicability as the "upgrading" of authoritarianism.[87] Moreover, one could trace a similar process elsewhere to that seen within some post-Soviet states in which popularly-elected leaders take steps to shift their countries toward entrenched authoritarianism, such as in Belarus. Venezuela under Hugo Chavez and quite possibly Turkey under Recep Erdoğan now are two examples outside of the former Soviet Union. Thus, this article does not

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[86] Julia Bader, et al. 2010. "Would Autocracies Promote Autocracy? A Political Economy Perspective on Regimetype Export in Regional Neighbourhoods." *Contemporary Politics* 16:1 (March): 81-100.

[87] Steven Heydemann. 2007. "Upgrading Authoritarianism in the Arab World." Brookings Institution, Saban Center Analysis Paper Series, no.13.

seek to develop a particularistic concept to explain a limited set of phenomena in just one region, but rather to use these cases of seemingly stable, autocratic regimes to prompt a larger discussion on the need to example the process of authoritarian consolidation.

Conclusion

This article has sought to complement Carothers' statement about the need to move away from viewing much of the former Soviet Union in terms of a transition to democracy and to study these countries as stable, authoritarian states whose potential for regime change is quite low. There are significant differences between the current conditions in this region and those of past clusters of democratization from which the previous iterations of transition literature emerged. Consequently, this article has argued that future research should draw upon the literatures of authoritarian persistence and consolidology, and should consider how the process of authoritarian consolidation affects the likelihood of regime survival. This viewpoint is admittedly pessimistic, but, given the trends evident in the region, it may be a more fruitful starting point to understand why political change appears unlikely in the short-to-medium term.

By taking a different approach, scholars should explore the foundations of regime strengths and stability, rather than look for signs of weaknesses and instability. However, in doing so, a word of caution is necessary: too much of an emphasis on why governments are unlikely to fall can distract researchers from these regimes' very real vulnerabilities. The surprise of policymakers and scholars alike over numerous revolutions throughout history demonstrates this danger well. What is needed is a shift away from a belief in the overwhelming power of democracy and the perception of authoritarianism as something inherently transitory within the current era. Our understanding of this region will only be helped by more balance.

In closing, the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus tells us that the only constant in the universe is change. Nothing lasts forever. Even if some consolidologists appear to flirt with the idea, neither democratic nor authoritarian consolidation should be taken to be a permanent state of being. Events often outstrip our predictions. Fagin's reference to Samuel Huntington's 1984 prediction that the chances for democracy in Eastern Europe were "virtually nil" is a case in point.[88] Similarly, theorists of authoritarian persistence in the Arab world will be forced to reevaluate their assumptions given the events of 2011.[89] As seen throughout history,

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[88] Fagin, "Democratization in Eastern Europe." 143.
[89] Eva Bellin. 2012. " Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Lessons from the Arab Spring." *Comparative Politics*. 44:2 (January): 127-150.

authoritarian regimes which appear to be consolidated may fall very rapidly and unexpectedly. The relevance of the transition literature may resurface once again in the former Soviet Union and beyond. Until then, it is perhaps better to more deeply understand the process of authoritarian consolidation.

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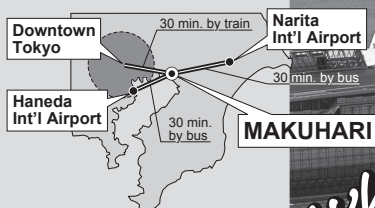# IX World Congress 2015
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