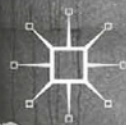# Politics and Legitimacy in Post-Soviet Eurasia

Edited *by* Martin Brusis,
Joachim Ahrens &
Martin Schulze Wessel

Politics and Legitimacy in Post-Soviet Eurasia

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Edited by

Martin Brusis

Director, Competence Network on Institutions and Institutional Change in Postsocialism, Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, Germany
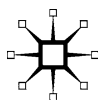
Joachim Ahrens

Professor of International Economics, Private University of Applied Sciences, Göttingen, Germany

Martin Schulze Wessel

Chair for the History of East and Southeast Europe, Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, Germany

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Contributors

Joachim Ahrens is Professor of International Economics at the Private University of Applied Sciences, Göttingen, Germany.

Martin Brusis is Managing Director of the project network 'Institutions and Institutional Change in Postsocialism', University of Munich, Germany.

Philipp Bürger is a historian and PhD candidate at the Institute of Historiography, University of Munich, Germany.

Fabian Burkhardt is a PhD student in Political Science at the Graduate School of East and Southeast European Studies, University of Munich, Germany.

Adele Del Sordi is a post-doctoral researcher in Political Science at the University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

Julia Grauvogel is a research fellow at the GIGA German Institute for Global and Area Studies, Hamburg, and a PhD student at the University of Hamburg, Germany.

Herman W. Hoen is Professor of International Political Economy at the University of Groningen, The Netherlands.

Leslie Holmes is Professor Emeritus of Political Science at the University of Melbourne, Australia.

Martin Schulze Wessel is Professor of History of East and Southeast Europe at the University of Munich, Germany.

Martin C. Spechler is Professor of Economics at Indiana University, USA.

Alfred Sproede is Professor of Slavonic and Baltic Literatures, University of Münster, Germany.

Christian Timm is a PhD student in Political Science and researcher at the Private University of Applied Sciences, Göttingen, Germany.

Alexei Trochev is Associate Professor of Political Science at Nazarbayev University, Astana, Kazakhstan.

Christian von Soest is a senior research fellow at the GIGA German Institute for Global and Area Studies, Hamburg, Germany.

Oleksandr Zabirko is a PhD candidate in East European Cultural Studies, University of Münster, Germany.

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The Politics of Legitimation in Post-Soviet Eurasia

Martin Brusis

The Eurasian successor states of the former Soviet Union hold regular elections, but few political regimes in the region meet democratic standards. Despite the color revolutions and subsequent protest movements, which have shown that the manipulation of elections entails considerable risks for incumbents, non-democratic arrangements of political rule have emerged and persist in many of the region's states. In fact, most of these political regimes have survived public protests and other challenges or threats originating from elite disagreements, ethnic divisions and economic crises. The causes and conditions of this robustness, however, are not yet well understood among scholars.

   A growing body of research aims to explore the sources of stability in authoritarian regimes across the world (for reviews of the literature, see Gandhi and Lust-Okar, 2009; Magaloni and Kricheli, 2010; Morse, 2012; Brancati, 2014). One key finding in this literature points to the role of political institutions such as elections, ruling political parties and legislatures; these perform important functions for authoritarian incumbents, for example, as tools of co-optation, credible instruments of self-constraint or channels of societal information. These important insights have solidly challenged the assumption that formal political institutions are merely facades behind which authoritarian rulers wield discretionary power. Moreover, the use of elections as instruments of authoritarian rule has led scholars to suggest that we are witnessing a new 'electoral', 'competitive' type of authoritarianism that differs from 'closed' or 'full' authoritarianism and democracy (Schedler, 2006; Levitsky and Way, 2010).

   However, the ambition of combining large-n evidence with generalizability has led many scholars in this new wave of research on authoritarianism to adopt instrumentalist or rationalist views of institutions that

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are most amenable to formal models which ignore national contexts (Bueno de Mesquita, 2003; Gandhi, 2008; Magaloni, 2008; Svolik, 2012). Defining institutions primarily as sets of rules that structure interaction, these approaches focus on how utility-maximizing political actors engineer institutions and their regulatory functions. These approaches, however, neglect the fact that institutions also serve legitimatory functions which are embedded in shared historical and cultural experience. But authoritarian rulers cannot simply create political institutions at will. Institutions are more than equilibria, reflecting the preferences of political actors whose behavior they are to regulate (March and Olsen, 1989).

This volume features contributions from scholars who in principle concur with this theoretical position. Their common aim is to study the legitimatory dimension of non-democratic political regimes and the relationship between institutional legitimacy and stability. Based upon an empirical concept of legitimacy that considers legitimacy beliefs and their justifications (Beetham, 1991), institutional legitimacy is conceived here as the functional and normative appropriateness of institutions with regard to shared interpretations and beliefs. This notion assumes a plurality of sources, modes and patterns of legitimation from which political actors can draw upon when either claiming or contesting the legitimacy of institutions.

This volume focuses on a single region, post-Soviet Eurasia (PSE), in order to investigate the impact of historical and cultural references common to this area. For many scholars, PSE is deemed to include Belarus, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine and the Caucasian and Central Asian successor states of the former Soviet Union. However, valid arguments can be made in favor of excluding specific states from this group, including other states, dividing the overall region into more homogenous subregions, or studying Russia separately. Research interests and theoretical considerations must inform decisions regarding the definitional scope of this region and the selection of individual countries.

Since this volume studies the politics of legitimation in non-democratic regimes, it seems appropriate to focus on those states that share the legacy of the former Soviet Union and its assumed relevance for legitimation, but which have not established stable democracies. It should be noted that the term 'non-democratic' refers to more and less authoritarian political regimes as well as hybrid regimes situated between full autocracy and consolidated democracy. Moreover, our volume's goal has not been to examine all post-Soviet Eurasian states systematically. Rather, the contributors have identified cases encompassing a single or several countries within this region as examples in order to examine questions of wider regional and theoretical relevance.

The conceptual framework for these empirical studies is outlined in this chapter. This chapter explains the relevance of institutional legitimacy for post-Soviet Eurasia and discusses approaches to distinguishing modes of legitimation. It is claimed that struggles over the legitimacy of political institutions are crucial for the stability of non-democratic regimes. The politics of legitimation affects conflicts between rival elite factions, the level of popular support accorded to incumbents and the strength of civil society, because institutional legitimacy shapes both the distribution of resources among political actors and the beliefs held by citizens.

1. Why institutional legitimacy matters

We can look at several features of non-democratic regimes in the post-Soviet and other regions of the world to help explain the importance of institutional legitimacy. First, the legitimating function of elections is a defining attribute of the new authoritarianism that has not been explicitly included within influential contemporary conceptual frameworks (Gerschewski, 2013, p. 18). The recent notions of 'electoral' and 'competitive' authoritarianism aspire to be more parsimonious than the 'classical' definition of authoritarianism proposed by Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan which includes 'distinctive mentalities' and legitimacy as a key feature of 'democratic-authoritarian hybrid regimes' (Linz, 2000, p. 159; Stepan and Linz, 2013, p. 20).

According to Andreas Schedler, '[e]lectoral authoritarian regimes play the game of multiparty elections [but] violate the liberal-democratic principles of freedom and fairness so profoundly and systematically as to render elections instruments of authoritarian rule rather than "instruments of democracy"' (2006, p. 3). This definition acknowledges that elections do not de facto serve to select political elites, but rather to reinforce the popular belief that political elites are selected in competitive elections and to cultivate this interpretation among external actors. For elections to become 'instruments of authoritarian rule', a majority of citizens need to believe that they do, in fact, regulate access to power. If incumbent political elites were to give citizens cause to perceive elections as a 'game' rather than a serious competition, the elites would lose their legitimacy.[1]

Similarly, Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way stress that '[c]ompetitive authoritarian regimes are civilian regimes in which formal democratic institutions exist and are *widely viewed* as the primary means of gaining power but in which incumbents' abuse of the state places them at a significant advantage vis-à-vis their opponents' (2010, p. 5, italics added).

This definition suggests that popular views about the appropriate competitiveness of elections are the key constraint to incumbents' ability to retain power.

Second, post-Soviet authoritarian regimes differ from other autocracies because they lack sufficient alternative sources of legitimacy. Since fraudulent elections have frequently evoked protests aimed at emulating the popular mobilization of the color revolutions, incumbent elites have ample grounds to be worried about sustaining the legitimatory function of elections. This concern constrains the extent to which they can manipulate outcomes at their discretion. Responding to protests with increased repression could jeopardize the permissive consensus among those citizens who had hitherto tolerated or were indifferent to electoral irregularities. Increased repression would also entail high political costs by damaging, for example, the regime's international legitimacy. Governments in several PSE countries have therefore sought to render increased levels of repression legitimate by adopting more restrictive rules on association and assembly rights that endow law-enforcement agencies with the legal justification to prosecute civil society organizations and activists.

Post-Soviet political elites cannot draw on alternative sources of traditional legitimacy that are still available in the authoritarian monarchies of the Gulf region, for example. Legitimating visions of development are either discredited or (at least) suspected of utopism due to the memory of the failed Communist experiment. Post-Soviet regimes thus depend on their capacities to produce mass prosperity, security and other common goods (Sil and Chen, 2004, p. 363; Feklyunina and White, 2011, p. 401). This systemic performance, in conjunction with incumbent presidents' associated technocratic knowledge and personal charisma, has been an important source of legitimacy. However, this performance has suffered from the global economic crisis that has hit Russia and other post-Soviet countries harder than China and other emerging markets with authoritarian political regimes.

Given the dearth and erosion of alternative legitimacy sources, since 2012, the Russian government has increasingly resorted to mobilizing nationalist sentiment (e.g., Rubtsov, 2014). Russia incorporated Crimea in 2014, claiming that the peninsula constitutes a historical part of Russia, that its residents feel closely tied to Russia and that Crimea's ethnic Russian and Russophone majority populations required protection against threats of forced assimilation emerging from the new Ukrainian government. Russia also supported separatist insurgents in the Eastern Ukrainian regions of Donetsk and Luhansk who claimed

to represent the interests of Ukraine's Russophone citizens. Opinion surveys indicate that these policies – or their heavily biased public communication through state-controlled media – were welcomed by many Russians. Thus, one may infer that they contributed to reinforcing the legitimacy of Russia's incumbent political leadership. However, the appeal of nationalism in the medium to long term remains uncertain, as citizens ultimately begin to feel the associated economic and political costs and as Russia's dependence within the international system becomes more visible.

Third, political regimes in Eurasia have partially opened up access to political office and policy-making through legislatures, the mass media, parties, interest associations and non-governmental organizations. These institutions are assumed to support governing by co-opting critics, conveying unbiased information from society to the regime and exposing regime officials to public scrutiny. To perform these functions, these institutions require legitimacy. In other words, non-governmental actors and the broader public must be convinced that these institutions incorporate different societal interests within the activities of political representation and participation. By establishing and permitting representational institutions, the political regimes in turn endow reform-oriented political actors with institutional and legitimacy resources available to constrain executive discretion.

Fourth, Eurasian states are characterized by a dualism of formal and informal institutions that has been described with reference to concepts such as 'neopatrimonialism', 'patronal presidentialism', a 'dual state' or 'substitutions' (Hale, 2005; Timm, 2010; Petrov et al., 2010; Sakwa, 2011). The extent to which formal political institutions can be successfully employed by a regime depends upon whether informal institutions (for example, clientelism) perform complementary or substitutive coordination and orientation functions. These informal practices may not be disclosed to the public because doing so would render the formal institutions illegitimate (Beichelt, 2014, p. 57). Labelling United Russia a 'party of crooks and thieves', for example, was so damaging to the party and Russia's political leadership because this (evidence-backed) assertion publicly revealed the existence of informal practices and thus delegitimized an important political institution.

2. Modes of legitimation

While most states in the PSE region may be described as electoral authoritarian regimes that rely on elections as the key legitimatory institution

for the exercise of political rule, elections are clearly not these states' single source of political legitimacy. Political elites in the region who have lost or depleted their electoral source of legitimacy continue to draw upon a repertoire of strategies to claim legitimacy. What other sources exist and how do different modes of legitimation interact to ensure the stability of political institutions in these countries? Scholars have proposed a variety of answers to these questions.

One of the most differentiated and theoretically grounded analyses of legitimation and legitimacy in Russia has been elaborated by Leslie Holmes who complements the Weberian modes of traditional, charismatic and legal–rational legitimation by distinguishing eight additional modes of legitimation based on empirical observations (Holmes, 2015, 2010, 1993). These modes include the 'goal rationality' suggested by Harry Rigby (1982) as a means of describing the teleological legitimation dominating late Communist systems; 'eudaemonic' legitimation which is based on satisfying the populace; official nationalism, identifying or contrasting with Russia's past; and three modes of external legitimation: international recognition, support from foreign leaders and the emulation of external role models (Holmes, 2015).

Valentina Feklyunina and Stephen White identify the promise of economic modernization as one of the three official narratives used by Russia's political elite to address the post-2008 economic crisis and the threat it posed to regime legitimacy (Feklyunina and White, 2011). According to Eugene Huskey, Russian exceptionalism – that is, Russia's collective identity that centers on being different from the West – combined with technocracy as a method of rule constitutes the key sources of regime legitimacy in President Vladimir Putin's Russia (Huskey, 2013, 2010). For Rudra Sil and Chang Chen, Putin's vision of a resurgent, unified and assertive state, Russia's international image as a great power and the country's economic performance appear to be the most important and effective legitimatory devices (Sil and Chen, 2004; Chen, 2011). Edward Schatz distinguishes Central Asian authoritarian regimes according to their primary legitimacy claims that include international engagement, charismatic authority and anti-Islamism (2006, p. 269). Anna Matveeva argues that political leaders in Central Asia base their legitimacy on their achievements in state-building and their guarantees of stability and security, but they have not been very credible in drawing legitimacy from Islamic symbols (2009).

Scholars have only recently begun to compare sources of legitimacy and legitimation modes across a wider range of non-democratic regimes (Kailitz, 2013; Grauvogel and von Soest, 2014). In a comparison of

72 authoritarian and democratic countries, Bruce Gilley measures state legitimacy based on opinion and expert surveys, tax revenues and electoral turnout (Gilley, 2009). He finds indicators of good governance, democratic rights and welfare gains to be the strongest predictors of high levels of state legitimacy. However, his research design does not allow any insight into possible patterned interactions between sources of legitimacy.

Steffen Schneider and his co-authors list 23 'patterns of legitimation' that are grouped in categories making reference to (1) the input and output dimensions of the political system and (2) the presence of democratic and non-democratic rule (2010, p. 111). These categories are then used to code media discourses in order to study how globalization affects democratic legitimacy in four Western countries. Focusing on authoritarian regimes, Peter Burnell distinguishes six main sources of legitimacy: the claimed right to hereditary or theocratic rule; political ideology (communism, ethnic nationalism); elections; performance; external legitimation; and origin (2006, p. 548–9; von Soest and Grauvogel, 2015). He argues that the legitimating claims derived from these sources differ in their degree of vulnerability and suggests different strategies for external promoters of democratization.

We therefore face a situation in which scholars not only use a variety of terms to discuss political legitimation but have also drawn on both inductive and deductive methods to comprise lists of modes and types. Furthermore, empirical classifications of legitimation modes differ depending on the country and time period under examination. In order to provide more clarity and structure to the debate, I propose a typology of legitimation modes that is grounded in the regional post-Soviet context as well as theoretical analysis. As for the latter, I draw here on David Beetham's concept of legitimacy (1991) which looks beyond rule-compliant behavior:[2]

> For power to be fully legitimate [...], three conditions are required: its conformity to established rules; the justifiability of the rules by reference to shared beliefs; the express consent of the subordinate, or of the most significant among them, to the particular relations of power.
>
> (Beetham, 1991, p. 19)

I assume that ruling political elites need to address these three requirements if they are to acquire and retain political legitimacy, irrespective of whether the political regime is authoritarian or democratic. Each

requirement corresponds to a different mode of legitimation, and these modes are both individually necessary and jointly sufficient to ensure legitimacy. To demonstrate that power conforms to established constitutional or legal rules, the ruling elites enforce these rules or, at least, convince other elites and citizens of their commitment to guaranteeing the enforcement of such rules. But valid rules must also correspond with shared beliefs regarding how institutions should function. This justifiability can be achieved by credibly demonstrating that public office-holders act responsively; that is, that they form and implement policies that citizens want (Bingham Powell, 2004). Lastly, political legitimacy requires citizens or their representatives to express their consent to the exercise of political rule. In order to provide evidence of this consent, ruling elites need to demonstrate that they and their policies enjoy popular approval.

It is possible to further specify the three modes of legitimation by focusing on political institutions that are objects of legitimatory politics and policies. Beetham's first condition of legitimacy, rule conformity, is a key theme in the literature on the consolidation of democratic institutions. This literature has been particularly concerned with establishing the validity of rules for those political actors who create these rules and who may therefore be tempted to question rather than accept them as binding constraints for themselves. A consolidated political institution can be defined as

> one in which the (contingent, 'non-natural') rules according to which political and distributional conflicts are carried out are relatively immune from becoming themselves the object of such conflict.
> (Elster et al., 1998, p. 28)

This separation of conflict *under* rules from conflict *over* rules (Offe, 1996) also constitutes a key aim of ruling elites in authoritarian political regimes. To prevent the emergence of entangled and potentially disruptive conflicts, ruling elites are likely to be particularly interested in establishing and enforcing boundary rules that (1) define higher-order institutions that are not at actors' disposal but can nonetheless be used to legitimize enforcement decisions ('vertical consolidation') and (2) insulate institutional spheres from each other ('horizontal consolidation') (Elster et al., 1998).

A primary object of vertical consolidation is the nation state or the political community. Legitimation aims at constituting the nation state as an entity distinct from prevailing political or economic systems and at

placing the president as the symbolic representation of the nation state, outside and above the political system. As the undisputable head of state, the president can legitimately arbitrate conflicts in or between the economic and political systems. President Putin's punishment of 'state capture' by wealthy 'oligarchs', for example, aimed at enforcing boundary rules, consolidating the new president's leadership and generating legitimacy for Putin's regime (e.g., Zudin, 2001). Horizontal consolidation refers particularly to boundary rules that separate the political and economic systems and prevent, for example, the appointment of business managers based solely on political loyalty.

Among the legitimation modes defined and discussed by scholars of post-Soviet and other non-democratic regimes, the two Weberian modes of traditional and legal–rational legitimation refer to the existence, observance and enforcement of rules. People may believe in the legitimacy of a political regime because its particular set of informal and formal rules and institutions governing the exercise of political authority has prevailed for a long time; or because the political regime embodies legal rationality – that is, generally applicable formal rules derived from reasonable constitutional principles. Both Holmes and Burnell have included these two modes of legitimation in their classifications (Burnell, 2006; Holmes, 2015), and Christian von Soest and Julia Grauvogel distinguish 'procedural legitimacy' as a strategy corresponding to legal–rational legitimation (2015).

The second condition of legitimacy, justifiability, refers to the fit between political institutions and the normative and functional expectations shared by citizens or elites. To meet this condition, ruling political elites need to act responsively; that is, to show that the government takes popular and elite preferences seriously and that government policies translate these preferences into policy outcomes. These two dimensions of responsiveness reflect the difference between input and output (or performance) legitimacy along with the underlying model of the political system introduced by David Easton (Easton, 1965; Scharpf, 1999).

The institutions generating input legitimacy range from elections to consultation formats with economic and other functional elites to regular televised discussions between the president and selected citizens. They are intended to demonstrate that the political leadership is listening to society and its key groups. Output legitimacy is produced by a wide range of institutions that provide prosperity and security for the general population, along with privileges or rents for key elite groups. In addition, ruling political elites respond to popular beliefs

about the nation state by defining membership in the nation, situating the present nation state in history and delineating the state's role in the international system.

In conceptualizing input and output legitimacy as dimensions of governmental responsiveness, no assumption is made as to whether democracies are necessarily endowed with higher input legitimacy than autocracies. Electoral authoritarian regimes do not permit free and fair elections, a fact which can be assumed to suppress or distort the representation of citizens' preferences in the legislature and executive. But governments in authoritarian regimes may be able to replace this defective link in the chain of (democratic) responsiveness (Bingham Powell, 2004) by observing their citizens and adjusting their policies accordingly.

Ruling political elites may thus demonstrate responsiveness through various avenues of legitimation that include socioeconomic performance, goal rationality, nationalism, ideology, the construction of contrasts with a negative past and legitimation through external support or international engagement (Burnell, 2006; Holmes, 2015).

The third mode of legitimation aims at overcoming the informational uncertainties associated with unclear or mixed popular preferences and their aggregation. Ruling political elites in authoritarian regimes suffer particularly from these uncertainties since they restrict the formation and aggregation of preferences through elections, political parties, mass media and other channels of information from society (Wintrobe, 1998; Schedler, 2013). They seek to reduce this uncertainty by demonstrating broad approval for their policies through elections, the legislature, party congresses and affiliated mass organizations. Such manifestations are orchestrated to convince citizens that their fellow citizens are overwhelmingly expressing their consent. These instruments furthermore serve to assure elites that the regime enjoys popular legitimacy, thereby raising the stakes of defection or opposition.

Public expressions of consent are encompassed within most of the legitimation modes distinguished by the above-mentioned scholars, insofar as such expressions may be used to confirm or indicate subordinates' support for socioeconomic achievements, nationalistic or other ideological claims or a state's particular international role (Table 1.1).

3. Legitimation shifts

Thus, legitimation needs and policies are closely linked to the exercise of political power and permeate political institutions, particularly in

Table 1.1 Modes and objects of legitimation

Conditions of legitimacy (Beetham)	Modes of legitimation	Institutional objects of legitimation
Conformity to rules (legal validity)	Demonstrating rule enforcement	Boundary rules: nation state; political and economic system
Justifiability of rules in terms of shared beliefs	Demonstrating responsiveness	Input and output institutions
Legitimation through expressed consent	Demonstrating popular approval	Elections; mass organizations; legislature

authoritarian regimes that rely on elections as a key source of legitimacy but which also have to transform these elections into manifestations of popular approval. This ambiguity of elections with predetermined winners, the distorted representation of citizens' preferences within input institutions and the vesting of unaccountable and ultimate enforcement authority in the president constitute crucial structural sources of uncertainty in electoral authoritarian regimes. Evidence of electoral fraud, government unresponsiveness or waning presidential authority jeopardize institutional legitimacy. Incumbent political elites try to address these challenges by shifting between and within legitimation modes (Holmes, 2010, 2015). For example, policy outputs and outcomes that reflect citizens' likely preferences may compensate for weak, facade-type institutions of interest articulation and aggregation.

More generally, one may argue that non-democratic and hybrid regimes in the PSE region depend more on responsiveness and popular approval than on rule conformity, because the dualism of formal and informal institutions systematically undermines the validity of rules. Formal rules do not stabilize behavioral expectations to the same extent as in political regimes that are based on legal–rational legitimacy and constitutionalism. Political elites in post-Soviet Eurasian regimes are thus less able to pass the burden of legitimation to formal rules and procedures. Instead, they have to rely more on those legitimation modes that require targeted public communication addressing shared beliefs and carefully designed manifestations of expressed consent.

In addition, the Internet, social media and new communication technologies have penetrated PSE societies and facilitated the growth of power-scrutinizing organizations and mechanisms (Peregudov, 2012, p. 64–5). These new forms of monitoring do not transform PSE countries into 'monitory democracies' (Keane, 2013), but exert pressure on

incumbents to legitimize their policies by suggesting that they reflect citizens' beliefs. New monitory mechanisms thus contribute to raising the demand for justifiable and consensus-based rules.

The chapters of this volume explore the interactions and shifts between legitimation modes and their consequences for institutional legitimacy in PSE. Tracing developments over time, the individual chapters analyze either the legitimatory dimension of institutional changes (Chapters 2–6) or the legitimating functions of discourses and policies (Chapters 2, 7–9). They cover a broad range of institutions and discourses: state–economy relations, pro-presidential parties, courts, ideas of nationhood, official memory policies and narratives in contemporary fictional literature. The ten chapters combine country case studies of Russia, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan with cross-national comparisons of all 12 post-Soviet Eurasian countries. Contributors to this volume have also employed different disciplinary approaches, including economics, political science, legal studies, historiography and literature.

All chapters share a focus on elite views and strategies rather than on the legitimating beliefs held by citizens. This empirical and methodological orientation is suggested by the insight that we know much less about the legitimating roles played by elites than about how respondents of surveys assess the legitimacy of political regimes and incumbents. One can assume that incumbent political elites closely monitor public opinion and adjust their public communication to perceived changes in citizens' attitudes. While elite politics is aimed at shaping popular beliefs in legitimacy, it simultaneously reflects prevailing beliefs. Shifts within and between legitimation modes can thus be interpreted as indicating crises or declines of popular legitimacy.

Drawing on a survey of 40 country experts, Christian von Soest and Julia Grauvogel analyze the legitimation strategies of political elites in all PSE countries from the early 1990s to 2010. Following Burnell's classification of legitimation modes (2006), von Soest and Grauvogel distinguish six legitimation strategies and trace cross-national as well as cross-temporal patterns across the PSE region. They find that civil wars, regime-changing mass protests, successions of presidents and socioeconomic crises precipitated major shifts in legitimation strategies. They also point to the erosion of socioeconomic performance as a source of regime legitimacy in the wake of the global financial and economic crisis, which forced many of the region's political leaders to rely more heavily on nationalism, as well as the state-building and security-providing performance of their regimes.

Focusing on Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, Joachim Ahrens, Herman W. Hoen and Martin C. Spechler investigate the political economy in each country that generates socioeconomic performance and regime legitimacy. They show how authorities in both have created state–capitalist dual economies consisting of a state-dominated core sector of (mainly) natural resources industries and a peripheral sector of services and small enterprises operating under market conditions. These hybrid economic systems have 'helped to legitimize and stabilize authoritarian forms of governance' by generating economic growth, granting entrepreneurial freedoms and providing resources that sustain clientelistic elite networks.

Examining the legitimation effects of Kazakhstan's party politics, Adele Del Sordi explains how Nur Otan, the pro-presidential and hegemonic political party of Kazakhstan, was established and adapted in order to legitimize the country's political regime. Kazakhstan's political leadership created Nur Otan in 1999 to subordinate a previously recalcitrant legislature to the executive and to impose presidential control over the legislative process. In the 2000s, the party's function shifted toward organizing overwhelming popular approval in view of initiatives to launch opposition parties. Following the global financial crisis, the party provided a voice to critics, becoming a channel of governmental responsiveness.

Christian Timm traces how Georgia shifted from a liberal economic model toward a state-led promotion of economic development after 2008. Domestic anti-government protests, the war against Russia, the global financial crisis and their economic effects caused this policy change. However, the government's new interventionist policy failed to generate sufficient output legitimacy, Timm argues, because prior neoliberal administrative and legal reforms had undermined the institutional basis for an effective developmental state.

Alexei Trochev's contribution examines how courts contribute to institutional legitimacy in Russia. While judges in criminal cases mostly approve decisions made by law-enforcement officials, they have increasingly ruled against the federal government in lawsuits brought by citizens or firms. This pattern, Trochev argues, reflects the dualism of arbitrariness and constitutionalism characterizing the Russian state. Whereas criminal justice serves to reinforce the discretionary power of prosecutors and to legalize the prosecution of political opponents or business competitors, administrative justice takes on the concerns of citizens without, however, undermining the authority of the political regime.

Focusing on authoritarian durability in Belarus, Fabian Burkhardt identifies four concepts of the nation in Belarusian discourse: an ethno-cultural concept, state-and-political concept, cultural-and-political concept and a Russo-centric concept. He argues that the lack of a shared concept of the nation among opposition groups and the ability of ruling elites to integrate cultural frames of the nation have weakened mobilization against the regime of President Aleksandr Lukashenko and may account for his regime's unexpected stability. Responding to a growing sense of cultural identity among Belarusians since the early 2000s, ruling elites have proven effective in framing the discourse of nationhood which, in turn, has reinforced the regime's claims to legitimacy.

Philipp Bürger documents memory policies implemented by the Russian government through state programs of patriotic education, YouTube videos of Russian heroism and the 7 November parade commemorating the Great Patriotic War. He finds that official memory policies have become more cohesive and are increasingly oriented toward assigning legitimacy to present political institutions. Governmental campaigns have used new channels of communication to influence young people and revived the parade's impact with the help of modern media and a creative choreography.

Turning to literary motifs, Alfred Sproede and Oleksandr Zabirko reconstruct the literary references of legitimation in three Russian novels: Natan Dubovitskii's *Almost Zero*, Aleksandr Prokhanov's *Mr. Hexogen* and Zakhar Prilepin's *Sankya*. These authors rely mainly on literary heroes who value and practice charismatic leadership, traditionalism and nationalism as modes of legitimation. At the same time, Sproede and Zabirko note a 'penchant for narratives inspired by [the] "goal rationality"' of empire-building and a Schmittian idea of 'decisionist legitimation' that is rooted in the primacy of politics conceived as the ability to distinguish between friend and enemy. The ideational worlds of Prokhanov and Prilepin in particular anticipate what sociologist Lev Gudkov (2014) has referred to as the 'technology of negative mobilization' seen in the calls for *Krym nash* ('Crimea is ours') and *Novorossiya* ('New Russia') since 2014.

In his comparative conclusion, Leslie Holmes argues that 'popular legitimation has become increasingly difficult in most post-Soviet states', mainly because socioeconomic performance has declined in the wake of the global financial crisis. Across the region, political leadership has responded to the looming crisis of legitimation by emphasizing official nationalism, artificial charisma and traditionalism. However, these modes will not be sufficient, Holmes contends, to keep incumbent elites

in power, leading toward either 'increasing coercion or regime (and possibly system) collapse'.

Notes

1. This constraint is well recognized by political actors. For example, Mikhail Khodorkovskii' noted in an interview: 'The authorities may not afford themselves that people recognize the elections as a complete fiction. In this case the authorities would lose their legitimacy.' *Vedomosti* 22.9.2014.
2. This approach is inspired by Heike Holbig who used Beetham's model to assign different functions to ideology as an instrument in maintaining regime legitimacy in China (2013). In her view, ideology provides 'the normative justification for the rightful source of political authority', 'the proper ends and standards of regime performance' and 'the main governance mechanism for mobilizing subordinates' consent' (Holbig, 2013, p. 65). In contrast, this chapter assumes that 'sets of beliefs' are more appropriate than 'ideology' – and its emphasis on cohesiveness – when describing sources of legitimation among post-Soviet regimes.

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