SUCCESSON IN AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES & TURKMENISTAN'S POWER TRANSITION IN 2006

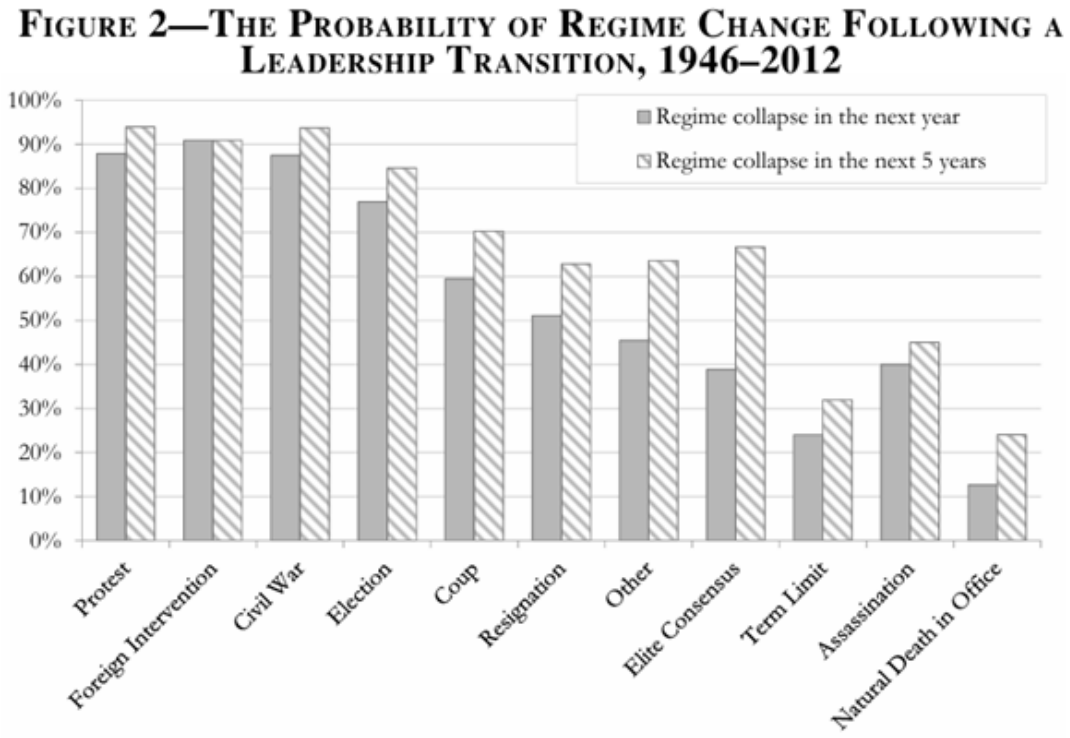
Ahmet Ali Bagci | 73804222 | Authoritarianism and Autocratization



SUCCESSION DYNAMICS

SUCCESSION THROUGH DEATH IN OFFICE

- Autocrats who die in office have tenures lasting an average of seventeen years, compared to just seven years for leaders who leave power for reasons other than death.
- The death of a sitting leader often generates widespread concerns that the system will unravel in his absence.
- Authoritarian regimes survive a leader's death in office 87% of the time



SUCCESSION DYNAMICS

SUCCESSION THROUGH DEATH IN OFFICE

- Ailing or aging leaders rarely identify a successor because they fear that such identification can mobilize a base of support for opposition.

- The lack of a succession plan typically creates a high degree of uncertainty, both domestically and abroad, about a regime's ability to survive the leader's death.



TURKMENISTAN

RESEARCH QUESTİON & JUSTİFİCATİON

How did the Turkmen regime achieve a stable transition in 2006 despite the absence of a formal succession plan or a hereditary heir?

Turkmenistan did not have a;

- party leadership like China,
- military tradition like Egypt,
- designated heir,

but a constitutional provision which was also disregarded.

PERIOD OF POWER TRANSITION

Two influential groups:

Presidential guards, in control of major power structures, including the Defense Ministry, the National Security Ministry.

Presidential administration, that worked as advisors to the President.

Article 60: The duties of the President transfers to the Chairman of the Assembly until a new president was elected.

DEC 21, 2006 (Morning)
DEATH OF NIYAZOV

DEC 21, 2006 (Afternoon)
LEGAL SUCCESSOR ARRESTED

DEC 21, 2006 (Evening)
ACTING PRESIDENT NAMED

DEC 26, 2006
CONSTITUTIONAL BYPASS

FEB 11, 2007
ELECTION WIN

MAY 2007
CONSOLIDATION & PURGE

WHAT MECHANISMS OF TRANSITION TOOK PLACE?

- Niyazov's leadership neither set a familial base for succession nor designated a successor from within the ranks of their supporting elites.
- Two mechanisms: Soviet practice of succession & collective decision making



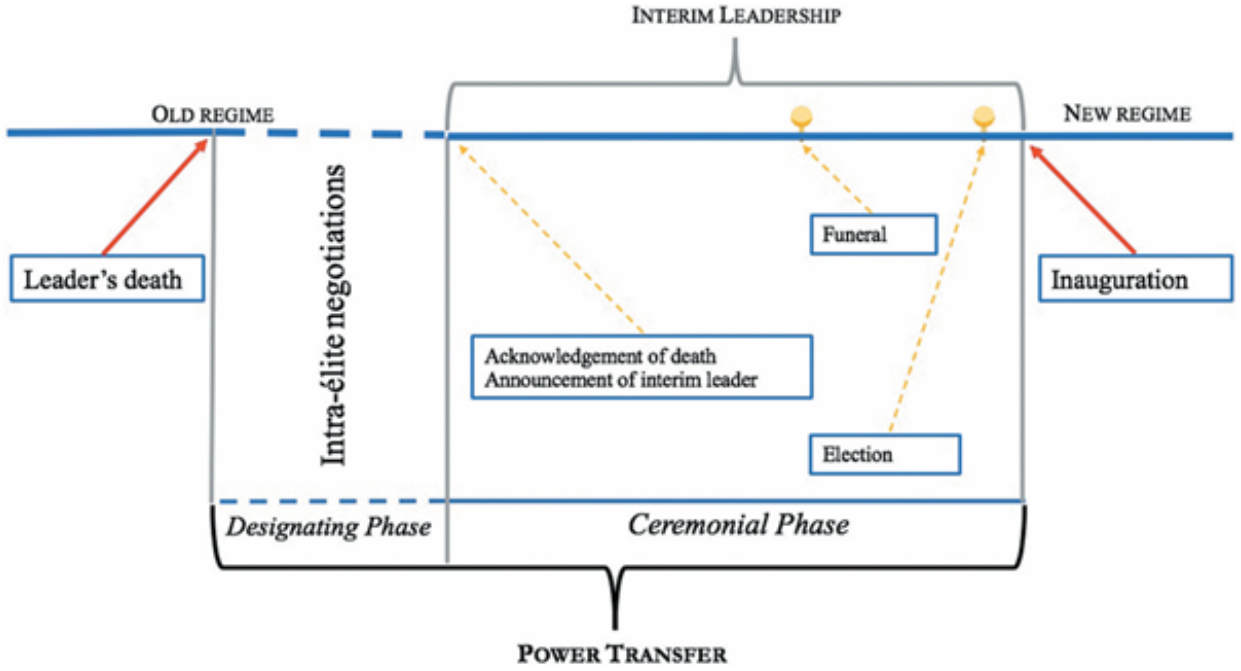


SOVİET PRACTİCE OF SUCCESSİON

- Elite cadres remained after Niyazov's death, looked at authoritarian practices consolidated in prior historical eras to address pressing political issues.
- Soviet rituals to regulate power transfers was practical choice. The practice of leading funeral commission is re-appropriated among Turkmen elites.

COLLECTIVE DECISION MAKING
THE "WEAK" SUCCESSOR STRATEGY

- Influential elites negotiates to protect and maximize their positions in the regime.
- They sustain old status quo left by the previous leadership instead of involving in a contestation.
- Elites sometimes seek to appoint a relatively weak successor, calculating (at times mistakenly) that they will be able to control him.



WHAT REMAİNED AND WHAT CHANGED

Feature	Niyazov Era (1991–2006)	Berdimuhammedov Era (2007–Present)	Status
Regime Type	Personalist Dictatorship	Personalist Dictatorship	Remained
Core Ideology	Personality Cult (Turkmenbashi)	Personality Cult (Arkadag)	Remained (New Face)
Economic Basis	Rentierism (Natural Gas)	Rentierism (Natural Gas)	Remained
Elite Structure	Patronage networks	Patronage networks	Remained

FROM “WEAK COMPROMİSE LEADER” TO TOTAL AUTOCRAT

- **Managed De-personalization**

Berdimuhamedov gained public and elite support by reversing Niyazov’s most irrational policies. He reopened rural hospitals, restored the 10-year education system, brought back the traditional names of the months.

- **New Personality Cult: Arkadag**

Berdimuhammedov had the council of elders bestow the title of Arkadag (the protector) upon himself. He dubbed his ruling as "The Era of Turkmenistan's Great Renaissance





THE RENTİER LOGİC OF PATRONAGE NETWORK

- Why did the elites stay loyal?
- In a rentier economy like Turkmenistan's, loyalty becomes a rational economic calculation for the elite, as the risks of challenging the established status quo far outweighs its possible gains.

QUESTIONS?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Are informal mechanisms (like funeral commissions and elite pacts) more critical for autocratic survival than formal institutions like political parties or constitutions?
- If the global transition to green energy significantly devalues natural gas, would the patronage network of the Turkmen regime inevitably stall?"

THANKS FOR LISTENING!