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After Personalism: Rethinking Power Transfers in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan

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After Personalism: Rethinking Power Transfers in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan

What happens to the élites when the personalistic leader they supported for so long suddenly dies? This article tackles comparatively transitions out of first presidencies in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, presenting an analytical framework that seeks to explain why these transitions unfolded in relatively smooth fashion. The overall stability defining power transfer processes instigated by the non-violent death of personalistic rulers in both contexts is explained here through the intersection of three key factors: the regimes' resort to succession practices consolidated in the Soviet era, the emergence of temporary forms of collective decision-making in both transitional contexts, and the implementation of de-personalisation strategies pursuing the obliteration of specific pockets of cadres but stopping short of wider regime re-organisation. The findings of this article contribute to broader debates on the politics of de-personalisation, while putting forward a comprehensive framework to analyse transitions out of personalism in and beyond post-Soviet Eurasia.

Keywords: personalism; Turkmenistan; Uzbekistan; authoritarianism; leadership

Introduction

As “invincible autocrats” (Svolik 2012, 62), personalist rulers exert their power in unrestrained fashion, without apparent need for legislative or ideological justification (Chehabi & Linz 1998, 7), to ultimately dominate over trajectories and outcomes of the key mechanisms that operate in their political systems. These systems regularly evade collective decision-making, to engage in power representations that centre on the leader's individual authority.

Beyond power centralisation, authoritarian personalisation is normally operationalised through the establishment of extensive patron-client networks pivoting on the ruler (Baturó & Elkink 2016). As the weaker party in these networks, élites calculate that their adaptive capacity to the leader's authoritarian agenda is essential to long-term political survival (Hale 2005). Their contribution to the personalisation process is therefore limited to a peculiar form

of support, articulated through unwavering loyalty to, and unlimited compliance with, the leader's persona and policies (Chehabi & Linz 1998, 12). The ultimate prize for such extreme loyalty is represented by the élites' access to specific wealth distribution channels managed by the ruler's inner circle through kleptocratic technologies of power (Acemoglu, Robinson & Verdier 2004).

The élites' positionality *vis-à-vis* the leader remains generally static throughout the evolution of personalistic rule, as the implementation of mercurial strategies of cadre management (Kailitz & Stockemer 2017, 338) continually feeds into the élites' perception that proximity to the ruler is the only avenue to permanence in power (Roth 1968). There are nevertheless obvious biological limits to the perennial reproduction of these peculiar ruler-élite relationships: what happens to the élites when the personalistic leader they supported for so long suddenly dies?

While assessing through different criteria the impact exerted by the leader's death upon the survival of personalist regimes, successive literature waves agreed in characterising such impact as a generally negative force *vis-à-vis* the long-term viability of personalist rule. Earlier works remarked that a leader's death while in office has to be seen as a harbinger of instability for authoritarian polities more generally defined (Betts & Huntington 1985/86, 141). Writing in the late 1990s, Barbara Geddes (1999, 132) noted that, after the completion of post-personalistic power transfers instigated by a leader's death, the implementation of cadre management strategies pursuing rapid de-personalisation tends to erode the viability of personalistic authoritarianism, leading to regime decay and ensuing collapse. Jay Ulfelder (2005, 312) echoed Geddes's argument, highlighting that it is the systematic "elimination of able potential rivals" to determine "why personalist regimes so seldom last longer than their founders". More recent scholarship confirmed these views, remarking that the low degree of

institutionalisation that underpins the politics of personalism enhances regime instability following the leader's passing (Kendall-Taylor & Frantz 2016, 161).

The puzzle that guided the research showcased in this article centres on the identification and the discussion of the strategies whereby élites who flourished under personalism adjusted to the changes instigated by the death of the leader whom they had supported for more or less protracted time periods. This puzzle is tackled here by focusing on two case studies selected from the wide panoply of authoritarian practices existing across post-Soviet Eurasia.

The findings of this study demonstrate that, contrary to conventional wisdom, transitions out of personalistic presidencies in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan proceeded in relatively smooth fashion and, in the medium-term, the post-personalistic regimes emerged from the deaths of Saparmurat A. Niyazov and Islam A. Karimov came to enjoy relative stability. As these findings deviate quite markedly from the chaotic representation of post-personalism evoked by the extant literature, the article's core argument contends that, in the contexts examined here, the orderly completion of transitions out of personalism is explainable through two specific factors: the return to Soviet political practices to regulate post-Soviet political processes, and the emergence, during the transitional processes, of consequential, albeit temporary, practices of collective decision-making that were redundant before the leader's passing. In developing a secondary line of argument, this article will also make the case for the emergence of managed de-personalisation pathways in both Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, attributing a key role in post-transitional regime maintenance to the personnel policies carried out after leadership succession had been completed.

Scholarly debates on personalism and personalist rule have so far delved into the systematisation of regime personalisation dynamics or focused on the factors contributing to the entrenchment of personalistic rule (Roth 1968; Jackson & Rosberg 1982; Chehabi & Linz

1998; Geddes 1999; Slater 2003; Acemoglu, Robinson & Verdier 2004; Guliyev 2011; Baturo & Elkink 2016). Not much attention has been conversely devoted to patterns of regime de-personalisation surfaced in the immediate aftermath of a leader's death. It is precisely within this literature gap that the present study intends to place its key findings.

To illustrate its findings, this article brings forward an appositely tailored analytical framework that is comparative in outlook, agency-centred, and underpinned by a multi-phased and methodologically diverse research agenda.

Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are relevant to the study of post-personalism as both countries experienced protracted periods of personalistic rule *and* witnessed the successful completion of power transfer processes set into motion by the non-violent deaths of personalistic presidents, namely S.A. Niyazov, who ruled Turkmenistan from independence until his death in December 2006, and I.A. Karimov, whose long term in office extended from the collapse of the Soviet Union to his passing in August 2016. Relevant Area Studies literature has agreed in analysing under the personalistic rubric the forms of authoritarianism consolidated in Turkmenistan under Niyazov (Bohr 2003; Anceschi 2009; Polese & Horák 2015; Koch 2016) and Uzbekistan under Karimov (Kangas 2003; March 2003; Ilkhamov 2007; Markowitz 2012).

The theory advancement agenda pursued by this article recognises that case study selection has resulted in the investigation of political dynamics emerged from relatively similar contexts. As the article will unveil a set of minimal differences between the two transitions studied here, however, the observation of similar cases becomes instrumental to a discussion of authoritarian diffusion dynamics in post-personalistic landscapes (Brinks & Coppedge 2006; Ambrosio 2010; Lankina, Libman & Obydenkova 2016). This latter proposition establishes that the two succession processes examined here are ultimately not independent, as, in late 2016, the Uzbek élites re-interpreted, and in some sense perfected, the

succession praxis established almost a decade earlier by the Turkmen regime, which, in turn, borrowed heavily from the Soviet authoritarian playbook to extricate itself from the political conundrums raised by Niyazov's sudden death.

In addition to establishing “institutionless polities” (Jackson & Rosberg 1982, 8) in both landscapes, protracted personalistic rule limited the range and relevance of the actors involved in regime politics under Niyazov and Karimov. Extra-familial élites constituted therefore the sole protagonist of the transitions instigated by the deaths of the two leaders. The article—and its first section more in particular—acknowledges this centrality and, when delving into the political processes that steered the transfer of power in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, is committed to grant *quasi* exclusive analytical attention to élite members. This approach, incidentally, echoes Vladimir Gel'man's suggestion to locate actors at the epicentre of any investigation of regime trajectories in post-Soviet Eurasia (Gel'man 2018, 286-290). Élite politics are interpreted throughout this study as the bellwether for the micro-logics behind the de-personalisation of Turkmen and Uzbek politics as carried out after the completion of the two leadership change processes.

To investigate these processes, the article articulates its empirical agenda around two distinct timeframes. A very short-term approach is initially required to sketch out patterns of de-personalisation emerged in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan across the brief transitional periods—56 days in the former case, 109 days in the latter—bookended by the death of a leader on the one hand and the accession to power of their successor on the other. These patterns are described in the article's second segment, which looks comparatively at the two power transfer mechanisms in question, rounding off the primary evidence extracted from the regime press published in both Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan with accounts of the transitions that appeared in Eurasian and Western media. This section of the article pursues a dual end. It captures at first the short interval of collective decision-making wherein élites defied the lack

of structural and institutional succession arrangements to coalesce around viable successors to both Niyazov and Karimov. It also, and perhaps most importantly, attempts a systematisation of the power transfer praxis consolidated in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, designing an analytical model that has wider implications for transitions out of personalistic regimes across the wider Asian political space.

A medium-term approach is in turn required to reveal how de-personalisation was sustained by the two regimes ruling over post-transitional Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. This end is pursued analytically in the article's third segment, which studies the élite management strategies at play in the early post-personalistic eras, scrutinising the career patterns of the 79 cadres who alternated in central and peripheral positions of power throughout the two years that followed the establishment of post-personalistic presidencies in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

While the persistence of shared Soviet legacies defines its significance in relation to succession dynamics in post-Soviet Eurasia—particularly in authoritarian systems where post-personalistic transitions are expected to occur imminently (Tajikistan) or are due at a later stage (Russia, Belarus)—the succession model outlined in this article is also intended as a contribution to germane scholarly debates on the transfer of power in non-postcommunist Asia. As a micro-level argument to the study of regime change and continuity, this article examines three specific casual mechanisms—the return of succession practices from prior political eras, the emergence of interim collective decision-making, and the selective use of post-transition purges—which may offer a viable framework to delve into transitions to be initiated in authoritarian systems featuring more or less visible personalistic tendencies, and Cambodia more in particular (Heder 2005; Morgenbesser 2018). At the same time, this paper intends to build an analytical bridge between the orderly transitions in post-personalist Central Asia and the authoritarian playbook of pre-Xi Jinping's China, where the same end—

smooth transfer of power—was pursued through essentially different means—carefully planned mechanisms of pre-arranged succession (Nathan 2003).

The Context for Collective Decision-Making

The absence of a designated successor is not an uncommon feature of contemporary authoritarianism. In Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, the leaderships' failure to set up pre-determined succession arrangements is explainable through the presidents' inability to instigate political succession on a familial basis and their protracted reluctance to designate a successor from within the ranks of their supporting élites. For different reasons, the option to set into motion mechanisms of familial succession was unavailable to both Niyazov and Karimov. The Uzbek leader missed the biological opportunity to orchestrate father-son succession, while Niyazov's son, Murat, harboured no political ambition throughout his adult life. The presidents' failure to elevate their daughters to power prominence appeared in turn linked to specificities intrinsic to the two political contexts in question. Incidentally, the contextualisation of the limited prospects for dynastic succession in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan clarifies *ex post* that the regimes led by Niyazov and Karimov were never entirely sultanistic, as they failed to develop a visible nexus between personalism and dynasticism—the core element of sultanistic rule as defined by Chehabi and Linz (1998, 13).

The designation of non-familial successors seemed at the same time a political praxis disconnected from the modus operandi of both Niyazov and Karimov, who therefore addressed their respective crown-prince problems (Brownlee 2007) in an identical fashion. Turkmenistan's personalistic rule was defined by unitary conceptualisations and representations of power, which, in the views of Turkmen official propaganda and the central regime more in general, had to reside exclusively in the presidential persona. Throughout his

15 years at the helm, Niyazov categorically refused to share the political limelight with other cadres, marginalising any élite member who, due to accrued expertise or rising popularity, had the potential to overshadow him. Conspiracy theories notwithstanding,¹ the selection of a post-personalistic leader from the very margins of Turkmenistan's political élite appears a transitional outcome thoroughly consistent with the power conceptualisation underpinning Niyazovism: the accession to power of Gurbanguly M. Berdymukhammedov—a virtually unknown, albeit very established, cadre—responded in full to exclusionary personnel policies designed to obstruct the rise of power centres disconnected from the president.

So far as Uzbekistan's non-familial succession, the longstanding association² between Karimov and Shavkat M. Mirziyoyev confirms on the one hand the latter leader's centrality in the Karimovist power system, yet it fails to constitute on the other an unequivocal signal of the late president's intention to openly designate Uzbekistan's long-term prime minister as his apparent successor.

¹ In the months that followed Niyazov's death, global media continued to report the rumour—which remains unverified at the time of writing of this article—that identified president Berdymukhammedov as Saparmurat Niyazov's illegitimate son. Based on the alleged physical resemblance between the two leaders, these rumours were still circulating 12 months after Niyazov's demise (see, for instance, the BBC profile of G.M. Berdymukhammedov appeared on 21 December 2007, available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/6346185.stm>, accessed 13 February 2019), and even made their way into respectable academic analyses of contemporary Asian dynasticism (Monday 2011, 825).

² The Karimov-Mirziyoyev axis had consolidated well before the latter's accession to the highest echelons of Uzbekistan's central élites, which was completed through his appointment as Prime Minister in December 2003. Lawrence Markowitz (2012, 398) noted that the two regions governed by Mirziyoyev—Jizzakh (1996-2001) and Samarkand (2001-2003)—received above-average funding throughout his tenure, in a further confirmation of the high regard in which his work was held by Uzbekistan's central government.

There is therefore no evidence to maintain that Niyazov and Karimov appointed, at any stage during their presidencies, their respective successors: the argument articulated in this article diverges from speculative views on presidential attitudes towards succession arrangements in Central Asia (Ambrosio 2015), aligning to the conclusions advanced by Eric McGlinchey (2016, 212-214) so far as the region's dynamics of authoritarian succession.

The specificity of the forms of personalistic rule developed in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan delimitates further the range of actors involved in the two power transfer mechanisms studied here. The leaders' political parties—*Türkmenistanyň Demokratik Partiyasy* [Democratic Party of Turkmenistan]; *O'zbekiston Liberal-demokratik Partiyasi* [Liberal-Democratic Party of Uzbekistan]—played essentially cosmetic roles in Turkmen and Uzbek politics, and did not rise to the position of hegemonic power assigned to authoritarian party structures elsewhere in the former Soviet Union (Bader 2011, 194-195). Niyazov and Karimov never intended to transform their parties into vessels for the establishment of power-sharing deals and the articulation of intra-party forms of designated succession (Magaloni 2008).

Due to the intensely authoritarian undertone of Turkmen and Uzbek politics, non-regime actors were prevented from contributing in any direct or indirect way to the power transfer mechanisms instigated by the deaths of first presidents in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The regimes' persistent work of authoritarian control eviscerated internal dissent, while extreme fragmentation condemned in turn the opposition-in-exile to protracted irrelevance.

As the strands of personalism consolidated in both Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan lacked designated successors, strong party structures to cultivate future leaders, and an opposition able to offer alternative solutions to mere regime continuity, Jason Brownlee's fundamental question ("Who will form the next generation of leaders in countries where

autocracy persists?” [Brownlee 2007, 627]) becomes relevant to intents and purposes of this study insofar as it directs our attention onto the cadres who supported Niyazov and Karimov throughout their time in office.

Explaining these post-personalistic transitions through the arrangements overtly or covertly made by the *élites* in Ashgabat and Tashkent highlights a first set of continuities with the succession praxis consolidated in the Soviet Union. The power transfer mechanisms completed in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan unfolded in a noticeably Brezhnevian context, defined on the one hand by the leaders’ unwillingness to delineate contours and terms of their political succession and, on the other, the consequential domination of a stagnating ruling class over the power transfer process. The latter feature holds exclusive relevance for Uzbekistan’s post-personalistic transition. In the Soviet Union, the self-stabilising *élites* of the Khrushchev era (Rigby 1970) receded to the “ossified oligarchy” (Bialer 1978, 186) of the 1970s and early 1980s (Willerton 1987): Islam Karimov implemented similar personnel policies, allowing long tenures to key cadres in order to reduce the size and outreach capacity of the patronage networks emanating from his principal allies (Tunçer-Kılavuz 2014, 48-52). The Niyazovist *élite* was conversely managed through erratic strategies pursuing the precariousness of cadres: extremely high turnover rates and the simultaneous reshuffle of multiple cadres at central and regional level defined in unequivocal terms how Turkmenistan’s personalistic leader engaged with his supporting *élites* throughout his 15 years in power (Kunysz 2012).

Ultimately, the structural demarcation of the two power transfer processes in question coincides analytically with the first prong of Richard Snyder’s mapping of post-sultanistic transitions, namely that which is centred on ruler-state relations (Snyder 1998, 53-55). Through the extreme degree of institutional penetration achieved by both Niyazov and Karimov, Turkmen and Uzbek personalisms came to be defined by an intimate fusion of

regime and state, in which virtually no political space was granted to regime soft-liners and peripheral élite members were forced to play essentially passive roles. The absence of a designated successor obliterated the individual dimension of post-personalistic transitions in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan: these political processes shaped up as a collective interval pursuing the de-personalisation of decision-making.

Succession is understood throughout this article in the way Valerie Bunce did, not as a mere “replacement of governing officials, but rather as a complex process which alters the policy environment in certain ways and, perhaps, policy priorities as well” (Bunce 1981, 16). The momentary shift between the individualised decision-making praxis underpinning personalist rule and the invisibly collective approaches that defined post-personalistic transitions in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan has to be seen as the most evident amongst the policy environment alterations instigated by the deaths of Niyazov and Karimov.

In acknowledging the existence of such collective, yet unwaveringly authoritarian, decision-making *milieux*, this article recognises that, in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, the absence of adequate norms, structures and practices to regulate *post mortem* passages of power was overcome through the crystallisation of informal political groupings determining trajectories and outcomes of post-personalistic transitions. A correct appraisal of the size of the winning coalitions remains a problematic issue in the application of Selectorate Theory (Bueno de Mesquita, Smith & Siverson 2003, 37-76) to non-democratic contexts (Gallagher & Hanson 2015). It has been however assumed that personalistic regimes normally feature very small winning coalitions, “typically a tiny cadre of fiercely loyal cronies” (Pickering & Kisangani 2010, 480). This latter proposition is validated empirically by the research showcased in the next paragraphs, which discuss size, membership, and roles of the winning coalitions operating in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan after the deaths of first presidents.

When first presidents die: Mechanics of power transfer in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan

Two noticeable differences come to the fore when we approach comparatively the internal facets of the power transfer mechanisms set into motion by the death of personalistic leaders in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. One is directly related to the regimes' reaction times to the demise of first presidents. Different reaction times to a leader's death indicate different levels of regime preparedness to deal with internal rifts before embarking upon fully-fledged processes of leadership change. This connexion—which bears key implications for power transfers in non-democratic environments, where established succession praxes are either unavailable to, or systematically ignored by, the ruling élites—surfaced most famously in the aftermath of Stalin's death, which remains the archetypal case of chaotic post-personalistic succession (Fitzpatrick 2015, 220-223).

News of Niyazov's death began to circulate on 21 December 2006, as Turkmen official media reported that the president had passed on overnight (Pannier 2006). The government in Tashkent waited more than a week to announce the demise of Uzbekistan's first president, which was not acknowledged until 2 September 2016.³ Uzbekistan's power transfer set on in a challenging environment: a 8-day interval between the president's actual passing and the public acknowledgement of Karimov's death was necessary to settle intra-élite scores and determine the role of the first family in the Uzbek succession—a thorny issue that, conversely, played no role in the apparently smoother Turkmen leadership transition, which was instigated by the death of a personalistic leader holding very loose familial links.

³ It has been possible to confirm the exact date of Islam Karimov's death (27 August 2016) only in late July 2017, on the basis of news reporting that some of Uzbekistan's most prominent political and religious leaders had gathered in Tashkent to hold a memorial dinner for the late president, in observation of a Uzbek tradition that stipulates similar commemorations to be held 11 months from the exact day of the deceased's departure (Pannier 2017).

A further difference between the power transfer processes studied here relates to the career backgrounds of the cadres selected to succeed the first presidents. Both selected presidents were regime insiders, although they wielded significantly different amounts of power at the time of their selection to interim leadership. The relatively unknown G.M. Berdymukhammedov, Turkmenistan's long-term minister for Health & Pharmaceutical Industry, was a deputy chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers at the time of Niyazov's death; Sh.M. Mirziyoyev, one of Uzbekistan's most visible politicians beyond Karimov, had occupied the post of Uzbekistan's prime minister since December 2003. Despite their long-term experience as regime insiders, the two selected cadres were nevertheless relatively young⁴ at the time of their elevation to the interim leaderships. It seems that the winning coalitions did not intend to deliberately shorten the length of second-generation presidencies by appointing ageing leaders, discarding in this sense the option to establish strategic gerontocracies (Magni Berton & Panel 2015) in post-personalistic Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The accession to power of younger cadres departs incidentally from the post-Brezhnev succession praxis, which, between the early 1980s and M.S Gorbachëv's rise to power (11 March 1985), saw the consecutive appointment of elderly leaders (Yu.V. Andropov, K.U. Chernenko) to the General Secretaryship of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

If the internal facets of the succession mechanisms completed in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan evolved in somehow diverging trajectories, their outward dimensions featured a series of striking similarities. Of these, the most important is certainly represented by the regimes' re-appropriation of Soviet political rituals to publicly announce the identity of the

⁴ Born on 29 June 1957, G.M. Berdymukhammedov was just under 50 years old when appointed to Turkmenistan's interim presidency. S.M. Mirziyoyev (born on 24 July 1957) rose to Uzbekistan's interim presidency at the age of 59.

selected leader. The Soviet praxis of the 1980s saw the successive deaths of L.I. Brezhnev, Andropov and Chernenko instigating consecutive transitions that invariably culminated in the accession to supreme power of the cadre who headed the funeral commission (Brown 1984). In line with this tradition, both Berdymukhammedov and Mirziyoyev acted as the first signatories of obituaries appeared on state media⁵ and were appointed to chair the *ad hoc* commissions⁶ tasked to organise the funerals of Niyazov and Karimov respectively. The re-appropriation of Soviet rituals to regulate post-Soviet power transfers may be regarded as a practical choice—both élites made use of readily available political tools featuring a demonstrable degree of effectiveness—and as an indicator that complex processes of authoritarian learning were at play in both post-Niyazov’s Turkmenistan—where the élites looked at authoritarian practices consolidated in prior historical eras to address pressing political issues—and post-Karimov Uzbekistan, where the regime perfected in turn the mechanism of post-personalist transition devised in Turkmenistan in the aftermath of the death of its first president.

⁵ For S.A. Niyazov’s obituary, see: “Saparmurat Turkmenbashi Velikii” [Saparmurat Turkmenbashi The Great], *Neitral’nyi Turkmenistan*, 22 December 2006, p. 1. For I.A. Karimov’s obituary, see: “Prezident Republiki Uzbekistana Islam Abduganevich Karimov” [The President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Islam Abduganevich Karimov], *UzA*, 3 September 2016.

⁶ In line with the process of élite militarisation intervened in 2002-2006, the organisation of the funeral for S.A. Niyazov was performed by the Committee for the National Security of Turkmenistan, as officially confirmed in: “Reshenie Gosudarstvennogo soveta bezopasnosti Turkmenistana i Kabineta Ministrov Turkmenistana” [Joint Resolution of the State Security Committee and the Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan], *Neitral’nyi Turkmenistan*, 22 December 2006, p. 1. For information on the funeral commission established in Uzbekistan after Karimov’s death, see: “O sozdanii gosudarstvennoi Komissii po organizatskii pokhoron pervogo Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan I.A. Karimova” [On the Establishment of a State Commission to Organise the Funeral of the First President of the Republic of Uzbekistan I.A. Karimov], *UzA*, 2 September 2016.

A set of carefully crafted political rituals articulated the evolution of the mechanisms whereby the demise of first presidents resulted in the establishment of post-personalistic regimes in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. To assess the influence exerted by key structural differences on these processes' timelines, this article analyses the two power transfers in question through a multi-phased approach, which is captured graphically by Figure 1.

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The *designating phase* of the power transfer mechanisms completed in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan encompassed a brief interval of collective decision-making bookended by the death of personalistic leaders on the one hand and the selection of interim presidents on the other. In this phase, two *winning coalitions*—smaller *élite* groups formed by top central cadres and military leaders of the highest rank—surfaced to wield unchallenged influence over the very opaque processes of intra-élite bargaining that culminated in the appointment of post-personalistic leaders. The existence of these informal yet powerful groupings is juxtaposed here with *outer élite groupings*, a broader range of subordinates who intervened at a later transitional stage to participate in regime processes formalising, through a series of impeccably staged political rituals, the establishment of fully-fledged presidencies.

While there is no absolute certainty so far as the exact composition of the two winning coalitions, this article managed to delineate with some degree of precision the contours of the inner groups overseeing presidential successions in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Combining insights included in media reports from the Eurasian region⁷ with

⁷ “Turkmeniya perebiraet preemnikov Niyazova” [Turkmenistan Selects Niyazov’s Successor], *Izvestiya*, 25 December 2006; “Turkmeniya: Akmurad Redzhepov pal zhertvoi rezhima, kotoryi on sam i postroil” [Turkmenistan: Akmurad Redzhepov, A Victim to a Regime that he himself Helped Building], *Fergana.ru*, 31 July 2017.

more systematic studies authored by European scholars (Peyrouse 2012, 108-110; Horák 2012, 307-309; Bohr 2016, 10-13), it may be suggested that the outcome of the post-Niyazov transition was brokered by Akmammed Rakhmanov (minister of interior) and Akmurad Rezhepov (head of the presidential guard). As representatives of Turkmenistan's very influential power structures, these two cadres wielded at the time enough influence to impose their succession plans upon longstanding members of the political élite and prominent personnel from Turkmenistan's military and para-military sectors.

The composition of the winning coalition at work in Uzbekistan between late August and early September 2016 is somehow less contested. Western and Eurasian media agreed⁸ on the emergence of a supreme triumvirate—comprising Prime Minister Mirziyoyev, Deputy Prime Minister Ruslan Azimov, and SNB head Rustam Inoyatov—which assumed prominence in the resolution of the leadership transition instigated by the death of Islam Karimov. This tripartite grouping embodied an alliance between established central cadres (Mirziyoyev, Azimov) and Inoyatov, who headed Uzbekistan's National Security Service for more than twenty years.

Two fundamental observations arise from this contextualisation of the two winning coalitions. The first relates to the leaders' power differential, which is identified here as the direct function of their position *vis-à-vis* the two groups that selected second-generation presidents. At the time of Niyazov's death, Berdymukhammedov was situated in a position of peripheral influence in relation to the Turkmen élite. Selected for presidential succession as the compromise candidate, he was therefore *external* to the winning coalition: his rise to power was conditional to the strength and durability of the alliances that he managed to forge with winning coalition members and their immediate supporters. As a cadre who was

⁸ “Uzbek leader sacks powerful security boss”, *Reuters*, 31 January 2018. See also, Medvedev 2017.

conversely situated at the core of the élite ensemble that supported president Karimov until his death, Mirziyoyev was *internal* to the restricted grouping that determined the outcome of Uzbekistan's post-personalistic transition. The new Uzbek leader was able to negotiate his rise to power directly with other winning coalition members, who had as a consequence limited capacity to constrain his agenda throughout the power transfer mechanism.

Emphasis on the successors' positionality *vis-à-vis* the winning coalitions as well the wider élites suggests in turn that élite pacts emerged as fundamental determinants for the success of the post-personalistic power transfers in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. In the former case, the pact between Rakhmanov and Rezhepov elevated Berdymukhammedov to power, marginalising Agageldi Mammetgeldiyev, Turkmenistan's minister of defence at time of Niyazov's death. Turkmen opposition sources⁹ reported that Mammetgeldiyev emerged as a key contender for the presidency during the short transition, suggesting that his relationship with Redzhepov deteriorated quite dramatically after the latter had supported Berdymukhammedov as Niyazov's successor. The Uzbek transition revolved around the pact negotiated between Mirziyoyev and Inoyatov during the turbulent week that followed Karimov's death. We are led to believe that Inoyatov extended his support to Uzbekistan's second president in exchange for a negotiated exit from the Uzbek élite (Medvedev 2017). Inoyatov's transactional approach to leadership selection was confirmed retrospectively by a series of developments that unfolded after 30 January 2018, the date of his official dismissal from the chairmanship of the SNB. Beyond his eventual appointment to the Uzbek Senate,¹⁰

⁹ "Turkmen Security Chief Ousted", *Gündogar*, 17 May 2007, available at: <http://gundogar.org/?022004431800000000000013000000>, accessed 20 February 2019.

¹⁰ Appointed to the Senate by presidential decree shortly after his dismissal from the SNB, R.R. Inoyatov remains, at the time of writing, one of the 15 senators whose Senate seats were object of direct presidential nomination. The complete list is available on the official website of the Uzbek Senate, <http://senat.uz/ru/senators/region/15>, accessed 25 February 2019.

Inoyatov was also guaranteed immunity from prosecution of crimes committed while in post and, at a later stage, became part of Mirziyoyev's new presidential administration, wherein he was nominated as the president's key advisor on national security.

The second point arising from this investigation of the two winning coalitions suggests a relationship of indirect causality between the élite policy implemented by the departed leaders in the later stages of their rule and the outcome of post-personalistic successions. Borrowing from Peter Frank, writing in 1987 about Soviet mechanisms of political succession, a new leader may be said to be “put in place by his predecessor's team—he inherits a government, rather than creates a new one” (92). As the fulcrum of wide patronage networks emanating personalistic authority over central and peripheral institutions, the ageing rulers left indelible imprints over the formation of these élites, exerting in this sense a modicum of incidental influence over the transitions themselves.

Turkmenistan's winning coalition emerged as an informal body that included two members, both operating within the power structures of the Turkmen state. This characterisation highlights a relationship of direct continuity between Turkmenistan's post-personalistic transition and the élite policies of the late Niyazov era (2002-2006), when power ministries and military structures progressively expanded their influence over Turkmenistan's domestic decision-making processes. At the same time, the identification of Uzbekistan's winning coalition as a tripartite grouping including established members of the political élite and influential representatives of the secret services mirrored the stagnating cadre structure of the late Karimov era, which witnessed the unrelenting expansion of the influence exerted by Uzbekistan's power structures over medium-ranked central personnel and regional cadres of all levels.

Official announcements informing the wider population about the establishment of funeral commissions to honour the deceased leader represented the exact political moment in

which the *designating stages* of the two power transfer processes studied here had reached a successful completion. These commissions, as we have seen before, were chaired by the cadre emerging victorious from the appointment process, who also became the country's *interim* leader and, in both contexts, came to be universally recognised as the president *in pectore*.

The linearity of the Turkmen power transfer mechanism allowed the regime to announce the death of its personalistic leader while simultaneously revealing the identity of Niyazov's élite-designated successor. Turkmenistan's 2006-2007 transition experienced in this sense a very brief designating phase, wherein the dictates of the Turkmen constitution were systematically ignored. Article 60 of the constitutional draft in force at the time of Niyazov's demise stipulated that, in case of death or incapacitation of a sitting president, the speaker of the *Majlis* (the Turkmen Parliament) was to be elevated to a position of temporary leadership.¹¹ Shortly after Niyazov's death, Ovezgeldy Ataev, Turkmenistan's parliamentary speaker since November 2002, was arrested and imprisoned amidst forged accusations of abuse of authority and immoral conduct, thus paving the way for the appointment of Berdymukhammedov to Turkmenistan's interim leadership. Ataev was not freed until early 2012.¹²

¹¹ For the full Russian-language text of the Turkmen Constitution in force in late 2006, see *Neutral'nyi Turkmenistan*, 20 August 2003, p. 2. Article 60 was modified shortly after Berdymukhammedov's appointment to the interim leadership. The new provisions—included in Article 58 of the constitution amended on 27 December 2006—stipulated that the “temporary fulfilment of the duties of the President of Turkmenistan [...] is entrusted to one of the Vice-Chairmen of the Cabinet of Ministers”, in a concerted attempt to bestow retroactive legitimacy upon the appointment of the new Turkmen leader. The Russian-language text of the post-2006 Turkmen Constitution can be consulted at: *Neutral'nyi Turkmenistan*, 27 September 2008, p. 6.

¹² “Former Turkmen Parliament speaker reportedly released from prison”, *RFE/RL Feature Article*, 21 March 2012.

While it evolved throughout a relatively longer timeframe, the designating stage of the post-Karimov transition similarly bypassed Uzbekistan’s constitutional dictates. Nigmatilla T. Yuldashev—the cadre who, in his capacity as chairman of the Uzbek senate, was constitutionally¹³ entitled to lead the transition—was however not forcibly removed from the presidential succession, as he publicly¹⁴ called for Mirziyoyev to acquire interim presidential powers. Yuldashev’s voluntary relinquishment of his constitutional duties did not however occur until 8 September 2016, almost a week after the announcement of Islam Karimov’s death. Incidentally, this cooperative attitude helped Yuldashev’s career: at the time of writing, he continues to chair the Uzbek Senate, the position he occupied at the end of the Karimov era.

The disclosure of the identity of second-generation leaders certified a triple evolution in the nature of the power transfer mechanisms studied here. First, it sealed the conclusion of the brief interlude wherein the transition from personalistic rule to hyper-authoritarian presidencies came to be dealt with through collective élite approaches. Cadre appointments to interim presidential posts, moreover, ushered in the most public phase of the power transfer processes set into motion by the death of first presidents in both Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The opening of the transitions’ *ceremonial phase* finally moved the post-

¹³ An annotated electronic draft of the Uzbek constitution, here consulted in its Russian language version, is available at: <http://www.lex.uz/acts/35869> , accessed 30 January 2019.

¹⁴ On 8 September 2016, during a joint meeting of the *Oliy Majlis*—the lower chamber of the Uzbek Parliament—and the Senate, Yuldashev argued in favour of elevating Mirziyoyev to Uzbekistan’s interim presidency, on the basis of his “many years of experience in senior positions of public authority and management, and the respect [he enjoyed] amongst the population”. The full account of this joint meeting is published in: “Informatsionnye sluzhby Zakonodatel’noi palaty i Senata Oliy Mazhlisa Respubliki Uzbekistan” [Information Service of the Legislative Assembly and the Senate of the Republic of Uzbekistan], *Narodnoe Slovo*, 9 September 2016, p. 1.

personalist transitions in question away from the realm of political informality, leading them into a more ritualised phase of their own evolution.

Critical to the effective advancement of this second transitional phase is an outer élite grouping, which was tasked to play central roles in the heavily ritualised culmination of the two post-personalist power transfers in question. As it unfolded through a series of public events, this ritualisation facilitated an exact reconstruction of the membership of these larger élite ensembles.

Three milestone events defined the transitions' ceremonial phases: the commemoration of the deceased leaders, the organisation of nation-wide campaigns that led to presidential votes in Turkmenistan (11 February 2007) and Uzbekistan (4 December 2016), and the official ceremonies that inaugurated the post-personalist presidencies after Berdymukhammedov and Mirziyoyev had enjoyed their respective electoral triumphs.

Presidential funerals set early benchmarks towards the conclusion of the power transfer mechanisms studied here. As spectacular events critical to post-personalistic succession, the commemorations of deceased leaders represented the conclusive element in the longstanding cults of the first presidents' personalities, the "fountainhead of authority" (Paltiel 1983, 50) for their respective political systems and a defining marker of the specific forms of personalism consolidated in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan throughout the post-Soviet years (Chehabi & Linz 1998, 13-15). In both cases, interim leaders played marginal roles in the commemoration of first presidents: these funerals can be therefore regarded as episodes of posthumous personalism.

As largely staged political events, the presidential elections that formalised the accession to power of post-personalistic leaders in both Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan contributed directly to the process of political ritualisation defining the latter phases of the two power transfer mechanisms studied here. Although their selection as interim leaders

guaranteed unchallenged access to the presidency and its powers, both Berdymukhammedov and Mirziyoyev opted to stage presidential elections that, ignoring any international standard of fairness and openness,¹⁵ came to be reduced to plebiscites for the two second-generation leaders.

These two votes were conducted through strikingly similar regime strategies. On the one hand, no member of either the winning coalition or the outer élite groupings ran as a candidate against the interim presidents.¹⁶ The non-competitive nature of transitional votes in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan—already guaranteed by the failure to involve any candidate expressed by opposition forces—was therefore enhanced by the regime’s choice to have marginal élite members running alongside the interim presidents. On the other, both Berdymukhammedov and Mirziyoyev interpreted high turnout rates and plebiscitary percentages of favourable votes¹⁷ through the Soviet political lens, which regarded inflated

¹⁵ In departure from the isolationist praxis established by both prior regimes, the first post-transitional presidential elections were either partially (Turkmenistan) or fully (Uzbekistan) monitored by OSCE observers. For the results of the monitoring missions, which expressed similar concerns about the overall fairness of these votes, see: OSCE/ODIHR, *Turkmenistan, Presidential Election, 11 February 2007: Needs Assessment Mission Report*, 19 January 2007; OSCE/ODIHR, *Uzbekistan, Early Presidential Election, 4 December 2016: Final Report*, 22 March 2007.

¹⁶ Beside interim leader Berdymukhammedov, the other five candidates running for the presidential elections of 12 February 2007 were: A. Atadzhiyev, first deputy *hakim* of the Tashauz *velayat* (region); M.S. Gurbanov, governor of the Karabekevyul province (Lebap *velayat*); O. Karadzhaev, mayor of Abadan (Ahal region); I. Nuryev, deputy minister for Oil and Gas; A.A. Pomanov, mayor of the city of Turkmenbashi (Balkan *velayat*). Reflecting Uzbekistan’s fictional pluralism, the presidential election of December 2016 was contested by Kh. Ketmonov (People’s Democratic Party of Uzbekistan); S.S. Otamuradov (Uzbekistan National Revival Democratic Party); N.M. Umarov (Justice Social Democratic Party). Interim leader Mirziyoyev represented the presidential party, the *O'zbekiston Liberal-demokratik Partiyasi*.

¹⁷ Official data on Turkmenistan’s 2007 presidential election reported a total turnout rate of 98.65% of eligible voters. Of these, 89.23 % voted for interim president G.M. Berdymukhammedov. Similar

figures as indicators of regime stability rather than as warning signs of the regime's failure to guarantee the political rights of the wider electorate (Kaya & Bernhard 2013).

The final element that needs to be analysed here to make sense of post-personalistic transitions in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan relates to the inauguration speeches that Berdymuhamedov and Mirziyoyev delivered after their electoral triumphs. As both campaigns were emptied of political content, inauguration speeches represented the earliest meaningful policy statement issued by the new leaders, if only because these speeches intended to introduce Central Asia's second-generation leaders to the wider international community.

A staunch commitment to uphold the policies of his predecessor represented the fundamental theme of Berdymukhammedov's inaugural speech.¹⁸ The constraints imposed by his somewhat precarious power position led the new Turkmen president to outline a policy course firmly entrenched in the illusions underpinning the Niyazovist construct of the *Altyn Asyr*—an unprecedented Golden Age of peace and prosperity brought to the population by Turkmenistan's post-Soviet leadership. To this end, Berdymukhammedov excluded any deviation from Niyazov's policies, reaffirming his commitment to a set of social and economic measures that, by the end of the post-Niyazov transition, had substantially failed. A similar degree of lip-service to his predecessor's policies pervaded Mirziyoyev's inauguration speech.¹⁹ While this specific narrative characterised the early segments of the

figures (87.73% turnout rate; 88.61% of votes cast in favour of the interim president) characterised Uzbekistan's presidential vote of December 2016.

¹⁸ For the full text: "Rech' Prezidenta Turkmenistana G.M. Berdymukhammedova" [Speech of G.M. Berdymukhammedov, President of Turkmenistan], *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*, 25 February 2007, p. 1.

¹⁹ For the full text: "Address by Shavkat Mirziyoyev at the joint session of the Chambers of Oliy Majlis dedicated to a Solemn Ceremony of Assuming the Post of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan"

speech—which almost tripled in length the one delivered by Berdymukhammedov in 2007—its central and concluding passages introduced a detailed series of policy measures departing very visibly from the social and economic strategies of the prior regime. Mirziyoyev’s speech mentioned political liberalisation only *in passim*; the attention of Uzbekistan’s second president was therefore fixated on social and economic change, in anticipation of the many policies he endeavoured to introduce throughout 2017 and 2018.

Specific focus on inauguration speeches adds a further complexity to the line of inquiry pursued here, inasmuch as it unveils the nexus between the successors’ positionality *vis-à-vis* the winning coalitions and the intensity of the policy de-personalisation drives introduced by second-generation leaders after their formal access to presidential powers. Kendall-Taylor and Frantz (2016, 166) problematised this nexus, suggesting that, in transitional processes originated by the death of authoritarian leaders, weak successors or compromise candidates have little capacity to stimulate policy innovation, constrained as they usually are by the limitations imposed by entrenched élites. Testing their conclusions through exclusive focus on Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan is beyond the analytical scope of this article, which is nevertheless committed to delve into a specific facet of the nexus between power transfer and de-personalisation.

The linkages between leadership succession and regime de-personalisation²⁰ are understood here as being intimately connected with the (s)elected leaders’ capacity to

[<https://www.un.int/uzbekistan/news/address-shavkat-mirziyoyev-joint-session-chambers-oliy-majlis-dedicated-solemn-ceremony>, accessed 14 February 2019].

²⁰ Abel Polese and his colleagues (2017) have related the durability of Turkmen authoritarianism to the regime’s capacity to establish a working cult of the leader’s personality, regardless of the leader’s identity or their personalistic tendencies. These scholars understood the 2006-2007 transition as an authoritarian continuum, wherein the post-Niyazov regime engaged in “as little restructuring as possible” to achieve its power preservation agenda (Polese, Ó Beacháin & Horák 2017, 440).

negotiate change with their supporting élites, imposing a return to forms of individual-ised, yet post-personalistic, decision-making. Personnel policy offers a very privileged point of view to discuss the processes whereby Berdymukhammedov and Mirziyoyev engaged with, or dismantled the fundamental constituents of, the élites inherited from their predecessors.

Pathways to managed de-personalisation: Post-personalistic Personnel Policies in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan

To identify regime pathways to élite de-personalisation in post-Niyazov Turkmenistan and post-Karimov Uzbekistan, this section showcases the results of a comprehensive study of biographies and career paths of the 79 cadres²¹ who rose to prominence in the initial two years²² of post-personalistic eras in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Table 1 lists the 43

The present article, conversely, located analytically transitions out of personalism at the intersection of two germane processes: de-personalisation and re-personalisation. The de-personalisation of Turkmen authoritarianism is in this sense understood as an outcome channelled through the de-Niyazovisation of the domestic political landscape. Whereas it recognises that a broader continuity in non-democratic governance methods has ultimately transcended Turkmenistan's transition out of Niyazovism—acknowledging in this sense the point advanced by Polese and his colleagues—this article is closer to the analytical framework outlined by Sébastien Peyrouse, for whom a clear, albeit short political moment—essentially coinciding with the first biennium of the Berdymukhammedov era—saw the regime in Ashgabat engaging in the “progressive erasure of the cult of Niyazov” (Peyrouse 2012, 117-118). Eventually, a Berdymukhammedov-centric personality cult surfaced as part of a wider process, whereby the regime endeavoured to re-personalise the legitimacy agenda of Turkmen authoritarianism while maintaining a high degree of complementarity between the cults of the personalities of Turkmenistan's two post-Soviet leaders (du Boulay & Isaacs 2018).

²¹ The biographies of the surveyed élite members were collected from official sources: *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan* and UzA, the official press agency of the Uzbek government.

²² In the Turkmen case, the two-year period under observation began on 21 December 2006, the day of Berdymukhammedov's appointment as interim leader. Yuldashev's relinquishment of the interim leadership in favour of Mirziyoyev (8 September 2016) represented in turn the event selected as the starting point for the analysis of Uzbekistan's post-personalistic personnel policies.

positions²³—20 in Turkmenistan and 23 in Uzbekistan—investigated throughout the section, identifying the frequency of their reshuffles across the two timeframes in question.

Please insert Table 1 HERE

Élite de-personalisation is understood here as the process whereby post-personalistic leaders pursued the eradication of power centres that pivoted on established cadres and pre-existed the inauguration of second-generation presidencies in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Three major observables are relevant to determine the scope of the de-personalisation strategies pursued by Berdymukhammedov and Mirziyoyev in the first two years of their presidencies: a) the élite turnover rate achieved throughout the two timeframes in question; b) the rejuvenation of the élites in power; and 3) the progressive reduction of their tenure. The latter two indicators, as noted in Table 2, are calculated at the endpoints of the intervals demarcating the chronological boundaries of this study.

Please insert Table 2 HERE

Mirziyoyev—who had accessed the presidency from within Uzbekistan’s winning coalition—achieved relatively comprehensive rates of élite de-personalisation. By 7 September 2018, Uzbek cadres were generally younger and definitely less entrenched than those in post at the time of Karimov’s death. This picture is starkly different from that relative to the Turkmen context, where similar turnover rates failed to impact visibly on cadres’ in-post entrenchment and average age.

²³ The final list of positions combines the posts occupied by members of the two winning coalitions with the larger range of positions associated with the outer élite groupings involved in the transitions’ ceremonial phases.

When analysed in light of average in-post tenure allowed by second-generation leaders, these turnover rates point to rather different de-personalisation drives, which did however depart from a similar origin: the reversal of the cadre management strategies implemented by Niyazov and Karimov.

In the early stages of his presidency, Berdymukhammedov was not in a position to replicate the unpredictable personnel policies of his predecessor: it was therefore possible to impose frequent reshuffles upon a very limited range of positions (see Table 1). The Turkmen élite, as suggested in Table 2, became as a consequence more entrenched. Indicators relating to Uzbekistan's de-personalisation pathway reveal in turn a more linear process, as Mirziyoyev wielded enough power to abandon the stability of cadres pursued by Karimov: over 24 months, Uzbekistan's élite had become much less stable, as its average tenure in post was halved by the second-generation leader. Table 1 indicates that no fewer than 7 positions experienced one single alternation across the same timeframe, suggesting that Mirziyoyev, at least initially, trusted his own appointees. Multiple reshuffles were conversely imposed on three posts, including the governorship of the Samarkand region, which saw the removal of three governors between December 2016 and June 2018, when E.O. Turdimov was appointed at the helm of the regional *hokimlik* following the arrest of T.I. Dzhuraev on corruption charges.²⁴

The contours of the two de-personalisation strategies at play in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan become sharper when this study shifts its attention on professional backgrounds and individual profiles of the cadres reshuffled by Berdymukhammedov and Mirziyoyev.

The élite turnover work carried out by the two leaders targeted specific pockets of positions, with the ultimate view to install loyalists in posts perceived as strategically vital for

²⁴ “Eks-khokim Samarkandskoi oblasti i ego sotrudniki vyaty pod strazhu” [Former governor of Samarkand region and his associates taken into custody], *Gazeta.uz*, 13 June 2018.

post-personalistic consolidation. Post-Niyazov personnel policies promoted the precariousness of cadres presiding over Turkmenistan’s law-enforcement sector, as confirmed by the alternation of three presidents of the Turkmen supreme court and three interior ministers across the two years surveyed here. A very similar picture emerges from the Uzbek context, where all jobs linked with the state’s power sector—with the eminent exception of Uzbekistan’s constitutional court—were reshuffled during the first two years of the Mirziyoyev era (see Table 1).

The timing of individual élite reshuffles unveils a further dimension to the two de-personalisation drives. Figure 2 maps out chronologically the dismissals of the 20 cadres who were part of the élites at the time of Niyazov’s and Karimov’s death and were removed from their posts within the two timeframes considered in this study. The figure offers a spatial representation of the political significance of specific cadre dismissals, relating single instances of personnel removals to individual in-post tenure.²⁵

Please insert Figure 2 HERE

There are two main immediate conclusions that can be drawn from Figure 2. To begin with, the two de-personalisation drives were carried out with greater intensity in the early stages of the post-personalistic eras: only three of the 20 dismissals surveyed here occurred in the latter half of the two timeframes in question. The figure does moreover identify the obliteration of the winning coalitions as integral to the de-personalisation pathways pursued in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. With the exception of Mirziyoyev, no member of either

²⁵ Round data points indicate Turkmen élites; Uzbek cadres are represented through squares. Cadres’ positionality *vis-à-vis* their respective élites is captured graphically through the size of data points: winning coalition members are represented in the figure through large markers, while medium-size or small markers are used here to indicate the dismissals of ministers or marginal élite members respectively.

winning coalition was still in power by the end of the two-year periods surveyed here.

Figure 2 also reinforces a series of previously advanced points about the emergence of diverging de-personalisation pathways in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. When related to pre-transitional appointments, Berdymukhammedov's de-personalisation drive involved a rather large group of cadres (14), who featured an average in-post tenure of 34 months at the time of their dismissal. Although low in absolute terms, these figures are significant when related to Niyazov's personnel policies, which did not allow tenure entrenchment even at the highest élite levels. Figure 2 identifies seven cadres occupying politically significant posts at the time of their dismissal: five of these—the exceptions being Justice minister A.Zh. Gulgaraev and deputy Prime Minister Yu. G. Davudov—were amongst Turkmenistan's ten most established élites at the moment of Niyazov's death, at least in terms of in-post tenure. The figure suggests that post-Niyazov de-personalisation came to be operationalised via the replacement of the regime core: the winning coalition was substituted by a set of very established personnel—foreign minister R.O. Meredov and long-term Presidential Administration members V.M. Khramov and Y.O. Paromov—joined by former presidential hopeful A. Mammetgeldiyev, who rose to prominence in the early Berdymukhammedov era by offering the support of Turkmenistan's power structures to the new leader.²⁶ Cadre redistribution was a marginal element in the de-personalisation of the Turkmen élites: with two notable exceptions,²⁷ dismissals from central and peripheral posts indicate definitive exit from Turkmenistan's post-personalistic regime.

²⁶ “Turkmen Security Chief Ousted”, *Gündogar*, 17 May 2007, available at: <http://gundogar.org/?02200443180000000000000013000000>, accessed 20 February 2019.

²⁷ These referred to D.N. Orazov, who rose to the ranks of deputy chairman of the Turkmen Cabinet from his role of governor of Ashgabat city in August 2008, and Supreme Court Chairman C.

The limited number of Uzbek cadres surveyed in the figure suggests that Mirziyoyev, at least during the early stages of his presidency, selected a pathway to de-personalisation centred on the redistribution of Karimov-era appointees, rather than on their ultimate removal from the Uzbek élites.²⁸ Personnel re-distribution had an immediate effect, namely the lowering of in-post tenure. Exclusions were limited to extremely established cadres, especially winning coalition members Inoyatov and Azimov. Their removal contributed decisively to élite rejuvenation: the dismissal of the six cadres featured in Figure 2 decreased by 50% the number of Uzbek élites born in the 1940s and in power on 7 September 2018.

The tables and the figure included in this segment finally reveal that the de-personalisation drives carried out in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan remain significant but were by no means all-encompassing. The regimes' explicit focus on a wider range of relatively second-tier cadres (Turkmenistan) or a smaller number of very powerful élite members (Uzbekistan) capture on the one hand the emergence of de-personalisation trends in both contexts, failing to highlight on the other the consolidation of cadre management strategies seeking the rapid and systematic elimination of the new leaders' political rivals.

As it offered an empirical picture departing from the chaotic characterisation of de-personalisation retrievable from the extant literature (Geddes 1999; Ulfelder 2005), this segment identifies in this sense a further factor to explain the stability defining post-personalistic regime evolution in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Through a very similar strategy, namely managed de-personalisation, the new leaders—who, as we have seen earlier,

Khodhamyradov, who was appointed as Turkmenistan's Prosecutor General in July 2007, to be eventually dismissed on 3 March 2008.

²⁸ Out of the 23 cadres in power at the time of Karimov's death, 10 remained in power throughout the timeframe surveyed here, while 4 were transferred to other jobs. The list also included two positions that were elective and one honorary post with no replacement possible.

rose to power from different positions of influence—avoided élite upheaval in the short term, sowing the seeds for enhanced regime durability in both contexts.

Conclusion

In approaching comparatively transitions out of established personalistic rule in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, this article has identified the key mechanisms through which élite collectives shaped succession dynamics in regime environments traditionally sustained by the influence of an individual political actor.

The first key conclusion that can be drawn from the research showcased here relates to the overall sense of stability that pervaded post-personalistic transfers of power in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The materialisation of temporary, informal structures of collective decision-making and the contemporaneous re-emergence of authoritarian tools tested in the Soviet era facilitated the codification of a succession praxis for Central Asia's two personalist regimes. This praxis, inaugurated in Turkmenistan and perfected a decade later in Uzbekistan, ensured the authoritarian resilience of regimes that, throughout sustained timeframes, categorically refused to adopt strategies of pre-arranged political succession. By systematising the politics of power transfer in post-personalistic Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, this article also demonstrated that Central Asia's mechanisms of regime preservation defeated any prediction of instability by working through ostensibly non-organised processes of leadership change. The systematisation of these mechanisms may prove useful to tackle analytically the next wave of post-personalistic transitions to be completed in the relative short term (Tajikistan) or a later stage (Russia, Belarus) across post-Soviet Eurasia, should these occur without the appointment of designated successors to E. Rahmon, V.V. Putin and A.G. Lukashenka respectively.

Beyond facilitating the identification of the élite collectives that managed the transitions out of first presidencies in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, the article's focus on the agency of post-personalistic power transfers has unveiled the options available to designated successors to de-personalise cadre management in their respective political landscapes. The leaders' different attitudes to non-democratic de-personalisation—very visible in Uzbekistan, relatively oblique in Turkmenistan in the early Berdymukhammedov years—were explained through the prism of the leaders' different power positions in the personalistic regimes. Élite centrality at a time of a leader's death was therefore illustrated here as a reliable predictor of a post-personalistic leader's capacity to rapidly access de-personalisation tools.

Does short-term de-personalisation lead to regime re-personalisation in the long run? The paper's focus on early post-personalistic politics in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan revealed a series of factors that contributed decisively to the eventual personalisation of the Berdymukhammedov regime and highlighted a few instances of the emergence of embryonic forms of personalistic decision-making in post-Karimov Uzbekistan. Future research may build upon the argument presented here to explain these dynamics in a comparative, long-term perspective.

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Figure 1. Systematising post-Personalistic Power Transfers

Table 1. Considered Positions & Total Reshuffled Posts

Table 2. Quantifying De-Personalisation in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan

Figure 2. Removing Entrenched Élites in Post-Personalistic Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan