

Henry E. Hale. *Patronal Politics: Eurasian Regime Dynamics in Comparative Perspective*. Problems of International Politics. Eds. Keith Darden and Ian Shapiro. New York: Cambridge UP, 2015. xviii, 542 pp. References. Index. US\$39.99, paper.

Henry Hale's new book is a magisterial overview of the political regimes of the former Soviet region. Through a series of deep case studies, Hale lays out a theory of "patronal politics," which explains the tendency of regimes in the region to revert to autocratic, corrupt, personalistic, and patronage-based forms of rule. Hale's theory helps explain why periods of apparent stability are, in some cases, punctuated by massive outbursts of popular protest, while in other cases, no such upheavals erupt. In fact, his book goes a long way toward explaining the reasons for these different outcomes.

Hale begins by showing that throughout the region in the 1990s, there was a tendency in each regime to form a single, dominant political machine organized around one leader. In such a system, the leader serves as the chief patron atop a pyramid of lower-level machines, all tied to one another through networks of mutual interest. In some cases, state power intermingles with organized crime syndicates. Commonly, the president's cronies and family members control lucrative assets. The exchange of benefits is the currency of power: rulers grant their cronies the right to enrich themselves in return for their political support. The linchpin of the system is the universal understanding of who is the ultimate patron sitting atop the pyramid. If a single patronage network of this type controls the exchange of benefits, the political system is reasonably stable, but if a second such pyramid arises, the state can become destabilized.

Hale offers a persuasive account of the relationship between formal and informal institutions. He argues that formal institutions, such as constitutions and elections, matter insofar as they shape the expectations of political game players about who is in charge. Even though they are rigged, elections serve some useful purpose for the rulers, such as channelling discontent into controllable and observable routines. Yet elections also carry some risk. A large-scale show of electoral support for an opposition leader or an egregious attempt to falsify the results can trigger a mass outpouring of opposition. And therefore, the regular rhythm of elections, as well as term limits (and a leader's aging), can engender expectations about when a ruler's term will end.

This is a theory of strategic action. Elites act in anticipation of how other elites will act. They want to rally around a successful leader and avoid backing losers. Uncertainty can, therefore, be destabilizing. Competition among rival patronage networks can induce mass mobilization and even the

ousting of a leader. Whether or not such upheavals are successful in removing a leader depends strongly on the leader's skill and popularity. Hale recognizes that leadership skill is variable and that skill can contribute to a leader's success. The ultimate arbiter of a leader's power, however, is public opinion: a leader who enjoys broad popular support can fend off challenges, whereas a leader who is widely unpopular cannot. Hale argues that in the case of Viktor Yanukovich in 2014, a combination of factors enabled the Maidan protests to unseat him: his deep unpopularity, his brutality, his impatience, and his ineptitude. Thus, Hale makes a strong argument that in Eurasian "patronal politics" regimes, public opinion is the final determiner of whether or not leaders remain in power.

Hale's book goes a long way toward explaining commonalities in regime dynamics across the region. His argument that we should focus on the cyclical character of change *within* regimes is compelling, as is his conception of the way formal rules reinforce the very patterns of behaviour that subvert them. He has a cogent explanation for the fact that the strength of both rulers and opposition forces is contingent on the expectations of others, rather than being an exogenous factor. Focusing on the institutional arrangements that shape the coordination of such expectations is useful, and he is undoubtedly right in seeing public support for a ruler as a factor that affects the calculations of the elites.

At the same time, in its sweep of the subject matter, the book underemphasizes some issues. In particular, Hale does not consider variation across the region in the degree to which power has been institutionalized. In some places, formal, codified procedures play a larger role in governing behaviour than in others. Certainly, informal rules matter throughout the region; but even in Western countries, which generally function under the rule of law, informal rules are familiar (old-boy networks, "pay-to-play" rules, machine politics, abuses of power, cronyism, self-dealing, outright bribery, and so on). As a simplified model for understanding regime dynamics in Eurasia, Hale's theory of patronal politics offers powerful insights, but it leaves out of the picture many sources of power in such systems. Also, the scope conditions under which the "patronal politics" model applies are not entirely clear. To what degree are these phenomena characteristic of the post-Communist/post-Soviet environment, and to what degree are they conditioned by centuries of political history? If these dynamics are characteristic of Eurasia or of post-Communism, then why do we not see them operating, for instance, in China? And if China does exhibit the same pattern, why has it been so remarkably successful in achieving economic growth?

The Soviet regime manifested many of the patterns of patronal politics discussed in Hale's book, and it collapsed because of the accumulation of

long-term negative externalities in the economy and society that were generated by the regime itself. It is likely, therefore, that the practices that enable post-Soviet dictators to maintain power are also laying the foundation for their demise.

Overall, the book under review is a signal scholarly achievement. It demonstrates a remarkable breadth and depth of knowledge of the regimes of the former Soviet region and has a powerful, synthetic theoretical vision. It is likely to have a significant impact on scholarship.

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