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The International Dimensions of Electoral Frauds and Electoral Malpractices
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Table of Contents

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Abstract

Electoral frauds and electoral malpractices relate to the domain of electoral affairs, which is the one of the core elements of a regime with representative institutions. During the last decades at the international level there have been many documents, charters and organizations that contributed to craft the standards of electoral integrity. With the end of the Cold War these standards have been spread and adopted in almost every country in the world. Yet, more than 25 years later elections are still rigged especially in hybrid regimes. During the last years many research have been conducted to analyse why elections fail, what is their role in hybrid as well as authoritarian regimes, and there is a growing stream of literature that is investigating electoral frauds and electoral malpractices.

This thesis provides a contribution in this debate by pointing to one of the less analysed factors in the study of electoral frauds and electoral malpractices, which is the international dimension. The latter is conceptualized in two ways: the first one relates to Western democratizing pressure and how it can affect the change or the evolution of electoral frauds and malpractices. The second one concerns socialization dynamics in terms of methods of frauds and malpractices among authorities in different countries. It is argued that where there is a stronger Western democratizing pressure authorities change the way they conduct elections, even if this change does not forcefully means democratization. Rather, along with formal improvements in elections management, authorities alter and modify methods of frauds and malpractices as a way to elude Western criticism. In order to properly modify electoral frauds and malpractices, authorities resort to learning practices by looking at other experiences.

These theoretical arguments have been verified on three cases study, which are Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. These countries share some key characteristics, which allowed for cross-temporal and spatial analysis regarding electoral frauds

and malpractices since their independence from the Soviet Union. The empirical analysis demonstrates that the more a regime suffers from Western democratizing pressure, the more authorities would change methods of frauds and malpractices. In doing so, they learn from other positive and negative experiences. Therefore, thanks to the inclusion of the international dimension in the study of electoral frauds and malpractices, this thesis argues that electoral mismanagement changes, evolves and adapts to new international conditions and poses continuous challenges to the electoral integrity.

Keywords: Election, Electoral Fraud, Electoral Malpractice, International Dimension, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Western Democratizing Pressure, Learning, South Caucasus, Hybrid Regimes.

Introduction

Elections have always been the engine of a democratic regime's development. The integrity of the electoral process is one of the first factors that affects democratic quality. Of course, elections alone are not sufficient to make a democracy work, yet they are still essential institutions for a participatory, competitive and legitimate self-government (cf. Bratton and van de Walle 1997, Lindberg 2006). The relevance of the electoral process is well underlined by Andreas Schedler (2013), who claims that a democratic election holds a logical sequence of seven necessary conditions (empowerment, freedom of supply, freedom of demand, inclusion, insulation, integrity, decisiveness),[1] which form the 'chain of democratic choice'. Schedler firmly underlines that an election is fully democratic if and only if each of these seven conditions are respected and fulfilled, otherwise the 'election is not less democratic but it's undemocratic' (Schedler 2013:86). Therefore, the management and mismanagement of elections is a crucial factor to be analysed in order to understand how regimes evolve and can avoid a full transition to democracy. This research stems from these arguments and it aims to further investigate how South Caucasian post-soviet

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[1] Please find hereby more detail about the seven different elements: *Empowerment*: Political elections are about citizens wielding power; *Freedom of supply*: The idea of a democratic election presupposes the free formation of alternatives. Elections 'without choice' do not qualify as democratic, and neither do elections with choice confined to a narrow menu of state-licensed options; *Freedom of demand*: Democratic elections presuppose the free formation of voter preference; *Inclusion*: In the contemporary world, democracy demands universal suffrage; *Insulation*: Once citizens have freely formed their preferences, they must be able to express them just as freely; *Integrity*: competent and neutral election management must count their votes honestly and weigh them equally; *Decisiveness*: elections that end without consequences are not democratic. The winners must be able to assume office, exercise power, and conclude their terms in accordance with constitutional rules. (cf. Schedler 2013:83-87).

regimes managed and mismanaged elections. In doing so, this study addresses one of the most underestimated factors for what concern the analysis of frauds and electoral malpractices: the international dimension.

The concept of electoral integrity refers to elections 'respecting international standards and global norms governing the appropriate conduct of elections' (Norris 2015:4). The international community takes elections seriously and drafted some key principles in international documents,[2] which were subsequently adopted by the majority of the states around the world. Moreover, since the early nineties the international community developed a wide portfolio aimed to help post-soviet countries to consolidate their democratic institutions. Thanks to these efforts, in all regimes around post-soviet space, people can vote through alleged democratic elections. However, since their independence the electoral process has always been affected by the presence of fraud and electoral malpractice, which has proved detrimental to the levels of political accountability of the ruling elites. Many studies have addressed this issue from democratisation theory standpoints, as well as from structural and domestic constraints. Yet, to my knowledge, there have not been any analyses that consider the international dimension from the following two perspectives: the first one refers to the assessment of international forces on electoral frauds and malpractices. The second one considers the international dimension as a space of socialisation for learning mechanisms regarding frauds and electoral malpractices.

As a matter of fact, according to Pippa Norris (2015) electoral integrity is affected by four main factors. These are structural constraints, institutional checks, electoral management bodies and international forces. The latter consist of three types of external factors: 'cosmopolitan communication that diffuses global norms to strengthen international standards of electoral

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[2] From the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) and the Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE (1990).

integrity, the provision of electoral assistance and development aid to build local capacity and the deployment of observer monitoring missions to strengthen transparency and accountability' (Norris 2015:89). It is submitted here that this standpoint did not include many other factors which have a strong impact on the quality of democracy (see for example Morlino 2011), that shape the international dimension of regimes' development (Levitsky and Way 2010).

The decision to focus on electoral frauds and electoral malpractices emerges from the assessment that the three South Caucasian countries, as well as the other post-Soviet countries, since their independence undertook a process which eliminated the Soviet formal structure in order to develop liberal democratic institutions, including multiparty elections. On the one side this process led to the creation of new legal frameworks that ruled the elections and transformed the citizens' participation in the political sphere of the country (see for example Herron 2009). On the other side, incumbents faced new constraints to their rule and therefore needed to find new solutions to preserve their positions of power. Authorities started to falsify and therefore to nullify the chain of democratic choice by recurring to a disparate set of frauds and electoral malpractice.

The process of consolidating a democratic legal framework was complex and full of challenges (see for example Anderson et al. 2001). Therefore, domestic authorities and international actors cooperated together in order to overcome difficulties and obstacles, and they gave shape step by step to democratic constitutions, democratic electoral codes, and democratic electoral management bodies (EMBs). Since their independence, the three South Caucasian countries' electoral frameworks improved dramatically, even with substantial differences among them. Indeed, the three South Caucasian countries offer three different outcomes for what concerns electoral integrity and international outlooks. This is one of the main reasons why this thesis selected these case studies.

The South Caucasus is a small regional agglomeration that testifies the conundrum of international dynamics and regime

development. There have been numerous analyses and studies that have addressed this topic from different perspectives (yet to my knowledge there are no analyses on the other side of the electoral management, i.e. electoral mismanagement). Drawing from these considerations, the main research questions that underpin my research are, 'To what extent are electoral frauds and malpractices affected by international forces?' and 'Do socialization mechanisms apply to the elections' rigging?'

This topic is addressed from two main arguments. The first one is that electoral management evolved substantially in all Southern Caucasian countries which, at least formally, abruptly modified Soviet's voting institutions. Western democratizing pressure was limited in this process, yet subsequently it became more influential. Thus, I claim that as the West began to increase its democratic pressure toward the countries in order to have a better election management, authorities started to change the methods of fraud and electoral malpractices. In other words, I am arguing that malpractices changed not only because the electoral management evolved over time, but also because the international forces played a decisive role. There are two basic international dimensions: the first one is the Western democratising pressure, which is based on Levitsky and Way's theory of linkage and leverage (2010). The second one is that the international dimension allows for socializing methods of frauds and electoral malpractices.

With regards to the Western democratizing pressure, I stem the research from the years following the end of the Cold War, when the international context changed and Western actors spread the principle of electoral integrity in new regions in the world. In this new context, South Caucasian countries strived for independence and gained freedom; subsequently they reformed the state according to new norms/values, which were fostered worldwide by Western actors. However, this process produced controversial results because of the international system's dynamics, which characterized the decades subsequent the Cold War, and affected the extent of different regimes' development. According to this study, the controversial outcomes of these process are fully visible at the electoral management level; in the

three South Caucasian countries more than twenty years after their independence, electoral management is still in quest for full integrity. Georgia only recently had a first peaceful governmental turnover, and it would be premature to speak about 'founding' election in transitional terms. Armenia is a perfect example of a competitive authoritarian regime (Levitsky and Way 2010; Roessler and Howard, 2009) and Azerbaijan is by now a consolidated authoritarian regime. Therefore, in all cases it is possible to observe a formal evolution of electoral management, but at the same time an inconsistent development of the quality of democracy and the electoral integrity. In order to analyse and explain such variances I am going to take into consideration the international dimension and its effects on electoral mismanagement.

The second pillar of this research is to understand how malpractices changed and evolved. To address this issue, I suppose that electoral malpractices' strategies are not fixed and they can be updated and 'ameliorated' by the socialisation mechanism, namely learning. Thus, the second argument of this thesis is aimed to find out and to specify the evolution's mechanisms of electoral malpractices. In doing so, I am taking into consideration the international dimension. Yet, this time the international dimension is considered as a space for interactions, exchange and socialisation. This understanding follows a huge literature born out democratization studies, which I address in the next chapter. Indeed, I argue that thanks to the opportunity of international socialisation, incumbents have different options to ameliorate the methods of fraud. Stemming from a recent literature about socialisation and learning mechanisms, this thesis argues that incumbents in the South Caucasus learnt how to rig elections both from past experiences and from abroad. Learning is a key factor and can be articulated in different forms. I will explain how this process works and what the methodological implications are in order to trace such conclusions. As a matter of fact, despite the study of learning and mimicking among non-democratic regimes still being in its infancy (Bank and Edel 2013), I am confident that research on these types of practices can provide important elements in order to understand how electoral mismanagement has evolved.

23

The above-mentioned arguments are supported by two main hypotheses. The first hypothesis is that election frauds and malpractices change according to the level of Western leverage and Linkage that states experience. Western Leverage is a concept by Levitsky and Way that stands for 'states' vulnerability to Western democratizing pressure' (Levitsky and Way 2010:24), whereas Western Linkage refers to 'the density of ties (economic, political, diplomatic, social, and organizational) and cross-border flows (of capital, goods and services, people, and information) between particular countries and the United States and the EU' (Levitsky and Way 2010:23). The two authors claim that the vulnerability of a state depends on its bargaining power *vis à vis* the West: 'where countries lack bargaining power and are heavily affected by Western punitive action, leverage is high; where countries possess substantial bargaining power and/or can weather Western punitive action without significant harm, leverage is low' (Levitsky and Way 2010:41).

When the concepts of Linkage and Leverage are referring to electoral affairs it can entails different aspects: from election observation mission (EOM) to international conditionality, from cooperation agreements to electoral assistance programmes, from acknowledgment of election results to diplomatic ties. In particular, for what concern international forces that exert leverage on South Caucasus countries in electoral affairs, there are the OSCE and Council of Europe (that includes Venice Commission). These institutions were often backed by other international actors, such as the European Union and United States agencies (USAID); all together these actors managed millions of dollars in terms of funds, aid and other tools for international cooperation.

It is difficult to speak about socialization mechanism in the South Caucasus, as it is a region characterized by a high level of political fragmentation, which is exacerbated by unresolved conflicts (Georgia with Russia concerning South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Armenia with Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh issue), and it is sealed by different international integrations' paths (Georgia toward a deeper cooperation with the European

Union, Armenia integrated within the Eurasian Union and Azerbaijan who which its ability to deal with different actors). There is not a common platform for socialization initiatives among South Caucasian countries at a regional level. Yet, in this study I hypothesize that the three governments have been looking and drawing important lessons from each other in the field of electoral management and electoral mismanagement. One of the key characteristics of learning mechanisms is geographic proximity (Bank and Edel 2015). Therefore, despite regional fragmentation, the second hypothesis is that incumbents learn from neighbors' experiences to rig elections. In addition, to have a full picture of learning mechanisms I must include also learning from past experiences. History, as the Cicero affirms, is *Magistra Vitae* and so it is also for what concerns electoral malpractices' strategies. This hypothesis stems from a recent branch of study that analyzes non-democratic learning and authoritarian cooperation. Learning might come from other countries or past practices; moreover, learning could be both from positive or negative examples. For the sake of the argument, learning is important insofar others' experiences might trigger policy or practice changes, which otherwise wouldn't have taken place, and overall they might affect elections' results.

The thesis is organized as follows: in the first chapter I am going to present the literature that addressed the different topics intertwined in this thesis. Therefore, it is organized by sectors and for each one I am going to explain where this project stems from and what types of gap it tries to fill. In the second chapter I am going to elucidate my theoretical framework and the concept that I am referring to. In the third chapter, I am going to analyze the Western democratizing pressure in the region by looking at the main actors that had a role in shaping the electoral management in the three countries. Subsequently, in chapter four, five and six I am going to analyze each country by looking at the evolution of electoral management and mismanagement since their independence from the USSR. In the conclusion I present the implications and the outcomes of this study. Finally, I sum up the main contributions of this thesis and I point to venues for future research.

Chapter 1:
Elections, Frauds and Diffusion in Nondemocratic Regimes

Introduction

This thesis does not analyze regime changes or transitions to democracy or autocracy either electoral systems or political parties in non-democratic countries. Rather, it is a research focused on the in-depth understanding of frauds and electoral malpractices, which have characterized South Caucasian countries since their independence. In order to explain such themes, I would rely on several arguments that are drawing from a wide range of academic branches. I think it is important to mention that this study is at the crossroad of new studies in several sectors, and it does suffer from the uncertainties of the pioneers. Therefore, it is fundamental to clearly refer to the current frontiers of the academic research in order to properly identify the limits and possible rooms for contribution as well. The theoretical and conceptual implications come mainly from authoritarian and hybrid regimes' analyses, from electoral studies - in particular concerning malpractices and manipulations, and from research on diffusionism and learning mechanisms: the literature review is organized accordingly. Moreover, a part of this literature review addresses how, at agglomerate level, post-soviet studies analysed the 'betrayed democratisation' (Di Quirico 2013) since the end of the Cold War.

On Autocracy and Hybridity

There is nowadays a substantial understanding about the shortcomings of the transitional approach (Carothers, 2002) and there is a growing consensus over the concept of permanent hybridization (Morlino 2008; Hale 2010; Di Quirico, 2013; Schedler, 2013) as well as on authoritarian resilience (Kagan 2008, Ambrosio 2009, Levitsky and Way 2015). Hybridity is a concept that has been discussed and applied ever since the mid-

nineties, and it was soon sided by the concept of electoral authoritarianism (Karl 1995, Collier and Levitsky 1997). The debate was triggered by reflections about the third wave of democratisation (Huntington 1991) and its consequences. In particular, the faith regarding the transition to democracy for all countries moving away from authoritarian rule, theorized by O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986), started to be challenged. This debate had its decisive moment with the publication of an article called 'The End of Transition's Paradigm,' by Thomas Carothers in 2002, which transformed the way most scholars saw the fields of democratisation and democracy promotion.

Subsequently, two different strands of research started to look on one side to persistent autocracies and on the other to the huge club of semi-democracies. The latter debate has not yet come to a conclusion, but there is still a lively debate on labelling the disparate variety of regimes around the world according to the degree of 'democratic/autocratic' outlook. Within this literature there are authors who believe that somehow a transition from a semi-democracy to a full democratic regime is possible (Bunce and Wolchik, 2011; Epstein, Bates, Goldstone, Kristensen, O'Halloran, 2006), thus focusing their research on what may contribute to transition; whereas, on the other those who started to conceptualise hybridity as regime *per se* (Larry Diamond 2002, Leonardo Morlino 2008, Levitsky and Way 2010, Hale 2011, Schedler 2013, Hale 2015), thus pointing their analyses to some characteristics of this regime. As a matter of fact, Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way describe competitive authoritarianism (that it is included in the broader set of hybrid regimes) as set apart from democracies 'in which democratic institutions offer an important channel through which the opposition may seek power [and] those regimes in which democratic rules simply serve to legitimize an existing autocratic leadership' (Levitsky and Way 2002:54). Moreover, as Schedler affirms, the transitional paradigm is overcome by 'the endogeneity of regime uncertainty and the pervasiveness of opacity (cf. Schedler 2013:12).

The Concept of Hybridity

The academic research has started to study hybridity only in recent years: as a matter of fact, Henry E. Hale claims, 'The chief

goal of research has been less to understand how these regimes actually function and more to evaluate their prospects for becoming more democratic' (Hale, 2011:23) despite the fact these regimes 'account for an increasing portion of current regimes and the lion's share of regime transitions' (Epstein et al. 2006:564). Indeed, the concept of hybridity is a challenging one, and highly contestable as it doesn't refer to any normative model. Nevertheless, it is still possible to define the notion of hybrid regimes in order to differentiate it from the notion of transitional regimes. So as to understand what a hybrid regime is, it is also necessary to investigate what a hybrid regime is not (Morlino, 2011b). First of all, it is not a democratic regime. Here Morlino refers to the minimal requirements for democracy, such as (a) universal suffrage; (b) free, competitive, recurrent and fair elections; (c) more than one party; and (d) different and alternative media sources. Thus, a hybrid regime is not a regime where all those elements are present. Secondly, a hybrid regime is not an autocratic regime. Here Morlino refers to the definition by Linz, which claims that autocracy is a political system with limited and non-responsible political pluralism, without an elaborated and guiding ideology but with distinctive mentalities, without either extensive or intense political mobilisation, except at some points in their development, and in which a leader or, occasionally, a small group, exercises power from within formally and ill-defined, but predictable, limits (Linz, 1975). Thus, stemming from what democracies and autocracies are, Morlino drew a definition of what a hybrid regime is, namely "a set of ambiguous institutions […] lacking as it does one or more essential characteristics of that regime but also failing to acquire other characteristics that would make it fully democratic or authoritarian" (Morlino, 2008:7); in addition, Morlino identifies further characteristics that help to differentiates hybrid regimes from other types of regimes, 'to avoid a misleading analysis of democratization processes, a hybrid regime can be defined as a set of institutions that have been persistent, whether stable or unstable, for about a decade; have been preceded by authoritarian rule, a traditional regime (possibly with colonial characteristics), or even a minimal democracy' (Morlino, 2011b:1115).

According to Hale, most of the post-Soviet countries are hybrid insofar they experience regular, *cyclic* behavior characteristics of a certain underlying type of regime; so that 'What is most interesting and important about Georgia, for instance, might not be that it meets a standard for authoritarianism or is moving toward it in a given year, but precisely that it has displayed a pattern of moving back and forth between more democratic and more autocratic conditions'. So there is a push to pass from the logic of regime change to the logic of regime dynamics. This is a new way of looking at post-Soviet realities, which for the time being has been extensively analyzed from a transitology's perspective. So according to Hale, 'we thus should not discount «hybrid regimes» (those that combine important elements of democracy and autocracy) as «regimes» simply because their formal rules tend to change frequently or because these dynamics make them alternately closer to or more distant from more established regime types like autocracy and democracy' (Hale, 2015:454). Hale stems from Gerardo Munk's conception of political regime as 'a set of rules that are at least strategically accepted and not normatively opposed by major actors and that govern which individuals have access to the most important state positions, how such access is obtained, and how binding state decisions are' (Hale 2015:15 note 32). Hale also underlines how these rules do not need to be formally recognized, they might also be informal. The latter are what constitute the patronalistic hybrid regimes such as those in Eurasia (Hale, 2015: 454).

Other studies based on systematic comparative research have demonstrated that hybrid regimes can be durable, sustainable and resistant and that they hold some specific characteristics. For example, they do not even have to behave like half-democracies or half-autocracies (Hale, 2009:35); that they are more likely to go to war than either democracies or autocracies (Mansfield & Snyder, 2005), that they are more prone to state failure than either democracies or autocracies (Goldstone et al., 2000), and that they have lower rates of business confidence than in either democracies or autocracies (Kenyon and Naoi, 2010).

The 'Institutional Turn' in the Study of Nondemocratic Regimes

Studies on hybrid regimes and autocratic revival flourished in particular after a worrying article published by Arch Puddington in which the author, relying on a Freedom House annual report, which warned that worldwide there was a 'pushback against democracy' (Puddington 2007). This alarm claim triggered a new-born interest in all forms of nondemocratic regimes around the world. It was not since Lipset's seminal book on authoritarian regimes (1975) that there had been such an attempt to understand how this type of regime works, focusing in particular on institutions.

The new strand of research was in particular interested in analysing the role that allegedly 'democratic institutions' performed in nondemocratic regimes. At the basis of this approach there was the consideration that '(e)lites in authoritarian regimes use political institutions to structure political order. But these institutions are fundamentally vulnerable to strategic manipulation by the elites' (Pepinsky 2014:631). Researchers were thus focusing their efforts, mainly through comparative studies, to understand formal political institutions and their misuses by nondemocratic leaders. Hereunder I present some arguments drawn from some of the noteworthy books on this topic, which contributed to set the agenda of further research.

Jason Brownlee, in his seminal book *Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization* (2007), is one of the first authors who clearly assess the importance of the institutions in non-democratic regimes. According to him political parties, elections and other state institutions are fundamental to maintain the hold on power for authoritarian leaders. The latter cannot merely rely on their personalistic use of power, rather organisational restraints prolong and expand their power (cf. Brownlee 2007:202). Therefore, he claims that authoritarian institutions are political creations, constructed by ruling elites when they 'decisively resolve their core conflicts' (Brownlee 2007:37).

31

Scholars were referring to nondemocratic institutions mainly for their role in redistributive policy, which contributed to the creation and continuation of patronage and clientelism. This conceptualisation of authoritarian institutions has been transformed by Jennifer Gandhi, who authors another important book which has enriched the research on authoritarian regimes: *Political Institutions under Dictatorship* (2008). She provides a slightly different interpretation about institutions in authoritarian regimes. According to her, authoritarian rulers maintain democratic institutions, such as parliaments, elections, political parties, in order to co-opt possible opposition fringes and control the society. In doing so, authoritarian rulers with institutionalised regimes are keener to provide policy concessions to opposition groups in order to maintain power. Therefore, even if a non-democratic regime allows for elections or political parties, it does not mean that it is more democratic, as 'democratic institutions under dictatorship do matter but in ways that differ from their counterparts in democracies' (Gandhi 2008: xxvi): vice versa legislatures and parties constitute a line of defence for autocrats against the opposition and protesters. These democratic-looking institutions, which are not simply 'window dressing', are the playing field of limited policy concessions; their role is important as, according to Gandhi, those institutions play a central role in the construction, policymaking, economic performance, and durability of authoritarian regimes. In the second part of the book she evaluates the above-mentioned attributes of institutions in nondemocratic regimes; according to her analysis, nondemocratic regimes with formal democratic institutions provide more public goods and experience higher economic performances than non-institutionalized ones. However, her claims about the durability of the regime are less evident: the statistical tests she held 'yield no relationship between institutionalization and regime survival, and she is forced to concede that this result could constitute a major strike against her claim that institutions preserve authoritarianism (Art, 2012:360).

Erica Frantz and Natasha M. Ezrow provide another outlook to understanding political institutions in authoritarian regimes. In

their book, *The Politics of Dictatorship Institutions and Outcomes in Authoritarian Regimes* (2011), the two authors claim that authoritarian institutions shape the struggle between the leader and the rest of the elites, as well as among elites themselves. According to them, leaders attempt continuously to maximise their power and to keep it as long as possible; they would try to 'gain personal control over as many key political instruments as possible throughout their tenure' (Frantz and Ezrow 2011:6). However, the analysis is focused mainly on the role of the party and military institutions, leaving other institutions of representation aside. Their argument in a snapshot is that the internal architecture of autocracies plays a key role in shaping the relationships between leaders and their elite supporters (Frantz and Ezrow 2011:11).

Finally, Boix and Svolik (2013) argue that dictatorships establish political institutions such as political parties, legislatures and other decision-making bodies in order to facilitate power-sharing among the ruling elite. As a matter of fact, according to the authors 'the central dilemma of any dictatorship is to establish a mechanism that allows the dictator and his allies to credibly commit to joint rule (Boix and Svolik 2013:300). Co-optation of ruling elite members is a key aspect to have a sustainable and durable regime, and to avoid rebellion. Power-sharing allows incumbents to signal on one side transparency and reduce misperceptions of the leader. On the other side, the dictator who complies with given institutional rules is signalling public openness and reliability. In other words, the authors support the idea that institutions generate power-sharing, which in turn reduces regime's institutional and informational uncertainties.

Overall, this new strand of research on authoritarianism has different merits. First of all, thanks to this new focus on institutions, researchers shown that institutions do matter, even in nondemocratic regimes. We now know that institutions are important for several reasons, not least to the regime's stability and durability. Secondly, scholars are becoming more acquainted about the mechanisms used to counterfeit and manipulate representative and democratic institutions. This new

understanding allows for a better comprehension of the intra-horizontal as well as vertical dynamics of power. Thirdly, as Art claimed these new studies 'demonstrate the continued utility of comparative historical analysis for explaining both past and contemporary regime types' (Art 2012: 352).

The idea that 'institutions matter' led some scholars to speak about an 'Institutional Turn' in the study of authoritarian regimes (Schedler 2009, Pepinksy 2013). Yet, according to Pepinsky 'the new institutionalist literature on comparative authoritarianism has failed to address basic theoretical and empirical challenges that emerge when scholars wish to make causal claims about the effects of authoritarian institutions on political outcomes.' (Pepinsky 2013:649). Pepinsky clearly demonstrates that '[s]cholars may miss the true politics of authoritarianism if they focus on readily observable institutional structures. […] [S]cholars will find that institutions correlate with important political outcomes, but will mistakenly believe that institutions (rather than the factors that shape them) are doing the explanatory work.' (Pepinsky 2013:650) and he solicits that '[s]tudents of authoritarianism more broadly will profit from systematically examining the non-institutional features of authoritarian rule. All of this will require detailed knowledge of individual regimes and careful attention to the logic of inference' (Pepinsky 2013:649). Following Pepinsky's call to study the non-institutional features of authoritarian rule, I am going to provide a contribution in the study of something that it is not institutionalised. Yet, frauds and malpractices nonetheless do have profound effects on institutions and regimes.

To conclude, I would like to clarify the use of words and concept in this thesis. I would avoid in the first place to carry out a distinction between hybrid, electoral authoritarian, and semi-democratic regimes, I rather use nondemocratic regimes or hybrid as general concepts to describe all of them: as a matter of fact, 'as electoral autocracies integrate formal institutions of representation into their systems of domination, they can fruitfully be described as hybrid regimes' (Schedler 2013:80).

On Elections in Nondemocratic Regimes

As it has emerged thus far, in recent years there has been an institutional turn in the analysis of authoritarian and hybrid regimes. Before that, scholars were far more focused on practices of domination and repression, whereas there is nowadays a growing interest in the institution of representation (Geddes 2005, Gandhi 2008, Gandhi & Przeworski 2006, Schedler 2006, Schedler 2013, Boix & Svolik 2013). The focus on elections in nondemocratic regimes stemmed from the knowledge that although in the aftermath of the Cold War, liberal electoral systems were adopted all around the world—with only a handful of countries that did not allow universal suffrages—this process did not resort to a global transition of authoritarian regimes to democratic systems. Scholars were shocked and puzzled when they looked at authoritarian regimes holding multiparty elections and at the same time preserving and consolidating their power. They thought there was incompatibility between authoritarian regimes and elections.

Since that moment on, elections have been analysed in a new paradigmatic outlook, and the literature that mushroomed accordingly provided different interpretations concerning their role in non-democratic regimes. Scholars have been devoted to addressing a diverse set of problems and issues concerning elections in nondemocratic regimes, and they tried to answer questions such as 'Why do incumbents in non-democracies allow for scrutiny to take place? What is the role of elections in authoritarian regimes? Under which conditions could elections represent a real threat to the incumbent?' Hereunder I offer an overview of such studies, and I will indicate where my research would add, if so, a contribution.

The Role of Nondemocratic Elections

At the earlier stage of this phase of research, following modernisation theory, some scholars have argued that elections, no matter how they were conducted, could be destabilising moments for nondemocratic regimes (cf. O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986, Di Palma, 1990). However, other scholars suggest that somehow elections were not always an undermining factor for authoritarian regimes (Linz 1975:236).

Subsequently, in the 90s other authors observed that rigged elections could actually reinforce and prolong autocratic rule (Joseph 1997:375, Chehabi and Linz 1998:18, Remmer 1999:349).

At the same time elections in non-democratic regimes became the lynchpin for theorizing about the different nuances of authoritarianism. Hybrid, semi-democratic, competitive or electoral authoritarian regimes are the result of a careful analysis of election structures (Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009). For example Andreas Schedler defines an electoral authoritarian as a regime in which 'elections are broadly inclusive, (they are held under universal suffrage) as well as minimally pluralistic (opposition parties are allowed to run), minimally competitive (opposition parties, while denied victory, are allowed to win votes and seats), and minimally open (opposition parties are not subject to massive repression, although they may experience repressive treatment in selective and intermittent ways)' (Schedler 2006, 3).

Nowadays, the most widespread understanding about elections in nondemocratic regimes is that they serve the incumbent elite's purposes to co-opt, through spoil of offices or goods reward, other elites (Boix & Svolik 2008) or members/fragments from civil society (Gandhi & Przeworski 2006) or even other party members (Magaloni 2006). Others view elections as a way for the incumbent to cope with informational uncertainties about intra-elites dynamics, power sharing, and popular support (Blaydes 2008, Cox 2008, Brownlee 2007).

In contrast to this understanding, where elections are somehow functional to regime's survival, there are at least two relevant studies (Sjöberg 2011, Schedler 2013), which look at competitive elections in nondemocratic regimes considering possible unintended outcomes. These studies address the possibilities that the elections may not be functional of the regimes' stability, but that they might also hold some risks. In particular, the two studies underline that even in nondemocratic regimes the elections can be competitive and may lead to the alternation in power. According to Sjöberg, in some contexts, the state capacity (or the organisational capacity) is very low but at the same time there are strong and contrasting elites. In this scenario, the

elections can be competitive not because of exogenous reasons, but because 'if the mechanisms for coordinating elite behaviour are weak, as in the case of a weak ruling party, it makes perfect sense for resource-laden individuals to run for office, even if that means openly challenging the ruling elite' (Sjöberg 2011:178).

More recently, Andreas Schedler provides another understanding about elections in nondemocratic regimes, which is slightly different from his first 'institutionalist' approach (Schedler 2009). According to Schedler, elections in non-democratic regimes are arenas of asymmetric struggle between incumbents and opposition parties that area characterized by a two-level game 'in which the struggle for voters goes hand in hand with the struggle over rules at the meta-game level (Schedler, 2013:388). This struggle is characterized by political uncertainty, which is composed by institutional and informational uncertainties: Schedler claims that in order to win the struggle both incumbents and opponents must dominate those uncertainties. Of course, incumbents benefit from their position as they can manage more resources and institutions for their goal. Yet, nondemocratic leaders are physiologically insecure and they must recur to instruments of manipulation in order to fill the informational gap. Elections, which might end-up with unexpected and unwanted outcomes for incumbents, are the emblematic and uneven playing field of the competition over uncertainty.

This eventuality is well depicted by Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik in their book *Defeating Authoritarian Dictators in Post Communist Countries* (2011). According to the two authors, opposition groups and parties can have one way to win the election, which is following the electoral model. The latter is a standard or example for imitation or comparison, which encompasses a wide range of electoral innovations [3] that opposition groups can adopt in order to create the widespread sense that victory is possible, so that it became much more

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[3] Such as running ambitious political campaigns, orchestrating elaborate voter registration and voter turnout drives, and putting in place electoral monitoring procedures that in combination made oppositions more effective and more politically attractive to voters.

difficult for the incumbent to win the election (cf. Bunce and Wolchik 2011:246). Bunce and Wolchik posit great focus on how opposition groups in different countries can cooperate among each other in order to share electoral innovations. Their approach is useful insofar it focuses on the strategies and tactics, which compose the 'micro-level' of the electoral struggle. Moreover, this book shed light on several elements that so far have been underestimated in the analysis of the power struggle during the election. The two authors have the merit to go beyond the debates over whether elections reinforce or undermine nondemocratic regimes; rather Bunce and Wolchik are more interested in understanding under which conditions, both domestically and international, opposition activists can take advantage of electoral processes to defeat authoritarian incumbents. In doing so, they take into consideration mechanisms of learning and policy transfer from one country to another one, which rekindled with grounded empirical analysis the idea of the 'snowballing' effect.

As a matter of fact, in this study I am sharing their approach in an attempt to better understand when and under which condition nondemocratic incumbents are forced to modify and change electoral malpractices, or vice versa when they are firmly holding power and therefore they do not need to change the way they rig elections.

Defining Frauds and Electoral Malpractices

The literature on frauds and electoral malpractices is very recent and it can be observed that it was triggered by the renowned interest in elections and institution of representations. As a matter of fact, systematic research on this field has rarely been comparative (cf. Alvarez et al. 2008, Birch 2011) and most of the time it takes the shape of handbooks or guidelines for electoral assistance or electoral best practices (Goodwin-Gill 1994, Goodwin-Gill 1998, International IDEA 2002). Only since early 2000 have scholars started to be more attentive to frauds and malpractices with some in-depth analysis and monographs (Brusco et al. 2004, Lehoucq and Molina 2002, Lehoucq, 2003, Magaloni 2006).

Before passing to review the main analysis on this topic, I would like to clarify the distinction between electoral fraud and electoral malpractice. The first one, fraud, refers to the illegal effort to shape election results (Lehoucq, 2003), and it is generally understood to take place on the election-day and that it affects votes. Moreover, an act to be considered fraudulent must break the law. This element has important implications when we look at controversial behaviours during the election period. Lehoucq depicted a very clear-cut example: according to him landlords are not fraudulent if they pressurise their retainers to vote for a specific candidate/party without breaking the law. Therefore, even if it is possible to demonstrate that retainers voted against their interests, it is not possible to call this activity fraudulent unless a law has been broken (Lehoucq 2003:235). This understanding reduces lots of acts that can be considered as fraudulent.

Other authors have provided a more comprehensive definition of fraud. For example, according to Schedler an electoral fraud 'involves the introduction of bias into the administration of elections [and] it can take place at any stage of the electoral process, from voter registration to the final tally of the ballots' (Schedler 2013:99). This definition, which is more inclusive and flexible, may raise some problems at the moment of defining what is a fraudulent behaviour and what is not. Moreover, even the reference to the electoral process can be contested, as for example media freedom or civil society rules might be biased even before the electoral process begins.

Yet, Schedler points to the fact that the integrity of the electoral process can be harmed even if a law is not broken. Therefore, I introduce hereby the concept of electoral malpractice, which has a broader mean. Sarah Birch, who has extensively studied frauds and malpractices, provides the most insightful definition. In order to mindfully identify malpractices, Birch stems from what an electoral malpractice is not: 'electoral malpractice is not *any* violation of electoral conduct that hinders the ability of elections to realize policy accountability, but a particular type of violation: specifically, a violation that serves to substitute personal or partisan gain on the part of a restricted number of political actors

for popular control by all. In this sense, electoral malpractice represents *a particularization of the electoral process.*' (Birch 2011a:26). According to Birch, malpractices can be disparate and they can take different forms such as manipulating the institutions, manipulating vote choice and manipulating the voting act. Manipulation of voting institutions consists of 'altering the design of the institutions governing elections to the advantage of one or more electoral contestants, in violation of the principles of inclusivity, impartiality, openness, or transparency. The manipulation of vote choice includes all kinds of undue influence: both incentives for voters to misrepresent their preferences as well as actions that alter those preferences. The manipulation of the voting *act* takes many forms, including the uneven implementation of the regulatory framework, the biasing of administrative decision in favour of one or more electoral competitors, and of course, outright fraud.' (Birch 2011a:27).

This broad understanding of electoral malpractice grasps different kind of practices, some that take place in pre-electoral period, others on voting day and post scrutiny. Stemming from the claim that electoral malpractices could be difficult to be observed (Lehoucq 2003), academic research has moved forward and it found out important elements for a better study of frauds and electoral malpractices. One of the classical aims of social sciences has always been to classify political and social phenomenon. Therefore, despite being challenging, there have been some tentative steps to number or classify different technics of manipulation. Two noteworthy categorisations are Hale's SCEAOMIDD [4] methods to defeat opponents and Schedler's menu of manipulation. Hale, based on Dahl's Regime Typology (Dalh 1971), identifies SCEAOMIDD regimes as separated from Competitive Oligarchy and Inclusive or Closed Hegemonic on the basis of liberalisation and inclusiveness degrees regarding elections. As a matter of fact, in Competitive Oligarchy not all the population can participate in scrutiny or has different degree

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[4] SCEAOMIDD stands for Semi-/Competitive/Electoral Authoriarianism or Managed/Illiberal/Delegative Democracy, see Hale 2011)

of political rights (e.g. Apartheid in South Africa), whereas in Inclusive or Closed Hegemony regimes opposition groups do not seriously contest elections. Instead in SCEAOMIDD regimes[5] 'at least some of the most important national political decision makers are chosen through regularly scheduled elections that feature the near-universal franchise and that are contested by at least two (sets of) candidates with substantially distinct interests or positions, but where state authorities and their collaborators significantly and systematically, through formal or informal coercive or corrupt methods hinder the ability of opposition candidates to gain public support and/or to convert this support into officially recognized votes' (Hale 2011:35). Hale sorts these coercive or corrupt methods into seven groups: media manipulation, coercing or buying votes, supporting informal groups to attack opposition, manipulation of the choice set, pressuring or co-opting or blackmailing elites, selective prosecution, falsification. Hale provides for all these groups concrete examples that happened throughout the world. Yet I consider this categorisation too extensive, and as it includes disparate techniques and it do not allow for a proper conceptualisation. Nonetheless, it is useful to differentiate the goals of such techniques rather than the methods. It is noteworthy to specify that according to Hale 'the application of these techniques *when at least some true opposition is allowed to compete* […] can produce cumulative effects that are typical of neither full democracies nor full autocracies' (Hale 2011:37, Italic in the original). This claim is important insofar as it adds new specifications to hybrid regimes as category *per se*. Moreover, it is noteworthy for this research as it clarifies that the presence of an opposition affects how those techniques are implemented and contested by the population, leading them eventually to an evolution.

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[5] All the three South Caucasian, despite they are undertaking three different paths, they did share the fact that all of them can be inserted in this regime categorisation: Georgia, Armenia (according to Schedler) and Azerbaijan (according to Susan Hyde and Nikolay Marinov 2009) are SCEAOMIDD regimes. Even in a recent book by Nodia and Stefes the two authors claimed that the three countries are hybrid regimes (Nodia and Stefes 2015).

Another work that categorizes different electoral malpractices is the renowned Menu of Manipulation by Andreas Schedler (2002a), which was subsequently refined in the Repertoire of Electoral Manipulation (2013). First of all, this menu is open-ended and incumbents' use of malpractices may change, thus it recognizes innovation and expansion of repertoires. Schedler's claim is that authoritarian malpractices follow the democratic chain, which is composed by seven steps: empowerment, freedom of supply, freedom of demand, inclusion, insulation, integrity, and decisiveness. Incumbents in nondemocratic regimes adopt strategies aimed to nullify the seven steps of electoral democratic chain through: disempowerment, supply-side restriction (exclusion, division, subversion), demand-side restriction (repression and unfairness), exclusive suffrage (formal and informal disenfranchisement), external interference (intimidation and corruption), redistributive electoral governance (discriminatory rules and practices) and indecisiveness (tutelage and reversion). This categorisation is helpful insofar as it allows on the one side other researchers to use this classification in order to further study malpractices and on the other it provides with a specific tool to identify different regimes. As a matter of fact, Schedler claims that 'electoral democracies comply with all essential condition of democratic choice, while electoral autocracies severely and systematically violate at least one of them (Schedler 2013:102). Moreover, Schedler clearly states that rulers cannot randomly or arbitrary chose from the menu of manipulation, but that their choices are subject to costs, constraints, risks and failures. I would stem from this insight in order to further identify what are the constraints that affect manipulation's choice.

Researches on Electoral Frauds and Malpractices

Beyond categorisation's efforts there has also been a flourishing stream of literature that has aimed to explain and assess electoral frauds and malpractices. The results have been uneven and sometimes contradictory. Until today, to my knowledge there are just a couple noteworthy books that have systematically addressed the topic: Alvarez, Hyde, and Hall's (eds.) *Election Fraud Detecting and Deterring Electoral Manipulation* (2008) and

Sara Birch's *Electoral Malpractice* (2011). The first book is a collection of different researches which highlight different facets of electoral frauds and manipulations. Some of those articles set the agenda for future research on the topic and identified the main problematic. Some of those studies are reviewed in the subsequent paragraphs.

However, it is only with the advent of Sarah Birch's book that the concept itself was defined and further investigated. As I have reported so far, according to Birch the electoral malpractice is a particular aspect of the electoral process, which can take different forms such as manipulating the institutions, manipulating vote choice and manipulating the act of voting. Beyond providing a definition, the main aim of Birch's *Electoral Malpractice* was to assess how different structural domestic conditions increased or reduced the risk of electoral malpractices. In particular, her arguments refer to the cost-benefits analysis for incumbents to resort to electoral malfeasances. Therefore, she assessed the impact of corruptions, freedom of the media, inequality, urbanisation, and protest capacity on the authorities' recurrence to electoral malpractices. One of the main findings is that a country is expected to have fairer elections where there is a lively civil society and where there is less corruption. Moreover, the study found that electoral malpractices are positively related to economic growth, but it did not really explain the reasons for this (Norris 2015). Nevertheless, the book remains one of the best sources for the study of domestic structural conditions and electoral malpractices.

A growing literature is adopting systematic forensic practices in the study of frauds, which aims to the post-hoc detection of possible fraud (Hyde and Marinov 2008, Alvarez and Boehmke, 2008, Leemann and Bochsler 2014). They work with mainly two methods: the first one relies on ecological information, and it stems from the political structure of a district and claims that it is possible to predict the voting pattern observed (Alvarez and Boehmke, 2008). The second one looks at the distribution of digits: according to Leemann and Bochsler '[t]he basic idea is that when someone makes up numbers they fail to produce

numbers that are truly random in the way they would be in a truly fair election or vote.' (Leemann and Bochsler 2014:37). However, there is still no consensus on the most reliable methods (Norris 2015) and therefore their validity contested.

Moreover, there has been growing interest in analysing more in depth some particular practices, on the other research aimed to identify what factors may or may not affect the presence of malpractices. In the first branch of study, researchers delve more in depth to better understand a type of malpractice. For example, one type of electoral malpractice that has received by now most of the research's attention is electoral clientelism and its effects over voter choice. Clientelism is 'a catch-all category that encompasses a variety of different political strategies' (Mares and Petrova 2013:2), and includes a disparate set of practices such as vote buying, patronage and intimidation. Vote buying is the most studied practice in the recent literature (Brusco et. al. 2004: 69, Stokes 2005, Bratton 2008, Vicente and Wantchekon 2008, Schwartzberg 2012), and it has been reported to be present in many countries in the world. According to some scholars, vote buying implies vote and cash distribution before an election (Vicente and Wantchekon 2008), and thus they do not include goods distribution in this practice, which relates to patronage. Accordingly, Mares and Petrova claim that 'patronage differs from vote buying along two dimensions. First, the benefits that are distributed to voters for political purposes involve resources of the state. They can be either policy benefits that are financed by public sources or the facilitation of particular administrative advantages to voters. Second, the intermediaries between politicians and voters in this political exchange are employees of the state.' (Mares and Petrova 2013:5). Even patronage is a widespread practice, and there are studies that reveal this practice in many continents: Africa (Lemarchand 1972), Latin America (Calvo and Murillo 2004, Oliveros 2012) in Europe and the United States (Charnay 1964, Shefter 1994, Folke et. al. 2011). According to Mares and Petrova (2013), incumbents choose to rely on patronage or vote buying depending on the grip over state resources and administrative personnel. As a matter of fact, it is more likely that when incumbents are in power for a numbers of years they have much more possibilities to rely on

state resources (both financial and administrative), so that they can avoid recurring to vote buying. Mares and Petrova's research is one among the few comparative analyses concerning malpractices. Indeed, for the time being, most malpractices have been analysed in cross-national comparisons to assess whether there were sufficient conditions for incumbents to win the election (Esfandiari 2003, Simpser 2005).

Another branch of study started to investigate how frauds and malpractices are affected by domestic factors, such as electoral governance (Birch 2007; Lehoucq and Molina 2002) political competition (Lehoucq 2003), the role of the electoral management body (Elklit 1999; Elklit and Reynolds 2002; Hartlyn, McCoy, and Mustillo 2008; Pastor 1999). In this field of study there is a study that diachronically analysed trends and patterns of electoral frauds and malpractices in post-Soviet Eurasia (Bader 2011). According to the author electoral malpractice are mostly affected by three variables: the type of elections (presidential or parliamentary), the presence of electoral competition (present in competitive elections, absent in hegemonic elections), and the advance of time. Interestingly, the findings demonstrate that electoral malpractices are as widespread in parliamentary as in presidential elections, they are more severe in hegemonic elections than in competitive elections and that they do not decrease over time. The results of this analysis suggest that electoral malpractices are not a temporary phenomenon, and that they change and adapt to new situations. Yet, Bader did not take into consideration the international dimension as a variable that may affect frauds' patterns.

From an international point of view, most of the studies argued that electoral observation missions could affect frauds and malpractices. Indeed authors have mostly included the international dimension of fraud and malpractices by analysing the role of electoral observers (Carothers 1997:22, Hartlyn and McCoy 2006, Hyde 2011, Hyde and O'Mahony 2010, Simpser and Donno 2012, Ichino and Schündeln 2012, Norris 2015). In particular, there are two strands of research that consider the observer's effect substantially in different ways. On the one side

there are those who underline positive factors from elections observation, claiming that international or domestic observer developed along the year new methods to deter frauds and malpractices quite effectively (Carothers 1997, Hyde 2007). Other authors highlighted that local or international observer might not be able to deter all different types of frauds and malpractices (Hartlyn and McCoy 2006, Simpser and Donno 2008) and some other studies pointed to certain negative consequences caused by election observation (Simpser and Donno 2012, Ichino and Schündeln 2012). These researches posit the attention on two unintended consequences of election observation: frauds displacement in other districts and the development of other forms of governance manipulation. The latter entails that the presence of electoral observers may worsen governance's performances as incumbents would be keener to manipulate legal, judicial and electoral institutions, which are less verifiable, rather than merely tamper elections' results. Thus, according to Simpser and Donno, electoral observation activities may have more negative unintended consequences (2012). For what concern fraud displacement, Ichino and Schündeln (2012) verified that malpractices were displaced from one constituency to another because of the presence of electoral observers. The study was conducted during the 2008 national election in Ghana and it focused on the tampering of voter registration lists. Thanks to field experiment methodology the two authors were able to deter how tampering of voter lists was displaced from one constituency, where observers were present, to others nearby. Yet, their study takes into consideration only voter registration and it focuses on solely on the actual Election Day; moreover, the percentage of the displacing effect is quite low. Finally, there are works that questioned why non-democratic regimes still invite international observers to monitor the elections. Susan Hyde (2011) claims that observers are invited to monitor elections particularly from 'leaders of regimes that were not already established democracies,' since 'democracy-contingent benefits created an incentive for incumbent leaders to identify a credible signal that they were, in fact, holding democratic elections.' (Hyde 2011:358); as a matter of fact, in her article she demonstrated that incumbents in non-democratic countries since the early 90s invited observers despite the fact

the observers were providing negative reports. These latter group studies, on external factors affecting frauds and malpractices, are important because they shed light on how the international system, through some specific actors, influences domestic realities. Yet, those are just small contributions that do not solve the black boxes of internal-external interactions in academic research, in particular for diffusion and democratisation studies.

Recently, Pippa Norris provided an excellent work (2015) where she addressed the pertinent question, 'why do elections fail?'. This book is not particularly on frauds and electoral malpractices in autocracies or hybrid regimes, but proved to be very effective to debunking common ideas about why elections fail. In her book she used fresh data from the Perception Electoral Integrity (PEI) dataset, which allowed her to test different reasons behind electoral failures. She weighted the impact of structural constraints, international forces, institutional checks and electoral management factors in order to understand which of these factors affect more electoral integrity. As far as the topic of this research is concerned, I am going to expand the concept of international forces as used by Norris. As a matter of fact, in this book the author has a limited understanding of international forces. Norris refers to three types of external factors: 'cosmopolitan communication that diffuses global norms to strengthen international standards of electoral integrity, the provision of electoral assistance and development aid to build local capacity and the deployment of observer monitoring missions to strengthen transparency and accountability' (Norris 2015:89). It is submitted here that this standpoint has failed to take into account many other factors which also have a strong impact on the quality of democracy (see for example Morlino 2013), and that shape the international dimension of regime change (Levitsky and Way 2010). The three factors individuated by Norris are just some of the multiple factors that form what Levitsky and Way label *Linkage*, which is one of the two components of the international dimension of regime change; in particular Linkage refers to 'the density of ties (economic, political, diplomatic, social, and organizational) and cross-border flows (of capital, goods and services, people, and information)

among particular countries and the United States, the EU (and pre-2004 EU members), and Western-dominated multilateral institutions' (Levitsky and Way 2010:43). In this analysis I am going to expand the concept of international forces in order to fully assess the different elements that can affect democracy and thus the quality of an election. At the same time, I am relying on Norris' book for her excellent assessment of other alternative explanations, such as structural, institutional and EMBs.

As reported so far, in the academic research, in the recent years, there has been a growing tendency to understand through cross-national comparison frauds and malpractices. However, these efforts suffer from some shortcomings as they have been hardly systematic in analysing the phenomenon (addressing just one malpractice or focusing on the election day) and they are still leaving out a broader understanding of the international dimension as an explaining factor (focusing just on the role of elections observer, or considering only some aspects of the international forces). Therefore, I am confident that this research, relying on this precious literature, would be able to address some of the missing factors, and it would provide with a new assessment of the intervening international dimension in the field of fraud and electoral malpractice. As the literature review goes on, in the following paragraph I am going to introduce the international dimension of authoritarian regimes as well as how the international context affects domestic actors and practices.

The International Dimension of Authoritarian Regimes

This stream of literature is very recent and the scholarly concern for this 'new' phenomenon is only around a decade old. As I am going to describe below, research on this topic is 'indebted' to diffusion theories and democratisation literature. Most of the concepts and ideas that triggered analysis on authoritarian regimes adopted, transformed and sharpen theoretical implications, which were extensively used to describe for example European Union enlargement or the diffusion of the democratic 'virus' (see 'snowball effect). Therefore, in this literature review I must include some of the most important

studies on democratisation, which subsequently became relevant to study nondemocratic regimes' diffusion.

Theories of Democratisation at the End of the Cold War

Scholars interested in the democratization process are well aware about the importance of the international dimension of norms, values and principles linked to democracy. This dimension takes the shape in different international factors, such as international cooperation, soft power's projection and the crystallisation of international system's norms and values, which affect how domestic actors behave and act. Originating from the end of the Cold War the international system itself started to be considered as dominated by some norms and values, such as democracy, human rights and self-determination. Some scholars conceived it as the victory of democratic forces over tyranny and oppression (Fukuyama 1991), which would also imply democratic dominoes everywhere (Starr 1991). Therefore, stemming from the Fukuyama's announcement that 'Western liberal democracy [is] the final form of human government' (Fukuyama 1991:3), in the aftermath of the Cold War, this claim was perceived as unquestionable and thus the norm of democracy 'achieved striking universality in the current international system' (McFaul 2004:148). Democracy became at least formally accepted, as there were few governments willing to publically sympathise with non-democratic systems.

In turn, the fact that the democratic paradigm was lacking challengers 'significantly shaped perceptions about the role external actors could, and should, play in assisting its spread across the globe.' (Kurki and Hobson 2012:2). Many scholars have been addressing the international dimension of democracy for decades. Stemming from the works of Tilly (1975) and Putnam (1988), the idea that somehow the international system affects domestic regimes became prominent in with the advent of democratisation studies (Huntington 1991, Linz and Stepan 1996, Withehead 1996, Gleditsch and Ward 2006). Moreover, other scholars started to look at how democracies diffuse, both intentionally and unintentionally, democratic norms and values (Whitehead 2001, Brinks and Coppedge 2006 Levitsky and Way

2005). Finally, another branch of studies delves into the effect of proper democracy promotion in nondemocratic regimes (Schimmelfennig 2007, Magen and Morlino 2009, Risse et al. 2009). Therefore, the idea that in the international sphere the external conditions and actors are important in the development of democracies is well grounded in the literature.

 This vision has been reinforced by globalization, which has increased scholarly attention to the importance of systemic factors. Some authors analysed globalisation from an economic perspective (such Frieden and Rogowski 1996, Andrews 1994, Oatley 2011) and they claimed that states are deeply affected by the international system, which is now overwhelming domestic factors. Others looked at the diffusion perspective instead, with the slogan that the spread of democracy will result in global peace (Maoz and Russett 1992, Ray 1995, Farberand and Gowa 1997); democracy has become so intertwined with the current international system that it is becoming difficult to clearly differentiate between democracy promotion and the international advocacy of human rights (Burnell 2011:1). One of the most controversial outcomes of this understanding was George W. Bush's declaration of war to tyrannies around the world. According to him, in order to assure global security and prosperity, all autocracies would have be eliminated and replaced with democracies.

However there have been criticisms and doubts about western democracy's supremacy throughout the world; some scholars started to reflect about other conceptualisations of democracy, which differed from Western liberal conceptions (Bunce and Wolchik 2012, Sadiki 2012). Others acknowledge that autocracies won't extinguish and thus it is necessary at least to contain them through a 'league of democracies' (Kagan 2008). Meanwhile, some scholars have claimed that the autocratic revival was just a fascinating myth (cf. Deudney and Ikenberry 2009). Finally, there are scholars who started to criticise this international system from a hegemonic point of views (Gilpin 1987), where concepts such as 'democracy', 'governance' and 'regime change' are linked and promoted by the club of nations that compose the oligarchy of the system. In particular, Bertrand Badie speaks

about the *Westernisation of the Political Order* (2000 [1992]), which subsequently determined the creation of a core of countries that act as *concert* (club), pushing forward a vertical or hierarchical conceptualisation of the international system (cf. Badie 2011). This conceptualisation of the international system as an oligarchic drift is useful insofar as it entails existing dynamics, such as external actors pushing toward a convergence to similar domestic political and economic institutions, as well as it underlines the cost for those who do not converge.

The idea of convergences or divergences toward democratisation or authoritarianism from an international perspective is well analysed by Levitsky and Way in *Competitive Authoritarian Regimes: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War* (2010). First of all, already in title it is possible to understand that these regimes' types are a product of a particular international context: the post-Cold War era. Secondly, despite the fact that the book is not about regimes' origins, the international dimension is articulated in two facets. As already mentioned in the introduction, Levitsky and Way speak about Western Leverage and Western Linkage as two driving forces for regimes' dynamics. Western stands for 'states' vulnerability to Western democratizing pressure' (Levitsky and Way 2010:24), whereas Western Linkage refers to 'the density of ties (economic, political, diplomatic, social, and organizational) and cross-border flows (of capital, goods and services, people, and information) between particular countries and the United States and the EU' (Levitsky and Way 2010:23). The two authors claim that the vulnerability of a state depends on its bargaining power *vis à vis* the West: 'where countries lack bargaining power and are heavily affected by Western punitive action, leverage is high; where countries possess substantial bargaining power and/or can weather Western punitive action without significant harm, leverage is low' (Levitsky and Way 2010:41). These factors raise the 'external costs of authoritarianism, leading elites to adopt the trappings of democracy while abusing those same institutions to preserve their power' (Art 2012:357). Thus, I claim that in this international system hybrid regimes suffer some costs from not choosing to align to the democratic norms of electoral integrity.

Obviously rigging an election breaks the electoral integrity and it may trigger international condemnations and sanctions.

The Diffusion of Nondemocratic Regimes

More recently, there have been scholars who started to consider how even nondemocratic regimes may have an international dimension, which can affect other domestic policies. This stream of literature rose from the negative assessments of democratic regimes' performances in the international scenario that followed the end of the Cold war. According to some authors, less than twenty years after the Third Wave of democratisation, democratic regimes around the world were suffering from a backlash or a reverse wave (Ambrosio 2009, Puddington 2008, 2009). According to Erdmann et al., the research on the international dimension of authoritarian regimes followed two strands: 'first, scholars formerly interested in processes of democratization took notice of the authoritarian rollback that reversed many efforts of democracy promotion (Burnell and Schlumberger 2010, Burnell 2011). Second, scholars previously interested in the stability and durability of authoritarian regimes became increasingly aware of the importance of international factors (Art 2012: 201).' (Erdmann et al. 2013:5).

Scholars are still debating and trying to build a framework through which analyse the international dimension of authoritarian regimes. Hereunder, I provide a literature review concerning those studies that addressed the international dimension of non-democracies from a diffusionist perspective, which includes learning mechanism as a diffusion process. As mentioned so far, diffusion studies have been mostly investigating democratisation processes. Most of them rely on the concept of diffusion theorized by Rogers, which affirms that diffusion is a 'process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system' (Rogers 1996:10). Despite this definition leaves out the channels as well as the actors (Erdmann et al. 2013) other studies built on it started to specify the missing items (Börzel and Risse 2012, Elkins and Simmons 2005). These analyses brought interesting insights about the mechanisms that drive the process, yet 'the empirical identification is still questionable'

(Erdmann et al. 2013:19). Many other scholars in this field of research share the same concerns about methodology and verification tools (Bank and Edel 2015), and despite many efforts, there is still not a proper tool to clearly identify diffusion. Nevertheless, I think it is important to look at how the literature concerning authoritarian diffusion addressed this fascinating, but still young, topic.

In a study concerning the diffusion of Coloured Revolutions, Beissinger (2007) provides a first attempt to conceptualise elite learning as an institutional factor that might hinder or slow down the diffusion of electoral revolutions. In other words, Beissinger claims that popular demonstrations in later-risers countries may have less chances to overthrown the regimes because incumbents learnt how to deal with protests from earlier-risers countries. In particular, he focuses on pre-emptive actions in order to avoid elites' defections. With this study Beissinger recognizes the importance of elite learning during the Coloured Revolutions 'in contrast to the modular spread of nationalism in the glasnost era [...] we have seen an elite learning process occurring among later risers in the spread of modular democratic revolutions, raising the institutional constraints to action and likely limiting the further effect of example on outcomes (Beissinger 2007:273). This study has good implications for my research, even if it limits to operationalize learning only for pre-emptive actions. Moreover, for the sake of this argument I am not going to assess whether the learning was a success or a failure in its implementation. Thus, this study posits itself in between a comparative analysis and a study of practices' innovation and diffusion.

Since then, there has been a growing interest in the mechanisms of authoritarian diffusion that focused on mechanism of learning and set the agenda for further research. The first author who dealt with this topic and tried to build a theoretical framework is Thomas Ambrosio. In his article '*Constructing a Framework for Authoritarian Diffusion*' (2010) he claims that democratization theories are not sufficient to explain this process and he prefers to borrow concepts from a 'wide array of disciplines' (Ambrosio 2010:376). He acknowledges the idea that diffusion is composed

of two-part divisions (Elkins and Simmon 2005), and he further develops the concept of *appropriateness* and *effectiveness,* adding important reflections in a comprehensive framework. The concept of *appropriateness* comes from former studies (Elkins and Simmon 2005, DiMaggio and Powell 1983) that analysed how some norms and practices are more appropriate in a specific time/space set. In other words, *appropriateness* refers to the cost and benefits that different policy options hold if adopted in a particular (international/domestic) environment (cf. Ambrosio 2010:379). Whereas for the concept of *effectiveness*, Ambrosio explains that it is 'a learning process by which policymakers are better able to identify what works and what does not through the experiences of others' (Ambrosio 2010:382). Therefore, some authoritarian regimes might look to other authoritarian regimes to find solutions or the best practices to adopt. Ambrosio then speaks about contributing factors, which have an impact on diffusion processes. Here, he includes geography, linkage, international organizations, major power prestige, and reference groups (Ambrosio 2010:384). This framework of analysis is very helpful for this study as it takes into consideration on the one side the international system and its constraints toward policy options, and on the other the effectiveness of other models. In addition, Ambrosio's article points to some further possible venues for research, in particular related to learning mechanisms, which this thesis would like to address: are incumbents in nondemocratic regimes adopting similar policies in order to achieve similar results? Is there a pattern of innovation and subsequent adoptions? Throughout the thesis I will take into consideration these questions and will provide a contribution to address them.

Stemming from Ambrosio's theoretical arguments, Rachel Vanderhill provides new empirical evidence from additional case studies. According to her, autocrats do learn from each other to find better strategies to stay in power, and she identifies three ways by which learning takes shape: demonstration effects, purposive and collaborative action by external 'change agents', and pressure by external actors to maintain authoritarian regimes. For the sake of the argument of this thesis the first type of learning, which is informal and indirect, is the most important

one. As a matter of fact, according to Vanderhill 'diffusion involves elites learning from the successes and failures of other countries […] illiberal elites may decide not to adopt certain policies because of the negative consequences of these actions in other states. (2012:2).

Subsequently, on the concept of learning among authoritarian regimes, there is a growing subsector of study that addresses some specific policy sectors (Koesel and Bunce 2013, Del Sordi 2014, Heydemann and Leenders 2014, Joshua 2015, Bank and Edel 2015). For example, there are two pioneering studies that delve in learning practices in the field of protest management and constitutional reforms carried out by researchers at GIGA (Joshua 2015, Bank and Edel 2015). Both of the articles rely on the concept of learning as it has been theorized by Levy (1994) in a seminal article concerning foreign policy. Levy asserts that learning is "a change of beliefs (or the degree of confidence in one's beliefs) or the development of new beliefs, skills, or procedures as a result of the observation and interpretation of experience" (Levy 1994: 283). Josua's paper aims to better-theorize learning from mistakes, which has been barely conceptualized by former studies, whereas Bank and Edel's research provided new evidence on how learning process affected later riser countries in the Arab Spring. My research will extensively rely on this research and will provide a new contribution for addressing an unexplored topic of learning: electoral frauds and malpractices.

As it appears, there is very little research on learning mechanisms on authoritarian regimes. One of the reasons concerns the facts that learning is a very difficult phenomenon to observe and to infer. As a matter of fact, Bennett and Howlett wrote that the concept of learning is 'overtheorized and underapplied' (Bennett and Howlett 1992:288). Scholars in this sector encountered plenty of methodological challenges and conundrums. However, and I am confident that there is a need to continue working on this fascinating and relevant topic, drawing as much as possible from the theoretical outcomes already existing and on an extensively empirical analysis.

The Authoritarian Regional Dimension

To conclude the literature review I must include a review of studies dealing with the post-Soviet region in order to understand how they interpret authoritarian regimes' development in the region. There is a huge strand of literature that considers Russia's interventionism as a reason for the "betrayed democratization" (Kramer, 2008; Ambrosio 2009; Burnell, 2010; Bunce and Wolchik, 2011; Baracani 2010; Babayan, 2015; Jackson 2010; Tolstrup, 2009; Hedenskog and Larsson, 2006) and some other conceived Russia as playing the black knight's role in maintaining authoritarian regimes in its surroundings (Levitsky and Way 2010, Vanderhill 2012, Tolstrup 2014). Others focus more on indirect forms of influence, such as soft power aimed to restore Russia's image and values across borders (Popescu, 2006; Tafuro, 2014). There is a noteworthy study conducted by David R. Cameron and Mitchell A. Orenstein that provides an original description about the deliberate and unintentional external influences of Russia on its neighbours (Cameron and Orenstein, 2012). Drawing data from Freedom House and Polity IV datasets, the two authors analysed the patterns of change in terms of civil and political rights in Russia and in its surrounding countries in the lasts two decades (1991-2010). They conclude their analysis by affirming that 'if one is to understand the persistence of authoritarian or hybrid polities in the non-Baltic post-Soviet space, the reluctance of most leaders in those states to strengthen the democratic elements in their polities, and the great difficulty experienced by the few who did try to strengthen those elements, one must examine the exercise and impact of Russian leverage in its near abroad.' (Cameron, Orenstein; 2012:40). In this article they highlight two important elements, the first one is that in the last decade Russia experienced the largest erosion in political rights, civil liberties and democracy of any of the post-soviet countries; the second one is that all the other countries also witnessed a similar path (except for a short period of time in the aftermath of the Coloured Revolutions). Some experienced shifts that brought them very close to Russia's level of civil and political rights; this is particularly evident in countries such as Armenia and Azerbaijan. Cameron and Orenstein did not dare to find a direct causality with this trend, however they suggest that 'one cannot

conclude on the basis of these patterns that Russia caused or contributed to the erosion of rights, liberties, and democracy in the other countries" […]; however, Russia "may have influenced that erosion, if not through direct intervention, as in Belarus in 1994–1996, through its legitimation, by its own practice, of authoritarian politics and the leverage afforded by the favourable asymmetry of power and its many linkages with the other states.' (Cameron, Orenstein; 2012:24).

However, those studies do not really elaborate a real framework for analysing external-internal interactions, even at a general level. In particular, "empirical tests of the effects of international factors have treated domestic politics as a black box that might be shoved this way or that by neighbours, sanctions, or whatever" (Geddes, 2009: 290). Moreover, they mainly focus on Russia *vis à vis* neighbourhoods, overlooking other forms of socialisation among other countries. I consider this to be a big gap that academic research needs to attempt to fill. As a matter of fact, socialisation may be horizontal rather than vertical. Some studies already acknowledged it in particular for what concerns the diffusion of electoral revolutions. This is the case with the already mentioned *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Postcommunist Countries,* by Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik (2011). In this monograph the authors analyse the post-soviet countries where domestic actors challenged the authoritarian regimes. They focus in particular on the performances of opposition parties, and how they use transnational networks to cooperate. These parties, they stress, may interact within different contexts of authoritarian regimes and create an innovative approach to defeat the incumbent in "democratizing elections". Overall, this book provides a very good framework for analysing international networks and activism, and it fills a gap that the literature had not addressed up until then. However, it has not such a great value with regard to elite socialisation, and it does not include a real framework of international forces (such as Western Linkage and Western Leverage).

Conclusion

The three different streams of academic research addressed in this literature review have seldom been combined in a single study. In other words, there have not been monographs or any form of systematic research on the intertwined topic so far. However, overall, this multi-sectorial literature review also highlighted that there has been a growing interest in studying nondemocratic regimes, both from an institutional and from a diffusional point of view. The international academic community is now acquainted with the concepts of authoritarian cooperation, diffusion and learning. There is also a broader understanding about the different types of frauds and electoral malpractices, and how nondemocratic regimes use elections despite the risks they hold, which might have counterproductive outcomes for the rulers. The elections and their management and mismanagement are at the core of the regimes types' analyses. Scholars are becoming more and more acquainted with the idea that even if elections are formally set up, this might not lead toward a real democratization. Therefore, nowadays there is a broader acceptance of the end of the transition paradigm and the recognitions of the durability and sustainability of hybrid regimes. In addition, scholars are analysing how democratic institutions are used to nondemocratic ends. The new institutionalism in the study of nondemocratic regimes provided important contributions to understand how rulers could manage the establishment of democratic and representative institutions without fully becoming democratic. Yet, there are also those scholars who criticise the 'institutional turn' in the study of nondemocratic regimes, insofar there are important issues that are taken for granted, and there is a blind confidence that authoritarian incumbents could easily bend the institutions to their will.

Based on this important research production, the literature review identifies some spots for future researches, in particular for those that aim to adopt an interdisciplinary approach. As the review on diffusion demonstrated, there is still stickiness to refer to democratization's concept to study authoritarian regimes, and too few attempt to assess the role of diffusion mechanisms in electoral frauds' analysis. I claim it is important to include such

analysis in a broader understanding of cost and benefits for non-democracies to proliferate and cooperate. Moreover, this approach will also address another gap in the literature concerning electoral malpractices, which for the time being has been more focused on investigating singular malpractices and less interested in providing systematic studies that analyse the diffusion of frauds in comparative perspective. Even fewer are the analyses that take into consideration the international dimension for what concern frauds and malpractices. Therefore, there is a need for further academic research on many topics related to electoral mismanagement in nondemocratic regimes. This thesis, with all the shortcomings and weaknesses typical for a pioneering study, will address this gap in the literature with an in-depth and comprehensive analysis over frauds and electoral malpractices in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Frauds and malpractices will be compared throughout the South Caucasus and I will analyse how and why they change, evolve or not, taking into consideration the cost and benefits coming from the international context, as well as international socialisation practices.

Chapter 2:
Change, Context and Learning: a Framework for Analysis.

Introduction

In order to assess the developments of frauds and electoral malpractices, , it is necessary to clearly identify what I use as basic concepts and how I am going to build from them my theoretical framework. As the title of this chapter reveals, there are at least three basic concepts from which I will stem to delve the topic of this research: they are 'change', 'context' and 'learning'. As I am going to elucidate, all these concepts entail others in subgroups relationships. Misunderstandings or misinterpretations are one of the most common problems in theoretical argumentations; as Gallie's landmark article claims, all concepts might be 'essentially contestable' (Gallie 1956) thus, for each of these words I will specify the conceptualisation that underpins my understanding. Although this won't help avoiding contestability, it would help the reader to discern my usage.

I am confident that some notions of political theory might serve to this purpose and they could support a better characterization of concepts. That is why I am going to refer to some of those theories, which developed in the aftermath of the 'Linguistic Turn'.[6] As a matter of fact, both change context and learning are complex political concepts that hold a cluster of concepts in their inside. I am going to use Freeden's approach (1996) to the study of political ideology, as I argue it could be of some help in order to clarify the specification of each concept. Freeden speaks about the morphology of political concepts as a useful approach to

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[6] The Linguistic Turn relocated the investigation of political concept to the study of language in the social world (cf. Rorty 1967, Thompson 1984).

properly identify what are the core and peripheral units of a political concept. He uses it to analyse political ideologies, which are morphological arrangements of political thinking in a society (cf. Freeden 2005: 124). Concepts thus are not isolated but they are intertwined with other, which charge them with different meanings and values. Thanks to this approach it is possible to trace a clear picture of what I mean with 'change', 'context' and 'diffusion'. In the next paragraph, before presenting the theoretical framework, I will present the morphological map of each concept.

Change

The very first concept that underpins the argument of the thesis is 'change'. It entails an act or process through which something becomes different: (see Oxford Dictionary). Applied to political issues, it concerns institutions, borders, practices, actors and all different factors that constitute public affairs. Most of the studies concerning change deal with institutions, which are seen as durable and less likely to change.

Different Types of Change

The literature analysed institutional change mainly from three different standpoints. The first explanation comes from functionalist' approach, which follows the evolutionary (paradigmatic) paths. Indeed, those institutions that 'best suit the underlying structural changes survive through the operation of some kind of selective mechanism, and institutions that do not follow this functionalist logic are weeded out by the competition from more successful institutional orders' (Rothstein 2011:222). Secondly, change can be triggered by 'exogenous shocks', which are unpredictable and unforeseen; Wars, economic crises, climate catastrophes are like 'black swan' (Taleb, 2007) that could radically change institutions in a country. Finally, there are those authors who look at institutional change as driven by agents with interests and purposes. Yet, this interpretation has been hardly criticised by other scholars, as 'the outcome of such strategic design may not always be in line with the agents' intentions because outcomes from institutional changes are hard

to predict, especially if there are simultaneous changes of other institutions outside the control of the designing agents' (Rothstein 2011:225, cf. Pepinsky 2014).

The concept of change adopted in this thesis stems from the latter conceptualisation, which posits the focus of change on actors with defined interests and goals. In this case, I rely on the assumption that rulers want to preserve their power and win the elections. In order to do so, they must take into consideration the portfolio of different strategies with costs and benefits for each choice. Changing strategy is a possible optimum choice in case there are constraints to use former strategies.

However, this study stands back from the claims of such conceptualisation of change in two ways. First of all because this study did not assess how change affected the institutional outcome, but rather aims to assess the presence of a changing process itself. Only then, in case of positive results it will be possible to understand the patterns of change. As pointed out in the literature review, there is a lack for what concern diachronically analyses in the study of electoral malpractices. Secondly, is it true that change in this thesis is seen as agent-driven, but I assume that the agent wants to deprive political institutions of their functions rather than change their structures. In other words, institutions are considered as durable and stable, what changes is their basic attributes, which eventually modify their meaningfulness rather than their structures. For example, heavily rigged parliamentary elections won't modify the structure of the institution; rather it changes the meaning and the proper functioning of the institution. Of course, the institution itself might subsequently be formally modified and loose some of its attributes. However, this is not the focus of the thesis.

Change and Evolution
I consider it to be important to reflect on the concept of evolution that is really linked with the concept of change. Although it might be easy to understand the concept of evolution with positive connotations, I rather conceive it as a passage from a simpler to a more complex form of something. Stemming from the basic definition of evolution as 'the gradual development of

something' (see Oxford Dictionary), I claim that the focus of such analysis is rather similar to Thelene's study of vocational trainings in Germany, Japan, Britain and United States (2004). In particular, I share her claim about the concept of evolution that relies both on structuralist and agent theories: 'these analyses all highlight the need to situate the interpretation of specific choice points within a broader temporal framework that takes account of the feedback effects that have defined the conditions with which specific policy and institutional choices are being made. They highlight the way that policies initiated at one point affect which actors are around to fight the next battle, how they define their interests, and how and with whom they are likely to ally themselves subsequently' (Thelene 2004, 288-89). In other words, Thelene claims that both views are historical.

Thelene's arguments allow for a better understanding of the factors affecting change. Her main goal is to set the experiences of some countries into a theoretical framework that would shed light on the causal mechanisms at work across a number of cases. In particular, she posits her attention on the context in which change takes place: 'it is not sufficient to view institutions as frozen residue of critical junctures, or even as "locked in" in the straightforward sense that path dependence arguments adapted from the economics literature often suggest.' (Thelene 2004:8). But, according to her, institutional change also involves 'active political renegotiation and heavy doses of institutional adaptation, in order to bring institutions inherited from the past into line with changes in the social and political context. (Thelene 2004:8)'. According to Herrigel (2006), Thelene's actors have different conceptions of the way things should be arranged, thus, 'contestation among agents with differing politics can affect the spectrum of possibilities for institutional transformation and the direction that transformation takes' (Herrigel 2006). In turn, the structuralist perspective helps define the resources available to actors. Context is an important factor that constrains the agent in his portfolio of choice. In addition, context can change altering the terrain on which the institution exists and the pressures that generate agent incentives. For example, as I mentioned in the literature review, historical context is an important factor in the constitution of the

international normative environment that affects governments' behaviors; given that rules and norms gradually shape the environment, it is not possible to understand what types of pressure are currently being exerted on political actors.

To summarize, I consider change as determined by both agents' preferences and contextual constraints. It might entail evolution insofar as it stems from a simpler to a more complex form of something. Looking at informal practices, I am not assuming that they eventually have modification and durable effects over institutions. However, it is a possibility.

Context

      At this point, I consider it necessary to investigate around the concept that affects both change and diffusion: the notion of context. There is nowadays a shared understanding that *context matters* and it has many implications for the study of political phenomena. More specifically the academic literature identifies three main explanations on how context matters. Franzese (2009) recaps them as: multicausality, context conditionality and endogeneity. *Multicausality* implies that 'the outcomes we seek to explain, understand, or predict have multiple causes, so the values of the many potential causes in any given context affect the outcomes' (2009:3). *Context-conditionality* concerns that the effects of each cause on outcomes tend to vary across contexts, which is to say that the effects of each cause tend to depend on the values of one or more other potential cause(s) present in that context' (ibid). Finally, *endogeneity* indicates that 'many outcomes and many putative causes in the political world that we seek to understand tend, in fact, to cause each other to some degree rather than some factors being only causes and others being only effects' (ibid). This categorization offers explanations about contexts mainly from a causality point of view. Yet, for the sake of the argument of this thesis it is necessary to better investigate the different modalities by which actors are affected by the context not merely as causality. Therefore, for what concern the object of my study, context is related to enhance the understanding of the diffusion of domestic practices through a

cross-countries comparative analysis and within an international dimension.

Indeed, this thesis argues that despite the former understanding of electoral frauds and electoral malpractices, the international context matters insofar as it can affect authorities' choice in the menu of electoral manipulation. In particular, context refers to the intervening dimension of the internal-external interactions among domestic and international actors, which eventually can trigger authorities' choice to select some malpractices instead of others. The outcome would highlight how context exerts binding effects over elite's decision-making and behaviour. Thus, context involves multiple levels with different dynamics and characteristics that are intertwined.

The Theory of Context

In order to fully grasp the complexity of context's role in the development of electoral frauds and malpractices, this study takes into consideration some precious insights from the 'Theory of Context' by Gary Goertz (1994). In this book the author analyses different ways political actors interact with their international environment, which is multi-dimensional, and it also explains why the latter can affect states authorities' behaviours. Context, as theorized by Goertz, has an incredible influence on policies and practices. In order to properly explain his conception of context, he relies on what he calls, quoting Mackie (1974), the 'causal field', which is the set of circumstances and background conditions that are important or necessary in explaining a political decision. Eventually, this theory provides sound methodological argumentations that, combined with process tracing analysis, explain how internal and external interactions occur. As a matter of fact, 'the emphasis on context has important methodological implications. It results in new ways to integrate state and system level of analysis.' (Goertz, 1994: 10). According to the author there are three substantive contexts affecting the decision-making process of the states: history, international system structures and international norms. These contexts matter in three different and articulate ways: as a cause (context in conjunction with other factors can explain the outcomes), as barrier (context as constraint and opportunity for

the actors) and as changing meaning (a changing context may alter the meaning of concepts). In Goertz's theorisation these modes of context imply that for states' actors multiple relationships can exist between opportunity and willingness. In other words, this theory of context attempts to integrate environment and individual-level variable in a consistent framework for analysis.

Goertz's theory has another important merit, which is that it was among the first attempt to overcome methodological differences between diffusionism and rational models. The IR debates concerning norms diffusion gravitated around two main interpretations, which posited the linchpin of the diffusion mechanism on two different factors: environment or actors. Rational models are far more diffused and they focus on norm entrepreneurs who, motivated by principled ideas, seek to change international or domestic behaviour through the generation of new international norms (Bueno de Mesquita 1989, Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). The second one considers environment (such as history, geography, culture) as the major factor affecting political actors' actions (Most, Siverson, and Starr 1989). Goertz's insights were afoot in this regard; he was among the first to claim that "states exist in an environment of rules and norms that influences their calculations and their goals" (Goertz, 1994:5). He paved the way for a later stream of literature that claims that actors seek to maximize their value or utility according to their preferences and beliefs about an expected outcome, while acting rationally against the definition of these interests (Wendt, 1999; Jackson and Nexon, 2013). This line of interpretation implies that rationality is a product of social construction (Del Sarto, 2015). Using context as an intervening variable, Goertz's theory rids off the idea that structural or individualistic paradigms are universal panaceas. He points to the fact that there are situations where structures are more constraining and others where individual choices have a greater impact.

From an analytical point of view, the potentialities of this theoretical framework for my research are twofold. First of all, it allows the theorisation of multiple levels of contexts, which

sometimes may overlap and other times might be divergent (Goertz 1994:3). In the South Caucasus region this overlap is particularly evident. First of all, from an international system standpoint, this area has been subject by several international actors, which created multiple levels for political actions. In particular, since the end of the Cold War, the region experienced a first phase of Russian weakening and the arrival of Western actors (1992 – 1999), with creation of interregional forms of cooperation (for example the European Union TACIS Programme 1991-2006). Subsequently, following the election of President Putin and the adoption of the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (June 2000), the South Caucasus experienced renewed Russian interests, which provoked controversial outcomes in the three countries. As a matter of fact, according to the new Russian foreign policy doctrine, the CIS states were identified as the first priority in Russian foreign policy. Yet, new forms of regional integration had to be created as the CIS had long proved 'its ineffectiveness and inability to adopt binding resolutions for its members' (Hedensgok and Larsson 2007:19). Overall, Russian foreign politics has been often characterized by political phases (Morini 2010), and with Putin Russia was keener to regain a hegemonic role around the world (Carnaghan 2007). One of the most successful outcomes for Moscow was the creation of the Eurasian Union, which proved to be a real challenge for the European Union's role in the region. Therefore, South Caucasian countries were inserted in a maze of intraregional and interregional initiative, which created a multiple set of contexts. The effects of Western Leverage were different in the three South Caucasian countries, depending on the position of each country within these multiple levels of context.

Secondly, I am going to focus on context as a *barrier* for state's authorities in the South Caucasus, which may hinder their policy's options available. As a matter of fact, Goertz claims that governments live in an international environment that posits constraints for arbitrary behaviours. Yet, as the environment changes states learn about these changes and alter their goals and behaviour (cf. Goertz 1994:11). This understanding of context as a barrier differs from those who look at context as

cause, because it limits the choices' portfolio. In particular, 'barriers are negative forces, they keep events from occurring. In this sense they are the opposite of a cause: A factor X is a barrier to another factor Y if and only if X's existence contributes to the non-existence of Y.' (Goertz, 1995:21). In other words, causes make things happen, whereas barriers hinder the occurrence of things. Therefore, barriers have different traits to causes. First of all because they do not hold the transitive property: 'a necessary condition for the occurrence of an event E is the non - occurrence of events that would prevent E from occurring.' (Sober 1983: 202, quoted in Goertz 1994:25). Secondly, because barrier strength is determined multiplicatively not additively: this means that when a part of the barrier goes missing, the effects would entail multiplicative interactions with the others. Thirdly, because barriers are not necessary conditions; in other words, the non-existence of the barriers is the necessary condition for the action to take place. Finally, barriers are linked to other causes insofar some counteracting cause might not work and some other yes to overcome the barrier: 'Causes can exist without counter-causes, but certain counter-causes have no impact without their appropriate, original cause (Goertz, 1994:24).

Electoral Integrity as a *Barrier*

This understanding of context is important when we have to take into consideration the normative dimension of the international system. The barrier model as theorized by Goertz was built to analyse how the structure of the international systems affects states behaviours. In this thesis I am reducing the scope of the analysis, thus passing from macro to micro factors – such as elections, and I am going to assess how this barrier is observable in electoral affairs. Indeed, as I presented in the previous chapter, the idea that elections had to respect some principles and some guidelines in order to be considered democratic and fair, produced a normative international context for the electoral integrity. Therefore, the concept of electoral integrity works as a barrier insofar as it sets the standards for the conduction of the elections worldwide and dismisses all other practices excluded from it. The gap between what is allowed and what is not generates tensions among members of normative organisation, especially within OSCE and Council of Europe

(CoE), which have to resort to internal conditionality (Fawn 2013). The latter is the ability of an international organisation (IO) to cope with threats that recalcitrant member states posit to the IOs' norms and values. Fawn looks at some peculiar case studies from the post-Soviet region, where 'states have devised specific forms of resistance to values and practices of what they see as the "western" dominated IOs of the CoE and the OSCE' (Fawn 2013:4).

Thus, barriers are the result of power relations that can hinder or modify rulers' behaviours at an international level. This understanding is consistent with Bertrand Badie's interpretation of the international system, which is a 'set of international practices that can be identified in a given time sequence, the interdependence of which constrains the actors involved by making them playing the same rules' (Badie, 2011: 3). Following Goertz's theory, barrier models consist of two principal components: the barrier itself and the pressure upon it generated from below. Those actors who pressure for change test barriers' strength by attempts. It may happen that barriers can be broken. According to Goertz these are rare events, but when they occur they are explosive, and provoke a rapid change in international politics. Goertz refers for example to the decolonisation process, the waves of democratization or nationalisation of oil in the seventies.

In my thesis the barriers are held up by international actors who advocate democratic elections aligned with international standards. Electoral democratic principles are thus conceived as intangible and normative barriers for conducting elections. The pressure is exercised by incumbents who want to reduce electoral uncertainties recurring to some type of electoral malpractices. In my understanding, barriers are broken or eluded when there is a diffusion effect of some methods of frauds or electoral malpractices. As this study is going to demonstrate there have been some occasions where despite international condemnation a method of fraud spread around the region and changed the dynamics of electoral manipulation.

The willingness to destroy or to avoid electoral integrity constraints led domestic actors to innovate and to reiterate bids in electoral mismanagement in order to attain their goals. Obviously, these actions entail some risks as it could happen that the international actors react to the attempt and decide to punish the perpetrators. For example, the European Union lifted economic sanctions on some Belarus high-officials in the aftermath of a rigged election in 2004. However, for state authorities in nondemocratic regimes every attempt provides information concerning the strength of the barrier and about the consequences that they could encounter if it violates the normative principles. This information could then be used by other actors who in turn challenge the barrier. Therefore, there is an additional diffusion of information regarding IO's reaction to the use of electoral malpractices, which in turn provide important data for the cost-benefits analysis that incumbents do when they decide how to rig the election. My focus is to understand not how this information spreads, but rather how other state's authorities use this information. In the coming paragraph I am going to introduce the last key concept of my theoretical framework: learning.

Learning

Political science literature posits learning within socialisation effects as one of the type of regime's diffusion and anchoring mechanisms (cf. Vanderhill 2012, Morlino 2013). Scholars have successfully unpacked different typologies of policy diffusion but they are still limping along to grasp empirical evidence, in particular for learning mechanisms. The latter implies, for policy makers, the presence of an example, a model to follow. In democratisation theories learning has been identified as one factors of policy influence that implies 'the acceptance of new rules, institutions, and policy choices by state and societal actors in transitional states, not as a result of external incentives or socialisation, but through sheer emulation of successful external model' (Morlino 2013:145). However, it is not possible to entirely transfer the example's role directly from democratisation theories, which borders on paradigmatic meaning, into a model for nondemocratic practices. Firstly,

71

scholars are still debating regarding the existence of alternative regimes models, such as the Russian alternative model of 'sovereign democracy'. Secondly, I am referring to practices rather than institutional arrangements. In particular, for what concerns the field of informal practices such as frauds in hybrid or authoritarian regimes, there might be successful examples, but they won't be the only source of learning. Indeed, I shall take into account other types of examples too.

Readopting Levy's theorisation

Following the recent academic developments on authoritarian learning (Bank and Edel 2015, Josua 2015), scholars define learning according to Levy's interpretation, which is "a change of beliefs, skills, or procedures based on the observation and interpretation of experience" (Levy 1994: 296). Speaking about political learning implies that political elites look elsewhere in order to find examples for policy change. Levy theorizes learning mainly from a historical perspective, but more recently new research has adapted it to synchronic learning. Levy claims that political learning is composed by two phases: '[first] the observation and interpretation of experience lead to a change in individual beliefs, and [second], belief change influences subsequent behaviours' (Levy 1994: 291). Yet, it might happen that sometimes learning may not take place or does not lead to policy change. There are two main factors that may hinder learning mechanisms: the first one is that learning sometimes does not occur immediately because ruling elites are not open or aware enough (Bank and Edel 2015:7). Policy makers may be more or less sensitive to the hints coming from others: sharing a common language, history or geographical proximity are facilitating factors for learning mechanisms (Gilardi 2010, Bank and Edel 2015). Secondly, incumbents might be limited by institutional and power settings in one of more contextual levels, such as domestic polity, intra-elites level and international sphere levels. In other words, there might be some structural constraints that do not guarantee change (Levy 1994, Bank and Edel 2015).

Before passing to the different types of learning mechanism, I would like to briefly present the different typologies of learning

mechanisms. Within the broad sectors of IR studies it is possible to find concepts such as imitation or adaptation, which also shares some similarities with learning mechanisms. The first one, imitation, is simply copying/pasting other government's policies without considering policies' effects and political outcomes (cf. Shipan and Volden 2008, Gilardi 2010). Some studies consider only the effect of policy itself as a driver for policy learning and do not regard political outcomes. Yet, recent studies demonstrate that given the fact every policy has a 'political' weight, policy-makers do look to the political effects of the implemented policy (Gilardi 2010). The second concept that is close to learning is the concept of adaption. The latter, despite the fact it entails changes from environmental modification, refers to innovating and resilient measures undertaken by policy makers (see Heydemann and Leenders 2013), yet this concept lacks a differentiation between learning and learning-induced policy change.

Characterizing Learning

For what concerns the different types of learning mechanisms, I will differentiate between learning from the past/present and learning from success/failures. In both cases policymakers may look both within their own country's experience and from abroad. As I mentioned already, Levy's learning conceptualisation is focused on learning from past. According to Levy, past success contributes to policy continuity whereas failure leads to policy change. Subsequently, scholars started to adapt Levy's insights also to other types of learning. Indeed, Levy's definition 'leaves the doors open for a source of learning such as the experiences of other states' (Josua, 2015:4). In the case of learning from abroad, it is important to distinguish between learning from success (positive learning) and learning from mistakes (negative learning) (Koesel and Bunce 2013, Del Sordi 2014, Josua 2015). The distinction between positive and negative learning drives the dichotomy of two different learning's effects and policy adoption choices: emulation and pre-emptive actions. The first one is related to the emulation of other experiences with contextual assessment of the policy transfer. The latter relates to efforts to avoid the diffusion of grievances and protests or

information and ideas or values and norms that are in contrast with the current state of affairs within a regime.

Learning from success has received greater attention from the scholarship and it has often been included in policy transfer studies (Bennett and Howlett 1992, Volden 2006, Shipan and Volden 2008). More specifically, for what concerns my field of study, the literature refers to the works of Rose (1991), Dolowitz and Marsh (2000), Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2005); all of these authors have a normative conceptualization of the learning process, as a way for policy makers to improve domestic conditions. For the sake of the argument of this research I am using the concept of 'improving domestic conditions' in 'improving the chances of being re-elected'. Recently, in the literature on nondemocratic regimes, some research highlighted the role of negative examples in shaping authoritarian incumbent's strategies (Heydemann and Leenders 2014, Bank and Edel 2015, Josua 2015, Weyland 2016). Stemming from the Levy's argument that 'people learn more from failure than from success' (Levy, 1994:304), this stream in the literature aims to explain how learning from the negative examples explains authoritarian resilience. These studies particularly focused on the Arab Spring events and showed how protests in later riser countries were coped with more efficacies due to rulers' learning experiences. The later raiser countries could draw important lessons from earlier riser regimes looking at their policies' failures. Morocco and Jordan for example were able to better respond to protests, avoiding the same mistakes made by rulers in Tunisia or Egypt.

Learning processes might be very challenging to observe and study. As a matter of fact, what Bennett and Howlett wrote more than twenty years ago could be retained valid even for today 'learning is overtheorized and underapplied' (Bennett and Howlett 1992:288). More recently, Volden, Ting, and Carpenter claimed that notwithstanding 'decades of study, systematic evidence that governments learn from one another has been limited' (2008, 319). Especially, direct interactions among elites are hard to prove for empirical studies in contemporary nondemocratic regimes (Tolstrup 2015). However, a recent

study, which analysed in depth elites' learning to cope with 1848 revolutionary movement (Weyland 2016), was able to draw important empirical material from a rich historical documentation. The article's main argument is that learning can take place and it is particularly useful in order to mitigate cognitive distortions (such as cognitive shortcut that may lead to simple mimicry) that could be counterproductive for incumbent elites. Therefore, as the growing literature on authoritarian learning suggests, there are rooms for further investigating this phenomenon, which is considered to be determinant in nondemocratic regimes' survival.

To sum up, in this research I am relying on Levy's concept of learning, which has been further expanded by new research on authoritarian learning, and it now includes theorisations concerning learning from others and learning from mistakes. The analysis of learning processes will be carried out through the most updated qualitative tools to infer the presence of learning. The outcome is then verified with the support of targeted interviews.

The Theoretical Framework

The concepts presented above are intertwined together in a theoretical framework that analyses the development of electoral management and frauds in the selected case studies. In order to do so, I am going to retrace the evolution of the electoral management and frauds considering the effect of the Western linkage and leverage in the process of reforms. Leverage, which is determined by the international context, could have been higher or lower according to the evolution of geo-political situations that occurred all along the decades. The inclusion of the Leverage provides a contextual analysis of each election, where regime strength and international pressure will be take into consideration.

Since the end of the Cold War, the international system crystallised a huge set of good practices for what concern election the process, which produced new constraints in governments' behaviours in all of the countries around the

world. The sources of the electoral integrity derive primarily from resolutions and treaties passed by the UN General Assembly, the UN Security Council and UN human rights bodies, supplemented by agreement reaching within regional intergovernmental bodies such as the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (Norris 2015:4). Yet, this is a quite recent phenomenon, which developed mainly from UN Peacekeeping missions during the 1980s (Tuccindardi ed. 2014), which eventually lead to a homogeneous set of practices.

In the aftermath of the Cold War therefore, elections, became unavoidable in almost every country around the world.[7] Ideally, for those who hold power, the best solution would be to establish a monarchy or a full hegemonic autocracy (Linz 1975), which suffer less from informational and institutional uncertainties (cf. Schedler 2013). However, in the new international system the legitimacy costs to maintain those regimes increased impressively (Huntington 1991, Waterbury 1999). There are IR studies, related to rational-choices analysis, which analysed the peremptory of the elections in the current international system (Schedler 2006, Levitsky and Way 2011, Zakaria, 1997) and on the opportunity to hold election in order to receiving aid or recognition from international institutions (Bunce and Wolchik 2011). In other words, the general acceptance and the diffusion of new normative values as well as self-determinations stances created new social and international expectation for rulers to behave accordingly. As Goertz indicates, 'barrier determines what is possible and what is not' (1994:95). The uncertainty of the scrutiny was a founding principle of the new 'democracies' born after the fall of the Soviet Union. Yet, the new political elites most of the time did not become acquainted with electoral integrity standards, and conceived them as barriers to their rule. Therefore, in hybrid regimes incumbents seek to maintain power even if it implies to resort to extra-legal means (Levitsky and Way 2010).

The first hypothesis relates to the capacity of incumbents in

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[7] There is just a bunch of regimes, which do not allow universal suffrage elections.

selected countries to overcome these barriers and find solution to the problem of uncertainty in allegedly democratic elections. Therefore, I expect that where the Western Leverage and Linkage became more preponderant I will witness two processes: on one side that formal electoral management improved substantially, on the other that malpractices changed along the years and contributed to hinder a full democratisation process. Vice versa, where Western Leverage and Linkage was lower, electoral management did not improve substantially and therefore there was no need to change how to rig elections. Thanks to the analysis of this hypothesis I will contribute to disentangle and unpack the interacting mechanisms among international variables and electoral malpractices development, which is one of the most important gap in electoral studies.

Subsequently, in a second phase, I include 'learning' as an additional element in the analysis. Therefore, I am going to verify if the changes in methods of electoral frauds have been determined by a learning process. Thanks to this analysis, I further explore the international dimension from a secondary, but not less important, perspective. The recent literature on authoritarian regimes resilience put under the spotlight the cooperative and socialisation sides of non-democracies. Despite this fact, in the South Caucasus, regional cooperation is very limited, indirect forms of socialisation occur and may affect the electoral process. As a matter of fact, reframing Hemingway's statement 'no man is an island' – and neither are incumbents. I claim that incumbents, willing or not, learn from the past or others' experiences to rig elections. The focus on learning provides additional elements to understand how and why some methods of fraud were introduced, changed or disappeared.

Methodological Implications
From a methodological standpoint, in the first phase I am going to carry out a qualitative diachronic and synchronic analysis of the case studies. In order to conduct such an analysis I rely on several primary sources such as electoral observation reports, newspaper articles and interviews, as well as on secondary literature about elections in post-Soviet countries. In particular I am relying on the election observation reports provided by the

Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE/ODIHR), which are a 'widely respected source' (Norris 2015:29) for many evaluations, academic analysis and data sets such as Free and Fair Election and Index of Electoral Malpractices (IEM). As a matter of facts, OSCE/ODIHR reports developed a relatively consistent lexicon to describe election quality, facilitating comparison cross-nationally and over time (Herron 2009). Nevertheless, sometimes it can happen that OSCE findings were in contrast with the assessment of another international actor that monitored the election. As it is well detailed in Chapter 3, in the aftermath of the 2013 Azerbaijani presidential elections the OSCE/ODIHR mission reported many irregularities, which eventually did not fulfil with international standards. In contrast, the election observation mission sent by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe reported that the electoral process was 'free and fair'. In order to overcome this conundrum I am relying on the analysis by Daxecker and Scheider who assess the quality of election monitoring agencies. So far, OSCE/ODIHR observation missions proved to be among the high-quality organisations (Daxecker and Scheider 2014).

For what concerns the second part, I am relying on the recent theorisation on authoritarian learning mentioned already, which expanded Levy's definition to include learning from others and from negative examples. In the case study's analysis, I will adopt Bank and Edel's approach (2015), which focuses on the practices concerned and then retraces the causal chain to evaluate whether it is an example of learning mechanism or not. In order to do so, I am going to carry out a cross-temporal and cross-national comparison of the frauds and malpractices in the three countries. This process will allow me to observe similarities and divergences in frauds and malpractices development, and it will constitute the pool for further observations. Secondly, stemming from the patterns identified in the first phase I am going to look for learning processes among countries, and I will assess what type of learning mechanisms they entail. Thanks to this double comparison I am able to verify whether the learning practices took place.

I carried out more than forty interviews with electoral stakeholders from Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan (electoral experts, members of electoral management bodies, parliamentarians, members of NGOs, journalists, former members of government, scholars). These interviews provided an in-depth understanding of electoral affairs, including frauds and electoral malpractices. The information was gathered through in-person interviews that were carried out during my field research phase in South Caucasus in the spring of 2015. Some other interviews were conducted by Skype or in other places (in particular those with interlocutors from Azerbaijan, as I was not able to get to the country to conduct these type of interviews). Given the confidentiality of the information received and the delicateness of the topic, most of the time the interviewed asked for anonymity. When possible, names are displayed in the thesis.

The Case Studies

The three South Caucasian countries offer disparate outcomes in terms of the regime types, but none of these countries attained a full democratisation process so far. Indeed, ten years after the independence from the USSR an International IDEA report claimed that 'while the political situations and dynamics in the three countries are very different, the studies reveal many common challenges for reformers seeking to entrench well-organised, transparent and sustainable election processes' (IDEA 2004b:5). Still, more than twenty years after independence the regimes' arrangements in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia could be labelled as hybrids (Nodia and Stefes 2015). During this period of times some of these countries experienced more democratic cycles (in particular Georgia) and some other more authoritarian, without experiencing a real democratization.

The literature extensively dealt with transition and democratization from Communist rule for what concern Russia and East Europe, while it overlooked the South Caucasian countries. As a matter of fact, most of the scholarship regarding Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia addresses issues such as

nationalism, inter-ethnic conflicts, security-building and conflict resolution, and the geopolitics of oil and gas (for example Lapidus, Zaslavksy and Goldman 1992, Smith et al. 1998, Tishkov 1997, Beissinger 2002). Only recently there is a growing interest in addressing topics such as democracy, civil society, media and justice from a regional perspective (Nodia and Stefes 2015, Erler and Jobelius 2011, Koryakov and Sisk 2003).

The selection of cases study is based on four mains criteria. First, I selected the Southern Caucasian countries for their geographical and political proximity, which is a key factor regarding learning mechanisms (Bank and Edel 2015): proximity doesn't refer just to Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, which have shared borders, but it refers to many other post-soviet countries from whom they share political and historical proximity, which affect the way elections were and are organized (Herron 2009, Bader 2012, Bader 2014). Secondly, all these countries experienced several political episodes, which affected the way incumbents understood and reacted to them (from highly manipulated election till the perils of 'revolutionary virus'). Thirdly, I selected those countries because this part of the post-soviet world has been hardly overlooked by electoral studies (Tucker 2002, Ergun 2009, Nodia and Stephes 2015). Finally, I consider the conformation of the South Caucasus particularly interesting because there are three different nuances of non-democratic regimes, which allows for a better comparison of how domestic and international factors interact with the evolution of electoral management and electoral malpractices. Georgia is a country experiencing high-levels of Western leverage, whereas Armenia medium-levels of Western leverage[8] and Azerbaijan a low-level of Western leverage.

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[8] I contest Levitsky and Way assessment of Armenia as a country with high-level of Western Leverage (Levitsky and Way 2010). This claim can be supported by many factors: firstly, from several interviews I conducted in Armenia with political experts and MPs, where I gathered anecdotal evidences that Western leverage has been more controversial in respect with Georgia because of security concerns regarding the situation in Nagorno Karabach; Yerevan has been always aware that it was not possible to fully abandon Russia for the West (according to Levitsky and Way *leverage* was at its maximum effect

Conclusion

In this chapter I presented how some concepts are defined and applied to this sector of study. For each concept, through a morphological approach, I specified and clarified what is their use and how they are interconnected. I hope that with this explanation the reader would be more acquainted with the slippery meanings that abstract concepts may hold. In this theoretical framework 'change', 'context' and 'learning' are intertwined together in order to explain how electoral management and malpractices developed during the last decades in South Caucasus. The theoretical framework may be used even for other cross-national and cross-temporal analysis around other regions of the world.

In the next chapter I am going to delve into the Western Leverage and Western Linkage in the region. Given the fact that the West includes different actors, I am going to disentangle it into the main international players that had an active role in the region. Finally, I am going to present the role of Russia, in order to assess if played the role of Black Knight in the three South Caucasian countries.

when was used along with *linkage* for EU membership accession (Levitsky and Way 2010). Secondly, by looking at some proxy variables in the Caucasus Barometer: at the question 'Our way of life needs to be protected against European influences?' those who answered 'yes' were 50% of Georgians, 53% of Armenians and 63 of Azeri (source Caucasus Barometer 2009); at the second question Support of country's membership in EU? Those who answered positively were 65% in Georgia, 40% in Armenia and 34 in Azerbaijan (Source Caucasus Barometer 2013). Finally, looking at United States foreign assistance to South Caucasus from 1992 to 2014 it is clearly reported that Georgia received $ 3,365.73, Armenia $ 1,951.83, and Azerbaijan $ 975.75 (millions of dollars).

Chapter 3:
Multiple External Influences in the Region

Introduction

With the end of the Cold war, the Western liberal system became the ultimate form of government that set the standards to evaluate the regimes' qualities around the world (Fukuyama 1992). Equipped with both ideological justification and geopolitical domination of the international system two of the mains Western international actors, such as the United States and the European Union undertook several programmes in order to spread liberal democratic values around the world. Authoritarian regimes suffered from this pressure and they had to introduce in their polities democratic institutions, multi-party elections and division of powers. The post-Soviet space was a particularly interesting area where the West could insinuate in, exploiting Russian weaknesses in the aftermath of USSR's fall. Overall, Western activism in the region took different forms and sometimes had different goals.

The West's involvement in the region can be classified according to the Levitsky and Way dimensions of Western Linkage and Leverage. Indeed, the fall of the Iron Curtain opened up new trade routes that led to new markets. Since then, Western companies started to gain dominant positions in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, and in less then fifteen years the EU became the first trade partner for all the three South Caucasian countries (Boonstra 2015). At the same time, since the early nineties, it was possible to observe, at international level, a trend concerning advanced universal guidelines on democratic development that affected the South Caucasian countries in the processes of shaping governance reforms (Koryakov and Sisk 2003). South Caucasian countries, so as all post-Communist countries, were understood as *in transition* toward democracies; as Nodia claims it was 'the universality of the modern democratic project that creates a conceptual space in which it becomes sensible--and indeed necessary--to compare different

attempts to implement this project.' (Nodia 1996:17). Even if this conceptualisation proved to underestimate the real consequences of *transition* from Communism (Nodia 1996, Fairbanks 2001), Western actors continued through the nineties to look at those regimes as incomplete democracies (Collier and Levitsky 1997) and subsequently they looked at Coloured Revolutions has final democratic breakthrough (McFaul 2005) in a protracted path toward democratization. Therefore, stemming from the early 1990s, former Soviet states became the object of considerable attention and resources from Western governments, IOs, and NGOs (Levitsky and Way 2010) aimed to foster democratic reforms and genuine elections, according to the electoral integrity standards.

In this chapter I am going to retrace Western external actors' involvements in the region in order to analyse Western Linkage and the Western Leverage through the last 25 years. In order to properly quantify the Western leverage and linkage I rely on Levitsky and Way methodology and measurement. Among the three South Caucasian countries, Levitsky and Way provide with a diachronic analysis of Armenia and Georgia (see pages 207-213 for Armenia and 220-228 for Georgia in Levitsky and Way 2010) analysing both external influences and regime organizational capacity. For what concern Azerbaijan, which was not included in the book, I adopted their methodology, which is detailed in appendixes II and III at the end of the book, and that are reported at the end of the thesis in annexes I and II. Their methodology proved to be functioning very well for Azerbaijan⁹. Subsequently, stemming from these assessments - for analytical porpoises, I identified some major turning points in these countries, which affected the overall conduction of elections.

As I am going to describe, Western interests did not always coincided and sometimes differed even in judging electoral conducts. This has become particularly observable in the last

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⁹ I had the opportunity to test the veracity of my personal assessment during the presentation of a part of the thesis at the conference organized by the Italian Standing Group of International Relations in Trento on the 24 of June 2016.

decade. In fact, I argue that the historical debate regarding the trade-off between security and freedom has become relevant in the South Caucasus light of 9/11 aftermaths, of developments in Color Revolutions countries as well as the return of the Russian activism in its neighborhood.

Levitsky and Way (2010) claim that such divergences among Western actors can hinder democratisation pressures. In addition, I am going to provide an assessment of the Russian role as black knight in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, which could be another hindering factor for Western goals. Therefore, I believe it is important to disentangle external pressure in order to fully understand the impact of international actors in in the region, so as subsequently I will delve into each country without overlooking the environment (context) in which they are inserted in.

The United States

The extinction of the communist threat opened an incredible opportunity to restructure world politics. Diamond wrote '[t]he Bush administration envisions a new world order' in which 'nations recognize the shared responsibility for freedom and justice' (Diamond 1992:25). The challenges were enormous and a United States official used the metaphor 'making eggs out of an omelette' (Barry 1992: 288) to describe the difficult situation in post-Soviet countries in the aftermath of the 1989 events. The United States intervened in the USSR mainly through two programmes, the first one, the SEED, was launched already in 1989 and targeted East European Countries, it aimed to support democracy, open markets and political parties. Funds allocated to this programme were $ 938 million, among which $200 channelled into the multi-lateral currency stabilization fund created for Poland (Wolf-Rodda 1993). Subsequently, in 1992, the United States Congress approved the Freedom Support act for supporting former USSR countries (with the exception of Azerbaijan). [10] The plan aimed to create free markets and

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[10] Section 907 explains why Azerbaijan was not included: 'United States assistance under this or any other Act (other than assistance under title V of this Act) may not be provided to the Government of Azerbaijan

establishing a democratic and free society by fostering: '(a) political, social and economic pluralism; (b) respect for internationally recognized human rights and the rule of law; (c) the development of institutions of democratic governance, including electoral and legislative process […]' (Freedom Support Act - Public Law 102-511, 1992:3325). The act, with around $ 15 billion funds in assistance delivered to twelve former Soviet countries over twenty years (Gordon et al. 2012), became the cornerstone for U.S. programme toward that area (Rosenblum 2011).

In particular, for what concern the South Caucasian countries, the United States sought to foster its ties with Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan to help them ending their dependence on Russia for trade, security, and other relations (Nichol 2014). The Freedom Support act included Georgia and Armenia but not Azerbaijan, which was targeted with bilateral and private investment once Washington acknowledge the presence of positive developments by Azeri government 'to cease all blockades and other offensive uses of force against Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh' (Freedom Support Act - Public Law 102-511, 1992:3357). Overall, United States foreign assistance to South Caucasus from 1992 to 2014 has reached almost $ 7 billion (**figure 1**).

Despite financial efforts, there have been critics that blamed the United States for a low-level policy priorities and incoherence toward the three South Caucasian countries (Macfarlane 2009, Giragosian 2011), as the overall U.S. priorities for the South Caucasus remained difficult to define (Boonstra 2015). However, American influence in the South Caucasus expanded proportionally to the reduction of Russian weight and influence (Aydin 1999), which was confronting with many challenges and difficulties in reorienting its role in the region (Çelikpala 2009).

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until the President determines, and so reports to the Congress, that the Government of Azerbaijan is taking demonstrable steps to cease all blockades and other offensive uses of force against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh' (Freedom Support Act - Public Law 102-511, 1992:3357)

Table 2. U.S. Foreign Assistance to the South Caucasus States, FY1992 to FY2014

(millions of dollars)

South Caucasus Country	FY1992-FY2010 Budgeted Aid[a]	FY2011 Actual[b]	FY2012 Actual[b]	FY2013 Actual[b]	FY2014 Estimate[b]	FY2015 Request[b]
Armenia	1,951.83	44.42	44.23	35.665	26.124	24.7
Azerbaijan	975.75	26.4	20.87	15.431	13.526	12.7
Georgia	3,369.33	87.1	85.49	67.168	56.747	53.566
Total	**6,365.73[c]**	**157.92**	**150.59**	**118.264**	**96.397**	**90.966**
Percent of Eurasian Aid (including Central Asia)	16	27	35	28	24	23

Sources: U.S. Department of State, Office of the Coordinator of Assistance to Europe and Eurasia, all agency funding for FY1992-FY2012; U.S. Department of State, *Congressional Budget Justification: Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, FY2015*, March 4, 2014 (the account tables listing country assistance were added on March 21, 2014).

Figure 1: source Nichol 2014

Multiple Goals for U.S. Engagement

The lynchpins of U.S. involvement in the South Caucasus were driven by four main objectives: reducing Russian influence, promoting democracy and free markets and stability (Cohen 1997, Aydin 1999). These lynchpins took the forms of different U.S. engagements. On the stability side, Washington participated since the beginning in the Minsk Group, the initiative aimed to negotiate the peace process for the Nagorno Karaback region. This group has been successful in assuring a long-standing ceasefire but it was not capable of solving the conflict, which eventually frozen for decades. For what concerns free markets, the South Caucasian countries represented an insignificant share for American import/export activities (Boonstra 2015), yet the Caspian Basin energy resources are strategic for at least two reasons: to have margins in oil supplies' prices and to reduce Western dependence on Russian reserves (cf. Macfarlan 2009). In particular, since the mid-nineties a group of major American energy companies started to lobby the administration to support their commercial ventures both in production and in transport in the region (Macfarlane 2009). Eventually, Washington was able to build stronger connections with Baku. For what concerns democracy promotion, Washington was first in line since the fall of communist regimes, and it 'quite deliberately sought to spread democracy through its aid programmes and through

such institutions as the National Endowment for Democracy, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, and the International Republican Institute, as well as through non-governmental organizations such as Freedom House' (Macfarlane 2009:112). Their programmes invested all the three South Caucasian countries, but their efforts had more effects in Georgia, which was labelled a 'beacon of democracy' by former President G. W. Bush during his visit in Tbilisi in 2005. As a matter of fact, since the Rose Revolution, Georgia became the lynchpin for U.S. democracy promotion goals and Washington was also inclined to integrate Georgia into NATO's structure. Yet, European members were recalcitrant as they were concerned about a possible Russian backlash.

The Four Phases of U.S. Foreign Policy in the Region

According to MacFarlane (2009) the U.S. policy toward the region can be divided in four main periods. The first one relates to Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan during their first years as independent countries. The United States immediately recognized and established relationships with all the three young states (the latest, Georgia, was recognized in 1992). Among the first interventions it is worth noting to mention the U.S. role in the Minsk Group in order to provide with an agreed solution to the Nagorno Karaback crisis, even if eventually 'US acquiesced in the successful effort of Russian Defence Minister Pavel Grachev to negotiate a cease-fire in 1994 once the Karabakh Armenians had won their war' (MacFarlane 2009:113). MacFarlane claims that United States did not want to fully engage in the region as stability provider, therefore they supported Yeltsin's role as peacekeeper in some key hot spot around the South Caucasus. Washington decision finds its *raison d'etre* for Clinton administration reluctance to take direct role in too many conflicts scenario (they were already committed in Somalia, Lebanon and former Yugoslavia).

The second phase begins in the mid-nineties, from the outset of the Clinton's second term. During these years the United States' outlook toward the region was characterized by the recognition of some form of stability (new-old leaders assured a sort of regime consolidation in the three South Caucasian countries), by

continuative democratizing pressure (more on Georgian and Armenia) and by the acknowledgement of oil and gas resources of the Caspian basin (in Azerbaijan). Furthermore, the Clinton administration recognised that Russia was not a reliable partner guaranteeing stability in the region and therefore the United States started to consider a possible NATO expansion in the South Caucasus. This, along with the situation in Kosovo, created tension with Russia. However, the U.S. did not contest Russia's dominant position in some of the frozen conflict in the South Caucasus (such as South Ossetia or Abkhazia).

The third phase started in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, as until then George W. Bush continued to pursue the same policies goals in the region. Since 2001 the U.S. reduced partially their interest in the South Caucasus and they started to rely on other partners more active in the region, such as the European Union (cf. Boonstra 2015). The reason for this change has to be found in the limited role (Giragosian 2011) that the three South Caucasian countries could provide to the new American grand strategy aimed to fight international terrorism. However, in Georgia the Shevardnadze regime was on the brink to collapse (see the chapter on Georgia), and thus good opportunities for regime change. Therefore in August the former U.S. Secretary of State James Baker travelled to Georgia, where he pledged for a further democratization of the country. His message was particularly important since it was pronounced just few months before the parliamentary election. Therefore, as soon as Mikhail Saakashvili took power through the Rose Revolution, the United States granted him with a special endorsement, as he would represent an important success for the democratizing agenda of the Bush. Meanwhile Russia was recovering its hegemonic role in the region, and Moscow was 'conscious of American overstretch […] increasingly openly claimed a sphere of special interest in the region (MacFarlane 2009:117). This renowned role for Russia, labelled as a new version of the Monroe Doctrine (Skak 2011) was accompanied by a staunch stance on the unacceptability of possible NATO expansions in the post-Soviet space. Washington and Georgia, its closest ally in the South Caucasus, probably overlooked Russia's strategic shift (Krastev 2009), which became

evident with the short but intensive Georgia – Russia war in August 2008. The conflict had strong repercussions on the credibility of United States commitments in the South Caucasus and shed lights on the new regional power structure.

The 2008 war between Georgia and Russia opened the fourth phase, which is characterized by a staunch Russian return as game setter in the region. Since then, the United States' foreign policy toward the South Caucasus 'necessitated a fundamental rethinking' (MacFarlan 2009:120). Eventually, with the election of Barack Obama to the White House, American foreign policy objectives shifted from unilateralism to a more concerted multilateral approach (Giragosian 2011), which lead to a more articulate agenda for the region to be adopted with the European Union. The United States invited the EU to take a bigger role in the region, while the United States would have started to be more assertive toward the local authorities' requests (Giragosian 2011).

 To sum up, the United States involvement in the region has been driven by different goals, which were determined by different assessment of democracy versus stability nexus. Democracy promotion (part of the Leverage) was stronger and more continuative in Georgia and less in Armenia and Azerbaijan, whereas in terms of trade and economic interest Azerbaijan was top of the three. Overall, the main tenet was to acquire more influence in the region so as to push back Russian domination. In the long run, this result has not been achieved.

The European Union

United States was not the only external player interested in the region in the aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union. Other international actors, such as the European Union (EU), took part in what constituted a big effort to promote new democratic frameworks in the countries. The EU is a younger actor in terms of its role as a democratic promoter. It was since 1992 that 'the development and consolidation of democracy' became one of the objectives of its Common and Security Foreign Policy (Baracani 2010). The EU's main instruments for democracy promotion are institutional links, economic assistance and trade concession.

The effectiveness of these tools depends on the possibility of full integration within the Union. As a matter of fact, the integration into the European Union has been considered as one key factors producing successful outcomes of transition process from authoritarian to democratic systems in post-Soviet space (Cameron 2007, Vachudova 2010). All these instruments constitute part of the EU linkage, which goes hand in hand with leverage. European Leverage is characterized by a powerful EU instrument that affects bilateral relations between EU and a third country: conditionality. The latter 'tries to manipulate the cost–benefit calculations of target actors through creating positive and negative incentives' (Borzel and Risse 2012:7) and proved to be really effective in norms transfer (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2004). This instrument was included already in the Maastricht Treaty (1992); Article J.2: 2 affirms '[t]he objectives of the common foreign and security policy shall be: [ ] - to develop and consolidate democracy and the rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms', thus it creates binding requirements for any kind of relations with third countries.

The Great Absent

During the nineties, the main umbrella structure, which allowed for funding and granting different types of projects, was TACIS (Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States) that was launched in 1991 by the European Commission. Within this framework, TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia) and INOGATE (Interstate Oil and Gas Transport to Europe) were initiated under the TACIS programme. Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan fully benefited from this programme, which bestowed €333 million between 1992 and 2004, for national projects. Among the initiative sponsored by TACIS there were training of judges, the reform of central and local government administrations, institutional building of Parliament, and the training of civil servants. Overall TACIS' projects 'contributed to the macroeconomic reform processes and the sectorial reform policies in transitional states' (Dekanozishvili 2004:6) and 'contributed to the transition towards a market economy and the building of democratic institutions through legal and regulatory reforms, thereby

harmonizing their legislation with the EU's legal acts' (Açikmeşein 2009:169). Beside these initiatives, the EU also undertook a humanitarian assistance programme to Armenia Azerbaijan and Georgia to contrast some harsh situations of misery and destitution, which arisen during the independence and transition process (IDEA 2003). The targets of aid were disadvantaged groups, in particular refugees, internally displaced persons and victims of conflict. Thanks to these programme, the EU began to act and being perceived as a 'structural stabilizer' (Açikmeşein 2009) in the South Caucasus.

However, the European Union was accused of being a great absent in the early nineties and to have delayed its involvement in respect to other regions around the world (Halbac 2011, Alieva 2006). Moreover, its cooperation programmes established during the Soviet era were not updated until 1999, when the Partnership Cooperation Agreements entered into force. The EU approach to the region suffered from relevant shortcomings, such as the EU 'did not differentiate between the states' population size, […] did not take into account the most favourable conditions for the support of institution building […] unlike the US, which rendered direct aid to the civil society and institution building' (Alieva 2006:3). Nevertheless, the appeal of EU programmes over Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan remained high and thanks to a deep restructure of the EU – South Caucasus relations the EU became step by step the most active actor in its neighbourhood (Manoli 2009, Boonstra 2015).

Since the mid-nineties the EU and South Caucasian officials negotiated the new framework of EU-South Caucasus relationships. The discussion concerned the main tenets for the New Neighbouring project. According to former European Commission President Romano Prodi, the New Neighbourhood project was aimed at opening the markets of the European Union with its 500 million population to the countries of the South Caucasus, to attract European investments to the South Caucasus and promote social and cultural integration of these counties with Europe' (quoted in Badalov and Mehdi 2005:158). However, alongside these agreements, in the field of development cooperation the EU set up some specific aid and

assistance programmes toward the region. Indeed, the EU entered the region assuming a 'background role of addressing the issues of the region from a transformative perspective in democratic and socio-economic terms' (Açikmeşe 2004:177). The signature of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCA) with the three South Caucasian countries on 22 June 1999 'represented a qualitative breakthrough in EU-Caucasus relations' (Demirag 2005:96), set the basis for enhanced cooperation in several sectors, including social, industrial and cultural. PCAs were individually signed with each state in the region, and among other things they envisioned the creation of Cooperation Councils, Cooperation Committees and Parliamentary Cooperation Committees as institutionalised mechanisms of bilateral relations with the EU.

The New Neighbourhood

The terrorist attacks in September 2001 changed the agenda for the EU engagement in the region. Emblematically, in March 2003, the European Commission published its Communication 'Wider Europe-Neighbourhood: A New Framework for relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours', which devised the European Neighbourhood Policy in order to promote stability, security and development in the EU's periphery, did not include the three South Caucasian countries. Yet, they were included in another document, 'A Secure Europe in a Better World', which casted the South Caucasus among other different regions in the world (and no more conceived as 'neighbour'). However, in this context, the Swedish presidency of the European Council, wanted the South Caucasus to become one of the top priorities for the EU (Açikmeşein 2009). As a direct consequence, in July 2003 the expert Finnish diplomat Heikki Talvitie, was appointed a EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus, in an attempt to foster EU political involvement in the region.

There were two other important factors that played an important role in bringing back to the top the region in the EU agenda. The first one was the Rose Revolution in Georgia (Popescu 2011), which 'appeared to be the best test for the EU to demonstrate its commitment to the declared values and principles' (Alieva 2006:4). Secondly, with the accession of some Eastern European

countries during the 2004-2007 enlargement, the South Caucasus became a closer neighbor for the EU (Açikmeşein 2009). As a matter of fact, in June 2004, the European Council decided to include Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan in the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). Although ENP lacked one of the stronger impulses for cooperation, the enlargement process, it still had an incentive of deeper integration in EU markets and societies. This decision gave an important message that the EU was 'fully committed to support these countries on their route towards building stable societies based on democratic values' (Demirag 2005:99).

The South Caucasus benefited from the ENP as the EU started to provide more financial assistance than during the TACIS programme: for example, under the National Indicative Programme the EU allocated for 2007-2010 € 98 million to Armenia, € 92 million to Azerbaijan and € 120,4 to Georgia (Delcour and Duhot 2011), and in 2009 the EU became the one of the major investor actors in the region (Boonstra 2015). Overall, the impact of the ENP in the region was positive, the countries of the region welcomed it as the 'EU was an attractive development model for the societies of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan' (Popescu 2011:232). In turn the EU pushed good governance, the rule of law and democratization in all three countries as a core priority (Delcour and Duhot 2011), to be taken into consideration for any further steps. In Georgia, in particular, during those years, there were hopes about a possible integration in the EU. More recently the EU launched new initiatives aimed to further deepen cooperation with the three South Caucasian countries. Despite the fact that Armenia and Azerbaijan were included in the EU programme, their involvement in bilateral cooperation did not grow as rapidly as in the case of EU-Georgia relations. One of the main reasons is that Georgia was 'much more willing to engage with the EU, whereas Armenia and Azerbaijan were both less interested in the way the ENP objectives were designed' (Popescu 2011:323).

Following these developments, the EU planned a further step in the cooperation process and in 2010 launched negotiations for a new framework of cooperation. This framework included

political cooperation and economic integration through Association Agreements (AA) with Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTA), progressive visa liberalisation and sectorial cooperation. The idea, in the long run, would further increase the trade exchange between the two regions, even if it for the time being it exclude the idea of a full integration into the EU. As a matter of fact, the EU was the first trade partner for each of the South Caucasian countries **(figure 2),** followed by Russia and Turkey.

Table 1: Top 5 trading partners South Caucasus – total trade 2014[26]

Armenia (100 per cent)	**Azerbaijan** (100 per cent)	**Georgia** (100 per cent)
1. EU 25.8	1. EU 33.8	1. EU 27.6
2. Russia 24.9	2. Russia 14.3	2. Turkey 20.1
3. China 9.5	3. Turkey 14	3. China 8.5
4. Turkey 5.3	4. China 7.6	4. Azerbaijan 7.4
5. Iran 4.7	5. US 6.1	5. Russia 6.7
Other: 29.8	Other: 24.2	Other 29.7

Figure 2: Boonstra (2015), data from European Commission, DG Trade.

The Vilnius summit in 2013 partly crowned these efforts for South Caucasian countries, with just Georgia signing the AA. Armenia decided not to sign the agreement and subsequently joined the Russian led Eurasian Union. As I am going to explain in the following paragraphs, Yerevan's decision was emblematic in two ways: the first one related to the actual level of Western Leverage over Armenia and the second one concerned the role of Russia as a *Black Knight*[11]. Azerbaijan resisted signing the AA and re-launched the negotiations, which are still on-going, for another form of agreement between the EU and Azerbaijan. The South Caucasus, which is intertwined in a difficult interregional dimension, complicates the EU's functional programmes toward the area. In this region, where there are multiple-levels of international context, 'post-Soviet elites' preferences for closer

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[11] According to Levitsky and Way (2010) a Black Knight is an international actor that bolsters a nondemocratic ruler in another country.

relations with the EU are often underpinned by geopolitical motives' (Delcour and Wolczuk 2013:3), and the EU is just one actor among others. Thus, the EU was not able to fully and comprehensively exert its democratization pressure on the three countries. Moreover, as we are going to see, democracy versus stability logics played a role in reducing the EU democratizing pressure especially on Azerbaijan.

To sum up, the role of the EU in the region increased gradually over the years. Despite a timid beginning the interests between Armenia Azerbaijan and Georgia and the EU mutually grew, as on one side the South Caucasian countries were keener to get closer to European market and *aquis communitaire* and on the other, thanks to the European Union enlargement, the South Caucasus became the new neighborhood. Moreover, European soft power proved to be more attractive for some countries, in particular for Georgia and sometimes for Armenia, where during the years political elites praised a possible accession's path into EU.

The Council of Europe and the OSCE

With regard to the other international actors that played a relatively important role in shaping the political and legal reforms in the South Caucasus, I must mention the Council of Europe (especially through the Venice Commission) and the OSCE, which proved to be essential in particular for what concern technical assistance to the establishment of democratic institutions and elections. Despite the fact that no comparable process of EU external conditionality was imposed on these new members, the CoE and OSCE have worked with the practice of *internal conditionality* [12] (Fawn 2013). During the nineties the Council of Europe became very active in providing legal advice at the moment of drafting constitutional and electoral laws in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Meanwhile, the OSCE played a prominent role in good governance, in particular anti-corruption, anti-money laundering and combating terrorist

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[12] Internal conditionality is the ability of an international organisation to cope with threats that recalcitrant member states posit to the IOs' norms and values (see Fawn 2013).

financing, as well as providing with election observers for almost all the elections that took place in those countries since mid-nineties. Moreover, the OSCE provided the international framework to set up the Minsk Group that since 1992 has been working to find solutions to the Nagorno Karabakh war.

The Role of the OSCE

For what concerns the OSCE, which is a regional arrangement established under Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter, contrary to the European Union, it opened up the possibility for membership to South Caucasian countries since the early nineties. Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia were admitted into the OSCE (at that time it was still called the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe – CSCE) in 1992. With the transformation into a permanent organisation – OSCE – there was the expectation of many Western governments that post-Soviet states would willingly adapt their national legal frameworks to suit OSCE funding norms (Fawn 2013), even if the organisation itself did not dispose of coercive or authoritative institutions to carry out such job.

The OSCE adopted a tailored programme for each country in order to provide specific responses to each context. Moreover, within the OSCE member states could find a framework to collaborate and confront in addressing many issues (good governance, anti – terrorism, borders management). Moreover, the OSCE served as an 'umbrella' organisation for sub-regional groupings within its space (Manoli 2009). One of the best examples of how synergies with partner organisations are developed is the Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC), a partnership between the OSCE, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), and the Regional Environment Centre (REC), with NATO as an associated partner.

For what concerns democratization and electoral affairs, the OSCE was, and still is, one of the most important actors. This is because since the establishment of the OSCE/ODIHR it started

to implement election observation missions. This task became particularly important in the post-Soviet world, where governments began to set-up multi-party elections. The work and the findings of election observation missions were an assessment of the overall democratisation process of the country. This was particularly important for Western states, which conceived democratizations and democratic elections as unquestionable lynchpins for the post-Soviet space (Fawn 2013). Western countries had high expectations regarding democracy and elections, so that they were pressuring, via the ODIHR, third countries to compel. In this framework free and fair elections are taken as 'an essential component of both democratization and security' (Fawn 2013:60). As a matter of fact, the Copenhagen Document of the CSCE published on the 29th June 1990 committed all the participating States to: free elections at regular intervals; the popular election of all seats in at least one chamber; universal and equal suffrage; the right to the establishment of political parties and their clear separation from the state; campaigning in a free and fair atmosphere; unimpeded access to the media; secret ballots with counting and reporting conducted honestly and the results reported publicly; and the due winners be installed and allowed to serve their full terms (cf. CSCE 1990). Therefore, Western leverage was channelled within an organization that among its members have Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus.

Already in 1990 with the establishment of the ODIHR, the CSCE was able to send first observation missions to observe some local elections in many Eastern European post-Soviet states. Rapidly, the OSCE/ODIHR became one of the most important actors that set and subsequently checked electoral integrity in the region. In the South Caucasus OSCE/ODIHR observations missions started in the mid-nineties (the first elections were parliamentary election and constitutional referendum in Azerbaijan in 1995), and since then they provided high-quality election assessments for most of the elections in the region.

The OSCE/ODIHR observation missions are an indicator of the Western leverage. This is particularly the case if we take into consideration the size of the missions. In fact, the observation

missions' sizes are one of the most contested items when OSCE/ODIHR is negotiating the observation mission in a country. In the 2015 parliamentary election in Azerbaijan the government argued that there were too many observers for a small country such as Azerbaijan. [13] Eventually, the OSCE/ODIHR decided not to send an observation mission. In Georgia, throughout the nineties, when Western leverage was low in the region, OSCE/ODIHR observation missions were composed by around 150/180 observers. This is in sharp contrast to the great international attention over the 2003 parliamentary election, when more than 400 observers composed the OSCE/ODIHR mission. The final report of that mission confirms the idea that the size of the OSCE/ODIHR missions are an indicator of Western pressure, in the introduction it reports 'in response to a strong interest of the international community, the OSCE/ODIHR deployed a reinforced and enlarged Election Observation Mission (EOM) that was formally established on 2 September 2003' (OSCE/ODIHR Georgia 2003:2). The findings of the OSCE/ODIHR missions included in the preliminary report published on November the 3rd contributed to trigger the political turmoil that led to the Rose Revolution.

However, many post-soviet states started to challenge the ODIHR standards, claiming that they did not fit to post-Soviet conditions even if, at the same time, they committed repeatedly to them according to the Western interpretations (Fawn 2013). First of all, it was Russia who since 2003 contested the final findings of the OSCE/ODIHR final report concerning 2003 legislative elections. Subsequently, other post-Soviet governments objected to the OSCE/ODIHR observation missions' reports. As a result, Russia and other allied states began to endorse each other's elections, even if they were considered to have fallen short of the international standards set by the OSCE/ODIHR mission. [14] Moreover, since 2003, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) started to implement parallel observation missions that normally endorsed

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[13] Authors' interview with Azerbaijan Ambassador in Paris (June 2016)
[14] For example Putin expressed positive opinion concerning Victor Yanukovich's victory in the highly contested election in 2004.

fraudulent elections.

In this context, the OSCE's operations and programme began to be contested, hindering its progress. In the South Caucasus, Armenia invited CIS observation missions since 2003 and Azerbaijan did the same since 2010. In both cases their final reports provided a different picture to the OSCE/ODIHR assessments. Moreover, since 2010 the Azeri government started to limit the OSCE presence in the country. First of all, the authorities decided to downgrade OSCE missions to Azerbaijan to the project co-ordinator level. Subsequently, they decided to close it altogether as 'the government of Azerbaijan has reported that there is no need for more activities of the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Baku' (letter from Foreign Ministry to the head of office in Vienna, 3 June 2015). This decision became effective from 4 July 2015. Currently there is just one OSCE mission to the South Caucasus, in Yerevan as the OSCE mission to Georgia ended its mandate and it was closed in 2008.

The Role of the Council of Europe
With the End of the Cold War the Council of Europe was met with the prospect of enlarging its membership to post-Soviet countries. In this delicate process the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) played an important role insofar as it was able to set up and develop relations with parliamentary institutions, even before the fall of the Soviet Union. With the upheaval against Communist rule, many former Soviet states looked at the Council of Europe as a natural dimension for their independence from Russia and for their efforts to establish democracy (cf. Bond 2012). The Council of Europe granted the status of applications to many post-Soviet states with 'few if any conditions attached' (Bond 2012:113). However, the same spirit did not relate to South Caucasian countries, where intra-national or inter-regional conflicts erupted in the early nineties. There, soon after Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia became independent, Council of Europe advisors and Venice Commissions experts took part in the drafting process of the different Constitutions; their opinions were fundamental in order to understand the quality of the Constitutional projects (Filippini 2005).

In this sense the Council of Europe is a guarantor for three main core concepts: democracy, human rights and rule of law. Its role is even more relevant for countries, such as Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, which do not have other regional affiliations that can safeguard those principles. Conversely, the Council of Europe has some instruments to achieve those aims, such as the European Court of Human Rights; the conventions on human rights (ECHR) to be signed and ratified by all member states; the possibility for the CoE to conduct monitoring activities within its member states, and capacity building programmes, which were implemented with the support of the EU in the South Caucasus.

When Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan became eligible to apply, the Council of Europe demanded a long list of requirements (Bond 2012). The three South Caucasian countries had to undertake some legal reforms that prompted a period of comprehensive legislative reform and harmonization. By the time of their accession, all three countries had introduced 'sweeping changes' (Zullo 2005:92) to their legal frameworks. This process was particularly important for Azerbaijan as thanks to the accession framework important reforms to its institutional landscape were carried out in 2002 (cf. Guliyeva 2005). Therefore, the Council of Europe played, and it is still playing, an important role in securing the continuation of political and legal reforms in the South Caucasus.

Moreover, among its activities there are also devising regional programmes to foster cross-border cooperation and the sharing of expertise, as well as engaging sub-state actors and civil society. After the accession of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in the organization, the Council of Europe launched specific programmes for the area. The first one was the *Kiev Initiative Regional Programme: Black Sea and South Caucasus'* aimed to foster democratic development through culture in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine relying on the experiences acquired in similar programme (such as STAGE - Support for Transition in the Arts and Culture in Greater Europe). Subsequently, in 2006, the Council of Europe launched another initiative in the Black Seas region called the *Congress of Local and Regional,* which was *a* platform for co-operation

complementary to existing national intergovernmental co-operation initiatives, acting in the remittance of regional and municipal competencies (Manoli 2009:98).

In summary, the CoE and the OSCE have developed ideational and practical measures that make 'internal political matters the purview of all' (Fawn 2013:53). In other words, concepts such as democracy, human rights, political pluralism and the rule of law are no longer a domestic prerogative. Within the IOs' frameworks those concepts have multiple means to making member-states accountable to each other (Fawn 2013). However, the role and prestige of international organisations in the South Caucasus has been undermined by several factors. The first one concerns the lack of progress with regard to the numerous attempts to resolve the protracted conflicts, including the role of the UN in Abkhazia and the OSCE Minsk mediator group. The Council of Europe cut off the Nagorno Karaback issue from its agenda. The second one concerns the acknowledgment of some failures of the democratization process in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia that still falters. Despite all the IOs' efforts to provide the best assistance to the reform process, there is still a big gap concerning the formal framework and its real implementation. Post-Soviet countries are still affected by many informal practices, which elude legal bindings (see for example Ledeneva 2006, Hale 2015). The third factor concerns the structural weaknesses of those organizations, which suffer from internal challengers (see Fawn 2013) or from competing assessments, which endanger the impartiality of the IO (for example see contrasting assessments of electoral integrity in Azerbaijan). Thus, Western leverage suffers from all the above-mentioned shortcomings. Yet, both the Council of Europe and OSCE, remain important drivers of cooperation and providers of resources and expertise on the democratization process and electoral integrity.

Russia: the Black Knight?

According to Levitsky and Way (2010) democratization efforts can be hampered by the presence of an external actor that bolsters a nondemocratic ruler or hinders democratic developments in another country. This external actor is labelled

as a *Black Knight*. There is a literature that already addressed the role of Russia in its neighbourhood. For example, in the study by Cameron and Orenstein (2012) quoted so far, the two authors observed a synchronism in the development of civil and political rights in Russia and in its neighbourhood. Some other studies addressed the same issue (Ambrosio 2009, Tolstrup 2009, Bader et al. 2010, Jackson 2010, Vanderhill 2013, Tolstrup 2014) and they were able to find proof of Russia's interventions in other countries' policies in order to affect domestic politics. In this section I am not going to provide an overview of all the different facets of Russian interventionism in the region; this topic has been already addressed in other studies. Rather, taking into consideration the regional and international contexts, I am going to explain if and how Russia acted as a Black Knight in the region.

For what concerns the topic of this thesis, it is important to focus on Russian efforts to prevent democratization process in the three South Caucasian countries. One of the main tenets of Russian foreign policy in its neighbourhood is bolstering governments and leaders that are supportive of its interests and are willing to establish close ties with Moscow (Kramer 2008). This policy is dictated by geopolitical stances rather than by normative preferences, at least in the South Caucasus. Many studies have been conducted on the effects of the Russian foreign policy over the South Caucasian countries, yet as far as I know for the time being there are none that proved that Russia directly promoted alternative regime's type. Moreover, for what concerns electoral systems all South Caucasian countries have been free to choose whichever electoral formula for their constituencies. I did not find any study or data concerning Moscow's pressure to adopt some particular provisions to craft electoral codes or electoral practices. These claims have been confirmed by many interviews I conducted with electoral experts, MPs and CEC members coming from all the three different countries. Therefore, despite the fact that Russia may maintain strong geo-political influences over the region, as well as high levels of linkage with some countries it does not provide an alternative for what concern the management of the election.

However, Moscow did affect the political scenario of the three South Caucasian countries bolstering, endorsing or hindering domestic political leaders' activisms, in particular since the advent of Vladimir Putin. This practice has been already analysed in different post-Soviet context, such as the Russian involvement in Ukraine and Belarus (Ambrosio 2009) and in Moldova (Tolstrup 2014). According to Tolstrup (2014) Russia acted as a Black Knight not because of a standard practice to sustain authoritarian leaders as such, but rather because it bases its interventionist policy 'on a rational estimation of the likelihood of regime breakdown and the costs associated with it' (Tolstrup 2014:15). Moreover, it is important to underline that when a Black Knight decides to bolster a domestic leader, it does not imply that it will lead to success. There are a number of cases where this did not happen (Ukraine in 2004, Moldova in 2009) or other cases where simply Russian preferences were left unheeded (such as in Azerbaijan in 2003 when Moscow did not favour the dynastic succession between Alyiev father and son).

Bewildered Years

A complex net of strategic, ideological and economic factors has affected Russia's early policies toward the South Caucasus. These factors intertwined in different ways that as the Russian foreign policy was characterized by different stages. The establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States played a fundamental role in Russia's foreign policy toward its neighbourhood (Kramer 2008). Nevertheless, at the outset far from being and authoritative project, the Yeltsin administration was endorsing democratization processes in all the post-Soviet states and sought to be closer to the Western world throughout the nineties (Ryabov 2011). Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia joined this regional framework since the very beginning.

In the first years after the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia undertook a great effort in order to structure the new Russian foreign policy. Indeed, Russia had to reform its foreign and security policies because of the drastic decline of its military power and its strategic landscape map (Fedorov and Nodia 1999). For what concerns the South Caucasus, at the beginning Russia had no single visions of its role in the southern periphery

(*ibid*). The result was an initial disengagement of Moscow and tolerance toward the domestic policies in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in their domestic and international, an anti-western policy began to increase especially in regard to those countries (Ryabov 2011). As a matter of fact, from the mid-1990s onwards, Western efforts to enlarge and sneak in the region provoked a growing frustration on Russia, which claimed that South Caucasus is a region of special interests. Therefore, since mid-nineties onward, Russia's approach toward the region was characterized by a wary and guarding position with a focus on damage limitation. As a matter or fact, in order to reassert its hegemonic position in the CIS, Russia 'applied whatever means it had at its disposal to halt the further erosion of its fast-fading influence' (Perovic 2005: 63). This had multiple implications, from obstructing any kind of legal settlement over the Caspian Sea (Perovic 2005) to impede solution to the conflicts in the region (Alieva 2006:5). However, at the end of the nineties, Russia and in particular Yeltsin presidency was suffering from many institutional and legitimacy weaknesses[15], which had repercussion also on its foreign policy (Lo 2002, Nygren 2007).

The Putin Turn

A new form of Russian foreign policy in the region became evident only with President Putin, who since early 2001 launched a new phase in relations with the three South Caucasian countries. Under President Putin there have been some attempts to establish multilateral summits to discuss more general Caucasian affairs. In June 2001 Putin set up several meetings with all the three South Caucasian presidents (first with the Armenian President Robert Kocharian and then with the Azerbaijan President Heidar Aliev and later with the Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze) to discuss security related regional problems and unresolved conflict issues. This new approach witnessed that the South Caucasus became a

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[15] The problem for Yeltsin to re-establish control of the CIS region was the fact that a re-union was not built on even domestic consensus, that his administration 'was never able to maintain a consistent position on either the balance of priorities or even the criteria by which they should be measured' (Lo 2002: 123)

priority for Russia's foreign policy (Nygren 2008).

President Putin has always been more comfortable dealing with authoritarian leaders (Kramer 2008) who would support Russia's interests and align their countries with the CIS and then with the Eurasian Union. This tendency was greatly reinforced by the series of popular uprisings, which were subsequently called 'Coloured Revolutions', that began with the ousting of Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia in 2000, and were followed by the Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004, the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan in 2005. According to Kramer this rapid sequence of events 'had a profound impact on Putin and his close aides' (Kramer 2008:5) and abruptly changed the strategy toward its neighbourhood, which became more proactive and pre-emptive (Ambrosio 2009). In the 'New Russian Doctrine' the Coloured Revolutions were identified as some of the most serious threats Russia faced (Ivanov 2006). As a matter of fact, from that moment on 'Russian leaders and organizations, to varying extents […] encouraged autocratic methods as an effective strategy for holding on to power' (McFaul 2007: 68).

Practically, in the South Caucasus, Russian Black Knight efforts aimed at achieving three main goals: first, avoiding the rise of political leadership that were against Russian interests in the region (Tolstrup 2014). Second, sustaining political elites that shared same vision and goals with Moscow (Boonstra 2015). Third, providing an alternative source for legitimacy to nondemocratic leaders. With regard to the first aim, Russia acted strongly and harshly especially when it suspected a possible Western expansion in the region. As a matter of fact, one of the interpretations of the August war in Georgia in 2008 sees Russia's invasion of Georgia and the subsequent 'Cypriutisation' of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as an action aimed at hindering Georgia's willingness to be further integrated into the Western international organisation's framework (Nodia 2012); this was achieved by crippling Tbilisi's ability to act as the sole authority within its borders (Hedenskog and Larsson 2007). The same logic lies behind the efforts to pressurise the Armenian elites to reject the EU's association agreement and to choose the

integration's path within the Eurasian Union. In this case, Russia took advantage of the unresolved conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the Nagorno Karaback in order to have more leverage *vis à vis* Yerevan. Meanwhile Armenia was undertaking all the necessary steps to sign the Association agreement with the EU[16], Moscow rekindled Yerevan's security concerns by selling huge amount of weapons to Baku (RFE/RL 04/09/2013). The decision by President Sargysan to withdrew from the Association Agreement and to sign the Eurasian Union accession was seen as an abruptly 'strategic U-turn' (Giragosian 2015), which was fostered by a great Russian pressure (Dreyer and Popescu 2014). As a matter of fact, Russia exerted similar pressure also on the other South Caucasian countries (*ibid*.) but it was successful only in Armenia because, as Sergei Minasian has asserted,[17] 'Armenia's security issues - which are not addressed at all by the Eastern Partnership - give Moscow "major leverage" over Yerevan' (quoted in RFE/RL 04/09/2013). Nonetheless, it is still too early to verify whether this international move will result in further faltering democratization process[18].

For what concerns the second method for influencing South Caucasian domestic politics, Russia carefully identifies and subsequently sustains certain political parties and leaders which prove to be friendly or have shared interest with Moscow. In order to attain this result, Moscow plays a mix of strategies that also include 'soft power'. As a matter of fact, Russia has a number of advantages for implementing a soft power strategy in its neighborhood, which goes from the presence of large Russian minorities to a shared history, including cultural and linguistic proximity (Tafuro 2014). The main instruments to channel soft power are through the Russian media, which are active in Armenia, Azerbaijan and to a lesser extent Georgia (Boonstra 2015), and the Orthodox Church (Petro 2015). The main aim of

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[16] The European Commission announced the 'substantive completion' of the three-year association talks with Armenia later in July, making the initialling of the Association Agreement at the Vilnius summit all but a forgone conclusion (RFE/RL 6/08/2013).

[17] Deputy head of the Caucasus Institute in Yerevan.

[18] Author's interview with a MP of an opposition party in Yerevan (May 2015)

Russian soft power is to counter the spread of Western ideas, which could 'infect' post-Soviet societies. President Putin used to refer to religion as a safeguard against the moral crisis of the West; in a speech he gave he condemned the rejection of Christian values in western society, claiming that 'without the values of Christianity and other world religions, without the norms of morality and ethics formed over the course of thousands of years, people inevitably lose their human dignity' (Putin 2007). Beside soft power, there have also been episodes of direct Russian participation in assisting friendly governments to cope with protests and electoral uncertainties, as happened in Azerbaijan during the elections in 2003 and 2005, and in Armenia in 2003 and 2008 (Bunce and Wolchik 2011). Concerning Armenian politics, there is anecdotal evidence that Russia played a role also preventing the leader of the political party Prosperous – Gagik Tsarukian – becoming to influential. As a matter of fact, Tsarukian since 2013 became very active as opposition leader and he successfully mobilized many supporters around the country. In 2015 he organized several rallies that gathered hundreds of people to condemn a constitutional referendum, which would have changed the role of the executive, and President Serzh Sargsyan endorsed it. In February Sargsyan openly accused Tsarukian of financial crimes and asked for his resignation. Tsarukian flew to Moscow for a two-day visit, where he met with Russian political leaders to discuss about the constitutional reforms (Armenianow 2015). Once he came back he unexpectedly decided that he would have resigned and quit politics.[19]

Finally, thanks to its hegemonic position Russia created an alternative source of legitimacy for its neighbours. There are different ways in which Russia carries out this aim. For what concern the topic of this research, the most important one is the creation of an alternative international organisation consecrated to elections observation and assessment in post-Soviet countries: the CIS Election Monitoring Organisation (CIS-EMO), which has been sending election observers to member countries of the CIS since 2002. Several of these observation missions have been

[19] Author's interview with political analyst in Yerevan (May 2015)

controversial, as their findings, generally positive (Daxecker and Schneider 2014), have often been in sharp contradiction with the findings of other international organisations such as the OSCE. Moreover, the composition of these missions is often in fact totally Russian and they are often accused of being subservient to Kremlin foreign policy (Hedenskog and Larsson 2007). Therefore, due to this biased CIS-EMO missions are considered to be a low-quality election monitoring organization (Daxecker and Schneider 2014). Nevertheless, they are still useful in some realities because through these observation missions, Russia 'provides authoritarian countries with a rhetorical upper-hand and the power to claim that their forms of government are equally legitimate to the conception of democracy emanating from the West' (Ambrosio 2010:381). In the South Caucasus CIS-EMO missions were invited in Armenia and Azerbaijan since 2003, and since then they have been providing controversial assessments (cf. Bunce and Wolchik 2011).

In conclusion, by providing legitimacy and political support to regimes with similar interests, Russia actively countered democratization efforts in the South Caucasus. Therefore, it is possible to observe a Russian *Black Knight* role, in particular since Putin's arrival. Moscow's efforts were mainly directed to hinder Western integration processes in the region and to sustain friendly political elites. Yet, these actions have not been comprehensive and systematic compared with many Western democratization efforts (Jackson 2010). Nevertheless, for what concerns electoral management, Russia contributed to endorsing practices which were against electoral integrity principles.

Conclusion

This chapter started with the idea of delving into the different facets of the Western leverage and linkage. As Levitsky and Way also underline, one of the main drivers of the democratization process is a consistent and aggregate pressure over third countries. The analysis of the different Western actors' actions along the decades allows for some observations concerning the Western linkage and leverage in the region. First of all, the South Caucasus experienced Western pressure only from the nineties, when the region was inserted in the broader aid baskets for the

post-Soviet space. However, the South Caucasus was one of the more remote areas of the former USSR, and it experienced low levels of Western interest (the West was far more concerned about eastern Europe and the Balkans) and inconsistent aid programmes. For what concerns the issue of this research, only the Council of Europe and the OSCE were implementing important reforms in the governance sector. Yet, these two organizations alone were not able to exert a significant degree of leverage on the countries.

Secondly, the South Caucasus became more geopolitically relevant during the early 2000s for three main reasons. Firstly, because of the spread of the Coloured Revolutions, which were seen as a final democratic breakthrough; this was particularly visible in Georgia, which became one of the success stories important to justify international commitment. The United States was particularly committed to sustaining democratic breakthroughs elsewhere, as President Bush claimed that Rose Revolution set an example for others during his visit to Tbilisi (BBC 10/05/2005). In the run-up of the Rose Revolution the West demonstrated particular unity and consistency toward Georgia, and it was able to exert a strong Western leverage over Shevardnadze. However, soon after the election of Saakashvili in 2004, Western actors began to show competing visions and interests over Georgia's role within Western security and regional framework (e.g. NATO), which in turn had implications for the effect of Western leverage as a whole. Secondly, the South Caucasus became more geopolitically relevant because it turned out to be the new EU's neighbourhood after the integration process in Eastern Europe. Therefore, the EU tried to launch a new tailored programme toward the region, which eventually would make the three South Caucasian countries closer to EU standards. Despite this process failing to work as expected (with just Georgia included in the new AA framework), the EU managed to became the first trade partners in the region.

Thirdly, the region acquired importance for the West due to new possibilities for exploiting natural resources in the Caspian basin. As expected, Western commercial interest increased in particular in Azerbaijan. However, it is not sufficient to produce

a general increase of the Western leverage, as the natural resources industry and trade are negatively associated with democratization process (Crystal 1995, Franke, Gawrich and Alakbarov 2009, Filetti 2012).

Subsequently, for what concerns the third phase, after the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia, Western pressure changed shape and structure. Integration into the European Union and NATO were no longer conceivable in the near future, as Moscow clearly demonstrated that it could take whatever means to avoid this possibility. After this event, Western leverage decreased sharply, as the United States proved to be inconsistent and incapable of defending the 'beacon' of democracy in the region. These developments went in conjunction with a renewed Russian presence in the region. On one side Moscow reaffirmed its leadership over the region with the new 'Monroe doctrine', on the other it proposed a new framework for regional integration – the Eurasian Union. Eventually, Armenia withdrew from the path toward the AA and joined the Eurasian Union. Speaking about Western Leverage and Linkage, this was one of the greatest setbacks for the West.

Thus, Russia played a black knight role in some cases and especially since Putin came to power. Its role has been stronger in Armenia, where Moscow could play over Yerevan's security problems. In the two other South Caucasian countries Russia had a lower impact, but it is regaining influence now thanks to its decisive role in frozen conflicts and its new soft-power efforts. Yet, one could ask the opposite question, such as 'Why didn't Russia manage to encapsulate all the three South Caucasian countries in its framework for regional integration?'. Despite being a very interesting and challenging question, I will leave this topic to another study.

Therefore, it is possible to observe three different periodization with three different levels of Western pressure. The first one (from early nineties till early two thousands) was characterized by medium levels of leverage and low linkage; subsequently, (from early two thousand up to the August war in 2008) there was high leverage and linkage; finally, a third phase in which

Western leverage decreased while Western Linkage remained high. In terms of Western Pressure in each of the three South Caucasian countries, in **Figure 3** I can provide a more detailed figure concerning the three different periodization. For every country I have signalled periods of different combinations of leverage and linkage concerning the main international developments sketched out so far. The years are just indicative and do not intend to be sharp reproductions of intangible phenomena.
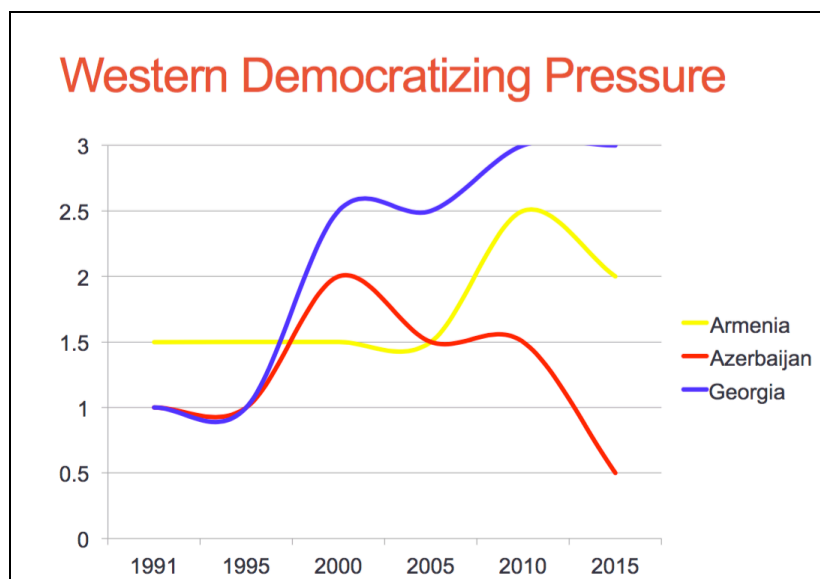
Figure 3: Western Democratizing Pressure (author's assessment on Levitsky and Way's methodology)

In the next chapter I am going to analyse the electoral management and mismanagement developments in the three South Caucasian countries. In order to do so, I am going to take into consideration the international factors that I presented in this chapter as main drivers for major changes.

Chapter 4:
The Case of Georgia

'Don't you know how these Westerners are?
They will make a fuss [about electoral fraud] for a few days,
and then they will calm down and life will go on as usual.'
– Eduard Shevardnadze, former President of Georgia

Introduction

The above quote from President Shevardnadze is emblematic as it depicts accurately the spirit of many post-Soviet leaders in young independent countries, such as Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, who were former officials of the USSR. Despite their government trying to establish new democratic institutions, those leaders remained sceptical about the West, which was perceived as an enemy, yet it was a necessary partner to overcome institutional and economic weaknesses.

Indeed, Georgia was a new-born country that was striving for international recognition and for the creation of new networks and relations. As a matter of fact, the 'insecurity of statehood within an 'insecure neighbourhood' (Legvold 2005:26), had affected the country since 1991. Moreover, Georgia's harsh social and economy situation in the 1990s were at the same level as those of the 1950s, which inevitably influenced the choice of its new international partners (Jones and Kakhishvili 2013). There were not just economic issues at the basis of this decision. In the mid 1990s Georgia's foreign policy agenda was dominated by territorial conflicts and tense relations with Russia over Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Tbilisi was therefore naturally keen to shift toward greater integration with the EU and NATO. In this sense, Shevardnadze's decision to turn to the West was dictated by survival necessities rather than 'a yearning for "a return" to Europe, so often cited by Georgian leaders' (Jones and Kakhishvili 2013:16). However, as I sketched out in the previous chapter, the Western pressure over Georgia was not high during the 1990s as other important issues affected the regional scenario. Western countries shared the idea that somehow, once the communist structure of power fell, new or not-so-new states

would develop a pro-democratic consensus with just light pressure and advice from the West, in order to carry out political and economic reforms (Nodia and Tsevszadze 2003). Moreover, international actors were mostly preoccupied with finding a solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh war, in which Georgia was marginally involved.

Shevardnadze and Low Western Leverage and Linkage

When Shevardnadze returned to Georgia in 1992, he found a state that had yet to be consolidated. Georgia's independence was one of the bloodiest in the former Soviet Union countries. In 1989, in occasion of the Congress of People's election, which were highly controlled by communist party officials (Slider, 1997), an opposition movement peacefully displayed discontent; in the morning of the 9th April, Soviet troops violently repressed the sit-in in front of the government building, killing 20 demonstrators. The political environment in Georgia became extremely radicalized and highly anti-Soviet, with a renewed chauvinistic fervour. In the specific political environment of the period, Gamsakhurdia was the best figure for driving the country out of the Soviet sphere: he was an intellectual who had struggled against the Sovietisation of Georgia and a human rights activist who had also been jailed during the USSR era. However, from early 1990 Georgia witnessed an escalation of violence among political, societal and ethnic actors. In particular, warlord criminal groups formed during the Soviet period played a major role in triggering violence in order to maintain vested interests and privileged positions within the country's political establishment. Moreover, the nationalist outlook of Gamsakhurdia's government exacerbated ethnic tensions and separatists' claims in Abkhazia, Ajara and South Ossetia.

Gasmakhurdia did not succeed in establishing domestic order and rooting out the warlords; he lacked the willingness to make political compromises and had an extremely polarized style of leadership which played a decisive role in his failure (Jawad, 2012); moreover, some of his administration's provisions proved to be counterproductive (such as the establishment of a National Guard, which became in turn another element of instability). The military coup took place on the 6th of January 1990;

Gamsakhurdia had to leave the country, and armed groups seized the power. At that time Jaba Ioselani and Tengiz Kitovani were the two strongest men in the country; they headed the two most important quasi-military organizations (respectively Mkhedrioni and National Guard) but they were rivals. Yet, they agreed to invite the former first secretary of the Georgian Communist Party Edward Shevardnadze back to Georgia to lead the new state.

Upon his arrival Shevardnadze was appointed as speaker of the parliament, which was acting as President of the country. The institution and the provisions of the young Georgian state 'were close to collaps[ing]' (Jawad, 2012:144). Shevardnadze had to consolidate both his leadership and state institution while avoiding the re-kindling of the civil war and the separatist stances of some regions. In few years Shevardnadze was able to create a hybrid political regime that allowed 'a certain space for civic and political freedoms but few conditions for genuine political competition and participation' (Nodia and Scholtbach 2006:12). What characterized Shevardnadze's ruling style was the widespread web of patron-client relationship that became the central power of his presidency. According to Timm 'Shevardnadze has made extensive use of this kind of integration not solely to secure his own political power base but with the purpose of supporting a comprehensive state building process' (Timm, 2012:170). These informal practices went hand in hand with formal structures in a neo-patrimonial logic. As a matter of fact, according to this mechanism 'clientelism combined with formal state structures can be identified as the engine of neo-patrimonial authority' (Timm, 2012: 173). Administrative and political positions as well as public goods were the wares of the clientelist relationship; in this way clientelism acted as integrative capacity inasmuch the patron was performing a broker role for different social groups (Lemarchand, 1972). Thanks to these connections, Shevardnadze could launch his new party, the Georgian Citizens' Union (CUG), which gravitated around his leadership. As a matter of fact, Shevardnadze was 'the ultimate decision maker both within the State and within the CUG' (Jawad, 2012:145). The party allowed him to maintain lively connections; it was a 'broad church that

out of necessity would include most of the key players in Georgia' (Weathley, 2010:359). Thus, thanks to this widespread party organisation, Shevardnadze was able to carry out large frauds and electoral malpractices while he was in power.[20]

In terms of electoral management, as soon as the government was formed it started to work on electoral law. The process of creating a new electoral law was not organized, and during the working days there were not any officials with any electoral background or expertise that interfered with the drafting process.[21] In March 1992 the State Council approved a new electoral law. The brand new electoral system envisaged a single transferable vote that would 'virtually guarantee representation by small parties and make it difficult for a party list headed by one prominent figure to take the lion's share of seats' (Slider 1997:117). Over forty parties registered for this election and some of them gathered in a coalition. However, just few weeks before the election, political parties weren't satisfied by the electoral law and sought to modify it. The last version, which was approved on August the 1st, envisaged the return to the single-transferable vote system with a combination of single-member districts and proportional voting by party list (Slider 1997). In particular, 75 delegates were elected on the basis of the majoritarian system (from single mandate districts) and 150 delegates were elected based on the proportional system (multi mandate districts). Regional representation was guaranteed since seats were allocated on a regional basis and there was not a national tally for each party; moreover, there just a 2% minimum threshold for entering the parliament (CEC Georgia 2010).

The Georgian Central Electoral Commission (CEC) was established in 1990 for the first multiparty election, still under Soviet rule. It was not a standing commission, and it was assembled each time before an election. Only with the 1995 Constitution did the CEC become a standing institution with permanent staff, but this did not improve the effectiveness and

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[20] Author's interview with a former Georgian MP in Tbilisi (April 2015)
[21] *Ibid.*

independency of the institution. [22] Indeed, Shevardnadze's clientelistic system wrapped the EMBs, which also affected the Georgian CEC[23]; in fact, the ruling party always succeeded in securing a decision-making majority at all levels of the election commission system (Usupashvili 2004). The CEC enjoyed a wide range of powers, including the authority to promulgate instructions and resolutions to clarify the law and adjudicate on complaints and appeals (OSCE/ODIHR 1999). The CEC was accused to contribute to carry out fraudulent activities during elections by some local NGOs.[24]

The first parliamentary election under Shevardnadze was held in October 1992 with the aim of legitimizing the new government. At the time the electoral legislation therefore favored the development of small parties (Nodia and Tsevszadze 2003). As a result, 24 parties won seats in the Parliament. An amendment to the electoral law permitted the creation of a special post for Shevardnadze, who became chair of the parliament. In order to be elected in this position a candidate had to gather 5,000 signatures and not be a member of any party. Nobody else eventually proposed candidatures and Shevardnadze won easily, with 96 per cent of the votes cast.

Given the fact Georgia joined the CSCE in 1992 a small observation mission from the CSCE was invited to monitor the first election in the country. The findings of the mission report grave breaches of basic principles of electoral fairness and human right abuses especially against Gamsakhurdia's supporters, including shootings, beatings and tortures against demonstrators (CSCE Georgia 1992). Moreover, voting procedures were still recalling Soviet elections' style: 'for voters, obtaining the ballots was easy, compared to filling them out. Upon arriving at the polling station, voters […] signed the

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[22] Until 2003 political parties appointed all the CEC's members. Subsequently the chairperson and five members were nominated by the President and elected by the Parliament, while political parties appointed the remaining seven.

[23] Author's interview with Georgian CEC expert in Tbilisi (May 2015)

[24] Author's interview with Georgian Young Lawyer Association (GYLA) in Tbilisi (May 2015)

voters' list and received three ballots […]. One was entitled "Elections for the Chairman of the Parliament of the Georgian Republic." Those wishing to vote for Eduard Shevardnadze were to circle the number "1" next to his name; those against him were to cross out his name. There was no separate box or space to mark if the answer was negative.' (CSCE Georgia 1992:12). Moreover, were several reports of people voting at the same time in a voting booth (another leftover of the Soviet time). Therefore, the CSCE report concludes that the 'October 11 vote was more a sort of referendum on Shevardnadze than a parliamentary election' (CSCE Georgia 1992:16).

Soon after the parliamentary elections, the parliament organized the committee to write a draft for the new Georgian Constitution. This process led to the adoption of a constitutional framework that was neither inclusive nor accountable (Roeder 2001). At the moment of writing, one of the most important issues is that drafters wanted to get rid off the Soviet heritage in the country's legal framework and started to look to western experiences in order to find possible examples. Therefore, the final draft was a 'Georgian version' of a mix (or a collage) of disparate western constitutions. [25] Indeed, some international consultant participated in the drafting of the constitution, such as the American Bar Association, the Council of Europe, the National Democratic Institute from the US and parliamentary experts from France, Hungary, Poland and Canada. A first version of this draft was submitted to the Venice Commission, which overall endorsed the project (Venice Commission 1994). Yet, according to some observers the final version of the Georgian constitution was then reviewed and modified by Shevardnadze himself, before sending it to the Parliament.[26] Moreover, Shevardnadze threatened to call a referendum if the legislature did not approve the draft. Eventually the constitution was ratified on August 24th 1995. Meanwhile a new electoral law was approved, just before the upcoming parliamentary election to be scheduled in November 1995. The adoption of the

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[25] Author's interview with Khatuna Gogorishvili, Tbilisi (May 2015)
[26] Author's interview with legal expert from Eurasia Partnership, Tbilisi (April 2015)

Constitution sealed the consolidation of Shevardnadze regime, which after three years could stabilize the country from an institutional point of view (Nodia and Tsevdzadze 2003)

Nevertheless, western actors welcomed the adoption of the Constitution and of the electoral law. In fact, despite some rough patches, Georgian democratic developments were seen as one of the best records in the former USSR (Economist Intelligence Unit Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia 1996). Moreover, Tbilisi was in the process of tightening ties with the European Union as in October 1995 Georgian foreign minister Irakli Menagarishvili, and the head of a 15-member EU delegation signed an interim trade agreement, which paved the way for the subsequent signature of the Partnership and Association Agreement with the EU, which contained principles concerning the respect of human rights and democracy. Meanwhile, Tbilisi was also striving to join the World Trade Organization rather than the CIS Custom Union. Therefore, during those years, Western pressure was mounting even if it was not fully consistent insofar it was tolerating Shevardnadze's ruling style in light of its foreign policy orientations.

New presidential and parliamentary elections were held in November 1995, and they saw an overwhelming victory by Shevardnadze and his party. The former was elected President with more than 74% of votes, the latter saw Shevardnadze's supporter winning the majority of the seats (CUG plus other parties such as the Georgian Greens). These elections suffered from many shortcomings, even before the beginning of the electoral campaign, the electoral framework was amended several time creating confusion and doubts over the electoral process (Allison 1996). Moreover, in August 1995 there was an assassination attempt to President Shevardnadze, which was followed by a crackdown on some opposition leaders and groups. In addition, authorities carried out serious violations of the electoral integrity process arresting and sentencing opposition leaders for political purposes (Economist Intelligence Unit Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia 1996). Nevertheless, Georgian authorities invited foreign election observation delegations in order to monitor the electoral process. The OSCE

final report attests that the conduction of the election improved substantially since the last scrutiny and that it was well managed (OSCE Georgia 1996). However, the imprisonments of opposition leaders following the presidential assassination attempts 'did reduce the opposition voice in the pre-election period' (OSCE Georgia 1996:1).

After the election the Georgian electoral framework continued to develop. The parliament adopted the Law on Political Associations of Citizens (approved in 1997), which specified how political parties and candidates could register to stand for election and set the minimum age for candidacy as long as guaranteed freedom of association and the right to create political parties. In terms of fraudulent conduct, the Criminal Code (adopted in 1999) recognized five articles regarding electoral conducts[27] but none of these specified any penalties for multiple-voting acts, which was considered an 'important legislative omission' (OSCE/ODIHR 1999:4). Overall, the international community endorsed these new acts, however there were some relevant shortcomings that could hinder the fairness and inclusiveness of the electoral process. In particular, according to OSCE/ODIHR experts 'the law remains vague regarding a number of important issues, e.g. what are the modalities to "ensure the creation of equal conditions during the election campaign for all parties, election blocs and candidates participating in the elections" (Art.22.2.m); there are no provisions to guarantee that observers and proxies are allowed to follow precinct election results during the process of vote tabulation at the District Election Commission (DEC) and CEC levels and to ensure full transparency at this crucial stage of the election process' (OSCE/ODIHR 1999:5-6).

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[27] In relation to illegal interference with meetings and demonstrations (Article 164), obstructing the right of a citizen to participate in an election or referendum (Article 165), interference with the activities of election commissions (Article 166), deliberate violation of the secrecy of the ballot, falsification of elections, deliberate incorrect calculation of votes or results (Article 167), illegal interference with the creation or activities or a party or union by violence or threat (Article 169). (OSCE/ODIHR 1999:4)

The subsequent parliamentary elections, the third since Georgia's independence, were held in 1999. The president's party, the Citizen's Union of Georgia (CUG), won a decisive victory in the election on October 31[27]; the CUG won 85 seats, the main opposition grouping, the Union for Democratic Revival (UDR), gained 51. Despite the fact that international observers judged the election as a step forward toward international standards, the election process 'failed to fully meet all commitments' (OSCE/ODIHR Georgia 1999:1). As a matter of facts, the electoral campaign was marred by some serious violations of electoral integrity principles, with some instances of intimidation and violence (such as the stabbing and shooting of opposition party members, and the burning of opposition candidate's offices). Moreover, law enforcement officers used the former Soviet Administrative Code in a questionable manner in an attempt to limit the campaign activity of the opposition parties.[28] Other malfeasances concerned the dominant position of the CUG, which could dispose of much more media coverage and by a privileged position to use administrative resources. Finally, on the Election Day, observers reported many irregularities, which included ballot-box stuffing, group and family voting, *Armenian carousel*[29]. Subsequently, other serious

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[28] Several buses belonging to the Revival Party were impounded on 11 October. The original reason given for incident was fear of contamination through contravention of veterinary regulations, despite the fact that the buses did not contain any livestock or produce. Article 120, used to impound the buses, provided only for financial penalties rather than restricting movement. (OSCE/ODIHR Georgia 1999:19)

[29] *Armenian carousel* is an electoral malpractice that consists of buses load of people that turn from one polling station to the next one in order to vote multiple times. According to some, it has been firstly introduced under Kocharyan's regime (1998-2008) in Armenia. It must not be confused with 'carousel voting' that is a method of illegally influencing the vote of an individual. A ballot form is illegally procured and marked with the desirable candidate's name or the party. The marked ballot is given to a voter. The voter obtains a regular ballot in the precinct where he/she is registered and proceeds to cast his ballot. Instead of casting the regular ballot, the voter casts the marked ballot provided illegally. The voter then returns the unmarked regular ballot to the person providing the marked ballot and the process is repeated with another voter.

violations of the electoral integrity principles were observed in the post-election phase, in particular concerning tampering of electoral results' protocols.

However, thanks to the electoral code reforms conducted before this scrutiny, the legal framework was 'sufficient to conduct genuine multiparty elections if applied in a non-selective and transparent manner' (OSCE/ODIHR Georgia 1999:1). Yet, 'regrettably, some of the activities of the election administration lacked transparency and the CEC failed to achieve a broad consensus in its decision making' (OSCE/ODIHR Georgia 1991:2). Therefore, for the first time since the first election, it is now possible to observe a growing gap between the legal framework and its implementation. Indeed, if on one side Shevardnadze's administration was looking into a broader inclusion in the Western international organization, on the other side he did not want to fully transform Georgia into a working democratic country. In other words, Shevardnadze's administration was wracked by the necessity to please the West, demonstrating commitment to electoral integrity principles and at the same time to preserve its political machine.[30]

The same dichotomy between a sufficient formal legal framework and the shortcomings in its implementation was observed during the 2000 presidential election. The OSCE/ODIHR mission concluded that 'fundamental freedoms were generally respected during the election campaign and candidates were able to express their views. However, further progress is necessary for Georgia to fully meet its commitments as a participating State of the OSCE. In particular, problems were identified in the following areas: the interference by State authorities in the election process; deficient election legislation; not fully representative election administration; and unreliable voter registers.' (OSCE/ODIHR Georgia 2000:1). In this election, which was marred also by serious frauds – in particular on the Election Day (ballot box stuffing) and during votes counting,

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[30] Author's interview with former Georgian MP in Tbilisi (April and May 2015)

Shevardnadze could confirm the presidency with over 82% of the votes.

Subsequently the legal framework ruling the election was amended and reformed several times, especially thanks to the prospect of further scrutiny in the future.[31] In August 2001 the parliament passed a comprehensive United Electoral Code (UEC) in order to harmonize the legal framework of the elections. This adoption was seen as 'a major and important step forward in securing democratic standards for elections for representative government in Georgia' (Venice Commission 2002:9). However, the UEC was subsequently and repeatedly amended so that 'the text of the law is very extensive and complex and involves risks of serious problems arising during its application' (Venice Commission 2003:3). As a matter of fact, according to both international and local electoral experts the UEC was over-regulating the scrutiny, which could lead to misinterpretations or inconsistent implementations[32].

The Years of High Western Pressure

The incapacity of Shevardnadze's administration to fully establish a democratic regime as well, as the accusation of being at the top of a corruptive system, had some consequences at the international level. Indeed, since early 2000s Western actors started to gradually take distances from Shevardnadze and, at the same time, increasing pressure over the regime. Before the beginning of the 2003 parliamentary elections' campaign, the American government, through its Ambassador to Georgia Richard Miles and the special emissary from the Bush Administration James Baker (who visited the country in the summer 2003), called for real democratic elections and encouraged the inclusion of civil society groups in the electoral process[33] and the conduction of parallel voting tabulation. These

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[31] 17 October 1997, 3 March 1999, 25 June 1999 and 20 July 1999

[32] Author's interview in Tbilisi (April and May 2015)

[33] It has been estimated that by 2000 there were 3,000 registered civil society organizations in Georgia, with both the United States and the Open Society Institute. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funded important organizations such as ISFED, the Eurasia Foundation, Horizonty, the International Republican

provisions could challenge the government capacity to rig parliamentary elections (Macfarlane 2009). As a matter of fact, the lack of political will to fully implement the electoral legal framework (Usupashvili 2004) was one of the factors that determined the outbreak of the Rose Revolutions (Levitsky and Way 2010).

The OSCE/ODIHR mission observed a worsening of the electoral management in the country and concluded that the election 'fell short of a number of OSCE commitments and other international standards for democratic elections' (OSCE/ODIHR Georgia 2003:1). Shevardnadze's administration recurred to a higher amount of electoral malfeasances because he was suffering from many defections within its party. Since the early 2000s, because of growing intraparty discontent, which provoked a split between 'reformist' and the rest of the party (Nodia and Tsevsdzadze 2003) as well as international pressure, some elites started to distance themselves from Shevardnadze, showing that his system was no more efficient and united. In this scenario, the electoral uncertainty increased and in order to cope with it authorities had to carry out far more fraudulent activities. However, this inaccuracy about the possible consequences demonstrated that Shevardnadze did not have a real understanding of the importance of the elections as an institution; rather he conceived them as 'a sideshow' (Bunce and Wolchik 2011:163). Due to this understanding Shevardnadze went beyond what was acceptable in terms of electoral malfeasances and tried to totally dismantle the barrier of the electoral integrity. This attempt proved to be disastrous, as by Georgia 2003 was included in several Western organizations and had signed new bilateral agreements with tutelage of democratic principles. Shevardnadze did not realize that the international structure in which Georgia was inserted had changed.

The West was no longer able to tolerate a further deterioration of the electoral integrity in Georgia and the choice by

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Institute, and the National Democratic Institute, and through the work of these organizations made significant contributions to political change in Georgia. (Bunce and Wolchik 2011:162).

Shevardnadze's administration to increase electoral malfeasances was firmly condemned by the international observers. The OSCE/ODIHR mission published a very harsh preliminary report over the conduction of the parliamentary election. The preliminary report, published the day after the election, begins with a laconic sentence: '[t]he 2 November parliamentary elections in Georgia fell short of a number of OSCE commitments and other international standards for democratic elections. Inaccuracies in the voter list seriously challenged the fundamental guarantee of universal and equal suffrage, and lessened voters' confidence in the State administration.' (OSCE/ODIHR Georgia Preliminary 2003:1). Moreover, the diffusion of the results of the parallel vote tabulation showed that the opposition party led by Mikhail Saakashvili – the National Movement – scored higher than Shevardnadze's party, whereas the official results were claiming the opposite.[34] These conclusions produced great consequences both domestically and internationally, with 'clear signs of "state capture" appeared' (Gegeshidze, 2011:32). The United States and the European Union became very active in pressuring the government because to get rid of Shevardnadze was a matter 'of short-term politics' (Bunce and Wolchik 2011:163). Georgia came under the spotlights of international attention and the government was suffering from both Western and domestic pressures. These events led to the dismissal of Shevardnadze and the system he was responsible for implementing.

The Rose Revolution has been analysed from many standpoints, last but not least by the body of literature concerned with diffusionism (Beissinger 2007 Bunce and Wolchik 2011). It was connected by other electoral revolutions that took place from the late-1990s in different post-Soviet countries. For the sake of the argument my aim is not to provide an alternative explanation about those events. Rather, my concern is to focus on the increasing Western pressure over Georgia and the Shevardnadze's administration. Of course, there are plenty of

[34] Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT) assigned to the National Movement 26,6% and to the For a New Georgia (a coalition supporting Shevardnadze) 18,9. Official results assigned to the National Movement 18.08% and to the For a New Georgia 21,3 (source: Welt 2010).

elements that played a role in the successful outcome of that revolution, even included the fact that many policemen guarding the Parliament did not receive their salary regularly. Therefore, in order to find causal patterns one can always posit her/his attention to macro or micro factors. Yet, the scope of this section is not to explain regime change, rather to evaluate the level of Western pressure over the country.

As I affirmed in the previous chapter, the Rose Revolution highlighted the fact that the West's interest increased and that it was able to unite and coordinate the pressure over the government. Saakashvili had to provide signals both at the international and domestic levels concerning his willingness to democratize the country. Soon after he seized power, Saakashvili promised a huge set of reforms and called for new elections to legitimize his new role. Therefore, the expectations were very high; as I presented in the previous chapter, at the international level this election could really signal a new hope for the country and for this region in the post-Soviet space that was limping in the process of democratization.

After the Rose Revolution, Saakashvili soon called for new extraordinary presidential elections. The Western leverage was very high and so were international expectations concerning the new political elite in the country. At the same time the population expected a real change. The public's participation in these "new turn" elections was massive, with over 80% turnout. As a matter of fact, the OSCE/ODIHR mission reported that 'In contrast to the 2 November 2003 parliamentary elections that were characterized by systematic and widespread fraud, the authorities generally displayed the collective political will to conduct a more genuine democratic election process' (OSCE/ODIHR Georgia 2004:1). The election was the most transparent since the election of President Shevardnadze in 1995, which 'restored public trust in the electoral system' (Jones 2005:307). Saakashvili was elected president with 96% of the preferences and his impressive victory was largely due to the absence of realistic opposition candidates. In terms of frauds and malpractices there were a number of relatively minor problems, such as local government officials encouraging support for the

new 'establishment' coalition (the National Movement-United Democrats bloc), inadequate verification of voters, opaque counting processes, and some ballot stuffing (OSCE/ODIHR Georgia 2004a, Jones 2005). This election was not a real test for Saakashvil's democratic intentions as the scrutiny was organized under special circumstances, which followed the revolution.

The following parliamentary election scheduled for March 2004 provided with a better idea of the electoral integrity during the first period of Saakashvili government. Yet, this election suffered mostly from the almost total absence of real opposition parties that could challenge the re-named National Movement (NM) – Democratic bloc, which were decimated or suffered from low level of legitimation after the Rose Revolution. Due to this factor, the NM gained 135 of 150 seats, changing definitively the political landscape in Georgia. The OSCE/ODIHR sent again a huge observation mission to monitor the election (more than 400 observers). In the final report, OSCE/ODIHR's experts discloses the unattended expectations 'future elections will be more genuine indicators of Georgia's commitment to democratic elections' (OSCE/ODIHR Georgia 2004b:1). The assessment was more based on the observation of electoral malpractices rather than of frauds. In particular, the OSCE/ODIHR report identified some key issues of concern: first, the continuing lack of a clear separation between State administration and political party structures, and the ongoing potential for the misuse of State administrative resources. Second, the inability to ensure the balanced composition of election commissions at all levels. Third, the interference by some local authorities in the functioning of a number of lower-level commissions, thereby lessening their independence (OSCE/ODIHR Georgia 2004b:3). According to the anecdotal evidence that I gathered during my field research in Georgia, Saakashvili tried to alter and manipulate electoral integrity through a different mix of malpractices, in order to elude international criticism.[35] I am going to analyze in more detail this tendency in the paragraph concerning learning mechanisms.

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[35] Author's interviews with electoral experts in Tbilisi (May 2015).

The extraordinarily Presidential elections in January 2004 and Parliamentary, in March of the same year, were ruled by the UEC slightly amended. Even the CEC model remained unchanged. Yet, soon after the revolution, in early December 2003, the interim president and speaker of the Parliament, Nino Burjanadze, replaced the five members appointed by President Shevardnadze in August and the chairperson of the CEC. The replacement took place even at the lower-level commissions. For example, in 49 districts, the District Electoral Commission (DEC) chairs formally resigned and a total of 339 DEC members were dismissed, not always voluntarily (OSCE 2004). The new CEC's president Zurab Chiaberashvili was the former Executive Director of the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy and an active observer during the 2003 elections. His appointment was a signal for local and international observers about Saakashvili's willingness to democratize. Yet, the general composition of the CEC was not fair and it was unbalanced. Thus the conductions of the first two elections in a renowned political context did not sort out the expected results by democratic stakeholders.

After these elections Saakashvili started immediately to implement many reforms in several sectors and changed the 1995 Constitution. Indeed, until 2004 Georgia was a presidential republic in which the head of state was also the executive and had no right to dissolve Parliament. Saakashvili sought to change the system and he eventually was able to create a cabinet of ministers and the post of Prime Minister while at the same time giving the President the right to dissolve the legislature, and deprive the parliament of the power to amend the budget or to question the government's annual report on budgetary obligations. It could be argued that Saakashvili created a 'superpresidentialist' regime (Areshidze, 2008). International observer soon criticised the choice as 'the new constitutional arrangements led to a greater concentration of authority in the hands of the President at the expense of a balance of powers' (IDEA 2005:5). Moreover, Saakashvili's administration started to modify the electoral legal framework in order to secure power (Jobelius 2011). The electoral law was amended several times in the intra-election period between 2004 and 2008. In particular,

the parliament modified the relationship between majority and proportional representation six times, always in favor of the ruling party UNM (Lanskoy and Areshidze 2008). Moreover, even the CEC was substantially reformed: the seven CEC members were professionals appointed by the parliament and nominated by the President. However, in 2007, following international advice by the Council of Europe and the Venice Commission the seven political parties represented in the parliament re-attained the possibility of having a representative in the CEC (parties which are represented by a faction in the current Parliament or received at least 4 per cent of the vote during the previous parliamentary elections). Thus, the new CEC had 13 members (professional members' posts were reduced from 6 to 5). However, the members within the CEC were not considered at the same level and some of them were often excluded from the decision making process,[36] creating a *de facto* subgroup in the core of the CEC. This symbolizes the fact that Saakashvili was particularly sensitive to Western leverage. Yet, he was able to find new ways to elude the guidelines (barriers) concerning good-management of electoral practices.

Finally, the government seized its power over many media outlets, including Rustavi 2, which proved to be a determinant player in the demise of the Shevardnadze government. The freedom of the media decreased abruptly over the course of a few years and Transparency International published a report claiming that the Georgian media landscape was less free and pluralistic during the Saakashvili's years than before the Rose Revolution (Transparency International Georgia 2009). Academic literature subsequently highlighted how Georgia was not actually taking the necessary steps toward democracy, but instead it was heading toward some forms of authoritarianism (Arakelian and Nodia 2005, Dolidze 2007, Levitsky and Way 2010); according to some analysts (Fairbanks and Gugushvili 2013, Filippini 2005, Di Quirico 2013), Russian presidential model would have inspired Saakashvili constitutional reform.

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[36] Author's interview with a former CEC member (Tbilisi, May 2015).

Meanwhile Saakashvili continued to please the West through his discourse aimed at reassuring both the West and an his domestic population about his willingness to modernize and democratize the country (Jobelius 2011). The Bush administration granted its endorsement to Saakashvili and the President of the United States accomplished a historic visit to Tbilisi in May 2005, where he pronounced his discourse concerning Georgia as a "beacon of democracy". For Saakashvili, this was one of his highest moments of his foreign policy. For the President of Georgia, NATO was the first foreign policy objective whereas the European Union was a longer-term project (Khidasheli 2010). It was easier for Saakashvili to combine his domestic political project within NATO integration, as it did not envisage any kind of conditionality in terms of democratic development. [37] Moreover, since its independence Georgia had suffered from a constant sense of insecurity (Nodia 2005), which could have been overcome only through a defensive framework such as NATO. Whereas, the European Commission could not grant any form of defensive framework, and in addition it was pressuring Georgia for to fully implement international standards in many sectors, including elections. This is evident in the European Commission Communication of December 2008, where it was clearly affirmed that 'a sufficient level of progress in terms of democracy, the rule of law and human rights, and in particular evidence that the electoral legislative framework and practice are in compliance with international standards, and full cooperation with the Council of Europe, OSCE/ODIHR and human rights bodies will be a precondition for starting negotiations and for deepening relations thereafter' (European Commission 2008:4). Therefore, since the parliamentary election in 2004 the Western pressure was no longer united and held different objectives, which allowed Saakashvili to gain some margins to carry out his controversial reforms.

However, Saakashvili's government faced a first massive domestic political crisis in the fall of 2007, when part of the Georgian population started to manifest openly against the lack of representation within the state apparatus. As a matter of fact,

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[37] Author's interview with IR scholar in Tbilisi (May 2015).

one of the main failures of the Saakashvili administration was the population's impossibility to participate in the political sphere, even at local level (Jawad, 2008). This triggered the feelings of powerless and betrayal among the population excluded by the Saakashvili's political machine. The crisis was initiated by the arrest of a former member of the government, Irakli Okruashvili, on the 28th of September 2007, who had just announced the creation of an opposition party (Movement of United Georgia) few days earlier. Mr. Okruashvili was detained with several charges concerning his period in office as Minister of Defense; in response to this, many members of parliament passed to the opposition's seats inflating the ranks of the Movement of United Georgia. This political group (as it never registered as political party) organized one of the largest demonstrations in contemporary Georgia, which ended up in violent clashes with police. The government declared the state of emergency and some opposition media were closed down. Saakashvili explained that he had to crack down on protests and adopt the state of emergency because according to him there was the peril of a Russian backed coup. [38] The international community promptly reacted with unity against the government crackdown on protests and media: NATO, OSCE, the EU, Council of Europe and Western governments all expressed serious concerns and called for lifting the emergency and reopening media outlets (Gegeshidze 2011). The day after the declaration of the state of emergency, Saakashvili called a snap presidential election for January 5, 2008. With this decision, he was able to calm down domestic and external pressure (New York Times 9/11/2007), but at the same time he did not give the opportunity to the opponents to fully prepare for the political campaign (Freedom House Georgia 2008).

The extraordinary Presidential election on 5 January 2008 was a real test for Saakashvili's grip on the country. The OSCE/ODIHR sent a huge observation mission composed by almost 500 observers. According to both domestic and international observers, this election was a great improvement

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[38] 'Georgian President Addresses Nation after Unrest in Tbilisi', 7 November 2007, Rustavi-2 TV, BBC Monitoring.

for Georgian democracy: OSCE/ODIHR wrote that 'this election represented the first genuinely competitive post-independence presidential election' (OSCE/ODIHR 2008b:1). Saakashvili won with 53,3% of the vote, allowing the incumbent to avoid a second round. Yet there were some shortcomings, including the fact that the UEC was amended several times just few weeks before the elections (a practice against the electoral integrity). One of the most relevant modifications to the UEC concerning presidential elections was the abolishment of one-third turnout for second round to be valid. Nevertheless, according to some opposition candidates there were alleged malpractices therefore they claimed the elections to be unfair and did not accept the results (Freedom House 2009 – Georgia).

In this political environment, the opposition parties pressurized the government in order to anticipate the Parliamentary elections, which eventually were rescheduled from November to May 2008. The Western leverage was still very high and the OSCE/ODIHR sent an observation mission with more than 550 observers. The OSCE/ODIHR EOM assessed 'compliance of the election process with OSCE commitments, other international standards and domestic legislation' (OSCE/ODIHR Georgia 2008b:1). Yet, the IEOM 'identified a number of problems which made this implementation uneven and incomplete' (*ibid*). As a matter of fact, one of the greatest sources of criticism was the fact that in the run up of the scrutiny, the UNM amended the Constitution and was able to generate more changes in the UEC than in the previous elections. The Constitutional amendment increased the number of majoritarian MPs who would be elected in single-mandate constituencies from 50 to 75 and reduced the number of MPs elected through the proportional system from 100 to 75. According to Areshidze, this move signaled that 'the UNM was losing confidence in its performance in the proportional party-list vote but felt that it could lure local power brokers into standing in single-mandate constituencies under the UNM party banner' (Areshidze, 2008:161). The UNM claimed that it pushed for this reform because it thought the electoral system was ineffective, and thus a more district representation was required. Yet, the Georgian constitution did not make this difference, all MPs are elected as national representatives and

legislators, not representatives of their districts (Transparency International Georgia 2008). The UNM and Saakashvili approach to electoral affairs 'amendments to the electoral system had created a situation in which there was no consensus between the government and the opposition about the rules of political competition' (Areshidze 2008:162). The election's results were strongly in favor the UNM, which conquered 119 over 150 seats (reaching almost 60% of preferences). Again there were some elected members of the parliament who contested the way the government managed the elections and they decided to boycott the parliament.

Soon after the election, the government had the opportunity to launch a huge set of reforms that radically altered the constitution, and which would transform the country from a presidential to a parliamentarian system. According to the new regulations, the prime minister had exclusive influence on the composition of the cabinet, and also on the appointment of regional governors. The head of government had also the right to countersign presidential decrees. Despite the fact that the international community endorsed these reforms, the reforms should be seen as Saakashvili's attempt to keep the power. Indeed, the incumbent could not run for another term as President, but could run for the post of prime minister, in a political shuffle that recalls 'Putinism' (Gono 2010, Fairbanks and Gugushvili 2013). On 15 October 2010 the Georgian Parliament finally accepted the amendments to transform the political system. These new provisions had to enter into force in October 2013, after the Presidential election.

A New Regional Equilibrium

In this thesis I am not going to delve in the dynamics of the war with Russia in August 2008, since there are several other analyses on it (Nygren 2011, Krastev 2009, De Wall 2013, Boden 2011, Nodia 2012). Nevertheless, for the sake of the argument it is important to consider some aspects. The war with Russia was a 'moment of truth' (Nodia 2012: 724) for Georgia, for the region (Kakachia 2009), but even for the broader international system's equilibrium. First of all, what changed after the August war was Georgia's perspective to be integrated into a Western security

structure. Secondly, it was blatant that Russia was prepared to use force to safeguard its interests in neighboring regions. As Nodia reports, 'The August war […] constituted an open challenge to the most powerful bloc of countries, loosely referred to as the *international community*.' (Nodia 2012:724 – italic added). Russia decided to actively stand out of the international community (the *oligarchy* for Betrand Badie – 2011), contesting its absolute role of international legitimacy manager. Thirdly, the West, and in particular the United States, did not come to defend Georgia when Russian troops invaded the country. Saakashvili believed that his allies in European capitals or Washington would have sustained him (De Wall 2013). In particular, his 'friend' George W. Bush, whose administration eventually managed to avoid Russia's troops entering Tbilisi.

These developments had some repercussions on Western leverage and linkage, as it was clear that Georgia's chances to continue its path toward NATO's integration were effectively zero.[39] Moreover, Saakashvili realized that his country could not rely anymore on the United States for the quest of security. This is one of the reasons why the war enhanced the profile of the European Union in the region (Nodia 2012), which became a key actor in mediating between Russia and Georgia during the war (Forsberg and Seppo 2011) and eventually led the monitoring mission (the European Union Monitoring Missions –EUMM) to the borders of the two breakaway regions (South Ossetia and Abkhazia). Moreover, in a speech by Bettina Ferrero-Waldner, the European Commissioner for External Relations to the European Parliament, after the extraordinary European Council that followed the August War, claimed that 'Il est important que l'Union se montre prête à apporter un soutien réel à la Géorgie, correspondant à notre détermination politique d'approfondir nos relations' (Ferrero-Waldner 2008). Less than a year after the conflict the European Union firmly strengthen its position in the country (Kakachia 2009), with the clear idea to foster deeper integration with the region. Thus, the Western leverage and

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[39] This became evident during the NATO summit in December 2008, where Georgia was not offered with any type of membership perspective (Nygren 2011).

linkage changed after the August war. The United States lost its prominent position and the European Union gained new leverage in the country.

From a domestic standpoint, the war helped the government in two ways: on the one hand to regain popular support and on the other to continue consolidating a strong executive. As a matter of fact the war with Russia was not a major source of instability for the government *per se*; taking into consideration data from Caucasus Barometer concerning "trust in the president" it shows that since 2008 the percentage of people that trusted or fully trusted the president was constantly rising till 2012.[40] According to Nodia, 'save for the separatist regions, the results of the war were not as dramatic as the initial shock had suggested' (Nodia, 2012: 723). Additionally, the invasion of Georgia by Russian troops reinvigorated Western support for the regime, both financially and politically. This huge assistance (4.5 billion dollars) had also mitigated the effects of the global economic crisis (Gegeshidze 2011, Papava 2012). Saakashvili's grip over the country at the end of the 2008 was stronger than the year before.

In the following years, Saakashvili pursued his reforming projects aimed to transform the presidency for a greatly empowered premiership and remain in charge once his second and final term would have expired in 2013. In order to carry out this reform the Constitution had to be changed. The amendments would endow the new post of prime minister with significant new powers in foreign and domestic policy and make him 'a de facto chief executive' (Grono 2010:2), at the expense of the president, who would retain the role of the head of state. According to the new regulations, the prime minister would have the exclusive influence on the composition of the cabinet, and also on the appointment of regional governors. This reform, was harshly criticized by opposition parties, who did not collaborate to the reform. But the reform was welcomed by the

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[40] Figures concerning people trusting and fully trusting the president (total) 2008: 51%; in 2009: 48; in 2010: 56%; in 2011: 58% (data from Caucasus barometer).

Venice Commission, which stated that it 'provide for several important improvements and significant steps in the right direction […] nevertheless it would be desirable to further strengthen the powers of parliament' (Civil.ge 18/10/2010). The parliament passed the amendments on the 15[th of] October 2010, and entered into force upon the inauguration of the next president, who was scheduled for October 2013.

The other reforms conducted by Saakashvili were not considered to be inclusive or accurate. For example, the judicial reform did not change both popular and experts' perceptions about judges' independence (Gegeshidze 2011, MacFarlane 2011). Other sources of concern came from the constrained freedom of the media sector, state power's abuses and limited civil oversight of the government by the parliament (see MacFarlane 2011). For these reasons, during the years prior to the 2012 elections, Georgia's political scene polarized as opposition parties did not recognize the 2008 parliamentary election's results. Civic movements and opposition political parties organized several huge demonstrations in 2009 and 2011, which called for Saakashvili's resignation. These times Saakashvili, aware of international criticism for his choice to violently repress the 2007 demonstrations, did not recur to extreme violent measures to cope with the protesters.[41]

In the run up of the parliamentary election, the Parliament adopted a New Election Code in 2011. This new code, despite addressing some of the recommendations made by the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the Venice Commission (see OSCE, Council of Europe and Venice Commission 2011), still had several important but unaddressed issues. One of the most important was the discrepancy among electoral districts in terms of population and the number of MPs elected, which dramatically altered representation percentages. For what concerns the CEC, the reform reduced the competencies of the

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[41] For example during the 2009 demonstrations, Saakashvili preferred to isolate the demonstrators, which were stationing on Rustaveli Avenue (one of the main roads in Tbilisi). After some weeks, protests decreased as many citizens started blaming them for causing high problems to the city's traffic circulation.

EMB, for example the CEC was not more responsible for managing voter lists, and for media and campaign finance monitoring (other institutions became entitled: e.g. the brand new Commission for Ensuring the Accuracy of the Voter Lists). According to both domestic and international observers[42], this reform allowed for a better management of the elections; since that time the CEC became competent and professional.

The 2012 parliamentary election's political campaign was characterized by different elements, which contributed to hider Saakashvili's project to swap the presidency to the premiership. First of all, there was the presence of a new opposition political party, Georgian Dream, founded by Bidzina Ivanishvili, a billionaire businessman. However, Ivanishvili was not a Georgian citizen (he hold a French passport) when he launched the party in April 2012. In fact, President Saakashvili tried to hinder his political project by revoking Ivanishvili's citizenship in October 2011, just two weeks after he declared he would enter politics to oppose the Government (Agenda.ge 28/01/2014). This choice provoked high international pressure (Freedom House Georgia 2013), including from Russia, which was allegedly endorsing Ivanishvili (Eurasianet.org 11/10/2011). Eventually, Saakashvili was pressurized to sign a constitutional amendment in May 2012 that allowed European Union citizens to form political parties in the country. Thus, Ivanishvili was able to lead Georgian Dream at the upcoming elections.

The second element that characterized the political campaign was the release of some videotapes concerning tortures and human rights abuses on some prisoners in Georgian jails just before the election. A national TV broadcast made the scandal public on September the 18th. The government reacted by calling for the arrest of the guards involved. Yet, a former prison officer, Vladimir Bedukadze, who leaked the video, claimed that the tortures have been ordered by the Minister of the Interior Bacho Akhalaia. Eventually the Minister resigned just a few weeks before the election. The disclosure of the videotape triggered

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[42] Authors interviews with local and international experts in Tbilisi, Paris (May and June 2015).

public indignation and protests. At the international level Western actors harshly criticized the episodes: The EU immediately condemned the physical and sexual abuse of Georgian prison inmates and Anders Fogh Rasmussen (at the time secretary-general of NATO) and warned that 'the October elections will test the NATO-aspirant country's democratic credentials' (Eurobserver 21/09/2012). Therefore, on the eve of the 2012 parliamentary elections, the Western leverage returned to a very high level with regard to Georgia.

In line with Constitutional requirements, President Saakashvili announced on August the 1ˢᵗ that Parliamentary elections would be held on October the 1ˢᵗ. The opposition coalition set up by Georgian Dream (GD), won the 2012 parliamentary election with almost 55% of the vote, acquiring 85 out of 150 seats. According to the new legislation, the parliament would have elected the new cabinet after the 2013 presidential election. Until then there was a 'cohabitation' of a parliament with GD majority and a President from UNM. The election was considered to be 'an important step in consolidating the conduct of democratic elections in line with OSCE and Council of Europe commitments, although certain key issues remain to be addressed' (OSCE/ODIHR Georgia 2012:1). The main sources of concern came from episodes of intimidation and harassment of opposition activists, and the blurred boundaries between state activities and the campaign of the ruling party (cf. OSCE/ODIHR Georgia 2012). Moreover, vote-buying was reported to be used both by UNM and Georgian Bloc (for a more detailed analysis concerning vote-buying in Georgia see next session). For the first time since independence an election, considered in line with electoral integrity principles, provoked a power change. The Georgian Dream Bloc formed a new majority in the parliament, which elected Ivanishvili as prime minister, which had been the real center of the executive power since Constitutional reform.

This outcome, which was somehow unexpected, raised both domestic and international expectations over the next Presidential election scheduled in 2013. Subsequently, at the 2013 Presidential election, the UNM candidate lost the election and

eventually the GD candidate, Giorgi Margvelashvili was elected. Overall, the election was assessed for 'its compliance with OSCE commitments and other international standards for democratic elections as well as national legislation' (OSCE/ODIHR Georgia 2013:3). From the legal framework standpoint, numerous amendments were made to the electoral legislation in 2013, which addressed the majority of OSCE/ODIHR recommendations (including more safeguards to reduce the potential for abuse of administrative resources and provisions for more equitable conditions for campaigning). The amendments were adopted by consensus in the parliament and also incorporated most of the recommendations made by NGOs (OSCE/ODIHR Georgia 2013). Moreover, the media environment was more open than in the previous parliamentary elections, and during the election campaign and the Election Day there were few episodes of electoral manipulation (such as vote-buying).

In less than two years Saakashvili was overwhelmed by opposition forces and subsequently left the country in to escape prosecution for the crimes committed during his presidency. There has been some analysis on Saakashvili's downfall, and some of them look also at Western pressure as a factor that contributed to his fall (Fairbanks and Gugushvili 2013, Hale 2015). As far as electoral integrity and western pressure are concerned, it is clear that under huge international pressure Saakashvili was forced to democratize the electoral process with reforms that could not go against the electoral integrity (such as the swap to parliamentary system and the improvements in the electoral code). Over Saakashvili's Georgia the Western actors imposed strict barriers over the electoral management, which forced him finally to accept the results. In facts, since the August 2008 war, Saakashvili and the UNM were not able to fully implement their political project (modernization without democratization), and they had subsequently 'imprisoned themselves in a box of democratic rules' (Fairbanks and Gugushvili 2013:121) from which they could not escape. Yet, as I am going to show in the next paragraph, Saakashvili tried to elude international criticism on electoral management by innovating and learning new ways to rig the elections.

Learning Episodes in Georgia

Looking at the electoral malpractices in Georgia it is possible to trace the evolution of electoral mismanagement in Georgia by examining the main discontinuities between Shevardadze and Saakashvili's approaches to electoral misconduct. Shevardnadze, whose style of electoral manipulation could be defined as elementary or brazen, focused his efforts on rigging the election on election day (OSCE 1999, OSCE/ODIHR 2003a, Mitchell 2004) when malpractices were explicit, using ballot-box stuffing, ballot stealing, ballot burning, 'Armenian carousels,'[45] and the falsification of electoral registers. He involved the police and other administrative personnel in his schemes.

In contrast, Saakashvili's attempts at fraud and malpractice were more hidden, occurring throughout the campaign, rather than strictly on Election Day. He focused on manipulating voters, rather than falsifying the votes. While phenomena such as ballot-box stuffing, ballot stealing or burning, and Armenia carousels decreased at the beginning of Saakashvili era, this evolution does not mean that the country became more democratic (Arakelian and Nodia 2005, Dolidze 2007, Levitsky and Way 2010). Instead, it signals an evolution of malpractice, likely triggered by two factors. Firstly, Saakashvili wanted to look like a democratising leader to the international community. Georgia relied extensively on Western international aid, and international donors were wagering on Saakashvili's Rose Revolution to be the success story imitated in other countries (Beissinger, 2007).

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[45] *Armenian carousel* (in Georgia and in other former Soviet Union countries, or *voting carousel*) is an electoral malpractice that consists of buses load of people that turn from one polling station to the next one in order to vote multiple times. According to some, it has been firstly introduced under Kocharyan's regime (1998-2008) in Armenia. This practice was firstly introduced under Kocharyan's regime and subsequently diffused in several other post-Soviet countries including Russia (in 2000) and in Ukraine (in 2004). However, similar practices can be found in many other contexts (Birch 2011), yet for what concerns the regional South Caucasian context it can be assessed that this type of malpractice was firstly introduced in Armenia and subsequently in Georgia: indeed, because of its origins, in Georgia this practice is known as Armenian Carousel.

Secondly, the revolution that brought Saakashvili to power was an electoral revolution, which was triggered by the discovery of massive fraud and electoral malpractices carried out during the 2003 election. As such, Saakashvili stressed that he would have led Georgia to a full democratic consolidation and to deepen the integration within Western organisations (such as NATO and the European Union) creating high expectations regarding the electoral integrity, which could not be disregarded.[44]

Saakashvili did undertake some important reforms. For example, to signal his commitment to democracy at the international level he pushed for full integration within the European Union and NATO. Domestically, he undertook a wide range of projects aimed at reducing corruption and inefficiencies. In the electoral sphere, he urged for the reformation of election administration in the country, which was seen as partisan and corrupt under Shevardnadze's rule. In 2005, the government set up a new permanent Central Election Commission (CEC) with commissioners that were appointed by all the parliamentary parties. Yet, despite the new CEC's modern look, there were informal internal dynamics which had the effect of decreasing the organization's impartiality and neutrality, [45] ultimately keeping the electoral management body partisan and partial. In fact, the members within the CEC were not considered at the same level and some of them, those from the opposition party, were often excluded from the decision making process, creating de facto a subgroup in the core of the CEC).

There are three major examples of learning and innovation in the Georgian case. The first concerns the media sector. Before the Rose Revolution there was some, albeit limited, media openness. *Rustavi 2*, the private broadcaster founded in 1994, and other smaller media outlets played a crucial role criticizing Shevardnadze's government. Yet, soon after Saakashvili came to power, the freedom of the media began to falter, leaving only the *Kavkasia* channel a non-pro-government voice (Transparency

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[44] Author's interview in Tbilisi (April 2015).
[45] Author's interview with a former member of the CEC in Tbilisi (April 2015).

International Georgia 2013). By the summer of 2004, *Rustavi 2* was under the control of a different owner that was connected to Saakashvili. In a detailed analysis, journalist and coordinator of the Committee to Protect Journalists [46] Nina Ognianova highlighted how Saakashvili's tactics to take control of *Rustavi 2* were extremely similar to Putin's tactics to seize NTV control in the early 2000s.[47] In both cases, she reported that there have been behind the scenes pressure, which led the owners handing over the broadcasts to media tycoons allied to the administrations. Eventually, in both cases the once pugnacious and outspoken broadcasts became reliably pro-government. Additional evidence of learning comes from the friendly relationship between Saakashvili and Russian President Vladimir Putin before the August 2008 war. The two presidents had met several times and at the outset of his presidency Saakashvili claimed that he was fascinated by Putin's *vertical vlasti (power vertical),*[48] of which the NTV takeover was one of the main pillars (Oates 2006, Ognianova 2008, Hale 2010,). Indeed, many domestic opposition leaders criticized the government's constitutional reform as inspired by the Russian model (Arakelian and Nodia 2005, Dolidze 2007). There is thus anecdotal evidence in support of Ognianova's argument, which is consistent with the presence of learning process.

Another important element introduced by Saakashvili to manipulate voters was the installation of video cameras inside the polling station, first used in local elections in 2006. The decision was allegedly taken by the electoral administration and was aimed at curtailing fraud in polling stations. However, voters often felt intimidated by the presence of video cameras. In some cases, supporters of incumbent parties warned voters that

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[46] The Committee to Protect Journalists is an independent, nonprofit organization that promotes press freedom worldwide.

[47] NTV was one of the first broadcast televisions that were born in post-Soviet Russia. It was particularly critical of the Russian political leadership in particular during the first Chechen war (1994). It proved to be very effective in affecting public opinion. Before Putin's first election (1999), NTV refused to cooperate with the Kremlin in order to build a favourable public image of Putin.

[48] Author's interview in Tbilisi (April 2015).

they would be able to see how they voted.[49] Eventually the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) recommended reconsidering this practice "so as not to compromise the secrecy of the vote or confidence in the process, and eliminate a potential factor for intimidation against voters" (OSCE/ODIHR 2006a:23). Nonetheless, this practice continued to take place until the 2010 municipal elections. There were no regulations enacted concerning the usage of the videotapes, which were not guaranteed for public use in the case of electoral disputes. This type of voter manipulation was first adopted in Azerbaijan for the 2003 Presidential election, and was subsequently introduced in Georgia (2006), Albania (2009) Ukraine (2012) and Russia (2012). This suggests a diffusion of a specific mechanism aimed at influencing voters' choices.

Another example of electoral misconduct during Saakashvili's tenure is vote buying. In order to identify the impact of vote buying on election outcomes, this chapter analyzed all OSCE/ODIHR reports from Shevardnadze's era until the most recent election. It found that during Shevardnadze's tenure, this practice was almost insignificant, with only a few allegations of vote buying (see ISFED 1995, OSCE/ODIHR 1999 and OSCE/ODIHR 2003a). Since the 2006 municipal elections, however, there has been a constant growth of vote buying as a tool to influence the election's outcomes (see OSCE/ODIHR 2006a, OSCE/ODIHR 2008a, OSCE/ODIHR 2008b, OSCE/ODIHR 2012). This type of malpractice is very difficult to observance and to deterrence (Birch 2011a: 34), but is also one of the most expensive practices of electoral manipulation to conduct. During Saakashvili's time, his party, the United National Movement, was the main party to be accused of vote buying, likely because the party had the financial capacity to engage in this practice. However, in Georgia, an opposition party with significant economic resources at its disposal, resorted to vote buying (OSCE/ODIHR 2012:22). Episodes of vote buying were limited during Shevardnadze's time. Saakashvili may have been inspired to use this method of electoral manipulation by looking at neighboring Armenia,

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[49] Author's interview in Tbilisi (April 2015).

where vote buying had been a common practice since 2003. This practice became particularly visible during Armenia's 2005 local elections. The following year, vote buying was widely used in Georgia to influence voters' choices during the 2006 municipal election.

Type of Malpractice	When introduced	Type of learning	From where
Reduce Freedom of Media (Rustavi 2)	Since 2006	Positive Learning	Russia
Video Cameras	Since Municipal Election 2006	Positive Learning	Azerbaijan
Vote Buying	Massively used since Municipal election 2006	Positive Learning	Armenia
Pre - Election Day Malpractice	Since Municipal Election 2006	Negative Learning	Past (During Shevardnadze's rule)

Table 1: Electoral malpractices in Georgia

In sum, it is possible to observe a dramatic change in the common practices of rigging elections in Georgia before and after the Rose Revolution. This change was characterized by the adoption of some new practices by Saakashvili, who significantly modified the types of malpractice in common use. It is possible to conclude that Saakashvili learned from a negative example (Shevardnadze's management) and worked to avoid past mistakes. There was a noticeable shift from malpractices carried out on Election Day to subtler forms of manipulation during the pre-election period, and the adoption of electoral practices (such as video cameras) to affect voters' choices on the election day. In doing so, Saakashvili evaded international

observers' critics, yet continued to manipulate elections for his benefit.

Conclusion

Georgia is one of the cases in which Western democratizing pressure is stronger as such countries' bargaining power vis à vis the West is lower compared to others. Indeed, since the early nineties Georgia suffered from a dimension of insecurity that determined its foreign policy orientations. The harsh struggle for independence from Russia and the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia pushed Tbilisi to depend more on western support than the other two neighboring countries. Thus, Georgia began before Armenia and Azerbaijan to abide by international standards in many sectors, including elections. In 1999 Georgia attained two important results: first of all, its electoral framework was recognized 'sufficient to conduct genuine multiparty elections if applied in a non-selective and transparent manner' (OSCE/ODIHR Georgia 1999:1); secondly, it was the first South Caucasian country admitted into the Council of Europe.

These factors determined the creation of barriers for what concern the conduction of democratic elections. Western actors began to be particularly active in the country and they shared common stances concerning Shevardnadze and his administration. This unity was determinant in the development of the events that resulted in the Rose Revolution. In fact, during the 2003 election, Shevardnadze tried to break the context in which Georgia was bound by forcing the rule of the electoral integrity but the barrier was solid and the attempt failed. At the same time, domestic forces played their role determining the end of Shevardnadze's rule. As Goertz claims, the attempts to break a barrier can be catastrophic for those who try; but at the same time they can provide useful information for others that want to break or elude the same barrier. That was the case with Saakashvili, who subsequently sharply modified the modalities and the methods to reduce the uncertainties of the electoral scrutiny.

Saakashvili exploited both the information regarding the context and the unconditional support of President George W. Bush. As a matter of fact, on one hand Saakashvili pushed Georgia's path toward a deeper Western integration without fully abiding to democratic principles (indeed he predominantly looked for NATO integration). On the other, he could rely on the close personal relationship with president Bush, whose administration was in quest of a success in its democratization programme. In turn, this relationship 'led the United States to disregard the clear retreat from democratic practice in Georgia under President Saakashvili' (Macfarlane 2009:117). Nevertheless, the war with Russia in 2008 changed the regional context, and the EU increased its leverage vis à vis Tbilisi. Subsequently, NATO and United States aligned themselves on democratic conditionality and Western democratizing pressure became united again.

However, as I presented in the paragraph concerning learning, Saakashvili changed substantially the methods of frauds by looking mostly to Georgia's neighboring countries. His administration was thus able to avoid harsh international criticism by staying away from classic brazen methods of frauds. Thus, in Georgia both electoral management and electoral mismanagement were heavily influenced by the international dimension, which included both Western democratizing pressure and socializing mechanism.

Chapter 5:
The Case of Armenia

'Armenia is democratically in a better situation than, say, Afghanistan'
- Levon Ter-Petrosyan, former President of Armenia

Introduction

Armenia unilaterally declared its independence on August 23rd 1990 and subsequently this decision was sealed by a popular referendum, which saw a huge turnout. Almost 100% of population chose independence from Moscow. The country officially declared independence on September 23rd 1991. The large majority of the members of the political elite that lead the country out of the Soviet Union were part of the Pan-Armenian National Movement (PANM), which was a political party born in the aftermath of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Council resolution in 1988. The quarrel with Azerbaijan on the Nagorno-Karabakh affected the political development of Armenia since its independence. The Autonomous Council resolution of 1988 envisaged that this oblast under Azerbaijan control would move under Yerevan control. The Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict escalated during the last semester in 1989. Both the PANM and the newly formed Azerbaijani Popular Front (APF) called for abolition of the Special Administrative Committee that Gorbachev established to manage the Nagorno-Karabakh. The two fronts were at the opposite sides: Yerevan held to their position that the region must become part of Armenia, and Baku called for the abolition of Karabakh autonomy. The Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union attempted to find a solution to the unfolding crisis but eventually failed to bring the parts together. In November 1989 Moscow understood that the situation was getting out of control and so decided to abolish the special status to the region and the return Nagorno-Karabakh under full control of Azerbaijan. However, Yerevan reacted by not recognizing this decision and calling unilaterally for Nagorno-Karabakh as part of Armenia.

These events had their political consequences in Armenia, which held a parliamentary election in 1990. This scrutiny, which has been considered freer and more democratic than in other elections after the independence (Zolyan 2011), saw the PANM scoring a great result. Since this moment, there has been a radical change in the Armenian political establishment. Indeed, a new generation of politicians, that shared a common concern and interest (the Nagorno-Karabakh issue) became the prominent political force in the country. And one of its leaders, Levon Ter-Petrosyan, soon became an eminent figure in Armenia as after the election he became the Chairman of the Supreme Council. The elections showed the weakness of the Communist party that for the first time went to the opposition. Soon after the elections the situation in the country became difficult and insecure. As happened in Georgia, some armed militias (mainly clans and criminal groups) started to ravage the cities and the frontiers with Azerbaijan. The odds of an escalation were very high and Moscow warned that in case the government was not able to tackle the situation it would have sent troops to cope with these militias. Differently to what occurred in Georgia, Ter-Petrosyan was able to disarm and restored order in the country in few months, avoiding possible perils.

In January 1991 Gorbachev launched a referendum to be held in all the Soviet Republic concerning the decision to preserve the USSR. However, the Armenian Supreme Soviet decided to not participate in this referendum; instead the republic would hold its own referendum in September to ask whether the people of Armenia wanted to acquire independence from Moscow. Soon after, Moscow sent military units to Armenia with the aim to protect Soviet defense installations in the country. Ter-Petrosyan reacted firmly claiming that it was a dangerous move close to 'a virtual declaration of war by the Soviet Union' (Curtis 1995:23). However, following the events in Russia, such as the attempted coup in August against Gorbachev, Ter-Petrosyan was able to play wisely and he could avoid an escalation of tension with Moscow. As a matter of fact, the biggest security concerns came from the conflict with Azerbaijan that had been taking place since 1988. The war for Nagorno Karabakh was dictating the

government agenda both domestically and internationally. [50] Western pressure materialized in the country since March 1992, through the so-called Minsk Group of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which was trying to foster mediation between the parts. Yet, as Thomas de Wall claims, the Nagorno Karabakh conflict is 'nobody's backyard, everyone's problem' (de Wall 2011:146), which clearly underlines the low strategic importance in Western political agendas. This disinterest, which did not encourage a unified strategic vision, allowed the presidents of both countries 'to resist international efforts to re-shape or broaden the Karabakh peace process' (de Wall 2011:147). Only in 1994 could the two countries agree on a ceasefire, yet the hostilities were far from being settled and the Nagorno-Karabakh issue became one of the less frozen conflicts around the region. Indeed, the needs of war were at the top of the country's agenda and the army became one of the main actors in the state-building process (Iskandaryan 2013).

Armenia, at least in the first decade after its independence, experienced a medium leverage and medium linkage. I disagree with Levitsky and Way's opinion concerning the level of leverage. According to the two authors, western leverage was high during the first decade; in fact, I found evidence and analysis that considered Western interest in Armenia as almost non-existent (Zolyan 2011). It is true that Armenia was the receiver of the highest amount of international aid assistance but donors did not act unified and did not understand local Armenian dynamics. [51] The main source of linkage was the Armenian diaspora in the West, whereas other types of ties, such as economic, political or technocratic, were weak. Moreover, Armenia, in contrast with Georgia, had a very strong state apparatus, which allowed it to maintain a higher control over the population and to suffer less from Western external pressure. Finally, the war with Azerbaijan allowed the political elites to

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[50] According to Sergey Minasyan the influence of the Karabakh issue on Armenian politics and development is best illustrated by independent Armenia's three presidents' careers: Levon Ter-Petrosyan, Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan. All of them played primary roles in the Karabakh movement. (Minasyan 2013).
[51] Interview with Alexander Iskandaryan in Yerevan (May 2015).

keep high security standards even domestically, which contributed to falter democratic developments. Overall, the Western pressure changed along the years and eventually lowered. In the coming paragraphs I am going to analyze the changes in the electoral management and in the Western pressure during Armenia recent history.

Strengthening the Presidency

In October 1991, Ter-Petrosyan ran against other six candidates in the first presidential election of Post-soviet Armenia. Ter-Petrosyan political campaign was focused on a four-point program: the development of a market economy; democratization; a realistic foreign policy; and the resolution of the Karabakh conflict (Asturian 2001). Eventually the leader of the PANM won with around 83% of the votes in an election that is remembered as the real democratic one[52] or at least whose results were widely accepted (Armine 2008, Zolyan 2011, Markarov 2016).

However, full democratization was not on top of the political agenda for the government, which was keener to keep the country united against the persistent Azerbaijani challenge. As a matter of facts, Armenia adapted the political system from the 1978 constitution to the short-term requirements of governance (Curtis 1995). The purpose was to use this system until a major constitutional reform that would introduce Western style institutions. Eventually major reforms could not be undertaken in the medium term, as the political class did not find an agreement concerning executive-legislative balance of power. The Constitutional Commission, which was comprised of twenty politicians, members of the Parliament, and lawyers, to draft a new constitution, was established by the parliament in November 1990, yet its first meeting took place only in October 1992, when the political landscape was already affected by Ter-Petrosyan's rule (Markarov 2006).

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[52] This judgment finds support also from anecdotal evidence gathered through different interviews conducted with electoral experts, academics and politicians in Yerevan (May 2015).

Ter-Petrosyan presidency has been analyzed as the main factor of democratic degradation (Fish 2001) in a similar path that characterized also other countries, such as Albania, Belarus and Russia. According to Fish 'the crucial common condition […] was a constitutional system that concentrated power in the president or that could readily be manipulated in a way that facilitated such concentration of power' (Fish 2001:69). Fish labels this system as 'superpresidency', which entangles many different types but they all share 'a very large apparatus of presidential power that greatly exceeds other state agencies in size and in the resources it consumes; a president who enjoys power to legislate by decree; a president who de jure or de facto controls most of the powers of the purse; a relatively emasculated legislature that cannot readily repeal presidential decrees and that has little authority and/or meager resources for overseeing the executive branch (*ibid.*).

The president exploited this standoff situation and gradually reinforced the executive power and his office at the expenses of other institutions relying on two laws adopted by the Supreme Soviet (the Law on the President of the Republic of Armenia and the Law on the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Armenia). Ter-Petrosyan, who was seen as a democrat in the early nineties, was subsequently seen as a quasi-autocrat a few years later (Mazmanyan 2010). Indeed, the Armenian presidency was the most powerful position in the government: 'more than a ceremonial head of state, the president is the most active proposer of new legislation, the chief architect of foreign and military policy, and, during Armenia's prolonged state of national emergency, the unchallenged center of government power in many areas' (Curtis 1995:59). The draft constitution presented by the Constitutional Commission on April 20, 1994, after more than one hundred meetings, recalled a semi presidential system, but in practice 'it showed more signs of presidential dominance than an equal distribution of power with checks and balances' (Markarov 2006:162). Considering the difficult situation with Azerbaijan, section 14 of the Constitution, 'provides the president with incredible power as it allows the president to suspend constitutional rights under rather vague conditions: in the event of an imminent danger threatening

constitutional order, and upon consultation with the president of the National Assembly and the prime minister, [the president] takes measures warranted by the situation and makes an address to the people on that matter' (Azerbaijan Constitution 1994, article 14). The final version of the constitution was approved by a popular referendum that was held together with the parliamentary elections on July 5, 1995.

During these years, Western actors did not play a big role in terms of pressuring efforts to foster democratic developments. Regional organizations in particular, such as the European Union and Council of Europe, were considered to be the great absents from the scene (Zolyan 2011). The lack of an external pressure went all along with the Armenian political culture, which allowed Ter-Petrosyan to reach his political goals without major challenges from the domestic side.[53] Indeed, 'Ter-Petrosyan is perhaps nothing but a typical manifestation of the uselessness of democratic ideals against the overwhelming force of the political culture with its irresistible tendencies toward the concentration of power' (Mazmanyan 2010:194).

The first parliamentary election in Armenia took place on the 5th July 1995. The OSCE/ODIHR sent an observation mission that judged this first parliamentary election as 'free but not fair' (OSCE/ODIHR 1995:2). From a legal point of view, the elections were firstly ruled by the Law on the Elections of the National Assembly Members, which established the electoral system that was characterized by a mix of majoritarian (150 seats) and proportional (40 seats) with a 5% threshold, and it also set out procedures for the formation of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC). The CEC was established as the independent model;[54] nevertheless, as I am going to indicate hereunder, genuine independence of the electoral administration was seriously under question (Galfayan 2014).

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[53] Author's interview with political analyst in Yerevan (May 2015).
[54] The independent model of electoral management is characterized by the fact that the EMB has and manages its own budget and it is not accountable to a government ministry or department (see aceproject.org).

These elections were particularly challenging for the PANM, as the domestic political front remained heated in 1994. Ter-Petrosyan's party had lost ground to the right and the left because of unsuccessful economic reforms that kept Armenia population in hardship. At that time there were some opposition newspapers and citizens' groups that criticized the government for corruption and called for the resignation of the Ter-Petrosyan government. These groups appealed to a large number of people and eventually gathered 50,000 protesters in an anti-government demonstration in mid- 1994. The president tolerated these groups, but at the same time was afraid of losing power and of having the constitutional draft rejected by the referendum. Therefore, on one side PANM formed a coalition with other political parties, which united in the Republican Bloc and on the other they organized a systematic violations of the electoral rules; marring the elections was the only way for the Republican Bloc to win the majority of seats in the parliament (cf. Bremmer and Welt 1997). Many opposition candidates were disqualified before the scrutiny, the others were denied financial backing (Bremmer and Welt 1997). The OSCE/ODIHR report states that 'observers strongly criticized the CEC, especially with regard to registering parties and candidates' (OSCE/ODIHR Armenia 1995:12). Moreover, the government set a ban against one of the main opposition parties, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, because its leadership was allegedly accused of assassination, drug running and corruption (OSCE/ODIHR Armenia 1995). The Republican block gained 88 of 190 seats. The second party gained just 8. Moreover, there had been many independent candidates that gained 72 seats. However, most of them, once elected they subsequently endorsed and supported the majoritarian party. Independent candidates are a characteristic of Armenia political landscape (cf. Navasardian 2011). Overall, this first parliamentary election revealed that it was very hard for opposition parties to organize and compete in an election.

The presidential election was ruled by a new electoral framework. Indeed, the parliament approved just before the election the Law of the Republic of Armenia on the Elections of the President of the Republic of Armenia, which ruled the

scrutiny and provided an improvement in comparison to the former legal framework (OSCE/ODHIR Armenia 1996). Yet, frauds and malpractices were deterred by international observers including: blank election protocols in circulation, with official stamps and seals; the presence of law enforcement personnel in polling stations; the failure to post election results in polling stations; instances of poor ballot security; and discrepancies between the number of signatures on the voter lists and the number of votes actually recorded (OSCE/ODIHR 1996b:15). However, according to the international observers the 'election process in the whole of the country [was] encouraging' (OSCE/ODIHR Armenia 1996:7). Ter Petrosyan won the presidential election with 51.71% of the preferences. Of the two other candidates Vazgen Manukian scored 41.3% of the vote and the Communist leader Sergei Badalian won slightly over 6%. Eventually the main competitor, the well-known physicist Vazgen Manukian, rejected the results claiming victory. What followed were large demonstrations in several cities around Armenia; in Yerevan a group of people assaulted the parliament, an act that led the government to call military troops to repress the crowd. Many people remained wounded and one person was killed. The army presided over the capital for several days, until the demonstrations disappeared. The international community, including Russia, criticized the brutal repression and increased its pressure over the regime (Wessenlink 1997).

In turn, the political situation in the country deteriorated and Ter-Petrosyan found himself more and more isolated within his circle. In order to find a way-out, Ter-Petrosyan acknowledged the poor electoral performance and found a scapegoat on the Prime Minister Hrant Bagratian, who was sacked soon after the election. Moreover, the President admitted in his 'preliminary assessments' of the election result the corruption in the state bureaucracy, and the widespread poverty facing many Armenians as two factors that affected voters' preferences (Economist Intelligence Unit 1996). Yet, disaffection among the political elites was growing and Ter-Petrosyan found himself in a lame duck position: it was openly discredited by the election, and unable to manage corruption scandal as well as familisitic policies that were alienating other elites. The last straw was Ter-

154

Petrosyan's position toward a new settlement with Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. The Karabakh leadership, the Armenian defense ministry, the Guardiansof the Homeland, the interior and national security ministry, the opposition, the intelligentsia, most diaspora organizations, and most of the Armenian media expressed their opposition to the president settlement as it was conceived too moderate[55] (Asturian 2001, Levitsky and Way 2010). It followed the deepest political crisis that Armenia experienced up until that moment, with many MPs defecting, resulting in Ter-Petrosyan's resignation in favor of his Prime Minister Robert Kocharian (who was firmly against any concession to Azerbaijan) and new presidential election in 1998.

Robert Kocharian won the presidency with 58,9% of the votes (he won after the second round against Karen Demirchyan – former Communist ruler, who finally accepted the result) in an election that, despite being an improvement on the flawed 1996 election, it felt well under the international standards (see OSCE/ODIHR Armenia 1998). The scrutiny was still ruled by the 1996 legal framework, as the upgrading was under way; the parliament was working on a comprehensive electoral code and it was not ready for the extraordinaire election. Twelve candidates were accepted by the CEC as competitors. All the candidates were free to campaign throughout the country, yet there were some serious episodes of illegal campaigning and incidents during an opposition candidate's rally, where there were clashes among the rally's attendants. Eventually eight people were injured, including one member of the Central Electoral Commission. Moreover, during the Election Day, the OSCE/ODIHR mission reported instances of ballot stuffing, the presence of unauthorized persons at polling stations, and discrepancies in the counting procedure. In addiction, according to anecdotal evidence I collected in Armenia, this was the first election where Armenian Carousel was introduced.[56]

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[55] What was being proposed was multi-ethnic autonomy for the region, the borders of Karabakh would be those effective in 1988, the OSCE would create a sort of buffer zone around the region, and an international peacekeeping force would be deployed, reportedly with an initial one-year mandate (see Asturian 2001, Walker 1998).

[56] Interview with Armenian MP in Yerevan (May 2015).

Kocharian ran as independent candidate with the support of several political leaders such as the defense minister, Vazgen Sarkisian, and the interior and national security minister, Serzh Sargsyan. These, in turn, 'acted with the support of powerful local groups, which control[led] much of the country's economic activity and favored the replacement of Ter-Petrosyan' (Economist Intelligence Unit Armenia 1998:23). This mechanism of power change is well analyzed by Henry Hale, who claims that Armenia (among many others post-Soviet states) developed a sort of patrimonial politics that has its own rules of spoil-system and accountability. In particular, according to Hale '*Patronalism* refers to a social equilibrium in which individuals organize their political and economic pursuits primarily around the personalized exchange of concrete rewards and punishments, and not primarily around abstract, impersonal principles such as ideological belief or categorizations that include many people one has not actually met in person'[57] (Hale 2015:20). In Armenia this patronalism, which has been also labeled as *Armenian Mafia* (Herzig 1999) is one of the highest in the region and it is a key factor when to take into consideration power change dynamics.

From an international perspective, the new President continued to pursue a foreign policy aimed to at looking for support from Russia, which was the first security provider for Armenia (Economist Intelligence Unit Armenia 1998); therefore, Kocharyan demonstrated continuity rather than change in the foreign policy sector (Papazian 2006). At the same time, Western actors were still pressuring the country to democratize. In 1996 the European Union signed the Partnership Cooperation Agreement (PCA) with Armenia, a framework that ruled EU-

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[57] According to Hale Patronalism is a more general notion than clientelism or patrimonialism. The new concept tends to subsume the latter 'rather than deny them' (see Hale 2015:23).

Armenia relationships, which entered into force in 1999. In this document it was envisaged and supported the idea of democratic development as well as the conduction of democratic elections. Since the signature of the PCA 'the relations between the European Union and the Republic of Armenia have been gradually intensifying' (European Union Friends of Armenia 2014:5). Moreover, Armenia in late nineties was in the process of accession to the Council of Europe. This process entailed the acceptance of signing several conventions in the sector of democracy, justice and human rights and the developments of some reforms in the good governance sector (CoE Parliamentary Assembly Armenia 2000). Kocharyan's administration was eager to show commitment toward this integration path and during his speech at the Council of Europe Parliament Assembly, the President underlined that '[w]ith its full accession to the Council of Europe, Armenia is registering a considerable degree of progress in democracy-building. We realize that we are still in the middle of this road. Meanwhile, Armenia is committed to full and timely observance of its post-accession obligations.' (RFE/RL 2001, January 25).

One Step Forward, Two Steps Backward

One of the shortcomings concerning electoral management in Armenia was the electoral framework. Thus, soon after the presidential election, the National Assembly approved the new electoral code. This code replaced and unified the three separate laws governing presidential, parliamentary and local elections. From an EMB perspective, the Electoral Code adopted in 1999 a three-tier election administration — the CEC, regional electoral commissions (RECs) and precinct electoral commissions (PECs). An important improvement was that it reduced the links of the election administration chain: the community electoral commissions were abolished in order to simplify the hierarchy and to avoid the potentially problematic influence of community administrations (IDEA 2004b). The Electoral Code also addressed voting issues for some social categories such as military personnel and refugees. In Armenia, on one side, the military are often considered to vote by orders from the commanders (*ibid*), therefore, the Code created some provision to alt this practice (for example: separate polling stations in

barracks were opened only if the military compound was located in an isolated area). On the other, refugees in some areas represent 100% of the population, yet the Code did not include any provision to let them vote. Thus, in some communities it was not possible to establish any form of self-governance bodies. Subsequently this provision was amended only for local elections.

Overall, the new Electoral Code 'was nevertheless a welcome and major step towards securing the integrity of the electoral process in a number of ways' (IDEA 2004b:6) as it was prepared by the support of the Venice Commission, the Council of Europe and the OSCE/ODIHR. The code addressed some of the recommendations made by the international organizations; for example, for the first time domestic observers were allowed to monitor elections and a brand new chapter was introduced into the Electoral Code on liability for violations. Yet 'the draft Code was never submitted to the ODIHR for comments prior to adoption' (OSCE/ODIHR Armenia 1999:3) and some amendments were edited and subsequently published in the Official Journal without a Parliamentary vote or consideration. Despite the fact there were many cases in post-Soviet countries where electoral laws had heavy Soviet traits, the Electoral code of 1999 was predominantly original (Bader 2012).

The new Electoral Code was first used to rule the March 30th, 1999 Parliamentary election. In this election, two prominent politicians such as the defense minister, Vazgen Sarkisian, and the People's Party leader Karen Demirchyan, unified their efforts in an opposition coalition called Unity Bloc, which scored more than 41% of the vote. According to some analyst of the Economist Intelligence Unit, 'the alliance between Mr Demirchian and Mr Sarkisian suggests that they are mounting a campaign to oust Mr Kocharian' (Economist Intelligence Unite Armenia 6/1999:18). The elections were judged by the OSCE/ODIHR observers as an improvement over the flawed elections of 1995, 1996 and 1998, yet it proved that many provisions of the Electoral Code missed a proper implementation, in particular in relation to the following issues: the composition of election commissions at all levels, the status

of commission members, the continuity of the work of the commissions, and the appointment of technical staff to the Central and Regional Election Commissions; the lack of transparency in a number of election procedures; the presence of unauthorized persons in election commission premises during electoral procedures; the complexity of election procedures; the vague provisions regarding the filing of complaints and resolution of disputes; and the inadequate protection of due process of law (OSCE/ODIHR Armenia 1999:3). Nevertheless, it was the most regular election since 1995, and proved that Armenia was fulfilling its commitments toward international standards.

The traumatic event of the 27th October, 1999, when the incumbent prime minister Vazgen Sarkisian and the speaker of the National Assembly, Karen Demirchyan, along with other top government and parliamentary officials were killed in a terrorist attack, had a strong impact on Kocharyan's presidency, as well as on the country itself (Economist Intelligence Unit Armenia 12/1999). According to some analysts 'the parliament shooting marked the end of Armenia's development as an emerging democracy with balanced political and social institutions, and the beginning of its slide into a semi-authoritarian state dominated by a powerful president' (RFE/RL Armenia 13/01/ 2009:2). As a matter of fact, this terrorist attack stopped the growing inter-institutional balances among the executive power and the legislative power in favor of the former. Despite this, Kocharian was never charged either as the instigator or the inspirational for the killings, and he came out as the winner of this confrontation as in the aftermath of the attack he succeeded to split the majority and 'since then, the dominance of the presidency has not been strongly challenged again' (Mazmanyan 2010:198). Therefore, it could be argued that the Kocharyan presidency benefited a lot from this event, which altered also Armenia's capacity to cope with Western pressures. In fact, the international community following the terrorist attacks increased its endorsement to the Kocharyan presidency (cf. U.S. House of Congress Resolution 222, 1999) and was more reluctant to criticize the Armenian government for democracy and human rights abuses (cf. European Parliament EU-Armenia Committee

2001). These changes had some reflections in the way the government administered and managed the elections in the upcoming years. In fact, due to a lower Western pressure over Armenia, the regime had a greater ability to alter the electoral playing field. This claim is supported when we take into consideration the size of OSCE/ODIHR observation missions between Armenia and Georgia (which have similar total voter numbers – cf. International IDEA). In 2003 the OSCE/ODIHR sent for the Georgian Parliamentary election an observation mission with more than 400 observers, whereas for the Armenian Parliamentary election there were around 200 observers (cf. OSCE/ODIHR Parliament Georgia 2003, and OSCE/ODIHR Parliament Armenia 2003). In 1999 the OSCE/ODIHR sent 170 observers to the Armenian parliamentary election and 189 for the Georgian parliamentary election. So, the gap in the 2003 elections is quite significant.

The first 'victim' of this new situation was the Electoral Code of Armenia, which despite having just been approved, was amended several times. As a matter of fact, 'major amendments were introduced in August 2002 to address the concerns that emerged in the wake of the 1999 parliamentary and local elections' (IDEA 2004b:6) generating many concerns, in particular for what concerned the independence and impartiality of the electoral commissions[*]. By 2002, the new composition of

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[*] Before the amendments, the Electoral Code provided a formula according to which three members of the electoral commissions at all levels were to be nominated by the government, with each party, party bloc or coalition that had a faction in the Parliament nominating a member. In addition, the top five parties or party blocs that collected the highest number of valid signatures, above a minimum of 30,000, to stand in elections to the National Assembly were also entitled to have commission members. One of the shortcomings of this formula was that usually the government nominees come from the parties that were already represented in the National Assembly, and the government would therefore be over-represented in the electoral commissions. In addition, verifying the validity of signatures was cumbersome, and if this procedure were carried out in a formalistic manner many parties would get on to the commissions or would be denied the chance to be represented on them depending on the arbitrary application of the provisions of the Electoral Code. The amended Electoral Code did

the CEC was formed by six out of nine presidential supporters or nominees.

Subsequently, Kocharian as his predecessor did not have the intention to carry out further Constitutional reforms aimed to strengthen the role of the parliament or the Constitutional court (Mazmanyan 2010). In fact, since 1998 a Constitutional committee had been preparing Constitutional reforms in order to strengthen the role of the parliament. During the 1998 political campaign Kocharian endorsed the reform and he made the argument of Constitutional reforms one of his cornerstones. However, subsequently his administration discharged the package of reforms as it envisaged a reduction of presidential power (Markarvo 2006). Therefore, 'it is likely that the president invested no sincere efforts in achieving the goals of the referendum, as these goals were not in his best interest' (Mazmanyan 2010:196). The 2003 Constitutional referendum took place at the same time as the Parliamentary election and the referendum was not even a top priority for opposition parties, which were far more interested in gaining parliamentary seats. Thus, there was no interest in fostering the population to vote for the 2003 referendum concerning the Constitutional amendments, which eventually failed.

The concentration of power concerned also the media sector. In fact, until 2002 there were some independent private television broadcasts (A1+ and Noyan Tapan) that enjoyed some freedom and were able to criticize the government. However, since early 2002 the government approved and sent to Parliament a vague legislative proposal called the Law on Mass Information, which would increase state control of the media. Subsequently, in April 2002 the government carried out an 'attack on the press' (Committee to Protect Journalist 2004), which stopped the activities of A+ and Noyan Tapan. As a matter of facts, due to controversial frequency tenders (*ibid.*) the two broadcasts lost their frequencies as the National Council on Television and

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away with this provision but still failed to propose a formula that would ensure a more balanced composition of the electoral commissions. (IDEA 2004b:6).

Radio refused to reissue their licenses. This decision was a big blow to the freedom of press in Armenia and it was condemned by local and international media watchdogs (such as Freedom House) as well as by the Council of Europe. However, there was not a strong condemnation by those international actors with higher leverage on the country.

These events occurred just before 2003 when there were multiple elections scheduled (Presidential, Parliamentary and Constitutional referendum). The first was the Presidential election, which took place on the 19th February and the 5th March. The election proved to be competitive and rigged simultaneously. The popular Stepan Demirchian, the son of assassinated Parliamentary Speaker Karen Demirchian, obtained enough votes to compete in the run-off election against Kocharian. The interlude between the first and the second round was marred by widespread attempts to intimidate and to hinder opposition participations (including administrative detentions of around 200 opposition supporters). As I am going to show in the paragraph concerning learning, the Armenian authorities resorted to using different methods to curtail Demirchian's success. Eventually, Kocharian won in the second round with 67% of the preferences, in an election that international observers judged to be not in line with international standards for democratic elections (OSCE/ODIHR Armenia Presidential 2003). The election was characterized by widespread use of methods of frauds including ballot box stuffing, and the electoral code was not implemented properly (OSCE/ODIHR Armenia Presidential 2003). International actors condemned the conduction of the election, yet they did not push their leverage to the maximum. As Bunce and Wolchik reported, there was not a full intention by the United States to provoke a regime change in Armenia (Bunce and Wolchick 2011). An official at the U.S. Embassy in Yerevan, clearly stated that 'the United States was interested not in an electoral revolution in Armenia, but rather in an *Apricot evolution*' (Bunce and Wolchick 2011:198). In other words, Washington, which was the first aid-supporter in Armenia, aimed for a gradual process of democratization rather than for a radical change as it happened in Georgia the same year.

Subsequently, the 2003 parliamentary election took place in a relative calm and quiet environment (OSCE/ODIHR Armenia Parliamentary 2003). The scrutiny was judged by international observers as 'an improvement over the 2003 presidential election […], but fell short of international standards for democratic elections in a number of key respects' (OSCE/ODIHR Armenia Parliamentary 2003:1). The election was characterized by widespread irregularities, which included ballot box stuffing, the falsification of results and the intimidation of observers and proxies (OSCE/ODIHR Armenia Parliamentary 2003:2). After the scrutiny, the parties that supported the president (the Republican Party of Armenia, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation and the Rule of Law Party) unified in a coalition and gained a majority of seats in the National Assembly. At the same time, the Constitutional referendum did not pass, as the number of votes in favor of the changes was lower than one-third of the number of registered voters. The OSCE/ODIHR mission did not observe the referendum process, which was observed by a small delegation from the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly.

Following the events in Serbia and in other post-Soviet states where the Colored revolutions were taking place, people started to gather in huge demonstrations aimed to push Kocharian to resign (Ishkanian 2008). International actors sustained this movement insofar as they formally condemned electoral malpractices; yet they did not further pressurize about the electoral outcomes. Subsequently, the government's legitimacy was reinforced by a decision of the Constitutional Court, which was called to review the result of the Presidential Election. It produced a decision 'perfectly fitting the political environment of the time and starkly exposing the political orientation and rational calculation of the Court and its members' (Mazmanyan 2010:207); the decision stated that 'the evidence of duly legally formulated and evidentially justified electoral violation has not been significant enough to have materially impacted the results of the election' (*ibid.*), thus sealing the election of Kocharian.

The outcomes of both the elections provided controversial results that subsequently affected the political scenario in Armenia. On one side the political scene became ever more polarized between the governing forces and the opposition; on

163

the other the stability of the new governing coalition was not guaranteed. As a matter of fact, soon after the election, tension rose among the parties forming the coalition, meanwhile the opposition parties disrupted parliamentary procedures. President Kocharyan aimed to increase his own political base with the creation of the Prosperous Armenia Party (PAP) in 2004, which was contrasted by the Republican Party led by the Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan (Markarov 2016). The two parties began to compete against one another, which had some effects during the 2007-2008 electoral cycle.

The president was thus finally elected two months after the election. This was the last term for Kocharian, as the constitution allows for a maximum of two presidential terms; the president himself affirmed soon after his 2003 reelection that he would not be seeking to alter the constitution in order to obtain a third term (Hale 2015). It was the perfect time to reskill the constitutional amendments that were covered up in the 2003 referendum. This time the authority conducted the political campaign, they cut off any possible dissident voices (with unbalanced media coverage for the opposition party); they also failed to invite the OSCE/ODIHR observers, claiming that 'the needs assessment report is unfairly critical towards the government and intends to create a misperception of the referendum campaign, and that the OSCE/ODHIR did not give a positive follow-up to the Armenian authorities' invitation to monitor the 2003 Referendum' (Council Of Europe Armenia Referendum 2005:3). The official results of the referendum were as follows: the turnout was of 65,4% (out of 1,514,545 registered voters), out of which 93,2% had voted in favor of the constitutional amendments and 5,4% against.

The amendments changed the balance of power between the legislative and executive branches of the government. In particular, the government and its prime minister became accountable to the National Assembly instead to the president; the prime minister would also be appointed by the President but it cannot be removed by the latter; moreover, the President would no longer have the authority to dissolve the parliament; finally, the government increased its areas of responsibilities

including new issues in domestic power as well as in foreign policy domain (Markarov 2006); This meant that whereas between 1995 and 2005 Armenia was a president-parliamentary regime, now it has a premier-presidential form of semi-presidentialism (Markarov 2016). In terms of the electoral system, ninety seats were filled on the basis of a national proportional contest of party or bloc lists, without preferential voting; with a threshold of five per cent (for political parties), or of seven per cent (for coalition). The remaining 41 seats were filled by majoritarian first-past-the-post contests in single-mandate constituencies; in the majoritarian contests, the candidate polling the highest number of votes was the winner (OSCE/ODIHR Armenia 2007). The amendments entered into force starting from the next parliamentary election in 2007.

The international community endorsed these reforms. In particular, the Venice Commission affirmed that they 'would constitute a good basis for ensuring the compliance of the Armenian Constitution with the European standards in the fields of respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law, and would pave the way to further European integration' (Venice Commission Armenia 2004:7). Meanwhile, the European Union was fostering its ties with Yerevan within the new European Neighboring Policy. In fact, in May 2005 a new Action Plan for Armenia was launched, which aimed to strengthen bilateral cooperation with the EU. Subsequently, in 2006, a Coordinating Committee headed by the President of Armenia was established to coordinate the activities of various ministries and governmental bodies with the EU institutions. These developments were very well assessed by the European Union, which positively acknowledged the progress made in implementing the ENP programme (Delcour and Duhot 2011). At the same time as these improvements both the United States and the European Union 'warned Armenia's government that the continuation of aid programmes would depend on the conduct of the general election' (Economist Intelligence Unit Armenia 2007:8), clearly demonstrating their dissatisfaction about the 2003 elections.

The upcoming parliamentary election in 2007 was characterized by a rediscovered unity among majority parties. In fact, for this election the Republican Party of Armenia (RPA) sealed a deal with Prosperous Party, founded in 2004 by businessman Gagik Tsarukyan. Analysts have understood Prosperous party's appearance, on one side, as a way for Kocharian to secure a personal power base in the country once Serz Sargsyan would become president in 2008; on the other, it was understood 'as an effort to ensure that Sargsyan, who was also Republican Party chief, did not completely dominate parliament' (Hale 2015:357). Moreover, the 2007 parliamentary election was marked by the return on the political scene of Ter-Petrosyan, which led the revived PANM during the political campaign. The return of the former President was a shock for the political establishment; indeed, 'Ter-Petrosyan still had status as the architect of the country's independence […] and informal patron of an extensive network of people who had played major roles in his regime (Hale 2015:358). Ter-Petrosyan started to heavily accused both Kocharian and Sargysan to be state criminal and alleged their implications in the 1999 massacre (Azatutyun 28/10/2009).

Eventually, in an election that was judged by international observers as an improvement and conducted largely in accordance with OSCE commitments and other international standards for democratic elections, together the RPA and Prosperous gained more than 48% of the votes. The electoral management improved substantially in several forms: the CEC demonstrated ongoing efforts to enhance the transparency of election procedures for the first time, there was a central computerized voter register under the authority of the police and the public media adhered to legal requirements concerning allocation of free airtime during the official campaign period (see OSCE/ODIHR Armenia 2007). Observers also reported few instances of voters apparently using fraudulent passports for identification, of vote buying, and of individuals voting more than once (*ibid*.). Some opposition parties tried to call for public demonstrations as they were not satisfied with the conduction of the election, however they did not encounter huge support both domestically and internationally (Economist Intelligence Unit Armenia 2007).

The former Chairman of the Central Bank, Tigran Sargsyan, was appointed as Prime minister of Armenia, replacing Serzh Sargsyan. The election proved to be important for the regime that could test the grip over the country before the 2008 Presidential election, when Kocharian was planning the succession with his ally Serz Sargsyan. Moreover, it was a necessary positive step *vis à vis* the international community, which was exerting a higher leverage in the country. Thanks to the positive assessment of the OSCE/ODIHR mission, the U.S. and the EU did not stop the aid programme for the country, which was at stake in case of negative assessment (Economist Intelligence Unit Armenia 2007). This was particularly stressed by German Chancellor Angela Merkel, at the time President of the EU Council, who after the election claimed that she was 'very much in favor of intensifying cooperation with Armenia. This would breathe new life into the European Neighborhood Policy and the Action Plan agreed under it' (quoted in Nichol 2007:5)

The next year, in the run-up to the presidential election, on the 27th October Ter-Petrosyan launched his candidacy for the presidency. The date chosen was strategic, as the 27th October 1999 was the day of the terrorist attack in the Parliament. Ter-Petrosyan continued to play the blaming card against the current political establishment: 'This massacre heralded the start of a cleaning up operation that enabled Robert Kocharian to take power' said Ter-Petrosyan, who affirmed that he would have punished this terrorist act if he had been elected head of State. (The European Elections Monitor 2008). Ter-Petrosyan proved able to mobilize some voters and raise public attention, making it more difficult for to Kocharian to smoothly conduct the succession (Economist Intelligence Unit Armenia 2008).

Eventually, Sargsyan won the election at the first round with 52.8% of the preferences. The victory was controversial and both opposition candidates and international observers reported occurrences of frauds and malpractices. The OSCE/ODIHR observer mission final report stated that the 2008 presidential election mostly met OSCE commitments and international

standards in the pre-election period and during voting hours; however, 'vote count demonstrated deficiencies of accountability and transparency, and complaints and appeals procedures were not fully effective' (OSCE/ODIHR 2008:2). It is noteworthy to underline that during the 2007 parliamentary election, the authorities did not resort to using brazen methods of fraud such as ballot box stuffing or violent incidents and intimidations (which occurred only in few polling stations). Rather, this time, there were other episodes of electoral malpractices, which can be categorized as clientelist practices (vote buying, government officials participating in political campaign whilst performing official duties, blackmails). These practices are condemned but they represent a 'soft' breach of the electoral integrity (if circumscribed). Despite the presence of these practices, both the 2007 and 2008 elections were considered in line with international standards.

However, Ter-Petrosyan, who received 21.5 percent of the vote, called for nullification of the election. Subsequently he led protests in the streets that reached approximately 15,000 people and lasted for 12 days. The government reacted harshly, declaring a twenty-day state of emergency that suspended most civil rights and allowed the government to assume extraordinary powers to restore order (Bunce and Wolchik 2011), in what has been understood as one the most serious political crisis in nearly a decade (EIU Armenia 2008). The protests were brutally broken up by the police and troops of the Interior Ministry, in the clashes 8 people died and over 400 were wounded. In addition the regime arrested numerous opposition figures and placed Ter-Petrosyan under house arrest. According to some of the interviews I gathered to Armenian analysts, the peril of a revolutionary contagion was extremely high, therefore the authorities carried out a savage repression in order to deter a possible colored revolution. The international community, in particular the U.S. and the EU criticized the repression and urged for an independent investigation on the events, and the United States decided to cut aid for a $67 million road construction programme (Eurasianet, 17/06/2009).

The Sargsyan's years

Serz Sargsyan began his presidency claiming that he would strengthen the rule of law, reduce corruption and ensure fair business competition. Yet, the crisis of legitimacy that affected the Armenian regime worsened because of the global economic crisis that since 2009 started to affect the country. The regime had to engage in some actions that would consolidate its legitimacy both domestically and internationally. One of the tools for regaining popular and international consensus was to allow civic participation and to show a less coercive apparatus *vis à vis* the society. One of the results concerned the civil society sector. Since those years, NGOs and other civil society organizations started to flourish and became more active. They found a receptive environment, where they were able to successfully advocate for different issues. Particularly strong were those associations that were lobbying for environmental issues which, among other things, contributed to ameliorate the condition of miners, preserved waterfalls and halted the demolition of a public park (see Ishkanian *et al* 2013). Therefore, despite the harsh repression and the state of emergency, in the subsequent months, the regime allowed for some social activism and NGO involvement.

This change ran counter to the repression drift that had been taking place since 2003 (see Ishkanian 2008). Moreover, in the years following the 2008 election, President Sargsyan took some surprising domestic initiatives, which contributed to relieve the stress of the political scene. For example, there were general prisoner amnesties in 2009 and 2011, when Sargsyan ordered the release of about 100 people imprisoned in connection with the 2008 violence (International Crisis Group 2012). Subsequently the government lifted bans on public gatherings, allowing the opposition ANC and other civic movements to hold rallies on the capital's central Freedom Square 'an emotional location because of its association with that year's post-election events' (International Crisis Group 2012:3).

At the same time, with the election of Sargsyan for the presidency, it is possible to observe a growth in Western leverage over Armenia. In fact, President Sargsyan demonstrated

to be keener to EU programme toward the region and after a cost–benefit analysis of the EU's offer against the country's specific regional, political and economic context, his administration decided to adopt EU rules and regulations (Delcour and Wolczuk 2015) in order to foster the cooperation aimed at signing an Association Agreement with the EU. There were three main factors that led to this change: 'first, a stronger domestic demand for reform templates; second, the perceived legitimacy of the EU's offer, and third, the perceived compatibility of EU templates for reforms with Armenia's security reliance on the Russian Federation' (Delcour and Wolczuk 2015:492). Within three years (2010-2013) Armenia adopted and implemented substantial reforms in line with the EU standards. Therefore, Armenia came under strict observance by the EU; in November 2012, the EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy, Štefan Füle, affirmed that the AA negotiations could be finalized by November 2013.

The parliamentary election in May 2012 was one of the biggest tests for the Sargsyan administration, which could demonstrate that Armenia was able to fulfill international commitment and permit legitimate democratic elections. This is one of the reasons that led the National Assembly to adopt the new Electoral Code in 2011, which was – contrary to what happened for the previous one – sent to the Venice Commission and OSCE/ODIHR for a final assessment before the adoption. Their joint final opinion stated, among other things, '[t]here have been a number of positive amendments made to the law, which address previous Venice Commission and OSCE/ODIHR recommendations. Amendments, such as the provision of a judicial remedy for all electoral disputes, inclusion of quotas for women in the CEC and CSECs, clarification on providing assistance to voters in the polling station, and broadening the definition for what may be the cause for an election to be invalidated, all improve the legal framework for elections.' (OSCE/ODIHR and Venice Commission Armenia 2011:18). It is noteworthy to mention that the composition of the CEC passed from being composed by partisan members to fully professional memberships, in which the President of the Republic had a strong limitation to affect the

appointment of the members. Yet, despite the Electoral Code being in line with most of the recommendations in terms of electoral management, the joint opinion stressed the fact that the exercise of political will by all stakeholders remains the key challenge for the conduct of genuinely democratic elections in the Republic of Armenia' (OSCE/ODIHR and Venice Commission Armenia 2011:19).

The Parliamentary elections scheduled for the 6th May 2012, were conducted amidst a vibrant and largely peaceful campaign and were administered in an overall professional and transparent manner prior to the Election Day (OSCE/ODIHR Armenia 2012). The result of the scrutiny confirmed the trend that the parties in power stay in power. Sargsyan's party, the Republican Party of Armenia, won 44 percent of the vote, while Prosperous Armenia Party, won 30 percent; in total the coalition supporting the government acquired almost 75% of the seats. Despite the generally positive commentary about the conduction of the election, there are some important facts that had negative weight on the management of the election. The most relevant are that, on one side a large number of PEC members withdraw from the commission shortly before election day; their replacements have not attended the second round of training, which resulted in poorer professionalism of the polling officials and more violations on election day (International IDEA Armenia 2014). Indeed, Arpine Galfayan from International IDEA wrote that 'electoral integrity is the biggest issue faced by the EMB today. It is largely controlled by the ruling political elites, and is not an impartial and ethical institution' (International IDEA Armenia 2014:104). This election was by far the best-managed till then, and it clearly demonstrated the fact that Sargsyan was fully committed to accomplish to Western leverage requirements.

However, soon after the election the leader of the Prosperous Party, Gagik Tsarukian, stated that his party would not join the coalition of government. For some commentators this was not an unexpected decision, as over the past couple of years, Tsarukian has progressively distanced himself from the coalition. The final decision not to enter into coalition with the Republican Party

triggered speculation about a possible and serious challenge for the upcoming Presidential election in 2013. Rumors spread out about the idea that former minister of foreign affairs and Prosperous MP Vardan Oskanian would be the presidential candidate. However, soon after some sections of the media started to report these rumors, Oskanian's Civilitas Foundation was charged with money laundering and the parliament, largely composed by Republican Party members, voted to strip Oskanian of his parliamentary immunity so that he could testify in the case (Freedom House Armenia 2013). The Prosperous Party was left without a credible candidate, and surprisingly the final decision was not to present a candidate for the presidential election or to sustain any other candidate (Armenpress.am 12/12/2012). Despite many possible explanations having been given to understand this political decision (RFE/RL 17 December 2012), Tsarukian's choice is still not clear. Since then, senior party officials have repeatedly stressed that Prosperous is not in opposition but rather sees itself as 'a constructive alternative' (RFE/RL 27 May 2013). The 2013 Presidential election was characterized by the defection of another challenging leader: Ter-Petrosyan, who claimed that he wouldn't run as candidate; the former President explained that he was too old to have the energy to run for another campaign. Thus the main opponent became Raffi Hovannisian, who was the founder of Heritage, a small opposition liberal party.

As a result of all of this, the race to the presidency became smoother for Serzh Sargysan, who eventually could assure the election at first scrutiny with more than 59% of the preferences. The OSCE/ODIHR final reports stated that '[w]hile the Election Day was calm and orderly, it was marked by undue interference in the process, mainly by proxies representing the incumbent, and some serious violations were observed' (OSCE/ODIHR Armenia 2013:1). In particular, the report assessed there were some problems with voter registration procedures and voter lists[59] that raised concerns about the integrity of the electoral

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[59] An OSCE/ODIHR EOM analysis of final results as published by the CEC shows a close correlation between the voter turnout and the number of votes for the incumbent (see OSCE/ODIHR Armenia 2013).

process (OSCE/ODIHR Armenia 2013). The opposition candidate Hovannisian claimed real victory because he claimed that there were high-level of frauds and started a hunger strike in the middle of Freedom Square. At the same time there were organized mass rallies by the opposition to push the President to resign. The Armenian authorities experienced again the perils of a revolution, which was even labeled as a 'Barevolution'. The contentious election result was once again assessed by a decision of the Constitutional Court, which issued a statement recognizing Sargsyan's victory. Nevertheless, the protests continued; the purpose of the demonstrations shifted towards expressing public discontent with the state of affairs in the country, but with lesser public participation (Economist Intelligence Unit Armenia 2013). The authorities, which this time did not order to clear the square, avoided a bloodbath. Eventually the demonstrations smoothly disappeared. Moreover, in his inaugural speech President Sargsyan acknowledged the fact that there were many Armenians who were not happy about the election and about the economic and societal condition in general. Therefore, one of the main promises was to implement economic reforms aimed to ameliorate the current low standards of living (Economist Intelligence Unit Armenia 2013).

The following year Armenia was supposed to sign the Association Agreement with the EU. However, surprisingly Sargsyan decided to withdraw from the signature of the Association Agreement with European Union and at the same time he declared that Armenia would have joined the Eurasian Union. In fact, in the same years Putin started to exert some leverage over the region by selling huge amounts of weapons to Azerbaijan. In turn, this provoked as deep crisis in Yerevan as it was still relying on Russian support for its security's requirements. In this new context, Armenia could not rely anymore on the AA with the EU, which was not guaranteeing any kind of security framework. Armenia thus accepted to be integrated in the Eurasian Union, a project that up until that time was not considered achievable by the Armenian political elites

(Giragosian 2013).[60] Therefore, this choice came as a shock and it raised some concerns about possible repercussions in terms of democratic development in Armenia. As a matter of fact, some EU-funded projects that were aimed at enhancing democratic governance were suspended in the aftermath of the signature of the Eurasian Union.[61]

In summary, the development of the electoral management in Armenia has been characterized by two mains paths: on the one side it is possible to assess a constant amelioration in terms of legal framework and a formal improvement of the EMB. On the other, an inconsistent improvement in the way authorities implemented the legal framework is also noticeable. Moreover, there has been an irregular Western pressure over the country, which rarely was able to erect valuable tools to protect the barrier of electoral integrity in the country. This in turn allowed the political elites to be able to deter many electoral challenges coming both from the elite and the populations. The fact that Armenia did not experience a Colored Revolution has been linked to the deeply entrenched patronal network that characterized Armenian politics (Hale 2015). However, I consider that the political elite has been successful to deter protests and revolutionary attempts because it drew important lessons to be avoided both from the past as well as from abroad. In the next paragraph I am going to better analyze this mechanism, which contributed to the retention of power.

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[60] In an interview to the Armenian prime minister Tigran Sarksian, he claimed that Armenia's 'reluctance to join the Russian-led Customs Union was rooted in several factors. First, the absence of common borders with Russia, or with Belarus and Kazakhstan, the two other members of the Customs Union, posed a logical impediment to such a move. Second, the prime minister explained that "the structure of the Armenian economy is very different from that of the economies of the Customs Union's countries that have substantial deposits of energy resources and pursue a policy of supporting domestic manufacturers through quite high customs duties." (Giragosian 2013:13).

[61] Author's interview with an Armenian MP in Yerevan (May 2015).

Learning Episodes in Armenia

From an electoral mismanagement standpoint, it is possible to trace how electoral malpractices evolved in Armenia. The country has a long history of fraud and malpractice, which affected election results since the 1996 presidential election, when Ter-Petrosyan won thanks to massive fraud (Bremmer and Welt 1997, Levitsky and Way 2010). Malpractice was concentrated particularly in the counting of the ballots phase. Observers reported serious breaches of ballot boxe integrity, and many episodes where the law was flagrantly disregarded "in clear view of international observers" (OSCE/ODIHR 1996:10). This practice continued under Kocharian's presidency. After the 1998 presidential election, the OSCE/ODIHR observers reported ballot box stuffing and other irregularities during vote count (OSCE/ODIHR 1998a). Again, after the 2003 Presidential election, the OSCE/ODIHR reported that the election failed to meet their standards, and experienced serious irregularities during voting and the count, including widespread ballot box stuffing (OSCE/ODIHR 2003c).

Surprisingly, following the 2008 Presidential election, the OSCE's assessment of the election was more upbeat, reporting that the election "mostly met OSCE commitments and international standards in the pre-election period and during voting hours" (OSCE/ODIHR 2008c:1). Yet, these improvements were not the result of better-managed electoral processes,[62] but a consequence of more discrete electoral manipulation. Like the case of Georgia, there was a drastic shift in this period from fraud conducted on Election Day to the pre-election period,[63] when international and local observers' attention is weaker. This shift again reflects a reduction in the use of more brazen techniques such as ballot stuffing and ballot stealing, in favor of the manipulation of voters. In other words, to rig the election, authorities relied less on falsifying electoral protocols, and more on clientelist practices and unfair propaganda. Additionally, this evolution marked a shift in the actors that conducted the

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[62] From 2006 to 2015 Armenia's scores in electoral process never improved beyond 5.50 (source: Nations in Transit).

[63] Author's interview with IFES expert in Yerevan (May 2015).

malpractice. Before 2008, commissioners at polling stations were the main perpetrators of malpractice, whereas more recently, party supporters emerged as the key actors that rigged elections in Armenia.[64]

Overall, these elements are evidence of innovation and learning: tactics to address electoral uncertainties and to prevent post-electoral protests. In fact, it is possible to suggest that the evolution of malpractice in Armenia occurred because of the regime's necessity to appear more legitimate, as a latecomer to the other electoral revolutions in the region. As posited by the modular phenomena thesis concerning the Colored Revolutions (Beissinger 2007), the examples of other countries' attempts to overthrow their regimes presented Armenia with a higher risk of regime change, an undesired outcome for the incumbent leaders. Thus, in Armenia, there was a combination of local and international factors that forced authorities to modify electoral malpractices to obtain more legitimacy for the regime.

There are some specific changes in the types of electoral malpractice common in Armenia that are worth investigating through the innovation and learning framework. Firstly, just as in Georgia, vote buying was a key factor that contributed to the development of electoral malpractices. Although there were very few episodes of vote buying in 2003 (OSCE/ODIHR 2003), this practice became a widespread strategy by time of the 2005 constitutional referendum. In the 2008 presidential election OSCE observers received frequent complaints regarding "widespread vote-buying and multiple voting through the impersonation of voters" (OSCE/ODIHR 2008c:8), but ballot-stuffing practices sharply decreased. [65] As was observed in Georgia, vote buying became a prominent strategy carried out by both the incumbent and the opposition. I suggest that Armenia, which started to use vote buying in 2003 and expanded the practice in 2005, could be seen as pioneering this practice in the region.

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[64] Author's interview with OSCE expert in Yerevan (May 2015)

[65] OSCE/ODIHR Final report records 'An isolated case of 'ballot stuffing' was observed at polling station 23/24 (Sevan)' (OSCE/ODIHR 2008c:21)

Other important elements that have characterized Armenian elections since the 1990s are electoral protests (that may turn out violent), which have been recognized as a common trait of hybrid regimes (Hale 2011). While these protests never resulted in a revolution, they became extremely dangerous for the regime on many occasions, even leading the regime to call a state of emergency in 2008. In fact, since 2003, the regime deliberately sought to win the election in the first round of balloting to minimize the possibility of protests. Authorities looked at the Bulldozer Revolution, which took place in Yugoslavia in October 2000, and became aware about the perils of a second round of elections. The Bulldozer Revolution emerged during the aftermath of the first round, when the Federal Electoral Committee claimed that no candidate won over 50% of the votes and called for a second round. In the intervening timespan, opposition groups were able to gather and unite their efforts to overthrow the incumbent. Drawing from this example, authorities resorted to the widespread use of administrative detentions when Kocharyan was unable to win in the first round of the 2003 presidential election. Despite the fact that the rallies and demonstrations that ensued were largely peaceful, the second round was clouded by the administrative detentions of over 200 opposition supporters (OSCE/ODIHR 2003c:1). These acts were seen as "an obvious attempt to intimidate and disable the opposition before the run-off" (Human Right Watch 2004:3). Nonetheless, despite the fact the elections fell short of international standards, authorities could not assure Kocharyan's victory at the first round.

Likewise, during the 2008 election, the Republican Party wanted to avoid a second round for several reasons.[66] Firstly, authorities feared a similar outcome as the Orange Revolution. Secondly, the Republican Party political establishment was apprehensive of Ter-Petrosyan's return to politics. Finally, there was high uncertainty over Serzh Sarghysan's succession, as Kocharan was unable to run for a new mandate. The Armenian authorities had to assure victory in the first round to avoid triggering dangerous

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[66] Author's interview with an election expert in Yerevan (May 2015).

protests. (Tucker 2007). Sarghysan ultimately won during the first round, with 53% of the votes. However, thousands of people still poured into the streets protesting against alleged irregularities. The government declared a state of emergency and, despite international pressure, reacted using violence and administrative detentions. The clashes eventually caused at least ten casualties and only ended when Ter-Petrosyan called for a stop to the demonstrations. A second round was avoided even in the 2013 presidential election as well, yet this time the regime was able to hinder[67] the presence of a strong competitor far before the election (Nations in Transit Armenia 2014).

These episodes provide evidence of two different kinds of electoral malpractices affecting elections. The authorities in Armenia learned from other countries' experiences that a second round of elections could be risky, and developed tactics to limit protestor disruptions at polling stations. In this way, the Republican Party was able to secure victory in the first round, avoiding a risky runoff election. As a tactic, the practice of administrative detention had been used in Armenia since the mid-1990s, but the recent approach has been more brazen, with defendants unable to present evidence or call witnesses to testify on their behalf.

In addition, during the 2008 election, the use of surveys and exit polls was altered by authorities. In unconsolidated democracies, exit polling can be manipulated to validate falsified election returns in the public mind (Kharchenko and Paniotto 2010). The Armenian government aimed to avoid the scenarios that had occurred in Ukraine during the Orange Revolution, when independent exit polls helped to trigger protests in Maidan Square. Armenian authorities therefore restricted independent surveys and set up their own controlled system of exit polling.[68] Consequently, the Baltic Survey/Gallup shaped public opinion during the pre-election period through Election Day in 2008. Doubts still persist over the true extent of this agency's

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[67] Author's interview in Yerevan (May 2015).
[68] Author's interview with election expert from IFES in Yerevan (May 2015).

independence, [69] which delegated the Armenian Sociological Association to conduct the surveys on behalf of the International Republican Institute (OSCE/ODIHR 2008c:8). As one analyst from the Open Society Institute in Armenia explains, exit polls were adopted as a *façade*.[70] In fact, during the last two presidential elections, exit polls either closely matched official results, or reported figures highly skewed in favor of the incumbents.

A final method of manipulation that has contributed to the evolution of election management in Armenia is the use of government-operated nongovernmental organizations (GONGOs) in electoral observation. GONGOs first appeared in the Soviet period (Podrabinek 2010), but became far more widespread beginning in the mid-1990s. Just as foreign non-governmental organizations (NGOs) provided election assistance according to principles of electoral integrity (Fisher 1997), authoritarian regimes established GONGOs as a countermeasure. In particular, the Slovak President Vladimir Mečiar was one of the first to set up 'parallel' NGO to compete with independent NGOs (Gershman and Allen 2006). In 2007, there was a boom in NGOs involved in electoral monitoring activities. Many of these NGOs did not have any previous engagement in democracy-building projects, yet they were granted the opportunity to be present in polling stations.[71] The large majority of these NGOs (46 out of 52) did not subsequently provide a report of their monitoring activities.[72]

The GONGOs' issue produced some particularly negative effects on the way civil society organizations worked with electoral management. Firstly, they called into question the independence of civil society (Nation in Transit Armenia, 2008). Secondly, they hindered the effectiveness and fairness of voting process

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[69] Author's interview with election expert in Yerevan (OSCE) and OSI (May 2015).

[70] Author's interview with election expert from OSI Armenia in Yerevan (May 2015).

[71] Until 2011 NGOs had simply to fulfil an accreditation request to the CEC whose sole selecting system consisted in checking whether NGOs' statutes had the words 'democracy and protection of human rights' (OSCE/ODIHR 2007:17).

[72] Author's interview with election expert at CEC Armenia (May 2015).

(including the unbalanced presence of partisans in polling stations, pressuring and controlling voters, and publicizing favoring reports). During the 2013 presidential election, even some international NGOs appeared to behave like domestic GONGOs. In fact, some GONGOs adopted names close to well-known international organizations. [73] For example, when comparing the OSCE and the International Expert Center for Electoral Systems (ICES) pre-election reports, there are serious discrepancies, particularly concerning the quality of voter registers, media coverage and the authorities' effectiveness to cope with fraud and malpractice. Some journalists have questioned the credibility of ICES and other international NGOs as well (RFE/RL 09/10/2013).

Type of Malpractice	When introduced	Type of learning	From where
Vote Buying	Since 2003/5	Negative Learning	n/a
Avoid 2ⁿᵈ Round in Presidential elections	Since 2003 but successful only from 2008	Negative Learning	Bulldozer and Orange Revolutions
Administrative Detentions	Since 2003	Positive Learning	From past (90s)
Biased Exit Polls	Since 2008	Negative Learning	Ukraine 2004
GONGOs	Since 2007	Negative and Positive Learning	Negative from activism of NGOs in electoral revolutions. Positive from Slovakia

Table 2: Electoral malpractices in Armenia.

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[73] Author's interview with election expert with former IFES expert in Yerevan (May 2015)

In Armenia, as in Georgia, tactics for electoral manipulation have evolved through observation and learning. In particular, incumbents took bolder steps to hold on to power and changed tactics in the early 2000s when they suffered more from electoral uncertainties. In fact, on one side the diffusion of the Colored Revolutions and frequent local protests, and on the other the new 'Europeanization' path launched through the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the European Union, gave Armenian authorities cause to worry about a possible electoral revolution. The fact that Armenia did not experience a Colored Revolution has been linked to the deeply entrenched patronal network that characterizes Armenian politics (Hale 2015). However, this chapter claims that the political elite has been successful in deterring protests and revolutionary attempts because it drew important lessons on how to better rig the electoral process and to avoid electoral protests. Therefore, learning mechanisms were employed to manage electoral uncertainty without eliciting international condemnation. They introduced new tools (surveys, vote buying), but also drew on past experiences (administrative detention, GONGOs) and experiences from abroad (Ukraine's second round of elections). In doing so, they reduced the incidence of more traditional, and often more brazen, forms of fraud.

Conclusion

Armenia's case shares some common trends with Georgia. On one side, it is observable a gradual adoption and implementation of democratic reforms and on the other a gradual change in the methods of frauds and electoral malpractices. Yet, there are many other differences. First of all, in Armenia, despite the fact that during the nineties Western leverage was stronger than in Georgia the effects of Western democratizing pressure were weaker. In order to explain such a variation, the domestic regime structure must be taken into consideration. As Levitsky and Way assert, the role the state organizational capacity plays is a factor that can hinder or reduce Western democratizing pressure. As a matter of fact, Armenia had a stronger state apparatus compared to Georgia. There are several reasons for this, last but not least because of its huge military apparatus, which exerted an important role in domestic politics. Moreover, the 1999 terrorist

attack at the Parliament slowed down democratic development for the entire Kocharyan presidency. Western actors at that moment reduced the pressure over the country, which was experiencing a difficult time. There was not an interest to pressurize Kocharyan presidency in terms of electoral integrity.

Another element that characterizes the Armenia experience is Russian support. Since the early nineties, Moscow directly sustained Yerevan especially from a military standpoint. This relationship permitted Yerevan to suffer less from security concerns and it allowed Armenia to avoid a desperate quest for the inclusion into the Western security framework. However, the relationship with Russia was not always linear, and sometimes it collided with the Armenian political elites' preferences. In the last years, the case of the Armenia accession to the Eurasian Union is very emblematic. In a first phase, the Armenian authorities dismissed this possibility, as it was unthinkable to join an economic union with countries not adjacent. At the same time Armenian political elites were fulfilling all the procedures to sign the AA/DCFTA. As I explained so far, Russia's pressure was a key determinant which swung Armenian' preferences.

Therefore, the context in which the Armenian authorities operated was multifaceted and the barriers to the electoral integrity were weaker than in Georgia. This allowed the Armenian authorities to resort often to brazen rigging methods and at the same time to repress public demonstrations more harshly. Western leverage was effective only in certain moments, when it was united and when it set veritable ultimatums. As analyzed so far, the West was particularly demanding for the 2007 elections.[74] As a matter of fact, despite the perils concerning the return of Ter-Petrosyan and the spread of revolutionary virus, Armenian authorities managed to set up an election that was conducted largely in accordance with OSCE commitments and other international standards.

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[74] At this election, OSCE/ODHIR sent a huge observation mission composed more than 450 observers, whereas for the 2003 parliamentary election it was composed by less than 200 observers.

What about electoral frauds and malpractices? In Armenia, it is observable a smooth and gradual development of new forms of electoral malpractices only since early 2000, when vote-buying was for the first time widely used. The real breakage in terms of methods of frauds and malpractices occurred since the 2007 elections, when authorities left brazen methods to rig the elections (such as ballot box stuffing) and anticipated fraudulent activities in the pre-election period. However, if we take into consideration the harsh repression of demonstrators after the 2008 presidential election, we can claim that the Western democratizing pressure was working just for what concerns electoral integrity. As a matter of fact, when the regime felt insecure about possible revolutionary movements, it did not spare violent reactions.

Therefore, the Armenian case displays ambivalent outcomes for what concern Western democratizing pressures over electoral management and mismanagement. This ambiguity has been recently reinforced by the accession to the Eurasian Union. It will be very interesting to analyze what kind of consequences this choice, which creates a new context, will have over the authorities' options concerning electoral frauds and malpractices.

Chapter 6:
The Case of Azerbaijan

*'Democracy is not an apple you buy at the market
and back home.'*
– Heyidar Aliyev, former president of Azerbaijan

Introduction

Azerbaijan is the most controversial case as it has several differences in comparison with the two other countries under analysis. The first one is that according to some scholars, Azerbaijan never experienced a democratic breakthrough and therefore it must be understood as stable authoritarian regime (Roeder 1994; Mamed-zadeh 2001). However, there are several others scholar who have analyzed the country's patterns of development in the last two decades and deduced that Azerbaijan could be considered a form of hybrid regime (Susan Hyde and Nikolay Marinov 2009, Nodia and Stefes 2015), in particular for what concerns the period in between independence and 2005 (Ottaway 2003; Prygoda 2003; Gulyev 2005). Indeed, there are some other scholars who underline how for a certain moment in Azerbaijan history there has been a sort of partial 'democratizing' breakthrough mainly because of Western international pressure (cf. Cornell 2001; Yunusov 2011; Abbasov 2011). Nevertheless, in comparison to the other two South Caucasian countries, Azerbaijan scores higher in the scale of authoritarianism (see Polity V or Freedom House).

Another difference is that there is a very limited amount of research done on Azerbaijan political institutions, and therefore there are still some grey zones concerning the real extension of the Aliyev's system of power. Despite the different labels that researchers give to the regime's structure, 'Azerbaijan's politics has been elite-dominated, but we know very little about who holds power (and how) in this ex-Soviet republic' (Guliyev 2012). The tight network of power, described as pyramidal, is composed by regional 'clans' (Rasizade, 2004; Bunce and

Wolchik, 2008; Gojayev, 2010; Guliyev 2012), which have been hardly investigated by researcher and scholars. However, there is a more recent literature that is reducing the impact of such 'clans' on grouping and commanding over all the different facets of the society (cf. Hale 2015). In addition, there are very few analyses about electoral developments in Azerbaijan and with the recently episodes about crunching on opposition movements, as well as the close down of media and civil society independent platforms, it became more difficult observing the inner mechanisms of the regime.

From an international point of view, Azerbaijan experienced medium to low leverage and a high linkage with the West. As the other South Caucasian countries, Azerbaijan suffered from a general disinterest in the early nineties, yet to be under the international spotlight in the mid-nineties for the signature of the contract of the century. However, linkage did not trigger leverage, and the country remained overlooked by international democratization's programme till the end of the century. This was the time when Azerbaijan entered into the Council of Europe, negotiated with the EU a new partnership, and when the domestic political elite began the process of the dynastic succession between the Aliyev father and son, which proved to be a very delicate passage. In these years, up until 2005, Azerbaijan suffered from international pressure, as it was one of its weakest moments. Subsequently, once Ilham Alyiev was able to consolidate his power, Azerbaijan began to take the distance from the West and eventually Baku decided to close down the OSCE office in the country and to impose strict restrictions to the OSCE/ODIHR mission to the 2015 parliamentary election. At the same time, economic linkages with the West continued to grow, in particular since 2005, when there was growth in the oil and gas production. Therefore, Azerbaijan is one of the few cases where there has not been a consistent development between linkage and leverage. In fact, the electoral integrity (but not only this) worsened in the last decade. Azerbaijan, thanks to its foreign policy preferences, as well as its economic independency, has been able to challenge and to elude electoral integrity barriers with innovative stratagems.

The Early Years and the Establishment of Democratic Institutions

Since its independence Azerbaijan has acquired and developed democratic institutions, as well as a Constitution that sealed the founding principles of the regime. Azerbaijan's transition from Soviet rule was characterized by the development of a strong nationalistic sentiment in reaction of the Nagorno Karabach issue. Since 1988, when the Soviet Regional Council of Karabach voted in favor of secession to Armenia, there were reviving sentiments against Moscow and Yerevan, which culminated in the massacre of the Black January in Baku and the intervention of Soviet troops to restore order in Azerbaijan. However, in the aftermath of the 1991 events in Moscow, mass demonstrations all around Azerbaijan forced the Soviet ruler, Ayaz Mutalibov, to resign from power and to dismantle the Soviet system. The country acquired full independence on 18th January 1991. The nationalist movement, which was repressed by the Soviet apparatus, the Azerbaijan Popular Front (APF), was eventually included in the National Council that replaced the Soviet Council.

The APF soon became the most important political actor in the country, as – at that time – it was embodying lively popular sentiments, such as anti-Russian and anti-Armenia stances. The public was eager to begin a new life as quickly as possible. The 1992 Presidential election saw the victory of the APF leader Abulfaz Elchibey, in a scrutiny that has been considered as a fundamental turn for democratic transition (Ottaway 2003). Indeed, since independence a number of new political movements and organizations were mushrooming, and they contributed to the development of a multiparty system. From an electoral management standpoint, this first election was ruled by the new Law on the Election of the President of the Azerbaijan Republic. This law, which was approved on 26 June 1991, was not very different from the previous electoral laws of the Soviet times (Idea 2004b:42). Subsequent modifications in 1992 and 1993 'were largely cosmetic and did not change its essence or its main content' (*ibid*.).

Soon after Elchibey took power, he carried out sweeping policy changes from their very first days in office (Yunusov 2011). In October 1992, Azerbaijan pulled out of the CIS, and six months later the Russian army withdrew from the republic. Despite the efforts to reform the country's foreign policy, the president and the APF were not 'even remotely prepared to govern the country' (Ottaway 2003:56) and the government was having a hard time in taking full control over many important sectors of the administration, the army included. As a matter of fact, the Communist networks were still alive and they were refraining the government to fully transform the regime. In addition, the war with Armenia over the control of the Nagorno-Karabakh was debilitating the country, which suffered from many defeats and was left with no external support. In February 1993 the political crisis reached its peak when the President ousted his official representative in Nagorno-Karabakh – Surat Huseinov, who in turn refused to comply and some months later marched with paramilitary troops toward Baku. At that moment Elchibey resigned and Heydar Aliyev, the former First Secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan, became the acting President thanks to Soviet succession rules, which were still working in the country.

Aliyev's first move was to nominate Huseinov as his prime minister in order to avoid an armed confrontation and to reestablish political stability in the country. The Aliyev presidency was further legitimized by the election in November 1993, where he gathered more than 98% of the votes. Since that election, Heydar Aliyev started to oust all the former APF members from positions of power and to centralize all the different sectors of the state under his control. The process of consolidating his power was accompanied on the other side by the establishment of democratic institutions, the creation of a western-inspired Constitution and the toleration of some kind of opposition. Indeed, Aliyev was struggling to find Western support 'in order to portray himself as a democratic leader, he needed the existence of certain democratic institutions, such as opposition parties, an independent media, and civic organizations' (Yusunov 2011:66).

Indeed, the Azerbaijani Constitution, adopted on 12 November 1995 with a popular referendum, had been crafted following liberal democratic principles and it assured the separation of powers, a secular states and individual rights among which most important principles of the citizens' electoral rights, including those relevant to parliamentary and presidential elections. For what concerns the Presidential position, a general election for a term of five years was envisaged, whereby no president could serve more than two consecutive terms. Moreover, the President was ultimately responsible for both domestic and international affairs and he could appoint and dismiss members of the cabinet and the prime minister as well (Shaffer 2004:29). The Constitution envisaged also the creation of a Constitutional Court and the regulations for administering at local level.

All these provisions constituted the formal political system, which was used more as crowbar accompanying the lever of the presidency *vis à vis* domestic political opposition and external players (Heradstvett 2001). On the one had this was a way to demonstrate democratic engagement at the international level,[75] as international actors such as the European Union began to be more interested in the region. On the 12th June 1995, the Council of the European Union (EU) adopted a common position on the South Caucasus for the purpose of assisting Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia with the difficulties of transitioning to a democratic system. This engagement opened up new opportunities for cooperation under the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement to be initiated in December 1995, just after the Parliamentary election. On the other, the adoption of the Constitution, which enshrined presidential power with new duties such as the possibility to appoint local authorities vested with complete and unaccountable power, paved the way for further antidemocratic laws (Gulaliyev 2005).

The 1995 parliamentary election was the first opportunity to test the credibility of Aliyev's engagement in a democratization project, and the international actors were particularly interested in the process. The regulations concerning the legislative body,

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[75] Authors' interview with a political analyst in Tbilisi (May 2015).

the Milli Majlis, were included in the electoral law on the 12ᵗʰ August 1995, which established that the parliament had to be elected every five years and it consisted of 125 members, of whom 100 were elected in single seats constituencies and the remaining 25 were allocated on the basis of a proportional nationwide party list system. However, according to the final report of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) the election 'did not correspond to internationally accepted norms' (CSCE 1995:2). The electoral malpractices included ballot stuffing, serious irregularities in the voting and vote count, arbitrary interpretation of the electoral law that led to the disqualification of one-third of the political parties and 60 percent of their candidates, and there was good reason to 'suspect that election officials inflated the results to meet minimum turnout requirements' (*Ibid.*). Despite the fact that President Aliyev repeatedly stressed his personal commitment to holding free and fair elections as an integral aspect of transforming Azerbaijan into a democratic, pluralistic society, in this first election authorities tested some methods of frauds that were 'since then repeated in every election' (Ottaway 2003:60). Eventually, Aliyev's New Azerbaijan Party got more than 62% of the votes and no other opposition parties gained more than 10%. The CEC announced that in 15 districts elections were to be reheld in February 1996, due to failures to meet minimum turnouts or because of massive infractions.

Meanwhile, on the 18ᵗʰ December 1995 Azerbaijan initialed the negotiation for a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the EU, which took effect from the 1ˢᵗ January 1999. This would have been a first cornerstone for a process that aimed to strengthen the links with the West and that eventually would have allowed a further integration into Western organizations such as NATO and the EU. In an interview President Aliyev clearly stated that 'although Islam is the ideology of some countries, in Azerbaijan we are building a secular state based on western and world standards. In other words, we are building a government based on the recognized principles of democracy and universal human rights for all' (Azerbaijan International 5 March 1997). Western countries, despite many reports concerning the basic violation of human rights and democratic

principles, often 'turned a blind eye to many of Heydar Aliyev's domestic policies' (Yunusov 2011:69). It must be remembered that in September 1994, President Aliyev signed the 'contract of the century' in terms of oil exploitation with an international consortium (mostly composed by Western countries) that projected to invest $13 billion. This contract was the cornerstone for the economic and political survival of the country, which could 'lead Azerbaijan out of Russian sphere of influence and toward the West' (Ottaway 2003:62).

Yet, the broader issues of the democratization process continued, and many flaws in the electoral legislation were addressed from a formal standpoint. As a matter of fact, the Venice Commission and the OSCE were insisting to review some aspects of the rules on the election of the President, and to update it in conformity to the requirements of contemporary democratic development. As a result, on the eve of the Presidential election in 1998 two laws were activated. The first one, the new Law on the Election of the President of the Azerbaijan Republic, was adopted on 9 June 1998. The second one, the law on the Central Electoral Commission, was successfully enacted on 15 May 1998. These two laws were conceptually different from the earlier ones, because they were addressing some specific shortcomings and they set standards for the transparency of elections, created favorable conditions for candidates, and introduced a new and more progressive system for appointing the electoral commissions. Overall, these laws had a number of shortcomings (Idea 2004b:42), such as the procedures for establishing the voter's registers at the precinct level, unambiguous rules regulating the campaign, the ballot printing and security and the aggregation of the election results (OSCE/ODIHR Azerbaijan 1998).

The Central Electoral Commission Law envisaged the establishment of a permanent 24-member Central Election Commission (CEC) and it represented the highest level of the election administration. At the second level, 82 Territorial Election Commissions (TEC) were appointed by the CEC 70 days before election day, following the casting of lots at the territory (rayon) level to determine the nine members of each TEC. A

similar procedure was implemented no later than 44 days before Election Day to form the approximately 4300 PECs, each consisting of seven members selected by lot and appointed by the respective TEC. According to the Law, both the Parliament and the President can appoint respectively half of the members of the Central Election Commission. Such a provision favored the incumbent as the President's party dominated the Parliament with an overwhelming majority. (OSCE/ODIHR Azerbaijan 1998).

Aliyev won the presidential election in 1998 with 76.1% of the vote against weak rivals [76] (EIU Azerbaijan 1998). The international monitoring mission by the OSCE/ODIHR stated in its final report that the overall election process fell short of meeting OSCE commitments and international standards. The observers reported that, 'in several instances, domestic observers and unauthorized local officials interfered with the work of the Precinct Election Commission' (OSCE/ODIHR Azerbaijan 1998:6). Moreover, 'significant discrepancies between the signatures present on the voter lists and the ballots found in the boxes were observed during the ballot counting. Additionally, observers witnessed clear evidence of ballot stuffing' (*ibid.*). However, the general atmosphere improved compared to the last elections and the understanding of the voting process increased. Thus, the scrutiny did not entirely misrepresent popular support for the president (EIU Azerbaijan 1998).

Heydar Alyiev was thus able to consolidate his power, with a plan that was aimed first of all to secure the interests of his family and his inner circle (Yusunov 2011), and secondly to prepare his succession. As a matter of fact, since the late nineties he started to suffer from cardiac problems and in 1999 he had a major heart bypass operation in the United States. At the same time, the President was working both domestically and internationally to push Azerbaijan toward the West. On one side he kept on flattering the West. During his visit in the United States, in February 2000, he affirmed that Azerbaijan would like

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[76] In fact, most of opposition candidates decided to boycott the elections because of the uneven composition of the CEC.

to join NATO in an effort to bring greater geopolitical attention in the Caucasus area (cf. Paliani 2002). On the other side, he facilitated the development of further democratization steps by allowing and inviting experts from international organizations, including the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe to actively participate in the updating of both the laws on Milli Majlis election and on the Central Electoral Commission, which eventually were adopted in 2000.[77] The international involvement brought significant improvement on the electoral legislations and contributed to the decision of the opposition to not boycott the upcoming Parliamentary elections (Cornell 2001).

On the 5th November 2000 the people of Azerbaijan were called to vote for the Milli Majlis. The ruling party, the NAP, won 79 out of 124 seats, while the opposition acquired just 13 seats. The election was harshly criticized by international observers because of the high degree of ballot stuffing, the exclusion of monitors in the polling stations, the manipulation of turnout figures and interference with electoral protocol. Already in the pre-Election day there were problems with political parties' registration. Eight out of thirteen parties that presented the 50,000 signatures necessary for registration in the party-list election were rejected by the CEC. The same problem was registered in the single-member constituencies, where more than half of the candidates were refused registration. Overall, according to international election observers the elections 'marked some progress over previous occasions, in particular in the preparatory phase and enhanced political pluralism, although the overall process fell short of international standards for democratic elections' (OSCE/ODIHR Azerbaijan 2000:1). The ODIHR conclusion was echoed by the National Democratic Institute report that stated that the elections represented "a

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[77] The reformed CEC was thus composed by 18 members appointed for a six-year term of office with one-third changed every two years. Six were nominated by the party of the parliamentary majority (based on the proportional ballot in the preceding elections), a further six were nominated by the parliamentary minority parties, with the remaining six made of independent lawyers nominated by parliamentary deputies who were not members of political parties.

continuation of a pattern of seriously flawed elections in Azerbaijan that fail to meet even minimum international standards" (Council of Europe 9 November 2000:1).

In terms of methods of frauds, observers reported ' ballot box stuffing, manipulated turnout results and pre-marked ballots […] party proxies frequently suffered intimidation, harassment and even arrest […] unauthorized local officials often controlled the process and sought to influence voters […] in several instances, international observers were denied access to polling stations and some were expelled from election commission premises […] the vote counting and aggregation of results processes were completely flawed and manipulated' (OSCE/ODIHR Azerbaijan 2000:2). Moreover, as a way to demonstrate the government's commitment to the democratic principle, the CEC and the Constitutional Court cancelled the results in 11 constituencies where serious violations were found, and ordered repeat elections only for the single-mandate contests.

Given the high international attention on the Election Day 'the regime was attempting to rig the election by keeping its most dangerous rivals off the ballot, thus relieving itself of the need to alter the results on Election Day' (Cornell, 2001:126) and the government began to manipulate the electoral process months before ballot. As a matter of fact, thanks to the contradictions and inconsistencies in EMB's implementation of different electoral laws, which were adopted at different times (International IDEA 2004b), the authorities could find dubious legal means to exclude participants. Moreover, they used some coercive measures, including physical intimidation until some weeks before the scrutiny. The government was particularly keen to exclude Musavat and the Democratic Party of Azerbaijan (EIU Azerbaijan 2001:14), led by Rasul Guliyev. However, 'foreign criticism about the exclusions was so severe that on October 6th Mr Aliyev changed his mind and appealed to the CEC to allow all parties to participate in the election' (*Ibid*.) Following this stance on inclusive participation, the authorities resorted to the use of blatant ballot stuffing and other gross

election violations that eventually were revealed by the international observers in their reports.

Confronting with Higher Western Leverage

In December 2000 the Council of Europe, in provision of the Azerbaijan accession to the organization (which eventually became a reality on January 25th 2001) stated that Azerbaijan would be subject to stricter monitoring. At the same time, with the outbreak of the war on terror in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Azerbaijan became a key ally for the United States as it represented a strategic bridgehead in the region (Frappi 2010). However, since the election of Putin as Russian President, the relationship among the two countries was ameliorating (EIU Azerbaijan 2001:15), which led to a deeper cooperation in the joint efforts to deter terrorism and smuggling between the shared borders. This was the starting point for a divergent path that from that moment onwards Azerbaijan took. As a matter of fact, the improvement in the relationship between Azerbaijan and Russia produced trade off *vis à vis* the Western leverage.

As soon as Baku recovered his relationship with Moscow, the needs for Western assistance became no longer vital. Yet, Russia did not directly play the black knight role in Azerbaijan as it had done with other countries (see Ambrosio 2009, Levitsky and Way 2010), as Moscow could not really rely on Aliyev's family and it would have preferred the former Communist party leader Ayaz Mutalibov for Aliyev succession (Cornell 2001). Nevertheless, it is possible to trace a common path in democratic backlash both in Russia and Azerbaijan, since Putin rose to power. In particular, the civil and political rights suffered were reduced with spillover effects in the freeness and fairness of the elections. Cameron and Orenstein have pictured very clearly the downturn of the civil and political rights in Russia and in the three South Caucasian countries: there are striking similarities between the situation in Russia and Azerbaijan.
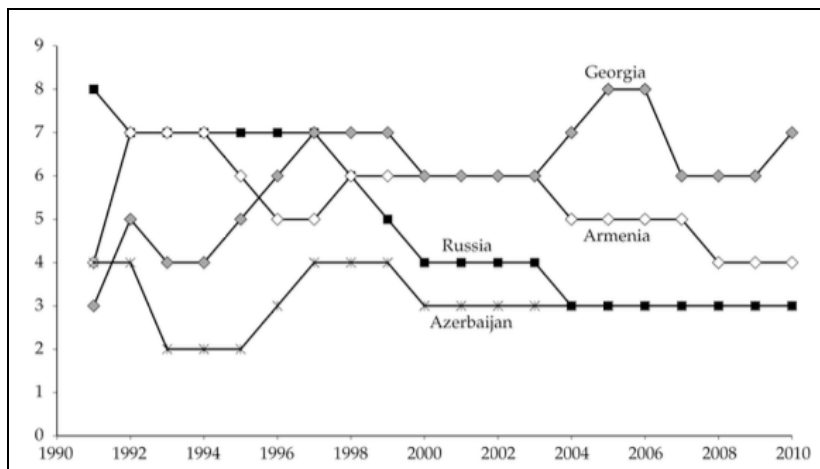
Figure 4 Political rights and civil liberties in Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, 1999–2010. (Source Cameron and Orenstein 2012)

The cooperation with the Western institutions was guaranteed for what concerned the development of a unified Electoral Code. However, the Azerbaijani authorities hided to their population the fact that the OSCE/ODIHR, the Venice Commission and the International Foundation for Electoral System were involved in this process.[78] Even the opposition parties were not aware about it until December 2002 and subsequently, once they were called to work at the draft, they refused to participate in the process. The international organizations sent back the reviewed Electoral Code with around 300 suggested variations, but only few of them[79] were modified accordingly (International IDEA 2004b). The new Electoral Code was 'essentially a compilation and revision of existing laws' (Sødergren 2004:5), without substantial changes, which however remained a 'sufficient basis for the

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[78] Author's interview with Azerbaijani electoral expert in Paris (July 2015)

[79] According to International Idea 'a whole range of crucial suggestions concerning questions of the establishment of the electoral commissions and their activities, the transparency of elections, the procedure for filing complaints against violations of the electoral law, and a number of others were not taken into account' (International IDEA 2004b:43).

conduct of free and fair elections' (Ibid). Eventually, the population was involved in the last stage of the Electoral Code adoption, which was sealed by a popular referendum held on 5 May 2003, just a few months before the crucial Presidential election.

The presidential election, scheduled for the 15th October 2003, was perceived as a 'window of opportunity' (Yunusov 2011:69), by both international and domestic actors and it created high expectations on the government's capacity to deal with it. The regime was experiencing a very delicate period. On the one side, Alyiev father had a rapid decline in his health conditions and he was hospitalized in the United States,[80]. On the other, Aliyev was aware that he could not count on his political apparatus to maintain control and thus had to rely on his son (Ottway 2003). Yet, the dynastic succession could exacerbate intra-elite tensions and provoke a rupture among the ruling class. Therefore, the process aimed to carry out the dynastic succession to Alyiev's son, Ilham, began few years before.

In 1995 Ilham was elected in the parliament and subsequently in 1999 entered in the PAN political establishment. Subsequently, in 2002 Aliyev's father proposed some constitutional amendments that would ease the path for the dynastic succession. The amendments allowed Heydar to appoint his son as Prime Minister on august 2003 (this move already put Ilham in the first position to take over his father in case of death).[81] Subsequently, the PAN nominated Heydar Aliyev as its candidate for the Presidential election; they decided that it was better not to weaken Heydar position and to avoid deepening the lame duck effect on the President (cf. Hale 2015). Ilham announced his willingness to run as independent (he was supported by an 'initiative group) a decision that was met with

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[80] The real conditions of the former president were not made public until the scrutiny was passed. Author's interview with Azerbaijani journalist in Tbilisi (May 2015)

[81] In addition the amendments eliminated the proportional list component of parliamentary elections. All 125 members of Parliament were elected in single seat constituencies, in a single round of voting.

severe criticism (Cornell 2011). Two weeks before the ballot, Heydar Aliyev stepped back and endorsed his son.

The effects of this decision were not fully forecasted by the government, which could not avoid confusions both internally and externally the ruling bloc. The opposition[62] had a great opportunity to launch a united strong candidate but 'proved unable to capitalize on this tactical advantage' (Cornell 2011:106). Isa Gambar, from the Musavat Party, was the most popular opponent but he did not encounter the support of many opposition parties and oligarchs.

Despite the weak opposition candidate, the election was massively rigged by frauds and electoral malpractices. The ODIHR mission reported that the election 'failed to meet OSCE commitments and other international standards for democratic elections', mostly because of a lack of sufficient political commitment to implement a genuine election process' (OSCE/ODIHR Azerbaijan 2003:1). Yet, the legal framework, in particular after the revision of former electoral laws and the recodification in a unified Electoral Code, with all its

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[62] In the early and mid-2000s, beside the Musavat Party, which is one of the oldest party in Azerbaijan a new range of opposition parties emerged. After Abulfaz Elchibey's death in 2000, the *Popular Front* was split into the *Classical Popular Front* led by Mirmahmud Miralioglu, and a reformist faction led by Ali Kerimli. The latter is the heir to Elchibey's party. The *Azerbaijan Democratic Party,* established by Serdar Jalaloghlu in 1991, became more active during this period. Jalaloghlu was a founder and board member of the Nakhchivan branch of the Popular Front from 1988 to 1990. The party's leadership was handed to Rasul Guliyev from 1996 to 2006. Currently, the party is run by Jalaoghlu. Rasul Guliyev, now a dissident, was a parliamentary speaker under Heydar Aliyev from 1993 to 1996. He established the *Open Society Party (Açıq Cəmiyyət Partiyası)* in 2007. Later, party leadership was transferred to Sulheddin Akber, deputy to the Minister of National Security under the Popular Front government. […] the establishment of so many parties split the opposition into many unnecessary fragments that prevented the opposition from working effectively (Sultanova 2014:20-21).

shortcomings, was acceptable and in line with international standards (Sødergren 2003).

The international observers (which also suffered from some movement constraints decided by Azeri authorities) observed electoral flaws before, during and after the Election Day. In particular, the pre-election period was characterized by widespread intimidation and unequal conditions for the candidates, with inefficient mechanisms for resolution od disputes. Observers on the Election Day witnessed 'significant irregularities during voting and widespread fraudulent practices during the counting and tabulation of election results, notably ballot stuffing and tampering with protocols at both the precinct and constituency levels' (OSCE/ODIHR Azerbaijan 2003:2). Moreover, new technologies were used in an attempt to threaten voters' right to vote privacy: since the 2003 elections, authorities installed video cameras inside the pooling station, allegedly to deter fraud, but actually to scare voters, as the video cameras were positioned above the voting booths (Sødergren 2004).

In the aftermath of the publication of the election results, which inaugurated Ilham Aliyev as the winner of the election with 77% of the vote, violent protests broke out in several cities. In particular, the opposition objected to Ilham Aliyev's claim that he had won in the first round. The day after, several thousand protestors gathered in Azadliq Square in the center of Baku. The authorities that forecasted the protests deployed soldiers and riot police to the scene, and demonstrators were violently dispersed (Sultanova 2014); the clashes had a heavy outcome: four people were killed, with many others were injured, including almost 100 police officers, and 600 opposition members were detained. Moreover, police attacked peaceful demonstrators in front of the Musavat Party headquarters and in Azadliq Square. These events brought under the spotlight of the international media the government policies. Eventually authorities had also to confront international judgment on single cases regarding mistreatment of demonstrators (such as the case of Muradova v. Azerbaijan – see European Court of Human Rights 2009).

It is worth noting that since those events, the principal and symbolic Azadliq Square in Baku has been closed off for any kind of demonstrations. As a matter of fact, from the 2005 Parliament elections onwards, the authorities denied any public gathering in Azadliq Square; demonstrations were subsequently organized in smaller and lesser symbolic places such as Galaba square. Authorities were very concerned that somehow protesters could undertake some sit-in strategies as those that characterized the Ukrainian Orange revolution or the Georgian Rose revolution, which implied the use of innovative tactics (such as rock concerts, pitched tents and colored garments). In order to avoid any sort of public gathering Azadliq Square was closed down from early 2006 till 2010 allegedly because of renovation works at Government House,[83] located nearby the square.

Western actors did not raise harsh criticism on what happened both during and after the electoral process; thus, the Azerbaijani government was able to exploit the situation. Indeed, on one side, the preliminary statements by OSCE/ODIHR reported minor breaches of the electoral integrity (cf. OSCE/ODIHR Preliminary Statement Azerbaijan 2003), and it was extensively used by the authorities to assess the integrity of the electoral process. Moreover, the Azerbaijani authorities resorted to publicizing also the report from the CIS observation mission,[84] which claimed that no serious violations in the conduction of the election could be determined. On the other, the West did not have any intention to further pressurize the regime because in Azerbaijan there were not important factors on which Western pressure could have leant upon (Cornell 2011). In particular, there was not unity in terms of opposition, the organizational strength of the regime was solid, and there was neither an independent media nor any organized civil society movements that could mount a large-scale get-out-the-vote campaign. These factors can play a powerful role to determining the outcome of

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[83] Author's interview with Azerbaijani political dissident in Paris (May 2015)
[84] Commonwealth of Independent States observation missions started to operate in 2003, however it is not considered to be a high-quality level monitoring organization (Bader 2012, Daxecker and Scheider 2014).

revolutionary movements (cf. Cornell 2011, Bunce and Wolchik 2011). Eventually, this two-faced criticism by western international organizations provoked a deep disappointment[85] among populations (Yunusov 2011), especially after they saw the pressure that international actors mounted few months later to unblock the situation in Georgia in the midst of the Rose Revolution.

In Azerbaijan the dynastic succession eventually became a reality. The election marked the start of 'a new model of state management in the country, with an emphasis on "strong statehood" and economic growth' (Hale 2015:294). However, the period between 2003 and 2005 was one of the weakest for the government, as the regime was still in a readjustment phase. Given the particularly weak situation, and the outbreak of the electoral revolution in neighboring Georgia and subsequently in Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, the authorities continued to make life difficult for the opposition by intimidating criticism and spreading propaganda through the state-run media.[86] Moreover, Ilham Alyiev was even more brazen than his father when he had to deal with opposition: since he came to power authorities 'did not even bother to conceal the new president's antipathy toward his political opponents, which included all pro-Western, pro-Russian, and pro-Islamist movements' (Yunusov 2011:71). The younger Aliyev managed to oust some of the most powerful networks in his initial coalition and he was able to increasingly find a role for his own family's network (Hale 2015).

The parliamentary elections that took place on November the 6th 2005, were the testbed for the new political establishment, not only for the younger Aliyev's capacity to hold on to power *vis à vis* the opposition forces, but also to assess the unity of the ruling elite (Cornell 2011). Many opposition parties, despite suffering from repression, participated in the election and they attempted

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[85] The public was particularly annoyed and shocked by the stance of the American administration, which not only closed its eyes to the massive election fraud and abuse of power, but actually rushed to congratulate Ilham Aliyev on his victory even before the official election results were announced (Yunusov 2011:70).

[86] Author's interview with opposition refugee in Tbilisi (May 2015).

to challenge the regime (Sultanova 2014). Over 2000 candidates and 48 political parties or party blocs contended for the 125 parliamentary seats. The international organizations were deeply involved in the election monitoring and OSCE/ODIHR sent 617 short-term observers. As a matter of fact, on the 11th May and subsequently on 25th of October President Ilham Aliyev issued two Executive Orders setting out updated guidelines for free and transparent elections. At that time President Aliyev was particularly engaged with the aim of acquiring the international reputation as a reformist leader of a country with significant geostrategic and economic potential (International Crisis Group 2005). The President also admitted that in previous elections 'there were shortcomings, which were beyond the control of the Azerbaijani leadership, he attributed them mainly to incompetence, irresponsibility, and, in some cases, to the "post-soviet mentality" of some bureaucrats and members of the Central Election Commission' (Kara 2007:721). Moreover, on June 6th the Electoral Code was amended in order to meet some recommendation. Despite some slightly improvements a number of shortcomings remained in the electoral framework, in particular referring to: the composition of election commissions, which remained problematic as it favored the incumbent authorities; the Election Code provisions regarding complaints were ambiguous, permitting procedural variations; the Law on Freedom of Assembly in practice provided local executive authorities with considerable discretion to restrict and ban election rallies and other campaign events. (cf. OSCE/ODIHR Azerbaijan 2005). Overall, Azerbaijan's electoral system was 'identified as one area of democratization where the government has shown the least amount of progress' (Guliyeva 2005:48) still in 2005.

However, despite all the formal government attention, as well as the massive presence of international observers, the elections 'did not meet a number of OSCE commitments and other international standards for democratic elections' (OSCE/ODIHR Azerbaijan 2006:3). The observers reported many episodes of frauds and electoral malpractices. These included the presence of unauthorized persons in the polling stations and interfering in the work of election commissioners, intimidation of voters,

improper application of inking procedures (i.e., checking voters' fingers for ink), cases of ballot box stuffing, and inflating votes for some candidates by swapping ballot papers from one stack to another, candidates' representatives being expelled from the count, protocols not being completed in the presence of observers or being left blank (cf. OSCE/ODIHR Azerbaijan 2006). Moreover, it must be signaled the persistence of video cameras and the presence of biased exit pollsters in inside polling station. The exit polls were a new form of vote manipulation, as they would serve the scope of legitimizing the official results (I am going to speak about this particular method of malpractice in the paragraph concerning frauds and malpractices).

President Aliyev was aware about the effects of frauds both at the international and domestic arena. Therefore, the day after the election in a speech broadcasted on television, he acknowledged the fact that there were some episodes of frauds, and that he would have set the stage for prosecution of those who were responsible. Moreover, he announced that in some cases the authorities would have repeated the vote. It was the first time that the President broke the 'climate of impunity for electoral frauds' (Cornell 2011:118). Subsequently, the CEC and the Constitutional Court invalidated the results in 6 constituencies where the elections had to be repeated. Therefore, the final vote count showed that the NAP won 61 seats, the Freedom bloc 5 seats and many other parties less than 3. However, the 'independent candidates' won 43 seats, scoring +14 seats compared to the previous elections. Those independent candidates resulted to be affiliated with the NAP, or endorsed him once elected (Kara 2007, OSCE/ODIHR Azerbaijan 2006). It is a way for the regime to claim openness to other political actors.

In the aftermath of the publication of the election results, the CEC received more than 1000 complaints, which it failed to address systematically (cf. OSCE/ODIHR Azerbaijan 2006). Moreover, opposition parties (in particular the leaders of the Freedom Bloc) organized sit-in and manifestations in Baku to contest election's results, but were squashed by the police that

massively intervened to wipe-out the demonstrators with tear gas and water cannons; the socio-political environment was particularly tense as the authorities viewed the attempted sit-in actions as 'an effort to duplicate the techniques used by the Ukrainian opposition during the December 2004 Orange Revolution' (Eurasianet 28 November 2005). Moreover, a combination of government restrictions and weak popular support prevented the opposition from mounting large-scale demonstrations in protest at the conduct of the November 2005 parliamentary election (EIU Azerbaijan December 2005). However, the international community soon after the election results were displayed acknowledged the election's outcome, conferring legitimacy to the new parliament (Yunusov 2011).

In those years, western international actors (United States in particular) had no vested interested in provoking a revolution in Azerbaijan. The post-Soviet region was already shocked by the Rose Revolution, the Orange Revolution and the Tulip Revolution; moreover, Azerbaijan was strategically important to the West due to its oil and gas resources; thus, 'keeping Azerbaijan politically stable [had] priority over moving it towards becoming a pluralist democratic polity' (Kara 2007:723; Cornell 2011). Moreover, since early 2006 the opening of the new oil pipeline connecting Baku to Ceyhan (Turkey) allowed the regime to fully exploit its enormous oil reserves. What followed was rapid economic growth, which also supplied some 'visible benefits to substantial parts of the population and thus served as one important basis for Aliyev's popular support' (Hale 2015:295). According to World Bank data, the country averaged economic growth rates of 15 percent between 2003 and 2010. That is demonstrated by the Government's high-appreciation rate, which scored 55% of adults that declared to trust or fully trust the government, whereas appreciation's rates in Armenia was 42% and in Georgia 31% (Caucasus barometer 2008). According to Cornell, Ilham Aliyev 'has been able to build a relatively strong popular following, a task facilitated by windfall oil revenues, but he does not generate widespread enthusiasm either' (Cornell 2011:174-175). Azerbaijan, contrary to the other South Caucasian countries, is the least exposed to international

financial markets, which is one of the reasons why it was not so affected by the global financial crisis of 2008.

A Renovated Stability

Thanks to the 2005 elections, Aliyev was reassured about his entourage and about his grip on the pyramidal power structure[87] that characterizes the country (Hale 2015). In the same year, Aliyev ordered the arrest of some prominent ministers in his government, who had been challenging his leadership (cf. Cornell 2011). The dynastic transition was over. The next period of the presidency was characterized by a dramatic shift both domestically and internationally. Internally, Aliyev's government crushed even more citizens' freedoms and civil rights, in particular against journalists (cf. Human Right Watch Azerbaijan 2010), whereas externally he sought more contacts with the West. Since 2006 Aliyev began to visit European capitals as well as Washington and signed various cooperation agreements with international donors. Subsequently, in 2009 he also signed the memoranda within the framework of the EU Eastern Partnership. When external actors raised the issue of human rights abuses, he replied that the Azerbaijani laws on defamation were not in line with European standards and that therefore must be amended; moreover, he promised that he would have pardoned the journalists sentenced to prison (OSCE Yearbook 2009).

Meanwhile he prepared his candidature for the 2008 Presidential election. During this campaign Aliyev showed the intention to detach from his fathers' heritage and to propose some kind of reformist agenda. He centered his campaign on themes of economic progress, local infrastructural improvements, and preparation for war - if necessary to regain Nagorno-Karabakh, and a battle against corruption (Hale 2015). The opposition did not even try hard to win the election, and most of them boycotted the election (EIU Azerbaijan December 2008), as it was clear that opposition's candidates did not have any chance to win. From a legal point of view, the parliament passed a new

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[87] Author's interview with Azerbaijani political expert in Tbilisi (May 2015).

law on Freedom of Assembly, which provided with some formal ameliorations. Yet, this law was subsequently strictly and unfairly implemented, in particular by the local authority in Baku (OSCE/ODIHR Azerbaijan 2008). Afterwards, in an effort to address some of the shortcomings individuated by the Venice Commission, the parliament amended some aspects of the Electoral Code. The 2008 presidential election was organized and managed by the CEC, which suffered from the withdrawal of the members nominated by the opposition parties. Substitutes joined the commission only in October, less than one month before the Election Day. However, according to the OSCE/ODIHR observation mission, 'preparations for the election were carried out smoothly and within the legal deadlines' and 'the OSCE/ODIHR EOM enjoyed good cooperation with the CEC' (OSCE/ODIHR Azerbaijan 2008:8).

Ilham Aliyev won the scrutiny during the first round with more than 87% of the votes. The second classified was Igbal Aghazade from the Azerbaijan Hope party, who scored less than 3% of the preferences. The high-percentage of the votes for Aliyev had a double explanation. On one side, given that most of the opposition candidates boycotted the election, there were not serious challengers. On the other, despite the fact that the pre-election process was better managed in respect to the previous elections, many frauds and malpractices were observed during the voting acts and voting counts. For what concern the voting act, the OSCE/ODIHR observers reported that 'there were important procedural shortcomings, in particular with regards to safeguards against multiple voting. In a significant number of polling stations, citizens voted in groups or the voters' secrecy was not guaranteed. In some instances, there were indications of serious violations, including ballot box stuffing, and apparently identical signatures on voter lists, an indicator of electoral malfeasance' (OSCE/ODIHR Azerbaijan 2008:3). Subsequently, for what concerns the vote count, frauds were even more conspicuous with 'many significant procedural shortcomings observed, including failure to follow basic reconciliation procedures' and with cases of 'tampering with voter lists, results and protocols, including some cases of overt manipulation (*Ibid*).

Moreover, the video cameras were still present inside the polling stations.

Therefore, this election, despite 'mark[ing] considerable progress towards meeting OSCE commitments and other international standards, in particular with regard to some technical aspects of election administration, the election process failed to meet some OSCE commitments' (OSCE/ODIHR Azerbaijan 2008:1). It was the first time that the OSCE/ODIHR pronounced such a 'positive' judgment for a scrutiny in the country. This result was determined by two factors. On one side the efforts of Aliyev to have at least a legal framework in line with international standards, and on the other the fact that the election was not really contested, determined the lesser negative assessment by the international observers. Oddly, the aftermath of the publication's result was not characterized by protests or violence, which reinforced the idea that a real opposition was at this point overwhelmed by the Aliyev political machine.

Soon after the election Aliyev prepared the next step of his final consolidation of power. Thanks to this renewed position of strength, he pushed the parliament to start the process to review the Constitution and add a clause to the article concerning the two-term maximum for the presidency. The parliament prepared a draft, which had to be subsequently approved by a referendum, mentioning that the possibility to run for other terms was applicable only in situation of war. At that time Azerbaijan was officially at war with Armenia. The opposition reinvigorated and openly criticized the initiative as a way to transform Azerbaijan in a full dictatorship and monarchy (Hale 2015). According to the government this proposition would have given the power to the people to reelect a leader that they liked (Valiyev 2009). Moreover, the authorities wisely set the referendum for the eve of the major Novruz holiday in order to lessen the possibility of protests taking place (Hale 2015). Aliyev was confident that he could bet on the unity of his pyramid system and won the scrutiny. The referendum, which was conducted without an international observation mission, resulted in an overwhelming victory for the president's proposal. Aliyev was already booking his reelection in 2013.

The subsequent parliamentary elections that were held in 2010 saw the full consolidation of the NAP, which won 71 out of 125 seats. Moreover, for the first time the opposition parties did not enter in the parliament (Gulyiev 2013), as independent candidates won the remaining seats. From a legal framework standpoint, these elections were affected by some amendments to the Electoral Code that shortened the period of the election campaign (it started just 23 days prior the E-day), so 'limiting candidates' opportunity to campaign in an already restrictive political environment' (OSCE/ODIHR Azerbaijan 2010:5) and removed candidates' access to public campaign funding, without addressing main shortcomings of the electoral framework, including those ruling the CEC (ibid.). The latter was still not impartially composed, as the pro-government forces had 'a decisive majority in all commissions' (OSCE/ODIHR Azerbaijan 2010:6). Yet the overall organization of the scrutiny was carried out smoothly and without major delays. One of the main problems concerning this election regarded voter registration. Despite all the effort by the CEC to improve and update the centralized voter register, which included around 4.8 million registered voters, there was a huge discrepancy between the CEC's register and the data from the State Statistic Committee, which assessed that there were more than 6 million people in the age of vote in the country. This led the CEC to allow direct registration at the polling station in case a voter could not find his/her name on the register. This solution created many supplementary episodes of mismanagements, as the PECs had to consider during the E-day more than 35.000 requests (OSCE/ODIHR Azerbaijan 2010:8).

Another source of concern was the registration of electoral candidates, a procedure that was handled at Constituencies Electoral Commission (ConsEC) level. The electoral observers noticed a lack of openness and transparency in the activity of many ConsECs with regard to the registration process (OSCE/ODIHR Azerbaijan 2010:9). Moreover, given the fact that ConsEC did not provide with a full explanation for the refusal to register, many candidates 'appeared, in most instances, to be due to unfairly restrictive implementation of provisions of the

Election Code and other legislation' (Ibid.). For what concern the Election Day, despite the fact that observers did not observe any particular episode of violence, they reported 'a high occurrence of serious irregularities and procedural violations, including ballot box stuffing' (OSCE/ODIHR Azerbaijan 2010:17). Therefore, the overall assessment of the 2010 Parliamentary election was not positive and its conduct 'was not sufficient to constitute meaningful progress in the democratic development of the country'[88] (OSCE/ODIHR Azerbaijan 2010:1).

Following the last election, opposition parties were no longer represented in the parliament; this outcome provoked a deep disaffection toward politics among the general population. The only way for those who opposed the regime was to develop new methods for contesting power. The youth looked at other post-soviet realities (such as Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine) in order to develop grassroots' initiatives aimed to challenge the regime, which were successful in defeat authoritarian leaders (see Bunce and Wolchik 2011). Therefore, the opposition united and formed several groups such as Positive Change (Müsbət Dəyişiklik), Free Youth (Azad Gənclik) and N!DA, which eventually had an impact over the Azerbaijani society, especially in the run-up of the 2013 Presidential election. These groups aimed to bring together those youths who wanted to change the country 'through non-traditional methods' (Sultanova 2014) and they were among those who organized the protests that took place in Azerbaijan since 2011 till 2013. This lively activism, which sometimes resulted in tumultuous events, was labeled the

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[88] This particular way of assessing the overall electoral conduct is the product of a harsh confrontation between the different actors (observers from the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly and the observers from the OSCE/ODIHR mission) that composed international observation missions. 'Finally, a compromise was reached on how to respond to the question whether these elections met international standards: 'While the November 7, 2010 parliamentary elections in the Republic of Azerbaijan were characterized by a peaceful atmosphere and all opposition parties participated in the political process, the conduct of these elections overall was not sufficient to constitute meaningful progress in the democratic development of the country.' (European Stability Initiative 2012:27).

'Azerbaijan spring' (Klomegah 2011) and demonstrated both to the regime and to the international that the Azerbaijani society was not in total apathy (Bedford 2014). However, these groups were halted by government repression, which hindered numerous activities. Several opposition leaders were also arrested in the run up to the 2013 Presidential election.

In the meantime, the government was reorienting its foreign policy goals and it was on one side reducing its ties with the United States (Frappi 2010) and on the other building up stronger relationships both with Turkey and Russia. As a matter of fact, the Azerbaijani government pressurized Turkey to stop the normalization of its relationships with Armenia as they were excluding any reference to the Nagorno Karabach conflict.[89] Subsequently, Baku and Ankara signed a gas deal, which ended a long dispute between the two countries (Economist Intelligence Unit Azerbaijan 2013) and envisaged the construction of a new pipeline (Trans-Anatolian pipeline), which would widen the Turkish market for the Azerbaijani oil's production. At the same time Aliyev strengthened his relations with Putin, who paid a visit to Baku in August 2013, just few weeks before the Presidential election. The visit, which also highlighted the Russia's 'clout' on Azerbaijan (The Moscow Time 13/08/2013), brought along a new cooperation agreement between oil producers of both countries and new Russian arms selling opportunities to the Azerbaijani government. Indeed, since 2011 the government had increased its military spending and started to buy massive amounts of weapons in particular from Russia, a decision that triggered high concerns in Yerevan.

Moreover, Azerbaijan was continuing to negotiate with the European Union the possible signature of the Association Agreement, which was expected to take place in November 2013. The negotiations started in 2010 and despite some positive steps the Azerbaijani government demonstrated far less interest in this process than its neighboring countries (Economist Intelligence Unit Azerbaijan 2013). Overall, during the Ilham Aliyev

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[89] Author's interview with an Azerbaijani Political Analyst in Tbilisi (May 2015).

presidency, Azerbaijan turned its foreign policies further from the West and closer to regional actors such as Turkey and Russia. At the same time, Baku decided not to participate in any supranational integration projects. As a matter of fact, Baku did not sign either the Association Agreement with the EU or the accession to the Eurasian Union. The Azerbaijani government proved to be very capable of managing different strategic chessboards without losing its independency and its arbitrariness. This particular Azerbaijani's attitude to play with other actors was labeled as 'caviar diplomacy' as the authorities were very capable of interacting and dealing with officials from everywhere. There is anecdotal evidence suggesting that when deputies from the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly attended meetings with their Azerbaijani counterparts, soon after the greetings they asked 'Where is the caviar?' (European Stability Initiative 2010:1).

Moreover, in March 2013 Baku decided to downgrade the status of the OSCE Office in the country, reducing its independence and its activities. Since that moment all projects would have to be officially approved by the Foreign Ministry and their implementation would be closely monitored[80]. This decision was another hole in the wall of the Western leverage in the country and a blatant symbol of the authoritarian path that the government was pursuing. This was also a decision that demonstrated the good shape of the regime and the high-level of consolidation that Aliyev was able to build along the past years. One of the reasons has to be found in government capacity to learn from other actors' policies in the field of oil revenues management (see Guliyev 2013), which prevented Ilham Aliyev's pyramid system, far more dependent on the oil production than his father's one, to resist the financial crisis and the volatility of oil prices. At the same time Aliyev brought his party, the NAP, at the center of his rule, making one of the important centerpiece that prevented the splits in the elite (Hale 2015).

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[80] Nevertheless, Baku invited an OSCE/ODIHR mission to observe the upcoming election.

The 2013 Presidential election saw the participation of ten presidential candidates, among which there was only one, Jamil Hasanli a renowned Cold War historian at the Academy of Sciences in Baku, who firmly contrasted Aliyev's rule. The others were spending 'the majority of their airtime giving Hasanli a hard time or defending the incumbent from the "vicious attacks" of the outspoken opposition candidate, as he was not present to do this himself' (Bedford 2014:11). As a matter of fact, Aliyev did not undertake political campaign activities, leaving the floors to his 'puppet' candidates to defend him and to disorient the voter populations. Meanwhile the authorities were fully engaged in detering any possible forms of dissent around the country, especially in some key spots in the capital (such as symbolic squares of strategic highways). Moreover, from a legal point of view, the Electoral Code was amended both in 2012 and 2013 with some modifications aimed to increase sanctions for public order offenses, including organizing and participating in unauthorized demonstrations and therefore limiting the political parties' capacities to connect with voters; there were also restrictions on the law regulating the freedom of assembly and NGOs (see Freedom House 2014 and OSCE/ODIHR Azerbaijan 2013). The OSCE/ODIHR observation mission clearly affirmed that 'these amendments further limited the freedoms of expression and assembly and restricted the functioning of civil society and are contrary to OSCE commitments and international standards' (OSCE/ODIHR Azerbaijan 2013:6).

At the same time the government was not addressing serious shortcomings in the Electoral Code, which were raised both from OSCE (see OSCE ODIHR election final reports 2010, 2013) and from domestic actors. On June 21st the Azerbaijani Public Chamber organized a workshop to discuss the Electoral Code; around 60 participants (several party leaders, NGO heads and electoral experts) discussed about the quality of the legal framework and they agreed to highlight three main problems: 'the need for the equal representation of political parties in the composition of the Central Election Commission (CEC), the Constituency Election Commissions (ConECs), and the Precinct Election Commissions (PECs); the need to lift the barriers for the

candidate registration process; […] to outsource the verification procedures for candidate registration to a group from outside the commission to ensure neutrality' (ElectionsWatch 21/6/2012). The opposition considered boycotting the elections in case those improvements would have not been addressed, but eventually most of opposition parties coalesced in a bloc that supported Jamil Hasanli.

Overall, the legal framework deteriorated according to the international standards, and the OSCE/ODIHR final report underscored 'the need for continued electoral reform in an inclusive format' (OSCE/ODIHR Azerbaijan 2013:1). Moreover, the problem concerning the discrepancies between the CEC's voter register and the figures provided by the State Statistical Committee persisted. The election was also characterized by a negative assessment of the voting process, with many episodes of frauds, including ballot box stuffing, obscure voting tabulation procedures, tampering of protocols and entry lists and votes being reassigned to another candidate (see OSCE/ODIHR Azerbaijan 2013). In addition, it is worth noting an episode that took place the day before the E-day. The election authorities prepared a mobile app for portable devices downloadable by Azerbaijani citizens, which would enable them to follow the counting process. However, because of a possible technical problem the app provided final election results one day before the scrutiny. The figures showed Aliyev gaining 72.76 percent of the vote and Hasanli with 7.4 percent of the vote (Eurasianet 9/10/2013b). The government provided two different explanations in a row, neither of which was convincing (cf. Fisher 2013, Bigg and Dilaverly 2013).

The incumbent President eventually won the scrutiny with more than 84% of the preferences, whereas the opposition candidate Hasanli scored only 5.53%. The latter, soon after the communication of the results, issued a statement where he claimed that he would not recognize the results and called for the repetition of the scrutiny. The newly reelected President affirmed publically that the electoral process was free and fair instead. The international electoral observers clashed again assessing the overall electoral process. For the Council of

Europe, which sent a delegation from the Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe jointly with a delegation from the European Parliament, the overall conduct of the electoral process was in line with international standards (PACE and EP 2013) whereas for the OSCE/ODIHR observation mission 'significant problems were observed throughout all stages of election day processes and underscored the serious nature of the shortcomings that need to be addressed in order for Azerbaijan to fully meet its OSCE commitments for genuine and democratic elections' (OSCE/ODIHR Azerbaijan 2013:1). The clash triggered many criticisms, in particular over PACE's observation mission; the European Stability Initiative (ESI), a think tank focused on the Caucasus and the Balkans, harshly criticized the PACE's assessment of the election and called for the resignation of the PACE's *rapporteur* Pedro Agramunt (ESI 2013). The concerns regarding the unrealistic assessment by the PACE mission were echoed by many other actors, including the United States government which agreed with the OSCE's concerns and affirmed 'the election fell short of international standards' (Peter 2013). Eventually the EP delegates to the mission backed away from the position of PACE and fully supported the OSCE/ODIHR assessment (Freedom House 2016). Given the particular contestability of the different election's assessments, I relied also on other sources in order to verify the soundness of the observed elements (such as direct interviews with local observers, journalists and political analysts). I am not going to discuss these divergent standpoints and their politically charged meanings[91], as they would go beyond the scope of this thesis.

Following the harsh criticism provided by the OSCE/ODIHR's final report, the Azerbaijani authorities responded that they would reconsider Azerbaijan's cooperation with OSCE. This process led the government to the unusual decision to close the OSCE office in Baku; the decision heightened criticism of

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[91] Authors' interview with PACE officials (June 2015) which finds supporting ground form Freedom House, Freedom in the World report (2016), which argues 'Some critics speculated that the positive assessment was the result of successful lobbying efforts on the part of the Azerbaijani government and European business interests in the country' (Freedom House 2016).

Azerbaijan's record on civil society and media freedoms by Western officials and international human rights watchdogs (Schreck 2015) and it was understood as a sign of 'the aggravation of relations with the West' (Human Rights Freedoms 2015, June 5). Indeed, in the country the civil and political rights situations along with media freedom overall worsened (Freedom House 2016, Economist Intelligence Unit 2015, Human Right Watch 2016) as the government continued its crackdown over independent nongovernmental organizations, opposition leaders and media. The wrongdoings were amplified by the organization of the first edition of the European Game in 2015, when many Western Head of States decided not to participate at the opening ceremony (Shearlaw and Jones 2015).

Later in 2015 the Azerbaijani people were called to vote for the parliamentary election, which the opposition parties decided to boycott (BBC News 2015, November 1). Moreover, for the first time in Azerbaijani history the OSCE/ODIHR refused to send an electoral observation mission in the country because it was deemed that there were too many limits that authorities were putting on the observers. The Need Assessment Mission (NAM) sent by OSCE/ODIHR, in order to evaluate the situation in the country a few months before the scrutiny, highlighted 'that the country faces significant challenges with respect to the exercise of fundamental freedoms in the pre-election period, pointing to systematic harassment and criminal prosecutions of those who express critical views of the government. Several parties informed the OSCE/ODIHR NAM of difficulties in securing meeting venues and office space. Concerns were raised about possible misuse of state resources and an increase in intimidation of voters and potential candidates in the run-up to the elections' (OSCE/ODIHR NAM Azerbaijan 2015:2). The election was obviously won by the NAP that gained 69 seats; the others were occupied by 'independent' candidates (43 seats) and by other minor political parties that gravitated around Aliyev's system as those who were genuinely opposing NAP boycotted the election (BBC News 2015, November 1).

The Azerbaijan case holds important implications for this analysis. First of all, it is the most blatant example of a sharp

deterioration in civil and political freedoms and rights in the South Caucasus. This process has worsened since Ilham Aliyev fastened his power on the pyramid system that rules the country. Second, the evolution of the electoral management has been affected by the overall worsening of the human rights situation in the country, which as spillover effects hindered the development of a genuine, or at least meaningful opposition. Azerbaijan proved to be little receptive to the suggestions to improve the electoral framework or to the conduct of the electoral process, which were coming both from international and local actors. Instead the government passed some amendments that were detrimental for the electoral integrity. Thirdly, the government successfully reduced the impact of the Western leverage in the country, as it was capable to develop the 'Caviar diplomacy' with multiple actors, without being forced to accommodate any external power. Finally, from a malpractices analysis point of view, the Azerbaijan case presents a combination of new and more sophisticated methods of manipulating the elections (such as the installation of video cameras inside the polling stations, or the development of a mobile app to project falsified turnouts) as well as the endurance of blatant and trivial methods of frauds (such as ballot box stuffing, voter intimidations, tampering of votes' registers). The next paragraph is devoted to analyzing these elements.

Learning episodes in Azerbaijan

Like Armenia, Azerbaijan did not experience an electoral revolution, despite many protests having occurred in the country during the last two decades. Azerbaijan's elections have come under scrutiny by international monitors for biased electoral commission decisions, improper campaigning practices, inaccurate voter lists, unequal media coverage, voter coercion, ballot box stuffing, protocol tampering, and inconsistent ballot invalidation (see Herron 2010, OSCE/ODIHR reports from 1996 to 2013). The majority of these types of malpractices have been used since the first election and, unlike the other Southern Caucasian countries, they continued to be present in all subsequent elections. Indeed, the ways by which these types of malpractices are carried out are identical to those used in the

nineteens and did not evolve as in the other countries[82]. Even in the last presidential elections, there were reports of Armenian carousels (RFE/RL 09/10/2013, Eurasianet 09/10/2013) and clear evidence of ballot stuffing (OSCE/ODIHR 2013). Instead vote buying was never particularly common in Azerbaijan, with only some cases in the 2005 Parliamentary election. Authorities preferred to perform other types of voter pressure, such as intimidation or blackmail.

Nevertheless, it is possible to identify some changes in the conduct of malpractices during the turnover between Ilham Aliyev and his son in the first half of the 2000s. This succession was characterized by high pressures and violent demonstrations in 2003. In addition, the Orange and Tulip revolutions, which took place a few months later, increased the possibility of attempts to emulate the electoral revolutions even in Azerbaijan. The following parliamentary election, which was conducted in November 2005, proved to be the most important one for Aliyev, as it tested the integrity and the unity of the regime (Hale 2015).

One of the first changes in electoral malpractices concerns the decision to install video cameras inside polling stations. This was an original innovation that has been adopted subsequently in many other post-Soviet countries (for example Georgia, Russia, Ukraine). Azerbaijan installed these video cameras during the 2003 Presidential election and, despite international condemnation and some changes (such as the introduction of web cameras), is still using them (as for the 2015 Parliamentary elections). The decision to install video cameras was adopted just one day before the 2003 election by the Executive Authority, which is the Government's executive branch at the regional level. In all but two polling stations, the video cameras were installed (Sødergren 2004), in some cases in the direction of the ballot box area (Sødergren 2004). The records were handled by the executive authority and not by an independent electoral management body, which constitutes a violation of the electoral code (Sødergren 2004). Despite claims from the regime that they

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[82] Authors' interview with an Azerbaijani electoral expert in Paris (June 2015).

installed video cameras for transparency and security purposes, the international community and electoral experts warned the intimidation of voters and lack of secrecy (Sødergren 2004, OSCE/PA 2003). This is particularly important since some recent studies have demonstrated when voter secrecy is not protected, forms of clientelistic strategies (such as post-electoral punishment) are more powerful (Mares 2015). Since 2008 Presidential election, following a OSCE/ODIHR recommendation, the authorities decided to provide web-access to the video camera in the polling stations, designed to enhance the transparency of the process. Yet, video cameras were installed (at least in one third of the polling stations monitored) in a way that could still affect voters' behavior, exerting psychological effects on voters (Herron 2010).

Another type of innovation aimed, in theory, to enhance the quality of the election (ICG 2005), was the electoral decree announced by Aliyev in March 2005, and enforced right before the 2005 parliamentary elections, a particularly weak moment in the regime. The decree outlined new regulations for election administration, threatening officials with punishment for violation of the rules, and introducing the use of exit polls (though the companies that ultimately conducted the polls were accused of being partisan, reflecting negatively on the government). All these elements were designed to curb possible imitation attempts to trigger an electoral revolution in Azerbaijan, 'by creating some avenues for citizens to air grievances but preventing the opposition from galvanizing adequate support to sustain large protests over time, government reduced the potential benefits of participation in public protest and sent signals that costs for unauthorized protest would be high' (Herron 2009:156). Additionally, in order to assure public support, Aliyev relied on the new incomes from the oil sector to raise the minimum wage 20% just one month before the election (see IMF July 2005, Hale 2015). Therefore, it can be argued that this decree was a tool to reinforce the general legitimacy of the regime. Aliyev wisely understood, from his observation of the others Colored Revolutions, which types of electoral manipulation's methods could be used and which needed to be avoided (Herron 2009).

This is also consistent for what concerns another type of malpractice, which involves civil society, and has effects on the electoral process too. In the Colored revolutions, western oriented and/or foreign funded NGOs proved to be a decisive factor for the success of regimes change. Azerbaijan government decided to follow Russian example for regulating NGOs. In December 2013, the parliament passed a law that obliged each foreign NGO to have an Azerbaijani citizen as deputy chief (even in branch offices), and limited foreign donations to AZN 200 (185 EUR) (Vučković, 2014). Moreover, subsequent amendments decreed that if an NGO closes it must provide full documentation to the Ministry of Justice. These amendments are reminiscent of the laws on foreign NGOs, which were passed one year earlier by Russia's Duma (RFE/RL 17/12/2013). The resemblance in tactics has been confirmed also by the PACE's Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights that addressed together Russian and Azerbaijani laws on NGOs in a memorandum concerning the prevention of inappropriate restrictions on NGO activities in Europe (Vučković, 2014:2). Anecdotal evidence further supports that the Azerbaijani authorities learned from Russian experiences and emulated their regulations[93].

It seems that the Azerbaijani authorities did not need to 'update' or 'improve' their methods of rigging elections, as was the case in Georgia and Armenia. This could be determined by two reasons. First, Azerbaijan experiences less Western leverage or pressure (including in terms of aid), and its leaders openly claim that the Western conceptualization of democracy is not suitable for Azerbaijan. For example, Ramiz Mehdiyeva, a member of the government and the principal ideologue of the regime, asserted that "Sovereign Democracy" suits better Azerbaijan (International Crisis Group 2010). Relations between Azerbaijan and OSCE have worsened, with the Azerbaijani government downgrading OSCE offices in Baku and eventually closing them altogether (RFE/RL 05/06/2015). Second, Azerbaijan is an oil

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[93] Authors' interview with an Azeri electoral expert in Tbilisi (May 2015).

and gas rich country and all the oilfields are managed by the national company SOCAR, which has a 'tentacular' diffusion among society. It is often reported that at least one member of each family in Azerbaijan works for SOCAR[94]. Because of this resource, Azerbaijan could be defined as a *rentier* state (Franke et al. 2009), characterized by high political stability and state capacity (including coercive capacity). In practice, Azerbaijan is a consolidating autocracy, centered on the Aliyev family, which has strong linkages with the political and business elites of the country. According to Nation in Transit, in 2005 when oil revenues skyrocketed, the Azerbaijani government began to misuse far more administrative resources than ever before (Freedom House 2014). Aliyev's ability to manage the huge revenues from the oil sector proved to be fundamental to strengthening his grip over elites and society in Azerbaijan. Within two years of his first election he firmly built his own single pyramidal system (Hale 2015). As a result, the state suffered less from institutional and informational uncertainties (Schedler 2013), which contribute to electoral uncertainty.

Type of Malpractice	When introduced	Type of learning	From where
Video Cameras	Since 2003	Innovation	n/a
Raised minimum wages	2005	Negative Learning	Tulip and Orange Revolutions
Biased Exit Polls	Since 2005	Negative Learning	Orange Revolutions
NGOs regulation	Since 2013	Positive Learning	Russia

The case of Azerbaijan is one with less evolution in fraud and malpractice. Electoral experts claim that in some cases of ballot stuffing is done even more blatantly than before.[95] With the

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[94] Author's interview with Azerbaijani refugee in Tbilisi (May 2015).
[95] Authors' interview with an Azeri electoral expert in Tbilisi (May 2015) and in Paris (June 2015).

closure of the OSCE office in Baku, it could be argued that Azerbaijan is moving away from international standards in conducting and managing elections. The only relevant changes were introduced during the transition between Aliyev father and son, when the regime was weaker. In this period the regime proved to be innovative, though attentive to external lessons.

Conclusion

Azerbaijan is the most stable and durable regime among the South Caucasian countries; moreover, it experienced the lowest level of Western democratizing pressure throughout the decades. These characteristics affected the regime's management and mismanagement concerning elections. In the first place, the Azerbaijani authorities did improve the electoral legal framework and introduced democratic institutional checks and electoral management bodies, yet, they never fully implemented those provisions. Secondly, Azerbaijan rolled back and amended electoral regulations in a detrimental way, as well as closed any kind of cooperation with OSCE. What account for such development?

In this chapter I took into consideration the international context in which the Azerbaijani authorities carried out their policy choices and it is possible to find some peculiar factors vis à vis the other two neighbouring countries. First of all, Azerbaijan oil and gas resources played an important role in keeping the country out of aid-conditionality mechanism and they provide important resources for what concern the most important sector for Baku's foreign policy: security. At the same time, Western actors developed divergent interests in Azerbaijan, which eventually contributed to a smoother leverage toward Baku. As a matter of fact, according to Levitsky and Way, competing interests may hinder or even nullify Western-democratizing efforts. However, Western linkage with the country was high, as since the mid-nineties Western oil and gas companies were involved in the exploitation of Azerbaijani natural resources. These links did not eventually trigger any forms of democratization effects. Therefore, despite the fact that for

Levitsky and Way linkage plays a bigger role in democratization's process, I claim that it is wiser to look at what type of linkage there is between the West and the country. In this case, linkage did not trigger democratization, on the contrary, it helped to separate Western interests. Eventually, contrasting interests shamefully affected Western electoral observation missions, which assessed differently the elections in 2010 and 2013. Finally, the Azerbaijan political elites were able to pursue a foreign policy path independently from any international/regional organizations. In turn, Baku has been able to set the agenda with international partners from a more equal standpoint.[*] In conclusion, the context exerted lesser binding effects for Azerbaijan, in which electoral integrity barriers where not sustained and enforced by strong Western responses.

Electoral integrity never reached an acceptable level in Azerbaijan and frauds and electoral malpractices have since the early nineties widespread every time an election has been observed. Contrary to Armenia and Georgia, frauds and electoral malpractices in Azerbaijan did not evolve or change. When I looked at the OSCE/ODIHR reports concerning elections in the nineties and I compared them with those that were more recent, I discovered the same kind of electoral malpractices. Given the fact that the Azerbaijani authorities did not experience the same Western pressure, they resorted to use the same methods to rig the elections. There was just one period where Azerbaijan suffered more from electoral uncertainties, and that was during the 2003-2005 period. In this span of time Ilham Aliyev was consolidating his pyramidal system after he took over the presidency from his father. Therefore, during the elections in those years, authorities developed new methods to affect voters' choices and to elude international criticisms.

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[*] Author's interview with Azerbaijan Ambassador in France (Paris, May 2016)

Conclusion: Comparative Lessons from the Southern Caucasus

The concluding chapter is devoted to drawing lessons from the case studies, verifying the hypothesis, outlining some theoretical reflections, and to discussing potential future research. By stemming from the argument that elections and their mismanagement are crucial aspects to be analysed in order to understand how regimes experience Western democratization pressure, the thesis takes into consideration the international dimension of elections in nondemocratic regimes. It is based on some theoretical arguments that refer to IR as well as to comparative politics. It could be a hazard but I am confident that the analysis of the cases study provided with some ground material for sketching some important remarks.

The thesis' main aim has been to study how the international dimension can affect the electoral mismanagement in selected countries under analysis. I tackle this issue from two perspectives: the first one concerns the role of external actors in affecting the electoral mismanagement along the last decades. In particular, I looked at the changing context, which could determine different choices for domestic actors when they rig elections. In the second perspective I analyzed the international dimension from a socialization standpoint. In other words, I looked at how authorities in the South Caucasus took advantage of socialization dynamics, such as learning, in order to cope with electoral uncertainties.

These arguments are underpinned by two main hypotheses. For what concerns the first one, I expect that where the Western Leverage and Linkage became more preponderant I would have witnessed two processes: on one side that formal electoral management improved substantially, on the other that malpractices changed along the years and contributed to hinder a full democratisation process. On the contrary, where Western

223

Leverage and Linkage was lower, electoral management did not improve substantially and the incumbents did not need to change their methods to rig elections. The second hypothesis relates to authorities' socialisation activities. I supposed that incumbents learn how to rig elections both from the past and from others' experiences. As a matter of fact, so far there has not been any analysis concerning learning activities in electoral related issues.

Both hypotheses rely on the idea of change, context and learning. As a matter of fact, these three concepts are intertwined and they are determinant in understanding the development of the electoral management in the three South Caucasian countries. The first concept, change, refers to different paths that incumbents may take once they have to manage an election. This stems from the assumption that rulers want to preserve their power and win the elections. Thus, changes can refer to both formal and informal facets. For example, formally the authorities can decide to modify or amend some articles in the electoral codes to get closer or further from electoral integrity principles. Yet, from an informal standpoint they can also change methods to nullify formal improvements. It is therefore important to trace such mix of formal and informal changes. When authorities carry out changes, they are driven by both preferences (which entail learn) and contextual constraints (which entail international actors' actions).

The second concept is context. In this case it refers to the norm and valued charged international system in which states are located (cf. Badie 2011). As a matter of fact, Goertz claims that governments live in an international environment that posits constraints for arbitrary behaviors and he identifies barriers as modes of context. For what concerns electoral management, this thesis argues that since the end of the Cold War post-Soviet states were affected by electoral integrity principles. Therefore, this new international context served as a barrier that set some standards and banned some other practices. Given the fact that barriers are the result of power relations, they can be stronger or weaker depending on Western pressure, which is composed by linkage and leverage. Moreover, barriers can be broken by other

actors, such as black knights (e.g. Russia through CIS observation missions) that can provide an alternative legitimization, or by other states that try to find ways to elude the barriers (e.g. Azerbaijan with the adoption of video cameras).

To break or avoid a barrier posed by the electoral integrity, incumbents in different countries can look at past or other experiences to circumvent those principles. Those experiences can be very insightful because they include important information concerning the barrier itself. As a matter of facts, according to Goertz, barrier models consist of two principal components: the barrier itself and the pressure upon it generated from below. Every time an actor attempts to infringe the barrier it generates important information that can be used by other actors. In particular, authorities can learn to what extent the barrier can be eluded, how far they can go in case they want to rig elections and which methods work better in order to avoid international condemnation. Learning becomes fundamental for incumbents that want to reduce the uncertainty of the scrutiny (which is one of the funding principle of a free and fair election). Thus, in my understanding, barriers are broken or eluded when there is a diffusion effect of some methods of frauds or electoral malpractices.

In this theoretical frameworks of 'change', 'context' and 'learning' are intertwined together in order to explain how electoral management and malpractices developed during the last decades in South Caucasus. In what follows, I am going to present the outcomes of this analysis and I am going to verify whether the hypothesis proved true in the case of the election management in the three South Caucasian countries since their independence.

The Western Democratizing Pressure
The international dimension affected the development of electoral management and mismanagement practices in the three South Caucasian countries. The analysis of the cases study brought some empirical evidence about such impact. Hereby, I am going to analyse the implications of this study. Indeed, the three cases present three different paths that each country

undertook along the decades. They represent a very interesting portfolio in order to analyze some of the elements that produced such variegate divergences.

The international context posed the same barriers (but with different weights) in terms of electoral integrity: all the three South Caucasian countries were included soon after the independence in the OSCE and subsequently they started the path toward the accession of the Council of Europe. In all the three countries, international experts collaborated to prepare new democratic frameworks to hold elections, they set up similar systems of monitoring and they proposed the same guidelines to conduct the electoral management. However, from a foreign policy standpoint, external actors (in particular the United States and the European Union) were not always united in pressuring and demanding the same results in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The context, which in this case worked as a barrier, changed and so changed the costs of deviant behaviors. Thus, from an international standpoint, electoral integrity standards had a different weight in each country.

First of all, the empirical analysis demonstrates that there have been radical changes in the way elections are ruled and managed, as well as deep modifications for what concern the methods of frauds and electoral malpractices in Armenia and in Georgia. On the contrary, Azerbaijan did improve its legal framework only during some limited periods of time, and subsequently authorities amended the electoral code in a detrimental way. Moreover, in Azerbaijan there is a constant presence of the same type of frauds and electoral malpractices. What accounts for such variation? The first hypothesis argues that the international dimension has important effects on it. As a matter of fact, Armenia and Georgia are the countries where the Western leverage and linkage are higher than in Azerbaijan; therefore, this factor determined, on the one side, the substantial improvement of the legal framework and, on the other, an evolution concerning methods of frauds and malpractices. Whereas, Azerbaijan because of its regime structure, which can be labeled as *rentier* state, and because of its 'caviar diplomacy', it did not suffer from Western pressure as its neighbors.

226

In Figure 3, I compare both the Western democratizing pressure in each country and the OSCE/ODIHR final assessment concerning key elections among the decades in the three countries. I built the dataset stemming from the analysis of the cases studies and from the OSCE/ODIHR reports. The Western democratizing pressure is calculated over a scale of three, where zero is when Western democratizing pressure is zero and three when the Western democratizing pressure is at its peak. Subsequently, in the figures concerning OSCE/ODIHR assessment there is a scale of five. In this case every election has been treated according to the OSCE/ODIHR judgment in the final report. Thus, five means that the elections *fully meet the international standards,* whereas zero means that it *felt short of international standards.* Interestingly, there is a good match between phases of higher western pressure and better electoral management and when the Western democratizing pressure is lower, so it is the OSCE/ODIHR electoral assessment.
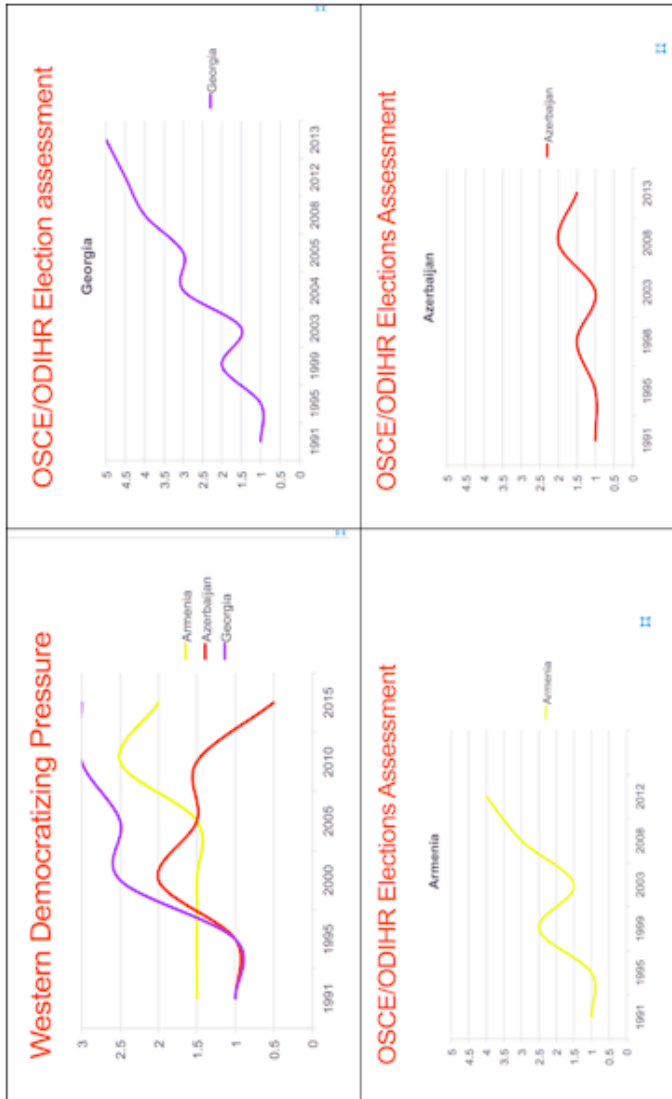
Figure5: Comparison among Western democratizing pressure and OSCE/ODIHR Elect ions Assessment

In the first decade after the independence, the barriers of the electoral integrity were not very strong in the three South Caucasian countries, as the Western actors with the strongest democratizing power were not so much involved in the region. Therefore, Shevardnadze in Georgia, Ter-Petrosyan in Armenia and Aliyev in Azerbaijan formally adopted a democratic legal framework, but at the same time they did not respect it and they brazenly rigged the elections. They were confident that the West would have not interfered in their polities: as Shevardnadze once declared, 'don't you know how these Westerners are? They will make a fuss [about electoral fraud] for a few days, and then they will calm down and life will go on as usual.' (Karumidze and Wertsch 2005:24). Moreover, in the early nineties the electoral frameworks were disunited, in disarray and often they overlapped between Soviet and new laws. Overall, almost all the elections in the nineties were characterized by a heavily uneven playing field.

The context changed gradually toward late-1990 and early-2000s, when the countries were close to join the Council of Europe (Georgia got the accession slightly before). In those years all the three South Caucasian countries adopted new Electoral Codes, drafted in cooperation with Western organizations (Armenia adopted it in 1999, Georgia in 2001 and Azerbaijan in 2003). Therefore, formally the three countries were getting closer to electoral integrity principles. This demonstrates that in those years electoral integrity became a stronger barrier for what concern electoral management and mismanagement. Yet, Western pressure did not work with the same weight and it resulted in three different outcomes concerning electoral integrity. In Georgia, when Shevardnadze broke democratic rules concerning elections Western actors pressurized the government and endorsed the revolutionary stances. Whereas, both in Armenia and Azerbaijan when incumbents did not respect electoral integrity principles, Western actors condemned the practices but they did not support regime change. Thus, Western pressure, despite increasing, was not uniform and electoral integrity barriers had different strengths in each country. As I explained on a case-by-case basis, Western actors

did not want or did not manage to have the same foreign policy vision on each regime. As a result, they were less effective in demanding the respect of electoral integrity principles.

These outcomes provide new evidence about the impact of international forces on the electoral integrity. In fact, in her recent analysis Pippa Norris claims that electoral integrity is affected by four main factors[47] among which there are the international forces. These forces include cosmopolitan communication, electoral and development aid and the deployment of election observation missions. However, for what concern the development aid and the deployment of election observation mission, Norris claims that 'the analysis failed to establish a significant link at aggregate level between these forces and the quality of the elections' (Norris, 2015:112). In this thesis I am relying on a different dataset based on OSCE/ODIHR elections' assessment rather than on the PEI index. Yet, there is evidence that international forces do have an impact on the quality of elections. For the sake of the argument, this claim is helpful insofar as it allows for a better understanding of the drivers of management and mismanagement changes.

Finally, these findings are in line with Levitksy and Way's argument concerning the effectiveness of Western democratizing pressure. In addiction, in the analysis I also took into consideration the role of Black Knight, which in this case is played by Russia in bilateral relations to each country or through the CIS organization. Indeed, Russia is the only actor that has a counter-hegemonic power in the region. However, Russia rarely interfered directly into the electoral process in the South Caucasus, whereas in other post-Soviet countries Russia exerted a bigger role in legitimizing or stabilizing an allied regime (see Tolstrup 2014). Following the analysis of each case study, it emerges that the black knight still is exerting a limited role for what concern electoral affairs. In fact, they do dispose of few tools to intervene in the filed of the elections. One of the most

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[47] That are: structural constraints, institutional checks, electoral management bodies and international forces (see Norris, 2015)

effective methods is to send CIS observers to conduct parallel observation missions. Yet, their reports are rarely considered objective and accurate even by domestic political actors (Ruzaliev 2005).

Notwithstanding, Russia exerted indirect effects over electoral integrity in the region: as a matter of fact, it served to local authorities (such as in Azerbaijan and Armenia) to gain bargaining power vis à vis the West. In other words, when incumbents in Armenia and Azerbaijan started to look toward Moscow in terms of linkage, they reduced the 'dependence' on West's conditionality. Therefore, they became more resistant to Western pressure even in electoral affairs. This is particular evident in Azerbaijan, where since Ilham Aliyev became president he turned the foreign policy's preferences (including trade) more toward Russia (Azerbaijan export to Russia increased about 200% from 2002 till 2005)[98]. At the same time, Azerbaijan started to challenge international organization such as OSCE concerning the validity of its principles (Fawn 2013).

In the near future, Russia - with the establishment of the Eurasian Union, may become more proactive in challenging the liberal democracy principles in electoral affairs. Indeed, on one side Russia may acquire more leverage vis à vis third countries for what concern political elite selections. On the other, new forms of political regime – such as sovereign democracy, may be amplified within the Eurasian Union. It is too early to verify this issue, yet there is another non-western organization in the region that already exerts a similar role.[99]

The Socialization Mechanism

The three cases presented so far reveal that incumbents do innovate and learn when they need to cope with electoral

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[98] Data from The State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan.
[99] The Shanghai Cooperation Organization is defending two core-principles for its member states: stability and diversity (Ambrosio 2008).

uncertainties. Therefore, it is possible to claim that malpractices evolve and change at the same time. In the Southern Caucasus, we can observe differences in the evolution of malpractice: in Georgia there has been a move toward new and more concealed ways to carry out malpractices, triggered mostly by learning processes from other regimes; in Armenia there have been relevant changes developed by looking to their own experiences along with the recurrent use of traditional malpractices; in Azerbaijan there were fewer innovations and changes, with the persistence of traditional frauds and malpractices (albeit in tougher forms), with some learning episodes from Russia. These cases help us to trace the development and spread of malpractices over time and space and give the opportunity to draw some conclusions about learning mechanisms in hybrid regimes.

Thanks to this analysis it is possible to elucidate some reasons behind the choice to modify and innovate electoral fraud and malpractice. First of all, there is sound evidence that where the Western democratizing pressure is higher, authorities try to elude Western monitoring activities by changing the way they falsify elections. Following the electoral revolutions, the assessment by international bodies became one of the preconditions to having an acceptable and legitimizing result vis à vis the domestic polities. Of course, international endorsement is not the only determining factor: as for example Bunce and Wolchik have demonstrated there are also other important elements that may trigger an electoral revolution (see Bunce and Wolchik 2011). Nonetheless, international forces do play an important role that has not been fully considered yet in studies of electoral integrity (see Norris 2015). As this thesis has demonstrated, the impact of international forces can be very significant in terms of election management and mismanagement. The cases of Georgia and in Armenia are meaningful as both countries fully experienced the effects of the international criticism on their elections managements.

Moreover, the evaluation of these case studies brings further evidence to the growing sector of research that analyzes international observers' effects over electoral malpractices. For

example, Simpser and Donno (2012) speak about strategic adaptation for what concerns the Armenian government's attempts to find more hidden forms of manipulations following the 2003 international contestation of its election management. Adaptation implies a change in policies, which are more in line with the changing context. As a matter of fact, following the 2003 elections, the peril of an electoral revolution became more vivid and incumbents needed to find better ways to assure election results and avoid international and domestic critics. Elites in power understood the deficiencies of the critical aftermath of 2003 election, and they actively worked in order to avoid the same mistake in the next scrutiny. Learning came from a negative election management example. What the elites were used to do was not sustainable because the context had changed.

Secondly, the analysis of socialization episodes in the region showed that when an election is highly contested authorities are more watchful about the methods of frauds. Incumbents in post-soviet space were particularly concerned by the development of revolutionary movements in the aftermath of rigged elections. Post-election violence has been analyzed as a characteristic of hybrid regimes (Hale 2011), which, eventually, could become a revolution. This analysis matches with Fairbanks analysis of fraud and electoral malpractices in hybrid regimes: according to him this type of regime is more vulnerable to post-electoral protests because incumbents pretend to be democratic without being so and without having the same control over the society as in consolidated autocracies (Fairbanks 2004). Both Armenia and Georgia (and to a lesser extent Azerbaijan) were affected by local and international pressure and heightened scrutiny, and worked to change the ways they rigged elections. To dodge revolutionary protests, they looked at other countries' experiences to avoid mistakes and to understand how to implement new ideas. This is particularly true in Georgia, which adopted video cameras following Azerbaijan's example. This move was possible because video cameras in polling stations has always been a highly contested issue, which could be easily masked as tool to avoid fraud rather than initiate it. Armenian authorities, because of both stronger domestic pressure and international attention, especially since early 2000, had to

develop new and more concealed ways to rig elections and avoid protests. Whereas in Azerbaijan, the most authoritarian country in the region, the regime demonstrated a tendency to be more solid and less affected by international pressure.

Therefore, it is possible to draw a distinction among the countries relating to the revolutionary experience. As a matter of fact, looking at the types of malpractice there is a pattern that pools Armenia and Azerbaijan: their first source of concern was to deter protests and violent demonstrations, which would catch the attention of the international community and cause widespread condemnation. This is especially observable after the first episode of electoral revolution that occurred in Serbia in 2000, and then triggered demonstration effects elsewhere. In Armenia the regime introduced new types of malpractices, such as vote buying, but at the same time they did not abandon more coercive strategies such as the misuse of administrative detentions for electoral protests. In addition, the quest for legitimization in Armenia led authorities to adopt two elements aimed at increasing the legitimacy of the state: GONGOs' electoral observation and exit polls. In Azerbaijan the authorities improved substantially the way they rig elections, in particular during the delicate transition (with vote-buying and video cameras). Subsequently, they clamped down on civil society and media. Thus, Armenia and Azerbaijan adopted some strategies that were more aimed at deterring possible electoral protests rather than merely manipulating voters.

In conclusion, it appears that these three cases from the Southern Caucasus point to an evolution and change in the tactics of electoral malpractices over time. Incumbents change methods of frauds and malpractices according to their international and domestic situations, and they learn from others about when they need to cope with higher electoral uncertainties. Additionally, this analysis provides a new understanding concerning the way authorities choose and carry out malpractices, which for the time being did not include learning as a factor that may lead to mismanagement's evolution.

Concluding Remarks

In the broad spectrum of the academic research on nondemocratic regimes there are still many unaddressed issues, which can be further analyzed to better understand the mode of operations and evolution of such regimes. This thesis addressed one of these topics and it shed some light on a particular phenomenon that concerns an issue that is not limited to the nondemocratic political context. Frauds and electoral malpractices are commonly used everywhere in the world, and they can do severely limit the democratic quality of an election. Therefore, it is fundamental for electoral integrity purposes to better analyze and understand past and future challenges to it. In this thesis I analyzed how and why frauds and electoral malpractices changed over the last decades and what are the triggering mechanisms of such changes. I discovered that the international context does play an important role at a domestic level for what concerns electoral mismanagement.

Electoral mismanagement changes, evolves and adapts to new international conditions and poses serious threats to electoral integrity. The latter was conceived as a barrier for states' authorities that set up elections in the South Caucasus. As a matter of fact, I assumed that incumbents want to stay and keep power and they do whatsoever it is necessary to maintain it. Yet, as presented in the case studies analyzed, since the early nineties incumbents are subjected to electoral standards in the way they manage the elections. Therefore, the international context poses barriers in the form of electoral integrity principles. However, the barriers' capacity to resist authorities' infringements are dependent on a consistent and united Western democratization pressure. The three South Caucasian cases demonstrated that this is not the case. Western actors often proved to have different and contrasting interests in the country. They therefore exerted inconsistent levels of pressure on the authorities. Eventually, the case studies show that according to different levels of democratizing pressure, there are three different ways authorities rig the elections. In Azerbaijan authorities did not change the way they rigged the elections, whereas in Georgia and in Armenia there has been a sharp modification for what concern electoral malpractices (in particular in the last decade).

These changes may be further analyzed in future research to assess the impact of new methods of frauds on the electoral integrity.

Moreover, the thesis argued that socialization mechanisms such as learning practices can be apt also to explain changes in electoral frauds and electoral malpractices. The compared analyses on mismanagement brought to light several episodes where authorities in one country looked at their past experiences or at their neighbor countries in order to find solution to shared problems. Therefore, this outcome can bring further understanding on how authorities rig the elections, which eventually can reduce the uncertainty of the overall electoral process. To date, frauds and electoral malpractices were analyzed within their own polity and, despite some studies carried out a comparative analysis, none have assessed the presence of socialization practices. This analysis may trigger future research aiming to verify if learning mechanisms are widespread practices also observable in other regions. Broadly speaking, the study of learning in mismanagement affairs helps to further understand how and why elections are rigged in the case of nondemocratic regimes; however, I am confident that there is room for the study of learning mechanisms as well as in frauds and malpractices in democratic regimes.

This thesis stems from the concept of hybrid regimes, which is becoming a type of regime in and of itself. This category still lacks a complete conceptualization and its characteristics are yet to be fully defined. In this analysis I identified some key features concerning nondemocratic elections in hybrid regimes, which may add a small contribution in the study of such regimes: electoral legal frameworks improve but at the same time there is an evolution in methods of frauds and electoral malpractices. Thus, in hybrid regimes there is a deeper dichotomy rather than in democratic or authoritarian regimes for what concerns the gap between formal rules and informal practices in the field of electoral management. In the South Caucasus, on the one side, Armenia and Georgia – that are hybrid regimes – improved substantially their electoral framework but at the same time they improved also their methods of mismanagement. On the other,

Azerbaijan, which is consolidating its authoritarian structure, did not improve its electoral framework and it is still using the same methods of frauds that it has been using since the early nineties. Therefore, the way authorities manage and mismanage the elections can be an indicator for regime identification. Of course, in order to have sounder validity, new research is required to verify this claim in other contexts.

Finally, I would like to underline that this thesis is not arguing that the international dimension is the only driver for what concerns electoral mismanagement. I am aware about structural, institutional and management factors that may undermine the quality of elections. However, I am firmly convinced that to date there has been an academic oversight in terms of the international dimension in electoral management/mismanagement affairs. To conclude, the general contributions of this thesis can be summarized as follows: 1) International dimensions matter in the study of electoral management and mismanagement; 2) Methods of electoral frauds and malpractices change and evolve according to Western democratizing pressure; 3) Authorities learn from their own past as well as from external countries' experiences how to better rig elections; 4) in hybrid regimes there is a bigger gap between formal electoral rules and informal practices than in democratic and authoritarian regimes. Future research will hopefully provide us with new evidence about these remarks, which could be verified in other elections and other countries around the world.

Appendix I

Measuring Leverage

Low Leverage: Cases that meet at least one of the following criteria:

- . Large Economy: Total GDP more than $100 billion (1995, current US$) (*Source*: World Bank World Development Indicators (online: www. worldbank.org/data))1
- . Major Oil Producer: Annual production of more than one million bar- rels of crude oil per day average (1995) (*Source*: U.S. Energy Information Administration, "International Energy Annual" (online: http://www.eia. doe.gov/emeu/iea/))
- . Possession of/capacity to use nuclear weapons (1990–1995)

Medium Leverage: Cases that meet none of the criteria for low leverage but meet
at least one of the following criteria:

1. Medium-Sized Economy: Total GDP between $50 billion and $100 billion (1995, current US$). *Source*: World Bank World Development Indicators (online: www.worldbank.org/data)
2. Secondary Oil Producer: Annual production of 200,000 to one million barrels of crude oil per day average (1995) (*Source*: U.S. Energy Information Administration, "International Energy Annual" (online: http://www.eia. doe.gov/emeu/iea/))
3. Competing Security Issues: Country where there exists a major security- related foreign-policy issue for the United States and/or the EU.
4. Beneficiary of Black Knight Assistance: Country that receives significant bilateral aid (at least 1 percent of GDP), the overwhelming dominant share of which comes from a major power that is not the EU or the United States (1990–1995). A major power is defined as a high-income country (per capita GDP of $10,000 or higher) or a major military power (annual military spending in excess of $10 billion, 1990–1995) (*Source*: "Correlates of

239

War," available at www.cow2.la.psu.edu). China, France, Japan, and Russia are considered potential Black Knights.

High Leverage: Cases that meet none of the criteria for low or medium leverage.

Appendix II

Measuring Linkage

Linkage is measured by the following four components:

- *Economic Ties*: Measured by the extent of trade with the United States and 15 EU member countries (exports and imports over GDP) (log) (1990– 2000), excluding years when a country is democratic.
- *Social Ties*: Measured by the average annual number of a country's citizens traveling to or living in the U.S. and EU (1990–2000) as a share of total country population (log), excluding years when a country is democratic.
- *Communication Ties*: Measured by per capita average annual interna- tional voice traffic 1993–2000 (log) and per capita average annual Internet access (1995–2000) (log), excluding years when a country is democratic.
- *Intergovernmental Ties*: Measured by membership in the Organization of American States (OAS) or potential membership in the EU.

For each of the four dimensions, each country is given a score (1– 5) based on its ranking relative to all non-Western countries in the world (5 = highest quintile; 1 = lowest quintile). The scores on the four dimensions are summed into a total score, which was recalculated so that scores range from 0 to 1.

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