

## Nothing personal: explaining the rise and decline of political machines in Ukraine

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This article is the first to explore and compare the dynamics of party-building between the three main political forces that competed for power during the last decade in Ukraine – Viktor Yushchenko’s *Nasha Ukrayina* (Our Ukraine), Yulia Tymoshenko’s *Batkvishchyna* (Fatherland), and Viktor Yanukovich’s *Partiya Rehioniv* (Party of Regions). We show that their political trajectories can be explained by differences in their organizational structure and distribution of resources within the party’s leadership. When a party depends on resources linked primarily to one individual, it will develop a personalized decision-making structure advantaging its leader, and the party’s fortunes will be tied to the popularity (or lack of same) of the leader. By contrast, when a party relies equally on resources from several groups, a more consociational style of decision-making is likely to emerge. Using Ukraine as a case study, the article shows that personality-led parties will be more vulnerable to defections and less capable of absorbing potential competitors. On the other hand, coalition-led parties are better capable of surviving defeats, maintaining internal cohesion, and merging with like-minded parties.

**Keywords:** party-building; party organization; political machine; elections; patronage; Ukraine

### Introduction

A political party is a risky investment for an elite group striving for power, wealth, or influence because it requires high start-up costs and sustainable funding while promising very uncertain returns. It is even costlier in an unstable political environment such as Ukraine, with fickle political loyalties, capricious ideological views, and volatile business fortunes. Hence, successful parties in post-Soviet states are more often an outgrowth of bureaucratic apparatus built around a state leader rather than an invention of nascent political actors or ideologies. Rarely do parties with privileged access to the spoils of power rescind into political oblivion. Even more rarely can parties in the post-Soviet space recover from a major electoral defeat and regain power after being in opposition. When these events do happen, however, as in the case of the Party of Regions after the defeat of Viktor

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Yanukovych in December 2004, they point to variables that may account for the variation in parties' resilience. This article offers an organizational theory of parties' durability, which we test using the case study of divergent trajectories of three major political parties in the second decade of Ukrainian independence: Our Ukraine, Fatherland, and the Party of Regions.

Parties played a marginal role in Ukraine's first postindependence decade, when national democrats with popularity primarily in the western and central regions of the country and so-called centrists primarily in the east and south cooperated against two threats – communists (the largest political force in parliaments elected in 1994 and 1998) and externally from Russia (which did not recognize Ukraine's borders until 1997–1999). Their informal alliance, with the backing of then weak and emerging clans, relied on short-term inter-elite bargains to sustain itself. Meanwhile, incumbent president Leonid Kuchma relied on amorphous catch-all organizational vehicles for his electoral campaigns, and avoided making any serious investments in party-building. As a result, Ukraine's Communist party (KPU), which traced its roots to the Soviet period but was banned in August 1991 (a new party was registered three years later), remained the largest and most popular political force in Ukraine during the first decade of independence. In the 1998 parliamentary election, the KPU received 24.65% on party-list voting, which put it far ahead of its main national democratic competitor *Rukh* (9.4%), one of two main offshoots from the former Ukrainian Movement for Restructuring established in 1988–1989. The KPU received a plurality of the vote in two (1994, 1998) and the Party of Regions in three parliamentary elections (2006, 2007, and 2012). Our Ukraine's plurality in 2002 was therefore the exception to the rule whereby eastern Ukrainian political forces have traditionally led Soviet and post-Soviet Ukraine.

The 2000–2001 Kuchmagate crisis, when tapes made illicitly in the president's office by presidential guard Mykola Melnychenko were unveiled showing high-level abuse of office, destroyed this alliance and led to a reconfiguration of the Ukrainian political scene (see Koshiw 2013). National democrats and nationalists regrouped around two major political figures – Yushchenko and Tymoshenko – who created their own aligned political forces, Our Ukraine and Fatherland, respectively, but ended up being bitter rivals. By contrast, the Donbas-based Party of Regions absorbed the bulk of parties from the centrist camp and later turned the waning Communist party into its junior satellite partner. The confrontation between centrists and national democrats has overshadowed every election campaign since 2002, with populists in eastern (Party of Regions and KPU) and western Ukraine (Bloc of Yulia Tymoshenko [BYuT] and Fatherland) coming to dominate these election battles. The successive victories of the Party of Regions following Ukraine's Orange Revolution in 2004 allowed for a comeback of the old ruling elites, and the Party of Regions returned as the dominant political force in the country. By contrast, its main competitor prior to the revolution – Our Ukraine – ceased to exist by the end of Yushchenko's presidency in 2010, being so closely tied to his standing.

What explains the relative success in party-building of an elite group that had previously been ousted in a popular uprising? Why do parties with access to

patronage and rents fail to consolidate and develop? Why do some parties easily absorb competing political groupings while others suffer from continuous defections? This article will address these questions by analyzing the origins and tracing the developmental trajectories of Ukraine's three main political parties that have engaged in bitter electoral disputes over the past decade.

### **Theoretical framework: what makes a political party endure?**

In this article, we view political parties primarily as coordination devices intended to encourage cooperation between political and business elites seeking access to or continued control over the government's policy-making and distribution of private goods, either in the form of rents and patronage or in the form of protection. A political party therefore represents a prior commitment to maintaining a long coalition, ensuring continuous benefits to each of its members through enhanced collective action and reducing uncertainty regarding the future outcomes (Aldrich 1995). For this purpose, members are willing to contribute their resources to turn political parties into effective vote-gathering machines "interested less in political principle than in securing and holding office for its leaders" (Scott 1969, 1144). Once in power, political parties serve to maintain cohesiveness of the ruling coalitions by reassuring loyalists, rewarding defectors, and marginalizing opponents (Magaloni 2006; Brownlee 2008). This elite-based model of party development has been characteristic of postcommunist states due to the particularities of communist legacies, time constraints, and costs associated with organizing parties along programmatic or social-model lines (Kitschelt 1995; Toole 2003). As Kitschelt (1995, 453) notes, Ukraine's experience with patrimonial communism based on "hierarchical chains of personal dependence between leaders in the apparatus and their entourage" advantaged its clientelistic networks, which, in the post-Soviet period, quickly reinvented themselves as political parties or, in essence, spoils-oriented political machines (see Gosnell 1933).

Successful elite coordination within a party, however, requires the functioning of an endogenous mechanism that helps to resolve in-group collective action problems. One such mechanism is the availability of a patron who can serve as a focal point for various elite groups (Hale 2011). Some of the most durable post-Soviet parties of power have been built around an incumbent state leader whose formal hegemonic position and informal control over administrative resources would serve as a credible guarantee of future rewards for allied political actors (Reuter and Remington 2009). Nursultan Nazarbayev's Nur Otan in Kazakhstan (since 1999), Vladimir Putin's United Russia (since 2001), and Islam Karimov's Liberal Democratic Party in Uzbekistan (since 2003) all represent this type of an incumbent-led successful political machine and party of power.

Another coordination mechanism is the availability of a popular political leader with substantial symbolic or ideological resources to make the party competitive (Hanson 2006). The prominent examples of this type of parties are Eduard Shevardnadze's Union of Citizens of Georgia (in the early part of his

presidency), Mikhael Saakashvili's United National Movement, and Geidar Aliyev's New Azerbaijan Party. In Ukraine, some of the most popular parties in the 2000s – Yushchenko's Our Ukraine and Tymoshenko's Fatherland party – were built around popular political leaders who could deliver votes for the entire party through a coattail effect. However, Ukraine's most resilient and successful party until the 2013 Euromaidan crisis – the Party of Regions – adopted a different and more successful model. Rather than organizing around a single resource-rich patron, it was built around the informal alliance of several business groups and a regional bureaucracy whose symbiotic relationship was sustained through continuous mutually beneficial exchange. What made this alliance endure without the coordinating role of a single charismatic leader?

The success of single-headed parties depends crucially on the ability of their patrons to make credible commitments to their key supporters (Reuter and Remington 2009). Their dominance within the party creates a moral hazard problem when they can turn down even their closest allies without the risk of undermining the party. This is similar to the problem that autocrats face when failing to “tie hands” credibly in relations with their subordinates (North and Weingast 1989; Svoboda 2012). As long as leaders can unilaterally decide on the distribution of rewards, their promises will weigh little because they can be easily reversed. The only way a dominant patron can maintain internal cohesion is by developing a reputation for honoring his promises and raising the risks of punishment for potential defectors. If a patron loses this reputation or is incapable of punishing defectors, individual-led parties inevitably experience the flight of disgruntled party members who are left without access to patronage and rents or influence over policy-making. Moreover, even groups receiving certain rewards, but remaining uncertain about their future, will be more likely to defect to those whose promises are more credible.

By contrast, in coalition-led parties decision-makers have to be mutually dependent in order to maintain their cooperative relationship. Hence, their success requires the understanding of all sides that each of them will be worse-off if they defect unilaterally. Achieving this semblance of equilibrium is possible only when each member of the alliance contributes a resource that others lack, but which is vital for the party to maintain a competitive edge. Relatively equal distribution of power among various factions also grants them an equal say and potential veto power in decision-making. Another advantage of coalition-led parties is the need to account for the diversity of interests when making decisions and hence invest in consensus-building. This helps to avoid subordination to the short-term interests of any particular leader, which is often the case with individual-led parties. In essence, coalition-led parties develop consociational decision-making procedures that have been effective in accommodating divergent interests and fostering inter-elite cooperation. As Lijphart (1969) argued, they rest on peculiar multiple balances of power among various subgroups that help prevent the domination of one particular actor. The internal organizational dynamics in the leadership of coalition-led parties is thus similar to military juntas, which often develop self-binding institutions to help maintain cohesion at the top (Barros 2002). Individual-

led parties, by contrast, are more likely to evolve along the lines of unstable sultanistic regimes, in which relationships are extremely personalized and dependent on the changing whims of one individual (Linz 2000).

Given their organizational structure, coalition-based political parties are also more likely to survive a major defeat of their leader (as with the Party of Regions after 2004) and remain more resilient when staying in the opposition. They may be created as “provision pacts” to redistribute material rewards among members, with the coalitional structure making it easier for them to transform into a protection alliance, offering their members security of material possessions and personal safety (Slater 2010). In fact, as Lijphart (1969) observes, the emergence of external threats creates additional incentives to maintain a cartel-like leadership. This reinforces the party’s cohesion at the time when it is most vulnerable to defections. Similarly, Smith (2005) shows that parties which invest in coalition-building are more likely to survive political and fiscal crises and become powerful organizational machines. In addition, coalition-led parties may also prove more effective than individual-led ones in absorbing other political forces. Since no single actor dominates in decision-making, newcomers to the party may expect to gain a voice if they bring in sufficient resources, such as the gas lobby that entered the Party of Regions in 2006–2007. This ensures their continued access to spoils generated from party activities, which personalized parties cannot credibly promise.

This article will test our theoretical arguments by looking at the organizational dynamics of the Party of Regions, Our Ukraine, and the Fatherland party. All three political parties were created as provision pacts of business and political elites, but differences in their organizational structure have produced a different internal dynamic in each. In the section detailing the rise of a coalition-led party, we analyze the evolution of the Party of Regions until 2010, when its leader Yanukovich was elected president, and demonstrate how multiple power centers within its decision-making process helped the party to maintain cohesion even after electoral defeat. Then, we will compare the dynamics of Our Ukraine before and after 2004, and show how its structural transformation from a coalition to an individual-led party in which the leader monopolized decision-making prevented its consolidation. We also discuss the trajectory of the Fatherland party and show how it suffered from many similar problems because of its extreme personalization under Tymoshenko, whose political force ran as a stand-alone party in the electoral process only after the jailing of its long-time leader and changes in the election law that banned participation by blocs. Our analysis is based on interviews with high-ranking party members and political consultants as well as on secondary sources, including diplomatic cables from the US Embassy in Kyiv that provide insightful, confidential views of leading key actors in Ukrainian politics.

This article makes four theoretical contributions to the existing literature on political parties. First, it demonstrates that successful elite coordination is possible not only around a single patron with a comparative advantage over all others but also when several equally powerful subgroups with unique resources collude to

form a political party. The article will show that excessive reliance on a single patron may create incentives for defections even by its staunchest loyalists and, ultimately, the fractioning of the party. Second, this article offers an alternative explanation for the resilience of a political party over time. Several influential sources link the cohesion of the party to the conditions it encountered during its origin, while various authors show that parties tend to be better organized when they face a strong political or societal opposition at their inception (Huntington 1970; Brownlee 2008; Slater 2010). A similar account relates party cohesion to its experience with an armed revolutionary struggle (Levitsky and Way 2012) or dire economic conditions (Smith 2005). A party's organizational strength viewed in terms of professionalism of its cadres and extensiveness of its network and membership has also been shown to lead to its electoral success through greater influence on voters (Tavits 2012). This article maintains analytical focus on a party's internal organization, but argues that the relative power balance and consensus-building procedures within a party's leadership may be no less consequential for its sustainability in the post-Soviet context.

Third, other theorists have explained a variation in party resilience by pointing to the commitment problems that arise in the process of party-building, either in relations between national and regional elites (Reuter and Remington 2009) or in relations between senior and junior party members (Svolik 2012). In these accounts, actors will not invest their resources in maintaining the party unless they are confident that others are similarly committed to the process, so that the party would last long enough to provide them with returns on their investment. The endurance of the party, then, depends on whether it can devise a reassurance mechanism that would provide sufficient incentives for key members to contribute to the party's development. Our argument reaffirms the critical importance of resolving a commitment problem for maintaining and consolidating the party. However, we also stress the role of resource distribution among the party's leadership and the role of decision-making procedures in maintaining coordination and cooperation among elite groups. Fourth, the article shows that parties can rely on patronage strategies to maintain their support, irrespective of whether they were organized by ruling or opposition elites. Shefter (1994) argues that opposition (or externally mobilized) parties with a sizeable following and no access to patronage prior to gaining power are less likely to use patronage once in power in order to remain popular. Our article shows that a popular party that failed to capitalize on its position in power to reward its key supporters proved to be least durable. It was the consistency and breadth of patronage and rent disbursement that made the three parties' fates so different.

### **The rise of a coalition-led party**

The Party of Regions emerged from a rent-seeking nexus of the Donbas-based former Communist Party machine and local *nomenklatura* network and the region's largest financial-industrial Groups (Hale 2005). As Kuzio (2012a) points out, during the period of chaos and redistribution of Soviet assets from the late



1980s to late 1990s, Donetsk had the USSR's/CIS's second-highest murder rate after the Crimea and close integration of criminal groups into political structures. A wave of assassinations of high-ranking political, business, and criminal leaders accompanied this process throughout the 1990s, one of the most prominent of which was the murder of Ukraine's wealthiest Donbas-based oligarch at that time (Yevhen Shcherban), less than a year ahead of Yanukovych's appointment as Donetsk governor. Violence continued through 1999, as different criminal groups with different political *kryshy* ("roofs" or patrons) sought dominance over Donetsk. Yevhen Kushnir's organized crime gang, which was behind 27 murders and 17 attempted murders, was destroyed in 1997–1999 when 23 members were murdered and 8 were criminally sentenced (Koshiw 2013). The criminal case against Givi Nemsadze, also a criminal leader reportedly behind the decimation of Kushnir's gang, was dropped in 2010 after Yanukovych was elected president. Not all Party of Regions deputies opted to become legitimate businessmen and 18 parliamentary deputies within its faction after the 2012 election still allegedly maintained ties to organized crime (Moskal 2013).

In 2000–2001, each constituent group contributed an equal share of its resources to turn the party into a powerful political force. Donetsk Governor Yanukovych (1997–2002) provided state-administrative resources, which allowed for a massive manipulation of the electoral process, and Donetsk became a testing ground for developing and perfecting the techniques of machine politics (Zimmer 2005). Yanukovych ensured that President Leonid Kuchma defeated his KPU challenger Petro Symonenko in the 1999 presidential elections by a margin of 12 percentage points – the widest in all of Eastern Ukraine, and in the KPU's home base of Donetsk. The fraud that occurred in this election is documented in tapes made illicitly by presidential guard Mykola Melnychenko in Kuchma's office (Darden 2008; Koshiw 2013). In the 2002 elections, the pro-presidential For a United Ukraine! bloc (ZYU) that the Party of Regions joined came in first only in Donetsk Oblast, where it received 37% (Our Ukraine or the KPU came first in all other regions of Ukraine). Even in neighboring Luhansk Oblast, ZYU received just 14% of the vote. State-administrative resources developed in Donetsk were applied throughout Ukraine in the 2004 presidential elections (sparking the Orange Revolution), and in national and local electoral contests during Yanukovych's four-year presidency.

Financial resources to launch a new political party were initially provided by the two regional industrial groups, representing different generations of businessmen. One included old guard "Red Directors" such as Valentyn Landyk, Vitaliy Haiduk, and former Prime Minister Yukhym Zviatil'skyi, who gained control over Soviet enterprises through insider privatization (described in Ukrainian as *prykhvatyzatsiya*, loosely translated as grab-itation). Another brought together rising oligarchs, such as Rinat Akhmetov, Borys Kolesnikov, and Serhiy and Andriy Kliuev, who led hostile takeovers of declining local industries. At the end of 1990s, the leaders of the Donbas clan remained outside public view (compared to the Dnipropetrovsk or Kyiv clans), but they controlled at least half of the country's industrial production.

The relationship between the local *nomenklatura* and big business in the Donbas became symbiotic by the late 1990s. According to one of the region's major businessmen, Serhiy Taruta, "business funded regional and local government salaries, the government developed oblast infrastructure and economics, and they received good results" (Ukraine: IUD's Taruta 2011). Yanukovich's appointment as governor, Taruta claimed, only became possible because of Akhmetov's lobbying efforts. At the same time, another local businessman, Andriy Kliuev, became Yanukovich's deputy and later formed a business partnership with the governor "so he would receive preferences" (Ukraine: IUD's Taruta 2011). The "Red Directors" established political parties such as the Labor Party and Party of Regional Revival (which became the Party of Regions), while former Komsomol (Communist Youth League) leaders such as Volodymyr and Yevhen Shcherban established the Liberal Party, one of Ukraine's first political parties (launched in 1991). Characteristically, already in the 1990s these Donetsk-based political parties were unwilling to cooperate with national democrats, and worked together with pan-Slavic local groups such as the Civic Congress and from 2006 with Crimean Russian nationalists. Centrist parties such as the NDP (People's Democratic Party), Inter-Regional Bloc of Reforms, and Labor Ukraine – with their bases in Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovsk, the two traditional centers of power in the Soviet era – were anticommunist, and cooperated with national democrats until the Kuchmagate crisis, and ruled out cooperation with Crimean Russian nationalists.

Launched in October 1997, five months after Yanukovich's appointment as governor, the Party of Regional Revival was led by Donetsk mayor Volodymyr Rybak, who represented the senior *nomenklatura* group in the new alliance. Rybak would remain an influential figure in the Party of Regions, serving alternatively as the head of its executive committee, deputy head of its parliamentary faction, first deputy chairman of the party, and Parliamentary Chairman in 2012 – 2014. Nevertheless, as with the Liberal Party and Party of Labor, the Party of Regional Revival was a failure and in the March 1998 parliamentary elections it received less than 1% of the vote, coming in ninth even in Donetsk Oblast.

However, the party's leadership decided to reorganize the party in the run-up to the 2002 parliamentary elections. In 2000, Governor Yanukovich and the state administration initiated a merger of the Party of Regional Revival with four other political parties, intended to consolidate its presence in the Donetsk Basin and expanding the area of its activities to other Ukrainian regions. Its new political partners included the "Red Director" Labor party, the Party of Ukrainian Solidarity led by Petro Poroshenko, and Beautiful Ukraine led by Kyiv-based banker and Kyiv's future (eccentric) Mayor Leonid Chernovetskyi. The fourth party in the merger was a virtual All-Ukrainian Pensioners' Party, brought in to appeal to older voters who had traditionally voted for the KPU. Poroshenko, who had hoped to become leader of the newly united party, and Chernovetskyi were typical of the opportunistic businessmen who moved between different political camps without a long-term commitment to any. After failing to become leader of the Party of Regions, Poroshenko moved to Yushchenko's camp and headed the



Our Ukraine 2002 election campaign, and four years later contributed a second Solidarity party to the formation of Yushchenko's new presidential party (see below). Chernovetskyi supported Yushchenko in the second and rerun second rounds of the 2004 elections and, although a highly corrupt Kyiv mayor, was protected by Yushchenko against attempts by Tymoshenko to unseat him (Levy 2009).

In March 2001, the congress of the new party officially gave it its current name and elected then-head of the State Tax Administration Mykola Azarov as its first chairman. Ten months later, he was replaced with Azarov's protégé, then-Deputy Prime Minister Volodymyr Semynozhenko, while Yanukovych's allies Andriy Kliuev and Rybak became his deputies. Yanukovych formally became the party's chairman only in April 2003 – almost six years after its founding and six months after he became Prime Minister. Although the Party of Regions' key oligarch financier Akhmetov remained behind the scenes, his protégé Raisa Bohatyriova was the official head of the party's parliamentary faction from 2002 to 2007.

From its founding the Party of Regions organizational structure had to accommodate the interests of the main subgroups in the provision pact – representatives of the senior Soviet-era *nomenklatura*, new oligarchs, and the “Red Directors” – who possessed relatively equal stakes in the new political force. According to a party insider, diverse groups of influence and the lack of one power center contributed to the development of a coalitional decision-making process within the party (O. Tsariov, interview, 20 June 2013, Kyiv, Ukraine). As another source explained, “it has a very complicated system for making decisions . . . with a dozen groups having their say” (Chornovil 2008). In contrast to Our Ukraine, whose electoral strength rested solely on Yushchenko's popular appeal, the Party of Regions' advantage lay in its skillful use of state-administrative resources, increasing penetration of state agencies, and financial clout. In power the Party of Regions was able to provide patronage to its members, as most clearly evident during Yanukovych's presidency. However, it could exercise this advantage only through inter-elite cooperation, which gave all major groups a strong incentive to seek mutually acceptable solutions. Yanukovych's appointment as Prime Minister in November 2002 moved the Party of Regions to the national level, further diversifying controls over strategic resources among key party stakeholders and making them more dependent on each other in their pursuit of rents and patronage. In his failed first bid for the presidency in 2004, Yanukovych received the party's official nomination, but the party was often sidelined because of his competing obligations to Kuchma and interference by other oligarchic groups. Hence, his long-time ally and the party's key functionary Andriy Kliuev was in charge of the alternative “shadow” campaign headquarters (located in the party-owned building) that specialized in undercover operations against the opposition candidates. Still, his campaign received major financial backing from the party's business wing, led by Akhmetov (Mostova 2004).

The Orange Revolution, launched in response to the fraudulent second election round in November 2004, became an existential threat to the livelihood of the leading figures in the Party of Regions. They now faced the risk of losing not only

access to patronage and rents but also their assets and personal freedom. The party's coalitional organizational structure, however, helped it to maintain cohesion in the face of a mounting threat from the country's new authorities. It offered political protection to the former state officials and appealed to aggrieved voters in Eastern and Southern Ukraine who felt cheated by Yushchenko's victory and many of whom believed (like Yanukovych to this day) that there had been no fraud and that there had been a US-backed conspiracy to install Yushchenko into power. As Yanukovych told US Ambassador to Ukraine, William Taylor: "What was important was that one-half of Ukraine must think about itself – that it exists and that there is a political force that protects its interests" (Ukraine: Yanukovych Suggests 2011). In effect, the Party of Regions reinvented itself from an exclusive club of rich officialdom and oligarchs into an umbrella organization for those who were allegedly prosecuted for their political loyalties and the protector of Russophone Eastern Ukraine against the "nationalists" who were in power. Hence, the essence of the pact between various groups was transformed from one centered on the mutually beneficial exchange of private goods to one offering mutual security guarantees. This is similar to what Slater (2010, 52) described as protection pacts or "counter-revolutionary parties," which are "particularly robust as sources of enduring collective action" because they emerge in response to mass unrest perceived as "an endemic and unmanageable threat."

In the first months following Yushchenko's triumphant victory, the Party of Regions may have been on the verge of a split. Azarov, who was Yanukovych's right-hand man in the government and one of the party's former leaders, was invited by Poroshenko to join Yushchenko on stage for New Year Eve celebrations on the *Maidan* (Independence Square, headquarters of the Orange Revolution). Another founding member of the party and the head of the political executive committee, Rybak (2005), promised that the Party of Regions would not go into opposition to the new authorities and that it could even delegate some of its members to the new government. Tellingly, the majority of the Party of Regions faction in parliament (46 of 54) voted in favor of appointing Tymoshenko as the country's next Prime Minister, citing the "similarities in the programs of the two leading presidential candidates" (Tymoshenko stala 2005).

However, public willingness to support the new authorities did not win any favors for the Party of Regions from the Yushchenko administration. In its first six months in power, that administration took a series of steps that directly infringed on the interests of Party of Regions leaders, particularly its main donor, Akhmetov. One of the government's first decisions was to annul the transfer of Ukraine's largest steel company Kryvorizhstal to the ownership of Akhmetov and Kuchma's son-in-law Viktor Pinchuk, who paid \$800 million in a closed tender. In October 2005, Kryvorizhstal was resold to the Dutch company Mittal Steel for \$4.8 billion. In a similar fashion, during his first trip to Donetsk as President, Yushchenko questioned the legality of the privatization of a major iron ore producer Ukrudprom, also co-owned by Akhmetov (Yushchenko v Donetske 2005). He also demanded the return of any land transferred from the Donetsk Botanical gardens to Akhmetov's private property who had acquired the gardens

for his residence (Yushchenko v Donetske 2005). Realizing the gravity of the threats, Akhmetov fled Ukraine in April 2005 and returned only half a year later, after Tymoshenko's ouster from the government. Meanwhile, in August 2005, Interior Minister Yuri Lutsenko publicly demanded that Akhmetov provide testimonies in criminal cases opened against companies closely affiliated with his business empire. As the Minister stressed, "Akhmetov should become used to the fact that his privileged status and any advantages he had in his relations with law enforcement agencies are now a thing of the past" (Lutsenko obeshayet 2005). The seriousness of Lutsenko's intentions became clear once law-enforcement agents came to search one of Akhmetov's companies in an armored personnel carrier (BTR 2005).

As the threats from the new ruling elite accumulated, the majority of the Party of Regions oblast branches (17 of 27) voted in favor of declaring their opposition to the Orange authorities (Viktorovych 2005). The official decision to become an opposition party was adopted during the party's congress on 6 March 2005. Just a month following the congress, the head of the Party of Regions in Donetsk Oblast and then-chairman of the Donetsk Oblast council Boris Kolesnikov was arrested on embezzlement charges and threatened with 5–10 years imprisonment (Kolesnikova zatymano 2005). Kolesnikov was not only a major businessman who owned a large chocolate-producing company but also Akhmetov's long-time business partner. As the main witness in the case later explained, he testified against Kolesnikov under direct pressure from Lutsenko (Nayem 2009). According to one party insider, pressure on Akhmetov, Kolesnikov, and other former officials convinced them to maintain an alliance with Yanukovych after the Orange Revolution and to remain in politics or, in the case of Akhmetov, to enter public politics for the first time in the 2006 parliamentary election to receive immunity from prosecution (Akhmetov never attended the 2006–2007 or 2007–2012 parliamentary sessions) (Chornovil 2009). Akhmetov did not seek a parliamentary seat in 2012 because potential threats had been removed after his ally Yanukovych had been elected president.

Yanukovych proved his capacity to provide protection to his allies when he forced Yushchenko to cosign a September 2005 memorandum, which included a pledge to "halt political repressions against the opposition" (Memorandum 2005). Oleh Rybachuk (2005), head of the presidential secretariat, described the memorandum as the means to unify Ukraine and "bury the hatchet," which meant ending the war with the Yanukovych group. Once the Memorandum was signed, the Party of Regions voted to confirm the more oligarch-friendly and anti-Tymoshenko Yuriy Yehanurov as the country's new Prime Minister, while Yushchenko appointed Yanukovych's choice of Oleksandr Medvedko as the new Prosecutor General. Medvedko began his career working in the local prosecutor's offices in Donetsk and Luhansk, and maintained close ties with the Party of Regions. His appointment was crucial in allowing Yanukovych to prevent, hinder, or halt investigations of state officials linked to his party. Under Medvedko the prosecutor's office closed criminal cases against Kolesnikov, former Sumy governor Volodymyr Sherban, former Interior Minister Vasyl Tsushko, and

Yanukovich himself, who was accused of illegally privatizing the Mezhyhirya state residence (Kuzio 2013). It also closed the investigation of alleged falsification of documents that cleared Yanukovich of two criminal convictions in the Soviet era (Lutsenko 2010). The Party of Regions understood early on the importance of the prosecutor's office in halting high-level investigations, and the Donetsk clan has been determined to control it. Importantly, another new Party of Regions member Nestor Shufrych argued that while the party was made up of several subgroups, when they were threatened they always joined forces against the threat (Ukraine: Regions Focuses 2011).

The reinstatement of the Party of Regions as a "protection pact" became clear during the party's congress in December 2005, which was attended by many previously prosecuted former officials, including Akhmetov, Kolesnikov, and Sergei Kivalov, who was Chairman of the Central Election Commission during the fraudulent first and second rounds of the 2004 elections. Kivalov's Odesa-based Maritime party was one of several Eastern Ukrainian political forces that subsequently merged with the Party of Regions. Addressing this aggrieved audience, Yanukovich condemned the authorities' attempts to "engage in witch hunts and fabricate criminal cases against leading opposition activists" (Nikolaenko 2005). The timing was opportune for him to promise not only protection but also renewed access to patronage and rents. By December 2005 the Party of Regions gained the lead in public opinion polls (17.5% against 13.5% for Our Ukraine and 12.4% for BYuT), capitalizing on the disillusionment of Orange voters with Yushchenko. This ensured that the Party of Regions would receive the largest faction in parliament following the upcoming elections in March 2006, and go on to win pluralities in the 2007 and 2012 elections (Natsionalna 2005, 31).

Although the idea of forming a personal electoral bloc that would include the Party of Regions along with other smaller parties was discussed and lobbied for by Russian officials, in the end the decision was made to consolidate the party through its direct participation in the 2006 election campaign and because the party felt powerful enough to go it alone (Butusov 2005). The United Russia party, with whom the Party of Regions had established a program of cooperation the year before, attempted to broker an alliance with the Social Democratic Party of Ukraine (united) (SDPUo), but this was rejected. Political figures such as Kivalov and Yuriy Boyko (leader of the gas lobby's Republican Party) who had aligned with the SDPUo in the 2006 elections, when it had failed miserably to win votes, moved their allegiances to the Party of Regions. In the Crimea, where the Party of Regions did not feel as powerful, Russia successfully brokered a coalition with Crimean Russian nationalists. A US cable reported that Kremlin political technologist Konstantin Zatulin "had personally brokered the electoral alliance between Russian Bloc and Regions' Crimean branch, even negotiating party list placement for favored Russian Bloc members" (Ukraine: The Russia Factor 2006). In the Crimean parliament elected in 2010, 8 of the 17 deputies in the For Yanukovich bloc were members of the Russia Bloc. This was part of a two-stage strategy used elsewhere by the Party of Regions: of cooperating with local forces in the Crimea and later in Transcarpathia (Viktor Baloga's United Center party

[*Yedynny Tsentr*], see below), and then when feeling more confident seeking to sideline these partners with the objective of taking full power in the region.

The decision to go it alone at the national level in the 2006 (and subsequent) elections was potentially decisive in maintaining the party's cohesion, developing its infrastructural capacity and producing a series of mergers with smaller centrist parties, which eliminated many of its potential competitors. Centrist parties were left with the option of either merging with the Party of Regions or becoming marginalized. Former head of the Kharkiv Oblast council Yevhen Kushnariov agreed to merge his New Democratic Party with the Party of Regions in December 2005 and became the chairman of its election campaign. Boyko, who was threatened with imprisonment in summer 2005, agreed to merge his Republican Party with the Party of Regions after the former failed to enter parliament in 2006 as part of the *Ne Tak!* (Not in this Way!) bloc with the SDPUo. The integration of the Republican Party led to the penetration of the gas lobby into the Party of Regions. Subsequently the Party of Regions also succeeded in attracting influential politicians from former pro-Kuchma political parties, such as Nestor Shufrych (SDPUo); Volodymyr Syvkovych, Valeriy Konovaliuk, and Serhiy Tihipko (Labor Ukraine/Strong Ukraine party); Andriy Derkach (Socialist Party of Ukraine [SPU]); Oleksandr Kostushev (Union Party); Anatolii Tolstoukov (NDP); Yuriy Miroschnyenko (New Generation party); and Inna Bohoslovska (Winter Crop Generation [KOP] and *Viche* parties). The Party of Regions also attracted defectors from the Orange opposition – including former leading member of *Rukh* Serhiy Holovaty and Anatolii Kinakh, head of the “Red Director” Party of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (PPPU) – and even more following Yanukovych's election in 2010, such as Pora (It's Time) party leader Vladyslav Kaskiv.

Since 2006 the party has garnered a plurality in three parliamentary elections. Its political dominance in Eastern Ukraine, particularly in the Donbas, ensured that the Party of Regions received stable support from about a third of the national electorate in parliamentary campaigns when it won pluralities of 32.14%, 35.5%, and 30% in 2006, 2007, and 2012, respectively. This transformed the political geography of Eastern and Southern Ukraine from that of pluralism among many competing centrists under President Kuchma to one of a political (and thereby economic) monopolization of power under the Party of Regions. This was further reinforced by the co-optation of the KPU as a junior satellite party that boosted the Party of Regions vote to over 40%, especially when some voters moved back and forth between both parties (as in the 2012 elections).

In July 2006, the Party of Regions formed a majority coalition with the SPU and KPU and returned most of its leading members to the government. While party leader Yanukovych became Prime Minister, other high-ranking party members (such as Azarov, Andriy Kliuev, and Rybak) became his deputies. Overall, 15 Cabinet positions were filled either with members of the Party of Regions or with Yanukovych's loyalists, supporting the goal of distributing patronage. The party also took control over the state gas monopoly Naftohaz Ukrainy, chairmanships in various lucrative executive agencies, and the boards of the two largest state-owned



banks Oshchadbank and UkrEksimBank. While in power, Yanukovich engaged in massive distribution of rents, reviving the party's reputation as a provision pact in addition to being a protective alliance. Two major examples of rent-seeking during Yanukovich's tenure (2006–2007) were his support for continued operation of the opaque gas intermediary company RosUkrEnergo (RUE), linked to Energy Minister Yuriy Boiko and gas mogul Dmytro Firtash, and awarding the license for the development of Black Sea oil and gas fields to the company Vanco Prykerchenska, jointly owned by Akhmetov and other Ukrainian and Russian oligarchs (Åslund 2009, 108). Other licenses for the exploration of gas reserves were rewarded to companies close to another party member, Minister of Environment Vasyl Dzharty (Chyvokunia 2008). Two privatization deals carried out by Yanukovich's government favored preselected companies (Poltavets and Rovnyi 2010). One of these deals – the issuing of shares of a state-owned thermoelectric plant Dniπροenergo – benefited Akhmetov's company, which, as a result, gained de facto control over the plant's management. Such support to favored tycoons has become even more pronounced since 2010.

Although the Party of Regions maintained its coalitional decision-making structure while in opposition, it became increasingly more complex as additional interest groups joined the party. Nonetheless, the core of the Party of Regions faction was still composed of two large groups around Yanukovich and Akhmetov (Ukraine: Party of Regions' 2011). In addition, however, there were three other groups vying for influence. The one that increasingly exerted leverage from 2006 over Yanukovich was the gas lobby headed by Firtash, Serhiy Liovochkin, and Boiko. Liovochkin was Kuchma's senior adviser and Yanukovich's chief of staff in 2006–2007, and in 2010 became the head of his Presidential Administration (Leshchenko 2007b). Boiko was the energy minister in 2006–2007 and then again in 2010–2012. The gas lobby, with its substantial financial and media resources, gave Yanukovich greater financial independence from Akhmetov and the Donetsk oligarchs, while control over the Inter television channel (with the largest number of viewers) gave the Party of Regions and Yanukovich a strategic media resource during elections. This independence most likely also assisted Yanukovich in amassing personal wealth by ensuring that he received kickbacks from shady financial schemes and control over real estate (Ukraine: Regions Focuses 2011) that was further strengthened after 2010 with the rise of “The Family” regional clan loyal to the president and headed by his eldest son, Oleksandr.

Another two subgroups represented the Azarov old guard “Red Director” and senior *nomenklatura* network and Andriy Kliuev's smaller business empire. The latter two, however, were also Yanukovich loyalists, and hence gave him a relative advantage in the party's decision-making process. In potential disputes between various subgroups, Yanukovich gained a tie-breaking vote. For example, in negotiations with Tymoshenko in winter 2008 and spring 2009 for a grand coalition, Yanukovich's decision to side with Firtash and Akhmetov's opposition to such a move proved more influential than Andriy Kliuev's support for the coalition. Firtash and Akhmetov told the US Ambassador they had lobbied for a



grand coalition of Our Ukraine and the Party of Regions. By contrast, after parliament was dissolved by President Yushchenko in April 2007, Akhmetov and Kolesnikov negotiated a compromise deal with the head of the Presidential Secretariat Baloga whereby Yanukovych reluctantly agreed to preterm parliamentary elections in exchange for a grand coalition of Our Ukraine and the Party of Regions (which Yushchenko subsequently reneged on).

At the same time, as party insider Bohoslovksa explained, there was a search for a compromise within the party that involved decision-making by “twenty senior people and regional leaders” (Ukraine: Regions Focuses 2011). According to her, no single decision was made unilaterally. Most importantly, as one party insider recalls, up until 2010 Yanukovych was accessible even to rank-and-file deputies and willing to consider their requests or discuss some of the contentious issues on the party’s agenda (O. Tsariov, interview, 2013). This ensured that none of the Party of Regions deputies have switched their allegiance since the party first entered parliament in 2006 until the Euromaidan crisis; defections have always been from the national democratic parties.

Following the revival of the Orange coalition and return of Tymoshenko as Prime Minister in December 2007, the Party of Regions again reconfigured itself as a protection pact. The new government threatened the business interests both of its old members such as Akhmetov and its new funders such as gas mogul Firtash, who became an informal leader of a new influential group in the party’s decision-making coalition (O. Tsariov, interview, 2013). In May 2008, Tymoshenko’s government annulled Yanukovych’s decision to award Vanco Prykerchenska exploration licenses, in a move directed against Akhmetov. She also insisted on eliminating the gas intermediary RUE from the 2009 gas contract with Russia. Moreover, the government moved to expropriate 11 billion cubic meters of transit gas owned by RUE as a part of a deal with the Russian Federation to provide Ukraine with gas at a discounted price. As a result, both Akhmetov and Firtash became adamant opponents of any attempts to establish a grand coalition with Tymoshenko in 2008–2009 that other Party of Regions members lobbied for (Ukraine: Akhmetov 2011). In 2012, the Vanco license was renewed and Firtash launched his third gas intermediary OstChem.<sup>1</sup>

In October 2009, the Party of Regions officially designated Yanukovych as its presidential candidate, and he became the party’s organizational vehicle for confronting Tymoshenko. Akhmetov and Firtash provided critical financial and media resources to run an effective campaign. Following Yanukovych’s victory, the Party of Regions received unprecedented influence over policy-making, with its members occupying key government positions and 90% of the governorships. Akhmetov’s group received the position of First Deputy Prime Minister (Kolesnikov) and several ministerial posts in the first government in 2010–2012. The gas lobby received even more influential positions following the 2010 elections in the first Azarov government: Chief of Staff Liovochkin, Security Service Chairman and briefly in 2012 Finance Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Valery Khoroshkovsky, Minister for Energy and Coal Industry Boiko, and Foreign Minister Kostyantyn Hryshchenko. Finally, Azarov was appointed

Prime Minister twice (2010, 2012) and Andriy Kliuev took the position of Deputy Prime Minister and secretary of the National Security and Defense Council (RNBO). Hence, each of the main subgroups within the Party of Regions received tangible rewards and channels for influence in the Yanukovych administration. Consociational decision-making assisted the Party of Regions in maintaining cohesion in some of the most difficult periods of its existence and, eventually, helped it in returning its leaders to the apex of political power. After Yanukovych was elected president, he returned the de jure chairmanship of the party to Azarov, but remained its de facto leader.

### **The trajectories of individual-led parties**

In contrast to the Party of Regions, neither Our Ukraine nor the Fatherland party monopolized power in one region or received large-scale support from big business groups. Support provided by Ihor Kolomoyskyi and the Industrial Union of Donbas to Our Ukraine and the Fatherland party, respectively, was far more limited than that provided by Akhmetov, who is among the top 50 wealthiest people in the world. Instead, they both were dependent upon popular and charismatic leaders who could promise to carry these parties to victory. This excessive influence of a single leader also became the main obstacle in their organizational development.

Our Ukraine emerged in late 2001 as an alliance of several minor, but mostly well-established political parties such as Rukh and Reforms and Order (*Partiya Reformy i Poryadok* [PRiP]), which coalesced around former Prime Minister Yushchenko. These diverse and earlier competing parties, Rukh chairman Hennadiy Udovenko admitted, “united because of Yushchenko’s high approval rating” (Hryniv 2011). The Our Ukraine bloc included a very wide array of liberal, national democratic, and nationalist parties, many of whom were in effect virtual parties with amorphous ideologies, a pattern that was repeated by Yushchenko in 2006 and especially in 2007. Our Ukraine also attracted at least a dozen (millionaire) oligarchs, particularly the leader of his second Solidarity party and confectionery business owner Poroshenko, as well as several prominent *nomenklatura* figures. Businessmen in the group belonged to a new breed of “minigarchs” who could boast multimillions in assets, but these paled in comparison with the billionaire oligarchs allied to Kuchma and the oligarchs within the Party of Regions. As Åslund pointed out, the Orange Revolution was in many ways a contest between (Orange) millionaires and (pro-Yanukovych) billionaires (Hoagland 2005).

Hence, Yushchenko’s personal “symbolic capital” was decisive in maintaining the cohesion of the alliance. Still, given his relative inexperience in politics and lack of personal fortune, Yushchenko had to rely on national democratic party functionaries for organization and on major donors for funding his campaign, who came to be known as the President’s *Liubi Druzi* (Dear Friends). This made the decision-making process in Our Ukraine up until 2005 similar to that of the Party of Regions. Although business elites were the least numerous group in

Yushchenko's parliamentary faction, they had a greater influence on him than other groups from minor parties. Indicative of this was the fact that 11 of its members occupied high-level government positions after Yushchenko was elected President. They also played a key role in informal discussions in the faction's top decision-making body, the Political Council (V. Pidhorna, interview, 21 June 2013, Kyiv, Ukraine). According to one insider, most important political decisions in Our Ukraine prior to 2005 had been made after long deliberation with the participation of the main players from subgroups (R. Zvarych, interview, 20 June 2013, Kyiv, Ukraine). During the debates, Yushchenko encouraged these discussions and avoided imposing his preferences on the participants. However, he would always have a final say and, most of the time, followed the majority opinion of the parliamentary faction in making his decision. Yushchenko's moderate instincts were usually in line with the "pragmatic wing" (i.e., the wing more inclined to favor cooperation with the authorities) of the faction that prevailed in Our Ukraine's decision-making circle. These included business elites, such as Poroshenko, Yevhen Chervonenko, and David Zhvania, as well as the incumbent president's former associates like Yekhanurov and Roman Besmertnyi. Hence, Our Ukraine avoided siding with the radical opposition in parliament (represented by Tymoshenko's bloc and the SPU) and was lukewarm in its support for anti-presidential protests in 2001–2003. One of the rare moments when Yushchenko found himself in a minority was in December 2004, when the faction's majority voted in favor of adopting the constitutional amendments limiting the powers of the president beginning in 2006 (R. Zvarych, interview, 2013). Indicative of how he was willing to honor the majority's view, Yushchenko in the end supported Kuchma's constitutional reform. This practice of coalitional decision-making within Our Ukraine quickly became a thing of the past after Yushchenko was elected President.

Given his political influence and exclusive control over administrative resources, President Yushchenko dominated the newly formed political force and gradually turned it into his personal tool. Yushchenko stated that the new presidential party should be "a people's party that would help a truly people's president to lead the nation to the new future." By selecting only his trusted loyalists and business donors to work on organizing the new force, Yushchenko showed that he was no longer willing to reach out to a wider circle of political allies. Nearly all national democratic parties in Our Ukraine, apart from two virtual parties (including Poroshenko's second Solidarity party), refused to merge with Our Ukraine to form a new presidential party of power. The Reforms and Order party failed to enter parliament independently in 2006 in an alliance with the virtual Pora party (an outgrowth of the Pora youth NGO) and from 2007 aligned with Fatherland in BYuT. The governing body of the People's Union–Our Ukraine presidential party launched in March 2005 consisted primarily of *Liubi Druzi* businessmen close to Yushchenko. In order to balance them, two senior positions in the party hierarchy were allocated to Besmertnyi, who became the chair of the party's political council, while Yekhanurov was confirmed as the head of the party's executive committee.

As one of Yushchenko's former supporters described it, Our Ukraine was created as "a party of the Orange oligarchs with no ideology and modeled from above" (Stetskiv 2006). Its electoral strength was based solely on its perceived affiliation with the President. According to an April 2005 poll, support for Our Ukraine would drop from 35.6% to 8.2% if Yushchenko's affiliation with the party was not mentioned in the polling question (Dumky i pohliady 2005). According to a cable from the US Embassy in Kyiv, some party insiders resisted the top-down approach to building the party, but were defeated by the party's business wing:

OU (Our Ukraine) followed the advice of discredited Orange oligarch Petro Poroshenko, who ultimately ran the 2006 show and embodied all of OU's weaknesses. Katerynchuk told us in May that he had advocated building a grass-roots, European-style political party in 2005 but had been overruled by others favoring a more typical Ukrainian "pro-Presidential electoral project" for the 2006 parliamentary and local elections; in making such a mistake, Our Ukraine reaped what it had sowed. (Ukraine: The Political 2011).

The excessive presence of businessmen in Our Ukraine's leadership became its Achilles heel during the parliamentary campaign, because of the September 2005 political crisis that led to the government's dismissal. Accusations against Yushchenko's main business funders leveled by then-Prime Minister Tymoshenko permanently tarnished their reputation and weakened their influence within the party, as *Liubi Druzi* became a synonym for cronyism and high-level corruption. In an attempt to neutralize the damage done to the party from the corruption allegations, Yushchenko insisted on forming an electoral alliance with five smaller, mostly national democratic, parties for the 2006 election campaign. As one insider recounts, the decision to run as a bloc rather than as a stand-alone party was the exclusive result of the personal relationship Yushchenko developed with the leaders of some of these parties, particularly Rukh leader Tarasiuk and Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists (KUN) leader Oleksiy Ivchenko (I. Vasiunyk, interview, 6 July 2013, Lviv, Ukraine). The use of Yushchenko's image in television ads and the party's billboards clearly personalized the bloc. In the 2007 election campaign, Our Ukraine again ran as an electoral bloc of nine parties (Our Ukraine–People's Self-Defense [NUNS]), led by former Interior Minister Yuriy Lutsenko. Our Ukraine competed with BYuT for Orange votes with a tarnished image damaged by allegations of corruption and collusion with Yanukovych, but just as important in its gradual disintegration was its internal organizational structure, which became increasingly dominated by a President who treated the political force as his personal fiefdom.

Following a disastrous third place finish in the 2006 and 2007 elections, Yushchenko sidelined the party leadership and began making unilateral decisions about future partners in the governing coalition. Following the 2006 elections, while asking Bezsmertnyi to negotiate an Orange coalition with BYuT and the SPU, Yushchenko also instructed Yekhanurov and Poroshenko to conduct separate talks with the Party of Regions in a complex game of intrigue and deception. Yekhanurov (2006) later clearly stated that his primary loyalty was with the President: "I acted not on behalf of the party but on behalf of the president. And,

I am satisfied that I completely fulfilled the instructions of the president.” Although, eventually, a grand coalition with the Party of Regions failed, Yushchenko’s conduct during the coalition talks showed that he had little interest in involving other leading party members in the decision-making process and, rather, used the party to pursue his personal political agenda. As one observer noted at the time, in Yushchenko’s team Our Ukraine played a role of a dependent appendix that was required to support the president’s policies (Butusov 2006a). Moreover, he also avoided any internal consultations within the Our Ukraine bloc when he decided on the distribution of posts in the new government (Butusov 2006b). According to the head of the party’s executive committee at the time (Mykola Katerynychuk), Yushchenko met him only twice in 2005–2006 to discuss issues related to party-building, and showed complete indifference to party-related matters (Ukraine: The Political 2011). Serhiy Sobolyev (interview, 9 December 2011, Washington, DC) recalled that, when he had been Yushchenko’s representative in parliament in 2005, he never once received any instructions, proposals, or strategic goals from the President. He found it impossible to reach Yushchenko by telephone or to arrange a meeting with him, and he resigned following the removal of the Tymoshenko government. Interior Minister Lutsenko (2012) complained about a similar lack of presidential support and political will from Yushchenko, especially over pursuing cases of abuse of office and corruption.

In response to accusations by Tymoshenko that he had “betrayed” the Orange Revolution, Yushchenko moved to weaken the business wing of the party, which received no executive positions after the 2006 elections and lost access to the President. According to a party insider, oligarchs stopped funding the party once they saw that they were no longer receiving any patronage and they were further marginalized when the party congress in late 2006 expelled them from the party’s main decision-making body (Ukraine: Our Ukraine 2011). An earlier governing structure had given each subgroup a share of influence (similar to the policy pursued inside the Party of Regions). All the new members of the party’s presidium were now Yushchenko’s sycophant loyalists (Ukraine: Our Ukraine 2011), which eliminated any serious counterweights to Yushchenko’s influence within the party. The *Liubi Druzi*, the US Embassy in Kyiv reported, “consistently provided him with bad advice, poor management, and an eroding base,” with Yushchenko surrounded by a “chaotic universe of personalities.”

Moreover, Baloga and Vira Ulianchenko, his Chiefs of Staff in 2006–2009 and 2009–2010, respectively, intervened in Our Ukraine and NUNS and the latter served briefly as party leader. Another Our Ukraine chairman, Vyacheslav Kyrlyenko, was elected to that position in April 2007 on Yushchenko’s request, while the President’s nephew became his deputy a year later. Finally, in November 2008 in the midst of a bitter confrontation with BYuT and growing risks of defection from his party, Yushchenko decided to change his status from the party’s honorary chairman to its formal leader, something he had earlier ruled out as unconstitutional (Leshchenko and Nikolaenko 2008).

Excessive personalization of Our Ukraine, however, proved counterproductive and led to increasing defections of potential allies and unwillingness by national



democratic political parties to merge with Our Ukraine. In 2008–2009, six leaders of political parties in NUNS – Lutsenko, Tarasiuk, Katerynychuk, Yuriy Karmazin, Anatoliy Hrytsenko, and Volodymyr Stretovych – broke ranks with Yushchenko and endorsed Tymoshenko in the 2010 presidential elections. (Stretovych broke ranks again in 2010 and defected to Yanukovych after his Christian Democratic Union elected another NUNS defector David Zhvania as leader.) Five senior NUNS leaders – Baloga (United Center), Kyrylenko (For Ukraine!), Katerynychuk (European Party of Ukraine), Arseniy Yatseniuk (Front for Change), and Hrytsenko (Civic Position), the latter two Yushchenko’s Foreign and Defense Ministers, respectively – launched new political forces, increasing the number of parties in NUNS from 9 to 14 (Kuzio 2012b). This fracturing of the national democratic camp was the opposite of the unification of centrists taking place at the same time around the Party of Regions, which was absorbing and eliminating potential rivals. Personalization also provided little incentive for party members to invest in party-building, because promotions depended on access to Yushchenko’s crony network rather than contribution to party development. This became clear when only three members of Our Ukraine received appointments in Tymoshenko’s second government in December 2007, all of them Yushchenko’s long-time loyalists.

By the end of Yushchenko’s term as president, Our Ukraine ceased to operate as an influential political force and could no longer provide any serious organizational or financial resources for his reelection campaign. The staff in regional party offices went unpaid for months at a time and received few campaign paraphernalia from Kyiv’s party headquarters (Konovalenko 2010). The campaign itself was run by one of Yushchenko’s remaining business cronies Ihor Tarasiuk, a head of the DUS (*Derzhupravlinnya Spravamy* [State Administrative Directorate]) asset management department of the Presidential Secretariat, who also owned a major poultry business.<sup>2</sup> Yushchenko’s failed reelection bid also was the last hurrah for those in his party who still attempted to capitalize on the spoils of power. Once their patron was out of office, the party was left in shambles, with no public support and \$10 million in debt. In 2010, Yushchenko attempted to revitalize the party by offering the former head of the Security Service (SBU) Valentyn Nalyvaichenko the position of party chairman. Two years later Nalyvaichenko left the party, citing his inability to overrule Yushchenko’s refusal to form an alliance with other opposition forces. Nalyvaichenko was elected to parliament in 2012 in UDAR, the political force led by Vitali Klitschko that replaced Our Ukraine as the non-Tymoshenko opposition, while Our Ukraine slumped into marginality with 1.11% support.

Personalization of the decision-making process had a similarly negative effect on the development of a party led by another Orange Revolution leader, Tymoshenko. She had established the Fatherland party in 1999 as a splinter group from the *Hromada* (Community) party, led by her political patron and former Prime Minister Pavlo Lazarenko. Following Lazarenko’s arrest in New York in February 1999, most of the members of his faction defected to the new parliamentary group led by Tymoshenko. By distancing themselves from Lazarenko, who was also under



criminal investigation in Ukraine, they expected to avoid being similarly targeted by the Ukrainian authorities (Leshchenko 2013, 30). Although Tymoshenko was earlier a strong critic of the incumbent president, she quickly reversed her position when faced with the threat of prosecution. Hence, the Fatherland party was initially established as a “protection pact” that was based on Tymoshenko’s personal “non-aggression agreement” with President Kuchma in 1999–2000. The party subsequently endorsed the incumbent president in the 1999 elections, while Tymoshenko, following Kuchma’s reelection, moved on to become Deputy Prime Minister in the new Yushchenko government. At around the time of her appointment, Tymoshenko formally became the party’s leader and has remained its dominant figure since. She brought in financial resources from a limited number of oligarchs as well as assets accumulated from her years as the chairman of the major gas-trading company YESU (*Yedyni Enerhetychni Systemy Ukrainy* [United Energy Systems of Ukraine]) that had replaced KUB (*Korporatsiya Ukrainyskyi Benzyn* [Ukrainian Petrol Company]), government connections, and her charismatic personality. The Fatherland party was, therefore, even more dependent on its leader than Our Ukraine, which was reflected in the name of the electoral alliance that the party has been part of from 2002 until 2011 – BYuT.

The Fatherland party–BYuT’s eclectic ideology reflected Tymoshenko’s personality and the ideological amorphousness of post-Soviet Ukrainian and Eurasian politics more broadly. For example, the Fatherland party has merged with two very different parties, the liberal Yabloko party headed by the even more eclectic Mykhaylo Brodskyi and the nationalist-populist Conservative Republican Party led by former prisoner of conscience and nationalist maverick Stepan Khmara. That the mergers were of incompatible and undisciplined political forces could be seen when Khmara and Brodskyi split from Tymoshenko in 2007–2009, with Khmara joining the Ukrainian People’s Party (*Ukrainska Narodna Partiya* [UNP]), led by Yuriy Kostenko, and Brodskyi forming the Party of Free Democrats (*Partiya Vilnykh Demokrativ* [PVD]). In 2010, Brodskyi defected to Yanukovich and was appointed chairman of the State Committee for Regulatory Policy and Entrepreneurship of Ukraine. Both of them had been Tymoshenko’s staunch supporters when she went into opposition in early 2001.

While claiming to espouse the center-left ideology of “solidarism,” the Fatherland party–BYuT also aligned itself in joint electoral alliances with the nationalist Ukrainian National Assembly (*Ukrainska Natsionalna Asambleya* [UNA]) in 2001 and several center-right parties, such as the Ukrainian Republican Party (*Ukrainska Respublikanska Partiya* [URP]) and the Republican Party (*Ukrainska Respublikanska Partiya “Sobor”* [URP-unity]) in 2002 and the liberal Reforms and Order party in 2007. In all of these cases, only Tymoshenko’s individual ties with the parties’ leaders – Andriy Shkil, Levko Lukianenko, Anatoliy Matvienko, and Viktor Pynzenyk, respectively – determined the composition of her election bloc. In 2007, the Fatherland party acquired the status of an observer in the center-right European People’s Party (EPP) political group in the European Parliament, which offered Tymoshenko access to the leaders of major European states who were all members of EPP. She was also adamant about

running in the parliamentary elections as the leader of a bloc named after her rather than as a leader of an impersonal party. In 2006 Tymoshenko formed an alliance with the little-known Social-Democratic Party of Ukraine (SDPU), which could have hardly strengthened her election campaign. The party's main advantage as a partner was that its leader – Vasyl Onopenko – was fully subordinated personally to Tymoshenko and barely participated in the campaign planning. Onopenko also was highly influential in the judicial system, and became Chairman of the Supreme Court (Leshchenko 2007a). Tellingly, the Fatherland party even lacked its own official website, and all the information about the party's activities was released on the web page of BYuT.

Similarly to Our Ukraine, the Fatherland party could not persuade smaller parties it aligned with to dissolve and create a single political force, and none of the parties it partnered with in an electoral bloc agreed to a merger. Moreover, its bloc experienced the same defections of minor parties that Yushchenko witnessed after 2005. All of its former political allies – Matvienko, Pynzenyk, Brodskyi, and Khmara – had turned against Tymoshenko by the 2010 presidential election. A major reason for this was what Khmara called Tymoshenko's "authoritarian style" of party management that placed her views above everyone else's (Tymoshenko *zasliplena* 2005). A cable from the US Embassy in Kyiv described Prime Minister Tymoshenko as "emotional" and a micro-manager, the latter problem being common among Ukrainian leaders: "Tymoshenko has deliberately avoided having an advisor on macroeconomic issues and makes all economic decisions on her own, usually without any counsel from experts" (Ukraine: Tymoshenko Runs 2009). After Pynzenyk resigned from the government in February 2009, he told the US Ambassador to Ukraine, "She also was overly confident in her own decisions and believed everyone else is wrong" (Ukraine: Former Tymoshenko 2010). In 2012, Pynzenyk, no longer leader of Reforms and Order, was elected to parliament within UDAR and, a year later after the election law no longer permitted blocs to participate, the Reforms and Order party together with Yatseniuk's Front for Change merged with the Fatherland party.

Despite the objections of many of her allies, Tymoshenko insisted on bringing into the bloc numerous former supporters of Kuchma (particularly from the SDPUo) with access to financial resources and broad business interests. Many of them contributed funds primarily to the parliamentary election campaigns in exchange for positions on electoral lists and high-ranking jobs in the government. When Tymoshenko became Prime Minister in 2007, she rewarded two of her key business supporters, Serhiy Buriak and Khoroshkovsky, with lucrative executive positions as chairmen of the Tax Administration and Customs Agency, respectively. Both, however, later defected to the Party of Regions once their business interests were at stake. A similar stream of defections occurred among many rank-and-file members of her faction in 2007, when every fifth BYuT deputy defected to the ruling coalition with the Party of Regions. Following Tymoshenko's defeat in 2010, a quarter of her faction's MPs aligned themselves with the Party of Regions in the parliament. A similar high rate of defections took place from NUNS after Yanukovich came to power in 2010.

The absence of a personal commitment to Tymoshenko's political force among many newcomers was the result of personal business-like deals she made with them when offering them a place on BYuT's list. As Brodskyi (one of her close confidantes) recalls, Tymoshenko signed contracts with potential donors (such as former SDPUo leading member Bohdan Hubskiy) that specified her obligations with a detailed list of government positions she would offer in exchange for funding (Leshchenko 2007a). Brodskyi compared the way Tymoshenko managed the activities of her political force with the way she earlier ran her gas trading company: "There is no competition within the party because everyone looks at the party's owner and it resembles United Energy Systems (of Ukraine) with the party's secretariat playing the role of the human resources department." According to him, either Tymoshenko or two of her deputies were in charge of all the main appointments within the party.

Given her reliance on personal charisma, Tymoshenko never prioritized party-building and viewed the party mainly in instrumental terms for her political advancement. While Yushchenko, for some time, had to manage competing power centers among businessmen within his party, Tymoshenko centralized all decision-making in the narrow circle of her long-time loyalists. Meanwhile, her relationship with donors was based on bilateral short-term contracts limited by the election cycle rather than on an expectation of a long-term partnership, such as in the Party of Regions. As a result, major businessmen never developed a stake in the party's development or gained a voice in its strategic planning. The party remained submerged in BYuT until the 2012 parliamentary election, when changes to election legislation banned the participation of blocs, forcing Fatherland and Front for Change to run as the united opposition. Meanwhile, Tymoshenko's sentencing to a seven-year prison term and a three-year ban on holding public office in 2011 created a leadership vacuum within the opposition, which opened the way for the merger of the Fatherland party with Reforms and Order and Front of Change. Tymoshenko, although jailed, formally retained the position of party leader, while Yatseniuk became the head of the party's political council. Rukh, which had split in 1999, also reunited with the UNP becoming the Ukrainian People's Party "*Rukh*."

Although the removal of Tymoshenko opened the way for the merger, it also came about as a response to growing pressure from the Yanukovich administration since 2010, which included the buying up of opposition deputies, abuse of state administrative resources in elections, and the pressuring of oligarchs to end their financial support for national democratic political forces. Nevertheless, Hrytsenko and Kyrylenko continued to oppose the merger of their political parties into the Fatherland Party.

While Tymoshenko was more successful than Yushchenko in maintaining the relative popularity of her political force, she similarly failed in creating a strong and competitive political machine. Instead, she relied on a personalized and amorphous electoral alliance that allowed her to exercise decisive decision-making powers that prevented her from engaging with the remainder of the party. While claiming over a half million formal members, the party's leadership failed to mobilize even a few thousand supporters on behalf of Tymoshenko during her

trial, and on the day of her sentencing Berkut (Golden Eagle) riot police outnumbered her supporters.

### Conclusions

The distribution of resources within a political party, as we have demonstrated in this article, may affect its developmental trajectories by influencing its organizational structure. All three major parties analyzed in this article were created with patronage goals in mind, but only Our Ukraine and the Fatherland party relied at the onset on the popular appeal and charisma of their leaders. Moreover, while Yushchenko initially had to establish a partnership with a group of businessmen willing to fund his emerging political force, Tymoshenko had established monopoly control over her newly created party because of her personal financial resources. As a result, the Fatherland party was the first to develop unilateral decision-making that privileged the views of the party's leader. Our Ukraine began to resemble the Fatherland party after 2005–2006, as Yushchenko gradually excluded his earlier financial donors from the decision-making circle and came to dominate the party. As a result, Our Ukraine and Fatherland faced many of the same obstacles in their political development, particularly an inability to absorb minor parties, frequent defections of their prominent members, and a lack of commitment by the rank-and-file.

By contrast, the strength of the Party of Regions rested on the alliance between regional *nomenklatura* elites and new Donetsk-based oligarchs who contributed different but equally important resources to the party's development. This promoted a consociational decision-making process among major party leaders and a consolidated policy-making once a decision had been reached. The Party of Regions provided different groups with a voice in internal discussions, showed a greater ability to absorb rival centrist political parties, and exhibited more coherent unity and discipline (Nikolaenko and Abramchuk 2012). NUNS (which included Our Ukraine) contested the 2007 elections as a coalition of 9 parties, and Yushchenko ended his term in office in 2010 with 14 parties in his election bloc. Tymoshenko similarly failed to maintain long-term alliances with center-right leaders, many of whom campaigned against her in the 2010 presidential elections. As the Party of Regions was co-opting potential ideological competitors in Eastern and Southern Ukraine, Our Ukraine and the Fatherland party could not consolidate Orange voters and competed both with each other and with new competitors such as the nationalist Svoboda (Freedom) party on the same ideological flank in Western and Central Ukraine.

A consociational approach to decision-making is particularly instrumental in maintaining cohesion when a party is defeated at the polls. In 2005 and 2007, the Party of Regions overcame electoral defeats and renegeing on agreements to establish grand coalitions without any serious damage to the unity of the party. By contrast, both Our Ukraine and the Fatherland party—BYuT experienced numerous defections once their leaders lost political influence or office. Finally, coalition-led parties may ensure a more equitable distribution of rents and

patronage among various groups. Yanukovych established his reputation as a consistent provider of patronage to leading party members both during his tenure as Prime Minister in 2006–2007 and, especially, following his presidential victory in 2010. This, in turn, reinforced their interest in investing in the infrastructural development of the party. The Party of Regions' successful participation in elections on all levels also promised its lower-ranking members tangible rewards for their commitment to the party's success. Its credibility in promising career benefits and rents to its members explains its success in removing the threat of competitors by absorbing other centrist political forces.

In contrast, Yushchenko's erratic decision-making, privileging one group over another in the distribution of government resources and access to government funds, undermined his credibility as a patronage and rent-provider within the party. In the absence of a reassurance mechanism that would guarantee party members payoffs for their contributions to election campaigns, the party as a provision pact could not ensure their loyalty and continued support. Although Tymoshenko was more consistent in rewarding her supporters, her reliance on personalized short-term deals prior to elections prevented a more sustainable long-term development of Fatherland. Finally, the decision of both Our Ukraine and the Fatherland party to participate in parliamentary elections in coalitions with smaller parties became another disincentive for its lower-ranking members to invest their resources in the party's development. With numerous free riders among coalition partners, the parties experienced a severe collective action problem both on the national and regional levels.

The success of the Party of Regions in establishing itself as Ukraine's single effective political machine also proved fleeting. First, any party formed as a provision pact depends on continuous redistribution of rents and patronage goods (Greene 2007). Their declining supply resulted in heightened internal party competition for the largest share of the shrinking pie. The party has also been severely weakened by Yanukovych's attempts to centralize the decision-making process or favor one group within the party at the expense of others, thus falling into the same trap of unilateral leadership as Yushchenko and Tymoshenko. Finally, Yanukovych's egregious misrule under the Party's banner and his disgraceful fall may ultimately prove fatal for its future. Whatever its further path, the durability of those parties that would come to replace it may similarly rest on their capacity to resist single leaders striving for personal dominance.

## Notes

1. The main gas intermediaries in Ukraine have been Respublika and Interhaz (tied to Ihor Bakay), United Energy Systems (headed by Tymoshenko in the 1990s), and in the 2000s Firtash-linked Eural-Trans-Gas (2002–2004), RosUkrEnergO (2004–2009), and OstChem (since 2012).
2. DUS is a relic of the Soviet era that manages property owned by the presidential secretariat/administration as well as dachas given to parliamentary deputies in exclusive settlements outside Kyiv (much as with the *nomenklatura* during the Soviet era), and provides services such as housing, clinics, and transport for senior Ukrainian elites.



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