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Explaining the success and failure of post-communist revolutions

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Abstract

Since 1999, the post-Communist states have seen a series of attempts to overthrow semi-authoritarian governments, with the successful attempts known as the “colored revolutions.” However, not all such attempts have succeeded. This paper seeks to explain the variation in outcomes. Most accounts have focused on the development of grass-roots activist movements. The central argument here is that elites, and in particular security services, play a much more significant role in these revolutions than has generally been appreciated. This hypothesis is elaborated through a threshold model of protest, in which the central question is whether protests achieve a “tipping point” that makes them continue to grow larger until success is inevitable. The actions of elites, it is argued, play a decisive role in whether mass protests reach a tipping point. The argument is examined through a paired comparison of two failed attempts to overthrow governments through street protests (Serbia 1996–1997 and Ukraine 2001) with two successful cases (Serbia 1999 and Ukraine 2004). By studying cases with variation on the dependent variable, this paper seeks to improve the empirical and methodological basis of research on post-communist revolutions.

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Introduction

Beginning in Serbia in 1999, and most recently in Kyrgyzstan in 2005, the post-communist world has witnessed a series of revolutions, in which partly authoritarian post-communist regimes have been overthrown after mass protests. Known collectively as the “colored” revolutions, they have led to hope that the pattern of post-communist semi-authoritarianism may be less stable than it once appeared.

Scholars, journalists, and policy makers have already given considerable attention to explaining these revolutions. Because revolution seemed to spread from one country to another, these events have led to hope in some corners, and fear in others, that a “formula” for the overthrow of undemocratic regimes might be found. Those who would promote further revolutions, as well as those who would prevent them, seek to learn the “ingredients” of successful post-communist revolution. Similarly, scholars seek to use these cases to augment existing explanations of protest and revolution. This study seeks to add to our understanding of post-communist revolutions in three ways:

First, by examining cases where revolution was attempted, but failed, as well as cases in which it succeeded, this paper seeks to improve the empirical and methodological basis of research. By comparing the failed Serb protests of 1996–1997 with the successful revolution of 2000, and by comparing the failed Ukrainian protests of 2001 with the successful revolution of 2004, we have two pairs of very comparable cases from which to examine the difference between failure and success. Second, by tying this group of cases to the broader literature on protest and revolution, this paper seeks to bring a broader body of theory and research to understanding these cases. Third, by focusing on process rather than prerequisites, this study aims to provide a more dynamic understanding of the variables that contributed to the “colored revolutions,” and the relationships between those variables.

The central argument of this paper is that elites, and in particular security services, play a much more significant role in these revolutions than has generally been appreciated.¹ While these revolutions have widely been viewed as the result of spontaneous “people power,” elites play a crucial role in determining which uprisings grow and succeed, and which wither and fail.

It is generally recognized that decisions by security forces whether to repress protests play a key role in determining the course of protest movements (Francisco, 1996). However, decisions by elites, including leaders of security forces, also play a powerful role in determining whether protests ever grow beyond a small size, and therefore whether repressing them ever becomes a major issue. In the key cases, including Serbia in 1999, Georgia in 2003, and Ukraine in 2004, elites did not merely abandon their leaders in order to avoid bloodshed. They actively facilitated the organization of protests, they declined to take steps that could have kept protests small, and they encouraged protesters by signaling that they would avoid violence.

¹ For our purposes, we define elites as those in high government positions, or controlling important economic resources, or controlling other important political resources such as media outlets or political parties. The essential work on elites is Mills (1956). See also Eldersveld (1989).

These protests quickly reached the “tipping point,” where the perception that protest would be safe and would be successful led ever larger numbers to join, eventually leaving leaders few options other than to resign.

In other cases, including Serbia in 1997, Ukraine in 2001, and Azerbaijan in 2003, elites remained loyal to the presidents, and security forces took the steps necessary to prevent protests from growing to the “tipping point.”² In these cases, large-scale repression was not necessary, because the protests withered on their own. These cases, in which elites failed to facilitate protest, help illuminate how important elite support has been to the successful post-communist revolutions.

This argument is elaborated through a focus on “threshold models” of protest, in which the central question is whether protests achieve a “tipping point” than makes them continue to grow larger, or whether, lacking that critical mass, they diminish in the face of government resistance. The actions of elites, it is argued, play a decisive role in whether mass protests reach a tipping point.

Following this introduction, a theoretical discussion casts the cases of post-communist revolutions in terms of the broader literature on protest and revolution around the world. Then, two paired comparisons are examined: one of Serbia 1996–1997 versus Serbia 2000, and the other of Ukraine 2001 versus Ukraine 2004. The empirical results of these comparisons are then summarized in broader theoretical terms. Finally, the conclusion suggests some caution about assuming that the findings from these cases will apply to future cases.

Theoretical framework

Protest theory and tipping mechanisms

Theories of protest and revolution contribute a great deal to the quest to understand this most recent set of cases. One strand of that research, often referred to as “threshold models,” focuses on why some protests grow bigger and bigger, while others either fail to catch on, or grow only to a point, and then founder.

Based on the work of the economist and game theorist Thomas Schelling, threshold models have been applied to social movements and protests in a large literature (Schelling, 1978; Granovetter, 1978; Lichbach, 1995 are prominent examples). Based on rational choice assumptions, threshold models investigate the decision making of each individual protester. The model is based on two basic ideas. First, individuals are sensitive to the costs and benefits of participating in a protest. Different individuals will have different “thresholds”—different payoffs at which they will join. Second, individuals’ perception of the costs and benefits are dependent upon the number of people already participating (Granovetter, 1978, p. 1422). As more people participate, the likelihood of success goes up, and the likelihood that any one protester will be repressed goes down. Each additional protester, by lowering costs and raising

² Henry Hale (2005) seeks to explain why elites defect from “patronal” presidents in some cases, and not in others.

benefits, increases the chance that someone with a higher threshold of participation will join.

Therefore, as more people join a protest, its chances of success increase.

The common knowledge among members of a community that a bandwagon is either about to begin or is in the process of unfolding can be a powerful inducement to collective dissent. After all, everyone likes to jump on a bandwagon, and no one likes to be left behind (Lichbach, 1995, p. 115).

The question is whether this process reaching a “tipping point,” where the protests grow spontaneously. As each individual is added, does the increased likelihood of success now mean that another protester’s threshold is met, so that he or she joins, and then, another, and so on? Or does the addition of another protestor not change the chances of success enough to get that chain reaction going? This dynamic was illustrated by a statement made by Kyiv Mayor Oleksandr Omelchenko to an aide to Viktor Yushchenko at the outset of the Orange Revolution: “If you bring out 100,000 I’m with you, we’ll take power in one day. If it’ll be 99,000 I won’t be with you” (Wilson, 2005, p. 125).

Two types of self-reinforcing cycles are possible: as the perceived likelihood of increases, additional people will join the protest. This increases the chances for success, so even more join, and so on. Conversely, if people are skeptical of success, they will not join, and some who *have* joined will quit. That reduces the chance of success, and so others will then drop out, and so on. In this cycle, the protests eventually die out altogether, as occurred in Serbia in 1996–1997 and in Ukraine in 2001.

The key question, from this perspective, is whether protestors can somehow boost participation above that tipping point at which the protest becomes self-reinforcing, or whether governments can manage to keep participation below the threshold. Where exactly the threshold is, is never exactly clear until after the fact. Threshold models might, for example, explain one effect that Michael McFaul and Joshua Tucker both point to: stolen elections seem especially powerful in causing revolution (McFaul, 2005, p. 7; Tucker, *in press*). Because stolen elections focus more people’s attention on the misdeeds of the regime, they expand the potential pool of protesters, making it more likely that participation will increase. Stolen elections also might increase each individual’s propensity to protest (lowering many individuals’ threshold for joining). As formal threshold models indicate, very small changes in initial conditions can make the difference in whether tipping occurs or not (Chwe, 1999). For our understanding of post-communist revolutions, we seek to understand why that threshold was exceeded in several cases, but not in other, less well-known cases.

Political opportunity structure and mobilization

For those who would foment revolution, the challenge is to mobilize sufficient dissent, and to sustain it, until that tipping point can be reached and protest becomes self-reinforcing. Scholars of social movements, therefore focus on the mobilization capacity of the protest organization, as well as on the “political opportunity structure” of the situation. Mobilization capacity concerns the organizational ability of a movement to persuade people to protest, to coordinate their protest activity,

and to offer material support to it. “Political opportunity structure” is a broad notion that encompasses the ease with which mobilization can occur. It can include both the level of repression and also specific events or policies that make it easier or harder to persuade people to protest. Again, stolen elections are a good example.

Strengthened mobilization capacity was clearly a central component in the “colored revolutions.” In each case, a well-organized, and well-funded opposition was able to orchestrate the bringing of people into the streets, their sustenance for prolonged time in the streets, and their deployment to most effectively challenge the regime. In Georgia in 2004, as well as in the successful cases in Serbia and Ukraine, the level of organization of the protestors, and the extent of preparation involved, surprised outside observers, and even the target governments. That organization, however, is not simply an independent variable: it relies in large part on the active support of elites.

Similarly, changes in political opportunity structure played an important role. In each of the successful cases, fraudulent elections provide a “focal point” that enabled the opposition to focus attention on the regime’s misdeeds, and fan popular outrage. Elections also provided an important focal point in terms of timing: for a protest to reach threshold-size, it must be possible to mobilize all of one’s supporters at once. By creating a single grievance for all citizens to focus on simultaneously, stolen elections provide an ideal mobilization opportunity (Tucker, *in press*).

By viewing these factors in general terms (mobilization capacity, political opportunity structure) rather than specific terms (support from abroad, stolen elections) we see that a variety of events or actors may fill the same role. Thus the protests that threatened the government of Islam Karimov in Uzbekistan were set off not by stolen elections but by the arrest of a group of locally popular businessmen (McGlinchey, 2005, p. 1). The protests that toppled Askar Akayev in Kyrgyzstan in 2005 were carried out by a well-mobilized protest movement, but one that had much less support from abroad than those in Georgia, Ukraine, or Serbia. Similarly, protests in Russia in early 2005, which were directly inspired by Ukraine’s “Orange Revolution,” were sparked by a government change in social welfare benefits, not stolen elections. It is certainly significant that only in the cases of fraudulent elections did protest successfully lead to revolution. This testifies to the especially powerfully mobilization opportunity presented by elections, but it probably does not mean that revolution cannot occur in the absence of stolen elections. Rather it prompts us to focus more research on how various perceived government misdeeds create different levels of opportunity for opposition groups.

The pivotal role of elites

The central contention of this paper is that elites play a pivotal role in determining whether a tipping point will be reached, such that protests continue to grow and put increasing pressure on the leadership to step down. We can see this by considering the key common ingredients of the successful colored revolutions, as enumerated by McFaul (2005, p. 7):

1. “a semi-autocratic rather than fully autocratic regime;
2. an unpopular incumbent;

3. a united and organized opposition
4. an ability to quickly drive home the point that voting results were falsified;
5. enough independent media to inform citizens about the falsified vote;
6. a political opposition capable of mobilizing tens of thousands or more demonstrators...
7. divisions among the regime's coercive forces"

A comparison of successes and failures in Serbia and Ukraine builds on McFaul's list by trying to show how these factors relate to one another. In particular, the contention here is that his seventh factor, division among the regime's elites, explains several of the other crucial variables, including the organization of the opposition, the ability to show that the election was stolen, the independence of the media, and the ability to mobilize thousands of protestors.

In other words, given an unpopular leader and some spur to initiate protest, almost everything else depends at least in part on the elites. The actions of the government's security forces are most important, but other government figures, wealthy business-people and owners of media outlets also have substantial power to push protests toward or away from the tipping point. In most cases these are closely tied to the executive branch. To illustrate, a key role was played in the Ukrainian case by the Mayor of Kyiv and the Kyiv City Council, which quickly denounced the results of the second round of the 2004 presidential election. This not only undermined the legitimacy of the government's claims, but signaled to potential protestors that the city government would support, or at least not obstruct, them.

The explanation advanced here should not be thought of primarily as a competing explanation to McFaul's model. Rather it is a simplification. My contention is that if we understand the role of key elites in these revolutions, the other variables are more easily accounted for. Mass protest was a central tool, but such protest was heavily influenced by elite behavior. This contradicts the widespread view that these revolutions were essentially popular in nature rather than elite driven. Mark R. Beissinger (2006), for example, attributes to the "colored revolutions" "the 'people power' tactics of nonviolent resistance," a view shared by Taras Kuzio (in press).

Tipping in the colored revolutions: a general model

The four successful colored revolutions (Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan) followed roughly similar trajectories, though Kyrgyzstan differs from the other three much more than they do from each other. In each case, there was existing opposition to the government well before the "revolution" took place. In three of the four cases (Kyrgyzstan is the exception) the protests that caused the resignation of the president were carefully prepared in advance.

In general, two contests must be won for the opposition to succeed. First, the opposition must get the protests to grow large enough and sustain themselves long enough to put pressure on the government. Second, the street protests must be leveraged into a calculation by the President that he is better off leaving power than staying. In other words, can the opposition win the "end game?" As the failed

protests against Slobodan Milosevic in 1996–1997 showed, putting thousands of people in the streets for extended periods does not automatically force the ruler out. The leader will step down only when doing so is a better option than waiting longer (in the hope that the protests can be repressed or will diminish on their own). This requires that the opposition be able to make credible threats of arrest, imprisonment, or simply physical harm if the president refuses to leave, combined with incentives such as immunity from prosecution, shared power, or roundtable talks if the leader steps down. In this stage, the role of elites is crucial not only in whether or not the leader is forced from power, but in what sort of deal is made. This has immense impact on the course of “post-revolution” politics in the country. The terms of the deal by which the president left power were especially contested, and have had especially significant consequences, in Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan.

In both the growth of protests and the end game, the role of elites is pivotal. They provide resources for mobilization, they make decisions that make repression impossible or more costly, and they can force the end game, by withdrawing their support from the leader.

The details in the four successful cases differ. But in the three most similar cases (Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine), we see a common set of roles played by elites, which contrasts with the less successful cases. Well in advance of the elections, elites that were formerly connected with the incumbent supported opposition candidates and financed the preparation for protests. If opposition candidates were not strong, the incumbent might win the election fairly. It is worth analyzing why these elites defected from the incumbent party, but that is a separate matter (Hale, 2005). Also in advance of the election, elites supported the building of massive vote-monitoring organizations. While much of the training for vote monitoring came from international organizations and foreign governments, the recruitment, logistical support, and equipment were largely internally funded and organized.

When the voting fraud actually occurred, media outlets reported the fraud. This included media outlets previously loyal to the government. Only the opposition leadership could rapidly convey to the citizenry that the voting was fraudulent. Then, after protests started, these media outlets provided coverage to show that protests were growing, were peaceful, and were celebratory in atmosphere; undermining contrary reports from outlets remaining in government control.

As many others have asserted, the role of security forces was crucial. But it was crucial much earlier in the process than is generally recognized. It is not simply that in successful protests the security forces refused to fire on protestors, while in unsuccessful protests (Uzbekistan) they did not refuse. Rather, in the successful cases, security services chose not to take a whole set of preventive measures to impede the initial launching of protests. In cases where protests have failed, security services have taken a series of steps to *pre-empt* protests, so that they do not need to be repressed. Such steps include blocking access to key cities or parts of cities, closing public transportation, interfering with telephone networks, and closing down uncooperative media outlets. That these steps were not taken in the successful cases can only be a result of a decision not to take them. We can see from some cases how security services could make it very difficult for protests to reach threshold size.

When they refrained from such actions, it became much easier for mobilization efforts to surpass the tipping point. Even in the revolution that looks least like the others, the clear sign that the Kyrgyz security forces were leaving the streets to the protesters helped those protests to grow rapidly (*New York Times*, April 3, 2005).

Moreover, by what they said and what they did not say, security forces in successful cases signaled to protesters that the security forces would not use violence to break up the protests. There was also communication between protest leaders and security forces to cooperate to avoid an unintended outbreak of violence. This reassurance that violence would not be deployed lowered the potential cost of participating in the protests, and hence made it easier for the threshold to be reached.

Method: paired comparison

The central question in most studies of the colored revolutions has been: “what are the necessary ingredients for a post-communist revolution?” Clearly the cases have several characteristics in common, so we seek to figure out which of these commonalities are necessary prerequisites, and which are not. Michael McFaul, for example, examines the Serbian, Georgian, and Ukrainian cases to ascertain what they have in common (McFaul, 2005).

However, it is difficult to tell only from looking at successful revolutions which factors were crucial to their success and which were not. Indeed, the fact that McFaul’s seven factors were present in each of the successful cases makes each of them look overdetermined. To refine our understanding of which causes are central, and how the various causes relate to one another, we could investigate more cases (the problem here being that we would lose some comparability) or we can compare these successful protest movements to failed protest movements in comparable countries.

In this study, we compare the successful Serb and Ukrainian revolutions with failed attempts at revolution in the same countries only a few years earlier. In examining the problem this way, the question we ask changes slightly: why has protest with the aim of revolution succeeded in some post-communist states, and failed in others? Asking the question this way focuses attention on the variance in outcomes. If we want to understand why revolution has occurred in some cases, we must examine not only where it has occurred, but where it has not. By gaining variation on the dependent variable (revolution or the absence of it) we are much better able to assess which factors are essential in contributing to revolutions. Moreover, shifting emphasis from the idea of “prerequisites” allows us to focus not just on static factors, but on the processes of protest and revolution and on the strategic choices made by actors.

The cases

“Stolen” elections have led to protests aimed at overthrowing governments around the world beginning with the “people’s power” protests that overthrew Ferdinand Marcos in 1986, if not earlier. In the post-communist world alone, there are

at least eight cases of attempted revolution (it is not always easy to identify attempts that failed quickly). This includes the four successful revolutions that are well-known as the “colored revolutions,” as well as several unsuccessful attempts to use street protests to overthrow semi-authoritarian or authoritarian post-communist leaders:

Serbia, 1996–1997: In response to municipal elections widely regarded as stolen, Yugoslav citizens protested in several cities. Protests lasted over a period of months, and grew in size, but did not force Milosevic out. In early 1997, the protests diminished.

Serbia, 2000: Following a stolen presidential election, growing protests forced Serb President Slobodan Milosevic from power.

Ukraine, 2001: Following a series of revelations about the misdeeds of President Leonid Kuchma, a movement called “Ukraine without Kuchma” organized street protests, which quickly died out.

Georgia, 2003: Following stolen presidential elections, Georgians forced President Eduard Shevardnadze from power.

Azerbaijan, 2003: Following presidential elections widely viewed as fraudulent, protesters took to the streets to force Ilham Aliyev from power. The protests were impeded by security forces, and eventually diminished.

Ukraine, 2004: Following stolen presidential elections, protests forced authorities to agree to a pact which included re-running the second round of the elections and altering the constitution.

Kyrgyzstan, 2005: Following unfair parliamentary elections, street protests forced President Askar Akayev to resign his position and free the country.

Uzbekistan, 2005: Following the arrest of prominent business leaders in Andijan, Uzbeks took to the streets in protest, expanding their demands to include the release of all political prisoners. The protests were forcibly repressed, and some 700 protestors were killed.

In the analysis that follows, we focus on four of these cases: the failed revolutions in Serbia in 1996–1997 and in Ukraine in 2001, and the successes in Serbia in 2000 and in Ukraine in 2004. Selecting these cases allows us for two kinds of comparisons: we can compare, within each country, how the successes differed from the failures only a few years earlier. This contrasts with the method of looking at only the successes, and seeing what they had in common. We can also make cross-country comparisons, not only examining what the successes had in common, but also examining what the failures had in common. This should provide a much more rigorous means of probing different hypotheses.

Serbia, 1996–1997

Serbia held municipal elections on November 17, 1996, and protests broke out immediately, starting in the city of Nis and spreading to many others. The immediate grievance was a revision of voting results, which stole victory from the opposition

coalition *Zajedno* and gave it to Slobodan Milosevic's Socialist Party of Serbia, or SPS, (UPI, November 20, 1996). Over the next three months, protests grew and spread. In early December, 150,000 turned out for a protest in Belgrade. By January 1997, protests in Belgrade had swollen to 500,000. As was later the case in Ukraine, organizers promoted a festive atmosphere at demonstrations to keep people coming out in the cold of winter (Thompson and Kuntz, 2004, p. 164). Up to this point, this protest movement resembles others that were successful.

Ultimately, however, the protests ended after 88 days, when a deal was struck between some of the opposition leaders and Milosevic. Milosevic made concessions on the local election results, and in return some of the opposition leaders agreed to discontinue the protests. This seriously split the protest movement, and while students continued to protest for another month, the protest was essentially defeated.

This case is interesting because protestors were able to gain enough support for protests to sustain them for three months. They were unable, however, to produce an endgame that they could win. Milosevic adopted a two-pronged strategy of delay and divide. By neither giving in to demands nor forcibly repressing the protesters, he left the burden on them to sustain the movement or to somehow increase the pressure on him. He reasoned that if he could delay long enough, the protests would run out of steam on their own. He also sought to weaken the opposition by dividing them. He was successful in co-opting opposition elites by giving in to some of their demands.

While the opposition did an admirable job of sustaining protests, it was unable to create a situation where Milosevic found it necessary to make a move of some type. In other words, it never was able to create a situation in which the status quo appeared unsustainable. To do so, the protests would have had to become even larger, and some credible threat to forcibly ejecting Milosevic from office would have to be developed. This never happened.

Elite behavior was critical in this respect. The leaders of Serbia's opposition parties, notoriously fractious, continued fighting with each other, even as they sought to topple Milosevic. Who would lead a new government was an especially contentious issue. These rivalries led several opposition leaders to cut separate deals with Milosevic, exchanging positions of power for defection from the protest movement. The defection of Vuk Draskovic, leader of the Serbian Renewal Movement, from the protest movement was especially demoralizing, causing others to lose hope and thus tipping the movement toward disintegration. While elites played an important role getting this round of protests going, and sustaining them, they ultimately played an equally important role in bringing them to an end.

The role of the government security forces in this case was ambiguous. Some individual police units indicated that they would not use violence against protestors, but there was never any large-scale defection that would embolden the protestors. There were enough incidents of repression to leave the safety of protestors in doubt. There was no clear signal to protestors that they would not be met with violence if they moved to physically eject Milosevic. Moreover, there were no elements of the security forces willing to use their power to force him from office. As a result, Milosevic's intransigence did not lead to the storming of government buildings, as

occurred in Serbia in 2000 and Georgia in 2003 (and was threatened in Ukraine in 2004).

*Serbia, 2000*³

Following the aerial bombardment over the contested region of Kosovo, in 1999, another round of protests aimed at unseating Milosevic began. Again, the counter-elite split, and this round fizzled much more quickly than had the protests of 1996–1997 (Thompson and Kuntz, 2004, p. 166). In 2000, Serbia had a new round of protests, which finally succeeded in ejecting Milosevic from office. The catalyst for this new round was the elections for the Presidency of Serbia, on September 24, 2000.

The opposition united behind a much more credible leader than in the past, the nationalist Vojislav Kostunica, and it organized a parallel vote tabulation, in anticipation that Milosevic would cheat. The official results indicated that Kostunica had finished first, but without a majority, requiring a subsequent runoff. Rather than contesting the runoff, the opposition announced that Kostunica had won a majority in the first round. Zoran Djindjic stated “Kostunica won in the first round and there will be no second round. The elections are over for us” (de Krnjevic-Miskovic, 2001, p. 104). By announcing immediately its tabulation showing Kostunica the winner, the opposition put Milosevic on the defensive, though Western governments opposed this move, figuring that Kostunica would win more clearly by participating in the second round of the elections.

On September 27, 300,000 protested in Belgrade. “Once the opposition had initiated the protests, the snowball effect kicked in. People showed greater readiness to take part in anti-regime protests because such activities now were considered much more likely to succeed” (Thompson and Kuntz, 2004, p. 168). However, opposition leaders had learned from the 1996–1997 experience that protests alone would not force Milosevic from power. They called for a general strike, and when coalminers ceased supplying coal for power generation, it became clear that the country could be brought to a halt. Actions such as these put greater pressure on Milosevic than had been the case in 1996–1997.

On October 5, the opposition occupied most of the major public buildings in Belgrade, including television facilities, from which Kostunica addressed the country. While the protestors had to break through police barriers, they encountered little serious opposition from security forces. These were steps that likely would have provoked repression in 1996–1997.

In contrast to their behavior in 1996, Milosevic’s supporters began defecting. This was part of its own tipping mechanism: as it became increasingly likely that Milosevic would be unseated, those elites who opposed him were more emboldened to defect from him. Even those who supported him, but were opportunistic and hedging their bets, adopted neutral positions.

³ This case is discussed in detail in Birch (2002), Thompson and Kuntz (2004) and de Krnjevic-Miskovic (2001).

The military, in this case, publicly encouraged the protestors by ensuring their safety. The Army Chief of Staff, Nebojsa Pavkovic, publicly announced the army's neutrality and support for the results of the election process. Similarly, the paramilitary units most widely viewed as loyal to Milosevic worked with opposition forces to avoid conflict (Thompson and Kuntz, 2004, p. 168). It appears that opposition leaders had been in contact with Pavkovic well in advance, and may have made a deal with him. He remained in his position after the revolution (de Krnjevic-Miskovic, 2001, p. 106).

The defection of the military made the endgame almost moot. The opposition had taken control of most of the government, and the security forces were cooperating with them. All that remained was for Milosevic to acknowledge that he had lost the election, which he did on October 6.

Why did the protests of 2000 turn out so much differently than those of 1996–1997? Not all of the difference can be attributed to different actions of elites. Two other factors are notable: The U.S. bombing campaign over Kosovo had further eroded Milosevic's popularity. The election stolen in 2000 was a presidential election, and directly dealt with Milosevic, whereas one could not claim that the local elections in 1996 would have ejected Milosevic from power if they had been fair.

However, the policies of elites were critical in two ways. First, the opposition was unified much more strongly than it had in the past. This led in turn to better planning and better organization, such as the preparations of the student *Otpor* movement. Second, the security forces not only stood aside at the key moment, but signaled that they would do so. Clearly this emboldened the final push by the opposition on October 5, 2000.

Ukraine, 2001

In late 2000, a group of Ukrainian opposition movements initiated street protests to try to eject President Leonid Kuchma from power. The immediate source of the protests was frustration that Kuchma's apparent involvement in the murder of journalist Georgiy Gongadze was not being investigated, but there was broader dissatisfaction with Kuchma's creeping authoritarianism (D'Anieri, 2006). In some respects, the protests shared many characteristics of the subsequent "Orange Revolution." Many of the same political groups were involved, including the Socialist Party of Ukraine and the supporters of Yuliya Tymoshenko, as well as student organizations, which provided many of the participants. Observers saw the formation of this broad coalition as a qualitative shift in opposition politics in Ukraine (UCIPR, 2001). Many of the tactics used in 2004 were used in 2001, including erecting tents at Kyiv's *Maidan Nezalezhnosti*, where 10,000 people turned out on February 6, 2001 and again on April 10, and the holding of concerts to provide a festive atmosphere for demonstrators.

These protests failed to grow, and had withered completely by the summer of 2001. Unlike Serbia's 1996–1997 protests, which might be viewed as a "near miss," these protests never seriously threatened Kuchma's position. Why did they fail? First, the opposition remained divided (D'Anieri, 2006, Chapter 5). While the "National Salvation Front" represented a new high point in the unification of

opposition forces in Ukraine, it lacked support from the most popular potential opposition figure in Ukraine, Viktor Yushchenko. Yushchenko was, in early 2001, still a member of Leonid Kuchma's cabinet (he was dismissed through a parliamentary motion in April 2001). Rather than joining the opposition, Yushchenko stated that he "never trusted spontaneous outbursts" (UNIAN, December 9, 2000, quoted in Lynch, 2006). He later co-signed a statement with Kuchma sharply criticizing the National Salvation Front. Even after being fired, he refused to join forces with the rest of the opposition, or to call for Kuchma's resignation.

Second, most elites remained loyal to Kuchma, and used a variety of means to prevent the protests from growing. Media outlets, including those owned by the state and those nominally independent, underreported the size of the protests. From the perspective of a threshold model, this is a powerful tactic: if the decisions of "fence-sitters" are based upon the size of the protests, then underreporting the size of the protest can make it much less likely that the movement will grow. The mayor of Kyiv, Oleksandr Omelchenko, impeded the tent city by declaring an unscheduled construction project on the *Maidan Nezlezhnosti*, causing it to be fenced off. When large protests were scheduled for April 10, people in other parts of Ukraine found it very difficult to get to Kyiv: there were no tickets available for trains, and cars heading into Kyiv were stopped and in many cases turned back (Author's interviews in Kyiv, November 2001). In sum, to squelch this movement required the collaboration of the press, the Transportation Ministry, the Interior Ministry, and the Kyiv City Government. The measures were highly effective. When protestors predicted a large turnout, and people did not show up, the movement appeared unpopular. Thus it was not surprising that the movement did not grow.

Ukraine, 2004⁴

In 2004, Viktor Yushchenko, finally united with other opposition leaders, to campaign for the presidency against Viktor Yanukovich, the chosen candidate of outgoing president Leonid Kuchma. After the second round, Yanukovich was announced as the winner, but domestic parallel vote counts indicated that Yushchenko won. Moreover, there was compelling evidence of widespread fraud. A well-prepared movement put thousands of people into the streets of Kyiv, refusing to accept the results. They remained in the streets for nearly three weeks in freezing temperatures while Yushchenko, Kuchma, and many others negotiated a solution to the confrontation. The ultimate solution was that the second round of the election was re-run (with Yushchenko winning), while Yushchenko agreed to a set of constitutional reforms that would drastically reduce his power.

The contrasts between the elite behavior in Ukraine in 2004 and in 2001 are striking. Why so many elites shifted position is a much longer story.⁵ The incredible sight

⁴ Åslund and McFaul (2006) and Wilson (2005) are two good sources on the "Orange Revolution."

⁵ See the articles in the special issue of *Problems of Post-Communism* (September–October 2005), dedicated to the rule of Leonid Kuchma.

of thousands of protestors the streets of Kyiv has tended to obscure the role of elites in the “Orange Revolution.”⁶ However, long before the elections, elites eased the path of the protestors, both by what they did and what they did not do. And once the protests started, elites worked to encourage the protests, while constraining Kuchma’s and Yanukovych’s options.

The unification of the opposition was perhaps the most important change. In particular, Viktor Yushchenko and Yuliya Tymoshenko were able to join forces, which they had been unwilling to do previously (and have been unwilling to do since). Additionally, the opposition coalition was supported financially by some business leaders that previously had supported Kuchma (most notable here was Petro Poroshenko). Without the financial support of these “opposition oligarchs,” it is not clear that Yushchenko would have been able to defeat Yanukovych in the election.

More interesting, however, is what happened immediately after the second round of the election. In contrast to 2001 (and to a few weeks before the 2004 election), the security forces made no effort to block access to central Kyiv. Students and others flooded to Kyiv from around the country by train and by road, and made their way to the *Maidan Nezalezhnosti* on Kyiv’s public transportation. That this area could be shut down tightly had been demonstrated only two weeks earlier, when Vladimir Putin was among the dignitaries watching a military parade.

Moreover, elites signaled that Kyiv would be “open for protest.” A clear message was sent the morning after the second round: the Kyiv City Council publicly declared the announced results invalid. Mayor Oleksandr Omelchenko, who had blocked access to the *Maidan* in 2001, openly signaled that the city would not interfere with protests (Wilson, 2005, p. 125).

The security forces took an equally important role in helping the 2004 protest movement grow and spread, rather than diminishing. Even before the elections, signals were sent that protestors would not be repressed. Thousands of protestors had gathered at the Central Electoral Commission in October, and had turned out again after the first round, which was probably also fraudulent, only to be sent home by opposition leaders to await the second round. In both cases, there were security forces on the scene (including a water cannon at the CEC), but in neither case was any attempt made to disperse protestors. This contributed to the notion that protests would not be repressed (Author’s interviews in Kyiv, October 2004). Once the protests began, high-ranking figures in the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) appeared on the stage at the *Maidan* encouraging the protestors. Moreover, there is considerable evidence that top officials in the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU; successor to the KGB) were in constant contact with protest leaders to ensure that there was no accidental or deliberately provoked outbreak of violence. The SBU also publicized intercepted telephone conversations in which leaders of Kuchma’s team conversed frankly

⁶ For an exception, see Chivers (2005). For additional analysis and critique of Chivers’ view, see Kuzio (2005).

about fixing the election results.⁷ In sum, many elites in the security forces did not merely remain neutral; they actively supported the opposition.

Once the crisis started, the elite did not merely divide; rather it defected wholesale to the opposition forces. In this respect, one can see a tipping mechanism within the elite similar to that among the masses: as more elites defect, the chances of hanging onto power decrease, and the costs of remaining in support of the regime increase, potentially prompting further defections. On November 29, for example, Yanukovych's campaign manager, Serhiy Tyhypko resigned, admitting that election fraud had taken place (*Interfax*, November 29, 2004). Like many others, Tyhypko was trying to cut his losses in a post-Kuchma Ukraine. On the same day, President Kuchma himself announced support for a rerun of the second round of the election, destroying what remained of Yanukovych's position (*Financial Times*, November 30, 2004).

However, even at this point the endgame remained unclear: It was not clear what legal mechanism existed to rerun the election, and opposition leaders were hesitant to step outside the bounds of the law. They recognized that their legitimacy depended in part on the perception that they were guarding the law, not overturning it. In that sense, there was a real desire to *avoid* a revolution. Had the protestors swept into the presidential palace, forcing Kuchma to resign, the Kuchma regime would have been swept away, and there would have been a fundamental discontinuity in Ukraine politics. Instead, there remained a tense bargaining process among elites. If Kuchma and Yanukovch did not give in, they would be forcibly removed from power, and perhaps imprisoned. But if the opposition stepped outside the bounds of the law, the legitimacy of their claim to power would have been diminished, especially among the large portion of the population (generally the east and south) that had limited enthusiasm for the "Orange Revolution."

The deal that was eventually reached included a crucial concession by Yushchenko: he agreed to support a revision of the Constitution that would considerably enhance the powers of the parliament and the Prime Minister, and diminish the Presidency correspondingly (D'Anieri, 2005). This was a plan that Kuchma himself had advanced earlier in the year, and which Yushchenko strongly opposed (and from the vantage point of 2006, it is easy to see why).

Comparison of the cases

Comparison of Serbia's failed 1996–1997 protests to its successful 2000 revolution, and of Ukraine's failed 2001 protests to its successful 2004 revolution provide a great deal of insight into the sources of post-communist revolutions. In both countries, the failed protests had close similarities to the later successful ones. Therefore, they provide a useful empirical base to explore why these efforts at revolution succeed in some instances and not others. Here we try to draw some inferences from a comparison of the Ukrainian and Serb cases.

⁷ Texts of these conversations are translated into English in Wilson (2005), Chapters 1 and 6.

Unity of opposition elites

In both countries, there was a fundamental shift in the position of opposition elites between the failed and the successful protest efforts. Particularly in Serbia, the division of elites was widely viewed as a source for the failure of the 1996–1997 protests, and opposition leaders understood the need to unify. In Ukraine, the unwillingness of Viktor Yushchenko to join with other opposition forces crucially undermined opposition efforts, not only in the 2001 protest movement, but in parliamentary elections in 2002, within the ensuing parliament, and of course, in the aftermath of the Orange Revolution. Because Yushchenko had so much moral authority, his decision to support Kuchma in 2001 fatally undermined the Ukrainian opposition, just as Vuk Draskovic's defection undermined the Serbian opposition in 1997.

Defection of pro-regime elites

The defection of pro-regime elites was more pronounced in Ukraine, because they had previously been much more thoroughly unified. In Serbia, the opposition had retained considerable access to money and media, even after the failed protests of 1996. In Ukraine, Leonid Kuchma's control dramatically increased between 2001 and 2004. It appeared that Kuchma had successfully co-opted most of the political/economic elite, and put all significant media sources under his thumb. He also appeared to have purged most important city and regional administrations of potential opponents (with significant exceptions in the west of the country).

Elite defection was important at two stages. First, over the long term, elites needed to give financial and organizational support to opposition movements and parties. These funds helped prepare the protest movements that were so effectively deployed after the elections. Equally important, by financing and organizing opposition parties, opposition elites made it possible to contest the elections, even on a very uneven playing field. This forced the incumbent elites to resort to fraud, which made the elections such a powerful mobilizing opportunity.

Second, when the protests actually started, elite defections were key in helping them reach a tipping point. Economic elites provided political support. Political elites contributed legitimacy to the opposition, and the defection of key regime elites helped undermine the legitimacy of the regime (Tyhypko's desertion of Yanukovych in Ukraine was especially devastating). Security elites facilitated protests by declining to obstruct protests, and reduced the perceived costs of protesting, by signaling that they would not resort to violence.

Well-organized protest movements

A great deal of attention has been given to the level of organization of the student-led protest movements, *Otpor* in Serbia and *Pora* in Ukraine (which was modeled on *Otpor*) (Kuzio, in press; Lynch, 2006). There is no doubt that these organizations played an important role in the success of the later protest movements. But did their involvement represent a fundamental change from the earlier movements? In the

Serbian case, there was also a well-organized student movement in 1996–1997, which was able to sustain protests for roughly a month after the main opposition groups called off their protests. In 1996–1997, putting people—sometimes as many as 500,000—in the streets over a period of months did not cause the government to capitulate.

Similarly in Ukraine in 2001, the protests were largely forged and staffed by students, inspired by an even earlier (successful) protest movement. Building a tent city on the *Maidan Nezalezhnosti* was not new in 2004 or 2001; rather both movements were modeled on a tent-city campaign that successfully forced out Prime Minister Vitaly Masol in 1990 (see Kuzio, 2000, pp. 160–1). It is striking that such a movement was successful in 1990 (under Soviet rule!) and in 2004 but not in 2001.

Thus it does not appear that a well-organized student movement explains the variation in outcomes—it existed in the failures as well as the successes. The later student movements—*Otpor* in Serbia and *Pora* in Ukraine—were clearly stronger, more organized, and better funded, than their predecessors. But why was that? In large part, it was due to the support of opposition elites, who supplied the funding for logistics, material, and training. The participation of Kyiv city sanitation workers in hauling trash from the *Maidan* is just one example. Some of these expenses were covered by outside actors, including NGOs, international organizations, and foreign governments. *Otpor*, for example, played an important role in training the Ukrainian *Pora* movement. But much was provided internally. While “people power” is important, the strength of “people power” appears to be significantly influenced by the policies of elites.

Security services

Perhaps the greatest difference between the failed protests and the successful ones was the role of security services. When the state’s monopoly on violence begins to erode, or is turned against corrupt leaders, common citizens are much more likely to join in the protests. Moreover, it is easier to bring about a successful endgame. As long as the security forces remain loyal to the government, the leadership can try to wait protests out. This is what Milosevic did in 1997. Only when security forces split, such that leaders themselves become vulnerable to the wrath of the protestors, are leaders put in a situation where holding out may become a sub-optimal solution. Leaders in such a situation face the possibility of being directly confronted by protestors, as happened to Nicolae Ceaucescu in 1989, and as nearly happened to Eduard Shevardnadze in 2003.

When security forces declare themselves neutral, as some did in Serbia in 2000 and in Ukraine in 2001, whether this serves the interests of the regime or the opposition depends on what others do. If some security services stay neutral, while others remain willing to suppress protests and protect the leadership, then neutrality might not help protestors. But when some security forces are willing to allow the protests access to key buildings, or to actively support the protestors, the neutrality of others undermines the government’s position.

Conclusion: elite behavior and people's power

Empirical findings

The goal of this paper has been to identify the important variations between and successful and unsuccessful attempts at post-communist revolution. The main finding is that, while popular protests have been the most visible components of these revolutions, elite behavior plays a central role.

To be more precise, we have sought to clarify the relationship between elite behavior and popular participation. These factors do not operate separately, and therefore to find that elites play a central role does not diminish the role played by mass publics. Instead, the cases show that the behavior of the elites and public are connected. When elites support protest movements, it is much easier for those movements to grow. There are several different ways this is true, but most of them work through the same mechanism: by increasing the perceived chances of success of the protests, and by decreasing the perceived costs of participation, that is being repressed, elite support makes it easier for popular participation to reach the tipping point at which protests will grow and sustain themselves spontaneously. Providing support for student movements, publicizing the misdeeds of the regime, forming a single opposition movement, allowing protests to take place, and signaling to protestors that they will not be harmed all raise the anticipated benefits and lower the costs for individual citizens to join the protests.

We have noted that elite involvement is important to protest movements in a second way, as well. Elite pressure on the incumbent can be essential in forcing an “end-game” in which the leadership relinquishes power. If violence is to be avoided, the President must be given some better alternative to staying and fighting it out. If a policy of waiting out the opposition is to be avoided, the president must be given some credible worse alternative to stalling. Establishment of these conditions is heavily influenced by the choices of elites, while masses remain important.

The analysis in this paper is based on a small number of cases, and it will be useful to examine further cases to examine the interaction between elites and masses in other successful and unsuccessful attempts at revolution. We should not expect to find a consistent relationship. There is no reason to believe that every protest movement or revolution will unfold in exactly the same way. The massive literature on protest and revolution or “contentious politics” makes this clear (McAdam et al., 2001, pp. 264–304).

The dangers of learning

Among the reasons that people have been so interested in the “ingredients” for the colored revolutions is the belief that if we can figure out these ingredients, we can successfully bring revolutions to other post-communist semi-autocracies. Anders Åslund, for example, recommends that the US promote the same kind of organizations in Russia that were viewed as so crucial in Ukraine (Åslund, 2005). There are three hazards in this kind of thinking.

First, it is not only potential revolutionaries that can learn the lessons of one case and apply them to another. Just as Ukraine's *Pora* learned from Serbia's *Otpor* and Georgia's *Kmara*, governments learn as well. Therefore, the possibility of cross-national transmission of protest tactics is countered by the cross-national transmission of repression tactics. This was clear long before the "colored revolutions," when one post-Soviet pseudo-democrat after another adopted similar tactics to get the legitimating benefits of elections without the accountability (D'Anieri, 2003). Russia, Belarus, and others are already taking pre-emptive steps to ensure that the "ingredients" of "colored revolutions" do not appear in their countries. Belarus's 2006 presidential election was a case in point: opposition movements sought to imitate the tactics that succeeded in Ukraine, while President Aleksandr Lukashenka sought to learn from the mistakes of the Kuchma administration.

Second, therefore, what worked in past cases may not work in future cases. For would-be revolutionaries, this creates obvious challenges. But it also creates challenges for political scientists, who tend to assume that the same cause-effect relationships should (other things being equal) hold across time and space. The adjustment of government tactics will likely mean that future cases will not work the same way as past cases. We are therefore likely to be confused by comparisons that generally are considered valid. The two countries studied in this paper show how learning occurs over time, so that different outcomes result in cases that start out essentially similar.

Third, if both governments and opposition movements are adjusting over time, the static models that we now use (and this paper has been no exception) will have to be revised. An analogy might be that of arms races, where two opposing organizations are constantly struggling to stay ahead of one another in terms of quantity and quality of weapons and tactics.

If this is indeed the dynamic, then the set of cases we are concerned with may soon shrink. McFaul (2005) and Hale (2005) point out that semi-authoritarian, rather than fully authoritarian regimes, are most susceptible to being overthrown by this kind of protest movement. Yet the responses that such regimes take in order to avoid the fate of Kuchma and Milosevic are likely to take them out of the semi-authoritarian realm and into full authoritarianism. We already see this clearly in Russia, where the law on NGOs is clearly aimed at avoiding the sort of spread of Ukrainian tactics that Åslund advocates.

These points contribute to the relevance of the central point made in this paper: revolutions are much more likely to succeed when powerful actors in the society (and government) want them to, and when security forces are at least ambivalent. To the extent this is true, the task for leaders who wish to guarantee their indefinite hold on power will be much more difficult. It will likely be much easier to foil the sorts of NGO activity that Putin is now worried about than it will be to keep all competing elites in line.

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