

# **People Power or a One-Shot Deal? The Legacy of the Colored Revolutions Considered from a Collective Action Framework**

Joshua A. Tucker  
Associate Professor of Politics  
The Wilf Family Department of Politics  
New York University  
[joshua.tucker@nyu.edu](mailto:joshua.tucker@nyu.edu)  
<http://homepages.nyu.edu/~jat7/>

November, 2007

\*\*\* DRAFT IN PROGRESS \*\*\*

Key Words: Colored Revolutions, Electoral Revolutions, Collective Action, Electoral Fraud, Ukraine, Serbia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Post-Communist Politics

---

Paper prepared for presentation at the 2007 Annual Conference of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, New Orleans, LA. I would like to thank participants in the First and Second Danyliw Research Seminars in Contemporary Ukrainian Studies hosted by the Chair of Ukrainian Studies at the University of Ottawa and the Kennan Institute Workshop on Ukrainian Civil Society for many helpful comments and suggestions on earlier papers from this project. I would also like to thank Dominique Arel, Jessica Allina-Pisano, Mark Beissinger, Valerie Bunce, Paul D'Anieri, Jerry Hough, Jason Lyall, Grigore Pop-Eleches, Lucan Way, and William Zimmerman for their time in commenting on drafts of earlier papers from this project. I thank Marc Berenson, Matthew Berner, and Kristin Michelitch for helpful research assistance. Citations are welcome, but please check <http://homepages.nyu.edu/~jat7/pubs.html> for the most current version of the paper. This paper is at a very early stage of development, so comments and suggestions are especially welcome!

## **Introduction**

In the first half of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it was clear something special was occurring in the post-communist world. In a series of stunning developments, a number of countries that had by and large failed to establish viable democratic governments in the original period of post-communist transitions ten years earlier suddenly rose up to demand democratic accountability following a series of fraudulent elections in such previous hotbeds of democracy as Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan. Scholars of course took notice, with a flurry of articles on each individual “Colored Revolution”, as they collectively came to be known, as well as a number of more recent papers that have tried to make sense of them collectively (e.g., McFaul 2005; Beissinger 2007; Bunce and Wolchik 2007; Tucker 2007). The focus of these papers, not surprisingly, lay in trying to explain how and why the Colored Revolutions took place. To the extent that they looked at all to the future, it was largely to speculate as to the next country that was likely fall in the path of this democratic onslaught (Belarus anyone?). Left relatively unexplored, however, was the legacy of the Colored Revolutions for the future of political protest for the countries in which they had occurred.

In this paper, I take up precisely this question. More specifically, I lay out two possible legacies of the Colored Revolutions for the countries in which they take place. The most intuitive expectation would be one that highlights citizens’ discovery of their own “people power”, leading us to expect to see protests again in the future when democratic development is threatened by corrupt or inept leaders. Surprisingly, though, when we consider in sufficient detail the micro-level motivation of protestors that took to the streets in the original Colored Revolutions, a paradox emerges: to the extent that the need for a second “Colored Revolution” might emerge in a country, it will simultaneously call into question whether the gains from the

original Colored Revolution was worth the cost paid by the people who participated in it. I will spend the bulk of this paper drawing out this paradox, noting why it is especially serious in the case of protests that followed electoral fraud (as all the Colored Revolutions did), and attempting to highlight the specific variables that would make it more likely that the Colored Revolutions will in fact turn out to be “one-shot deals”.

In order to do this, I draw upon a framework that I have presented in detail elsewhere that suggests one way to think about the Colored Revolutions is in terms of the collective action problem faced by citizens who are confronted by an abusive or unrestrained regime (Tucker 2007; see Weingast 1997, 2005 on the idea of unrestrained regimes<sup>1</sup>). In a sense, I utilize a “bottom-up” approach to understanding the Colored Revolutions by focusing on the motivations faced by individual citizens to participate in protest following instances of electoral fraud; most of the rest of the literature on the Colored Revolutions tends to focus on the actions and motivations of elites (although see Way 2006; Fournier forthcoming for an exception in the case of Ukraine). In this paper, I will then extend this bottom-up approach to considering the longer-term future of protest in the Colored Revolution countries.

I proceed as follows. I begin by laying out a very concise summary of the events of the Colored Revolutions in Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan. I then briefly sketch out the arguments that I have made previously regarding how we might consider the Colored Revolutions as an example of how the prevalence of publicly known major electoral fraud is a particularly useful device for solving collective action problems faced by citizens who are

---

<sup>1</sup> More specifically, Weingast introduces the concept of citizens that are or are not able to place “appropriate limits on the state”. The idea I have in mind here is the set of circumstances faced by citizens in countries where the populace is in fact unable to place appropriate limits on the state in the sense proposed by Weingast. Examples of such behavior could include state agents engaging in acts of petty corruption, such as demanding bribes to perform routine state functions, or grand corruption, such as outright theft of state resources by upper level members of the government. It also could include a state that does not respect its citizens’ political or civil rights. Even beyond examples of corrupt behavior or specific violations of rights, this sense of a non-limited or abusive state may extend to the feeling that citizens are not treated with the respect and dignity they deserve.

confronted by abusive governments. In what is the heart of the paper, I then expand upon this argument to consider what it has to teach us about whether we ought to expect to see more protest in the future in these countries, concluding with the somewhat counter-intuitive observation that the set of circumstances in which we might expect this to occur is actually rather limited. I conclude the essay with a number by briefly speculating about how I might further develop this argument in the future.

## **The Colored Revolutions<sup>2</sup>**

The Colored Revolutions are often grouped together because each shared a number of common features.<sup>3</sup> In all four countries an election was held and results were widely viewed to have been seriously manipulated by the current regime. Protests then broke out, and, after some period of uncertainty, the incumbent president either resigned from office and/or the election results were overturned, resulting in a member of the opposition becoming the new president of the country.

Of course, in practice this played out in a slightly different manner in each of the four countries. In Serbia, incumbent president Slobodan Milošević scheduled early presidential elections for September 24, 2000. His primary opposition was Vojislav Kostunica of the Democratic Party of Serbia, who was the nominee of the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS).<sup>4</sup> On September 26, the Yugoslav Election Commission announced that Kostunica had

---

<sup>2</sup> This section and the one that follows it draw very heavily from Tucker 2007.

<sup>3</sup> For a much broader conception of the second group of post-communist countries to join the “democratic club” that considers the events that transpired in the Colored Revolutions in conjunction with democratization in Slovakia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania and others, see Bunce 2005; Bunce and Wolchik 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Alex Todorovic, “Serb Vote Holds Hope for Change,” *Christian Science Monitor*, August 2, 2000, p. 6, and Stefan Racin, “Serbia’s Opposition Blocs Begin Mud-Slinging,” *United Press International (UPI)*, August 7, 2000, accessed through Lexis-Nexis. The two also faced competition from another opposition leader, Belgrade mayor Vojislav Mihajlovic of the Serbian Renewal Party. Fears that he would split the opposition vote later proved unfounded; see Irena Guzelova, “New Candidate May Split Serbia Opposition Vote,” *Financial Times*, August 7, 2000, p. 7.

gained the most support with 48.2% of the vote and in a second round run-off with would face Milošević, who had come in second place.<sup>5</sup> The DOS, however, announced that by its count from independent election monitors, Kostunica had won 55% of the vote to Milošević's 35%, and Kostunica immediately announced that he would not participate in the run-off."<sup>6</sup> The following day over 200,000 people took to the streets of Belgrade.<sup>7</sup> On October 5, over half a million people marched on Belgrade and quickly seized control of major government institutions including the parliament and Serbian state run television; protestors used a front-end loader to break through barricades, thus earning the events the name of the "Bulldozer Revolution".<sup>8</sup> The following day, Milošević resigned and the Yugoslav Constitutional Court declared Kostunica the winner of the election.<sup>9</sup>

The Georgian Rose Revolution unfolded in a similar manner almost three years later, although the crisis was sparked by a legislative, as opposed to presidential, election.<sup>10</sup> Following the November 2, 2003, Georgian parliamentary elections, small-scale protests began in Tbilisi as various reports of fraud appeared. Following the release of a set of particularly suspect results

---

<sup>5</sup> Stefan Racin, "Yugoslav Election Panel Says Milosevic, Rival to Vie in 2<sup>nd</sup> Round," UPI, September 26, 2000, accessed through Lexis-Nexis.

<sup>6</sup> "Kostunica rejects run-off against Milosevic," Agence France Presse, September 26, 2000, accessed through Lexis-Nexis.

<sup>7</sup> "Yugoslav opposition calls for "blockade" to force Milosevic's hand," Deutsche Presse-Agentur, September 27, 2000, accessed through Lexis-Nexis, and Irena Guzelova and Stefan Wagstyl, "Serbs mass to push Milosevic out," Financial Times, September 28, 2000, p.1, accessed through Lexis-Nexis. Estimates of the size of the crowd vary: Thompson and Kuntz 2004 report that there were 700,000 people in Belgrade on the 5<sup>th</sup>; McFaul 2005 describes the march on Belgrade as a "million-strong" (p.13).

<sup>8</sup> Misha Savic, "Angry protesters meet in Belgrade for anti-Milosevic rally," UPI, October 5, 2000, accessed through Lexis-Nexis; "Protesters enter Parliament Building," UPI, October 5, 2000, accessed through Lexis-Nexis.

<sup>9</sup> "Popular Revolt Sweeps Yugoslav Opposition Into Power; President Milošević Concedes Defeat – Protesters Over-run Parliament," Facts on File World News Digest, October 5, 2000, p. 729A1, accessed through Lexis-Nexis, and "Yugoslav Constitutional Court Confirms Election Irregularities," Beta News Agency (Belgrade), in Serbo-Croat, 1618 GMT, October 6, 2000, in BBC Monitoring Europe – Political, October 6, 2000, accessed through Lexis-Nexis. For more on the Serbian Bulldozer Revolution, see Birch 2002; Bieber 2003; Tunnard 2003; Thompson and Kuntz 2004.

<sup>10</sup> This fact is occasionally overlooked given that the crisis ended with the resignation of the president and new presidential elections. It has been suggested that the Georgian opposition leaders themselves had not expected the legislative elections to lead to the overthrow of Shevardnadze, but instead had thought their own revolution would take place following the 2005 presidential elections (Personal communication with Valerie Bunce, October 6, 2005).

from the region of Ajaria, the size of the crowds began to increase substantially (Fairbanks 2004, 116). By the time the Georgian Central Election Commission proclaimed the “official” results, handing victory to the pro-President Eduard Shevardnaze “For a New Georgia” bloc, the crowds were over 100,000 people.<sup>11</sup> On November 22, these protests came to a head as Shevardnaze tried to address the new parliament.<sup>12</sup> Led by opposition leader Mikhail Saakashvili – holding a rose to show he was unarmed<sup>13</sup> – protestors stormed the parliament demanding Shevardnadze’s resignation; Shevardnaze was ushered out of the building by his bodyguards without a shot being fired,<sup>14</sup> and he resigned the following day.<sup>15</sup>

In 2004, a presidential election set the stage for Ukraine’s Orange Revolution. Following an indecisive first round when Viktor Yanukovich, the officially anointed successor to the regime of outgoing president Leonid Kuchma, and opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko each received almost 40% of the vote, a second round run-off was held on November 21<sup>st</sup>. Despite the fact that the second round was marked by widespread allegations of fraud, the Central Election Commission declared Yanukovich the winner by a 49.5% to 46.6% margin.<sup>16</sup> Armed with nonpartisan exit polls suggesting that Yushchenko actually had won by a 52% - 43% margin, supporters took to the streets of Kyiv in protest, now famously adorned in orange clothing representing the color of Yushchenko’s “Our Ukraine” parliamentary bloc.<sup>17</sup> Over the following

---

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Johnson, “Power Struggle Breaks Out in Georgia as Opposition Proclaims Velvet Revolution,” Independent on Sunday (London), November 23, 2003, accessed through Lexis-Nexis.

<sup>12</sup> Nikolai Topuria, “Georgian leadership on ropes as opposition launches ‘Velvet Revolution,’” Agence France Presse, November 22, 2003, accessed through Lexis-Nexis.

<sup>13</sup> Marielle Eudes and Nikolai Topuria, “Georgia Plans Presidential Elections for January 4 after ‘Rose Revolution,’” Agence France Presse, November 25, 2005, accessed through Lexis-Nexis.

<sup>14</sup> Anna Badkhen, “‘Velvet Revolution’ in Georgia,” San Francisco Chronicle, November 23, 2003, p. A3, accessed through Lexis-Nexis; and Nikolai Topuria, “Mikhail Saakashvili, Architect of Georgia’s ‘Velvet Revolution,’” Agence France Presse, November 22, 2003, accessed through Lexis-Nexis. Andrew Johnson, “Power Struggle Breaks Out in Georgia as Opposition Proclaims Velvet Revolution.”

<sup>15</sup> “Shevardnadze Resigns In Georgia’s ‘Velvet Revolution,’” ONASA News Agency, November 23, 2003, accessed through Lexis-Nexis.

<sup>16</sup> See Kuzio 2005b, 119.

<sup>17</sup> See Karatnycky 2005.

weeks, the protests continued in Kyiv despite frigid conditions as the crisis was resolved peacefully through the use of existing institutions. Following a parliamentary resolution declaring the results invalid (November 27) and a vote of no confidence in the government (December 1), Ukraine's Supreme Court on December 3<sup>rd</sup> declared the second round election results to be invalid and ordered that the round be run again on December 26.<sup>18</sup> In the "second" second round, Yushchenko won by a 52.0% to 44.2% margin.<sup>19</sup>

As in Georgia, the Kyrgyz Tulip Revolution took place after allegations of major electoral fraud in a legislative election, although again it culminated with the resignation of a president. After two rounds of parliamentary elections marred by accusations of fraud and regime interference, the opposition won a total of only 6 out of 75 seats.<sup>20</sup> Protests began in the southern Kyrgyz city of Jalalabad before spreading to other parts of the country including Talas and Osh.<sup>21</sup> Within two weeks, nearly 30,000 protesters would converge in the main square of Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan's capital, leading the then Kyrgyz president Askar Akayev to flee to Russia.<sup>22</sup>

One additional common feature across the four Colored Revolutions is that they all took place in extremely corrupt societies. At the time of the Bulldozer Revolution, Serbia ranked 89<sup>th</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> See Karatnycky 2005 and U.S. State Department, Country Background Notes: Ukraine. The question of why the Serbian and Ukrainian courts diverged in their approaches to their respective revolutions remains an excellent subject for future research. In particular, it would be interesting to gauge the extent to which the members of the Ukrainian Supreme Court were aware of the role previously played by the Serbian Constitutional Court.

<sup>19</sup> Carolynne Wheeler and Mark MacKinnon, "Yushchenko claims victory in Ukraine election," Globe and Mail, December 27, 2004, in Dominique Arel, "The Ukraine List (UKL)," No. 327 (December 27, 2004.) See as well Kuzio 2005b, p. 119. For more on the Orange Revolution, see Karatnycky 2005; Kuzio 2005a, 2005b; Way 2005a.

<sup>20</sup> Jeremy Page, "Poll Protest in Kyrgyzstan Echoes Orange Revolution," The Times (London), March 16, 2005, accessed through Lexis-Nexis.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*; see as well Chris Stephen, "Governor Held Captive in Election Protest," The Irish Times, March 17, 2005, p. 9, accessed in Lexis-Nexis; "People Power, Perhaps; Central Asian Unrest," The Economist, Economist.com, March 22, 2005, accessed through Lexis-Nexis; Jeremy Page, "Opposition Seize Second City in Kyrgyzstan Election Revolt," The Times (London), March 22, 2005, accessed through Lexis-Nexis.

<sup>22</sup> Jessicah Curtis, "The Day the Tulip Revolution Came," The Independent (London), March 25, 2005, p. 24-25, accessed through Lexis-Nexis; Richard Spencer, "Kyrgyzstan President Flees Tulip Revolution," The Daily Telegraph (London), March 25, 2005, p. 13, accessed through Lexis-Nexis; and "3<sup>rd</sup> Roundup: Kyrgyz Opposition Seizes Power, President Flees," Deutsche Press-Agentur, March 24, 2005, accessed through Lexis-Nexis.

out of the 90 countries in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI), scoring a 1.3 on a 0 (highly corrupt) to 10 (highly clean) score; only Nigeria was judged to be more corrupt.<sup>23</sup> The year of the Rose Revolution, Georgia ranked 124<sup>th</sup> out of 133 countries, with a score of 1.8.<sup>24</sup> In 2004, Ukraine scored 2.2, which was good enough to tie with five other countries for 122<sup>nd</sup> – 128<sup>th</sup> out of 145 countries.<sup>25</sup> And in 2005, Kyrgyzstan tied for 130<sup>th</sup> – 136<sup>th</sup> place out of 159 countries.<sup>26</sup> So not only were all four of these countries plagued by corruption, they were actually some of the most corrupt countries in the entire world.<sup>27</sup>

### **Explanations for the Colored Revolutions<sup>28</sup>**

Broadly speaking, two general sets of explanations for the Colored Revolutions have been proposed in the academic literature. The first set of explanations places these events in a larger framework of the post-cold war East-West struggles. This argument usually takes one of two related forms. The first approach stresses the lure of the West for members of the opposition fearful that their countries' current leadership could be leading the country down a path of permanent exclusion from "Europe" generally and European institutions such as the EU more specifically.<sup>29</sup> Especially popular in Russia is a second form of this East-West story, which placed these revolutions squarely in the context of post-cold war geopolitical struggles for dominance between Russia and the West, particularly in areas that had been long considered in

---

<sup>23</sup> According to Transparency International, the "CPI score relates to perceptions of the degree of corruption as seen by business people, risk analysts and the general public". In 2000, the CPI ranked Yugoslavia as opposed to Serbia individually. See <http://www.transparency.org/cpi/2000/cpi2000.html>.

<sup>24</sup> Source: Transparency International, [http://www.transparency.org/pressreleases\\_archive/2003/2003.10.07.cpi.en.html](http://www.transparency.org/pressreleases_archive/2003/2003.10.07.cpi.en.html)

<sup>25</sup> Source: Transparency International, [http://www.transparency.org/pressreleases\\_archive/2004/2004.10.20.cpi.en.html](http://www.transparency.org/pressreleases_archive/2004/2004.10.20.cpi.en.html).

<sup>26</sup> Source: Transparency International, [http://www.transparency.org/cpi/2005/cpi2005\\_sources.en.html#cpi](http://www.transparency.org/cpi/2005/cpi2005_sources.en.html#cpi)

<sup>27</sup> Other surveys confirm this as well; see, for example, Cokgezen 2004.

<sup>28</sup> This section, and the one preceding it, draw very heavily from Tucker 2007.

<sup>29</sup> Obviously, this particular explanation is less cited in the Kyrgyz case.

the Soviet sphere of influence. The more nefarious view of this struggle attributed the success of the various Colored Revolutions to CIA plots carried out by American sponsored NGOs, and in particular George Soros and his Open Society Institute.<sup>30</sup> The fear in Moscow was that all of these revolutions were merely a prelude to the big prize – the overthrow of the Russian government. As Andrei Vladimirov put it in *Itogi*, a Russian political weekly, at the time of the Orange Revolution “The day before yesterday: Belgrade. Yesterday: Tbilisi. Today: Kyiv. Tomorrow: Moscow”.<sup>31</sup> A slightly less conspiratorial and geo-strategic version of this explanation nonetheless continues to place the focus on the role played by external actors in assisting domestic opposition leaders, especially in terms of election monitoring.<sup>32</sup>

The second general approach to explaining the Colored Revolutions has been to focus on the nature of the opposition movements in each of the countries. In particular, commentators have highlighted how opposition groups learned over time to become more effective, be it through their own experiences or through the transmission of information from external actors (and in particular actors from countries that already had experienced their own Colored Revolution).<sup>33</sup>

A different type of explanation for the Orange Revolution in particular has been advanced by Lucan Way. Building on his previous work on the phenomenon of “unconsolidated

---

<sup>30</sup> It was not only Russians who ascribed an important role to Soros. Zaza Gachechiladze, editor of the Tbilisi-based English-language daily, The Georgian Messenger, stated that “it is generally accepted public opinion here that Mr. Soros is the person who planned Shevardnadze's overthrow.” (Leigh Phillips, “Sugar daddies and revolutions; Georgia's revolt was something to celebrate. Does it matter that it was funded by a billionaire?” New Statesman, December 8, 2003, accessed through Lexis-Nexis.)

<sup>31</sup> Andrei Vladimirov, “Revoliutsiia na Eksport” (Revolution for Export), Itogi, December 7, 2004, as cited in Herd 2005, p.5.

<sup>32</sup> This argument is spelled out most clearly, although not necessarily supported, in Herd 2005, but see as well as the copious evidence of democracy assistance on the part of the United States and the Open Society Institute in Georgia in Fairbanks 2004. Beissinger 2005; Bunce 2005 and McFaul 2005 all also note the role of international actors.

<sup>33</sup> See for example Kuzio 2005a; McFaul 2005; Bunce and Wolchik 2006; Beissinger 2007.

authoritarian regimes”,<sup>34</sup> Way has argued that the success of the Orange Revolution can best be understood as a consequence of Kuchma’s inability to successfully “consolidate” an authoritarian regime in Ukraine.<sup>35</sup> Here, the emphasis is on the inability of government elites to prevent a successful uprising, as opposed to either the ability of international forces or opposition elites to deliver one.

All of this work, however, places most of its emphasis on the actions of elites, be they in other countries, non-governmental organization, or leaders of the state, armed-forces, or oppositions in the countries in question. In response, in previous work I have advanced an alternative theoretical approach for understanding the Colored Revolutions based on the logic of collective action problems (Tucker 2007). Collective action problems characterize situations in which a group would benefit from cooperation, but the lack of individual incentives to engage in the actions necessary to achieve this cooperation prevents the goal from being attained. Each individual faces a cost to participating in the action necessary to achieve the group goal, a benefit that they will enjoy from the group goal being attained, and a belief about the likelihood of the group successfully attaining that goal. If individuals believe that their cost of participation outweighs the benefits to be gained from the group goal, then they will choose not to participate. And if enough individuals choose not to participate – the threshold obviously varies widely across different collective action problems – then the goal will not be achieved. Similarly, if individuals value the group goal but believe that the likelihood that it can be achieved is sufficiently low, then again they will choose not to participate and the goal will not be achieved.

---

<sup>34</sup> See in particular Levitsky and Way 2002.

<sup>35</sup> See Way 2005a, 2005b.

Solving collective action problems, therefore, depends on the costs of participation, the benefits of the goal being sought, and beliefs about the likelihood that the goal can be achieved.<sup>36</sup>

Abusive or unrestrained states present a classic collective action problem.<sup>37</sup> Most societal actors would agree that society as a whole would be better off with a less abusive and appropriately restrained state. This is not to deny that there are individual actors in society who clearly benefit from these types of arrangements. Nevertheless, the assumption that most citizens would prefer not to have to pay bribes to policemen, health care workers and government bureaucrats and would also prefer not to have government officials stealing public funds and using their public positions for private financial gain seems to be a reasonable one. Achieving this goal in states where such abusive actions regularly take place, however, requires confronting these abuses and attempting to stop them. This can take a variety of forms, but all share two common features. First, there is a cost to any individual in taking any of these steps, from the relatively minor loss of time to the potentially major loss of livelihood or life. Second, the likelihood of success is always questionable, and this is especially so for individuals facing petty corruption in the course of daily life. This combination yields the familiar result predicted by the collective action framework: individuals “shirk” and tolerate whatever actions on the part of the state that have given rise to their grievances, and as a result everyone is worse off from having to continue to live under an abusive regime.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> For a more thorough explication of collective action problems and their application in particular to social movements, see Chong 1991, especially p.4-5. For an excellent and easily accessible formal explication of some of the characteristics of collective action problems, see Shepsle and Bonchek 1997, chapter 9.

<sup>37</sup> See Weingast 1997, 2005.

<sup>38</sup> Readers should note that in order for the following argument to hold, it is not in any way necessary that all citizens perceive the same level of grievances, or even the same grievances at all for that matter. The key point is that enough citizens hold grievances against the regime that they could affect change if they managed to work together, but are customarily prevented from doing so by the logic of the collective action framework.

Major electoral fraud, however, can help solve this collective action problem.<sup>39</sup> It can do so by both lowering the costs of participating in anti-regime actions and/or increasing the likelihood of a successful result stemming from those actions. For once, the entire country is experiencing the same act of abuse simultaneously; in the language of the collective action literature, major electoral fraud provides an obvious *focal point* for action.<sup>40</sup> People no longer have to choose whether to react alone. Especially as crowds grow, individuals know that they will only be one of many, many people protesting, and thus much less likely to be punished individually. This does not mean that there is no chance of punishment – and it is certainly not meant to deny the bravery of citizens who risked harm to participate in the revolutions described above – but only to note that major electoral fraud presents an opportunity to act on grievances against the current regime without a high degree of certainty that punishment – if it is forthcoming – will be felt by you individually.

Simultaneously, major electoral fraud followed by large scale protests can dramatically increase the likelihood of a successful “result” from one’s participation in an anti-regime protest. This is of course not to say that all large scale protests following electoral fraud against abusive regimes are successful. Nevertheless, in contrast to every day life, major electoral fraud offers hope for greater success in combating an abusive regime in two important ways. First, if protests follow the fraud, then immediately there is the opportunity to speak out with a much stronger voice than anyone could have alone. But perhaps even more importantly, fighting major electoral

---

<sup>39</sup> I define “major” electoral fraud as fraud which effects the overall outcome of an election. This is in contrast to “minor” electoral fraud, which, while in violation of electoral law, would not have changed the results of the election had it not occurred. In no way are “major” or “minor” intended as normative statements related to the level of perniciousness of the fraud.

<sup>40</sup> On focal points, see Schelling 1960; Chong 1991; Weingast 1997. Thompson and Kuntz (2005) take this one step further, arguing that not only does an election present an act of abuse aimed at everyone at the same time, but that it actually “creates an ‘imagined community’ of robbed voters, in which people can suppose that also their attitudes towards the regime’s latest behavior are shared by their fellow- citizens”(p.11).

fraud holds open the hope of changing who actually wields political power in a country; if you are successful, the bums actually can be thrown out.

While there are many other implications that we can draw about both the causes and effects of the Colored Revolutions from this framework (see Tucker 2007, 541-3), for the sake of the current argument we need focus only on the central claim: the protests at the heart of the Colored Revolutions occurred at least in part because major electoral fraud altered both the perceived costs and benefits of participating in actions aimed against an abusive/unrestrained regime.<sup>41</sup> For the remainder of this paper, we consider the following question: if this framework does indeed correctly explain what happened in the Colored Revolutions, then what ought to happen in the future should the country's regime once again behave in a way that is seen to threaten democracy?

### **People Power vs. a One-Shot Deal**

In order to answer this question, I will employ the following simple model. I assume that a Colored Revolution has indeed occur in a given country. I then assume some period of time passes, after which some “event” occurs that that suggests that the regime in power is once again acting in an unrestrained/abusive manner. I will then attempt to answer the question of whether – based on the collective action framework posited in the previous section to model the dynamics that gave rise to the protests in the original Colored Revolutions – we would expect people to once again take to the streets to protest the action from this new “event”. In this extremely simple framework, we can vary the length of time between the two events, what has transpired during this time period, and the nature of the “event” that gives rise to the new threat to

---

<sup>41</sup> This is not to deny that there were other reasons that people chose to participate in these protests; see for example Fournier forthcoming.

democracy. For simplicity's sake, I will refer to the time at which this event takes place as  $t+1$ , and the time of the original Colored Revolution as time  $t$ .

To start with, we would expect the experience of a Colored Revolution ought to greatly revise citizens' perceptions of both the potential costs and potential benefits from engaging in collective action against an abusive state. The argument advanced in the previous section only got us to the likelihood of protest following electoral fraud. However, in the case of the Colored Revolutions, these protests actually succeeded in toppling governments and removing rulers from office. Thus we would likely expect a huge revision upwards in the minds of citizens of the potential benefits of protesting against an abusive state. Moreover, as the Colored Revolutions were – with some minor exceptions in Kyrgyzstan – generally nonviolent affairs that did not lead to any long term sanctions against the participants (consider recent events in Myanmar or Pakistan in contrast), we would also expect a downward revision in the costs associated with protest. And while spending weeks outside in Kyiv in December is clearly nothing to sneer at, by all accounts most protestors were enjoying themselves most of the time. Therefore, as long as nothing happens in the intervening period between the Colored Revolutions and the next “event”, we would expect to see people likely to take to the streets again in defense of democracy.

This begs the question of what could happen in the intervening time period so as to change this cost-benefit analysis. At one extreme, so much time could pass (say 50+ years) so that the actual participants in the Colored Revolutions were no longer around to participate in a new protest, at which point it would be safe to say that the effect of the original Colored Revolutions would likely have dissipated. Given that I am writing this in 2007, however, this case is of little interest at the moment, but I mention it only to highlight the fact that there is

some sort of temporal upper bound to the entire process; where exactly it is may be uncertain, but is beyond the scope of our concern for the foreseeable future.

Within the relevant time frame, it is easiest to begin by considering changes to the “cost” component of the cost-benefit analysis. Simply put, we would expect that if the regime were to demonstrate credibly that it was capable of using violence against its own citizens, we might expect potential protestors at time  $t+1$  to be more hesitant to take to the streets than they were at time  $t$ . This is of course far from a novel explanation of the calculus of the decision to protest, and there is nothing in the argument specific to protests that follow electoral fraud at time  $t$ .

Of slightly more interest, however, is to consider the question of what exactly is counted as a credible commitment to use violence. It is not difficult to come up with some obvious cases where we would say this has taken place. For example, if the head of the security services had changed, the new head was known as a hardliner, and the security services had cracked down on political dissent in a violent manner in the period of time between  $t$  and  $t+1$ , we would expect people to update accordingly. Where it gets interesting, however, is to consider steps short of this. How seriously might statements committing to using violence be taken in the aftermath of restraint during a Colored Revolution? And perhaps most intriguing, would it be possible for some sort of “global shift” in the perceived acceptance of repression of dissent by other regimes in the region cause domestic actors to be more fearful of rising costs to participation in protest in their own country, even where had been no such violence domestically? To put a more concrete spin on this, is it possible that participation in protests earlier this month in Georgia could have been tempered by the fact that violence was used to put down protests in Uzbekistan and, to a lesser extent, in Belarus since the time of the original Georgian Rose Revolution?<sup>42</sup> And, if so,

---

<sup>42</sup> For more on recent protests in Georgia, see for example Vaisman, Daria and Fred Weir, 2007, “Georgia Verges on Repeat Turmoil”, *Christian Science Monitor*, November 5, 2007, p.6, accessed through Lexis-Nexis.

what would be the limits of this upward cost-revision from violence in other countries? Would it matter, for example, at some future date in Serbia as well?

Even more interesting than considering revisions in people's estimates of the costs of protest, however, is considering what happens to people's revised estimates of the *benefits* of having participated in a Colored Revolution. Herein lies the crux of the question: if people are expected to have revised their expectation of the benefits of protest against an abusive regime because the "success" of a Colored Revolution resulted in "throwing the bums out", then would the need for more protest somehow undercut the original perceived "success" of the Colored Revolution? What is particularly interesting about this tension is it is explicitly tied to an original protest at time  $t$  that involved a protest that actually resulted in a change in who held office, as did the Colored Revolutions.

We can consider the paradox of whether a need for a protest at time  $t+1$  undermines the perceived success of actions at time  $t$  from a number of different starting points. In all cases we will assume – as was basically the case with the actual Colored Revolutions – the protest at time  $t$  was over major electoral fraud, and that the protest culminated with a reversal of the fraud and a change of office holders in key political institutions.<sup>43</sup> Let us therefore start from one extreme, and consider the case where the event demanding a protest at time  $t+1$  is again an instance of major electoral fraud, this time perpetrated by the very people who rode the tide of popular protest into office at time  $t$ . In this case, it seems obvious that protestors would likely think "why bother?" when considering whether or not to take to the streets again. If both sides have shown themselves willing to resort to electoral fraud to stay in office, then why should

---

<sup>43</sup> I use the term *major electoral fraud* to differentiate between two different types of electoral fraud: *minor electoral fraud*, where results were tampered with but in which the tampering is perceived to have had little effect on the overall outcome of the election, or *major electoral fraud*, cases in which electoral fraud is suspected to have influenced the overall outcome of an election (see Tucker 2007, 536-7).

individuals risk any harm to get one side into power at the expense of the other?<sup>44</sup> This is, of course, a fairly easy scenario, but does nicely illustrate the inherent paradox.

Let us then take a step backwards from the easy first scenario and assume nothing so obvious as another case of electoral fraud at time  $t+1$ , and instead consider a scenario whereby the newly empowered government simply continues to engage in fairly corrupt practices, leading to charges that “nothing has changed”.<sup>45</sup> Perhaps the event at time  $t+1$  is some particularly egregious act of corruption, symbolizing the fact that the new regime is no less abusive – or even only a little bit less abusive – than the previous regime. Would the people take to the streets in this case to protest the new event at time  $t+1$ ? We might expect them to hold the new government to a higher standard. But on the other hand, if the new government turned out to be just as abusive as the prior one, then people might update that although they had paid some cost to protest previously, they had now learned that they received little or no benefit from the changes that took place after that protest, which could again cause them to decide to sit this one out.

We can even back a second step away from this scenario, and still get to a point where protest looks doubtful. Consider a scenario similar to what seemed to unfold in Ukraine in the last couple of years. A new “better” regime comes to power following electoral fraud, only to gradually lose power to the old regime through a series of bad decisions, highlighting perhaps arrogance and/or incompetence on the part of the newly empowered forces. The result is a situation where once again the old regime is in power, and the members of the forces that had

---

<sup>44</sup> Of course, this assumes something roughly resembling a two party system, or else two distinct “forces” in a country (e.g., Ukraine, which is multiparty but has clear pro and anti-Orange forces). But even if there are three forces, we can just extend the logic out into another period with the third force also falsifying election results.

<sup>45</sup> And indeed, as early as March 2005, *Ukrains'ka Pravda* had published an article entitled “Did We Win?” noting that “What specifically has changed around here? Only the faces.” “Did We Win? Or, the Notes of an ‘Orange’ Official,” *Ukrains'ka pravda*, March 15, 2005 (<http://www2.pravda.com.ua/archive/2005/march/15/1.shtml>) in Dominique Arel, “The Ukraine List (UKL),” No. 343 (April 9, 2005), translated by Peter Larson for UKL.

been victorious in the Colored Revolution call on the people to support them with protest. Ought people to take to the streets in this circumstance? Again, we have to wonder whether individuals, seeing that the hard work of their protest from a number of years earlier did nothing to ultimately prevent the return of the original corrupt regime to power, will decide that the benefits of protest no longer seem to outweigh the costs.

Walking through these three scenarios raises the question if there is *any* circumstance where we would theoretically expect citizens to take to the streets again in the years following a Colored Revolution. Let us then consider perhaps the most hospitable scenario for seeing renewed protests: the original Colored Revolution succeeds at time  $t$ , the new regime comes into power and behaves in a non-abusive manner but loses power in a free and fair election because of other factors (e.g., the state of the economy), and then the old regime comes back into power, starts behaving abusively once again, and ends up committing major electoral fraud again in an effort to stay in power. If ever there was a situation conducive to a realization of the “people power” scenario whereby citizens once again rise to defend their newly granted rights, this ought to be it. And yet, we need to ask how different this scenario actually is from the preceding one. In both cases, people have protested (and therefore borne costs) at time  $t$ . In both cases, citizens find themselves at a time  $t+1$ , where the people they threw out of office at time  $t$  are back in power and continuing to behave in an abusive manner. What, therefore, can citizens logically conclude was the benefit gained from the costs they paid in participating in protests at time  $t$ ? And, more importantly, what is the point of risking harm in a new Colored Revolution, if the ultimate result is that the “bums” always come back to power?

Take together, we get the Paradox of the Colored Revolutions: given the nature of the “success” inherent in overthrowing a government that has attempted to stay in power through

electoral fraud in a society where the regime has behaved in a consistently abusive or unrestrained manner towards the citizenry, is there any sort of event in the future which can simultaneously drive people back on to the streets to protest without forcing them to question the benefits gained from the original protest?

With this in mind, we can ask whether there are any other factors that might make this paradox less likely to bite. For now, I will suggest three such factors, although I by no means consider this list to be exhaustive.

First, and very counter-intuitively, a less successful original Colored Revolution at time  $t$  could actually make protest more likely in the future. Here, the Kyrgyz case is illustrative. As mentioned in the previous section, although the fraudulent election in question was a parliamentary election, the crisis was resolved when President Akayev fled the country and resigned. The fraudulently elected parliament, however, was still allowed to be seated. Future “abusive” actions on the part of the Kyrgyz regime, therefore, could continue to be attributed to the presence of this illegitimate parliament, and not exclusively to the “result” of the Kyrgyz Colored Revolution at time  $t$ . Thus when faced with an abusive state at time  $t+1$ , Kyrgyz citizens could arguably believe that the benefits of their actions at time  $t$  (removing a corrupt president, but unfortunately leaving a corrupt parliament in place) were still present, despite the fact that current government was behaving in a corrupt manner. Indeed, it could be possible that Kyrgyz citizens could accept the current problem leading to the desire to revolt at time  $t+1$  as essentially unfinished business from the last Colored Revolution, and thus make them more willing to take to the streets at time  $t+1$ . When a Colored Revolution is more successful in capturing control of the key organs of power at time  $t$ , however, it leaves little room for this kind of rationalizing at time  $t+1$ .

A second factor that could forestall the paradox would be if people believe that no matter how bad things are currently, they still would have been worse without the original Colored Revolution. Indeed, this seems to me to be the best way to solve the Paradox of the Colored Revolutions, and would likely need to work through one of two avenues. First, in the “new government behaves abusively as well” scenario, citizens would have to perceive the government as making important progress on other highly salient issues, despite the fact that it is still acting in an abusive manner towards its own citizens. Here I could imagine a country that has been a bit of an international pariah having a government come to power that drastically improves the country’s international image, thus getting it access to things like EU or WTO membership, while still not really changing a domestic climate that is conducive to corruption. Alternatively, if the new government behaved well but still managed to lose power to the original abusive regime, citizens might still value the benefits from the intervening good years to be willing to risk harm by participating in protest at time  $t+1$  in the hope for some short term benefits again.

Even with these factors in mind, we are still awfully far away from the original “people power” scenario, which would lead us to expect governments to behave in a restrained manner towards their citizens out of fear that newly empowered citizens would simply rise up again should the government deviate from this path. Indeed, we need to make some pretty strong assumptions either about the original Colored Revolution having not been particularly successful or about citizens having extremely short-time horizons for this to work. Moreover, even if these assumptions hold, the scenario can still be undone by events that might cause citizens to update their beliefs about the likelihood of bearing costs from participating in future protests, potentially even from events outside of one’s own country.

## Next Steps

Perhaps the first question to ask is whether this framework for thinking about protest in countries that have previously experienced Colored Revolutions gives us any leverage at all over real world events. Now, to be fair, even if it does not at the current, that still does not mean the approach is without its merits, as it may be that not enough time has passed in these countries to really assess the theory. Nevertheless, the arguments I have laid out in the previous section seem to be compatible with the fact that (1) the Orange forces had a much harder getting protestors onto the street during last spring's constitutional crisis than they did in the winter of 2004 (despite nicer weather!);<sup>46</sup> (2) that the Georgian protests of the past couple weeks do not appear to match the strength of protests during the Rose Revolution<sup>47</sup>; and (3) that of all the countries that had successful Colored Revolutions, protest seems to continue to be most prevalent in Kyrgyzstan, where the original Colored Revolution was the least influential of the four.<sup>48</sup> This is not in any way intended to serve as anything resembling an empirical test of the approach, but it is at least suggestive that it is worth continuing to think about the legacy of the Colored Revolutions in this manner. Moreover, it is useful to note just how different the sorts of predictions that arise from the micro-level framework I have presented would be from

---

<sup>46</sup> Indeed, reports of the protests explicitly contrast their much smaller size as compared to the Orange Revolution; see for example Weir, Fred, 2007, "Ukraine's Latest Revolt Hews Blue," *Christian Science Monitor*, April 17, 2007, p.7 and Halpin, Tony, 2007, "Orange Revolution rivals summon people's armies for power struggle", *The Times (London)*, April 4, 2007, p.35, accessed in Lexis-Nexus.

<sup>47</sup> Whether they stay this way is an open question, as at least one report put the size of the crowds in Tbilisi earlier this month at 50,000 people (see Vaisman, Daria and Fred Weir, 2007, "Georgia Verges on Repeat Turmoil", *Christian Science Monitor*, November 5, 2007, p.6, accessed through Lexis-Nexus).

<sup>48</sup> This includes protests initially over poor penal conditions in the fall of 2005, protests against corruption and the influence of criminal networks over politics in the spring of 2006, mass demonstrations over constitutional division of power between the present and parliament in late 2006 and early 2007, and renewed protests over this topic in the spring of 2007 (Source: *Economic Intelligence Unit*, <http://www.eiu.com/article1231115308.html?pubtypeId=30000203&text=protest>.) as well as additional protests as recently as the last month by Kyrgyz youth movements (see for example "Kyrgyz Youth Group to Stage Rally on 8 November 2007", *BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit*, November 5, 2007, accessed in Lexis-Nexus).

predictions generated from more standard elite-based explanations focusing on either state actors, domestic opposition leaders, or international power struggles.

The next question is where I ought to take this research if I want to do anything further with it, and on this topic I am especially interested in feedback. I can see three potential options. One possibility would be to formalize the arguments made in the preceding section using a game theoretic framework to see if I can pin down more precise hypotheses than what I am now presenting. A second, and quite possibly related, option would be to try to craft a more explicit empirical test of the model. My concern here is whether this is at all possible within the current time frame. Although the last six months have been rather busy for three of the four Colored Revolution countries, the model itself purports to speak to the future of protest in these countries, and it is possible that enough time has passed to begin to assess this future empirically. If so, how ought the argument to be developed further?

## **Conclusions**

The Colored Revolutions were dramatic events that captured the attention of the world with the spectacle of people in countries with less than stellar democratic histories rising up to hold their governments accountable to a very specific and yet very important aspect of good governance: respecting outcomes of elections. As scholars, we first sought to understand how these revolutions came about and whether they were likely to spread to other countries. As time has passed, however, the legacy of the Colored Revolutions for the countries in which they occurred has become a more pressing question. In this paper, I have attempted to examine this question from the bottom up, asking whether the motivations of individual protestors in the original Colored Revolutions has anything to tell us about whether these same protestors are

likely to return to the streets to defend democracy again in the future. Ironically, despite the perceived feel good people power experiences of the original Colored Revolutions, this particular analysis has suggested that these events may be unlikely to occur again. Indeed, just as the train of the Colored Revolutions seemed to stall out in Minsk, it may be the case that even in the countries where the Colored Revolutions took place they may more often than not turn out to be “one shot deals”.

## Works Cited

- Beissinger, Mark R. 2005. *Structure and Example in Modular Political Phenomena: The Diffusion of Bulldozer/Rose/Orange/Tulip Revolutions*. Madison, Wisconsin. 57p.
- Beissinger, Mark R. 2007. "Structure and Example in Modular Political Phenomena: The Diffusion of Bulldozer/Rose/Orange/Tulip Revolutions." *Perspectives on Politics* 5 (2):259-76.
- Bieber, Florian. 2003. "The Serbian Opposition and Civil Society: Roots of the Delayed Transition in Serbia." *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 17 (1):73-90.
- Birch, Sarah. 2002. "The 2000 elections in Yugoslavia: the 'Bulldozer Revolution'." *Electoral Studies* 21:499-511.
- Bunce, Valerie. 2005. "Domestic Conditions and Democracy Promotion". Paper presented at Roundtable on US Democracy Promotion in Post-Communist Societies, US Department of State.
- Bunce, Valerie, and Sharon Wolchik. 2005. *Promoting Democracy After Communism: Electoral Revolutions in Slovakia, Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan*. Ithaca, N.Y., 11p.
- Bunce, Valerie, and Sharon Wolchik. 2006. "International diffusion and postcommunist electoral revolutions." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 39 (3):283-304.
- Bunce, Valerie, and Sharon Wolchik. 2007. "Transnational networks, diffusion dynamics, and electoral revolutions in the postcommunist world " *Physica A* 378 (1):92-9.
- Chong, Dennis. 1991. *Collective action and the civil rights movement*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Cokgezen, Murat. 2004. "Corruption in Kyrgyzstan: the Facts, Causes, and Consequences." *Central Asian Survey* 23 (1):79-94.
- Fairbanks, Charles H. 2004. "Georgia's Rose Revolution." *Journal of Democracy* 15 (2):110-24.
- Fournier, Anna. forthcoming. "Ukraine's Orange Revolution: Beyond Soviet Citizenship?" In *The Contest for Social Mobilization in Ukraine*, ed. P. D'Anieri. Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Herd, Graeme P. 2005. "Colorful Revolutions and the CIS: "Manufactured" Versus "Managed" Democrac." *Problems of Post-Communism* 52 (2):3-18.
- Karatnycky, Adrian. 2005. "Ukraine's Orange Revolution." *Foreign Affairs* 84 (2):35-52.
- Kuzio, Taras. 2005a. "From Kuchma to Yushchenko: Ukraine's 2004 Presidential Elections and the Orange Revolution." *Problems of Post-Communism* 50 (2):29-44.
- Kuzio, Taras. 2005b. "The Opposition's Road to Success." *Journal of Democracy* 16 (2):117-30.
- Levitsky, Steven, and Lucan Way. 2002. "Elections Without Democracy: The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism." *Journal of Democracy* 13 (2):51-65.
- McFaul, Michael. 2005. "Transitions from Postcommunism." *Journal of Democracy* 16 (3):5-19.
- Schelling, Thomas C. 1960. *The strategy of conflict*. Cambridge, : Harvard University Press.
- Shepsle, Kenneth A., and Mark S. Bonchek. 1997. *Analyzing Politics: Rationality, Behavior and Institutions*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Thompson, Mark R., and Philipp Kuntz. 2004. "Stolen Elections: The Case of the Serbian October." *Journal of Democracy* 15 (4):159-72.
- Tucker, Joshua A. 2007. "Enough! Electoral Fraud, Collective Action Problems, and Post-Communist Colored Revolutions." *Perspectives on Politics* 5 (3):537-53.
- Tunnard, Christopher R. 2003. "The 'Anarchy' of the Internet: The Changing Influence of Communications and Information in Serbia in the 1990s." *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 3 (2):97-120.

- Way, Lucan. 2005a. "Kuchma's Failed Authoritarianism." *Journal of Democracy* 16 (2):131-45.
- Way, Lucan. 2005b. "Rapacious Individualism and Political Competition in Ukraine: 1992-2004." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 38:191-205.
- Way, Lucan. 2006. "Identity and Autocracy: Belarus and Ukraine Compared". Paper presented at 2nd Annual Danyliw Research Seminar in Contemporary Ukrainian Studies, Toronto, Canada.
- Weingast, Barry M. 1997. "The Political Foundations of Democracy and the Rule of Law." *American Political Science Review* 91 (2):245-63.
- Weingast, Barry M. 2005. *Self-Enforcing Constitutions: With an Application to Democratic Stability In America's First Century*. Palo Alto, CA. *manuscript*, 41p.