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Regime Change and Survival in the Post-Communist 'Gray Zone': The Rise of Electoral Revolutions

Topic of Research:

In this project I examine the process of regime change or continuity ('crisis' survived) in four authoritarian competitive regimes in Eastern Europe. My major goal is to provide an explanation as to *why*, *how* and to *what internal and regional effect* similarly hybrid political regimes in the post-communist world survived or collapsed at the face of a critical opportunity for regime change. More specifically the analysis discusses the phenomenon of Electoral Revolutions that took place in the countries of Serbia (2000), Georgia (2003) and Ukraine (2004) but failed to materialize in Armenia (2003). I thus provide a focused and structured comparison on of the processes and events leading to and following the ousting of Milosevic in the Serbian 'October Revolution' in 2000; the ending of Shevardnadze's regime following the 'Rose Revolution' in Georgia, the advent of regime change brought in by the 'Orange Revolution' in Ukraine, and the controversial Armenian presidential elections of 2003 which were followed by mass political protests but did not result in removing the current president Robert Kocharian from power. My main theoretical questions fall within four major categories of: (1) *specifics and nature of the extrication process*, (2) *factors defining its success or failure*, (3) *nature of the following transition(s)*, and (4) *its regional effect and 'transposability'*. Each of these set of questions also defines and structures a discrete thematic section of the dissertation.

Relevance and Contribution to the Field:

The process of hybrid regime change through Electoral Revolutions has turned out to be one of the most exciting and controversial political developments in the last several years. It has essentially become the 'top event' of the decade for the post-Soviet gray zone and beyond. The rise of Electoral Revolutions, defining possibly a 'forth wave' of democratization in the world appears currently as a momentous source of inspiration for the democratization and comparative politics literatures. The theoretical conclusions derived from these events are likely to present a critical input to these areas of scholarship.

My work on the Electoral Revolutions seeks to examine these latest developments and contribute to the still nascent but growing "third generation on literatures on transition". The conclusions derived from it can currently explain and predict the future trajectory of a number of countries in the post-Space and also provide qualified predictions for the future of the democratization process in general. Secondly, the project examines process and places which are currently of intense interest and importance for the US foreign policy. It touches on the role of US (as a powerful international sponsor) in contributing to and partially defining the outcome of the political outcomes in these countries; and thus provides direct practical insight as of which diplomatic, political and democracy promotion strategies are best suited for achieving such an outcome.

Approach and Methodology (Including Research Sites):

My main method of research was semi-structured interviews complemented by opinion polls data and documentary information. I have prepared a question set for the first group of interviewees (active participants) with questions designed to establish through several indicators the divergent levels of electoral and mobilizational capacity of the opposition, and the presence/activity of international patron(s) invested in regime change. To determine the particular treats and challenges obstructing the transition process following the process of regime change, I conducted a new round of interviews with my previous sources, examined the main new laws and regulations adopted, and consulted with members of the restructured 'opposition' forces and the NGO community at large.

In the country of Georgia I conducted 28 interviews with political activists and members of the new administration in the cities of Tbilisi and Batumi. In Armenia, I stayed mostly in Yerevan and talked with members of the opposition forces and a range of academics and NGO activists closely familiar with the political developments there. In addition, I got in contact with some of the opposition leaders currently in exile in Austria and have been in communication with them during the last three months. During my stay in Ukraine, I traveled to Uzgorod and Kirovograd for interviews but spent most of the time in Kiev. My work there involved conducting close to 35 formal and informal interviews, as well as informal election observation and post-electoral evaluation.

Summary of Research Findings:

What demarcated the Serbian, Georgian and Ukrainian instances of regime change as examples of the same category of "Electoral Revolutions" and distinguished them from the previous democratic transitions and revolutions are four defining characteristics pertaining to their: *development dynamics, political strategy applied, actors' connectivity* and *model replication*. In essence based on the commonalities of the examined processes the mode of transition in these countries and for 'Electoral Revolutions' in general is defined by: (1) clearly sequenced three-stage dynamics, (2) 'paradoxical' political strategy, (3) targeted international assistance and the rise of 'networking' (4) deliberate diffusion and replication of the model.

First, all the three cases of hybrid regime change involved a distinct three-staged sequence, starting with fraudulent national elections and ending with the resignation of the country's executive and his administration. Second, in all of these cases the democratic opposition employed a paradoxical strategy of a "Vote-Controlled Revolt" pattern in which extra constitutional means were used strictly in defense of the legal and constitutional order. Third, in all of these countries there was a thick layer of directly involved international and transnational actors who worked closely with the domestic opposition. The intensity and spread of this cooperation amounted to a new type of trans- and intra-country networking model. Finally, a substantial number of the domestic and international actors and NGOs involved in the process were willing and eager to 'export' their organizational experience and know-how, contributing thus to the further replication of the model in the region.

Two major variables appear critical in explaining the occurrence and success of electoral revolutions within this subset of cases: (I) *Opposition Sector Capacity*, and (II) *Western*

Patronage. I qualify and measure the opposition sector capacity based on the (1) strength and functionality of its five main elements, and (2) the level of cooperation and complementarity between those elements. The term Western Patronage is defined here as comprising of two variables: (1) targeted democracy promotion and (2) targeted political pressure.

Based on my research I identify the *Opposition Sector Capacity* in the examined countries as defined by five fundamental structures and the level of coordination and alignment between them: (1) United and Credible Opposition Coalition- *providing political leadership and focus*, (2) Civil Advocacy Sector- *organizing electoral mobilization, elections monitoring and PVT*, (3) Independent Media- *keeping the population informed and external outreach*, (4) Youth Radical Organizations- *dispersing fear, energizing with humor*, (5) Opposition Controlled Municipalities- *supplying logistical support and resources*. The level of cooperation and complementarity between these existing elements ultimately defined the overall capacity of the opposition sector in the examined countries to challenge the regime.

The second major variable *Western Patronage* for ‘free and fair’ elections is identified in the research as a composite variable comprised of two main elements: (1) targeted democracy promotion with the concrete objective of producing ‘free and fair elections’ and (2) high-end political pressure towards the same goal. In essence, I argue that there exists external patronage for the process of regime change only when a major international actor (or actors) combines the two listed mechanisms in one coordinated strategy, clearly seeking to affect the implementation and outcome of the electoral process in a given country.

The combination of these variables for the examined countries can be summarized as follows: Table (1) Opposition Sector Elements Individual Strength and Capacity

<i>Country</i>	<i>Opposition Coalition</i>	<i>NGO Sector</i>	<i>Youth Movement</i>	<i>Independent Media</i>	<i>Municipalities</i>	<i>Alignment and Coordination</i>
Serbia	Unified Strong leadership High	Diversified Not highly integrated W/ IEMC Medium-High	Strong, Grassroots, Very Active High	No TV ANEM and Radio Stations, Internet Low-Medium	In several regional cities. No major support in the capital Medium	Good, complex planning and coordination High
Georgia	Eventually unified. Strong leadership High	Strong and Integrated W/ IEMC High	Not well developed “Virtual” Low-Medium	Rustavi 2 TV- most Popular High	In some regional cities and to some extent in the capital Medium-High	Good level of complementarity and coordination High
Ukraine	Unified Strong Leadership High	Diversified Partially Integrated W/ IEMC Medium-	Diversified Very Active High	Channel 5- Not Widespread Coverage Low-	In several regional cities and the capital.	Good level of complementarity and coordination

		High		Medium	High	High
Armenia	Not unified Not strong leadership Low-Medium	Diversified Not integrated W/ IEMC Low-Medium	No youth Movement Low	Closed Independent TV Media, Independent Dailies Low	No representation in the regions and the capital Low	Low-Medium

Table (2): Level of Western Patronage

	<i>Serbia</i>	<i>Georgia</i>	<i>Ukraine</i>	<i>Armenia</i>
<i>Targeted democracy promotion</i>	Sustained and massive support, from several sponsors High	Sustained support from one sponsor- the US Medium-High	Serious but not very massive support from several sponsors Medium-High	Basic Support form USAID. No other major sponsors Low-Medium
<i>High-end political pressure</i>	Ultimate Goal Economic, Political, Diplomatic US+ Other Western Govts. High	Relative Goal Economic, Political and Diplomatic. Mainly the US Medium-High	Coordinated approach. Largely political and diplomatic. US+ Other Western Govts. High	Very limited and restrained criticism. Mainly from major IGOs Low-Medium

My major finding is that Electoral Revolutions occurred only in a political context where the overall capacity of the opposition was at least medium (usually high) and it was combined with and at least medium level of western patronage. These structural based-explanations are found to provide a much better understanding of why hybrid regime changes occur (through Electoral Revolutions) than any other alternative model, such as for example: 1) state and regime- based explanations, 2) economic explanations or 3) systemic theory explanations. Based on this conclusion it is now relatively easy to predict which of the remaining 'gray zone' regimes are likely to experience a process of regime change in the future and which are not.

Further, my research demonstrates, that the Electoral Revolutions in the examined countries appeared as a part of a whole new 'democratization wave' involving overall of seven transitions to democracy. This wave involved three distinct processes of diffusion: *positive, wider positive and negative*. A process of positive diffusion appeared mainly between the opposition sector forces in the countries of Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine (and later Kyrgyzstan). It involved a direct inter-regional transfer of information, people and experienced and appeared key for the transposition of the electoral revolution model from one place to the other. The wider positive diffusion reflected the repercussions the Electoral Revolutions, and mainly the Orange Revolution, had in places like Romania and some Middle Eastern countries like Lebanon, Egypt and even Israel.

The process of negative diffusion generated by the Electoral Revolutions spread largely to Russia and the rest of the post-Soviet space and involved three interconnected

developments: (1) Rise of Preemptive Authoritarianism in the post-Soviet Space; (2) Attack on election observation organizations, such as OSCE, IFES, ENEMO, and: (3) Reassertion of Russian hegemony in Eurasia. These developments not only made further Electoral Revolutions in the region much less likely, but they to a large extent affected the possibility of a democratic reversal in Kyrgyzstan and challenged the survival of the new democratic regimes in Ukraine and Georgia. By the end of 2005 the process of negative diffusion and political backlash in the region seems to have taken prevalence and marked the end of any hopes for further democratization in the post-Soviet space.

The final part of my research deals with the processes of democratic consolidation or reversal in the countries which underwent a process of regime change through Electoral Revolutions. My findings show that at the moment the democratic development of Serbia is precarious and the wave of rising nationalism presents a critical barrier to the process of democratic consolidation there. Georgia, on the other hand, seems to be making a significant progress towards the development of both state institutions and engagement of a new political elite in them. While this has been a very chaotic and at times socially and politically costly process, one can still say that at the moment the Saakashvili's government makes "two steps forward and one step back", but still keeps the right direction. Ultimately, It seems however, that the success of the democratization project in Georgia will be defined by the ability of the government to solve the territorial disputes in South Ossetia and Abkhazia and continue to keep the Russians at bay.

In the case of Ukraine the situation seems to be currently more complicated and less encouraging.

During my interviews it became clear that majority of the Ukrainian population is disappointed with their new president for three major reasons: (1) his internal strife with Julia Timoshenko before the parliamentary elections, (2) his unwillingness to seek responsibility and 'purge' the old elite, and (3) the lack of major political and economic reforms initiated. There is, however, an shared opinion among the political insiders and academics that the Yushchenko administration has achieved a lot in terms of internal bureaucratic consolidation and preparation for gradual democratization, but has failed to sufficiently publicize and demonstrate it. For now (before a new government is formed) it is really difficult to evaluate the degree to which the Orange Revolution has consolidated its democratic gains.

Suggestions for Future Research:

I would suggest that there are two key areas which are calling for future research and exploration. First, it is necessary to continue to follow the political developments of the countries which experienced hybrid regime change and make clear the link between this particular mode of transition and prospects for democratic consolidation in generates. Second, another fruitful line of research is the 'negative diffusion wave' appearing as a response to the spread of the democratization process in the post-Soviet space. It is quite important to understand what has been the composite effect of the Electoral Revolution on the political regimes in Russia, the Central Asian countries, and the rest of the Caucasus.

Recommendations for the US policy Community:

I have three general recommendations for the US policy community. First, it seems imperative that US advisers should continue to work and exert pressure on the new presidents in the 'Electoral Revolutions' countries. It seems that these figures take such enormous role and responsibility all of a sudden, that they find themselves bound to

over-consolidate their powers (Georgia), quickly loose them (Serbia) or find themselves in a rather precarious state of affairs (Ukraine). As one the close advisers of the Yushchenko team shared with me- “the American should get really deeply involved in the working of this administration if we are to achieve what the Baltic states did. It is really difficult to rely solely on internal pressures.”

Second, it is my opinion that the Electoral Revolution model has become a victim of its own success and it has exhausted its transformative potential in the region (at least for now). This would mean that a new formula for helping democratize the remaining authoritarian states in the post-Soviet region is highly necessary. With the new resurgence of Russia as a geopolitical leader such strategy will be difficult to find and implement at the current moment. My expectation is that political events being so cyclical in the region, it will probably take a year but Russia and the post-Soviet states will start to experience a new round of falling out and growing estrangement. This will be the moment for the US to step in and open a new discourse and strategy of ‘evolutionary’ ‘regime opening, while also seeking ways to boost alternative political forces.

Finally, I would suggest that the US get more actively involved (possibly through OSCE) in helping countries, especially Georgia, solve its territoriality problem with Russia and the breakaway states and thus finally move to political and territorial consolidation.