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STG 2005-2006
Ukraine

**Engendering the Orange Revolution:
Women, the 2004 elections and protest mobilization in Kyiv, Kharkiv and Lviv**

Topic of Research and Countries Visited

This short-term travel grant supported two months of research on women's participation in the Orange Revolution in Ukraine. My grant allowed me to expand upon previous research that I conducted in Ukraine that examined women's participation in NGOs, protest and politics.

My previous research concluded that the Soviet Union's collapse created opportunities for new forms of protest as well as new arenas for civic and political action. While women in Ukraine played an important role in the protests and civic and political activities that brought down the Soviet state, most retreated from politics and protest after independence. A small elite group of women intellectuals formed organizations that pursued gender-coded issues. These included women's NGOs that formed around issues of concern to foreign women's rights advocates as well as locally oriented groups that focused on the welfare of families, children, or the elderly. Such organizations by the late nineties had either disengaged from local politics to work on foreign grants or were co-opted by political parties or the resurgent power structure.

My new grant allowed me to explore the role women played in the emergence of the protest movement that challenged the post-Soviet power elite during the 2004 elections and that led to the Orange Revolution. My research explored this process of mass mobilization across the country's main regions and within three different types of organizations: 1) political parties, 2) women's NGOs that work on women's political empowerment, and 3) youth protest groups like *Pora*.

Relevance and Contribution to Field

During the Fall 2004, hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian citizens participated in mass protests that challenged election fraud. These protests came to be called the Orange Revolution. As the first major episode of protest in Ukraine since the collapse of Soviet rule the Orange Revolution constitutes a turning point in this country's democratization. This event offers a unique opportunity for studying the gendered mechanisms that structure politics and protest and more broadly shape prospects for reform in post-Soviet countries. The Orange Revolution can also be used to analyze the development of beliefs that are fundamental to democratization: that citizens can resist coercion to participate meaningfully in politics and in particular, that voters (not ruling elites) decide the results of elections.

The 2004 elections and the Orange Revolution provide a crucial case for exploring the conditions that reshaped voters' willingness to submit to "managed" political participation and helped opponents win the popular support needed to challenge the oligarchs who dominated Ukraine and post-Soviet countries. These events also offer a chance to investigate how organizational channels shape political engagement among women and draw this vulnerable sector of the electorate into settings within which they are able to overcome decades of institutionalized powerlessness and develop the capacity for meaningful political and civic engagement.

Summary of Approach and Research Methodology

I conducted focus groups and interviews in Kyiv, Lviv and Kharkiv. Kyiv was chosen because the city's residents unexpectedly took to the barricade in protest against the massive fraud used to orchestrate a victory for Yanukovich. Lviv was chosen because this city's residents have for nearly fifteen years supported Ukraine's democratization and integration with the West. Kharkiv was chosen because it was run by a political elite that remained divided over whether or not to use quasi-Soviet tactics of "managed democracy." My goals were to understand how the different local political contexts these three cities presented 1) affected why women resisted state efforts to coerce them into supporting Yanukovich and instead chose to participate in the Orange Revolution and 2) shaped their engagement in the elections and protests. In each city I conducted three focus groups; each was recruited through one of three different types of organization: Yushchenko's election campaign headquarters, local women's organizations, and protest groups like *Pora*.

I asked the following main questions:

- How and why did members of the focus group participate in the 2004 elections?
- How and why did they participate in the Orange Revolution?
- How did they become involved in working as observers or election commission members?
- Why did they support Yushchenko and not Yanukovich?
- How do women and men differ in their political interests?
- What role did Yulia Tymoshenko play in the Orange Revolution? Does she represent "women's interests"?
- How might women become more politically involved and influential?
- How did ethnicity and region affect attitudes toward 2004 elections and subsequent protests?

In addition to focus groups, I also conducted 15 interviews with leading women's rights advocates. These interviews focused on the elections and the Orange Revolution. More broadly they examined the role women are playing in President Yushchenko's administration. I interviewed women who had been politically active and who had participated in various projects to encourage women to enter politics and influence policy making. These women included the founder and head of a women's crisis center, an oblast city deputy, six leaders of a coalition of women's NGOs and women leaders, the head of the Ukrainian Women's Fund, the director of the UNDP Gender Unit director and founder of an organization that promotes women's participation, numerous local leaders of foreign funded women's leadership empowerment projects, the heads of three different gender studies centers based in Kyiv, the head of a local soldiers' mothers' organization, the founder of a businesswomen's group, heads of several youth groups concerned with gender equality, and leaders of several traditional women's organizations allied with Our Ukraine. Topics explored included the impact of local political environments on how women understood their political interests, how they participated in the elections and protests, and why they supported Yushchenko or Yanukovich.

Summary of Research Findings and Preliminary Conclusions

Women who participated actively in the political events leading to the Orange Revolution tended to live in Western Ukraine or Kyiv. They became active in the elections and protests primarily through friends, family and informal channels. Most had voted in past elections but were involved in other facets of electoral politics such as distributing campaign literature or staffing polling stations for the first time.

Their primary reason for becoming involved in the 2004 elections was that they felt that for the first time, they had a real choice in who would be the leader of their country. A further important reason for participating was the heightened level of surveillance and repression they and their families and

friends experienced during summer and fall 2004. Participants in my focus groups typically supported Yushchenko because they believed him to be honest, Western-oriented, patriotic and professional. They opposed Yanukovich mainly because they perceived him to be a corrupt politician and a violent criminal. Numerous women in focus groups noted that they did not want a rapist to be their president.

Women who participated in the 2004 elections and the Orange Revolution believed that they would in the future remain involved in social and political reform. Overall, participation in the elections and the Orange Revolution enhanced confidence not only in individual political efficacy but also collective efficacy or trust in fellow citizens. Few women who participated in the Orange Revolution expected to remain continuously active in formal politics. However, those who participated experienced a sense of political empowerment that changed them as citizens and increased their likelihood of responding to future government injustice with mass protest. As one young woman commented, “politics used to be something that happened far away.” But now she and others who participated in the Orange Revolution knew that politics was something in which they and other ordinary people with no connections to local elites could participate. They expressed confidence that they as voters (rather than local elites) should determine the results of elections. They were proud to have played crucial roles in the success of the events that culminated in Yushchenko’s election.

Suggestions for Future Research

To understand ongoing obstacles to reform future research should examine the role gender plays in the many new political parties that have proliferated in Ukraine since electoral competition was legalized in the early 1990s. These include several women’s parties as well as “women’s wings” of political parties. Parties devoted to women as well as other special interests have remained weak and have proven easy to co-opt and manipulate. Future research should examine their role in reshaping political and social agendas in politics.

Research should also examine the influence of the tens of thousands of new civic groups that have formed in Ukraine around what are viewed as “women’s issues” since the late eighties. These include over a thousand women’s organizations and some two dozen women’s NGOs.

Recommendations for the US Policy Community

Patterns of women’s participation in, and understanding of, the Orange Revolution suggest that foreign advocates have played a relatively minor role in encouraging political participation among women outside a small elite of women’s rights experts who work closely with foreign programs and foundations.

Future foreign funding should encourage women reformers to run for office. Quite a few focus group participants noted that women should play a role in shaping elections and party platforms to incorporate social welfare issues. Before the Revolution, women were active in distributing campaign literature, they helped register voters and they ran local polling places. But they were largely excluded from positions of authority in political parties and in formal political organizations. With outside support and encouragement women could expand their role in public life still more. Foreign funders should take note that their job in Ukraine is not done. Women’s NGOs continue to provide services and goods that voters as well as protesters will need in the future.