

Chapter 2

Mapping Color Revolutions

Abstract This section presents a series of case studies of ‘Color Revolutions’. It outlines the most important features of the events and situates them within the political context. As a working definition, we refer to Color Revolutions as counter-elite-led, non-violent mass protests following fraudulent elections in Eurasian post-socialist countries in transition. Some have been successful, in the sense that they removed the existing state leadership (>successful cases); others failed to achieve that goal (>attempted cases). Thus, the label ‘success’ does not imply any characteristics of the resulting post-revolutionary government or achievements towards a consolidated political system. Eight cases will be discussed: Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan form the ‘successful’ group; Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Russia represent the ‘attempted’ cases of Color Revolutions.

Keywords Bulldozer revolution • Rose revolution • Orange revolution • Tulip revolutions • Maidan • Bolotnaya • Lukashenka • Putin • Elections

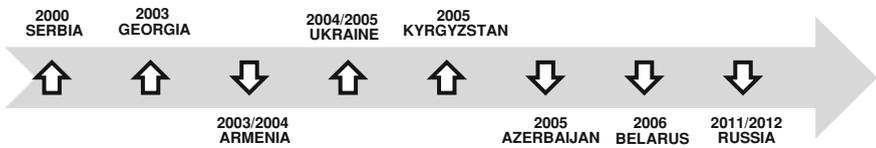


Fig. 2.1 Timeline of first-order and large-scale ‘color revolutions’. Source own illustration

2.1 Successful Cases

2.1.1 Serbia's Bulldozer Revolution (2000)

According to the mainstream body of literature, the uprising that occurred in Serbia following the presidential elections of autumn 2000 is the first case of a Color Revolution in Eurasia. In this respect, these events form the role model for subsequent Color Revolutions. Due to its unexpected success in ousting a long-term autocratic leader through creative, non-violent mass protests within only a few days, the actors involved managed to promote the Serbian model as a formula for success, which has subsequently served as a tool kit for political activists not only in the post-socialist space, but also during the so-called Arab Spring in the Middle East (Aneja 2011: 548) (Fig. 2.1).

On the eve of the events, Serbia suffered severe political and socioeconomic problems. Many can be considered consequences of bloody civil wars and ethnic conflicts that had accompanied the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). By the year 2000, five independent states existed within the territory of the former SFRY: Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) as a rump state of Montenegro and Serbia (including the autonomous provinces Vojvodina and Kosovo). FRY's situation was extremely tense because of the war in Kosovo—another attempt at secession, which had led to NATO's military engagement in 1999 and political and economic sanctions. Under the leadership of Slobodan Milošević, a former communist and extreme-nationalist who came into office in 1987, the country had not only lost territory and many lives, but also international reputation. Above all, the infrastructure and the state budget were close to collapse. An unemployment rate of almost 40 %, hyperinflation, and shortages of certain goods and basic services led to poverty and resentment (Nikolayenko 2009: 10).

In this context, early presidential elections in the FRY were announced for September 24, 2000. By only giving 8 weeks notice of the elections, the authorities allegedly aimed to prevent effective participation by the parties opposing Slobodan Milošević, the autocratic incumbent. The opposition had been divided for more than a decade, lacking unity out of programmatic and personal reasons—its leaders barely trusted each other. They eventually united to challenge Milošević, who had remained in power for more than a decade by changing constitutions and switching offices in the elections (Bunce and Wolchik 2011: 87). As a result, 18 parties formed a coalition called *Democratic Opposition of Serbia* (DOS). Their candidate for presidency was Vojislav Koštunica, a lawyer who had been dismissed from his position at Belgrade University because of his criticism of the communist leader Tito (Josip Broz) in 1974. In this critical vein, Koštunica was one of the founders of the *Democratic Party* in 1989, which he left in 1992 to found the *Democratic Party of Serbia*. He had served as a member of parliament from 1990 until 1997. His nomination was a clever move because he appeared 'untouchable', never having been associated with communism, Milošević's

regime, or the West. Politically, he stood for moderate nationalism and the re-integration of the FRY into the international arena. His campaign manager and most important ally was Zoran Đinđić, who also had been a dissident in the 1970s. Facing trial, Đinđić had emigrated to West Germany, where he completed a PhD in philosophy at the University of Konstanz. Upon his return, he was involved in founding the *Democratic Party*, became a member of parliament for 7 years and the mayor of Belgrade in 1996 (Krnjević-Mišković 2001: 97ff.).

Another crucial actor particularly ensuring mass mobilization for protests was the youth movement *Otpor (Resistance)*. Emerging from the student movement in Belgrade in the mid-1990s and trained in non-violent protest in ‘the West’, it had developed a large non-hierarchical network of activists both in the capital and throughout the regions. During the presidential election campaign, *Otpor* cooperated with civil society groups and NGOs, and supported the parliamentary opposition by mobilizing people, especially the young, to vote. *Otpor* employed creative and simple campaigning with the slogans “*He is done!*” (referring to Milošević) “*It is time!*” (referring to political change), and a new pop-culture of resistance and street protest (Nikolayenko 2009: 14).

Despite being virtually banned from TV and radio campaigning in the run-up to the election, out of the five presidential candidates, Koštunica was leading the polls. People in Montenegro and Kosovo by the majority boycotted the election. This is why the upcoming events have been associated with Serbia, and not with the FRY. The following day, both Milošević and DOS claimed victory. In the political turmoil, the *Federal Election Commission* called for a second ballot, arguing that neither candidate had won an outright majority. In protest, the opposition called for a general strike and a boycott of the second ballot. From September 27, large-scale protests started in Belgrade and other cities, putting pressure on Milošević. In particular, the general strike involved miners at the Kalubara mine that supplied Serbia’s most important electric power plant. On October 3, police attacked the miners. Spreading the news, the labor unions mobilized citizens to support the miners and to successfully break the police lines. Under pressure, the *Supreme Court* annulled the elections on October 4, calling a re-run for July 2001. By then, thousands of people from all over the country had attended anti-Milošević rallies in Belgrade, and the opposition had set a deadline of October 5 for Milošević to give up power. Approximately half a million people (10 % of the country’s population) gathered in front of government buildings and state media *Radio Television of Serbia* (RTS), eventually storming and occupying them on the evening of October 5. Velimir Ilić (the then mayor of Čačak) arrived at the protests in a bulldozer, and Ljubisav Đokić, an unemployed bulldozer operator, used his vehicle to storm the RTS building. These events (whether accurate or not) represent the turning point of the protests, and are eponymous: the events in Serbia are called the ‘Bulldozer Revolution’. Neither police nor security forces opposed the demonstrators. Once in control of the political infrastructure, Koštunica addressed the public from the balcony of Belgrade City Hall. On October 6, Milošević recognized Koštunica’s victory in the elections and resigned the following day. Koštunica served as president from 2000 until 2003 (Bunce and Wolchik 2011: 105–112).

Parliamentary elections held on December 23, 2000, granted DOS a landslide victory of more than two-thirds of the votes. Đinđić became prime minister, serving until his assassination in 2003. The main challenges for the Koštunica/Đinđić duo were to keep the DOS coalition together, whose links had been key to winning the elections against Milošević. After this achievement, political differences became obvious. One of the main issues was how to deal with the political past, mainly with Milošević and his entourage, and their involvement in war crimes. Another issue was the future of the FRY, particularly the status of Kosovo and whether the FRY should prospectively follow European integration. In April 2001, Milošević was arrested and initially brought to trial in Belgrade for corruption, abuse of power, and embezzlement, but was released because of 'lack of evidence'. In 2002, he was charged with war crimes at the *International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia* in The Hague, where he was subsequently found dead in his cell in 2006. After the peaceful dissolution of the FRY into Serbia and Montenegro in 2006, Kosovo became independent by the efforts of the international community (Ahtisaari Plan) in 2008, opposed by Serbia. Despite this issue, the European Union opened accession negotiations with Serbia, starting in 2014.¹

2.1.2 Georgia's Rose Revolution (2003)

The uprising in Georgia in November 2003 marks the first Color Revolution in the post-Soviet space. The plot leading to the events reflects similarities to Serbia. After independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, separatist movements in the Georgian regions South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and to a certain extent, Adjara, challenged Georgia's territorial integrity. The country suffered from bloody civil wars and ethnic conflict in which the Russian Federation played a crucial role supporting the breakaway regions. Russia has been considering Georgia of great geopolitical relevance and worth influencing, particularly because of its potential to establish a corridor for pipelines from Baku/Azerbaijan to Ceyhan/Turkey, bypassing the Russian monopoly on gas and oil (Companjen 2010: 17).

After the end of the civil war in 1993, Georgia mourned the loss of many lives and the displacement of approximately 250,000 people. Russian and *Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe* (OSCE) troops were based on Georgian territory. However, Eduard Shevardnadze (first secretary of the Georgian Communist Party from 1972 until 1985, minister for foreign affairs under Mikhail Gorbachev, and Georgian president since 1992) managed to stabilize the country by balancing complex domestic and international coalitions and made Georgia join

¹ For the progress of Serbia's EU accession and membership status, see the information on the website of the European Commission, http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/countries/detailed-country-information/serbia/index_en.htm.

international organizations like the UN, IMF, and the *Council of Europe*. The price of his backroom deal policy was admittedly a state prone to informal and criminal networks, corruption, and powerful non-transparent informal institutions. As a consequence, the state failed to provide basic services like water and electricity, and to achieve economic development. The turn of the millennium was marked by stagnation, declining investment, growing poverty and corruption (Shevardnadze's allies and family controlled up to 70 % of the economy) (Bunce and Wolchik 2011: 153).

The situation had become politically tense since 2000, when Shevardnadze first lost international and then domestic support. His party, the *Citizens' Union of Georgia* (CUG), started to disintegrate. To stop the process, he resigned as its head. In 2001, student-led mass protests criticizing the prevalent electricity blackouts in the country and the planned closure of the state-independent radio and TV station *Rustavi 2* had brought the people to the streets. In this context, civil society groups were formed, some of which were trained and funded by Western organizations, and a generation of young politicians realized a window of opportunity for political change (Bunce and Wolchik 2011: 156f.).

In parliamentary elections on November 2, 2003, Shevardnadze and his party *For a New Georgia*, which had made a deal with the *Revival Party* of Adjarian leader Aslan Abazhidze, were challenged by politicians who had formerly served in key positions. The opposition party *United National Movement* (UNM) was led by Mikhail Saakashvili, a man in his mid-30s who had trained as a human rights lawyer in Kiev, New York, and Strasbourg. Saakashvili had become a member of parliament in 1995, and had worked on reforming the electoral and judicial systems as well as the police—two state institutions pervaded by in-transparency and corruption. In 2000, he was appointed minister of justice but left this post after only a few months, claiming that corruption would not allow him to fulfill his duties properly. A few months later, he founded UNM. Following success in local elections, he became mayor of Tbilisi in 2002. In contrast to Shevardnadze, Saakashvili went for an American style parliamentary election campaign, focusing on the fight against corruption, expressing pro-Western and anti-Russian statements. His main allies in the protests after the elections had been rivals in the late 1980s for the Georgian Greens, and served as general secretary of Shevardnadze's *Union of Citizens of Georgia* party in the 1990s. Once in parliament, he became the parliament's chair from 1995 until 2001 when he resigned in protest against corruption, going on to found his own party, *United Democrats*. He was succeeded as the parliament's chair by Nino Burjanadze, a Tbilisi- and Moscow-trained lawyer and the daughter of a successful Georgian businessman. She had become a member of parliament in 1995, chairing committees for constitutional law and international relations. She later formed the party *Burjanadze Democrats* to contest the 2003 elections (Companjen 2010: 18).

Following the elections, the opposition parties united only in response to protests led by Saakashvili and supported by various civil society groups and the students' organization *Kmara* (*Enough*), which had been in close exchange with

Serbia's *Otpor*. The trigger for mass-demonstrations was the announcement of Shevardnadze's victory by the *Central Elections Committee* (CEC) even before the votes were properly counted. Pre-election polls had predicted Saakashvili's party to win. International election monitoring organizations, the American Embassy, and *Rustavi 2* reported on irregularities, particularly the use of fake voter lists. The first mass rally took place on November 4, involving a few thousand participants. A public dispute began between Shevardnadze and the opposition, backed by Georgian and Adjarian state TV and *Rustavi 2*. Burjanadze stated she would not serve in the parliament because of fraudulent elections. Shevardnadze criticized external meddling in internal Georgian affairs, particularly the funding of the opposition. Domestic as well as external mediation with the Russian President Vladimir Putin failed, as did an ultimatum presented to Shevardnadze by the opposition. After the CEC announced the victory of the Shevardnadze–Abashidze coalition on November 20, the number of protesters rose to more than 100,000 (considering the country's population of approximately 4,600,000 and Tbilisi's population of 1,500,000, a large-scale rally). The state's response was to bring in buses filled with their supporters from Adjara. The rallies remained peaceful (Horvath 2010: 10f.). This is expressed by the name 'Rose Revolution', which refers to protesters giving roses to police and security forces, thereby demonstrating the will for non-violent demonstrations.

The inauguration of the parliament was planned for November 22, 2003. When Shevardnadze was about to open the session, Saakashvili and his supporters, accompanied by CNN cameras, stormed the building. Shevardnadze wanted to continue, but was evacuated from the building by his bodyguards while the crowd took over. After negotiations with the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, and his foreign minister Igor Ivanov, Shevardnadze resigned and left for Moscow. Due to constitutional limitations on terms of office, he was scheduled to leave the presidency in a matter of months, anyway. Burjanadze became interim president according to the constitution. Presidential elections were held on January 4, 2004; Saakashvili won with 96 % of the votes and served until 2013. Zhvania became prime minister, until his death under questionable circumstances in 2005.² Burjanadze remained in her position as speaker of parliament (Companjen 2010: 24, 25).

Saakashvili took the fight against corruption seriously, and put huge effort into reforming the state apparatus and the police. By significantly raising wages, he eventually managed to push back corruption. After a smaller uprising in Adjara that resulted in the ousting of Abadshidze, Adjara came back under Tbilisi's control (Horvath 2012: 17–20). Tensions with Russia, mostly over the status of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, increased and culminated in the *Five-Days* or *Russian–Georgian War* of 2008. After signing a ceasefire agreement, Russian

² Zurab Zhvania was found dead (along with Raul Usupov, a young regional leader), in a rented Tbilisi apartment on February 3, 2005. The official cause of the deaths was carbon-monoxide poisoning from a faulty gas heater, which has been widely disputed and is currently (spring 2014) under investigation, s. <http://en.ria.ru/world/20140116/186593017/Body-of-Former-Georgian-PM-to-be-Exhumed-in-New-Death-Inquiry.html>.

troops have remained in the regions on the basis of bilateral agreements. Georgia de facto lost territory and Saakashvili international reputation after independent reports revealed that Georgia had attacked first without respecting international law.³ Domestically, Saakashvili demonstrably began suppressing the opposition, particularly Russophiles (Berglund 2013: 788ff.). His party lost the parliamentary elections of 2012, and Saakashvili left his presidency in 2013 as a ‘fallen hero’.⁴

2.1.3 Ukraine’s Orange Revolution (2004/2005)

Ukraine seems to be an exception when it comes to the preconditions for the Color Revolutions. Prior to the events of 2004/2005, the country had not faced violent conflict or secession, though it is deeply divided along cultural lines. While western Ukraine had historically been part of Austria–Hungary and Poland–Lithuania, the east and south were part of the Russian Empire. This influenced the dominant languages and religions: Ukrainian, Catholicism, Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodoxy and Ukrainian Orthodoxy of the Kievan Patriarchate, versus Russian and Ukrainian Orthodoxy of the Moscow Patriarchate, respectively. Agriculture is typical for the west, whereas the east commands heavy industries and mining. Identity patterns differ significantly: west towards Europe and east towards Russia. However, the division had not led to serious moves towards secession on the eve of the Orange Revolution.⁵

In contrast to Serbia and Georgia, Ukraine experienced increased prosperity since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The introduction of economic reforms in the country led to a significant increase in GDP between 2000 and 2004. The distribution of wealth did not reach everybody, of course, but many Ukrainians

³ The report was ordered by the Council of the European Union. Ambassador Heidi Tagliavini served as head of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia (IIFFMCG—CEIG). The final report can be downloaded, <http://www.ceig.ch>.

⁴ For the latest developments in Georgian politics and prosecutions (including on the death of former prime minister Zurab Zhvania, starting with Saakashvili leaving office, see an analysis in *The Economist*, <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21588949-georgia-elects-new-less-powerful-president-end-saakashvilis-reign> and in *Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty*, <http://www.rferl.org/content/georgia-ivanishvili-zhvania-death-saakashvili-charges/25144205.html>.

⁵ Political violence and secession of southern and eastern regions have become severe issues undermining Ukraine’s territorial integrity following mass protests in Kiev and other Ukrainian cities in 2013/2014. The initial trigger of the demonstrations was President Viktor Yanukovich’s refusal to sign an association agreement with the European Union, in order not to harm the economic integration in the framework of the Russia-led Customs Union. However, the initially pro-European demonstrations unfolded dynamics that fueled tensions between inner-Ukrainian identities, and between a newly installed government in Kiev and ‘western’ supporters, and emerging Ukrainian separatists and Moscow. It eventually led to the secession of Crimea and Sevastopol, and their incorporation or annexation into the Russian Federation in March 2014. Further regions, particularly in the east of the country, seek for independence from Kiev, and allegedly, some of them for integration into the Russian Federation.

became better off after the turn of the millennium (Copsey 2010: 40). Despite reasonably good economic performance, the political situation was tense, as a consequence of the internal divide and the political system that had been established under Leonid Kuchma. Kuchma had ruled the country since 1994. He was a former member of the Communist Party and had held leading positions in the Ukrainian SSR, but been a critic in the last years of the Soviet Union. Independent Ukraine had politically been captured (state capture) under Kuchma by so-called oligarchs—businessmen who had become extremely wealthy under questionable circumstances during the period of privatization in the early 1990s. Many of them became members of parliament, thereby gaining influence and legal immunity. Kuchma had managed to control the oligarchs to a certain degree. Yet the influence of informal networks and the interference of business in politics led to strong criticism of kleptocracy and bribery. However, the ‘red line’ was crossed when secretly recorded tapes revealed Kuchma’s involvement in the murder of the independent journalist Georgiy Gongadze in 2000 (*‘Kuchmagate’*) (Bunce and Wolchik 2011: 119).

Kuchma did not participate in the 2004 presidential elections, because of the two-term presidential limit set by the Ukrainian constitution. Nevertheless, he publicly supported the candidacy of Viktor Yanukovich, leader of the *Party of the Regions*, who had served as regional governor of Donetsk from 1997 until 2002, and then as prime minister. Yanukovich was perceived as a pro-Russian candidate, caring for the eastern, industrial part of the country. Most controversial about him was his criminal past (prosecution inter alia for rape). The opposition to Kuchma had been divided for years. After Kuchma’s weakness became more obvious and he even harassed his own allies, a process of elite defection strengthened the opposition. In 2004, the opposition managed to establish a coalition for the elections, called *Power to the People*. Its leader and presidential candidate was Viktor Yushchenko, an expert in finances who had been head of the *National Bank* from 1993 and prime minister from 1999 until Kuchma dismissed him in 2001. He and his party, *Our Ukraine*, were perceived as moderate and rather oriented towards ‘the West’. More radical and controversial was his key ally, Yulia Tymoshenko and her *Bloc Yulia Tymoshenko*. Tymoshenko had been involved in the gas business in Ukraine’s east. In 1996, she became a member of parliament, and deputy prime minister for fuel and energy from 1999 until 2001.

Election polls forecasted Yanukovich and Yushchenko to lead the first ballot, which fueled their campaigns. Yushchenko led an American-style campaign close to the people and in cooperation with civic groups, while Yanukovich relied on TV campaigning that promoted him and discredited his main rival through negative campaigning. During the campaign, Yushchenko was poisoned with dioxin (the perpetrators remain still unknown). He survived, but is left with visible scarring. External actors were quite clear about supporting Yushchenko. Western NGOs and foundations trained civil groups to participate in the campaign and organize rallies. Russia supported Yanukovich. Vladimir Putin arrived on a state visit, spending several days publicly backing Yanukovich and giving interviews to

Ukrainian state television (Horvath 2012: 22ff.). Kremlin political technologists took over Yanukovych's campaign (Copsey 2010: 36). For Russia, Ukraine had enormous strategic importance, as it was close to a decision on joining the *Single Economic Space*, a supranational organization creating a common market between several former Soviet republics (Horvath 2012: 22f.).

The preliminary presidential ballot involving 26 candidates was held on October 31, 2004. Yanukovych and Yushchenko received very similar support, approximately 41 % each. The second ballot on November 21 triggered mass protests when the *Central Election Commission* declared Yanukovych to be the winner on November 22. The official results were published 2 days later, giving Yanukovych 49.46 % and Yushchenko 46.61 %. After a formal appeal by the opposition, the *Supreme Court* suspended the publication of the results while examining the case. Meanwhile, the protests had brought 1,000,000 people at its peak from all over the country to *Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square)* in the center of Kiev. There, 'orange' (supporters of Yushchenko) and 'blue' (supporters of Yanukovych) camps lined the streets. The youth network *Pora (It's Time)* had not only been one of the key actors for mobilization but also constructed a tent city to host and feed the protesters from outside the capital (Nikolayenko 2009: 18ff.). Kiev was in a non-violent state of emergency.

Yanukovych and Yushchenko held talks without results, and eastern regions threatened to secede if Yushchenko was declared president. On November 30, Kuchma publicly demanded a rerun of the elections; and on December 3, the *Supreme Court* decided the rerun would be held on December 26. In this ballot, Yushchenko won with 55 %, Yanukovych received 44 % claiming electoral fraud. The *Supreme Court* rejected his appeal on January 20, 2005, and Yushchenko was inaugurated on January 23, 2005. The *Orange Revolution*, mass protests that persisted for more than a month with probably more than 1.5 million participants at their peak, had succeeded.

Expectations were high when the new government took office with Yushchenko as president and Tymoshenko as prime minister. However, the Orange Coalition split shortly after, due to personal and political rivalries. The consequence has been several parliamentary elections ahead of schedule, and government coalitions that broke down. Parliament, prime minister, president, supreme court—the political actors neutralized each other by changing coalitions, resulting in a political blockade and perpetual instability for more than five years, until Yanukovych was elected president in 2010. Yushchenko was relegated to insignificance; Tymoshenko was charged with abuse of office and imprisoned in 2011 (released after a change in government in Kiev in February 2014).

Only recently, from November 2013, *Maidan* has again become the arena for large-scale demonstrations against Yanukovych, fueled by his refusal to sign an agreement on Ukraine's association with the EU. In a long chain of events, they led to Yanukovych's escape to Russia and the installation of a new, western-oriented government in Kiev. In contrast to 2004/2005, the protests have turned violent and spread throughout the country; they are no longer solely about the EU

but reveal the country's internal cleavages, culminating in the secession of Crimea and Sevastopol and their de facto annexation by the Russian Federation, and similar tendencies and violence in regions in the east.⁶

2.1.4 Kyrgyzstan's Tulip Revolution (2005)

The uprising in Kyrgyzstan following the fraudulent parliamentary elections in 2005 stunned Western observers, because the mountainous Central Asian republic was perceived as a relatively stable 'island of democracy' surrounded by authoritarian neighbors (Radnitz 2010: 303). The mainstream body of literature refers to the events in spring 2005 as one in the series of Color Revolutions. Although there are striking similarities with the events in Georgia and Ukraine, there are also fundamental differences. This section addresses both perspectives.

Similarly to Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan is a divided country, between north and south. The cleavage is quite complex, involving economics, ethnicity, kinship, and regional affiliation. The north, including the capital of Bishkek has, to a large extent, broken with nomadic tradition. It has become more industrialized, and is ethnically dominated by Kyrgyzs, Kazakhs, and Russians. The south had traditionally been sedentary and is rather agriculturally oriented, dominated by Kyrgyzs, Uzbeks, and Tajiks. Politically, the south has been more problematic; it is poorer and has faced ethnic and religious clashes in the Fergana Valley, mainly between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks. Despite economic and ethnic divisions, tribal and clan traditions in combination with spatial identities have remained strong in Kyrgyzstan. Tensions between north and south date back at least to Soviet times, culminating in the struggle for political control of the capital (Lewis 2010: 45f.).

In contrast to most former Soviet republics, after gaining its independence, Kyrgyzstan has been ruled neither by former Communist elites nor by nationalists. Askar Akaev, who came to power in 1990 as president of the Kyrgyz SSR, made his career in science (physics) and was president of the *Kyrgyz Academy of Science* before entering politics during the period of Perestroika. He started as both a political and economic reformer. By the mid-1990s, Kyrgyzstan had undergone market reforms and was considered to guarantee liberal freedoms, including supporting the establishment of political parties and civil society (Radnitz 2010: 304). Akaev benefited from promoting himself as a liberal, which was appreciated by Western organizations and states, granting Kyrgyzstan international integration into the WTO and financial support. The downside was relatively strong Western influence through foundations, NGOs, and education (such as the *American University* in Bishkek); and, after the events of September 11, an American military airbase at *Manas* airport. Similarly to Shevardnadze, by attempting to balancing

⁶ For an overview on the events until the end of April 2014, see coverage by *BBC*: The Ukraine crisis timeline, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26248275>.

ties with both Russia and the West, Akaev became vulnerable. From the mid-1990s, he came under domestic pressure because of economic slowdown, ethnic conflict in the south, over-representation of ‘northerners’ in leading positions; and conflict with the Communists, and one leading northerner, Minister of the Interior Felix Kulov, a former policeman who was dismissed and later jailed. Akaev’s response to the struggle was to concentrate power in the presidency, suppress the third sector, ban rivals from running in elections, and to jail opposition leaders. On top of this, his allies and family gained economic and political influence, and corruption spread (Bunce and Wolchik 2011: 170). Akaev’s announcement that he would leave office after his term finished in mid-2005, and the assumption that his son and daughter would then step in, boosted elite defection (Lewis 2010: 49).

The first ballot of the parliamentary elections was held on February 27, 2005, with more than 27,000 candidates for 75 seats. This ballot was important for Akaev in order to keep his influence and legal immunity. The system of majority voting made a second ballot inevitable, which was planned for March 13. The newly introduced unicameral system based on personal votes was criticized because powerful clan leaders and businessmen feared losing their influence. Some of them even failed to register as candidates, which spread discontent and in some cases led to regional protests ahead of the elections (Lewis 2010: 53). Akaev and the party *Forward Kyrgyzstan*, only recently established by his daughter, competed against a number of parties and individuals, of which the coalition *People’s Movement of Kyrgyzstan*, under the leadership of Roza Otunbaeva and Kurmanbek Bakiev, was the strongest but remained a highly fractious opponent without clear political visions. Otunbaeva completed a doctoral degree in philosophy from *Moscow State University* and had served as a diplomat for the Soviet Union and subsequently for Kyrgyzstan for many years, in addition to international missions for UNESCO and the UN. Bakiev trained as an engineer, and began his political career with Kok-Yangak town council before becoming governor of Jalalabad and Issyk-Kul and then prime minister, in 2001. He was forced to resign after the so-called ‘Aksy Crisis’, a political upheaval that caused the death of six unarmed demonstrators following the prosecution of a parliamentarian from the southern town of Aksy (Lewis 2010: 47f.).

According to international observers, the elections were the most competitive in the country’s history, but still failed to meet international standards. The protests in Kyrgyzstan did not originate in the capital but in various places in the south. The link between all the protests was that the local leaders had underperformed or lost their seat in parliament. The first large-scale rally took place in the town of Jalalabad in the south, bordering Uzbekistan, where protestors—mainly middle-aged and older people—stormed the regional administration building on March 4, 2005, and later blocked main roads. The upheaval turned violent involving deaths (numbers remain unknown), and spread to Osh and other southern towns. The protests were not led by civil society groups or by figureheads of the opposition political parties, but by leaders of powerful local networks, and were allegedly supported by the Bakiev family. Initially, there was no political program or intention to oust Akaev and his entourage—instead, the demonstrations were in

support of local and regional leaders (Bunce and Wolchik 2011: 173f.). However, oppositional leaders with broader influence over the country seized the opportunity after the second ballot, claiming electoral fraud. They traveled to the south to negotiate with the protesters and eventually, in mid-March, installed 'people's governors' in strategically important places like Jalalabad and Osh. This marked the red line for the regime, and military and security forces were ordered to regain control. However, the crowds reacted violently, bringing many southern towns under their control and installing even more people's governments. So far, the capital of Bishkek remained quiet, although regional leaders promoted their 'revolutionary idea' as a nationwide solution (Radnitz 2010: 306). The newly elected parliament held its opening session on March 22, 2005, led by Akaev. About one third of the members refused to swear the oath to the constitution as an expression of protest. March 23 saw the first and only mass rally in Bishkek. An estimated 15,000 (considering 900,000 inhabitants in the capital and an overall population of 5,200,000, a small crowd compared to other Color Revolutions) gathered to demand free and fair elections, democratic reform, and the end of nepotism. The event involved urban-led NGOs, the student organization *Kel-Kel (Renaissance)*, opposition leaders, and people from the south who were brought by buses. One day later, protesters stormed the *White House*, Akaev's residence, and seized the state TV station. Finally, they obtained the release of Felix Kulov, who immediately took over security. Akaev and his family fled via Uzbekistan to Moscow (Lewis 2010: 57ff.). The official resignation was submitted ten days later (Radnitz 2010: 308).

After the Tulip Revolution, which gained its name from the symbol of a pink tulip, a 'gentlemen's agreement' saw Kulov installed as prime minister. Bakiev was elected president with an outright majority of 89 % of the votes in July 2005, and re-elected in 2009. However, the tandem arrangement failed due to personal and political rivalry. Losing influence, Bakiev tried to consolidate his power; Kulov and other potential rivals were charged with creating public disorder in connection with protests against Bakiev in 2007. Kyrgyzstan returned to nepotism by Bakiev bringing three of his brothers and his son in relevant government positions (Juraev 2010: 2). At the same time, state capacity declined and the state was not able to provide basic services like energy supply (Radnitz 2010: 301). There is almost unanimous agreement among observers, that the aftermath of the events of 2005 represented a political setback for the country. Another successful yet bloody upheaval between April and June 2010 (an estimated number of 2,000 people were killed), again against Bakiev, indicates that the expectations of the Tulip Revolution were not met. When he eventually lost support from Moscow (allegedly linked to energy deals with China, bypassing Russia), Bakiev fled via Kazakhstan to Belarus. An interim government led by Roza Otunbaeva took over. The prosecution of Bakiev and members of his family in 2013 reveal the elite's involvement in corruption and crime.⁷

⁷ For information on the prosecution, see coverage by BBC, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-21424022>.

2.1.5 Comparison

In addition to their use of non-violent large-scale demonstrations, successful Color Revolutions share certain other characteristics that might have contributed to removing the existing leadership. In terms of preconditions, all of the countries display strong internal divisions along a continuum from cultural cleavages (Ukraine) via violent conflict (Kyrgyzstan) to bloody secessionist civil wars, and followed by foreign intervention (Georgia, Serbia). Their political systems also reflect striking similarities, particularly the prominent role of the president and, in the case of the post-Soviet countries, the emergence of strong informal networks around the president that derive from business, kin, or regional affiliations. Regional and business networks are crucial for Ukraine, whereas kin and regional affiliations matter most in Kyrgyzstan, and business and kin relations predominate in Georgia. Serbia is an exception in this respect: Military and security networks have played an important role in the country as legacies of the civil wars, but did not undermine the political process on a scale similar to other post-Soviet states, wherein informal networks strongly influence and paralyze the political sphere, particularly via corruption that undermines formal institutions and decision making.

Various factors contribute to two processes that erode the strength of the leadership: the growing weakness of the incumbent president, and the emergence of a competitive opposition. In Serbia and Georgia, the political performance of the president was perceived as being low in the period immediately prior to the uprising. Incumbent leaders could not provide basic services, and the economy was stagnating. In Ukraine, political scandals, culminating in ‘Kuchmagate,’ had undermined the accountability and legality of the ruling elite, including the incumbent’s successor. In Kyrgyzstan, local leaders and their supporters (regional and kin networks) were enraged by changes to the law, and by simultaneous constitutional amendments that aimed to guarantee the power of the incumbent president and to limit the influence of potential challengers. In all cases, the popularity of the incumbent had declined significantly on the eve of the events.

Elite defection occurred in all countries—allegedly in response to the growing weakness of the president. Former ministers and mayors split with the regime and formed counter-elites. In the elections (presidential: Serbia, Ukraine; parliamentary: Georgia, Kyrgyzstan), these ‘graduates’ who were already well-known due to their engagement in politics became the most competitive challengers to the incumbent regime. However, the degree of unity among the opposition varied significantly. Opposition interests in Serbia displayed the greatest unity, with 18 parties founding a coalition to support one electoral candidate. Both the unity and strength of the movement were improved by cooperation with civic and students groups, which enlisted large parts of the population. This enabled the opposition campaign to focus on ‘defeating the regime’ on various levels—parliamentary and non-parliamentary—and to mobilize citizens, both in terms of participating in the elections in support of the opposition and in subsequently demonstrating against

electoral fraud. The mobilizing capacity of the opposition seems to be crucial for success. Although a similar scope of oppositional organization and activities was evident in Ukraine, the 'Orange Coalition' has been fragile from the very beginning, due to internal disputes and rivalries among the 'orange elite'. In Georgia, the opposition united behind Saakashvili relatively late—only when he mobilized for protests after the elections. The Kyrgyz case differs significantly: The opposition was divided on a scale similar to Georgia, with a few strong leaders, but mass protests were not initially led by those leaders. Upheaval occurred in several provincial locations, initiated by local strongmen. Demonstrations only swept to the capital a few weeks later, where protesters eventually stormed federal government buildings. Counter-elite leaders then took over the situation.

All successful cases, except that of Kyrgyzstan, had an incumbent regime that was unable or unwilling to use coercive measures against the protesters. In Kyrgyzstan, protests turned violent when locals seized regional government buildings. It is not clearly documented to what extent protesters used force when storming buildings. However, government security forces were eventually sent to reclaim the buildings, which resulted in an unclear number of deaths. In Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine, opposition rallies were surprisingly peaceful, despite their large scale and the storming of government buildings. This is due to the promotion of non-violent protest strategies, and also the response of police and security forces, which remained calm and did not employ force to oppose the protestors. It is a matter of speculation whether there were informal agreements between the opposition and high-ranking security and police officials.

In all successful cases, ties to the West and pro-democracy assistance via endorsements, training and funding of the opposition, as well as international media coverage all played a crucial role (least so in Kyrgyzstan). Although it is claimed that the events would also have occurred without Western influence, they might have had a different scale, vigor, and outcome. Finally yet importantly, international ties and the strengthening of links to 'the West' have influenced election campaigns. The strongest turn towards the West was promoted by Saakashvili, accompanied by resentment of Russian influence. In Ukraine, the divisions and tensions within the country led Yushchenko to attempt a more moderate turn. In Serbia, Western cooperation or integration was less prominent on the agenda, and would have been unpopular because of previous NATO bombing and the then unclear status of Kosovo. For Kyrgyzstan, geographic remoteness and legacies limited links to the West.

Comparing the successful cases reveals not only similarities, but also important differences. The similarities are reflected in both structures and agency: a weakening incumbent, a strengthened opposition, and eroding state capacity. As for the differences, it seems necessary to reconsider whether the case of Kyrgyzstan belongs to the series of Color Revolutions. The protests that started in the regions and latterly spread to Bishkek were violent, and were not been led by the counter-elite that contested the elections. Comparing these events with regional demonstrations in the town of Andijan (Uzbekistan) may reveal more similarities. In May

2005, there were protests against the prosecution of local businessmen. There are reports that hundreds of deaths occurred when the protests were broken up by special forces (Megoran 2008: 15f.).

2.2 Attempted Cases

2.2.1 Armenia (2003/2004)

Contrary to other post-Soviet republics, Armenia has not lost but de-facto gained territory after the dissolution of the Soviet Union: following a bloody war, since 1994 Armenia has exercised control over Nagorno-Karabakh, a region within Azeri territory that is mostly inhabited by ethnic Armenians. As a consequence, relations with Azerbaijan have deteriorated. In addition, the relationship with Turkey has become problematic, fueled both by Turkey's support for Azerbaijan, and continued refusal to acknowledge the elimination of almost the entire Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire in 1915 as an act of genocide. The unresolved status of Nagorno-Karabakh (frozen conflict), the tensions with Turkey and Azerbaijan, and the politics of closed borders have promoted the perception of a security dilemma within Armenia. This has led to a strategic partnership with Russia. At the same time, Armenia established links to the West after the turn of the millennium by becoming a member of the *Council of Europe* in 2001 and involved in the *European Neighborhood Policy* in 2004 (Zolyan 2010: 85f.).

Compared to the cases analyzed previously, Armenia has a relatively strong tradition of mass protests from the late 1980s, first demanding reunion with Karabakh, and later, secession from the Soviet Union. The country has seen various mass protests over the years, many of them opposing the results of elections. As early as 1996, a crowd of several tens of thousands of protestors (led by former defense minister Vazgen Manukian in a challenge to President Levon Ter-Petrosian) demanded a rerun of the elections. However, all oppositional mass protests in Armenia after 1991 have failed to achieve their demands.⁸ This is also true of the protests following fraudulent presidential elections on 19 February and 5 March, 2003, involving incumbent Robert Kocharian (former president of Nagorno-Karabakh and prime minister of Armenia) and challenger Stepan Demirchian (politically inexperienced son of Karen Demirchian: former Armenian Communist leader and head of the *National Assembly*, who was assassinated in 1999), both of whom have a background in electric engineering.

⁸ The resignation of President Ter-Petrosian in favor of his successor Robert Kocharian was due to pressure from the elite circle around him, not from an external counter-elite or mass protests on the streets (Zolyan 2010: 89).

Due to Armenia's recent economic success (it has the highest rate of GDP growth from all former Soviet republics, though not well distributed among the population), Kocharian's initial position seemed to be promising. He also effectively controlled the state apparatus and the elite circle around him, after his political rivals were killed in a dubious attack on the parliament in 1999. In addition, most of the country's media and business community were controlled by Kocharian, his family, and informal networks, many of them related to Nagorno-Karabakh. The opposition, in contrast, was not united behind one candidate. Nine parties had formed the coalition *Justice Block* supporting Demirchian, but seven other parties promoted their own candidates in a relatively quiet and hardly programmatic campaign. After the first round, some parties eventually backed Demirchian, the most promising (but still uncharismatic) oppositional candidate. In contrast, Artashes Geghamian, his strongest rival within the opposition, called for a boycott of the second ballot (Zolyan 2010: 91).

The civic sector in Armenia has been strong in numbers but not in advocacy. During the 2003 election campaign, NGOs launched monitoring and education campaigns (using the slogans "*Stand by your vote*" and "*Defend your vote*") which, however, did not have measurable effects. International monitors doubted that the elections reflected international standards. The opposition was even divided on action in this respect: Demirchian challenged the results of the second ballot in front of the *Constitutional Court*, whereas Geghamian demanded the first ballot should be annulled. The Court annulled the results from 40 polling stations but did not order a rerun. Instead, Kocharian was asked to hold a 'referendum of confidence' within a period of one year (Bunce/Wolchik 2011: 194).

Electoral fraud was allegedly repeated in the parliamentary elections in May 2003. When the news from the Rose Revolution in Georgia spread to Armenia, Demirchian and Geghamian finally started to collaborate in spring 2004, demanding the conduction of the 'referendum of confidence'. Activists tried to adopt Georgian strategies by organizing rallies, but barbed wire and special police units using force managed to stop the crowd of up to 6,000 protesters (which is rather small, considering the metropolitan area of the capital with a population of 1,200,000). Later, oppositional groups and media were raided, activists and journalists detained. However, the referendum was never conducted, despite domestic protest (Zolyan 2010: 94). Kocharian, who received congratulations on his electoral victory from Vladimir Putin, stayed in office as president until his term legally expired in 2008. Large-scale protests occurred again in 2008 around the presidential elections, which brought Serzh Sarkisian to power—and this time they turned violent. Clashes with special forces caused the deaths of a dozen of protesters (Bunce/Wolchik 2011: 196). Similar scenarios repeated after Sarkisian's victory in presidential elections 2013.⁹

⁹ For information on the events, see coverage by *Reuters*, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/02/20/us-armenia-protest-idUSBRE91J0XM20130220>.

2.2.2 Azerbaijan (2005)

After Georgia and Armenia, the last Caucasian post-socialist country, Azerbaijan, experienced mass protests following fraudulent elections in 2005. Azerbaijan's post-Soviet political history has been shaped by three factors: the war with Armenia over the Nagorno-Karabakh region (see the case-study on Armenia) and its consequences, including refugees and internally displaced people; the enormous wealth of natural resources, particularly gas, controlled by the state ('petro-state'); and the leadership of the Aliev family since 1993. In 2005, Heidar Aliev, a former communist leader, regained power, ending a short period of political and economic reform (Alieva 2006: 148). All power was transferred to his son, Ilham Aliev, who first became the acting president and was then elected president in October 2003 (shortly before his father died). This 'hereditary super-presidency' marks an exception in the post-Soviet space. Ilham Aliev trained as a historian at the *Moscow State Institute for International Relations* (MGIMO), where formerly future Soviet diplomats had been educated. For several years after his education, Aliev also taught at MGIMO. The Aliev family fostered informal patronage networks, based on both family and regional affiliations connected to the Nakhichevan region and territories in Armenia. By the turn of the millennium, this network commanded virtually the entire media and the economy of Azerbaijan, which in 2003 was reliant on natural gas for about 90 % of the country's export revenues (Bunce/Wolchik 2011: 179). Politically, the Aliev family was also supported by the *New Azerbaijan Party* (YAP), led first by Heidar and later Ilham Aliev.

Azerbaijan experienced violence during protests around the presidential elections in 2003, when security forces and demonstrators clashed. At that time, the opposition failed to coalesce around one candidate. For the parliamentary elections on November 6, 2005, opposition leaders formed coalitions to compete with YAP. Isa Gambar, a challenger to Aliev in 2003, led the *Freedom Coalition* (*Azadlig*), comprising the two strongest opposition parties: *Equality* (*Musavat*) and the *Azerbaijan Popular Front Party*. This was considered the most competitive alliance. Another coalition comprised the *New Policy Bloc* under the former Prime Minister Ali Masimov; third was the *Liberal Party*. The regime used various methods similar to those in Georgia and Ukraine to prevent events: Media restrictions limited the scope of opposition campaigns, as did the lack of funding (Alieva 2006: 150). Holding meetings in the capital was almost impossible, due to strict laws on public assembly that were turned against the opposition. Nevertheless, the opposition brought several thousand demonstrators onto the streets before the May 2005 elections. However, police and security used massive force against protesters in Baku (Bunce/Wolchik 2011: 183f.). Prominent opposition figures faced prosecution, such as the youth activist Ruslan Basirli who was imprisoned prior to the elections in August 2005 (Mitchell 2012: 149). A well-known journalist, Elmar Huseynov, was killed under unclear circumstances in March 2005, but this did not trigger large-scale collective action (Cheterian 2010: 108). When domestic election monitoring organizations claimed electoral fraud,

the opposition organized rallies. However, despite involving civic groups and youth movements, and applying strategies that had been successful in Georgia and Ukraine, the protests failed to mobilize large crowds, and only approximately 15,000 people gathered out of a population of approximately 2,100,000 in the capital and 9,500,000 in the country (Cheterian 2010: 107).

Compared to other Color Revolutions, external actors were less involved. Opposition activists exchanged information with ‘graduates’ of successful Color Revolutions. Western organizations trained civic and election monitoring groups and provided some funding for the elections and international election monitoring, and Western politicians spoke in support of free and fair elections (Bunce/Wolchik 2011: 188). Russia’s position in supporting Aliev was unquestionable, yet relatively quiet. However, similar protests and regime reactions occurred again around the presidential elections in October 2013, when Aliev ran for the third term and (according to the official results) won an outright majority. Despite public demands for change, the leadership of Ilham Aliev has successfully resisted political liberalization.¹⁰

2.2.3 *Belarus (2006)*

Belarus has recently been given two inglorious titles—the ‘last dictatorship in Europe’ and the ‘hotspot of Soviet nostalgia’. While most former Soviet republics developed hybrid regimes in the gray zone between democracy and authoritarianism, Belarus can be considered an ideal type of the latter, concentrating all political power around the central political actor, the so-called ‘president’. Also, unlike in other CIS member states, the regime did not promote a search for national identity; instead, the state-led national discourse was dominated by Soviet symbols, Russian language, and the narrative of ‘the stab in the back’ represented by the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In practice, 80 % of the economy is not only controlled by the state but also state-owned, which contributes to social cohesion by both creating job-dependency through short-term contracts and keeping the level of inequality fairly low. However, the scope of the regime reaches not only the economic sphere but extends to all levels of public life (Silitski 2005: 85ff.).

In contrast to all the other cases presented in this book, Belarus has not faced secession or violent conflict, and there are no major cleavages that undermine societal cohesion. In terms of international links, after previously having a balance between ‘East’ and ‘West’, the country has gradually become isolated from its European neighbors, despite all European efforts to at least cooperate, on bilateral levels particularly during the 1990s and later, within the framework of the

¹⁰ For information on the protests and political development, see coverage by *Reuters*, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/10/12/us-azerbaijan-election-protest-idUSBRE99B06Q20131012>.

European Neighborhood Policy. Belarus then opted for a close relationship with Russia and gradual economic integration by joining the *Single Economic Space* that came into effect in 2012. The relationship between Belarus and Russia has not been without tensions, however.

The incumbent president, Aliaksandr Lukashenka, first amended the constitution to allow him to run for office indefinitely; then, in the presidential elections of March 19, 2006, he faced for the first time a relatively unified opposition (although lacking a clear electoral manifesto) supporting two candidates, Aliaksandr Milinkevich and Aliaksandr Kazulin. Lukashenka trained as a teacher in history and economics, managed collective farms and enterprises, and started his political career as a member of parliament in the early 1990s. In 1993, he gained public attention and sympathy as the chairman of a parliamentary commission fighting corruption. This popularity helped him to beat the incumbent president Viacheslau Kebich in elections in 1994. In the first two years of his presidency, his focus was on consolidating power by establishing formal personal control over all key state institutions, inter alia by abolishing the autonomy of local and regional governments (Silitiski 2005: 85f.) and establishing a security apparatus able to infiltrate all levels of society (Way/Levitsky 2006: 406). His methods of dealing with opposition were extremely harsh and made extensive use of coercion, including blocking individuals' access to higher education and jobs, and the sudden disappearance, imprisonment, or even murder of critics (Markus 2010: 124ff.). In such a political climate, opposition is unlikely to be established. Nevertheless, public opinion polls suggest that Lukashenka remains popular. This is mainly because he is perceived as successfully fighting corruption and granting people a certain standard of living by relative economic success (Markus 2010: 131)—fostered by special deals with Russian energy providers at below-market rates.

Milinkevich trained as a physician and was a long-term academic. He had been chief-of-staff for an oppositional candidate in the 2001 elections and subsequently became the candidate for the *Congress of Democratic Forces*, a coalition of various oppositional and civic groups. Kazulin, former rector of the *Belorussian State University* in Minsk and leader of the *Social Democratic Party*, was initially suspected of being the regime's pseudo-candidate whose role would be to divert votes from Milinkevich; however, during and after the campaign, he turned out to be a harsh critic of Lukashenka. Both candidates tried their best to achieve media visibility for their campaigns within the limited opportunities of a state in which the media are controlled by the regime (Bunce/Wochik 2011: 202).

During the campaign, opposition candidates and activists faced severe repression, including detention. Protest had already started before the elections, but was hardly visible outside the capital. Inspired by Serbia's *Otpor*, the youth movement *Zubr* (which means *Bison*, the heraldic symbol that national groups use to represent Belarus) had launched a campaign using the slogans "*It's time to choose*" and "*It's time to clean up*". Unlike in Serbia, the campaign did not reach or mobilize the population. One reason was that the group only represented parts of the urban youth by not having members in the countryside; another is that the campaign was perceived as being funded from the outside and therefore 'alien'—stickers looked

too professional (Nikolayenko 2009: 25ff.). Large-scale protests with up to 20,000 participants (out of a capital population of roughly 2,000,000) started when Lukashenka was announced to have won the first ballot by more than 80 %. Opposition, civic groups and *Zubr* mobilized activists and managed to build up a tent city. This so-called ‘Jeans’ or ‘Denim’ Revolution was ended when police used force and simply removed tents and protesters. Many were jailed, among them Kazulin, who was sentenced to five years in prison (Markus 2010: 124ff.). *Zubr* decided to disband in May 2006. However, political protest did not stop in Belarus. It culminated again around the presidential elections of 2010, but was severely suppressed. In 2011, a series of civil disobedience protests using new non-violent strategies took place in Belarus, through actions such as groups of people spontaneously clapping in public, or remaining silent, etc., but without giving any indication of why they had gathered. These protests which have been organized using social media, have caught international attention but had hardly an effect on the regime in Belarus.¹¹

2.2.4 Russia (2011/2012)

No other regime was as well prepared as Russia to respond to a Color Revolution. Kremlin policy makers, so-called ‘political technologists’, had closely followed the events in former Soviet republics, particularly those in Ukraine, and had developed a broad set of measures to counteract any predicted challenge (Horvath 2013: 47ff.). However, the large-scale protests that occurred between December 2011 and June 2012 in Moscow and other major Russian cities, involving up to 120,000 protesters at the peak which represents an estimated 10 % of the capital’s population, virtually paralyzed political Russia for a few months.

Russia faced the two most important elections within a period of three months: parliamentary elections on December 4, 2011, and presidential elections on March 4, 2012. The situation before the elections was unusually tense. Many Russian citizens were outraged about Vladimir Putin’s comeback strategy, which was announced at the end of September 2011. Putin, who grew up in St. Petersburg and trained as a lawyer, had spent most of his career from 1975 until 1990 in the Soviet security service KGB, and for a few years had reported from former socialist East Germany. After working in the St. Petersburg administration from 1990 until 1996, he served in various political positions in Moscow until becoming prime minister in 1999. In the same year, President Boris Yeltsin appointed him acting president. Following presidential elections in 2000, Putin served as president for two terms until 2008. The country’s economic growth, distribution of wealth, and political stability improved remarkably during his terms, and were appreciated by the

¹¹ For information on these protests, see coverage by *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/04/world/europe/04belarus.html>.

majority of Russians, as reflected in Putin's high ratings in independent opinion polls. However, the price of these positive developments was the centralization of power, and the gradual elimination of potential opposition through the control of media, political organizations, and pluralism (Ambrosio 2010: 137).

The Russian constitution allows two presidential terms in succession. Instead of retiring after two terms, Putin built a tandem partnership with Dmitri Medvedev, also a lawyer from St. Petersburg. From 2008, Medvedev served as the president and Putin as the prime minister of the Russian Federation. At the party meeting of *United Russia* in September 2011, it was announced that Putin planned to run again for the presidency in 2012; Medvedev would step back in favor of him. Many Russian citizens felt betrayed—and tired of Putin (Aron 2012: 6). Political technologists had misjudged the citizens' perception, and had underestimated public outrage, which was fueled when monitors criticized irregularities and electoral fraud in the parliamentary elections of December 4, 2011. Seven parties had participated in the elections. The number was small due to special requirements for registering parties. According to the *Central Election Commission*, four parties met the threshold of 7 %, and *United Russia* won more than 49 % of the votes (a loss of roughly 15 % compared to the 2007 elections).

Large-scale protests occurred in Moscow and other cities after the CEC rejected almost 90 % of the claims for irregularities on December 10, 2011. Protestors initially demanded 'clean elections'. In the course of the events, the protest also targeted Putin and *United Russia*. Most prominent were the slogans "*Russia without Putin*", borrowed from the banned *National Bolshevik Party*, and "*Crooks and Thieves*" for *United Russia*, popularized by the anti-corruption activist and blogger Alexei Navalni. The protests were not led by an opposition party or coherent oppositional coalition. In fact, there were several individuals who mobilized—most famously Alexei Navalni, the political leftist activist Sergei Udaltsov, and the oppositional free-market activist Boris Nemtsov. In addition, smaller parties or groups (most with a nationalist or communist profile) that had not participated in the elections also mobilized for protests. In this respect, the protests were colorful, but it was obvious that there was little common ground beyond criticizing the elections, Putin, and *United Russia*. Also, the protests that used white ribbons as a symbol were dominated by certain elements of the urban population, mostly relatively young, well-educated, and middle-class groups (Aron 2012: 1f.). The wave of protests failed in reaching out to the wider population. The information and mobilization for protests relied heavily on social media, particularly on *Vkontakte*, *Odnoklasniki*, *Livejournal*, *Facebook*, and *Twitter* (White/McAllister 2014: 77ff.). Counter-protests were also organized, mobilized inter alia by *Nashi*, the Kremlin's counter-revolutionary youth movement. The regime used 'black PR' to undermine the protests, criminalizing them (White/McAllister 2014: 82).

The election of Vladimir Putin as president on March 4, 2012 (beating the four other candidates with approximately 63 % of the ballot) did not initially halt the protests, but did instill feelings of resignation among opponents, which gradually prevailed. Overall, the protests remained non-violent until May 2012, when

protestors and special police forces clashed. However, large-scale protests ceased after June 2012.

Protesters had obviously not achieved their main goal; there was no rerun of the elections, and no change in the presidential re-election policy that had provoked the rallies. In contrary, the regime reacted introducing a number of preventive measures. Following June 2012, several laws were passed that aimed to restrict public protest and diminish external influences: The new anti-demonstration law raised fines for illegal protests from the current maximum of 5,000 rubles to 300,000 for participants and 600,000 for organizers. A new law suddenly required foreign-funded NGOs involved in political activity to register as “foreign agents”. Amendment of the treason law redefined treason as any act “providing financial, technical, advisory, or other assistance to a foreign state or international organization (...) directed at harming Russia’s security”. Finally yet importantly, a new internet law supposedly intended to protect children from harmful internet content allows the government to take websites offline without a trial. Obviously, these laws and several other acts, such as the arrest and prosecution of activists, were suited to more efficiently control and prevent oppositional activities. The most prominent activist facing prosecution was Navalni, who was sentenced to five years in prison for embezzlement and fraud in April 2013, a sentence that was suspended in October 2013 (Orttung 2013: 2ff.).

However, the protests provided activists and leaders with the experience of organizing such events by networking and cooperating, and taking the streets peacefully. Non-violent large-scale protest marks a shift in Russian political history, reflecting a civic turn in which citizens are politically active. The protests also created leaders, who in the future might build an opposition to challenge the ruling elite. Navalni ran for mayor of Moscow in September 2013, receiving about 28% of the votes, whereas the incumbent Sergei Sobyenin won with 51 %. During his April 2012 trial, Navalni had already announced his interest in running for the presidency in 2018 (Orttung 2013: 2ff.).

2.2.5 Comparison

The attempted or failed cases of Color Revolutions have a number of distinct features, but also share certain characteristics with successful cases. The preconditions to the successful cases are similar. Except for Belarus, all countries analyzed in this section have experienced civil war: Armenia and Azerbaijan fought over Nagorno-Karabakh; Russia over the secessionist republic of Chechnya. The political systems provide a strong presidency that, in practice, becomes stronger via informal arrangements, including the influence of networks. For Belarus and Russia, security networks matter most, while Armenia and Azerbaijan rely on kin and regional networks.

Striking differences reveal the strength of the leadership with respect to the position of the incumbent and that of the opposition. For Belarus and Russia, data

suggest that the overall performance of the presidents has been perceived positive by the majority of the population (despite the impact of the economic crisis); both leaders are also popular. There are more limited data for Armenia and Azerbaijan, but a relatively high rating can be assumed. Along with the relative popularity of the incumbents, large parts of the population believe there is no viable alternative to the current leadership. In all four countries, the opposition has been marginal and weak for years, for a variety of reasons. Formal institutions hindered 'real' opposition parties and candidates from registering for elections. Lawsuits have been used to both imprison and threaten (potential) oppositional activists. This 'legal track' response has been most exploited by Russia.

Surveillance, detentions, violence by police and special forces, and other preventive measures have been employed in all attempted cases before and after elections, but in various forms and degrees. In Russia, there was less reliance on violence to prevent the opposition from operating or demonstrators from protesting. In Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Belarus, police used force.

In contrast to successful cases, elite defection neither formed assertive counter-elites and coalitions nor produced charismatic leaders able to unite the opposition and the people and to mobilize to both participation in elections and protests. In presidential elections, the opposition did not unite behind an agreed candidate (although it was close to doing so in Belarus) and failed to form coalitions to compete with the regime in parliamentary elections. The parliamentary and non-parliamentary opposition did not cooperate as intensively as in the successful cases. In this sense, Russia is a special case, because the protests were even orchestrated by individuals who did not run in the elections. This means that challengers in the elections and on the streets were two of a different kind. It is obvious that this does not increase the strength of the parliamentary opposition.

Pro-democratic support by Western interests has been strong in Belarus and Russia, and less dense in Armenia and Azerbaijan. However, such intervention has not affected the success or failure of mass protests.

The similarities between successful and attempted cases support inverse conclusions to those of the successful cases: relative strength of the incumbent; weakness of the opposition (disunity and lack charismatic leadership; fueled by 'legal track' and 'preventive' measures), in contrast to the resilient regime's state capacity.



<http://www.springer.com/978-3-319-07871-7>

Color Revolutions in Eurasia

Gerlach, J.

2014, V, 56 p. 6 illus., Softcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-07871-7