

# Electoral Protests and Democratization

## Beyond the Color Revolutions

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The sight of thousands of people demonstrating for clean elections and an end to corrupt postcommunist regimes led many observers to declare that the so-called color revolutions had finally brought democracy to Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan. But how successful have these electoral revolutions actually been? The authors analyze all cases of electoral revolutions worldwide since 1991, distinguishing between failed and successful electoral revolutions, to conclude that even successful electoral revolutions have shown insignificant or no democratic progress in their wake. Electoral revolutions are ineffective at advancing democratization because they place too great an emphasis on elections and do not address other fundamental obstacles to democratization in hybrid and authoritarian regimes. International influences have proven more successful in promoting democratization in countries of postcommunist Europe.

**Keywords:** *democratization; electoral revolution; protest; violence; developing countries; hybrid regimes*

Color revolutions in Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan raised enormous expectations for countries that lagged behind the third wave of democratization in East Central Europe and throughout the world. In these countries, the postcommunist era was dominated by semi-authoritarian regimes masquerading as democracies (Kuzio, 2006; Nodia, 2005; Silitski, 2005a). The sight of thousands of people demanding clean elections and the end to corrupt regimes revived faith in people power and reminded analysts of the revolutions of 1989 in Central Europe (Aslund, 2004; Diuk, 2004; Karatnycky, 2005; Silitski, 2005a). Many observers saw these protests as second-stage revolutions that would bring democratization to countries that failed to capitalize on the original democratic breakthroughs of 1989–1991.

Aslund (2005) asserted that Ukraine had become a real democracy. Mitchell (2004) wrote that electoral revolution in Georgia “represented a victory not only for the Georgian people but for democracy globally” (p. 342). Bunce and Wolchik (2006) declared that the wave of electoral revolutions in post-communist states “was just as regionwide in its scope and just as powerful in its democratizing effects as the first wave that occurred during the years from 1988 to 1992” (p. 5). **IAQ: 1**

But how successful were these electoral revolutions? Is the quality and pace of democratization in these countries comparable to that of the first wave of postcommunist revolutions in East Central Europe? How many electoral revolutions have had a undisputedly positive effect on the regime standing? To answer these questions, we provide a comprehensive analysis of the impact of electoral revolutions on democratization that moves beyond the present literature in several ways.<sup>1</sup> First, we examine all cases of electoral revolution in hybrid and authoritarian regimes worldwide since 1991, rather than the postcommunist cases exclusively. Second, we draw an important distinction between failed electoral revolutions—electoral protests that were repressed violently or otherwise subdued—and those that successfully challenged electoral results. We find that countries where electoral revolutions ended unsuccessfully demonstrate no discernible impact on subsequent regime dynamics. More interestingly, even successful electoral revolutions show little democratic progress in their wake.

This happens, we argue, because electoral revolutions are more often symptoms of the problems of hybrid and authoritarian regimes, rather than solutions to their ills. Fraudulent elections are only one of many deficiencies in pseudo-democracies (Hale, 2006; Levitsky & Way, 2005). Addressing electoral shortcomings and changing top leadership does not transform many features underpinning hybrid and authoritarian regimes. Just as elections do not automatically produce democracy (the so-called electoral fallacy; Schmitter & Karl, 1991), neither does improving the quality of elections. According to the logic of the electoral fallacy, electoral revolutions are too narrow to address the full range of issues holding back democratization in hybrid and authoritarian regimes. While focusing on electoral fraud and the general democratic deficit of political rights and civil liberties in an effort to build a broad anti-regime coalition, they do not resolve deeper issues of corruption, clientelism, underdeveloped political parties, and lack of transparent decision making. Negotiated transitions and those transitions with direct international pressure have been more successful in promoting democratization.

Our study looks globally at all electoral revolutions. Bunce and Wolchik (2006) argue that the postcommunist region “has emerged as the primary site for democratization through electoral revolutions” (p. 7), **[AQ: 2]** and most literature on the subject has focused solely on the postcommunist states. However, we find that whereas successful electoral revolutions are indeed mostly found in postcommunist societies, other countries, particularly in Africa, experience similar dynamics. Thus, electoral revolutions are not only a postcommunist phenomenon. We restrict our study to the period after 1991, given that the end of the Cold War coincided with the victory of the liberal paradigm and a massive spurt of worldwide democratization, resulting in the formation of a large number of political regimes that held elections that were less than free and fair. These regimes found it beneficial to provide a democratic façade, offering political openings to the opposition in the form of elections. Thus, elections began to play an important role in many systems of government, and people came to view fair elections as their right (Levitsky & Way, 2002). These changes enabled electoral protests in hybrid regimes, such as Georgia and Ukraine, as well as in closed authoritarian systems, such as Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Ethiopia.

We found that 11 countries—African, postcommunist Eurasian, and Latin American—have had major electoral protests since 1991: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Ethiopia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Madagascar, Peru, Serbia, Togo, and Ukraine. In fact, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Serbia experienced more than one outbreak of electoral protests. As such, we examine 17 cases of electoral revolutions. We do not include in the sample borderline cases<sup>2</sup> or disputed elections in democratic countries,<sup>3</sup> given that our primary interest is the effect of electoral revolutions on hybrid and authoritarian regimes.

We also exclude cases of critical elections (Romania, 1996; Bulgaria, 1997; Slovakia, 1998; Croatia, 2000) where the illiberal incumbent did not actively steal the elections or refuse to accept the electoral results and where the election was not contested through mass protests (Bunce & Wolchik, 2006). These countries do not fit McFaul’s definition (2006) of electoral revolution, which emphasizes four features: First, a fraudulent election serves as a catalyst for electoral protests; second, the opposition resorts to extraconstitutional means, including mass protests, to defend the democratic cause; third, owing to disputed electoral results, both the incumbents and the oppositional candidates declare their authority; and, fourth, both sides avoid any significant use of violence. We adopt McFaul’s interpretation of electoral revolutions, except for the last point (on violence), which we believe helps to distinguish between successful and repressed

electoral revolutions; that is, failed electoral revolutions are often repressed by violent means. What makes electoral revolutions unique is the presence of mass protests in favor of adherence to a key feature of democracy: free and fair elections that give the opposition the opportunity to win. The fact that the people come into the streets to defend their democratic rights gives electoral revolutions a sense of legitimacy, internally and internationally, that many other mass protests lack (D'Anieri, 2005; Diuk, 2004; Thompson & Kuntz, 2004; Tucker, 2007).

We base our case selections and observations on an analysis of the scholarly literature on regime dynamics in these countries, as well as on changes in Freedom House scores<sup>4</sup> over time—specifically, scores on the 7-point scale based on Freedom House's *Freedom in the World (FW)* series for general assessments of regime dynamics. We rely on another set of Freedom House publications, *Nations in Transit (NT)*, for a closer look at all cases of successful electoral revolutions, except that of Madagascar. **AQ: 3**

In contrast to *FW* and the two broad categories that it uses—namely, political rights and civil liberties—*NT* builds on an inclusive range of categories,<sup>5</sup> providing a close look at the complex nature of a political regime. It guards against the electoral fallacy (Schmitter & Karl, 1991) that equates democracy with elections alone. For instance, as presented in *FW*, Georgia's regime improved from 4.00 in 2003 (the year of the electoral revolution) to 3.50 in 2004, whereas its *NT* score declined from 4.83 in 2003 to 4.96 in 2004 (more on these scores later in the article). This does not mean, however, that *FW* and *NT* are contradictory or that one is incorrect. Rather, the former focuses on a minimal definition of democracy, in which the electoral process and civic participation play a fundamental role. But *FW* remains a useful source for evaluating long-term tendencies, and it comprises the most comprehensive data set on political regimes from the 1970s to the present. Analyzed with care, these rankings help to demonstrate our central case; however, we do not use Freedom House scores as the sole measure of regime analysis. We use the rankings to support and substantiate the qualitative data on the subject and thus do not overemphasize year-to-year changes in the scores.

## Outcomes of Electoral Revolutions

Electoral revolutions can be divided into three categories: failed/repressed cases, successful cases without democratization, and successful cases with democratization (or some democratization). Freedom House scores provide

**Table 1**  
**Results of Electoral Revolutions**

Democratization Score	Revolution	
	Failed/Repressed	Successful
Stagnate or worse	Armenia (1996, 2003) Azerbaijan (2000, 2003, 2005) Belarus (2001, 2004, 2006) Ethiopia (2005) Peru (2000) Serbia (1996–1997) Togo (2005)	Georgia (2003) Kyrgyzstan (2005) Madagascar (2001)
Improved		Serbia (2000) Ukraine (2004)

a useful visual tool that helps to analyze the outcomes of electoral revolutions. Differentiating between repressed and successful revolutions, we can see whether subsequent rankings demonstrated democratic improvement (see Table 1).

### Failed or Repressed Electoral Revolutions

Failed cases are incidents of electoral revolutions successfully subdued by the incumbent regime. The examples include electoral protests in Serbia (1996–1997), Armenia (1996, 2003), Azerbaijan (2000, 2003, 2005), Peru (2000), Belarus (2001, 2004, 2006), Ethiopia (2005), and Togo (2005). These unsuccessful electoral revolutions all followed a similar scenario: A fraudulent election served as a catalyst for electoral protests, which followed elections that were municipal (Serbia, 1996), presidential (Armenia, 1996; Azerbaijan, 1998, 2003; Belarus, 2001, 2006; Peru, 2000; Togo, 2005) or parliamentary (Armenia, 2003; Azerbaijan, 2000, 2005; Belarus, 2004; Ethiopia, 2005). The opposition contested the official electoral results and demanded their reexamination or nullification. The demonstrations typically attracted hundreds of protesters, although sometimes many thousands—for instance, 500,000 people participated in the electoral protests in Serbia in 1997 (D’Anieri, 2006), and the opposition in Armenia organized protests of between 150,000 and 200,000 in 1996 (*FW 1996–1997*). In most cases, incumbents used violent means to disperse protesters and safeguard their hold on power. In 1996, the Armenian military responded to protests by blocking access to the capital, shutting down opposition headquarters, and

incarcerating about 250 opposition supporters (Way & Levitsky, 2006). In the 2005 Togolese protests, casualties included between 400 and 500 fatalities, thousands of injured, and about 40,000 refugees seeking shelter abroad (*FW 2006*). After the fraudulent Ethiopian election in 2005, clashes between the protesters and the security forces resulted in at least 36 deaths and thousands of arrests (*FW 2006*; Harbeson, 2005).

There are two exceptions. In Serbia, Slobodan Milosevic was able to subdue the protests without resorting to any significant violence in 1996. He negotiated a deal with some opposition leaders, offering concessions on the election results without a general *recalculation*. Unity of the opposition—in the face of intimidation and generous offers from the incumbent—remains one of the critical aspects for a successful electoral revolution (McFaul, 2006). Peru is exceptional because the illiberal incumbent lost power after, but not as a result of, electoral protests (Garcia Calderon, 2001; Schmidt, 2002). The presidential election of 2000 was tainted by the allegations of fraud, but international observers confirmed President Fujimori's victory in the first round, although they criticized the conduct of the polls. Fujimori later won the second round. The opposition's protests on inauguration day ended in violence and in the arrests of at least 150 people. These protests failed to influence electoral outcomes, but a few months later, Fujimori's government unexpectedly fell amid a major corruption scandal (Garcia Calderon, 2001; Schmidt, 2002). After Fujimori's fall, Peru's *FW* scores improved from 5/4 in 1999 to 2/3 in the 2003–2007 period, and Freedom House now ranks the country as an electoral democracy (*FW 2007*).

Excluding Peru, unsuccessful electoral revolutions have had little discernible effect on regime development. There has been some movement toward authoritarianism in Belarus and Azerbaijan, but this is not necessarily the result of failed revolutions. As some authors argue (Silitski, 2005b; Way & Levitsky, 2006), the frequency of electoral revolutions in the region has alerted authoritarian leaders such as Alexander Lukashenko (Belarus) to the possibility of protests in their countries. Thus, it is difficult to distinguish between the endogenous and exogenous effects of electoral protests on democratization and the rise of autocracy in such countries.

## Successful Electoral Revolutions

Successful electoral revolutions are cases in which the demonstrations achieved their original objectives or more—namely, the rerunning of the election, the nullification of the election results, and/or the resignation of the incumbent—and in which the subsequent change in leadership, from an

undemocratic incumbent to new democratic forces, occurred as a direct result of the electoral protests. The surprising finding from this research is that some successful electoral revolutions fail to progress toward democracy. We find that three of five successful electoral revolutions in our sample (Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Madagascar) had no clear democratizing effect, as measured by scholarly analysis and lack of improvement in democracy scores. Moreover, regarding the two cases where successful electoral revolutions led to some democratization (Serbia and Ukraine), analysts have noted considerable stagnation and weak and slow improvements, when compared to the first-stage postcommunist revolutions.

We show that even though electoral revolutions resulted in a number of democratic improvements (especially in Serbia and Ukraine), deeper problems remained—institutional, structural, and otherwise—in part because successful electoral revolutions tend to have a narrow focus, as exemplified by the lack of democratic reform programs on the part of the new leaders (or by a lack of agreement on what these reforms should be).

*Successful electoral revolutions without democratic improvement.* The two successful electoral revolutions that resulted in no democratization over the medium term were in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan. Georgia's Rose Revolution was sparked by a fraudulent parliamentary election in November 2003, held under the presidency of Eduard Shevardnadze (Chikhladze & Chikhladze, 2005; Fairbanks, 2004; Mitchell, 2004). Shevardnadze subsequently resigned under pressure from the opposition and the protesters. In January 2004, opposition leader Mikheil Saakashvili was elected president, with more than 96% of the vote.

The Rose Revolution highlighted some of the central problems of the Georgian hybrid regime: routinely rigged elections, abuses of power, and lack of political transparency and efficient governing in the regions. The new leadership has since increased the fairness of the elections, returned the unruly region of Ajara to central control, decentralized the government, and taken action against corruption (Mitchell, 2006; *NT 2006*; Papava, 2006). Unfortunately, the problems post-2003 are deeper than that of providing fair elections and more orderly decision-making practices.

Georgia suffers from an underdeveloped culture of political competition and a lack of transparency in governmental business. After the Rose Revolution, the political arena remained uncontested, with no viable opposition to Saakashvili, which allowed for his semi-authoritarian behavior; since the fall of 2007, the political arena has been chaotic, with the murky Okruashvili affair and an active but visibly disoriented opposition (Hale, 2006; Jones,

2005)<sup>6</sup>. Neither does it bode well for democracy that Georgia retains a superpresidentialist regime: A powerful executive dominates a weak parliament (Fairbanks, 2004; Mitchell, 2006). Other major problems include the territorial conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the government's persisting manipulation of the media and the judiciary, and the absent rule of law (Anjaparidze, 2004; Fairbanks, 2007; Mitchell, 2006; Papava, 2006).

The Georgian case shows well how electoral revolutions tend to be narrow in scope, highlighting surface-level democratic deficiencies, such as the elections, but not focusing as much on the deeper institutional and structural problems of the regime. Saakashvili was characteristically elected on a populist platform, and although he certainly had a state-building agenda, he had no clear democratizing program (Jones, 2005; Mitchell, 2006). Furthermore, his democratic credentials came under critique after he used violence to disperse protesters in November 2007, imposing a state of emergency and closing down the television station of the opposition.<sup>7</sup>

Western pressure, which facilitated democratization in East Central Europe and the Baltic countries, was not as consistent in Georgia, and it failed to prevent the persisting illiberal tendencies of the regime (Levitsky & Way, 2005). The European Union (EU), suffering from its enlargement fatigue, gave Georgia few signs of encouragement (Basora, 2008). The United States has been more supportive of Georgia's Western integration, promoting the country's membership in NATO at the 2008 organization summit, but West European countries blocked the move, apprehensive of Russia's negative reaction.<sup>8</sup> Overall, Georgia registered democratic improvements after the Rose Revolution, particularly in the areas of electoral and civil society freedom (*FW 2007, NT 2006*). But because of democratic deficiencies and setbacks, the *NT* ranking for Georgia declined after the electoral revolution and remained stagnant thereafter (*NT 2007*).

Similarly, Kyrgyzstan's Tulip Revolution broke out as a response to the fraudulent parliamentary election in February–March 2005 (Tudoroiu, 2007). Faced with protests, president Askar Akayev fled the country. Remarkably, major opposition politicians played a small role in the electoral revolution (Radnitz, 2006). The protesters were mobilized by their dislike of Akayev rather than a popular figure, such as Saakashvili in Georgia or Viktor Yushchenko in Ukraine (*NT 2006*). The new president, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, was not the revolution's leader but rather a compromise chosen from the political elite. The more sporadic and bottom-up nature of the Kyrgyz protests distinguishes them from other successful electoral revolutions.

It also explains why Kyrgyzstan remained a chaotic political arena, with unsettled issues of power distribution within the elite, aggravated by the

underdeveloped parties and a lack of experience in orderly, democratic competition. The presence of a vibrant civil society—a crucial asset for the electoral protests—has taken on dark undertones after the Tulip Revolution: The authorities have not been able to prevent unsanctioned demonstrations and outbursts of public violence, whereas a heightened sense of power contestation has resulted in a number of high-profile assassinations (Hale, 2006; *NT 2006*). Both 2006 and 2007 were marked by continual protests denouncing the failure of Bakiyev to deliver constitutional reforms—namely, to effectively fight poverty, corruption, and crime—and thus demanding his resignation (*FW 2007*; Radnitz, 2006; Tudoroiu, 2007).

This new series of protests reflected the fact that although the Tulip Revolution ushered in a period of more open and transparent politics, it set no clear and ambitious reform goals; in fact, it has been remarkably leaderless and programless, even in comparison with the other successful electoral revolutions. Bakiyev promised major democratic reforms at the time of his election; however, he later appeared to have no democratization plan, and he became reluctant to part with vast presidential powers (Fairbanks, 2007; Radnitz, 2006; Tudoroiu, 2007). In 2007 the protests forced him to hold a referendum on constitutional amendments. Voters approved the proposed constitutional draft, but international observers criticized numerous irregularities in the conduct of the referendum.<sup>9</sup> In a fresh parliamentary election of December 2007, Bakiyev's party achieved an astounding victory, whereas no opposition party secured seats in parliament.

Kyrgyzstan's geographic position is not advantageous for the development of strong ties with the West, which could foster a consistent democratizing influence on the country (Levitsky & Way, 2005). The United States has a military base in Kyrgyzstan, but so does Russia, and this does not seem to have facilitated democratization. As an Asian country, Kyrgyzstan cannot benefit from potential EU membership. The country's scores from both *FW* and *NT* (see Tables 2 and 3) **[AQ: 4]** remained mostly unchanged<sup>10</sup> after the Tulip Revolution, keeping Kyrgyzstan in the ranks of "soft" autocracies.

Madagascar has also failed to register significant democratic progress after its electoral revolution. After the presidential election in December 2001, supporters of opposition candidate Marc Ravalomanana protested the official vote counting that produced a victory for the incumbent president Didier Ratsiraka; they reported the alleged electoral fraud (Cornwell, 2003; Randrianja, 2003). After the High Constitutional Court upheld the official vote count and called for a runoff, Ravalomanana's supporters took to the streets and began protests that lasted through June. The confrontation between the two sides involved some violence and threatened to spark a

Table 2  
**Regime Transition in the Cases of Electoral Revolutions: *Freedom in the World* Scores**

Country	1996–1997	1997–1998	1998–1999	1999–2000	2000–2001	2001–2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Armenia	<b>5/4</b>	5/4	4/4	4/4	4/4	4/4	4/4	<b>4/4</b>	5/4	5/4	5/4
Azerbaijan	6/5	6/4	6/4	6/4	<b>6/5</b>	6/5	6/5	<b>6/5</b>	6/5	<b>6/5</b>	6/5
Belarus	6/6	6/6	6/6	6/6	6/6	<b>6/6</b>	6/6	6/6	<b>7/6</b>	7/6	7/6
Ethiopia	4/5	4/5	4/4	5/5	5/5	5/5	5/5	5/5	5/5	<b>5/5</b>	5/5
Georgia	4/4	3/4	3/4	3/4	4/4	4/4	4/4	<b>4/4</b>	3/4	3/3	3/3
Kyrgyzstan	4/4	4/4	5/5	5/5	6/5	6/5	6/5	6/5	6/5	<b>5/4</b>	5/4
Madagascar	2/4	2/4	2/4	2/4	2/4	<b>2/4</b>	3/4	3/3	3/3	3/3	4/3
Peru	4/3	5/4	5/4	5/4	<b>3/3</b>	1/3	2/3	2/3	2/3	2/3	2/3
Serbia	<b>6/6</b>	<b>6/6</b>	6/6	5/5	<b>4/4</b>	3/3	3/2	3/2	3/2	3/2	3/2
Togo	6/5	6/5	6/5	5/5	5/5	5/5	6/5	6/5	6/5	<b>6/5</b>	6/5
Ukraine	3/4	3/4	3/4	3/4	4/4	4/4	4/4	4/4	<b>4/3</b>	3/2	3/2

Note: Years correspond to the *Freedom in the World* editions (2007 shows data for 2006, etc.). Years of electoral protests are shown in bold. Rankings: 1 = most democratic regimes, 7 = most authoritarian (hybrid regimes are clustered between 3 and 5). Formatting (e.g., 1/2) denotes two categories: political rights and civil liberties, respectively.

**Table 3**  
**Regime Transition After Successful Electoral Revolutions: Nations in Transit Scores**

Country	1997	1998	1999	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Georgia	4.70	4.55	4.17	4.33	4.58	4.83	<b>4.83</b>	4.96	4.86	4.68
Kyrgyzstan	4.65	4.70	5.08	5.29	5.46	5.67	5.67	5.64	<b>5.68</b>	5.68
Serbia	—	4.90	5.67	<b>5.04</b>	4.00	3.88	3.83	3.75	3.71	3.68
Ukraine	4.00	4.25	4.63	4.71	4.92	4.71	4.88	<b>4.50</b>	4.21	4.25

Notes: Years correspond to the *Nations in Transit* editions (2006 shows data for 2005, etc.). There was no publication for 2000. Years of electoral protests are shown in bold. Rankings: 1 = most democratic regimes, 7 = most authoritarian (hybrid regimes are clustered between 3 and 5).

full-scale civil war. Finally, a newly appointed High Constitutional Court recounted the votes and declared Ravalomanana the victor. Ratsiraka fled to France in June 2002 (Marcus & Razafindrakoto, 2003).

Since 2002, Madagascar's *FW* regime scores have remained virtually unchanged, keeping it in the ranks of hybrid regimes (*FW 2007*). Despite references to the defense of democracy (Marcus & Razafindrakoto, 2003), economic concerns seemed to dominate the agenda during the crisis of 2001–2002 (Randrianja, 2003). One of the poorest countries in the world, Madagascar has registered some economic development under Ravalomanana, and foreign investment in its economy has grown (*FW 2006*). Ravalomanana has made his poverty action plan a priority (“Madagascar: Poverty Action Plan,” 2007). Much less attention has been paid to democratic reforms, however. First, the electoral revolution has not secured free and fair elections for Madagascar. Ravalomanana was reelected for a second term in 2006, but international observers described various irregularities in the conduct of the election, including multiple ballots and unequal media coverage of the contenders (*FW 2007*). Corruption remains a major problem, as well. International observers have also expressed concerns about freedom of the press and the arbitrary imprisonment of people accused of “terrorist activities” during the crisis of 2001–2002, most of which were Ratsiraka’s supporters (*FW 2004*).

Ravalomanana has controlled the political and economic life of Madagascar since 2002: His party, TIM (which stands for “I love Madagascar”), is the strongest political force, whereas other parties remain weak; he has dominated the work of the judiciary and the legislature; and he has been accused of mixing his personal interests with the country’s economic interests (Marcus, 2004). He called a referendum on constitutional changes in April 2007, which among other issues have expanded presidential powers. Some observers questioned his authoritarian leanings (“Madagascar: April 4th Referendum,” 2007).

Madagascar presents little interest for the major world powers because of its disadvantageous position and weak ties to the West (Levitsky & Way, 2005; Randrianja, 2003). It has no chances of joining organizations known to facilitate democratic progress, such as the EU or NATO. Thus, it has not benefited much from external democratizing pressures.

*Successful electoral revolutions with democratic improvement.* The third category of cases includes countries such as Serbia and Ukraine that have demonstrated some regime democratization after their electoral revolutions. However, democratic progress in these countries has been slow, and

reforms insignificant, over the last 2 to 3 years such that we can talk of evident democratic stagnation. For instance, Serbia's *FW* scores (3/2) have not changed since 2003 and still have not reached the level of democracy (1/2) that the *FW* ratings showed for Hungary and the Czech Republic 4 years after 1989. The *NT* scores also demonstrate that although Serbia's democracy score jumped from 5.04 in 2001 to 4.00 in 2002, it registered only a modest improvement between 2003 and 2007 (3.88 to 3.68).

The Bulldozer Revolution of 2000 in Serbia was provoked by Milosevic's refusal to acknowledge the opposition's victory in the first round of the presidential election (Birch, 2002; D'Anieri, 2006; Thompson & Kuntz, 2004). After a decade of extreme fragmentation, Serbia's democratic opposition united around one candidate, Vojislav Kostunica (Bieber, 2003). When a million people marched on Belgrade in his support, Milosevic resigned (McFaul, 2006; Thompson & Kuntz, 2004).

The new leadership made elections free and fair, relieved pressure on the media, and implemented fiscal and tax reforms, as well as anti-corruption legislation (*NT 2002*, *NT 2006*). The Union of Serbia and Montenegro dissolved peacefully in 2006, and the same year Serbia enacted a new democratic constitution (*NT 2007*). Unfortunately, the two most pressing problems for Serbia remained unsolved: the status of Kosovo and the continuous elite power struggles. The balance of political forces at the onset of regime transition was favorable for democratic reforms. But continual disagreements between President Kostunica and prime minister Zoran Djindjic—and later between the new president, Boris Tadic, and his prime minister, Kostunica—repeatedly undermined the credibility of the democratic parties and so contributed to a generally chaotic political scene (Birch, 2002). By the time Kosovo declared its independence in February 2008,<sup>11</sup> it had become clear that Serbia's democratic forces could not agree on a common agenda of democratization: The stance on the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, the problem of Kosovo, and Serbia's pro-Western/EU orientation versus its relations with Russia have remained contentious issues since the Bulldozer Revolution. The broad democratic coalition collapsed, and the country remained deeply split, even after the victory of Tadic's pro-European forces in the snap election of May 2008.

External actors played an important role in Serbia's democratic progress, encouraging but also pressuring the country. Serbia benefits from a history of stronger contacts with the West and weaker ties to Russia, as compared to many postcommunist countries (Levitsky & Way, 2005). Among our cases, Serbia has the highest chances of joining the EU in the near future,<sup>12</sup> and it has experienced an unprecedented Western interference: NATO

bombings, the UN protectorate over Kosovo, extraditions of indicted war criminals, and financial pressure. For instance, the Djindjic government felt forced to extradite Milosevic because the outcome of the donor's conference for Serbia depended on this decision. Eventually, the conference brought \$1.3 billion for the Former Republic of Yugoslavia (*FW 2001–2002*). Unfortunately, the EU motivation and the positive external pressure remain offset by Serbia's domestic problems.

In Ukraine, electoral fraud during the presidential election of 2004 provoked the Orange Revolution (Way, 2005). The authorities were forced to accept a rerun of the second round of the election, which brought victory to the opposition candidate, Yushchenko (Hesli, 2006; Kuzio, 2006; McFaul, 2006). The best achievements of the Orange Revolution have been the free and fair electoral process and the atmosphere of greater openness and freedom in the society. The policy-making process under Yushchenko has also become significantly more democratic, transparent, and lawful. There have been marked improvements with regard to the independence of the media and the civil sector, as well as some improvements in the fight against corruption (Kuzio, 2005; *NT 2006*). The most fundamental institutional change was the constitutional reform of December 2004, which increased the parliament's power and weakened the president's position (D'Anieri, 2005; *NT 2007*). The reform was praised by many as a preventive measure against power abuse by any future presidents. Ironically, Yushchenko and the "orange" forces did not initiate this reform but had to grudgingly accept it as a deal with the outgoing government (i.e., that of president Leonid Kuchma; D'Anieri, 2005; Hale, 2006).

Soon after the Orange Revolution, democratic deficits in the general areas of political rights and civil liberties (electoral fairness, civil society freedom) were relatively easy to remedy, and deeper problems remained. Continuous power struggle is likely the most negative inheritance of the Orange Revolution (Gorbach, 2007)<sup>13</sup>. Riabchuk (2008) describes the Ukrainian political system as "feckless pluralism": On one hand, the country conducts fair and free elections; power changes hands; and the general situation with political rights and liberties has improved significantly. On the other, the rule of law is still absent; the party system is underdeveloped; democracy remains superficial; and political elites are corrupt and self-absorbed, concerned primarily with their hold on power.

Characteristically, Yushchenko has not had a program of reforms for a long time after assuming power. His team appeared inactive and disorganized in the first 100 days of his presidency, when the new leadership was expected to take advantage of the period of extraordinary politics and introduce its

reform package (Riabchuk, 2008). The number of law initiatives submitted to parliament by the executive branch during this period has been the lowest since independence (Arel, 2005; Tudoroiu, 2007). Furthermore, the relationship between Yushchenko and his former “orange” ally, Yulia Tymoshenko, has been extremely conflictual during her two tenures as prime minister. Tymoshenko recently accused Yushchenko of blocking her reform initiatives, and she suggested amending the constitution in favor of a parliamentary model, knowing well that her party consistently beats the president’s party in the polls.<sup>14</sup> These continual political crises are a direct result of the fact that major political actors in Ukraine have failed to negotiate a stable power-sharing agreement before or after the Orange Revolution.

In terms of international impact, Ukraine is a moderate leverage and linkage country (Levitsky & Way, 2005). On one hand, although the West hailed the Orange Revolution, it has not shown consistent interest in Ukraine since then; the country has received little encouragement from the EU and NATO (Basora, 2008). On the other, Ukraine is not wholeheartedly open to integration into Western structures.<sup>15</sup> A significant portion of the population believes that Ukraine should remain closely allied with Russia, and it strongly opposes the prospect of NATO membership.

## **Results of Electoral Revolutions: Evaluation and Explanation**

### **Evaluating the Results**

How do electoral revolutions compare with other democratic revolutions? Because most successful electoral revolutions (with the exception of Madagascar) have been in postcommunist countries, we use other postcommunist revolutions as a relevant set of comparisons. Specifically, we address the following: Has the wave of electoral revolutions in postcommunist countries been just as powerful in its democratizing effects as the first wave of democratization, between 1988 and 1992? The suggestion is hopeful but exaggerated: As the leading postcommunist countries in which people power played an important role in democratization, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary jumped from authoritarian regimes to highly performing democracies quite quickly (a clear transformation in 2 to 3 years); yet, the magnitude of change in the cases of the more recent electoral revolutions, within a similar time span, has been far smaller. In sum, the results of electoral revolutions are more comparable to other, less successful postcommunist attempts at democratization. **[AQ: 5]**

To evaluate the performance of the successful postcommunist electoral revolutions (leaving Madagascar aside), we divide the postcommunist cases into three categories based on democratization outcomes (Table 4). First are the rapid democratizers—those countries that became highly democratic shortly after 1989–1991 and stayed that way over subsequent years (Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, and Slovenia). Second are countries that exhibited little or no democratization in the years after communism’s collapse (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan). Third are countries that exhibited some progress toward democracy after 1989–1991 but not enough to become full democracies by the mid-1990s (Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Macedonia, Moldova, Mongolia, Romania, Russia, Slovakia). Many of these countries continued to progress toward democracy in subsequent years under the tutelage of the EU (Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Romania, Slovakia; Vachudova, 2005); Mongolia is an exceptional case that democratized in a hostile geographic environment. Russia reverted to authoritarianism. Albania, Bosnia, and Macedonia continued to make limited progress. Moldova stagnated.

Postcommunist electoral revolutions occurred in Category 2 and 3 countries. As can be seen from the Tables 2 and 4, successful electoral revolutions have caused less democratization, on average, than that of the initial democratic revolutions of 1989–1991. Five rapid democratizers reached the 1/2 ranking by 1995; the slower democratizers, Estonia, Latvia, and Slovakia, reached the same level 5 to 6 years after the original transition year (the critical election of 1998 facilitated democratization in Slovakia); and Bulgaria, 13 years after the official end of communism and 6 years after the critical election that signified actual democratization. Romania, Croatia, and Mongolia have almost fully democratized (2/2) without major revolutionary events. The single critical factor in the democratization of the Category 3.1 countries (later democratizers) has been the effect of the potential EU membership (Basora, 2008; Vachudova, 2005). Successful electoral revolutions have provided some acceleration (except in Kyrgyzstan) but, on average, have displayed a pace of democratization comparable to that of other struggling hybrid regimes (Category 3.3, slow/stagnate progress). They have not, however, returned to authoritarianism, as Russia has. As such, electoral revolutions are not harmful to democracy, but neither do they advance it much. Electoral revolutions have been far weaker than the other main impetus to democratization in the postcommunist countries: EU membership conditionality.

**Table 4**  
**Regime Transition in the Postcommunist Countries After 1989: Freedom in the World Scores**

Category	Country (Year)		Scores	
	1995	2007	1995	2007
1: Rapid democratizers	Czech Republic (1989), Hungary (1989), Lithuania (1991), Poland (1989), Slovenia (1991)	All 1/2	All 1/2	All 1/1
2: No democratization	Armenia (1991), Azerbaijan (1991), Belarus (1991), Kazakhstan (1991), Tajikistan (1991), Turkmenistan (1991), Uzbekistan (1991)	$M = 6/6$ Range = 4/4–7/7	$M = 6/6$ Range = 5/4–7/7	$M = 6/6$ Range = 5/4–7/7
3: Some democratization	Albania (1991), Bulgaria (1990), Croatia (1991), Estonia (1991), Latvia (1991), Macedonia (1992), Moldova (1991), Mongolia (1990), Romania (1989), Russia (1991), Slovenia (1993)	$M = 3/3$ Range = 2/2–4/4		
3.1: Later democratizers	Bulgaria, <sup>a</sup> Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Mongolia, Romania, Slovakia			
3.2: Return to authoritarianism	Russia		$M = 1/2$ Range = 1/1–2/2	
3.3: Slow progress or stagnation	Albania, Bosnia, Macedonia, Moldova		$M = 3/3$ Range = 3/3–3/4	

Note: Rankings: 1 = most democratic regimes, 7 = most authoritarian (hybrid regimes are clustered between 3 and 5). Formatting (e.g., 1/2) denotes two categories: political rights and civil liberties, respectively.

a. We rank Bulgaria as a later democratizer because it did not experience a true change in leadership until the late 1990s (Linz & Stepan, 1996; Vachudova, 2005).

## Explaining the Results

Most electoral revolutions after the Cold War have not been successful: The protesters have not achieved their goals of annulling or reviewing the fraudulent electoral results. Those electoral revolutions that have been successful did not result in as much democratization as what optimists were expecting. Even where regimes have improved through electoral revolutions, progress has been modest. Ukraine has been gripped by continual political crises. Serbia, the most encouraging case overall, has suffered from a slow pace of reforms and from unresolved issues of territorial integrity, which present hurdles to democratic consolidation.

We argue that democratization has been slow (or absent) in these countries, first, because there remained deeper structural problems that the electoral revolutions were not equipped to solve. Fraudulent elections were only the tip of an iceberg in these countries. Other problems include an underdeveloped culture of political competition and party politics, power conflicts beyond the electoral circle, corruption, and lack of the rule of law—to name a few. All these countries remain poor or relatively poor, and two (Georgia and Serbia) have ongoing territorial disputes.

Second, electoral revolutions have relatively narrow aims, mostly targeting fraudulent elections and a number of visible deficits of political rights and civil liberties. This explains why leaders of these revolutions often had no actual programs of democratic reforms upon assuming power and were not prepared to deal with many deep-seated obstacles to democratization.

Electoral revolutions left behind unsolved issues of power distribution because of their narrow focus and the fact that they highlighted tensions between different sides instead of attempting to reconcile them. These power conflicts resulted in multiple political crises, snap elections, and accusations of fraud by all and against all, and they contributed to the general disillusionment of the population in their new leaders. Previous transitions demonstrated how important it was to solve the issues of power distribution beforehand: For example, in the Latin American transitions, power distribution within and between elites was addressed first—that is, as part of a negotiated transition, before the actual democratization commenced (O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986).

Once the main actors reached an agreement on the fundamental rules of the game and stopped using every opportunity to joust for personal power, it became easier to prepare and efficiently execute a plan of reforms. With the rapid democratizers in East Central Europe, for instance, the broad outline of democratic reforms was so widely accepted that even when the

former communists returned to power in Poland or Hungary, they continued the process of democratization initiated by their predecessors (Bunce, 2003; Elster et al., 1998; Grzymala-Busse, 2003). On the contrary, electoral revolutions failed to provide a common reform agenda, at least with respect to democratization, which greatly weakened the position of the new leadership.

Finally, many of these countries have lacked the sustained external pressure to democratize, as experienced by some of the more successful cases of democratization, particularly in the postcommunist countries (Levitsky & Way, 2005; Vachudova, 2005). International influences have greatly assisted democratization in East Central European countries, most visibly in the later democratizers, such as Bulgaria and Romania. Among the cases of successful electoral revolutions, however, only Serbia has experienced consistent external pressure to democratize and has a real chance of EU integration. In Ukraine and Georgia (and to a lesser extent in Kyrgyzstan), the West actively encouraged the electoral revolutions but fell short of extending this support beyond the revolutionary moment (Basora, 2008)—with a partial exception of the U.S. advocacy of the countries' NATO membership. Madagascar is on the periphery of international interests (Randrianja, 2003).

By and large, electoral revolutions have not fulfilled the hopes of their supporters. We find that they more so resemble symptoms than solutions to the ills of hybrid regimes. A more effective strategy for democratization would not focus single-mindedly on elections but also address some of the deeper underlying issues preventing democratic progress, as well as seek to resolve issues of inter-elite power contestation before, rather than during, elections. Finally, many of the countries where electoral revolutions take place lack important prerequisites for democratization, including high per capita income and high linkage with the international community. Electoral revolutions are powerful moments of mass protest and civic participation, but their lack of effectiveness requires rethinking this strategy of democratization.

## Notes

1. For discussion of the applicability of the term *revolution* to the color revolutions, see Fairbanks (2007), Tudoroiu (2007), McFaul (2006), Nodia (2005).

2. The coup d'état attempt in Côte d'Ivoire in 2000 had no prearranged electoral fraud; protests in Zimbabwe in 2003 were connected to, but not provoked by, the 2002 election (Freedom House, 2002, 2004).

3. For example, the 1994 electoral protests in the Dominican Republic are not included, because the regime has been ranked *free* for the 1979–1993 period and that after 1996. It seems that between 1993 and 1996, it was an electoral democracy with a significant democratic deficit, rather than a hybrid regime (Freedom House, 1995; Hartlyn, 1994).

4. Freedom House is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization based in Washington, DC, that promotes democracy and freedom worldwide. In the *Freedom in the World* and *Nations in Transit* rankings, 1 refers to the most democratic regimes and 7 to the most authoritarian (we believe that hybrid regimes are clustered between 3 and 5). In this article, *Freedom in the World* rankings are formatted, for example, 1/2, to denote two categories: political rights and civil liberties, respectively. As such, for space consideration and simplicity, all references to *Freedom in the World* and *Nations in Transit* will be cited from this point forward as follows: *FW year* and *NT year* (with the year indicating the edition, based on the previous year's data; e.g., *FW 2002* is based on data from 2001).

5. Categories include the following: national democratic government, electoral process, civil society, independent media, local democratic governance, judicial framework and independence, and corruption—which then produce a combined democracy score.

6. “Georgia Holds President’s Ex-Ally,” September 27, 2007; “Huge Rally Against Georgia Leader,” September 28, 2007; “Georgia President Scorns Accusers” and “Toughest Challenge for Georgian Leader,” September 29, 2007, *BBC News*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk>.

7. “Georgia Crackdown ‘Went Too Far,’” December 20, 2007; “Georgia to Hold Early Elections,” November 8, 2007, *BBC News*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk>.

8. “Georgia Sees Iraq as NATO Route,” April 3, 2008, *BBC News*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk>.

9. “Pravitel’stvo Kirgizii otpravleno v otstavku [Kyrgyz government resigned],” *BBC Russian*, October 24, 2007, <http://bbcussian.com>.

10. The *Freedom in the World* ranking for Kyrgyzstan for 2005 has improved because of the occurrence of the electoral revolution and the change in leadership.

11. “Kosovo MPs Proclaim Independence,” February 17, 2008, *BBC News*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk>

12. “Serbia and EU Sign Pact on Ties,” April 29, 2008, *BBC News*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk>.

13. “Yushchenko’s First Year Reviewed,” January 24, 2006; “Free to Mourn the Orange Dream,” October 18, 2005; “Ukraine Torn by Broken Promises,” October 31, 2005, *BBC News*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk>.

14. “Yushchenko i Tymoshenko: snova protivostoyaniye? [Yushchenko and Tymoshenko: conflict again?],” April 22, 2008, *BBC Russian*, <http://bbcussian.com>.

15. “Ukraine’s Hopes to Join NATO Soured by Fierce Opposition From Russia, Internal Problems,” March 30, 2008, *International Herald Tribune*.

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