

TRANSITIONS FROM POSTCOMMUNISM

Michael McFaul

Michael McFaul is Peter and Helen Bing Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution and associate professor of political science at Stanford University. He is also a nonresident senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. His latest book, edited with Kathryn Stoner-Weiss, is After the Collapse of Communism: Comparative Lessons of Transitions (2004).

The collapse of communism did not lead smoothly or quickly to the consolidation of liberal democracy in Europe and the former Soviet Union.¹ At the time of regime change, from 1989 into the first few years of the 1990s, popular democratic movements in the three Baltic states, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, eastern Germany, and western Czechoslovakia translated initial electoral victories into consolidated liberal democracy. These quick and successful democratic breakthroughs were the exception, however. Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, and eastern Czechoslovakia (after 1992 known simply as Slovakia) failed to consolidate liberal democracy soon after communism collapsed. Yet in time, the gravitational force of the European Union did much to draw these countries onto a democratic path.

Farther from Western Europe, however, there was no such strong prodemocratic pull. Full-blown dictatorships entrenched themselves early across most of Central Asia and, after its 1994 presidential election, in Belarus. Semi-autocracies and partial democracies spread across the rest of the ex-Soviet states, including Russia. By the end of the 1990s, further democratic gains in the region seemed unlikely.

Starting in the year 2000, however, democracy gained new dynamism in the region in unexpected ways and places. In October of that year, Serbian democratic forces ousted dictator Slobodan Milošević. Three years later, Georgia's far less odious but still semi-autocratic president Eduard Shevardnadze fell before a mobilization of democratic forces. The following year, in a similar drama but on a much grander

stage, Ukrainian democrats toppled the handpicked successor of corrupt outgoing president Leonid Kuchma.²

The Serbian, Georgian, and Ukrainian cases of democratic breakthrough resemble one another—and differ from other democratic transitions or revolutions—in four critical respects. First, in all three cases, the spark for regime change was a fraudulent national election, not a war, an economic crisis, a split between ruling elites, an external shock or international factor, or the death of a dictator. Second, the democratic challengers deployed extraconstitutional means solely to defend the existing, democratic constitution rather than to achieve a fundamental rewriting of the rules of the political game. Third, each country for a time witnessed challengers and incumbents making competing and simultaneous claims to hold sovereign authority—one of the hallmarks of a revolutionary situation.³ Fourth, all of these revolutionary situations ended without mass violence. The challengers often consciously embraced nonviolence on principle, using occasionally extraconstitutional but almost always peaceful tactics. The failing incumbents do seem to have tried coercive methods including assaults on journalists and opposition candidates and the closing of media outlets. But no incumbents dared to call on military or other state-security forces to repress protest.

Another remarkable thing about these democratic breakthroughs is how few analysts predicted them. To many it seemed a miracle that Serbian democratic forces could overcome a decade of disunity in order first to beat Milošević in a presidential election on 24 September 2000, and then to galvanize hundreds of thousands of citizens to demand that the actual election result be honored when it became clear that Milošević was trying to falsify it. Similarly dramatic events unfolded in Georgia after Shevardnadze tried to steal the November 2003 parliamentary elections, leading to his resignation as president and a landslide victory for opposition leader Mikheil Saakashvili in a hastily scheduled January 2004 balloting. While many anticipated controversy over Ukraine's autumn 2004 presidential election, most observers still expected that Kuchma would find a way to make his chosen successor, Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich, Ukraine's next president. Not even opposition leaders predicted the scale and duration of the street protests, which would break out after the government tried to claim that Yanukovich had won the November runoff against Viktor Yushchenko of the prodemocratic "Our Ukraine" coalition.⁴

Identifying the common factors that contributed to success in these cases may be our best method of predicting future democratic breakthroughs not only in this region but perhaps in others as well. Deploying John Stuart Mill's "method of similarity"—which holds that in order to be considered necessary to the causation of a certain effect, a variable must be present in every case—we can assemble a list of commonalities that unite Serbia in 2000, Georgia in 2003, and Ukraine in 2004 as cases of successful democratic breakthrough.

The factors for success include 1) a semi-autocratic rather than fully autocratic regime; 2) an unpopular incumbent; 3) a united and organized opposition; 4) an ability quickly to drive home the point that voting results were falsified, 5) enough independent media to inform citizens about the falsified vote, 6) a political opposition capable of mobilizing tens of thousands or more demonstrators to protest electoral fraud, and 7) divisions among the regime's coercive forces. We should also note that these cases were not wholly independent from one another, and indeed were most likely linked by demonstration effects. Moreover, identifying the commonalities may also help us to isolate other factors often regarded as vital to success that were not present in all these cases.

A semi-autocratic regime. All autocratic regimes are vulnerable to collapse at some point. But which kinds of autocracies are more vulnerable than others? Some observers posit that semi-autocratic or “competitive authoritarian” regimes are more open to democratization than full-blown dictatorships, while others argue that semi-autocracies or partial democracies can actually do more to block genuine democratization by deflecting societal pressures for change.⁵

In this second wave of democratization in the postcommunist world, every incumbent regime was some form of competitive autocracy or partial democracy, in which formal democratic procedures—elections especially—were never suspended.⁶ This particular regime type in turn allowed pockets of pluralism and opposition within the state, which proved critical to democratic breakthrough.

Even Milošević, the communist-turned-ultranationalist provocateur who won election to first the Serbian and later the Yugoslav federal presidency while pursuing policies of ethnic cleansing and aggression, never set up a full-blown dictatorship. He harassed opposition movements but never outlawed them. He occasionally shut down independent media outlets, and ordered the assassination of outspoken journalists, but he also allowed critical outlets such as the B-92 radio station to reopen. He let human rights organizations continue their work, and while he tampered with the results of elections, he never banned them altogether. Parliamentary elections helped to sustain opposition leaders and parties, even if they enjoyed no real power. More importantly, local elections allowed the democratic movement to gain footholds in more than a dozen regional parliaments as well as the Belgrade mayor's office in 1996 and 1997 (though only after more than three months of protests to force Milošević to honor the results). With control of these regional governments also came control over regional media outlets, a vital resource in Milošević's ouster in 2000.

In Georgia, Shevardnadze early in his rule created conditions for democratic institutions and actors to emerge, including Georgia's most popular television station, Rustavi-2. Although he tried to become more

authoritarian as time wore on, his achievements fell far short of his ambitions. Attempts at monitoring and curtailing the activities of civil society and the media had limited effects or even backfired. Shevardnadze's state lacked the resources to be more effectively harsher, and the president himself often seemed irresolute about repression, perhaps because so many of his leading critics had at one time been part of his own camp.

Kuchma came to power in Ukraine through a competitive 1994 election, in which he had proclaimed it as his goal to move forward with the consolidation of democracy. Instead he eventually tried to build a "managed democracy"—combining formal democratic practices with informal control of all political institutions—similar to President Vladimir Putin's in Russia. But Kuchma never enjoyed anything like Putin's popularity, and many of his clumsy and brutal attempts to squelch critics served to mobilize even greater opposition. The "Ukraine Without Kuchma" campaign from December 2000 to March 2001 and the results of the March 2002 parliamentary elections demonstrated that Ukrainian society was active and politically sophisticated. The success of "Our Ukraine" in the 2002 voting gave it a foothold within state institutions. Kuchma never quite rallied all of Ukraine's economic elites behind his rule, and the fall of 2004 found them still divided.

An unpopular incumbent. A second necessary condition for democratic breakthrough in all of these countries was the falling popularity of the incumbent leader. This factor may seem obvious, but it is also a feature that distinguishes these cases from countries such as Russia, where President Putin is still popular, or countries like Mexico during the heyday of semi-authoritarian rule, when the ruling party could manufacture electoral victories without major voter fraud. In Serbia, polls put Milošević's popularity at less than 30 percent by the summer of 2000.⁷ In Georgia, 82 percent of respondents were saying as early as 2001 that the country was going in the wrong direction, up from 51 percent the year before.⁸ Kuchma's approval ratings plummeted during his last year in office.

The causes of presidential unpopularity differ from case to case and can be difficult to trace within each one. Milošević had won a number of free and fair elections and persistently sought mandates from the voters. He himself had changed the Yugoslav constitution to set up his campaign for direct election to the federal presidency in September 2000. Yet several military defeats, culminating with capitulation to the 1999 NATO air campaign, and years of economic decline severely undermined his support.

Shevardnadze too was popular at first. Yet he failed to set Georgia's economy on a sound course even as Rustavi-2 and other independent media sources began exposing the growing corruption of his government and made honesty in public life a major issue in the 2003 parliamentary elections. Shevardnadze also suffered for having failed

to win or satisfactorily resolve wars or territorial disputes in the troubled regions of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Ajaria.

In 1994 and again in 1999, Kuchma won a presidential election judged relatively free and fair by regional standards. During his second term, economic growth began after a decade of contraction, roaring to a record 12 percent in 2004. Yet severe corruption made him unpopular. Typifying the rot was Kuchma's apparent complicity—illustrated by leaked audiotapes—in the 2000 abduction and assassination of Web-based investigative reporter Georgi Gongadze. More than any other event, Gongadze's murder exposed the illegitimacy of Kuchma and his allies.

A united opposition. A united opposition—or at least the perception of one—is a third factor that appears crucial for democratic breakthrough, although the extent of unity varies widely enough across the cases that one may question its necessity as a factor. In Serbia and Ukraine, unity before the election was critical to success; in Georgia, less so. This may have been because the former countries had presidential elections, while Georgia held parliamentary balloting. In each case, however, a viable alternative to the incumbent leader seemed critical.

Throughout the 1990s, personality clashes had plagued the Serbian democratic movement and tarnished its reputation. In January 2000, Serbia's democrats agreed to set aside their differences to create a united front, the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS). Most importantly, DOS settled behind one presidential candidate, Vojislav Koštunica, for the September 2000 presidential election. At the time, Koštunica headed the relatively small Democratic Party of Serbia and had only modest fame. Yet polls showed that Koštunica's newness, coupled with his brand of moderate nationalism, made him the ideal opposition candidate. Support began to gel behind him firmly and broadly enough to make him seem the potent challenger for whom so many Serbian voters had been longing.

Ukrainian democrats also created the perception of unity in the run-up to the 2004 presidential election. For much of the previous decade, Ukraine's democratic forces had remained divided and disorganized. The crafting of opposition unity was complicated by the presence of strong and legitimate Socialist Party, which made cooperation with liberals difficult. Nor, for many years, was there a single, charismatic leader of the opposition who stood out as an obvious first among equals. Ironically, Kuchma helped to create such a leader when he dismissed Viktor Yushchenko as his prime minister in 2001.

While known more as a technocrat than a politician, Yushchenko had overseen economic growth and otherwise done well in office, making him a dangerous opponent to the party of power. His new "Our Ukraine" bloc captured a quarter of the popular vote in the 2002 parliamentary elections, causing other contenders for the role of opposition standard-bearer to step aside in advance of the 2004 presidential balloting.

Facing legislative elections under a system of proportional representation, the Georgian opposition had little reason to unite before polling day. Saakashvili's National Movement was one of three serious opposition blocs, and gained only a fifth of the popular vote. But in the 37-year-old Saakashvili, a U.S.-trained lawyer and former justice minister, the transformative moment of the postelectoral protests against Shevardnadze's chicanery found a revolutionary leader. Saakashvili gave fiery speeches, mobilized popular protest, and took bold decisions. His thin ties to the old regime (he had quit the cabinet in protest) helped him. His decision to lead unarmed protestors to storm into the parliament chamber and interrupt a Shevardnadze speech was a more radical and less constitutional step than anything that the Serbian or Ukrainian democrats did or would later do. It was also tactically risky: Had part of the Georgian democratic opposition refused to go along, Shevardnadze might have been tempted to fight harder to stay in power.

Independent electoral-monitoring capabilities. A fourth condition critical to democratic breakthrough in Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine was the ability of NGOs to provide an accurate and independent tally of the actual vote quickly after polls had closed. In Serbia, the Center for Free Elections and Democracy (CeSID) provided the critical data exposing voter fraud in the first round of the presidential election in September 2000. Exit polls were illegal in 2000, so CeSID conducted a parallel vote tabulation, a technique now used in many transitional democracies that CeSID founders originally observed in Bulgaria.⁹ They posted their representatives at 7,000 polling sites, which allowed them to produce a remarkably sophisticated estimation of the actual vote. On election night, DOS officials announced the results of their own parallel vote tabulation, but did so knowing that their results corresponded with CeSID results. CeSID, in other words, provided the legitimacy for the claim of falsification. CeSID's figures also supported Koštunica's claim that he had won more than 50 percent in the first round and therefore did not need to stand in a second round.

In Georgia as well, independent electoral monitoring was crucial. Buoyed by international funding, Georgian NGOs and survey firms carried out the country's first-ever exit polls and parallel vote count. All told, around 20,000 voters across 500 precincts were questioned, while about 8,000 foreign and domestic monitors observed the voting.¹⁰ The results from the exit polling and the parallel count were remarkably similar and strikingly at odds with official tallies. Observation teams documented instances of vote fraud.

In Ukraine, the Committee of Ukrainian Voters (CVU) played the central role in monitoring all rounds of the 2004 presidential vote. CVU also conducted a parallel vote tabulation. A consortium of polling firms coordinated by the Ukrainian NGO "Democratic Initiatives" did exit

polls, though so too did firms associated closely with the Kuchma regime. Unlike their Georgian counterparts, the Ukrainian organizations had years of experience. Yet they also had to contend with a far more sophisticated vote manipulator using novel tactics. Kuchma and his allies falsified the vote at the level of precinct, and not between the precinct level and higher levels of counting, where fraud traditionally occurs.¹¹ A parallel vote tabulation attempts to expose fraud by sampling the actual vote count at the precinct level. But if the precinct numbers are already phony, then a parallel count will also reflect the result of the falsified vote, an outcome that the CVU had to face. Second, Kuchma's government muddied the results of the exit polls by compelling two of the consortium partners to use a method in the second round different from the method used by the other two polling firms more closely tied to the opposition.¹² After the second round of the presidential vote, therefore, two different exit polls were released with different results.

Where quantitative or large-scale methods for exposing fraud failed, however, finer-grained or qualitative methods came to the rescue. Individual election monitors affiliated with Ukrainian NGOs and international organizations reported hundreds upon hundreds of specific irregularities. At the same time, the turnout levels that the government was claiming in some regions of the east (a pro-Kuchma bastion) were so absurdly high that analysts knew they had to be false. The combination of systematically reported irregularities with ridiculous turnout claims gave a few members of the Central Election Commission the courage to refuse to certify the final count, sending the issue to the Supreme Court.¹³ The Court, deliberating amid the grand peaceful protests of late November and December 2004, then used the evidence of fraud that the CVU and other NGOs had gathered as grounds for overturning the official results and ordering a rerun of the second round, which Yushchenko won decisively.

A modicum of independent media. A fifth critical element in Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine was the presence of independent media able to relay news about the falsified vote and to publicize mounting popular protests. For years, such media outlets and brave individual journalists had been reporting the misdeeds of semi-autocratic incumbents. At the moment of breakthrough, autonomous media remained vital in triggering change despite the incumbents' last-ditch efforts to hang on to power.

In Serbia, several important independent media outlets contributed to the decline of Milošević's popularity. The B-92 radio station had offered unsparing professional coverage of Milošević and his regime since 1989.¹⁴ B-92 cofounder Goran Matić also played an instrumental role in establishing a regional radio and television network to distribute independent news broadcasts. The ANEM network, a media cluster consisting of a news agency, several independent dailies and weeklies,

and a television station, helped to give Serbians news from outside state-dominated channels. Critical coverage of Milošević's wars, his economic policies, and his government's violent arrests and abuses of young protestors helped to undermine his support within the population. In September 2000, independent media coverage of official vote fraud brought outraged Serbians into the streets. At the time, Milošević had closed B-92, but ANEM and Radio Index in Belgrade ensured that there was no letup in coverage. Without these media outlets, popular mobilization would have been much harder.

In Georgia, too, independent media were key. Shevardnadze's second term had seen him take a pounding from the serious, corruption-exposing "60 Minutes" show on Rustavi-2, while the cartoon satire "Dardubala" skewered him with tongue in cheek. During the late fall of 2003, Rustavi-2 and some smaller media outlets broadcast the exit-poll and parallel-count results endlessly, right next to the official results released by the Georgian Central Electoral Commission. Unlike the opposition media in Serbia or Ukraine, Rustavi-2 had become the most watched television network in Georgia even before the controversial election. Once people took to the streets, Rustavi-2's cameras showed them all. Networks once loyal to Shevardnadze followed suit, and even more Georgians came out to speak their minds once it became clear that the government would not use force.

While Ukraine's democratic opposition had access to fewer traditional sources of independent media and found all their major broadcast channels owned or controlled by oligarchs loyal to Kuchma and Yanukovich, Ukrainians made up for this with their slightly richer country's higher level of Internet connectivity. Indeed, the Orange Revolution (so called after the party color of "Our Ukraine") may have been the first in history to be organized largely online.

Gongadze's own Web-based publication, *Ukrainskaya Pravda*, had carried on despite his murder and remained a critical (in both senses) source of news and analysis about the Kuchma regime. By the end of the Orange Revolution, this Internet publication was the most widely read news source of any kind in Ukraine. During the critical hours and days after the second-round vote, *Ukrainskaya Pravda* displayed the results of exit polling, detailed news about other allegations of fraud, and provided all sorts of logistical information to protestors. Text messaging via cell phones or handheld digital devices was a great tool for spreading information among the large crowds of outdoor protestors in Kyiv and its tent city.

The comparatively old-fashioned technology of television also played a role in the Orange Revolution's success. Realizing that national television access was going to be a problem, the wealthy Yushchenko supporter Viktor Poroshenko bought a small station in 2003 that he then renamed Channel 5. Amazingly, the authorities let the sale go through.

They would have cause to rue this when Channel 5 began running round-the-clock coverage of the protest in downtown Kyiv after the false official results came out. As Ukrainians witnessed the peaceful, even festive mood of the crowd, more came out to join the 11-day demonstration. By the fourth day, the staffs at most other proregime stations had joined forces with the street demonstrators. So in Ukraine as in Georgia, television proved a major headache for the fraudulent incumbents.

Mobilizing the masses. A sixth critical factor for democratic breakthrough in Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine was the opposition's capacity to mobilize significant numbers of protestors to challenge the falsified electoral results. In all three cases, newly formed student groups—Otpor in Serbia, Kmara in Georgia, and Pora in Ukraine—provided logistical support and in the case of Ukraine, the first wave of protestors. Beyond that early boost, all of these student groups worked together with both the main opposition parties and other NGOs in helping to mobilize the giant demonstrations (in Serbia and Ukraine the crowds topped a million) that forced the election violators of the old administration to leave office.

In Serbia, the opposition had planned for street-level activism well in advance. A broad coalition of Otpor, DOS, regional government heads, union leaders, and civil society organizers coordinated efforts that culminated in the million-strong 5 October 2000 march on Belgrade. As columns of protesters neared the capital, they met police barricades, but not one seriously tried to stop the caravans. The sheer scale of the unarmed demonstration (the total population of Serbia is about ten million) overwhelmed any thought of resistance. Within hours, the opposition had seized the parliament building, police headquarters, and the national television station. The next day, Milošević resigned.

In contrast to their Serbian predecessors, Georgia's protestors seemed less organized and were smaller in number (in population terms, Georgia is about half Serbia's size, and about eleven times smaller than Ukraine). But by Georgians standards, the mobilization was coordinated, well organized, and massive, involving not only citizens of Tbilisi, but people from all parts of the country. The student group Kmara, modeled after Serbia's Otpor, took the lead.¹⁵ Kmara was new, and so had not paved the way for protest as Otpor had, but once the vote was stolen, Kmara played a more central role than had its Serbian counterpart in mobilizing street protests. Saakashvili became the voice and face of the opposition. He used his boldness and speaking skills to coordinate a new United Opposition coalition joining the three opposition parties with Kmara and other civil society organizations. Eventually, the protests in Tbilisi reached that unspecifiable tipping point where anyone could see that suppression would mean mass casualties, an outcome that no powerholder—including Shevardnadze—deemed acceptable.

Compared to their counterparts in Serbia and Ukraine, Georgia's dem-

onstrators (or at least their leaders) were more radical in both their demands and their actions. In Serbia, protestors took to the streets to press the government to recognize the results of the presidential election. In Georgia, Saakashvili called for and succeeded in obtaining not only recognition of the actual parliamentary election results, but Shevardnadze's ouster, even though the Georgian president was not standing for reelection at the time. The demand was unconstitutional. Like Serbian democrats, but in contrast to the Ukrainian demonstration, Georgia's protestors initiated physical contact with the authorities by storming into parliament.

In Kyiv on the day after Yanukovich's fraudulent runoff "victory," Pora and "Our Ukraine" set up hundreds of tents near Independence Square, where "Our Ukraine" activists and legislators were erecting a large stage. Truckloads of tents, styrofoam mats, and food soon appeared. But these were logistics for tens of thousands, not the more than one million people who would eventually turn out. As the numbers rose, organizers succeeded in keeping people fed, clean, calm, and warm in the dead of a Ukrainian winter only because thousands of small businesspeople lent aid and because the city government of Kyiv (the city was a Yushchenko bastion) was supportive. In fact, support from city hall was critical not only in Kyiv, but also Belgrade and Tbilisi, and may even constitute another necessary condition for success.

Splits among the "guys with guns." A seventh and final necessary condition for success is a split among the "guys with guns," meaning the state's military, police, and security forces. A segment of these must distance itself far enough from the incumbents to show that the option of violent repression is risky if not untenable. In all three cases such a split developed, though its size as well as the threat of violence varied from case to case.

In Serbia, Milošević called upon local police to undertake increasingly violent actions against young Otpor protestors. Many police officials disliked such orders. As demonstrations grew in size and intensity throughout 2000, many in the security ministries came to suspect that Milošević would soon be finished. The size of the fresh protests that broke out after Milošević falsified the presidential vote convinced many police and intelligence officials that violent repression was no longer an option. On the eve of the giant march on the capital in early October, the major opposition politician Zoran Djindjić convinced the Yugoslav army's chief of staff to have his troops stand down the next day. This helped greatly in preventing bloodshed during the October 5 march, since some demonstrators had come to Belgrade armed and ready to fight.

The Georgian opposition began courting the security ministries well before the 2003 election. Once demonstrators took to the streets, some key officials either openly deserted Shevardnadze or made it clear that

they would refuse to order units under their command to arrest, much less to shoot, peaceful protestors. When an elite Interior Ministry paramilitary unit went over to the side of the protestors, other formations followed. Memories of the heroism that Georgian police had shown in trying to protect civilians from attacks by Soviet security troops during a 1989 rally in Tbilisi also played a huge role in stimulating defections and keeping the 2003 response peaceful.

Compared to his counterparts in Serbia and Ukraine, Shevardnadze had a more legitimate reason to use force against the rebellious opposition. They, after all, stormed the parliament and then demanded his resignation, not simply the recognition of the results of the parliamentary election. Shevardnadze, however, refrained from trying to use force. He may have realized that finding reliable forces to carry out such an order would be no sure thing, but also may have had sincere qualms. Then too, Shevardnadze enjoys a positive reputation in the West by dint of his role in winding down the Cold War as Mikhail Gorbachev's foreign minister, and no doubt felt reluctant to mar that good name with the blood of civilians.

In Ukraine, the contacts that opposition leaders made with the security *apparatus* also helped to close the door to violent repression.¹⁶ On the streets, where protestors and soldiers were close together for days, Pora's humorous tone (as well as the number of young female demonstrators who took positions on the front line, eye-to-eye with the soldiers guarding government buildings) defused tensions. As in Georgia, several police and intelligence units made clear that the "guys with guns" could not be trusted to carry out a repressive order.

As laudable as some of the defections may have been, it is wise not to overidealize the attitude of the security forces in these situations. More than their good will, what kept violence at bay was the sheer size of the crowds. Smaller, less organized protests would have been tempting targets for aggressive police action. Ten thousand people can be dispersed with tear gas and armored cars. A crowd of one million cannot be.

Unessential Factors

Highlighting these seven factors implicitly suggests that other factors were not as important. For instance, the state of the economy or level of economic development did not play a uniform causal role in these cases of democratic breakthrough. Students of modernization have identified a long-term positive correlation between rising wealth in a country and the emergence of a middle class and democratization.¹⁷ But while Ukraine has a growing middle class and a recent history of robust growth, the same cannot be said of Serbia or Georgia. Those latter two countries, indeed, had been living through periods of economic trauma and hardship that served to undermine Milošević and Shevardnadze,

but in neither case was an economic meltdown the trigger for transition. Instead, it was a purely political factor—vote fraud—that set things off.

While all three countries had some recent history of ethnic tensions or troubles up to and including outright warfare, neither a full resolution of all border disputes nor clear stipulation of who “belonged” in the polity formed a precondition for democratic breakthrough.

Splits between hard-liners and soft-liners among the semi-authoritarian incumbents also figured little as tactical triggers for democratizing change. In part this may be because such splits had taken place years before, so that the oppositions in these three cases were dominated not by dissidents or civil society leaders, but by former reformists within the regime. Koštunica had sat in parliament, Saakashvili had been recruited for government service by Shevardnadze, and Yushchenko had been Kuchma’s premier.

The relationships between the incumbents and the West in these cases do not fit into a single clear pattern. Milošević obviously had the worst such relationship: After he had refused to accept NATO peace-keeping plans for Kosovo, NATO warplanes had bombed Serbia for almost the entire spring of the year before his ouster (the effect of the air war on democratization is still a hotly debated topic among Serbian democrats and students of Serbian politics generally).¹⁸ Shevardnadze, by contrast, enjoyed much better ties with Western leaders, but this good standing did not help him keep power. Kuchma’s cordial but strained relations with the West may have pushed him at the margin to do the right thing and relinquish the succession rather than try to force his handpicked successor on a country that had elected someone else.

Western democracy-assistance programs played a visible role in all three cases. Saying which instance of aid helped, hurt, or made no difference to democratic breakthrough is a complex subject well beyond the scope of this essay. It seems safe to say that foreign aid played no independent role in any of these breakthroughs (and rarely does), but contributed to the drama by increasing or decreasing the relative value of each of the seven factors outlined above. With the possible exception of election monitoring, each factor would still have been present had no Western assistance been forthcoming.

Another possible factor, the quality of the positive appeals or platforms worked out by the opposition in each country, also appears fairly insignificant. In every case, the heart of the matter was getting rid of unpopular and deeply dishonest incumbents, not backing some specific new set of policies or reforms. Even the role that democratic ideas played in mobilizing first voters and then protestors is not uniform across these cases. Rather, all three successful movements constructed compelling ideologies of opposition, whose main message was a cry of “Enough!” hurled in the face of the incumbent powerholders.

Even the pivotal role of the opposition leader is not easy to discern in

all three cases. After the breakthrough, it seems as if no other leader could have united the opposition and toppled the regime. But this “fact” only seems obvious after success. Immediately after victory in 2000, Koštunica looked like the only moderate nationalist who could have defeated Milošević in a free and fair election, yet Koštunica’s limited skills as a politician have since diminished his heroic status. The diabolical tactics of the Kuchma regime, including most obviously the poisoning of Yushchenko, transformed Yushchenko into an indispensable hero of the Orange Revolution. Yet just months before victory, several leaders within the Ukrainian democratic movement questioned whether he had the political and campaigning skills needed to win. In Georgia, Saakashvili became essential and one-of-a-kind only after he ordered the storming of the parliament and Shevardnadze’s ouster. Had the opposition maintained more modest objectives—a new parliamentary vote or the recognition of the actual results of the vote already held—Saakashvili’s place in Georgian history could have evolved into a very different narrative. Whether leaders seize greatness or have it thrust upon them by circumstance is not a question that these cases will settle.

In seeking to learn lessons from these democratic breakthroughs, it is important to realize that the list of necessary conditions is long. (It is bad social science to have seven independent variables to explain three outcomes!) The presence of only a few of these factors is unlikely to generate the same outcome. A more popular or more clever and ruthless autocrat might have been able to outmaneuver the democratic opposition. A less-organized electoral-monitoring effort in any of these three countries might not have been able to convince people to take to the streets. Smaller numbers of protestors in the streets might have led to outcomes that looked more like Tiananmen Square in 1989 than the big and peaceful wins for democratization that actually happened. The stars must really be aligned to produce such dramatic events.

Democratic breakthroughs are a start, but in and of themselves they cannot ensure success in consolidating democracy. In Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine, we have seen an antidemocratic status quo knocked off its pins and a stalled democratic transition get a new lease on life. But renewed democratic stagnation and even reversal remain possible.

Moreover, each case played out in a different way that has consequences (social scientists call this “path dependency”). In Serbia, the 4 October 2000 deal that prevented shooting also allowed top security officials from the Milošević administration to stay in power. The very general who negotiated with Djindjić appears to have ordered his murder three years later. Corrupt officials entrenched within the interior and intelligence ministries still threaten the deepening of Serbian democracy—a problematic legacy of October 2000.¹⁹

Georgia’s breakthrough was not pacted or negotiated. Rather, one side seized power, which was both good and bad. In the plus column,

Saakashvili owed no favors and could clean house, which to his credit he has tried to do. In the minus column, the lack of constraints faced by a man who seized power in what was very like a coup and then had it ratified by 96 percent of his country's voters makes some worried that he too might one day turn to autocratic methods.²⁰ To date, these predictions have all proved premature: Saakashvili is still a force for democratic consolidation. But critics recall that Shevardnadze, after all, became president under somewhat similar circumstances and appeared, at least comparatively, as a liberalizing figure. Georgia has yet to see executive authority change hands through an elective and rule-based process.

By contrast, Ukraine's leaders eventually did agree to negotiate, with the assistance of international mediators, a pacted arrangement by which Kuchma and his side allowed the second round of the presidential election to be rerun and Yushchenko and his side agreed to changes in the constitution, giving the parliament and prime minister more powers and the president fewer. At the time of these roundtable talks, some leaders of Ukraine's opposition wanted to end discussions, follow the example of the Rose Revolution, and simply seize power.²¹ Yushchenko, however, rejected these calls for storming government building three times, and insisted instead on the negotiated path. Yushchenko's decision will constrain his presidential powers in the short run, but in the long run may help to consolidate democratic practices of compromise and checks and balances between branches of government. If so, he may prove the most visionary of the three anti-authoritarian leaders.

NOTES

The author would like to thank David Abesadze, Valerie Bunce, Daniel Calingaert, Taras Kuzio, Ryan Podolsky, Matthew Spence, and Cory Welt for comments on earlier drafts of this article.

1. On why, see Valerie Bunce, "The Political Economy of Postsocialism," *Slavic Review* 58 (Winter 1999): 756–93; M. Steven Fish, "The Determinants of Economic Reform in the Post-Communist World," *East European Politics and Societies* 12 (Winter 1998): 31–78; and Michael McFaul, "The Fourth Wave of Democracy and Dictatorship: Noncooperative Transitions in the Postcommunist World," *World Politics* 54 (January 2002): 212–44.

2. In early 2005, Kyrgyzstan's semi-autocratic president Askar Akayev also suffered an ouster at least in part due to the factors described in this essay, but the nature of the events remains too murky—and their implications for democracy too uncertain—to be included in this analysis at this time.

3. Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978), 191.

4. Author's interview with Taras Stetskiv ("Our Ukraine" leader and one of the central organizers of the protest at Kyiv's Independence Square after 22 November 2004), Kyiv, 10 March 2005.

5. Daniel Brumberg, "Liberalization versus Democracy," in Thomas Carothers

and Marina Ottoway, eds., *Uncharted Journey: Promoting Democracy in the Middle East* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2004), 15–36.

6. On this regime type, see Larry Diamond, “Thinking about Hybrid Regimes,” *Journal of Democracy* 13 (April 2002): 21–35; and Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism,” *Journal of Democracy* 13 (April 2002): 51–65.

7. Zeljko Cvijanović, “Belgrade Opposition Upbeat,” Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 28 July 2000.

8. Richard Dobson, U.S. Department of State, “Georgians Fast Losing Faith in Shevardnadze and Their Democracy,” M-238-01, 3 December 2001, 1.

9. Author’s interviews with CeSID officials Zoran Lucić and Marko Blagojević, Belgrade, 13 January 2005.

10. Author’s interview with Anna Tarkhnishuli (director of the Business and Consulting Company, one of the three firms involved in the exit poll), Tbilisi, 14 October 2004.

11. Author’s interview with Ihor Popov (chairman of the Committee of Ukrainian Voters), Kyiv, 10 March 2005.

12. Author’s interview with Ilko Kucheriv (president of Democratic Initiatives and organizer of the exit-poll consortium), Kyiv, 10 March 2005.

13. Author’s interview with CEC member Roman Knyazevich, Kyiv, 12 March 2005.

14. On B-92’s history, see Matthew Collin, *Guerilla Radio: Rock ‘n’ Roll Radio and Serbia’s Underground Resistance* (New York: Nation, 2001).

15. On the Serbia connections, see interview with David Zurabishvili (former head of the Liberty Institute), in Zurab Karumidze and James Wertsch, eds., *Enough! The Rose Revolution in the Republic of Georgia 2003* (New York: Nova Science, 2004), 61–68; and Peter Baker, “Tbilisi’s ‘Revolution of Roses’ Mentored by Serbian Activists,” *Washington Post*, 25 November 2003, A22.

16. C.J. Chivers, “How Top Spies in Ukraine Changed the Nation’s Path,” *New York Times*, 17 January 2005, A1.

17. Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Basis of Politics* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1960).

18. Author’s interviews with several democratic activists involved in the anti-Milošević campaign in 2000. Polls show that Milošević benefited in the short run from the bombing campaign, although, ironically, this spike in popularity might have caused him to miscalculate his chances of winning a direct election.

19. Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, *Human Rights and Accountability: Serbia 2003* (Belgrade: Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, 2004), 163–66.

20. Author’s interviews with several Georgian NGO leaders, Tbilisi, 12–14 October 2004.

21. Author’s interview with Pora leader Vladislav Kaskiv, Kyiv, 9 March 2005.