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Bringing Down Dictators: The Diffusion of Democratic Change in Communist and Postcommunist Europe and Eurasia

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**Bringing Down Dictators:
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Eurasia**

by

Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik

Abstract

What explains the cross-national diffusion of democratic change? A comparative analysis of two waves of such changes in postcommunist Europe and Eurasia from 1988-2005 suggests that three factors are critical. One is an expansion of opportunities for change; another is the appeal of positive precedents, especially when parallels can be drawn between the “sender” and the “receiving” country; and a third is the rise of transnational groups supporting political change. For subversive innovations, all three factors seem to be necessary—which is one reason why each of the waves of democratic change came to an end.

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“There are no miraculous events here, but many years of concerted action.”
Padraic Kenney (2002: 16)

A Regional Tradition: The Diffusion of Democratic Change¹

The collapse of authoritarian regimes in east-central Europe and Eurasia has occurred in two distinct waves. The first and more well-known wave took place from 1987-1992, when everyday citizens, in collaboration with local opposition groups within the Soviet Union and in various countries in Eastern Europe (to use the “old-fashioned” place names of that bygone era) mobilized in large numbers against communist party hegemony. These protests, together with a variety of other developments, some short-term and others longer-term, had dramatic consequences, including not just the end of communist regimes in many cases, but also the dissolution of three ethnofederal states in the region—the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. These developments in turn brought an end to the Cold War international order—a development that was also both long-in-the-making, yet seemingly sudden (Bunce, 1984/5, 1999b; Beissinger, 2002).

The second round of mobilization against dictatorial rule in this part of the world began in 1996 and continued through 2005. In this round, citizens, again in collaboration with opposition groups, confronted authoritarian leaders, with these challenges to the status quo, as in the first wave, spreading from state to state. Also similar were certain patterns in diffusion dynamics. “Early risers” (to borrow from Beissinger, 2002) experienced a more definitive break with authoritarianism than the mobilizations that followed in other regimes in the region. Moreover, this wave, like its forerunner, came to an end, with many authoritarian regimes in the region successful in escaping regional pressures for democratic transition.

These similarities notwithstanding, however, the two rounds did differ from one another in several respects. Perhaps the most important contrast is that the second round of democratic change took place in a different international and domestic context, and this shift in context necessarily affected the mode of political confrontation. Thus, citizens in the postcommunist period—as opposed to mobilizations at the end of communism—operated in an international environment in which democracy promotion had become an important component of both American and EU foreign policy. At the same time, in direct contrast to the Soviet Union under Gorbachev, the Russian Federation, especially towards the end of the second wave, had become an increasingly assertive defender of both the dictatorships and the hybrid regimes that fell within what Putin and his allies defined as the Russian zone of influence.

The domestic context was also different. All the regime participants in the second wave featured some elements of democratic politics—in contrast to the fully authoritarian regimes that served as the focus of mobilizations in the region during the second half of the 1980s. As a result of this factor, together with differences in international context, the mode of mobilization was

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different. In the second round, citizens and opposition groups used an electoral model of democratization to challenge authoritarian rule. This model had been put to good use in such countries as the Philippines in 1986 and Chile in 1988. It rested on carrying out specific actions that enhanced the prospects for an opposition electoral victory—in particular, increased collaboration among opposition groups in order to present a united front to the voters; concerted pressures on regimes (by both domestic and international actors) to reform voter lists and other aspects of election management in ways that conformed more closely to the democratic ideal of a transparent, fair and inclusive process of leadership selection; use of public opinion polls and both internal and (where tolerated) external vote monitoring; registration drives to expand the number of voters; sophisticated electoral campaigns that broke with past practices by transforming the election into a referendum on “politics as usual,” reaching out to young people and citizens throughout the country who had been long alienated from both the regime and what many saw as an ineffective, if often compromised opposition; and utilization of a variety of techniques to get out the vote and provide visible evidence that each vote counted and would be counted correctly.

The focus of citizen mobilization, in short, was on using elections to wrest power from authoritarians—even in countries, such as Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, where incumbents had traditionally been able to manipulate electoral outcomes in their favor. However, even in many of these pivotal elections, protests played an important role—in bringing down the government and thereby forcing new elections (as in Bulgaria, for example, in 1997) and in forcing authoritarians, immediately after the votes were counted, to admit defeat and leave office (as in Serbia in 2000; Georgia in 2003; Ukraine in 2004; and Kyrgyzstan 2005). In this sense, the second round of democratization in this region bore a family resemblance to the first round—in its focus on defeating dictators and in the role of popular mobilization in achieving that political end.

Comparing the Two Rounds

The purpose of this paper is to use these two waves of democratic change in Europe and Eurasia in order to explore both the role and the limits of the cross-national diffusion of citizen and opposition mobilization against authoritarian rule. This is an important question—most obviously, because of the focus of this conference on why some communist regimes (and other authoritarian states) have succeeded in resisting democratic change. This comparison, therefore, reminds us that democratization is a response to both domestic and international influences; that its spread, even within regions, is uneven; and that resistance is not just a story about countries outside of Europe and Eurasia, but also regimes *within* this region. The comparison of these two waves also carries an important implication. If the spread of democracy is far from inevitable, so the resilience of authoritarianism may be bounded not simply by regime and region, but also by time.

However, there are several other reasons for analyzing these two rounds of mobilizations against dictatorial rule, especially if one wants to engage the literature on democratic transitions. One is that such transitions, it is often overlooked, entail virtually by necessity a first stage; that is, the end of the authoritarian monopoly on political power. This is a separate issue from the usual focus on much of the work in this field on transitions to democracy—which may or may not follow the deregulation of incumbent authoritarian regimes. Another consideration is that these two rounds provide further evidence that the focus in the early transitions literature on the

role of elites, not publics in the process of democratic transition tends to under-estimate the critical role of citizen mobilization in many transitions—whether such mobilizations immediately precede the end of authoritarian rule or whether they provide a longer-term pattern that can be interpreted as the beginning of the end (Bunce, 2003; Ackerman and Karatnycky, 2005).

Third, and again with reference to the earlier literature on democratic transitions: by analyzing waves, rather than specific cases of democratic change, we can gain further insights into the recent finding that democracy seems to spread within regions—at least in the Third Wave, but also, arguably in earlier waves (Brinks and Coppedge, 2005; but also see Wehnert, 2005, Markoff, 1996). While illuminating, these studies fail to provide compelling answers to such important questions as *how* diffusion takes place—or the role of actors and structures—and *why* the process comes to an end (but see Beissinger, 2002; Bunce and Wolchik, 2007; Jacoby, 2007). Put simply: both waves ended, and even today postcommunist Europe and Eurasia feature a number of regimes that are either hybrid or authoritarian—regimes, in short, that have resisted in part or in full the two waves of democratization of interest here. This observation in turn takes us full circle. By comparing the two waves, we are in a position to shed some light on two issues central to this conference—that is, dynamics of both resistance and resilience—and to do so, while holding region constant.

I begin the analysis by laying out a summary of the two waves—with more detail provided for the second wave, since it is more recent and less widely-analyzed. I then address the question of why this region has managed to be the site of so many popularly-based challenges to authoritarian rule. However, even in postcommunist Europe and Eurasia, there are diffusion gaps; that is, regimes that have managed to swim against the democratic tide. Why did this happen? The answer to this question will be the focus of the final section of this paper. In the conclusion, I join these two stories—of emulation and resistance—in order to speculate more broadly about why China in particular has resisted both of these waves.

Wave One: The Collapse of Communism

There is a sizeable literature on the events of 1987-1992 and my summary, as a result, will merely highlight the main elements of these challenges to authoritarian rule (see, for example, Bunce, 1999b; Osa, 2001, 2003; Glenn, 2001; Joppke, 1995; Stokes, 1993; Brown, 2000; Beissinger, 2002). The mass protests that eventually led to the disintegration of communism and communist states began in fact in two places: in the Soviet Union in 1987, with the rise of popular fronts in support of perestroika in Russia and the Baltic states, and in Slovenia, with the rise of a student movement that, by entering the forbidden zone of military affairs, took on both the Yugoslav state and the regime (see Mastnak, 1994). Protests then broke out in Poland in the fall 1988 (much to the consternation of Lech Walesa, who was losing control over his movement), and culminated in an unprecedented roundtable between the opposition and the Party that focused on ending the political stalemate in Poland, in place since martial law was declared in 1981, through the creation of a transitional regime (which led to a far more rapid transition to democracy than expected by either side, following the June, 1989 partially free elections that by August produced a democratic government).

The Polish precedent, coupled with the considerable loosening of strictures on political change in Eastern Europe as a result of the Gorbachev reforms, was powerful enough to lead in the late summer of 1989 to a roundtable in Hungary, which was different in important respects

from its Polish counterpart—for example, it was not televised; it featured a more complex and focused set of working groups; and it involved more detailed planning for a democratic future, including fully competitive elections in the following year. In the fall of 1989, massive protests then broke out in East Germany, which were then followed by similar developments in Czechoslovakia—with participants in the latter speaking directly of demonstration effects and similarities in domestic conditions. Protests, albeit smaller and with less direct translation into democratic politics, then followed in Bulgaria, Romania, and Albania. In the course of these developments, moreover, protests within the Soviet Union continued and spread, as they did within Yugoslavia, where the Slovenian developments influenced, by all accounts, subsequent mass mobilization in both Croatia and Serbia in particular. Indeed, even the Hungarians, scarred by 1956, joined the fray, using Republic Day and renewed debates about the events of 1956 and Imre Nagy as a hero versus a villain, to carry out their own demonstrations.

Mass Mobilization and Electoral Revolutions

Let us now turn to the second wave of citizen confrontations with authoritarian rule—from 1996-2005 (see, for example, Beissinger, 2005, 2006; Bunce and Wolchik, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2007d, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c; McFaul, 2005; Forbrig and Demes, 2007). In this round, the form of protests changed to some degree (moving from an entirely street-based activity to an electoral one that was combined, in many cases nonetheless, with street demonstrations). The regime context also changed: that is, not communism, but, rather, regimes that either fell short of being full democracies (as with Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia) or that were either somewhat or very authoritarian, albeit tolerant to varying degrees of competition for political office (with Ukraine and Georgia less authoritarian and Serbia far more so). These distinctions aside, however, the issue on the table was the same, whether in Bulgaria or Serbia: popular challenges to authoritarian rule. Moreover, the pivotal elections of interest all featured an upsurge in the turnout of voters supporting change—and often as well an overall increase in turnout, especially in comparison with declining turnout across earlier elections over the course of the postcommunist era.² For example, in the 1998 Slovak elections, turnout increased nine percent over the 1994 elections and in the 2000 Croatian elections six percent over the 1997 presidential elections and eight percent over the 1995 parliamentary elections. In discussing this wave, we will provide greater detail, largely because these events are new and not fully-digested, especially from a comparative or a diffusion standpoint.

Let us begin by noting that there is rarely a hard and fast answer to the question of when a process of diffusion actually begins. In my view (also see the articles by Bunce and Wolchik), the emergence of the model of democratizing elections began with four inter-connected political struggles in Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia from 1996-1998—countries that provided a hot-house for political change, in part because of the combination of democratic deficits, active oppositions and shared borders. From 1996-1997 there were massive three-month-long protests in Serbia—protests that were motivated by Milosevic's attempt to deny the opposition its significant victories in many of the local elections that took place in 1996 (Lazic, 1999; Pavlovic, 2005). These protests, as in the cases that followed in their footsteps, built on previous rounds of

² Here, we draw upon the data collected by the Swedish-based organization, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance: http://www.idea.int/vt/survey/voter_turnout2.cfm. On the structure of turnout, see, for example, Lucic, Vasiljevic, Bjeloglav, 2002 for the Serbian case.

political protest—in the Serbian case going back to the early 1980s and in Romania, Bulgaria, and Slovakia to 1989 (and even during the communist period, as in Slovakia from 1967-1968 and the miner's strikes in Romania during the 1980s). Although the Serbian protests failed in the short-term, they contributed in important ways to a subsequent round of election-based protests in the fall of 2000 that succeeded in bringing down Milosevic (see St. Protic, 2005; Bieber, 2003; Pribecevic, 2004). Also helpful in producing a new generation of protesters and expanding the geography of anti-Milosevic sentiment were Milosevic's decisions, following these protests, to crack down on the autonomy of universities, local governments and the media (Pavlovic, 2005; Goati, 2000; Spasic and Subotic, 2000;). As the regime became more, not less repressive over time, the Serbian example reminds us of the contradictory effects of repression trends. Less repression can provide more opportunities for change, but greater repression can increase grievances, while indicating for both publics and opposition forces (at least in the Serbian, Ukrainian, and Georgian cases) that the leader was becoming more insecure and more desperate (and see Francisco).

The second set of struggles took place in Romania, where the liberal opposition finally came together and ran a sophisticated political campaign that succeeded in 1996 in replacing the former communist incumbent president (who came back to power in 2000) with a candidate with far stronger liberal credentials and commitments (see, for example, Romanian Coalition for a Clean Parliament, 2005; Mungui-Pippidi, 2005, 2007; but see Bunce, 2002 on the advantages for democratization of authoritarian forces losing, then winning power). The third set of struggles took place in Bulgaria at roughly the same time (see, especially, Petrova, 2007; and also Ganey, 2007).. In Bulgaria, Serbian protests next door were influential in particular in bringing labor and other groups out into the streets. While lagged in their response and to some degree shamed by the spontaneity of their own citizenry, Bulgarian intellectuals and leaders of the opposition finally recognized, especially given the poor performance of the incumbent regime, that such protests could lead to a new election and pave the way for the Union of Democratic Forces (which, prior to this time, would be better characterized as a fractious ensemble) to take power (which they did in 1997). Although the cohesion of the Bulgarian liberal opposition proved to be temporary and their effectiveness limited (as in the Romania story as well), their victory, again as in Romania, served as a decisive political turning point—as indicated, for example, by the consistent improvements in Freedom House scores following these pivotal elections in both countries (and see Kurekova, 2006; Ganey, 2007).

The Slovak Turning Point

The same generalization applies to the fourth participant in the story of the spread of the electoral model of democratization: Slovakia. It was in that country where all the components of the electoral model came together, with a variety of players, such as leaders of the Slovak, Bulgarian and Romanian oppositions, the American ambassadors to Slovakia and the Czech Republic, “graduates” of the Romanian and Bulgarian turn-arounds, and representatives of organizations such as the International Republican Institute, the National Democratic Institute, Freedom House and the National Endowment for Democracy, combining forces to create the OK98 campaign that led to the defeat of Vladimir Meciar in the 1998 Slovak parliamentary elections. It can be argued, therefore, that it was in Slovakia where the innovation of interest in this paper was fully fleshed out: the electoral model. As noted in the introduction, this was a model that broke with past electoral practices in a number of ways and that demanded for its

successful implementation both hard, often tedious and sometimes dangerous work on the part of the opposition and a widespread belief on the part of both citizens and opposition leaders that their participation could make a difference, not just in who rules, but also in the very nature of the regime itself. Central to this model, in short, were factors in short supply in previous electoral rounds; that is, greater unity among opposition forces, high energy and political engagement, attention to the details of winning power and defending that outcome, and optimism about the future. There was nothing inevitable, in short, about the success of these electoral contests in replacing dictatorial leaders with their more liberal counterparts—as we can see, for example, in the many cases for electoral breakthroughs failed, as in Armenia in 2003, Azerbaijan in 2005, and Belarus in 2006.

Once fully articulated and successful when implemented in Slovakia in 1998, the electoral model was then applied in a number of competitive authoritarian regimes (see Levitsky and Way, 2002, 2006; Schedler, 2002, 2006). Its first stop in the diffusion process was in Croatia in 2000, where the death of the long-serving dictator, Franjo Tudjman, in 1999 had weakened the governing party and provided an opportunity for the opposition to win power. In this case, as in Bulgaria and Romania, the election was for the Presidency, and as in these cases as well as Slovakia, the electoral outcome produced a smooth transition. The Croatian opposition also benefited (as would Serbia later in the same year) from earlier successes in local elections and earlier actions by the hardline regime to prevent the translation of voter preferences into representative governments. As in Slovakia, and in contrast to the situation in Bulgaria and Romania after these pivotal elections, the electoral revolution had dramatic effects on democratization in Croatia. A political corner was turned (Fish and Krickovic, 2003).

Later in 2000, the electoral model moved to Serbia (see Bunce and Wolchik, 2007a for details). While the implementation of the electoral model was as careful and thorough-going as it had been in Slovakia and Croatia, there were, nonetheless, some differences that distinguish Serbia from these other cases. One was that the struggle against Milosevic was severely constrained by the heavy authoritarian hand of the Milosevic regime. Thus, for example, there were no external election monitors in Serbia in the fall 2000 elections and the media were closely controlled by Milosevic. However, there was one similarity to Slovakia: the key role played by young people (Bunce and Wolchik, 2007b). Their organization in Serbia, Otpor, played a critical role in bringing down Milosevic—by providing evidence that the regime was both vulnerable and incompetent, by moving opposition development from the major cities to other sites within Serbia, by encouraging the opposition to coalesce, and by helping the Serbian Orthodox Church shift support from Milosevic to the opposition. Also important was the decision by Zoran Djindjic to throw his support to an opposition candidate more likely to win votes: Vojislav Kostunica.

The Serbian Presidential election of 2000 was a turning point for elections as democratizing agents, because the incumbent regime had been in power much longer and was far more authoritarian than the earlier sites for such electoral turning points, and because these very characteristics meant that the regime refused to vacate office, once the election and the tabulations of the vote, both fraudulent and accurate, had concluded. This led to massive political protests that succeeded in taking control over the capital and forcing Milosevic to resign. While the result, as in Croatia, was a regime change and not just a change in government, the Serbian opposition has continued to be plagued by severe divisions that were exacerbated by the continuing border problems represented by Kosovo and Montenegro (with the first on its way to statehood and the second, following the summer 2006 referendum, already there); growing

pressures for expanded autonomy in Vojvodina; and pressures on the part of the international community to move quickly in cooperating with the demands of the Hague War Crimes Tribunal (see Bieber, 2003; Begovic, 2005). The assassination of Djindjic in 2003—the most effective and certainly most charismatic leader of the Serbian opposition—did not help matters (and see Miller, 2004; International Crisis Group, 2006; but see the nuanced appraisal by Licht, 2007).

The Georgian opposition then followed suit in the 2003 parliamentary elections—though this produced, it is important to recognize, a coup d'etat by the opposition, since the long-serving President, Eduard Shevardnadze, left office without having been in fact up for reelection (Papava, 2005; Wheatley, 2005; also see Welt, 2007). In Georgia, the political context was less constraining than in Serbia, especially given the lackluster campaign by Shevardnadze's allies, the breakup of the party supporting Shevardnadze, the defection of so many key players from the ruling group to the opposition (such as Mikheil Saakashvili, the current president), the relative openness of the Georgian media, the formation of a youth group in support of political change (Kmara) that worked closely with the Georgian opposition around Saakashvili, and the presence of a significant number of local and international election monitors (Karumidze and Wertsch, 2005). As with the other cases, moreover, it was clear that the Georgian opposition modeled its campaign on the previous electoral breakthroughs in the region and benefited as well from various kinds of support from the Open Society Foundation and various American groups (see Devdariani, 2003; Meladze, 2005; Cooley and Ron, 2002; and see Grodeland, 2006; Mendelson, 2004; Mendelson and Glenn, 2002; Mendelson and Gerber, 2005 on international democracy promotion and its strengths and limitations).

The next successful democratizing election occurred in Ukraine a year later (see, in particular, Kuzio, 2005; Kubicek, 2005; Way, 2005a, 2005b; Aslund and McFaul, 2006). As in the Georgian case, a single charismatic politician—in this case, Viktor Yushchenko—played a critical role. As in both the Georgian and Serbian cases, the successful political breakthrough exploited a record of a leadership that had grown increasingly corrupt, careless and violent; benefited from defections from the ruling circles; built upon earlier rounds of protests and recent successes in local elections; and reached out to diverse groups, with young people playing nearly as important a role as one saw in Serbia with Otpor. Moreover, as in Serbia and Georgia, political protests after the election (which were as large and as persistent as those in Serbia) were again necessary to force the authoritarian challenger to admit defeat. More distinctive to the Ukrainian case, however, was the breakdown of central control over the media during the campaign and especially during the protests, and the remarkable role of the Supreme Court, which came down in support of the opposition's argument that the elections had been fraudulent and had to be repeated. As in Serbia, moreover, the unity of the opposition was short-lived, a factor that has blocked a consistent movement toward the creation of a stable and fully democratic polity (but see McFaul, 2006; Riabchuk, 2007).

The electoral model then moved to a number of new locales—Kyrgyzstan, where it succeeded, as in Georgia, in deposing the long-serving leader, despite the fact that these elections were also parliamentary, not presidential, and to Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Belarus, where there were more repressive and vigilant regimes, more divided oppositions (though less so in Azerbaijan in 2005), smaller protests (though larger in Azerbaijan, but blocked from the capital's center), and an inability to implement some of the most important components of the electoral model, such as reform of the electoral commissions, improvement in voter registration processes, widespread distribution of campaign materials, the establishment of cooperative relations with the security forces, and parallel vote tabulation to expose the contrast between official and “real”

results. All these factors, plus the popularity of the incumbents, allowed leaders in Belarus, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan to maintain power (see, for example, Silitski, 2005a, 2005b, 2007; Valiyev, 2006). In addition, in part because of deficits in the application of the electoral model (which was usually not the fault of the opposition in these highly repressive contexts), the United States—in sharp contrast to its role in Slovakia, Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine—failed (except in the case of Belarus) to take a strong stance condemning the quality of these elections (which was also true of the European Union).³

The dynamics of these recent elections from 2005-2006 were similar in fact to earlier, failed attempts to carry out electoral revolutions in Azerbaijan, Armenia and Belarus. Given the political chaos that has ensued in Kyrgyzstan since the spring 2005 elections, moreover, it is fair to say that the electoral model has had decidedly mixed results in that country (see, for example, Weyerman, 2005; Huskey, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c). Indeed, the result—that is, the fall of the Akayev regime—says more about the power of an idea than anything approaching a full application of the electoral model. However, this pattern parallels that of the first wave of democratic change in the region. Later breakthroughs are less orchestrated, less rooted in domestic developments and more uneven in both process and outcome than earlier ones.

Why the Waves?⁴

What explains the spread of mass-based (and opposition-supported and-facilitated) challenges to authoritarian rule in this region? Sharon Wolchik and I (2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2006b) have addressed this question in some of our recent work on the second wave, and Mark Beissinger (2002), Archie Brown (2000) and I (1999b), among others, have done the same with respect to the first round. Rather than go through the laborious (and no doubt boring) process of defining what diffusion means and what it requires, laying out the origins of the innovation, and then applying these theoretical insights to each wave from its beginning to its end, I will instead provide a more streamlined argument—and one that will prove helpful, I hope, once we turn to the question of gaps in cross-national transfer of mobilization against dictators.

Let me begin with some core assumptions about what might be termed the preconditions for diffusion.⁵ While a variety of long-term political and economic developments are no doubt critical, the key issue, when all is said and done, when assessing whether, and, if so, how mobilizations against authoritarianism spread from one country to the next, is the decision calculus of those citizens and opposition leaders who face difficult choices about whether to import models of democratic change that are making the rounds in their neighborhood. I emphasize difficult, because there is nothing inevitable about the departure of authoritarians

³ Indeed, interviews conducted in Baku in March, 2007 suggest that the Aliyev regime benefits in its relationship with the United States not just from energy resources (including endowments in oil and gas and a pivotal location for regional pipelines) and its increasingly tense relationship with Russia, but also its proximity to Iran.

⁴ A full treatment of diffusion, of course, would focus on a prior question; that is, why certain locations became the site for changes that then moved to other locales. This question has been treated by a number of analysts (Bunce, 1999b; Beissinger, 2002; Bunce and Wolchik, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2007d, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c). Rather than further extend the paper, I have chosen to ignore this issue.

⁵ Diffusion is defined in this paper as the conscious transfer of an innovation (such as new and subversive repertoires of political behavior in our case) from its point of origin to new sites (and for elaboration, see Bunce and Wolchik, 2007a, 2007b, 2006b).

from power, especially in contexts, such as the ones of interest in this paper, where mobilizations can be dangerous; where they have often failed; where incumbents are often viewed as impossible to defeat; and where oppositions have often been dismissed by the citizenry as weak, incompetent, irrelevant, and/or unworthy of support. Implied here is one important point that is easily overlooked, particularly in more structural studies that have the advantages of hindsight. Even in very unpopular regimes, citizens can decide, for quite understandable reasons, to co-exist or to collaborate with the regime. There are, in short, significant obstacles to diffusion.

With these points in mind, let us now turn to a discussion of three factors that figure prominently in the literature on diffusion and that, as we will see below, seemed to have played an important role in the cross-national diffusion of democratic change during the first and second waves. The first factor is a widespread sense on the part of oppositions and citizens that the precedent set by other countries successfully challenging authoritarian rule is an appealing prospect in terms of both what it requires and what it accomplishes. Here, the key question is as follows. Are successful mobilizations against dictators in other countries attractive because, for example, they fit with existing political goals; succeed in moving oppositions from the perimeters to the center of power (thereby tapping, for example, into political self-interest); and produce desirable outcomes (not just the removal of unpopular leaders, but also empowerment of more popular leaders, and improvements in the quality of both political and economic life)? Innovations in neighboring countries are also attractive if they are viewed as relatively easy to implement; that is, models of change that are well-designed to make quick use of expanded opportunities (such as Gorbachev's deregulation of the bloc, a succession crisis, or regular elections), contain a well-specified set of tasks that build on relatively familiar practices, and require limited personal sacrifice and risk. Also important are the costs of failure. Does implementation of the model promise at least some gains, and are their reasons to think that failure will nonetheless constitute an investment in future successes? Put simply, then, the key issue is the ratio for would-be challengers to authoritarianism between the costs and the benefits of importing a model of democratic change that has been successful elsewhere.

A second set of considerations that affect the potential for diffusion is whether contexts are similar. The issue here is both structural commonalities across countries—what sociologists often term the existence of structural isomorphism-- and perceptions on the part of exporters and particularly importers that the conditions in the latter resemble conditions in the former and thereby legitimate and facilitate cross-national emulation. What is critical to recognize in this line of argument, to return to the innovation of interest here, is that diffusion is more likely to occur when both objective conditions and subjective readings reveal important parallels in conditions “demanding” and “supporting” mobilizations against authoritarian rule between countries where a political breakthrough has occurred and countries where it has not. Such conditions include, for example, a decline in the popularity, repressive capacity and international support of a regime and growing collaboration among opposition groups. Leaving aside the details, however, is a larger question. What is required for diffusion is giving up the assumption of national distinctiveness and embracing instead an assumption of cross-national similarities—in context and political possibilities. What makes such a shift in beliefs surprising, it is important to note, is that this assumption had to be adopted in regimes where the national question (like the structure of the Soviet bloc, with its severe constraints on horizontal ties among countries) had highlighted distinctiveness and where both the communist and the postcommunist experience had drawn sharp divides—between the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the first wave and between Russia and its near abroad versus east-central Europe and the Balkans. Here, I am

reminded of an interview I conducted with one of the leader's of Otpor, the Serbian youth movement. Immediately after the successful defeat of Milosevic, he was called by an opposition leader in Tbilisi to find out how the Serbian opposition had carried out their venture. His first response was—where's Tbilisi?

This leads to a final factor: opportunities for political change. The desire to copy an appealing precedent and arguments about similar and facilitating conditions are insufficient to encourage diffusion unless opportunities present themselves to convert ideas and theories into action. Put differently: there are important moments that can facilitate targeted acts of emulation—for example, because of a crisis that seems to demand action, because of the appearance of a decision point, or because of a relatively sudden and widely-recognized redistribution of capacities between those defending the status quo and those contemplating a challenge to it and informed by precedents elsewhere (see, for example, Tarrow, 2005). While these moments cannot substitute for similar conditions and positive precedents, they can activate innovations that already meet the first two conditions. What is striking about our two waves of mobilizations against dictators is the role of international factors in particular in suddenly expanding opportunities for democratic change—in particular, increased Soviet tolerance of change in the first wave, coupled with growing collaboration among dissident communities from the 1970s onward, and, in the second, external support for electoral-based democratic change, with that external support including, in particular, not just American democracy assistance, but also the assistance of transnational networks composed of both American promoters and graduates of the processes that carried out earlier electoral breakthroughs in the region.

Diffusion Dynamics

What is striking about the two waves of interest in this paper is that all three factors were in fact in play, thereby facilitating the cross-national movement of mobilization against dictators. Before I elaborate, let me note two related points. One is that this region seems to be unusually “regional,” whether under communism or postcommunism—with regional understood as both a high number of similar conditions across states and relatively dense interactions linking developments in one state to developments in many other states in the region (and see Mainwaring and Perez-Linan, 2005). Put differently: this is a region predisposed for a variety of reasons to diffusion dynamics, as evidenced, we must remember, in the spread of protests and ideas about economic and political reforms long before communism came to an end. The other observation is that the movement of subversive innovations in particular may require precisely these kinds of regional characteristics and, thus, the three conditions of cross-national transmission outlined above.

Let me now turn to the question of applying these three conditions to the first wave. As a number of analysts have pointed out, what was striking about the communist experiment in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe was that it produced—in direct contrast to other regions also featuring a large number of dictatorial orders—regimes that were not just similar in their domestic political-economic structures, but also closely tied to one another with respect to issues of security, energy, political dependence, and economic exchange (Bunce, 1984/5; Bunce, 1999b). These similarities were joined, moreover, by similar political and economic trajectories, thereby insuring, for example, that political and economic difficulties would take a region-wide form, in part because of similar domestic circumstances and in part because of bloc integration. Just as important was the problem of fusion of politics and economics. Problems in one area

necessarily became problems in the other. It is, therefore, not surprising that there were in fact several dress-rehearsals before the eventual collapse of these regimes—when, for example, succession crises, as well as economic crises and political protests spread from state to state (see, especially, Bunce, 1984/5, 1999b; Gitelman, 1974; Vardys, 1983; Mlynar, 1980; Hodnett and Potichnyj, 1974; Bunce and Wolchik, 2006b, 2006c). Boundaries in short, whether demarcating politics from economics, one republic from another within federal states, the Soviet Union from Eastern Europe, or, more generally, one state from another were all unusually porous.

These objective similarities were matched, moreover, by subjective ones. Party leaders across these states assumed that their domestic situations were relatively similar, and feared that a crisis in one country—especially in the core, the Soviet Union—would spread to others (Mlynar, 1980). At the same time, dissidents during communism believed the same—with both sets of actors reflecting a similar reading of the problems of “mature socialism” and both the sources and the limits of the state’s political and economic power. Thus, it is not surprising, for example, that, beginning in the 1970s, there were more and more cross-national contacts among dissidents in Eastern Europe. The process began with the two most liberalized countries in the bloc—Poland and Hungary—and then extended to others. For instance, Hungarian dissidents approached their Polish counterparts in the 1970s about the Polish innovation of “flying universities,” and leaders of Solidarity were often asked to give seminars to oppositions in other countries in the region (though travel was still, of course, restricted). By the second half of the 1980s, contacts among dissident communities increased sharply, as did various types of opposition-sponsored communiqués that purposefully highlighted issues in neighboring countries—for example, calls for solidarity when dissidents in other countries were under siege.

Why did this happen? It was not simply assumptions that they were fighting a common enemy, or that oppositions could learn from one another about strategies for dealing with that common enemy. It was also a widespread sense in dissident culture at the time that success required cross-national collaboration, and that there was a civic responsibility, more generally, to join forces in fighting against oppression. What developed, in short, was a common dissident culture that, while tolerating differences in strategies, depending upon local theories and contexts, nonetheless reflected common situations, such as the continuing struggle for survival; a common set of practices, such as carving out islands of autonomy from the party-state and, where possible, standing up to authoritarian rule; and a common ideology, with particular emphasis on issues of freedom, dignity and law. Central to these commonalities, however, was a pronounced sense among dissidents throughout the region that the struggle against authoritarianism was regional and that success rested on the deployment of regional resources (Kenney, 2002). This made sense: Western governments were unreliable; the left opposition in the West was divided and often unhelpful as well; and the enemy was regionally-organized, as well as locally-endowed and dependent.

If both structural and perceived similarities were critical in diffusion dynamics during the first wave, so were the other two modes of transmission: appealing precedents and expanded opportunities for change. Perhaps the most significant development from 1987-1989 was the clear signaling from the regional hegemon—the Soviet Union—that it supported, first in words and then repeatedly in deeds, political and economic liberalization and non-intervention, whether of the military type or other forms, in changes taking place in Eastern Europe. It was also important that the first protests and the first roundtables in Eastern Europe paved the way for a peaceful transition from state socialism to democracy—and soon thereafter, capitalism. The costs of change, in short, were perceived locally and in neighboring countries as smaller than

expected, especially in comparison with the past, and the benefits were quickly judged as considerable. At the same time, it was far from accidental that the protests in Eastern Europe first began in countries that combined economic difficulties with relatively liberal politics (for the time); some market reforms; relative cultural homogeneity (which helped nationalism merge with liberalism); communist parties that had a well-developed reform wing; and a well-established and large opposition with substantial international contacts, both within the region and with the West.. It was relatively easy, in short, during 1989 (as during the 1970s, for that matter) for Hungary to learn from Poland, and then for other countries in Eastern Europe to follow suit. Whether those who followed the pioneers could make as definitive a break with communism, however, depended largely upon whether their opposition was large and experienced—which was certainly not the case for much of the Balkans and the successor states of the former Soviet Union.

Second Wave Diffusion

The spread of democratizing elections can also be explained by reference to the three sets of conditions outlined above. First, while it is true that postcommunism has produced dramatic diversification of the region with respect to both political and economic regimes and performance (Bunce, 1999a, 2006, 2007a, 2007b), it is also true that there were nonetheless a number of similarities among those states in the region that had failed to create sustainable democratic orders after 1989 and that later became sites for democratization through electoral breakthroughs. In particular, the countries of interest (Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine) shared the following characteristics. First, they tended to fall in that large space between full-scale dictatorships and full-scale democracies—though Slovakia had indeed made remarkable democratic strides until Meciar’s second term in particular and though Bulgaria combined a robust democratic order with what could be termed a hybrid economy (Petrova, 2007). Second, their transitions for the most part were marred by high levels of corruption, crony capitalism, and very poor economic performance (though this was not true for Slovakia, and though Ukraine, while experienced an economic surge prior to the Orange Revolution, nonetheless featured long years of economic decline during the transition). Indeed, unusually poor economic performance is typical of hybrid regimes more generally in the postcommunist region (Bunce, 1999a).

Third, all the regimes in question featured continuing tensions over definitions of the political community, the rules and rights of citizenship, and acceptable levels of autonomy for regions featuring a high concentration of minority communities. What is striking about this similarity is that it fits every case, with these tensions playing a critical role in the early years of transition in dividing and demobilizing the opposition and thereby leaving a significant space for illiberal nationalists, whether communists or otherwise, to play a prominent political role. Put simply: nationalism in these culturally-diverse contexts had the effect in the early years of postcommunism of derailing the transition by dividing democrats and empowering authoritarians.

Fourth, in most of these cases either the communist party or former communists continued to play an important political role throughout the transition. Sometimes they stayed in power (as in Serbia and Ukraine); sometimes they alternated in power with a relatively divided liberal opposition (as in Romania and Bulgaria); and sometimes they reconstituted themselves simply as nationalists, even claiming, as in Croatia, that they were anti-communists.

These leaders, however, had become less and less popular over time. They were also widely viewed as increasingly vulnerable—for example, because of continuing economic problems, and because they resorted increasingly to corruption, violence and extreme forms of electoral manipulations in order to maintain power. The latter point is critical, primarily because they were increasingly perceived by publics to be both despotic and desperate. Even in competitive authoritarian regimes there is a sense among publics of how far leaders can go in protecting their power and how much they can play with existing constitutions. Symptomatic of regime vulnerability were two developments, common in particular to the more authoritarian regimes in the group. One was increased defections from the ruling circle, and the other was growing success of the opposition in mounting protests and in winning political power at the local level (as in Croatia, Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine).

A final similarity is that these countries, despite differences in regime context, nonetheless featured a relatively large, but perennially fragmented liberal opposition. This is important. It is very easy to assume that there is a strong negative correlation between the repressiveness of regimes and the size of the opposition. In fact, what is striking—indeed, distinctive—about the cases in the second wave is that, despite differences in regime repression, oppositions in all cases over the course of the transition—and even earlier in the Slovak and Serbian cases—were significant in both their size and their continued political activism. This point is brought home once we focus on the universe of cases where pivotal elections were possible in theory; that is, the regimes in the region left, once we subtract, on the one hand, full-scale democracies that resulted from the first wave, and, on the other, authoritarian regimes, such as in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, that did not tolerate any electoral competition. When surveying the remaining group of potential cases, we find that the key distinction between countries where pivotal elections were carried out from 1996-2005 and countries where either the electoral model was not implemented or where it failed to substitute authoritarians with democrats is the presence of a relatively well-developed liberal opposition in the first set of cases and its absence in the second.

That opposition, however, had long labored under a number of constraints. It was divided by personality conflicts, and it was remarkably disinterested in the idea, so central to the logic of democratic politics, of cooperation in pursuit of power—largely because there were struggles over power within factions that drove opposition groups apart; because winning even a few seats could produce spoils to divide (and thereby tempt oppositions to go it alone); and because the regime was clever in its political courtship rituals, waving the nationalist flag and exploiting differences among opposition leaders. Also important in dividing the opposition were different readings among their leaders over how rigged elections actually were and over the utility of adopting certain strategies over others in struggling with the incumbent regime—for example, the difficult choices of collaboration with the regime versus independence, and, if the latter, participation in elections versus boycotts. Finally, unlike the oppositions that won power in the early stages of the collapse of communism, these oppositions were not experienced—nor had they developed long-term close relations with publics, sharing with them a definition of the enemy and developing with them ideas about strategies and goals for the future. Thus, while oppositions in the 1970s and 1980s learned the hard way, but learned nonetheless, oppositions that developed largely after communism had less of a record of learning behind them. They also operated, it must be remembered, in a less clear-cut political environment. Whereas there was a stark political choice during communism between democracy and authoritarianism, after communism regimes were hybrid in form and generated the kinds of difficult choices for

oppositions discussed above. It is not accidental, therefore, that the West—especially the Americans—have played an important role in assisting opposition development in many of the pivotal election cases.

The similarities among many of the postcommunist regimes, moreover, were not lost on local oppositions eyeing electoral changes in the neighborhood, nor were they lost on external democracy promoters seeking new sites for democracy assistance. The key consideration here, however, is that, once again, successful mobilizations—in this wave, leading to electoral breakthroughs—were seen by oppositions in a number of countries as extremely appealing. One reason is that the first wave provided to would-be participants in the second a glimpse into a highly attractive future—and one that contrasted sharply with what had transpired in much of the region after 1989. Thus, the countries in the region that became fully democratic in the first wave had an extraordinarily appealing profile—including, for example, not just democracy and stability, but also the most robust economic performance in the region and the guarantees of both economic and political security that come from membership in both the European Union and NATO.

However, developments early in the second wave were also influential. One can argue that the precedent of electoral breakthroughs showed that oppositions could actually win, even with a history of failure and on a decidedly uneven playing field. Moreover, most of the victorious oppositions showed a similar and, for oppositions in other countries, reassuring historical profile—for example, continuing fragmentation and failure followed by, first, local and then national successes, earlier rounds of mobilization against regime policies, and international support for democratic change.

Also attractive was the nature of the electoral model itself—which in many ways compensated for the absence in round two of such facilitating conditions, present at the end of the 1980s, as remarkable similarities in local political economies, bloc integration, and a regional hegemon tolerant of democratic change. In particular, it can be argued that the electoral model—as opposed to the mass mobilizations in the second half of the 1980s—was a nearly *ideal* mechanism for challenging authoritarian regimes in a political context that featured an evident tension between holding regular elections and tolerating competition, on the one hand, but, on the other, deploying various methods, such as rigging results, controlling the media, and harassing the opposition, to insure reelection. Thus, all the regimes where democratizing elections took place had a history of allowing oppositions to participate, although with varying constraints (and see Schedler, 2002 and 2006). They held the promise, in short, of regular expansions, at least in theory, of the political opportunity structure—which was important for purposes of planning, among other things.

Moreover, if democracy is an international norm, elections are even more widely embraced—which is one reason why the vast majority of countries in the world now hold regular elections and why authoritarian regimes often advertise their democratic credentials by introducing, first, semi-competitive local elections (as in Hungary in the 1980s and China twenty years later). Elections are critical, because they are widely seen as performing the function of presenting the regime with a verdict on its right and capacity to rule. In authoritarian contexts, moreover, competitive elections perform other functions, such as calibrating the division of the spoils, exposing threats, and providing mechanisms for evaluation of policy performance (Lust-Okar, 2004, 2005). Elections also present a circumscribed period of activity, which makes demands on the opposition and citizens less taxing, and they produce results that provide a precise metric for all to see regarding the distribution of political power, the influence of the

citizenry, and the direction of future policies. All of these characteristics make elections unusually attractive sites for political mobilization—which is one reason why political protests tend to follow an electoral cycle.

This leads to two final points regarding the benefits of the electoral approach to democratization. Elections are both regular and familiar and thereby provide singular opportunities for promoting change and assessing the fit between expectations and reality. At the same time, it is much harder for regimes to justify the use of force against their citizenries during elections than at other times (Dawisha and Deets, 2006).

Adopting the electoral approach was also appealing for some practical reasons. These elections had translated into a victory for the opposition in other countries, and this approach rested on a relatively straight-forward model of change that could be implemented in a coming (and scheduled) election. Pivotal elections also combined international support (during and, if successful, after the election) with relatively low costs associated with the change. Just as even authoritarian regimes hold elections and tolerate opposition activity, so the early democratizing elections in the region were not just peaceful, but also produced some other benefits, such as regime change (as in Serbia and Croatia) or at the least improved democratic performance, reduction in corruption, EU membership (as in Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia), and improved economic performance (most noticeably in Bulgaria).

This leads to the final set of factors: local capacity. As already noted, in all of the successful cases of challenging dictatorial rule through elections, we see an opposition that was large, experienced, energetic, and, in the decisive election, unusually united. We also see quite vulnerable regimes (which may explain unity—see Van de Walle, 2006). Most of the leaders who lost had become increasingly unpopular—as revealed in public opinion polls in many cases, as well as a pattern of defections from the ruling stratum. After all, Saakashvili and Yushchenko, for example, had been in the government before they decided to mount their own campaigns for political power.

While it is fair to say that the international system in 1989 “tolerated” democratic change in the communist region, a decade later it would be more accurate to argue that international actors, including the United States, took a much more proactive role—another factor that compensates, in effect, for the absence of some factors that promoted change in the first versus the second wave. Indeed, as Sharon Wolchik and I have argued (2006b), from 1990-2003 the postcommunist region received more democracy assistance from the United States—and more consistent assistance over time—than any other part of the world. Moreover, in some of these electoral breakthroughs, the United States made it a priority to support the defeat of dictators, with Slovakia, Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine cases in point.

However, it would be wrong to reduce these pivotal elections to the work of the U.S. It was not just that domestic oppositions were the critical variable, as were publics willing and able to support the liberal opposition and defend what they saw as the correct electoral results. It was also that the spread of electoral change was a product of a transnational network committed to full implementation of the electoral model. This network had at its center graduates of earlier electoral breakthroughs, who saw export of their experience as both a matter of interest—for instance, safeguarding their hard-won political victory by creating a democratic neighborhood—and values—the regional tradition, if you will, of fighting against a common enemy using tried and true techniques. These regional graduates, moreover, were unusually effective, because their experiences were widely viewed as instructive. After all, they had succeeded in similar circumstances in carrying out electoral change.

Failures

This leads to the final issue of concern in this paper. Many regimes in this region managed to resist the pressures for democracy unleashed by the first and second waves. In practice resistance took several forms. In the first wave, some countries avoided popular mobilization; other countries experienced smaller-scale mobilizations; and still others experienced mobilizations that were hijacked by illiberal nationalists. Indeed, most countries in the region—nineteen of twenty-seven by January, 1993—failed to break with the authoritarian past, leading either to a continuation of authoritarian rule, with communists and/or illiberal nationalists at the helm, or the rise of hybrid regimes where, typically, communists and liberals co-existed in rough balance.

The second wave was also uneven in its regional effects. Here, one of two scenarios materialized. In some cases, such as Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus, attempts to carry out democratizing elections failed, even after public protests. In other cases, the electoral approach to democratic change was not even attempted—either because the regime did not tolerate any competition (as in Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) or because the regime was too powerful, too repressive and too popular and the opposition too fragmented to provide even minimal conditions for electoral change (as in Kazakhstan).

What explains these gaps in diffusion? There are two ways to answer this question. The first is to focus on how diffusion usually works, especially the geographical spread of subversive innovations, such as mobilizations against authoritarian rule. Put simply, one can argue that, as the spread of such innovations moves from its point of origin to new areas, two factors come into play that increasingly compromise transplantation. One is that ideas have a tendency of outrunning local capacity for change—in part because the very lag in adoption speaks to the existence of a less supportive local environment, and in part because attractive ideas move faster in effect than the creation of conditions that allow these ideas to take root. Central to this line of argument is an assumption, certainly warranted in the cases of interest here, that local actors, eyeing the attractive possibility of winning power, find it easier and easier as the wave moves to embrace the idea, but discount the critical role of local conditions, such as unpopular leaders and experienced and united oppositions; the hard work required to be successful in mounting large-scale protests, as in the first wave, and implementing the electoral model, as in the second wave; and the importance of an international environment that at the least tolerates democratic change.

The other factor, also common to many diffusion stories, is that demonstration effects are dual-edged. Just as citizens and opposition leaders monitor positive precedents in the region, so authoritarian leaders and their international allies also follow developments in the neighborhood that, from their perspective, threaten their power. As the wave of democratic change moves, therefore, authoritarian leaders are increasingly forewarned and fore-armed. As a result, they go to considerable lengths to protect themselves—for example, by priming public support, by maintaining control over elections and public spaces, and by co-opting, dividing or cracking down on the opposition. In this sense, gaps in diffusion are particularly easy to explain, when the innovation in question constitutes a major threat to the status quo.

All these observations are relevant, but they also remind us of the importance for successful diffusion of subversive innovations of meeting all three conditions noted above for the cross-national movement of democratic change—whether in the form of protests, as in the first wave, or elections and often protests as well in the second. More specifically, it can be argued that all

of the regimes that managed to resist these challenges to their power were able to capitalize on an absence of at least one and often all the preconditions for diffusion. Rather than lay out a detailed comparison, allow me to focus on two regimes that have thus far resisted democratization through elections and that were the focus of extensive interviews carried out by Sharon Wolchik and me in March, 2007: Armenia and Azerbaijan.

In the case of Azerbaijan, none of the three conditions for diffusion was or is available. First, it is not clear that the precedent of an electoral revolution was all that attractive to the citizenry—for example, because economic growth is robust; the opposition widely viewed as both politically incompetent and out of touch; the electoral revolutions too de-stabilizing; and the Aliyev regime too popular, too strong, and too deeply-rooted in complex clan networks to be unseated, whatever the actions of citizens at election time. Moreover, it is widely assumed that the United States backs the regime—an assumption that seems to be correct, given policy statements and interviews we conducted at the U.S. embassy in Baku. At the same time, there are some similarities in local conditions between Azerbaijan today and, say, Georgia on the eve of its electoral breakthrough in 2003—for instance, an early break with the communist past, ongoing territorial disputes, tensions with Russia, extraordinary levels of corruption, and a leader who dates back to the communist era (through his father). However, it is important to recognize not just that there is a sharp contrast in economic performance, but also that, while Shevardnadze was distracted and the Georgian polity democratic in certain ways, Aliyev is ambitious and his regime far more repressive than Georgia on the eve of the Rose Revolution. Finally, the 2005 election in Azerbaijan, while parliamentary like the 2003 election in Georgia, did not provide much opportunity for democratic change. The election procedures were tightly controlled by the regime, as was certification of the candidates and the tabulation of the votes, and the regime made sure that popular protests were limited to the outside perimeters of Baku. Moreover, there were no external election monitors in Azerbaijan, and the role of the U.S., including the International Republican Institute and the National Democratic Institute, is quite limited. Also limited is the role of both the Open Society and transnational democracy promotion networks, including graduates of successful electoral revolutions.

A similar story can be constructed about Armenia and its 2003 election. Perhaps the two most important considerations here are international alliances and regime propaganda. Armenia is closely allied with Russia, largely because Armenia exists in an extraordinarily hostile neighborhood, given its long-term distrust of Turkey and its ongoing hostilities with Azerbaijan as a consequence of the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabagh (which is largely controlled by Armenia, to the point where the President of Armenia represents the Karabagh clan). Russia, moreover, provides considerable support of Armenia (including cheap gas and a large number of jobs for unemployed Armenians in Russia), and it is viewed by Armenian citizens as their country's most important and most consistent ally. Here, the security concerns of Armenia and the focus on protecting the Armenian nation, especially given the memories of the genocide, place an unusually strong emphasis on both domestic stability, even at the cost of rigged elections, and the vital role of the Russian alliance.

The second factor is the remarkable success of the Armenian leadership, aided by their control over the media and their popularity as a result of their ties to Karabagh (which, after all, is the only war Armenia has won), in placing the emphasis in the idea of electoral revolutions on the noun, not the adjective. The early years of the transition in Armenia were extraordinarily difficult, and the last things Armenians want is what is implied by revolution; that is, disorder and violence. Moreover, Armenians are not interested in actions that might alienate Russia, or

that emulate their neighbor, Georgia—a country that for Armenians is widely viewed as unreliable and quite unstable (given the continuing fracas between Georgia and Russia over energy costs and over the future of the secessionist regions of Abkhazia and southern Ossetia) and that is further resented because of its close collaboration with both Azerbaijan and West, as revealed in both the construction of pipelines and new transportation networks that connect Georgia and Azerbaijan (and, even worse, Turkey in the case of pipelines), but that bypass Armenia. Put simply, then, what stands out in Armenia is a failure of most citizens and, indeed, at least some opposition leaders, to view electoral revolutions in a positive light or to see Armenia as similar to countries where electoral revolutions took place (or, for that matter, given the nationalist mentality there, any country).

In addition, we see other local conditions that limit capacity for democratic change. The leader is popular; the opposition is extraordinarily fragmented and weak (and the target, as in Azerbaijan, of selective violence); and there is considerable international support for the incumbent regime. This support, moreover, comes not just from Russia, but also from many members of the diaspora community who prefer a stable and independent Armenia with a strong military (as a result of the Karabagh issue) to an Armenia where leaders and politics are in flux. The diaspora also provides significant economic resources, with half of the population receiving remittances from abroad.

The United States, however, has taken a somewhat more supportive stance on free and fair elections in Armenia than it has in Azerbaijan. This is particularly important, since presidential elections will take place in Armenia in 2008—which, as in Russia, has a constitutional term limit for the incumbent—and since Armenia is part of the Millennium Challenge Program (which requires evidence of democratic progress before funds can be dispersed). However, it is unlikely (and even more unlikely in Azerbaijan, where presidential elections will also take place in 2008, though Aliyev can run again) that this election will lead to a colored revolution. The United States is unlikely to tangle directly with Russia in Armenia; it shares with Armenians concerns about political stability, especially given the strategic importance of the Caucasus in a time of worries about both energy and Iran; and it is more ambivalent about democracy promotion, given, for example, what happened in the recent elections in Egypt and Palestine, not to mention the disastrous venture in Iraq. However, democracy assistance in Armenia is extraordinarily large, and the focus of the U.S. is in fact on such typical actions as supporting party development and free and fair elections.

The gaps in diffusion of democratic change in the postcommunist region, therefore, can be explained—like the gaps that emerged in 1989—as a function of deficits in the three factors that supported diffusion. While the specific deficits involved depend upon the regime and the wave, the fact remains that challenges to authoritarian rule cannot happen unless: 1) citizens and opposition leaders perceive successful mobilizations as highly attractive because of their values and interests and because they appear amenable to local implementation; 2) there are similarities in conditions supporting challenges to authoritarian rule; 3) citizens and opposition leaders perceive facilitating similarities between their situations and those that existed where successful mobilizations against authoritarian rule took place, and; 4) the site in question presents expanded opportunities for democratic change as a result, for example, of increased Soviet and local regime tolerance of liberalization in the first wave and regular elections in the second. This is a tall order—though one that has been met, interestingly enough, in two rounds of democratic change in Europe and Eurasia over the past twenty years.

Conclusions

There is no need, especially in so long a paper, to repeat the major conclusions drawn from this comparison of two waves of democratic change in Europe and Eurasia since 1987. Instead, let me close with some thoughts about how to apply the conclusions of this paper to the Chinese case. It is fair to argue that China, perhaps even more than Armenia and Azerbaijan, is well-situated to resist waves of democratic change. There is, first, the problem that neither mode of challenges to authoritarianism—that is, massive protests or application of the electoral model—is likely to command a great deal of popular or opposition support. While protests are common in China, they are not sizeable and they do not challenge the Party's right and capacity to rule. Instead, they are cases of limited, but rightful resistance—reminiscent, I would argue, of protests during the early years of communism in Eastern Europe. Moreover, the Chinese version of 1989, especially in view of Chinese versus Russian economic and political trajectories since that time, carry the clear message that protests are dangerous and that quiescence pays off. At the same time, like Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, China does not offer competitive elections at the national level and, thus, no opportunity for electoral revolutions to take place.

Conditions in China, moreover, diverge sharply from those countries where citizens mobilized against authoritarian rule. The Chinese opposition is small, fragmented, repressed and highly inexperienced; the Chinese Communist Party is powerful; and the Chinese working class and the peasantry, largely because of the sequencing of economic reforms and integration into the world market, are internally divided through atomization and horizontal competition (Gallagher, 2005). Perhaps the most important limitation on democratic change in China, however, is the success the regime has had thus far in its project of using both nationalism and opportunities for “some to get rich first” as a means of both shifting grievances away from the party and linking democratic change with political instability.

Finally, there are few international pressures supporting democratization. The United States is more interested in markets than in civil liberties and political rights in China—though it justifies this position in ways that are remarkably similar to explanations of why the U.S. could not support opposition charges of electoral fraud in Azerbaijan in 2005. The argument in both cases is that the U.S. supports “gradual change.” In addition, the Chinese, in cooperation with the Russian, Belarusian, Kazakh, and Venezuelan leadership, has played an active role in limiting external pressures for democratic change (Spector and Krickovic, 2007; Herd, 2005, Nygren, 2005a, 2005b, NED, 2006). More generally, what we find, therefore, is the absence of the kind of political opportunities that were present in the first and second waves of democratization in Europe and Eurasia; that is, international support or acquiescence for democratic change and, in the case of the second wave, regular elections that allow for competition.

The Chinese leadership, therefore, has taken elaborate measures to prevent pressures for democratic change within its borders and outside its borders. In this sense, China reminds us of two important lessons that can be drawn from the uneven diffusion of democratization in communist-era and postcommunist Europe and Eurasia. The first is what can be termed for authoritarianism the “advantages of backwardness.” Location outside the core of democratic change reduces the pressures on authoritarian regimes for change, while giving them time to develop an “anti-revolutionary toolkit” (as borrowed from Spector and Krickovic, 2007). At the same time, a vigilant leadership, especially with powerful international allies, can go very far in blocking diffusion of democracy.

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