

Becca Hawkins
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Final Paper

Q: To what degree does the regimes use of oppression through control of the armed forces and control of the Internet influence the outcomes of revolutions that resulted from fraudulent elections in competitive authoritarian regimes?

There are many factors involved in revolutions that result from fraudulent elections in competitive authoritarian regimes such as civil society, the Internet, the type of mobilization, etc. However, one of the main aspects that influence the outcome of this type of revolution is the degree to which the regime reinforces or does not reinforce oppression through its control of the armed forces and its control over the Internet. This aspect is key in determining the outcomes of these types of revolutions because it affects whether an opening or weakening of the regime occurs. In order for the people to succeed in overthrowing the government there must be an opening or weakening of the regime. The impact that the degree of repression the regime implements through the Internet and the armed forces has on the outcomes of these types of revolutions can be seen more clearly when examining the situations in Serbia, Ukraine, Burma, and Iran. In this essay, I will examine the revolutions that occurred in each of these nations to illustrate the differences between how each regime utilized these tools in order to demonstrate how those differences affected the outcomes of the revolutions in those nations.

Serbia is an example of a nation in which the revolution succeeded in toppling the government. This was possible because the regime did not have control over its armed forces or the Internet so it could not exercise its power, which created an opening for the people to take advantage of. Serbia's revolution began in reaction to electoral fraud in the September 2000 elections between incumbent Milosevic and Kostunica. Parallel-vote

counts revealed that Milosevic had tampered with the election and had lost to rival Kostunica.¹ After this was revealed to the public, the regime refused to step down. Milosevic instead insisted on a second round of elections and then an annulment of election results. Street demonstrations and strikes ensued, including a pivotal slowdown in work at the Kolubara coalmines in central Serbia that provided 70 percent of the republic's energy reserves.² By midday on October 5th, over 500,000 protesters converged in Belgrade, assisted and directed by opposition party activists, civic groups, and student organizations.³ Security force and paramilitary declined to act in regime's defense and the following day, Kostunica was sworn into office.

One of the reasons that this regime was not successful in holding onto its power is because of the immense power of opposition within civil society. The movement that had the most influence on the revolution was a student run group called Otpor. Otpor began to push civic and political leaders toward each other, helping define and mature their roles, and the public warmed to their alternative leadership.⁴ Otpor focused on non-violent methods of resistance to the regime strategy including; branding highly visible campaigns (both on the internet and outside), external support (US and the Netherlands have 3 million to the Otpor fund), communication and horizontal command structure, and decentralized organization.⁵

¹ Ray Jennings, "Serbia's 'Bulldozer Revolution': Evaluating the Influence of External Factors in Successful Democratic Breakthrough in Serbia," *Stanford Center for Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law*: 3,

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid 4,

⁵ Ibid

One of the reasons Otpor was so successful in mobilizing is because of its use of the Internet. Otpor as a social organization took advantage of the possibilities offered by the individualized and instantaneous aesthetic logic of the new media using it for peer to peer communication and marketing strategies for commercial brands and established political parties in Western liberal democracies.⁶ The main way that Otpor followers gained information out about protests was through the use of mobile phones and the Internet. Otpor also created a website supporting their cause and participated in horizontal communication to other activists and people in the movement through the use of emails.

This is something that sets Serbia apart from the situation in Iran and Burma. Milosevic's regime never regulated the Internet and aside from cracking down on people protesting in the streets there was little fear of the regime. Milosevic was authoritarian but he was not as extreme as other leaders in the fact that he was not tracking people down and threatening them or killing their families like what was happening in Iran. There could be a number of reasons why Milosevic did not crackdown on internet use, it could be because the internet was still very new at that time that he did not see it as a threat. Or it could be because the technology was not advanced enough yet and many people did not know how to handle the Internet. Nevertheless, this lack of repression allowed for civil society to become strong enough to overthrow his regime.

Another possible reason why Milosevic did not crackdown on Otpor is because he did not have the manpower possible to initiate a crackdown due to his lack of control

⁶ James Aulich , "The Democratic Delusion: New Media, Resistance and Revolution in Serbia 1995-2000," *Digital Icons: Studies in Russian, Eurasian and Central European New Media*, 5, no. 2 (2011): 3,

over the armed forces. As more protests began to erupt, the armed forces stopped responding to the regimes call, rather many people switched their support in favor of the protestors. Binnendijk and Marovic argue that the armed forces in Serbia switched sides in favor of the protestors because the organizers in the opposition movement developed explicit strategies to increase the cost of repression and to undermine the willingness of state security forces to engage in violent acts against them.⁷ The protestors knew that in order to be successful they had to weaken key portions of Milosevic's power base.

To weaken Milosevic's power base Otpor focused on targeting both the military and the police force. They focused on the military first because conditions of the military were deteriorating at a faster rate. Military personnel under Milosevic, in contrast with the once-privileged Tito's Yugoslav National Army, reportedly felt less valued than their colleagues in the interior police forces.⁸ Otpor begged the army to serve the Serbian people. They also condemned the NATO bombing campaign explaining that Milosevic was responsible for it. In addition, the political leadership of the Serbian opposition coalition already included two retired generals-one of whom was General Momcilo Perisic, who had served as the Serbian army Chief of Staff between 1992-1998 boosted Otpor's credibility.⁹ This organization of the opposition trying to appeal to the army and gain their support definitely affected the outcome of the revolution. The army ultimately did not step in and help Milosevic when the people revolted. An opposition movement

⁷ Anika Binnendijk, and Ivan Marovic, "Power and persuasion: Nonviolent strategies to influence state security forces in Serbia (2000) and Ukraine(2004)," *Science Direct: Communist and Post-Communist Studies* , 39 (2006): 412,

⁸ Ibid 417,

⁹ Ibid 418

appealing to the armed forces is something that did not occur in any of the other revolutions, making Otpor's strategy unique.

Otpor also had a separate strategy to appeal to the police force, which had a closer relationship to Milosevic than the military. The police are part of professionalized bodies with constitutional mandates to protect public order making their identities more closely linked to the regimes in power.¹⁰ Otpor was clever and knew that they had to undermine regime credibility and convince law enforcement agencies of their legitimacy. In Otpor a stylistic decision was made to adopt the logo of a clenched fist and black t-shirts. The goal was to look dangerous but remain nonviolent in order to deceive high ranking government officials while providing the correct information to police officers.¹¹ Otpor knew that during protests some protestors were going to be picked up and interrogated by police. During these interrogations the protestors would give the police different information hoping to get them to start questioning the regime.

This strategy worked extremely well and once the protest broke out on October 5, 2000. Otpor was able to succeed because of the regimes lack of repression. The regime did not try to stop the behind the scenes mobilization of Otpor. Rather Milosevic only tried to stop the protests when they erupted in the streets and by that point the movements already gained so much strength that it was too late to crush them. Also, Otpor exploited the regimes weaknesses by appealing to the army and police force and convincing them not to repress the movement. The opposition was able to gain momentum because the regime already had some weaknesses one of these being the economy due to the strikes at the Kolubara coal mines. This decline in the economy combined with free access and

¹⁰ Ibid 419,

¹¹ Ibid 419,

mobilization of the civil society through the Internet and in the real world, and the loss of control over the armed forces demonstrated the extreme weaknesses of the regime and created an opening for this strong opposition to be successful.

Another revolution that was successful due to the weakness of a regime is the revolution in Ukraine. Ukraine's Orange Revolution began in reaction to electoral fraud that occurred in November 2004 runoff elections between Yanukovich the officially anointed successor to the regime of outgoing president Kuchma and opposition leader Yushenko. The second round of voting marked widespread voter fraud- including the illegal expulsion of opposition representatives from election commissions, multiple voting by busloads of people, absentee ballot abuse, and an extraordinary high number of mobile ballot box votes as well as dramatic changes in turnout figures in eastern Ukraine, where Yanukovich's support was stronger.¹² The preceding regimes have had a history of intense corruption dating back to the fall of the Soviet Union. These old officials remade themselves as nationalist heroes and gained power in the Kuchma regime. This corruption accelerated throughout Kuchma's presidency.

While the regime may appear strong, under the surface coalition groups were building and this election fraud provided an opening that these opposition groups could exploit. Ukraine had benefited from more than a decade of civil society development; a good deal of it nurtured by donor support from the US, European governments, the National Endowment for Democracy and private philanthropists.¹³ Authentic democratic values were being reinforced by a new generation that had grown up under glasnost and

¹² Joshua Tucker, "Enough! Electoral Fraud, Collective Action Problems, and Post-Communist Colored Revolutions," *Perspectives on Politics*, 5, no. 3 (2007):537,

¹³ Adrian Karatnycky, "Ukraine's Orange Revolution," *Foreign Affairs*, 84, no. 2 (2005): 43,

later with a broad awareness of democratic practices around the world.¹⁴ This relaxation in strict communist values allowed for these civil society groups to build upon this want of democracy while the regime appeared to become weaker.

The Internet was a key factor in this build up of civil society. It promoted a dynamic civic sector that was increasingly aware of the ruling elites corruption.¹⁵ Citizens in major cities had unrestrained access to the Internet and it was in these areas that civic protest became the most widespread and opposition the most determined.¹⁶ Old media such as objective newspapers and local radio stations also continued to function despite the governments attempt to control. By November 2004, Ukraine with a population of 48 million people, boasted some 6 million distinct users accessing the Internet.¹⁷ The opposition movements in Ukraine used the Internet to coordinate everything from election monitoring trainings to policy discussions to the protests that led to the eventual overthrow of the regime.¹⁸ The use of the Internet played a huge role in the outcome of the revolution and the eventual success of Yushenko because it created another space for civil society to grow and for the opposition movement to spread.

The way the Internet was utilized in this revolution is similar to the way it was used Serbia in that the opposition movement used it to organize protests and gather support. In the case of the Ukraine Internet use went completely unregulated. This unregulated Internet coupled with little to no government crackdowns on protestors led

¹⁴ Ibid,

¹⁵ Ibid,

¹⁶ Ibid,

¹⁷ Ibid,

¹⁸ Joshua Goldstein, "The Role of Digital Networked Technologies in the Ukrainian Orange Revolution," *The Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard Law School: Research Publication* (2007),

for the opposition movement of Yushenko to gain control because it allowed the civil society to mobilize.

Also during the time of transition the armed forces were virtually absent. In Ukraine, national budget cuts over the previous fifteen years had left the military with lower pay, less domestic training, and lower morale than their counterparts in the Interior Ministry.¹⁹ Estimates show that more than 80% of officers would describe the living conditions of their families as “below average” or “low”.²⁰ The armed forces did not respond to the regimes call when the uprising occurred. This is because the political oppositions had capitalized on the armed forces sentiments throughout the campaigns emphasizing their relative deprivation and proposing measures to address them.²¹ The armed forces agreed with the claims of the opposition movements and at the time the situation was so bad in Ukraine that they decided to join the movement. This is a completely different outcome from the situations in Burma and Iran.

The outcome of the situations in Ukraine and Serbia are different from the outcomes in Burma and Iran because of the varying degree of repression. In Ukraine and Serbia the regimes were already extremely weak and unpopular due to their policies and the economic situation in each nation. This weakness escalated by the fact that they did not maintain a good relationship with the armed forces, which caused the armed forces to shift its support in favor of the opposition. Also the government did not crackdown on the

¹⁹ Anika Binnendijk, and Ivan Marovic, "Power and persuasion: Nonviolent strategies to influence state security forces in Serbia (2000) and Ukraine(2004)," *Science Direct: Communist and Post-Communist Studies* , 39 (2006): 417,

²⁰ Anatoily Grytsenko, "Civil-Military Relations in Ukraine on the Way From Form to Substance," *Nato Fellowship Program* (2000),

²¹ Anika Binnendijk, and Ivan Marovic, "Power and persuasion: Nonviolent strategies to influence state security forces in Serbia (2000) and Ukraine(2004)," *Science Direct: Communist and Post-Communist Studies* , 39 (2006): 418,

build up of civil society both online and off. This allowed for the opposition to organize and gain a lot of power and support. Shirky describes the internet as a, “Communications tools...did not cause governments to collapse, but they helped people take power from the state when it was weak”. This is exactly what Otpor used the internet for, it built up civil society and exploited the governments weaknesses as a result of its bad policy choices and lack of control over the armed forces.²² Therefore, since the regime was weak and did not fight back against these revolutionary groups it created an opening for these groups to push forward and to succeed with the revolution.

The revolution in Burma represents a contrast to the situations in Ukraine and Serbia, because the military played a strong role. Burma became independent from Britain in 1948, since that time it had the challenge of unifying different local ethnic factions under one leader, plunging it into civil unrest and racial tensions. This inability by elected officials to maintain control led to unprecedented growth in the strength of the armed forces, which ultimately staged a coup in March 1962 under General Ne Win, who enforced a socialist party.²³ In the 1988 revolution the government of General Ne Win fell only to be replaced by another military dictator, General Saw Maung.

The Saffron Revolution occurred in September of 2007. It was a response to the end of government subsidies for diesel fuel and natural gas. This caused an immediate and significant hike in the price of diesel fuel and natural gas, which quickly created inflationary pressure on basic commodities such as rice and cooking oil.²⁴ This led to

²² Clay Shirky, "The Political Power of Social Media," *Foreign Affairs* (2011): 4,

²³ Mirdul Chowdhury, "The Role of the Internet in Burma's Saffron Revolution" The Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard Law School: Research Publication (2008): 5,

²⁴ Ibid 6,

intense protests against the government and by late August, Buddhist monks began to join in. These monks were met with strong violent resistance from the military. In one case on September 5, 2007 protesting a pro-government militia who tied monks to poles attacked monks, beat and disrobed them.²⁵ This led to more and more outrage and outbreaks of civilian protests. However, the government did not back down as in the earlier cases but instead they attempted to control the situation through mass arrests, torture, and murder. Through these methods the government was able to stop the protest and afterwards security forces continued to search for suspected protestors and carry out political executions.

One way the government was able to crack down on these protests was through tight control of the Internet. By the time the protests began, the government had already established one of the worlds most restrictive systems of information control and had been extending its reach into the internet despite less than 1 percent of the population having online access.²⁶ Throughout the crisis in 2007, citizen journalists and bloggers continued to feed raw, graphic footage and witness accounts to the outside world via the Internet. Through trusted contact blogging many Burmese became involved in circulating valuable information not obtainable by traditional means to the rest of the world. Photographs and videos taken with cell phones and digital cameras were dispatched outside the country by way of the Internet. The government began to worry about these images being distributed and completely shut down all Internet access to the entire

²⁵ Ibid 6,

²⁶"Pulling the Plug- A Technical Review of the Internet Shutdown in Burma." *Open Initiative Bulletin*,3.

country and terminated the majority of cell phone services on September 29, 2007.²⁷ The government was able to do this because all the internet service providers (ISP) in the country are controlled by the Burma government.

Besides having the ability to completely shut off the Internet the government also became specialized in controlling the Internet. The government prohibited any content that is, “detrimental to the current policies and secret security affairs of the government”.²⁸ This included the filtering and blocking of sites like Youtube, Blogspot, and international news sites such as CNN.²⁹ They also limited download speeds in order to make using the Internet very slow and difficult. The regime even went far enough to create a special Cyber Warfare Division within its secret police force to track online criticism of the regime.³⁰ Having this much control over the Internet helps keep the regime in power because it makes civil society mobilization against the regime more difficult.

The government crackdowns that occurred both off and online had huge effects on the mentality of civil society. Here the regime took an extremely strong stance against the protestors even going as far to disgrace and abuse monks who are sacred in Burma. This sent a clear message to the people that the government and the armed forces do not care who they are hurting. This can be damaging to a civilian who was thinking about protesting. Kuran describes the process in which people come to participate in revolutions. He argues that participation in revolutions depends on how an individual

²⁷ Ibid, 2

²⁸ Mirdul Chowdhury, “The Role of the Internet in Burma’s Saffron Revolution” The Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard Law School: Research Publication (2008): 13,

²⁹ Ibid 4,

³⁰ Ibid 13,

views the situation. If an individual views the situation as hopeless and does not think that a protest will help anything then they will not join the opposition. In the case of Burma, when an individual sees the police beating a monk, he may become scared because he does not want to be beaten either, so he will do a risk analysis and decide not to step up. This intense government crackdown was a huge factor in the outcome of the revolution and led to the regime remaining in control.

One reason the regime was able to control the armed forces and the Internet even though the economy and the people were suffering is because the government had the support of the Chinese government and other neighboring nations both financially and politically. Therefore, the government did not have to worry about what the rest of the outside world was thinking because they had the support of such a strong nation. This is something that was different from the 1988 revolution that successfully overthrew the regime in Burma. That revolution was also a response to economy faltering under Ne Win's administration. However in that case the government did not have any backing from other nations and could not control the vast protests by civil society. Therefore, Ne Win's government was toppled. It demonstrates how important an opening or weakness in the regime is for a regime to be overthrown. In the 2007 case, there was no opening and the regime remained strong because of outside support, large control over the Internet and harsh government crackdown on protestors.

This vast control that the Burmese government had over the Internet and the armed forces separates Burma from the revolutions in Serbia and Ukraine. Here the regime took a very intense stance against protesters. The regime was cracking down on opposition groups in two fronts both on the Internet and on the street. The military's

harshness and brutality towards the monks was meant to send a clear message to the rest of society. It demonstrated that the regime did not even care about the most sacred officials in the country. It was meant to strike fear into the protestors. Also, through shutting off and controlling the Internet the regime it illustrated the intense control that the government possessed, showing civil society that the government was not weak and was not going to change their ways. This is very different from Ukraine and Serbia where the governments did not focus on cracking down on protests before they erupted and did not regulate the Internet in any way.

Another example of a revolution failing to overthrow a regime due to too much government strength is the case of Iran. The Iranian revolution was formed in reaction to the Iranian presidential elections in 2009. The 2009 presidential election involved incumbent Ahmadinejad against challenger Mousavi. Mousavi lost the election and then took on the role of a radical confronting an elected government he deemed illegitimate. The Internet provided a space for the radicalization of his followers and the movement centered on a conspiracy theory, rather than a party unified by a political theory.³¹ People believed the Iranian Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) was responsible for the fraud because the IRGC's political role during Ahmadinejad's first term had expanded as the clergy's role had lessened. Rising protests implied a loss of faith in the regime. As the regime began to crack down on dissent, the Iranian Internet, already home to the world's most concentrated blogosphere, provided a seemingly free space to express ideas and

³¹ Kevin Cross, "Why Iran's Green Movement Faltered: The Limits of Information Technology in a Rentier State," *SAIS Review*, XXX, no. 2 (2010): 170,

build political coalitions.³² However as this Internet space evolved, the IRGC developed its own capacity to assert itself on the Internet.

The current Iranian regime has responded to what it perceives as cyber threats, instituting a complex and elaborate machine to control information led by a new cyber police unit. It initiated secret measures to curb the flow of digital information, implementing these measures even before the June 13 election results announcements. This can be seen through the government's uses of techniques such as; Smsblock: reported days in which the regime blocked the sending of SMS messages, inetslow: days in which download speed was prohibitively slow, sattvblock; days in which the regime jammed reception of foreign satellite tv reception in Iran.³³ All of this blocking demonstrates how the government was beginning to use the Internet in their favor. This is something that is vastly different from the cases of Ukraine and Serbia where those regimes did not pay attention to the Internet.

The Iranian government went even further in its control of the Internet and its crackdowns on dissenters. The regime trained a cyberjihad that it uses to influence chat rooms and hack various sites. Also the government has 10,000 members of the Basji who are trained to track people posting negative information about the regime and harass, threaten, beat, and in some cases murder them.³⁴ This was a tactic used to install fear in the opposition movement and people using the Internet. It was a way to control the threshold of people speaking out against the government. The regime was willing to use

³² Kevin Cross, "Why Iran's Green Movement Faltered: The Limits of Information Technology in a Rentier State," *SAIS Review*, XXX, no. 2 (2010): 170,

³³ Kevin Cross, "Why Iran's Green Movement Faltered: The Limits of Information Technology in a Rentier State," *SAIS Review*, XXX, no. 2 (2010): 176,

³⁴ Milani, Abbas. "Iran's Hidden Cyberjihad." , sec. Foreign Policy , July/August 2010

any amount of violence necessary against the opposition movement. This demonstrates another contrast to the Ukrainian and Siberian revolutions. In this case the regime was ruthless, had intense control over the Internet, and was successful at instilling fear and cracking down on protestors. This use of the cyberjihad also demonstrates how much strength and control the regime has over the armed forces.

One aspect that caused Ahmadinejad's regime to have the strength and ability to control the Internet and the armed forces is the regime's complete control over the economy. Iran's economy is largely dependent on petroleum interests.³⁵ In the 1979 revolution, the oil workers strikes were largely responsible for crippling the economy, which led to the fall of the Shah.³⁶ In contrast in 2009 political protest activity did not endanger oil production rather it caused oil sales to climb, which led to an improvement in the Iranian economy. The structure of the global economy is such that the Iranian regime benefits economically from political unrest. The protests were actually making the regime stronger, economically which left little room for an opening or weakness to occur that could be exploited. This represents a stark contrast to the revolutions in Ukraine and Serbia where the economy and the regime was weak and therefore could be exploited by opposition movements.

The outcomes and the conduct of the revolutions that occurred in Iran and Burma were vastly different from the situations in Ukraine and Serbia. In Iran and Burma the regimes took a harsher stance on Internet use and used the armed forces to instill fear in the population. While in Ukraine and Serbia the regimes were weaker in the sense that

³⁵ Kevin Cross, "Why Iran's Green Movement Faltered: The Limits of Information Technology in a Rentier State," *SAIS Review*, XXX, no. 2 (2010): 183,

³⁶ Ibid

they did not attempt to crackdown on revolution movements early enough and did not regulate the Internet in any way. It is important to note that every revolution is unique and has various factors that affect the outcome. However, the differences among the situations in Serbia, Ukraine, Burma and Iran demonstrate that in revolutions that occur as a result of fraudulent elections the degree of oppression the regime implements through its control of the armed forces and its control of the internet plays a role in the conduct and outcome of the revolution.

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