

# **Youth Movements in Post-Communist Societies: A Model of Nonviolent Resistance**

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**Abstract**

Over the past decade, the rise of youth movements applying nonviolent methods of resistance against autocratic incumbents occurred in the post-Soviet region. This protest cycle was set in motion by the spectacular mobilization of Serbia's social movement Otpor against Slobodan Milosevic in 2000. Similarly, Ukraine's Pora in 2004 and, to a lesser extent, Georgia's Kmara in 2003 mobilized large numbers of young people to demand political change in the aftermath of fraudulent elections. In contrast, Belarus' Zubr in 2001/2006 and an assortment of Azerbaijan's youth groups in 2005 were less effective in staging nonviolent struggle against autocratic incumbents. This paper provides an explanation for divergent social movement outcomes in non-democracies by investigating the dynamics of tactical interaction between challenger organizations and the ruling elite. The paper argues that both civic activists and autocratic incumbents engaged in processes of political learning. Hence, tactical innovation was vital to the success of youth movements, especially late risers in the protest cycle.

Over the past decade, a wave of youth mobilization against repressive political regimes has swept the post-communist region. Thousands of young people took to the street to demand political change at a critical juncture in domestic politics, the election period. In 2000, Serbia's social movement Otpor (Resistance) played a vital role in bringing down Slobodan Milosevic. Inspired by Otpor, Georgia's Kmara (Enough) in 2003 and Ukraine's Pora (It's Time) in 2004 mobilized youth to press for the turnover of power. Similarly, Belarus' Zubr (Bison) in 2001/2006 and Azerbaijan's Magam (It's Time), Yeni Fikir (New Thinking) and Yokh (No) in 2005 have attempted, albeit unsuccessfully, to mobilize large numbers of young people and propel a democratic breakthrough. This spectacular outburst of youth activism, spanning several years and stretching across countries, affords an excellent opportunity to unravel the dynamics of nonviolent resistance during a protest cycle.

This paper seeks to account for divergent movement outcomes by examining processes of tactical interaction between challenger organizations and incumbent governments. This empirical inquiry applies the dynamic approach to the study of social movements, positing that both movement participants and their opponents engage in political learning.<sup>1</sup> The paper argues that tactical innovation was vital to the success of youth movements, especially late risers in the protest cycle. By tactical innovation, I mean experimentation with the choice of frames, protest strategies and interaction styles with allies.

The study seeks to contribute to academic literature in two ways. First, this empirical inquiry seeks to advance our understanding of nonviolent resistance by providing a detailed analysis of tactical interaction in non-democracies. To date, most empirical work has traced processes of tactical interaction in mature democracies.<sup>2</sup> It is plausible to assume that tactical innovation is of greater importance to challenger

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<sup>1</sup> Beckwith, Karen. 2000. "Strategic Innovation in the Pittston Coal Strike." *Mobilization* 5 (2): 179–199; McAdam, Doug. 1983. "Tactical Innovation and the Pace of Insurgency." *American Sociological Review* 48 (6): 735–754; McAdam, Doug, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly. 2001. *Dynamics of Contention*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>2</sup> Karapin, Roger. 2007. *Protest Politics in Germany: Movements on the Left and Right since the 1960s*. University Park: Pennsylvania State Press; Minkoff, Debra. 1999. "Bending with the Wind: Strategic Change and Adoption by Women's and Racial Minority Organizations." *American Journal of Sociology* 104: 1666–1703; McCammon, Holly. 2003. "Out of the Parlors and into the Streets: The Changing Tactical Repertoire of US Women's Suffrage Social Movements." *Social Forces* 81 (3): 787–818.

organizations in the repressive political regimes, since the stakes of political struggle – regime change or the survival of the autocratic incumbent – have wide-ranging implications for the ruling elite and the society at large.

Second, this study aims to expand the existing body of literature on social movements by focusing on cases of unsuccessful mobilization. There is a bias in social movement literature to focus on cases of success. Within the post-communist literature, most empirical work was geared to identify determinants of electoral revolutions in Georgia, Serbia, and Ukraine.<sup>3</sup> Much less attention has been accorded to abortive attempts of civic activists to bring about political change.<sup>4</sup> Social scientists and civic activists, however, can draw valuable insights from the analysis of movement defeats.

## Definitions

**Youth Movements.** Youth movements are here broadly defined as “organized and conscious attempts on the part of young people to initiate or resist change in the social order.”<sup>5</sup> The modifier “youth” refers to the demographic composition of the movement, rather than a range of issues advocated by protesters. The average age of Otpor members, for example, was 21.<sup>6</sup> Empirical evidence further suggests that students formed the core of activists in the youth movements. This is consistent with the argument that the tipping point for participation in protest activity tends to be lower for students than other social

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<sup>3</sup> Aslund, Anders and Michael McFaul, eds. 2006. *Revolution in Orange: The Origins of Ukraine's Democratic Breakthrough*. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; Binnendijk, Anika Locke and Ivan Marovic. 2006. “Power and Persuasion: Nonviolent Strategies to Influence State Security Services in Serbia (2000) and Ukraine (2004).” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 39: 411–429; Bunce, Valerie and Sharon Wolchik. 2006a. “Youth and Electoral Revolutions in Slovakia, Serbia, and Georgia.” *SAIS Review* 26 (2): 55–65; Devdariani, Jaba. 2004. “Georgia: Rise and Fall of Façade Democracy.” *Demokratizatsiya* (Winter): 89–115; Kuzio, Taras, ed. 2009. *Democratic Revolution in Ukraine: From Kuchmagate to Orange Revolution*. New York: Routledge; McFaul, Michael. 2005. “Transitions from Postcommunism.” *Journal of Democracy* 16(3): 5–19; Tunnard, Christopher R. 2003. “From State-Controlled Media to the ‘Anarchy’ of the Internet: The Changing Influence of Communications and Information in Serbia in the 1990s.” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 3 (2): 97–120; Wheatley, Jonathan. 2005. *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution: Delayed Transition in the Former Soviet Union*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

<sup>4</sup> Marples, David. 2006. “Color Revolutions: The Belarus Case.” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 39: 351–364; Silitski, Vitali. 2006. “Contagion Deterred: Preemptive Authoritarianism in the Former Soviet Union (The Case of Belarus).” *CDDRL Working Paper Number 66*. Retrieved from <http://cddrl.stanford.edu>; Valiyev, Anar M. 2006. “Parliamentary Elections in Azerbaijan: A Failed Revolution.” *Problems of Post-Communist* 53 (3): 17–35.

<sup>5</sup> Braungart, Richard G. and Margaret M. Braungart. 1990. “Youth Movements in the 1980s: A Global Perspective.” *International Sociology* 5 (June): 157–181, p. 157.

<sup>6</sup> *National Public Radio*. 2002. “Fresh Air from WHY: Interview with Srdja Popovic.” March 20.

groups.<sup>7</sup> Young people tend to have less access to positions of political power and fewer commitments associated with the fulfillment of adult roles. At the same time, students play an important symbolic role in modern societies.

Youth are small in numbers in the former Soviet republics, these are “old nations.” But students are perceived as the future of the nation. If they turn to the street, it signals to the rest of people that something is wrong. They don’t stand only for themselves, but also for their families.<sup>8</sup>

***Social Movement Outcomes.*** This study treats the level of youth mobilization during the election year as the dependent variable. While thousands of ordinary citizens joined post-election protests, youth movements carried out nonviolent resistance to the repressive regime for months prior to the election. Moreover, in the aftermath of fraudulent elections, young people were among the first to protest against electoral fraud and among the last to leave protest sites.

It must be stressed that this study does not seek to account for outcomes of electoral revolutions in the post-Soviet region. The application of the term “revolution” itself is contested in the analysis of recent post-election protests.<sup>9</sup> Newspaper reports suggest that there has been an insignificant turnover of the political elite in the aftermath of the “revolutionary” elections.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, numerous analysts cast doubt over democratic credentials of the newly elected presidents.<sup>11</sup> Still, it is indisputable that an extraordinary large number of post-communist youth became politically active during the election year.

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<sup>7</sup> Jarvikoski, Timo. 1993. “Young People as Actors in the Environmental Movement.” *Young* 3 (3): 80–93; Karklins, Rasma and Roger Petersen. 1993. “Decision Calculus of Protesters and Regimes.” *Journal of Politics* 55: 588–615.

<sup>8</sup> Author’s interview with X.N.

<sup>9</sup> On this topic, see Silitski, Vitali. 2009. “What Are We Trying to Explain?” *Journal of Democracy* 20 (1): 86–89.

<sup>10</sup> Mulvey, S. 2005. “Ukraine Torn by Broken Promises.” *BBC News Online* October 31; Zarakovich, Yuri. 2007. “Ukraine Votes: Old Cast, New Line Up?” *The Times* September 27. Retrieved from <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1666107,00.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Dolidze, Ana. 2007. “Inside Track: Georgia’s Path to Authoritarianism.” *The National Interest* August 24. Retrieved from <http://www.nationalinterest.org/Article.aspx?id=15274>; Khinkulova, Kateryna. 2005. “Free to Mourn the Orange Dream.” *BBC News Online* October 18. Retrieved from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4354542.stm>.

### **Explaining Social Movement Outcomes: Structure or Agency?**

One of the most prominent debates in social movement literature deals with the relative importance of structure and agency in accounting for movement outcomes. A principal argument of political process theory is that changes in the political opportunity structure affect the movement outcome.<sup>12</sup> Political opportunity structure refers to “consistent—but not necessarily formal or permanent—dimensions of the political struggle that encourage people to engage in contentious politics.”<sup>13</sup> Another line of inquiry emphasizes the role of ideational factors in explaining social movement outcomes. Within this line of inquiry, scholars examine the impact of diffusion on movement strategies.<sup>14</sup>

Over the past few years, students of electoral revolutions have contributed to this academic debate. Consistent with the structural argument, Silitski (2009) distinguishes between “embattled semi-authoritarians” in Georgia and Ukraine and “embedded authoritarians” in Azerbaijan and Belarus. Furthermore, Way (2008, 2009) contends that the strength of the country’s linkage to the West and the strength of authoritarian organizational power (ruling party, coercive apparatus, and discretionary control over the economy) affect the odds of the regime’s vulnerability to opposition threats.<sup>15</sup> Another strand of research focuses on the transnational diffusion of ideas to explain the outbreak of electoral revolutions. Using the concept of modularity, Beissinger (2007) posits that the power of example has led to a sequence of electoral revolutions in the region.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Bunce and Wolchik (2006b, 2009) demonstrate the diffusion of the electoral model from one country to another.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> For a review, see Meyer, David S. 2004. “Protest and Political Opportunity.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 30: 125–145.

<sup>13</sup> Tarrow, Sidney. 1998. *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 19-20.

<sup>14</sup> For a review, see Strang, David and Sarah A. Soule. 1998. “Diffusion in Organizations and Social Movements: From Hybrid Corn to Poisonous Pills.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 24: 265–290.

<sup>15</sup> Way, Lucan. 2008. “The Real Causes of the Color Revolutions.” *Journal of Democracy* 19 (3): 55–69; Way, Lucan. 2009. “A Reply to My Critics.” *Journal of Democracy* 20 (1): 90–97.

<sup>16</sup> Beissinger, Mark R. 2007. “Structure and Example in Modular Political Phenomena: The Diffusion of Bulldozer/Rose/Orange/Tulip Revolutions.” *Perspectives on Politics* 5 (2): 259–276.

<sup>17</sup> Bunce, Valerie and Sharon Wolchik. 2006b. “International Diffusion and Postcommunist Electoral Revolutions.” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 39: 283–304; Bunce, Valerie and Sharon Wolchik. 2009. “Getting Real about “Real Causes.”” *Journal of Democracy* 20 (1): 69–73.

This study attempts to add to this literature by scrutinizing tactical choices of youth movements and incumbent governments. While most previous work has analyzed electoral revolutions as a whole, this study focuses on episodes of interaction between these two players. Drawing upon McAdam's work (1983), I distinguish between tactical innovation of movement participants and tactical adaptation of the ruling elite. Tactical innovation involves a shift from conventional forms of collective action and the application of novel confrontational tactics. Tactical adaptation refers to tactics of the incumbent government to neutralize unorthodox mobilization efforts of challenger organizations and introduce new barriers for contentious collective action. The empirical inquiry singles out several arenas in which movement participants and incumbent governments seek to exercise strategic thinking.

***Arenas for Tactical Innovation.*** In an attempt to determine the manifestation of tactical innovation, this study focuses on the choices of frames, protest strategies, and influential allies. To gain leverage in the political arena, a social movement needs to articulate persuasive messages, employ effective protest strategies, and forge ties with influential allies. Each of these choices can involve tactical innovation.

Framing movement ideas presents an opportunity for tactical innovation. It is incumbent upon all civic activists to devise a frame, "an interpretive schemata that simplifies and condenses the 'world out there' by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of actions within one's present or past environment."<sup>18</sup> As a persuasive device, the frame allows movement participants to identify a problem, specify the target, and offer motivation for action.<sup>19</sup> Yet, the formulation of frames that resonate with the target population and stand out in the universe of political messages requires considerable creativity.

Another arena for tactical innovation is the choice of protest strategies. Though a range of protest tactics seems to be limitless, protesters tend to resort to a recurrent toolkit

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<sup>18</sup> Snow, David A. and Robert Benford. 1992. "Master Frames and Cycles of Protest." In *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, eds. Aldon Morris and Carol McClug Mueller. New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 133–155, p. 137.

<sup>19</sup> For a review, see Benford, Robert and David Snow. 2000. "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment." *Annual Review of Sociology* 26: 611–639.

of contentious collective action.<sup>20</sup> Tilly (1995: 26) conceptualizes a repertoire of contention as “a limited set of routines that are learned, shared, acted out through a relatively deliberate process of choice.”<sup>21</sup> In his influential work, Tilly (1978) demonstrates how it takes such macrohistorical factors as the rise of the nation-state and the emergence of new communication technologies to engender novel forms of protest.<sup>22</sup> A central advantage of novel protest strategies is that they can catch the authorities off guard and produce a stronger political impact than familiar protest tactics.

In addition, the cultivation of ties with influential allies creates an opportunity for tactical innovation. On the one hand, youth movements need to cooperate with other civil society actors to amplify their power. On the other hand, there is often a palpable danger that opposition political parties will use youth for personal gain. Thus, it is critical for youth movements to display resourcefulness in serving as a check on the self-serving behavior of political leaders.

***Arenas for Tactical Adaptation.*** Social movement literature has documented a toolkit of strategies that the ruling elite deploys to suppress mass mobilization. Repression is a common policy instrument used in non-democracies.<sup>23</sup> In the so-called hybrid regimes, the ruling elite systematically manipulate democratic procedures to the extent the turnover of power is hardly possible,<sup>24</sup> but refrain from the conspicuous use of violence. Furthermore, incumbents in non-democracies take preemptive action to minimize the likelihood of civil disobedience. In applying the concept of preemptive authoritarianism to the case of Belarus, Silitski (2006) illustrates how the incumbent president targets prominent civil society actors (tactical preemption), undermines the strength of social

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<sup>20</sup> On this topic, see Taylor, Verta and Nella van Dyke. 2004. “‘Get Up, Stand Up’: Tactical Repertoires of Social Movements.” In *Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, eds. David Snow, Sarah Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi. Malden, MA: Blackwell, pp. 262–293.

<sup>21</sup> Tilly, Charles. 1995. “Contentious Repertoires in Great Britain, 1758-1834.” In *Repertoires and Cycles of Collective Action*, ed. Mark Traugott. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, pp. 15–42.

<sup>22</sup> Tilly, Charles. 1978. *From Mobilization to Institutionalization*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

<sup>23</sup> For a review, see Davenport, Christian. 2007. “State Repression and Political Order.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 10: 1–23.

<sup>24</sup> Diamond, Larry. 2002. “Thinking about the Hybrid Regimes.” *Journal of Democracy* 13 (2): 21–35; Levitsky, Steven and Lucan Way. 2002. “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism.” *Journal of Democracy* 13 (1): 51–65.



institutions independent from the state (institutional preemption), and exploits dominant cultural norms (cultural preemption). In this paper, I focus on government tactics aimed at youth. More specifically, I examine how the incumbent governments responded to the rise of reform-oriented and technologically savvy youth movements by setting up state-sponsored youth organizations and intensifying the use of modern technology to subvert youth mobilization.

### **Methodology**

**Case Selection.** This study focuses on youth movements in five countries: Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Serbia, and Ukraine. The selected youth movements share several characteristics: (1) the formation of youth movements during the election year, with the exception of Serbia's Otpor; (2) anticipation of electoral fraud, (3) demand for free and fair elections, (4) mass mobilization in the repressive political regime, and (5) use of nonviolent methods of resistance. Notwithstanding considerable similarities, some youth movements were more successful than others in expanding the base of popular support for political change in non-democracies. A brief description of the political situation in each country is provided below.

Post-Soviet Azerbaijan has evolved into a non-democratic state endowed with huge oil reserves. In 1992, following losses in the war with Armenia, the reform-oriented president Abulfaz Elchibey was ousted from office. Heidar Aliev, former First Secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan and former KGB chief, was elected as the new president and later passed the reigns of power to his son, Ilham Aliev. Over the past seventeen years, the Alievs have solidified their political standing in the country. According to an IFES opinion poll in June 2005, the plurality of Azerbaijanis considers the ruling party Yeni Azerbaijan as the party that represents best interests of ordinary citizens, while the opposition political parties are rather unpopular.<sup>25</sup>

Another autocrat – President of Belarus Alyaksandr Lukashenka – has made his country famous as Europe's last dictatorship. The incumbent president orchestrated a

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<sup>25</sup> When asked to name a party that represents best interests of ordinary citizens, only 5.9 percent of respondents named Musavat party, and 1.7 percent of respondents mentioned Popular Front Party. The opinion poll was conducted on June 4-26, 2005. N=1,120. See Sharma, Rakesh. 2005. *Public Opinion in Azerbaijan 2005: Findings from a Public Opinion Survey*. Washington, DC: IFES.

referendum in November 1996 to disband the parliament and prolong his tenure until 2001. Another referendum held in 2004 abolished presidential term limits, enabling Lukashenka to run for a third term. Yet, despite state encroachments on civil liberties and political freedoms, Lukashenka is popular with the plurality of citizens. In August 2001, 51.5 percent of Belarussians reported satisfaction with the way the president governed the country.<sup>26</sup>

Georgia's post-Soviet politics is marred with intrastate conflicts and institutional failures. In 1992, the first democratically elected president of Georgia was forced to flee the country, and Eduard Shevardnadze made a political comeback. Yet, the former First Secretary of the Communist Party of Georgia failed to develop viable state institutions and revive the moribund economy.<sup>27</sup> In August 2003, only 11 percent of the population approved of Shevardnadze's job performance.<sup>28</sup>

Likewise, Serbia under Milosevic experienced a litany of socioeconomic and political problems.<sup>29</sup> In the early 1990s, the local economy was in the grips of hyperinflation.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, Milosevic dragged the country into military conflicts with its neighbors to distract the disgruntled population from domestic problems. Yet, popular support for the national leader gradually eroded. On the eve of the 2000 election, 58 percent of the surveyed Serbs agreed with the following statement, "Milosevic leads the country into disaster only to remain in power."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Research. 2001. *IISEPS Newsletter* (in Russian). September Issue, p. 12.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Baker, Peter. 2001. "A Hero to the West, a Villain at Home." *Washington Post* April 14.

<sup>28</sup> Georgian Opinion Research Business International (GORBI). 2003. "Pre-Election Situation in Georgia." August Report. Retrieved from <http://www.gorbi.com>.

<sup>29</sup> On Serbian politics, see Bieber, Florian. 2003. "The Serbian Opposition and Civil Society: Roots of the Delayed Transition in Serbia." *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 17 (1): 73-90; Lazić, Mladen, ed. 1999. *Winter of Discontent: Protest in Belgrade*. Budapest: Central European University Press; Thompson, Mark T. and Philipp Kuntz. 2004. "Stolen Elections: The Case of Serbian October." *Journal of Democracy* 15 (4): 159-172.

<sup>30</sup> Lyon, James. 1996. "Yugoslavia's Hyperinflation, 1993-1994: A Social History." *East European Politics and Societies* 10 (2): 293-327.

<sup>31</sup> The Center for Political Studies and Public Opinion Research of the Institute of Social Sciences, University of Belgrade conducted the opinion poll on August 3-11, 2000. N=1,700.

Similarly, President of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma (1994-2004) was dismally unpopular during his last year in office. While the economy grew at a remarkable rate of 12.1 percent,<sup>32</sup> almost nine-tenths of Ukrainians disapproved of Kuchma's job performance.<sup>33</sup> In September 2000, Kuchmagate – the tape scandal implying Kuchma's involvement in the murder of Georgiy Gongadze, the opposition journalist and editor of the online publication *Ukrainska Pravda* (Ukrainian Truth) – triggered the formation of Ukraine without Kuchma movement, demanding the president's resignation. More broadly, citizens grew discontent the bleak performance of state institutions and, in particular, rampant corruption.

***Semi-Structured Interviews.*** To provide a thick description of social movements, I collect data through semi-structured interviews with key informants, “a small number of knowledgeable participants who observe and articulate social relationships for the researcher.”<sup>34</sup> The criteria for choosing key informants are the amount of knowledge about the topic and the leadership role in the movement. A principal advantage of semi-structured interviewing is that it generates “not only information but also themes and categories of analysis” overlooked or misrepresented in the mass media.<sup>35</sup> Based upon field trips to the region in January-April 2008, I interviewed 46 former movement participants.<sup>36</sup> In addition, I retrieved qualitative data from a combination of public sources, including newspaper articles, NGO reports, and online forums.

***Estimating the Level of Youth Mobilization.*** In estimating the level of youth mobilization, I rely upon three indicators: the size of the youth movement, the size of post-election protests, and the length of post-election protests. The reported statistics,

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<sup>32</sup> European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. 2007. *Transition Report 2007*. London, UK: EBRD.

<sup>33</sup> The Institute of Sociology, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine conducted the opinion poll in 2004. Respondents were prompted to evaluate incumbent job performance on a scale from 1, worst, to 10, best. The plurality of Ukrainians (28 percent) gave President Kuchma the lowest possible mark. Less than two percent assigned his job performance the highest score. N=1,800. For further details about the survey, see Panina, Natalia. 2005. *Ukrains'ke suspil'stvo 1994-2005: Sotsiologichnyj monitoring* [Ukrainian society 1994-2005: Sociological Monitoring]. Kyiv: Sophia Publishing House.

<sup>34</sup> Seidler, John. 1974. “On Using Informants: A Technique for Collecting Quantitative Data and Controlling Measurement Error in Organizational Analysis.” *American Sociological Review* 39 (6): 816–831, p. 816.

<sup>35</sup> Blee, Kathleen M. and Verta Taylor. 2002. “Semi-Structured Interviewing in Social Movement Research.” In *Methods of Social Movement Research*, eds. Bert Klandermans and Suzanne Staggenborg. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, pp. 92-117, p. 94.

<sup>36</sup> In the paper, I conceal the identity of former movement participants. I randomly assigned two-letter initials to the interviewees to distinguish between individual respondents.

however, should be considered only as crude estimates of cross-country variations in youth mobilization. Accurate data on the movement size are missing, since some individuals participated in protest events without establishing a formal affiliation with the movement.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, I report the size of post-election protests as a whole because it is nearly impossible to compile the headcount of young protesters in each country. According to some estimates, for example, 17-25 year old people made up 85-90 percent of tent city residents in Belarus in March 2006.<sup>38</sup> Since young people constituted the majority of protesters in the street, the overall size of post-election protests can give us a good proxy for youth mobilization.

### Findings

Table 1 presents estimates of the level of youth mobilization in the selected states. Clearly, Otpor developed the most extensive network of activists. According to the reported data, every hundredth citizen of Serbia was a movement participant. In Georgia and Ukraine, a smaller fraction of the total population was regularly involved in the work of social movements. Still, Pora had more than 35,000 regular members,<sup>39</sup> and Kmara's membership reached 3,000 people at the peak of the movement's activity.<sup>40</sup> In Belarus, Zubr established its presence in 152 towns.<sup>41</sup> In contrast, Azerbaijani youth groups attracted no more than 100 people each and operated, mainly, in the capital city of Baku.

Notwithstanding data limitations, it is quite clear that post-election protests in Serbia and Ukraine were larger than those in Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Georgia. The size of the largest protest rally was equivalent to approximately one-half of Belgrade's

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<sup>37</sup> Exact data on the size of Zubr are missing due to the political situation in Belarus and ethical concerns about the security of the remaining activists.

<sup>38</sup> Pontis Foundation. 2007. *Young People in Belarus: Next and/or the L. Generations*. Bratislava: Slovakia, p. 4.

<sup>39</sup> Kaskiv, Vladyslav, Iryna Chupryna, Anastasiya Bezverkha, and Yevhen Zolotariov. 2005. *A Case Study of the Civic Campaign Pora and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine*. Retrieved from <http://www.pora.org.ua>.

<sup>40</sup> Kandelaki, Giorgi. 2006. "Georgia's Rose Revolution: A Participant's Perspective." *Special Report 167 (July)*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> Kobets, Vlad. ND. *Zubr and the Fight against Europe's Last Dictatorship*. Denmark: Young Europeans for Security. Retrieved from <http://www.yes-dk.dk/YES/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=145&Itemid=169>.

population and one-third of Kyiv's population. According to various estimates,<sup>42</sup> between three and ten percent of Tbilisi's population turned to the street on November 22-23, 2003. In contrast, the size of post-election protests was equivalent to one percent of the capital city's population in Baku and Minsk. In general, the data suggest that it is insufficient to bring 10,000-15,000 protesters in the city's main square to deter police violence. When hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians filled Maidan, Kyiv's main square, the sheer size of the crowd imposed constraints on the elite's response. In contrast, the small size of Minsk's tent city, in proportion to the city's population, has eased the isolation and the subsequent arrests of protesters by the coercive apparatus.

In the remainder of the paper, I first provide an overview of tactical innovations introduced by Serbia's Otpor and then discuss choices of successive youth movements. Finally, the paper examines a range of elite responses to the rise of similar youth movements in the post-Soviet region.

### **Otpor: A Model of Nonviolent Resistance**

In this study, Otpor is treated as the initiator movement that set in motion a protest cycle by providing a stunning example for civic activists in the post-Soviet region. Without doubt, the strategic choices of Otpor activists played a crucial role in affecting the outcome of nonviolent resistance. The movement's innovations included (1) the development of a horizontal organizational structure; (2) a two-track approach to framing movement ideas, with a negative campaign targeted at the incumbent president and a positive campaign aimed at boosting youth voter turnout; (3) production of the culture of resistance, and (4) cultivation of ties with influential allies.

First, Otpor developed an extensive non-hierarchical network of activists in the regions. By the time of the 2000 election, the social movement had more than 70,000 members in 130 branches across the country. "You cannot defeat the government by imposing sanctions on it or outspending it. But you can accomplish it by gaining

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<sup>42</sup> Nodia, Ghia. 2005. "Breaking the Mold of Powerlessness: The Meaning of Georgia's Latest Revolution." In *Enough! The Rose Revolution in the Republic of Georgia 2003*, eds. Zurab Karumidze and James V. Wertsch. New York: Nova Science Publishers, p. 99.

numbers,” a former Otpor activist said.<sup>43</sup> In addition to effective recruitment, Otpor activists devised numerous ways to maintain a sense of solidarity and strengthen commitment to the movement’s cause. In particular, Otpor developed a comprehensive plan of action in case an Otpor member was arrested. In this way, civic activists had a sense of confidence that they would not be left behind.

Second, Otpor launched a negative campaign *Gotov Je!* (He’s Finished) to expose weaknesses of the incumbent government and a positive campaign *Vreme Je!* (It’s Time) to boost voter turnout. The social movement conspicuously shifted all the blame for the plight of Serbian people on Milosevic. As one former Otpor activist put it, “We realized that we shouldn’t fight against the consequences of Milosevic’s regime. We had to fight against the source of all the problems – Milosevic himself. We decided that we would put all the blame on Milosevic.”<sup>44</sup> In the public eye, however, Otpor distanced itself from the get-out-to-vote campaign, creating “an opportunity for the less brave to get involved”<sup>45</sup> in anti- Milosevic struggle.

Third, the youth movement applied a novel toolkit of nonviolent methods of resistance. Otpor created a culture of resistance by popularizing the image of the clenched fist through graffiti, stickers, badges, T-shirts, umbrellas, and other promotional material. Furthermore, Otpor set up a web site before it had an office (on the use of the Internet, see Tunnard 2003). “It is amazing how people notice branding in their everyday life, but underestimate it in nonviolent struggle,” a former Otpor activist said.<sup>46</sup> The application of marketing ideas boosted the movement’s recognition for “saying things that older people were afraid to say.”<sup>47</sup>

Fourth, Otpor forged alliances with multiple civil society actors and pushed for the unity of the opposition political parties. For example, the campaign *Vreme Je!* involved 37 NGOs, along with the media support of Radio B92 and the Association of Independent Electronic Media.<sup>48</sup> In addition, Otpor developed a “fraternizing approach” to the police. Drawing a lesson from a record of earlier confrontation between Serbian

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<sup>43</sup> Author’s interview with X.N.

<sup>44</sup> Author’s interview with M. A.

<sup>45</sup> Author’s interview with K. P.

<sup>46</sup> Author’s interview with X.N.

<sup>47</sup> Author’s interview with A. Z.

<sup>48</sup> Paunović, Zarko et al. 2000. *Exit 2000: Non-governmental Organizations for Democratic and Fair Elections*. Belgrade: Verzal Printing House.

protesters and the law enforcement agency, the youth movement decided to turn police officers into the allies by treating them as victims of the regime and showing affection for them. Most importantly, Otpor skillfully expanded the political opportunity structure by propelling the unity of the political opposition and endorsing a single candidate from the united opposition.

In the beginning, forty percent of our campaign efforts were spent on making the opposition unite. Until the opposition parties were blackmailed, until they realized that they were losing their supporters, they wouldn't unite.<sup>49</sup>

Upon Milosevic's exit from power, Otpor's experience of nonviolent resistance has become a topic of thorough examination in the post-Soviet region.<sup>50</sup> Civic activists carefully studied how to emulate Otpor's success, while the ruling elite contemplated upon a course of preemptive measures to prevent the repeat of the Serbian scenario. In the following paragraphs, I discuss strategic choices of movement participants and the ruling elite in the selected four states.

### **Georgia's Kmara (2003)**

The core of Kmara activists came from an independent student union at Tbilisi State University (TSU), the country's leading institution of higher education, and Student Movement of Georgia. In 2001, a group of reform-minded students initiated the formation of a new student structure to counterbalance the existence of the official student union controlled by the university management. In the wake of protests against the closure of the TV channel Rusatvi-2, another group of students formed Student Movement of Georgia. Young Georgians deliberated upon novel forms of collective action.

In 2001, we were looking for fresh examples of changing the political system. Gandhi was too old and too remote from Georgia's reality. It was not too appealing to our youth. Likewise, velvet revolutions of the 1980s occurred a while ago. The most recent example of nonviolent resistance came from Serbia.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Author's interview with Q. E.

<sup>50</sup> On channels of cross-national diffusion, see Bunce and Wolchik (2006b); Nikolayenko, Olena. 2007. "The Revolt of the Post-Soviet Generation: Youth Movements in Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine." *Comparative Politics* 39 (2): 169–188, pp. 181-184.

<sup>51</sup> Author's interview with W. B.

Kmara's first symbolic action was a rally held on April 14, the 25th anniversary of a student demonstration against the constitutional amendment abolishing Georgian as the sole state language. Back in the Soviet times, Shevardnadze succumbed to the protesters' demand and restored the original status of the Georgian language. In 2003, Georgian youth advanced another demand: free and fair elections. Inspired by Otpor's ridicule of socialist symbols, Kmara activists burnt Soviet flags with the imprinted images of Georgian politicians, including Shevardnadze.

While Kmara leadership was based in the capital city, the movement's recruitment efforts focused on rural youth. To some extent, the prevalence of consumerism was an obstacle to the rapid growth of the movement in Tbilisi.

In Tbilisi, there are certain clichés. You need to wear a certain type of bag, a certain brand of shoes [to win social acceptance]. It is painful to stand out, to go against the tide...I tried to speak about Kmara with my fellow students [at TSU], but they had nothing, no spark in their eyes. In remote areas outside Tbilisi, people were more active. For a long time, they didn't do anything. They cultivated the land and stayed at home. But they wanted to feel useful. They wanted to feel that they were needed. It was clear from their faces that they wanted some change.<sup>52</sup>

Unlike Otpor, Kmara refrained from organizing two campaigns to propel political change. "We had less time than youth in Serbia. That's why we decided not to disperse our resources and not to organize two separate campaigns," a former Kmara activist said.<sup>53</sup> Kmara focused its efforts on ridiculing the incumbent president. Furthermore, Kmara modified Otpor's toolkit of protest strategies. To grab media attention, Kmara activists spray-painted graffiti on the building of the Ministry of Interior Affairs. Later on, however, Kmara abandoned this protest strategy, since most Georgians considered graffiti as a form of vandalism. Instead, a few Kmara activists became involved in the production of TV cartoons lampooning Shevardnadze.

Since inception, Kmara established good working relations with the opposition political parties. For the first rally in April 2003, Kmara asked the opposition political leaders to bring Georgian youth from the regions to create an illusion of the massive youth movement. Furthermore, the NGO Liberty Institute provided logistical and

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<sup>52</sup> Author's interview with T. C.

<sup>53</sup> Author's interview with Z. D.



technical support for movement participants. In the aftermath of the Rose Revolution, Kmara self-dissolved, and a few former Kmara activists joined the staff of the Liberty Institute.

### **Ukraine's Pora (2004)**

Approximately one year before the 2004 presidential election, two youth movements with the same name, later labeled as black Pora and yellow Pora for the color of their insignia, emerged in Ukraine.<sup>54</sup> The mission of Pora was “to prove to the ruling political elite that the power it gets from people is not given forever and prove to the citizens that they have enough power in their hands in order to channel the development of their country in the direction they need.”<sup>55</sup> In March 2004, Pora organized its first public campaign “What is Kuchmism?” in an attempt to generate a common understanding of the repressive regime ruled by President Kuchma.<sup>56</sup> The next month, yellow Pora made its first public appearance during the mayoral election in Mukachevo. Beyond the colors of their insignia, the movements differed in several ways. But the movements’ leaders made a conscious effort to mute these differences in the public eye. At the local level, young people often participated in activities of both black and yellow Pora without getting enmeshed in disagreements at the leadership level.

On the personal level, designers from black and yellow Pora knew each other. We had good interpersonal relations. But there was some tension at the top level. For us, it didn't matter much. We were just doing our job.<sup>57</sup>

First, the two youth movements adopted different organizational structures. Modeled on Otpor, black Pora sought to build an extensive horizontal network of activists across Ukraine and apply the principle of anonymity. They drew upon their

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<sup>54</sup> Yellow Pora distributed color copies of its campaign material with the prevalence of the yellow color, whereas black Pora utilized white and black colors. From the economic standpoint, black Pora saved resources: it cost much more to print campaign material in color.

<sup>55</sup> Pora Statement of April 30, 2004. Retrieved from <http://kuchmizm.info/weblog/archives/000041.html>.

<sup>56</sup> To be precise, Pora started its campaign on March 28, 2004, the day on which Ukrainian households adjusted time for the purpose of daylight saving and moved their clocks one hour forward. The implicit message of their action was that it was high time to start a new lifestyle and take a more active political stance.

<sup>57</sup> Author's interview with P.P.

personal experience of protesting against the incumbent president in the aftermath of Kuchmagate.

Some people involved in the campaign For Truth worked hard planning and doing street action. Others made a name by appearing on TV. In 2004, black Pora decided to adopt the principle of anonymity so that nobody would join the movement to advance his or her career.<sup>58</sup>

Yellow Pora was more hierarchical than black Pora. “In yellow Pora, there wasn’t even a hierarchy. There was just one dot – Vlad Kaskiv,” a Ukrainian civic activist said. Another civic activist refined this point. “Kaskiv made all the financial decisions. It meant that he made all the decisions.”<sup>59</sup> Nonetheless, even critics of Kaskiv acknowledge that he managed to assemble a group of professionals around him and, thus, contributed to the political salience of the youth movement.

Second, youth movements differed in their methods of nonviolent resistance. Black Pora became known for street action and the anti-Kuchma campaign, whereas yellow Pora focused on voter mobilization and election monitoring activities. These differences reflect more the public image of the youth movements than the scope of their actual activities.

[Black] Pora introduced the term “Kuchmism” in the media. We also gave a new, positive meaning to the word “activist.” What we did was civic activism, not aggression. We didn’t want to be marginalized. But it would have been too boring to just say to young people, “You must vote.” Kaskiv’s position was that black Pora shouldn’t do positive campaigns. But we did send some positive messages. Among our positive campaigns are *It’s Your Pora!*, *Independence Day*, and *Constitution Day*.<sup>60</sup>

The pattern of interaction with the traditional mass media differed across the movements. Given its emphasis on anonymity, black Pora devoted less attention to the cultivation of strong ties with journalists than yellow Pora.<sup>61</sup> Members of yellow Pora were more frequently available for comment and could be identified by name. As a result

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<sup>58</sup> The author’s interview with L.V.

<sup>59</sup> The author’s interview with L.V.

<sup>60</sup> The author’s interview with C. M.

<sup>61</sup> A major source of frustration among black Pora activists was a self-promotion by Vlad Kaskiv. He frequently presented himself as the leader of Pora, while black Pora members insisted on the leaderless structure. On this point, see Kandelaki (2005).

of these divergent approaches, activists of yellow Pora received much more media exposure than their counterparts from black Pora.

Notably, Ukrainian civic activists regularly used modern communication technology to organize nonviolent resistance to the non-democratic regime. McFaul (2005: 12) referred to the Orange Revolution as “the first in history to be organized largely online.” In particular, the web site *Maidan* (<http://maidan.org.ua>) created in the wake of Kuchmagate was “a vital, multi-faceted tool useful for outreach, training, and awareness raising, as well as fundraising and marketing.”<sup>62</sup> In addition, the web site <http://www.pora.org.ua> supplying regular updates of Pora activities ranked fifth among the most frequently visited Ukrainian web sites in 2004.<sup>63</sup> While the Internet-based communication fulfilled various functions, it is noteworthy that online forums provided a venue for an instantaneous exchange of ideas.

Activists thought out and discussed various methods of nonviolent resistance. Even such a mundane task as the distribution of leaflets in the street generated a spirited online discussion. People exchanged ideas on how to approach passers-by. Then they compiled guidelines on how to do it in an effective way.<sup>64</sup>

Turning to the strength of ties between youth movements and the presidential contender from the united opposition, the analysis uncovers some differences. Like Otpor, black Pora tried to distance itself from any political party. At the same time, yellow Pora cooperated more intensely with Yushchenko’s campaign team. In April 2004, Yushchenko was photographed wearing the badge of yellow Pora. In turn, flags of yellow Pora were waived at the Student Assembly organized by Yushchenko’s election campaign team in October 2004.

Pora members were among the first to set up tents in Kyiv’s Maidan. For weeks, protesters weathered harsh weather conditions demanding the nullification of fraudulent election results. On 3 December, the Supreme Court ordered the repeat of the second round of the election. On 26 December 2004, Yushchenko was elected as the new president.

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<sup>62</sup> Goldstein, Joshua. 2007. “The Role of Digital Networked Technologies in the Ukrainian Orange Revolution.” *Research Publication No. 2007-14*, p. 17. Retrieved from <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/publications>.

<sup>63</sup> Kaskiv et al. (2005).

<sup>64</sup> The author’s interview with C.M.

**Azerbaijan's Dalga, Magam, Yokh and Yeni Fikir (2005)**

Inspired by the example of recent events in Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine, several youth groups sprang up in Baku on the eve of the 2005 parliamentary election. Given the small size and the narrow geographical reach of these challenger organizations, it is more appropriate to describe them as youth groups, rather than youth movements.

To function in the repressive political environment, the youth groups moderated their claims. Unlike Otpor, Azerbaijani youth activists refrained from mounting a personal attack on Aliyev and his family. Furthermore, given the scarcity of available resources, the youth groups abandoned the idea of launching a nationwide get-out-to-vote campaign to bring young voters to the polling stations. Instead, Azerbaijani youth activists focused on the issues of corruption and free and fair elections. Dalga (Wave) campaigned solely against corruption in the educational sector. Yeni Fikir (New Thinking), Yokh (No) and Magam (It's Time) also articulated demands for free and fair elections and favored the idea of nonviolent resistance.

Yet, some youth groups failed to establish clear-cut independence from the political parties and, thus, reproduced factionalism within the opposition camp. In particular, the leader of Yeni Fikir, 27-year old Ruslan Bashirli, was widely perceived as the protégé of Ali Kerimli, leader of the Popular Front Party (PNF). The office of Yeni Fikir was located inside PNF main office, utterly discrediting the group's image of a politically neutral force. Furthermore, Razi Nurullayev, the leader of Yokh, has previously held the position of deputy head of the Popular Front Party-Classic and ran for a seat in parliament as an independent candidate in 2005.

Opposition politicians thought it would look good to have a constellation of satellite organizations around them. As a part of this strategy, they wanted to set up a youth movement informally attached to them. Sometimes youth movements even helped political parties financially. Unlike political parties, youth groups could get some grant money from international donors.<sup>65</sup>

Furthermore, internal tensions undermined the effectiveness of youth groups. Yokh, for example, disintegrated into several cliques, following intra-group disagreement over the unification of several youth groups under a single umbrella organization. By the same token, the choice of Yokh symbols occurred in the absence of an open internal

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<sup>65</sup> Author's interview with L. U.

discussion. Rather than generating home-grown ideas, Nurullayev turned to professional American designers to create Yokh symbols.

Yokh logo was developed in the United States. We liked the image of the person who shouted “No!” to non-democracy and invited people to join his victorious struggle. As the election campaign advanced, the person’s hands were supposed to close forming the clenched fist. Another symbol was the big palm stretched as if saying Stop! We thought that both symbols were good so we couldn’t abandon any of them.<sup>66</sup>

Another example of cross-national borrowing is the prevalence of the orange color at protest events. Like the Azerbaijani opposition, Magam picked the orange color as a political symbol.

It was the optimum choice. If we picked the green color, we would be accused of being Islamic fundamentalists. If we picked the blue color, we would be accused of being gay.<sup>67</sup>

In choosing their protest strategies, youth groups sought to minimize the level of police violence against youth. First, youth activists carried out the so-called leaflet rains, i.e. tossed print material from balconies or roofs of the high-risers. Second, young people ventured into the street under the cloak of night to spray-paint political slogans. Third, a few members of Magam and Yeni Fikir went on a hunger strike to demand the reinstatement of university students.<sup>68</sup> Despite all their efforts, these youth groups failed to attract a large number of young people.

### **Belarus’s Zubr (2001, 2006)**

In the aftermath of Spring 1996,<sup>69</sup> the youth wing of the opposition party Belarusian National Front (*Belarusskii Natsional’nyi Front*, BNF) proclaimed the formation of an independent youth movement called Malady Front (Youth Front).<sup>70</sup> Drawing upon BNF ideology, Malady Front called for the liberalization of the political regime and the revival

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<sup>66</sup> The author’s interview with R.N.

<sup>67</sup> The author’s interview with J.J.

<sup>68</sup> On the hunger strike, see Amirova, Leyla. 2006. “Politicheskoe obrazovanie” [Political education]. *Transitions Online* October 26.

<sup>69</sup> On protests in spring 1996, see Dubavets, Siargei. 1996. *Menskaia viasna 1996: Kronika, dokumenty, svedchan’ni* [Minsk Spring 1996: Chronicle, documents, testimonies]. Minsk: Nasha Niva.

<sup>70</sup> For more information, see the web site of Malady Front <http://mfront.net/>.

of Belarusian culture. Yet, the emphasis on the use of the Belarusian language and the daily practice of Christian values was bound to narrow the appeal of the youth organization in the predominantly Russian-speaking, secular society.<sup>71</sup>

In the wake of Serbia's Bulldozer Revolution, the youth movement Zubr (Bison) was formed to mobilize urban, Russian-speaking youth to campaign for free and fair elections in September 2001. The new movement was named after the country's national animal, invoking the myth that the bison doesn't live in captivity. According to Seviarynets (2002: 52), Zubr was set up with assistance from Charter 97, a Belarusian human rights group, and included several former Malady Front activists.<sup>72</sup> In planning its nonviolent struggle, Zubr sought to emulate Otpor's strategies and tactics, but overlooked differences in the political context.

The movement's leadership sought to develop a nationwide network of activists. The founding meeting of Zubr brought together civic activists from different regions. Zubr, however, was less effective than Otpor in building a sense of solidarity among its members. "Zubr leadership underestimated the importance of human resources. People are not like robots; they can't function all the time as if they were wound up. A lot of young people inside Zubr considered themselves as patriots. Still, they needed a recurrent reinforcement of motivation for ongoing action," a former Zubr member acknowledged.<sup>73</sup> Another devastating decision by Zubr leadership has been to put a few youth activists, including regional coordinators of the movement's branches, on the payroll. This monetary distinction between the movement's leaders and rank-and-file members might have fomented some negative feelings within the movement.

Emulating Otpor, the Belarusian youth movement launched a positive campaign under the slogan "It's Time to Choose" (*Vremia vybirat'*) and a negative campaign, titled "It's Time to Clean Up" (*Vremia ubirat'*). For this purpose, Zubr produced and distributed colorful stickers. Those stickers were so professionally done and eye-catching that other civil society actors were willing to distribute them. On the downside, the

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<sup>71</sup> According to the official results of the 1999 census, only 36.7 percent of citizens reported using the Belarusian language at home. For further details, visit the web site of National Statistics Committee of the Republic of Belarus <http://belstat.gov.by/homep/ru/perepic/p6.php>.

<sup>72</sup> Seviarynets, Paval. 2002. *Pakalen'ne Maladoga Frontu* [Generation of Youth Front]. Retrieved from <http://mfront.net/content.php?content.18>.

<sup>73</sup> Author's interview with a former Zubr member.

excellent quality of print material might have sent a damaging message to ordinary citizens. A former Otpor activist provided the following insight into the situation:

When you create such an organization [as Zubr], you need to keep in mind that you operate in the impoverished country. When you print a sticker, use black and white for two reasons: first, it is cheaper, you will be able to print more material; second, it builds up the brand. When people look at these stickers, they need to be convinced that it was cheap to print them. But Zubr printed a small quantity of stickers on high quality paper. This print material left the impression that it came from such an organization as BMW, not an opposition movement.<sup>74</sup>

Furthermore, the genuine popularity of the authoritarian incumbent hampered Zubr's campaign for political change. In Serbia, majority of citizens were frustrated with Milosevic's policies so Otpor skillfully tapped into this public mood and amplified it. In Belarus, however, a large segment of the population supported the preservation of the welfare state and favored close ties with Russia. In August 2001, Lukashenka's approval rating stood at 52 percent, while only 29 percent of the electorate reported the intent to vote for Uladzimir Hancharyk, a single candidate from the opposition.<sup>75</sup> Unlike Otpor, Zubr exercised little leverage over the power struggle within the opposition camp. Only several weeks before the election date, five presidential contenders from the opposition parties reluctantly pledged support for the candidacy of 62-year old Hancharyk, widely perceived as "not even marginally charismatic."<sup>76</sup>

The re-election of Lukashenka for another term in office has signified the defeat of the opposition in 2001. Yet, there remained a number of civic activists committed to nonviolent struggle against the political regime. In 2002, Zubr spraypainted the slogan "He Must Go!" and participated in the rally, titled "One can't live like this anymore." In 2004, Zubr members traveled to Ukraine to share their experience with Ukrainian youth activists and participate in the Orange Revolution.

Over the course of nonviolent resistance, Belarussian youth activists have significantly expanded the use of modern communication technology. According to

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<sup>74</sup> Author's interview with G. S.

<sup>75</sup> Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Research (2001), p. 13.

<sup>76</sup> Wines, Michael. 2001. "Street Theater and Graffiti: Belarus Dissidents Make News by Making Noise." *New York Times* August 11.

recent opinion polls,<sup>77</sup> the number of Internet users has grown from 3.8 percent in 1997 to 17 percent in 2003. Among the computer literate population, the opposition-run web sites are quite popular. Pazdnyak (2005), for example, finds that 9 out of top 20 most frequently visited web sites belonged to the political opposition in August 2005.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, there has been a growth of Russian- and Belarussian-language live journal entries regarding the political situation in Belarus. Given state encroachment on the freedom of assembly, the blogosphere provides a relatively safe environment for sustaining a community of youth activists.

By the time of the 2006 presidential election in Belarus, the protest cycle was drawing to an end. After five years of nonviolent resistance, Zubr turned into “an old, exhausted animal.”<sup>79</sup> Without using the movement’s brand, Zubr activists became involved in various civic initiatives, including the campaign For Freedom. The official electoral results – 83 percent of votes for Lukashenka and the turnout rate of 92 percent – set the backdrop for the so-called Jeans Revolution.<sup>80</sup> For six days, protesters gathered in October Square to defy the election results. On March 25, however, the police brutally dispersed the crowd by beating people with batons and using tear gas. Some civic activists blamed the opposition political parties for lack of preparation:

By the time of the March rallies, activists have already been arrested. It was ordinary citizens who turned to the street. They were morally prepared for the harsh response of the authorities. When they left their houses and apartments, they hugged their relatives because they were unsure whether they would come home alive. But politicians [in the opposition camp] were ill-prepared for such a massive rally. They haven’t thought through how to increase the number of protesters and bring more supporters to the square.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Research. 2003. *IISEPS Newsletter* (in Russian). December Issue.

<sup>78</sup> Pazdnyak, Vyachaslau. 2005. “A One-Window “Democracy”? Shaping E-Government in Belarus.” *Wider Europe Review* 2 (2). Retrieved from <http://review.w-europe.org/4/4.html>.

<sup>79</sup> Author’s interview with a former Zubr member.

<sup>80</sup> The name derives from events surrounding the rally “We Remember,” held in Minsk on 16 September 2005 to commemorate the “disappearance” of dissidents. Zubr member Mikita Sasim hoisted his denim shirt in the form of a flag when the police officer confiscated all the white-red-and-white flags symbolizing resistance to Lukashenka’s regime. Sasim was severely beaten by police officers and hospitalized with the diagnosis of craniocerebral trauma.

<sup>81</sup> Author’s interview with a former Zubr member.



In May 2006, Zubr announced its dissolution and its intent to join forces with other civil society actors in a single democratic movement. Yet, it is increasingly difficult for young people to participate in nonviolent resistance against the regime, since the government stifles any manifestation of civic activism.

### **Tactical Adaptation by the Ruling Elite**

The list of conventional measures that the ruling elite deploy against youth movements includes:

- (1) administrative pressures on university students, e.g. expulsion from the university or eviction from the dormitory;
- (2) discrediting youth movements through state-controlled mass media, e.g. labeling movement participants as drug addicts and terrorists;
- (3) physical harassment of activists by police officers and “unidentified individuals”;
- (4) detention of movement participants;
- (5) imposition of fines for the disruption of public order;
- (6) criminal proceedings against prominent activists.

As the protest cycle advanced and youth movements followed a similar course of action, incumbent governments in Azerbaijan and Belarus not only intensified the above-mentioned demobilization strategies, but also applied them at an earlier stage in the movement development to eliminate the threat of a strong challenger organization. Furthermore, the ruling elite introduced new strategies of depressing civic activism among youth. Unlike presidents of Georgia and Ukraine, the non-democratic rulers in Azerbaijan and Belarus invested resources into state-sponsored youth organizations to co-opt a large share of young people. Moreover, the incumbent governments scrutinized the use of modern technology by civic activists and turned around the use of these devices for political gain. These strategies are briefly discussed in the remainder of the section.

### **Counter-Movement Tactics in Serbia**

Based upon interviews with Otpor members and “written evidence,”<sup>82</sup> the Belgrade-based Humanitarian Law Center (HLC) developed the following typology of police action against Otpor: (1) “informational conversation” – summoning an individual to the police station for extensive questioning and subsequent fingerprinting; (2) detention; (3) entry into apartments, search, and confiscation of property; (4) inhumane treatment of detainees; (5) assaults by unidentified individuals, e.g. men in sportswear and surgery masks; (6) filing a misdemeanor complaint; and (7) criminal proceedings.

In addition to these repressive measures, the government of Serbia employed a variety of discursive devices to dampen popular support for Otpor. In view of intense anti-American sentiments in the wake of the 1999 NATO bombing, the state-controlled media tried to discredit Otpor as a pawn of US foreign policy. The ruling elite labeled Otpor members as “terrorists” and produced posters with the image of the clenched fist and the slogan “Mladlen Jugend,” trying to invoke connections to both US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Hitler Jugend.<sup>83</sup> But Otpor fended off accusations of close ties with US government by claiming the receipt of financial resources from the Serbian diaspora and pledging electoral support for Vojislav Kostunica, a staunch nationalist with anti-American views.<sup>84</sup>

### **Counter-Movement Tactics in Georgia**

The range of Shevardnadze’s counter-movement tactics was restrained by the fact that Georgia was a weak state. Since the government lacked resources to provide adequate funding for the police, rank-and-file officers had no monetary incentive to defend the incumbent president. The police verbally and physically harassed Kmara members in the street, but activists were arrested “only on two occasions.”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> HLC does not provide information on what exactly this phrase means. Throughout the book, HLC refers to interviews with victims of state repression and texts of laws used as a pretext for police action. See Humanitarian Law Center. 2001. *Police Crackdown on Otpor*. Belgrade: HLC.

<sup>83</sup> Rozen, Lauren. 2000. “Milosevic’s Media Blackout.” *Salon Magazine* May 18. Retrieved from <http://archive.salon.com/news/feature/2000/05/18/milosevic/index.html>.

<sup>84</sup> On Kostunica’s political views, see Bilefsky, Dan. 2008. “Kostunica Warns of Treason on Eve of Serbian Vote.” *International Herald Tribune* May 9.

<sup>85</sup> Kandelaki (2006), however, notes that the magnitude of state repression was much higher in Adjara, an autonomous republic governed by pro-Russian strongman Aslan Abashidze from 1991 to 2004. According

As far as the choice of discursive strategies, the ruling elite imitated Serbia's approach and framed Kmara as a political project of the external enemy. Unlike Serbs, Georgians tend to perceive Russia as the biggest external threat, and the ruling party in the former Soviet republic attempted to capitalize upon this fear. Yet, the government failed to demonstrate a credible link between Kmara and Russia's security services, since Kmara advocated close ties with the West, rather than Russia.

### **Counter-Movement Tactics in Ukraine**

The political regime in Kuchma's Ukraine lacked creativity in hampering youth mobilization. Working through the Ministry of Education and Science, the government applied political pressures on university students. Young people were threatened with eviction from dormitories and expulsion from universities for engaging in protest activity. In addition, Sumy students became politicized when they mobilized against the merger of three public universities under the leadership of a political appointee whose job would have been to coerce students into voting for Kuchma's handpicked successor, Viktor Yanukovych. Furthermore, the police detained, at least, 150 Pora activists.<sup>86</sup>

In the state-controlled media, the government portrayed Pora as a "terrorist organization." In mid October, the police allegedly found two kilos of explosives in Kyiv's office of Pora.<sup>87</sup> By that time, however, Pora was well known in Ukraine, and few people believed in the authenticity of government claims. In general, most efforts of the state-controlled media focused on smearing Yushchenko's reputation and underestimated the power of the youth movements.

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to the open letter to Abashidze by Article 19 (an international human rights organization), a dozen of Kmara activists and their family members were detained for distributing leaflets and posting posters with the slogan "Enough, Abashidze's dictatorship," "Enough, because I love Georgia," and "Enough, Inaction" in January 2003. Three Kmara activists, for example, were sentenced to a ten-day detention. After the Rose Revolution, another wave of Kmara protests coupled with the support of the central government accelerated the resignation of Abashidze, but he was allowed to leave for Russia. In January 2007, the trial was held in his absence. A Batumi court found Abashidze guilty of embezzlement of state funds (\$52 million) and sentenced him to a fifteen-year imprisonment (in absentia).

<sup>86</sup> A report about human rights violations during the 2004 presidential election, compiled by the non-governmental organization Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group, refers to some instances of police action against Pora. The full text of this report is available at <http://khpg.org/index.php?id=1124786228> (in Ukrainian).

<sup>87</sup> Kuzio, Taras. 2004. "Ukrainian Leaders Crack Down on Youth Groups Ahead of Election." *Eurasia Daily Monitor* October 19.

### Counter-Movement Tactics in Azerbaijan

The government of Azerbaijan employed a wide range of tactics to hamper youth mobilization against the repressive political regime. Like incumbent presidents in other former Soviet republics, the government of Azerbaijan invoked the image of the external enemy to discredit reform-oriented youth movements. It is widely believed that the Azerbaijani security services framed Bashirli, leader of Yeni Fikir, as a participant in the anti-government plot and collaborator with Armenian intelligence services.<sup>88</sup> The state-controlled media showed video images of drunken Bashirli in the company of alleged Armenian intelligence service officers, convincing many ordinary citizens and donor organizations that existent Azerbaijani youth groups were rather immature.

We lost a lot of people after Ruslan's arrest. He discredited all the youth movements. The media turned all youth activists into some sort of degenerates without any morals. We couldn't recover from this black PR. Shortly afterwards, Isa Gambar [leader of the opposition party Musavat] told his son to leave Yokh. He was told that he might also find himself in some compromising situation [if he stayed involved in the youth movement].<sup>89</sup>

Beyond the black PR, the government could draw upon the dominant cultural norms and economic resources to induce youth disengagement from politics. As a social value, respect for the elderly reinforces the preservation of a hierarchical society in Azerbaijan.

Starting from the cradle, parents tell their children what they ought to do. Young people are told at home that they should study well, get a well-paid job, and make a career. In our society, it is considered rude to argue with the elderly.<sup>90</sup>

Youth can see that those who work in state agencies drive expensive cars and wear fashionable clothes. And those who speak out against the government can't find a job. Youth sees it and chooses the easy path.<sup>91</sup>

By the same token, Azerbaijan's ruling elite is getting savvier in using modern technology to subvert the rapid mobilization of protesters. The government, for example,

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<sup>88</sup> One should bear in mind that Azerbaijan and Armenia waged a war over the Nagorno-Karabakh region in the 1990s. Though military action stopped, the conflict remains unresolved. See, for example, Socor, Vladimir. 2005. "The Conspirator as Braggart." *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 2. August 8.

<sup>89</sup> Author's interview with J.J.

<sup>90</sup> Author's interview with E.S.

<sup>91</sup> Author's interview with E. S.

is intent on blocking citizens' access to alternative sources of information via the Internet. In 2003, only three out of 14 Azerbaijani internet service providers could use their own satellite connection to access the Internet independently of state control. Moreover, the government has the right to order ISPs to block any web site containing material "contrary to the mentality, traditions and customs" of Azerbaijan.

In the aftermath of the Orange Revolution, the government of Azerbaijan showed determination to prevent a massive sit-in action on the city's main square. On four occasions in November 2005, youth activists, jointly with the opposition political parties, peacefully dispersed after two- or three-hour sanctioned protests against fraudulent elections.<sup>92</sup> Once the opposition attempted to start a sit-in action and permanently occupy Qalaba (Victory) Square, the police violently dispersed the crowd and arrested protesters.<sup>93</sup>

Furthermore, in response to the emergence of multiple youth groups, the government sponsored the formation of Ireli (Forward). Using Russia's Nashi (Ours) as a model of state-sponsored youth mobilization, Ireli set the objective of boosting popular support for the incumbent president. In addition to campaigning for Aliiev, the movement tackled a number of social problems, including computer illiteracy, drug addiction, and refugees.

The government realized that some young people couldn't be co-opted by using administrative/coercive methods. Ireli is loyal to the government, but it is closer to youth than youth branches of pro-government political parties.<sup>94</sup>

Upon the re-election of Aliyev for another term in October 2008, Ireli formally suspended its activities to re-emerge as a national movement to recruit citizens of various age groups and build a more broad-based platform for the presidential support.

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<sup>92</sup> *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*. 2005. "Azerbaijani Opposition Rally Ends Peacefully in Baku." November 9.

<sup>93</sup> Peuch, Jean-Christophe. 2005. "Baku Police Disperse Opposition Rally." *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* November 26.

<sup>94</sup> Author's interview with S. P.

### Counter-Movement Tactics in Belarus

The government of Belarus mounted a series of measures to squash youth mobilization against the current political regime. Above all, the President Lukashenka built a police state permeated with the security services and KGB informants.<sup>95</sup> Like other autocrats in the post-Soviet region, the government of Belarus allegedly uncovered foreign-sponsored plots aimed at toppling the country's constitutional order in both 2001 and 2006. Approximately two weeks before the 2006 election, KGB chief Stsyapan Sukharenka made a public statement claiming that KGB was "well familiar with this scenario and its actors."<sup>96</sup> Like his colleagues from Baku, the KGB chief produced a videotape to support his claim about preparations for a violent overthrow of the government.<sup>97</sup> On tape, the detainee allegedly confessed that he had undergone terrorist training in the Georgian camp Kmara, whereby his instructors were four Arabs, a Georgian colonel, former Soviet military officers, and Americans. Sukharenka warned citizens that participation in "any destabilizing activity" entails, at minimum, eight years in prison, and, at maximum, death sentence.

In tackling the issue of youth activism, the government of Belarus toughened control over the education system. The authorities drove private universities out of business and placed public schools in ideological straightjackets. As a result, youth activists were denied access to higher education and employment in the public sector. Since Lukashenka retained significant control over the country's economy, most civic activists are either self-employed or unemployed.

To deprive the opposition of symbolic resources, the ruling elite launched an attack on Belarusian culture and, in particular, restricted the use of the Belarusian language. In Minsk, the percentage of secondary school students who obtained education in Belarusian declined from 58 percent in 1994 to 4 percent in 2000.<sup>98</sup> Meanwhile, the

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<sup>95</sup> On the size of the police force, see Szyszlo, Peter. 1999. "Post-Soviet Orphan: Belarussian Paradoxes." *Central Europe Review* August 6.

<sup>96</sup> KGB of Belarus. 2006. "KGB raskryt plan silovogo zakhvata vlasti v Belarusi" [KGB uncovers a plan of coup d'état in Belarus]. *KGB informiruet* March 2. Retrieved from <http://www.kgb.by/press/inform/8.html>.

<sup>97</sup> *Belarusskaia Delovaia Gazeta*. 2006. "KGB Belorussii zaiavil o podgotovke silovogo zakhvata vlasti" [KGB of Belarus exposed preparations for coup d'état]. March 16.

<sup>98</sup> Retrieved from the web site of Society of the Belarussian Language [http://tbn.org.by/tbn\\_old/bel/stats\\_edu.html](http://tbn.org.by/tbn_old/bel/stats_edu.html).

president restored Soviet symbols of statehood and prohibited symbols associated with pre-Soviet Belarus independence, including the white-red-and-white flag and the old coat of arms (*Pahonia*). Moreover, the government raised the costs of ridiculing the incumbent president. The parliament adopted a bill, making a public insult on the president a criminal offence.<sup>99</sup> Given the loose definition of public insult, any individual can be sentenced to four years in prison or two years in a labor camp for criticizing the president.

Another Soviet-style policy was the government's attempt to resurrect the idea of a nationwide state-controlled youth organization. Modeled on Komsomol, the Belarusian Republican Union of Youth (Belarusskii respublikanskii soiuz molodezhi, BRSM) was set up in September 2002 on the basis of two state-controlled youth organizations, the Belarussian Youth Union and the Belarussian Patriotic Youth Union. To confuse the electorate, the co-opted youth plastered the capital city with Zubr-like stickers campaigning for the re-election of Lukashenka in 2001.<sup>100</sup> By now, BRSM membership has become an informal prerequisite for admission to the university and career growth in the public sector.

Having drawn lessons from the Orange Revolution, the government of Belarus displayed the commitment to contain the concentration of protesters in the main square.<sup>101</sup> Most passages to the protest site were blocked so that nobody could bring food and warm clothes to the protesters, while anybody leaving the tent city was immediately arrested. Moreover, the government used modern information technology to subvert mass mobilization. Clients of Velcom, the country's largest mobile phone operator, received anonymous text messages, warning citizens of the bloodshed on Election Day.<sup>102</sup> In anticipation of a protest rally, the security services brought downtown special equipment to block the reception of cell phones. As the riot police was dispersing protesters on March 25, the authorities blocked access to the Internet in Minsk.

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<sup>99</sup> Article 19. 2006. *Defamation Law and Practice in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine*. London, UK.

<sup>100</sup> Zubr. 2002. "Time of Zubr." January 15.

<sup>101</sup> On police action, see *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*. 2006. "Belarus: Is This the End of the Election Protests?" March 24.

<sup>102</sup> Heintz, Jim. 2006. "Text Messages Warn of Violence in Belarus." *Associated Press* March 18.

To date, Lukashenka continues to rule the country. The presidential administration closely follows events in the post-Soviet region and displays the capacity to learn from the mistakes of the ousted autocrats.

### **Conclusion**

The empirical analysis has identified a number of cross-movement similarities. Most youth movements were formed around the time of a national election and advanced the demand for free and fair elections. Emulating Otpor, youth activists planned a negative campaign targeted at the incumbent president and a positive campaign aimed at boosting youth voter turnout. Youth movements employed a similar toolkit of protest strategies, including stickers, graffiti, street performances, and rock concerts. Notwithstanding slight cross-country modifications of Otpor's model, youth movements in the selected states followed a similar course of action and, thus, deployed little tactical innovation to catch the authorities off guard.

At the same time, a cross-country analysis of elite responses to the rise of similar youth movements unveils the progression of political learning. In light of electoral revolutions in Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine, the governments in Azerbaijan and Belarus have significantly raised costs of political participation. Specifically, the coercive apparatus applied violence to prevent the permanent occupation of the public space in the wake of fraudulent elections. Moreover, the authorities deployed coercive measures against youth movements before they could develop into powerful agents of political change. In addition, the governments in Azerbaijan and Belarus have invested considerable resources into the creation of state-sponsored youth organizations.

In sum, this empirical inquiry used the case studies of Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Serbia, and Ukraine to examine processes of tactical interaction between social movements and incumbent governments in non-democracies. The analysis demonstrates that both civic activists and the ruling elite are able to draw lessons from prior episodes of nonviolent resistance during a protest cycle. As a result, late risers in the protest cycle need to apply a series of innovative strategies to overcome increasing constraints on political participation and introduce an element of surprise.



**Table 1. The Level of Mass Mobilization**

Country, Year (Youth Movement)	YM Size	Size of the Largest Post-Election Rally	Population in the Capital City	Population in the Country	Length of Post- Election Protests
Serbia, 2000 (Otpor)	70,000	700,000	1.5 mln	7.5 mln	Sept. 24 – Oct. 5
Georgia, 2003 (Kmara)	3,000	50,000-150,000	1.54 mln	4.6 mln	Nov. 3–23
Ukraine, 2004 (Pora)	>35,000	1 mln 1,546 Pora tents (15,000 people)	2.8 mln	46 mln	Nov. 22 – Dec. 3/26 (sit-in action)
Azerbaijan, 2005 (4 youth groups)	50-100 each	15,000	1.7 mln	8 mln	Nov. 9, 13, 19, 26 (2-3 hours each)
Belarus, 2001/2006 (Zubr)	N/A cells in 152 towns	10,000-20,000 tent city (200-300 people)	1.8 mln	9.8 mln	March 19–24 (sit-in action)

Sources: Interviews with former movement participants; Kandelaki (2006); Kaskiv et al. (2005); Nodia (2005); *RFE/RL* (2005; 2006).