

## **The Diffusion of Revolutions.**

### **Comparing Recent Regime Turnovers in Five Post-Communist Countries**

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#### **Abstract**

The recent wave of revolutions or near-revolutions in Serbia, Georgia, Moldova, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine shared the following characteristics: they were triggered by *stolen elections*, they were the result of massive but non-violent demonstrations, and the opposition united behind a single, often charismatic, leader. This article combines two theoretical perspectives on the recent revolutions in South-Eastern Europe and Central Asia: a state failure perspective that focuses on the domestic characteristics that might explain these events, and a diffusion perspective that focuses on the interrelatedness between these events by means of the interchange of financial resources, activists and knowledge. It concludes that foreign interventions aimed at the democratization of unstable states might facilitate regime change by democratic or undemocratic means, but it never is a sufficient condition for regime change.

#### **Keywords**

Revolutions, democratization, state failure, policy diffusion

#### **Introduction**

The latest wave of revolutions in South-Eastern Europe and Central Asia once again illustrates the vulnerability of oppressive, authoritarian, non-democratic regimes. This wave started in Serbia in 2000, and ended in the Kyrgyz Republic early 2005 (1). Almost all these revolutions shared the following characteristics: they were triggered by *stolen elections*, they were the result of massive but non-violent demonstrations, and the opposition united behind a single, often charismatic, leader. Theoretically, the occurrence of a revolution often is linked to the concept of failing states. However, various sources also point the attention towards the

role of foreign non-governmental organizations (NGO's) that helped to build and sustain a coalition of opposition parties, to train volunteers in campaigning and monitoring election results, and even to formulate and implement strategies to overthrow the regime (2). Singh (3) even speaks of *franchised revolutions*.

This article combines two theoretical perspectives on the recent revolutions in South-Eastern Europe and Central Asia: a state failure perspective that focuses on the domestic characteristics that might explain these events, and a diffusion perspective that focuses on the interrelatedness between these events by means of the interchange of financial resources, activists and knowledge. The article intends to contribute to the explanatory and – perhaps more importantly – the predictive power of the state failure approach by taking into account the deliberate strategies of foreign actors to overthrow regimes. This analysis is based on a review of existing literature and databases, except for the Moldovan case, which has also contributed from a series of interviews during a visit to Moldova in March 2005.

The literature on revolutions is elaborate, and shows a lack of consensus on how to define a revolution. In this article, I follow Goodwin (4), who defines a revolution as any and all instances in which a state or government is overthrown and thereby transformed by a popular movement in an irregular, extra constitutional or violent manner. However, whether an event is labeled a revolution or not is not a matter of a simple dichotomy. Following Yinger and Katz (5), we could argue that there is a potential variety in the amount of 'revolutionness' in a revolution. So while using Goodwin's broad definition, I would like to stress the variety within the group of phenomena that might be labeled 'revolutions'.

In the next section I will provide a brief overview of the state of the art of both state failure and policy diffusion literature and integrate them in an analytical framework. Section three describes and analyses five recent revolutions in the South-East European and Central Asian regions: Serbia's October Revolution, Georgia's Roses Revolution, Ukraine's Orange Revolution, Moldova's Silent Revolution, and Kyrgyzstan's Tulips Revolution (6). Section four draws conclusions from a comparative analysis of these five revolutions. The final section reflects on the lessons that might be drawn regarding non-violent action against non-democratic regimes beyond the cases that have been analyzed in this article.

## **Theoretical approaches: State failure and policy diffusion**

This section introduces the analytical framework that will be used for describing and analyzing the revolutions in Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, and Kyrgyzstan, and their interrelatedness. This framework consists of the integration of two theoretical perspectives: studies of state failure and theories on the diffusion of policies. The ‘state failure’ perspective is a useful perspective for analyzing revolutions, but start from the domestic situation within the country. The addition of a diffusion perspective enables a more dynamic perspective that also incorporates the role of foreign interventions. Table 1 gives an overview of the analytical framework that will be used in this article. The remainder of this section will be dedicated to an explanation of the framework. First, the state failure perspective will be described, and complemented with the issue of state performance. Next, an overview of the diffusion perspective will be given. Finally, the role of ‘trigger events’ will be discussed. Trigger events are events that set the events in motion once favorable conditions for a revolution have emerged.

Table 1 Analytical framework

<b>Theoretical perspectives</b>	<b>Factors</b>	<b>Indicators</b>
<b>State failure</b>	Regime type	Authoritarian, semi-democratic or full democratic (Source: Polity IV)
	Material well-being	Infant mortality (Source: Unicef Transmonee)
	Trade openness	Import + export as a percentage of GDP (PPP) (Source: World Development Indicators)
	Population size and density	(Source: World Development Indicators)
<b>State capacity</b>	Corruption	Level of transparency (Source: Transparency International)
	Tax revenues	Tax revenues as a percentage of GDP (Source: World Development Indicators)
	Implementation	Composite state capacity score (Source: World Bank Governance Indicators)
<b>Policy diffusion</b>	Transnational NGO networks	Development of NGO sector (Source: USAID)
	Involvement of Otpor activists	Qualitative descriptions
	Openness for ideas	Composite openness score (Source: World Development Indicators)

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	Press Freedom	Freedom of the Press rating (Source: Freedom House)
<b>Trigger events</b>	Elections	Qualitative descriptions
	Opposition strategy	Qualitative descriptions

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## **State failure**

‘State failure’ refers to the complete or partial collapse of state authority (7). According to Goldstone et al., four different kinds of state failure events might be distinguished: revolutionary wars, ethnic wars, adverse regime changes, and genocides and politicides (8). In this perception, the non-violent regime changes in the five countries that are the subject of this article might be regarded as state failure events as well.

One of the most comprehensive overviews of factors affecting the likelihood of state failure has been provided by the State Failure Task Force, which was established in 1994 by the US government. This Task Force analysed the impact of more than thousand variables on the likelihood of state failure (9). The following overview of factors contributing to state failure relies heavily on the Task Force’s final report (10). The findings of the State Failure Task Force can be summarized as follows. The strongest influence on the risk of state failure is regime type. The odds of failure for partially democratic regimes are seven times as high as they are for full democracies and full autocracies. Low levels of material well-being, low trade openness and the presence of major civil conflicts in bordering states roughly double the odds of state failure. Finally, countries with larger populations and higher population density had 30-percent and 40-percent greater odds of state failure, respectively. The Task Force did not find direct relations to state failure for environmental factors, ethnic or religious discrimination, price inflation, government debt, or military spending. In the next section, I will discuss each of these explanatory factors in more detail.

### *Regime type*

The Task Force roughly distinguishes three regime types: full democracies, partial democracies and autocracies. Perhaps a bit surprisingly, the odds of state failure were almost equivalent for fully autocratic and fully democratic regimes. The odds of failure were seven times as high for partial democracies (11). Whereas Goldstone et al. use a rather rude distinction between full democracies, partial democracies and full autocracies, in this article I

use the polity score based on the information in the Polity IV reports (12). This polity variable is an index based on several aspects of a country's political system. The polity variable ranges between -10 (fully autocratic) and + 10 (fully democratic) (13).

### *Material well-being*

There are several indicators to measure a country's quality of life, like GDP per capita, life expectancy and calories consumed per capita. The Task Force concludes that all of these indicators are highly correlated, but infant mortality is most consistently associated with state failure. According to the Task Force, a country's infant mortality rate as such does not cause a change in the risk of state failure, but it provides a sensitive indicator of broader changes in economic development and material well-being. In this article, I will relate the infant mortality rate to the average in the region. We speak of a high infant mortality rate when the rate is at least one standard deviation above the average in the region (14).

### *Trade Openness*

According to the analysis of the State Failure Task Force, the odds of state failure were nearly twice as high in countries with relatively low trade openness than in countries with higher trade openness. Whereas other economic variables like inflation rate, investment, levels of government taxation, debt and spending, flows of foreign aid and GDP growth do not come up as significant factors associated with state failure, trade openness does. In the Task Force's perspective, trade leads to faster growth and more democracy, both of which encourage political stability (15).

### *Population Size and Density*

Although the relation between both population size and density are rather weak compared to the other factors, population characteristics do affect the risk of state failure. Some political scientists argue that larger populations are more difficult to control, and that mobilization of the population is easier in denser populated countries.

### *Conflicts in Neighboring States*

In its conceptualization of the impact of neighboring states, the State Failure Task Force heavily relies on the idea of armed conflicts. "The presence of major conflicts in neighboring states might mean that guns and other weapons are more readily available throughout the region. Concern for the plight of ethnic kin, or even the mere example of conflict, might also

encourage groups to act violently” (16). However, in the policy diffusion literature, a much more elaborate concept has been developed on the impact of activities in neighboring or nearby systems. In the following section, I will deal with this issue more in detail.

### *State capacity*

The State Failure Task Force’s analysis brings forward a set of six variables that are helpful in predicting the chance of a revolution’s occurrence. In addition to this analysis, over the last decade an extensive set of literature has developed on the weakness of post-communist states. Some authors regard the weakness of states as the main reason for disappointment in the state, which of course is an important potential cause for revolution (17). Therefore, I complement the Task Force’s list of variables with indicators that refer to the strength or weakness of a state. Partially following Fukuyama (18), three indicators are used to measure the state strength: the level of corruptions, the level of tax revenues, and an index variable based on government effectiveness, regulatory quality and rule of law, as identified in the World Bank Governance Indicators dataset (19). These issues are expected to enhance the country’s vulnerability to state failure events.

This section has provided a brief overview of domestic factors that affect state failure. In the following section, I will introduce the policy diffusion perspective.

### **Policy Diffusion**

Most diffusion studies have been conducted among American states and concern the processes by which innovations spread from one unit, individual, or entity to another. Diffusion has been described as ‘any pattern of successive adoption of a policy innovation’ (20). In this section, I will first focus on transnational NGO-networks as an important means of the spread of the non-violent revolutions in the South-East European and Eurasian region, and secondly on the geographical dimension of the diffusion of the revolutions.

### *Transnational Networks and the Diffusion of Revolutions*

The last decade has shown increasing attention from different disciplines for the rise and functioning of transnational networks of non-governmental organizations (21). According to Levitsky and Way, the emergence of a transnational infrastructure of organizations and networks committed to the promotion of democracy and human rights has significantly weakened authoritarian regimes. Strengthened by the proliferation of international human rights organizations and other international non-governmental organizations (INGOs),

cheaper air travel, and new information technologies, transnational networks drew international attention to human rights abuses, lobbied Western governments to take action against abusive governments, and helped to protect and empower domestic opposition groups.

From a civil society perspective, there has been a lot of attention for the role of the Serbian-based student movement *Otpor* (Resistance) movement in the diffusion of nonviolent transitions beyond Serbia (22). The ties between the Otpor movement, multimillionaire George Soros' Open Society Institute and the US Government even lead to accusations of the neo-imperialist character of the revolutions in Serbia, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan.

The combination of both state failure and policy diffusion explanations for the revolutions in this article enables us to take into account diffusion strategies and tactics of the Otpor movement, as well as the role of other transnational networks, without mythologizing their impact. In the comparative analysis, I will take into account both the general characteristics of transnational NGO networks in these countries and the available evidence for the role of Otpor activists.

### *Geography and the Diffusion of Revolutions*

Kopstein and Reilly argue that in the analysis of governance in post-communist countries, there are powerful spatial and neighborhood effects that cannot be reduced to other factors that account for varieties in the reform path in post-communist societies (23). Of course, it is not the mere geographical situation that accounts for diffusion. A wide variety of mechanisms - including learning, competitive and cooperative interdependence, coercion, common norms, and symbolic imitation - account for diffusion (24). Therefore, I will focus on the concept of openness. This concept reflects the amount to which ideas and information can freely flow into a country and can be distributed within a country. In this article the measure of openness is a composite score based on indicators that are conceptually linked to the exchange of ideas and associated in prior research to processes of diffusion (25).

Finally, several authors stress the importance of independent media before and during the revolutions (26). Reports on the events in other countries, on the events within the countries and the mere fact that election results are disputed, all heavily rely on independent media. Therefore, press freedom is used as a final indicator for the diffusion thesis.

Combining the state failure and policy diffusion literature, we now have created an integrative framework that accounts for a country's revolutionary potential. However, a high potential does not automatically lead to a revolution. Even though the political situation might

be highly inflammable, there will be no explosion without a spark. What is needed is a concrete event that serves as this spark and sets in motion a chain of events.

Thomson and Kuntz argue that within mixed regimes, *stolen elections* often create conditions favorable for the outbreak of democratic revolutions. “Elections are considered stolen when a regime hinders an opposition victory through blatant manipulation of the vote count or through the annulment of the electoral results” (27).

In this section I have introduced and explained an integrated framework of analysis for the study of the recent wave of revolutions in post-communist countries. This framework starts from a traditional state failure perspective, but incorporates both state performance and openness. This enables a more dynamic perspective on the events. In the remainder of this article, I will try to assess what this integrative framework contributes to the explanation of the events in Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova and Kyrgyzstan.

## **Non-violent Revolutions in Five Post-communist Countries: An Overview**

In this section I will briefly present an overview of the recent revolutions in five post-communist countries. Each country description starts with a short overview of the events, followed by a discussion of the elements in the analytical framework. The order is based on the moment the revolutions occurred, so we’ll start in Serbia, moving on to Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova and finally Kyrgyzstan. A comparative analysis is the subject of the next section. Appendix 1 provides the quantitative data that have been used in these descriptions.

### ***Serbia’s October Revolution***

#### *A short overview of the events*

When it occurred, Serbia’s October 2000 Revolution was considered as Europe’s final revolution (28). However, it also might have been the first step in a chain reaction in the Eurasian region. Unlike other transitional countries, the first free elections in Serbia were won by Slobodan Milošević’s Socialist Party. During fourteen parliamentary and presidential elections between 1990 and 2000, the opposition did not succeed in attaining any political power before the fall of 2000, with the exception of a number of cities and communes in the local elections in November 1996.

Although there was some pressure by the opposition to hold early elections, it was on Milošević's own initiative that early elections were called for 24 September 2000. Like many other autocratic rulers involved in electoral politics, Milošević overrated the support he still would be able to draw and he underestimated the skills and passion of his opponents once presented with the opportunity of early presidential elections. They grabbed the chance by forming the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS), a broad alliance of 18 parties. DOS united behind the candidacy of Vojislav Koštunica, a candidate who was untainted by any past associations with Milošević, communism or the West, and who had a reputation for humility, honesty, principle, and moderate nationalism.

Koštunica won by a landslide in the first round of the elections. According to exit polls carried out by voluntary monitors, he received 50,2 % of the votes, against 37,1% for Milošević. In a desperate attempt to stop Milošević's defeat, the Federal Elections Commission ordered that Koštunica had won a plurality but not a majority, and thus called for a second round on October 8. However, Koštunica refused to participate in a second round. Instead, DOS called for a countrywide strike to culminate in a massive demonstration in the center of Belgrade on October 5 if the regime did not recognize Koštunica's victory. Days of mass protest followed, and about 13.000 miners from the country's major coal mine, Kolubara, halted production and joined the protesters.

The demonstrations reached a climax on October 5 when more than 700.000 citizens from all over Serbia poured onto the streets of Belgrade and other Serbian cities. At a little past 3 p.m., as the ultimatum to Milošević expired, the demonstrators seized the federal parliament and national television buildings. Bloodshed was avoided as Milošević's elite police units refused to open fire on the crowd, joining the citizens instead. By the early evening, the opposition was in control of all strategic sites in Belgrade (29).

### *Analysis*

Appendix 1 gives an overview of scores on all selected indicators. From a state failure perspective, Serbia before 2000 can be considered as a state that was vulnerable to state failure. The low level of trade openness, the high level of corruption, and the weak implementation account for that. The authoritarian characteristics of the regime kept Slobodan Milošević in power.

Serbia beyond doubt has been the country in which foreign intervention has been strongest. However, the low level of openness to ideas in the society and the low level of

press freedom prevented the diffusion of the ideas of the western supporters for democratization in Serbia. In the months to the election, the Otpor activists network served as a substitute for other means of communication. This explains its relatively large role in the Serbian revolution. “Otpor’s founding principles were straightforward, refined by failure of earlier agitation: remove Milošević because otherwise nothing will change; spread resistance to the provinces; galvanize a cowed population by providing examples of individual bravery; be hip, funny where possible, in order to create a contemporary message; avoid hierarchy because the regime will co-opt any leader” (30). Based on interviews with Washington-based officials, Cohen concludes that “from August 1999 the dollars started to flow to Otpor pretty significantly”.

However, various sources claim that we should not overestimate the effect of Western support. Slobodan Homen, put it to the *Washington Post* as follows: “Without American support, it would have been much more difficult. There would have been a revolution anyway, but the assistance helped us avoid bloodshed.” Otpor activists coordinated many of their activities with the opposition’s well-run campaign, ensuring that the crowds turned out in the provinces and that the people went out to vote on election day” (31).

Whereas the Otpor activists might have been instrumental in mobilizing the population and especially Serbia’s youth, much more important was that the traditionally heavily divided opposition united behind a single candidate that was considered trustworthy by the population. According to various sources, Milošević never anticipated on the ability that he might lose the elections. In fact, he was so confident that he even scheduled early elections (32).

The overall conclusion on the Serbian case is that it was the weak state, the unpopularity of Milošević, the opposition’s unison behind a good candidate and the activities of the Otpor movement that helped mobilize the Serbian people that formed the main ingredients of Serbia’s revolution. In other words, domestic characteristics played a dominant role. Help from abroad might have catalyzed the events by strengthening the Otpor movements and refining its tactics, but it has not played the crucial role that some authors claim.

### **Georgia’s Rose Revolution**

Georgia is considered one of the most volatile countries in the Eurasian region, particularly caused by the desire for independence of two of its regions: Abkhazia and South-Ossetia. Moreover, the country is considered by a large set of other countries, including Russia,

Turkey, the United States, Iran and Afghanistan, as a key player in the quest for influence in the Caucasus and Central Asian regions (33).

The November 2003 parliamentary elections that lead to the fall of president Eduard Shevardnadze, were subject of intense competition between the pro-governmental bloc 'For a New Georgia' on the one hand, and several opposition parties on the other. The opposition, although divided, could count on the support of the NGO's, including the youth organization Kmara! (Enough!). Kmara! was only established in April 2003, with the help of a start-up grant from Soros' Open Society Institute. It attacked government corruption through a poster and graffiti campaign, copying tactics from the Serbian Otpor movement (34). Kmara is considered as an important force behind the Rose Revolution, as well as the independent TV-station Rustavi-2 (35).

On the evening of the election on November 2, reports began to surface about discrepancies between the results reported by the Central Electoral Commission of Georgia and those reported by the nongovernmental organization 'Fair Elections', which was partly financed by multimillionaire George Soros' Open Society Institute (36). In contrast to the pre-election period, the leading figures and blocs in the opposition were able to unite on the second day after the elections. Their first joint action was a call upon the people of Tbilisi to demonstrate on November 4 [28]. What followed were three weeks of intense people's protests, which, not coincidentally, reminded of the peaceful protests in Serbia. Various sources claim that 1.500 National Movement member and 2.000 Kmara members have been trained by Serbian Otpor-activists in non-violent resistance (37). Several of the key players of the Rose Revolution claimed that it also was Rustavi-2, much more than Kmara! or other NGO's, in mobilizing the people and influencing the general opinion (38). During the protests, roses were given to army and the police, to stress the non-violent character of the protest. Although the flower is not in any way related to Georgia, the rose became the symbol of the revolution.

The events came to a height on November 22. During the formal opening session of the newly elected parliament, which was boycotted by the opposition, demonstrators managed to enter the parliamentary building. The opposition's leader Mikheil Saakashvili, holding a rose, interrupted Shevardnadze as he was reading his opening remarks, and asked him to resign. The president fled from the parliament to his residence, where he declared a state of emergency. However, since none of the law-enforcement bodies appeared to carry out the order, this was doomed to fail. On November 23 word came out that Shevardnadze had resigned (39).

The November 2 elections were cancelled by the supreme court. New parliamentary elections were scheduled, and Saakashvili was nominated as a presidential candidate for the now united opposition. He won the January 2004 presidential elections with 96,7% of the votes, the united opposition won 67 % of the seats of the new parliament at the parliamentary elections of March 2004.

### *Analysis*

As in Serbia, the main reasons for the Rose Revolution have been domestic. The regime was moderately democratic, but extremely weak. A popular joke in Georgia was that, in the period before the elections, Shevardnadze was president of Tbilisi, whereas it was unclear who governed the rest of the country. The regions Abkhazia in the north-west, South-Ossetia in the north and Ajaria in the south-west were practically controlled by regional leaders (40). Moreover, material well-being and trade openness were low, as were other important state characteristics like tax revenues, implementation of policies. With the corruption increasing to the highest level in the region, Georgia at the end of Shevardnadze's reign was desperately in need of a regime change.

The involvement of NGO's in Georgia's revolution was considerably less than in Serbia. According to Baker, "U.S. government-funded programs provided instruction in building independent democratic institutions to any parties in Georgia that wanted it, though nowhere near as actively as in Yugoslavia, where it was targeted at overthrowing Milošević . According to an anonymous Western diploma: "It's safe to say it was a more generic and traditional support of the democratic process in general" (41). Moreover, both the U.S. and Russia were reserved in their interventions, in order to prevent further destabilisation. Both countries seem to have anticipated on a gradual transition, mainly because Shevardnadze was nearing the end of his constitutionally last term as president, and was not expected to try to run again.

The openness in the country and the press freedom were relatively high in Georgia, which meant that western pro-democratization movements had easier access to Georgia. However, foreign intervention was rather limited and unfocused in Georgia. The role of Georgian-based NGO's on the revolution had been rather limited as well. "In sum, NGOs in Georgia did not *cause* the Rose Revolution in any simple sense, and they also were not day-to-day managers of events" (42). This also holds true for the Otpor-styled student movement Kmara!. According to Georgia's current president Saakashvili, the independent TV-station Rustavi-2 did play an important role in mobilizing the people. "The NGO's were not that important, but

Rustavi-2 was extremely important. (...) The NGO's did have some role in organizing student protests, but I think this was mostly Rustavi work really. Most of the students who came out on the streets were brought by Rustavi, not by the NGO's. They had some younger students in the Kmara! movement, but these were relatively small numbers (43).

So in short, the Georgian case must be considered much more of a domestic revolution than a revolution that has been triggered by western intervention. A highly unpopular president, an extremely weak state and a high level of corruption were the main ingredients. The country's relatively openness for ideas and knowledge might have facilitated the events, but there is no evidence for a specific, targeted western campaign against Shevardnadze.

### **Ukraine's Orange Revolution**

Of the recent wave of revolutions that are discussed in this article, Ukraine's Orange Revolution probably has received the most prominent media coverage in the West. Due to its size and geo-political position, it also has been the event that most deeply affected the relation between Russia and the West, specifically the US (44).

Since Leonid Kuchma's election in 1994, the Ukraine followed a path that is comparable to that of other countries in the region. Increasing corruption, diminishing freedom of press and a slow pace of economic reforms, combined with an extensive use of surveillance by state surveillance organizations created a pseudo-democracy. Darden even speaks of Ukraine as a "black-mail state" (45).

In December 1999, pressure from Western donor countries seeking deeper economic reforms resulted in Viktor Yushchenko's appointment as prime minister. In 2000, his first year as a prime minister, the economy grew by nearly 6 percent, after years of negative growth rates. However, in order to reach his goals, Yushchenko needed to interfere with the privileges of Kuchma's cronies, by imposing fiscal discipline, rigorously collecting tax revenues and privatization receipts (46).

However, Yushchenko's economic successes were undermined by increasing political uncertainty in 2000 en 2001. "In April 2001, parliament passed a vote of no-confidence in Yushchenko's government, which promptly resigned. The move led some analysts to conclude that oligarchic interest groups linked with the communist party were determined to sabotage or derail the Yushchenko program" (47).

With the constitution limiting Kuchma to two terms as president, the ruling class needed to find a successor for Kuchma who would be capable of beating Yushchenko, who had become the candidate for the united opposition parties. Various sources claim that the

selection of the highly unpopular Viktor Yanukovych has been an important factor in Yushchenko's victory (48).

In the first round on 31 October 2004, 24 candidates ran for president. On 21 November 2004 the election was supposed to reach a final conclusion in the run-off between Yanukovitch and Yushchenko. Immediately after the second round, there were widespread accusations by Ukrainian and foreign election monitors of massive fraud in the elections (49).

After the Electoral Commission's statement, Yushchenko-supporters – all dressed in his campaign color orange - took hold of Kiev's Independence Square. What followed, were chaotic days. Yushchenko urged the people not to leave the Independence Square until the Electoral Commission's ruling was overturned.

“On November 27, after days of mass protests and the siege of the cabinet of ministers, the presidential administration, and Kuchma's residence, parliament met and by a clear majority voted to declare the poll invalid. Six days later, Ukraine's supreme court annulled the results of the runoff, accepting Yushchenko's legal team's evidence of massive fraud and official high-level conspiracy. The court called for fresh elections” (50). On December 26, Ukrainians went to the polls for the third time in 2004. Amidst 12,000 European, American, Russian and Asian elections monitors, Viktor Yushchenko received 52 percent of the votes and Viktor Yanukovych 44 percent.

### *Analysis*

The strategic importance of Ukraine, its size and the extensive media coverage of the Orange Revolution have provoked an extensive flow of analyses of the events in the last weeks of 2004. Even more than in the other countries, accusations of 'imperialism', 'conspiracy', 'a franchised revolution', or even a 'carefully planned coup d'état' could be found in (leftist) media around the world (51). To quote Singh – a former Indian ambassador to Turkey and Azerbaijan: “(...) experience gained in Serbia, Georgia and Belarus has been invaluable to the US in planning the operation in Kiev. (...) The operation (...) is now so smooth that methods have matured into a template for winning other people's elections. Located in the center of Belgrade, the Center for Non-violent Resistance, staffed by computer-literate youngsters, is ready for hire and will carry out operations to beat even a regime that controls the mass media, the judges, the courts, the security apparatus and the voting stations” (52).

If we try to go beyond this rhetoric, the following elements seem to have been important in the development of the Ukrainian case.

With a relatively democratic regime, decreasing corruption and better performances in trade and material well-being than the average in the region, from a state failure perspective Ukraine was not the most likely candidate for revolution. As the Orange Revolution does not have a clear cause in domestic characteristics, the diffusion perspective might shed a better light on the events. Over the years, Ukraine had been considered as a seamy state led by a criminal elite ruling over a passive populace. However, international donors, who had relatively easy access to Ukraine, had aimed efforts at civil-society development for over a decade. These contributions were non-partisan and included a wide range of organizations, including – according to one source – the seemingly innocent Ukrainian scouting program (53). Although ‘the West’ undeniably has contributed to the viability of Ukrainian civil society, it is highly unlikely that the efforts were aimed exclusively or primarily at overthrowing the Kuchma-regime or discrediting Yanukovich.

It is hard to precisely identify the role of the Pora (It’s Time!) student movement in the Orange Revolution. It is clear that Otpor helped train the Pora movement. The Dutch Alfred Mozer Foundation claims that over 600 young people attended training seminars. “The main characteristic of those seminars has been the involvement of Serbian resistance movement Otpor! activists as trainers, who did their best to transfer the hands-on knowledge of leading a non-violent resistance struggle against the corrupt regime” (54). Consequently, the Pora campaign showed clear similarities with the Otpor and Kmara campaigns in Serbia and Georgia. Important Pora campaign tactics were the websites and stickers, pranks and slogans, comparable to those used in the other countries. “Channel Five, sympathetic to Yushchenko, played an important role in the elections in breaking the state’s monopoly on information” (55).

### **Moldova’s Silent Revolution**

From an outsider’s perspective, it may seem odd to incorporate Moldova in this comparative analysis, as no revolution has taken place in Moldova. However, in this description of the events in Moldova in 2004, I will argue that the communist party’s change in strategy in anticipation to the elections might have prevented the outburst of a revolution that might have resembled the ones that are the topic of this article.

By far the poorest country in Europe, Moldova has the distinction of being the first country in which an unreformed communist party regained control over government through democratic elections in 2001 (56). The Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova

(PCRM) won 71 of the 101 seats in parliament. Thus communist leader Vladimir Voronin was elected the country's new president on April 4 2001. In its campaign, the PCRM presented itself as an old-fashioned communist party, based on the orthodox Marxist-Leninist doctrine. Important themes in the campaign were clamping down on corruption, setting price controls, linguistic re-russification, and reliance on the Kremlin to resolve the conflict in Transnistria (57). Transnistria is the region that is de-facto separated from Moldova and is ruled by the Moscow-supported dictator Igor Smirnov and controlled by Russian peace-keeping troops.

However, on some issues the Voronin-government proved to be more pragmatic in its deeds than might have been expected. This especially holds true in the economic sphere and its foreign policy (58). In contrast, the fragile state of democracy in Moldova suffered greatly from the communist regime. In the judiciary, the communist replaced numerous judges with their own loyal supporters, whereas the media effectively were placed under state control.

A remarkable U-turn in Voronin's foreign policy has taken place towards the end of his first term. Several commentators argue that it is this U-turn that has prevented a revolution in Moldova. A revolution that already wishfully had been named 'grapes revolution' (Moldova is a large-scale wine producing country) or 'sunflower revolution' by some (59). With this regard, Radio Free Europe spoke from the 'orange **evolution**' in Moldova, Page stated that "Moldova has pro-Western revolution even before poll is held", whereas Ciobanu spoke of the 'Paradoxical "Revolution" in Moldova' (60).

The cause for Voronin's remarkable change in policy lies in the last-minute rejection in 2003 of the Kozak memorandum, a Russian attempt to resolve the Transnistria conflict. This memorandum granted disproportionate powers to the separatist region relative to its size and provided for the continued deployment of Russian troops (61). Both pressures from the West and the opposition in Moldova – including a massive rally in Chisinau - made Voronin back-off from the memorandum.

In the months to the election, Voronin developed a purely anti-Russian attitude. He refused to invite Russian election observers, expelled Russians with the accusation of espionage, and he arranged meetings with the leaders of the Ukrainian and Georgian revolutions Viktor Yushchenko and Mikheil Saakashvili in the weeks before the elections. Although the communists' electoral victory was not as overwhelming as in 2001, in the 2005 elections they gained 56 seats. Perhaps even more striking than Voronin's U-turn, is the collaboration that evolved in the aftermath of the elections between the right-conservative

Christian-Democrat People's Party (PPCD), the moderate right Social-Liberal Party and the communists.

### *Analysis*

To some extent, the Moldovan case shows similarities with the other cases. However, the absence of a proper revolution also makes it the odd one out. With regard to the central question in this article, the most interesting aspect of this case is an assessment to what extent Voronin's dramatic change in political strategy has been inspired by domestic motives or to what extent it has been orchestrated by foreign – and especially Western – forces.

Although there are some sources that indicate that Western preparations for a Serbian-styled revolution in Moldova had begun, these are not widespread throughout the literature. For instance, Stratfor claims that "Sources on Capitol Hill said Feb. 18 (2005; MF) that the U.S. government has "dispatched" \$ 1.7 million "to support Moldovan democracy". Sources indicate that the National Endowment for Democracy and non-governmental organization such as George Soros' Open Society Institute have been holding seminars for the Moldovan opposition that explain how to govern and how "root democracy" works to achieve democracy through protests" (62). Another source claims that, observing Voronin's remarkable change in strategy "Washington abandoned the idea of sending political technologists to Kishinev to train local oppositionists in the art of revolution making. The figures of Georgian "Kmara" revolutionary organization were recommended to leave Moldova immediately. The leader of "Kmara" Tea Tutberidze hurried to state that her people had nothing to do in Kishinev and went home immediately" (63).

But these stories are rare and appear to be based more on incidental than on structural ties. There is no evidence of the development of a youth organization comparable with Otpor or Kmara! With approximately 600.000 mainly young people having left the country to work abroad, the base for the development of such an organization should be considered limited.

Moreover, as Voronin himself said, there was no possibility for a revolutionary scenario. "There is no point for power to falsify the elections, as according to many polls, the ruling party is ahead of the opposition with a big margin" (64). Several sources claim that the limited access of the opposition to the state television partly accounts for this. But more importantly, there was no point in a revolution as the ruling Communist Party and the largest part of the opposition agreed on the country's pro-European and anti-Russian strategy.

It's impossible to pinpoint a single cause for Voronin's and the Communist Party's remarkable change in attitude towards Russia and the West.. From a comparative perspective

it will always remain unclear how events would have developed without this change in direction. What is clear however, is that a variety of causes, including tactical considerations of Voronin, the colored revolutions in other countries and the massive protest in Chisinau have had impact on this change of perspective. This illustrates the value of the diffusion perspective that has been embraced in this article.

### **Kyrgyzstan's Tulip Revolution**

The tiny mountainous republic of Kyrgyzstan was seen in the early 1990s as an 'island of democracy', within which flourished a vibrant realm of social organisation (65). Under the communist leadership of Absamat Masaliyev, the *glasnost* and *perestroika* that were characteristic of the late Soviet empire had left the country unaffected. However, the mishandling of the inter-ethnic conflicts in the southern city of Osh led to a discrediting of Masaliyev's leadership. The political inexperienced physics professor Askar Akayev was chosen by the parliament to lead the republic in October 1990.

As dissatisfaction with his leadership mounted in the late 1990's, increased authoritarianism was aimed at blocking criticism and retaining power. The parliamentary elections of 2000 were reported to be heavily falsified, provoking considerable tension throughout the country, particularly in the south. The presidential elections of that same year were an easy target for Akayev, as his most prominent challenger Feliks Kulov had been imprisoned on vague charges of abuse of power, and eventually was convicted to a ten-year sentence .

In 2005, Akayev's unpopularity had grown considerably. Long term problems of corruption, socio-economic decline and ineffective governance had caused much of the population, and particularly in the poorer, more conservative south, to oppose Akayev. The events that would eventually lead to the Tulip Revolution, started with the second round of the parliamentary elections. Whereas the first round had been rather fair (66), the run-off on 13 March seems to have involved more malpractice than the first. It was this run-off that caused the initial protests. These protests were about local issues, mostly conducted by supporters of individual candidates who had been the victims of deregistration or some clear campaign malpractice. But gradually the wider opposition joined in, and the agenda broadened to national issues, in the first place the resignation of President Akayev (67).

The final stage of the revolution started on 20 March when in Jalabadad 10,000 people retook control over the regional administration building which they had been forced to leave by security forces earlier. The same events took place in Osh, so that most of the south was

effectively in opposition hands. After these events, the opposition politicians agreed on a major rally in Kyrgyzstan's capital Bishkek on 24 March. What happened on that day surprised almost everybody, including opposition leaders, who claimed that they were prepared for several days of protest. "If there was a prearranged plan, they seemed unaware of it" (68). After a peaceful start of the rally, the atmosphere grew slightly tenser, resulting in a fight between a group of young people and the riot police outside Akayev's headquarters, the White House. The police managed to force the protestors back twice, but having been given orders not to use arms, they realized they could not keep control and fled. Within minutes, the White House was occupied by protestors. Akayev seemed to have left the country earlier that day. After these events, Bishkek was in complete disorder for a few days, until Feliks Kulov, who was released from prison to try to calm the situation and stop the looting, managed to control the situation (69).

In the aftermath, the newly elected parliament was recognized as legitimate, and former prime-minister and one of the opposition's central figures Kurmanbek Bakiyev, was appointed as prime minister and acting president. In the 2005 presidential elections, he acquired almost 90% of the votes.

### *Analysis*

From a state failure perspective, Kyrgyzstan might be considered as a state with a high vulnerability to collapse. A mixed authoritarian regime, a low level of material well-being, low trade openness, a high level of corruption and weak implementation form the ingredients of an unstable regime.

From a diffusion perspective, it seems highly unlikely that western interventions aimed at improving democracy have had high impact in Kyrgyzstan. The level of openness in the country is low, as is the press freedom. Moreover, the situation of the NGO-sector has worsened significantly the last years. For this reason, we might consider Kyrgyzstan's revolution a domestic event. Several sources confirm the limited impact of foreign efforts aimed at democracy-building. The International Crisis Group stated that "Akayev began openly criticising U.S. policy and putting more pressure on Western-funded NGOs. But he attacked the wrong target: such NGOs and civil society had only a limited impact on the March 2005 events". Burke (2005) argues that "change in Kyrgyzstan is being led by a far less disciplined force, with no widely recognized leader and no clearly defined program. It should thus not be viewed as another in a string of "velvet" revolutions" (70).

Given the highly local character of the parliamentary elections, it even has been highly unclear which forces were behind the first stage of the revolution. It started as separate revolts in the country's southern provinces, where clans of politicians disqualified from the recent parliamentary elections occupied government buildings (71). The main organizers seem to have been aides of local candidates, who also arranged food and other support. The Otpor-style student movement KelKel seems to have played a very limited role in the Kyrgyz events (72).

The opposition movement in Kyrgyzstan traditionally has been highly divided. In the months before the elections, opposition personalities continued to promote different agendas, with only a limited attempt to promote a united slate of candidates, despite formal agreements. Unity only evolved when the various opposition leaders agreed to try to take the revolt in the provinces to Bishkek divided.

The local accents on Kyrgyz parliamentary elections make the effect of stolen elections different from the other cases. It's obvious that there has been election fraud on a rather massive scale, but it's not always clear which parties were behind this fraud. Not only the interests of Akayev and his family seem to have played a role, a wide variety of other local and regional interests were at stake at these elections too. Therefore, the elections might have been chaotic and fraud may have occurred, there has been no orchestrated attempt in favor of one specific party or candidate.

So we might conclude that Kyrgyzstan's tulip revolution primarily has been a domestic event, which not even has been orchestrated by a well-organized and well-prepared opposition. It more or less coincidentally evolved from local protests, and clearly has not been triggered or even facilitated by the interventions by foreign NGO's.

### **A Comparative Analysis**

Table 2 provides a comparative overview of the characteristics of each of the countries that have been discussed in this article. This analysis is based on two theoretical perspectives, a domestic state failure perspective, a policy diffusion perspective. The central claim in this article is that the combination of both the characteristics of the governance system and the openness for ideas, knowledge and other resources improve our understanding of the occurrence of state failure events.

- table 2 about here -

Based on these theoretical perspectives, we might distinguish two different types of revolutions. In countries that are characterized by unstable governance structures, and a low level of openness to diffusion, we would expect a revolution to be caused primarily by domestic factors. We would not expect a high impact from foreign interventions, for instance by aid or training of activists aimed at democratization. From the countries in our analysis, Kyrgyzstan is the purest example of this type of revolution. On the contrary, countries with a relatively high level of openness to the diffusion of knowledge and ideas and an unstable governance structure, might be more vulnerable to ‘imported revolutions’. These are triggered by the deliberate attempts of foreign organizations to improve the level of democratization in a country, if needed by overthrowing the ruling regime.

Although we did not observe pure examples of ‘imported revolutions’ in this analysis, the Serbian case is the clearest example of this type. In countries with more stable governance structures, the level of openness for diffusion is rather irrelevant, as we would not expect a revolution in such countries. If regime changes occur, they are likely to follow the path of legitimate, democratic procedures. The Moldovan case is a clear example of this in the five countries that have been discussed in this article. The Georgian and Ukrainian case both carry characteristics of a domestic revolution, although there are some elements that might be attributed to the imported democratization attempts of foreign organizations. However, following from this comparative analysis, we have to conclude that it is highly unlikely that all revolutions that have been discussed in this article are the result of deliberate interventions of foreign governments and NGO’s. In some cases foreign aid might have facilitated the events, but given the low level of openness for ideas and knowledge in the countries that have been discussed here, there is no fertile ground for these interventions.

### *Who’s next?*

Using the data that have been gathered for the quantitative descriptions in this article, we can now extend the analysis of the interplay between the governance characteristics and level of diffusion in all East-European and Central-Asian countries. Figure 1 provides a scatter plot of the stability of governance structures and level of openness for ideas, knowledge and other resources in 26 countries.<sup>73</sup> This diagram is obtained by recoding all variables on a 1 to 5 scale, and from that creating an index for governance stability and for the level of openness (74).

Figure 1 illustrates the value of the approach in this article. It makes clear that non-democratic regime change might take different paths, and provides an overview of the vulnerability of

each country for both a ‘domestic’ and an ‘imported’ revolution. Although this approach still fails to ultimately predict the occurrence of a revolution, it provides a useful tool to analyze the vulnerability of a country. For Western NGO’s and governments providing aid and assistance aimed at democratization, it shows in which countries this assistance might be most successful. It shows that primarily Kazakhstan, and to a lesser extent Tajikistan and Azerbaijan might provide fertile soil for the seeds of democratization, although the lack of openness might hinder the effectiveness of these efforts. In fact, some of the recent reforms in Azerbaijan, and president Ilham Aliyev’s prompt response to accusations of election fraud, can only be regarded in the shadow of the recent events in the area (Cornell 2005). On the other hand, attempts to foreign-assisted regime change in Belarus, Uzbekistan and Russia are bound to fail because these regimes are more stable and less open to the diffusion of knowledge, ideas and other resources.

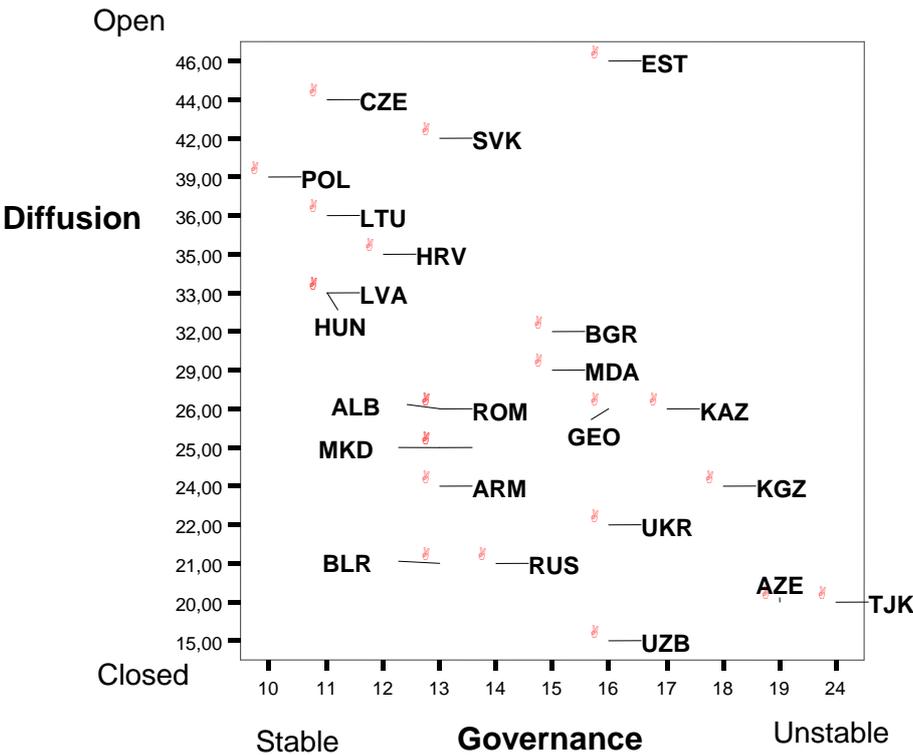


Figure 1 Governance and diffusion in Eastern Europe and Central Asia

**Conclusions**

This article has provided an attempt to integrate theories on state failure and policy diffusion in an analytical framework for the study of revolutions. It has illustrated both from the detailed case descriptions and from a comparative analysis of several East-European and

Central-Asian countries that the combination of these two perspectives provides a richer explanation of the effects of foreign attempts to trigger a revolution, and to the occurrence of revolutions in general.

However, this approach still falls short in predicting the next revolution. The incorporation of trigger events provided some extra favorable conditions. The mix of an unstable state, a relatively high openness for the diffusion of ideas, knowledge and other resources and elections proved to be a set of necessary and sufficient conditions in Georgia, Moldova, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine. The fact that the governments in these countries tried to block the regime change that to some extent was inevitable with undemocratic means, served as the spark that set in motion the revolution. However, this approach also makes clear that there is no such thing as an imported revolution in its purest form. Foreign interventions aimed at the democratization of unstable states might facilitate regime change by democratic or undemocratic means, but it never is a sufficient condition for regime change.

## Notes

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73. These are all countries that have been mentioned in note 14, except Bosnia-Herzegovina, for which no complete dataset could be created.
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