

Ukraine's Orange Revolution

THE OPPOSITION'S ROAD TO SUCCESS

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Ukraine's Orange Revolution unearthed a vibrant civil society that few scholars and analysts believed had existed. Massive popular demonstrations in Kyiv were sparked when authorities proclaimed Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich the winner of the 21 November 2004 presidential runoff, despite exit-poll reports of a clear lead for opposition candidate Viktor Yushchenko. In the October 31 first round, which had also been marred by voting irregularities, Yushchenko had officially outpolled Yanukovich by 0.6 percent (see the table on p. 118 below). At their peak, the protests mobilized an estimated half a million opposition activists, students, and disillusioned voters. These mass demonstrations, in combination with evidence of large-scale fraud, led the Supreme Court on December 3 to nullify the results of the second round, and to call for a repeat runoff to be held on December 26. In that election, Yushchenko defeated Yanukovich by 52 to 44 percent, and he was inaugurated as independent Ukraine's third president on 23 January 2005.

In previous years, there had been well-organized antiregime protests that had drawn impressive crowds, but they never attracted sufficiently large numbers to constitute a threat to President Leonid Kuchma's semi-authoritarian rule. So what explains the massive outrage that in 2004 resulted in a democratic breakthrough comparable to those in Serbia in 2000 and Georgia in 2003? To answer this question, we need to take a closer look at the origins and evolution of Ukraine's opposition.

Between 1992, when the country became independent, and 2001, when a vote in the 450-seat Verkhovna Rada or Supreme Council

(Ukraine's parliament) removed the government of then-prime minister Viktor Yushchenko, the main opposition clustered around the Communist and Socialist parties (KPU and SPU, respectively). The KPU had been banned in 1991, but was allowed to reregister in 1993 after agreeing that it was not the continuation of the Soviet Communist Party and thus forsaking any claim to the property owned by that party during the Soviet era. The new KPU nonetheless espoused the hard-line ideology of its predecessor's "imperial wing": It not only wanted a restoration of the communist system, but it also opposed the very idea of Ukrainian statehood.¹ In other words, the largest opposition force in Ukraine from 1993 to 2001 was hostile to the country's independence.

Like the KPU, the SPU grew out of the Soviet-era Communist Party. Although it was organized by the former leader of the Communist legislative majority when the KPU was outlawed in 1991, the SPU was "not so much a successor to the Communist Party, as a party of economic populism."² It remained the smaller of the two leftist parties, with about a third as many members as the KPU. These two parties dominated the Rada from 1994 until 1999 and constituted the main opposition to Kuchma's regime during six of his ten years in office.

Ukraine's 1999 presidential election was in some ways a repetition of Russia's presidential election of 1996. In both cases, the incumbent (Kuchma in Ukraine and Boris Yeltsin in Russia) defeated the Communist Party leader. In Ukraine, however, the election was less a vote on Kuchma's vague and corrupted "reform" program than a second referendum on the country's independence. In light of KPU leader Petro Symonenko's anti-statehood stance, many Ukrainians voted *against* him rather than *for* Kuchma. That had not been the case in Russia in 1996, since Russian Communist leader Gennadiy Zyuganov on many occasions had expressed his support for the Russian "national idea."

After the fall of communism, former high-ranking members of the Ukrainian *nomenklatura* converted their Soviet-era political power into economic influence and financial capital. Eager to lobby for their own business interests, these newly rich so-called oligarchs reentered politics during the 1998 parliamentary elections, representing centrist parties that soon were counted among Kuchma's principal support groups. The oligarchs either took over already established parties, such as the Social Democratic Party (United) (SDPU[O]), the Green Party, and the People's Democratic Party (NDPU), or created new parties, such as the Labor Party (PTU) and the Party of Regions (RU). These parties were ideologically amorphous and merely "roofs" (*kryshy* in Russian criminal slang) for regional and business interests. Most of them lacked any real political platform and were unable to propose concrete policies; instead, they tended to copy their opponents, use dirty tricks, and put forward populist measures such as pension hikes.

The rise of the oligarchs and their centrist parties mirrored the de-

TABLE—OFFICIAL RESULTS OF UKRAINE’S 2004 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION (PERCENT OF VOTE)

NAME (PARTY AFFILIATION)	FIRST ROUND* OCTOBER 31	RUNOFF NOVEMBER 21	REPEAT RUNOFF DECEMBER 26
Viktor Yushchenko (Our Ukraine)	39.90	46.61	51.99
Viktor Yanukovych (Regions of Ukraine)	39.26	49.46	44.20
Oleksandr Moroz (Socialist Party of Ukraine)	5.82	–	–
Petro Symonenko (Communist Party of Ukraine)	4.97	–	–

Source: Central Election Commission of Ukraine

* No other candidate received more than 2 percent of the vote. A portion of the electorate (1.98 percent) voted against all candidates.

cline of the KPU, which enjoyed its last heyday in the 1999 presidential election. After Kuchma’s reelection, reformist Viktor Yushchenko, the former head of the National Bank, assumed the premiership, and a progovernment majority was formed by 11 center and center-right factions that all had long sought to rid the Rada of its entrenched left-wing leadership. This new parliamentary majority comprised both centrists and national democrats (the Right), who had little in common apart from their shared hostility to the Left.

As prime minister, Yushchenko launched a comprehensive reform program, which included efforts to promote privatization, lower inflation, balance the budget, and reduce government bureaucracy. Anticorruption measures, particularly in the energy sector, returned more than US\$2 billion to the budget, which was used to pay wage and pension arrears. As a result, Yushchenko’s popular support climbed above 35 percent, a figure unprecedented in independent Ukraine. While his reforms were beneficial for the country as a whole, however, they quickly began to hurt the interests of the oligarchs, and Yushchenko’s government (particularly Deputy Prime Minister Yuliya Tymoshenko) soon became embroiled in a confrontation with influential industry leaders.

“Kuchmagate”

While Yushchenko’s popular support soared, Kuchma’s took a big hit. On 28 November 2000, SPU leader Oleksandr Moroz released to the public an audio recording on which Kuchma was heard instructing then–interior minister Yuriy Kravchenko to “deal with” opposition journalist Georgi Gongadze, a longtime critic of the regime and a crusader against corruption. Gongadze had vanished on September 16. His decapitated body had been found west of Kyiv on November 5, and Kuchma’s alleged involvement in the disappearance had led to a public outcry. The demonstrations



that erupted in response to the scandal—which became known as “Kuchmagate”—were on a scale unseen since the late Soviet era.

At the height of the Kuchmagate scandal in late 2000 and early 2001, protest rallies by the grassroots “Ukraine Without Kuchma” movement attracted tens of thousands of protestors, but even that was far too few to pose a threat to the president’s position. At the time, only a fraction of the opposition—Yuliya Tymoshenko’s Fatherland Party and Moroz’s SPU—supported the demonstrations. They formed the National Salvation Front, which sought to coordinate the activities of “Ukraine Without Kuchma” while advancing a center-right legislative agenda. The KPU, although it was also in opposition, refused to join the anti-Kuchma protests because it believed in Moscow’s conspiracy theory that Kuchmagate was a U.S.-backed plot aiming to remove Kuchma from power and install a U.S.-friendly regime.

Throughout the Kuchmagate protests, the regime had used increasingly heavy-handed, Soviet-style tactics and rhetoric against the opposition, denouncing them as “destructive elements,” “extremists,” and “radicals.”³ Kuchma insisted that those attempting to seize power under the slogan “Ukraine Without Kuchma” were “political pygmies.” The protests eventually collapsed in March 2001, when the authorities, seeking to discredit the opposition, enrolled paramilitary provocateurs to turn the peaceful demonstrations into riots, and then sent police in to quell them by force.

As the country’s prime minister at the time, Yushchenko opposed the protests, throwing his weight behind Kuchma and stating, “I am convinced the president could not order anyone’s murder. Morally, I cannot accept that the Ukrainian president could have been linked in such a way to anyone’s disappearance.”⁴ In February 2001, Yushchenko signed a joint letter with Kuchma and parliamentary speaker Ivan Plyushch condemning the protesters as “fascists.”

The Kuchmagate scandal, in combination with Yushchenko's unpopularity among the oligarchs in the Rada, made his government untenable. In April 2001, he was removed from office by a parliamentary vote of no confidence pushed through by an unlikely coalition of oligarchs and Communists. The oligarchs were motivated by their own private interests; the KPU desperately wanted to unseat Yushchenko, whom they saw as an "American satrap." The dismissal of Yushchenko's government put a definite end to a decade of center-right cooperation against two commonly perceived threats, the KPU and Russia. More importantly, it also led to the emergence of a nonleftist opposition for the first time since Ukraine's independence.

Although his business, banking, and government background made Yushchenko an unlikely radical or oppositionist, after his removal as prime minister, he became a vehement opponent to the rule of Kuchma and his centrist-oligarchic allies. A few of Yushchenko's former allies in government followed his lead and joined him in opposition (although most of his key collaborators in 2004 did not join his election team until 2003). In July 2001, he created the "Our Ukraine" bloc, which sought to unite disparate and factious national-democratic and liberal parties around a common antiregime platform. In the March 2002 parliamentary elections, this bloc came in first with 112 of the 450 seats, followed by the propresidential, centrist "For a United Ukraine," with 104 seats. The KPU came in third with 66 seats, and for the first time since independence it lost its position as the largest faction in the Rada.⁵

Although the opposition fared well in the 2002 elections, it was too divided to pose a real threat to the oligarch-backed Kuchma regime. Opposition voters were split among Our Ukraine, the Yuliya Tymoshenko bloc, the KPU, and the SPU. It would not be until 2004 that the opposition was able to unite and agree on a common anti-Kuchma platform. In this respect, the consolidation of the Ukrainian opposition mimicked that of its Serbian counterpart: Both could agree on a platform only after uniting behind an uncorrupted opposition candidate—with Viktor Yushchenko in Ukraine filling the role played by Vojislav Koštunica in Serbia.

Opposition Failures

Although the four major opposition parties won a majority of seats in the March 2002 parliamentary elections, they ended up playing second fiddle to a propresidential faction cobbled together by "independent" candidates. This led to increasing political tensions that brought protestors to Kyiv once again on the second anniversary of Georgi Gongadze's disappearance. In September 2002, tens of thousands took to the streets in Kyiv and around the country, calling for Kuchma's resignation and early presidential elections. The cause of the opposi-

tion—comprising Our Ukraine, Tymoshenko’s eponymous bloc, the SPU, and the KPU—was buoyed by U.S. charges that Kuchma had sanctioned the sale of an anti-aircraft radar system to Saddam Hussein’s Iraq. In view of these allegations, Yushchenko declared that he would boycott all voting in the Rada until Kuchma agreed to discuss solving the country’s mounting political tensions. Nevertheless, the protests eventually fizzled out.

The failure of the four opposition parties to unite against Kuchma’s regime was one reason why earlier protests failed to attract the kind of mass support that propelled the Orange Revolution.

The next sizeable demonstration took place in March 2003, when as many as 50,000 people took to the streets of Kyiv. The protests ended when several members of the organizing group, “Rise Ukraine,” were arrested, although allied protestors promised to keep up the calls for Kuchma’s resignation. Beleaguered and politically battered by the constant call for his resignation, Kuchma offered a package of constitutional reforms aimed at devolving

presidential powers slightly while affording parliament greater authority. The Rada voted on this reform package in April 2004, but did not pass it (the constitution requires the support of 300 out of 450 representatives). The reforms were eventually adopted in December 2004 as part of a “compromise package,” which was passed in order to deal with the fraud of the recent elections, and will enter into effect in September 2005.

Although at this point both KPU and Our Ukraine supported the anti-Kuchma movement, they did so only halfheartedly, and they still refused to agree on a shared political platform. The splits within the opposition rendered it unable to produce common policy proposals, which in turn limited its capacity to mobilize popular support. In a combined poll by four of Ukraine’s leading survey organizations, 64 percent of respondents said they did not know the views of the opposition, and when asked if they wished to learn more, only half of them said yes.⁶

The failure of the four opposition parties to unite against Kuchma’s regime and its oligarchic allies was one reason why these protests failed to attract the kind of mass support that propelled the Orange Revolution. Because of its motley make-up, the opposition could not agree on a positive message, focusing instead on negative slogans and catchphrases. In the 2004 presidential election campaign and subsequently during the Orange Revolution, the opposition came together around a positive message of democracy, political accountability, and battling corruption.⁷

While the opposition failed to remove Kuchma and his oligarchic

allies from power after the Kuchmagate scandal and its extended aftermath, the massive protests did produce a certain degree of political awakening among many Ukrainians. Particularly affected were the politically apathetic youth—the generation that mobilized in 2004 to constitute the driving force behind the Orange Revolution.

As a whole, however, Ukrainian society continued to be disaffected from politics. In a poll published by *Ukrayinska Pravda* in March 2003, nine out of ten respondents said that significant change was needed in Ukraine, but that they themselves did not have the power to bring it about. The same percentage believed that they had no influence over local and central authorities, and that human rights were regularly infringed in their country.⁸ Similarly, in the runup to the 2004 election, polls showed that, although many Ukrainians believed that Yushchenko would win, few thought that the authorities would allow him to assume the presidency.

Before 2004, however, this widespread disenchantment with the regime did not translate into support for the opposition. In 2003, two polls found that between half and two-thirds of Ukraine's population either did not back the opposition protests or were unwilling to take part in them.⁹ In April of that year, a Centre for Sociological and Political Research poll cited in *Ukrayinska Pravda* found that even though support for the opposition was at twice the level of support for the regime (33 percent versus 16 percent), more than one-third of the population was so disillusioned with politics that it supported neither side.¹⁰

With the March 2003 protests fresh in their minds, both sides began gearing up for the 2004 presidential elections. The opposition finally united behind Yushchenko, who was by far Ukraine's most popular politician. In fact, he was the *only* candidate who consistently received higher positive than negative ratings in opinion polls. A 2003 poll cited in *Ukrayinska Pravda* found that 48 percent of respondents supported Yushchenko, but that 32 percent still stated that they would never vote for him.¹¹ (This latter group was made up largely of Communists and Yanukovych supporters from Eastern Ukraine.)

Meanwhile, Kuchma, his entire political machinery, and Russian president Vladimir Putin fiercely promoted the presidential candidacy of Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych. The Kuchmagate crisis and the ensuing protests had severely damaged the incumbent regime's legitimacy, making it difficult to choose a candidate who could carry the torch when Kuchma's second term ended. Parliamentary speaker Volodymyr Lytvyn and National Bank chairman Serhiy Tyhipko would both have been far less objectionable candidates than Yanukovych, yet their popularity ratings were too low to make them viable candidates.

Kuchma believed that Yanukovych, a representative of the Donetsk oligarchic elite, would bring with him the support of Ukraine's two

most populous provinces, Donetsk and Luhansk in the East, home to much of the country's mining industry. Yanukovych did have a significant following among the *lumpenproletariat* in this part of the country, most of whom had bought into the myth that Yushchenko's economic reforms would shut down their loss-making industries. They were joined by the oligarchs, who threw their considerable heft behind Yanukovych, fearing that they might lose their privileged status or even face prosecution for corruption in the event of a Yushchenko victory.

The regime appeared to have everything stacked in its favor: ample finances, administrative resources, the security forces, and an informal militia of organized-crime thugs. But Kuchma had picked a candidate against whom it was easy for the opposition to rally. Yanukovych had served time in prison in his youth, and his opponents alleged that since the late 1980s he had maintained strong connections to organized crime (so-called brotherhoods), serving as its lobbyist in local and national government. He was closely linked to the Donetsk "clan" and its leader, oligarch Rinat Akhmetov. Moreover, Yanukovych's poor command of the Ukrainian language (as opposed to Russian) was evidenced by widely publicized handwritten documents that he had submitted to the Central Election Commission when he registered as a candidate.

Not only Yanukovych's background but also his tenure as prime minister made it relatively easy for the opposition to mobilize against him. It was Yanukovych's cabinet that had forced independent candidates in parliament to create a propresidential "majority" after the 2002 elections—marginalizing and infuriating the opposition. During the 2004 election campaign, his opponents painted a bleak picture of Ukraine in the event of a Yanukovych victory. His rule, the opposition said, would be little different from that of Kuchma: authoritarian, abusive, and corrupt. Yushchenko told the crowds that "bandits will not formulate the future of this country. They want to teach us, tens of millions of us, every Ukrainian family, my family, to live in accordance with the rules of criminals, to learn prison slang and wear prison uniforms."¹²

Revolution

Perhaps sensing a growing support for the opposition, the regime began to take measures that would ensure a Yanukovych victory. In public, Kuchma rebuffed and ridiculed the idea that a democratic breakthrough similar to Georgia's November 2003 Rose Revolution was possible in Ukraine. In private, however, he feared that the 2004 presidential election might actually put an end to the semi-authoritarian regime that he had put in place. In fact, the authorities never entertained the idea of a genuinely free and fair election, the outcome of which would have been completely out of their hands.

Two months before the October 31 first round, the interior ministry, the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), and the prosecutor's office issued a joint statement warning that they were taking "preventive measures" to avoid a Georgian-style revolution. These agencies claimed to have "evidence indicating that the opposition political forces are currently preparing various and dangerous acts aimed at destabilizing the country." They alleged that the opposition was calling upon Ukrainians to "express protest in the most extreme forms—a revolt," and that such actions "are dangerous for society and domestic stability and will be dealt with according to Ukrainian law."¹³

The authorities' fears, of course, were not without foundation. Opposition leader Yuliya Tymoshenko had indeed warned that she would "organize and lead acts of civil disobedience" in the event of election fraud. Her threat was based on the suspicion that the regime was planning to steal the presidential election in the same way that it had stolen the mayoral election in Mukachevo earlier in 2004. It was widely believed that this municipal contest, in which the regime had installed its own candidate despite a clear opposition victory, had been a trial run for the presidential elections.¹⁴

On August 27, *Nasha Gazeta*, the newspaper of the progovernment Social Democratic Party (United), predicted that if a revolution similar to that in Georgia were attempted, it would not have widespread support. Kuchma himself subscribed to the same view. On the eve of the presidential elections, he cynically recalled how in past years the opposition had threatened him with 200,000 protestors, but had never mustered more than 50,000.¹⁵ Yushchenko had never been in favor of street rallies, but he had little choice but to prepare for popular protests in the event of massive fraud by the authorities. The opposition was hoping that a stolen election would bring more than a hundred thousand people into the street. Even they were stunned when, after it became obvious that the regime had falsified the results of the November 21 runoff, protestors descended on Kyiv in the hundreds of thousands.

Neither the authorities nor the opposition could have known how many Ukrainians would take to the streets to defend their right to a democratically elected president. Shortly before the election, a national survey by the Razumkov Center showed 84 percent of respondents agreeing that they had a right to protest in the event of election fraud; only 6 percent disagreed. The Razumkov Center cautioned that not all those who insisted on their right to protest would necessarily do so in the event of a fraudulent election, but it warned, "It would be naïve to hope that the authorities can without limits discredit themselves in the eyes of their own population without an outcome that could turn out to be fatal to themselves."¹⁶

This prediction proved to be true: The authorities had indeed grossly underestimated the outrage that a stolen election would spark. Once

Yushchenko had officially won the first round of the elections, many Ukrainians began to consider the possibility of a democratic breakthrough. Three weeks later, when exit polls showed that he had also come out first in the November 21 second round, they began to taste victory. Before the election, surveys showed that most Ukrainians would trust exit polls rather than the official result if the two differed.

Another preelection poll, conducted by the Democratic Initiatives Foundation, found that 18 percent of respondents were ready to take part in protests in the event of a stolen election, and almost 11 percent claimed they would protest if their candidate did not win. Thus it is not surprising that when the fraudulent election results contradicted the exit polls by declaring victory for Yanukovych, droves of disillusioned voters from around the country traveled to Kyiv to join the revolution. Some were veterans of the Kuchmagate protests, others had become convinced of the need for change through opposition campaigns, and even more had never before taken an interest in politics but found the fraud too blatant to ignore.

Many Ukrainians had long espoused a political approach based on the common proverb *moya khata z krayu*—in essence, “I’m staying out of this, as it is none of my business” (the literal translation is “my house is off to the side”). In the wake of the stolen runoff election, the refrain instead became: “If Yanukovych wins there will never be another election; if Yushchenko wins, at least I know there will be.” It was this kind of disillusionment, frustration, and outrage that fueled the Orange Revolution. Within three days of the stolen November 21 runoff, the crowd on Kyiv’s Independence Square and the surrounding streets had swelled to more than half a million. Without such massive popular support, these demonstrations—like protests in previous years—might have ended in violence and failure.

Earlier protests had drawn most of their support from the opposition’s traditional stronghold, the European-oriented western parts of the country. In 2004, Yushchenko also won all the central Ukrainian provinces, and enjoyed overwhelming support among Kyiv residents, who were the first to take to the streets after the election. Even a significant part of the Kyiv elite, which had largely been loyal to the regime, defected to the Yushchenko camp during the revolution.

As it had in previous years, the regime resorted to inflammatory, Soviet-style rhetoric, denouncing the protestors as “extremists” and “terrorists.”¹⁷ During the election campaign, a bomb explosion in Kyiv was blamed on the opposition, and Kuchma’s cronies tried to frame an opposition youth group for the deed. The scale and brazenness of these tactics finally became so obvious that they only served to mobilize further support for Yushchenko. In response to the regime’s dirty campaign, opposition leaders and supporters alike emphasized nonviolent means of protest and eschewed any provocations. Crime dropped by a third in Kyiv during the Revolution,

and the only violence reported took place outside of Kyiv and was instigated by Yanukovych supporters.

The West and the New Generation

Although the Orange Revolution drew most of its funding from domestic sources (particularly small and medium-sized businesses), international support was a key factor to its success.¹⁸ The youth group Pora (“It’s time”), which played a crucial role in the protests, had received training from Serbia’s Otpor, and many Western NGOs and civil society groups provided key assistance to their Ukrainian counterparts. International election observers, as well as domestic observers trained by foreign NGOs, made a critical contribution by exposing and reporting election fraud and voting irregularities. Support furnished to independent media outlets such as the Internet-based newspaper *Ukrayinska Pravda* helped to spread the opposition’s message throughout the country.

The Yushchenko camp and its predominantly young supporters used modern technology to their advantage. The Internet had already become an important campaigning tool during the 2002 elections, and it was even more central in 2004. Pora and other youth groups set up online forums—using servers abroad to avoid hackers loyal to the regime—for Yushchenko supporters to discuss policy and strategy for the demonstrations. The opposition made effective use of cell phones, during both the election campaign and the revolution itself. In a now-infamous video clip, recorded by an oppositionist’s cell-phone camera, a university professor is seen illegally instructing his students to vote for Yanukovych.

The success of the Orange Revolution should in part be attributed to Ukraine’s youth, the generation that has no memories of pre-*perestroika* Soviet rule and therefore harbors much less fear of the authorities than do their parents and grandparents.¹⁹ Despite having grown up under Kuchma’s corrupt semi-authoritarianism, this generation, thanks to the Internet, satellite television, and popular culture, has acquired an essentially Western mindset. Many young people have traveled, studied, and worked in Europe or North America, and most of them take the desirability of democracy as a given.

Inspired by the transformation of their country’s western neighbors from Soviet satellites to EU members, the young generation supported Yushchenko’s vision of a democratic and “European” Ukraine. Many of them joined the Orange Revolution out of fierce opposition to the corrupt semi-authoritarian system that had evolved under Kuchma and to the strong influence exerted by Russia. Ukraine’s youth saw the 2004 election as a fork in the road: Its outcome would decide whether Ukraine followed the path toward Western liberal democracy or toward consolidated autocracy à la Putin’s Russia.

Another societal group that supported the Orange Revolution was the

owners of small and medium-sized businesses—often referred to as the “new Ukrainians”—who had long been both politically and economically oriented toward the West.²⁰ They rooted for Yushchenko because they wanted to put an end to widespread corruption, politically motivated investigations by the authorities, and high taxes that forced them to operate in the shadow economy. Above all, they saw the need to separate business and politics, thereby stripping the oligarchs of some of their power and creating a more level playing field for small and medium-sized businesses ready to play by the rules of a democratic system.

The Regime Loses Control

As had been the case in both Serbia and Georgia, the neutrality of the security forces, as well as defections from within their ranks, played a crucial role in the success of the Orange Revolution. In Ukraine, former defense minister and SBU Chairman Yevhen Marchuk was the first to jump ship. After remaining silent throughout the election campaign, he appeared on television four days after the November 21 runoff and denounced the regime for election fraud. Marchuk’s defection spurred others within the security forces, and his contacts in the different branches of law enforcement served the opposition well.

Yushchenko sympathizers within the SBU provided the opposition with evidence of election fraud, such as illicit recordings of intercepted telephone conversations from Yanukovych’s “shadow election headquarters.” That parallel structure to Yanukovych’s regular campaign office had been established to channel funds above the legislated candidate spending limits, to coordinate administrative and media resources, and to undertake other “dirty tricks” that undermined the Yushchenko campaign. The SBU had earlier approached the Yushchenko camp as well as supporting groups to let them know that the SBU opposed the regime’s politically motivated attempts to fabricate charges of “terrorism” against them.²¹

The country’s military stayed neutral or, in the case of the Western Operational Command headquartered in Lviv, openly supported Yushchenko. The Interior Ministry was divided, with some units and special forces aligning themselves with Yushchenko, especially during the week following the second round.²² Police cadets openly agitated in favor of Yushchenko and called upon riot police to switch sides. Hence, when 10,000 Interior Ministry troops were mobilized on November 28 to put down the protests in Independence Square, the SBU had already warned opposition leaders of the crackdown. Bloodshed and possibly even civil war were avoided, however, because top SBU officials called on the troops’ commander to pull back, which he did. Nevertheless, the Orange Revolution’s real heroes are Yushchenko and his supporters, who displayed an unflinching commitment to nonviolent means of protest.

Much like Georgia's former president Eduard Shevardnadze, Kuchma now claims to take pride in the peaceful way in which his rule came to an end. But in neither case was the absence of violence due to the benevolence of the outgoing leader. In reality, both Shevardnadze and Kuchma lacked the support within their own ranks to suppress a revolt. Semi-authoritarian regimes like the one that Kuchma had constructed in Ukraine are inherently vulnerable during elections, because they do not enjoy the legitimacy that comes with popular support. In 2004, the Ukrainian authorities knew that, in a free and fair election, the opposition candidate would win an absolute majority in the first round. It was this awareness, coupled with the fear of being ousted from power, that motivated the regime to launch the dirtiest campaign since the country's independence. When that campaign culminated in massive, unconcealed fraud in the November 21 runoff, it only demonstrated how weak, desperate, and careless the regime had become.

The Yanukovich campaign had severely underestimated the domestic as well as the international reaction to such blatant fraud. Although the Orange Revolution was unquestionably homegrown, it was fueled and encouraged by international condemnations of the fraudulent election results. The Ukrainian opposition also drew inspiration from the ousting of Eduard Shevardnadze in Georgia and Slobodan Milošević in Serbia—both of whom were deposed by mass protests following their attempts to hold on to power through fraudulent elections. Though apparently spontaneous, these three revolutions were the result of extensive grassroots campaigning and coalition building among the political opposition and civil society groups. In Ukraine, the Orange Revolution had been several years in the making.

Therefore, any account of Ukraine's democratic breakthrough needs to begin not at the onset of the revolution in November 2004, but exactly four years earlier, when the evidence of the Kuchmagate scandal first came to light. The experience of popular protests during those four intervening years prepared and equipped Ukraine's opposition members to lead the Orange Revolution and to set their country on the path toward democracy and reintegration with Europe.

NOTES

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15. *Den* (Kyiv), 20 July 2004.
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