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### **Inna Melnykovska: Public Support for the Orange Revolution in Ukraine or for the Authoritarian Consolidation in Russia. Choice of a Lesser Evil?**

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## Abstract

Why have the populations in some FSU countries rejected authoritarian regimes while the populations in other FSU countries still support them? The paper attempts to answer the question by studying the determinants of public attitude towards the political regimes in Ukraine (2004–5) and Russia (1998–9). The preliminary results suggest that in both Ukraine and Russia the populations opted for a change of political regime. In Russia, the population supported the demonstrated readiness of the incumbent political regime to improve its deficits, despite the fact that this regime had authoritarian features. Thus, the regime change took place so smoothly that one might infer regime continuity. As a result, authoritarianism has been consolidated there. In Ukraine, however, the majority of the population rejected the incumbent political regime completely. Hence, the regime change unfolded in a radical way – through the Orange Revolution – towards democracy.

*A new regime is supported, notwithstanding its faults,  
so long as it is viewed as a lesser evil.*

*Winston Churchill*

## 1. Puzzle and research question

During the first decade of transformation in the 1990s, the populations of the former Soviet Union (FSU) countries were largely passive with respect to policy-making.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the meagre participatory rates and low levels of organizational membership revealed the weakness of civil society in these countries.<sup>2</sup> Thus, public support for a political regime was generally regarded as neither a driving nor constraining force to push for change or to promote continuity of the political regimes in the FSU.<sup>3</sup> However, the notions of popular passivity and the unimportance of public support have recently disappeared in some FSU countries. During the upheavals – known as the colour revolutions – in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004) and Kyrgyzstan (2005), thousands or even millions of people took to the streets and demonstrated against election fraud. The mass demonstrations revealed the public's disloyalty to the incumbent political regimes, which were often labelled as defective or illiberal democracies or semi- or competitive autocracies.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the populations of these countries opposed the preservation

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<sup>1</sup> The paper refers to the political regime and public support in twelve Former Soviet Union countries, excluding the Baltics.

<sup>2</sup> Howard, Marc: *The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003; World Values Survey, 2005, <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>

<sup>3</sup> McFaul, M.: The fourth wave of Democracy and Dictatorship. Non-Cooperative Transition in the Post-Communist World, in: *World Politics*, 2002 (Vol. 54), No. 2, pp. 212–224.

<sup>4</sup> Karatnycky, A.: The Decline of Illiberal Democracy, in: *Journal of Democracy*, 1999 (Vol. 10), No. 1, pp. 112–123; Levitsky, S. / Way, L. A.: The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism, in: *Journal of Democracy*, 2002 (Vol. 13), No. 2, pp. 51–65; Croissant, A.: From transition to defective democracy. Mapping Asian democratization, in: *Democratization*, 2004 (Vol. 11), No. 5, pp. 156–178. Furman D.: Ursprünge und Elemente imitierter Demokratie. Zur politischen Entwicklung im postsowjetischen Raum, in: *Osteuropa*, 2006 (Vol. 56), No. 9; Merkel, W.: Defekte Demokratie. Band 2: Regionalanalysen, Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2006.

of the incumbent political regimes and contributed to their ouster.<sup>5</sup> Despite the variety of outcomes, by that time, the populations in these countries expected the colour revolutions to push for democratization and thus nudge their political regimes towards democracy. On the contrary, the populations in the other FSU countries remained passive and inert with respect to their manipulated elections. Furthermore, they largely supported the shift of their political regimes towards consolidating autocracies.<sup>6</sup>

The different attitudes of the populations to the political regimes across the post-Soviet area – despite having inherited similar Soviet legacies and experienced similar challenges of transformation – are puzzling:

Why did the populations of some FSU countries participate in mass demonstrations during the colour revolutions and demand democratic standards, while in the rest of the FSU the populations remained passive and supportive of the consolidating authoritarian regimes? In other words, why did the populations of some FSU countries reject their authoritarian regimes while others continue to support these kinds of regimes? And finally, what are the determinants of public support for a political regime? And what leads to public rejection of a political regime?

## 2. Research design

### 2.1 Case studies

Previous studies analysing public disloyalty or public support for political regimes in post-Soviet countries have concentrated either on the countries of the colour revolutions<sup>7</sup> or on the countries with authoritarian political regimes.<sup>8</sup> The most common explanation for why the populations in some FSU countries rejected their regimes tends to be the popular ‘unwillingness to live this way any longer’<sup>9</sup> while their complacent counterparts have been described as willing to adapt to the given political regime.<sup>10</sup> However, these explanations are somewhat limited. Before the colour revolutions, the attitude of the populations towards the political regimes in the FSU was fairly uniform. It is therefore not clear why the populations in the FSU countries ended up exhibiting such different attitudes and behaviour patterns.

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<sup>5</sup> While studies on the colour revolutions differ in their judgment of the importance of the mass demonstrations for the outcome of the colour revolutions, they agree that the political regime could hardly have been broken down without them. See: McFaul, M.: Transition from Postcommunism, in: *Journal of Democracy*, 2005 (Vol. 16), No. 3, pp. 5–19; Kudelia, S.: Revolutionary Bargain. The Unmaking of Ukraine’s Autocracy through Pacting, in: *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 2007 (Vol. 23), No. 1, pp. 77–100; Gel’man, V.: Out of the Frying Pan into the Fire? Post-Soviet Regime Changes in Comparative Perspective, in: *International Political Science Review*, 2008 (Vol. 29), No. 2, pp. 157–180; Way, L. A.: The Real Causes of the Color Revolutions, in: *Journal of Democracy*, 2008 (Vol. 19), No. 3, pp. 55–69.

<sup>6</sup> Hale, H.: Regime Cycles. Democracy, Autocracy, and Revolution in Post-Soviet Eurasia, in: *World Politics*, 2005 (Vol. 58), No. 1, pp.133–165.

<sup>7</sup> See for example, Kuzio, T.: Ukraine's Orange Revolution. The Opposition's Road to Success, in: *Journal of Democracy*, 2005 (Vol. 16), No. 2, pp. 117–130.

<sup>8</sup> See for example, Rose, R.: Is Russia Becoming a Normal Society?, in: *Demokratizatsiia*, 2007 (Vol. 16), No. 1, pp. 75–86.

<sup>9</sup> Kudelia, S.: Revolutionary Bargain. The Unmaking of Ukraine’s Autocracy through Pacting, in: *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 2007 (Vol. 23), No. 1, p. 82.

<sup>10</sup> Rose, R. / Mishler, W. / Munro, N.: *Russia Transformed. Developing Popular Support for a New Regime*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

This paper challenges the explanatory power of these studies by applying the most similar systems design and comparing the cases of contrasting attitudes to a political regime, i.e. Ukraine and Russia. Ukraine and Russia had been following a similar transitional trajectory in their political and economic development before the Orange Revolution took place in Ukraine. Both states were characterized by strong presidential power but weak parliamentary oversight, and both saw business groups – often called oligarchic clans – ‘capture’, i.e. infiltrate and manipulate, state authorities. Civil society was weak in both states, too. In addition, both countries’ economies suffered from their Soviet legacies, e.g. inefficient over-industrialization, energy-intensive technologies, market distortions and rent-seeking opportunities. Partial economic reforms ran parallel and had similar outcomes in both Ukraine and Russia. In good times and bad, these countries almost contemporaneously experienced their own respective financial crises whilst benefiting from similar driving forces in economic recovery. However, the popular attitudes towards the political regimes were different. In Ukraine, the population demonstrated disloyalty towards and rejected the semi-authoritarian regime of Leonid Kuchma during the Orange Revolution. In Russia, the population supported the ‘peaceful’ transmission of power from Boris Yeltsin to Vladimir Putin and further consolidation of the authoritarian regime.

The comparison of the most similar systems with the contrasting outcomes of the dependent variable (i.e. public support / rejection) tests the explanations of the previous studies (concentrating on the cases with similar outcomes) and provides an alternative (deeper) explanation for the public support for / rejection of political regimes.

## 2.2 Time frameworks

The time frameworks for the analysis of the public attitudes towards the political regimes in Russia and Ukraine were different. For Russia, the author concentrated on the transfer of power from Yeltsin to Putin in 1998–9. For Ukraine, the author focused on the change of political regime in the course of the 2004–5 presidential elections, when Viktor Yushchenko was voted into office. In other words, the first presidential elections under the circumstances of semi-authoritarianism in these two countries served as the determining criterion for the choice of time framework.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the author chose presidential elections in which the former president did not attempt to run for another term in office and thus the change of personalities in the presidential office was expected.<sup>12</sup>

## 2.3 Dependent variable. Public support for / rejection of a political regime

In general, public support or rejection of a political regime can be defined as the acceptance of the manipulated election results in some FSU countries and their rejection in the others. In addition, both behaviour patterns also reveal the public attitude towards the political regime in question. The author assumes that in accepting the results of manipulated elections, the population supports an incumbent political regime, although popular expectations for positive and non-radical changes in the incumbent

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<sup>11</sup> This excluded the transfer of presidential power from Leonid Kravchuk to Leonid Kuchma in 1993–4, as by that time Ukraine was ranked as a democratizing country and the elections were expected to be freer (than they indeed were during the presidential elections of 1999). The recent change in the presidential post in Russia, from Putin to Medvedev, is also excluded, because that was not the first presidential election to take place under conditions of an authoritarian regime.

<sup>12</sup> Thus, the author excluded the presidential elections of 1999 in Ukraine and of 1996 in Russia, when Kuchma and Yeltsin (respectively) were candidates for a second term in office.

regime might exist. The rejection of election fraud also implies the rejection of the incumbent regime's continuation and a public wish for a radical change in the political regime.

In particular, the concept of public attitude to a political regime, i.e., support or rejection, is multi-dimensional. According to Easton<sup>13</sup> and Norris<sup>14</sup>, the author distinguishes between the objects of political support at different levels (Table 1).

Table 1: Objects of Political Support

Level 1	Political Community	a basic attachment to the nation beyond the present institutions of government and a general willingness to co-operate together politically
Level 2	Regime Principles	support for a certain regime type as an ideal, its principles and values
Level 3	Regime Performance	satisfaction with the workings and outputs of the regime
Level 4	Regime Institutions	support for government institutions
Level 5	Political Actors	a focus on politicians

*Source:* own illustration, based on Easton, D.: A Re-Assessment of the Concept of Political Support, in: *British Journal of Political Science*, 1975 (Vol. 5), No. 4, pp. 435–457; Norris, P.: Introduction. *The Growth of Critical Citizens*, in: Norris, P.: *Critical Citizens. Global Support for Democratic Government*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 1–27.

## 2.4 Theoretical approaches and independent variables

To explain public support for or rejection of a political regime, the paper combines different theoretical approaches (the cultural and socialization approach, the neo-institutional approach and the economic approach). The cultural and socialization approaches emphasize the distinctive cultural values and historical experiences of societies as determinants of public support for a defined type of political regime. In particular, these approaches suggest that if a political regime conflicts with a political culture and historical experiences of a society, then it is likely to lack legitimacy and support.<sup>15</sup> The neo-institutional approach concentrates on the influences of legacies as well as on political structures and actors in a political regime. The economic theories focus on cost-benefit calculations, thereby comparing the values of freedom with the values of wealth provided in a given political regime.

## 2.5 Hypotheses

- I. Both in Russia and Ukraine, the populations supported the change of political regimes.
- II. However, the Russian population supported the further non-radical consolidation of its authoritarian regime, while the Ukrainian population rejected the preservation of its authoritarian regime, demanded democratic standards such as free and fair elections, and pushed for the radical change of the political regime towards democracy.

<sup>13</sup> Easton, D.: A Re-Assessment of the Concept of Political Support, in: *British Journal of Political Science*, 1975 (Vol. 5), No. 4, pp. 435–457.

<sup>14</sup> Norris, P.: Introduction. *The Growth of Critical Citizens*, in: Norris, P.: *Critical Citizens. Global Support for Democratic Government*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 1–27.

<sup>15</sup> See for example Almond, G. A. / Verba, S.: *The Civic Culture*, Princeton/NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963.

- III. Regime performance and political actors are the decisive objects in public support or rejection of a political regime.
- IV. The attitude towards a certain political regime is determined by cultural, political and economic factors.

### **Cultural factors**

*A political regime enjoys public support:*

- *if there are favourable preconditions for the type of incumbent regime in the political culture of a country*
- *if the socio-cultural and religious features in a country favour the type of incumbent regime*
- *if public support for democracy / autocracy is high*
- *if public trust in the ability of the political institutions to govern the country and to manage crises is high*

### **Political factors**

*A political regime enjoys public support:*

- *the longer a new regime persists and the more readily the population accepts it as the only political regime they can have in the future*
- *if there are no structures, such as civic organizations, free media etc., able to mobilize and organize mass demonstrations*
- *if the probability of punishment and suppression through coercive power is high*
- *if there are no veto-players in the political system (eventually opposite to the president)*

### **Economic factors**

*A political regime enjoys public support:*

- *if a country experiences economic growth (economic rents can be used by an incumbent regime to 'buy' its legitimacy in the population)*
- *if the living standards are improved (or merely appear to be improved) in the population by the incumbent political regime (in comparison to the previous regime types)*
- *the closer a country is to democratic communities (the openness and liberalization can offer long-term migration opportunities for educational or work purposes and can cause 'democracy-learning' in the visiting population).*

### 3. Preliminary results

#### *Public support for the political regimes was weak in both countries*

Regime support was quite high in Russia in 1994 in the aftermath of the breakup of the Soviet Union, with 44% of Russian citizens supporting the new regime (see Table 2). This high level of regime support fell dramatically to 13% in 1996, even before the 1998 summer and fall economic crisis.<sup>16</sup>

The pattern of regime support in Ukraine has shown a downward trend since 1992. In 1992, upon the declaration of Ukrainian independence, 38% of Ukrainian citizens supported the new regime. However, this public support soon declined to 35% in 1994 and dropped to 21% in 1996. After a small recovery of support to 27% in 1998, the political legitimacy of the Kuchma regime in Kiev collapsed to 11% of the Ukrainian electorate in 2002.

Table 2: Index of political support for current regimes in Russia and Ukraine (in percentages)<sup>17</sup>

	1992	1994	1996	1998	2002	2007
Russia	14	44	13	*	26	69
Ukraine	38	35	21	27	11	70

*Source:* Haerpfer, C.: Support for Democracy and Authoritarian Regimes in Russia and the CIS, 1992–2002, Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Marriott Wardman Park, Omni Shoreham, Washington Hilton, Washington D. C., 1 September 2005, available at: [http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p41862\\_index.html](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p41862_index.html); Rose, R.: Learning to support new regimes in Europe, in: *Journal of Democracy*, 2007 (Vol. 18), No. 3, pp. 111–125.

#### *Cultural factors. History and culture matter, but how?*

Both Ukraine and Russia possess the historical preconditions for either support or rejection of democracy. They both have histories with authoritarian regimes and little experience with democracy-learning. The absence of a democratic history coupled with a brief democracy-learning experience could explain Russian popular support for authoritarian regimes; this support is rooted in Russian history. The brief pre-World War II experience with democracy in Ukraine might then explain the current political shift towards democracy in that country. Moreover, Ukraine's negative experience with Soviet authoritarianism might have led to its rejection of the Kuchma regime. The two nations' relative locations within the Soviet empire might also have shaped their stances towards their regimes: Having been at the Soviet periphery, Ukraine might have had different experiences with authoritarianism than Russia, which was situated in the heart of the Soviet Union.

The two countries also had different religious features, with religious authorities backing or confronting the regimes. The Orthodox Church supported the authoritarian regime in Russia; in Ukraine, however, there was a variety of churches propagating different political attitudes to the incumbent regime.

<sup>16</sup> The public support for the current political regime in Russia during the presidential terms of Putin and Medvedev recovered substantially.

<sup>17</sup> The questions asked are: 'People have different views about the system for governing this country. A scale for rating how well things are going: 1 means very bad and 10 means very good. (1) Where on this scale would you put the political system as it is today? (2) Where on this scale would you put the political system as you expect it will be in ten years from now?' The 'index of support for the current regime' is an additive and one-dimensional scale combining both questions with high reliability.

Furthermore, the majority of the populations in both countries see democracy as a positive ideal for a political regime but at the same time realize the non-compatibility of the incumbent regimes in their countries with this ideal. However, democracy is less popular in Russia because it is not expected to improve the regime's performance.<sup>18</sup>

***Political factors. For the turn towards democracy, the parliament matters***

Under Yeltsin, Russia was often classified as a semi-democratic regime, but Yeltsin's regime was unpredictable. The power in this regime was based on the patronage linked to the personality of the president. After the settlement of the constitutional crisis of 1993 by undemocratic means,<sup>19</sup> there were no other veto-players in this political system.

In Ukraine, Kuchma pursued the 'divide and rule' strategy in a situation of 'feckless pluralism' and in so doing also accelerated uncertainty and instability, while occasionally benefiting one political group or another. Unsatisfied with this policy, the Ukrainian political groups used the available veto powers of the Ukrainian parliament to overthrow the incumbent political ruler and transform Ukraine into a parliamentary-presidential republic with limited possibilities for the monopolization of state power by any single political force.

***Economic factors. Perceived wealth is more important than actual wealth***

Since the end of the 1990s, both Ukraine and Russia have achieved strong economic growth. However, at the time of the 1998 presidential elections in Russia, the country was still in the throes of the economic crisis. To quickly overcome the challenges posed by the economic crisis, the population favoured a power concentration in the presidency and the further consolidation of the political regime towards authoritarianism. Meanwhile, at the time of the 2004–5 presidential elections in Ukraine, the economy exhibited a high rate of economic growth, around 8–9%. In addition, GDP per capita, personal income and living standards increased. However, the perception of personal wealth was low.

***In personalized regimes, personal background matters***

The personal backgrounds of the presidential candidates who were nominated and elected as the successors of the ruling presidents are important. It seems that Putin's KGB background was more attractive than Yanukovich's criminal background.

## 4. Outlook

The paper presents some preliminary results. At a later stage, the other (possibly omitted here) variables will be analysed. In addition, the analysis will be extended with a number of public surveys.

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<sup>18</sup> Rose, R.: Learning to support new regimes in Europe, in: *Journal of Democracy*, 2007 (Vol. 18), No. 3, pp. 111–125.

<sup>19</sup> President Yeltsin used troops and tanks to subdue the representatives of the Russian parliament.