

A Regional Tradition:
Popular Mobilization Against Dictators under Communism and Postcommunism

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Paper prepared for the volume on Waves of Democratization in the Postcommunist World, ed. by Valerie Bunce, Michael McFaul and Kathryn Stoner-Weiss. This is the first stab by Bunce at this chapter, completed July 12, 2006. Wolchik has not gone over the draft and will no doubt have serious issues with some of what has been argued.

“There are no miraculous events here, but many years of concerted action.”
Padraic Kenney, 2006: 16

Democratization and Diffusion¹

In a recent statistical analysis of the global spread of democratic governance, Daniel Brinks and Michael Coppedge (2005) argue that a major characteristic of the Third Wave has been the intra-regional diffusion of transitions from dictatorship to democracy. Thus, even when taking other influential factors into account, democratization in one state seems to increase the probability of democratization in adjacent states. In this sense, democratic transitions—at least since the fall of the Salazar dictatorship in Portugal in 1974—seem to cluster in both temporal and geographical terms, thereby indicating an international diffusion of democratic governance. However, why this happens—or the role of agents, ideas and processes—is left unexplained by Brinks and Coppedge. As the authors note, their data and their methodology are unable to speak to this important question.

The purpose of this chapter is to bring some evidence to bear on this question by analyzing the diffusion of popular challenges to authoritarian rule in one region during several periods: communist-era Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union and, to “update” our language, postcommunist Europe and Eurasia. This region provides in fact an illuminating context for the analysis of both democratization and its intra-regional diffusion. First, there is little doubt that the postcommunist area provides strong evidence for the localized spread of democracy. It is not just that the number of democracies in this area has increased since the Cold War ended. It is also that this process of democratic expansion has occurred in fact in several discrete waves: from 1987-1990 and from 1996-2005.

Second, the very fact of multiple waves allows us to bring comparative data to bear on the question of *how* diffusion works. Such a vantage point is useful, because it provides additional data, but with these data drawn from a controlled comparison. Thus, in this study we hold the region as a bounded geographical construct constant and focus on a similar political struggle (bringing down authoritarians), but vary the locus of that struggle in terms of both regime-type (communism and, later, electoral authoritarianism) and, to some degree, the methods deployed (or mass mobilization in the case of 1987-1990 versus high turnout elections, sometimes combined with mass mobilization, for the 1996-2005 wave of political change).

Third, this comparative exercise facilitates a focus on several important aspects of both democratization and its diffusion that have often been overlooked or minimized. One is the centrality of mass publics in this process, and another is the centrality as well of international actors—factors that receive considerable emphasis throughout this volume and that have only begun to receive attention in recent studies of democratization (see, especially, Bunce, 2006, 2003; Ackerman and Karatnycky, 2005). Yet another is the importance of focusing on what can be termed the minimal condition for democratization; that is, powerful challenges to the continuation of authoritarian rule. All-too-often in studies of democratization this issue is blended with other concerns, such as the victory of democratic forces and the establishment of democratic government. It is

fair to argue, however, that, unless authoritarian rule is decisively contested, the democratic scenario cannot play out. By the same token, even powerful challenges to authoritarian regimes do not by any means guarantee that democratization will commence. This distinction was even important in the case of Portugal's complex transition—the very state where the Third Wave is widely-recognized to have begun. These distinctions, moreover, are relevant for many countries in the postcommunist region—for example, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, Russia, and Serbia, where mass protests early in the transition failed to lead, either in the short-term or the longer-term, to sustainable democracy.

Finally, a comparative perspective, especially when region is held constant and consequences vary, allows us to provide helpful answers to the questions necessarily posed by cross-national diffusion dynamics: why a political innovation develops in certain contexts; why it moves to certain locales; how the innovation changes in response to new contexts; and why successful emulation comes to a halt. Here, it is important to keep in mind that, while democracy has become a global norm (McFaul, 2004/5), it has not become the only political game in town—in the postcommunist region, but also in Latin America, South, Southeast and East Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and, especially, the Middle East.

We begin our analysis by defining diffusion and outlining some of its core properties. We then provide a summary of the two rounds of popular confrontations with authoritarian rule, providing somewhat more detail with respect to the more recent and less fully-studied electoral revolutions. In the final part of the paper, we draw some comparative generalizations based upon an application of our discussion of diffusion to these two rounds of political change. As we will discover, the two rounds resembled one another, including their remarkable conformity to common understandings of diffusion processes. What our analysis seems to say to students of both democratization and diffusion and to analysts who address questions of regional effects in political dynamics are issues that we address in the conclusion.

Defining Diffusion

Diffusion is a process wherein new ideas, institutions, policies, models or repertoires of behavior spread from their point of origin to new sites—for example, from one enterprise, governing unit, or non-governmental organization to others (see, for example, Ackerman and Duvall, 2000; Aksartova, 2005; Lee and Strang, 2005; Beissinger, 2002; Brinks and Coppedge, 2005; Markoff, 1996; Tarrow, 2005a, 2005b, 2003; Tarrow and della Porta, 2005; Bockman and Eyal, 2002; Bunce and Wolchik, 2006d). Diffusion, therefore, implies a coincidence of time and geography with respect to similarly new ways of doing things. When applied to the issues of interest here, diffusion refers to a significant shift in mass political behavior—that is, mobilization against authoritarian regimes—in one country that then moves to other countries within the postcommunist region. Such mobilization has taken two forms: popular protests against communism and communist states (from 1987-1990) and electoral mobilization, sometimes combined with mass protests, against the electoral authoritarian regimes that succeeded communism (from 1996-2005).

Does this definition mean that diffusion dynamics are at work whenever similar innovative developments take place across a number of states? The answer is no. Most

obviously, a temporal lag is required, since the assumption is that the innovation itself travels, for whatever reason, to new contexts. At the same time, if domestic actors are simply responding to similar conditions in similar ways, albeit at different times, but in the absence of any evidence of a cross-national dynamic in play, then diffusion is an illusion (to borrow from Brinks and Coppedge, 2005). To cite one example: while communist forces rose to power in Yugoslavia in 1945 and in China four years later and while the diffusion of communist ideas and the influence of international communism played some role in both developments, the key factor that married these two cases was a similar response to similar local conditions—for example, the discrediting of the old regime, the disintegration of the state during wartime, and the role of the Partisans in Yugoslavia and the Chinese Communist Party in defending the nation and expanding popular support through the aggregation of local zones of liberation.

Another dynamic that masquerades as diffusion, but that is at variance with its core principles, is when similar changes in a group of states occur because of the ability of powerful international actors to dictate changes resonant with their values and interests to less powerful states that fall within their zone of influence (but see Bookman and Eyal, 2002 and their understanding of how diffusion of neoliberal reforms has usually been analyzed). Again, developments during and after World War II provide a good example. The rise of communist regimes throughout Eastern Europe from 1944-1948 reflected in large measure the Soviet commitment to creating communist regimes on its western flank—because of security interests and ideological ambitions. While there were some diffusion elements embedded in this process, such as the role of the Yugoslav partisans in Albania and Greece, and while local support for communism and, for that matter, regime formation in general varied across Eastern Europe during this highly unsettled political period, these considerations do not detract from the key point. It was the Soviets, helped by both the Red Army's march to Berlin and certain gaps in Western planning for the postwar period, followed by a heightening of East-West tensions, that were responsible for guaranteeing that Eastern Europe, save for Greece (despite, ironically, the widespread support for communism at the time), would import the Soviet model in "ready-to-wear fashion" (Brus, 1977).

Our understanding of diffusion, therefore, is that this process occurs only when actors make a conscious decision, given their values and interests and significant opportunities, incentives and capacity for change, to copy innovations introduced by actors in other contexts. How this process plays out, however, varies. One dynamic is what has been termed demonstration effects. This is where a new, highly attractive and seemingly low-cost development in one setting alters the calculus of actors in other settings—by redefining what is possible (as astutely observed by Adam Przeworski in an analysis of Solidarity—see Przeworski, 1982) and by tilting the ratio of benefits versus risks attached to the innovation in the decided favor of the former. Central to this scenario are advantages derived from the existence of a dress rehearsal. A second model of transmission emphasizes similar conditions, including problems and assets. Here, actors are prone to import a change, when they see this change as one that can and should be carried out in their circumstances as well. The issue here is the intersection between perceptions of relevance and evaluations of benefits. Finally and less commonly-noted: diffusion can take place, because there are expanding collaborative networks that fan out from the original point of innovation and that support emulation. In this dynamic, two

types of diffusion are at work and interact: the movement of the innovation itself and the movement of a complex array of actors supporting that innovation (see, especially, Bookman and Eyal, 2002; Jacoby, 2004; Muiznieks, 1995; and see Tarrow, 2005a, 2005b on both “rooted cosmopolitans” and the critical role of trust).

Let us now step back from these definitions and transmission scenarios and provide both complications and refinements. First, most diffusion processes in fact contain the first two scenarios at the least and sometimes the third as well (see, especially, Jacoby, 2004; Beissinger, 2002). Particularly inclusive and complex in this regard are controversial innovations, with controversial referring to changes that represent a considerable departure from the past, that limit possibilities for partial change or a turning back, and/or that challenge existing political, social and economic hierarchies. Mass mobilization against authoritarian regimes is an obvious case in point. Because such actions threaten the existing order and, indeed, order itself, the “push” component has to be much stronger than the “protection” component. For that very reason, both the introduction of this mechanism of political change and its spread cannot be reduced to a sudden expansion of opportunity and other short-term considerations—though these factors play a role. Instead, much longer-term developments are also necessarily in play, with these developments having already undermined the status quo and empowered what have traditionally been weaker and disengaged constituencies. This is one of many reasons why it is a mistake—though common practice in many diffusion studies—to focus on the “here and now” and to privilege short-term factors—a mistake that is also common in earlier studies of recent democratization. By embracing proximate causality, analysts run the risk of confusing effects with causes; overlooking subtle accumulations of learning and preparations for change on the part of the “outs” and longterm reductions in the capacity and especially the desire of the “ins” to defend the status quo; and exaggerating the power of ideas, international actors, and “sudden” events (Bookman and Eyal, 2002; also see Kitschelt, 2003 on the methodological side). The facile interpretation that Gorbachev and/or Reagan ended both communism and the Cold War is a case in point.

Moreover, innovations themselves are usually the product of diffusion processes. In the social world, therefore, there are precious few examples of “pure” originality. Instead, many innovations are the product of “mini innovations,” and they are often the successors to instructive and earlier dry runs. In the case of both mass protests against communism and electoral revolutions, for example, one can point to a number of similar developments within and outside the communist and postcommunist world. For example, political protests were in evidence, albeit episodically, throughout the communist period, and attempts to use elections to defeat dictators goes back to the mid-1980s in both Southeast Asia and Latin America—and even before that, if we relax the assumption of a full-blown electoral model designed to defeat dictators in the particular context of competitive authoritarian regimes (Bunce and Wolchik, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2006d; and see Levitsky and Way, 2002; 2006).

In addition, it is important to recognize that the first two models of diffusion that we laid out above rest upon the existence of both knowledge of what happened elsewhere and perceptions of the relevance and feasibility of those changes. Our approach to diffusion, therefore, is actor-rich, rather than structurally-passive. This distinction is critical, because one of the arguments we will be developing in this paper—and one that

rests on the many interviews with dissidents in this region we have conducted over the past thirty years (gasp!)—is that members of these communities, whether during or after communism, believed deeply that their struggle was similar to struggles elsewhere in the region; that the most effective struggles against tyranny involved a cross-national pooling of resources; and that they had a responsibility to share their techniques with others struggling against similar systems (and see Kenney, 2002). This mindset, it can be suggested, may be distinctive to this region. It is far more common for political activists (and many of the scholars who analyze them) to emphasize the distinctive aspects of their own experiences and countries.

Finally, let us close this discussion of diffusion with some generalizations from the literature on this subject that will prove useful for the discussion that follows. One is that innovations change as they move from their origin to new areas. Innovations, in short, domesticate (and see Bunce and Wolchik in this volume). The transfer is not mechanical. Another is that the relative impact of domestic capacity for change versus demonstration effects shifts as the wave of innovation spreads, with the local supports for change being in less and less evidence and demonstration effects becoming more powerful. Put simply: ideas and precedents outrun capabilities and, for that matter, preparation. Thus, it becomes easier and easier as precedents mount for emulators to underestimate the requirements of the change in question, and easier and easier for local actors committed to the status quo to be forewarned and forearmed. This leads to a final generalization that will be helpful for the discussion that follows. Diffusion processes end, in large part because the gap widens to the point where diffusion can no longer be supported.

Wave One: The Collapse of Communism

There is a sizeable literature on the events of 1987-1990 and our summary, as a result, will just touch on the main elements of this diffusion process (see, for example, Bunce, 1999b; Stokes, 1993; Beissinger, 2002). The mass protests that eventually led to the disintegration of communism and communist states began in fact in two places: in the Soviet Union in 1987, with the rise of popular fronts in support of perestroika in Russia and the Baltic states, and in Slovenia, with the rise of a student movement that, by entering the forbidden zone of military affairs, took on both the Yugoslav state and regime. Protests then broke out in Poland in the fall, 1988 (much to the consternation of Lech Walesa, who was losing control over his movement), which culminated in an unprecedented roundtable between the opposition and the Party that focused on ending the political stalemate in Poland, in place since martial law was declared in 1981, through the creation of a transitional regime (which led to a far more rapid transition to democracy than expected by either side, following the June, 1989 partially free elections that by August produced a democratic government).

The Polish precedent was powerful enough to lead in the later summer of 1989 to a roundtable in Hungary, which was different in important respects from its Polish counterpart—for example, it was not televised; it featured a more complex and focused set of working groups; and it involved more detailed planning for a democratic future, including fully competitive elections in the following year. In the fall of 1989, massive protests then broke out in East Germany, which were then followed by similar developments in Czechoslovakia—with participants in the latter speaking directly of demonstration effects and similarities in domestic conditions. Protests, albeit smaller and

with less direct translation into democratic politics, then followed in Bulgaria, Romania, and Albania. In the course of these developments, moreover, protests within the Soviet Union continued and spread, as they did within Yugoslavia, with the Slovenian developments influencing, by all accounts, subsequent mass mobilization in both Croatia and Serbia in particular. Indeed, even the Hungarians, scarred by 1956, joined the fray, using Republic Day and renewed debates about the events of 1956 and Imre Nagy as a hero versus a villain, to carry out their own demonstrations.

Mass Mobilization and Electoral Revolutions

Let us now turn to the second wave of citizen confrontations with authoritarian rule—from 1996-2005. In this round, the form of protests changed to some degree (moving from an entirely street-based activity to an electoral one that combined, in many cases, with street demonstrations) as did the regime context; that is, not communism, but, rather, electoral authoritarian regimes, most of which were dominated in fact by the former communists. These distinctions aside, however, the issue on the table was the same: popular challenges to authoritarian rule. Moreover, the electoral revolutions all featured an upsurge in mass participation in politics. In discussing this wave, we will provide greater detail, largely because these events are new and not fully-digested, especially from a comparative or a diffusion standpoint.

The story of the electoral revolutions began with four inter-connected political struggles in Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia from 1996-1998—countries that provided a hot-house for political change, in part because of shared borders. From 1996-1997 there were massive three-month-long protests in Serbia—protests that were motivated by Milosevic's attempt to deny the opposition its significant victories in many of the local elections that took place in 1996 (Lazic, 1999; Pavlovic, 2005). These protests, as in the cases that followed in their footsteps, built on previous rounds of political protest—in the Serbian case going back to the early 1980s and in Romania, Bulgaria, and Slovakia to 1989 (and even during the communist period, as in Slovakia from 1967-1968 and the miner's strikes in Romania during the 1980s). Although the Serbian protests failed in the short-term, they contributed in important ways to a subsequent round of election-based protests in the fall of 2000 that succeeded in bringing down Milosevic (see St. Protic, 2005; Bieber, 2003; Pribecevic, 2004). Also helpful in producing a new generation of protesters and expanding the geography of anti-Milosevic sentiment were Milosevic's decisions, following these protests, to crack down on the autonomy of universities, local governments and the media (Pavlovic, 2005; Goati, 2000; Spasic and Subotic, 2000). By becoming more, not less repressive over time, the Serbian example reminds us of the contradictory effects of repression trends. Less repression can provide more opportunities for change, but greater repression can increase grievances, while indicating perhaps that the leader is becoming more insecure and more desperate.

The second set of struggles took place in Romania, where the liberal opposition finally came together and ran a sophisticated political campaign that succeeded in replacing the former communist incumbent president (who came back to power in 2000) with a candidate with far stronger liberal credentials and commitments (see, for example, Romanian Coalition for a Clean Parliament, 2005; Mungui-Pippidi, 2005; but see Bunce, 2002 on the advantages for democratization of authoritarian forces losing, then winning power). The third set of struggles took place in Bulgaria at roughly the same time. In Bulgaria, Serbian protests next door were influential in particular in bringing labor and other groups out into the streets. While lagged in

their response and to some degree shamed by the spontaneity of their own citizenry, Bulgarian intellectuals and leaders of the opposition finally recognized, especially given the poor performance of the incumbent regime, that such protests could lead to a new election and pave the way for the Union of Democratic Forces (which, prior to this time, would be better characterized as a fractious ensemble, rather than a union) to take power (which they did in 1997). Although the cohesion of the Bulgarian liberal opposition proved to be temporary and their effectiveness limited (as in the Romania story as well), their victory, again as in Romania, served as a decisive political turning point—as indicated, for example, by the consistent improvements in Freedom House scores following these pivotal elections in both countries.

The same generalization applies to the fourth participant in the development of the electoral model in the postcommunist region: Slovakia. As we discuss in our other chapter in this volume, it was there that all the components of the electoral model came together, with a variety of players, such as leaders of the Slovak, Bulgarian and Romanian oppositions, the American ambassadors to Slovakia and the Czech Republic, “graduates” of the Romanian and Bulgarian turn-arounds, and representatives of the International Republican Institute, the National Democratic Institute, Freedom House and the National Endowment for Democracy, combining forces to create the OK98 campaign that led to the defeat of Vladimir Meciar in the 1998 Slovak parliamentary elections. It can be argued, therefore, that it was in Slovakia where the innovation of interest was devised: the electoral model. This model included, for example, the formation of a cohesive opposition; pressures on election commissions to improve their procedures and render them more transparent; ambitious campaigns to register voters, advertise the costs of the incumbent regime, and get out the vote; and the deployment of both domestic and international election-monitoring, as well as exit polls, to provide quick feedback on turnout during election day, to catalogue abuses by the regime, and to provide evidence of actual voter preferences.

Once fully articulated and successful when implemented, the electoral model was then applied in a number of electoral authoritarian regimes (see Levitsky and Way, 2002, 2006). Its first step in the diffusion process was in Croatia in 2000, where the death of the long-serving dictator, Franjo Tudjman, in 1999 had weakened the governing party and provided an opportunity for the opposition to win power. In this case, as in Bulgaria and Romania, the election was for the Presidency, and as in these cases as well as Slovakia, the electoral outcome produced a smooth transition. The Croatian opposition also benefited (as would Serbia later in the same year) from earlier successes in local elections and earlier actions by the hardline regime preventing translation of voter preferences into representative governments. As in Slovakia, and in contrast to the situation in Bulgaria and Romania after these pivotal elections, the electoral revolution had dramatic effects on democratization in Croatia. A political corner was turned.

Later in 2000, the electoral revolution moved to Serbia (see Bunce and Wolchik in this volume for details with respect to the Serbian dynamics). While the implementation of the electoral model was as careful and thorough-going as it had been in Slovakia and Croatia, there were, nonetheless, some differences that distinguish Serbia from these other cases. One was that the struggle against Milosevic was severely constrained by the heavy authoritarian hand of the Milosevic regime. Thus, for example, there were no external election monitors in Serbia in the fall 2000 elections and the media were closely controlled by Milosevic. However, there was one similarity to Slovakia: the key role played by students. Their organization in Serbia, Otpor, played perhaps the most important role in bringing down Milosevic—by providing evidence that the regime was both vulnerable and incompetent, by moving opposition development from the

major cities to other sites with Serbia, by encouraging the opposition to coalesce, and by helping the Serbian Orthodox Church shift from support of Milosevic to opposition. Also important was the decision by Zoran Djindjic to throw his support to an opposition candidate more likely to win votes: Vojislav Kostunica.

The Serbian Presidential election of 2000 was a turning point for electoral revolutions, because the incumbent regime had been in power much longer and was far more authoritarian than the earlier sites for such revolutions, and because these very characteristics meant that the regime refused to vacate office, once the election and the tabulations of the vote, both fraudulent and accurate, had concluded. This led to massive political protests that succeeded in taking control over the capital and forcing Milosevic to resign. While the result, as in Croatia, was a regime change and not just a change in government, the Serbian opposition has continued to be plagued by severe divisions that were exacerbated by the continuing border problems represented by Kosovo and Montenegro (with the first on its way to statehood and the second, following the summer, 2006 referendum, already there); growing pressures for expanded autonomy in Vojvodina; and by pressures on the part of the international community to move quickly in cooperating with the demands of the Hague War Crimes Tribunal (see Bieber, 2003; Begovic, 2005). The assassination of Djindjic in 2003—the most effective and certainly charismatic leader of the Serbian opposition—did not help matters (and see Miller, 2004).

The Georgian opposition then followed suit in the 2003 parliamentary elections—though this produced, it is important to recognize, a coup d'etat by the opposition, since Shevardnadze resigned, but was not in fact up for reelection (Papava, 2005; Wheatley, 2005; also see Cory Welt in this volume). In Georgia, the political context was less constraining than in Serbia, especially given the lackluster campaign by Shevardnadze's allies, the defection of so many key players from the ruling group to the opposition (such as Mikheil Saakashvili, the current president), the relative openness of the Georgian media, the formation of a youth group in support of political change (Kmara) that worked closely with the Georgian opposition around Saakashvili, and the presence of a significant number of local and international election monitors (Karumidze and Wertsch, 2005). As with the other cases, moreover, it was clear that the Georgian opposition modeled its campaign on the previous electoral revolutions in the region and benefited as well from various kinds of support from the Open Society Foundation and various American groups (and see Devdariani, 2003; Meladze, 2005; Cooley and Ron, 2002; Grodeland, 2006; Mendelson, 2004; Mendelson and Glenn, 2002; Mendelson and Gerber, 2005 on international democracy promotion and its strengths and limitations)..

The next successful electoral revolution occurred in Ukraine a year later (see, in particular, Kuzio, 2005; Kubicek, 2005; Way, 2005a, 2005b; Aslund and McFaul, 2006). As in the Georgian case, a single charismatic politician—in this case, Viktor Yushchenko—played a critical role. As in both the Georgian and Serbian cases, the successful political breakthrough exploited a record of a leadership that had grown increasingly corrupt, careless and violent; benefited from defections from the ruling circles; built upon earlier rounds of protests and recent successes in local elections; and reached out to diverse groups, with young people playing nearly as important a role as one saw in Serbia with Otpor. Moreover, as in Serbia and Georgia, political protests after the election (which were as large and as persistent as those in Serbia) were again necessary to force the authoritarian challenger to admit defeat. More distinctive to the Ukrainian case, however, was the breakdown of central control over the media during the campaign and especially during the protests, and the remarkable role of the Supreme Court, which came down in support of the opposition's argument that the elections had been fraudulent

and had to be repeated. As in Serbia, moreover, the unity of the opposition was short-lived, a factor that has blocked a consistent movement in the creation of a stable and fully democratic polity.

The electoral model then moved to a number of new locales—Kyrgyzstan, where it succeeded, as in Georgia, in deposing the long-serving leader, despite the fact that these elections were also parliamentary, not presidential, and to Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Belarus, where there were more repressive regimes, more divided oppositions (though less so in Azerbaijan in 2005), smaller protests (though larger in Azerbaijan, but blocked from the capital's center), and an inability to carry out some of the most important aspects of the electoral model, such as reforms of the electoral commissions, improvement in voter registration processes, creative distribution of campaign materials, the establishment of cooperative relations with the security forces, and parallel vote tabulation to expose the contrast between official and “real” results. All this, plus the popularity of the incumbents, allowed incumbents to maintain power (see, for example, Silitski, 2005a, 2005b and in this volume; Valiyev, 2006). In addition, in part because of deficits in application of the electoral model (which was usually not the fault of the opposition in these highly repressive contexts), the United States—in sharp contrast to its role in Slovakia, Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine—failed (except in the case of Belarus) to take a strong stance condemning the quality of these elections (which was also true of the European Union).

The dynamics of these recent elections from 2005-2006 were similar to earlier, failed attempts to carry out electoral revolutions in Azerbaijan, Armenia and Belarus. Given the political chaos that has ensued in Kyrgyzstan since the spring 2005 elections, moreover, it is fair to say that the electoral model has had mixed results in that country (see, for example, Weyerman, 2005; Huskey, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c)

Diffusion of Mobilization: Comparing Protests Against Authoritarian Rule

We can now step back from the details of these two waves of popular mobilization against authoritarianism and apply the arguments presented in our earlier discussion about diffusion dynamics. We can begin at the most general level. Both waves of mass mobilization against authoritarian regimes provide ample support for an interpretation of diffusion dynamics at work. Thus, we see a temporally-clustered process of similar innovative developments in a number of countries; lags in the adoption of the model of political change; and the limited applicability of competing explanations, such as identical circumstances giving rise to identical developments and international actors dictating these changes. We also see in our two rounds of mobilization against dictators a shift in international politics that, while hardly orchestrating what transpired, nonetheless weakened the defenders of the status quo and enhanced local opportunities for change-- by providing additional resources to constituencies supportive of change and lowering the risks attached to them taking action. As examples, we can point in the first round to the Gorbachev reforms, including his clear signaling that political and economic liberalization was the future, that Eastern Europe was free to chart its own course, and that constituencies in support of liberalization, whether within or outside the party, were his allies, not his enemies. In the second round, international influences included the diffusion of democracy as an international norm and American and EU support for democracy in the postcommunist region. Just as important for both rounds was a transnational factor: the development of regionally-based opposition networks that collaborated closely with one another in support of a showdown with incumbent

authoritarian regimes. In the second round, these networks received considerable support from the United States and, secondarily, from the European Union.

Finally, our overviews of the two waves provide strong support for both structural mechanisms, such as similar regimes, and an actor-based process of both innovation and transmission. The two waves also document changes in the nature of the innovation itself as it moved from the point of origin to other contexts, and declining effectiveness of the model as it proceeded down the country chain of more to less supportive local settings. These patterns are, of course, typical of the way diffusion usually plays out.

Let us now turn to some more specific questions, all of which are central to the understanding of how diffusion actually works. Why were particular models of citizen challenges to authoritarianism selected and how did they develop? How did these models spread from place to place, and why were they more successful in some contexts than in others? Finally, why did these waves come to an end?

Inventing the Model

Why do we see in the first wave the focus on popular protests and in a few cases roundtables, and focus in the second wave on elections, sometimes combined with popular protests? The simple answer is that these models of change were selected because of both local conditions and historical experiences. To elaborate: in the first wave, the focus on political protests reflected the constraints in authoritarian regimes on how citizens can register their preferences and their dissatisfaction; the time-tested historical linkage during the communist era between divisions within the Soviet leadership or a decisive shift by them in a reformist direction, on the one hand, and a weakening of the local party coupled with expanded opportunities for citizen mobilization, on the other; and the accumulation of experiences with protest, aided by regimes that forged unwittingly optimal conditions for concerted actions on the part of the public (for example, a common and easily identified enemy, a common set of grievances, and timing of regime actions, especially unpopular ones, that tended to affect citizens in similar ways at virtually the same moment). Moreover, elections under communism were too controlled and too ritualized to be transformed into weapons of the weak, to borrow from Jim Scott. To all this, we can add the Hungarian exception—the preference for roundtables over protests. This reflected the scars of 1956, the particular coping strategies developed by both the Hungarian opposition and the Kadar regime, and the powerful precedent presented by the Polish roundtable.

The selection of electoral confrontations in the second round also spoke to a number of influences. They included successful application of the electoral model in other parts of the world (which American democracy promoters, at least, recognized); the close tie in the popular mind between elections and democracy; and the expectations unleashed by the fall of communism about democratic possibilities, yet the continuing power of the communists in these hybrid regimes and the similarities between the rigged electoral rituals of the past and the partially-rigged character of elections after communism. However, perhaps the most important influence was that elections were widely recognized as an ideal mechanism for challenging the regime. All the regimes where electoral revolutions took place allowed oppositions to participate (but with varying constraints). Moreover, elections are widely recognized as performing the function of presenting the regime with a verdict on its right and capacity to rule. Finally, elections have visible results that speak to power, rights, and policies, and they have the

advantages for both oppositions and citizens of demanding actions that are bounded in time. It is also far harder for regimes to justify the use of force against their citizenry during elections than at other times.

The differences in the particular strategies selected for regime confrontation across the two waves, however, should not blind us to several commonalities. One is that electoral revolutions were in fact often combined with popular protests—either before or after the pivotal elections. This was the case either because significant groups within the country saw the regime as bankrupt and the opposition too divided to act effectively (Bulgaria), or because the regime, already viewed as corrupt and careless, tried to steal the election one too many times. In either case, popular demonstrations functioned as a necessary support for the full implementation of the electoral model. Another similarity is that we see in both cases a “selection moment” which reflects a sudden decline in the costs of mobilization and a rise in expected payoffs. In the case of the successful electoral revolutions, there was both significant support for democratic change provided by the United States and, to a lesser extent, the European Union—not just longterm investments in civil society and fair elections, for example, but also clear signaling of dissatisfaction with both the incumbent regime and its conduct of the election (though this was less apparent in the Slovak, Bulgarian and Romanian cases)—and increasing evidence of a regime that had become more vulnerable and often less wedded either to political niceties or the democratic rules of the game.

In the first round, evidence of a growth in regime vulnerability was also important, as was the clear message that the Soviets were unwilling to use force against protesters within the Soviet Union (though there were some exceptions) and certainly within Eastern Europe. However, like American assistance in the second wave, so this version of international change was not a purely short-term development. In 1980, martial law was declared in Poland; in 1968, the Soviets (and their allies) mounted a low-violence intervention in Czechoslovakia; and in 1956 the Soviet “visit” to Hungary was far more costly in human terms. Put simply: a pattern had been established, even before Gorbachev, of declining Soviet willingness and capacity to use force against its “allies.” In fact, there were even divisions within the Politburo regarding the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968—divisions that grew out of the fears of the Ukrainian members at the time that Slovak nationalist protests might diffuse to the Ukraine (Hodnett and Potichnyj, 1974). This pattern also explains why the violent transitions in Eastern Europe took place in states distanced from the Soviet bloc; that is, Romania, Yugoslavia and Albania. In these three countries, command and control resided in the local party, not in Moscow.

This leads to a second insight about the beginning of the two waves and the sources of innovations in the key countries. In both rounds of mass mobilization, the “lead” states in this diffusion story fit the profile of contexts that exhibited, by regional comparative standards, the optimal conditions for anti-regime protests. Let us examine, first, the events of 1987-1990. Of all the Yugoslav republics, Slovenia had the most liberal party (and consistently so over time), and it was also the republic most connected to Western Europe (which, to take us back in time, was touting full integration in 1992—a train the Slovenes feared was leaving the station without them). In addition, it was Slovenia that had become the main target of Milosevic’s calls for recentralization, economic, political, and military, of the Yugoslav state. Also helpful for building

horizontal bonds was the unusually culturally homogeneous nature of the Slovene republic—a factor that also played a helpful role in subsequent state-building and in the many rounds of Polish protests, including the fall, 1988.

At the same time, it is important to note the relative cultural homogeneity of Lithuania (and Armenia, which also experienced early protests) and the far shorter duration of Soviet rule (and won through force) in the Baltic states and Moldova. Finally, to focus in particular on Eastern Europe (as it was defined at the time): Poland, Hungary and Yugoslavia were the three countries in this region where disastrous economic performance combined with relatively liberal communist regimes (though in the Yugoslav case, the latter point is more apt for Slovenia and Serbia than for the other constituent republics, especially Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia). In this sense, “early risers,” to use Mark Beissinger’s (2002) terminology, reflect the convergence among three facilitating conditions for mass protests: extensive grievances, a more malleable political order (but not one that created ample opportunities for more institutionalized forms of effective participation), and significant protest capacities. The most “protest-ready” country in the region, of course, was Poland, given not just its long history of political struggle going back to Russian and Habsburg imperial control, but also the remarkable success of Polish publics during the communist era in using protests to win concessions, rather than invite violent reprisals.

In similar vein, the rise of the electoral model in Serbia (1996-1997), Romania, Bulgaria and Slovakia is far from surprising. In Serbia, the key issue was the longterm ripening of the opposition, and in the other three countries, this was critical, along with their close proximity to one another and a domestic context that permitted significant room for democratic maneuver. Moreover, as already noted, the Bulgarian, Romanian and Serbian economies were in terrible shape (as is typical of postcommunist regimes that straddled democracy and dictatorship—Bunce, 1999b); the incumbent regimes were extremely unpopular and also corrupt and incompetent; and American democracy promoters, like the EU, had made democratic change in Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia a very high priority (as they were to do a few years later in Serbia, when the Dayton-related pressure for tolerating the Milosevic regime had dissipated).

This leads to a final issue: the role of earlier diffusion dynamics in contributing to the innovation itself, which then in turn diffused. As we noted above and as applies to both of our waves, there is in fact little that is new in the political world, even when developments diverge sharply from “politics as usual.” Thus, the protests that started the collapse of communism and communist states built upon the experiences and the cadres associated with earlier rounds of protest, and the first electoral revolutions that succeeded also built upon earlier and illuminating precedents—not just in specific countries (the Serbian protests, beginning in the early 1980s in fact), but also in the first wave where massive protests translated into electoral breakthroughs in support of democracy in 1989-1991 and outside the region, such as in Chile, the Philippines, Nicaragua and elsewhere, during the second half of the 1980s.

The understandable logic of both learning and diffusion foreshadowing the rise of innovations that then diffuse is typical, of course, of how diffusion dynamics occur in a variety of different settings. However, this may be particularly common for high-risk innovations, such as the one of interest here, because the creation of the model and its implementation may very well require long-term political struggle, inroads made into

existing political monopolies, and the development of sophisticated and tested techniques. However, this long chain of influences does introduce a messy issue, especially given the similarities among the two waves—similarities that facilitated our comparative exercise, but that might violate the assumption of “separate” cases. Put bluntly: are the two waves of mass mobilization against authoritarianism in fact one wave involving a similar innovation, but with this wave featuring a lull and somewhat of a change in focus and format? Indeed, we find in our two stories a recycling of certain repertoires of protest, such as street theatre, youth movements, and coordinated symbolic confrontations with authorities (such as orchestrated giggling in front of the police) in the Serbian case from 1999-2000 that we saw, for example, in the Baltic states a decade earlier when they were in the process of exiting from both socialism and the Soviet state. In fact, the history of these actions goes further back—for example, to the Polish opposition during the 1980s (Kenney, 2002).

The detailed character of such similarities (in addition to the many parallels that emerged in the two overviews) suggests more than a family resemblance between the two waves of mass mobilization. In our view, the waves are separable, but they were influenced by the development of a regional dissident culture that began to solidify in the second half of the 1980s, when large dissident communities in such countries as Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia began to connect with each other and to reach out to new communities in East Germany, Romania and Bulgaria. After communism, new groups were added, and these cultural communities evolved into somewhat new forms and developed some new strategies that reached out to those parts of the region where the first wave had failed to produce a decisive democratic breakthrough. The assumption here is that cultures live independent of specific individuals, that these developments also took place within, as well as across the two waves, and that dissident networks moved around, depending upon the geography of struggle. Thus, just as there were good reasons for the development of a cross-national dissident culture and related actions during communism, given regime similarities, the integrated fate of members of the bloc, and the overarching influence of the Soviet Union, so there were also some good reasons why this culture and its associated mechanisms for confrontation with authoritarians both changed and continued—for example, commonalities among electoral authoritarian regimes and the electoral moments they provided, beliefs by dissidents that sharing their experiences was a matter of both values and interests, and, finally, the availability of opportunities, new struggles, and yet time-tested techniques of confrontation (Bunce, 1984/5, 1999; Vardys, 1983; Mlynar, 1980; Hodnett and Potichnyj, 1974; Gitelman, 1974; Bunce and Wolchik, 2006c, 2006d).

These complications recognized, however, difficulties in crediting one or several contexts with inventing new behaviors and, more generally, in disentangling related waves of activity is hardly unique to the diffusion dynamic of interest in this paper. As noted above, innovations that diffuse rarely arise “de novo,” and they are usually themselves products of diffusion—especially when they are controversial and thus dependent not just on opportunities and incentives, but also complex historical developments and previous experimental rounds that invest in capacity to invent and to export. Oppositions, in short, in politically hostile circumstances must learn by doing, borrowing and planning.

Diffusion Scenarios

Both waves of popular challenges to authoritarian rule reflected the impact of all three diffusion models outlined earlier; that is, demonstration effects, similar conditions, and the spread of transnational networks. The demonstration effects can be seen most clearly in the changing calculus of both opposition leaders and citizens. It was not just that they were aware of successful confrontations in the neighborhood; it was also that these precedents pointed to far fewer costs than they had come to expect. The role of the Soviet leadership in the events of 1987-1990 is a case in point. It was not simply that Gorbachev encouraged the rise of popular fronts in support of perestroika; supported the Polish roundtable and even favorable stories of Lech Walesa in Soviet newspapers; chided the hardline East German and Romanian regimes (which often censored his speeches), while refusing to back up its demand that the Hungarian government should prevent defection of East German tourists to the West; and that stood aside while massive protests broke out in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and other countries. It was also that in the early part of the wave regimes did not use force to defend themselves—in part because control over force resided in Moscow. Thus, the early mobilizations against communism were both successful and seemingly low cost—which, especially given similar domestic and international circumstances, encouraged emulation.

For many of the same reasons, demonstration effects were also critical in the electoral revolutions. While we should not minimize the hard work and risk involved in these struggles, as with the demonstrations in the first round, it is important to recognize that the electoral precedents set by Romania, Bulgaria and Slovakia were quite attractive for the simple reasons that they were both successful and relatively cost-free. At the very least, they were seen as an efficient way to get rid of incumbents and, not incidentally, as a way for opposition leaders to finally succeed in their goal of capturing political power.

However, demonstration effects are only one part of the diffusion story. As implied in the discussion thus far, a critical factor was also the existence, at least in the minds of opposition leaders viewing their victorious counterparts, of similarities in problems, opportunities and goals.

Similar Conditions

A number of analysts have commented on the ways in which the structure of domestic communist regimes, the Soviet bloc, and even the ethnofederal Yugoslav, Soviet and Czechoslovak states was ideally-suited for the transmission of political and economic change, whether supportive of Soviet and local party control or threatening to both. The case for structural isomorphism and the ways this eventually undermined the centers in these three constellations—that is, the Soviet Union in the bloc, communist parties in individual countries, and the center as opposed to the republics in the ethnofederations—has been made in detail elsewhere (Bunce, 1999b). However, it is important to recognize the attitudinal side to this story. These similarities were widely-recognized, not just by Soviet leaders intent on homogenization and domination and Soviet generals afraid that one leak could bring the entire ship down (Mlynar, 1980), but also by oppositions and citizens. This is one major reason why, despite political constraints, the oppositions in Poland, Hungary and the Czech lands began to pool ideas and resources the second half of the 1980s; to issue common manifestos; and to publish in various ways their support for oppositions in more repressive contexts, such as Romania, Bulgaria, East Germany and Russia. Thus, while oppositions were diverse in

size, strategies and goals, they nonetheless assumed their struggle against authoritarianism was a common struggle (and see Kenney, 2002; Renwick, 2006).

There were many reasons to assume, however, that the collapse of communism, communist states and the Soviet bloc, coupled with the remarkable divergence in the political and economic trajectories of the postcommunist regimes following these changes, would have had the effect of weakening the regional impulse for cross-national diffusion of political change as a consequence of similarities in structures and perceptions. However, this line of argument ignores, first, the existence of an extremely attractive model of simultaneous and rapid transitions to democracy and capitalism provided by the experiences of Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovenia in particular (Bunce, 2006). In addition, to downplay the potential for diffusion on the basis of growing dissimilarities after communism is to ignore the many parallels between those regimes that served as the sites of the electoral revolutions. Thus, they shared a communist past, with its similar ledger of obstacles to transition and a similar political and economic agenda. They also shared a similar postcommunist profile, including recent transition to independent statehood; earlier rounds of political protests, both accompanying state disintegration and more recently focusing on such issues as corruption and threats to democracy; heterogeneous populations which often provided a pretext for struggles for political power that accentuated cultural differences; and hybrid forms of democracy that included regular elections, limited opportunities for political competition and some civil liberties and political rights, but also fragmented liberal oppositions and corrupt authoritarian incumbents. Finally, with the exception of Slovakia, the electoral revolutions took place in states with unusually poor economic performance. By our estimate, this profile describes virtually every country in the region where successful electoral revolutions have taken place (but with Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia more democratic than Croatia, Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan). Put simply, this is a remarkably large group of similar countries that because of their commonalities can be considerable prime candidates for electoral revolutions.

Put simply, then, structural similarities in political and economic contexts, the self-interest of both senders and receivers, and habits of thinking that date back to the communist era, but which nonetheless fit postcommunist realities, have all worked together to create a sense of common needs and capacities that facilitated the cross-national spread of mobilization against authoritarian rule. While these factors hardly guarantee that the model will remain the same or will always produce the desired set of results, they nonetheless render this region in the postcommunist era, as during the communist era, a remarkable antechamber for the diffusion of political change.

Collaborative Networks

The third mechanism by which innovations move from place to place is the existence of transnational collaborative networks that fan out from the original site of the innovation and that “carry” the new model with them.. It is easy to forget that the history of communism was not just the history of the spread of a regime-type and its eventual decline; it was also a history of the spread of networks that first supported the diffusion of communism and then another set of networks that poked holes in its legitimacy and eventually in its political hegemony. In the course of this study, we have already said a great deal about these networks—under communism and postcommunism. However, it

is important to recognize that these networks were different during the two waves of anti-regime mobilization. During communism, the networks were primarily contained within the region, though the Helsinki Process and periodic linkages with various Western European groups, did occur (see, for instance, Thomas, ; Wylie, 1999; Kenney, 2002; Evangelista, 2003). However, these ties with groups outside the region were difficult to forge, given closed borders for most of these countries and perhaps as importantly, ideological tensions between a Western left focused on issues of peace and divided over the Soviet experiment and the politics of dissent in the communist region, which was less taken with the over-arching importance of peace and certainly not divided over the meaning of the Soviet experiment. Moreover, cross-national linkages among dissident communities within the region were hard to forge, both because of border control and because dissident cultures varied from place to place. As a result, it was primarily in the 1980s that dissidents from various countries in the region began to make common cause.

The transnational networks that arose in support of the electoral revolutions, by contrast, brought together a complex array of players, including local and regional dissidents, a range of non-governmental organizations, “private” players, such as the Open Society, and democracy promoters from both the European Union and the United States (such as USAID and their funded projects and groups, Freedom House, the International Republican Institute, and the National Democratic Institute). While authoritarian leaders tried to prevent these networks from ending their rule, especially in the more authoritarian contexts of Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, and while they were especially successful in this endeavor in Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia and Uzbekistan, for the successful electoral revolutions at least there were far fewer barriers than during communism to the expansion and geographical extension of transnational networks supporting the defeat of dictators. Moreover, the West, in direct contrast to the communist era, had shifted in the decided direction of full support for democracy abroad —especially, it is important to recognize, in the postcommunist region (though even there, concerns about oil and gas, as well as security, could trump this priority).

Two other factors were critical. One was the rapid proliferation of the non-governmental community, beginning in the late 1980s—a proliferation that served as a key site for the development of transnational networks of all sorts. At the same time, the electoral model itself facilitated transnational organization. While political protests do not always invite support, even from purportedly committed democrats, free and fair elections do. And electoral assistance, it can be argued, is far less complex to administer and far easier to be framed as legitimate activity to leaders in target states than, say, external support for mass demonstrations against the government.

We have addressed elsewhere the role of the United States in electoral revolutions and the role as well of regional networks bringing together “graduates” of these electoral revolutions and local dissident communities and non-governmental organizations (Bunce and Wolchik, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2006d). Suffice to note here that the electoral revolutions depended upon a convergence among American verbal and financial support of fair elections; committed and energetic regional exporters armed with valuable lessons about strategies; and vibrant local dissident communities. While it is fair to argue that the first wave of mobilization from 1987-1990 was assisted by transnational networks, the

second wave of electoral revolutions was fueled by such networks. In this sense, if we were to choose which mechanism of diffusion was the most important, we would argue that in the first wave, both demonstration effects and similar conditions were more critical, whereas in the second wave, it was really an interweaving of all three.

The End of Diffusion

In both waves, popular mobilization stopped before it transformed the entire region. Why did this happen, given, for example, the existence of the three mechanisms of transmission? Here, we can be succinct. As already noted, innovations typically arise in optimal contexts and then move from more to less supportive circumstances. Thus, the earlier popular mobilization in the first wave and electoral revolutions in the second occurred, the more effective they were—not just in bringing down dictators, but also in establishing democratic rule. By contrast, later mobilizations and electoral revolutions were far less effective. In this sense, the end of the diffusion dynamic is incremental, rather than sudden.

However, there is a second consideration: the double-edged swords of demonstration effects when existing hierarchies of power and money are at stake. Successful electoral revolutions did encourage emulation, but as these revolutions moved, precedent took precedent (so to speak) over local preparation and opportunity. Domestic capacity, in short, was limited, in part because regimes were more repressive and oppositions less united and effective. For example, it was impossible in Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Kazakhstan to have a full implementation of the electoral model. This, in turn, made it difficult for the United States to register strong complaints—though it did in Belarus and though considerations of oil and strategic location were far from irrelevant for either Azerbaijan or Kazakhstan. At the same time, it was not just oppositions that were learning from these successful challenges to authoritarian rule; it was also authoritarian rulers. A dress rehearsal for one group is also a dress rehearsal for the other. The abilities of Aliyev, Nazarbayev, and Lukashenka to ride out challenges to their power in recent elections in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Belarus, respectively, from 2005 -2006, are all examples of authoritarian leaders who have benefited from demonstration effects and have been, as a result, forewarned and forearmed (and see (Herd, 2005; Nygren, 2005a, 2005b). This argument is one reason, for example, why Vladimir Putin has recently pushed through a reform in Russia that facilitates the state's monitoring of foreign support of non-governmental organizations and makes it easy for local officials to close down non-governmental organizations.

Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter has been to explain the cross-national diffusion of mass mobilization against authoritarian rule in east-central Europe, the Balkans, and the Soviet successor states. Two rounds of diffusion were analyzed: the region-wide challenge to communist rule from 1987-1990—where popular protests served as the major venue—and the confrontations with electoral authoritarian regimes from 1996-2005—when the primary instrument was electoral mobilization, though often combined with popular protests. As we discovered, while there were differences in political contexts and instruments, the diffusion process itself was remarkably similar. Changes in the international system, similar domestic conditions, the power of demonstration effects,

and the impact of transnational networks all played a critical role in our two rounds of mobilization against authoritarianism.

There are several implications we can draw from this comparative study of diffusion. First, at the most general level, the story we have developed is a typical one insofar as both transitions from authoritarian rule and the diffusion of democracy are concerned. Thus, as characteristic of the Third Wave, especially in light of recent studies, transitions from authoritarianism are strongly influenced by the rise of a more “permissive” international order and mobilization of the citizenry. Moreover, democracy seems to diffuse within regions, as both cross-regional studies and our own have supported. At the same time, our two rounds of diffusion follow a familiar logic. Thus, in our cases, as so many others, innovations are themselves the product of diffusion, as well as past experiences, and the possibilities and constraints posed by local contexts, and innovations arise where the status quo is discredited and constituencies in support of change are both resourceful and emboldened. Our innovations, in turn, like most cases of diffusion, spread to other contexts, when innovators have the desire and the capacity to export change and when importers perceive the value of the change and have both the resources and the opportunities required for emulation. Put simply: cross-national transmission occurred because of similar conditions, demonstration effects, and supportive transnational networks. The presence of all three, moreover, testified to the difficulties of diffusion, when the change in question, as with mass mobilization against authoritarianism, undermines existing hierarchies and features a package of actions that are not easily disassembled in the face of resistance or regret. Finally, and again like most diffusion dynamics, the “product” changed over the course of diffusion; demonstration effects began to outrun local capacity; and the movement of the innovation came to an end.

At the same time, this study provides some new insights into our understanding of both democratization and diffusion. First, it is important to disentangle struggles with authoritarian rule from democratization—though the former may be motivated largely by commitments to the latter. Indeed, our study suggests that the later the confrontation takes place in the wave, the less related the two developments—largely because of less supportive domestic and international conditions. Whether this is more generally true, either within other regions or over the course of the Third Wave, however, is less clear—though there are reasons to think that this generalization may hold outside the communist and postcommunist region.

In drawing connections between the first and second rounds of diffusion, as well as the influence in turn of earlier events on the first wave, moreover, carries some important lessons. It is not just that innovations are not all that innovative; it is also that it is very difficult in fact to pinpoint the beginning of a diffusion process. As we discovered, some of the repertoires of behavior, the decisive role of mass publics, the diffusion of transnational networks supporting change, and the presence of an opposition culture that assumes regional similarities and values collaboration were in effect constants across our two waves. Also constant, but addressed elsewhere in this volume, was the availability of international “follow-up” to political breakthroughs; that is, the role of the United States, the European Union, and others in encouraging further democratic development.

If the beginning of diffusion is hard to identify, so is its end, at least in our study. The similarities between the two waves and their common regional location open up the question of whether we have analyzed two rounds of diffusion, or just one, with the period of 1990-1996 representing a lull in activity. In this sense, we may have violated a canon of comparative or statistical study: the necessity of assuming separate cases. However, in our view, the two rounds are sufficiently different in timing, mechanism, regime contexts, and the specific states involved (though Slovakia, because of democratization, straddles the two) that they constitute separate rounds of political action against dictators, with the first wave best understood as providing to the participants in the electoral revolutions evidence of a possible and desirable future and some useful techniques and strategies.

Finally, this study adds further evidence about the importance of regional effects in processes of political change. It has often been noted that the postcommunist region and the communist region for it have been unusually prone to diffusion. Indeed, there are no examples to our knowledge of the region-wide spread of popular protests that we saw in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union from 1987-1990, and electoral revolutions have been, by cross-regional standards, unusually successful in postcommunist Europe and Eurasia. As we argued above, the singular character of these developments reflects not just structural similarities and their support of diffusion dynamics, but also the existence of transnational networks that rest upon the convergence between strong commitments to share strategies on the part of “senders” and strong beliefs on the part of “receivers” that these strategies and goals are relevant and doable.

However, variations in attempts to mobilize and variations in their ability to end authoritarian rule also remind us of the limits of regional effects. The key point here is that, while similar domestic conditions, forms of transmission, and the like facilitate diffusion in this region in particular, there were nonetheless limits to the power of these factors. Whether these limits are fixed or whether the issue is variable delays in local ripening and receptivity remains to be seen. At the least, one has to guard against an assumption that is a third round of diffusion is around the corner and that democracy, as a result, promises to become the only game in the region.

^{1 1} We are thankful to the International Center for Non-Violent Conflict, the Smith Richardson Foundation, the Einaudi Center for International Studies, and the Institute for the Social Sciences at Cornell University for their support of this project. In addition, we thank Vlad Micic, Sara Rzyeva, Nancy Meyers, and Melissa Aten for their research assistance.

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