

# Ukraine's Orange Revolution

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## Abstract

Color revolution is one of the new ways of changing a regime at the beginning of the twenty-first century, which has usually been carried out on corrupt, political systems remaining from the Cold War era in Eastern European countries and countries that have become independent from the former Soviet Union and through such revolution a new peaceful form of political power transition emerged. An exploration of the circumstances of Ukraine's Orange Revolution suggests foreigners' support and leading. Ukraine's presidential elections of 2004 and the competition between Viktor Yushchenko and Victor Yanukovich and the presence of international observers in the process of elections and the controversy of electoral fraud and the West's support of Yushchenko were all directed toward the formation of a color revolution in Ukraine. Poor economic conditions and official corruption, religious, linguistic, class and racial gaps in Ukraine led the way for foreigners to use them in creating electoral situations and prepare the fall of the government. The main purpose question in this article is the Orange Revolution and its causes.

**Keywords:** color revolution, the Orange Revolution, soft overthrow, dictatorial

## Introduction

In 1989, a new theory based on "soft war", later referred to as "color revolution", "velvet revolution" or "flower revolution" emerged as a way to produce changes in political systems which were against Western powers' policies and some autocracies. In fact, velvet or flower and color revolutions are different names for gentle overthrow; a transformation and transition of power through civil resistance. This kind of nonviolent overthrow was first made known to the world by Václav Havel, former Czech president who was the opposition leader then.

After the Cold War and the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc, countries of the Eastern Bloc were trapped by totalitarianism after freeing themselves from Communist domination. Such countries became the first targets for color revolutions. These revolutions' main goal was the complete annihilation of American hegemony's two main obstacles, China and Russia. These attempts are still in progress in the form of a non-ideological cold war and the final result has not become clear yet. To this end, numerous institutions and foundations were established by espionage agencies and other Western government institutions, especially the US, who started carrying out different organized operations with the common objective of implementing velvet coup project (Esmaili, 2010; p. 7).

In this article, we will try to investigate into color revolution and its structure and Ukraine's Orange Revolution as a successful case will be addressed.

### **1. Analytic Framework for the Exposition of Color Revolution**

To analyze color revolution and evaluate its causes and related factors regarding Ukraine, setting an analytical framework is inevitable. Accordingly, the following analytical framework, using the methodological study of incidents resulting in color revolution in Ukraine which relies on the two concepts of *structure* and *situation*, is presented to underscore economic, political, cultural and social variables from the one hand and the behavior of national and international actors from the other hand in the development of color revolution:

1. Production or reproduction of social movements in critical political, social, economic and cultural turning points originating from generalized public dissatisfaction, particularly among the youth, students, lower class, people of ethnic areas, and some part of the modern middle class, which leads to the intensification, expansion and protraction of collective nonviolent behaviors such as strikes, gatherings, street demonstrations and similar behaviors (Structural aspects).

2. Activation and Solidification of Opposing Movements (the Opposition)

2.1 Governmentally excluded opposition; those who were formerly in the government but due to some reasons are no longer in the government (withdrawn or cast out)

2.2 Domestic opposition (all active, illegal factions within the country)

2.3 Overseas opposition.

3. Foreigners' Supervision and Guiding

A cursory review of the fall of the Ukrainian government, it is known that foreigners used cash injection, influencing some NGOs, and training some domestic opposition agents to overthrow the government.

4. All-out psychological campaign with the aid of mass, particularly foreign and opposition, media and changing collective behaviors into the priority issue within and outside the country.

5. Theoretical and practical impossibility of employing force against mass movements and interpreting it as the inefficiency of the political power in confrontation with demonstration, strikes, etc.

Based on the above analytic framework, we can derive the following assumptions for theoretical reinforcement:

One. Marginal behaviors and individual activities have no impact on color revolution analysis.

Two. Sophisticated organization and management of protest behavior is observed.

Three. High instability is observed among the elite, especially dependency on the foreigners.

Four. Institutionalization of norms and factors strengthening the national structure and social bonds has been minimal.

Five. There has been extensive foreign communications including information, business, economic, cultural and political communications throughout the revolution (Ziaii Parvar, 2004, p. 45).

Six. Legitimacy of the ruling governments has increasingly declined among the mass due to the assumption that the governments depended on Russia.

Seven. The opposition of dependent civil institutions, foreign embassies and international agencies were influential in stimulating the public, managing the protests and organizing movements.

Eight. Economic poverty, corruption of the authorities, financial dependency, low development rate and high unemployment rate had cut down opposition activities.

Nine. Sense of national unity and elements of the union of the mass were seriously confounded.

Ten. Ruling governments had no definite strategy for initiating reforms by responding to the demands and controlling mass actions (Orf, 2010, pp. 13-15).

## **2. Ukraine's Orange Revolution**

### *2.1 Ukraine's Domestic and Foreign Status before the Orange Revolution*

Ukraine, with an area of 7603 sq. km, which was the third largest country of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics after Russia and Kazakhstan, is currently the second largest European country neighboring Russia, Belarus, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Moldavia, which enjoys special geopolitical position because of its adjacency to the Black Sea. At the time of the Union of Soviet Republics, the bulk of manufacturing industries was in Ukraine and that is why, even after the dissolution of the Soviet Republics, it was still very important for Russia. In other words, Ukraine was in the first tier of areas surrounding Russia and its breaking away from Moscow's dominion meant the neighboring of West and Russian borders. In spite of everything, Ukraine attained national sovereignty on July 16 1990 and full independence on August 24 1991. Under Ukraine's constitution, the political system has been designed based on executive-legislative model while recognizing segregation of powers. Executive affairs of the country are the responsibility of the president who is elected five-yearly by people's direct ballot in public elections. Leonid Kravchuk, head of the state for four years, was the first president after whom Leonid Kuchma presided in 1994 and was in charge for a period of five years. Thus, when in November 2004 the Ukrainians participated in the election to vote for the new president, the government's financial crisis and its continuous conflicts with the parliament had already instigated public dissatisfaction which led to the transformation of the presidential election into a scene of political struggles and conflicts culminating in and ending with the Orange Revolution (Kulaii, 2005, p. 121).

Ukraine, which like other republics liberated from Soviet Union, had experienced an increased turning away from Moscow and toward the West after its independence, has accepted nuclear disarmament, left the circle of commonwealth countries, signed Guam and Traceca agreements, and has joined European Council and Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe all encouraged and assisted by the West. In addition, powers who wished to turn their back to Moscow and approach the West intensified their activities during the presidential elections and defied Leonid Kuchma, who had made considerable efforts in order to maintain and reinforce Ukraine's relationship with Russia during his ten years of leadership (Bahman, 2009, pp. 136-137).

Although more than twenty candidates from different groups and parties competed in Ukraine's presidential election, the main competition was between Victor Yanukovich and Victor Yushchenko. Due to the support of Ukraine and Russia's presidents, Victor Yanukovich wanted the continuation of a close relationship with Russia and in his electoral campaign, he had promised recognizing Russian language as the second official language and trying to establish a confederation consisting of Ukraine, Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. In contrast, Victor Yushchenko advocated closer relations with the West and economic liberation program. He wanted Ukraine to have closer relationship with the European Union, to consider cooperating with North Atlantic Treaty Organization, to liberate the economy and to fight the corruption of those he called corrupted governing authorities. This divergence was reflected

inside the Ukrainian society and the people of the western areas and large cities such as Kiev supported Yushchenko's programs and embraced his promises. Hence, victory of either of the candidates would have an impact on Ukraine's domestic conditions, and more extensively, on its foreign relations and in a larger scale, on the balance of political power and in the area and the world.

## *2.2 Foreign Support of Revolution*

Ukraine's Orange Revolution took place at a time when the atmosphere of the country was sharply polarized and political forces were arrayed around the two poles of Russia and the West. Needless to say, political forces who supported Russia wanted the current situation to be maintained while supporters of the West sought to change the situation and move it forward toward their desired state. As a result, protests began in Ukraine following the presidential election in which the two opposing candidates competed. In this election, people's assumption that the votes count was doubtlessly fraudulent was the main reason for the protests. After tight electoral campaigns and the main candidates' severe attacks at each other coupled with the fraud accusations and attempts made by the government to assassinate its opposers, on October 13 2004, constituents went to the ballot boxes to select their new president. The first round of Ukraine's presidential election was conducted with the participation of 24 candidates and a 75-percent public participation. Yushchenko and Yanukovich, who had polled 39.87 and 39.32 percent, respectively and did not succeed in securing a maximum 50-percent poll to win, went to the second round. International observers, who monitored the election, released an unfavorable report of violations during the electoral procedures which resulted in further complication of tensions between political forces. Hence, Victor Yushchenko, who had warned about a probable riot before the election began and had announced that the government authorities would not allow the democratic process of presidential election to lead to antidemocratic violence, asked for nonviolent demonstration and civil disobedience. Thus, about twenty thousand Ukrainians holding orange flags as signs of protest gathered in the streets and marched. Choosing orange color by the opposition was because it was the dominant color in Victor Yushchenko's campaign. Hence, the opposers held up orange flags and bands with slogans such as "Yes! Yushchenko" and marched on shouting "It's time." The second round of the election was held on Sunday, November 21 2004 in this atmosphere. An early vote count heralded Yushchenko's outrunning Yanukovich by a poll of 58 percent. Eventually, Yanukovich was announced winner with a total vote count of 49.4 percent while Yushchenko lost the election with 46.7 percent. However, the opponents did not acknowledge Yanukovich's victory and by accusing the government of fraud in the process of the election demanded a rerun (Quinn-Judge & Zarakhorich, 2004, p.22).

As soon as the Ukrainian parliament announced the result of the election, demonstrated blocked Yanukovich's way to the office of the prime minister and the country split into two eastern (Yanukovich's supporters) and western (Yushchenko's supporters) parts in a state of civil war, When chaotic conditions in the country loomed, the Ukrainian parliament reconsidered its decision and declared that the election had been fraudulent and asked president Kuchma to dissolve the election commission.

With the minister of defense's siding with Yushchenko, the situation changed in the favor of the supporters of the West and the U.S. Consequently, Ukraine's Supreme Court finally nullified the election's result and announced December 26 as the date for the new election.

Reelection was conducted on December 26 in the presence of 12000 international observers; and with the assistance of American and European media propaganda, Yushchenko won the election with a total poll of 62.52 percent and became president of this country.

### *2.3 Ukraine after the Orange Revolution*

Victor Yushchenko took his oath as the president on January 23 2004 and asked the Ukrainians to put their differences aside and support him. He also prioritized battling corruption, reconstructing Ukraine's economy, bringing the country closer to European institutions and joining NATO and WTO. He demanded EU's absolute guarantee to accept Ukraine's membership in the Union while Ukraine suffered from severe social problems including poverty, rampant AIDS spreading, and privatization and media reforms. Meanwhile, having accomplished her purpose by Yushchenko's victory, made plans to grant Ukraine some financial support and the EU too, in order to strengthen its relations with Ukraine, made a plan to increase financial support, reduce VISA issuing barriers for Ukrainian citizens, provide trading facilities in European markets and support the country's request to join WTO (Kuzio & Moroney, 2005, p. 18).

In addition, choosing Yulia Tymoshenko as Ukraine's prime minister with positive votes of 373 parliament members lead to Ukraine's even drawing even closer to the West and further away from Russia to be put on the government's agenda.

Tymoshenko, who had a major role in the Orange Revolution, put joining the EU and NATO, battling economic corruption and transparency in trading matters on top of her plans (Larrabee & Kuzio, 2006, p. 33).

### **Conclusion**

Color Revolution tends to occur at the time of the elections. Some countries are susceptible to color revolutions and since at the time of the elections there is a more open atmosphere, opposition groups unite at this time and using domestic and foreign media and organizing nonviolent and sometimes riotous gatherings and massive demonstrations, they protest against the governing party and thereby undermine supporters of the government. As a result, that election turns out unusually and candidates who support the opposing party are elected. In these revolutions, by gathering in front of legal state institutions such as the parliaments, ministries of the interior, elections commissions, police stations, etc., opponents of the government, prevent these institutions from taking any actions and block the entrance of

the representatives or police authorities to the buildings and practically deprive state institutions of their legitimacy (Esmaili, 2010, p. 10).

The process of Ukraine's Orange Revolution can be thus classified:

- Injecting U.S- and Europe-funded aids to the opponents of the Ukrainian government;
- Performing reverse legitimacy operation by accusing the Ukrainian government of violence, assassination of the opponents of financial, official and political corruption;
- Inducing the belief that the government is inefficient
- Creating a favorable image of Yushchenko and distorting Yanukovich's image using American and Western media;
- Altering public opinion by spreading the rumor of Yushchenko's poisoning by Yanukovich's government;
- Inducing the idea of perpetuating fraud in the election by the government;
- Opposing the announcement of election results and calling opponents to civil disobedience and fight;
- Vast coverage of Ukraine's latest developments by CNN, BBC and EuroNews and redirecting the country's public opinion;
- Disturbing public order and security and occupying state buildings.

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