

# Youth Movements and Elections in Eastern Europe



**OLENA NIKOLAYENKO**



## CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN CONTENTIOUS POLITICS

At the turn of the twenty-first century, a tide of nonviolent youth movements swept across Eastern Europe. Young people demanded political change in repressive political regimes that emerged since the collapse of communism. The Serbian social movement Otpor ("Resistance") played a vital role in bringing down Slobodan Milosevic in 2000. Inspired by Otpor's example, similar challenger organizations were formed in the former Soviet republics. The youth movements, however, differed in the extent to which they could mobilize citizens against the authoritarian governments on the eve of national elections. This book argues that the movement's tactics and state countermoves explain, in no small degree, divergent social movement outcomes. Using data from semistructured interviews with former movement participants, public opinion polls, government publications, nongovernmental organizations' reports, and newspaper articles, this book traces state-movement interactions in five post-communist states: Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Serbia, and Ukraine.

**OLENA NIKOLAYENKO** is Associate Professor of Political Science at Fordham University and an Associate at the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard University. She received her Ph.D. in political science from the University of Toronto and held visiting appointments at the Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law, Stanford University; the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard University; the Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies, Princeton University; and the Department of Sociology, the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Ukraine. Her research was supported by the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Cover illustration: A supporter of pro-Western opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko places flowers on the shields of riot policemen lined outside the Presidential building in Kiev, 24 November 2004. Credit: Viktor Drachev / Getty.

Cover designed by Hart McLeod Ltd

**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS  
[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

ISBN 978-1-108-41673-3



9 781108 416733 >

**Nikolayenko** **Youth Movements and Elections in Eastern Europe**

**CAMBRIDGE**



# Youth Movements and Elections in Eastern Europe

OLENA NIKOLAYENKO

*Fordham University*



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

4843/24, 2nd Floor, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, Delhi – 110002, India

79 Anson Road, #06-04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781108416733](http://www.cambridge.org/9781108416733)

DOI: 10.1017/9781108241809

© Olena Nikolayenko 2017

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2017

Printed in the United States of America by Sheridan Books, Inc.

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

ISBN 978-1-108-41673-3 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

## Youth Movements and Elections in Eastern Europe

At the turn of the twenty-first century, a tide of nonviolent youth movements swept across Eastern Europe. Young people demanded political change in repressive political regimes that emerged since the collapse of communism. The Serbian social movement Otpor ("Resistance") played a vital role in bringing down Slobodan Milosevic in 2000. Inspired by Otpor's example, similar challenger organizations were formed in the former Soviet republics. The youth movements, however, differed in the extent to which they could mobilize citizens against the authoritarian governments on the eve of national elections. This book argues that the movement's tactics and state countermoves explain, in no small degree, divergent social movement outcomes. Using data from semistructured interviews with former movement participants, public opinion polls, government publications, nongovernmental organizations' reports, and newspaper articles, this book traces state-movement interactions in five post-communist states: Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Serbia, and Ukraine.

Olena Nikolayenko is Associate Professor of Political Science at Fordham University and an Associate at the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard University. She received her Ph.D. in political science from the University of Toronto and held visiting appointments at the Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law, Stanford University; the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard University; the Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies, Princeton University; and the Department of Sociology, the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Ukraine. Her research was supported by the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

## *Cambridge Studies in Contentious Politics*

### *General Editor*

Doug McAdam *Stanford University and Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences*

### *Editors*

Mark Beissinger *Princeton University*  
Donatella della Porta *Scuola Normale Superiore*  
Jack A. Goldstone *George Mason University*  
Michael Hanagan *Vassar College*  
Holly J. McCammon *Vanderbilt University*  
David S. Meyer *University of California, Irvine*  
Sarah Soule *Stanford University*  
Suzanne Staggenborg *University of Pittsburgh*  
Sidney Tarrow *Cornell University*  
Charles Tilly (d. 2008) *Columbia University*  
Elisabeth J. Wood *Yale University*  
Deborah Yashar *Princeton University*

Rina Agarwala, *Informal Labor, Formal Politics, and Dignified Discontent in India*  
Ronald Aminzade, *Race, Nation, and Citizenship in Post-Colonial Africa: The Case of Tanzania*  
Ronald Aminzade et al., *Silence and Voice in the Study of Contentious Politics*  
Javier Auyero, *Routine Politics and Violence in Argentina: The Gray Zone of State Power*  
Phillip M. Ayoub, *When States Come Out: Europe's Sexual Minorities and the Politics of Visibility*  
Amrita Basu, *Violent Conjunctures in Democratic India*  
W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg, *The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics*  
Nancy Bermeo and Deborah J. Yashar, *Parties, Movements, and Democracy in the Developing World*  
Clifford Bob, *The Global Right Wing and the Clash of World Politics*  
Clifford Bob, *The Marketing of Rebellion: Insurgents, Media, and International Activism*  
Charles Brockett, *Political Movements and Violence in Central America*  
Marisa von Bülow, *Building Transnational Networks: Civil Society and the Politics of Trade in the Americas*  
Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik, *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Postcommunist Countries*  
Lars-Erik Cederman, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and Halvard Buhaug, *Inequality, Grievances, and Civil War*

(continued after index)

*To my sons, Anvar and Sanjar*





## Acknowledgments

This book would not have been possible without the support of many people and institutions. First and foremost, I am deeply indebted to the social movement participants and civic activists who were willing to share with me their insights into civil resistance and tell their stories. I have profound respect for their courage and determination to stand up against authoritarian governments at the risk of their physical, psychological, and financial well-being. No matter how much they succeeded in bringing down the regime, they left an indelible mark on their societies and stimulated further debate over the organization of civil resistance in the region. My critical remarks regarding tactical missteps of some youth movements are meant to provide some food for thought for a new cohort of youth activists and do not diminish the significance of the defunct challenger organizations in demanding political change. Most interviewees are identified by their real names. I use pseudonyms for those who preferred to conceal their identity and/or continue to reside in countries with a high level of state repression. I am thankful to the Belgrade-based Center for Applied Nonviolent Action and Strategies (CANVAS) and in particular Srđja Popovic and Sinisa Sikman for their support of my research in Serbia. I also thank Imke Hansen, Ivan Marovic, Tamara Martsenyuk, Giorgi Meladze, Vitali Silitski, Charles Szrom, and Steve York for facilitating my fieldwork in Eastern Europe.

A number of institutions shaped my thinking about state-movement interactions in a nondemocratic setting. The graduate program at the University of Toronto provided me with solid training in the discipline and brought me in contact with many outstanding scholars. My thanks go to Jeffrey Kopstein, Neil Nevitte, Susan Solomon, Peter Solomon, and Lucan Way for advancing my understanding of comparative politics and supporting my research endeavors on the linkage between youth and politics in Eastern Europe. As a postdoctoral fellow at Stanford University's Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law, I found an intellectually

stimulating environment for the development of my research project. In particular, the workshop “Political Sociology, Social Movements, and Collective Action” in the Department of Sociology and the Comparative Politics Workshop in the Department of Political Science provided superb venues for a productive exchange of ideas on social science research. I am thankful to Doug McAdam and Michael McFaul for their mentorship and Larry Diamond, Karen Long Jusko, Susan Olzak, Paolo Parigi, and Andrew Walder for their helpful feedback on my work. At a later stage in my research project, the Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies at Princeton University provided an intellectually invigorating setting for drafting a book-length manuscript. In particular, I am grateful to Mark Beissinger for his immense support of my research project in so many different ways. I also thank the Caucasus Research Resource Centers (Azerbaijan), the Liberty Institute (Georgia), the Department of Sociology at the National University of Kyiv–Mohyla Academy (Ukraine), and the Centre for Political Studies and Public Opinion Research at the Institute of Social Sciences (Serbia) for warm receptions during my visit to the region. Finally, the Department of Political Science at Fordham University offered a collegial environment for completing this research project. I am especially thankful to Jeff Cohen for his sage advice on academic publishing.

On the completion of data collection, I greatly benefited from the feedback I received at the pre-ASA workshop, “Making Connections: Movements and Research in a Global Context,” the Politics and Protest Workshop held at the CUNY Graduate Center, and the manuscript-development workshop held at the Leitner Center for International Law and Justice, Fordham Law School. Some findings from this research were also presented at the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta; the Center for Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies, Stanford University; the Institute of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies, University of California–Berkeley; the Kokkalis Program on Southeastern and East-Central Europe, Harvard University; the National University of Kyiv–Mohyla Academy, Ukraine; the Social Sciences Research Center (WZB) Berlin, Germany; the Ukrainian Catholic University, Ukraine; the Kennan Institute, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars; and annual meetings of the American Political Science Association, the American Sociological Association, the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies, and the Association for the Study of Nationalities. I thank participants and in particular Robyn Angley, Maciej Bartkowski, Marije Elvira Boekkooi, Valerie Bunce, Jeff Goodwin, Henry Hale, Valerii Khmelko, Lester Kurtz, David Marples, Sharon Erickson Nepstad, Tsveta Petrova, Blair Ruble, Kurt Schock, Fredrik M. Sjöberg, Marlene Spoorri, Mark Thompson, and Sharon Wolchik for their insightful comments.

This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC postdoctoral fellowship); the Center on

Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law, Stanford University; the First Year Faculty Research Grant, Fordham University; and the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict (manuscript-development grant).

As an author, I was fortunate to work with an extraordinary editorial, production, and marketing team at Cambridge University Press. I thank Lewis Bateman for expressing initial interest in the book project and Robert Dreesen for deftly taking it over and efficiently handling the review process. I am also thankful to the series editors and anonymous reviewers for their constructive criticism of my work.

Last but not least, I thank my family for their steady support of my research endeavors. Words are not enough to express my gratitude to my spouse for his love and encouragement throughout my academic career. I dedicate this book to my sons, Anvar and Sanjar, who frequently insisted on a respite from my working on the computer and joyfully brought me to Astoria Park or a nearby playground. I hope that my children's generation will live in a freer world.

#### COPYRIGHT ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am thankful to the publishers for graciously granting me permissions to reuse some material I have previously published.

Nikolayenko, Olena. 2015. "Youth Movements and Elections in Belarus." *Europe-Asia Studies* 67(3): 468–92. Copyright © 2015 University of Glasgow, reprinted by permission of Taylor & Francis, Ltd., [www.tandfonline.com](http://www.tandfonline.com) on behalf of University of Glasgow.

Nikolayenko, Olena. 2015. "Youth Mobilization before and during the Orange Revolution: Learning from Losses." In *Civil Resistance: Comparative Perspectives on Nonviolent Struggle*, ed. Kurt Schock. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 93–120. Copyright © 2015 by the Regents of the University of Minnesota.

Nikolayenko, Olena. 2013. "Origins of the Movement's Strategy: The Case of the Serbian Youth Movement Otpor." *International Political Science Review* 34(2): 140–58. Copyright © 2013. Reprinted by permission of SAGE Publications.

Nikolayenko, Olena. 2012. "Tactical Interactions between Youth Movements and Incumbent Governments in Post-Communist States." In *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change* (vol. 34), ed. Lester Kurtz and Sharon Erickson Nepstad. Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing, pp. 27–61. Copyright © 2012. Reprinted by permission of Emerald Group Publishing Limited.





# Contents

<i>List of Tables</i>	<i>page viii</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>ix</i>
1 Introduction	i
2 Elections as an Opportunity for Political Change	23
3 Youth's Revolt against the Regime	73
4 Otpor's Resistance until Victory in Serbia	96
5 Zubr's Struggle against Authoritarianism in Belarus	125
6 Kmara! Enough of Corruption and Poverty in Georgia	155
7 Pora! Youth's Mobilization in Ukraine	172
8 The Emergence of Youth Movements in Azerbaijan	203
9 Conclusion	230
<i>Appendix: List of Interviewees</i>	<i>252</i>
<i>Index</i>	<i>255</i>

# Tables

3.1	Cross-Age Support for Democracy	77
3.2	Perceived Link between Democracy and Bad Economy	78
3.3	Youth Participation in Protests, Mid-1990s	80
3.4	Size of the Youth Population	83
3.5	Sizes of the Youth Movements	85
3.6	Youth Vote	88
3.7	Level of Protest Activity	93
5.1	Zubr’s Leaflet, “Think! Decide! Act!”	139

## Introduction

At the turn of the twenty-first century, there has been a spectacular rise of nonviolent youth movements in Eastern Europe.<sup>1</sup> Young people called for free and fair elections to bring about political change in repressive political regimes that had emerged since the collapse of communism. In 2000, the Serbian social movement *Otpor* (“Resistance”), formed by a small group of students from the University of Belgrade, recruited thousands of young people and propelled electoral defeat of the incumbent president. Within three months of Slobodan Milosevic’s downfall, the youth movement *Zubr* (“Bison”) was set up in Belarus to press for political change during the 2001 presidential election. Similarly, the youth movement *Kmara* (“Enough”) was established in the Republic of Georgia to challenge the current regime during the 2003 parliamentary election. This tide of youth activism continued with the emergence of two Ukrainian youth movements with the same name – *Pora* (“It’s Time”) – on the eve of the 2004 presidential election. The following year, the youth movements *Maqam* (“It’s Time”), *Yeni Fikir* (“New Thinking”), and *Yokh* (“No”) called for free and fair elections in Azerbaijan. Never before have post-communist youth mobilized against the regime on such a grand scale.

A striking feature of these youth movements was the adoption of similar strategies regarding the timing of mass mobilization, the content of movement claims, and the repertoire of contention. Almost all the youth movements were formed during an election year. In anticipation of vote rigging, youth activists campaigned for free and fair elections and targeted the incumbent president as a stumbling block to democratization. Another common attribute of the youth movements was the use of nonviolent methods. The cross-national diffusion of ideas explains, to a large degree, cross-movement similarities.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The term “Eastern Europe” is here loosely applied to refer to the whole post-communist region, including Southeastern Europe and the South Caucasus.

<sup>2</sup> On the cross-national diffusion of ideas, see Arias-King, Fredo. 2007. “Orange People: A Brief History of Transnational Liberation Networks in East Central Europe.” *Demokratizatsiya: Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 15(1): 29–71; Beissinger, Mark. 2007. “Structure and



Since post-communist youth shared similar political values and faced a similar set of institutional constraints on political participation, the attribution of similarity provided a basis for the adoption of Otpor's tactics.<sup>3</sup>

Some youth movements, however, were more successful than others in mobilizing young people against the regime. Thousands of youngsters joined Otpor to wage a nonviolent struggle against the incumbent. Similarly, thousands of young Ukrainians challenged the power of the ruling elite through nonviolent action in 2004. Compared with Pora, Zubr mobilized a smaller number of youth during the 2001 presidential elections. Likewise, the Azerbaijani youth groups Maqam, Yeni Fikir, and Yokh recruited a smaller fraction of the youth population than Georgia's Kmara on the eve of the parliamentary elections.

A central argument of this book is that tactical interactions between social movements and incumbent governments explain, in part, the level of youth mobilization against the regime. Tactical interaction is "an ongoing process . . . in which insurgents and opponents seek, in chess-like fashion, to offset the moves of the other."<sup>4</sup> On the one hand, the social movement seeks to attain its goals through the deployment of innovative tactics. On the other hand, the movement's adversary tries to devise savvy countermobilization tactics. The level of youth mobilization is affected by the extent to which the social movement and the incumbent government deploy innovative tactics and counteract each other's action. Here innovation does not imply the generation of absolutely novel ideas. The novelty of protest tactics or state countermoves in a particular context might be sufficient to catch an opponent by surprise and gain a strategic advantage.

This study further contends that learning is vital to the development of effective tactics. The analysis focuses on two learning mechanisms: participation in previous protest campaigns and the cross-national diffusion of ideas. The underlying assumption is that both civic activists and the ruling elite can draw lessons from earlier episodes of contention. Movement participants can devise more effective tactics if they critically assess the dynamics of previous protest campaigns inside and outside the country. Similarly, the

Example in Modular Political Phenomena: The Diffusion of Bulldozer/Rose/Orange/Tulip Revolutions." *Perspectives on Politics* 5(2): 259–76; Beissinger, Mark. 2009. "An Interrelated Wave." *Journal of Democracy* 20(1): 74–77; Bunce, Valerie, and Sharon Wolchik. 2010. "Defeating Dictators: Electoral Change and Stability in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes." *World Politics* 43(1): 43–86; Bunce, Valerie, and Sharon Wolchik. 2011. *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Post-Communist Countries*. New York: Cambridge University Press; Fenger, Menno. 2007. "The Diffusion of Revolutions: Comparing Recent Regime Turnovers in Five Post-communist States." *Demokratizatsiya: Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 15(1): 5–27.

<sup>3</sup> On belonging to the post-Soviet generation as a basis for the attribution of similarity, see Nikolayenko, Olena. 2007. "The Revolt of the Post-Soviet Generation: Youth Movements in Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine." *Comparative Politics* 39(2): 169–88.

<sup>4</sup> McAdam, Doug. 1983. "Tactical Innovation and the Pace of Insurgency." *American Sociological Review* 48(6): 735–54, p. 736.