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POPULAR PROTESTS AND DEMOCRATIZATION IN POST-SOVIET COUNTRIES: AN
ANALYSIS OF WHY SOME DEMOCRACY MOVEMENTS FAILED AND OTHERS
SUCCEEDED

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By David B. McDonald

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for completion
Of the Bachelor of Arts degree in International Studies
Croft Institute for International Studies
Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College
The University of Mississippi

University, Mississippi
December 2021

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to analyze pro-democracy movements in post-Soviet countries through the lens of existing theories of democratization to determine why a particular protest movement succeeded or failed. Through a qualitative analysis of theories of democratization and four case studies – Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Belarus – this thesis finds that the theories of democratization are ultimately applicable and helpful in understanding these case studies, albeit in different ways. Whereas the theories and their predictions might be proven correct in the cases of Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, the opposite is true in Russia and Belarus, where authoritarian regimes have taken steps to counteract democratic pressure in their countries.

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Introduction

Democratization in the post-Soviet space became an important issue in the years following the collapse of the USSR as a new era of political development began across the former USSR. The challenge of negotiating a transition away from the remnants of the Soviet command economy, forging new political institutions, and establishing ties with the rest of the world was handled differently by each of the former Soviet republics. Some, like the Baltic states, quickly transitioned to democracy and a market economy. Others had a much different experience of democratization, filled with political and social unrest. Outside of the Baltics, the dramatic pro-democracy protest movements only began over a decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. State-supported democratization and privatization efforts were the preferred way forward during the 1990s, but by the 2000s, the average citizen still had not seen many of the democratic or economic improvements that had been promised at independence, setting the stage for frustrated and angry citizens joining together in mass protests to accelerate democratic reform in their countries.

The first of a long series of political upheavals and mass protests among the nations of the post-Soviet sphere took place in Georgia in 2003. The protest movements, beginning in Georgia but spreading to other post-Soviet republics, shook the foundations of the post-Soviet order in their demands for more democratic governance. Democratization can be understood here with the broad definition set out by Grugel and Bishop: the “introduction and extension of citizenship rights and the creation of a democratic state,” or what Grugel and Bishop term “substantive” democratization, in which citizens’ rights do not only exist on paper but also have

“real meaning” for people.¹ In the years since Georgia’s transition to democracy, a number of other, similar protest movements across the post-Soviet sphere, but not all were successful in the same way that Georgia’s protest movement was. This thesis seeks to answer the question of why some pro-democracy protest movements succeed in ousting non-democratic governments while others fail. What factors are important in determining the success or failure of a protest movement? Existing theories about the process of democratization may explain some of the factors that determine whether a protest movement succeeds or fails. The hypothesis for this thesis is that pro-democracy protests are more likely to be successful in countries with more links to other democratic countries and whose post-socialist economic reforms led to less state control of key industries and less dependence on the Russian petro-economy.

There are several theories of democratization that may aid in understanding why protests succeeded or failed in certain countries. Some of these theories have been used to describe the so-called "color revolutions," such as the theories surrounding the diffusions of ideas, protests, and tactics across borders; the strength of the state security apparatus; the agency of the democratic activists mobilizing support for the protest movements; and the structure of the country's post-Soviet economic and political reforms. These theories can be grouped together based on whether they describe endogenous or exogenous factors in order to more easily make comparisons between countries and democratization movements. Diffusion and international linkages are exogenous, while the agency, security apparatus, and reform theories are each endogenous. This thesis will apply these theories to four selected case studies—Georgia in 2003, Russia in 2011, and Belarus and Kyrgyzstan in 2020—in order to determine which factors may have played a role in the success or failure of the pro-democracy protest movements in those

¹ Jean Grugel and Matthew Louis Bishop, *Democratization: A Critical Introduction* (London: Red Globe Press, 2014): 7.

countries. While many things changed globally in the seventeen years between the first and most recent protest movements, these cases are comparable to one another because they each started off in roughly similar positions in the early 1990s – newly independent, and with immense political and economic instability. The effects of new developments in technology, especially with regard to the Internet and social media, and the political cultures of the countries in reaction to international events also serve as valuable areas of comparison.

Literature Review

There is a great deal of scholarly literature on the topic of democratization, particularly in regard to post-Soviet transitions to democracy and their successes and failures, and much of it is relevant to the protests and social movements to be examined in this thesis. The literature on democratization contains several theories that may be used to analyze the protest movements in Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Georgia. Such theories deal with topics like economic development, participation of political and economic elites in democratization, and the design of formal state institutions and informal practices. Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik in their book *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Postcommunist Countries* summarize several of the generally accepted theories and processes of democratization, such theories about diffusion, international linkages, economic development and reform, and then analyze several postcommunist countries that have seen some form of pro-democracy movement.² Their analyses of Belarus, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan focus on the spreading of protest tactics across national borders from other protest sites, the role of linkages and democracy promotion from the West, the control of the state security apparatus, and the role of local political elites in determining potential causes for why protests succeeded or failed.

² Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik, *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Postcommunist Countries* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way in their article “International Linkage and Democratization” present one of the important theories of democratization in the form of the international “linkages” between countries that help influence democratization’s spread. In short, the linkage theory contends that the more international linkages (connections) a country has to other democratic countries, the more likely it is that the country will experience some level of democratization. Levitsky and Way write that linkage “raises the cost of autocratic behavior...[increases] the odds of an international response, and [creates] influential constituencies for political change.”³ Further, Kristian Gleditsch and Michael Ward promote the related theory of diffusion, which contends that democratization processes and tactics spread across borders, and find that more connections to other democracies can bolster support for democratic reforms, a finding that lends itself to the international linkage theory.⁴ This theory, along with the theory of diffusion, can be used to describe exogenous factors that may help determine the success or failure of protest movements.

Political and economic situations also influence democratization. Scott Radnitz suggests in “The Color of Money: Privatization, Economic Dispersion, and the Post-Soviet Revolutions” that countries whose post-socialist economic reforms privatized large segments of the economy relatively quickly created a new class of entrepreneurs and business people whose interests did not always align with the interests of the state and who had enough money to help finance and create effective opposition to some or all state policies.⁵ In short, post-socialist countries who privatized more of their economies are more likely to have higher levels of democratization and

³ Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, “International Linkage and Democratization,” *Journal of Democracy* 16, no. 3 (2005): 20–34, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2005.0048>.

⁴ Kristian Skrede Gleditsch and Michael D. Ward, “Diffusion and the International Context of Democratization,” *International Organization* 60, no. 4 (2006): 911–33.

⁵ Scott Radnitz, “The Color of Money: Privatization, Economic Dispersion, and the Post-Soviet ‘Revolutions,’” *Comparative Politics* 42, no. 2 (2010): 127–46.

to have more sustainable democracies. Further, Mark R. Beissinger in his article “Structure and Example in Modular Political Phenomena: The Diffusion of Bulldozer/Rose/Orange/Tulip Revolutions” proposes two models -- “elite defection” and “elite learning” -- that consider the relationships between a country’s business and political elite and the political institutions they are either defending or opposing.⁶ These models, in conjunction with other analysis, can be helpful in understanding the development of the protest movements in relation to the support shown by the political and business elites of a country.

Methodology

This thesis is a qualitative study of the factors that may influence the outcomes of pro-democracy protest movements. I have chosen to analyze four case studies of democratization movements -- Georgia in 2003, Russia in 2011, and Belarus and Kyrgyzstan in 2020 -- because they represent both successful and failed protest movements, and they show how the dynamics of democratization may have changed over the seventeen-year time period. A successful protest movement might be characterized by the ousting of the non-democratic or authoritarian government and the installation of a more pro-democracy government in its place. A failed protest movement might be characterized by the opposite situation, where the incumbent regime stays in power, and the protests are broken up or fizzle out on their own when no progress is made to remove the regime.

Georgia is perhaps the model for pro-democracy protests in the post-Soviet contexts, as it was the first of the former Soviet republics to experience such a large democratization movement that ended in success. The events in Russia in 2011 offer a glimpse into what regimes might do to counteract democratic pressure and how differing organizational strategies among protesters

⁶ Mark R. Beissinger, “Structure and Example in Modular Political Phenomena: The Diffusion of Bulldozer/Rose/Orange/Tulip Revolutions,” *Perspectives on Politics* 5, no. 2 (2007): 269, <https://doi.org/10/cnvc7h>.

might negatively affect the outcome for the protest movement. Kyrgyzstan and Belarus mirror the other two case studies, but they also happened recently on a very politically different regional stage, along with a radically different technological stage that impacted the tactics of democratization movements. To answer the question of why the Russian and Belarusian protest movements failed to create meaningful change while the Georgian and Kyrgyz movements succeeded, these protest movements will be viewed through the lens of accepted theories of democratization. These theories can be tested against more recent examples of pro-democracy protests to show whether or not they are still relevant today. The four case studies selected for analysis address success and failure in protest movements and are made up of a combination of earlier and more recent movements. The 2003 Georgian protests and the 2011 Russian protests have both been explored in the scholarly literature, and offer good examples of how theories conform to practice and subsequent outcome, both in protest movement successes (Georgia) and failures (Russia). The much more recent protest movements in Belarus and Kyrgyzstan in 2020 are very much entrenched in today's social media landscape and the connectivity and access to information it provides. This combination of case studies will allow for the testing of the established theories, to see if they still hold up under these different conditions.

A variety of sources will be used to test each theory. The diffusion and the international linkage theories will be examined through analysis of news reports, social media posts, and the relevant scholarly literature. The agency of pro-democracy organizers likewise will be examined through news reports and social media posts, with social media posts and other messaging likely being the more useful sources. The analysis of the state security apparatus will depend upon secondary sources, such as the existing literature and other publications by experts on the topic.

Similarly, the post-communist political and economic reforms undertaken by each country will be examined using the existing scholarly literature.

If a theory is correct or applicable, then relatively direct connections between the conditions in the country and its transition to democracy will be found, such as evidence of diffusion of protest tactics or the continued operations of foreign, pro-democracy non-governmental organizations. The protest movements that will be examined occurred in 2003, 2011, and 2020, allowing the study to distinguish the potentially different outcomes based on past and present, and the forms of communication and organization that changed between those years. The older protest movements—those in Georgia and Russia—will be examined primarily through secondary literature, given that Georgia has become one of the foremost cases of successful postcommunist democratization upon which many of the theories have been developed, and the Russian government's anti-democratic efforts have influenced those in other countries. The more recent protests will be examined primarily through sources such as government statements, news reports, and social media, given how recently the protests happened and how information was shared about them both domestically and internationally.

Structure of Thesis

This thesis is broken up into two main parts. The first presents the two successful protest movements in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan. This part will begin with a brief introduction for the hypothesis and the relevant theories for what successful post-Soviet democratization efforts tend to do well. The protests will have a chapter devoted to them to provide the necessary background information and subsequent analysis. The second part of the thesis will present the two failed protest movements from Russia and Belarus. As in the first part, there will be a brief introduction

to the hypothesis and relevant theories as to why protests failed, followed by chapters devoted to the background and analysis of the protest movements in each country.

Part I: Successful Protest Movements

By the early 2000s, democratization movements had taken hold in several countries across Central Europe and the Balkans, providing examples for other pro-democracy movements in the semi-authoritarian and authoritarian states of the former Soviet Union. A famous example is that of Serbia, where elections and subsequent mass protests saw the ousting of Slobodan Milosevic and the rise to power of the democratic opposition movement.⁷ The events in Serbia in 2000 are not unlike what later happened in other democratizing countries across the former Soviet Union. In the 1990s and early 2000s as old institutions were being dismantled, new connections formed between the former Soviet republics and the democracies of the West, political-economic structures changed, and pro-democracy activists coordinated and organized. These factors, as understood through the lens of theories of democratization, may help explain what is necessary for a pro-democracy movement to succeed.

The exogenous group of democratization theories -- diffusion and international linkages -- is important to examine as countries across the former USSR transitioned from authoritarian regimes to other forms of government. Western support for pro-democracy media outlets, non-governmental organizations, and other groups is an important factor in determining the outcome of pro-democracy protests, and the United States especially poured millions of dollars into Eurasia after the collapse of the Soviet Union with the aim of promoting democracy, aiding pro-democracy elements of civil society all across the former USSR.⁸ Aid such as this, and the

⁷ Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik, *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Postcommunist Countries* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 113.

⁸ David Anable, "The Role of Georgia's Media--and Western Aid--in the Rose Revolution," *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 11, no. 3 (July 2006): 20, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1081180X06289211>.

linkages formed by it, contribute to the formation and success of a democratization movement by supporting opposition news outlets in authoritarian regimes and providing financial resources to pro-democracy NGOs and activists to which they would otherwise not have had access. This aid strategy was used in Serbia beginning in 1998.⁹ Five years later, the US and other Western democracies employed a similar strategy during Georgia's transition to democracy.

The diffusion of pro-democracy ideas and activism tactics is not so dependent on outside, state-level support, but it nonetheless crosses borders and influences democratization movements. One example is that Serbia's pro-democracy Otpor activists, successful in 2000, eventually met with and trained the Kmara activists who would later be instrumental in the protests that toppled Georgia's government.¹⁰ For later democratization movements, the Ukrainian "Orange Revolution" of 2004 would become the model to which pro-democracy movements in other countries across the former Soviet Union looked for inspiration, even when their chances for success were not very promising.¹¹ Of course, it also became the model which repressive governments carefully analyzed and took steps to ensure it was never recreated in their own countries.

The endogenous theories -- those that deal with the agency of pro-democracy activists, the post-communist economic and political reforms, and the strength of the security apparatus -- help explain the domestic conditions that allowed for the protests to succeed. The agency of activists of course refers to their organization and how effective they are at mobilizing the general public to take to the streets and protest. In successful protests, activists are often well

⁹ Bunce and Wolchik, *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders*, 103.

¹⁰ Charles H Fairbanks, "Georgia's Rose Revolution," *Journal of Democracy* 15, no. 2 (2004): 115, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2004.0025>.

¹¹ Mark R. Beissinger, "Structure and Example in Modular Political Phenomena: The Diffusion of Bulldozer/Rose/Orange/Tulip Revolutions," *Perspectives on Politics* 5, no. 2 (2007): 259–76, <https://doi.org/10/cnvc7h>.

organized and able to persuade people to join their cause and protest with them. The postcommunist economic and political reforms of a country are an important structural condition that can greatly influence democratization. Countries whose economic reforms have liberalized the economy and facilitated the rise of a wealthy business elite are more likely to transition to democracy. Viktor Yushchenko in Ukraine is perhaps the most visible example of this theory in practice; he turned from central banker to opposition politician to president of Ukraine following sustained protests in 2004.

In some instances, the members of the business elite are simply oligarchs. However, being an oligarch does not necessarily mean that a person is anti-democratic, and an oligarch's stance on democracy may not even really matter so long as they have the economic and political means and willpower to seriously challenge an authoritarian regime. Generally business elites or oligarchs might favor pluralism, which tends to characterize democracies (though it can apply to other forms of government), to ensure that their interests are represented in the halls of power. Coupled with immense economic influence and the accompanying political clout, business elites can place pressure on authoritarian regimes where the general public or pro-democracy activists may be unable.

The strength of the security apparatus is dependent on the political realities of the state it is supposed to serve. In authoritarian countries with large, well-funded security organizations, the state is much more likely to retain control against forces pushing for democratizations. The struggle to maintain the state's control over the country often depends on the cohesion and effectiveness of the security apparatus in undermining or outright suppressing pro-democracy movements and protests. The postcommunist economic and political reforms also play a role here; the regimes in Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, which did not completely privatize their

economies and instead relied on resource rents to pay for state activities, were able to use their security apparatuses to repress even serious attempts at democratization.¹² Then there is the culture of the apparatus to consider. If the various security agencies operating in a post-Soviet republic were never reformed, or only slightly reformed, following independence it stands to reason that their methods of coercion have likely not changed very much either. The authoritarian bent of their pasts and their loyalty to the president or state before the people as a whole may be part of why riot police and certain special operations units are relatively quick to use force and brutality to clear the streets of pro-democracy protesters. In countries where democratization occurs, the security apparatus is often unwilling or unable to effectively repress the pro-democracy movements, potentially either because of reform or a lack of unswerving loyalty to the state itself.

¹² Scott Radnitz, "The Color of Money: Privatization, Economic Dispersion, and the Post-Soviet 'Revolutions,'" *Comparative Politics* 42, no. 2 (2010): 142.

Chapter 1: 'Revolution' in Georgia

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to a turbulent decade for the newly independent Georgia, just as it did in so many other post-Soviet countries. Georgia's political history of the 1990s is certainly bloodier than that of some of the other countries that emerged from the ashes of the Soviet Union. In 1992, a violent coup d'état ousted the country's first democratically elected president, Zviad Gamaskhurdia, a Soviet dissident and pro-independence activist.¹³ Soon after, Georgia spiraled into a bitter civil war that lasted until the mid-1990s, along with the ethnic conflicts in Abkhazia and Ossetia that also plagued the country. Following the coup, Eduard Shevardnadze, the former First Secretary of the Communist Party of Georgia, became Georgia's second president. Under his leadership, Georgia earned something of a reputation in the West for being a post-Soviet democratization success story, though this was an unjustified reputation as old Soviet tendencies began to show themselves more and more in Georgia's governmental institutions.¹⁴ The pace of political and economic reforms slowed in the mid-1990s as well, and the Shevardnadze's ruling party fragmented and took heavy blows in the 2002 local elections.¹⁵ The long-running tradition of corruption in Georgia, developed over the centuries of foreign rule, continued after the fall of the USSR. Shevardnadze, one of the beneficiaries of the system of corruption in the Soviet era, perpetuated the system during his

¹³ Laurence Broers, "After the 'Revolution': Civil Society and the Challenges of Consolidating Democracy in Georgia," *Central Asian Survey* 24, no. 3 (September 2005): 333–50, <https://doi.org/10/cfdc2g>.

¹⁴ Broers, "After the 'Revolution,'" 334–5.

¹⁵ Charles H Fairbanks, "Georgia's Rose Revolution," *Journal of Democracy* 15, no. 2 (2004): 113, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2004.0025>.

years in power, culminating in the fraudulent elections of 2003 that inspired thousands to take to the streets.¹⁶

The 2003 elections were set to be an important midway point before the 2005 presidential elections. During the campaigns, the various opposition parties partially coalesced and participated in demonstrations against the Shevardnadze government together.¹⁷ Mikheil Saakashvili, leader of the New National Movement opposition party, became a major player in the elections. In the days directly preceding the elections, however, chaos took hold as Shevardnadze began working against holding free and fair elections and the international and domestic monitors that were watching them.¹⁸ The Central Electoral Commission had scrapped the computer-generated voting lists, leading to hundreds of thousands of Georgian citizens being turned away at the polls, and electoral commissions at other levels of government were massively overreporting votes for Shevardnadze and his allies compared to the independent vote tabulations of election observers.¹⁹

As allegations of massive electoral fraud emerged, tens of thousands of protesters began spilling out into the streets of Tbilisi, led principally by Saakashvili -- this was the beginning of Georgia's "Rose Revolution." On November 20, 2003, the Central Electoral Commission announced the falsified results of the elections, sparking further domestic outrage and international condemnation. Two days later, on November 22, Shevardnadze was convening the new parliament, Saakashvili and a group of his supporters made their way into the parliament chambers and disrupted the session. As Shevardnadze's bodyguards hurried him away from the

¹⁶ Louise Shelley, Erik R. Scott, and Anthony Latta, eds., *Organized Crime and Corruption in Georgia* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 1-2.

¹⁷ Fairbanks, "Georgia's Rose Revolution," 114.

¹⁸ Fairbanks, "Georgia's Rose Revolution," 115.

¹⁹ Fairbanks, "Georgia's Rose Revolution," 116.

demonstrators, the members of parliament also dispersed. Shevardnadze fled to his residence, declared a state of emergency, and vowed that the “revolutionaries” would be arrested. Despite the heavy police presence at the parliament, the gathering of armed groups on both sides in the wake of the emergency declaration, and Shevardnadze’s apparent willingness to use force, no shots were ever fired. Shevardnadze, left with no real options, quickly resigned, paving the way for a new, democratic government to form.

Endogenous Theories

Postcommunist Economic and Political Reforms

The 1990s were an incredibly turbulent time for Georgia. Ethnic conflicts between Georgians, Ossetians, and Abkhazians predictably led to privatization reforms being deemed much lower priority as compared to the security needs of the entire population. While not spending time and resources defending territory from separatist operations in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Georgia was also busy building itself a functioning state, something it had not really needed to do before -- Georgia had been part of the Russian empire or Soviet Union for roughly 200 years before its 1991 independence.²⁰ Throughout the 1990s, Georgia’s economy was largely devastated.

Part of the reason for Georgia’s miserable economic situation throughout the 1990s was its implementation of “shock therapy” reforms, parallel to those in Russia and other post-Soviet countries.²¹ While these reforms obviously were disastrous in the short term for the Georgian economy, they were likely a major driver in the formation of the 2003 democratization movement. A small circle of elites were the chief beneficiaries of the reforms of the 1990s,

²⁰ Nodar Khaduri, “Mistakes Made in Conducting Economic Reforms in Postcommunist Georgia,” *Problems of Economic Transition* 48, no. 4 (August 2005): 19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10611991.2005.11049982>.

²¹ Khaduri, “Mistakes Made,” 22.

controlling the most lucrative business enterprises in the entire country.²² While it would likely have been better for the average Georgian if the economic reforms had created more equitable business and living conditions, the fact that large portions of the country's wealth became concentrated in the hands of a few does not preclude the possibility of the business elites or oligarchs being able to challenge the state in support of a pro-democracy movement. Indeed, Georgia's independent television stations, owned by the oligarchs who rose to prominence in the 1990s, were hugely influential in spreading the pro-democracy messages that would influence Georgians to take to the streets in support of the democratization movement being spearheaded by Mikheil Saakashvili and his National Movement opposition party.²³

The economic and political reforms of the 1990s allowed the formation of the market economy and the creation of a business class with enough resources to support causes that undermined the authority of the state. In this case, the average Georgian was left behind, but the dissatisfaction arising from economic hardship likely encouraged many Georgians to join the pro-democracy protests once they began in Tbilisi. Georgia's case shows that, even if liberalizing economic reforms are slow to be implemented, they are still important for setting the stage for democratization. Without the opposition messaging emanating from elite-owned television stations, it is not likely that the democratization movement would have gained nearly as much momentum as it did in 2003. Along with the independent station Rustavi-2, the Imedi and Mze television stations, two elite-owned media outlets, shifted from supporting Shevardnadze to more objective reporting that gradually encouraged the democratization

²² Charles H Fairbanks, "Georgia's Rose Revolution," *Journal of Democracy* 15, no. 2 (2004): 111, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2004.0025>.

²³ Fairbanks, "Georgia's Rose Revolution," 120.

movement and became the core of media coverage of the protests in Georgia.²⁴ Table 1 below demonstrates the effects of these reforms in the years leading up to 2003, and the broader effects of the 2003 protest movement on Georgia’s democratic and economic developments.

Table 1: Georgian Polity2 Score and Economic Freedom Index

Georgia		
Year	Polity2	EF Index
1996	4	44.1
1997	4	46.5
1998	4	47.9
1999	4	52.5
2000	2	54.3
2001	2	58.3
2002	2	56.7
2003	2	58.6
2004	6	58.9
2005	7	57.1
2006	7	64.5
2007	6	69.3
2008	6	69.2
2009	6	69.8
2010	6	70.4
2011	6	70.4
2012	6	69.4
2013	7	72.2
2014	7	72.6
2015	7	73
2016	7	72.6
2017	7	76
2018	7	76.2

Sources: Polity5 Annual Time-Series, 1946-2018 and Heritage Foundation 2021 Index of Economic Freedom

The Polity2 variable above refers to Georgia’s overall level of democracy on a composite scale of -10 to +10, with -10 being more authoritarian and positive +10 being more democratic.

²⁴ David Anable, “The Role of Georgia’s Media--and Western Aid--in the Rose Revolution,” *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 11, no. 3 (July 2006): 20, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1081180X06289211>.

The Economic Freedom Index (EF Index) evaluates the relative economic freedom of a country, providing a useful history of the effects of the economic reforms of the 1990s and beyond. From 2000—2003, years in which Shevardnadze was in power, overall democracy in Georgia actually degraded as Shevardnadze's government became more authoritarian. After the mass protests toppled Shevardnadze, Georgia became considerably more democratic and less authoritarian, explaining the four-point jump between 2003 and 2004. Throughout all of this, economic freedom (on a scale of 0 to 100, with 100 being freer) in Georgia—brought on by its drastic economic reforms—increased considerably, by 14.5 points by the time the protests began. Since the protests, both Georgia's Polity2 score and its Economic Freedom Index have continued to increase, perhaps demonstrating a correlation between the relative economic freedom of a country and its overall status of democracy.

Agency of Activists

The activists in Georgia were remarkably well organized. Kmara, a pro-democracy youth movement modeled on Serbia's Otpor youth movement, organized summer camps and seminars that trained students in protest techniques -- skills they would have the chance to use only a few months later.²⁵ Kmara activists formed close working relationships with other opposition movements, notably ISFED, the Liberty Institute, and of course Saakashvili's National Movement.²⁶ Kmara also directly interacted with the Georgian security forces before the fraudulent election of 2003 and the subsequent protests, building rapport among the ranks of the police prior to the explosion of protests that would come later.²⁷ These all proved to be extremely effective tactics when it came down to the street-level interactions between pro-democracy

²⁵ Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik, *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Postcommunist Countries* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011): 161.

²⁶ Bunce and Wolchik, *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders*, 161.

²⁷ Bunce and Wolchik, *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders*, 161.

protesters and the police. The protesters were well-trained and organized, and the police had already been exposed to Kmara and its message. The organization of Kmara and the establishment of connections with the police likely are important factors as to why the protests did not turn deadly.

In addition to Kmara's growth and training of young activists, the political opposition was also fairly well organized. Following the fraudulent elections, Mikheil Saakashvili's opposition party, National Movement, was also fairly well organized and was also able to inspire protesters to come to its support in ousting Eduard Shevardnadze. Following several weeks of protests, Saakashvili was able to lead protesters into the halls of the Georgian parliament, forcing Shevardnadze to abandon his attempt to open a new session of parliament.²⁸ Shortly after the protesters broke into the chambers of parliament, protesters took over other government buildings, though opposition leader and head of parliament Nino Burdzhaneladze said that this other group of protesters would not enter any offices in the buildings they occupied.²⁹ This points to a high degree of organization within the larger protest movement. That Burdzhaneladze was able to speak authoritatively on the actions of a group of protesters shows that the protests had been well organized and operated with lots of cohesion between the opposition political leaders - - Saakashvili and Burdzhaneladze -- and the protesters who were occupying buildings themselves. Had the protests and activists been less organized, it is not as likely that the pro-democracy protests would have been so successful so quickly. In Georgia's case, the flat organizational structure of Kmara, along with its training of activists, and the close collaboration between protest groups and the political leaders of the opposition working to oust Shevardnadze, were

²⁸ Seth Mydans, "Foes of Georgian Leader Storm Into Parliament Building," *The New York Times*, November 23, 2003, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/23/world/foes-of-georgian-leader-storm-into-parliament-building.html>.

²⁹ Mydans, "Foes of Georgian Leader."

important factors in what made the democratization movement so successful, at least with regard to the street-level interactions between activists, civilians, police, and politicians.

Security Apparatus

The last of the endogenous factors that may play a role in the success of democratization movements is the strength and effectiveness of the security apparatus. The Georgian security apparatus of the 1990s was strained as it tried to manage a brief civil war and then separatist wars in different parts of the country. By 2003, however, the burden of managing wars had largely been lifted. Instead, the security forces in 2003 were faced with repressing protesters with whom they had much in common. The political and economic woes that had caused thousands of civilians to come out and protest affected everyone, even the army and police.

The security apparatus of Georgia in 2003 was not particularly fearsome or well-funded. Years of conflict had taken their toll, and the Georgian economy was in no place to support large expenditures for the operations of the army or police forces. The lack of funding for the security apparatus was so dire that Shevardnadze's regime had actually failed to pay the police for several months before the protests broke out.³⁰ Failing to pay the enforcers usually means that the enforcers will lose their motivation to maintain order and protect the interests of the state, and that is essentially what happened in Georgia in the early 2000s. Later on in the protests, some members of the security forces actually defected and joined the protesters in calling for Shevardnadze's removal from office.³¹

The loyalty of the Georgian security forces to the Shevardnadze regime was not particularly great. Immediately after protesters broke into the chambers of parliament and forced

³⁰ Bunce and Wolchik, *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders*, 165.

³¹ Seth Mydans, "Georgian Leader Agrees to Resign, Ending Standoff," *The New York Times*, November 24, 2003, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/24/world/georgian-leader-agrees-to-resign-ending-standoff.html>.

Shevardnadze to flee elsewhere, the Interior Minister, who was in charge of the police, said that he and, by extension the police, would follow all of Shevardnadze's orders.³² While that may have been reassuring for Shevardnadze to hear, it was not actually a statement that meant anything in practice. During Shevardnadze's years in power, the Georgian security apparatus had become used to criticism and democratic pressures thanks to the semi-liberal regime.³³ By the time the protests began, all of the Georgian security forces -- the army, police, and presidential guards -- were internally split on the issue of whether or not they were willing to attack the civilians protesting to demand democratization.³⁴ The "outreach" to the police conducted by Kmara may have been a contributing factor to this split; when protesters chant "We are on your side," it normally becomes more difficult to justify striking out at them.

Exogenous Theories

International Linkages and Diffusion

The exogenous theories of democratization played a very important role in the formation of Georgia's democratization movement and helped ensure that the pro-democracy protests enjoyed widespread support. Newly created connections between Georgia and the West enabled the spread of democratic ideas across borders. Political liberalization and reform allowed for non-governmental organizations to form and establish their own connections with pro-democracy activists and organizations across the world. Interactions between activist groups in different countries also facilitated the spread of pro-democracy sentiments in Georgia.

Diffusion -- the spread of ideas, information, and tactics across borders -- is easy to see in the Georgian case. Serbian Otpor activists met with Georgian pro-democracy activists (the

³² Mydans, "Foes of Georgian Leader."

³³ Giorgi Kandelaki, *Georgia's Rose Revolution: A Participant's Perspective* (United States Institute of Peace, 2006).

³⁴ Fairbanks, "Georgia's Rose Revolution," 117.

Kmara youth movement in particular) to train them in protest and electoral techniques that would help the Georgians replicate the successful push for democratization that occurred in Serbia some years earlier.³⁵ This meeting and training of activists proved to be a great help for the democratization movement when the protests began. Georgian activists used the tactics and techniques they had learned from their Serbian counterparts to help mobilize people to join the protests and to begin interacting with the police, making it less likely that the police would attack them during the protests.³⁶ The tactics which had been successful in Serbia were also successful in Georgia -- Kmara's organizational structure and strategy of using humor to engage with the general public prevented it from being targeted by pro-regime forces and helped break through Georgians' general political apathy, encouraging many to leave their homes and join the protests in the streets of Tbilisi.³⁷

The international linkages formed between Georgia and the democracies of the West may have been even more important than the diffusion that occurred between the Serbian and Georgian activist groups. Georgia had gradually increased its involvement with the West throughout the 1990s, leading to Western pro-democracy NGOs and funds entering the country for the first time. The involvement of pro-democracy international organizations and activist groups emerging from these newfound opportunities and connections was exceptionally important in the Georgian case.

Development aid targeted at media institutions in Georgia was particularly effective and enabled the spread of pro-democracy ideas and the tactics learned from Otpor on a much larger scale than if media outlets had not received financial support from Western organizations and

³⁵ Bunce and Wolchick, *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders*, 160.

³⁶ Bunce and Wolchick, *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders*, 161.

³⁷ Kandelaki, *Georgia's Rose Revolution*, 3.

governments. Rustavi-2, the “voice and vision of Georgia’s ‘Rose Revolution,’” was an extremely important independent media outlet that benefited from its relationships with the Western NGOs Eurasia Foundation and Internews.³⁸ The guidance and resources provided by the Western NGOs which worked with Rustavi-2 helped the news station resist Shevardnadze’s attempts to shut it down because of its messaging in support of the political opposition.³⁹ Resisting the shutdown attempts of course allowed Rustavi-2 to continue its operations and support pro-democracy activism throughout the entire country.

Other NGOs, both Georgian and Western, were also very involved in supporting the democratization movement in the lead-up to the protests. The Liberty Institute, a Georgian NGO, and George Soros’s Open Society Institute collaborated to send two Liberty Institute members to Serbia to meet with Otpor activists and later helped Otpor activists visit Georgia to train members of the Kmara youth movement.⁴⁰ In addition to this involvement, the U.S. Agency for International Development poured \$1.5 million into computerizing Georgia’s voter rolls, and the US and European governments contributed money to help fund election observers, who sounded the alarm on the fraud that sparked the mass protests.⁴¹

Conclusion

The theories of democratization can easily be applied to Georgia’s pro-democracy movement of 2003. The case of the Georgian people’s ousting of Eduard Shevardnadze in favor of a more democratic government is the classic case of democratization upon which several theories of democratization have been based. The endogenous theories surrounding the economic and political reforms, agency of activists on the ground, and the strength and the

³⁸ Anable, “The Role of Georgia’s Media,” 15.

³⁹ Anable, “The Role of Georgia’s Media,” 15.

⁴⁰ Anable, “The Role of Georgia’s Media,” 11.

⁴¹ Fairbanks, “Georgia’s Rose Revolution,” 114-15.

effectiveness of the security apparatus can reasonably be used to understand what happened domestically in Georgia. For the international side of things, the exogenous group of theories -- international linkages and diffusion -- can also be successfully applied in the understanding of Georgia's democratization movement. Georgia is one of the first examples of a pro-democracy protest movement succeeding in overthrowing a semi-authoritarian regime, and it has since influenced the wider understanding of how democratization works in practice.

Chapter 2: Protests in Kyrgyzstan

Following the dissolution of the USSR, the Central Asian republics gained independence and immediately had to contend with the issues of building their own states and stable political systems, something that they had not had to do during their years under Russian rule. The new republics, in territories that were once a vital link in the global trade network, also had to decide how they would orient their political and economic policies after years of northward-focused trade with Russia and Soviet-directed collectivization. During this period in Kyrgyzstan, Askar Akaev, a former professor turned deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, rose to the office of president in October 1990 and initially spoke of creating a vibrant civil society in what was probably the most “open” of the post-Soviet Central Asian republics. However, in the mid-1990s, Akaev transitioned away from this rhetoric and instead focused on giving the state more power to intervene against civil society organizations and prolong his time in office.⁴² Akaev was committed to economic reform—Kyrgyzstan rapidly liberalized its economy, and by 1996, roughly two-thirds of the state-controlled sectors of the economy were in private hands.⁴³ These reforms had the side effect of collapsing living standards for much of the population, however. Still, Akaev maintained his increasingly authoritarian grip on Kyrgyzstan until 2005, when the events of the so-called “Tulip Revolution” forced him out of power as protesters stormed government buildings and demanded his resignation.⁴⁴ This was the first time that the Kyrgyz

⁴² John Anderson, “Creating a Framework for Civil Society in Kyrgyzstan,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 52, no. 1 (2000): 79-80, <https://doi.org/10/b2nb4x>.

⁴³ Anderson, “Creating a Framework,” 81.

⁴⁴ “Unrest flares in Kyrgyzstan,” *The New York Times*, March 16, 2005, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/16/world/asia/unrestflares-in-kyrgyzstan.html>.

people had overthrown their government in the hopes of establishing a more democratic state, but it would not be the last.

After the upheaval of 2005, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, the former prime minister of Kyrgyzstan and chairman of the People's Movement of Kyrgyzstan that contested the 2005 elections, became the second president of Kyrgyzstan. If Akaev's regime had transitioned into a competitive authoritarianism, Bakiyev's style of governance was still harsher authoritarianism as well.⁴⁵ Bakiyev liked to use intimidation and force to suppress his growing list of enemies, but by 2010, the blatant corruption and economic slowdown had drained his regime of most of its legitimacy.⁴⁶ The opposition, by now convinced of the need for genuine democratization, launched large-scale protests that eventually drove Bakiyev out of power, paving the way for a provisional government and new elections.⁴⁷

Ten years later, a new protest movement emerged after members of the political opposition disputed the results of the October 2020 parliamentary elections, which were claimed to be rigged.⁴⁸ The president, Sooronbay Jeenbekov, declared a state of emergency as the protests continued, government buildings were stormed, troops deployed, and election results annulled.⁴⁹ Amidst the chaos, Sadyr Japarov, who had been freed from his jail cell by a group of protesters, was chosen to be the new prime minister, and president Jeenbekov announced his resignation.

⁴⁵ Kathleen Collins, "Kyrgyzstan's Latest Revolution," *Journal of Democracy* 22, no. 3 (July 2011): 153, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2011.0040>.

⁴⁶ Collins, "Kyrgyzstan's Latest Revolution," 154.

⁴⁷ Collins, "Kyrgyzstan's Latest Revolution," 156-7.

⁴⁸ Ivan Nechepurenko, "Kyrgyzstan in Chaos After Protesters Seize Government Buildings," *The New York Times*, October 6, 2020, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/06/world/europe/kyrgyzstan-protests-election-parliament.html>.

⁴⁹ Andrew Higgins, "A Convicted Kidnapper Is Chosen to Lead Government of Kyrgyzstan," *The New York Times*, October 10, 2020, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/10/world/asia/kidnapper-kyrgyzstan-prime-minister.html>.

Kyrgyzstan certainly has a strong recent history of protests and overthrowing governments relatively quickly. It took around two weeks from the beginning of the 2020 protests for the government to collapse and President Jeenbekov to resign, pointing to existing conditions of Kyrgyz civil society, the economy, and generally effective protest mobilization as factors for why the 2020 protest movement was so successful, even as the Belarusian protests of a few months prior failed.

Endogenous Theories

Postcommunist Economic and Political Reforms

The first post-independence government of Kyrgyzstan, led by President Akaev, sought to make deep, radical changes to the Soviet command economy that persisted in Kyrgyzstan. This was in line with the aims of several of the other newly independent post-Soviet countries, although Kyrgyzstan's economic transition was not exactly the same as Georgia's or Russia's. The Kyrgyz government was at first torn on how to approach the necessary economic reforms. It eventually settled on a policy to liberalize and decentralize the economy, not unlike the "shock therapy" reforms carried out in Georgia, Russia, and other post-Soviet countries.⁵⁰ By 1996, roughly two-thirds of the public sector had been transferred into private hands, a remarkably quick turnaround.⁵¹ As in the other countries, independence and the introduction of the new reforms devastated Kyrgyzstan's economy in the short-to-mid-term, with standards of living falling and unemployment rising. Table 2, shown on the next page, illustrates the overall trend of democratization in Kyrgyzstan and the economic liberalization that developed alongside it over the course of the last 20 years. The level of economic freedom in Kyrgyzstan has stayed fairly

⁵⁰ Rafis Abazov, "Policy of Economic Transition in Kyrgyzstan," *Central Asian Survey* 18, no. 2 (June 1999): 205, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634939995687>.

⁵¹ John Anderson, "Creating a Framework for Civil Society in Kyrgyzstan," *Europe-Asia Studies* 52, no. 1 (2000): 81, <https://doi.org/10/b2nb4x>.

stable since 2005, when the Polity2 score (a stand-in for overall levels of democracy) spiked upwards by six points, while Kyrgyzstan's Polity2 score continued to trend upwards, indicating greater democratization. Though no data is available for the years 2019 and 2020, it is likely that Kyrgyzstan's Polity2 scores would have dropped as the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (SDPK) consolidated its power and suppressed political opponents and critics.⁵²

Table 2: Kyrgyz Polity2 Score and Economic Freedom Index

Kyrgyzstan		
Year	Polity2	EF Index
1998	-3	51.8
1999	-3	54.8
2000	-3	55.7
2001	-3	53.7
2002	-3	51.7
2003	-3	56.8
2004	-3	58
2005	3	56.6
2006	4	61
2007	3	60.2
2008	3	61.1
2009	1	61.8
2010	4	61.3
2011	7	61.1
2012	7	60.2
2013	7	59.6
2014	7	61.1
2015	7	61.3
2016	7	59.6
2017	8	61.1
2018	8	62.8

Sources: Polity5 Annual Time-Series, 1946-2018 and Heritage Foundation 2021 Index of Economic Freedom

⁵² "Kyrgyzstan: Freedom in the World 2021 Country Report," Freedom House, accessed September 18, 2021, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/kyrgyzstan/freedom-world/2021>.

While the shock therapy reforms introduced by Akaev's government in the 1990s hollowed out much of the Kyrgyz economy and made things much more difficult for the average citizen, there were of course elites who benefited from the liberalization of the economy. Kyrgyz political and economic elites, often exercising great influence over certain regions of the ethnically divided country, were instrumental in the first of Kyrgyzstan's great political upheavals—the 2005 “Tulip Revolution.” The regional elites of Kyrgyzstan stoked anger against the government and the outcome of the 2005 parliamentary elections, mobilizing their supporters, mainly people from rural areas of Kyrgyzstan, and were eventually successful in ousting the Akaev regime.⁵³ The decentralized nature of political patronage networks and the north-south regional rivalries present in Kyrgyzstan were important in both the 2005 and 2010 political upheavals that ousted Akaev and later Bakiyev. In the aftermath of the 2010 protests, Kyrgyzstan adopted a new constitution that transformed it from a presidential democracy and into a parliamentary democracy.⁵⁴ Kyrgyzstan also has a diverse landscape of independent media outlets, though there are still some glaring issues that affect journalists and bloggers.⁵⁵ Overall though, the spread of information is not as restricted in Kyrgyzstan as it might be in other, more authoritarian countries, enabling the faster spread and acceptance of the democratic ideals that inspired the major protest movements in Kyrgyzstan.

Agency of Activists

The Kyrgyz protests were not necessarily organized, at least not in the same way that they were in Georgia. There was no Kyrgyz equivalent of the Georgian Kmara youth movement

⁵³ Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik, *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Postcommunist Countries* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011): 167-8.

⁵⁴ “Kyrgyzstan 2010 Constitution,” Constitute Project, accessed September 18, 2021, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Kyrgyz_Republic_2010?lang=en.

⁵⁵ “Kyrgyzstan: Freedom in the World 2021 Country Report.”

to learn protest tactics and encourage other people to join the protests. That kind of knowledge had already been developed -- the revolutions in 2005 and 2010 had worked for a reason, and many Kyrgyz had not forgotten the lessons learned during those years. The kind of mass mobilization that it would take to oust the government had been done before, and the residual knowledge of how to motivate people to pour out into the streets, even during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, was still there.⁵⁶

Social media, ever present in 2020, played a large role in getting the word out about the electoral fraud of the October 5th elections. Opposition leaders, activists, and political commentators used the microblogging platform Twitter for most of their discourse about the fraud and the protests. Some were very cynical about the government's actions, even as the elections were still going on. Azamat Akeneev, the deputy chairman of the opposition Reform party, wrote on October 5th, "...they will bring and register hundreds of thousands of purchased [voters] here to steal from Bishkek residents their choice" in the city's elections.⁵⁷ Clearly, the opposition did not have much faith in the electoral process under President Jeenbekov's regime. Social media was also used to reach foreign audiences as activists sought to bring the pro-democracy protests into the international spotlight: one tweet which was retweeted by a young activist in Bishkek reads "To everyone here in the UK, there is a massive unrest happening right now in Bishkek, capital of Kyrgyzstan following an election yesterday. All my mind is there right now. This plus Covid-19 is a bad combination."⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Asel Doolotkeldieva, "The 2020 Violent Change in Government in Kyrgyzstan Amid the Covid-19 Pandemic: Three Distinct Stories in One," in *Between Peace and Conflict in the East and the West: Studies on Transformation and Development in the OSCE Region*, ed. Anja Mihr (Springer, 2021): 161.

⁵⁷ Azamat Akeneev (@akeneev), "Kogda vchera nachali obsuzhdat' vozmozhnoe uchastie reformy v gorodskikh vyborakh, ved' Bishkek nas podderzhal, to kto to iz odnopartiitsev skazal. A tolku s shulerami igrat'? Oni privezut i propishut zdes' sotni tysiach kuplennykh liudei i ukradit u bishkekchan ikh vybor." Twitter, October 5, 2020, 10:16 p.m., <https://twitter.com/akeneev/status/1312954888037584896>.

⁵⁸ Azat (@Azat25), "RT @AselSartbaeva To everyone here in the UK, there is a massive unrest happening right now in Bishkek, capital of Kyrgyzstan following an election yesterday. All my mind is there right now. This plus

Security Apparatus

The last of the endogenous factors that may play a role in the success of democratization movements is the strength and effectiveness of the security apparatus. The Kyrgyz security apparatus is not a particularly strong organization -- certainly not strong enough to keep protestors out of government buildings like the Kyrgyz parliament building and the president's administrative offices.⁵⁹ The 2005 and 2010 protest movements and their successes in overthrowing the regimes are a testament to the relative weakness of the security forces in Kyrgyzstan.

In addition, the Kyrgyz security apparatus is not particularly well-funded, and its attitude towards pro-democracy dissidents and protestors is nowhere near as hostile as the security apparatuses of Belarus or Russia. Kyrgyzstan is a relatively poor country, and there are no oil rents to fund state activities and the security forces. Coupled with the Covid-19 pandemic severely disrupting the global economy, this lack of economic resources and funding meant that things were likely more strained among the rank and file of the security forces than usual.

Exogenous Theories

International Linkages and Diffusion

Kyrgyzstan is often thought of as a bastion of democracy surrounded by dictatorships or similarly authoritarian states. While it would make sense to assume that Kyrgyzstan's democratic development might have been hampered by its proximity to authoritarianism under the predictions of the exogenous theories, Kyrgyzstan has managed to maintain a comparatively more democratic style of governance as compared to its immediate neighbors. After the fall of

Covid-19 is a bad combination." Twitter, October 5, 2020, 12:38 p.m., <https://twitter.com/Azat25/status/1313262718590300163>.

⁵⁹ "Fotoreportazh. Demonstranty v «Belom dome»," Radio Azattyk (Kyrgyzskaia sluzhba Radio Svobodnaya Evropa/Radio Svoboda), accessed September 18, 2021, <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/30876907.html>.

the Soviet Union, new connections formed between the West and the newly independent republics -- in Kyrgyzstan's case, the political and economic liberalization reforms attracted Western investment and non-governmental organizations. These conditions are what helped create popular support for previous Kyrgyz "revolutions," and they likely contributed to this most recent government overthrow.

Diffusion in the Kyrgyz case is more about the spread of ideas and information than about the training of Kyrgyz activists by activists from another country. For most of the last decade, Kyrgyzstan has been surrounded by other authoritarian regimes, and it could be expected that the Kyrgyz government (prior to the events of 2020) might learn a thing or two from them about how to maintain a firm grip on power. However, it appears that this exchange of authoritarian mechanisms did not fully take place, or if it did, then it did not take place fast enough to have any meaningful impact on the outcome of the protest movement. It is also important to note that the Belarusian protests had taken place only a few months before the Kyrgyz protests began, and many Kyrgyz surely knew about and sympathized with the Belarusian protesters as well, given the abundance of social media posts focusing on the Belarusian protests. Especially on Twitter, many users spoke about the events in Belarus and compared them to the events in Kyrgyzstan.⁶⁰

The international linkages formed between Kyrgyzstan and the democracies of the West were very important in the development of pro-democracy support in Kyrgyzstan. In the early years of independence, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), greatly influenced by the "Washington consensus" of the 1990s and 2000s, gave Kyrgyzstan a significant amount of

⁶⁰ Azim Azimov (@azim_azimovv), "Seichas daiu inter'viu belarusskoi sluzhbe radio 'Svoboda' – budem govorit' o sxozhestni i raznitse politicheskikh sobytii v Belarusi i Kyrgyzstane." Twitter, October 7, 2020, 7:37 a.m., https://twitter.com/azim_azimovv/status/1313820720766558208.

financial support, creating an important link to international organizations and development funds.⁶¹ In addition to the sudden influx of IMF money, Western NGOs also flooded into Kyrgyzstan and began pushing for reforms in many different sectors of society and politics, with around one thousand such NGOs operating by the early 2000s.⁶² Many of these NGOs have remained active in the Kyrgyz civic and political spheres, helping to maintain important links with other democracies outside the region, although some NGOs have reported harassment over the issues they seek to address or perceived government favoritism.⁶³ It is also important to note that on a geopolitical level, Kyrgyzstan is similar to Belarus in that it is vulnerable to external Western influences but also insulated from them by its close ties to Russia. The effects of having closer ties to Russia -- the concept of “authoritarian diffusion” -- are perhaps a more recent phenomenon as the political landscape of Kyrgyzstan changed following the 2010 upheavals. Some linkages between Kyrgyzstan and Western nations were weakened within the last decade. For example, a United States military base was closed in 2014, and in 2015, President Atambayev ended a cooperation agreement with the US.⁶⁴ However, NGOs were largely unaffected by this worsening of relations with the US, and most are still operational.

Conclusion

The 2020 Kyrgyz protest movement’s success can be understood through the existing theories of democratization. The endogenous theories relating to economic and political reforms, agency of activists in the streets, and the strength, loyalty, and effectiveness of the security apparatus can be used to reasonably describe what happened for the domestic side of

⁶¹ Bunce and Wolchik, *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders*, 169.

⁶² Bunce and Wolchik, *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders*, 169.

⁶³ “Kyrgyzstan: Freedom in the World 2021 Country Report,” Freedom House, accessed September 18, 2021, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/kyrgyzstan/freedom-world/2021>.

⁶⁴ Temur Umarov, “Is There a Place for a U.S. Military Base in Central Asia?,” *The Moscow Times*, June 7, 2021, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/06/07/is-there-a-place-for-a-us-military-base-in-central-asia-a74127>.

democratization within Kyrgyzstan. The exogenous theories dealing with international linkages and diffusion, can also aid in understanding the case of Kyrgyzstan in 2020. Kyrgyzstan has in the past provided examples of these theories in action during the previous government oustings, and 2020 appears to be no exception.

Part II: Protest Movement Failures

Just as other democratization movements across Europe and the former Soviet Union had taken hold and ushered in new political eras in each country, other pro-democracy movements were being quashed. The semi-authoritarian and authoritarian regimes of the former Soviet Union had learned from the events in countries where new democracies had been established, taking notes on how best to protect themselves from nascent democratization movements in their own countries. Azerbaijan serves as a good example. In 2005 Ilham Aliyev's regime prevented prominent opposition leaders from returning to Azerbaijan, confiscated "orange material" -- the pro-democracy Orange Revolution in Ukraine had only happened a year earlier -- to prevent mass opposition mobilization, and used the incredibly loyal security forces to break up opposition meetings and rallies.⁶⁵ Other regimes have learned the same lessons and taken similar actions as the regime in Azerbaijan. The tactics adopted by semi-authoritarian and authoritarian regimes have prevented the development of new connections with the democratic West, slowed the reform of political-economic structures, and disrupted the organization and mobilization of pro-democracy activists. These disruptions to democratization, at least in relation to the existing theories, may help explain why some pro-democracy movements have failed.

The exogenous theories of democratization play an important role in understanding the development of the newly independent countries across the former USSR as Western democracies pushed for the spread of democratic ideals in the region. As time wore on however, regimes across the former USSR, fearful of democratization movements threatening their grip on

⁶⁵ Valerie Bunce and Sharon Wolchik, *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Postcommunist Countries* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011): 180-1.

power, restricted the vehicles for Western, pro-democracy influence that had proved so important in other countries. Regimes turned to the strict regulation of non-governmental organizations and their finances to make promoting democracy all the more difficult, both for foreign NGOs and domestic ones that received donations from abroad.⁶⁶ New regulations aimed at stifling the activities of pro-democracy NGOs denied them the chance to influence civil society and form connections with pro-democracy activists.

The diffusion of pro-democracy ideas and activism tactics is similarly impacted. Organizations that attempted to mimic organizations like the Serbian Otpor or Georgian Kmara were actively suppressed and new, pro-regime organizations were created -- Nashi in Russia and Zhaz Otan in Kazakhstan, for example.⁶⁷ In addition, foreign activists -- those who might have the expertise to help train other pro-democracy activists -- have also been denied entry into countries with more repressive regimes.⁶⁸ The international reach of successful pro-democracy movements in other countries like Serbia and Ukraine is now much more limited in some authoritarian regimes as suppression tactics disrupt pro-democracy activist organizations at home, foreign activists with knowledge of protest and mobilization tactics are denied entry to the country, and state-backed groups compete for support from the general public.

The endogenous group of theories which helps explain the domestic conditions in which protests occur is also important to examine. The agency of activists is perhaps the most clear-cut theory in this group, as its predictions are easily seen in practice. For successful democratization movements, activists are often well-organized and persuasive to the general public, allowing activists to mobilize large numbers of people to protest with them. In countries where

⁶⁶ Richard Sakwa, *Russian Politics and Society* (Routledge, 2008): 343-4.

⁶⁷ Abel Polese and Donnacha Ó Beacháin, "The Color Revolution Virus and Authoritarian Antidotes," *Demokratizatsiya* 19, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 124.

⁶⁸ Polese and Ó Beacháin, "The Color Revolution Virus," 124.

authoritarian regimes have learned from the events of earlier democratization movements in other countries, however, regimes have taken great pains to disrupt the operations of activist groups. The regimes have essentially reduced the agency of activists, limiting their potential for organizing a grassroots democratization movement.

The postcommunist economic and political reforms undertaken by a country are also important in creating the conditions for protest movements. Theoretically countries which liberalized their economies and allowed the formation of a wealthy business elite are more likely to transition to democracies, though this is not always the case. Several countries drastically reformed their economies through “shock therapy” reforms, creating a new class of business elites who could justifiably be called oligarchs. Others chose limited reform or virtually no reform at all. In countries with liberalized economies but authoritarian regimes, the business elites that could have challenged the regime through their significant political and economic influence even if they were not truly pro-democracy, have been subordinated by their regimes, as has happened in Russia and other countries.⁶⁹ In countries that have only implemented limited reforms or where the oligarchic/business elite is not as strongly developed, as in Belarus or Kazakhstan, the interests of the elites have likewise been subordinated to the interests of the state.⁷⁰ The economic influence of business elites or oligarchs thus does not always translate into political influence, limiting their effectiveness in challenging aspects of authoritarian regimes and whatever political or economic liberalization they may have been able to promote.

The effectiveness of the state security apparatus depends on the political realities of the state it serves. Large, well-funded security organizations are predictably much more well

⁶⁹ Sergei Guriev and Andrei Rachinsky, “The Role of Oligarchs in Russian Capitalism,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 19, no. 1 (March 2005): 147.

⁷⁰ A.V. Buzgalin and A.I. Kolganov, “The Protests in Belarus: Context, Causes and Lessons,” *Critical Sociology*, December 30, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920520982368>.

equipped to suppress democratization movements than ones that are small or underfunded. The loyalty and cohesion of the security apparatus is also important. A security apparatus that is loyal to a regime is often one of the pillars of power for authoritarian strongmen. Postcommunist economic and political reforms cannot be ignored either. The regimes in Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, neither of which completely privatized their economies and instead relied on oil rents to fund state activities, were able to use their well-funded security apparatus to repress even serious attempts at democratization.⁷¹ Additionally, security organizations loyal to authoritarian regimes are not known for “playing nice” with political dissidents or activists. The use of force, then, is a more readily available option for the riot police and special units that are deployed to quell the protests.

⁷¹ Scott Radnitz, “The Color of Money: Privatization, Economic Dispersion, and the Post-Soviet ‘Revolutions,’” *Comparative Politics* 42, no. 2 (2010): 142.

Chapter 3: Putinism and Russia's 'Illiberal Democracy'

Initially, Russia's government, led by President Boris Yelstin during the 1990s, turned towards market liberalization and the idea of democracy, though there were some who resisted reforming Russia's economy and cumbersome political institutions left over from the Soviet era.⁷² The reforms were eventually pushed through, and they saw limited success. While Russia's economy rapidly transformed into a market economy during the 1990s, it also became extremely volatile, making it difficult for average citizens to get by and somewhat delegitimizing the new political institutions being put in place. These circumstances are what led to President Boris Yeltsin's unexpected resignation and Vladimir Putin's rise to power. Despite the difficulty Russia faced during its transition to democracy, it remained the major economic and military power of the former Soviet Union, and this legacy has likely influenced Russia's political culture at all levels.

After ascending to the presidency at the end of the 1990s, Vladimir Putin has sought to maintain control and relative political stability for the last two decades. Even when Putin served as prime minister (to reset his term limits for the presidency), his hand-picked successor, Dmitri Medvedev, was little more than a puppet of Putin's overall political position, although he did create certain expectations for a more liberal style of governance that were eventually quashed as Putin signaled his return to the presidency.⁷³ Under Putin and Medvedev, the Russian government turned into a quasi-authoritarian state or "hybrid regime," which tolerates

⁷² Richard Sakwa, *Russian Politics and Society* (Routledge, 2008), 40-59.

⁷³ Julie A. Cassidy, and Emily D. Johnson, "Putin, Putiniana and the Question of a Post-Soviet Cult of Personality." *The Slavonic and East European Review* 88, no. 4 (2010): 683.

opposition parties--so long as they do not upset the status quo--and uses a variety of repressive tactics to maintain social control.⁷⁴ These political conditions, especially the crushing of any hope that there may be a more liberal style of governance in the future, set the stage for the 2011 protests that took place in Russia's major cities.

In the December 2011 Russian State Duma elections, reports of blatant election fraud emerged and quickly spread online and in the news, galvanizing support for the opposition and inspiring protests. The opposition parties quickly organized themselves into a broader coalition of both the "old" and "new" oppositionists, smoothing over any disagreements on policy matters. A protest movement was born. The protest movement called for new, fair elections, the release of political prisoners, and a more general turn towards democracy. Unfortunately for the opposition, this new protest movement failed -- opposition leaders were quickly arrested, and the protests were crushed by riot police. Vladimir Putin has since maintained his grip on power in Russia, using the appearance of democracy to legitimize his authoritarian style of governance.

Endogenous Theories

Postcommunist Economic and Political Reforms

Russia differs from most of the other former Soviet republics in that it is the only one that has maintained a large economy, a powerful military, and its global presence. Despite the initial chaos of the 1990s, Russia has maintained influence and power over the rest of the former Soviet Union, which Russia considers its geopolitical backyard. As the heavyweight of the former Soviet Union, Russia's political and economic activities often have consequences beyond its own

⁷⁴ Cassidy and Johnson, "Putin," 684.

borders, which has both empowered the regime and forced it to come to terms with the “risks” of allowing too much reform or democratization.

Russia’s economic reforms had established a fairly successful and dynamic market economy by the turn of the millennium, but it was dominated by the fabulously wealthy oligarchs who made their fortunes (not always legally) in the 1990s. These oligarchs, by virtue of their economic dominance, also wielded significant political influence -- Boris Yeltsin essentially struck a deal with the oligarchs to secure his re-election in the mid 1990s. While this development might have theoretically supported pluralism and democracy in Russia, Vladimir Putin was eager to end the political power exercised by the oligarchs once he ascended to the presidency. In 2000, Putin offered an unwritten pact to the oligarchs: if they paid taxes and did not exercise their political power against Putin, the state would respect their property rights and allow them to keep their assets.⁷⁵ Putin later enforced this pact in 2003, arresting the oligarch owner of the Yukos oil company Mikhail Khodorovsky and seizing the company’s assets for criticizing Putin’s regime and supporting opposition parties and media outlets.⁷⁶ The Khodorovsky affair showed the other oligarchs that Putin was serious. Most oligarchs have since abided by the unwritten pact and have relinquished their political influence in return for being allowed to keep their wealth.⁷⁷ Through cases like this, Putin has effectively neutralized the oligarchs who might once have challenged his grip on power, eliminating a possible avenue for democratic pressures to reach the Russian government.

Russia’s economy was, and still is, heavily dependent on its energy sector and on two resources in particular: oil and gas. In 2011, Russia’s exports were worth \$616 billion, with

⁷⁵ Sergei Guriev and Andrei Rachinsky, “The Role of Oligarchs in Russian Capitalism,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 19, no. 1 (March 2005): 146, <https://doi.org/10/czw42w>.

⁷⁶ Guriev and Rachinsky, “The Role of Oligarchs,” 146.

⁷⁷ Guriev and Rachinsky, “The Role of Oligarchs,” 147.

roughly \$385 billion being resource and energy exports; 93.92 percent of these exports were directly related to the petroleum industry, followed by coal at a comparatively miniscule 3.68 percent.⁷⁸ The overwhelming dominance of the petroleum industry in Russia's exports and the wider economy as a whole has informed the regime's decision-making, and has for the most part enabled it to pour money into activities deemed important to protecting the regime. In addition to its dependence on oil rents, the regime began to increase its share in the energy sector and other important, high-value economic sectors such as aviation or shipbuilding and the financial sector in the 2000s.⁷⁹ The state's growing interest in key parts of the economy has certainly provided more revenue for the regime to fund anti-democratic activities, but it has also led to economic inefficiencies that may harm Russia's economy overall. Still, the state control, or at least significant state presence, in various high-value economic sectors and industries gave the regime ample resources to silence oligarch critics and fund anti-democratic groups and security forces. On the next page, Table 3 shows the relative levels of economic freedom and democracy in Russia from 1995 to 2018. Notably, the economic freedom index rating for Russia never reaches quite the same level as Georgia, or even Kyrgyzstan, in any of the years. The Polity2 score, representing democracy, spikes in 2000, when Putin became president, but decreases in 2007 and 2008, right before his position-switch with Dmitri Medvedev to get around constitutional term limits. The values for both measures in 2010, 2011, and 2012, all remained very stable, even in the wake of the 2011 protests. Perhaps the Russian state's style of governance, and especially its repression tactics used against the protestors, are behind this period of stagnation in the scores.

⁷⁸ "The Atlas of Economic Complexity by @HarvardGrwthLab," accessed September 12, 2021, <https://atlas.cid.harvard.edu/countries/186/export-basket>.

⁷⁹ "What Is the State's Share in Russia's Economy? | Russia Matters," accessed September 12, 2021, <https://www.russiamatters.org/analysis/what-states-share-russias-economy>.

As the table shows, nothing significant changed. The regime was clearly able to protect its own power and prevent any meaningful reforms from being implemented during those years.

Table 3: Russian Polity2 Score and Economic Freedom Index

Russia		
Year	Polity2	EF Index
1995	5	51.1
1996	3	51.6
1997	3	48.6
1998	3	52.8
1999	3	54.5
2000	6	51.8
2001	6	49.8
2002	6	48.7
2003	6	50.8
2004	6	52.8
2005	6	51.3
2006	6	52.4
2007	4	52.2
2008	4	49.8
2009	4	50.8
2010	4	50.3
2011	4	50.5
2012	4	50.5
2013	4	51.1
2014	4	51.9
2015	4	52.1
2016	4	50.6
2017	4	57.1
2018	4	58.2

Sources: Polity5 Annual Time-Series, 1946-2018 and Heritage Foundation 2021 Index of Economic Freedom

Agency of Activists

The 2011 protests in Russia were primarily organized and announced on social media platforms like Vkontakte and Facebook and on blogging platforms like LiveJournal. Opposition leaders who were already popular at the time were able to quickly send announcements to their

followers and gain new ones as the evidence of election fraud became public. Social media allowed for much quicker responses from the activists who were organizing the protests and from the general public. The first of the protests against the results of the State Duma elections actually was only announced on the day it was to occur -- Aleksei Naval'nyi, an opposition figure who had a relatively large following at the time of the protests, published a post on LiveJournal his plans for holding a demonstration that night, accusing the government and electoral officials of being crooks and thieves.⁸⁰ This is likely one of the first instances where a relatively large, impromptu demonstration was able to be organized without the aid of traditional media outlets like television or radio stations.

In addition to the internet being a much faster way for word to travel about the protests, the opposition activists also came together to oppose the results of the election, organizing joint protests. Boris Nemtsov, a prominent opposition politician, gave a detailed account of the first major protest, wrote that “[the opposition activists] are united by the understanding that these elections are a fraud and a farce. And the main victory of the opposition is that this understanding has become nationwide.”⁸¹ This is an important point -- the opposition had coalesced around a common goal, even if different factions preferred other strategies for protesting. Nemtsov goes on to say in the same post that roughly 300 people were detained after the rally, with most of those being held overnight.⁸² Detaining protesters, and particularly the opposition leaders who organized the rallies and protests, would become a major strategy for the

⁸⁰ Aleksei Naval'nyi, “Miting na Chistykh Prudakh. Segodnya. 19-00,” *LiveJournal*, accessed February 21, 2021, <https://navalny.livejournal.com/656297.html>.

⁸¹ Boris Nemtsov, “Miting. Chistye prudy. Bespredel,” *LiveJournal*, accessed February 21, 2021, <https://b-nemtsov.livejournal.com/133027.html>.

⁸² Nemtsov, “Miting.”

regime, as it tried to disrupt the protests already going on and prevent new ones from being organized.

Security Apparatus

The Russian security apparatus has a long history of suppressing dissent and helping maintain political and social control in the country. The intelligence and security services are loyal to the state (and more specifically to Putin) and are often willing to use force to suppress protests. They are also well-funded compared to their counterparts in other former Soviet republics -- the oil rents upon which much of the Russian state budget depends certainly have helped make sure that the police and special response units are never under-equipped or disloyal over payment withholdings.

When protests do arise, the OMON special response units are often mobilized. The OMON units have gained a reputation for being the “stormtroopers of repression” and for being ruthlessly efficient.⁸³ The OMON were deployed to Bolotnaya Square in 2011, and they quickly lived up to their reputation as brutally efficient riot police. In the beginning days of the protest, thousands of police, among them the OMON, were deployed to Moscow in preparation for the protests. There, police chased off protesters and detained those they were able to catch, violently throwing them into police vans.⁸⁴ A number of opposition leaders were arrested on the first night of the protests--Ilya Yashin and Alexei Navalny both were sentenced to fifteen days in jail after being arrested on December 5th.⁸⁵ After serving the fifteen days in jail, Navalny wrote a blog

⁸³ Mark Gaelotti, *Russian Security and Paramilitary Forces since 1991* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2013), 12-13.

⁸⁴ Miriam Elder, “Russian Police and Troops Clash with Protesters in Moscow,” *The Guardian*, December 6, 2011. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/dec/06/russian-police-troops-moscow-protest>.

⁸⁵ Miriam Elder, “Russian Police and Troops.”

post encouraging the protesters and saying that he will continue to organize protests.⁸⁶ During one of his protest marches (supposed to end at Lubyanka Square), protesters were “grabbed by riot police, thrown against walls, or tackled to the ground and then dragged along the wet street.”⁸⁷ In another protest organized by Navalny in May 2012, after Putin won the presidential election, violence once again broke out between riot police and protesters, ending with more than six hundred protesters detained, more than fifty hospitalized, and many more injured.⁸⁸ While many Russians were probably undaunted by the prospect of being arrested at a protest, probably more people were discouraged from even going to the protests because of the response from the security forces.

Exogenous Theories

International Linkages and Diffusion

While the Western democracies may have significant influence over smaller, weaker countries that can be susceptible to democratization movements, they do not have very much leverage over Russia. Russia is a large, powerful country that has shown itself to not be intimidated by sanctions or other threats often used by Western powers to influence other countries and, to borrow a phrase from Levitsky and Way, “raise the cost of repression” to such a degree that democratization may be encouraged.⁸⁹

There are five dimensions to international linkages as they relate to the West: economic, geopolitical, social, communication, and transnational civil society linkages.⁹⁰ Russia, while

⁸⁶ Aleksei Naval’nyi, “(no subject),” *LiveJournal*, accessed April 17, 2021, <https://navalny.livejournal.com/2011/12/21/>.

⁸⁷ Masha Gessen, *The Future is History: How Totalitarianism Reclaimed Russia* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2017), 336.

⁸⁸ Gessen, *The Future is History*, 362.

⁸⁹ Levitsky and Way, “International Linkage and Democratization,” 22.

⁹⁰ Levitsky and Way, “International Linkage and Democratization,” 22-23.

exporting large amounts of petroleum-based products to countries in European Union, it imports substantially more products from authoritarian states such as China (21.33% of total imports in 2018) and Belarus (5.73% of total imports in 2018) than it does from Western democracies like Germany (13.93% of total imports in 2018).⁹¹ The economic linkages between Russia and the West are likely not significant enough to influence any meaningful amount of democratization in Russia. Geopolitical linkages between Russia and the West are likewise limited; Russia's participation in Western-led alliances and organizations are limited, and Russia has formed its own international organizations (such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization and Eurasian Economic Union), which serve as geopolitical counterweights to Western organizations like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and European Union.

Social linkages, related to tourism, migration, and elite education in the West, are harder to measure, but tourism statistics from 2014 show that Russian citizens do often travel to nearby countries that are associated with the West: millions of Russians traveled to nearby Finland (no. 1 destination), Estonia (no.7), Poland (no. 9), and Germany (no. 10).⁹² However, Western tourists do not visit Russia on the same scale; Poland and Finland were the only Western or Western-associated countries in the top ten tourist origin countries in 2014.⁹³ Communications linkages--those created from telecommunications, Internet connections, and Western-media penetration--are less obviously influential. While Western social media companies such as

⁹¹ "Russia," Atlas of Economic Complexity, Harvard University, accessed April 22, 2021, <https://atlas.cid.harvard.edu/countries/186/export-basket>.

⁹² "Informatsiia o chisle turistskikh poezdok grazhdan Rossii v zarubezhnye strany za 2014 g." Federal Agency for Tourism, accessed 22 April 2021, https://www.tourism.gov.ru/content_s/analytics/statistics/statisticheskije-pokazатели-vzaimnykh-poezdok-grazhdan-rossiyskoy-federatsii-i-grazhdan-inostrannykh-vyborochnaya-statisticheskaya-informatsiya-rasschitannaya-v-sootvetstvii-s-ofitsialnoy-statistichesk/.

⁹³ "Informatsiia o chisle turistskikh poezdok inostrannykh grazhdan v Rossiiu za 2014 g.," Federal Agency for Tourism, accessed 22 April 2021, <https://www.tourism.gov.ru/contents/analytics/statistics/statisticheskije-pokazатели-vzaimnykh-poezdok-grazhdan-rossiyskoy-federatsii-i-grazhdan-inostrannykh-vyborochnaya-statisticheskaya-informatsiya-rasschitannaya-v-sootvetstvii-s-ofitsialnoy-statistichesk/>.

Twitter and Facebook do increase political awareness and general support for democracy in authoritarian regimes and sometimes become organizing platforms for opposition movements, the market share of these companies is often very low--in Russia in 2011 to 2012, only about seven percent of Russian adults used Twitter or Facebook.⁹⁴ Transnational civil society linkages -- ties to international NGOs, party organizations, and other networks -- were somewhat restricted in Russia in 2011, due to Russia's restrictive law on foreign NGOs. While the extremely restrictive version of the law was amended in 2009, the requirements left in place significantly affected the capacity of NGOs to do their work.⁹⁵

In short, Russia is largely resistant to any leverage that the West could use to promote democracy there. It is a large, militarily powerful country that is not as susceptible to Western pressures as some smaller, weaker countries perhaps are. Its linkages with the West are likewise limited: Russia is not solely economically dependent on the West and its geopolitical goals are often in opposition to those of the West. Its social linkages are difficult to measure and likely not altogether that important, and its communications linkages--to Western social media companies, for example--are often drowned out by domestic companies. Russia's transnational civil society linkages are also limited, in large part because of restrictions on foreign NGOs put in place in the mid-late 2000s.

Conclusion

The 2011 protest movement in Russia failed for a number of reasons that can be understood through the lens of the theories of democratization. The endogenous theories can be very clearly seen as being negated in Russia's case. First, despite the economic and political

⁹⁴ Ora John Reuter and David Szakonyi, "Online Social Media and Political Awareness in Authoritarian Regimes," *British Journal of Political Science* 45, no. 1 (January 2015): 49. <https://doi.org/10/gfbz6q>.

⁹⁵ "Fact Sheet: Russia's NGO Laws," Freedom House, accessed April 16, 2021, https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/Fact%20Sheet_0.pdf.

reforms introduced in the 1990s, the business/oligarch class that might have supported or financed the democratization movement was firmly under the thumb of Putin's regime. Second, Russia's security forces proved more than willing to suppress the protests through the use of force and arbitrary detentions and arrests. The exogenous theories likewise have been somewhat negated by the decision and anti-democratic actions taken by Putin and his supporters in the government. Russia's linkages with the West were somewhat limited and governed largely by economic and geopolitical considerations often in opposition to Western democracies; democracy-promoting NGOs likewise were restricted in their operational capacities because of this. Had some of these conditions been different, then it is possible that the pro-democracy protests would have been successful, or at least not so effectively crushed.

Chapter 4: Lukashenko's Fragile Authoritarianism

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Belarus became an independent country. In the early 1990s, Communist party officials, who were still in charge of the post-Soviet Belarusian government, largely resisted major reforms to Belarus's economy and political institutions, although there was a significant amount of pro-democracy activism and the creation and proliferation of political parties from 1991 to 1993.⁹⁶ In 1993, a new constitution that called for the election of Belarus's first president was ratified, and the election date was set for 23 June 1994. During the election, the two candidates who supported democratic reforms polled at a combined 23 percent of the vote, showing that there was a significant amount of support for market reforms and democratization among the voting population.⁹⁷ Aleksandr Lukashenko, a former Communist Party official at various collective and state farms, won a runoff election with 80.1 percent of the vote.⁹⁸ He remains the president of Belarus to this day, and under his rule Belarus has seen the least political and social reform out of any former Soviet republic.

In the years following Lukashenko's ascension to the presidency, there were a number of civil demonstrations and protests against the increasingly repressive actions of the Lukashenko government. On 26 April 1996, a commemoration march for the tenth anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster which was opposition-dominated (though not organized by the opposition) turned violent when Ukrainian militia group of nationalist extremists began assaulting the crowd,

⁹⁶ David Marples, "Chapter 3: Perestroika and Independence, 1985-1993," in *Belarus: A Denationalized Nation* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 85-112.

⁹⁷ Marples, "Chapter 4: A New Presidency, June 1994-Spring 1996," in *Belarus: A Denationalized Nation* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 116-141.

⁹⁸ Marples, "Chapter 4," 118.

and the day ended with some 204 people arrested, among them 17 of the militia who initiated the violent exchange.⁹⁹ A few weeks later in May, further demonstrations were met with police and militia violence against demonstrators. During the November 1996 protests against Lukashenko's proposed changes to the constitution, protesters were again suppressed through the use of force, and a referendum saw Lukashenko's proposed changes go through, giving Lukashenko far more power. After this crisis, Lukashenko's position at the top of an increasingly authoritarian regime was cemented. Authoritarian and anti-democratic measures, such as the silencing of the opposition press and the normalization of electoral irregularities, soon followed. After the 2006 presidential election was deemed to have been neither free nor fair, citizens took to the streets of Minsk to protest the results, but they were quickly dispersed by riot police who arrested between 500 and 1000 people, 392 of whom were subsequently sentenced.¹⁰⁰

The most recent protest movement in Belarus was sparked by the results of the presidential election that was held on August 9, 2020. The election was marred by claims of electoral fraud and the outright bans of opposition candidates, which encouraged protesters to take to the streets in the aftermath of the election. The protest movement's main goals were to overturn the election results and to hold new elections that were free and fair. This protest movement, while still somewhat active, no longer sees the same widespread public action that it did in the days and weeks immediately following the August election. In addition, the main goals of the protests have not been achieved. Aleksandr Lukashenko, despite the scores of protesters calling for his resignation, is still the president of Belarus, and no elections have been held since the presidential election in August.

⁹⁹ Marples, "Chapter 4," 135-6.

¹⁰⁰ Elena Korosteleva, "Was There a Quiet Revolution? Belarus After the 2006 Presidential Election," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 25, no. 2-3 (September 2009): 326, <https://doi.org/10/fg283x>.

Endogenous Theories

Postcommunist Economic and Political Reforms

Belarus differs from the other countries being examined in that it did not drastically reform its economy in the years following its independence. Aleksandr Lukashenko, president since 1994, may have initially presented himself as a reformer and man of the people, but in practice he proved himself to be neither of these things.¹⁰¹ Generally, countries that quickly and drastically reformed their economies into market economies, allowing the creation of an independent business class whose interests are not entirely dictated by the state, are more likely to be democratic. While some limited economic reforms, aimed at privatizing state-owned enterprises and encouraging private entrepreneurship, were attempted in Belarus, they did not last very long on account of Lukashenko's aversion to real reform. Today, state-owned enterprises account for roughly half of the Belarusian GDP and around sixty percent of employment.¹⁰² This high level of state involvement in the economy gives the state a decisive advantage when it comes to dealing with protests. Protesters or opposition sympathizers who work for state-owned industries--as many Belarusians do, given the scale of state economic involvement--have fewer resources to "finance the organization of mobilization" and instead have to rely simply on the courage of individuals to organize the protests.¹⁰³

In addition, in countries without a major independent business class, protestors have a much more difficult time attracting elites to help finance and organize protests.¹⁰⁴ While state owned enterprises dominate the Belarusian economy as a whole, there is still an active private

¹⁰¹ Andrew Wilson, *Belarus: The Last European Dictatorship* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 169.

¹⁰² Sergei Guriev. "The Political Economy of the Belarusian Crisis." *Intereconomics* 55, no. 5 (2020): 274

¹⁰³ Scott Radnitz. "The Color of Money: Privatization, Economic Dispersion, and the Post-Soviet 'Revolutions.'" *Comparative Politics* 42, no. 2 (2010): 134.

¹⁰⁴ Radnitz, "The Color of Money," 134.

sector. However, it faces an “unfair competitive environment, and [private firms] are harassed by bureaucrats.”¹⁰⁵ Private entrepreneurs lack the same level of access to political power and state resources that are common in other post-Soviet countries.¹⁰⁶ This lack of political power and general economic influence can help explain why the 2020 protests in Belarus have failed: the protests rely on normal people for organization, but those who would organize or join in the protests do not have sufficient financial backing to make sustaining the protests feasible. The private firms that do exist are already dogged by state intervention and competition. Economic and political power in Belarus are firmly in the hands of the state.

Given that the state has immense control over the economy as a whole, it is no surprise that most of the media and journalism sectors are either under direct state control or under immense state pressure. State-owned broadcasters are the only ones that broadcast nationwide and are able to reach the whole of Belarus’s population, and all of them spread propaganda for Lukashenko and the state.¹⁰⁷ While the internet has relieved some of the anti-democratic pressure coming from the regime, it is primarily used by younger Belarusians and has also had restrictions placed on it. Laws introduced in 2009 and 2010 created obstacles for independent journalists and media outlets and restricted certain parts of the internet.¹⁰⁸ While some independent media organizations have managed to continue their operations, others have been forced to shut down or have moved operations to nearby countries. The regime has stamped out most media organizations that would pose a direct threat to it, and those that are left have been forced to leave the country, weakening their access to information and influence further.

¹⁰⁵ Guriev, “The Political Economy of the Belarusian Crisis,” 274.

¹⁰⁶ A.V. Buzgalin and A.I. Kolganov. “The Protests in Belarus: Context, Causes, and Lessons.” *Critical Sociology*, December 30, 2020, 4.

¹⁰⁷ Oleg Manaev, “Media in Post-Soviet Belarus: Between Democratization and Reinforcing Authoritarianism,” *Demokratizatsiya* 22, no. 2 (Spring 2014): 211.

¹⁰⁸ Manaev, “Media in Post-Soviet Belarus,” 211-12.

Table 4: Belarusian Polity2 Score and Economic Freedom Index

Belarus		
Year	Polity2	EF Index
1995	0	40.4
1996	-7	38.7
1997	-7	39.8
1998	-7	38
1999	-7	35.4
2000	-7	41.3
2001	-7	38
2002	-7	39
2003	-7	39.7
2004	-7	43.1
2005	-7	46.7
2006	-7	47.5
2007	-7	47
2008	-7	45.3
2009	-7	45
2010	-7	48.7
2011	-7	47.9
2012	-7	49
2013	-7	48
2014	-7	50.1
2015	-7	49.8
2016	-7	48.8
2017	-7	58.6
2018	-7	58.1

Sources: Polity5 Annual Time-Series, 1946-2018 and Heritage Foundation 2021 Index of Economic Freedom

Table 4 above shows the extreme authoritarianism of Lukashenko's regime in Belarus. In the early 1990s, there might have been some hope for democratic reform. In 1995, the year Lukashenko was able to modify the constitution and further consolidate power, the Polity2 score sits at zero. One year later, it drops all the way to -7 and has remained at that level ever since. Belarus has by far the most authoritarian government of the four case studies; the others have managed to maintain a positive Polity2 score for most of their recent histories. Economic

freedom is also fairly low in Belarus when compared to the other case studies. In this respect, it is most comparable to Russia, where the 2011 protest movement failed. This trend of unending authoritarianism certainly continued into 2020. It should be no surprise that Lukashenko actively repressed the protests when his extreme authoritarianism has kept him in power for so long.

Agency of Activists

The activists on the ground in Belarus were relatively well organized, though their methods of organization and attracting supporters to join their marches and demonstrations differed from those used in other democratization movements. Notably, the Belarusian democratization movement did not rely on rallies during its marches. This organizational decision served to promote other protest tactics in which the protesters participated as equals, such as the many marches and human chains that were a part of the broader democratization movement.¹⁰⁹ In addition, the relatively few prominent opposition leaders frequently address their supporters in a way that foregrounds their own agency as citizens and protesters, rather than speaking for them or using a “rally around the flag” approach.¹¹⁰ This approach emphasized the role of protesters as activists and representatives as a larger pro-democracy movement, rather than just supporters of a certain opposition political faction or figure.¹¹¹ In this form of organization, the Belarusian protests were not unlike the ones in Georgia. Both used a relatively flat organizational structure centered around the activism and agency of individual citizens.

As in Kyrgyzstan, social media played an important role in the organization and mobilization of protests, although this organization took place on other platforms for the most part. The most important social media platform during the 2020 pro-democracy protests was

¹⁰⁹ Mischa Gabowitsch, “Belarusian Protest: Regimes of Engagement and Coordination,” *Slavic Review* 80, no. 1 (Spring 2021): 28, <https://doi.org/doi:10.1017/slr.2021.28>.

¹¹⁰ Gabowitsch, “Belarusian Protest,” 29.

¹¹¹ Gabowitsch, “Belarusian Protest,” 30.

likely the messaging platform Telegram, where users can both message each other privately and join large channels where announcements and other updates can be made to thousands of users at once. While there were certainly other platforms involved, the regime greatly restricted internet traffic as the protests began, limiting where people could get information about the democratization movement -- Telegram was one of the only major platforms that continued working during the regime's internet blackouts.¹¹² NEXTA, an opposition media organization based in Warsaw, operated several channels that were instrumental in disseminating information to Belarusians and international observers. One Telegram channel, NEXTA Live, quickly grew to over one million users who were all receiving the same updates about protest times and locations and the actions of the Belarusian police and special security forces, enabling relatively synchronized protests in cities all across Belarus.¹¹³

The organizational resilience of the pro-democracy protesters in Belarus is remarkable -- the protest organizers were able to effectively side-step the regime's emergency restrictions on internet access and use during the first waves of major demonstrations. In other cases where the organization of protests was more dependent on traditional forms of media rather than large-scale messaging boards and announcement channels, the regime's strategy of blocking or outright shutting down the outlets might have worked. It also enabled the opposition leaders, many of whom had been forced to flee Belarus for their own safety, to continue communicating with their supporters in the streets of Belarus.

¹¹² Robert Coalson, "How Telegram Users Found A Way Through Belarus's Internet Lockdown," RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, accessed April 23, 2021, <https://www.rferl.org/a/how-telegram-users-found-a-way-through-belarus-s-internet-lockdown/30780136.html>.

¹¹³ NEXTA Live, "KAK GOTOVIMSIA K MARSHU SPRAVEDLIVOSTI?" Telegram, September 19, 2020, 2:41 p.m., https://t.me/nexta_live/11242.

Security Apparatus

The Belarusian security apparatus is a group of opaque, feared organizations. The main Belarusian intelligence agency still bears the name of its feared Soviet predecessor, the KGB. Together with the Interior and Defense Ministries, the security apparatus in Belarus has shown itself to be eager to protect the regime from all threats foreign or domestic, even if it means brutalizing the people of Belarus. The culture of the various security organizations appears to be similar to that in Russia -- the state generally comes before the people.

While the Belarusian economy has had its fair share of troubles in the three decades since independence, Lukashenko's regime has always found the money to put into the security services. Belarus does not have the same natural resources as Russia or Azerbaijan, where oil revenues could be used to fund security operations. However, pipelines carrying Russian oil westward across Belarus to the rest of Europe still provide billions of dollars in oil export revenue to the regime, helping prop it up and enabling the funding of its operations.¹¹⁴ The regime in Belarus did not have the same problems paying its enforcers that the Shevardnadze regime had in Georgia in 2003. So long as the enforcers got paid for doing their jobs, there was no real risk of the security forces losing their motivation to defend the regime or defecting to the democratization movement, at least from an economic point of view.

In contrast to the Georgian and Kyrgyz situations, the security apparatus in Belarus was and is very loyal to Lukashenko. Lukashenko has to depend on the unity, loyalty, and willingness to "crack heads" of his security forces to maintain his grip on power.¹¹⁵ To ensure the necessary

¹¹⁴ Nik Martin, "Belarus' Soviet-Era Economy Still Propped up by Moscow," *Deutsche Welle*, August 25, 2020, <https://p.dw.com/p/3hUdQ>.

¹¹⁵ Mark Galleotti, "In Moscow's Shadows Cellcast: 11 August 2020: Russia and Belarus," August 13, 2020, in *In Moscow's Shadows*, podcast, 10:52, <https://www.buzzsprout.com/1026985/4977737-in-moscow-s-shadows-cellcast-11-august-2020-russia-and-belarus>.

loyalty, Lukashenko has changed around some of his heads of the security organizations in 2020. Lukashenko appointed Ivan Tertel to be the next head of the KGB in response to the Russian offer of support for Lukashenko. Tertel is loyal, and he and Lukashenko have worked together in suppressing political unrest before.¹¹⁶ Yuri Karayev, head of the Interior Ministry which sent out the OMON special police units to repress the pro-democracy protests, is firmly loyal to Lukashenko as well.¹¹⁷ Viktor Khrenin, a loyal and unimaginative supporter of the regime, was named Minister of the Defense, and during the protests he declared to his military subordinates that there was a real possibility that the military would have to get involved to suppress the protests.¹¹⁸ The loyalty of the heads of the Belarusian security apparatus cannot be doubted, and this loyalty likely extends much farther down into the ranks, giving Lukashenko a powerful security apparatus that he was able to use to clamp down on the democratization movement and maintain power.

Exogenous Theories

International Linkages and Diffusion

The exogenous theories of democratization normally play an important role in the formation and spread of democratization movements. In Belarus, however, the effects of international linkages and diffusion were blunted by Belarus's geopolitical position and dependence on Russia. Political liberalization and reform had been virtually halted by Lukashenko during his decades in power, stunting the growth of nongovernmental organizations both domestic and foreign. Further, restrictions were actually placed on the operations of NGOs,

¹¹⁶ Mark Galleotti, "In Moscow's Shadows Cellcast: 6 September 2020: Belarus's Strongmen," September 11, 2020, in *In Moscow's Shadows*, podcast, 12:33, <https://www.buzzsprout.com/1026985/5313799-in-moscow-s-shadows-cellcast-6-september-2020-belarus-s-strongmen>.

¹¹⁷ Galleotti, "Belarus's Strongmen."

¹¹⁸ Galleotti, "Belarus's Strongmen."

limiting the impact that any existing NGOs could have. The regime took careful steps to prevent another Georgia or Kyrgyzstan scenario from playing out in Belarus.

In contrast to the situation of international linkages and diffusion in Russia, Belarus is more vulnerable to external Western pressure. Belarus is not a particularly large or powerful country on the global stage, and it has thus had to manage its relations with both Russia and its neighbors in the European Union. Belarus does have significant ties to the West, due to it bordering a number of European Union member states and also via gas pipelines that cross through its territory, carrying Russian gas exports to the EU.¹¹⁹ However, Belarus's close ties to Russia have served to insulate Lukashenko's government from any serious Western democratizing pressure through political backing and major economic subsidies from Russia.¹²⁰

In addition to the economic and political backing from Russia insulating the Lukashenko regime from external democratizing pressure, the development aid from Western democracies that was so influential in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan was restricted in Belarus. NGOs that might have received guidance and funding from abroad had that financial backing cut off in 2003 when Lukashenko implemented a law that forced NGOs to receive prior approval before receiving donations from abroad and greatly restricted the operations for which donation funds were allowed to be used.¹²¹ This attempt at defunding the NGOs that might have helped Belarusian civil society develop was relatively successful. Western influence on Belarusian civil society has been nowhere near as effective at promoting democratization as it was in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, where such restrictive laws were never implemented.

¹¹⁹ Andrew Wilson, *Belarus: The Last European Dictatorship* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011): 238.

¹²⁰ Levitsky and Way, "International Linkage and Democratization," 32.

¹²¹ Darin Christensen and Jeremy M. Weinstein, "Defunding Dissent: Restrictions on Aid to NGOs," *Journal of Democracy* 24, no. 2 (2013): 85, <https://doi.org/10/gjsggf>.

Conclusion

The failure of the 2020 democratization movement in Belarus in 2020 can be understood through the lens of theories of democratization. In Belarus's case, the effects of these theories appear to be limited, or even completely negated, by actions taken by Lukashenko's regime. The endogenous theories about economic and political reforms, agency of activists in the streets, and the strength and effectiveness of the security apparatus can be used to understand the situation in Belarus, especially when examining the steps taken by the regime to limit democratizing pressure from within. No major business/oligarch class that could challenge the regime ever really developed in Belarus since the state maintained control over most of the economy. In addition, the security apparatus is loyal to Lukashenko and more than willing to use force to break up protests. The exogenous theories again have largely been negated by Lukashenko's choice to stay close to an increasingly-authoritarian Russia, and the limitations on NGOs have prevented foreign, pro-democracy NGOs from gaining very much ground in Belarus. The anti-democratic conditions created by the Lukashenko regime in Belarus severely limited or outright negated virtually all of the theories of democratization.

Conclusion

The democratization movements in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Belarus each began with similar circumstances: increasingly authoritarian leaders, growing corruption in the government, and fraudulent elections. In Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, the democratization movements were successful in achieving change: the Georgian and Kyrgyz regimes were toppled and replaced with at least nominally more pro-democracy leaders and governments. In Russia and Belarus, the opposite was true. The regimes in those countries were not removed from power, and in some ways they may have even tightened their grip on power. The Russian and Belarusian democratization movements, then, were not successful in achieving meaningful democratic change.

Each of these four democratization movements, even with their differing outcomes, can be understood through the theories of the democratization that have been developed over the last several decades. Georgia is perhaps the model example of the theories in practice; both the endogenous and exogenous theories appear to have played out there in the 2003 mass protest movement that brought Georgia closer to democracy. The events in Georgia have likewise influenced the further development of the theories of democratization in the nearly two decades since its political reckoning. The theories can be well applied in Kyrgyzstan's case, too, though perhaps not as clearly as in Georgia, thanks to Kyrgyzstan's vastly different political landscape and history of mass pro-democracy protests. Both countries moved quickly towards establishing market economies and fostered vibrant civil societies, enabling the financing and spread of pro-democracy ideas in both countries. Both also had extensive ties to other democracies. The

Georgian protesters were well-organized and determined, and the Georgian security apparatus was not strong or loyal enough to effectively end the protests. The Kyrgyz protesters may not have received the same training as their Georgian counterparts, but they were just as determined, and the Kyrgyz security apparatus was similarly ineffective at controlling and ending the protests before the government was toppled.

In contrast, the Russian and Belarusian democratization movements may be understood through the steps taken by their regimes to negate any influences that might shift their countries toward democracy. Stalled reforms, restrictions on outside pro-democracy influence, and repressive political cultures coupled with fearsome security organizations all played a part in the failure of the protests in both Russia and Belarus. Russia's commanding presence on the world stage insulated it from Western democratizing influences, and Belarus's close relationship with Russia did the same in the end. Economic reliance on oil and gas revenues slowed, and potentially reversed, some of the economic reforms that might have aided the spread of democracy in Russia. Belarus has always been averse to reforms under Lukashenko's regime, and its dependence on the Russian economy has fused its political-economic structure ever tighter with Russia's.

Table 5, shown on the following page, compares the Polity2 (democracy) scores to the Index of Economic Freedom rating for each of the four countries. In terms of political and economic reform, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan are the clear leaders, with higher ratings for both measurements across all years thanks to their wide-reaching reforms. Russia and Belarus, on the other hand, did not reform their political and economic systems as much, or had the effects of their reforms curtailed by state interests. Their lower scores across the board are a reflection of this reality created by the reactions of authoritarian states to the "encroachment" of pro-

democracy pressures both at home and abroad, seen in the stagnated reforms, consolidation of political and economic power, and the brutal repression tactics employed by these states.

Table 5: Comparison of Polity2 Scores and Economic Freedom Index

Year	Georgia		Kyrgyzstan		Russia		Belarus	
	Polity2	EF Index	Polity2	EF Index	Polity2	EF Index	Polity2	EF Index
1998	4	47.9	-3	51.8	3	52.8	-7	38
1999	4	52.5	-3	54.8	3	54.5	-7	35.4
2000	2	54.3	-3	55.7	6	51.8	-7	41.3
2001	2	58.3	-3	53.7	6	49.8	-7	38
2002	2	56.7	-3	51.7	6	48.7	-7	39
2003	2	58.6	-3	56.8	6	50.8	-7	39.7
2004	6	58.9	-3	58	6	52.8	-7	43.1
2005	7	57.1	3	56.6	6	51.3	-7	46.7
2006	7	64.5	4	61	6	52.4	-7	47.5
2007	6	69.3	3	60.2	4	52.2	-7	47
2008	6	69.2	3	61.1	4	49.8	-7	45.3
2009	6	69.8	1	61.8	4	50.8	-7	45
2010	6	70.4	4	61.3	4	50.3	-7	48.7
2011	6	70.4	7	61.1	4	50.5	-7	47.9
2012	6	69.4	7	60.2	4	50.5	-7	49
2013	7	72.2	7	59.6	4	51.1	-7	48
2014	7	72.6	7	61.1	4	51.9	-7	50.1
2015	7	73	7	61.3	4	52.1	-7	49.8
2016	7	72.6	7	59.6	4	50.6	-7	48.8
2017	7	76	8	61.1	4	57.1	-7	58.6
2018	7	76.2	8	62.8	4	58.2	-7	58.1

Sources: Polity5 Annual Time-Series, 1946-2018 and Heritage Foundation 2021 Index of Economic Freedom

Ultimately, the theories of democratization apply in each of these four case studies. In Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, their predictions are largely proven to be correct and applicable in each country. In Russia and Belarus, their general predictions are not what occurred. However, they are still valuable in that they illuminate what authoritarian regimes might do to suppress democratization in their countries. Perhaps there are other ways activists might engage with

authoritarian regimes to bring about democratization that are not so well described by existing theories, and it is still possible to create change in those countries.

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