

Quick Counts

These regime changes were not just about people taking to the streets; they were also the product of science. Activists crafted messages by relying on specific technologies, focus groups, and polling data. Most important, they used a “parallel vote tabulation” (PVT) to detect election fraud, a method that randomly samples 2 to 5 percent of polling stations and counts the votes, tracing the results up the administrative chain. A PVT is not rocket science, but it is not magic either. It allows activists in places like Chile, the Philippines, Bulgaria, and yes, Serbia and Georgia, to confirm or challenge

Media Space

Democratic activists must find some outlet to get their message to the people. If they have no public space, they cannot mobilize. Media can drive people to the polls or keep them away. They have the power to institutionalize the rule of law or, as in Rwanda, incite genocide.

US donors and policymakers have not accorded media enough priority in foreign assistance. In addition to training journalists, donors can support activist training in strategic communication with public opinion data. In places with constricted media, these become alternative media strategies.

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election results shortly after they are announced.

In 1995 I helped bring an inventor of this method to Russia. But governments and private donors did not rush in to fund a PVT in Russia as they had done elsewhere. Unsurprisingly, it took weeks after the December 2003 parliamentary elections for Russian organizations, claiming to have run a “quick count,” to release their information in confusing and incomplete press statements. Maybe before the next federal election cycle in Russia, donors will take seriously the need to fund and train for this complex operation.

Coalition Politics

All of the above are conditions that outsiders can affect. They instruct democratic activists to go back to the basics of social and political campaigning. These are not US, Serb, or Georgian technologies; they are effective technologies to open and maintain public political space based on local demand. However, it is also important to understand the conditions outsiders cannot easily affect.

The first is that an organized opposition is always better than a disorganized one. In Georgia and Serbia, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), political parties, and the media all worked together. But in many former Soviet states, the failure to cooperate has plagued transitions. Political parties sometimes try to broker deals with corrupt authorities. NGOs often disdain parties. The media is weak, and journalists feel powerless.

Outsiders cannot create coalitions; we can only remind activists of what happens when coalitions are absent. In reality, groups often go it alone, even at their own peril. For example, more than ten years of efforts in Russia have yielded few successful coalitions. Liberal candidates in certain districts did occasionally negotiate to avoid splitting the democratic vote, but these efforts were too little, too late. And despite Russian authorities’ aggressive moves on the media, no media coalitions formed as they had in Serbia.

Serbia and Georgia showed that activists could, with training, learn to craft resonating messages even in controlled political spaces. In fact, Georgian media was open enough to air a documentary about Serb activists bringing down their dictator. In Serbia the media space was just enough to land activists on the radio. But this was not the case in Azerbaijan, is often not in Russia, and is never in Belarus.

Security Services

While all of the above conditions are necessary for regime change, security services in both Serbia and Georgia were critical in enabling citizens to assemble without violence. What explains this? Some point out that in Georgia, law enforcement training included a human rights component. True, but security services are strategic actors that make calculations about whom the winners and losers are likely to be. They were influenced by the mistakes of Milosevic and Shevardnadze and by smart activists who took advantage.

Outsiders have an extremely limited role to play, but they can encourage local stakeholders to create back channels to security services. The Serbian and Georgian cases suggest that there exists a tipping point for convincing security services to remain peaceful. In the end, it made the difference between blood and no blood.

Then, the Hard Part

The lessons are fairly positive for promoters of democracy—especially in small states with enough media freedom and foreign assistance. These conditions are, however, not always replicable. The real and often heartbreaking problem for all involved is that even when these conditions exist, the critical work only just begins the day after the election. As we have seen in Serbia, jubilation can turn easily to tears. We are still holding our breath for Georgia. It is in the months and years that follow peaceful revolution that the true tests come. But that, of course, is another story. ■

The Seven Ingredients

When Democracy Promotion Works

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The fall of Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze, like the ousting of Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic, will go down as the stuff of democracy promotion legend. As in any successful campaign, veterans were revered and the defeated grew bitter. Authoritarians everywhere foamed at the mouth. "There were democracy camps where the Serbs trained the Georgians!" snarled one Russian parliamentarian, perhaps made uneasy by headlines about the triumph of people power. Although such accounts heralded the victory of democracy, from the sidelines many democracy activists were secretly and silently puzzled. What did the Serb and Georgian activists do right? What are we doing wrong? What did Serbia and Georgia have going for them that, say, Russia, Belarus, and Azerbaijan do not?

Serbia and Georgia offer many lessons. When specific conditions come together, we see extraordinary outcomes. The international community has enormous control over some of these conditions, and very little over others. All of them, however, must be better understood if we are to see peaceful regime change and democracy promotion at its best.

Getting Supply and Demand Right

The success in Georgia reaffirmed the importance of matching local activists with like-minded international democracy trainers. A very specific form of regime change has emerged from this close match between local demand and international supply. But it is unusual. Democracy training—in election observation, in the nuts and bolts of campaigns—goes on all over the world, every day, and the sort of chemistry we saw in Serbia and Georgia rarely manifests itself.

I know from personal experience. In 2002 I helped bring some of the very same Serb activists who worked in Georgia to talk with human rights activists in Russia. Like in most trainings, however, the results were minimal. The Serbs, though funny, smart, and interesting, were not especially good trainers for what the Russians needed: basic training in strategic communication and public awareness campaigns. As they freely admit, they are gas on the fire only if it is already lit.

So before rushing Serb or Georgian activists to the next exotic locale, democracy promoters ought to think more about supply and demand. One solution is the establishment

of an international training center that could match activists from around the world. Although Freedom House has attempted such cross-border work in Eastern Europe and Eurasia, this effort should be institutionalized and adequately subsidized.

The demand side is simpler. Public demand can be measured by large quantity, randomly sampled survey data, which allows donors to program dollars efficiently and helps activists on the ground speak effectively to the local population. Foreign assistance is commonly criticized as Western imperialism, driven by outsiders' interests. But when guided by survey data, assistance becomes fundamentally about responding to citizens. What do *the people* want? How can activists address citizens' interests? The Serb organization *Otpor!* did not manufacture resentment of Milosevic any more than the Georgian organization *Kmara* did of Shevardnadze in Georgia. They simply started listening and responding to the people.

Sufficient Assistance, Consistent US Policy

Democracy-promotion efforts in Georgia and Serbia were well-funded. In Serbia, estimates ranged from US\$10 to \$40 million over two years, and in the post-Soviet period, the United States might have spent more than a billion dollars on assistance in Georgia.

The good news is that the impact of democracy promotion is especially great in less populated countries such as Georgia and Serbia. The bad news, however, is that US foreign policy is often self-contradictory, rhetorically supporting democracy promotion in regions such as the Middle East while under-funding and ignoring assaults on democratic activists elsewhere, as in Central Asia and Russia.

Policymakers should do a far better job of figuring out how much democracy promotion *really* costs—and then funding it. Instead, the US Congress allocates money and the US Department of State and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) spend it without sufficient strategic analysis of what the goals are and how much money is needed to achieve them. The US government, along with many public and private donors, has long under-funded this work, treating it as a luxury rather than fundamental to stability and security. Moreover, the modest funding has actually thinned just as activist capacity has increased and threats from authorities have multiplied. It is not terribly surprising that the impact of foreign assistance has been limited.