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### *Defining and Domesticating the Electoral Model: A Comparison of Slovakia and Serbia*

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Defining and Domesticating the Electoral Model:

A Comparison of Slovakia and Serbia

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## Introduction

The transitions to democracy in the postcommunist region over the past decade and one-half share a common dynamic, featuring the interaction between two sets of factors. The first is the long-term development of both civil society and a liberal opposition. The second is more short-term: an expansion of international support for regime change, clear demonstration by mass publics that they reject incumbent illiberal regimes (through protests and voting), and the victory of the liberal opposition in competitive elections. Successful democratization in the postcommunist world, therefore, seems to rest upon mass mobilization, a supportive international environment, and a sharp break with the authoritarian past, rather than the model that emerged in Spain and parts of Latin America; that is, a largely domestic dynamic combining bargaining between incumbent and opposition elites and elections and policies in the early stages of transition that bridged the old and the new order (Bunce, 2003).

In one respect, however, the democratic transitions in the postcommunist world have been typical of the Third Wave. What we see is an intra-regional diffusion of democratization (see Brinks and Coppedge, 2005; Bunce and Wolchik, 2006c). In the postcommunist area, diffusion dynamics reflect the persuasive power of positive precedents, a supportive international community, similar domestic conditions, and a long history of cross-national collaboration among opposition groups—with the final three factors of particular and distinctive importance (Bunce and Wolchik, 2006b).

Embedded in this common story of transitions to democracy, however, are critical differences within the region in the details of transition—differences that provide insights, more generally, into the “how” and the “why” of recent transitions to democracy. The most important of these distinctions is the timing of the transition, and what that suggests in turn about the variable legacies of the communist era and their consequences for regime development once communist party hegemony, the Soviet bloc, and the Soviet, Yugoslav and Czechoslovak states unraveled between 1989 and 1992. Put simply, the first round of transitions to democracy in this region—that is, those in Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, the Baltic states and Slovenia—benefited from a communist past that had forged a strong liberal (and often nationalist) opposition and that had also built a popular consensus around three related issues: rejection of the communist model of politics and economics, substitution of liberal political and economic regimes for this model, and integration with Western economic, political and security institutions. This consensus was reflected in the campaign slogans of almost all parties and movements that participated in the first free elections in these countries: “Democracy, the Market, and Back to Europe.”

In the early years of the postcommunist transitions, however, this supportive dynamic was in fact the regional exception, not the rule (see Bunce, 1999a; Bunce, 2006). In the remaining twenty countries, the communist past, coupled with the formation of successor regimes and in most cases successor states as well, created a public more

divided on the three issues specified above; an opposition that was also divided on these issues, as well as on the definition of the nation and the borders of the state; a communist party less willing to exit or cooperate (though Georgia was exceptional here); and more powerful illiberal elites, whether communists, nationalists, or a combination of the two. In these cases, much of the “work” of building public support for democracy and integration with the West, of constructing a large, united and effective liberal opposition, and of creating, as a result, the conditions for defeating illiberal regimes at the polls and in the streets and thereafter producing a transition to fully democratic politics were all tasks that had to be carried out *after* the pivotal events of 1989-1992. Because of their timing, moreover, these struggles had to take place in the context of successor regimes that were intent on staying in power; that were often corrupt; and that, by combining their experiences during communism with the advantages of being both forewarned and forearmed by democratization in their “neighborhood,” were unusually savvy in blocking major and sustained political and economic reforms. Once the Cold War ended, moreover, the role of the international environment in this region also changed. Both the U.S. and the European Union became democracy promoters in the postcommunist area, while Russia, especially in the “near abroad,” often played the opposite role, especially where porous state boundaries and energy dependence facilitated Russian influence. As in the earlier waves of democratization, however, the later transitions depended upon a confluence between domestic support for democratization and international assistance (Carothers, 2004).

### Slovakia and Serbia

It is precisely these later transitions to democracy that are of interest in this paper. In particular, we compare the decisive turn to democratic politics in Slovakia in 1998 with a similar dramatic political turn in Serbia in 2000.<sup>1</sup> Such a comparison is instructive because of the importance of the model of democratization that was developed and applied in these cases, and because of the insights these two countries offer as a consequence of variations in both political-economic context and the nature of their electoral revolutions.

Slovakia and Serbia in fact played a pivotal role in developing a distinctive and remarkably effective model of democratization: the electoral revolution. This model combines such actions as forging a more united liberal opposition, conducting sophisticated campaigns, expanding voter registration and turnout, and improving the

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<sup>1</sup> While the state has been variously called Yugoslavia, the former Yugoslavia, and Serbia and Montenegro, it is in fact developments within Serbia that are of interest in this study—though Milosevic, it is important to note, moved from being President of Serbia to being President of Yugoslavia in 1997 and the election of interest in 2000 was in fact an election for the Presidency of the state as a whole, not Serbia. However, we will nonetheless refer primarily to Serbia in the analysis that follows. First, the central political actor in the federation is Serbia, given that this is precisely where Milosevic focused most of his career and power (since 1986, when he became head of the Serbian party) and since Serbia contains an overwhelming majority of the population of Serbia and Montenegro. Second, both the timing and the approach to democratization was different in Montenegro than in Serbia, with Montenegro best understood as a sideshow to Serbian developments—though a sideshow that is in the process of becoming a sovereign state, depending upon the outcome of the referendum in the summer, 2006. Finally, it is fair to argue that there could be in effect no democratization in Serbia and Montenegro until politics underwent a dramatic shift in Serbia.

quality of election procedures, including the accuracy of vote tabulation. It is termed a revolution for three reasons (aside from the obvious ones of journalistic hyperbole and their parallels to the events of 1989). Such elections typically involve massive increases in citizen mobilization—at the polls and often in the streets. Moreover, these electoral exercises are committed to significant changes in governments, represented constituencies, political ideologies and domestic and foreign policies. Finally, when successful in bringing liberal governments to power, they have had political consequences that have been far more significant for the future of democracy than “normal” electoral politics. They have put an end to de-democratization (Slovakia); they have produced a democratic turn that led to consolidation of democracy down the road (Slovakia, Bulgaria and Romania); they have ended an authoritarian polity long in place and increased substantially the likelihood of full-scale democracy (Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine); or they have produced a veritable leap from dictatorial to democratic politics (Croatia).

In part because of the success of the efforts in Serbia and especially Slovakia, moreover, the electoral revolution has proven to be an unusually attractive approach to democratization for opposition groups operating in competitive authoritarian regimes in the postcommunist region-- whether attempts to emulate the experiences of Slovakia and Serbia were successful in empowering liberal regimes through electoral revolutions (as in Croatia, Georgia, and Ukraine) or failed to do so (as in Belarus in 2006, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan in 2005, and Armenia 2003-2004) (and see Levitsky and Way, 2002; Diamond, 2002; Way, 2005 on hybrid regimes that “tolerate” competitive elections). While there is little question that diffusion dynamics were at work in these electoral revolutions, it is also important to realize that the diffusion process in this case is more complex than it might seem.

It is not just that the story of electoral revolutions actually begins with the Serbian electoral protests in 1996-1997, which then influenced protests and then elections in Bulgaria and Romania from 1997-1998, that the Bulgarian and Romanian electoral shifts, the formula for change underlying them, and even some of the actors involved influenced in turn the OK98 campaign in Slovakia, or that both Slovakia and Slovaks influenced the elections in Yugoslavia (now Serbia and Montenegro) two years later.

The origins of this model go further back and have played out on a global stage. The first examples of attempted electoral revolutions took place in the Philippines in 1986 and Chile in 1988 (see, for example, Bunce and Wolchik, 2006a; Thompson and Kuntz, 2004); since that time there have been a large number of such attempted and sometimes successful revolutions in southeast Asia (Burma and Indonesia), Latin America (Nicaragua and Peru), North Africa (Algeria), and Sub-Saharan Africa (here, the long list includes, Benin, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ivory Coast, Madagascar, Nigeria, Togo and Zimbabwe).

However, the variant of the electoral revolution developed in Slovakia and Serbia has become in effect *the* approach to democratic breakthroughs in the postcommunist region for all those states in the region that in the early years of transition fell in between the poles of full-scale democracies and full-scale dictatorships. Indeed, since the first round of democratization in the early 1990s, it has only been through such electoral revolutions that the remaining countries in this region have demonstrated significant

improvements in their democratic performance—as Freedom House figures indicate (but also see Vachudova, 2005 on the leverage provided by the European Union).

Finally, there are some important contrasts between the Slovak and the Serbian cases which allow us to understand the electoral model as a dynamic that evolves, depending upon local circumstances. Serbia added in particular mass protest after the elections to the model. This change from the pattern evident in Slovakia and Croatia, where mass mobilization of citizens to vote in elections was sufficient to oust authoritarians and their successors, was a necessity in that context, given the resistance of the incumbent regime to recognizing the victory of the liberal opposition in the first round of the Yugoslav Presidential elections in September, 2000. This innovation carries several important implications. One is that it reminds us that there have been in fact two distinctive rounds of electoral revolutions in the postcommunist area: those that produced an immediate transfer of power (Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia and Croatia) and those that required massive public protests for the liberal opposition to take office after the elections (Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan). The other is that it is the latter version of the model that is the most common in competitive authoritarian regimes around the world. As Marx reminded us, the ruling class does not give up power easily.

Our comparison will proceed in three stages. We begin the analysis by setting the regime context. Here, we discuss Slovakia under Meciar and Serbia under Milosevic. This comparison is motivated by two issues: the origins and structure of authoritarian rule and its evolution over time. We then turn to the events of 1998 in Slovakia and 2000 in Serbia. Here, the focus is on the development and application of the electoral model. Finally, in the concluding section of the paper, we discuss why these efforts succeeded, at least in the minimal, but nonetheless critical sense of producing a transition from illiberal to liberal governance. As Michael McFaul (2005) and others have suggested, the requirements for successful electoral revolutions are steep. All the stars have to be aligned.

### Authoritarianism under Meciar and Milosevic

In some ways, Slovak politics under Meciar and Serbian politics under Milosevic resembled one another. At the most general level, we can point to some similarities in the founding of these two states and the framing of both public opinion and elite struggles during their regime and state transitions. The new states of both Slovakia and Serbia (though both, especially Serbia, have historical antecedents as states prior to the communist era) came into being as a result of a two-step process. One was the accumulating costs over time of ethnofederation under communism—for example, the tendency of this form of state to create in its constituent republics both nations- and states-in-the-making and to create a chain of dependencies, both economic and political, between each republic and the center, rather than among the republics. As a result, over time republics followed increasingly varied political and economic trajectories; they competed with one another for the support of or control of the central, federal government; and they found it easy to develop resentments about their status within the ethnofederal state and the payoffs of state membership (Bunce, 1999b). All of these effects were exaggerated in turn by economic frustrations and the short-term opportunities for changes in regimes and state boundaries as a consequence of expanding

debates in the second half of the 1980s throughout the communist area about the future and form of political and economic liberalization. These debates, not surprisingly, played out differently in the constituent republics of Yugoslavia, while dividing and weakening the party and state apparatus at the center. In Czechoslovakia, where the political system remained far more repressive and rigid than that in the Soviet Union under Gorbachev, not to say, post-Tito Yugoslavia, it was only in the last two years of communist rule that experts and intellectuals could begin to use the r (reform) word again. But, even during the heyday of so-called “normalization” under Gustav Husak, developments in the periphery (Slovakia), were somewhat different than those in Prague. One of the most evident, and eventually significant, differences, was in the nature of the opposition, which was most evident in religious activities in Slovakia, as well as actions by small numbers of intellectuals involved in “islands of creative deviance,” as Martin Butora, one of the founders of Public Against Violence and later independent candidate for the Presidency in Slovakia, termed them. In Prague, by way of contrast, dissident intellectuals centered around Charter 77 were the most visible opponents of the regime. Sources of discontent were also somewhat different in the two parts of the country: in Slovakia, dissatisfaction with the communist system was coupled with an added dissatisfaction with the perceived neglect of Slovak interests by the (Pragocentric) federation.

As a consequence, the transition from communism in both Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia created a combustible combination of political struggles within the republics over the nation, the state, and the regime, and the agenda of transition in both Serbia and Slovakia included not just the familiar choices between liberal versus illiberal political and economic regimes and rule by the communists versus the opposition, but also between an expansive and a narrow definition of the nation and existing state boundaries versus republican sovereignty (and, in the Serbian case, the boundaries of the new state).

The struggles over nation, state and regime divided what had been in fact a relatively large liberal opposition in Serbia during the communist era, and a much smaller group of liberal intellectuals and more traditional, nationalist, Catholic lay leaders in Slovakia. These issues created, as a result, an opportunity for enterprising communist politicians, whether at the top of the party or lower down, to seize upon exclusionary nationalism as a way either to maintain power (as in Serbia) or to gain power (as in Slovakia) through nationalist and populist appeals to the population and, perhaps more importantly, through the division, cooptation and demobilization of both other communist elites and the liberal opposition (see, especially, Gagnon, 2005 on this final point for Serbia and Croatia). This dynamic was also facilitated by the decentralization of the Czechoslovak and Yugoslav ethnofederations at the time of the transition—for example, the absence of a powerful and integrative center, constitutions that focused political struggles over transition within republics, and founding elections that encouraged inter-republican competition rather than cooperation.

Thus, while in fact exceptional in the postcommunist region (in contrast to widespread assumptions), both Meciar and Milosevic became the prototype of the proverbial communists who became nationalists. They accumulated power and avoided liberal reforms (or amended those in place, as in Slovakia) by pursuing an exclusionary nationalist agenda that played up threats to the nation, that used minority populations as scapegoats, and that created among many elites and publics a “bunker” mentality, given

increasingly conflictual relations with both their neighbors, minorities, and with the West (with conflict in the Serbian case, of course, taking on a far more violent form as a result of the aggressive use of military power to challenge existing borders). The appeal to nationalism was more overt in Serbia than in Slovakia, where Meciar, although posing as a champion of the neglected interests of Slovakia, was outflanked on the right by a small but very vocal extreme nationalist party, the Slovak National Party. Thus, while trumpeting the need to take Slovakia's particular history and needs into account in decision-making at the federal level, Meciar did not call openly for the disintegration of the common state until he and Klaus negotiated its end after the June 1992 elections (see Butora and Butorova; Wolchik; Kraus and Stanger; and Musil). To a greater extent than in Serbia, support for Meciar's movement also derived from economic dissatisfaction and the populist promises he made regarding the organization of the economy.

However, the game pursued by both Meciar and Milosevic was even more complex. They combined these appeals, attacks and policies with a politics that, while tolerating regular, competitive elections and some civil liberties (which were far more expansive in Slovakia), nonetheless compromised these "nods" in the direction of democracy by taking advantage of constitutional loopholes, increasing the political and economic dependency of parliament and thereby weakening its powers, centralizing their own powers, and amending the constitution and laws (especially in Serbia) in ways that divided and weakened those who would challenge them, either from the vantage point of being in office or outside the official political arena (and see Fish, 2005 on the importance for democratization of strong legislatures).

If these regimes had similar logics, however, they diverged from one another in two important respects. Czechoslovakia had an early and clear-cut break with the communist past as a result of the strong victory of both the Civic Forum and Public Against Violence in the 1990 elections and the economic reforms that quickly followed. By contrast, the Serbian elections of 1990 provided no such break with the past—in terms of the specific parties or the individuals who emerged victorious or the economic agenda that followed. Moreover, whereas in the following years Slovakia had turnovers in governments that led to several single terms for Meciar, Serbia experienced remarkable governmental continuity. Thus, Milosevic came to power in 1986 as head of the Serbian League of Communists, and he stayed in power under various guises for fourteen more years (shifting, for example, from being the President of Serbia to the President of Yugoslavia). During those years, he survived a remarkable number of threats, most of which did not exist in the Slovak case—for example, no less than six national or federal elections from 1990 to 1998 (and a number of others at the local level); the violent dissolution of the Yugoslav state; protracted wars in Croatia and especially Bosnia-Herzegovina; the Dayton Peace Accords of 1995; Serbian attacks on Kosovo, with the most dramatic aggression taking place in 1998-1999; the NATO bombing in 1999; and the end of authoritarian politics in Croatia, prompted by the death of Tadjman, the disintegration of his ruling party, and the victory of a liberal opposition in early 2000. Moreover, under Milosevic's direction, by 2000 the Serbian economy had shrunk to approximately forty percent of its size a decade earlier—a feat only equaled in the region by Georgia and Moldova (see Begovic, 2005; Bunce, 2005). Indicative of the problems of the Serbian economy is the decision in 2000 by the parliament to devote seventy-five percent of its expenditures to the military (Birch, 2002). By contrast, Slovak economic

performance throughout the postcommunist era has been, especially by the standards of the region, relatively robust. However, the dislocations produced by the shift to the market and the decline in production and incomes in the early post-communist period were significantly greater in Slovakia than in the Czech Lands. As a result of the fact that much of Slovakia's industrialization occurred only under communism, more of the "monuments of socialist industry," the extremely large, inefficient enterprises that were unable to compete in a market economy, as well as the country's arms industry, were located in Slovakia. Unemployment rates in Slovakia were thus several times higher than those in Prague in the early to mid 1990s. Under Meciar's rule, foreign direct investment in Slovakia lagged as well. As the 1998 election approached, it became clear that Slovakia was no longer on the fast track to EU membership and its anticipated benefits, largely due to the illiberal, antidemocratic actions of the Meciar government.

These differences in leadership tenure, regime continuity from communism to postcommunism, foreign policy, and domestic economic performance translated, not surprisingly, into differences in the nature of the Milosevic versus the Meciar regimes. Two distinctions are critical here. One is that the Czechoslovak transition versus the violent end of Yugoslavia (and the central role of the Serbian leadership in that process) meant that, while Slovakia never left Europe, Serbia did. Although former US Secretary of State Madeline Albright once called Slovakia the Black Hole of Europe, the US and western Europeans continued to be engaged with and active in Slovakia, particularly with the ngo community, but also with the government. This meant that Western leverage in Slovakia was far greater than in Serbia—a situation that was exaggerated by the incompetence of the West, especially the western Europeans, in dealing with the wars in Yugoslavia, and the peculiar consequences of Dayton in legitimating both ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and the stature of Milosevic.

The other consideration is that Meciar had to operate within a far more liberalized and more institutionalized democratic environment than Milosevic—though Milosevic did adhere, where convenient, to the 1990 Serbian Constitution (which he had in effect written). In practice, this meant that, rather than just play at the margins of the political rules, Milosevic was more free to change them when he needed to do so (which also occurred at times with Meciar). Milosevic also went much further than Meciar in combining the power generated by his formal roles—for example, as President of Serbia and then Yugoslavia and his institutional ties, as a result, to the police, the security apparatus, the Socialist Party, and the military—with informal powers based upon chains of dependency that radiated out from him—for example, his family (his wife was in Parliament until 2003), the Serbian mafia, and (though "and" is an exaggeration) the heads of banks and enterprises. Here, it is important to recognize that Serbia was still a socialist economy, and that the war plus Western sanctions had generated market dynamics that gave considerable power to those who could control and manipulate shortages, capitalize on weak state boundaries, and dominate illegal trade (see also King, 2002; Andreas, 2005). These dynamics, the sheer duration of Milosevic's rule, and the impact of the wars and sanctions translated, not surprisingly, into an economic tailspin, hyperinflation and extraordinarily high levels of corruption. It is fair to say that Milosevic was both the cause of these externalities, and, ironically, their primary beneficiary.

## A Ledger: Milosevic and Meciar on the Eve of the Electoral Revolutions

Thus, the Milosevic regime was more authoritarian, less constrained by other institutions, far more aggressive and isolated in external terms, and far more corrupt and violent than the Meciar regime—with examples of the latter including the suspicious car accident of Vuk Draskovic in 1999 and the abduction and murder of Milosevic’s mentor, Ivan Stambolic. However, the regime was at the same time less repressive and less elaborate in its structure than, say, the authoritarian regime that has developed under Lukashenka in Belarus since his initial electoral victory in 1994 (see Silitsky, 2005b). There were always pockets (hard-won and hard-maintained) of political autonomy in Serbia, including some independent media; civil society expanded (though it was in many respects more under siege than in the first half of the 1980s); and elections were in fact competitive and, indeed, increasingly so over time, to the point where Milosevic was forced to form coalition governments. Perhaps most importantly, outbreaks of public protests were a consistent feature of the Milosevic era—especially in Belgrade, where Milosevic had been in fact consistently unpopular throughout his rule. Each round of protests left traces of popular resentments about his violations of accepted political norms (and his violations became more extreme over time); lessons for the opposition to apply in the future; and new recruits to the opposition (such as new generations of young people and people living in small and medium-sized towns). It is interesting to note in passing that one graduate of the earlier student protests in Serbia is Boris Tadic, the current President.

These costs became particularly pronounced when Milosevic’s regime became more hardline, beginning in 1997 and continuing throughout 2000 right up to the September election. For example, between May and August 2000, more than one thousand members of Otpor (Resistance), the Serbian youth movement, were arrested, including some people as young as thirteen. All of these actions made Milosevic appear towards the end of his rule to be a leader who was both desperate and despotic.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, Milosevic (like Meciar) began to face serious international constraints. Of course, the Open Society had played a critical role in Serbia since the early 1990s, but it did so largely alone until 1999—when, for example, support by the National Endowment for Democracy jumped three-fold, with an additional fifty percent increase the following year (see, especially, Freedom House, 2005; and see Bunce and Wolchik, 2006b on American democracy promotion, more generally, in the postcommunist region). Finally, if the duration of Milosevic’s rule was helpful to the survival of his regime in some respects, it was harmful in others. It is a cliché that long-serving authoritarian regimes are undermined by growing corruption and isolation from critical feedback about their support and performance. However, this is a cliché that applies to

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<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the most striking example of this was in the 1999 parliamentary elections when, facing the possibility of Seselj becoming President of Serbia, Milosevic jiggered the results by locating a substantial number of votes from Kosovo supporting the Socialist Party. Kosovar Albanians had in fact been boycotting elections since the early 1990s, and they would hardly vote for the Milosevic’s party—actions as bizarre as the groundswell of electoral support for Bush in 2000 from so many Jewish retirees living in Miami.

the last years of the Milosevic regime—as does another cliché. Regime change begins when there are defections from the ruling circle.

Even towards the end of his rule, however, Milosevic could still rely on some formidable assets. These included his ability to situate himself in the ideological middle (conveniently flanked by the extremist, Seselj, on the one hand, and, on the other, moderate nationalists, such as Vuk Draskovic, and the liberal opposition, including a sizeable anti-war movement). This allowed him to sell himself as a compromise candidate who, nonetheless, was protecting the Serbian nation—a stance that was aided, for example, by the radicalization of politics in Kosovo, the seeming stability of the authoritarian regime in Croatia, and the actions of the West, including sanctions and the 1999 bombing (which led to a sizeable, but temporary inflation in his popular support). He was also, almost to the end of his rule, exceedingly successful in coopting, compromising and dividing the opposition—for example, forcing Djindjic for a time to flee Serbia, courting power-hungry leaders, such as Vuk Draskovic (the head of the Serbian Renewal Party), and splitting the opposition repeatedly over the issue of whether to participate in fraudulent elections or to boycott them. This made it hard for voters to support the opposition—because so many members were compromised, because so many protests had failed, and because they assumed that their votes could not lead to an actual change in government. Finally, Milosevic was able to protect his power by practicing a relatively soft form of authoritarianism (though it became harder the last three years of his reign), while avoiding running for office (he only did so twice) and exploiting the difficulties of the European Union in particular in carrying out a consistent foreign policy that challenged his right and capacity to both rule and wage war.

Vladmir Meciar's situation on the eve of the 1998 elections differed from that of Milosevic in a number of ways. In contrast to Milosevic, who achieved his position by manipulating the electoral process to mask his real source of power as head of the former communist party with the trappings of elected office, Meciar emerged onto the national political scene in the context of the Velvet Revolution of 1989 when his later opponents in the liberal opposition put him forth as Prime Minister of the government Public Against Violence formed in 1990. He soon (in April 1991) quarreled with his former allies and founded his own movement which twice (in June 1992 and September/October 1994) gained the most votes in free and fair elections. But, although Meciar remained the dominant figure on the Slovak political scene for almost a decade, by the 1998 elections, he faced an opposition that had learned a lesson from its failure to unite for the elections in 1994 after forcing Meciar to temporarily leave the position of Prime Minister and forming a broad coalition government that ruled for several months. In addition, Meciar faced an ngo community that was unusually self-organized and cohesive. Due in part to Meciar's dominance of the sphere of partisan politics and in part to the energy and organizational abilities of some of the third sector's dominant personalities, the ngo community attracted many of the most active and democratically oriented leaders in Slovakia. By the late 1990s, the community had a Gremium, or coordinating committee, that included representatives of all of the main sectors of ngo activity and an established tradition of yearly conferences at Stupova to discuss issues of interest to the community as a whole. It also could rely on longstanding ties of friendship that, in some cases, stretched back to common participation in the para-opposition groups and activities of the communist period. Facing frequent verbal attacks by the government and hampered in its

activities by laws designed to restrict their activities and influence, the third sector in Slovakia was well-equipped to play a role in mobilizing opposition to Meciar in 1998. Its leaders were also very well connected in the West and skilled in dealing with international donors and other supporters.

At the same time, however, Meciar had a stable core of well-disciplined supporters who could be counted on to vote for him in the election. Largely older, less educated, and rural, these voters could be expected to be resistant to calls for change, whether couched in terms of the need to restore democratic politics or ensure Slovakia's integration into European and Euro-Atlantic institutions. Meciar also had considerable influence in the police and security forces and controlled much of the media.

Although his flagrant abuses of power were not as frequent or as costly as the genocide Milosevic set in motion, Meciar also engaged in his share of dirty tricks and anti-democratic behaviors, ranging from the kidnapping of then President Kovac's adult son and his transport across the border into Austria where he was wanted for fraud, the firebombing of the car of the main inspector investigating this incident, and sporadic harassment of political opponents. He also had used his power in Parliament to attempt to manipulate the election by creating a single electoral district in Slovakia and increasing the percentage of the vote needed by coalitions to seat deputies in Parliament, among other actions.

By the late 1990s, these behaviors, as well as the manipulation of the privatization process to favor Meciar's cronies, and the restrictive policies his government adopted toward the sizeable Hungarian minority resulted in increasingly clear signals from the West that Meciar had become a liability to Slovakia. The demarches of the US and other governments, as well as assessments by representatives of the EU and NATO, made it obvious to the informed public that Meciar's reelection would very likely result in Slovakia's exclusion from these organizations and isolation within Europe. But many Slovaks appeared to be indifferent to these possibilities.

### The Electoral Model

The analysis above indicates that, on the eve of the decision to hold parliamentary elections in Slovakia in 1998 and presidential and parliamentary elections in Serbia and Montenegro in 2000 and minus the advantages of hindsight, there were some good reasons to expect that, while vulnerable in certain respects, both the Meciar and Milosevic regimes would be able to withstand challenges to their power through electoral revolutions.. Indeed, for Milosevic, this was a rational assumption. After all, Zajedno (Together) had disbanded in 1997; Kostunica had never been a formal member; and one of the co-leaders, Vuk Draskovic, had been visibly courted to join forces with Milosevic after a subsequent election. Moreover, while under considerable pressure from Otpor, the Serbian youth movement founded in 1998, to join forces and while making some progress in building greater cohesion in early 2000, the Serbian opposition was still too divided among the parties led by Kostunica, Djindjic and Draskovic in particular to rally around a single presidential candidate when, from June to July, 2000, Milosevic engineered constitutional changes for the direct, rather than indirect election of the President of Yugoslavia (which he had become through parliamentary voting in 1997) and then called for early presidential and parliamentary elections to take place in late September, 2000.

Thus, Milosevic calculated that the opposition would have too little time to prepare for an election, and that he would benefit by holding elections before the winter came, with its promise of unusually severe heating shortages (on his addiction to elections, see, especially, Pavlovic, 2001).<sup>3</sup> However, like Meciar, Milosevic miscalculated. To understand why, let us turn to an analysis of the electoral model of regime change, with examples provided for both the Slovak and the Serbian cases.

We can begin this discussion by noting some premises that underline the electoral model of regime change. One is that elections in authoritarian settings provide a contradiction between unaccountable power and power derived from public support (see Schedler, 2002; Thompson and Kuntz, 2004). Second, it is assumed that elections are a global norm, even more than other aspects of democracy. Citizens resent elections being stolen, especially when they are exposed to clear differences between the official tabulation and the tabulation offered by other, more trusted groups. While vote fraud can demobilize voters, it can also generate strong resentments when the alternative vote count comes before the official one, when election commissions and courts issue ever-changing rulings (as they did in Serbia), and when there is other evidence of fraud, such as knowledge of how others voted, extreme media attacks on the opposition during the campaign, and voter intimidation. Finally, elections are useful devices for regime change, because they occur within a short span to time; ask little of citizens; encourage them to think about their future; and provide a moment when the reality of political rights and choices and in legitimacy of the regime are all put to a visible and quantifiable test (also see Tucker, 2005; Beissinger, 2006).

From the vantage point of American electoral politics, the electoral model of democratization seems largely a matter of “politics as usual.” However, it was new to both of these countries, and it rested in practice on a number of key factors often in short supply, even in the United States: optimism, extraordinarily hard work, innovative ideas, and considerable planning and coordination. To understand how the electoral model played out, however, we need to focus, first, on developments that preceded the campaign season. These developments include, especially for the cases of interest here, the long-term expansion of civil society. This was aided in part by the international community. As noted above, it is fair to say that civil society was far more developed in Slovakia than in Serbia, in part because Slovakia was more democratic than Serbia and participation in the work of civil society groups was thus less risky, in part because of the longer-term investment of the international community in Slovak democracy, and in part because of the constraints on such developments in Serbia, especially between 1997 and 2000 (see, for example, the data on funding provided by Freedom House, 2005; on the development of non-governmental organizations presented in Hermann, May, 2005 and USAID, May, 2005; and on civil society and social capital in Serbia presented in Grodeland, 2006; Ganev, et.al., 2004; “Aspirations,” 2004; see also Demes in Global Report).

Also critical in the longer-term were previous rounds of elections, where, for example, the opposition gained electoral experience, confidence and sometimes even office. Djindjic, for example, was elected Mayor of Belgrade—though he was deposed by Milosevic and Draskovic—and both Djindjic and Kostunica served in the Parliament from 1990-1997. At the same time, these prior elections allowed the application of some elements of the electoral model—though electoral monitoring, for example, never occurred in any consistent way, even

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<sup>3</sup> Ellen Lust-Okar (2004a, 2004b) also argues, for a different part of the world, that authoritarian leaders use elections as a way of estimating the distribution of power among their allies and enemies, the utility of certain networks, and future payoffs.

domestically, in Serbia until 2000. Defeats in previous elections, as those in Slovakia in the fall of 1994, also illustrated to the opposition the political costs of their lack of unity. Finally, earlier elections produced, especially in Serbia, previous rounds of political protest and growing knowledge about the falsification of election results and the methods used to carry out fraud.

There are also some medium-term influences that foreshadow the application of the electoral model. These include exploitation of media openings (which was more difficult in Serbia, given the Milosevic crackdown on some of the opposition papers and the radio station, B-92); building cooperative ties among what is invariably a dispirited opposition divided along both personal and ideological lines (and in Serbia in particular shaped by an elite culture resistant to compromise for the sake of winning power); developing public opinion polling (which was relatively sophisticated in both Slovakia and Serbia and documented clearly that the regime was vulnerable); and expanding both the generational and geographical reach of opposition development. In addition, as already noted, in Serbia a strong performance in the local elections in 1996, the impact of three months of protests thereafter, and clear evidence of fraud in these elections and in two subsequent elections before 2000 helped bring the oppositions together; gave them some “practice” in carrying out campaigns, voter registration, and electoral monitoring; and provided publics with a sense that the regime in fact might be vulnerable, that it was certainly corrupt, that votes mattered, and that the opposition, as a result, had the potential of winning elections and perhaps even political power.

Perhaps the most distinctive example of these dynamics common to both Serbia and Slovakia was the rise of large numbers of young people committed to political change. Otpor in Serbia, for example, originated in 1998 when students organized in opposition to educational reforms that threatened to end the autonomy of Serbian universities. By 2000 Otpor had approximately 30,000 to 40,000 activists and approximately one hundred and twenty branches throughout Serbia—despite, for example, a significant crackdown throughout 2000. Otpor played a pivotal role—not just in exposing the weakness of the regime (for example, through street theatre, concerts, rallies, and an unusually large-scale distribution of pamphlets, posters and other materials that mocked the regime) and in reaching out to very young people throughout the country, but also in pressing the opposition to work together and to focus on a leader who could win. It was also Otpor that brought in substantial new supporters to the cause of ending the Milosevic era, such as pensioners, union members, even portions of the military and the police and citizens from smaller towns. They also received the support of the Serbian Orthodox Church, which had been a clear supporter of the Milosevic regime since it formed in the second half of the 1980s. In Slovakia, young people played a key role in the march across Slovakia which the opposition used to get their message to voters in light of media manipulation by Meciar. They also worked with the Rock the Vote campaign that, together with other actions of the OK98 Campaign, resulted in an 80 percent turnout rate of first time voters, a key element of the opposition’s victory.

This leads us to short-term dynamics: the electoral campaigns. Perhaps the most important development here was the formation of a single coalition of opposition parties—for example, no less than eighteen parties in Serbia and seven “parties,” (many of which were themselves coalitions of parties) in Slovakia. Critical as well, because the Serbian contest was also a Presidential race, was the remarkable decision by Zoran Djindjic to drop out of the contest (despite heading the largest party within the coalition) and throw his support to Kostunica. Data in public opinion polls that showed Kostunica to be the more popular opposition candidate, because he had suffered under communism (he was relieved from his teaching position in

Belgrade in 1974 and refused to be reinstated in 1989); lived a modest life; had taken principled stances during his tenure in parliament; and combined moderate nationalism with commitment to rule of law were important factors in Dindjic's decision. Moreover, Djindjic assumed (correctly) that a victory in the presidential race would lead quickly to new parliamentary elections, which held open the prospect of a major coalition victory and a role for him as Prime Minister. Of course, that still left five presidential candidates in the race.

Once the opposition succeeded in coming together in both Slovakia and Serbia, the electoral model went into full gear. Actions included significant voter registration and mobilization drives (including considerable support by Freedom House and others to encourage first time voters, who were known to have anti-Meciar attitudes, in Slovakia and voters in areas outside of Belgrade, focusing, for example, on women's groups, in Serbia); pressures on regimes to open up the media to the opposition (which meant in practice relying primarily on the independent media in both Slovakia and Serbia and on the "pamphlet and poster" mania that had served the Bulgarian opposition so well in 1996-1997) and to improve the quality of voter lists; pressures on central election commissions to be more representative in their membership, to tighten up their procedures, and to carry out their tasks in a more transparent fashion (which fell short of these objectives in Serbia, given their subsequent decision to expel opposition members when they protested electoral fraud in September); wide distribution of campaign materials that advertised the costs of the incumbent regime and attempted to empower voters by assuring them that their ballots were critical; and far more ambitious campaigns conducted by opposition groups than in the past or in comparison with incumbent politicians and parties.

In Slovakia, the newly formed Slovak Democratic Coalition's leaders engaged in hosts of face to face meetings with voters organized by organizations in the third sector; its leader and future Prime Minister Mikulas Dzurinda bicycled through Slovakia. And, in contrast to the situation in the 1994 elections, members of the coalition remained united throughout the campaign, despite their very real differences in policies in many areas. In Serbia there was a sharp contrast between the one week campaign by Milosevic in a few towns, coupled with a short-term priming of goods in the stores versus Kostunica's much longer campaign throughout Serbia—a style of politicking that was new to the behavior of both liberal and illiberal candidates in Serbian elections.

In addition, there were ambitious get-out-the-vote campaigns before and on election day—which led to record turnouts in both Slovakia and Serbia (seventy-five percent). In Slovakia, these activities were carried out as part of a citizens' campaign, OK98, organized by the leadership of the third sector. This campaign, which was conceptualized over the Christmas 1997 holiday and began in earnest in the spring of 1998, coordinated and supported individual actions by a multitude of ngos. Ranging from the hosting of citizens' meetings with candidates from a variety of political parties to the distribution of literature emphasizing the rights of citizens in a democracy to actions, including rock concerts in the squares of large cities and media campaigns to make voting "cool," directed toward youth to a march across Slovakia, these activities succeeded in raising public awareness and heightened the salience of the elections. Although the campaign's leaders and spokespersons scrupulously maintained that they were acting in a neutral, non-partisan manner, there were close links between the leadership of the campaign and the opposition coalition, and it was clear that increased voter turnout would benefit the opposition, given the stability of Meciar's voter base.

The activities of civil society groups were coupled in both countries with measures focused specifically on highlighting any irregularities in the vote. These included rapid

tabulation of votes, often advertised repeatedly during election day through, for example, press conferences; election monitoring (which was only internal in Serbia and organized in sophisticated fashion by CeSID); and extensive use of parallel vote tabulation, which provided a comparative standard against which “official” results could be contrasted. In Serbia, there were several ironies in this process. One was that Serbian polling stations had long been required by law to post the number of votes outside the station. CeSID then allocated workers to every constituency to phone in the numbers, thereby making it harder for vote fraud through the last minute generation of new ballots. The other irony is that CeSID was very worried about turnout by the late afternoon of voting day, and they were able to disperse their volunteers to targeted constituencies in order to get out the vote. This turned out to be critical, since the margin of victory for Kostunica was barely over fifty percent, and fifty percent plus one was required for election in this first round of a two-round system.

Finally, in Serbia in particular the opposition prepared for public protests in the likely event that the regime lost, but refused to vacate office. In both Slovakia and Serbia, this preparation built upon on popular mobilization and protest techniques used in the past and on training during the election in techniques for non-violent struggle (see Ackerman and Duvall, 2000; Carothers, 2004). Preparations for protest also capitalized on linkages already made outside the capital and large cities—through the campaign and through the work of civil society organizations.

Despite minor irregularities in certain localities, election monitors and international election monitoring groups judged the 1998 Slovak elections to be free and fair. Although Meciar had tried to manipulate the results of the elections in numerous ways prior to the elections, including new legislation passed one month before the elections that hindered the opposition, he did not resort to the blatant fraud that occurred in many other electoral revolutions. He also accepted the outcome of the elections once they were held. His concession speech, though delayed and very emotional, left no doubt that he would leave office peacefully once a new government was formed. There was thus no need for his opponents in Slovakia to take to the streets—in any way except to celebrate. Meciar’s decision to acknowledge the results of the election and leave office peacefully undoubtedly reflected the more constrained nature of public life in Slovakia than in Serbia under Milosevic. It may have also reflected the fact that, although his government had engaged in actions that violated the spirit and at times the letter of Slovak law as well as democratic norms, Meciar was not, as Milosevic was, facing the threat that he would be indicted for war crimes and delivered to The Hague by his political successors.

In Serbia, the Milosevic regime did not give up as easily. In the face of widespread election fraud and manipulation, the opposition turned to street protests. The success of such protests depended upon many of the factors we have discussed above. However, it also reflected another very important development: conversations during the campaign between opposition groupings and security forces (facilitated in the Serbian case by well-established linkages between Otpor and members of the military and the security apparatus) that reminded the police, the military and the like that they had also paid dearly for the actions of the regime. What is striking about the protests that followed elections in Serbia is the fact that the security forces, even when pressed by the regime to act against protesters, backed off from repression at two key stages: when the miners in Kolabara went on strike (protected by the quick mobilization of citizens) in reaction to Milosevic’s declaration of victory, and a week and a half later, when hundreds of thousands of people from throughout Serbia converged on the Parliament in Belgrade to bring an end to the Milosevic era.

All of these developments—including, for example, the creation of a unified opposition, sophisticated campaigning, voter registration and voter turnout drives, and even preparations for political protest—were aided by the support of the United States. This occurred both through more institutionalized channels, such as Freedom House, the National Democratic Institute, and the International Republican Institute, and more informally—in particular, through the actions of the ambassadors to these countries (though the U.S. embassy, after the 1999 bombing, was closed in Serbia and the Canadian Embassy functioned as a substitute). While such assistance is common to most of the electoral revolutions that have occurred in the postcommunist region, it is important to remember that both the United States and the Europeans (though the latter were less engaged in the various components of the electoral model) had become strongly committed by 1997 and 1999, respectively, to ending the Meciar and Milosevic regimes. .

### Success and Failure

Why did these two electoral revolutions succeed—at least in the minimal sense of ending authoritarian rule and bringing liberal oppositions into power? A full answer to this question would require, of course, a systematic comparison between the electoral revolutions that have produced liberal governments and those that failed to do so. This is an issue we will be addressing in subsequent work. However, there are some factors we can nonetheless highlight as critical to the democratic outcomes in Slovakia and Serbia.

One factor is that both Serbia and Slovakia, despite the contrasts between Meciar and Milosevic, were the “right” types of regime for electoral revolutions. Here, we refer, first, to their mixed character of democracy and dictatorship and their holding of regular elections (not just in the postcommunist period, but also during communism). This created, as noted above, tensions between principles and practices, formal and informal institutions, voting as ritual versus voting as choice, and disengagement versus active participation. Such tensions created, in short, both incentives and opportunities for political change—the former because such regimes are repressive enough to invite public resentment, but liberal enough to be open to the development of an opposition. These tensions also make it far easier for incumbents to miscalculate; supporters to defect; and oppositions and citizens to transform symbolic exercises into competitive ones.

On a less theoretical level, moreover, the elections held in 1998 and 2000 came at a time when the incumbents, while still resourceful, were nonetheless vulnerable. The costs of the Milosevic and Meciar regimes, while different in certain respects, were nonetheless increasing, and there was evidence that their ability to control their allies and political outcomes and to deliver results to important constituencies was declining. Indeed, it is striking how public opinion data for both countries on the eve of the pivotal elections suggested that the nationalist games played by Meciar and Milosevic were resonating less and less with both their allies and the citizenry.

Beyond the regime context, moreover, there are a number of factors, more short-term in nature and less common, that help opposition groups to carry out successful electoral revolutions. Here, one key consideration is the mounting costs of authoritarian rule and a pattern of increasing violation of social and political norms. Given secure jobs, privileged access to economic resources, and insulation from feedback (especially negative) about their performance, authoritarian leaders can become both corrupt and careless—which invites public resentment and defections from the ruling circle. In the Serbian case, for example, Milosevic ignored trends in

earlier elections with respect to his popularity and the commitment and capacity of the opposition to defeat him. Thus, he made the mistake of submitting himself to the verdict of the voters (by changing the election procedures of the Yugoslav Presidency)—a mistake that was only compounded by calling for early elections (a mistake that was also made by Shevardnadze in Georgia, Akayev in Kyrgyzstan and, for that matter, Jaruzelski in Poland in 1989). In addition, like Meciar, he was involved in a number of financial scandals, as well as acts of violence. Finally, he alienated students—who were able to compensate for the limitations of Serbian civil society by forming Otpor, the organization most responsible for his defeat in the fall, 2000.

Vulnerable regimes can endure, however, if both civil society and the opposition are demobilized. Thus, other pieces of the puzzle of successful electoral revolutions are the following, arranged in terms of whether they are longer-term or shorter-term in nature: 1) whether there has been a gradual, but sustained growth in the size and diversity of civil society (or associational life independent of the state); 2) whether opposition groups have accumulated experience, both negative and positive (for example, through earlier rounds of protests and successful forays into local elections), and; 3) whether various elements of the opposition have found ways to cooperate with one another over the duration of the national election period; mount a serious campaign that convinces publics to participate and register their dissatisfaction with the regime; encourage institutional supporters of the regime either to maintain their distance or to defect; and prepare for protests, should the incumbents or their designated successors try to steal the election. Also critical is implementing the elaborate mechanics of the electoral model, as detailed earlier.

When all is said and done, the key factor is a change in the behavior of the opposition as they move from fragmentation to unity (also see Howard and Roessler, 2006; Van de Walle, 2005). However, this is the hardest piece to put into place. Most oppositions most of the time in hybrid regimes proliferate, rather than concentrate, and they squabble with one another for reasons of personality and personal histories, competing networks, successful actions by the regime to divide and conquer, and less often, significant ideological disagreements. All of these constraints, it is important to remember, were in full evidence in both Slovakia and Serbia prior to their electoral revolutions—and, though this is topic for a subsequent paper, after the electoral revolutions as well. Moreover, oppositions are often concentrated in the capital, caring little about the provinces, and they find it all too easy to avoid the hard and often boring work of putting together successful campaigns for political office.

### American Assistance

As we have argued in an earlier article (Bunce and Wolchik 2006b), the United States' democracy assistance efforts have given preference to the post-communist region. US funding for the development of civil society, citizen education, and the development of strong political parties began soon after the end of communism in Slovakia and continued, in somewhat modified form, through the ouster of Meciar in 1998. The US also played a key role in facilitating the sharing of experience between the Bulgarian and Romanian oppositions, who had united in the mid-1990s and achieved electoral victories, and Slovak opposition and ngo leaders, as well as in introducing the leaders of the future

opposition coalition to the West. The direct US role in fostering the development of civil society and supporting the formation of a political opposition was more limited in Serbia, due to the nature of the Milosevic regime and the sanctions against Serbia. However, by funding civil society activists from other parts of the region to work in Serbia and identifying Milosevic as the key individual responsible for Serbia's status as an international pariah, the US played an important if indirect role in bolstering the opposition.

If the United States played an important role in both the Serbian and the Slovak electoral revolutions, does that mean that the U.S. engineered the downfall of both Meciar and Milosevic? Put another way: while all the factors detailed above are important, do they pale in comparison with the central role of the United States in producing successful electoral revolutions?

On the one hand, it is true that especially since the end of the Cold War the U.S. has been in the business of promoting democracy abroad (especially when it converges with security interests); that it has been in this game longer and has devoted more resources to this goal than other countries, private foundations or international organizations; and that American democracy promotion efforts are in both per capita and per-state terms particularly concentrated on the postcommunist region, especially with respect to both programs, such as the development of civil society, free and fair elections and rule of law, and policies, such as signaling considerable dissatisfaction with the quality of purportedly democratic elections and promises of support for more liberal governments, should they come to power (see Bunce and Wolchik, 2006b). It is also true that of all USAID outlays, electoral assistance stands out as the one most strongly associated with improved democratic performance (see Seligson, et.al. 2005). Finally, there is in fact a correlation between American commitment to regime change and the success of electoral revolutions in the postcommunist world. The contrast between American reactions to the elections in Azerbaijan in 2005 and Ukraine in 2004 and the different outcomes of the two elections are a case in point, as is the contrast between the outcomes of the 1996 elections in Serbia (where the U.S. was not involved) and the 2000 elections (where the defeat of Milosevic was a clear priority). Moreover, it is clear that the United States was strongly committed to the electoral defeat of both Meciar and Milosevic and that both leaders did in fact exit from power.

However, we would argue that the key factors for the success of electoral revolutions in Slovakia and Serbia were domestic, as outlined earlier. First, as a number of studies have documented and as our research supports, international democracy promotion—whether by the United States, the European Union, the German foundations, or the Organization of American States—cannot work in the absence of domestic democracy promotion (Carothers, 2004; Devdariani, 2003; McFaul, 2005). The U.S., in short, cannot substitute for a lack of domestic will and capacity. Indeed, as a number of participants in these revolutions have argued, it is both inaccurate and insulting to argue that domestic players are mere puppets of the United States and that they could not by themselves succeed in defeating dictators at the polls (Melakadze, 2005)..

Second, as our respondents also noted, the most important international actors in these events were not necessarily democracy promoters from the United States. Instead, significant credit was also given to the “graduates” of successful electoral revolutions who shared their ideas and strategies with oppositions in neighboring countries who were

committed to carrying out their own revolutions. Thus, Bulgarians and Romanians were critical to the ideas behind and the success of the OK98 campaign in Slovakia, and Slovaks played a key role in the campaign against Milosevic as well as in the victory of the Croatian opposition in 2000. Indeed, the importance of these “rooted cosmopolitans”, as Sidney Tarrow (2006) has termed them in his study of transnational social movements, has even been recognized by authoritarian leaders. Just as Kuchma blocked visits by Georgians and Serbs, so Lukashenka has done the same—before and even after the 2006 election.

Third, as already noted, an important part of the story of successful electoral revolutions were mistakes by incumbents; the accumulation by the opposition of experiences with protests and local elections; and the extremely hard work, planning and risk involved in implementing the electoral model. The U.S. had little role in any of these required conditions.

Finally, there is a certain logic to American democracy promotion that returns us to the importance of domestic factors. Just as the international development community focuses on cases where there is some domestic capacity for growth and just as the international community targets interventions in internal wars when there is some hope for peace, so American democracy promotion efforts tend to specialize in places where there are favorable conditions for democratic change (even if, as in Iraq, those conditions are misread). In all of these instances, the logic is the same: favorable conditions lead to playing favorites. All of these exercises require collaboration between international and domestic actors. Thus, what may seem to be a powerful role for the United States in electoral revolutions, as in Slovakia and Serbia, is in reality a decision to nudge along promising situations. International support tends to go where there is support on the ground.

## Conclusions

The purpose of this paper has been to compare the electoral revolutions in Slovakia in 1998 and in Serbia in 2000. Rather than repeat our arguments, let us conclude with one key point. It is easy with hindsight to assume that both regimes were quite vulnerable, and that all the opposition had to do was to run “good” campaigns. As we argued in this paper, this interpretation is wrong. Both regimes had considerable assets, and their defeat spoke to the remarkable properties of the electoral model as an agent of democratic change; the painstaking work of the opposition, their planning, and the risks they were willing to take; and the surprising willingness of jaded voters, new and old, to participate in large numbers in choosing a new government. In this sense, the electoral model can be seen as a mechanism of transition that surmounts a number of obstacles posed by hybrid authoritarian regimes—in particular, the tendency of such regimes to be effective at dividing the liberal opposition and demobilizing voters. The value of the model in achieving these results clearly is one of the reasons, in addition to the diffusion process, why the model has been used by opponents of authoritarian leaders in other hybrid regimes, including those in which conditions have been less favorable.

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