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Competitive authoritarianism and popular protest: Evidence from Serbia under Milošević

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Abstract

This article explores the relationship between competitive authoritarianism and popular protest. Building upon comparative regime analysis and social movement research, it argues that this hybrid regime type facilitates popular protest by providing opposition forces with considerable institutional resources to organize themselves and confront regime elites, along with grievances that provide strong incentives for popular challenges. In turn, popular protest may trigger regime crisis and extract important concessions from regime incumbents. In the long run, popular politics strongly shapes the interests, identities and capacities of regime elites and opposition forces, as well as the regime's formal and/or informal institutions, and may lead to government change and/or regime change. Evidence is provided from Serbia under Milošević, which experienced massive opposition protest campaigns in 1991, 1992, 1996-1997, 1999 and 2000, which resulted in regime change.

Keywords

Competitive authoritarianism, popular protest, mobilization, regime change, post-communism

Introduction

Competitive authoritarianism is a hybrid regime type that became widespread after the Cold War. It appeared in over 40 countries at some point after 1989; scholars counted 35 competitive authoritarian countries in the world between 1990 and 1995, and 12 of these were post-communist.[1] Competitive authoritarianism is marked by an 'inherent tension' because the democratic procedures it involves produce 'arenas of contestation' within which opposition actors may legally confront authoritarian rulers (Levitsky and Way, 2010: 20). There is empirical evidence that these regimes are less stable than either democracies or authoritarian regimes, and are considerably more likely to be succeeded by democracy than authoritarianism (Brownlee, 2009: 516; Roessler and Howard, 2009: 119–122). Scholars have identified various factors that facilitate political change, and especially

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democratization, in this political context: opposition coalition building (Howard and Roessler, 2006); repeated multi-party elections (Lindberg, 2009); massive electoral fraud (Thompson and Kuntz, 2004); the electoral model of opposition mobilization (Bunce and Wolchik, 2011); international influences; and the regime's organizational weakness (Levitsky and Way, 2010).

This article explores the relationship between this hybrid regime type and popular protest – a theme that remains largely unexplored – and reveals limitations in existing arguments. It focuses on the ways in which competitive authoritarianism shapes popular mobilization and how popular protest in turn influences political change. Building upon comparative regime analysis and on studies of social movements and revolutions, the article argues that this regime type facilitates popular protest by providing regime opponents with considerable institutional resources, along with political grievances that provide strong incentives to mount popular challenges. In turn, popular protest may trigger regime crisis and extract important concessions from regime incumbents. In the long run, popular politics strongly shapes the interests, identities and capacities of authoritarian elites and opposition actors, as well as the regime's formal and/or informal institutions, and may lead to government change and/or regime change.

I employ a case study strategy – and, more specifically, analysis of a single case and process-tracing in the form of historical analysis – to examine the role of popular protest, a variable ignored in existing explanations, and to uncover evidence of causal mechanisms (see George and Bennett, 2005; Gerring, 2007). I selected Serbia as a highly relevant case in this respect. On the one hand, this case is representative of those post-communist competitive authoritarian countries that have experienced considerable popular protest and its political consequences. Nearly two-thirds of these countries fit this demanding criterion: (1) massive non-violent opposition demonstrations brought about a change of government and/or regime change in Serbia (2000), Georgia (2003) and Ukraine (2004); (2) large popular protests, accompanied by violence, caused governments to resign in Romania (1991), Albania (1997), Kyrgyzstan (2005, 2010) and Ukraine (2014); (3) large protest campaigns did not remove regime elites from power in Armenia (1993, 1996, 2003) and Moldova (2002, 2009), but strongly shaped the regime's formal and informal institutions and policies. If we also count smaller popular protests that ended with some regime concessions or political conflict, the case of Serbia is fully representative of competitive authoritarianism in post-communist countries.

On the other hand, the levels of popular protest were higher in Serbia than in other post-communist cases judging not only by the level of popular mobilization surrounding regime change, but also by the frequency of popular protest and regime crises it triggered over time. Prolonged protest campaigns that involved over a hundred (and sometimes several hundred) thousand participants occurred, and triggered regime crises, in March 1991, the summer of 1992, the winter of 1996–1997, September 1999 and, ultimately, in October 2000, when non-violent protests removed Milošević from power. That the relevant variable is at an extreme value helps to uncover causal mechanisms that may be operating in a less extreme form in other relevant cases – and also makes Serbia a study of an extreme case (see Gerring, 2007: 101–105). This study focuses on post-communist competitive authoritarian regimes in the first instance, but has important implications for competitive authoritarianism worldwide.

Popular protest in competitive authoritarian regimes

Political regimes have considerable consequences for institutional transformation, including regime change, because they strongly influence the capacities and behaviour of regime incumbents and their opponents (Snyder and Mahoney, 1999: 103–104). For example, modern non-democratic regimes, such as totalitarian, post-totalitarian, authoritarian and sultanist, largely determine

transition paths available and tasks required for democratic consolidation (Linz and Stepan, 1996: 55–65). Space for popular mobilization against non-democratic rule, and its forms and levels, are also strongly shaped by regime type. Closed non-democratic regimes, such as totalitarian and sultanist (that is, extreme neo-patrimonial) regimes, normally close most avenues for non-violent popular protest. Highly exclusive and repressive low-capacity regimes, including some sultanist and authoritarian regimes, encourage the formation of revolutionary movements and shape their trajectories and prospects of success (Goodwin, 2001: 26–30). Still, revolutionary action is unattractive in many authoritarian and post-totalitarian regimes, which exclude sizeable parts of their population from the political process but are inclusive in terms of taking into account the social and economic interests of different groups and/or granting recognition of their ethnic, religious or national identity. These are high-capacity regimes, which renders revolutionary action a risky business, unlikely to succeed. The less centralized and exclusive among those regimes may, in periods when political alignments become unstable and elite conflicts emerge, open space for massive popular protest. These periods are relatively rare though, and reflect a regime crisis (Vladisavljević, 2014).

By contrast, competitive authoritarianism normally provides considerable freedom and resources to opposition forces. These are civilian regimes with regular multi-party elections, which are competitive but unfair. Democratic institutions exist, but rules are often violated. Election outcomes are uncertain, even if a degree of manipulation by the ruling group is normally present, and elections are taken seriously by both regime incumbents and the opposition (Levitsky and Way, 2010: 5–12). The legislature, the judiciary and local governments – institutional resources available to the opposition – are normally weak and subordinate to authoritarian rulers, but may become arenas of conflict. There is more space for independent media, interest groups and civic associations than in other forms of authoritarianism. Simultaneously, competitive authoritarianism creates considerable grievances among opposition forces and important sections of the population. Opposition candidates and activists are intimidated and their access to media and campaign funding obstructed. Civic activists and journalists are often harassed, and media restrictions and human rights violations are not uncommon. State resources are routinely exploited for partisan purposes and against opponents, not least through patronage, corruption and extortion. Massive electoral fraud may also occur in some cases (Levitsky and Way, 2010: 5–12, 20, 27–28).

Scholars of competitive authoritarianism are silent on the implications of this regime type for popular protest, although these are implicit in their debates. If viewed from the perspective of social movement scholarship, however, the implications seem obvious. First, regime opponents benefit from legally recognized (although in practice often restricted) freedoms of association, assembly and speech. Opposition parties, civil society organizations and other regime opponents rarely limit their contestation to formal political institutions, such as elections, legislatures, judiciaries and local governments. They often mount non-institutional challenges through popular protest, ranging from small protests and civil disobedience campaigns to massive demonstrations. Second, the considerable institutional resources available to opposition groups – to recruit activists and supporters, organize themselves and confront regime officials within and outside political institutions – together with the ample grievances these officials produce by violating democratic procedures, is a political milieu highly conducive to popular protest. Third, competitive elections, and a more permissive context for popular protest than in other non-democratic regimes, steer protesters towards non-violent strategies of political action (see Tarrow, 2011; Tilly, 2006).

Competitive authoritarian regimes with neo-patrimonial leanings intensify popular grievances, alienate regime supporters and encourage the building of broad opposition coalitions. Although considerably less repressive and exclusive than sultanism (extreme neo-patrimonialism), these regimes also feature personalist and arbitrary rule, tendencies towards familial and dynastic power, narrow social base, politicized, corrupt and stagnant economy,

hedonist lifestyles among the ruling clique and extensive human rights violations.[2] Transitions from sultanism normally take extra-constitutional forms, such as revolutionary mobilization or military coup; these regimes cannot easily remove unpopular leaders and co-opt new groups into the polity and the extensive penetration of state institutions by the ruler's clique prevents the emergence of regime soft-liners and significant concessions to the opposition (Goodwin, 2001: 30; Snyder, 1998). By providing extensive space for the opposition's organization and operation, competitive authoritarianism with neo-patrimonial features provides incentives to regime opponents to choose non-violent strategies.

Popular protest does not flow directly from any regime type. Opposition groups may not be able or may not choose to challenge authoritarian rulers. They are weaker than regime elites, and only political opportunities and threats that reduce this power imbalance or threaten interests of some groups actually trigger popular mobilization, as social movement scholars suggest. The relaxation of repression reduces the costs of participation in popular protests, while the emergence of allies of challenger groups helps them engage in protest (Tarrow, 2011: 163–167). In competitive authoritarian regimes with neo-patrimonial features, the opposition's allies largely come from abroad and provide financial resources, expertise and a degree of protection. Threats to interests of some groups and the escalation of repression may also trigger mobilization (Goldstone and Tilly, 2001). For example, the suppression of opposition forces and independent media, and externally driven events (e.g. a defeat in war, violent conflict and democratization in neighbouring states) may undermine regime elites and create opportunity for their opponents.

Does popular protest matter when it comes to political change in competitive authoritarian regimes? If so, how does it influence political outcomes? One study provides evidence of some, though not significant, correlation between the incidence of anti-government popular protest in the year in which elections are held and 'liberalising electoral outcomes' (Howard and Roessler, 2006: 372, 375–376). Another suggests that non-violent popular protests that occur in three years after elections do not seem to have influence on the fate of the next election (Schedler, 2010: 21). These studies share a narrow focus on popular protest as a trigger of political change in a single election cycle. They overlook its long-term 'constitutive' influence on the interests, identities and capacities of regime and opposition actors, and on the regime's formal and informal institutions – within and across election cycles – and thus on political change.

Other studies of political change in competitive authoritarian regimes largely ignore popular protest. One claims that repeated multi-party elections are an independent cause of democratization because they tend to raise the costs of oppression and reduce the costs of toleration (Lindberg, 2009). However, elections tend to reveal and sanction, rather than redistribute, the power of authoritarian rulers and the opposition; they are more symptoms than causes of regime persistence or change (Brownlee, 2007: 9–10). Elections form only a part of a long political struggle between authoritarian rulers and opposition forces in which important battles occur outside political institutions and during protest campaigns, and leave important political legacies. Another study points to a specific form of elections – those that are stolen by authoritarian rulers – as the cause of regime change, since they provide a clear focus for popular discontent and trigger elite divisions and defections to the opposition (Thompson and Kuntz, 2004: 161–163). Still, new grievances and threats can hardly trigger anti-regime mobilization without strong pre-existing opposition identities, organizations and networks, which often originate from earlier protest campaigns. Elite splits do not follow from electoral fraud, but emerge during massive mobilization.

Other arguments focus on the role of opposition strategies, for example, the creation of broad opposition multi-party coalitions reduces disparity in power between regime incumbents and opposition (Howard and Roessler, 2006: 370–371). It is also argued that the electoral model of opposition mobilization builds upon elections as the opposition's key institutional resource and involves

various opposition strategies and techniques, along with international support and diffusion (Bunce and Wolchik, 2011). These strategies can work, however, only if built upon strong opposition solidarities, parties and social networks, which in turn stem at least partly from earlier protest waves against authoritarian rule. An alternative view is that the opposition's successes largely originate from the incapacity of regime elites to maintain effective authoritarian manipulation, which in turn flows from international influences and the regime's organizational weakness (Levitsky and Way, 2010: 54–68). Still, the regime's capacity – and the interests and identities of regime elites – are strongly shaped by oppositional activities, including protest campaigns.

The impact of popular protest on political change, which the existing literature largely ignores (but see Kalandadze and Orenstein, 2009), involves both immediate and long-term dimensions. The opposition's initial protests reveal that regime elites are vulnerable, attract various opponents of regime elites, encourage those who have not taken part in earlier protests to join in (Tarrow, 2011: 195–214) and may thus trigger political crisis. Another form of immediate outcome involves important concessions from regime elites, such as policy reversals, dismissal of regime officials and defence of legally granted (but in practice repeatedly restricted) freedoms. In some cases, regime crises, government change and/or regime change may occur.

Popular protest also has a long-term, 'constitutive' influence on political regimes. It shapes the identities, interests and capacities of authoritarian elites and opposition forces, as well as the regime's formal and informal institutions. First, by triggering political polarization, and thus rapid vacating of the uncommitted or moderate centre, large protest campaigns erode popular support for regime elites, strengthen solidarity among their core supporters and may push them towards more exclusive and repressive policies. Second, they can facilitate coalition building among opposition parties and civil society groups, build confidence among regime opponents and foster the evolution of disparate goals and of short-term coalition-building efforts into broad programmatic anti-regime coalitions. Third, protest campaigns also provide opposition and other participants experience with anti-regime protest, help forge long-lasting anti-regime networks and strengthen the opposition's organizational resources.

Competitive authoritarianism and anti-regime protests in Serbia in the early 1990s

Serbia under Milošević was not formally an independent state but the largest of six republics of socialist Yugoslavia until the latter's collapse in 1991–1992, and subsequently a federal unit in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) along with Montenegro. Nonetheless, Serbia effectively operated as an independent polity during much of this period. Yugoslavia, the most decentralized communist multi-national federation, had started disintegrating with the crumbling of communism and spiralling nationalist conflicts in 1989–1990 (Vladisavljević, 2008). Multi-party elections, held in all republics but not at the federal level, produced separate party systems that facilitated the break-up of the state. The newly formed FRY was an unusual federation in which Serbia comprised over 90% of the population and resources and in which federal institutions had little power. After a major row between Milošević and Montenegro's leaders in 1997, the dominant political party in the smaller republic gradually withdrew from the federal institutions.

The gradual shift from a crumbling communist regime to a new form of authoritarianism in Serbia ended with the first multi-party elections in December 1990. In contrast to much of Eastern Europe, the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) and its exceptionally popular leader Slobodan Milošević thrashed their rivals. Milošević won 65.3% of the popular vote, while Vuk Drašković, the leader of the Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO), the largest opposition party, gathered only 16.4%. Simultaneously, 46.1% of the electorate voted for Milošević's SPS and the rest for various

opposition parties and independent candidates. The deeply unfair electoral process – not least the extensive anti-opposition propaganda in state-controlled media and massive abuse of state resources for partisan ends – resulted in a three-quarters majority in parliament for the SPS and in the marginalization of the opposition.

While many communist leaders in Eastern Europe jumped before they were seriously pushed, Milošević and his associates were able to ride the storm surrounding the end of communism. They enjoyed a 'genetic' legitimacy among their core supporters, based on specific historical circumstances that led to the establishment of their rule. Milošević's ascent to the position of Serbia's communist leader in 1986–1987 had been an internal party affair, without much influence from society. In contrast, his subsequent consolidation in power and extraordinary popularity owed much to the rapid disintegration of the communist power structure and the spread of nationalism in a complex multi-national federation in 1988–1989. These developments unfolded under strong pressures 'from below' during a large protest wave in Serbia and Montenegro, which Milošević supported against other parts of the communist establishment (Vladisavljević, 2008). One consequence was a large and committed membership of the ruling party. In early 1991, the SPS had about 350,000 members, a majority of whom had never been members of the communist party, against 60,000 of the largest opposition party, the SPO.[3] Another consequence was the renewal of the political elite. The younger generation of Serbia's communists had already been in power since the mid-1980s, and the leadership was further renewed with many younger party-state officials and entrepreneurs of the 'anti-bureaucratic revolution', that is, leaders of protest campaigns against the political establishment in 1988–1989 (Vladisavljević, 2008: 195–211). In the 1990 elections, the SPS fielded as its candidates many well-respected doctors, lawyers and businessmen.

The ruling party blatantly exploited state resources for partisan purposes and systematically violated newly introduced democratic procedures. First, Milošević created the SPS before the 1990 elections by fusing the communist party (SKS) and its transmission-belt organization (SSRN), partly to preserve the old regime's organizational resources and partly to maintain control over huge material assets of the party-state. Second, the ruling party firmly controlled most electronic and print media and employed them to denounce opposition leaders as corrupt and quarrelling traitors of the nation. Some opposition parties were systematically accused of being unpatriotic – at a time when the struggle of Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia for national self-determination enjoyed broad popular support – while others were accused of chauvinism and warmongering. Meanwhile, Milošević and the SPS were presented as patriotic, moderate and experienced. The other media strategy was effectively to exclude the opposition from coverage and thus create the sense that the SPS was a natural ruling party (see Gordy, 1999: 33, 38, 71; Matić, 1997: 80–83). Third, there was a concerted effort to split and divide the opposition. Milošević strongly supported the rise of the extremist Serbian Radical Party (SRS) in order to pit authoritarian against democratic opposition (Antonić, 2002: 121–123, 151–159).

Still, two waves of popular mobilization shook the foundations of Milošević's political establishment early on. On 9 March 1991, opposition parties held a protest of tens of thousands in Belgrade over the continuing anti-opposition propaganda of the regime's media. A failed attempt by the police to break up the demonstration ended in chaos and a final toll of two dead, including a policeman. Milošević then arranged for tanks to be sent onto the streets of the capital to maintain order,[4] jailed the opposition leader and silenced Belgrade's two independent TV and radio stations. In turn, 2000 students marched to the city's centre and occupied one of Belgrade's central squares with thousands of other citizens for four days, demanding the resignation of the Minister of Interior and the directors of state television and the lifting of the independent media blackout. Ultimately, Milošević accepted these demands in order to end student protests (*Vreme*, 11 March 1991: 10–14; 18 March 1991: 4–9, 26–29). There were other important implications. First, the protests

undermined the regime's populist credentials: those who built their public image on support for street rallies in the late 1980s now sent riot police, even tanks, to disperse popular protests. Second, opposition parties were now back in the political process just three months after a crushing electoral defeat.

The break-up of Yugoslavia, which resulted in civil war in 1991–1992, and the 1991 regime crisis facilitated less conciliatory policies on the part of regime elites. First, they provided greater financial and military support for fellow Serbs to create their own states in Croatia and Bosnia, which in turn triggered UN economic sanctions against the FRY. Second, Milošević and Montenegro's leaders introduced a new federal constitution in April 1992, without consulting opposition parties, and called federal parliamentary elections. Opposition forces, having learned lessons from 1991, now created the Democratic Movement of Serbia (DEPOS) – a broad coalition supported by many intellectuals and church dignitaries – which boycotted the elections and called for anti-regime resistance. Belgrade University went on strike and student protests from the previous year were now replayed (*Vreme*, 1 June 1992: 10–12; 22 June 1992: 8–10). Facing international isolation and opposition protests, Milošević appointed a well-known writer and dissident under communism as federal president and an American billionaire of Serb origin as federal prime minister. He also promised parliamentary and presidential elections by the end of year. A demonstration of 100,000 people occurred in late June and lasted, with fewer crowds and parallel student protests, for a week. Ultimately, the opposition accepted Milošević's proposals and ended the protests.[5]

Why did Milošević's regime not collapse in the face of massive anti-regime mobilizations in March 1991 and June 1992? Why at least did not the opposition secure more substantial and long-lasting concessions? The regime's 'genetic' legitimacy mattered, as did Milošević's exceptional popularity and authoritarian manipulation. The regime also faced a fragmented opposition. Programmatic differences stemmed from Serbia's state-building challenges. Some opposition parties supported Milošević's policy in favour of the national self-determination of Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia, while others were strongly against it. Political parties that represented Kosovo Albanians, an ethnic majority in this autonomous province, boycotted political institutions and demanded secession. Opposition leaders also harboured great personal animosities. The DEPOS was an improvement over earlier opposition conflicts, but its participants shared little more than provisional demands for Milošević's resignation and for free and fair elections (see Stefanović, 1994). To sum up, an exceptionally strong regime proved resilient against a weak to moderately strong democratic opposition, despite extensive space for such encounters provided by competitive authoritarianism.

Political polarization, electoral fraud and the winter protests of 1996–1997

The most visible consequence of the regime crises and popular mobilization was a considerable decline in electoral support for regime incumbents. In the December 1992 presidential and parliamentary elections, Milošević won 53.2% of the vote against 32.1% of the outgoing federal prime minister; the SPS slumped from 46.1% to 28.8% of the vote (translated into 40.4% of seats). The SPS then bounced back with 36.7% of the vote (49.2% of seats) in the December 1993 parliamentary elections triggered by the withdrawal of SRS support for the minority government. Election results still reflected widespread authoritarian manipulation.

The ruling party translated its 1990 electoral victory into a firm grip over the state apparatus and local government, and routinely employed public sector resources for partisan purposes. The SPS retained control over large state enterprises by blocking privatization. During the UN sanctions,

regime incumbents gained nearly total control over the export and import of goods and smuggling, especially of strategic materials (Arandarenko, 2000). They compensated for declining passions of their supporters by building an elaborate clientelist network, which extended from regime heights to local government and public sector companies (Cohen, 2001: 129-136). The regime-controlled electronic media, the most important information source for the population, exploited the sanctions and their economic consequences to denounce democratic opposition leaders as Western stooges. After Milošević's foreign policy reversal and support for ending the Bosnian war, the media stopped actively denigrating the opposition. They now ignored it altogether while glorifying Milošević's 'peace-loving' initiatives (Matić, 1997: 83–86). Harassment of the opposition continued. After a policeman died during a small but violent opposition protest in June 1993, Drašković and his wife were badly beaten by the police and imprisoned. They were released a few weeks later following Drašković's hunger strike and the appeals of foreign leaders (see Drašković, 2001: 163–171).

The 1991–1992 protest campaigns, and regime crises strongly shaped the interests and identities of key political forces. Earlier, Serbia had featured a multipolar political space, with the hegemonic SPS and many small (often mutually hostile) opposition parties. The protests triggered the division of the country into two political camps – the regime and opposition – which reduced the number of uncommitted actors and facilitated the formation of a new democratic opposition identity. The opposition parties' priorities shifted from an exclusive focus on their electoral prospects to a broader struggle against authoritarian rule. The opposition coalition 'Zajedno' (Together) was built upon this legacy during a series of opposition rallies and talks in the summer and autumn of 1996 (see Ćetković, 2000: 160–172). 'Zajedno' reflected a programmatic realignment and organizational reinforcement of the democratic opposition. The latter now aimed not only at the coming elections and the removal of Milošević, but also at the country's mid- to long-term democratization and modernization. In 1992, the opposition parties fielded election monitors in roughly half the c.10,000 polling stations; four years later, they covered nearly all of them. Civil society groups emerged initially as intellectual circles and environmental societies, and expanded in reaction to the wars in Yugoslavia's successor states, principally in the form of anti-war, humanitarian and legal support organizations, and independent trade unions. These groups gradually acquired a broader anti-regime outlook and increasingly joined forces with opposition parties and other regime opponents (see Stojiljković, 2006: 322–325).

Federal parliamentary and local elections were held in November 1996, after the end of the war in Bosnia and of economic sanctions. While the SPS-led coalition secured 45.4% of the vote (59.3% of seats), 'Zajedno' won a resounding victory in local elections. Milošević privately conceded defeat in the latter elections but then changed his mind, as a Belgrade mayor loyal to Milošević later testified (*Vreme*, 6 November 1999: 26). Local election committees and courts started illegally annulling election results in constituencies where the SPS lost (*Vreme*, 23 November 1996: 6–11). Electoral fraud had occurred before, but its scale was unclear. The opposition's efforts to improve election monitoring now paid off. Opposition leaders hesitated initially, but were pushed into action by growing spontaneous popular protests against electoral fraud. Soon tens of thousands people attended daily protests in Belgrade and other cities. Protesters spontaneously marched along central streets of Belgrade, hurled eggs at state and television buildings and blew whistles throughout. Students also initiated protests, but kept them separate. During the evening state television news broadcasts, thousands of people showed up on their terraces and windows to bang pots, demonstrating that they were fed up with regime propaganda.

The protests in freezing winter weather lasted for 88 consecutive days, and on occasions several hundred thousand protesters turned up on the streets of Belgrade and tens of thousands in other cities. Cracks within regime elites started to emerge under the pressure of popular protests.

Belgrade's SPS mayor openly acknowledged opposition victory, while the army chief met student protest leaders and stated publicly that forces under his command would keep out of the events. The BK TV network, which had long supported Milošević, now defected to the opposition. Facing massive non-violent resistance and growing international pressure, Milošević ultimately reinstated the opposition election victory, which meant opposition control over the capital and other large cities.[6]

Why did regime elites manage to weather the protests? Milošević and the SPS were now clearly weaker than in the early 1990s, but there was still a power imbalance between the regime and opposition. The legacy of nationalist conflicts in the former Yugoslavia still mattered. In the early 1990s, Milošević strongly supported Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia; by the mid-1990s, he withdrew much of this support and insisted that peace in the region and economic development of Serbia mattered more. Since the population was exhausted by economic hardship and international isolation, Milošević's electoral prospects improved. Western officials now portrayed him as a statesman who helped end the Bosnian war and thus made the lifting of UN sanctions possible. Milošević's manoeuvrings baffled democratic opposition leaders. Some had strongly opposed his policy towards Serbs outside Serbia, while others had largely approved. Now the former supported Milošević's policy shift and the latter opposed it. Finally, 'Zajedno' fought a weak election campaign: a highly popular former central bank governor withdrew from the coalition's helm in the middle of the campaign. In short, weakened regime incumbents survived the challenge by a moderately strong opposition thanks largely to favourable contextual factors.

The regime's neo-patrimonialist turn and Serbia's October

The 1996 protest wave undermined Milošević internally and shattered the little international backing he had secured in negotiations to end the Bosnian war. Increasingly personal, arbitrary and repressive rule followed. Soon a leadership struggle brought down the 'Zajedno' coalition. Milošević in fact bought off the SPO, its largest party, by helping its leaders take over Belgrade's city authorities. Towards the end of his second term as president of Serbia, Milošević moved to the unelected position of FRY president. The democratic opposition, principally the remaining parties from 'Zajedno', boycotted the September 1997 elections, while Milošević's party kept hold of Serbia's presidency and parliament, with the help of the extremist SRS, their new coalition partner.

The populist competitive authoritarian regime transformed gradually into an exclusive personalist rulership with neo-patrimonial features. The regime's unity stemmed originally from Milošević's exceptional popularity, electoral success and tight control over the economy and public sector. As the regime's electoral support eroded and the opposition pressure increased – principally through waves of mobilization – Milošević increasingly maintained the regime through personalist and arbitrary rule. In the early 1990s, a high turnover rate in the SPS leadership reflected its electoral focus and its efforts to represent the interests of important segments of society. Since the mid-1990s, however, it revealed Milošević's desire to remove all potential opponents and to distance himself from the regime's previous policies. He fired several key SPS officials in 1995; only a third of members of the party's Main Committee elected in 1992 retained their positions four years later (Vukomanović, 1997: 42).

Milošević further tightened control over regime elites by weakening the SPS through a coalition with two small regime parties. The Yugoslav Left (JUL), a small party of his wife, received a quarter of the coalition's seats in the lower chamber of the federal parliament, despite being electorally insignificant. The JUL cadre – drawn from among unpopular politicians and businessmen slavishly subservient to Milošević and his wife, together with a few colourful Leftists – occupied important

ministerial posts and directorships in large state enterprises (see Jović, 2001: 139–147). The quality of leadership declined considerably, the regime's ties with society eroded and corruption abounded in the public sector. The competitive authoritarian regime, which initially relied on its founder's popularity, the SPS's electoral and organizational strength and its large clientelist network, gradually transformed into a highly personalist and arbitrary rule of Milošević and small clique of his family's friends and courtiers. Milošević personally maintained an austere lifestyle, but his son and daughter and his cronies excelled in hedonism. This was heavily publicized by the independent media and bred resentment among citizens who could barely make a living (see Đukić, 2009: 407–411, 448–450, 619–621).

The extensive penetration of state institutions by the ruling clique in the late 1990s made the emergence of regime soft-liners, who could reach out to the democratic opposition, highly unlikely. The military retained a degree of autonomy in spite of Milošević's distrust, repeated purges of its top echelons and lack of resources. However, the growing power of the police and paramilitary forces reduced the threat of military involvement in politics, and many generals strongly disliked a democratic, pro-Western opposition. Therefore, democratization by way of an elite pact between regime soft-liners and opposition moderates was not an option.

'Zajedno' broke up, but left a lasting legacy. Political identities were now highly polarized. Surveys revealed a strong anti-regime orientation among most voters, but also disillusionment with the still fragmented opposition. The opposition improved its organizational capabilities, exploiting local government resources under its control. A newly formed network of independent local electronic media gave a stronger voice to regime opponents. The civic sector grew rapidly in size and influence. New mainstream, anti-regime and pro-European, civic organizations expanded with the introduction of repressive legislation on the media and higher education (Stojiljković, 2006: 271–274, 330–334).

In 1997–1998 a long-standing conflict between Serbs and Albanians in and over Kosovo, Serbia's autonomous province, was reignited by Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) insurgency and harsh government responses, both of which resulted in civilian casualties. In March 1999, NATO initiated air strikes against the FRY (Serbia and Montenegro). The 11-week bombing campaign ended with UN Security Council Resolution 1244, which stated that Kosovo remained part of the FRY but the province effectively became an international protectorate. There was little dissent during the war, but popular protests against Milošević broke out soon after the end of hostilities and the lifting of the state of emergency. Large protests occurred in late June and early July in several cities and then spread across Serbia. Dignitaries of the Serbian Orthodox Church called again for Milošević to resign and 'Otpor' (Resistance), a student and youth movement, reappeared. The largest protest in this wave of anti-regime mobilization occurred in Belgrade in August 1999 with over 100,000 protesters (*Vreme*, 3 July 1999: 2–3; 10 July 1999: 2–5; 17 July 1999: 6; 28 August 1999: 2–5). However, when it became clear that personal animosities among the leaders would prevent opposition coalition building, the protests petered out.

Why did Milošević not fall from power in 1999? He had just lost the war against NATO, which equalled a national humiliation. Still, the summer 1999 wave of mobilization occurred too soon after the war. People were still suffering from the effects of the war and its devastating consequences for the economy and social life; only the most committed activists were in the mood for anti-regime protest. NATO bombing in fact helped Milošević consolidate power, at least in the short term. For most people, his removal from power was not a priority during the war, while they subsequently needed time to come to terms with consequences of the intervention. The war also provided an excuse to the regime to increase repression: a prominent independent journalist was assassinated outside his flat. Finally, a fragmented opposition remained an important obstacle to effective challenges of the regime.

In the following months, opposition parties renewed attempts to create a common opposition front. Milošević provided an opportunity by changing the federal constitution to make the federal presidency directly elected and by calling federal presidential and parliamentary elections for September 2000. The opposition forces were better prepared this time, boosted by financial support from Western governments and their promise to end Serbia's international isolation. Opposition parties formed a broad coalition – the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS) – which presented a joint list for parliamentary elections and ,Vojislav Koštunica as presidential candidate. Koštunica led a small opposition party but was highly regarded for his personal integrity, patriotism and principled opposition to authoritarian rule. The NGO sector and independent media played an important role in getting people to vote in the elections, while 'Otpor' energized young people through non-violent resistance (see Bujošević and Radovanović, 2003).

Ultimately, Koštunica won just over half of the vote against Milošević's less than 40%. Since Milošević refused to concede defeat and leave office, the DOS initiated a wave of demonstrations and strikes across the country. The protests culminated in a large strike of the workers in Kolubara, a strategic mining and power corporation, and a massive demonstration in Belgrade on 5 October 2000. Several hundred thousand protesters arrived in long columns of buses, trucks and cars from various parts of Serbia and converged on the square outside the Federal Assembly, taking control of the building. The event triggered the collapse of the regime's power structure, the police and military forces withdrew their support from Milošević, and the DOS and Koštunica took over the main levers of power. The takeover unfolded peacefully for the most part, with only sporadic violence (*Vreme*, 28 September 2000: 6–13; 5 October 2000: 3–15; 12 October 2000: 4–17; 19 October 2000: 7–11).

Why did Milošević fall from power in October 2000? The regime's capacity to keep its supporters satisfied and to employ effective repression against democratic opposition protests had declined, while the opposition's capacity to challenge authorities had improved. The regime's weakness originated principally from its neo-patrimonialist turn: an inclusive populist regime had transformed into an exclusive personalist rulership. The SPS, initially the regime's hegemonic party, with an extensive organizational network, well-educated cadre, tightly run operations and close ties with the largest trade union, had turned into a worn out, poorly run electoral vehicle for Milošević. Contextual factors were also important. First, the Kosovo war weakened Milošević in the long run, especially the regime's capacity for repression. Second, before the 1996 elections, there were improvements in living standards and hopes of better life following the end of the Bosnian war and the lifting of economic sanctions. In 2000, economic hardship prevailed as the country was recovering very slowly from NATO bombing. Third, in 1997 Richard Holbrook, US special envoy to the region, had called the opposition's boycott of deeply flawed elections 'stupid' and thus strongly supported Milošević (*Vreme*, 16 August 1997: 15). Now Western leaders provided support to the opposition and increased the diplomatic and financial isolation of regime insiders and their friends, pressing them to reconsider their options.

The opposition's strength came from various sources. Firstly, the DOS exploited opposition-controlled local government and electronic media, while the civic sector and independent media also helped to mobilize anti-regime vote. Secondly, opposition parties, civic groups, independent media and opposition-controlled municipalities received financial aid of $70–80 million from the US and European governments and private groups. The US Democratic and Republican party institutes helped train over 5000 opposition party activists and 10,000 local election monitors, and provided US-financed polling (see Carothers, 2001). Thirdly, Milošević unintentionally aided the opposition's coalition-building efforts. After a failed assassination attempt by the secret police, the mercurial leader of the SPO left Serbia and thus inadvertently opened the way for the creation of a new opposition coalition. To sum up, a severely weakened regime now confronted a strong and

committed opposition – forged principally through earlier waves of anti-regime mobilization – which sharply reduced its chances of survival.

Conclusion

Milošević's rule is often interpreted in light of the highly specific circumstances in which it emerged and developed – including the break-up of Yugoslavia, the ensuing civil wars in Bosnia and Croatia, continuing Serb-Albanian struggles in and over Kosovo and the 1999 NATO bombing (Cohen, 2001) – and, more particularly, war (Popov, 1996) and some instruments of rule, such as the secret police (Drašković, 2001). Still, Milošević's regime was hardly unique in those respects. Most (but not all) post-communist competitive authoritarian countries emerged from the break-up of larger states – the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia – and parallel with rising nationalist passions. Milošević was involved in one way or another in the wars in Croatia and Bosnia, and over Kosovo. The wars helped shape his rule, but a competitive authoritarian regime emerged well before the onset of the wars, retained its key features throughout, remained in place even after the violence and was overthrown by non-violent popular mobilization. Some post-communist competitive authoritarian countries have also experienced wars, such as Croatia (1991–1995), Armenia (1991–1994) and Georgia (1991–1993, 2008), while Slovakia, Romania and Ukraine did not. Likewise, there is evidence that agents of the secret police assassinated journalist Ćuruvija and former Serbian President Stambolić, and failed twice to eliminate Drašković (Đukić, 2009: 477–479, 506, 548–549). Yet, such extreme acts occurred exclusively at the height of the regime's neo-patrimonialist phase, between April 1999 and August 2000. Earlier, the secret police involvement had formed only a part of the broader package of authoritarian manipulation.

Do existing explanations of political change in competitive authoritarian regimes shed light on the Serbian case? There is little evidence for Lindberg's claim (2009) that repeated multi-party elections cause democratization. I have shown that democratization was pushed forward by opposition activities, principally protest campaigns, which only in some cases related to electoral conflicts. There is evidence for the claims that electoral fraud amplified popular discontent with Milošević (Thompson and Kuntz, 2004) and that opposition strategies mattered, including the creation of broad multi-party coalitions (Howard and Roessler, 2006) and, in general, the electoral model of opposition mobilization (Bunce and Wolchik, 2011). Still, regime change resulted principally from massive popular mobilization, which built upon strong opposition identities and solidarities, broad activist networks, strong organizations and extensive experience with non-violent protest – all of which originated at least in part from earlier waves of mobilization.[7] Elite splits and defections to the opposition did not result from stolen elections, but from massive demonstrations that altered the balance of power between the regime and opposition. The regime's organizational weakness strongly contributed to the fall of Milošević (Levitsky and Way, 2010), but its sources were more in long-standing, unrelenting opposition pressures and the resulting neo-patrimonialist turn of the regime and less in the 1999 NATO bombing.

The democratic opposition mounted several protest campaigns that nearly toppled Milošević before 2000, exploiting ample institutional resources and energized by grievances systematically produced by competitive authoritarianism. In the early 1990s, a fragmented opposition met an exceptionally popular regime. Still, the 1991–1992 protest campaigns shook the regime's foundations, triggered political polarization, eroded support for regime elites, and fostered the broadening of networks and an increase in the organizational capabilities of opposition forces. In 1996–1997, a moderately strong regime survived the challenge by a moderately strong opposition thanks to favourable contextual factors. The long-term implications of the winter protests were, however, considerable. By stealing the opposition's election victory, Milošević lost

whatever authority he enjoyed internally or had earned abroad by helping to stop the war in Bosnia. The gap between the regime and opposition camps widened, the uncommitted centre diminished and democratic opposition identity was reinforced. Opposition parties took control of key local governments and their resources, while civic groups and independent media expanded rapidly. This power shift between the regime and the opposition was not apparent during the summer of 1999 when authoritarian rule was weakened by defeat in war, but in its most repressive stage. In 2000, the consequences of the regime's neo-patrimonialist turn and of war undermined regime elites and empowered opposition forces. This time a weak regime met a strong and committed opposition in a domestic and international context favourable to regime change. To sum up, this case study provides ample evidence of the causal mechanisms that link competitive authoritarianism and popular protest.

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Notes

1. The latter include Albania, Armenia, Belarus, Croatia, Georgia, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine. Kyrgyzstan turned competitive authoritarian later. See Levitsky and Way (2010: 16, 32, 369–370).
2. For sultanism and its implications see Chehabi and Linz (1998: 7–23) and Goodwin (2001: 26–27).
3. Milan Jovanović, the SPS executive secretary at the time and political science professor, interview with the author.
4. Borisav Jović, a member of Yugoslavia's collective presidency and Milošević's associate at the time, recounted the events in Jović (2001): 65–69.
5. *Vreme*, 6 July 1992: 12–15. For the student protests see Kuzmanović (1993); a regime insider account is provided in Rančić (1994).
6. *Vreme*, 23 November 1996: 6–11; 30 November 1996: 8–15; 7 December 1996: 6–8; 14 December 1996: 6–9; 21 December 1996: 6–10; 28 December 1996: 6–12; 4 January 1997: 6–9; 11 January 1997: 6–10; 18 January 1997: 6–10; 25 January 1997: 6–13; 8 February 1997: 6–10. See also Babović et al. (1997).
7. For a related argument that focuses on the Otpor movement see Nikolayenko (2013).

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