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What is This?

Origins of the movement's strategy: The case of the Serbian youth movement Otpor

Olena Nikolayenko

Abstract

Using the case of the Serbian social movement Otpor (Resistance), this article argues that learning is critical to the development of an effective movement strategy. This article specifies three learning mechanisms: (1) participation in previous protest campaigns, (2) the cross-national diffusion of ideas, and (3) within-movement deliberation practices. The empirical analysis is based upon semi-structured interviews with former movement participants. This research seeks to contribute to the comparative democratization literature by tracing the development of the movement's strategy in a hybrid regime falling somewhere between democracy and dictatorship.

Keywords

social movements, nonviolent resistance, democratization, Serbia, youth

During the past few years, there has been growing interest in the study of movement strategies (Downey and Rohlinger, 2008; Ganz, 2009; Jasper, 2004, 2006; McCammon, 2012; Maney et al., 2012; Meyer and Staggenborg, 2008). Strategy is a long-term plan of action pursued by a challenger organization to attain its goals, while tactics are the means used to execute the strategy. Empirical research indicates that strategy is vital to a movement's success. Szymanski (2003), for example, demonstrates the impact of strategy on the outcome of two temperance campaigns in the USA. Similarly, McCammon (2012) shows how the use of protest tactics affected women's struggle for changes in US jury laws. Given the potential effects of strategy on social movement outcomes, surprisingly little attention has been paid to the origins of movement action. This article seeks to address this issue by examining the case of the Serbian social movement Otpor (Resistance).

This article argues that learning is critical to the development of an effective movement strategy. The article specifies three learning mechanisms: (1) participation in previous protest campaigns,

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(2) the cross-national diffusion of ideas, and (3) within-movement deliberation practices. Based upon semi-structured interviews with former movement participants, this empirical inquiry traces how movement choices are informed by earlier protest campaigns and within-movement deliberation practices.

The case of Otpor warrants academic attention for several reasons. First, Otpor represents a social movement that effectively mobilized a large number of citizens in a repressive political regime and contributed to the downfall of the incumbent president Slobodan Milosevic. Formed by a group of university students in October 1998, the social movement grew into a nationwide network of approximately 70,000 members in more than 130 cells across the country (Cohen, 2000). Thousands of young people became engaged in nonviolent resistance to the regime. Furthermore, the social movement propelled the electoral defeat of the incumbent president by boosting the turnout of young voters. Remarkably, almost 86 percent of voters aged 18–29 participated in the 2000 elections (Paunovic et al., 2000: 39). Since mass mobilization is often critical to the breakdown of a political regime, analysis of Otpor's strategies can deepen our understanding of factors conducive to regime change. A related reason for the study of Otpor's strategies lies in the movement's commitment to nonviolence. The analysis of the Serbian experience illustrates how the use of nonviolent methods, rather than violence, may lead to the removal of an incumbent ruler from power. Moreover, the Serbian social movement merits academic attention because its model of nonviolent resistance became diffused across the post-communist region and beyond (Bunce and Wolchik, 2006a; Nikolayenko, 2007; Rosenberg, 2011).

This article seeks to extend the social movement literature by unraveling the origins of the movement's strategy in a nondemocratic setting. The bulk of empirical research has focused on movement strategies and protest tactics in mature democracies (Gamson, 1990; Ganz, 2000, 2009; McAdam, 1983; McCammon, 2012; Meyer and Staggenborg, 2008; Tarrow, 1993, 1998; Tilly, 1978, 1995). Numerous studies have also analyzed social movements in autocracies (Calhoun, 1994; Eckstein, 2001; Nepstad, 2011; Osa, 2003; Schock, 2005). The proliferation of hybrid regimes, falling somewhere between democracy and dictatorship, provides another political context for studying social movements in the post-Cold War period. A salient feature of a hybrid regime is the nominal presence of democratic institutions and the systematic violation of democratic procedures by the ruling elite to the extent that the overturning of power is hardly possible (Diamond, 2002; Levitsky and Way, 2010a). This article suggests that the regime type influences the timing of mass mobilization, the scope of a movement's claims, and the repertoire of contention, that is, 'a limited set of routines that are learned, shared, and acted out through a relatively deliberate process of choice' (Tilly, 1995: 26). The regime type also affects learning processes conducive to the development of movement strategies.

In addition, this article seeks to contribute to the burgeoning research on electoral revolutions (Arias-King, 2007a; Aslund and McFaul, 2006; Bunce and Wolchik, 2006b, 2011; Fairbanks, 2004; Forbig and Demes, 2007; Karumidze and Wertsch, 2005; Kuzio, 2005; McFaul, 2005). During the past decade, large-scale electoral fraud has triggered mass protests against regimes and culminated in the resignation of incumbents in a few post-communist states. Social scientists have provided multiple explanations for this phenomenon. Some scholars argue that structural factors are primarily responsible for the breakdown of hybrid regimes (for example, Levitsky and Way, 2010a; Way, 2008). Others contend that the cross-national diffusion of ideas and the adoption of savvy electoral strategies have a strong impact on the outcome of electoral revolutions (for example, Beissinger, 2007, 2009; Bunce and Wolchik, 2006b, 2009, 2011). Though the present analysis does not test these competing hypotheses, it still speaks to the debate over the relative importance of structure and agency. In tracing the origins of a movement's strategy, this article illustrates how

civic activists can display resourcefulness in their interactions with state authorities and, thus, influence the odds of political change.

The rest of the article proceeds in the following manner. Section 2 provides an overview of Serbian politics in the late 1990s. Section 3 lays out the theoretical framework for this study. Section 4 briefly describes the data sources. Section 5 examines Otpor's strategy. Section 6 investigates how earlier protest campaigns and within-movement deliberation practices influenced the development of the movement's strategy. The article concludes by pointing out the implications of this research.

Serbia in the late 1990s

Serbia under Milosevic was a hybrid regime, displaying a combination of democratic and authoritarian features.[1] On the one hand, the incumbent government maintained a facade of democracy and regularly held multiparty elections. On the other hand, the ruling elite systematically hampered the turnover of power by safeguarding 'an uneven playing field' (see Levitsky and Way, 2010b). As the country's president and leader of the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), Milosevic concentrated most power in his own hands. According to Sekelj (2000: 59–61), there were four major factors conducive to the consolidation of Milosevic's power in the early 1990s: the president's imposition of the rules of the game, the fragmentation of the political opposition, state control of the media, and the lack of a viable alternative to the socialist government. The late 1990s, however, were marked by shifting alignments, the unification of the opposition political parties, the growth of local TV channels, and the withdrawal of western support for the incumbent president. This political opportunity structure, defined as 'consistent – but not necessarily formal or permanent – dimensions of the political struggle that encourage people to engage in contentious politics' (Tarrow, 1998: 19–20), set the context for the development of Otpor's strategy.

Milosevic exploited a 'strong distributive and repressive machinery' inherited from the communist period to concentrate most political and economic power in his hands (Gordy, 1999: 15). As the successor to the League of the Communists of Serbia, the SPS gained access to the League's formidable infrastructure. In addition, the president and his cronies developed opaque business schemes to amass wealth (Miljkovic and Hoare, 2005). The government also strengthened its repressive capacities by increasing the size of the police force and secret services. Thomas (1999: 161), for example, reports that Belgrade was 'the most heavily policed capital in Europe' in the 1990s.

Nonetheless, civil society limited the exercise of the president's power. According to some estimates, there were approximately 2000 registered nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) (USAID, 2001: 144) as well as 300 privately owned radio stations and 100 privately owned TV stations, operating mainly at the local level, in 1997 (Bardos, 2001: 424). These civil society actors posed a threat to the incumbent government. Furthermore, the existing regime was vulnerable to public outrage over the violation of democratic procedures (see Thompson and Kuntz, 2004). To quell mass protests against vote-rigging in 1996–97, the government was forced to make concessions and recognize the opposition's electoral victories. As a result of the 1996 local elections, opposition political parties gained a majority of seats in most large cities. Additional cracks in the political regime emerged on the eve of the 2000 elections for the federal Yugoslav presidency, the federal assembly, and city councils.

The unification of the political opposition around a single presidential candidate signaled a positive change in domestic politics on the eve of the 2000 elections. Throughout the 1990s, the opposition political parties were divided along ideological lines.[2] Lack of unity within the

opposition camp was aggravated by the power struggle between the leaders of the main opposition political parties. On the eve of the 1996 local elections, the Civic Alliance, the Democratic Party, and the Serbian Renewal Movement formed the coalition Zajedno (Together), but it fell apart shortly after the elections. The opposition made another attempt to present a united front against Milosevic in 2000. Some 18 political parties established the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS) and backed the candidacy of Vojislav Kostunica, a constitutional lawyer with strong nationalist views. Public opinion polls indicated that Kostunica could beat Milosevic at the ballot box (Slavujevic, 2007: 343).

Another major political change occurred in the media sector in the late 1990s. A large number of local TV channels fell under the influence of the opposition political parties that had received a majority of seats in city councils as a result of the 1996 local elections. While the state-controlled TV channels with nationwide reach denied airtime to the political opposition, local media provided a platform for criticism of the incumbent government on the eve of the 2000 elections. By the same token, the radio station Radio B2-92, banned by the government on several occasions, continued to reach approximately 60 percent of the population by rebroadcasting the news via the Internet and satellite in cooperation with its regional partners.[3]

Furthermore, a substantive change in Milosevic's relations with the West and, in particular, a shift in US foreign policy altered the political opportunity structure in Serbia. Initially, western diplomats were willing to negotiate with Milosevic to end ethnic violence in the region. By 1999, however, Milosevic had lost his credentials as a peace-broker. The NATO military campaign lasting from March through to June 1999 was a hallmark of Milosevic's confrontation with the West. The subsequent western pressure on the incumbent president took three forms: economic sanctions, diplomatic isolation, and increased funding for civil society actors in Serbia (Carothers, 2001).

By the same token, deteriorating economic conditions eroded public support for Milosevic. The country experienced one of the world's highest levels of hyperinflation when its economy collapsed in the early 1990s (Bartlett, 2008: 42–8). Between October 1993 and January 1995 prices increased by 5 quadrillion percent (Lyon, 1996). As a result of these economic shocks, 'over half the population lived on less than US$60 per month and unemployment was near 50 percent' in the late 1990s (Haggett, 2002: 1761). This bleak economic climate gradually turned public opinion against the incumbent president. An opinion poll conducted in August 2000 found that less than one-third of the electorate intended to vote for Milosevic in the upcoming elections (Bideleux and Jeffries, 2007: 266). In sum, Milosevic miscalculated his chances of re-election when, almost a year before the end of his four-year presidential term, he introduced constitutional amendments to have the president of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) directly elected, and scheduled elections for 24 September 2000.

Theoretical framework

Drawing upon Ganz's work (2000, 2009), this article singles out three elements of strategy: timing, targeting, and tactics. First, a social movement needs to identify an opportunity for political change to act effectively upon its demands. Second, a social movement needs to focus on a specific target to make the best use of its resources. Third, activists need to choose tactics that are most likely to produce the desirable outcome. This article focuses on recruitment tactics, tactics vis-a-vis opponents, and tactics regarding allies. The 'logic of numbers' dictates that recruitment tactics are important in order to upset the power balance between the challenger organization and the ruling elite. Likewise, tactics regarding the movement's interaction with its opponents and allies are

critical to enlisting broad-based support for the movement's demands. This article assumes that the development of a movement's strategy is primarily a product of interactions among movement leaders (Ganz, 2009: 10).

The article focuses on the role of learning in shaping the development of a movement's strategy. The article specifies three learning mechanisms: (1) participation in previous protest campaigns, (2) the cross-national diffusion of ideas, and (3) within-movement deliberation practices. Participation in previous protest campaigns may enable civic activists to develop a more effective strategy, providing that they critically reflect upon earlier episodes of contention and draw valuable lessons from the past. Specifically, movement participants with a record of previous protest experience might gain a better understanding of what works and does not work in a particular social context. Another learning mechanism is related to the cross-national diffusion of ideas, broadly defined as 'the flow of social practices among actors within some larger system' (Strang and Meyer, 1993: 488). One contention in the literature is that direct interpersonal contact between adopters and transmitters increases the probability of diffusion. Another line of inquiry focuses on non-relational channels of diffusion and investigates, in particular, the role of the mass media. Ample empirical research documents the effects of the cross-national diffusion of ideas on movement strategies and tactics (Arias-King, 2007a; Bunce and Wolchik, 2006a, 2006b, 2011; Chabot, 2000; McAdam and Rucht, 1993). In light of new knowledge, for example, movement participants can modify a pre-existing repertoire of contention.

Moreover, within-movement deliberation practices may facilitate the development of the movement's strategy. Empirical evidence indicates that participatory decision-making within social movements has multiple benefits (Polletta, 2002). In particular, a deliberative structure that provides regular opportunities for group discussion, problem analysis, and collective decision-making is likely to generate more effective movement strategies than a structure that suppresses a broad discussion of movement strategies. This article assumes that a social movement with a horizontal organizational structure tends to be in a better position to facilitate learning processes via an open exchange of ideas.

The development of movement strategies in non-democracies is influenced by the repressive nature of the political regime. First, the pool of activists with previous protest experience and leadership skills might be smaller in non-democracies due to high levels of state repression. Second, state encroachment on political freedoms and, in particular, a government crackdown on the mass media might hamper the cross-national diffusion of ideas. Third, the government's use of informants and provocateurs might impede an open exchange of ideas among movement participants. In sum, civic activists in non-democracies need to overcome more obstacles to tap into the reservoir of public knowledge about anti-regime struggle and to craft more effective strategies.

Furthermore, the regime type affects the choice of movement strategies. The regime type imposes constraints on the timing of a viable protest campaign. Presumably, social movements in democracies can organize a protest campaign at any point in time, whereas civic activists in autocracies are systematically denied opportunities to express their political grievances and demand concessions from the government. Compared with autocracies, hybrid regimes offer limited opportunities for political action against the government. In particular, an election period may present an opportunity for mass mobilization against the regime (Forbig and Demes, 2007; Kuntz and Thompson, 2009; Lindberg, 2009). In addition, the regime type has an impact on the scope of movement's demands and its choice of tactics. While social movements in democracies can advance a wide range of political demands, the scope of permissible political claims is quite limited in non-democracies. An anti-incumbent campaign is usually met with repression in both autocracies and hybrid regimes. Incumbents in hybrid regimes, however, might be vulnerable to popular

demands for free and fair elections because the ruling elite seek to maintain a facade of democracy. Moreover, the choice of protest tactics varies across regime types. Compared with their counterparts in non-democracies, social movements in democracies can deploy a wider range of tactics without fear of state repression. In contrast, challenger organizations in hybrid regimes might adopt a mix of tactics commonly used in either liberal democracies or full-blown autocracies so that they can take advantage of nominally present democratic institutions and minimize the deployment of political violence against regime opponents.

Data sources

The analysis is based upon data from semi-structured interviews with 14 former Otpor members and a few nonmembers (for a list of interviewees, see the Appendix). I conducted most interviews during fieldwork in Serbia in January–February 2008. The main criterion for choosing interviewees was a leadership role in the movement. Specifically, eight out of eleven founding members of Otpor participated in the study.[4] Most interviewees resided in Belgrade. Additional data on protest events were retrieved from public sources, including media reports and NGO publications.

Otpor's strategic decisions

Timing of mass mobilization

Otpor's leadership recognized the snap presidential elections as an opportunity for ousting Milosevic from office and dismantling the repressive political regime. As previously described, several changes in the political opportunity structure increased the odds of mass mobilization against the regime. In particular, there emerged a viable alternative candidate to the incumbent president. Opinion polls showed that Kostunica was a frontrunner in the presidential race (Slavujevic, 2007: 343). At the same time, there were widespread concerns that Milosevic would manipulate electoral procedures to stay in power. In this political climate, the movement's leadership assumed that electoral fraud would provide a strong incentive for mass participation in protest activity. 'If somebody is messing up with your vote, it is personal,' said Srdja Popovic, head of Otpor's human resources department, when interviewed.

Targeting

The social movement articulated three major demands: (1) free and fair elections, (2) press freedom, and (3) depoliticized universities. More broadly, Otpor called for the removal of Milosevic from power. Otpor focused on the issue of free and fair elections because it provided a mechanism for a peaceful transfer of power from the ruling elite to the opposition forces. Yet, the integrity of the election process had been systematically compromised in Serbia through pre- and post-election abuses of democratic procedures (OSCE, 1997, 2000). The incumbent government, for example, regularly obstructed unbiased media coverage, denied domestic observers accreditation, and disseminated election results in a non-transparent manner. In anticipation of electoral fraud, regime opponents sought to bring as many voters to the polling stations as possible, since high voter turnout would hamper the clandestine manipulation of the vote count.

Another demand of the movement was press freedom. In particular, Otpor protested against draconian media laws. In October 1998, the Serbian parliament passed the Law on Public Information, granting the government broad powers to curtail press freedom. This law was applied

to impose hefty fines on media outlets critical of Milosevic. In addition, the government exploited the NATO bombing campaign to introduce further restrictions on journalists' work. The government's crackdown on the mass media inhibited citizens' access to information and hindered the opposition's efforts to campaign against the incumbent president.

In the face of mounting political pressure on universities, Otpor also called for reforms in the education sector. Specifically, the social movement opposed the 1998 Law on Universities that aimed to eliminate university autonomy and curtail academic freedoms by placing political conformists in positions of power. The law granted the government the right to appoint rectors, deans, and supervisory boards who, in turn, could unilaterally fire dissenting professors and exert administrative pressure on students. Yet, the introduction of repressive laws backfired and fueled the growth of the social movement.

Recruitment

Otpor's strategy was to build a broad base of supporters by recruiting citizens of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and ideological leanings. The core of the movement's membership was Serbian youth. Illic (2001) estimates that 71 percent of Otpor's members were under 25 years of age. Moreover, the majority of Otpor's members were students. Predrag Madzarevic, a member of Otpor's network department in the city of Kragujevac, recalled:

> In December 1998 I was a freshman in the Faculty of Law at the University of Kragujevac. My friends and I were sitting in a café, and a small group of people walked in. The girl put an Otpor flyer next to me. By that time, I had heard about Otpor from the mass media. In a few days, we met again in a student club. That's how Otpor was formed in Kragujevac.

When thousands of young people joined the movement, they drew their families into nonviolent struggle against Milosevic. This recruitment strategy grew, in part, from the belief that 'even if you disagree politically with your children, you are, above all, a parent' (Popovic interview). In addition, the concentration of universities in four Serbian cities contributed to the diffusion of the movement's ideas in the provinces. Slobodan Djindovic, a member of Otpor's university department responsible for coordinating the movement's relations with university students, stated:

> Students were our best messengers. There are only four universities in Serbia: University of Belgrade, University of Novi Sad, University of Nis, and University of Kragujevac. Students came from all parts of Serbia. When they went home to small towns and rural areas, they would spread the word.

The emergence of Otpor Mothers, a group of women sympathetic with the movement's cause, illustrates the growing web of citizens drawn into nonviolent struggle against the incumbent president. A spike in arrests of Otpor members led to the mobilization of women in Novi Sad (Markov and Kleut, 2005). In turn, whenever Otpor Mothers were held in detention, the Vojvodina Chamber of Lawyers provided legal assistance to women activists. Slobodan Homen, a member of Otpor's network department, noted that the movement built a nationwide network of lawyers doing pro bona work. 'It was a time of genuine friendship and camaraderie,' said a member of Otpor Mothers, Vesna Tomic. 'It didn't exist in any political organization. People were interested in only one thing – how to topple Milosevic.'

Furthermore, Otpor sought to broaden its base of supporters by offering multiple venues for political participation. Involvement in the campaign titled *Gotov Je!* (He's Finished!) was regarded as a high-risk activity due to its explicit anti-incumbent message. In contrast, a second campaign,

titled *Vreme Je!* (It's Time!), was designed to boost voter turnout and recruit more risk-averse citizens. As Ivan Andric, a member of Otpor's marketing department, put it, 'the GOTV [Get Out the Vote] campaign gave the less brave an opportunity to become involved.' In addition, the *Vreme Je!* campaign allowed Otpor to build ties with other civil society actors within the framework of the pre-election campaign *Izlaz 2000* (Exit 2000).[5] In February 2000, Otpor attracted media attention by mocking the SPS annual congress and holding its own national meeting in Belgrade to redefine itself formally as a broad-based civic movement, rather than a youth movement.

Tactics vis-a-vis opponents

A major movement's decision was to reject violence. The use of nonviolent methods was advantageous to the movement in several ways. First, nonviolent action could check the state's military capabilities. As Popovic pointed out when interviewed, 'We couldn't defeat Milosevic by force. NATO couldn't do it, so how could we?' Second, Otpor's commitment to nonviolence had a positive impact on the movement's recruitment campaign, since it appealed to a larger number of citizens in the war-torn country. Finally, the use of nonviolence boosted Otpor's legitimacy in the international community.

Furthermore, Otpor set itself apart from earlier protest campaigns by applying marketing ideas to anti-regime struggle. Taking cues from multinational corporations, the Serbian social movement created a culture of resistance. Otpor's symbol (the clenched fist) could be seen on stickers, badges, T-shirts, and other items commonly associated with a marketing campaign. Furthermore, Otpor promoted nonviolent resistance through a western-style advertisement aired on local TV channels. In the TV advertisement, an aproned middle-aged woman put a T-shirt with the image of Milosevic inside a laundry machine and pushed the button with the symbol of the clenched fist on it. Upon washing, the T-shirt was shown impeccably clean, without any trace of Milosevic on it. The resounding political message was that Otpor was capable of removing the incumbent president from power.

Ivan Marovic, a member of Otpor's press department, stated in interview that branding was an important dimension of the movement's strategy:

> When I have recently read an article about grassroots marketing, a new trend in the corporate world, I realized that that's exactly what we did. Our product was dissent. Our message was 'Jive Otpor.' In other words, you don't support resistance, you live it. We wanted people to join us and live resistance so we promoted revolution like a fashion line. We had Otpor T-shirts, mugs, and umbrellas. It was a lifestyle promotion.

The notion of a constant campaign was another idea Otpor borrowed from marketing. 'The movement never stopped ... [being] present,' said Ana Djordjevic, a designer and member of Otpor's marketing department. 'We live in a consumer society, whereby people tend to quickly forget a campaign, and Otpor constantly organized some action. It is also important to keep activists busy and informed. People felt that they were doing something.' This approach boosted the movement's visibility and gave members a feeling of accomplishment.

Otpor differed from the opposition political parties because it deftly used humor to lampoon the regime and overcome fear of the regime within the population. 'When you are fighting against brutal force, it is best to put up passive resistance and make funny jokes to show how stupid the regime is. And the Milosevic regime didn't know how to react to it,' said Nenad Belcevic, a member of Otpor's press department. In particular, movement participants parodied government action. When the government launched a fundraising campaign called 'Dinar for

Sowing' and placed donation boxes in public spaces to collect funds for farmers, Otpor responded with its own campaign 'Dinar for Retirement'. Otpor members put a barrel decorated with the president's picture in the street and offered passersby an opportunity to hit the barrel with a bat in exchange for coins. Dejan Randic, a member of Otpor's marketing department, recalled it as being one of the most successful street actions:

> the sound [of hitting the barrel] was astounding. After a couple of Otpor activists did it, 15–20 people lined up. It was working by itself. We were just sitting in the nearby café and watching. The secret police didn't know what to do. They couldn't arrest us because we looked like spectators of the street action. Then they just arrested the barrel. And journalists were there to report it. Then we reproduced this action in several cities. So the following headlines appeared in the media, 'The second barrel was arrested,' 'The third barrel was arrested.' We've got a lot of publicity without spending a lot of resources.

Within the framework of the *Vreme Je!* campaign, rock concerts were held across the country to boost voter participation in elections. As music critic Dragan Ambrozic put it when being interviewed, these performances 'tried to build a context within which change was possible'. Through their lyrics such rock bands as Darkwood Dub, Eyesburn, and Kanda, Kodza i Nebojsa depicted the hardships of life under Milosevic and, thus, elevated the importance of voting. The GOTV campaign targeted youth because voter turnout was usually lower among this segment of the population. Concurrently, opinion polls showed that young people were more critical of the political regime than older citizens. In bringing young voters to the polling stations, Otpor sought to accomplish its ultimate goal of ousting Milosevic from office.

Interactions with allies

Otpor effectively cultivated ties with influential domestic allies. A major movement ally was the mass media, especially local TV channels and independent newspapers. As Nenad Konstantinovic, a member of Otpor's network department, recalled, the social movement sought to grab the media's attention through eye-catching street action: 'We wanted to be on the front page every day. So we needed a picture every day, and we organized daily events in the street.' Moreover, Otpor attempted to establish informal contacts with the security services and develop a 'fraternizing approach' to the police (Binnendijk and Marovic, 2006). In the early 1990s, protesters used confrontational tactics in dealing with the police. Instead, Otpor decided to treat police officers as victims of the political regime and show affection for them. For example, young female activists brought flowers and baked goods to the police stations to soften the attitudes of local police officers. Furthermore, Otpor exerted pressure on opposition political parties to unite in the face of a common enemy. Acting as an independent force, Otpor members contrived and frequently chanted a provocative slogan ('Traitors Are Scum!') to shame the opposition for its internal factionalism. In the long run, the opposition political parties succumbed to popular demands, agreeing upon a viable presidential candidate from the united opposition. As Popovic put it while being interviewed:

> Initially, 40 percent of our campaign efforts were spent on making the opposition unite. Until the opposition parties were blackmailed, until they realized that they were losing their supporters, they wouldn't unite.

In addition to domestic allies, Otpor found support in the international donor community. As stressed by Tanja Azanjac, Program Coordinator at the Belgrade-based NGO Civic Initiatives, Serbia's civil society caught the attention of foreign donors only when 'Milosevic's image changed from a peacemaker from Dayton to a butcher from the Balkans.' In 1998–99, Otpor built

its network of activists without extravagant foreign funding. In the wake of the NATO bombing, however, the USA significantly increased its financial and technical assistance to Serbian civil society actors (Carothers, 2001), and Otpor benefitted from this shift in US foreign policy. Yet, given the preponderance of anti-American sentiment in Serbian society, Otpor made a strategic decision to deny publicly any US connection. Back in the Milosevic period, when asked to comment on the sources of their financial support, Otpor activists preferred to exaggerate the role of the Serbian diaspora (Hockenos, 2003: 173).

Nonetheless, the Otpor activists whom I interviewed emphatically stated that US funding did not dictate their tactical choices. Western money, for example, enabled Otpor to print a million stickers, but Serbian youth developed original ideas on how to design print material and craft messages that would resonate with the population. As Aleksandar Maric, a member of Otpor's network department in the city of Novi Sad, put it, 'We didn't need Gene Sharp's book to generate ideas. We just needed money to print material.' Given their immersion in local culture, Otpor activists felt that they were better positioned than foreigners to develop effective tactics. Otpor activists, for instance, rejected the idea of western-style canvassing on the eve of the 2000 elections. In the words of Stanko Lazendic, a member of Otpor's network department (Novi Sad):

> Americans advised us to do a door-to-door GOTV campaign. But they didn't take into account the extent of political intolerance in Serbia at that time. It was impossible to campaign from door to door. Some Milosevic supporters could have attacked us.

In sum, Otpor made a number of important strategic decisions. First, the social movement identified elections as an opportunity for large-scale mass mobilization. Second, Otpor focused on the incumbent president as its primary target. Third, the movement built a broad base of support. Fourth, Otpor effectively employed marketing techniques to create a culture of resistance. Finally, the social movement pushed for the unity of the opposition political parties and fostered ties with multiple influential allies. The next section traces the origins of these strategic decisions.

The origins of the movement's strategy

Participation in previous protest campaigns

The government's annulment of the 1996 local election results triggered massive civic and student protests in 1996–97 (Lazic, 1999; Milic and Cickaric, 1998). The SPS-controlled Federal Election Commission annulled the electoral results when it realized that the Zajedno coalition had won a majority of seats on 34 city councils, covering more than 60 percent of Serbia's population. To defend their electoral victories, the opposition political parties organized peaceful demonstrations in several major cities. Independently of the political parties, university students held daily protest marches. In addition to demanding state recognition of stolen votes, students called for the resignation of the rector and the student vice-chancellor at the University of Belgrade. Participants in the 1996–97 student protest later played a prominent role in crafting Otpor's strategies.

The outcome of the 1996–97 student protest informed the formulation of Otpor's major goal. In spring 1997, Milosevic decided to diffuse social tensions by agreeing to recognize Zajedno's victories in 14 of Serbia's 19 biggest cities. By summer 1997, however, the acrimonious power struggle between the opposition leaders Vuk Draskovic and Zoran Djindjic caused the breakdown of the coalition and facilitated Milosevic's election as the president of the FRY. This political setback provided an impetus for the re-evaluation of the goals pursued by the challenger organizations. As Randic put it when being interviewed, 'We realized that we shouldn't fight against the

consequences of Milosevic's regime. We had to fight against the source of all problems – Milosevic himself. We decided that we would put all the blame on Milosevic.'

Furthermore, participation in the 1996–97 student protest had an impact on the subsequent development of the movement's recruitment strategy. Otpor's leadership realized that a viable social movement should spread into the provinces and build a nationwide network of activists. Furthermore, Otpor sought to broaden the social base of the movement's participants by recruiting nonstudents. Vladimir Pavlov, a member of Otpor's network department, said:

> I was allergic to the word 'student.' Universities represent a pretty close circle of people. At the university, one can easily find a receptive audience, since most students share the same views. But society is more complicated than that. I believed that our base should be bigger.

Another major outcome of the 1996–97 student protest was the realization that a horizontal organizational structure was vital to the survival of the social movement in the nondemocratic setting. As Djindovic stated, 'a lesson that we learnt from 1996 was that it is important not to have visible leaders.' While a team of Otpor activists based in Belgrade made key strategic decisions, it was hidden from the public eye. Instead, Otpor rotated its spokespeople each fortnight without compromising the consistency of its political message. This tactic baffled the authorities, who were accustomed to co-opting, dividing, or discrediting a handful of opposition political leaders. An additional advantage of rotating Otpor's spokespeople was the cultivation of popular perceptions about the movement's strength. The frequent rotation of spokespeople fostered popular beliefs about the movement's growing membership.

Moreover, the 1996–97 protest campaign brought Otpor activists to the realization that regime opponents should develop a broader repertoire of contention. Compared with student protesters in 1996–97, Otpor deployed a wider range of protest tactics against the regime. According to Konstantinovic:

> The model of daily protest marches didn't work. The authorities could just redistribute the traffic so that it wouldn't affect them. Besides, people were exhausted to march every day.

Finally, the protest campaign strengthened the belief that the movement should not count on the support of the opposition political parties. 'The 1996–97 student protests were not supported by political parties, they were used by politicians,' as Azanjac stated in an interview, adding 'None of the political parties reacted to the 1998 Law on Universities.' Once Milosevic promised the Zajedno coalition seats on city councils, the politicians called off the demonstrations. From mid-February to late March 1997, students alone continued the protest campaign to have their demands met.

Cross-national diffusion of ideas

Both direct and indirect channels of diffusion enabled Otpor to gain knowledge about nonviolent methods of resistance. One source of strategic thinking about nonviolent action was Gene Sharp's book *From Dictatorship to Democracy: A Conceptual Framework for Liberation*. The Serbian NGO Civic Initiatives translated this book into Serbian and printed 5500 copies of it in June 1999 (Albert Einstein Institution, 2004: 15). Otpor later distributed this material among movement participants. In addition, a few Otpor activists participated in a workshop organized by the International Republican Institute (a Washington-based nonprofit organization funded by the US government)

and held in Budapest, Hungary. The workshop's highlight was a seminar with Robert Helvey, a retired US colonel and a longtime proponent of Sharp's ideas. In an interview with the American filmmaker Steve York (2001), Helvey pointed out the significance of his meeting with Otpor activists:

> I think I was able to show them [Otpor activists] a different way of looking at society. So that they could use their resources much more effectively, and be able to measure the effects of their efforts by looking at each of [the] institutions [upon which the regime's survival depends].[6]

The exposure to new ideas, however, produced mixed reactions among activists. Some of them found Helvey's tips on nonviolent resistance useful. Srdja Popovic, for example, took from the seminar the idea that it was to the movement's advantage to focus on the regime's capabilities, rather than try to guess its intentions (Miller, 2001). Others adopted a more critical view of Helvey's advice. Among them was Stanko Lazendic, a member of Otpor's network department (Novi Sad) and a participant in the workshop, who stated:

> The truth is that Helvey didn't make Otpor. Prior to the seminar, Otpor had already developed a full-blown network of activists, but Helvey has attributed a lot of Otpor's success to himself. Up to that point, I had been arrested eighteen times. I was even put on the wanted list because the government alleged that I killed a top Vojvodina politician.

Moreover, the Slovak experience informed the development of the GOTV campaign in Serbia. Within the framework of the GOTV campaign during the 1998 parliamentary elections, the Slovak NGO community carried out the *Rock volieb '98* (Rock the Vote '98) campaign. A salient feature of the 1998 campaign, developed in consultation with Bulgarian and Romanian civic activists and the US-based nonprofit organization Rock the Vote, was the organization of rock concerts to boost voter turnout among young people (Nadacia pre obciansku spolocnos, 1998). Marek Kapusta, the campaign's national coordinator, shared his expertise with Otpor and other civil society actors in Serbia (Arias-King, 2007b). The Otpor activists whom I interviewed, however, noted that the adoption of the Slovak experience was challenging due to the cross-country differences in the level of state repression. The opposition's access to the mass media, for example, was much higher in Slovakia. While Slovak civic activists enlisted the support of the national TV channel Markiza, Serbian activists had to work closely with local TV channels and negotiate airtime with the editorial staff in each locale. Still, rock concerts in both countries proved to be effective in boosting voter turnout.

Within-movement deliberation practices

Otpor built a horizontal organizational structure without any visible leaders. In part, the rotation of Otpor's spokespeople fostered the belief that anybody could be a leader. The movement consisted of autonomous cells in more than 130 Serbian towns, with the main office in Belgrade. The main office was divided into several departments, including the action, human resources, marketing, network, press, and university departments. The action department was responsible for logistically supporting Otpor's activities across the country and coordinating rapid reaction to arrests of Otpor members. The human resources department dealt with the recruitment and training of new members, while the network department coordinated cooperation within the movement and cultivated international ties. The university department focused on contacts with students at Serbian universities. The press department dealt with public relations. Additionally, the marketing department was

responsible for the design and production of Otpor's campaign material. Within these departments, activists developed the movement's tactics. According to Ivan Andric from Otpor's marketing department:

> At the very beginning, there were five–six people dealing with marketing. Three of us were designers. I was previously a campaign manager for student anti-war campaigns, and I was actively involved in 1996–97 student protests. We started by making stencils. After the bombing, we began to work in a different way. Our top priority was campaigning all the time. Approximately 20–25 people became involved in marketing. It was like a medium-size ad agency.

Another organizational feature of Otpor was its campaign-based division into two parts. For security reasons, Otpor set up separate offices for the negative and positive campaigns, and the two teams were discouraged from communicating with each other. In the public eye, Otpor sought to distance itself from the GOTV campaign so that it could get off the ground without provoking an instant backlash from the state authorities. The rock concerts were held without the use of Otpor's symbols. In addition, the GOTV campaign involved a greater level of cooperation with other civil society actors (Paunovic et al., 2000).

Notwithstanding these organizational divisions, the organizational structure encouraged the free exercise of creativity and personal initiative in staging nonviolent resistance. While key strategic decisions were made in Belgrade, each cell had a lot of autonomy. Otpor activists in the provinces, for example, could develop original scripts for street action as long as they followed the movement's principles of nonviolent resistance. In the words of Dejan Randic:

> We didn't have a system of hierarchy in Otpor. We told Otpor activists that in each city they had their own Milosevic, head of the Socialist Party or the mayor, or somebody else. That person should be a target too. But each cell had a total autonomy. If you create something good, put it on the market. For example, the eclipse-related street action was first staged in Belgrade and then it spread to several cities. In other organizations, everything needs to be controlled. In Otpor, it didn't happen that way. We in Belgrade didn't try to control activities in other cities.

The purposeful cultivation of the movement's organizational culture facilitated the development of creative ideas. Otpor instituted training for its members to introduce them to key principles of nonviolent resistance and, thus, lay the groundwork for an informed discussion of the movement's tactics and the generation of new ideas. Srdja Popovic noted the following when interviewed:

> I assumed a leadership role in the human resources department when the movement was very small and later recruited and trained a group of eight people. Like in multilevel marketing, these eight people trained approximately 200 people from 30 different towns. These town representatives went back to their communities and trained more people.

In sum, the analysis reveals that the movement's strategic decisions were primarily informed by previous protest campaigns. Veterans of the 1996–97 student protest drew lessons from previous protest campaigns in the country. Furthermore, the cross-national diffusion of ideas affected Otpor's strategizing on the eve of the 2000 elections. In addition, the movement's organizational structure supported deliberation practices conducive to extensive and diverse inputs. A combination of these learning processes contributed to the development of an effective movement strategy.

Conclusion

This study stresses the significance of learning in shaping a movement's strategy. The social movement literature tends to focus on structural or proximate causes of contentious collective action. Yet, the confrontation between social movements and their opponents often spans a long period and involves learning from defeats. Using the case of the Serbian social movement Otpor, this article demonstrates the significance of several learning mechanisms. The analysis finds that participation in previous protest campaigns had a strong impact on the formulation of Otpor's strategy. In addition, the findings demonstrate how the cross-national diffusion of ideas and within-movement deliberation practices influenced the development of the movement's strategy.

This theoretical framework can be applied to explain the origins of movement strategies in diverse social contexts. For example, analysis of two youth movements with the same name, Pora (It's Time), formed shortly before the 2004 presidential elections in Ukraine, reveals how movement participants developed anti-regime strategies by drawing lessons from previous protest campaigns inside and outside the country. Domestically, the student hunger strike of October 1990 and the Ukraine Without Kuchma Movement of 2000–01 shaped activists' strategizing on the eve of the 2004 elections. In addition, Pora activists drew inspiration from Otpor. Likewise, leaders of the April 6 Movement in Egypt built upon their own protest experience and their knowledge of Otpor's nonviolent struggle to craft a strategy for ousting President Hosni Mubarak from office. Mohamed Adel, one of the movement's leaders, traveled to Serbia to learn nonviolent methods and, subsequently, to train his peers back in Egypt (Rosenberg, 2011).

Egyptian youth can further learn from Otpor by examining the movement's development in the post-Milosevic period (Joksic and Spoerri, 2011). The heterogeneity of Otpor's membership, which was initially a source of the movement's strength, later led to the self-dissolution of the movement. In particular, the definition of Otpor's new role became a divisive issue in the wake of the 2000 elections. Some Otpor activists believed that Otpor should act as a watchdog on the new government and organized a public campaign, titled *Samo Vas Gledamo!* (We Are Watching You!). Others envisioned the transformation of the social movement into a political party. As a newly formed political party, however, Otpor received less than 2 percent of the popular vote in the 2003 parliamentary elections. Instead, a more successful youth initiative was the establishment of the Center for Applied Non-Violent Action and Strategies (CANVAS) with the mission to 'support nonviolent democratic movements through transfer of knowledge on strategies and tactics of nonviolent struggle' (CANVAS, 2011). Since 2003, CANVAS has provided training for civic activists around the globe, including Burma, Iran, Lebanon, and Zimbabwe.

Cross-national diffusion of movement ideas is a fruitful area for future research. What is the effect of modern technology on the development of a movement's strategy? How do citizens in repressive political regimes adapt methods of nonviolent resistance to the local context? How does the ruling elite try to neutralize the effectiveness of innovative protest tactics? Answering these questions can advance our understanding of mass mobilization in contemporary non-democracies.

Appendix

List of interviewees

Dragan Ambrozic. Music critic and program manager of the Exit Festival Main Stage (nonmember of Otpor). Belgrade, 2 February 2008.

Ivan Andric. Member of the Otpor marketing department. Belgrade, 28 January 2008.

Tanja Azanjac. Program coordinator, Civic Initiatives (nonmember of Otpor). Belgrade, 7 February 2008.

Nenad Belcevic. Member of the Otpor press department. Belgrade, 8 February 2008.

Slobodan Djindovic. Member of the Otpor university/NGOs department. Belgrade, 25 January 2008.

Ana Djordjevic. Member of the Otpor marketing department. Belgrade, 26 January 2008.

Slobodan Homen. Member of the Otpor network department. Belgrade, 7 February 2008.

Nenad Konstantinovic. Member of the Otpor network department. New York, 6 November 2009.

Stanko Lazendic. Member of the Otpor network department (Novi Sad). Novi Sad, 24 January 2008.

Predrag Madzarevic. Member of the Otpor network department (Kragujevac). Kragujevac, 4 February 2008.

Aleksandar Maric. Member of the Otpor network department (Novi Sad). Novi Sad, 24 January 2008.

Ivan Marovic. Member of the Otpor press department. Washington, DC, 13 December 2007.

Vladimir Pavlov. Member of the Otpor network department (Novi Sad). New York, 4 November 2009.

Srdja Popovic. Member of the Otpor human resources and marketing department. Belgrade, 23 January 2008.

Dejan Randic. Member of the Otpor marketing department. Belgrade, 30 January 2008.

Vesna Tomic. Member of Otpor Mothers (Novi Sad). Novi Sad, 27 January 2008.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. For further information on Serbian politics, see Hall (1999), Ramet and Pavlakovic (2005), Sell (2002), and Thomas (1999).
2. For an overview of these political divisions, see Bieber (2003: 74–82).
3. A brief history of Radio B2-92 is available at http://www.b92.net/english/.
4. Otpor's 11 founding members were Ivan Andric, Slobodan Djindovic, Slobodan Homen, Milja Jovanovic, Nenad Konstantinovic, Ivan Marovic, Vladimir Pavlov, Vukasin Petrovic, Srdja Popovic, Dejan Randic, and Andreja Stamenkovic.
5. For further information on *Izlaz 2000*, see Paunovic et al. (2000).
6. An excerpt from Steve York's interview with Robert Helvey is available online at http://www.aforcemorepowerful.org/films/bdd/story/otpor/robert-helvey.php.

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