An Anatomy of Mass Protests: The Orange Revolution and Euromaydan Compared

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

This article surveys and discusses the latest wave of mass protests in Ukraine, the Euromaydan. This study situates the Euromaydan within the history of the other protests in post-communist Ukraine and makes a comparison to the Orange Revolution (the Orange Revolution). The authors recognize the importance of international factors, but argue that Ukrainian domestic political factors contributed significantly not only to the emergence, but also to escalation of the latest conflict in Ukraine. This study tests a theory about the role of institutional factors versus the role of cultural-historic legacies in the process of mass protest formation and conflict development. We argue that institutional factors, such as: governmental policies; the composition of governmental, opposition, and civil society groups; corruption; and timing of legislative activity on most divisive issues in Ukraine have contributed to the conflict escalation in Ukraine.

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1. Introduction

The most recent spate of the protests in Ukraine adds to the history of anti-governmental strikes in the post-communist Ukraine. The puzzling observation here is that all previous mass protests in Ukraine, such as the Orange Revolution, have developed and ended up as peaceful demonstrations, but the latest wave of mass protests, the Euromaydan, has already resulted in an escalation of violence with multiple fatalities. The question then is: what factors have contributed to the observed escalation of conflict in the 2013–2014?

This article documents and analyzes Ukrainian domestic factors that have contributed to the developments observed in the most recent mass protests of 2013–2014 in Ukraine, and makes a comparison between the Euromaydan of 2013–2014 and the Orange Revolution of 2004. Although the authors recognize the importance of international factors in this most recent development in Ukraine, and believe that an analysis of international relations and foreign policy issues can and will be useful, this article argues that domestic factors deserve closer attention from both academics and practitioners. These factors are frequently overlooked and may be lost in big discussions of international relations and the foreign policies of major international players, such as the USA, EU, and Russia. The article argues that, although domestic factors may not be sufficient in and of themselves to spark mass protests and allow for the escalation of violence, they nevertheless constitute a necessary

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condition for the escalation of conflict observed in Ukraine. In other words, if these factors would have been absent, the escalation of violence would not have taken place. Moreover, this analysis of domestic factors allows for a productive discussion of plausible options for moving political developments from the stage of mass protest to a constructive political process stage. Finally, understanding these factors would allow for a productive discussion of how to prevent escalation of violence from happening in the first place.

2. Legacies of the past v. imperatives of liberalization approaches

Two broad approaches have been developed to explain political dynamics in post-communist countries, namely the cultural–historic legacies of the past approach and the imperatives of liberalization approach. The proponents of the first approach emphasize the role of past legacies and argue that the development of modern institutions depends mostly on and reflects existing historical patterns, such as culture, social relations, and traditions (Geddes, 1995). These scholars are working on pinpointing what particular legacies exercise significant influence over current institutional forms and political dynamics. For example, Putnam argues that civic culture is the most important factor influencing the effectiveness of democratic governmental institutions (Putnam, 1993). Some publications have addressed the case of Ukraine specifically, and some authors argue that institutionalism does not offer a complete explanation of the complications in Ukrainian politics. This group maintains that institutional arguments need to be complemented by cultural and historical reasoning. They further argue that the inchoate state of Ukrainian political culture and the absence of a firm tradition of civil society are important for understanding the institutional shortcomings of the Ukrainian state (D'Anieri et al., 1999: 145–146). The logic of the cultural legacies of the past argument is that historic self-consciousness contributes to the creation and maintenance of a group identity and strengthens boundaries between groups engaged on opposite sides of a conflict (Tajfel, 1978; Brown, 2000; Brewer and Miller, 1996). If we apply the cultural-historic legacy argument to the Ukrainian case, then the long history of the Ukrainian struggle for independence, its pro-European orientation, and the political traditions it manifests would be among the main factors that contributed to the escalation of conflict in Ukraine and the Euromaydan.

An alternative to cultural-historic legacies of the past approach is the imperatives of liberalization approach, which argues that the presence or absence of the right set of institutions explains the successes and failures in post-authoritarian societies (Di Palma, 1990; O'Donnel and Schmitter, 1986). This group of authors argues that as institutions mature and become fully developed, these institutions will channel societal conflicts and allow for a productive decision-making process. Another argument claims that collective fears of the future, uncertainty, lack of information, problems of credible commitments, and a security dilemma occur as a state weakens, making violent conflict more likely (Lake and Rothschild, 1996; Rose, 2000). Further, violence is likely to escalate if the government in power fails and opposition groups come to power. Thus, Posen (1993a,b) argues that when a state collapses and a state of anarchy occurs, groups are fearful for their survival, so competitive mobilizations occur and windows of opportunity can lead to potential preventive ethnic conflict involving the use of force by minority ethnic groups against other groups and government forces. Likewise, Fearon and Laitin (1996) argue that cooperation among and within groups is more likely with institutional policies of in-group policing and more information sharing, but there is no discussion of how to promote cooperation between groups and governments.

Scholars within the camp of institutional studies argue that, "political institutions and decision rules can make a major difference in ethnic outcomes" (Horowitz, 1993, 28). Horowitz (1985) suggests that weak civil society, a lack of power sharing arrangements, sharp cleavages, and ethnic based political parties can all be influential factors associated with conflict escalation among different groups in a society and the deepening already-existing cleavages The exclusive character of immature political institutions can result in a confrontation between government and opposition groups because these newly-formed institutions do not allow all groups to pursue their particular interests within the existing political structures. In the case of such groups in sub-national territories, they are likely to demand separation from the national state in order to build their own political institutions and thus allow their own interests to be represented in the political process. Horowitz advocates changing the rules of the institutional game in order to make these institutions function more inclusively. Inclusive institutions, especially power-sharing arrangements, reformed constitutions, and a federal system, will then provide conflicting parties with the means to resolve conflicts peacefully. Political institutions play such an important role because they structure the political process, determining what political groups get to participate, what actions they can take, who gets to use what resources, and what the rewards and punishments are for each action (Wise and Brown, 1997). This role, furthermore, is a historically structured phenomenon, so that whether conflicts between the government and opposition groups are resolved violently or non-violently depends on the capacity of new institutions to deal with old legacies. If we apply the institutional argument to the Ukrainian case, we find that the conflict and the Euromaydan, then, has been the result of specific institutional failures.

We are still left with the question of whether cultural and historic factors are the main driving force behind the latest wave of the mass protests in Ukraine, or are the causes of these developments found in the institutional shortcomings of post-authoritarian Ukraine? This discussion has important practical implications, because, if cultural legacies are most important in conflict development, then all post-communist societies will necessarily face violent waves of mass protests and there is little hope for peaceful developments in the region. However, if institutional factors play more significant roles in conflict escalation and subsequent waves of mass protests, then the study of institutions can bring useful answers