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**Sovereign Democracy:
Russia's Response to the Color Revolutions**

By
Sarah Fisher

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for Graduation *summa cum laude*
and
for Graduation from the Department of Political Science
University of Louisville
May 10, 2014

Table of Contents

I. Abstract.....	1
II. Introduction.....	1-5
III. The Color Revolutions and the Centralization of Sovereign Democracy.....	5- 22
1. Democracy Promotion in Russia Before the Color Revolutions.....	5-10
2. After the Color Revolutions: Regulation of Civil Society.....	11-17
3. The Evolving Theoretical Construct of Sovereign Democracy.....	11-22
IV. The Federal Public Chamber.....	22-32
1. Integrating State and Society.....	22-29
2. The Public Chamber: Defenders of Civil Society or Defenseless?.....	29-32
V. The Russian Defense of “The Last European Dictatorship”.....	32-41
1. Russia Federation and Republic of Belarus: A Historically Symbiotic Relationship....	33-35
2. The 2006 Belarusian Presidential Election.....	35-41
VI. Conclusion.....	42-43
VII. Bibliography.....	44-47

Sovereign Democracy: Russia's Response to the Color Revolutions

Sarah Fisher

Senior Political Science, History Major, University of Louisville, Kentucky 40208, USA

Abstract: The Russian Federation developed very different ideologies on the concept of democracy. In 2006, Vladislav Surkov, the First Deputy of the Chief of the Russian Presidential Administration, coined the term “sovereign democracy”. This gave a name to the Russian form of “managed” democracy and introduced a Russian alternative to Western liberal democracy: Sovereign Democracy. It asserts that Russia is a democracy and this fact must never be questioned by any state or such action will be viewed by the Kremlin as unwanted intervention in its domestic affairs. The Kremlin reacted to the recent Color Revolutions in the former Soviet Bloc by defining the concept of sovereign democracy. Russian democratic ideology, depicted within sovereign democracy, states both sovereignty and democracy are socially and culturally determined. The Kremlin argues Western interference, such as supporting the Color Revolutions, imposed Western conceptions of democracy on Russian civilians, and this interference is an attempt to influence Russia’s political philosophies and institutions. Putin and his administration emphasized the demarcation between Russian sovereign democracy and Western liberal democracy. Sovereign democracy allows the Kremlin to validate their increasingly undemocratic domestic and international policies. In particular, it led to the creation of the domestic agency, Russian Federal Public Chamber, in 2006 and heavily influenced the Kremlin’s decision to assist Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko after the presidential elections in 2006. When the Kremlin proclaimed sovereign democracy as the uniquely Russian form of democracy, it crafted itself a defense against international criticism; because, to question sovereign democracy, and the policies it led to, would be tantamount to criticizing Russian social and cultural history.

Introduction

The outbreak of Color Revolutions across former Soviet republics: Georgia (Rose Revolution 2003), Ukraine (Orange Revolution 2004), and Kyrgyzstan (Tulip Revolution 2005) deeply disturbed the Putin administration. The term “Color Revolutions” was widely used by international media to depict various associated movements that developed in several Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) nations and the Balkans throughout the early 2000s.¹ The movements take their name from the fact that they adopted a certain color or flower as their symbol.² Color Revolutions were considered unique; people took to the streets and through nonviolent protests (also called civil resistance) demanded free and fair elections, which resulted in new democratic governments. These former Soviet states rebelled against their despotic governments that had been heavily swayed by the Russian state, generating a strong pressure for regional democratic change. The Putin administration felt deeply threatened by this outcome.

Officially, Russia still functions under democratic institutions, such as constitutionally insured liberties and freedoms, elections, independent courts and media. In actuality, democratic practices have eroded and been replaced with increasingly more

¹ The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is a regional organization that developed when the Soviet Union began to collapse. Its members are a loose association of former Soviet Republics. The organization is headed by Russia, and at times has been referred to as the “Russian Commonwealth.”

² The Rose Revolution gained its name from the action of demonstrators in its main square. When soldiers and local police arrived to enforce order, the student protestors often were seen giving them red roses. Orange Revolution’s name derived from the color identified with the campaign of the opposition candidate the protesters rallied around, Viktor Yushchenko. Kyrgyzstan’s Tulip Revolution had been called many things by the media: the “Pink,” “Silk,” “Lemon,” or “Daffodil,” Revolution. However, it was a term used by protested President Askar Akayev in a speech declaring- no Color, or Tulip, Revolution would happen in Kyrgyzstan.

authoritarian methods.³ Freedom House's 2014 annual report listed Russia's status as "Not Free," with a Freedom Rating of 5.5 (range 1 to 7 with 1=best, 7=worst).⁴ The Putin administration claimed these authoritarian policy changes as necessity in order to institute a "sovereign democracy." In 2006, Vladislav Surkov, the First Deputy of the Chief of the Russian Presidential Administration, coined the term sovereign democracy and gave a name to the Russian form of "managed" democracy, which asserts that Russia is a democracy and this fact must never be questioned by any state or such action will be viewed by the Kremlin as unwanted intervention in its domestic affairs. Soon after sovereign democracy's creation by Surkov it became the official doctrine of Putin and his administration. The introduction of sovereign democracy was the Russian reaction to the recent Color Revolutions, and an attempt to reassert its status as a great power in the twenty-first century.

Russian democratic ideology, depicted within sovereign democracy, states both sovereignty and democracy are socially and culturally determined. The Russian government argues Western interference, such as supporting the Color Revolutions, imposes Western conceptions of democracy on Russian civilians, and this interference is an attempt to influence Russia's political philosophies and institutions. The Western response is to accuse the Russian state of undermining and corrupting genuine democratic change in the post-Soviet region. My thesis focuses on the following questions: How did

³ Michael A. McFaul and Kathryn Stoner. "The Myth of the Authoritarian Model: How Putin's Crackdown Holds Russia Back," Originally appeared in *Foreign Affairs* January 1, 2008. Stanford University, September 28, 2008.

⁴ "Freedom In the World 2014: Russia," *Freedom House*.

the Color Revolutions in former Soviet republics, and its feared domino effect, impact the development of sovereign democracy? Moreover, how has it influenced domestic and international policy decisions?

Grounded in democratization literature, this essay investigates how the Color Revolutions led to an increase in unapologetic, anti-democratic domestic and foreign policies by the Russian Federation, and a uniquely Russian concept of democracy. When the Kremlin proclaimed sovereign democracy as the uniquely Russian form of democracy, it crafted a defense against international criticism; because, to question sovereign democracy, and the policies it spawned, would be tantamount to criticizing Russian social and cultural history. The policy justification sovereign democracy permitted was not limited the period after the Color Revolutions. This study has relevance to what is going on now in Russian-Ukrainian relations, however it is beyond the capacity of this study offer an in-depth investigate of this ongoing event.

The primarily focus of this study is the domestic and international policy decisions made by the Russian Federation closely following the Color Revolutions. Official Kremlin documents and statements made by key Russia policy-makers show a clear reaction to the Color Revolutions. I pay special attention to the statements made in the years 2004-2006, especially relating to the creation of the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation and 2006 presidential election in Belarus.⁵ The first point examines democratization in Russia and the specific ways Color Revolutions, and the evolving theoretical construct of sovereign democracy, has affected Russian domestic and foreign

⁵ The majority of sources used have been professionally translated into English.

policy. The second point then turns to the Kremlin's new domestic vision of state and society detailed in the philosophy of sovereign democracy. This is done through an in-depth case study of the newly created Russian Public Chamber (2006.) Finally, the third point discusses how the revolutions have influenced Russian foreign policy decisions in relation to Belarus, using a case study of the Russian reaction to the 2006 presidential elections in Belarus. The Russian leadership feared more former Soviet States would experience a Color Revolution, especially Belarus. I look at the assistance the Kremlin gave Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko's regime after highly criticized 2006 presidential elections. These exemplify the undemocratic authoritarian policies enacted within Russia's domestic and international sphere in the period immediately after the Color Revolutions.

The Color Revolutions and Concretization of Sovereign Democracy

Democracy Promotion in Russia Before the Color Revolutions I begin the discussion of my first point by giving a brief summary of democracy in the newly created Russian Federation. Western style NGOs appeared in the Soviet Union during the last few years of the Gorbachev period. Democracy promotion began in the early 1990s when foreign NGOs were officially legalized by the Russian Federation, after the collapse of the Soviet Union. American, along with European intergovernmental organizations and Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) aspired to develop the new Russian state into a stable democratic state, with respect for human rights and international laws. An

effective, stable democracy is defined as four key mechanisms: an *open and accountable government, free and fair elections, significant civil and political rights, and a democratic society*.⁶ This definition does not entail an economic component (e.g. liberalism) instead focusing heavily on the idea of free, fair elections and a functional civil society.

Democracy promoters were hopeful after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Mikhail Gorbachev's perestroika had led to an increase in liberalization and civil activism, and the seemingly more democratic and liberal Boris Yeltsin had replaced Gorbachev. Russia aspired to be acknowledged by the West and to be judged by Western standards, and the new leaders attempted to remove the conventional Russian exceptionalism and have Russia accepted as a true European country.⁷ President Yeltsin desired complete integration of Russia into Western institutions to achieve this objective, however, the new Russian state lacked stability, and both communists and nationalists endangered the new leadership. Russian instability caused Yeltsin to ignore the development of independent citizen organizations; therefore, foreign donors led the

⁶David Beetham and Kevin Boyle. *Introducing Democracy: Eighty Questions and Answers*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995. 31.

⁷ The idea of Russian exceptionalism began in early tsarist Russia, and was the belief that the state was a vessel of Orthodoxy, its mission the expansion and defense of the faith, and the Third Rome. After the 1917 Revolution, the Bolsheviks altered Russian exceptionalism to fit Marxist goals instead of the Orthodoxy. Russian exceptionalism now centered on the idea that the state's destiny was to be an ideological inspiration to the world, and the communist system produced the world's most sophisticated industrial and scientific achievements.

charge in shaping the source of independent nongovernmental organizations.⁸ Western governments and intergovernmental organizations sought to actively express their support, politically and financially, for President Yeltsin since he had come to represent the liberal, democratic forces in Russia.⁹

Leading the first wave of Western NGOs were pro-democracy foundations financed by George Soros and the MacArthur Foundation, which had initiated contact in the twilight of the Gorbachev years. The largest hurdle for these NGOs was to bolster an underdeveloped civil society and remove the deeply entrenched passive political culture, all during a time of extreme economic instability.¹⁰ The Russian general population faced many struggles during the early 1990s: economic instability, a tenuous political and civil society, and a constant political struggle for leadership between the president and the parliament.

The power struggle came to fruition in September of 1993 when President Yeltsin suspended the Supreme Soviet and the Congress of People's Deputies, first by decree and later by force.¹¹ Yeltsin stated in a 1993 official presidential decree this "situation that has come about as a result of reciprocal accusations of corruption and legal claims against one another by officials in the system of executive power is seriously undermining the state authority of the Russian Federation," and called for new elections and a referendum

⁸ Henderson, Sarah L. "Civil Society in Russia: State-Society Relations in the Post-Yeltin Era," 12.

⁹Saari, Sinikukka. "European democracy promotion in Russia before and after the 'colour' revolutions," 734-736.

¹⁰, Marc Morje Howard, *The Weakness of Civil Society*, 17 – 18.

¹¹Eugene Huskey. "Democracy and Institutional Design in Russia," *George Washington University Archive*, Stetson University, (1996): 460.

on the new constitution.¹² The supporters of the Congress of Deputies began a violent riot in Moscow to protest Yeltsin actions. Yeltsin retaliated by shelling the Russian White House with tanks, which ultimately resolved the conflict but led to an estimated 200 casualties. The majority of Western organizations chose to ignore Yeltsin's unconstitutional actions, and those that claimed he acted undemocratically and suggested the new elections were rigged were largely overlooked. Societal stability, which appeared to be arising in Russia, was given preference over strict regard for democratic practices. This began a trend of disregarding Russian undemocratic practices in attempts to further the larger goal of democracy, which allowed undemocratic practices to become the norm in Russia.

The mid to late 1990s saw a shift in attitude from the West towards Russia. In 1995 many NGO's reported significant worsening of democracy and human rights, and demanded more condemnation from governmental actors. The vast human rights violations enacted in the first Russian war with the Chechen Republic could not be overlooked, however the intergovernmental organizations did attempt to balance their criticism with the usual support towards the Russian government. As the First Chechen War continued the European regional organizations employed harsher methods in relation to Russia, such as the EU delaying the ratification of the Interim Agreement on Trade.¹³

¹² Boris Yeltsin. "Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 1328." *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press*, (September 1993): 1.

¹³ The Interim Agreement on Trade suspension only lasted from January to July 1995, and was signed on July 17, 1995 in Brussels. (European Commission, Press Release: Interim Agreement with Russia, July 17, 1996, PRES/95/224.) This is evidence of the success of the Russian tactic; the war with Chechnya was still underway.

The efforts made by intergovernmental actors did not satisfy most NGOs. The 1996 Human Rights Watch's World Report classified the European Union's involvement in the Chechen War as "waning prematurely," and criticized the Clinton administration as responding "sluggishly" and "belittling it as an internal matter."¹⁴ Saari states the Russian reaction to these criticisms was to assert that European censure endangered the new constitutional order and strengthened anti-democratic opposition in Russia. This tactic, to combat Western criticism, has been utilized many times by Russian leaders with a high rate of effectiveness.¹⁵

Over the next few years the Russian political elite increased their manipulation of the political processes, which others viewed as the unwritten rules of Russian politics and elections, and were in essence undemocratic. NGOs operating in Russia reported such practices as manipulation of the media and outright election fraud, and once again demanded governmental action.¹⁶ Nevertheless, European intergovernmental organizations acknowledged the recent Russian 1996 elections as free and fair, upholding the results. The failure of intergovernmental organizations to disclose the surge of anti-democratic practices in the Yeltsin regime weakened the democratic values the organization promoted. It also reinforced many past communist practices, such as solidifying the interdependence between the Russian political system and economics,

¹⁴ "1996 World Report," *Human Rights Watch*.

¹⁵ Sinikukka Saari. "European democracy promotion in Russia before and after the 'colour' revolutions." *Democratization* 16, no. 4 (2009): 737.

¹⁶ Michael McFaul. *Russia's 1996 Presidential Election: The End of Polarized Politics*, Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1997, 14.

and promoted the creation of “fictions” to gratify authorities.¹⁷ As Saari notes: “The Western policy of explaining ‘irregularities’ away indirectly legitimized Russian undemocratic practices.”¹⁸

In the 1990s the states located furthest away from Western Europe, primarily Central Asia, saw a rise in draconian policies and dictatorship. Russia, like most of the states located in Eastern Europe, transformed into semi-autocracies and partial democracies.¹⁹ The Russia Federation has moved past the chaos of the 1990s, deemed the Yeltsin years, and into the Putin era. By the late 1990s democratic change in the region seemed extremely doubtful.²⁰ Putin has amalgamated semi-authoritarian institutions in Russia. The Putin had already begun enacting more authoritarian policies, inspired by the terrorist acts of 1999 and the Second Chechen War, within the first three year of his presidency. Putin cemented his control over the national media and crafted a system of “vertical power” with him at the head. This increase in semi-authoritarian domestic policies did not extend to directly condemning international democracy promotion, and he remained relatively pro-Western in his public statements. However, these authoritarian policies drastically increased in the mid-2000s when the Color Revolutions began.

¹⁷ Janine R. Wedel. *Collision and Collusion: The Strange Case of Western Aid to Eastern Europe 1989–1998*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 188-190.

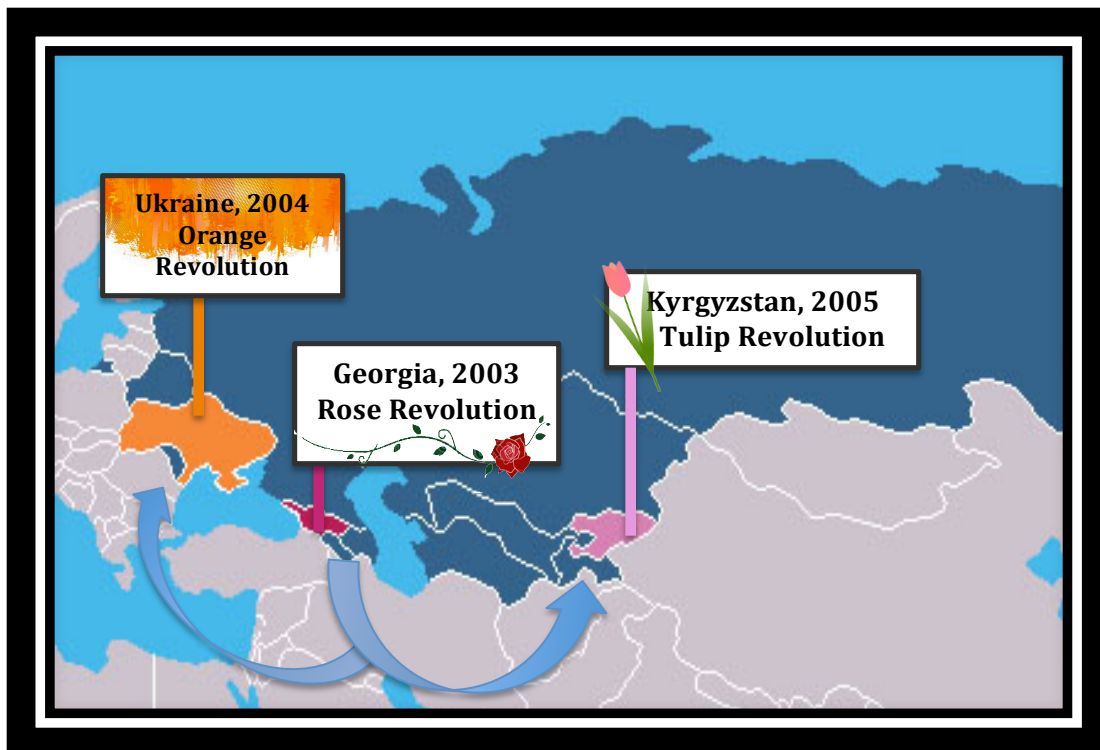
¹⁸ Sinikukka Saari. “European democracy promotion in Russia before and after the ‘colour’ revolutions,” 738.

¹⁹ Michael McFaul. “Transitions from Postcommunism,” *Democracy* 16, no 3. (July 2005): 5-6.

²⁰ Michael McFaul. “Transitions from Postcommunism,” 6.

After the Color Revolutions: Regulation of Civil Society: The Color Revolutions began in 2003 with the Georgian Rose Revolution, which was quickly followed by the Ukrainian Orange Revolution in 2004, and Kyrgyzstan's Tulip Revolution in 2005 (see Figure 1.) From an outside perspective the revolutions appear closely linked; some even consider the Orange Revolution as a by-product of the Rose Revolution. Georgian activist and organizers traveled to Ukraine and assisted pro-democracy activists with their local movement. Success in a near-by state inspired others to rebel against their own authoritarian regimes. Democratization scholars commonly refer to this process as 'diffusion.'²¹

Figure 1



²¹ Thomas Ambrosio. "Insulating Russia from a Colour Revolution: How the Kremlin Resists Regional Democratic Trends," *Democratization* 14, no. 2 (2007): 232.

Diffusion is the process in which one state undergoes democratic change, which intensifies pressure on other authoritarian regimes in close proximity. Democratic revolutions ultimately are established upon local dynamics; however, geographic propinquity notably increases the probability of democratic change. Once the people of a non-democratic state observe their neighbors employing democratic demonstration efforts regime change is now seen as plausible. Furthermore, the population begins to consider regime change as inevitable; this emboldens citizens and the movement gains momentum. This consideration also poses a threat to authoritarian regimes in which the populations do not become politically active (as was the case in Russia.) The new democratic border states are a continual reminder of the prospect of regime change. Moreover, as the amount of states in the region become more democratic, the discrepancies between regime types appear blatant, which can lead to increased international pressure and external criticism. Once democratic states become effectual internally, they are inclined to export their ideas and tactics to local like-minded groups in authoritarian states (through organizations such as NGOs), with the assistance of established democracies (e.g. the United States).²² Authoritarian regimes view the abovementioned trait of diffusion as an extreme threat to their national security.

Thomas Ambrosio proposes three strategies the Kremlin implemented to avoid the regional democratic trends brought about by the Color Revolutions. These international strategies are defined as: insulate, bolster and subvert. The Kremlin attempted to *insulate* itself from democracy by employing “authoritarian resistance,” seen

²² Thomas Ambrosio. “Insulating Russia from a Color Revolution: How the Kremlin Resists Regional Democratic Trends,” 234-236.

in the changing policies discussed below (4-pronged strategy and the Public Chamber.) The second tactic, *bolster*, is exemplified in the Russian support for authoritarianism in Belarus.²³ This essay is limited in scope, therefore, will not present an in-depth look at the final tactic, *subvert*, which describes the Russian rhetorical and foreign policy aggression against Ukraine.

It had been recognized that the West used various means to expand its influence (through democracy promotion) since the disintegration of the Soviet Union; however, the Color Revolutions saw a deployment of new methods more ominous than traditional military intimidation.²⁴ The Kremlin perceived these events as proof Western actors, especially the United States, intended to instigate regime change in the post-Soviet space through external and internal infiltration tactics. There have been many common factors recognized by the Russian and Western scholarly community that explain the reason the color revolutions transpired. Kuzio's framework lists these factors:

- A semi-authoritarian state allowing for the existence of democratic opposition,
- A 'return to Europe' civic nationalism- rallying civil society,
- A pro- democratic capital city,
- A preceding political crisis, charismatic opposition candidate,
- A highly unpopular ruling class,
- Cohesive opposition,
- Mobilized youth,
- Decentralization along with foreign intervention.²⁵

²³ Thomas Ambrosio. "Insulating Russia from a Color Revolution: How the Kremlin Resists Regional Democratic Trends," 234.

²⁴ Gleb Pavovskii, quoted in, "Is the Cold War Being Repeated?" *Renminribao*, May 16, 2006, via World News Connection.

²⁵ Taras Kuzio, 'Democratic Breakthroughs and Revolutions in Five Postcommunist Countries, 2008, 97-99.

The Color Revolutions served as the framework to the evolving discussion over the new Russian model of democracy. Moreover, the Russian elite recognized the common factors and began to arrange their domestic and international policies to counter the internal and external threat of Color Revolutions.

Russia chose not to act as a passive target in the face of perceived Color Revolutions domino effect. The Kremlin, under Putin, increased its efforts of ‘authoritarian resistance’ to restore centralized control over state and society. Policies were implemented to counter the process of diffusion, insulating Russia and preserving authoritarianism.²⁶ Jeanne L. Wilson detailed the Kremlin’s response as a “four-pronged” strategy: (1) regulate NGOs, (2) channel the political activism of the youth, (3) directly manage elections, and (4) rigorously restrict foreign election monitors.²⁷

(1) Regulating NGOs: The Putin administration alleged foreign backed NGOs had played a large role in the Color Revolutions and feared these NGOs would weaken his government’s authority. In his 2004 State of the Nation Address Putin expressed his anxiety that NGOs had been used by Western governments to incite regime change. He stated the primary goal of NGOs had become “receiving financing from influential foreign foundations” rather than “standing up for people’s real interests.”²⁸ In 2006, Putin signed the NGO Law, which placed the organizations under intense government

²⁶ Thomas Ambrosio. “Insulating Russia from a Color Revolution: Regional Democratic Trends,” 236.

²⁷ Jeanne L. Wilson. "The Legacy of the Color Revolutions for Russian Politics and Foreign Policy." *Problems Of Post-Communism* 57, no. 2 (2010): 21-23.

²⁸ Vladimir Putin. “Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation” (Moscow) May 24, 2006.

scrutiny and would later (after a 2007 modification) forbid any governmental figure from associating with foreign, or foreign backed, NGOs.²⁹

(2) *Pro-Kremlin Youth Movements:* All of the Color Revolutions saw a mass mobilization of that country's youth. The youth movement in Ukraine, called Pora, modeled itself after the movements in Georgia. The Putin administration concocted a counter-response, which was designed to gain the support of the Russian youth. Pro-Kremlin youth organization, such as Nashi (Ours), emerged and endorsed patriotism, civil responsibility and the defense of Russian sovereignty.³⁰ Nashi's main task, as the largest of the recently created youth organization, was to eliminate any trace of a potential Russia Color Revolution within the Russian youth.

(3) *Directly Managed Elections:* Color Revolutions typically arose from a contested election; the Kremlin was acutely mindful of this fact. This had occurred in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan and caused the Kremlin to initiate an extensive effort to manage future election results.³¹ Putin even attempted to demonize the Color Revolutions, and the opposition leaders it benefited, as minions of Western governments. The November 21st, 2007, speech by Putin described these potential opposition leaders as people "who act like jackals at foreign embassies . . . who count on the support of foreign funds and governments but not the support of their own people. . . . They've learnt from Western

²⁹ Jeanne L. Wilson. "The Legacy of the Color Revolutions for Russian Politics and Foreign Policy," 22.

³⁰ Michael Schwirtz. "Russia's Political Youths," *Demokratizatsiya* 15, no. 1 (2007): 81-82.

³¹ Jeanne L. Wilson. "The Legacy of the Color Revolutions for Russian Politics and Foreign Policy," 24.

specialists. They've trained in neighboring republics.”³² Many viewed these blatantly managed elections as unnecessary, considering the support for Putin's party United Russia. Nevertheless, the Putin administration today continues the practice out of fear.

(4) Restricting Foreign Election Monitors: The West uses various means to insure fair, free and transparent elections, one of which is election monitoring. The principal organization that does this in former Soviet states is the Office for Democratic and Human Rights (ODHIR), the election-monitoring branch of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).³³ Many in Russia criticized the purpose of election monitoring; stating it is not to insure fair free election but as a means of political pressure. After the Color Revolutions, and the increase of election managing described above, the Kremlin did not wish to allow the West anymore reason to become involved in their affairs. In 2004, Sergei Lavrov Russia's foreign minister claimed, “Election monitoring is not only ceasing to make sense, but is also becoming an instrument of political manipulation and a destabilizing factor.”³⁴ The relationship between the OSCE and the Kremlin has only weakened since 2004. For example, the 2007-2008 elections saw a heightening of tension between the Kremlin and OSCE. The OSCE declined to send any monitors to oversee the December 2007 legislative elections; stating unreasonable and severe restrictions imposed by the Russian government. In addition to

³² Vladimir Putin. “Speech to a Gathering of the Supporters of the President of Russia,” (Luzhniki Stadium, Moscow), November 21, 2007.

³³ Jeanne L. Wilson. "The Legacy of the Color Revolutions for Russian Politics and Foreign Policy," 25.

³⁴ C. J. Chivers. “Russia Aims to Cut Vote Observers,” *International Herald Tribune* (October 25, 2007) <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P1-145310729.html>.

imposing various constrictions on their mobility, Russia reduced the number of monitors invited to seventy in 2007; a stark difference from the 450 invited in 2003. An OSCE representative reported, “despite repeated attempts to attain entry visas into the Russian Federation for ODIHR experts and observers, entry visas have continuously been denied.”³⁵ The situation did not find a resolution and Russia continues to review the rules of electoral monitoring.

The Russian approach to democracy and state sovereignty has been heavily influenced by the Color Revolutions, and there is a close link between Putin’s domestic recentralization project, and his efforts to reassert Russia’s position internationally. The first point of this essay examines democratization in Russia and the specific ways Color Revolutions, and the evolving theoretical construct of sovereign democracy, have affected Russian domestic and foreign policy

The Evolving Theoretical Construct of Sovereign Democracy. The basic definition of sovereignty is the application of supreme authority over a defined geographical territory.³⁶ The constructionist view of sovereignty asserts that states uphold certain central units of analysis, yet the sovereignty is socially and culturally constructed; therefore subject to change vis-à-vis each state’s interpretations. Authority, national identity, population and territory are major aspects of sovereignty and are socially constructed; which are contingent on the specific society. After the collapse of the Soviet

³⁵ Jim Nichol. “Russia’s December 2007 Legislative Election: Outcome and Implications.” *Congressional Research Service: Report for Congress*. Order Code RS22770 (December 10, 2007): 2-3.

³⁶ Charles Ziegler. “Conceptualizing sovereignty in Russian foreign policy: Realist and constructivist perspectives,” *International Politics* 49, no. 4, (2012): 401.

Union new norms of sovereignty began to emerge, particularly in regards to intervening into states' internal affairs.³⁷

Russia's concept of sovereignty has evolved since the Color Revolutions began in the early 2000s, an evolution they have shared with the world through domestic and international policy modifications. In the 1990s Russian policies frequently contained undemocratic undertones, but they were hidden under pro-Western democratic rhetoric. Once the Color Revolutions occurred this veil of pro-Western sentiments has been almost completely removed from the Russian dialogue, and a more straightforward challenge to international democracy promotion taken. In 2006 Vladislav Surkov, then the First Deputy of the Chief of the Russian Presidential Administration, expanded the debate on democratization when he developed a term for the Russian alternative to Western liberal democracy: Sovereign Democracy.

Sovereign democracy can be simplified into two basic features: (1) Russian democratic development does not conform to Western standards, and (2) sovereignty always takes precedence over democracy.³⁸ Surkov professes that Russian society, and therefore Russian sovereignty, is distinct and cannot be expected to conform to Western norms and models. He elaborates in his 2008 article "Russian Political Culture: The View from Utopia." Surkov expresses his dismay that the Russian people often call their country "the new Russia," as if it were the New World, or "new home."³⁹ Like the

³⁷ Charles Ziegler. "Conceptualizing sovereignty in Russian foreign policy: Realist and constructivist perspectives," 403-404.

³⁸ Petrov Nikolai. "From Managed Democracy to Sovereign Democracy," *Center for Political-Geographic Research*, PONARS Policy Memo No. 396 (2005): 181-182.

³⁹ Vladislav Surkov. "Russian political culture: The view from utopia," *Russian Social Science Review* 49, no. 6, (2008): 81.

country, Russian sovereign democracy has been constructed on the historical foundation of national statehood. Its political culture and norms are rooted in European civilization, except in a specific Russian variety of that civilization. Russian political culture is holistic, instinctively centralized and there is a geopolitical subtext.⁴⁰

Authoritarianism and centralization were necessary to maintain Russian sovereignty according to Surkov, “The consolidation and centration of power were necessary to preserve the sovereign state and turn it around, away from oligarchy and towards democracy.”⁴¹ For Surkov, and many other Russian leaders, democracy (personal freedom) is interlocked with sovereignty (national freedom), meaning state sovereignty is of paramount importance surpassing popular sovereignty. If not bolstered by a strong executive and institutions, Russia would fragment and descend into pandemonium, undermining the state’s sovereignty. Russia faces real threats to its sovereignty, and as long as it remains rich in natural resources and in possession of nuclear weapons, outsiders will continue to attempt to invade and influence the state.⁴² Russia’s appraisal of the Color Revolutions reflected this trepidation of outside interference in its affairs and the affairs of the states in its sphere of influence.

As mentioned previously democracy is secondary to sovereignty, however the concept of “democracy” has not disappeared from the official Russian political discourse. Over the last decades the achievement of democracy has been correlated to modernization, a symbol of national progress. Western governments, especially the

⁴⁰ Vladislav Surkov. “Russian political culture: The view from utopia,” 82-86.

⁴¹ Vladislav Surkov. “Russian political culture: The view from utopia,” 96.

⁴² Vladislav Surkov. Nationalization of the future: Paragraphs pro sovereign democracy, *Russian Studies in Philosophy* 47, no. 4, (2009): 12-13, 17-21.

United States, inserted this theory into the wider political discourse to increase the likelihood of democratic transitions. Currently, democracy remains a significant topic in Russian political discourse, associated with modernization, regardless there have been many measures taken to restrict it in political practice. This is primarily because sovereign democracy identifies the international world in terms of the standard realist interpretation of world affairs: as an essentially lawless dangerous place structured around brutal competition, and democratic practices must be suspended to preserve the sovereign state.⁴³ Valerii Zorkin, the current Chairman of the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation, claimed: “In this sense, we really found ourselves in a chaotic world in which everything has become unpredictable. In this anomic global chaos there is only one law—the law of the strong and aggressive: the superpowers, dictators, and leaders of mafia-like and terrorist groups”⁴⁴ The sovereign democracy discourse among elites underlines the importance of Russia independence, and the international law of noninterference.

Sovereign democracy also stresses the importance of Russian sovereign and democratic externally and internally. Surkov writes internal sovereign democracy is “a type of political life for the society in which the state, its organs and activities are chosen, formed and directed exclusively by the Russian nation with all its many forms and unities, in order to achieve the material well-being, freedom and justice for all citizens, social groups and peoples who form that nation.”⁴⁵ He also asserts the importance of the

⁴³ Philipp Casula. “Sovereign Democracy, Populism, and Depoliticization in Russia,” 6.

⁴⁴ Valerii Zorkin. “In Defense of the Westphalian system,” *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, August 22, 2006.

⁴⁵ Vladislav Surkov. “Sovereignty—This Is the Political Synonym of Competitiveness,” February 7, 2006.

population to sovereignty; Russian popular sovereignty differs drastically from the liberal definition of the term. Sovereign democracy designates the population as a collective entity, which embodies the whole nation, and rather than following their own individual goals the Russian citizen must “bow to the will of the nation.”⁴⁶ Western liberal democracy is quite different, it entails citizens must pursue their own private interests to contribute the good of the nation. Surkov maintains the Russian population can only obtain true freedom when, “the nation of which he is a part if also free in a justly structured world.”⁴⁷ Sovereign democracy is a democracy that values collective initiative in a nationalist display rather than individual freedoms. In essence, the collective will of the population is achieved through the state, however sovereign democracy does not offer an explanation of what determines the collective will.

The majority of Russian elites maintain that the civil society lacks the organization and trust to effectively carry out the collective will. Therefore, government’s role is not to decide what the collective will of society is, but instead to determine what it is and imposes it. A charge, which according to Surkov, must be accomplished by a formable personality, “strong personalities often compensate for the collective’s ineffectiveness, the lack of mutual trust and self-organization.”⁴⁸ Since this single strong personality does not design the collective will, elites assist by acting as functional agents of civil society. Political analyst Vlad Ivanenko perceived sovereign democracy as

⁴⁶ James Richter. "Russia Reacts To Globalism: Sovereign Democracy and the Public Chamber." *Conference Papers -- International Studies Association* 1-54 (2008): 20.

⁴⁷ Vladislav Surkov. “Sovereignty—This Is the Political Synonym of Competitiveness,” February 7, 2006.

⁴⁸ Vladislav Surkov. “Sovereignty—This Is the Political Synonym of Competitiveness,” February 7, 2006.

assuming society contains two groups: elites and ordinary citizens. Elites must keep the state together and uphold internal unity when exposed by internal and external threats. Their vital task allows them to control the majority of the national wealth and rule unopposed.⁴⁹ The philosophy of sovereign democracy serves as a consolidating doctrine for the governing elites and creates an elite confederation, which assures democratic progress in Russia.⁵⁰ After the Color Revolutions President Vladimir Putin saw an express need for this type of elite confederation. His solution was to create the nongovernmental organization the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation.

The Federal Public Chamber

Integrating State and Society: As discussed previously, reasserting the power of the Russian state, internally and externally, has been a central goal of the Putin administration, and one way to achieve this has been to institutionalize relations between the state and civil society. The doctrine of sovereign democracy has served as a model for the Kremlin's efforts to control civil society. Civil society is the vehicle in which the ranges of citizen's initiatives are explored, and is fairly independent from state

⁴⁹ Vlad Ivanenko. "An Alternative Platform: Building Democracy Needs to Involve Civil Society," *Russia Profile* last modified February 8, 2007.

⁵⁰ James Richter. "Russia Reacts To Globalism: Sovereign Democracy and the Public Chamber." 21-22.

mechanisms.⁵¹ In essence, it is the relationship between state and society, as well as society's engagement as an active participation in public interests. President Vladimir Putin's administration effectively removed the term "civil society" from the vocabulary of democratic reformist, who condemned Putin's authoritarian policies, by twisting the rhetoric of civil society to their own purposes. The Russian version of civil society stressed the significance of the collective interest of the nation, and the expectation that citizens must subordinate their private interests to further state interests. This very narrow view of the public realm caused any deviation from these boundaries to be labeled non-credible extremism.⁵²

Putin defined civil society not as a chaotic arena where private and public interests competed equally, but rather as a unified body working towards state interests.⁵³ If these two groups do not efficiently work together the Kremlin believed the sovereignty of the state would be threatened. From 2003 to 2004, three events transpired that deeply alarmed the Kremlin, and made the campaign to command civil society an extreme priority. First, the crisis in Beslan, which shocked the nation, emphasized popular apathy and corruption had made the state more susceptible to terrorism.⁵⁴ Second, and most significant, the Color Revolutions, especially the Orange Revolution in Ukraine,

⁵¹ Larry Diamond. *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation*, 221.

⁵² James Richter. "Russia Reacts To Globalism: Sovereign Democracy and the Public Chamber." 5-6.

⁵³ James Richter. "Russia Reacts To Globalism: Sovereign Democracy and the Public Chamber," 6.

⁵⁴ The Beslan school hostage crisis began September 1, 2004, and lasted for three days. A group of Islam separatist militants occupied School Number One (SNO) in the town of Beslan, Northern Ossetia. The hostage-takers demanded recognition of the independence of Chechnya at the UN and Russian withdrawal from Chechnya, and the crisis involved the capture of over 1,100 people (ending with the death of over 380.)

amplified suspicions of foreign organizations working in Russia. Third, mass protests began in Russia, which objected to the monetization of social benefits, served to reinforce anxieties raised by the recent revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine.⁵⁵ The protests confirmed the Kremlin's worse fear; the potential for political unrest in Russia. In reference to a Color Revolution Surkov stated, "I am not able to say that this issue is no longer on the agenda, because if they can achieve this in four states, why not do it in a fifth?"⁵⁶

Putin presented numerous speeches that contain many references to constructing a sturdy civil society, and the necessity of integrating civil society into the power sphere of the executive branch. This goal became a reality in 2004 when he began formulating the structure of civil society he deemed appropriate for Russia. In this section I examine Vladimir Putin's creation of the Federal Public Chamber in order to institutionalize Russian civil society, which was purposed with delivering feedback to the state.⁵⁷ Creating "social chambers," usually staffed by NGO representatives that counseled and consulted government agencies, became a common tactic used by the Kremlin to strengthen the sovereign state. The Public Chamber stood at the head of this initiative.

On September 13, 2004, twelve days after the Beslan school hostage crisis, Putin emphasized the need for political unity, cementing the executive authority's chain of command, and proposed the creation of the Public Chamber. The new chamber would

⁵⁵ James Richter. "Russia Reacts To Globalism: Sovereign Democracy and the Public Chamber." 18.

⁵⁶ Vladislav Surkov. "Sovereignty—This Is the Political Synonym of Competitiveness," Speech to United Russia, (Moscow) February 7, 2006.

⁵⁷ Alfred B. Evans Jr. "The First Steps of Russia's Puplic Chamber: Representation or Corrdination?," *Demokratizatsiya* (2008): 345-346.

symbolize a promise to give civil society more input in policy-making and serve as a “platform for extensive dialogue, where citizens’ initiatives could be presented and discussed in detail.” This executive unity would allow the two groups to “work as a single integrated organism with a clear structure of subordination,” and this new chamber “essentially means civilian control of the work of the state system.”⁵⁸ Putin formally submitted the Public Chamber bill in December 2004, and it received final approval by the Duma and Federal Assembly in March 2005. Putin himself signed the bill into law one month later; the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation (*Общественная палата Российской Федерации*) became operational January 2006.⁵⁹

The new Public Chamber consisted of 126 prominent members of civil society, who were selected under careful consideration; Putin either directly or indirectly selected all of the members. For example, the official Russian Public Chamber website describes the organization’s formation in three stages, in accordance with Russian federal law. The first forty-two members Putin appointed himself, and these were “Russian citizens who had performed special services to the state and society.”⁶⁰ These first forty-two members selected the next forty-two from popular Russian NGOs. The previously chosen eighty-four members selected the final forty-two from a pool of candidates that had advanced from regional and federal districts.

⁵⁸ Vladimir Putin, “Speech at the Enlarged Government Meeting with the Government and Head of Regions,” Web Site of the President of Russia, last modified on September 13, 2004.

⁵⁹ Alfred B. Evans Jr. “The First Steps of Russia’s Puplic Chamber: Representation or Corrdination?” 346-347.

⁶⁰ “About: Civic Chamber of Russia,” *Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation*, last modified November 16, 2007.

The Kremlin's vision of who may be a legitimate participant of civil society played a large part in the selection of the members of the Public Chamber. All of the members were successful and admired individuals, bringing prestige and credibility to the new chamber.⁶¹ President Putin stated in 2005 that the members should be "citizens who have broad public support, personal authority, and influence in society and their professional milieu."⁶² The majority of members of the first term Public Chamber were from organizations supportive and with close ties to the Kremlin. They consisted of:

- 22 academics
- 16 political scientists or economic analysts
- 15 work in the arts and culture
- 14 lawyers
- 12 journalists or literary figures
- 8 religious leaders
- 7 entrepreneurs
- 5 doctors
- 4 education experts
- 23 have other occupations⁶³

The Public Chamber stands at the center of organized civil society. It serves as a model for the various other regional public chambers and councils, and its members, as mentioned previously, are some of the most influential individuals of civil society.⁶⁴ It outlines the federal government approved version of how state and society should interact. The Public Chamber is a detailed example of the boundaries between the Russian state and society, as depicted in the doctrine of sovereign democracy. James

⁶¹ Alfred B. Evans Jr. "The First Steps of Russia's Puplic Chamber: Representation or Corrdination?" 346.

⁶² Vladimir Putin. "Introductory Remarks at a Meeting for the Council for Facilitating the Development of Civil Society Institutions and Human Rights," (Moscow) July 20, 2005.

⁶³ "About: Civic Chamber of Russia." *Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation*, last modified November 16, 2007.

⁶⁴ "About: Civic Chamber of Russia." *Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation*, last modified November 16, 2007.

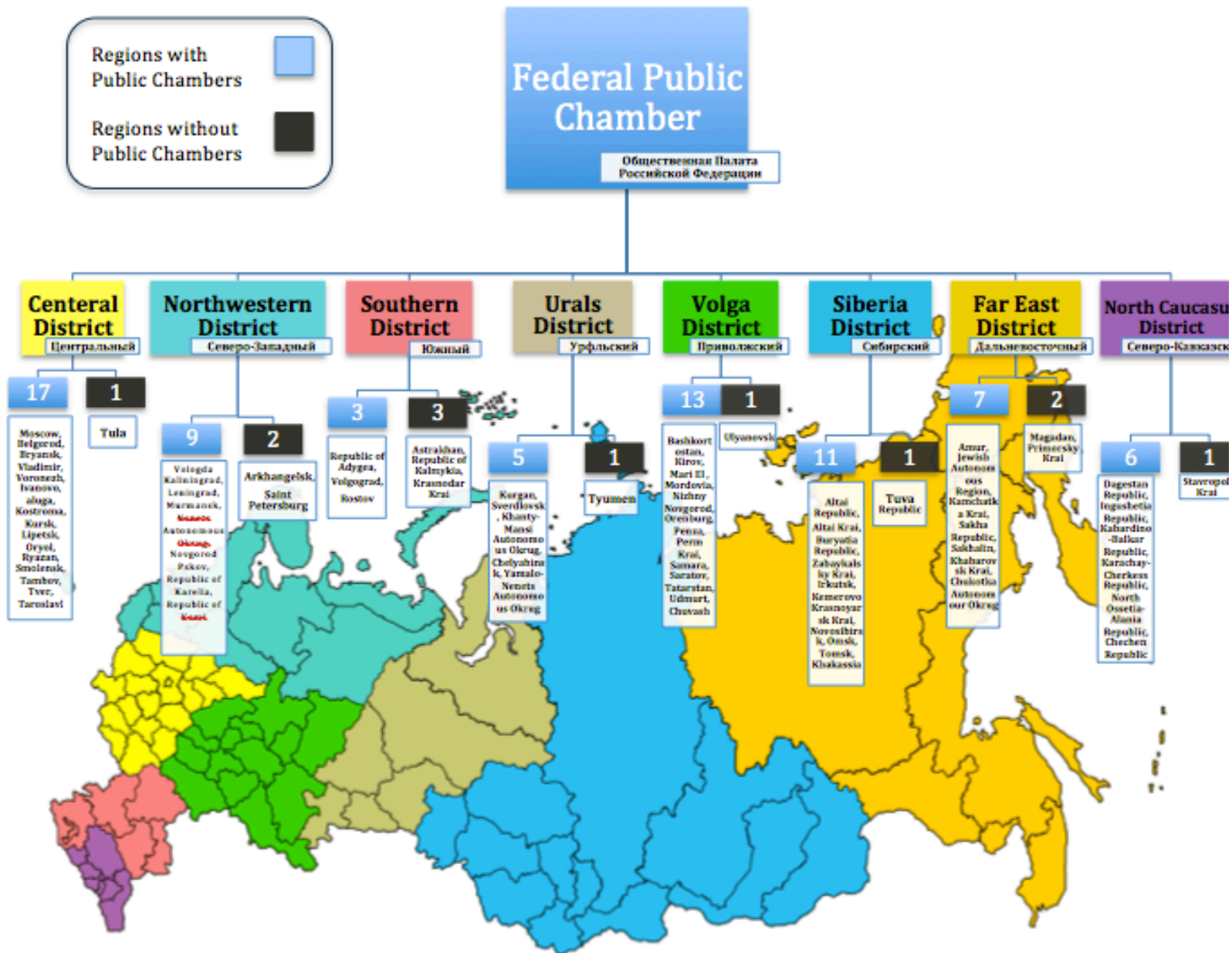
Richter describes this as; “The very notion that this creature of the state [Public Chamber] should represent society reflects the belief that the state serves as the embodiment of a collective will separate from and higher than the particular interest of society itself,” and it is a “more or less unified coalition of social notables” whose primary task is to assist the state in comprehending that state’s national interests.⁶⁵

Many regions in Russia have conformed to Putin’s ambition to organize civil society and have modeled their own Public Chambers after the Federal Chamber. In 2007 four of the then seven federal districts contained local Public Chambers, and in 2009 they had formed in six districts.⁶⁶ As of 2013 Public Chambers can be found in all eight federal districts, moreover the majority of the regions located in those eight districts have formed their own local chambers (see Figure 2.) The figure that follows shows a map of the Russian Federation divided into its eight federal districts. Each districts’ regions are separated into those that contain local public chambers and those that do not. Of the eighty-three regions sixty-nine have local public chambers compared to the fourteen that do not.

⁶⁵ James Richter. "The Ministry of Civil Society? The Public Chambers in the Regions." *Problems Of Post-Communism* 56, no. 6: 7-20, (2009): 7.

⁶⁶ James Richter. "Russia Reacts To Globalism: Sovereign Democracy and the Public Chamber." 27.

Figure 2



The Kremlin encouraged regional chambers to adhere to the federal model, the vision of state and society inherent in sovereign democracy, however there is no concrete evidence that suggests they were forced to do so. The Kremlin believed if the majority of regions choose to replicate the federal chamber the vertical power structure would be strengthened, as would the nation's internal sovereignty. It would do this in two ways. First, it would create a detailed outline of the proper, Kremlin approved, role of public initiatives in Russian society. Secondly, the federal Public Chamber would dominate a statewide network of regional chambers insuring centralized control.⁶⁷

The Public Chamber: Defenders of Civil Society or Defenseless? The Public Chamber symbolizes the sovereign democracy's version of civil society, therefore it is not able to pass legislation or make binding decisions. The Kremlin recruited social organizations to aid the state in managing society more efficiently. Putin desired for these organization to "become good and genuinely indispensable partners for the state," and assist in important social objectives such as "AIDS prevention, drug addiction, homeless children, the social rehabilitation of disabled people and developing local self-government."⁶⁸ The Chamber's principal objective is to analyze prevalent social issues and advise governmental actors on the most efficient means of public policy. Public Chamber members are forbidden to participate in any political parties or bring their personal political beliefs into Chamber discussion. They are supposed to act as a united coalition

⁶⁷ James Richter. "The Ministry of Civil Society? The Public Chambers in the Regions," 13.

⁶⁸ Vladimir Putin. "Introductory Remarks at a Meeting for the Council for Facilitating the Development of Civil Society Institutions and Human Rights," (Moscow) July 20, 2005.

that speaks as the voice of civil society. However, many doubt the effectiveness of the Public Chamber, and believe it is an arena where a few elites use government resources for personal gain.

From the Public Chamber's conception, many have regarded it with apprehension and skepticism. Many critics claimed the chamber's only reason for existing is to create the illusion of representation for civil society. Igor Yakovenko, leader of the Russian Union of Journalists, was quoted affirming the chamber served only as "the Kremlin's puppet theater."⁶⁹ Nikolai Petrov viewed the chamber as a "thoroughly domesticated element of civil society in bureaucratic form," and would serve as an alternate for the Duma, where demands for social reform could be voiced but without the legislative power to legalize them.⁷⁰ Petrov also referred to the Public Chamber as a premiere example of "weakened institutions being replaced by substitutes with no independent legitimacy and which are controlled by the president."⁷¹ These allegations may or may not be true, they frequently are not accompanied with any quantitative or qualitative support and often read as wishing for the chambers failure under assumptions of the Russian government's indifference towards its citizens. Little serious interests, both from academics and the public, have been directed towards the success of the Russian Public Chamber.

The Public Chamber not only faces the criticism of the outside elite but the challenge of an apathetic public. The average Russian citizen tends to be suspicious of

⁶⁹ Alfred B. Evans Jr. "The First Steps of Russia's Puplic Chamber: Representation or Corrdination?" 347.

⁷⁰ Nikolai Petrov. "Where the State and Society Meet," *Moscow Times*, (Moscow, Russia), January 18, 2006.

⁷¹ Nikolai Petrov. "From Managed Democracy to Sovereign Democracy," *Center for Political-Geographic Research*, PONARS Policy Memo No. 396 (2005): 183.

organized activity; a throwback to the Soviet era. Additionally, people still know very little about the Third Sector (NGOs) or the government bodies that work with them like the federal Public Chamber. Sarah Henderson reported that according to a 2009 VTsIOM poll, only 3 percent felt well informed about the Public Chamber, 37 percent had “heard something” and 57 percent did not even know it existed.⁷²

The Federal Public Chamber was created to enact the ideals of state and society depicted in the Russian concept of sovereign democracy; nonetheless it seems to have failed in achieving this objective. Rather the chamber is often viewed as a collection of individuals using the state’s resources to further their own interests.⁷³ As stated previously, there has been little research conducted to efficiently judge the effectiveness of the Public Chamber. The challenge seems to be getting the regional selection committees to nominate true civil activists and not those only concerned with promoting their personal agendas.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the Public Chamber is striving to produce an official record containing data on civil society through an annual “Status of Civil Society Report.” The annual report discusses new trends in the development of the nonprofit sector, and summarizes topical issues discussed by the citizens of Russia throughout that year. As well as gives data on the social and civic climate in Russian society and its level of cohesion and trust authorities.⁷⁵

In summary the Public Chamber is a body that was created to appease the average

⁷² Sarah L. Henderson. “Civil Society in Russia: State-Society Relations in the Post-Yeltsin Era,” *Problems of Post-Communism* vol. 58, no.3, (Maine: Sharp Inc. 2011): 11-27.

⁷³ James Richter. "Putin and the Public Chamber," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 25, no. 1 (2009): 53.

⁷⁴ Petrov Nikolai. “Where the State and Society Meet,” *Moscow Times*, (Moscow, Russia), January 18, 2006.

⁷⁵ “Report on the state of civil society in the Russian Federation 2012,” *Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation*, 4-5.

Russian citizens and allow them to voice their complaints in a Kremlin approved fashion, however the public remains indifferent to the organization. The only authority the chamber possesses is derived from Putin, and if his approval were ever lost the Public Chamber would crumble. After the Color Revolutions President Vladimir Putin saw a direct need for this type of elite coalition. The nongovernmental organization the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation served as a solution to that dilemma.

The Russian Defense of “The Last European Dictatorship”

In this final section we move from Russian domestic policies affected by the Color Revolutions to foreign policy. The Russian leadership feared more former Soviet States would experience a Color Revolution, especially Belarus. Belarus encompasses an essential position in Russia’s European security policy, and an absence of it would cause Russia’s sphere of influence to shift eastward.⁷⁶ Traditionally countries that experience democratic change begin to align more with the West. For example, after the Orange Revolution in Ukraine the new president, Viktor Yushchenko, began pursuing membership in the European Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). It is not a far stretch to assume a more democratic Belarus would become affiliated with the West. Therefore, the Kremlin has become adamant that a Color Revolution does not occur in Belarus. What follows is a discussion of how the revolutions have influenced

⁷⁶ Thomas Ambrosio. "The Political Success of Russia-Belarus Relations: Insulating Minsk from a Color Revolution." *Demokratizatsiya* 14, no. 3 (2006): 425-427.

Russian foreign policy decisions in relation to Belarus, using a case study of the Russian reaction to the 2006 presidential elections in Belarus. I look at the assistance the Kremlin gave President Aleksandr Lukashenko after the 2006 presidential elections.

Russia Federation and Republic of Belarus: A Historically Symbiotic Relationship:

July 20th, 2014 will mark Aleksandr Lukashenko's 20th year as the first, and only, President of the independent Republic of Belarus. The new Republic's slide into authoritarianism began in late 1996, two years after Lukashenko took office. Lukashenko instigated a constitutional crisis when he announced his intention to amend the 1994 Constitution, which weakened the parliament and Constitutional Court, as well as extended his presidential term for two more years. There was an attempt to impeach Lukashenko, however, it was not until the Russian Prime Minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, got involved that the conflict was resolved.⁷⁷ The vital role Russia played in Belarus's 1996 constitutional crisis exhibited the prominent role Russia holds in other country's internal affairs.

Russia's relationship with Belarus is the closest of any former Soviet Union Republics; furthermore, reintegration of the two countries was even proposed in the mid-1990s. The proposed Russia-Belarus union's grounding can be simplified in two reasons. First, Russia and Belarus share an historical origin, along with Ukraine, the two countries' founding can be traced to the ancient civilization of Kievan Rus; this had led

⁷⁷ David R. Marples. "Belarus: The Last European Dictatorship?" in *The EU and Belarus: Between Moscow and Brussels*, ed. Ann Lewis (London: Federal Trust, 2002), 37–40.

many Russians to believe the union is naturalistic.⁷⁸ Secondly, many scholars recognize that Belarus lacks a strong national identity; the Soviet Union's russification program found the most success in Belarus. This has led to Belarus being the most pro-Russian of the former Republics, and established long history of mutual cooperation and assistance dominated by Russia. The close relationship between the two has been vital in insulating Belarus from Western influences and political reform. I argue both Putin and Lukashenko have benefited from the Russian-Belarus union because it has allowed them to isolate Belarus from the West. Lukashenko remained in control of Belarus, while Putin ensured a pro-Russian authoritarian ally remained in power. Belarus forms the eastern border with the democratic Western states; therefore the loss of the country to democracy would be tremendous.

It is in the best interest of authoritarian leaders to halt the effects of democratic diffusion by assisting similar regimes. After the 2003-2005 wave of democracy swept through the former Soviet Union, Russia's hegemony in the region was threatened. Under the guise of the Russian form of democracy, sovereign democracy, Russian foreign policy became focused on securing its state sovereignty through means of preempting democracy. Vitali Silitski defines this as "Preemptive authoritarianism.... a strategy to combat the democratic contagion [and] is becoming commonplace in the political practices of nondemocratic governments throughout Eurasia."⁷⁹ This tactic is exemplified in Russian foreign policy, especially after the Color Revolutions, toward

⁷⁸ Taras Kuzio. "National Identity and Foreign Policy: The East Slavic Conundrum," in *Contemporary Ukraine*, ed. Taras Kuzio, Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, (1998): 221-244.

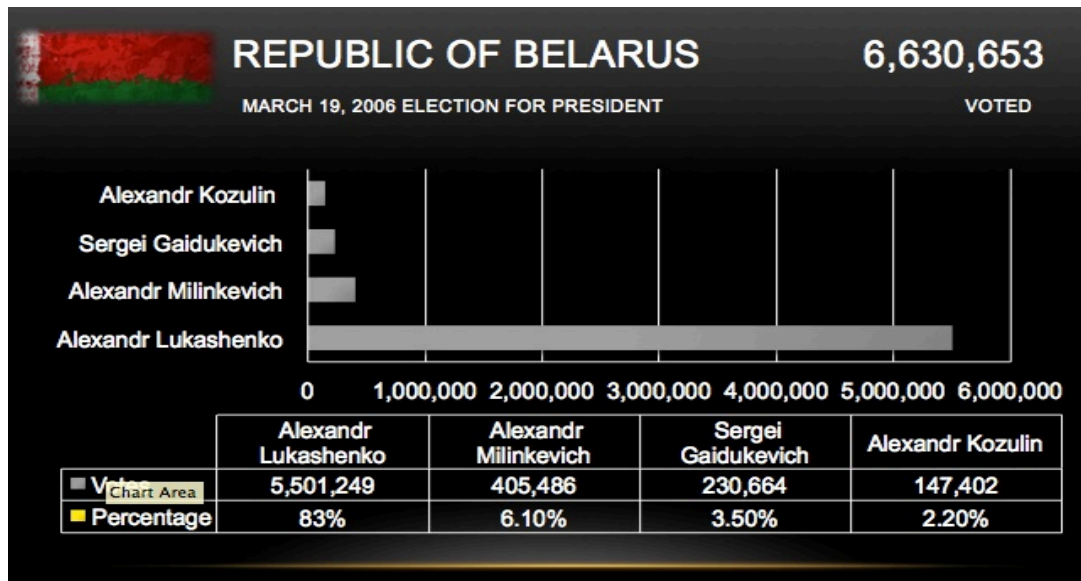
⁷⁹ Vitali Silitski. "Preempting Democracy: The Case of Belarus," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 16, No. 4. (2005): 83-97.

Belarus. Suzanne Werner states, “Leaders fearful of such effects [democratic diffusion] have a keen interest in seeing the establishment or the maintenance of governments abroad that strengthen, or at least do not undermine, their position at home and a keen interest in undermining governments abroad that pose any threat to their position at home.”⁸⁰ To Bolster the stability Lukashenko’s authoritarian regime has become the focal point of Russian foreign policy. This is seen in Russia’s reaction and foreign policy actions towards the 2006 presidential election in Belarus.

The 2006 Belarusian Presidential Election: On March 19, 2006 Belarus held its third presidential election since the states independence, and with the exception of Russia, no other notable government or governmental organizations recognized the election as free and fair. The Belarusian Central Commission for Elections and National Referendums (CEC) released the official election results on March 23, 2006, which are summarized in figure 3 below.

⁸⁰ Suzanne Werner. “The Effects of Political Similarity on the Onset of Militarized Disputes,” *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 53, No.2 (2000): 3-18.

Figure 3



Source: "Central Commission for Elections and National Referendums Results Message," *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*, (Minsk) March 23, 2006.

The results stated 6,630,653 million out of a voting population of 7.1 million (93%) participated in the 2006 presidential election. Of those 6.63 million 5,501,249 (83%) voted for incumbent president Lukashenko, 405,486 (6.1%) for opposition candidate Aleksandr Milinkevich, 230,664 (3.5%) for Sergei Haidukevich and 147,402 (2.2%) for Aleksandr Kozulin.⁸¹ The results were obviously falsified. All public opinion polls taken prior to the election had allotted Lukashenko more than 60%; others depicted a considerably lower percentage. Additionally, the numbers reported for the opposition candidates appeared ridiculously low considering their previous support.⁸² These clearly contrived results developed into a brief protest movement led by the opposition

⁸¹ "Central Commission for Elections and National Referendums Results Message," *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*, (Minsk) March 23, 2006.

⁸² David R. Marples. "Color revolutions: The Belarus case," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 39 (2006) 352.

candidates, calling for a repeat election.

On the night of the election an estimated 10,000 people gathered in Minsk’s main square. The opposition leaders Kozulin and Milinkevich led this demonstration and called for a new democratic election to be held on July 16, 2006. Authorities allowed the protest to continue for five days, however the police detained those who tried to leave or reenter the square. Police also prevented food, clothing and blankets from being brought to the protestors. On the morning of March 24th the authorities broke up the demonstration and arrested the remaining protestors. An estimated 500 to 1,000 people were arrested in association with the demonstration, including the opposition leaders Kozulin and Milinkevich.⁸³ The protest ended without a regime change or a repeat election, and Belarusian government withstood harsh international criticism and pressure with the assistance of its vital ally, the Russian Federation.



March 2006 protest. Police refused to allow protests to reenter or leave the capital square.

Source: “Leaked cables give an unsettling view of Belarus president, Alexander Lukashenko, who’s dubbed ‘Europe’s last dictator,’” *Aljazeera*, last modified December 23, 2010, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/europe/2010/12/201012235375941289.html>

⁸³ “Republic of Belarus 2006 Presidential Election Observation Mission Report,” *OSCE*, (Warsaw: 2006): 24-25.

Russian employed three main tactics to bolster Lukashenko's authoritarian regime in Belarus: (1) creating a sense of international legitimacy, (2) 'fraternal' economic assistance and (3) media control and Pro-Lukashenko propaganda. These tactics keep Belarus from being politically, economically and militarily isolated in Europe, as well as removing the Western world's ability to put pressure on the Lukashenko regime.

The Kremlin repeatedly defended Lukashenko's regime in the international arena, and attempted to legitimize the government. Belarus is the only CIS autocracy located within Europe, therefore is regularly criticized. To combat this Russia repeatedly lobbied to change the criteria of election monitoring and downsize the ODIHR branch of the OSCE.⁸⁴ Russia also employed efforts to counter-monitor elections by introducing a new branch of the CIS that deals with elections, and since has pushed for their presence at all elections. Sergei Lavrov, the Foreign Minister, criticized "lopsided rules...which the OSCE is trying to impose contrary to the proposals on developing commonly accepted election monitoring rules." This is to avoid an "OSCE monopoly" on the election-monitoring process.⁸⁵ The increase of CIS monitors gives the Belarusian government a sense of international legitimacy where there would be none. In addition to its attempts to legitimize the 2006 presidential election, the Russian state has also given Lukashenko's authoritarian regime a great deal of financial support throughout the years.

⁸⁴ Vitali Silitski. "Belarus and Russia: Comradeship-In-Arms in Preempting Democracy," *Political Trends in the New Eastern Europe: Ukraine and Belarus*, Title 17, United States Code, Section 101 (2007): 10-11.

⁸⁵ Robert Bridge. "Moscow calms Minsk over EU's election-monitoring 'monopoly'." *Russian Times*, (Moscow, Russia) August 15, 2012.

Lukashenko often referred to Belarusian economy as an “economic miracle,” however there is no mystery to this miracle. Over the last two decades Russia has given Belarus considerable economic assistance to help it maintain internal stability and resist Western pressures. Furthermore, without this economic support the country’s unreformed economy would not have survived. In addition to reversing all reforms made before he took office, Lukashenko instituted a neo-socialist model of state controlled economy.⁸⁶ For instance, Russia heavily subsidized energy exports and has cancelled a large portion of Belarus’ debt. This allowed the country to sustain its standard of living and reinforced Belarusian industry.⁸⁷ From 2001–2008, Belarus’s GDP on average grew by 8.3 percent annually, more swiftly than Europe and Central Asia at 5.7 percent and CIS at 7.1 percent.⁸⁸ In 2006 Russia charged Belarus \$46.68 per 1000 cubic meters of gas, less than a fifth of the European price. According to economist Leonid Zaiko energy subsidies from Russia totaled more than 7 billion USD, which would be 30 percent of Belarus’s GDP.⁸⁹ The Russian economic assistance bolstered the Lukashenko’s authoritarian regime as well as sent a message to the less compliant governments, such as Georgia and Ukraine.

In the year before the presidential election the Russian and Belarusian governments highlighted the stark contrast between Belarus gas prices and that of (democratic) Ukraine. This was a key strategy used to foster support for Lukashenko before the 2006

⁸⁶ Anders Aslund. “Is the Belarusian Economic Model Viable,” *The EU and Belarus: Between Moscow and Brussels*, ed. Ann Lewis (London: Federal Trust, 2002) 82.

⁸⁷ Thomas Ambrosio. “Insulating Russia from a Colour Revolution: How the Kremlin Resists Regional Democratic Trends,” 243-244.

⁸⁸ “Belarus Overview.” *World Bank Group*, World Bank (2014).

⁸⁹ “Independent but still very close to Russia,” *Economist: Financial Times*, April 2009, 29.

elections. David Marples argues the price they paid for these low prices would be paid later in the form of Belarusian gas company Beltransgaz to the gargantuan Russian conglomerate Gazprom; however, this fact remained hidden from the public until after the elections.⁹⁰ Russian aid has taken the place of foreign assistance, which has been withheld from Belarus due to its authoritarian policies. In addition to economic assistance given in 2006, Russia also went to great lengths to positively portray and support the Lukashenko regime.

The Kremlin has directly endeavored to increase support for Lukashenko by implementing pro-Lukashenko propaganda through the Russian controlled media and elite public shows of support. The 2006 presidential election was highly publicized by the Russian television, which is widely shown in other Russian speaking countries. These stations portrayed Lukashenko in an extremely positive light while criticizing the legitimacy of his opponents. Moreover, they condemned the Color Revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia, and later accused Western governments of an attempt to interfere with Belarus internal affairs.⁹¹

When U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice met with Belarusian opposition leaders in April 2005 she advocated they unite against the Lukashenko's regime. In response, Putin met with Lukashenko the very next day to publicize his support of the leader. Soon after Sergei Lavrov publicly announced, "We think the democratic process, the process of reform cannot be imposed from the outside," and cautioned against

⁹⁰ David R. Marples. "Color revolutions: The Belarus case," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 39 (2006) 358- 359.

⁹¹ Thomas Ambrosio. "Insulating Russia from a Colour Revolution: How the Kremlin Resists Regional Democratic Trends," 243.

attempting a regime change, according to Western standards, in Belarus.⁹² A short time later, Sergei Ivanov, Russian defense minister, at the 42nd International Conference on Security Policy in February 2006 referred to Lukashenko as “the most popular politician in Belarus whether you like it or not,” and emphasized “We [the Russian Federation] treat negatively a flare-up of disorders after the elections and believe it is necessary to do [our] utmost to prevent them.”⁹³ Ivanov’s statement indicated the Kremlin would not tolerate a color revolution in Belarus.

The urgent threat of a Color Revolution in Belarus ended when the fleeting protests in March and April 2006 collapsed. However, the Russian support for maintaining an authoritarian regime in Belarus remains still to this day. The Russia-Belarus alliance offers Belarus a promising third alternative to its otherwise stark options. If not for Russian support then Belarus would either be forced to join the European Union, which would require drastic political and economic changes, most likely ousting Lukashenko. Or the country would face complete political, economic and military isolation. The third alternative Russia presents has allowed Belarus to ignore Western pressures and regional democratic trends. Russia continues to bolster authoritarianism in Belarus, because as Lukashenko himself said “a revolution in Belarus is a revolution in Russia.”⁹⁴

⁹² RIA Novoti. “Russia Warns Against Attempts at ‘Regime Change in Belarus,’” *BBCMIR*, February 27, 2006.

⁹³ Pyotr Netreba. “Putin and Fradkov Endorse Alexander Lukashenko,” *Kommer-sant*, March 9, 2006, 2, reproduced in *What the Papers Say Part B* (Russia), March 9, 2006.

⁹⁴ Centre TV. “Belarusian President Vows to Resist Political Change,” *BBCMIR* (July 2005; Moscow) quoted in Ambrosio ‘Insulating Russia...’ 244.

Conclusion

The Color Revolutions that appeared throughout the former Soviet republics have profoundly disturbed the Putin administration. The Kremlin responded to these democratic revolutions by creating the term “sovereign democracy,” a uniquely Russian form of democracy. They claimed Western interference imposed Western style liberal democracy on the Russian population. Under the guise of promoting this Russian form of democracy the Putin administration has instituted a number of authoritarian domestic and international policies. Since the Color Revolutions Russian policy have become focused on securing state sovereignty through means of preempting democracy, and it has strived to insulate itself internally from a Color Revolution while simultaneously bolstering authoritarian regimes in neighboring countries.

This essay examined how the newly created philosophy, sovereign democracy, has affected Russian domestic and foreign policies. Done through case studies of the Russian Public Chamber and Belarusian presidential elections of 2006; sovereign democracy was a concept designed to deflect criticism of the West, and as a way for the Russian Federation to expand its influences and retain its status as a major world power.

Officially, Russia is a democratic state, however in reality, democratic practices have been substituted with authoritarian methods. I argued that sovereign democracy was a term created to justify the Russian Federation’s undemocratic policies to the international community. When the Kremlin proclaimed sovereign democracy as the uniquely Russian form of democracy, it constructed a defense against international

criticism; because, to question sovereign democracy, and the policies it spawned, would be tantamount to criticizing Russian social and cultural history. This research is more than just a reflection on the past with limited relevance. The policy justification sovereign democracy created was not limited the period immediately after the Color Revolutions. Russia continues to use the rationalization of sovereign democracy in present time, as seen in Putin and Russia's reactions to the ongoing popular revolt in Ukraine. Their response falls into the same pattern.

The memory of the successful 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine generated an aggressive response from the Russian government into current Ukrainian affairs. The Kremlin saw the popular revolt in Ukraine as foreshadowing to another possible democratic transition within the country. Since such a transition in 2004 led to Ukraine aligning more with the West as well as lessened Russian influence, Putin and his administration were not willing to risk the prospect of a repeat experience. This is one possible explanation for the increasingly aggressive Russian policy towards Ukraine and its decision to invade and annex the Crimean Peninsula, shaping Russia's continuously evolving relations with the West.

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