

should look for hypocrisies among businesses and public figures and seize upon opportunities to spread provocative Internet memes. Also, because Israel utilizes paid Internet propagandists (usually college students with multiple false accounts), activists should organize means to overcome their voices with the counter narrative.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>67</sup> "Israel to Pay Students to Defend It Online," *USA Today* (August 14, 2013), [www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2013/08/14/israel-students-social-media/2651715/](http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2013/08/14/israel-students-social-media/2651715/).

## Social media, Kyiv's Euromaidan, and demands for sovereignty in Eastern Ukraine

BRYON J. MORASKI

One of the most intractable problems confronting democracy's advocates involves the question of what constitutes a people deserving of an independent unit.<sup>1</sup> The move toward greater integration in Europe under the auspices of the European Union, for example, has done little to silence, and may have even increased, calls for independence on the continent. Elsewhere, questions about the democratic credentials of a regime may fuel separatist demands, particularly when the mobilizing forces of the Internet give greater visibility to public concerns, mass dissatisfaction, and political dissent. Thus, although democracy promoters may view new media as a welcomed addition to the toolbox of political empowerment, such optimism may be less warranted where democracy's roots are shallow, corruption is rampant, and popular trust is low.

In such cases, internal and external actors may, theoretically, use social media to foment national division and – when political and social divisions assume a geographic component – separatist conflict. This chapter considers these dynamics by focusing on demands for sovereignty in eastern Ukraine following President Viktor Yanukovich's removal from office in February 2014.

The chapter begins by highlighting the ambiguity of the implications of mobilization via the Internet and social media, drawing particular attention to the question of localized empowerment within the literature on communication technology and democratization. With this foundation laid, the work discusses the 2013–14 events leading to the deposing of Ukraine's president

The author thanks the Fulbright Program, the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy in Kyiv, Ukraine, and the University of Florida for supporting fieldwork that contributed to this chapter. The work benefited from research assistance by Jung Hoon Park and Jessie-Leigh Thomas. The opinions expressed in the chapter do not reflect the positions of these institutions or individuals; the author is solely responsible for all interpretations or errors.

<sup>1</sup> Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973), p. 193.

and considers how regional distrust and heightened levels of uncertainty combined with social media as parts of eastern Ukraine advanced demands for greater sovereignty. In general, the events preceding the removal from office of Ukraine's President, Viktor Yanukovich, nicely parallel the arguments of those who see social media as a powerful democratic tool. Yet the events that followed Yanukovich's departure suggest that social media can exacerbate the uncertainty that inherently accompanies dramatic regime change while also further politicizing existing societal divisions. Thanks in part to intervention by a meddling authoritarian neighbor, these developments quickly degenerated into demands for secession and civil war.

#### The uncertain effects of the Internet and social media

The potential for the Internet to complement if not contribute to separatist demands undergirds, if implicitly, the positions of both advocates of social media as a democratizing force as well as its detractors. In *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, Castells identifies networked social movements as new forms of democratic movements. By his account, networked social movements have been mobilized for a host of causes, from battling dictatorship in the Arab world to a perceived mishandling of economic crises in Europe and the United States.<sup>2</sup> Castells contends that the interaction between the Internet and local communities has allowed networked social movements to reconstruct the public sphere and experiment with assembly-based decision making that is autonomous from the confines of existing systems.<sup>3</sup> On one hand, the Internet and social media facilitate this development by permitting what Castells calls "mass self-communication."<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, Castells reminds the reader that social movements – even networked ones – emerge when elites (political and economic) lose the trust of the masses. Castells's point that trust is the fabric of the social contract between rulers and the ruled is one worth emphasizing, especially where societal divisions follow, if weakly, geographic lines and the regime itself is in transition.

By allowing individuals to communicate unencumbered by governmental interference, the Internet and social media, in some instances at least, may become what Diamond labels, "liberation technology":<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2012), pp. 2–3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246. <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Larry Diamond, "Liberation Technology," *Journal of Democracy*, 21, 3 (2010), 69–83. Specifically, Diamond labels as liberation technology any form of information and

They allow citizens the chance "to report news, expose wrongdoing, express opinions, mobilize protest, monitor elections, scrutinize government, deepen participation, and expand the horizons of freedom."<sup>6</sup> Selnow takes a more poetic stance, asserting that the opportunity for feedback and interactivity on the Internet "cultivate the soul of democracy."<sup>7</sup> How this occurs for Selnow is particularly noteworthy: "It provides a sense of control, and its user-driven choices reinforce this medium as a metaphor for *self-determination*."<sup>8</sup> Thus, Selnow's work in the Balkans appears to have bred an appreciation for the Internet's potential to facilitate democratic self-rule.

While the Balkans' location in the heart of Europe may have advanced democracy's cause by linking people across borders,<sup>9</sup> in locales with authoritarian neighbors, especially ones that might be perceived as external homelands,<sup>10</sup> such cross-border ties are less likely to represent democratizing forces. In the former Soviet space, for example, a primary concern driving Russian foreign policy is the protection of Russians and Russian speakers in its "near abroad," even if those populations do not necessarily view Russia as an external homeland.<sup>11</sup> This dynamic has grown in salience under Russian President Vladimir Putin, as evidenced by the August 2008 war with Georgia and the current conflict in Ukraine. In some cases, then, new communication technology and social media not only may permit antide-mocratic sentiments to flow across borders but also may serve those who want to divert or manipulate information on ongoing events.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, Diamond tempers any unwarranted enthusiasm for the potential of "liberation technology" by noting that, like the printing press and telegraph before it, new media are merely tools, and tools that can be

communication technology (ICT) that can expand political, social, and economic freedom. This technology, therefore, includes computers, the Internet, mobile phones, and the innovative applications that accompany them, like new social media platforms (e.g., Facebook and Twitter); see p. 70.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>7</sup> Gary W. Selnow, "The Information Age Is Fostering the Spread of Freedom and Democracy," in James D. Torr (ed.), *The Information Age* (Farmington Hills, MI: Greenhaven Press, 2003), p. 33.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33; emphasis added. <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>10</sup> Rogers Brubaker, "National Minorities, Nationalizing States, and External Homelands in the New Europe," *Daedalus*, 124 (1995), 107–32.

<sup>11</sup> Lowell W. Barrington, Erik S. Herron, and Brian D. Silver, "Research Note: The Motherland Is Calling: Views of Homeland among Russians in the Near Abroad," *World Politics*, 55, 2 (2003), 290–313.

<sup>12</sup> Ian Bremmer, "Democracy in Cyberspace: What Information Technology Can and Cannot Do," *Foreign Affairs* (November/December, 2010), [www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/66803/ian-bremmer/democracy-in-cyberspace](http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/66803/ian-bremmer/democracy-in-cyberspace). Accessed on November 20, 2014.

used for "both noble and nefarious purposes."<sup>13</sup> For present purposes, social media then may allow individuals of similar minds to aggregate and, like other information technologies before them, assist in the creation of imagined communities.<sup>14</sup> Just as new media can grant people opportunities to share outrage and hope, its use also can reinforce fears and fuel resentment among local communities. In turn, these local communities may either express little interest in democracy, in general, or little interest in democracy as it operates (or is expected to operate) within the state in which these communities currently reside.

The potential for social media to nurture local demands for sovereignty complements the prevailing view that the Internet's openness and nonproprietary status can undermine existing hierarchies.<sup>15</sup> According to Diamond, for example, one of the most direct threats to authoritarian regimes in recent years has been the ability of communication technology, starting with cell phones and SMS text messaging, to facilitate large-scale mobilization,<sup>16</sup> or what Rheingold calls "smart mobs."<sup>17</sup> Diamond's position largely reflects the role of technology in the overthrow of authoritarian rulers – though not their replacement with democratic regimes. Scholars had been quite pessimistic about the prospects for democratization in the Middle East and North Africa until the role of social media during the Arab Spring of 2010–11 captured the imagination of democracy promoters. Thanks to the proliferation of mobile devices, particularly cell phones, Internet access has expanded across the Arab world. As a result, blogs, news websites, Twitter feeds, and political Listservs emerged as the "best and perhaps the only place" where critics could reach a wide audience, where women could debate policy with men, and "where regime secrets could be exposed."<sup>18</sup>

One lesson of the Arab Spring, then, is that social media were instrumental in airing grievances, spreading opposition, organizing and

<sup>13</sup> Diamond, "Liberation Technology," p. 71.

<sup>14</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso Books, 2006 [1983]).

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Shapiro, "The Information Age May Not Foster Democracy," in Torr (ed.), *The Information Age*, p. 52.

<sup>16</sup> Diamond, "Liberation Technology."

<sup>17</sup> Howard Rheingold, *Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 2003).

<sup>18</sup> Philip N. Howard and Muzammil M. Hussain, "The Role of Digital Media," in Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner (eds.), *Democratization and Authoritarianism in the Arab World* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), p. 42.

coordinating protests, and driving coverage by mainstream media. These dynamics may prove amenable to separatism as easily as the overthrow of an authoritarian regime. Of course, social media alone cannot bring down regimes, and one should not expect them to be the primary explanation for state dissolution. For cyber activism to succeed in the dismantling of the status quo, it needs action by people on the ground.<sup>19</sup> That is, while digital media can help "turn individualized, localized, and community-specific dissent into a structured movement with a collective consciousness,"<sup>20</sup> a collective consciousness alone is not enough. Successful protest requires a physical presence. Only with the sight of thousands of people in the streets opposing the regime will international actors, for example, take notice or lend support.<sup>21</sup>

Large-scale protests also may generate an interaction effect between social media and traditional news outlets. According to Bunt, Iran's 2009 "Green Revolution" became a template for social network activism by demonstrating how relatively small protests can gain momentum and size as events that circulate on social media garner local, national, and international media coverage.<sup>22</sup> The fact that domestic and satellite television relied on clips captured by cell phones and additional information disseminated via online posts testifies to this "symbiosis" in the Iranian case.<sup>23</sup> Lotan et al.'s work also points to a symbiotic relationship between mainstream media outlets and new media, Twitter in particular. By tracing information flows during the 2011 Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, Lotan et al. find that interactions between activists

<sup>19</sup> In Egypt, ironically, one reason why so many Egyptian protesters went to Tahrir Square was the Mubarak regime's decision to clamp down on Internet access, thus depriving much of Egypt's urban youth of an online outlet. See Michael S. Doran, "The Impact of New Media: The Revolution Will Be Tweeted," in Kenneth M. Pollack et al., *The Arab Awakening: America and the Transformation of the Middle East* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2011), p. 44.

<sup>20</sup> Howard and Hussain, "The Role of Digital Media," p. 41.

<sup>21</sup> See Doran, "The Impact of New Media," p. 44. At the same time, such protests may benefit from their egalitarian nature. Since the organization of such "smart mobs" tends to be leaderless (see Rheingold, *Smart Mobs*), authoritarian regimes struggle to contain them using conventional tactics. According to Doran, Tunisia's secret police were busy trying to hunt down a subversive organization and failed to realize that "the most dangerous opposition network actually had no leader and no organization" (*ibid.*, p. 42).

<sup>22</sup> Gary R. Bunt, "Mediterranean Islamic Expression: Web 2.0," in Cesare Merlini and Olivier Roy (eds.), *Arab Society in Revolt: The West's Mediterranean Challenge* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2012), p. 85.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

and journalists generated more retweets than other interactions.<sup>24</sup> For these authors, the results support the argument that news on Twitter is mutually constructed by bloggers and activists alongside journalists.<sup>25</sup>

Not all causes, of course, turn "slacktivists" – those Internet users content with simply liking a cause on Facebook<sup>26</sup> – into street protesters. A medium can function as a mobilizing agent only if the message disseminated resonates with its audience, and this requires a message that maps onto existing grievances. In the case of Egypt's 2011 revolution, Carapico contends that the metaphor of a digital or Twitter revolution confuses the medium with the message.<sup>27</sup> While Carapico does not deny the critical role of Internet users and how forums like the "We Are All Khalid Said" Facebook page allowed them to reach wider audiences around the country and abroad, she gives more credit to the message of Khalid Said's mother, Umm Khalid, in a YouTube video. In that video, Umm Khalid implored her countrymen and women to show solidarity against police brutality on Police Day. For Carapico, it was a mother's plea that galvanized moral outrage, not the electronic medium that delivered the message.<sup>28</sup> In Tunisia, meanwhile, the lavish lifestyle of President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, which had been documented and publicized for years by a Tunisian blogger known as Astrubal, took on new salience when Ben Ali visited the bedside of the self-immolated fruit vendor, Mohammed Bouazizi, in December 2010.<sup>29</sup> For Castells, such outrages and juxtapositions capture a common desire among networked social movements to find dignity amid suffering and humiliation.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, one might argue that the public display of another's actions can serve as a catalyst, one that mobilizes those people whose utility preferences had been on the cusp. Given the right ordering of individual utility preferences in society, then, the action by one individual may result in a cascade effect that brings throngs of people to the streets. While Kuran offered this explanation to understand the

<sup>24</sup> Glad Lotan, Erhardt Graeff, Mike Ananny, Devin Gaffney, Ian Pearce, and Danah Boyd, "The Revolutions Were Tweeted: Information Flows during the 2011 Tunisian and Egyptian Revolutions," *International Journal of Communication*, 5 (2011), 1375–1405.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1399–400. <sup>26</sup> Doran, "The Impact of New Media," p. 41.

<sup>27</sup> Sheila Carapico, "Egypt's Civic Revolution Turns 'Democracy Promotion' on Its Head," in Bahgat Korany and Rabab El-Mahdi (eds.), *Arab Spring in Egypt: Revolution and Beyond* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2012), p. 212.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 212–13. <sup>29</sup> Doran, "The Impact of New Media," p. 42.

<sup>30</sup> Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, p. 3.

unexpected nature of the 1989 revolutions against communism,<sup>31</sup> the logic fits other settings well and suggests that social media may allow more signals of discontent to be sent more often and received by a wider audience.

Still, most scholars assess the role that social media plays in revolutionary events with caution. Howard and Hussain, for example, emphasize that although journalists tend to focus on the visible use of technology, social scientists generally identify additional factors to explain the upheavals and are even more reticent to conclude that revolutionary events will lead to a consolidated democracy.<sup>32</sup> Bunt, meanwhile, notes that longstanding issues like regional economic and social deprivation, dissatisfaction with the government, the lack of political accountability, and human rights abuses helped spur the Arab Spring.<sup>33</sup> Doran not only concurs, but also submits that victorious protests do not end the battle between freedom and oppression: "Dictators have the capacity to learn, and the clever ones find ways to exploit the Internet to their advantage."<sup>34</sup>

Authoritarian regimes have developed the ability to filter and control the Internet as well as identify and punish their opponents.<sup>35</sup> Many states also deploy a wide range of legal strategies to control information technology and its users. These strategies include expanding laws that regulate traditional press, mandating the registration of online journalists and bloggers or requiring them to join state-controlled associations, intensively prosecuting for defamation, criminalizing traditional forms of protest, passing special laws that prohibit communication with foreign countries during potentially volatile periods, and banning or sanctioning information sharing with countries identified as enemy states.<sup>36</sup>

While dictators may initially be skeptical of the Internet, many have recognized its power. In Venezuela, for example, President Hugo Chavez

<sup>31</sup> Timur Kuran, "Now Out of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989," *World Politics*, 44 (1991), 7–48.

<sup>32</sup> Howard and Hussain, "The Role of Digital Media," p. 40.

<sup>33</sup> Bunt, "Mediterranean Islamic Expression," p. 85.

<sup>34</sup> Doran, "The Impact of New Media," p. 40.

<sup>35</sup> In Iran, for example, chat rooms in its closed online network permit only two people at a time to communicate; see Shapiro, "The Information Age May Not Foster Democracy," p. 48.

<sup>36</sup> Giovanni Ziccardi, *Resistance, Liberation Technology, and Human Rights in the Digital Age* (New York: Springer, 2013), pp. 14–15.

responded to the opposition's use of Twitter in April 2010 by opening an account of his own.<sup>37</sup> Within months, Chavez boasted that he received nearly 288,000 requests for help from citizens, and, more importantly, he promised that 200 staffers with access to public funds would help him win "the Twitter war."<sup>38</sup> In Russia, the Kremlin has cultivated close relations with leading lights of the country's Internet culture.<sup>39</sup> In 2009, a think tank called The Kremlin's School of Bloggers held a series of public talks and workshops designed to counter Western-backed threats to Russian sovereignty.<sup>40</sup> At the same time, the Kremlin has actively pursued those who use the Internet to oppose the regime. The most prominent case involves the anticorruption blogger and regime critic Aleksei Navalny, who helped lead demonstrations against the results of Russia's 2011–12 election cycle. Navalny quickly found himself charged with criminal fraud. After almost a year of house arrest, he was convicted on December 30, 2014, and given a suspended sentence while his brother, Oleg, received three and a half years in prison.<sup>41</sup> As these examples suggest, agents of democracy are not the only users of the Internet and social media. Authoritarian actors, including state representatives, are there too, promoting their own interests and, if possible, controlling what users can see and do.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), pp. 113–14.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>39</sup> They include Yevgeny Kasperky, who founded the popular antivirus software Kasperky Lab, and Konstantin Rykov, whom Morozov (*ibid.*, p. 124) identifies as "an undisputed godfather of the Russian Internet." One of Rykov's best-known works of pro-Kremlin propaganda is his company's documentary, *War 08.08.08: The War of Treason*, which examines the 2008 Georgian-Russian war from a highly ideological, pro-Russian perspective. Rykov also served as a deputy in Russia's lower chamber while "moonlighting as the Kremlin's unofficial ambassador to 'all things Internet'" (*ibid.*, p. 125).

<sup>40</sup> The project emerged as a direct response to the Glasnost Foundation's The School of Bloggers. Since that foundation was partially funded by the US National Endowment for Democracy, the notion that the American government was backing schools of bloggers with the intent of launching a "color revolution" in Russia set the Russian blogosphere abuzz with conspiracy theories and suggestions for countering this virtual threat. The mastermind behind The Kremlin School of Bloggers, Alexey Chadayev, went on to become a top ideological functionary within Russia's ruling party, United Russia (Morozov, *ibid.*, pp. 128–29).

<sup>41</sup> See David M. Herszenhorn, "Aleksi Navalny, Putin Critic, Is Spared Prison in a Fraud Case, but His Brother Is Jailed," *New York Times* (December 30, 2014), [www.nytimes.com/2014/12/31/world/europe/aleksei-navalny-convicted.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/31/world/europe/aleksei-navalny-convicted.html). Accessed on January 14, 2015.

<sup>42</sup> Bremmer, "Democracy in Cyberspace."

### Ukraine's Euromaidan

On November 21, 2013, a few hundred protesters took to the streets of Kyiv, Ukraine, in response to then-President Viktor Yanukovich's volte-face on the country's plans to sign an association agreement with the European Union prior to an EU summit scheduled for November 28–29 in Vilnius, Lithuania. While the government stated that the policy reversal was based on the need to protect the country's "national security," both the EU's commissioner on enlargement, Stefan Fuele, and Sweden's Foreign Minister, Carl Bildt, laid blame for the decision at the feet of the Kremlin.<sup>43</sup> In July and August 2013, Russia instigated what was perceived to be a trade war with Ukraine as a way to demonstrate Ukraine's economic reliance on Russia and force Ukraine to reject the association agreement in favor of the Russian-sponsored Eurasian Customs Union.<sup>44</sup> The Russian side, meanwhile, emphasized the European Union's failure to adequately consider the economic costs of Ukraine's European pivot to Ukraine, let alone to Russia.<sup>45</sup>

President Yanukovich's reversal surprised not only the Ukrainian public, but also members of Yanukovich's own staff who had been preparing the president's speech in Vilnius.<sup>46</sup> On the day of the announcement, disappointment was quickly voiced on social media.<sup>47</sup> Among those disappointed was Ukrainian journalist Mustafa Nayem, who is credited with using social media to draw people to the streets of Kyiv. Apparently fearing the danger of "slacktivism," Nayem's Facebook

<sup>43</sup> "Ukraine Suspends Preparations for EU Trade Agreement," *BBC News* (November 21, 2013), [www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25032275](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25032275). Accessed on January 6, 2015.

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, "Trading Insults: A Trade War Sputters as the Tussle over Ukraine's Future Intensifies," *The Economist* (August 24, 2013), [www.economist.com/news/europe/21583998-trade-war-sputters-tussle-over-ukraines-future-intensifies-trading-insults](http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21583998-trade-war-sputters-tussle-over-ukraines-future-intensifies-trading-insults). Accessed on January 6, 2015.

<sup>45</sup> See "To Deal or Not to Deal? Ukraine's EU-Russia Crossroads in Facts and Numbers," *RT News* (November 29, 2013), <http://rt.com/business/eu-trade-deal-vilnius-449/>. Accessed on January 15, 2015.

<sup>46</sup> Serhii Tereshko, Senior Expert at the Department for European Integration of the Presidential Administration, made this point during a conversation with the author in Kyiv on February 11, 2014.

<sup>47</sup> According to Portnov and Portnova, demonstrators were not angered so much by the decision as by the way it was communicated to society: without public explanation or justification even though governmental representatives had just the day before confirmed that they would be signing the Association Agreement in Vilnius. See Andriy Portnov and Tetiana Portnova, "The Dynamics of the Ukrainian Eurorevolution," *Religion & Society in East and West*, 42 (2014), 9–12.

post stated: "Come on guys, let's be serious. If you really want to do something, don't just 'like' this post. Write that you are ready, and we can try to start something."<sup>48</sup> On Twitter, Nayem called on people to meet in Kyiv's Independence Square – or Maidan Nezalezhnosti – encouraging attendees to "dress warmly and bring umbrellas, tea, coffee, and friends."<sup>49</sup> The initial protests in Ukraine, then, developed from the ground up. While their numbers would rise to tens of thousands of people as early as November 23, not a single political leader had reacted to Yanukovich's decision by calling for mass demonstrations.<sup>50</sup>

Although Ukraine's Euromaidan, as it came to be called,<sup>51</sup> began with Ukrainian demonstrations promoting European – rather than Russian – economic integration, the cause quickly changed from a disagreement over policy direction to questions about the regime's legitimacy. In the early hours of Saturday, November 30, Ukraine's riot police, or *berkut*, entered the Maidan on "the pretext of safeguarding the erection of the New Year's tree."<sup>52</sup> After entering, the *berkut* violently broke up a pro-Europe rally, injuring hundreds of demonstrators in the process. By Saturday night, an estimated 10,000 protesters gathered outside Kyiv's Mikhailovsky Cathedral, which had given sanctuary to those hurt in the early morning's violence.<sup>53</sup> While President Yanukovich subsequently condemned the use of force against the protesters, the opposition had a new, more powerful message, one about the regime's legitimacy rather than simply a policy decision. Not surprisingly, the opposition used the incident to call for early elections.<sup>54</sup> Demonstrators, meanwhile, erected

<sup>48</sup> Tom Balmforth, "From the Streets to the Rada: Euromaidan Activists Enter Politics," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (October 23, 2014), [www.rferl.mobi/a/ukraine-euromaidan-activists-parliament-elections/26651905.html](http://www.rferl.mobi/a/ukraine-euromaidan-activists-parliament-elections/26651905.html). Accessed on January 12, 2015.

<sup>49</sup> Luke Johnson, "Eight Tweets That Show How the Maidan Is Being Remembered Differently," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (November 21, 2014), [www.rferl.org/content/ukraine-russia-remembering-the-maidan-differently/26704172.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/ukraine-russia-remembering-the-maidan-differently/26704172.html). Accessed on January 14, 2015.

<sup>50</sup> Portnov and Portnova, "The Dynamics of the Ukrainian Eurorevolution," p. 9.

<sup>51</sup> On Twitter, one could follow @euromaidan and track additional activity using the appropriate hashtags in Ukrainian, Russian, and English (#Євромайдан, #Евромайдан, #Euromaidan).

<sup>52</sup> Portnov and Portnova, "The Dynamics of the Ukrainian Eurorevolution," p. 9.

<sup>53</sup> According to Portnov and Portnova (*ibid.*), "up to a million" citizens gathered in Kyiv on Sunday, December 1.

<sup>54</sup> "Ukrainian Opposition Urges Early Elections amid Mass Protests," *Deutsche Welle* (November 30, 2013), [www.dw.de/ukrainian-opposition-urges-early-elections-amid-mass-protests/a-17263842](http://www.dw.de/ukrainian-opposition-urges-early-elections-amid-mass-protests/a-17263842). Accessed on January 7, 2015.

tents and barricades in the heart of Ukraine's capital with social media continuing to serve as an important organizational and mobilizing tool.

The Social Media and Political Participation lab at New York University closely monitored social media activity related to the protests in the three months between the onset of Euromaidan and Yanukovich's removal from office.<sup>55</sup> Barberá and Metzger found significant spikes in the number of tweets per day during critical events on Maidan. This includes January 16, 2014, when the Ukrainian parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, voted in favor of a state budget that conformed to a December 2013 agreement negotiated by President Yanukovich with Russian President Vladimir Putin.<sup>56</sup> In the same session, the majority of legislators voted (by a show of hands) in favor of a series of repressive laws resembling Russian legislation.<sup>57</sup>

Barberá and Metzger's data reveal that Twitter activity remained high in the days and weeks that followed, including on Sunday, January 19, when tens of thousands of people once again swelled the Maidan in response to the new laws. That evening, demonstrators marched on the Rada and clashed with riot police, turning Hrushevskii Street, which joins Independence Square and European Square (located along the path to the Rada) into a battlefield. Molotov cocktails and stun grenades left a scene of burnt-out buses while newly erected barricades formed a new frontline in the fight for Ukraine's future.<sup>58</sup> Over the course of February 18, the start of the last wave of clashes between demonstrators and riot police, Barberá and Metzger found that the number of tweets originating from protesters using the hashtag #Euromaidan (as well as its Ukrainian and Russian equivalents) increased significantly as the conflict grew more

<sup>55</sup> Pablo Barberá and Megan Metzger, "Tweeting the Revolution: Social Media Use and the #Euromaidan Protests," *Huffington Post* (February 2, 2014), [www.huffingtonpost.com/pablo-barbera/tweeting-the-revolution-s\\_b\\_4831104.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/pablo-barbera/tweeting-the-revolution-s_b_4831104.html). Accessed on January 12, 2015.

<sup>56</sup> Portnov and Portnova, "The Dynamics of the Ukrainian Eurorevolution," p. 11.

<sup>57</sup> In Kyiv at the time, these laws were referred to as the "dictatorship laws," and some darkly joked that Yanukovich had done in five minutes what Putin had taken five years to do. It was also rumored that the presidential administration had threatened deputies of the ruling Party of Regions with physical harm if they violated party discipline (personal communication with Ukrainian activists at the Fulbright-Ukraine office in Kyiv).

<sup>58</sup> On January 22, Ukraine experienced its first deaths from the conflict when snipers shot protesters on Hrushevskii Street. As the president and opposition leaders, including Arsenii Yasteniuk and Vitalii Klitschko, negotiated a ceasefire, demonstrators in Ukraine's western city of Ternopil stormed and occupied the regional administrative headquarters. The act was soon emulated in other western regions. See Portnov and Portnova, "The Dynamics of the Ukrainian Eurorevolution," p. 11.

violent. Notably, the proportion of tweets in English jumped relative to previous days, possibly as Ukrainians used English-language tweets to directly engage the international community. On Facebook, meanwhile, Barberá and Metzger found pages dedicated to logistical issues such as sharing information on how to handle emergencies and where to take those in need of medical care.<sup>59</sup> With snipers killing approximately eighty people in the heart of Kyiv on February 20,<sup>60</sup> these pages sadly proved to be valuable resources at the time.

As the preceding discussion suggests, Ukraine's Euromaidan illustrates how social media can facilitate mass mobilization and empower those who oppose an existing political hierarchy. Indeed, the tendency to label the events as "The Revolution of Dignity"<sup>61</sup> echoes Castells's point that networked social movements share a common goal of finding dignity amid despair.<sup>62</sup> Yet, like their counterparts studying the Arab Spring, scholars seeking to understand the events in Ukraine have placed them in a larger context, whether temporally or comparatively, by emphasizing the systemic causes underlying the events. For example, Shveda identifies low levels of public confidence in governmental institutions, low GDP per capita with Ukraine behind post-communist counterparts like Albania and Turkmenistan, and an economic and social situation "complicated by total corruption" with Ukraine ranking 144th alongside Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Iran, Cameroon, and the Central African Republic on Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, the democratic gains associated with the 2004 Orange Revolution were widely seen as having slipped away even before the laws of January 16, 2014.<sup>64</sup> For Shveda, then, the "Revolution of Dignity" constitutes a

<sup>59</sup> Barberá and Metzger, "Tweeting the Revolution."

<sup>60</sup> The individuals are collectively referred to as the "Heavenly Hundred."

<sup>61</sup> Yuriy Shveda, "The Revolution of Dignity in the Context of Social Theory of Revolutions," *Religion & Society in East and West*, 42 (2014), 20–22.

<sup>62</sup> Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, p. 3.

<sup>63</sup> Shveda, "The Revolution of Dignity," pp. 20–21.

<sup>64</sup> For example, Motyl notes that while Yanukovich had presented himself as a moderate democrat seeking to heal past divisions during his 2010 election campaign, upon assuming office he undermined Ukrainian democracy, neglected the country's broken economy, and began realigning the country with Russia. See Alexander J. Motyl, "Ukrainian Blues: Yanukovich's Rise, Democracy's Fall," *Foreign Affairs*, 89 (2010), 126. Indeed, Motyl (*ibid.*, p. 136) predicted that the most likely outcome of Yanukovich's election would be an "ineffective and embattled" president destabilizing the country. Freedom House, meanwhile, downgraded Ukraine's democracy rating in 2011 from "free" (with a score of 2.5 on its scale of 1 "most free" to 7 "least free") to "partly free" (3). See Freedom

continuation of the Orange Revolution, one that was successful but incomplete.<sup>65</sup>

Stepanenko also sees the Euromaidan as possessing longer historical roots.<sup>66</sup> Specifically, he sees the Maidan protests as attempts to deinstitutionalize key elements of post-Soviet politics, specifically the mechanisms and logic of centralized decision making, which are heavily burdened by the institutional memory of "state-bureaucratic and single-party machinery."<sup>67</sup> To the extent that President Yanukovich himself embodied this system, it is notable that demonstrators celebrated his removal from office by descending on his personal residence and using social media to share with the world the extravagant lifestyle of their former leader.<sup>68</sup>

For Riabchuk and Lushnycky, Ukraine's post-Soviet system increasingly contradicted the growing Western values of Ukrainian citizens.<sup>69</sup> They assert that trends from the 1995, 2000, and 2006 rounds of the World Values Survey disprove pessimistic assertions that a post-Soviet mentality would continue to define Ukrainian values for the foreseeable future. Instead, more Western-oriented attitudes on value-charged issues from democracy versus a "strong hand" to lamenting or not lamenting the demise of the Soviet Union can be found among Ukraine's younger, more educated, and ethnically Ukrainian population.<sup>70</sup> From this perspective, then, one should not be surprised that those with increasingly Western values would go to the streets to oppose a regime that not only sought closer relations with Russia, but also made this shift after having openly committed to a European trajectory.

House, *Freedom in the World Report: Ukraine* (2011), <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2011/ukraine#.VLgsBVobtUQ>. Accessed on January 15, 2015. In 2012, Ukraine would fall another half point overall (to 3.5) as Freedom House added one point to its Political Rights scores due to efforts to "crush the opposition" that included the politicization of courts, crackdowns on free media, and forceful dispersals of demonstrators. See Freedom House, *Freedom in the World Report: Ukraine* (2012), <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2012/ukraine-0#.VLgsGVobtUQ>. Accessed on January 15, 2015.

<sup>65</sup> Shveda, "The Revolution of Dignity," 22.

<sup>66</sup> V. Stepanenko, "Ukraine's Farewell to Post-Soviet Politics," *Religion & Society in East and West*, 42 (2014), 26–28.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>68</sup> Espresso TV illustrates the symbiosis between social media and traditional media outlets in Ukraine during the Euromaidan. The Kyiv-based station streamed events from the Maidan live on the Internet.

<sup>69</sup> Mykola Riabchuk and Andrej N. Lushnycky, "Ukraine's Third Attempt," *Religion & Society in East and West*, 42, (2014), 29–31.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

### From celebration to separation

Although Riabchuk and Lushnycky observe changing values among Ukrainians, they also acknowledge that ethnic Russians and Russian speakers living in Ukraine are more likely to exhibit Soviet values since these individuals could more easily internalize Soviet ideology as their own as opposed to Ukrainians and Ukrainian speakers who sought to preserve their cultural identity.<sup>71</sup> Mapped onto this linguistic and cultural divide in Ukraine is a geographic one. As Wilson and Birch note, where a person lives in Ukraine is an important predictor of the language he or she speaks, with rural residents and those living in central and western Ukraine much more likely to speak Ukrainian than those living in south-east Ukraine and in large cities, where Russian predominates.<sup>72</sup>

From a comparative perspective, such reinforcing identities are often associated with culturally segmented societies,<sup>73</sup> and, in such cases, major political, economic, or social changes can destabilize an otherwise balanced system. According to Enloe, for example, ethnic identity may be grasped more tenaciously in a climate of turbulence and uncertainty as a familiar and reassuring anchor.<sup>74</sup> And while ethnic grievances alone are unlikely to become sufficient causes for revolution,<sup>75</sup> conditions that deprive authorities and institutions of their legitimacy can become catalysts for popular action.<sup>76</sup> From this vantage point, then, the rise of secessionist and irredentist demands in Ukraine, particularly in the aftermath of regime change, makes sense.

Yet divisions in Ukrainian society are more nuanced and complicated than most talk of an East-West divide would suggest. Wolczuk submits

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Andrew Wilson and Sarah Birch, "Voting Stability, Political Gridlock: Ukraine's 1998 Parliamentary Elections," *Europe-Asia Studies*, 51, 6 (1999), 1039-68.

<sup>73</sup> See J. S. Furnivall, *Colonial Policy and Practice* (Cambridge: University Press, 1948), and M. G. Smith, *The Plural Society in the British West Indies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965).

<sup>74</sup> Cynthia Enloe, *Ethnic Conflict and Political Development* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1973), p. 15.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 224.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 232. It is precisely because regime transitions may alienate important segments of society, from the military and key economic actors to different sides of a communitarian divide, that O'Donnell and Schmitter promote pacts as important steps in a process that can increase the prospects of a country seeking viable democracy. See Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 37-47.

that Ukrainian regional identities differ along three dimensions: "1) How to interpret nationalism (and the role of Russia) in Ukrainian history; 2) the position of Russian language and culture; and 3) relations with Moscow, especially regarding Russia-led integration projects."<sup>77</sup> Moreover, she argues that these differences have become manifest when political and economic elites from Ukraine's eastern regions seek to exploit them for political gain. While such behavior has characterized Ukrainian politics since independence, a more recent demonization of Ukrainian nationalism, including the notion that fascists or neo-Nazis dominated the Euromaidan agenda, was used to justify eastern demands for sovereignty.<sup>78</sup>

Although Riabchuk and Lushnycky note that Ukrainians remain divided about the country's geopolitical orientation, they also point out that 94 percent of western residents and 70 percent in the southeast supported Yanukovich's ousting, while 91 percent of western residents and 70 percent of eastern residents condemned Russia's invasion of Crimea.<sup>79</sup> Likewise, based on interviews and focus group discussions with protests and activists, Onuch emphasizes that some of the most radical Euromaidan protesters were Russian speakers from the east.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, Fisun and Avksentiev observe that Euromaidan movements in southeastern Ukraine grew significantly after the November 30th dispersal of demonstrators in Kyiv - that is, when the issue became less about Europe and more about how the state treated its citizens.<sup>81</sup> While the growth in these regions was from only a handful of people to hundreds of participants, the authors depict these efforts as "no less heroic" due to the

<sup>77</sup> Kataryna Wolczuk, "Ukraine's 'Regionalism' of Convenience," *Washington Post* (May 6, 2014), [www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/05/06/ukraines-regionalism-of-convenience/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/05/06/ukraines-regionalism-of-convenience/). Accessed on January 7, 2015.

<sup>78</sup> Wolczuk notes that the question of separatism and federalism in eastern Ukraine was also raised after then-President Leonid Kuchma's anointed successor, Viktor Yanukovich, faced accusations of electoral fraud during presidential elections of 2004 that led to the Orange Revolution. However, while elites advanced a vaguely defined notion of "separatism," no signs of mass support for separatism emerged in the east (ibid.).

<sup>79</sup> Riabchuk and Lushnycky, "Ukraine's Third Attempt," p. 30.

<sup>80</sup> Olga Onuch, "What Have We Learned in the Year since Ukraine's EuroMaidan?," *Washington Post* (November 26, 2014), [www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/11/26/what-have-we-learned-in-the-year-since-ukraines-euromaidan/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/11/26/what-have-we-learned-in-the-year-since-ukraines-euromaidan/). Accessed on January 15, 2015.

<sup>81</sup> Oleksandr Fisun and Anton Avksentiev, "Euromaidan in South-Eastern Ukraine," *Religion & Society in East and West*, 42 (2014), 23-25.



local authorities' counter-measures and the negative reporting on regional "Euromaidans" in local media.<sup>82</sup>

On the other hand, Haran and Bukovskiy argue that while Ukraine's traditional divisions were declining in the years prior to Ukraine's Euromaidan movement,<sup>83</sup> significant regional variation still marked the country including when it came to popular support for the Euromaidan movement. For example, although the Euromaidan protests enjoyed the support of 50 percent of Ukraine's population in December 2013, the distribution varied dramatically across Ukraine's macroregions. In the regions of western Ukraine, support reached 80 percent, while it was 63 percent in the central regions. In Ukraine's eastern regions, however, support for the Euromaidan dropped to 30 percent. In the south, which included Crimea, it was only 20 percent. A February 2014 survey, meanwhile, revealed that 57 percent of respondents in the east and 44 percent in the south believed that Western influence was fueling the protests, and 45 percent of respondents in the east and 35 percent in the south feared that nationalistic sentiments among the active participants were inspiring the demonstrations.<sup>84</sup>

Regardless of what level of aggregation is the most appropriate for assessing popular attitudes,<sup>85</sup> such variation is important for present purposes because it illustrates the presence of potentially fertile ground

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>83</sup> Olexiy Haran and Petro Bukovskiy, "Before and after Euromaidan: European Values vs. Pro-Russian Attitudes," *Religion & Society in East and West*, 42 (2014), 13–16. Haran and Bukovskiy (ibid., p. 13) note that while everyone seemed to accept an "East-West" divide in politics as predetermined with the inhabitants of different regions seeing the struggle between pro-Western and pro-Russian forces as a zero-sum game, the 2012 parliamentary elections actually signaled change. In that election, pro-European and pro-Western parties won new levels of support in several key eastern and southern industrial regions, while pro-Russian forces lost ground thanks to public disappointment with the rule of the Party of Regions and President Yanukovich, widespread corruption, and the impunity of officials who committed crimes against ordinary people.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>85</sup> Clem emphasizes that focusing on larger swathes of territory in Ukraine, as opposed to finer-grained analysis, exaggerates Ukraine's "Russia problem." For a discussion of how the level of aggregation determines the results that one draws from such surveys, see Ralph S. Clem, "Location, Location, Location: Measuring Public Opinion in Ukraine's Regions," *Washington Post* (May 22, 2014), [www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/05/22/location-location-location-measuring-public-opinion-in-ukraines-regions/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/05/22/location-location-location-measuring-public-opinion-in-ukraines-regions/). Accessed on January 15, 2015. Also see Ralph S. Clem, "Two Important Facts about Ukraine," *Washington Post* (August 15, 2014), [www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/08/15/two-important-facts-about-ukraine/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/08/15/two-important-facts-about-ukraine/). Accessed on January 14, 2015.

for agents interested in exacerbating the uncertainties and tensions that accompanied President Yanukovich's removal from power. In fact, attitudes in the east and south echoed the interpretation of events broadcasted by domestic pro-presidential media as well as Russian media, the latter of which enjoy particular influence in Crimea and Ukrainian regions adjacent to Russia. These broadcasts depicted protesters as fascists, terrorists, and outlaws and the Euromaidan itself as resulting from Western pressure. Unfortunately, the presence of radical right-wing elements on the Maidan as well as visits by high-profile Western politicians, like US Senators John McCain and Chris Murphy, complemented these narratives, making them difficult to dismiss out of hand. Yet while pro-Yanukovich agents throughout the country promulgated the contention that radical nationalists and western agents were organizing the protests and fomenting violence in Kyiv, it was in the *eastern and southern* regions where the messages led to the establishment of paramilitary organizations. As Haran and Bukovskiy note, pro-regime media and misinformation out of Russia stoked division by consistently focusing on far-right elements within the protest movement.<sup>86</sup> At the same time, these outlets concealed facts that pointed to the demonstrations' broad support base, including participation among activists from the Jewish community, the Russian and Ukrainian Orthodox churches, and war veterans.<sup>87</sup>

While pro-Yanukovich paramilitary organizations disbanded after the president's fall,<sup>88</sup> "hacktivists" quickly filled the gap. On Sunday, March 16, 2014, hackers crashed several public NATO websites in what observers interpreted as an escalation of tensions over Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, the former of which houses Russia's Black Sea Fleet. A group called "CyberBerkut" claimed responsibility for the attacks, saying that it was upset with the alliance's interference in Ukraine. At the time, computer security experts noted that the attacks on NATO were only the latest in a series by groups calling themselves "CyberBerkut" with

<sup>86</sup> See Haran and Bukovskiy, "Before and after Euromaidan." In 2014, viewers of Russia's three main state television channels could hear fabricated stories about how Ukrainian soldiers had crucified a three-year-old boy in Ukraine's eastern city of Slovyansk, how Nazi-style concentration camps had been established to detain Ukraine's Russian-speakers, or even how the country's new government was conspiring with Satanist lamb torturers. See Glenn Kates, "Russia's Media Machine Looks West," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (December 29, 2014), [www.rferl.mobi/a/russia-media-machine-looks-west/26767603.html](http://www.rferl.mobi/a/russia-media-machine-looks-west/26767603.html). Accessed on January 7, 2015.

<sup>87</sup> Haran and Bukovskiy, "Before and after Euromaidan," p. 16. <sup>88</sup> Ibid.

Ukrainian websites serving as previous targets.<sup>89</sup> Like so-called hacktivists elsewhere,<sup>90</sup> these actors operated neither in a vacuum nor without a cause in mind. Even if the majority of Russian speakers in the east may have wished to see a united Ukraine preserved, many residents in the region still had grievances against the central state, which was universally recognized as mismanaged.

Alongside these general concerns was a distrust of the new interim government and a fear that the victors of the Euromaidan revolution would use their new positions in Kyiv to benefit their supporters in the west at the expense of citizens residing in the east. The perceived gravity of this prospective injustice was compounded further by a belief among eastern residents that the fate of the national economy depended on the east, particularly the mining industry,<sup>91</sup> as well as a system where local tax revenue goes to the central government before any is channeled back home.<sup>92</sup>

The new government in Kyiv also did little to placate easterners' fears. Not only was the opposition slow to react to allegations of anti-Semitism and radical nationalism upon assuming office, but the newly invigorated parliament voted, on February 23, 2014, to cancel the status of Russian as the country's second official language. It did not help matters that the far-right faction, Svoboda, advocated in favor of the bill as a way to stop the "Russification" of Ukraine.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, the public had yet to prove that far-right politicians lacked widespread popular support, as the May 25 presidential elections made evident. So, while acting president Oleksandr Turchynov refused to sign off on the change in the status of the Russian language, the damage was done: Protecting the status of the Russian language in Ukraine became a major rallying point for a pro-Russian separatist agenda.<sup>94</sup> With these developments in mind, one can understand why many of Ukraine's eastern residents would doubt the

<sup>89</sup> Adrian Croft and Peter Apps, "NATO Websites Hit in Cyber Attack Linked to Crimea Tension," *Reuters* (March 16, 2014), [www.reuters.com/article/2014/03/16/us-ukraine-nato-idUSBREA2E0T320140316](http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/03/16/us-ukraine-nato-idUSBREA2E0T320140316). Accessed on January 7, 2015.

<sup>90</sup> Ziccardi, *Resistance, Liberation Technology, and Human Rights in the Digital Age*.

<sup>91</sup> Although the mining industry is heavily subsidized today, this perception lingers due to the region's position as an industrial powerhouse during the Soviet era.

<sup>92</sup> "What Are Eastern Ukraine's (Legitimate) Grievances with Kyiv?," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (May 29, 2014), [www.rferl.mobi/a/ukraine-explainer-eastern-grievances/25402922.html](http://www.rferl.mobi/a/ukraine-explainer-eastern-grievances/25402922.html). Accessed on January 6, 2015.

<sup>93</sup> Haran and Bukovskiy, "Before and after Euromaidan," p. 16.

<sup>94</sup> "What Are Eastern Ukraine's (Legitimate) Grievances?,"

assertion that life for them would be better under the new regime than it was for them under the old regime.

Equally important, of course, was the presence of a neighboring "black knight,"<sup>95</sup> Russia, with an interest in reacquiring at least part of Ukraine, Crimea, and Sevastopol and a desire to stir up enough trouble to complicate any attempt by the new Ukrainian government to pursue its desired European pivot. In pursuit of these goals, the Kremlin has consistently advanced the message that Yanukovich's removal from power resulted from an anti-constitutional, neo-fascist coup, muddied any counter-claims using disinformation, and even placed actors on the ground in Ukraine to make sure that the Russian interpretation of events was adequately received and acted upon.

According to Pomerantsev and Weiss, the crisis in Ukraine illustrates how the line between fact and fiction has been thoroughly distorted in Russian media and public discourse.<sup>96</sup> One such claim, particularly sensitive among Western audiences, was the Russian contention of rising anti-Semitism in Ukraine following Yanukovich's fall. Ukraine's Jewish community has rejected this assertion, even placing a full-page advertisement to this effect in *The New York Times* in March 2014.<sup>97</sup> Still, the appeal of the anti-Semitic message (thanks to the presence of neo-Nazi groups in Ukraine and on the Maidan) led John Pilger, a prominent journalist for Britain's *The Guardian*, to report an unnamed doctor's account of the May 2014 violence in the port city of Odesa. In his commentary, Pilger quoted the alleged doctor's Facebook description of how, on his way to help the injured, pro-Ukrainian neo-Nazis stopped him and threatened him and "other Jews of Odesa." Yet, as it turns out, the Odesa doctor did not exist. Not only did the page soon disappear, but the person who posted the story used a picture of a dentist from the Russian republic of Karachai-Cherkessia.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 41.

<sup>96</sup> Peter Pomerantsev and Michael Weiss, "The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money," *The Interpreter* (2014), p. 10, [www.interpretermag.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/The\\_Menace\\_of\\_Unreality\\_Final.pdf](http://www.interpretermag.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/The_Menace_of_Unreality_Final.pdf). Accessed January 16, 2015.

<sup>97</sup> See "Ukrainian Jews Slam Putin in Full-Page Ad in New York Times," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (March 27, 2014), [www.jta.org/2014/03/27/news-opinion/world/ukrainian-jews-slam-putin-in-full-page-ad-in-new-york-times](http://www.jta.org/2014/03/27/news-opinion/world/ukrainian-jews-slam-putin-in-full-page-ad-in-new-york-times). Accessed on January 14, 2015.

<sup>98</sup> Luke Johnson, "'Guardian' Op-Ed Quotes Cryptic Odesa 'Doctor' Seen as Hoax," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (May 14, 2014), [www.rferl.org/content/guardian-op-ed-quo](http://www.rferl.org/content/guardian-op-ed-quo)

The Russian propaganda machine has not gone wholly unchecked. On March 2, 2014, Yevhen Fedchenko, the director of Kyiv's Mohyla School of Journalism, founded StopFake.org, a self-described fact-checking website that publishes in English, Russian, and Ukrainian.<sup>99</sup> In December 2014, StopFake.org published a video listing the Top 75 "lies and untruths" about the crisis in Ukraine.<sup>100</sup> In addition, the new Ukrainian government moved to establish a Ministry of Information following new parliamentary elections in October 2014, although this move also prompted demonstrations from journalists and activists concerned about increased governmental control over Ukraine's media.<sup>101</sup> The information war also has witnessed the emergence of pro-Ukrainian hackers like the Ukrainian Cyber Troops led by Yevhen Dokunin, which has used distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks against rebel websites. Dokunin also claims to have hacked two Russian interior ministry servers and to have hijacked networked printers in eastern Ukraine and Crimea to print pro-Ukrainian messages.<sup>102</sup>

Still, the violence in eastern Ukraine that followed the Russian annexation of Crimea in March 2014 has turned the Internet into an inaccessible luxury for many living in eastern Ukraine. As a result, those still residing in places like Luhansk have been left primarily with information from Russian, Crimean, or Belarussian television.<sup>103</sup> Moreover, Pomerantsev and Weiss submit that the goal of Russian propaganda is not to convince or persuade but to keep viewers hooked, distracted, passive, and paranoid.<sup>104</sup> In their view, the Kremlin has used tactics like

tes-cryptic-odesa-doctor-seen-as-hoax/25385076.html. Accessed on January 12, 2015.

<sup>99</sup> See Kates, "Russia's Media Machine Looks West," and "About Us," *StopFake.org*, [www.stopfake.org/en/about-us/](http://www.stopfake.org/en/about-us/). Accessed on January 15, 2015.

<sup>100</sup> "The Kremlin's Top 75 Lies about the Ukraine Crisis," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (December 12, 2014), [www.rferl.mobi/a/russia-ukraine-lies-stopfake-kremlin-propaganda/26739439.html](http://www.rferl.mobi/a/russia-ukraine-lies-stopfake-kremlin-propaganda/26739439.html). Accessed on January 12, 2015.

<sup>101</sup> Charles Recknagel, "No Big Brother! Ukrainian Journalists Oppose Kyiv's New Ministry of Information," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (December 3, 2014), [www.rferl.mobi/a/ukraine-ministry-information-journalists-protest/26723352.html](http://www.rferl.mobi/a/ukraine-ministry-information-journalists-protest/26723352.html). Accessed on January 14, 2015.

<sup>102</sup> Vitaly Shevchenko, "Ukraine Conflict: Hackers Take Sides in Virtual War," *BBC News* (December 19, 2014), [www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30453069](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30453069). Accessed on January 15, 2015.

<sup>103</sup> "Letters from Donbas," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (December 11, 2014), [www.rferl.mobi/a/ukraine-personal-stories-conflict/26737914.html](http://www.rferl.mobi/a/ukraine-personal-stories-conflict/26737914.html). Accessed January 13, 2015.

<sup>104</sup> Pomerantsev and Weiss, "The Menace of Unreality," p. 11. The day before Ukraine's October 26, 2014, parliament elections, hackers used electronic billboards to broadcast

denial of service attacks, threatening journalists with libel, and confusing the West with mixed messages to demoralize their enemy, shatter communications, and take out command structures.<sup>105</sup>

Since attempts to control information depend on well-positioned advocates of the preferred message, it is notable that when separatist sentiment in eastern and southern Ukraine appeared to be on the wane,<sup>106</sup> reports of Russian provocateurs within Ukraine began to wax. In the case of Russia's annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol, these activists came in the form of what Ukrainians labeled "little green men," a description that captures both their uniforms without insignia and their alien (i.e., Russian) origin. In Sevastopol and other eastern cities, pro-Russian groups used Maidan-style tactics against the new regime, holding mass rallies and storming local governmental offices. Then, on February 27, 2014, armed men seized the parliament building of Crimea and raised the Russian flag.

The following night men in military uniforms without insignia took over the airport in Simferopol, while representatives of local "self-defense" forces took control of government buildings there. Later, on Thursday, April 17, 2014, President Putin would admit that Russian military servicemen were, as suspected but previously denied, on the ground in Crimea prior to the referendum that preceded the region's annexation by Russia.<sup>107</sup> Similarly, Russian officials initially denied the presence of Russian troops in Ukraine's eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk only to later state that they could not stop Russian citizens from going to fight in Ukraine as "volunteers."<sup>108</sup>

images of alleged civilian carnage at the hands of Ukrainian forces fighting in the east. Yet at least one image, showing a Russian soldier near mass graves, actually came from Russia's first Chechen war. See Carl Schreck, "Ukraine Unspun: Chechnya War Pic Passed Off as Ukraine Atrocity by Hackers, Russian TV," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (October 27, 2014), [www.rferl.org/content/russian-media-propaganda-ukraine-conflict-chechnya/26660126.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/russian-media-propaganda-ukraine-conflict-chechnya/26660126.html). Accessed on January 14, 2015.

<sup>105</sup> Pomerantsev and Weiss, "The Menace of Unreality," p. 14.

<sup>106</sup> Haran and Burkovskiy, "Before and after Euromaidan," p. 16.

<sup>107</sup> The acknowledgment was widely reported, including by RT News, a stridently pro-Kremlin, international-oriented news outlet. See "Putin Acknowledges Russian Servicemen Were in Crimea," *RT News* (April 17, 2014), <http://rt.com/news/crimea-defense-russian-soldiers-108/>. Accessed on January 15, 2015.

<sup>108</sup> In October, a Russian action film star, Mikhail Porechenkov, was caught by the rebels' Novorossia TV channel firing a machine gun toward Ukrainian lines alongside pro-Russian rebels near the Donetsk airport. See Christopher Miller, "Russian Action Star Caught Firing a Machine Gun toward Ukraine," *Mashable* (October 31, 2014), <http://mashable.com/2014/10/31/russian-action-star-ukraine/>. Accessed on January 15, 2015. In December 2014, the head of the Russian-based Sverdlovsk Fund of Spetsnaz

Perhaps the best-known Russian "volunteer" in Ukraine is Igor Girkin, a Russian citizen and former colonel in Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB), who arrived in the eastern town of Slovyansk in April 2014. Girkin, who goes by the *nom de guerre* Strelkov (Russian for "shooter"), boasted on the Russian social media site *Vkontakte* of shooting down a Ukrainian warplane just before reports surfaced that the civilian Malaysian flight MH17 from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur had crashed in eastern Ukraine on July 17, 2014.<sup>109</sup>

After returning to Moscow, Girkin not only admitted to fighting in eastern Ukraine but also suggested that the protests in eastern Ukraine would have fizzled out without his effort to escalate the situation there.<sup>110</sup> Less known, perhaps, is the story of a Russian soldier, Alexander Sotkin, who in July posted "selfies" on Instagram using a phone or tablet that geotagged his locations: the rebel-controlled villages of Krasna Talycha and Krasny Derkul.<sup>111</sup> Both cases illustrate how the increasing ubiquity of the Internet and social media can undermine official governmental positions. More difficult, however, is the task of filtering through the cacophony of information disseminated to determine which contentions are credible. According to Pomerantsev and Weiss, the Russian position has been not only to embrace this uncertainty but to add to it so that all arguments appear equally plausible and none wholly defensible.<sup>112</sup>

(i.e., Special Forces) Veterans outlined in previously unprecedented detail how Russians are participating in the violent conflict in eastern Ukraine. See James Rupert, "How Russians Are Sent to Fight in Ukraine," *Newsweek* (January 6, 2015), [www.newsweek.com/how-russians-are-sent-fight-ukraine-296937](http://www.newsweek.com/how-russians-are-sent-fight-ukraine-296937). Accessed on January 7, 2015.

<sup>109</sup> See "Ukraine Separatist Social Media Site Claims Plane Downing," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (July 17, 2014), [www.rferl.org/content/ukraine-separatist-leader-boasts-downing-plane/25460930.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/ukraine-separatist-leader-boasts-downing-plane/25460930.html). Accessed on January 15, 2015. Of course, social media has been rife with debates about who is actually to blame for the downing of MH17. See, for example, "US Dismisses Russian MH17 Pictures That Blame Ukraine for Disaster," *The Guardian* (November 15, 2014), [www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/15/ukraine-fighter-shot-mh17-claims-russian-tv-photo-fake](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/15/ukraine-fighter-shot-mh17-claims-russian-tv-photo-fake). Accessed on January 15, 2015.

<sup>110</sup> Corey Flintoff, "The Russian Who Claims Credit for Fanning the Flames in Ukraine," *National Public Radio* (January 6, 2015), [www.npr.org/blogs/parallels/2015/01/06/372872870/the-russian-who-claims-credit-for-fanning-the-flames-in-ukraine](http://www.npr.org/blogs/parallels/2015/01/06/372872870/the-russian-who-claims-credit-for-fanning-the-flames-in-ukraine). Accessed on January 6, 2015.

<sup>111</sup> Paul Szoldra, "Without Realizing It, Russian Soldiers Are Proving Vladimir Putin Is Lying about Eastern Ukraine," *Business Insider* (July 31, 2014), [www.businessinsider.com/russian-soldiers-social-ukraine-2014-7](http://www.businessinsider.com/russian-soldiers-social-ukraine-2014-7). Last accessed on January 6, 2015.

<sup>112</sup> Pomerantsev and Weiss, "The Menace of Unreality."

## Conclusion

Advances in information technology, and increased popular access to these advances, have permitted opponents of existing hierarchies to reach wider audiences. However, as the literature examining social media's impact on regime change and democratization emphasizes, the ability to tangibly undermine the status quo requires a message capable of moving one's audience out from behind the computer desk and onto the streets. Events in Ukraine over the course of 2013 and 2014, which led to the ouster of President Yanukovich, seem to illustrate many of the arguments that previous scholars have made about the democratizing potential of information technology and social media. These media served as critical tools that the regime's opponents employed to initiate protests as well as sustain them. Moreover, when clashes between the government and protesters turned violent, Facebook pages and Twitter feeds became resources for those wishing to track developments, disseminate information to a larger national and international audience, and even treat the injured.

Yet the case of Ukraine also reveals that the overthrow of an existing regime may create a power vacuum where uncertainty can combine with prior grievances to fuel regional tensions. While Ukrainians across the country recognized that President Yanukovich had political warts, he won an election in 2010 that was widely recognized as relatively free and fair. At the same time, Yanukovich's removal from office was predicated on the Rada's interpretation of his fleeing Kyiv, first for the eastern city of Kharkiv and then for Russia, as a decision to vacate office, something that Yanukovich would subsequently deny. These developments, then, exacerbated the existing atmosphere of mutual distrust among incumbent legislators, between protesters and politicians, and even among residents of eastern and western regions of the country. Regardless of the breadth or depth of these feelings, social media provided a forum for some to celebrate and others to mourn the change. For the latter, concerns focused on both the composition and the motives of the incoming regime, concerns that were raised by traditional media outlets that had backed the former president as well as those in Russia. Moreover, uncertainty about the new government combined with the precedent that locally organized street protests could change not just the direction of government but the system itself. For some opponents of the new regime, then, the system to be challenged was centralized rule from Kyiv.

Despite these dynamics, however, domestic actors alone have not determined the direction of events in Ukraine. Russian intervention, both via an information war and with boots on the ground in Ukraine, has undermined the ability of the new government to peacefully establish its authority. At a minimum, Russia's annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol raised the stakes of the conflict between the new government and the regional strongholds of the former regime. This action shifted the conversation away from questions about how greater regional sovereignty might protect local interests to a precedent in which regional politicians, unhappy with the direction of Ukraine's national government, could employ the trappings of democracy, though not the substance – referenda supervised by armed representatives of another country – to not only break away from Ukraine but possibly join the Russian Federation. As a result, the resolution of Ukraine's political crisis tilted away from a discussion of democratic principles and a prospective reallocation of political power toward an escalation of violence with pro-Russian separatists benefiting from Russian manpower and weaponry.

## Networks of protest in Latin America

JUANITA DARLING

Latin America was the place where, two decades ago, social movements discovered the potential of the Internet. The protosocial media of Listservs turned an indigenous uprising in southern Mexico into an international protest against the Washington Consensus form of globalization. Within six years of the Zapatista rebellion, a seventy-year regime famously described as “the perfect dictatorship” fell. Democracy, aided by new media, triumphed. Yet at this writing, the triumph seems less than decisive: Social media on three continents are sharing news of protests against the disappearance of forty-three Mexican students followed by the discovery of sixty-two unrelated bodies in unmarked graves.<sup>1</sup> The once-defeated regime is back in power, despite a student social media campaign that ranged from animated satire to reasoned statements to coverage of street protests.<sup>2</sup> While Mexico, as a precursor, may be the most dramatic case, the nation is hardly alone in the ambivalent results of using social media as a tool for human rights. Throughout Latin America, there are examples of both the promise and limitations of digital media. The region presents the opportunity to examine the varying ways that established and emerging social movement networks are attempting to incorporate digital media into a repertoire of protest in support of human rights.

This chapter posits that communication technology has become a site of struggle in the region, indicating its relevance to the allocation of power. Thus, much of the struggle over media is part of a struggle over

<sup>1</sup> Harry M. Cleaver Jr., “The Zapatista Effect: The Internet and the Rise of an Alternative Political Fabric,” *Journal of International Affairs*, 51, 2 (1998); Rolando Aguilar, “Sicario Ordenó La Matanza en Iguala; CNDH Pide a Gobierno de Guerrero No Frenar Justicia,” *Excelsior* (October 6, 2014); “Todos Somos Ayotzinapa,” *Regeneración*, #AccionGlobalporAyotzinapa, <http://regeneracion.mx>.

<sup>2</sup> Francisco Javier Gómez Carpinteiro, “The Subject's Tracks: The Other Campaign, Self-Knowledge, and Subjectivity in the Liberal Democratic Cycle,” *Latin American Perspectives*, 40, 5 (2013), 150.