

REVIEWS

UDC 323.26/.28:316.42
DOI: 10.5937/spm96-63461
Polemic

Српска политичка мисао
(Serbian Political Thought)
No 2/2026.
Vol. 96
pp. 219-232

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COLORED REVOLUTIONS – CONTEMPORARY FORMS AND EXPERIENCES

INTRODUCTION

From their initial manifestations to the present day, colored revolutions do not represent merely a complex socio–political and security phenomenon. Still, rather an entire conglomerate of ideas, influences, strategies and tactics, means and methods, techniques and activities that penetrate nearly all spheres of contemporary society, striving to gain essential control over it, reshape it, exert decisive influence, or direct its further functioning in a manner that corresponds to the interests of the centers of power behind the organization and implementation of this form of revolutionary action. If this proves unattainable, the objective of coloured revolutions becomes pushing the target state into prolonged instability, potentially even into total and lasting devastation.

In academic theory, the first coloured revolution is considered to have occurred in October 2000 in Serbia through mass actions

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that primarily manifested in the streets and at key state institutions in Belgrade. After the initiators and organizers of that process (for colored revolutions are always processes, not events) achieved their interests in Serbia and tested and validated their previously designed theoretical premises in practice, political coups of this character followed one after another across the entire post-Soviet space, the Middle East, North Africa, and the Far East, under seemingly appealing and romantic hybrid names (combining the term for a form of political violence with an association to something positive, soothing, and beautiful), such as the “Orange Revolution,” the “Rose Revolution,” the “Bulldozer Revolution,” the “Tulip Revolution,” the “Arab Spring,” and similar.

However, the outcomes of all these colored revolutions, as a particular and complex form (or combination of several basic and complex forms simultaneously) of political violence¹, whether in the short or somewhat longer term, essentially amounted to an overt or more perfidious and less easily discernible (and therefore more difficult to overcome) regression of society and its values. This was, as a rule, accompanied by the devastation of national economies, with numerous – usually detrimental – examples of their being handed over to foreign control or subordinated to the interests of foreign significant capital and multinational companies and organizations, as well as the endangerment of national security and stability, primarily through the systematic weakening of state institutions or the consolidation of foreign influence, up to the level of complete domination over domestic intelligence services, the destruction of defense systems, the establishment of parallel (para)security structures, and the like.

¹ It is specific above all because violence in the narrower sense of the word and in its physical manifestation is often not present – especially not on a larger scale or with greater intensity—during the various stages of implementing colour revolutions, nor does it rank among the most essential means for carrying them out. However, experience shows that there are exceptions in this regard. However, in a broader sense and on another level, elements of political violence are indeed present in contemporary forms of attempts to provoke a color revolution, through the blocking of essential traffic routes of local, regional, and international significance, the obstruction of the functioning of institutions and key public enterprises, as well as through restricting the right to freedom of movement and arbitrarily suspending the right to education and work for a significant portion of the population by an aggressive, determined, well-trained, media-supported and “vocal,” indoctrinated, yet also manipulated minority, etc.

In the most extreme cases that we study today, certain states were exposed to years of intense and brutal, highly complex, and ultimately insurmountable social, political, national, religious, and other contradictions with enormous conflict potential, which ultimately resulted in mass bloodshed and wars (Libya, Syria, Ukraine, etc.). Such coloured revolutions drove the target countries to the brink of existence, ruined their vital national interests, and, at the same time, jeopardised the very foundations of their once-stable, sustainable statehood.

NEW MODELS AND PRACTICES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COLORED REVOLUTIONS

Unlike the aforementioned cases, coloured revolutions – following attempts to execute them in Hong Kong in 2019 (Heaton 1970, 840–857), in Belarus in 2020, and in Kazakhstan in 2022 (Luzianin 2005, 7–19) – failed. This may primarily be attributed to the adequate response of the political leaderships, as well as to the professionalism and efficiency of the security apparatuses of the states in which they were attempted, but also to the fact that the security bodies of most countries have become resistant to the previous models and methods of colored revolutions. Building on past examples, they have studied them thoroughly within their analytical centres, understood them at the strategic leadership level, and, on the practical level, developed effective operational and technical measures and mechanisms for counteraction.

For these reasons, the creators, inspirers, and organisers of colored revolutions – generally striving in their offensive approach to remain at least one step ahead of their competitors in target states – have recently begun to devise new strategies in attempts to carry out these forms of political coups, basing their subversive conduct on entirely new principles. In this regard, it may be observed that one of the fundamental forms of this new modality of subversive action lies in the organisation of mass, exhaustively prolonged protests without clearly articulated political leadership (Grinin and Korotayev 2024). Namely, previous theory and practice of coloured revolutions unequivocally confirmed that, opposite the ruling structures, there always stood opposition or other political forces, as well as specific movements, associations, non-governmental organisations, and civic activists, all of which, without exception, had clearly articulated leadership.

In this context, it is necessary to emphasise that the opposition corpus in all its manifestations (including the strong opposition potential displayed in certain states by the aforementioned movements, the non-governmental sector, etc., abundantly supported by media outlets sharing the same ideological and interest-driven agenda) constitutes an integral part of the democratic order. However, its security dimension arises when it undermines that order, that is, when it resorts to a gross overstepping of democratic participation's boundaries. In other words, the opposition corpus, understood in the broadest sense described above, inherently represents the positive side of any democratic order, provided that opposition forces act toward political compromise and the improvement of the overall social environment, rather than toward the erosion of the fundamental values of the entire system. Nevertheless, when the latter scenario is at play, in every specific case of preparation and execution of colored revolutions, all structures that decided to participate did so by gathering, leading, and directing them through publicly or covertly declared individuals, most often assembled into groups known as the "action core."

This action core was not always composed of ideologically and politically uniform like-minded individuals; it often possessed a heterogeneous, even contradictory character. In a significant number of cases, there could be no talk of a high degree of homogeneity among its members, since not only the lowest common denominator, but also the only truly cohesive factor, was the motivation to overthrow the then-ruling regime, treated as the common enemy. Nevertheless, at the moment when coup intentions were embodied and subversive activities launched – most often through rallies and demonstrations – the key actors – that is, the leaders of the protests and their closest associates – were already well known to the public as indispensable elements of every coloured revolution. In this regard, it should be recalled that a revolution does not exist without the participation of large popular masses; if a coup is carried out without the element of mass participation, then one may speak of another form of unconstitutional and subversive action, such as a coup d'état, putsch, armed rebellion, or the like.

In addition to the above, one of the new features of coloured revolutions is that groups of citizens, in the absence of a clearly defined leadership, take part in mass protests, blockades, and demonstrations without a unified ideological or political platform. Until recently, it was virtually impossible to maintain the monolithic character and kinetic

potential of protests without these components, which served as the connective tissue and powerful drivers of joint action directed toward the same objectives. This stemmed from the fact that dissatisfied citizens clustered around political ideas that were close to and appealing to them, regardless of the diversity of political actors that together formed a whole with the potential for a coup.

Thus, it was previously entirely sufficient to infiltrate certain elements of differing or opposing ideological-political orientation within the subversive forces, particularly within their action core, for protests and demonstrations suddenly to lose momentum, and not infrequently to wither away altogether and soon thereafter permanently cease. However, new forms of coloured revolutions have become resistant to this as well, because in their modelling, the emphasis has been placed on unifying elements such as hatred, aggression, and extreme intolerance toward the authorities, which draw their strength from irrational categories rather than from expected and logical ideological and political motivations.

One of the exceedingly harmful and at the same time profoundly immoral features of contemporary forms of colored revolutions lies in the fact that the focus of action aimed at mass mobilisation and the expansion of coup potential is directed toward the youngest segments of society, and, what is particularly alarming, toward minors. Even more absurd and from an ethical standpoint entirely unacceptable – yet unfortunately present in practice – is the instrumentalization of parents and teachers (professors), who encourage their own children and pupils (students) to join colored revolutions, disregarding how risky and even dangerous this may be for all parties involved, and especially for the abused youth of a society that has become a target of the ideologues and operational executors of subversive activities. In this context, one contemporary characteristic of coloured revolutions is also reflected in the “bottom-up” approach, which targets the local community to secure mass participation in protests and ensure their territorial spread by securing its support. This type of outreach to the “hearts and minds” of the local population constitutes part of a new methodology of a strategic character, as it encompasses not only the intellectual elite but also other classes and strata of the population of diverse social profiles, particularly those insufficiently familiar with the functioning of state institutions and therefore susceptible to various attempts at disinformation.

This is a hazardous social phenomenon with devastating long-term consequences, as it stratifies and antagonises young people –

among themselves, toward the authorities, and even toward the state as a whole, its values, and its symbols. At the same time, such an approach introduces confusion and tension among youth and almost invariably implies the negation of authority as a generally accepted norm. The injection of “bad blood” among minors or barely adult individuals – who at that age are understandably neither qualified nor educated for any form of active, thoughtful, and constructive political engagement – along with the creation of a “value system” in which a teacher or homeroom instructor no longer represents an authority for the pupil (or, even more detrimentally, the conscious and deliberate positioning of those same educators as negative authorities who actively participate in directing younger generations in a destructive direction through political misuse and incitement to rebellion that in fact constitutes a malicious articulation and distorted manifestation of critical thinking), carries immeasurable dimensions of destructiveness. These will systematically and persistently inflict damage on the further development of a society exposed to such forms of hybrid aggression.

The hidden trap of such an approach to modeling colored revolutions lies in the fact that the negative consequences of the political misuse of young people – entailing the neglect of their education and enlightenment, as well as their deliberate redirection toward false and misguided “authorities” and “value systems” – may manifest with delayed effect, that is, after the passage of many years. Therefore, state authorities and competent institutions, including security services, must not, due to preoccupation with solving everyday problems and challenges, nor due to shortsightedness and blindness caused by a temporary sense of power and stability, neglect such phenomena or fail to react in the early stages of their development and expansion. Otherwise, any subsequent confrontation with the crisis will prove far more complex and challenging.

KEY ACTORS AND THEIR METHODOLOGY

Colored revolutions in their present form were primarily conceived in the not-so-distant past in the United States of America, within the then-dominant elites of its intelligence services, specialized research institutes, universities with specific study programs, certain entities of civil society, as well as influential segments of international and local organizations declaratively oriented toward the protection

of human rights and similar causes, such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the International Republican Institute (IRI), and the National Democratic Institute (NDI), among others. In defining the roles of these structures, it is sufficient to refer to the highly negative assessment of the influence and consequences of numerous USAID projects abroad given by the current U.S. President, Donald Trump, who for this reason directed the resources of his administration toward dismantling this institution of global reach – more than six decades old – which, at its disposal for the expansion of American “soft power,” often with not-so-“soft” consequences, had hundreds of billions of dollars.

Until recently, the basic characteristics of coloured revolutions lay in their predominantly nonviolent nature; that is, violence was used only to the extent necessary to achieve the objective. They typically manifested after prolonged, exhausting socio-political crises and fragile security conditions, and their culmination most often occurred during or immediately after the conclusion of an electoral process. Opposition forces would proclaim victory in advance, characterise the election results of ruling structures as fraudulent (with extensive reference to alleged electoral fraud), and organise mass demonstrations to paralyse the system. In such scenarios, the main political strength of the opposition was not represented by political parties but by non-governmental organisations (Гапич and Лушников 2010, 12–13). Today, one of the new characteristics of colored revolutions is reflected in the organisation of political protests well after elections have been held, whereby – regardless of the causes, pretexts, publicly proclaimed goals, and dynamics of the protests – the demand for early elections ultimately emerges at a certain point as the principal, if not the sole, demand. Another new feature of such demonstrations is their prolonged duration, achieved, *inter alia*, through the constant discovery of new pretexts to extend their continuation (Korotayev *et al.* 2025).

It is well known in the theory of political and security phenomena that favourable conditions exist for the execution of revolutions, that is, for bringing a society into a revolutionary state. In brief, these include accumulated social contradictions in the sphere of domestic politics and political relations, international pressures and sanctions, prolonged economic, social, or security crises, authoritarian modes of governance, religious or other conflicts that in some instances may also possess nationalist or racial components, and similar factors. The common

denominator of these processes is that society, due to one of these causes – or most often a combination of several – has fallen into a state of chronic tension and instability, where revolution appears as the only real or presumed exit (and sometimes the shortest path to ruin). In this sense, it is recognized that among all favorable conditions for the execution of a revolution there exists a strong cause-and-effect relationship, reflected in the fact that a state or society can't experience only a political crisis, since all difficulties in the political sphere inevitably reflect upon the state of the economy, which in turn leads to disturbances in social relations, spilling over into the sphere of security and thus into almost all areas of contemporary society, with all its virtues, shortcomings, and contradictions.

However, a particular feature of colored revolutions is that they may be initiated even without the fulfillment of these enumerated, one might say classical, patterns. Sometimes a single tragic event is sufficient to mobilise broad popular masses. Such an event must be of such intensity that it becomes the subject of widespread social unrest, a rise in general agitation, and the activation of mobilising forms of mass behaviour. It is at this moment that mechanisms for initiating conflict are activated – initially nonviolent in nature, but gradually acquiring violent characteristics. A general anxious mood, often assuming shades of collective hysteria, leads to a situation in which the consciousness of individuals shifts into a so-called borderline state, when larger groups of citizens become susceptible to mass panic reactions and heightened aggressiveness, frequently manifested at the level of reflex and instinct. Inevitably, this also results in a large number of individuals experiencing negative impacts on daily and professional activities, culminating in acute conditions at the collective level. During such periods, the masses are effectively channelled into energetic, large-scale demonstrations.

All of the above confirms that even states with solid, steadily growing economies may be exposed to a colour revolution. For this reason, this primarily political-security but also broader socio-economic phenomenon should not be strictly associated with a country's poverty or its citizens' low living standards. People quickly grow accustomed to improved living conditions – much more rapidly than they adapt to a decline in their standard of living. Likewise, it is in human nature rarely to be satisfied with the existing state of affairs, no matter how good and comfortable it may be, but always to strive for something higher and greater, often on unrealistic grounds. Therefore, political authorities and

state institutions responsible for safeguarding the constitutional order must always bear in mind that the internal stability of a society or state is not ensured solely by providing a high standard of living, but also by attending to all other segments of social reality.

In the contemporary era, colored revolutions are essentially special operations of hybrid warfare aimed at carrying out a political coup. They are conducted through the broadest spectrum of political, informational, communication, diversionary-terrorist, and moral-psychological methods of influence, accompanied by blatant violations of international law. The objectives of such unlawful actions may include the complete or partial disintegration of a state (Mijalkovski and Konatar 2010, 17)², a qualitative shift in its domestic or foreign policy, the replacement of state leadership with loyal regimes, the establishment of external control over the state, its criminalization, and its subordination to the dictates of other states or transnational corporations (Panarin 2019, 325).

The very technique of organising and executing coloured revolutions (Karpovich and Manoilo 2015) entails, in its initial phase, creating a favourable environment in which the economy of a targeted state (the object of aggression) is rendered as dependent as possible on external factors through various economic pressures. This is most often carried out through financial interventions and pressures exerted by multinational companies, as well as by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Where these institutions are not present, influence is exerted through commercial banks, investment funds, oligarchs, corrupt officials, and similar channels. It is not uncommon for specific states in the initial phases of a coloured revolution to be subjected to

² “As interests change, so do relations. Nothing is secure – territory, borders, sovereignty, property, the individual, spiritual values, the environment, resources... Challenges and threats will continue to exist, as will opponents, competitors, rivals, and enemies... The modern world is a world of competition, rivalry, and the use of all means to achieve the goals of an individual, a people, a state, or a corporation. In this regard, one must always bear in mind that at the end of the arsenal of all means stands, in its extreme form – coercion, very often in its most radical form – in the shape of military force. That argument is understood in all languages and at all times. That is why strength is always acknowledged. However, force here should not be understood only in the literal sense. Still, also in the broadest sense – as power, that is, as potential within the field in which the conflict unfolds (for example, through economic and political power, media power, scientific potential, industrial power, and the like)” (Mijalkovski and Konatar 2010, 17).

comprehensive, severe, and long-lasting economic sanctions by parts of the international community.

In any case, the goal is to provoke, within the shortest possible time, a powerful and intense destabilisation of the entire economic system, leading to financial collapse and, consequently, a decline in the standard of living of citizens in the target state. As living standards fall, social tensions and contradictions – previously less perceptible – come to the forefront. Simultaneously, through psychological-propaganda efforts, a media narrative is constructed portraying the political, that is, state leadership as primarily responsible for the country's complex economic and social situation (accompanied by the dissemination of narratives about weak, incompetent, and corrupt governance), thereby plunging the state into an even more profound political and security crisis. Such subversive activities from abroad, aided by domestically motivated actors, including the dissemination of disinformation and fake news, are carried out in numerous ways, and the list of methods and techniques is virtually endless, limited only by the imagination and creativity of those conducting aggressive actions.

The most frequent modality involves the use of media, above all social networks, given that in today's world, the internet has become the primary communication arena with extraordinary capabilities. For this reason, the media play a particularly significant role in the architecture of colored revolutions. When referring to the press, it must once again be emphasised that the focus here is on their negative role, primarily in the form of biased and partial (dis)information, which, in some instances, leads to serious political and security complications. Certain subversive-propagandistic phenomena play a particularly destructive role in social networks, which have become part of everyday life and are, to varying degrees, accessible to almost all of humanity. Among these negative phenomena, foremost is the practice of disseminating so-called fake news – deliberately designed and distributed in advance to produce specific harmful consequences. Such fake news does not pertain exclusively to political struggle but may also extend to discrediting individuals, inciting panic among the population, and similar effects. Destruction and subversion almost invariably lie behind fake news. In addition, there are other methods of spreading disinformation, which for a considerable time – particularly in the modern era – have indeed constituted one of the domains of activity of intelligence services,

thereby producing highly damaging, indeed destructive consequences (Parezanović 2013, 88).

In this regard, there is almost always a tendentious dissemination of carefully crafted fake news aimed at creating the impression that the government to be overthrown is powerless, incapable, incompetent, and ineffective in addressing the problems afflicting the state and its citizens. In such circumstances, situations are typically selected that are intended to demonstrate that the competent institutions are unable to protect or ensure specific fundamental civilizational values and to create the conditions necessary for satisfying essential existential needs, such as security, basic and other standards of living, the dignity of individuals and social groups, and so forth. If such constructions prove difficult to sustain, because the population does not genuinely perceive deficiencies in the targeted sphere, other means and themes are chosen (Parezanović and Željki 2019, 416).

To protect the state and society from such blows, it is imperative to identify the external factors that instigate a coloured revolution, as well as the internal factors that create conditions for such events (Way 2008, 55–69). Where the authorities enjoy genuine authority and respect, and where citizens trust state institutions, there are no external actors capable of promoting “colored” technologies of regime change. Conversely, if citizens believe that existing state institutions do not allow them to express their positions, they resort to unconstitutional means to express their political will, forms actively exploited by those seeking to advance their own interests. For all these reasons, establishing and maintaining trust in state institutions, as well as ensuring the regularity of all electoral processes, is of paramount importance. Any internal instability or disunity within society may open the door not only to a colored revolution but also to military intervention.

At this point, it is essential to emphasise that in almost all states the opposition consists of the same citizens as those who support the government; therefore, the opposition should not be viewed as an enemy of the state – it is also a constitutive element thereof (Parezanović 2022, 332). Should this not be the case, relationships of pronounced political divergence within a society over time evolving into open hostility between government and opposition, may produce harmful consequences

for the state and its order (Kisindžer 2016, 732).³ The first phase involves political rivalry, followed by political enmity, and ultimately a phase of personal conflicts between representatives of the government and the opposition. At that point, the most dangerous – indeed, one might say terminal – phase ensues, in which all options for further development of the crisis become possible, including those of a violent nature. Responsibility for such a condition within society most often lies with the government, which, unlike the opposition, possesses concrete institutional and other mechanisms for managing and containing crises. However, it may also occur that opposition forces act in an organised and targeted destructive manner to provoke a crisis and deliberately steer political relations into the realm of violence (Goldstone 2009, 18–32), more rarely independently, and almost always with the support of certain actors from abroad. For all the above reasons, social stability is achieved primarily through the rule of law, the functionality of institutions, respect for democratic forms of organising political relations, and progressive advances in the development of the most significant spheres of social life (Parezanović 2022, 43).

CONCLUSION

Today, coloured revolutions rightfully represent one of the most intriguing and challenging topics for scholars, particularly those working in political and security studies, who devote themselves to it with considerable enthusiasm. The key reason lies in the very factor that simultaneously poses the most significant concern to intelligence services and other state institutions tasked with identifying and preventing, or repressing, such subversive actions. This factor is the pronounced dynamism and diversity in their manifestations, methods, techniques,

³ The viewpoint of Henry Kissinger is also noteworthy, as he argues that in almost all parts of the world, the state preceded the nation; it was, and often remained, the fundamental element in its formation. Political parties, where they exist, reflect specific – usually shared – identities, while minorities and majorities tend to strive to remain so permanently. In such societies, the political process consists of domination rather than a regular alternation of power, which, if it occurs at all, results from a coup rather than through constitutional procedure. The idea of a legitimate opposition – the essence of modern democracy – rarely prevails. The opposition is far more often viewed as a threat to national unity and is therefore equated with treason and harshly persecuted (Kisindžer 2016, 732).

and effects, which continually evolve and transform, adapting to the specific socio-political, economic, and security dynamics of the states targeted by this form of aggression.

Consequently, the structures responsible for protecting those states are obliged to constantly keep pace with the aggressor, developing “antidotes” and defensive capacities so as not to be outmanoeuvred or outplayed, since the future of both the state and the society exposed to a coloured revolution may depend on it. Thus, a kind of “vicious circle” is created, in which a single inadequate, ill-considered, or belated move on the chessboard may determine the difference between a victorious and a defeated state.

We believe that the best illustration of this lies in the current, more or less visible, and more or less advanced and successful attempts at organising and implementing colored revolutions that we are witnessing. The moment their previous methodology ceased to yield the expected results, the inspirers and agents of subversive processes resorted to new actions that have proven to be well-designed and effective. As this paper has sought to demonstrate, the most significant specificities of these actions were the effort to sustain for as long as possible the appearance of spontaneity and the absence of clearly defined protest leadership, as well as the insidious and immoral focus on youth, students, and underage pupils. Only by correctly interpreting this hidden algorithm have the conditions been created for proper scientific interpretation at the theoretical level and for effective and efficient counteraction to new forms of coloured revolution in the sphere of practical action by security services and other competent state institutions.

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* This manuscript was submitted on December 13, 2025, and accepted by the Editorial Board for publishing on April 1, 2026.