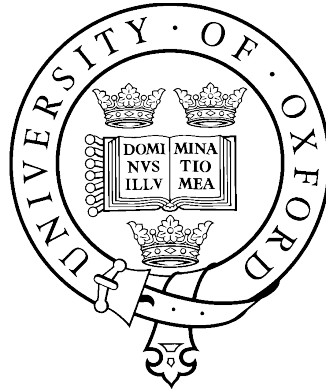


**‘Together We Are Strong’: Exploring Regional  
Protest During Moments of Mass Mobilisation  
in Ukraine and Belarus**



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## Thesis Abstract

Word count: 299

During nationwide instances of mass mobilisation, what shapes subnational variation in where protest – and the repression of protest – occurs? And what can examining the drivers of this variation teach us about protest more broadly? When they occur, mass protests are usually concentrated in large urban centres. As such, much research on protest focuses on these events, often in capital cities. However, during some mass mobilisations, protests happen on a nationwide scale, in regional towns and cities across a given country. But, even in these cases, not all localities or even regions will mobilise. And, protest can be greeted with different responses at the local level. This article-based thesis examines in particular the role that different kinds of social networks play in shaping this geospatial variation during nationwide mass mobilisations. It explores how activist networks account for changes in the geospatial dispersion of protest over subsequent protest waves; how pre-existing networks facilitate early-rising mobilisation in certain localities; how different employment patterns and the workplace networks they create are associated with regional protest event frequency; and how the embeddedness of ruling-party networks at the local level shapes the repression of regional protest.

This project examines two recent cases of nationwide mass mobilisation in eastern Europe: Ukraine's 2013-14 Euromaidan, and the 2020 Belarusian post-election protests. In both cases, the nationwide scale of mobilisation was unprecedented, but even so, not all cities rose. This thesis explores reasons why. It engages with and tests existing literature on the centrality of social networks to mass mobilisation, applying it to new cases, using innovative methods, and complimenting existing works by exploring how social networks influence mobilisation at the locality level. It also

uncovers original knowledge about regional mobilisation in Ukraine and Belarus, vital to helping us better understand local resistance to Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

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My first academic ‘home’ in Oxford was nevertheless Russian and East European Studies (REES), where I completed my masters, and was inspired to continue graduate study. This is partly due to Nicolette Makovicky, who made writing my master’s dissertation a pleasure. I’ve also greatly benefitted from Paul Chaisty’s guidance throughout my masters and DPhil. REES is where I have met some of my greatest friends and colleagues, who’ve been there to provide support, inspiration, and commiseration when things got tough. I won’t name everyone here, but I wouldn’t have made it through without the unwavering support of my dear friend, Marija Norkunaite, in particular. The late Elizabeth Teague was also a wonderful source of kindness, enthusiasm, and encouragement, who will be sadly missed by myself and the many students she mentored. I also extend my gratitude to Cordelia Buchanan

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This PhD would not have been possible without the support of a joint ESRC Doctoral Training Partnership and Balliol College Devorguilla studentship. I am grateful not only for the funds that supported my DPhil, but also that enabled me to make the most of opportunities to attend conferences, travel to Ukraine, and study the Ukrainian language. On that note, I thank my wonderful Ukrainian tutor, Olenka Cherednichenko, for helping me get to grips with this beautiful language.

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### Maps of Ukraine and Belarus



Source: Nations Online Project (nationsonline.org)

## **Thesis Introduction**

Word count: 6670 (excluding references)

### **Introduction**

During nationwide moments of mass mobilisation, what shapes subnational variation in where protest – and the repression of protest – takes place? And what can examining the drivers of this variation teach us about protest more broadly? When they occur, mass protests are usually most visible in large urban centres. However, during some mass mobilisations, protests take place on a nationwide scale, in towns and cities across a given country. In these cases, not all localities or even regions will mobilise. And, protest can be greeted with different responses by the government at the local level.

Some scholars would argue that differences in political opportunities at the local level shape this geospatial variation (McAdam 1996; Tarrow 2011; Lankina 2015; Robertson 2011); others would argue that the availability of certain local resources is key (Edwards and McCarthy 2007; McCarthy and Zald 1977); whilst another area of scholarship would highlight the ways in which flows of information are crucial (Lohmann 1994; 1993; 2000). This thesis argues that social networks play a central role in all of the above-mentioned processes, and thus examines in particular the role that different kinds of networks play in shaping subnational variation during nationwide mass mobilisations. The article format enables me to investigate four ways in which social networks influence subnational protest: how activist networks are associated with geospatial shifts in protest over subsequent mass mobilisations; how pre-existing networks facilitate early-rising mobilisation in certain localities; how different employment patterns and the workplace networks they create are associated

with regional protest event frequency; and how the embeddedness of ruling party networks at the local level shapes the repression of regional protest.

As the basis for this study, I have selected two recent cases of nationwide mass protest in Eastern Europe. The first case is Ukraine's 2013-14 Euromaidan, where three months of street protests initially in support of EU integration, and later against government brutality, saw over 100 protesters killed and President Yanukovich flee. The second case is the 2020 Belarusian protests, where citizens demonstrated en masse against falsified elections, but were brutally repressed by incumbent President Lukashenka, who even diverted a plane from EU airspace to seize dissidents (BBC 2021). These two cases were selected because in both instances, the nationwide scale of mobilisation was unprecedented, but even so, not all cities rose. This thesis explores reasons why. Moreover, the mobilisations occurred in very different political, economic, and social contexts, providing ample leverage to investigate the central questions of this thesis, whilst also exploring the role of certain contextual factors: The Euromaidan took place in a developing democracy, with a market economy, established history of mass protest, and well-developed civil society. Meanwhile, the 2020 Belarus protests occurred in a repressive authoritarian regime, operating an economic system characterised as 'state capitalism'<sup>1</sup>, with a limited history of mass mobilisation and development of civil society. Thus, the cases offer the opportunity to examine what influences variation in mass mobilisation in two quite different contexts, within the same region.

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<sup>1</sup> Scholars such as Rudy (2020) and Papko and Kozarzewski (2020) describe the Belarusian economy as 'state capitalism', as it combines features of state socialism, such as tight state control over the economy and high state employment, with some market features.

This thesis assumes an article format, comprising of an introduction, literature review, four papers, and a conclusion. It draws upon original protest event catalogues compiled by the author, which, in addition to news media, make innovative use of social media data. The articles variously utilise quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods of analysis. The first paper examines how activist networks develop over time, demonstrating how the activity of these networks is associated with changes in the geospatial dispersion of mobilisation over three protest waves in Ukraine prior to the Euromaidan, from 1990-2004. As the first study to examine nationwide mobilisation during these protests, the paper provides important context for other articles in this thesis. The second paper examines the role played by pre-existing networks in the initial stages of mass mobilisation, taking the case of the first week of the 2020 protests in Belarus. Making innovative use of Telegram Messenger data, the study highlights the importance of pre-existing networks for protest, even in authoritarian contexts. The third paper, in addressing the question of how different employment patterns align with regional protest event frequency, sheds light on the effect of certain workplace networks, and compares the Ukrainian and Belarusian cases. It makes an engaging contribution to debates in the literature about the role of middle-class versus industrial workers in mass mobilisations. The final paper looks beyond protest, towards repressive responses to it at the local level, examining how the embeddedness of the ruling political party in local political networks shapes variation in the repression of regional protest during the Euromaidan. Via qualitative comparisons of six Ukrainian cities, the paper demonstrates that responses to protest can differ radically at the subnational level, and highlights the role played by certain political networks.

Overall, this thesis makes an important contribution to the sociological literature on protest and repression by demonstrating the ways in which different kinds of social networks can play a vital role in shaping nationwide instances of mass mobilisation. The individual papers also contribute significantly to research on mobilisation in Ukraine and Belarus specifically. This thesis is positioned to become a leading source on the regional aspect of the 2020 Belarus protests, presenting the first published study to empirically demonstrate their nationwide scale, as well as important findings highlighting pre-existing networks of resistance in authoritarian Belarus, and the potential role played by state industrial workers. Most crucially, in the context of Russia's ongoing, full-scale invasion of Ukraine, as one of few studies examining the regional dimensions of recent Ukrainian protest, the thesis uncovers valuable knowledge helping us to better understand Ukrainians' civic resistance to Russian aggression in towns and cities across the country in 2022.

In what follows, I provide an introduction for the four papers which make up this thesis. First, I discuss the main puzzle and motivation of my thesis as a whole. Following this, I explain my case selection and provide some background information about the Ukrainian and Belarusian cases. I then provide an overview of my four papers, their various research designs, and outline how they connect to one another. Finally, I discuss the overarching theme and main contributions of these works, and finish by presenting the structure of the thesis.

### **Subnational variation during nationwide mass mobilisation**

During nationwide mass mobilisations, subnational variation in the occurrence of protest is not, in itself, inherently puzzling. Most of us would intuitively expect that protests will vary across a country to a certain extent. After all, the towns and cities of

most countries differ in ways that might influence variations in protest: from demographics, and local politics, to their economy, infrastructure, and local civil society, to name a few factors. What remains unclear, however, is precisely which factors shape variation in local mobilisation and repressive responses to it, and how. Understanding what influences this subnational variation will not only better help us to interpret and analyse nationwide instances of mobilisation in single countries, but also mass mobilisation more broadly.

The exploration of this puzzle has been limited by two factors. Firstly, instances of nationwide mass mobilisation are rarer than mass mobilisations as a whole – not all are nationwide in nature. Mass mobilisations are instances when large numbers in a country – usually over 100,000 – participate in protest, thus comprising of ‘ordinary’ citizens, not just activists (Onuch 2014a). Nevertheless, when they occur, mass mobilisations are usually concentrated in large urban centres (Brancati 2016). It is rarer that a significant proportion of the population mobilises throughout a country. This requires the overcoming of the collective action problem not only in the largest cities of a country, but also in smaller cities, towns and even villages. And secondly, and relatedly, limited research on protest explicitly examines such regional mobilisation. This is due not only to the fact that nationwide cases of mass mobilisation are more frequent, but also for practical reasons: data collection and analysis of protest at the subnational level can require many more resources; and scholars of protest are often less interested in smaller protest events. In terms of protest event analysis specifically, there are significant methodological challenges associated with researching subnational protest. Crucial data sources, such as news media, less consistently cover protest events in regional and smaller towns and cities, making gathering reliable data on these events challenging (Hutter 2014). The inclusion of

regional news sources can help overcome this bias, but to a limited extent, as the bias, quality, and coverage of local media can vary across a country. Where scholars are able to collect data subnational data on protest, its analysis presents another challenge. Working with data at the locality level can be very labour intensive, due to the sheer number of observations – particularly if the chosen unit of analysis is the location-day. For the above reasons, even large, well-resourced protest event catalogues such as ACLED<sup>2</sup> and GDELT<sup>3</sup> may be of limited utility for fine-grained analysis of subnational protest. When disaggregated beyond country and region to the individual locality level, there may be much missing data. Hence, single-country studies of nationwide protest at the subnational level are important.

There are a number of studies which have addressed this task, despite these challenges (e.g., Sullivan 2021; Thomson 2018; Andrews and Biggs 2006; Ketchley and El-Rayyes 2021)<sup>4</sup>. The ability of such studies to disaggregate across space and time is extremely useful for analysis of protest and repression (Davenport 2007b). This thesis adds to this literature of subnational protest analysis, making a valuable contribution as there are few subnational studies of protest in Eastern Europe, particularly for Ukraine and Belarus<sup>5</sup>.

So, turning to the key question of this thesis: what shapes subnational variation in where protest – and the repression of protest – takes place? Scholars of political opportunity structures (POS) would argue that it is differences in political opportunity

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2 The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) is a disaggregated data collection, analysis, and crisis mapping project. ACLED collects the dates, actors, locations, fatalities, and types of all reported political violence and protest events around the world, making the data freely available for public use. <https://acleddata.com/>

3 The GDELT Project monitors the world's broadcast, print, and web news and identifies key events and locations across the world. Data is freely available <https://www.gdeltproject.org/>

4 Ketchley and El-Rayyes analyse how protests at the district level influence attitudes towards democracy, rather than seeking to explain this subnational variation in protest

5 There are a number of subnational studies of protest for Russia, such as Lankina and Skovoroda (2017), Lankina and Voznaya (2015), and Lankina and Libman (2019).

structures in various localities which may account for subnational variation in protest. POS refer to the broader context in which a protest occurs. Favourable POS include: the presence of elite divisions, the availability of elite allies, and the relative openness of a political regime (McAdam 1996, 27). Such opportunities are thought to facilitate mobilisation by reducing the costs and increasing the possible benefits associated with collective action, encouraging people to protest (Tarrow 2011; Kitschelt 1986). POS vary not only between but also within countries (Eisinger 1973), and so they may help to explain geospatial variation in protest during a mass mobilisation. For example, local governments' openness and willingness to listen to diverse actors may differ (Lankina 2015); and politico-economic elites in some localities may be supportive of protests, whilst others may perceive protests as a threat (Robertson 2011).

However, some researchers would contend that although POS are important in providing a more or less favourable context for mobilisation at the subnational level, protest in itself is not possible without available resources: In order for a locality to mobilise, various forms of resources are needed (Edwards and McCarthy 2007; McCarthy and Zald 1977). These resources can include: moral resources like public support for protest grievances and goals; material resources such as money, or equipment; human resources including labour and skills; and cultural resources like knowledge about protest tactics (Edwards and McCarthy 2007). Without some configuration of these resources available at the local level, no matter how favourable the POS, mobilisation will be limited. Like POS, access to resources can vary across a country (Edwards and McCarthy 2007). For example, some regions may be wealthier, or have higher levels of public support for a protest's aims. Hence, variation in types of and access to resources may also influence subnational variation in protest.

Nevertheless, other theories have focused on one resource in particular – information – arguing that it is fundamental for the occurrence of protest. Information is vital to mobilisation, because in order for a protest to occur, people need to know why it is happening, when and where it is taking place, and most importantly, they must be convinced by this information. Lohmann (1993; 1994; 2000) sees protest waves as a process whereby information about an issue travels through a population: ‘an informational cascade’. As information travels, individuals can decide whether to join the protest, and subsequently their decision may influence others (Lohmann 1993; 1994). Hence, the way an informational cascade unfolds across a country may influence geospatial variation in mobilisation. Information can travel via three main channels: social networks (including word of mouth) (Snow, Zurcher, and Eklund-Olson 1980); ‘old’ media including TV, radio and newspapers (Koopmans and Olzak 2004; Andrews and Biggs 2006); and ‘new’ media such as social media, online news sites and news streams (Youmans and York 2012; Tufekci and Wilson 2012). However, while old media certainly help disseminate information across a country, it is unlikely that they may shape geospatial variation in protest: in today’s highly saturated media landscape, localities rely on a wide variety of sources of information, and as such protest is unlikely to spread along old media circulation networks, as it did in the past (e.g., Andrews and Biggs 2006). It is also questionable whether new media would have such an influence: information travels so quickly and easily online that it seems improbable that it would reach some localities and not others. There is also limited recent evidence that old and new media are actually mobilising at the micro (individual) level (Onuch, Mateo, and Waller 2021; Onuch 2015c; Jost et al. 2018). We know, however, that social networks can mobilise protest participants at the micro level (Onuch 2015c; Kitts 2000; Schussman and Soule 2005). This may be,

in part, because information received via social networks may be viewed as more trustworthy than that transmitted by old or new media (Born, Akkerman, and Thommes 2016). Thus, when social networks transmit information across a country, as individuals communicate with their friends, family, and colleagues in other towns and cities, they may influence mobilisation across space.

Nevertheless, social networks may help mobilise localities not only because they disseminate information. I hypothesise that social networks play a crucial role in all the theories outlined above, relating to resources, political opportunities, and information. Earlier theory on mobilisation focused on the role of one particular kind of social network, social movement organisations (SMOs), described by McCarthy and Zald (1977, 1218) as ‘a complex, or formal, organisation which identifies its goals with the preferences of a social movement or a countermovement and attempts to implement those goals’. SMOs were viewed as a vital ‘mobilising structure’, but they are one form of social network amongst many which can play a vital role in facilitating protest. For the purpose of this thesis, I use ‘social network’ as a broad term, referring to a group of people connected to one another by various ties, via which information and other resources necessary for protest can flow.

Not only SMOs, but also more informal activist networks and even networks of ordinary citizens can act as a ‘mobilising structure’, mobilising resources to channel funds, manpower, skills, and human capital into action (Edwards and McCarthy 2007; McCarthy and Zald 1977). Social networks provide access to resources, including information, from across a wider population (Granovetter 1983). Social networks also do the work of framing information: Mass mobilisations do not simply emerge when groups share claims or grievances – rather, activists must work to mobilise potential constituents by dynamically and interactively producing ideas and meanings, and

disseminating them across a population (Benford and Snow 2000). Activist networks also do the important work of identifying favourable political opportunities, disseminating information about them, and organising campaigns around them. Political opportunities are a ‘necessary prerequisite’ for mobilisation, but organisation is needed to seize these opportunities (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996, 7). It is networks of certain kinds that do this work – particularly, but not limited to, networks of activists and the SMOs which they form. Variation in the structure and location of different networks across a country may therefore shape subnational variation in protest.

Thus, this thesis primarily examines the ways in which social networks influence subnational variation in protest during mass mobilisations. As alluded to above, there are many different kinds of social networks, from activist networks to more diffuse grassroots networks, workplace networks, and even networks relating to the government and political parties. There are also many ways in which nationwide protest, and responses to it, can vary at the subnational level. The choice of article format enables me to investigate distinct, but interrelated questions, about the role of different networks, and their impact not only upon mobilisation but also repressive responses to it. The research questions, methods, and findings of the four articles of this thesis will be outlined in more detail below, following the description of the cases.

## **Two cases of nationwide mass mobilisation**

### ***Ukraine’s 2013-14 Euromaidan***

Ukraine is a country with a history of mass protest. However, many of Ukrainians’ hopes raised by the success of the country’s most famous mass mobilisation, the 2004 Orange Revolution, had been disappointed by 2013. Viktor Yanukovich, whose

falsified election victory was thrown out after the 2004 protests, had been re-elected President in 2010. Yanukovich worked to strengthen his presidential powers, appoint loyal figures in key positions, and enrich his own business empire and that of his key oligarch supporters (Kudelia 2014). By late 2013, the majority of Ukrainians were dissatisfied with the socio-political and economic situation in the country, and Yanukovich's approval ratings were low (IFES 2013). Then, hopes that Yanukovich would seek closer ties with the EU were frustrated in November 2013, when he performed a U-turn and refused to sign planned EU association agreements (EUAA)<sup>6</sup>. This refusal was the initial trigger for what became known as the Euromaidan protests – a combination of the word 'Europe' and the Ukrainian word for central square, '*maidan*'. As the news broke on 21 November, protesters took to public spaces in Kyiv and a number of other cities<sup>7</sup>, condemning Yanukovich's refusal to sign the EUAA (Onuch and Sasse 2016; Onuch 2014b). During the first week, protest events occurred in every oblast (province)<sup>8</sup>, largest in the centre and west, but with several protests of over 1000 in southern and eastern cities (Tyzhden 2013; Onuch and Sasse 2016).

After police violently dispersed Kyiv's protesters overnight on 29-30 November, protests grew in size, and expanded to more localities as their focus shifted to safeguarding civil rights, Ukraine's democratic future, and denouncing government corruption (Onuch and Sasse 2016; Kyiv Post 2013; Onuch 2014b). The first clashes between protesters and police occurred in Kyiv in December 2013, and as violence escalated throughout January and February 2014, approximately 100 were killed, and thousands injured (Portnov 2015; Kudelia 2016). Regional protests also escalated as

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<sup>6</sup> Yanukovich was pressured by Russia not to sign (Kudelia 2014)

<sup>7</sup> Prior research has noted that on the first night protests occurred in cities including Uzhgorod, Donetsk, Ivano-Frankivsk, Lutsk and Lviv (Onuch and Sasse 2016; Kyiv Post 2013a).

<sup>8</sup> Oblasts are the main type of first-level administrative division in Ukraine. The country is divided into 24 oblasts, plus the autonomous Republic of Crimea.

protesters occupied government buildings and forced governors to resign (Ishchenko 2016). The Euromaidan came to an end after Yanukovych fled Kyiv on 21 February 2014.

To date, much has been written on the Euromaidan, highlighting the diversity of the protest participants (Onuch 2014b; Onuch and Sasse 2016), the role of mass media (Szostek 2018; Onuch, Mateo, and Waller 2021) and the widespread use social media (Lokot 2021; Onuch 2015b; Bohdanova 2014; Metzger, Nagler, and Tucker 2015). However, despite the fact that the Euromaidan was the most widespread instance of nationwide protest in Ukraine (Onuch 2014b; 2015c), limited scholarship focuses specifically on protests beyond Kyiv. Although single cities (Kuhutyak 2016; Yaremchuk 2014; Shebelist 2015) and key regional claims and actors (Zelinska 2015; 2016; 2018) have been researched, there are few studies of the Euromaidan as a *nationwide* phenomenon. It is precisely this nationwide aspect of the Euromaidan protests, and the variation in the protests across the country, which provides the leverage for this study of the factors influencing subnational protest variation.

Regional variation in protest is not in itself inherently surprising, not least in Ukraine. In political science research, Ukraine is commonly divided into four macro-regions: east, south, west and centre<sup>9</sup>. Many scholars have noted the significance of these regional cleavages in shaping Ukrainians' political behaviour (Barrington and Herron 2004; Birch 2000; Sasse 2010; 2001; Barrington and Faranda 2009). There is a lack of consensus as to why regions matter: some scholars highlight the legacy of divergent regional experiences of Soviet rule (Arel 1995), or even pre-Soviet rule

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<sup>9</sup> Kyiv International Institute of Sociology divides Ukraine into west: Volyn, Zakarpattia, Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv, Rivne, Ternopil, Khmelnytsky, and Chernivtsi oblasts; centre: Kyiv, Vinnitsa, Zhytomyr, Kirovograd, Poltava, Sumy, Cherkasy, and Chernihiv oblasts; south: Dnipro, Zaporizhzhya, Mykolaiv, Odesa, and Kherson oblasts; and east: Kharkiv, Donetsk, and Luhansk oblasts.

(Birch 2000); others refer to economic and political economy arguments<sup>10</sup> (Sasse 2001; Kubicek 2000), while some highlight the weakness of Ukraine's institutions and party ideologies in allowing oligarchs to exploit region divisions (D'Anieri 2011). Nevertheless, what is interesting about the case of the Euromaidan is that we see variation in protest not only between the broad macro-regions of Ukraine, but also *within* macro-region (Onuch and Sasse 2014; Onuch 2015c). Examining what factors shape this within-region variation will enable me to address the central questions of this thesis.

The Euromaidan represents a recent case of nationwide mass mobilisation in Eastern Europe. Prior to the Euromaidan, Ukraine has a strong history of mass protests, and as a result a developed civil society (Onuch 2021c). The regional dimension of mass protests prior to 2013 is examined in the first paper of this thesis. A degree of political plurality and media freedom allowed the existence of political opposition and dissent, but in 2013 the country was not a full, free democracy (Freedom House 2013), as is the case for the context for many mass protests. Democratising contexts<sup>11</sup> such as Ukraine in 2013 are particularly interesting for protest research because of collective action's role in promoting democratisation (Tilly 2004). The context of the Euromaidan is very different to that of the 2020 post-election protests which emerged in authoritarian Belarus – the second case studied in this thesis.

### ***The Belarus 2020 Post-election Protests***

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<sup>10</sup> A number of researchers have noted that Western Ukraine is more rural and agricultural compared to the industrialised and urban East, and this may influence the regional patterns discussed above (Birch 2000; Sasse 2001). Meanwhile, scholars such as Kubicek (2000) argue that the differing economic experiences of Ukraine's regions during transition may play a role in regional divisions. The 'losers' of transition – including industrial workers, ethnic Russians, and the elderly – who are less supportive of the market economy and more supportive of economic ties with Russia, are more concentrated in Eastern Ukraine (Kubicek 2000).

<sup>11</sup> Democratising context refers to a country which is in the course of transition from non-democratic to democratic form of rule (Huntington 1991).

The 2020 protests in Belarus are a particularly interesting case of nationwide mass mobilisation: like the Euromaidan, protests were widespread, with much variation in mobilisation both across and within regions of the country; however, they were also occurring in a highly repressive context with limited past protest. These 2020 protests were not the first time Belarusians mobilised, but previous protests did not reach anywhere near the same scale (Bulhakava and Dynko 2011; Herasimenka 2019; de Vogel 2022). Lukashenka came to power in fair elections in 1994, but subsequently undertook constitutional reforms and increased repression, censorship, and propaganda to ensure he remained in power (de Vogel 2022). Attempts to mobilise youth around the 2001 presidential elections failed to gain momentum (Nikolayenko 2017), and several protests against subsequent falsified presidential elections were crushed by harsh repressive measures (de Vogel 2022). Most recently, in 2017, 16 cities mobilised in an ‘Anti-Tax’ campaign against tax reforms targeting the unemployed – although no single event gathered over 3000 people (Herasimenka 2019, 122). Time and again, protesters have struggled to resist President Lukashenka’s ‘consolidated authoritarian regime’ (Freedom House 2019), which has developed a variety of features to prevent mobilisation. Lukashenka’s regime has increasingly used violence against the political opposition, activists and journalists; and a combination of repression, anti-protest legislation, censorship, and surveillance has largely suppressed protest and civil society, particularly since 2011 (de Vogel 2022; Bedford 2017; Manaev 2014; Reporters without Borders 2019). And yet, despite all these factors restricting activism and the flow of information, Belarusians mobilised en masse in 2020, following the elections.

The 2020 elections saw incumbent President Aliaksandr Lukashenka challenged by political novice, Sviatlana Tikhanouskaya. Tikhanouskaya was a

schoolteacher who decided to run following the arrest of her husband, a blogger, businessman, and activist who was one of several opposition figures running against Lukashenka (Specia 2020). Only Tikhonouskaya was allowed to run, perhaps because Lukashenka underestimated her appeal and thought that Belarus was not ready for a female president (Petkova 2020). However, as campaigners for other opposition figures united behind Tikhonouskaya, her campaign gained momentum (Roth 2020). On election day, 9 August 2020, Belarusians waited outside polling stations for the results. When Lukashenka claimed victory with 80.1% of the vote (Central Election Commission 2020), protests began immediately. The elections were widely decried as falsified. Data from this thesis indicates that at least 19 locations mobilised on the first day of protests (Mateo 2022). The police and security forces used repressive measures against protesters including beating, stun grenades, tear gas, and rubber bullets, and an estimated 7000 people were arrested in the first week (Shotter and Seddon 2020). As news of the repression spread, along with reports of further beating and torture in police custody, mobilisations grew larger and expanded to new locations. Over time, protesters adapted their tactics in the face of persistent and brutal crackdowns, but unable to maintain protest amidst widespread repression, the mass phase of the protest was over by autumn 2020.

Research emerging in the 18 months since the protests has shed light on the cross-cleavage coalition of protest participants (Onuch 2021b) including the role of women (Paulovich 2021; Gaufman 2021) and workers (Artiukh 2021), highlighted protesters' European foreign policy aspirations (Onuch and Sasse 2022), and examined the ways in which independent media consumption aligned with protest participation (Greene 2022). Studies have also critically reflected on the role of Telegram Messenger in the protests (Wijermars and Lokot 2022; Herasimenka et al. 2020), and

examined the ways in which changing demographic trends, an eroding political contract, and generational divides contributed to mobilisation (O’Loughlin and Toal 2022; Krawatzek and Langbein 2022). This thesis has already made an important contribution to this literature, with the publication of the sole and leading work examining the regional aspect of the protests (Mateo 2022).

With regards to regional protest in Belarus, it is important to note that political behaviour in Belarus is not characterised by such strong regional divides as in Ukraine. According to Belarusian social scientist Nelly Bekus (2021), Belarusian society is ‘significantly more homogenous’ than Ukraine. Belarus is more centralised than Ukraine in terms of population, with almost 20% of its 9.4 million population living in Minsk (Belarus.by 2021). All other cities have a population under 500,000. It is therefore unsurprising that the largest protests in 2020 occurred in Minsk. What is more interesting is the number of smaller towns and cities that mobilised – over 100 in the first week, according to my research. Moreover, the variation in which of these towns and cities mobilised or not remains unexplained: within individual districts, some localities saw protests, whilst others, otherwise similar in many respects such as population size, political economy, and demographics, did not mobilise. Therefore, like the Euromaidan protests, the case of the 2020 Belarus protests provides plentiful leverage to examine the central puzzle of this thesis – what drives subnational variation in protest.

### **Overview of Papers**

In examining this puzzle, this thesis takes an article format, comprising of an introduction, literature review, four papers, and a conclusion. It draws upon original protest event catalogues compiled by the author, which, in addition to news media,

make innovative use of social media data. The articles variously utilise quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods of analysis.

The first paper examines what accounts for changing geospatial patterns of protest over time. It profiles three subsequent waves of mass mobilisation in Ukraine prior to the Euromaidan – the 1990 Revolution on Granite, the 2001 Ukraine Without Kuchma protests, and the 2004 Orange Revolution – using protest event analysis to identify patterns in where protest occurred. As such, this article provides useful context for other papers in the thesis, whilst making an empirical contribution in its own right. Whilst scholars of POS might argue that the expansion or contraction of political opportunities help to explain changes in the geospatial scope of protests, and other researchers might highlight the availability of resources at different moments in time, this article foregrounds the role of activist networks. My analysis suggests that shifts in the geospatial scope of protest over time were associated with the development of activist networks and cross-cleavage coalitions over subsequent protest waves.

The second paper<sup>12</sup> builds on these findings, examining the role of pre-existing but not necessarily activist networks. The paper takes a much narrower timeframe, focusing on the initial week of protest in Belarus, and asks whether and how local, pre-existing social networks drive specifically early-rising protest at the city level. The limited timeframe of this article facilitates more detailed analysis of regional protest events, and enables me to make cautious causal claims about the relationship between networks and early-rising protest specifically. The paper makes three important contributions to the study of protest in the region, and research on mass mobilisation more broadly: I provide quantitative and qualitative evidence that pre-existing social

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<sup>12</sup> This paper has been published in *Post-Soviet Affairs*.

networks play a significant role in driving early-rising, geographically dispersed protest, contributing to research highlighting the centrality of social network ties to mass mobilisation. I also make innovative use of Telegram Messenger data to both source difficult-to-collect data on regional protest, and to trace the activity of social networks engaging in protest – thus demonstrating the utility of Telegram data to social science scholars. Finally, the paper helps us better understand these recent protests in Belarus, as the first to map the impressive extent of regional mobilisation, and also to demonstrate that nationwide networks of opposition to the ruling regime were already well-established prior to election day – despite the authoritarian context.

The third paper examines the role of a specific kind of pre-existing network, that is not necessarily involved in activism or resistance: the workplace. In doing so, it engages with ongoing debates about whether working-class industrial or white-collar middle-class employees are the driving force behind mass protests, by looking to the subnational level whilst also comparing Ukraine and Belarus. Thus, the article also contributes to the scant literature on labour protest beyond Western liberal democracies (highlighted by Ketchley and Barrie 2018). Utilising my protest event catalogues alongside employment data from the *Bureau van Dijk Orbis* database, I use quantitative analysis to examine how subnational variation in protest frequency is influenced by local employment patterns – specifically levels of white-collar and industrial (factory) employees. I find that protest events are initially more frequent in regions with a larger white-collar workforce in Ukraine, but in regions with more industrial employees in Belarus. This finding for Belarus challenges theories about the apparent passivity of regions with a large industrial workforce, and the results as a whole suggest that the relationships between class, employment, and protest are not fixed, but may be shaped by contextual factors such as regime type, protest grievance,

and economy. I also find that it is important to take into account not only type of employment, but also type of employer, in line with theories proposed by Rosenfeld (2017).

The final paper shifts in focus, and instead of examining the regional networks that may engage in protest, looks to the regional networks that may respond to it. I address the question of how repressive tactics vary across a country during a nationwide mass mobilisation, and what explains this variation. Examining the case of the Euromaidan, I conduct within-case paired comparisons, exploring repression used in Kharkiv and Donetsk in eastern Ukraine, Cherkasy and Vinnytsia in central Ukraine, and Ternopil and Lutsk in western Ukraine, during local protests. Via qualitative analysis I demonstrate that the relative local embeddedness of Party of Regions networks, representing the ruling political party, was an important factor in determining how repression was used in a city. I find scant evidence to support the contrasting arguments identified in the literature that regional variation in the use of repression is shaped by the size or repertoires of local protests. My findings also highlight the extent to which repression can vary across space in a single mass mobilisation, and demonstrate the utility of subnational and qualitative studies in contributing to research on the protest-repression nexus.

### **Contributions of this thesis**

Together these papers make scholarly contributions in three main areas: the sociological literature on protest and networks; methodological innovations in protest event analysis; and empirical research on protest in eastern Europe, specifically Ukraine and Belarus.

***Theoretical contributions***

First and foremost, this thesis contributes to the sociological literature on protest by testing existing theory on the importance of social networks in mass mobilisations. I demonstrate that over multiple protest waves, activist networks seek to expand via cross-cleavage collaboration to bring protest to new localities, and in the short term, that pre-existing social networks are also crucial in facilitating early rising protest mobilisation. Nevertheless, this research does not just test, but also applies existing theory in two novel ways. First, I test theory about the role of social networks in a new case, the 2020 Belarus protests. Thus, I find that even in a highly repressive context, where we might expect networks to be weak, they still appear to play a crucial role in driving early rising protest in a locality. I also test existing theory using new methods, by attempting to utilise Telegram Messenger data to identify pre-existing social networks. As such, I contribute to innovation in ways we might identify social networks for analysis.

Although mostly theory testing, this thesis does also seek to complement existing theory on social networks. Most existing work on social networks explores how they mobilise protest participants at the individual level. This thesis draws upon this theory, but conducts analysis at the regional or locality level, trying to answer what shapes variation in where protests take place, rather than in who mobilises. My findings thus suggest that social networks play an important role not only in mobilising individuals, but also in contributing to the geographic dispersion of protest.

***Methodological contributions***

Second, this thesis makes a modest but useful contribution to protest event analysis methodology, by demonstrating the utility of social media data for the collection of

information on protest events. Two of my thesis articles use my protest event catalogue for the Belarus protests, compiled using Telegram messenger data. I argue that such social media data may prove particularly useful for scholars sourcing hard-to-collect data on regional protest events, and protests in highly repressive contexts where widespread censorship renders traditional news media of limited use. I also make innovative use of Telegram Messenger data to trace the activity of social networks engaging in protest –further demonstrating the utility of Telegram data to social science scholars. Social media are not only an important tool for protesters, but also those of us who study protest.

### ***Empirical contributions***

Finally, this thesis makes an important contribution to empirical research on protest in Ukraine and Belarus specifically. It builds on existing literature on Ukrainian protest, by demonstrating not only the nationwide scale of protest during the Euromaidan, but also earlier mass protests from 1990-2004. By highlighting the role of social networks in Ukrainian protest, it complements other studies of mobilisation in Ukraine which have often focused on the role of external actors or influences (McFaul 2007; Beissinger 2007; Wilson 2006), or more recently, that of social media (Bohdanova 2014; Lokot 2021; Metzger, Nagler, and Tucker 2015; Vlasov and Leonard 2014). In terms of the 2020 Belarusian protests, this thesis is part of an emerging body of research examining the mobilisation, providing vital analysis on the unprecedented regional scale of the mobilisation. My research also challenges preconceptions about the weakness of activism in Belarus pre-2020, and the ways in which industrial employment suppresses protest, by demonstrating the role of nationwide, pre-existing social networks and workers' mobilisation during the 2020 protests.

These contributions to research on Ukrainian and Belarusian mobilisation are made even more significant by recent events in the region. As this thesis neared completion, Russia embarked on a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. Many observers and Western analysts, and indeed the Russian president himself, anticipated that Ukraine would fall within days (Cooper and Sanger 2022; ISW 2022). However, so far Ukraine has resisted Russian occupation and fought back, successfully preventing an attempt to take the capital of Kyiv and swathes of territory across the country. At the time of writing, the war is entering its second phase, as Russia pulls back and seeks to secure territory in the east of Ukraine. It is unclear what the future of this war holds; however, what is certain, is that Ukrainian resistance in the face of what was believed to be one of the strongest armies of the world has proved truly extraordinary. This achievement is not only due to efforts of the Ukrainian military, bolstered by weapons and support from allies, but also likely due to Ukrainian civil society, including pre-existing active and activist networks. Ukrainians have mobilised to join civil defence brigades, to equip front-line soldiers with defensive and protective equipment, and to offer aid and evacuation to those in besieged cities, and those displaced by the war. Ukrainians in these occupied cities have even taken to the streets in peaceful demonstrations against the Russian invasion, particularly in southern and eastern Ukraine, facing down tanks and Russian troops armed with automatic weapons (BBC 2022). This extensive, nationwide mobilisation of Ukrainians in the face of brutal aggression and war crimes may have surprised those who thought that Ukraine would fall within days. This thesis shows that this resistance is rather the latest demonstration of nationwide mobilisation in Ukraine, facilitated by the power of social networks.

Moreover, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has been supported in Belarus by Lukashenka's regime. At the time of writing, Belarus is yet to deploy troops into Ukraine, but the country has provided a crucial launch pad and logistical support for Russian forces to the north of Ukraine. In response to Belarus' involvement in the war, regions of Belarus are experiencing renewed resistance, although not on a mass scale as in 2020. Belarus' involvement in Russia's war is an additional grievance for those opposing Lukashenka's presidency. Since the invasion, Belarusian railways have been targeted in acts of sabotage across the country, including cyberattacks and damage to infrastructure, and as a result over 100 railway workers have been detained (Nevedomskaya 2022a; 2022b). A wave of anti-war protests has also taken place, particularly 27-28 February, with over 1100 people detained in two days. Between the start of the war and early April, protest events against the war have been held in at least 25 Belarusian towns and cities (Viasna 2022). Although mass resistance in Belarus has been crushed by harsh repression, regional protests are not going anywhere. This thesis provides important context for this continued regional protest in Belarus, contributing to analysis of future protest.

Russia's war in Ukraine is still unfolding, and none of us knows what the future will bring for Ukraine and Belarus. However, mobilisation and resistance will continue throughout the two countries. This thesis provides important context to help us understand this ongoing mobilisation, and suggests that social networks will certainly play an important role in what is still to come.

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## Literature Review

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### Introduction

The over-arching question of this article-based thesis is what shapes subnational variation in where protest – and the repression of protest – takes place, during nationwide mass mobilisations? The introduction that precedes this chapter has summarized my main argument, cases, and provided an overview of the articles to come. This literature review provides context and a broad framework for the study by examining the relevant scholarly literature in more detail, and justifying this thesis' focus on social networks.

I first review what key schools of the contentious politics and social movements literature have to say about the factors that may shape subnational variation in protest. I begin by exploring arguments about how the political opportunities and threats presented by local institutions, informal power relations, and repression may influence subnational variation in mobilisation (Tarrow 2011; McAdam 1996; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996). However, scholars argue that even when these political opportunities are favourable, resources are necessary for mobilisation. Hence, I then turn to discuss how variation in access to resources may shape mobilisation (Edwards and McCarthy 2007; McCarthy and Zald 1977; 1973). Some theories focus on one resource in particular – information – so I unpack the literature relating to information cascades (Lohmann 1994; 1993; 2000), and discuss how this may influence subnational variation in protest. I then note that social networks are a crucial component of the processes highlighted by these theories of political opportunities, resource mobilisation, and information cascades, but their influence on subnational variation in where protest occurs is not necessarily theorised

in its own right. I develop an argument based on the role of social networks in identifying political opportunities, mobilising resources, and sharing and framing information, hypothesising that networks are a key part of the puzzle of what explains subnational variation in protest. I then examine the various ways in which social networks may influence subnational variation in protest, and responses to protest, identifying questions to be addressed in the articles of this thesis. I begin by turning to the literature on political opportunities.

### **Political opportunity structures**

What shapes differences in where protest occurs during a mass mobilisation? Or where repression takes place? One might anticipate that the local political context of towns and cities is key in determining whether they will experience mobilisation, and whether those mobilising will be repressed. Scholars of political opportunity structures (POS) would argue that differences in political opportunities in various localities may account for subnational variation in protest. A number of scholars have argued that the context of a protest provides POS, which shape the way a protest unfolds (Tarrow 2011; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996; Meyer 2004). Political opportunity structures are ‘any event or broad social process that serves to undermine the calculations and assumptions on which the political establishment is structured’ (McAdam 1982, 41). These POS shape actors’ perceptions of the costs and benefits associated with airing a grievance<sup>13</sup>, influencing whether and how actors use their resources to protest (Tarrow 2011, 33). Synthesising existing studies, McAdam (1996, 27) has identified three key POS: Firstly, the extent to which a state’s institutionalized

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<sup>13</sup> Grievances are perceptions of injustice, such as inequality or deprivation (Klandermans 1997; van Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2013)

political system is 'open' or 'closed' restricts opportunities for actors to challenge or criticise the regime. Secondly, informal power structures, including stable/unstable political elite alignments, and the availability of elite allies for protesters, influence a regime's vulnerability to challenge. Finally, a state's ability and willingness to use repression increases the costs and risks associated with mobilisation. As Eisinger (1973) has noted, these POS vary not only between but also within countries, and so they may help to explain subnational variation in mobilisation during a mass protest. In locations where local POS mean costs and risks associated with protesting are higher, and chances of success lower, protesters may not mobilise.

Thus, variation in the 'openness' of local governments may help explain differences in protest across a country (Lankina 2015). In localities where local governments are more open – offering multiple and/or diverse groups opportunities for political influence and formal representation (Eisinger 1973; Kitschelt 1986) – mobilisation may be more likely. Relatedly, the presence of elite divisions and allies may also encourage mobilisation in a town or city. Much theory on POS has focused on the presence of elite divisions and allies at the central government level: unstable elite alignments may help trigger protest, as they indicate a government's vulnerability (McAdam 1996, 27; Tarrow 2011); and the presence of elite allies facilitate protest by increasing the likelihood protesters' demands will be heard, and acting as 'guarantors against repression' (Tarrow 2011, 166; Jenkins and Perrow 1977). However, unstable elite alignments and divisions also exist at the local level, for example in local councils. Similarly, the presence of elite allies can vary across a country. As such, we might expect protests to be more likely in localities where the local government is divided, or local elite are more supportive of protesters' claims and grievances.

But what about variation in where the repression of protest takes places? Although definitions of what constitutes repression vary greatly (Della Porta 1995), repression is defined for the purposes of this study according to Earl (2011), as ‘state or private action meant to prevent, control, or constrain noninstitutional, collective action (e.g., protest), including its initiation’. POS theory notes that capacity and propensity for repression varies across states, (McAdam 1986; Davenport and Inman 2012; O’Brien and Deng 2015), and Robertson (2011) has highlighted that a state’s capacity for and usage of repression may also vary across a country. This would suggest that repression is more likely in localities where the government – local or national – is more able or willing to act against protesters. This local capacity and propensity for repression may also, in turn, influence whether a locality mobilises. However, there is a lack of consensus on how exactly repression affects protest. Rational choice approaches to mobilisation originally understood repression as raising the potential costs of protest by escalating risks (Tilly 1978, 100; Olson 1965; Lichbach 1987). Thus, repression was expected to de-escalate protest. More recent research suggests that repression provokes a backlash response where actors angered by repression mobilise further (Curtice and Berhlendorf 2018; O’Brien and Deng 2015; Almeida 2003; Francisco 1996). Other studies variously find that the impact of repression upon protest is conditioned by the type of repression (Earl 2011; Earl and Soule 2010), when it is used in the protest cycle (Brockett 1995), the consistency with which it is applied, whether it is targeted or not (Rasler 1996; Demirel-Pegg and Rasler 2021), and even by the media environment and censorship (Hess and Martin 2006; Pop-Eleches and Way 2021). The protest-repression nexus is an enduring puzzle, but whatever the precise impact of repression, it is clear that its variation across a country may shape subnational variation in protest.

However, whilst the theory on political opportunity structures helps us better understand how the local context may facilitate or reduce the likelihood of mobilisation in a place, this theory mostly focuses on factors external to a social movement, highlighting the conditions that constrain or encourage mobilisation. The local political context in a town may be favourable to protest, but this means very little if the locality lacks the necessary resources to mobilise.

### **Access to resources**

How might differences in the local availability of resources necessary for protest shape geospatial variation in protest across a country? In order for a locality to mobilise, various forms of resources are required (Edwards and McCarthy 2007; McCarthy and Zald 1977). Even when the political opportunities for protest are favourable, organising protests and attracting potential participants still requires manpower, motivation, skills, equipment, finances, and organisational tools. McCarthy and Edwards (2007) have highlighted that protests require five types of resources: moral, cultural, social-organisational, human, and material. However, resources are unevenly distributed across populations and social groups (Edwards and McCarthy 2007). Therefore, unequal access to resources could account for subnational variation in protest.

For example, moral resources – public support for a protest’s claims and grievances (Cress and Snow 1996; Edwards and McCarthy 2007) – vary across geographic space, as support for grievances may differ across a country (Klandermans and Oegema 1987). For instance, southern, conservative US states have less support for abortion, and are less likely to see protests in favour of reproductive rights. In another example, the material resources available for mobilisation also vary across

space. Protests require financial or physical capital, such as the availability of offices, equipment, money, or useful supplies (Edwards and McCarthy 2007), to provide for protest participants, and facilitate the organisation and promotion of protest. If a local population has limited surplus resources left over once basic needs have been met, less material resources will be available to allocate towards mobilisation (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Kerbo 1982; Oxhorn 2009).

Nevertheless, neither variation in the availability of resources, nor political opportunity structures, fully account for differences in where protest takes place during a mass mobilisation. These theories represent favourable conditions for protest in a location, but do not consider exactly how a locality mobilises. Political opportunity structures may be favourable in a town, and the available resources for protest may be plentiful, but nothing will happen unless potential protesters in the town hear about the mass mobilisation, and feel compelled to join. How do localities mobilise, and how might this process lead to geospatial differences in where protests occur?

### **Channels of information**

Lohmann's theory on 'information cascades' (1993; 1994; 2000) is useful in helping us to understand how different localities mobilise. Lohmann argues that a protest wave is a process whereby information about the 'status quo' travels across a population, prompting people to mobilise: As individuals receive information about the status quo, they decide whether to support it, mobilise against it, or simply accept it (Lohmann 2000, 660–61). Each mobilised individual spreads information further along the cascade, and may also influence others to participate. Lohmann's theory concerns the sharing of information at the micro (individual) level, but we can imagine

that, as information spreads through the population, it reaches new towns and cities, where members of the local population then face a choice about whether to join the protest or not.

Therefore, how an information cascade unfolds may account for variation in protest across a country: information about the status quo needs to reach potential participants in a location, then they can decide whether to support it, contribute to the protest, or abstain. A location untouched by the information cascade, or receiving little information, is unlikely to see mobilisation. However, information does not transmit itself. Information can travel via three main channels: old media including TV, radio and newspapers (Koopmans and Olzak 2004); new media such as social media, online news sites, and online news streams (Youmans and York 2012; Tufekci and Wilson 2012); and social networks (including word of mouth) (Strang and Soule 1998). Thus, the way in which these channels are structured may be relevant in helping to explain geospatial variation in protest.

Old media such as television and newspapers have long been seen as a channel for the dissemination of information about protests across space (Spilerman 1976). Scholars such as Andrews and Biggs (2006) have shown that, in the past, as these media transmit information about protest, protest may spread along their circulation networks to new towns and cities. At the micro level, there is evidence that consumption of certain old media sources was associated with the decision *not* to protest in the case of the Euromaidan (Onuch, Mateo, and Waller 2021) and the Belarus protests (Michiels 2022), with those who consumed certain TV channels being less likely to mobilise. However, it seems unlikely that in such recent mass mobilisations, old media shape subnational variation at the *locality* level in where protest takes place. In today's world, the media landscape is extremely complex:

people rely on a wide variety of sources for information, including online news sources and social media platforms. Old media such as TV and newspapers no longer have the monopoly on spreading information to new localities, as they did in the past, and so are unlikely to be one of the primary drivers of spreading information to a town or city, contributing to mobilisation in that locality.

But what about new media sources? With the rise of the internet, old media are no longer the primary means by which information travels (Schulz 1998). New media are a low-cost and very rapid means of communicating information about a protest, and this speed and ease with which information can be spread was expected to facilitate more widespread mobilisation (Bennett and Segerberg 2013; McClain Brown 2017; Youmans and York 2012). Nevertheless, a number of studies are sceptical about the role social media actually play in mobilising individuals at the micro level (Onuch 2015a; 2015b; Jost et al. 2018; Onuch, Mateo, and Waller 2021). And at the locality level, whilst new media certainly play a role in transmitting information across a country, given this speed and ease with which information travels, is hard to see how social media could account for information travelling to certain towns and cities, but not others.

What, then, of the role played by social networks, the third channel of information? Information is not only transmitted via new and old media, but also via social networks. At the micro level, this might look like an individual hearing about a protest from a co-worker, deciding to participate, and so sharing information with family and friends about the mobilisation. Or it might be an activist group organising a protest campaign and circulating information about the upcoming event via their networks of fellow activists. Certain networks in particular, such as activist groups, possess knowledge on how to effectively disseminate information about why people

should protest, when, where and how, mobilising potential participants (Edwards and McCarthy 2007; Klandermans and Oegema 1987). Information transmitted via social networks may also be perceived as more trustworthy than that received via social media or TV, for example, as it comes from a trusted individual (Born, Akkerman, and Thommes 2016). This may be one of the reasons why social networks are one of the channels of information that have been shown to mobilise protest participants at the micro level (Onuch 2015c; Kitts 2000; Schussman and Soule 2005). This sharing of information at the individual level results also results in the transmission of information across space, to new localities. Individuals who have ties to multiple localities act as bridges, facilitating the flow of information to a network in a new location (Granovetter 1983). Of course, in today's world, information is not only shared via social networks face to face, but also by people communicating with their family and friends via phone, email, messaging applications, and social media (Jost et al. 2018) – hence, using new technologies, social networks can rapidly transmit trusted information across space via existing social networks. We might thus anticipate that the structure of social networks across a country shapes the way information cascades unfold across space. Multiple overlapping networks, such as pre-existing, informal networks and activist networks, influence how information spreads across localities in information cascades (Gould 1991).

Nevertheless, social networks are important for more than just the transmission of information. This thesis proposes that social networks play a central role in all of these processes outlined above, that may shape geospatial variation in mobilisation: Social networks are crucial not only for the dissemination of information to localities, but also for the identification of favourable political opportunity structures, and the mobilisation of local resources necessary for protest,

as discussed below. And yet, the role of social networks in explaining geospatial variation in mobilisation has not been studied in great detail.

### **Social networks as central to the contentious politics literature**

So, how might social networks help account for subnational variation in where mobilisation occurs? First, social networks can help identify favourable political opportunity structures in a location, disseminating information about them, and organising campaigns around them. As discussed above, favourable political opportunity structures are a ‘necessary prerequisite’ for mobilisation – however, organisation is needed to seize these opportunities (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996, 7). It is networks of certain kinds that do this work – particularly, but not limited to, networks of activists and the social movement organisations (SMOs) which they form.

Social networks also can act as a mobilising structure: following the identification of favourable POS, social networks mobilise resources in a locality to channel the funds, manpower, skills, and human capital necessary for protest into action (Edwards and McCarthy 2007; McCarthy and Zald 1977). Resource mobilisation theory has particularly highlighted the role that certain kinds of networks – formal SMOs – play in mobilising resources: for example, SMOs provide cultural resources – specialist knowledge of tools, tactical repertoires, event templates and protest strategies (Edwards and McCarthy 2007; Marwell, Oliver, and Prael 1988). However, the nature of any social network is that individuals are tied to one another via a combination of strong and weak ties (Granovetter 1973; 1983). Via these ties, resources can be shared and transmitted. So, SMOs are not the only kind of network that can mobilise resources. For example, funds can be sourced from a wide group of

‘ordinary’ people to support a cause, or a workplace network can act as a vehicle to share information about a protest. Many different kinds of social network in a locality can contribute to the mobilisation of resources, facilitating the organisation of protest in a town or city.

Moreover, with regards to their role in the dissemination of information, social networks do more than simply act as a channel to convey information, as discussed in the previous section. Social networks also do the crucial work of framing information. Mass mobilisations do not simply emerge when groups share claims or grievances – rather activists must work to mobilise potential constituents by dynamically and interactively producing ideas and meanings, and disseminating them across a population (Benford and Snow 2000). Frames ‘select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating context, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation’ (Entman 1994, 52). This framing is important because it helps to give meaning to political opportunities in a way which inspires mobilisation in a locality (Gamson and Meyer 1996).

Thus, given the central role of social networks in mass mobilisation, this thesis primarily examines the ways in which social networks influence subnational variation in protest during mass mobilisations. Of course, there are many different kinds of social networks, from activist networks to more diffuse grassroots networks, workplace networks, and even networks relating to the government and political parties. There are also many ways in which nationwide protest, and responses to it, can vary at the subnational level.

**Regional mobilisation over time**

Sometimes countries see repeated waves of mass mobilisation, and the extent to which protests occur across the country differs each time. When a country experiences multiple mass mobilisations in close succession, what accounts for variation in the geospatial scope of protest? The first article of this thesis seeks to answer this question. Whilst some scholars might expect shifts in political opportunity structures over time to influence changes in the extent to which protest takes place across a country (Tarrow 2011; Kitschelt 1986), others researchers might emphasise that the availability of resources at different moments in time helps to explain changes in the geospatial scope of protests (Edwards and McCarthy 2007; McCarthy and Zald 1977). A another area of scholarship would suggest that the varying grievances and frames of subsequent protest waves may be more or less successful in mobilising populations across a greater geographic area (Benford and Snow 1992; 2000). Given the discussion of this literature presented above, I argue that the activity and development of activist networks may be associated with changes in the geospatial dispersion of protest over time. Much research on networks has focused on the role of SMOs in mobilisation, as seen above. Early resource mobilisation scholars who highlighted the importance of SMOs, defined them as ‘a formal or complex organisation that identifies with the goals of a social movement [...] and attempts to implement those goals’ (McCarthy and Zald 1977, 20). Subsequent scholars have argued that not only formal SMOs, but a variety of more informal activist organisations and networks can also play the role of mobilising structures (Diani and McAdam 2003; McAdam 1986; Meyer, Whittier, and Robnett 2002). Thus, in this thesis I tend to refer to the term ‘activist network’ rather than SMO. As alluded to above, activist networks are particularly important for widespread mobilisation because they possess certain kinds of resources – they have

the skills and experience to organise protest, and may be familiar with protest repertoires. They may also be practiced at identifying favourable political opportunity structures, and framing and disseminating information about them. As activist networks thus expand and develop over time with subsequent mass mobilisations, this may be associated with the expansion of protest to more localities.

### **Geospatial variation in early-rising protest**

But what about more short-term variation in protest, within a single mass mobilisation? During nationwide moments of mass mobilisation, what distinguishes early rising localities from those that do not see protest? The second article of this thesis addresses this question. Although research has variously suggested that population size, transport and communication networks, socio-economic factors, and local political context shape the geography of protest (Andrews and Biggs 2006; Lankina 2015; Brooke and Ketchley 2018), I anticipate that pre-existing social networks specifically are crucial in influencing geospatial variation in early-rising mobilisation. Pre-existing social networks help prime a population in a locality to mobilise when protest begins. They first foster communication, allowing information to flow via trusted and already established sources, paving the way for an information cascade when the moment of protest arrives. The existence of the network and its pre-established channels of communication also facilitates coordination, enabling the mobilisation of the resources needed to protest, and the organisation of joint action (Tarrow 2011). Pre-existing social networks also usually involve some form of shared discussion and activity, which can prepare people for engagement in collective action. All this means that pre-existing social networks in a locality can form a crucial foundation for mobilisation

before protest begins. The second article of this thesis therefore investigates how local, pre-existing networks account for geospatial variation in early-rising mobilisation.

### **Employment and regional protest patterns**

There is much debate about the role that one particular kind of pre-existing network, the workplace, plays in shaping mass mobilisation. While on the one hand, numerous studies have suggested that industrial workers have led mass mobilisations which have undermined authoritarian regimes (Collier 1999; Crowley 2010; Valenzuela 1989), other research finds that most protest participants are white-collar middle-class (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006; Beissinger 2013; Huntington 1991). Countries often see higher concentrations of industrial or white-collar workers in certain areas. Thus, during nationwide mass mobilisations, is subnational variation in employment patterns associated with regional variation in the occurrence of protest events? The third article of this thesis engages with this question. Those working in factories are thought to form strong workplace-based social network ties, and a strong sense of collective identity – key factors which mobilise individuals (Valenzuela 1989), and hence might contribute to more frequent mobilisation in areas with a large industrial workforce. In contrast, those employed in white collar jobs are seen as more likely to mobilise not necessarily due to network effects, but due to their improved access to resources such as financial security, free time, and education, which facilitate their protest participation (Stockemer 2014). Nevertheless, not only the type of employment, but also the type of employer may influence the link between employment patterns and protest participation: the government may use incentives and punishments to prevent workers in state-owned factors from protesting (Kim and Gandhi 2010); and white-collar state-sector employees may not mobilise, in case they lose their job or the

benefits gained from their position (Rosenfeld 2017). The third article of this thesis investigates how these dynamics are associated with regional differences in protest event frequency.

### **Local political networks and repression**

But if activist networks, pre-existing social networks, and employment networks are expected to shape geospatial variation in protest, what influences geospatial variation in the response to protest? As visible in the literature discussed above, much of the work on protest and networks has focused on the relationship between networks and mobilisation. Less attention has been paid to the relationship between networks and a crucial factor which influences mobilisation – repression. Given that there are many forms of repression available, do the repressive tactics used against protesters vary across a country? And, if repression indeed varies across a country, what explains this variation? The final article of this thesis turns to address these questions. Some scholars would argue that repression is more likely to be used in locations where perceived threats to the government are higher, for example where protesters are more numerous (Earl 2011; Hendrix and Salehyan 2017). Others would contend that protesters' tactics influence the usage of repression, and that places that see violent protest are more likely to be suppressed (Chenoweth, Perkoski, and Kang 2017; Carey 2010). Meanwhile, other areas of the literature would highlight the importance of local politics and regime type (Davenport 2007a; 2007b; Ritter 2014; Pierskalla 2010). Thus, given that networks are crucial in shaping geospatial variation in protest, I examine whether the composition of local political networks may also influence subnational variation in repression, in the final article of this thesis.

## **Conclusion**

Addressing this question, and the three preceding ones identified in this literature review, will improve not only our understanding of what shapes variation in where protest and repression occur during nationwide mass mobilisations; but also the role of social networks in shaping the processes of mobilisation and repression more broadly.

In seeking to answer what shapes differences in where protest and repression occur, during a mass mobilisation, this chapter has turned to some of the key areas of the contentious politics literature. First, I examined work on political opportunity structures, resource mobilisation, and information cascades, discussing the various ways in which the processes proposed by these theories may influence subnational variation in protest. I noted that favourable political opportunity structures are necessary in a locality to facilitate mobilisation. However, they are not sufficient – local resources are then needed in order to actually organise and hold a protest. I highlighted that beyond political opportunities and resources, the flow of information is also required, to get the word out to people who may actually mobilise. I observed that social network ties are an important means of transmitting trusted information across space. Nevertheless, I delved deeper into how social networks may shape geospatial variation in mobilisation – noting that social networks appear to play a central role in all three processes relating to opportunities, resources, and information: social (often activist) networks help to assess and identify political opportunities; social networks are then needed to mobilise resources; and social networks are a crucial channel for the broadcasting and dissemination of information across space. Thus, I anticipate that social networks are crucial in accounting for subnational

differences in mobilisation. The four articles to come in this thesis will examine in more detail the ways in which social networks shape different elements of geospatial variation associated with mass mobilisation: variation in where protest takes place over time; variation in early-rising mobilisation; how regional employment patterns are associated with protest event frequency; and what shapes differences in the usage of repression across space. In addressing these different elements, I will explore the role of four kinds of social networks: activist networks, broader pre-existing social networks, workplace networks, and political networks.

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**‘Together we are many’: Activist networks and regional protest in  
Ukraine 1990-2004**

Word count: 9129 (excluding references)

**Abstract**

When a country sees multiple mass mobilisations over time, what accounts for variation in where protest occurs across the different protest waves? This article examines the case of mass protests in Ukraine 1990-2004, exploring how the emergence and development of activist networks may align with changes in the geospatial dispersion of protest over time. It draws on archives and interviews with activists made available by The Three Revolutions Project, and newspaper reports from *Ukrainska Pravda*, *Kommersant* and *Radio Svoboda*, utilising protest event analysis, along with QGIS software to visually represent findings. The article presents novel empirical findings on the geospatial scope of events across Ukraine from 1990 onwards, and demonstrates some of the ways in which regional activist networks expanded, developed, and sought cross-cleavage collaboration, aiming to facilitate increasing nationwide mobilisation.

**Introduction**

When a country sees multiple mass mobilisations in close succession, what accounts for variation in the geospatial scope of protest? When a new protest wave sees mobilisation occur in different localities than the preceding one, what factors are at play? Proponents of political opportunity structure theory might argue that the expansion or contraction of political opportunities underpin changes in the extent to which protest occurs throughout a country (Tarrow 2011; Kitschelt 1986). Other research might suggest that the availability of resources at different moments in time helps to explain changes in the geospatial scope of protests (Edwards and McCarthy 2007; McCarthy and Zald 1977). Another area of scholarship would highlight the role of grievances and frames in mobilising populations across a greater or lesser

geographic area (Benford and Snow 1992; 2000). Perhaps others still would centre the role of activist social networks in shaping the geospatial scope of mobilisation (Gould 1991; 1993). This article examines the case of mass protests in Ukraine 1990-2004, exploring how the emergence and development of activist networks may align with changes in the geospatial dispersion of protest over time. The aim of this article is not to prove the dominance of one theory over another, but rather to improve our understanding of how geospatial changes in protest over time are associated with the activity of activist networks.

There have been three key moments of mass mobilisation between the beginning of Ukraine's departure from the Soviet Union, and the advent of the Euromaidan protests in 2013: the 1990 'Revolution on Granite', the 2000-2001 'Ukraine Without Kuchma' protests, and the 2004 'Orange Revolution'. Examining the geospatial shifts in protest over these three protest waves allows us to unpick some of the ways in which activist networks facilitate the expansion of protest across space, contributing to the sociological literature. This article also contributes to scholarship on these Ukrainian protests specifically: whilst scholars such as Onuch (2014a; 2017; 2019), Beissinger (2007; 2011; 2013), Kuzio (2007; 2005), and Wilson (2005), amongst others, have done much to further our understanding of these mass mobilisations, there is still no detailed analysis of the regional aspect of these protests<sup>14</sup>.

This article seeks to build on this research by investigating where protest took place beyond Kyiv, and the role played by activist networks, in Ukraine from 1990-2004. It draws on archives and interviews with activists made available by The Three

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<sup>14</sup> Onuch has identified some regional trends.

Revolutions (3R) Project (Kisly 2016; The 3R Project 2020), and newspaper reports from *Ukrainska Pravda*, *Kommersant* and *Radio Svoboda*, utilising protest event analysis, along with QGIS software to visually represent findings. This paper does not aspire to conduct comprehensive protest event analysis for the three mass mobilisations, but rather seeks to enhance our understanding of the regional dimensions of these protests, and the role played by activist networks. Thus, this article serves three aims: firstly, to identify regional patterns of protest during moments of mass mobilisation in Ukraine; secondly, to examine how activist networks may contribute to geospatial shifts in protest across space over time; and third, to provide valuable context for studies of more recent mass mobilisations in Ukraine, including the Euromaidan and ongoing anti-war mobilisation at the time of writing. It presents novel empirical findings on the geospatial scope of events across the country from 1990 onwards, and demonstrates some of the ways in which regional activist networks expanded, developed, and sought cross-cleavage collaboration, aiming to facilitate increasing nationwide mobilisation.

However, it is important to acknowledge two ways in which these findings are limited. First, my findings on the geospatial scope of the protest waves may be constrained by my data sources. The arrival of the internet and development of the Ukrainian media landscape mean that protest events were better reported over time. Hence, my claims about the geospatial extent of these protests should be interpreted with caution, and ideally expanded upon with analysis of additional data sources. Second, this article does not make causal claims about the relationship between activist networks and geographically diffuse protest. Many other factors may also have influenced protest over time, such as increased internet and mobile phone usage, and demographic changes. Nevertheless, this article contributes to the literature on mass

mobilisation by highlighting the role of activist networks over time, and enhancing our knowledge on the history of protest in Ukraine.

In the sections that follow, I first outline the case of Ukraine and the three mass mobilisations to be compared, and then develop a theoretical framework for my study, drawing on the contentious politics literature. I briefly outline my methodological approach, and then present my findings.

### **The case of Ukraine: a protesting nation**

Ukraine provides a country context in which there have been multiple waves of mass mobilisation over a 30-year period. Scholars such as Onuch (2021c) and those participating in the Three Revolutions Project (The 3R Project 2020; Kowal et al. 2019; Kowal 2019) have highlighted key moments of mass mobilisation that represented nationwide protest engagement by ordinary citizens. These mass mobilisations include the 1990 Revolution on Granite, the 2000-2001 Ukraine Without Kuchma Protests, and the 2004 Orange Revolution. All of these moments of mass mobilisation predominately featured mass protests in the capital. However, large regional centres were also reported to have experienced mass protest events. As I will show in what follows, the original geospatial scope of protest was much larger than initially expected. I will also demonstrate that the geospatial distribution of protest varied between the mass mobilisations. Whilst some localities protested repeatedly, others only mobilised in later protest waves. Understanding these past mass mobilisations and what shaped variation in their geospatial scope will help us better understand more recent instances of nationwide mobilisation in the country, such as the 2013-14 Euromaidan protests, and the ongoing civil resistance in response to full-

scale Russian invasion.<sup>15</sup> Below I will provide some context for each of the mobilisations in turn. Let us begin by looking to the Revolution on Granite of 1990.

### *The Revolution on Granite*

The first of these mass protests, the Revolution on Granite (RoG) of September to October 1990, was one of a wave of pro-independence protest movements from 1989-1991 in the wider Soviet Union (Onuch 2017). Amongst Soviet republics, Ukrainian dissidents had experienced the harshest repression and many were only released from Gulags, prisons, and psychiatric hospitals from 1987 onwards (Onuch 2019; Bilocerkowycz 1988). Following these releases, old dissident organisations resumed their activities and new ones formed, agitating on issues ranging from human rights, to economic reform, and Ukrainian independence (Marples 2019). Dozens of these dissident and informal organisations worked together to challenge the Communist party in Spring 1990, presenting as the ‘Democratic Bloc’ and winning 108 out of 450 seats in parliament (Marples 2019). In July 1990, the newly-elected parliament declared Ukrainian sovereignty, giving the Ukrainian Soviet Republic’s laws precedence over USSR laws, and the Republic control over its army, national bank, and currency (Verhovna Rada 1990; The Ukrainian Weekly 1990). This set the stage for the RoG: in the months that followed, dissidents, activists and students began to call for the declaration of sovereignty to be enshrined in law, alongside steps to secure Ukraine’s full independence – including an end to military service outside Ukraine, the de-politicisation of the police, armed, and security forces, and particularly the non-signing of a new Union Treaty with the USSR<sup>16</sup> (Onuch 2017; Mykhelson 2011).

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<sup>15</sup> Whilst not a protest wave per se, this is an important instance of nationwide mobilisation

<sup>16</sup> A new Union Treaty would confirm Ukraine’s continued membership of the USSR as the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

Protests against a new Union Treaty began to build through September 1990, largely co-ordinated or inspired by the work of *Rukh* (Kisly 2016). *Rukh* (Ukrainian for movement) was a civic and political organisation founded in 1989, with the aim of securing an independent and democratic Ukraine (Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group 2006). These events culminated in a massive march in Kyiv on 30 September 1990, followed by the beginning of student hunger strikes on 2 October on Kyiv's central square, now known as *Maidan Nezalezhnosti* (Onuch 2017). These protests became known as the Revolution on Granite, named after the granite of the square. For 16 days, hunger strikes continued in Kyiv alongside protests of solidarity in other parts of Ukraine (Kisly 2016). On 17 October the government agreed to the students' key demands, bringing the RoG to an end (Onuch 2017). The protests played an important role in helping Ukraine move along the path to full independence, declared in 1991.

The next wave of protests to occur in Ukraine were the miners' strikes of the early nineties, which peaked in 1993 as over 1 million workers, primarily miners from the Donbas region, went on strike over hyperinflation, unpaid wages, and unmet expectations about Ukrainian independence (Makarenko 2016; Crowley 2010). These protests were significant in size and succeeded in securing early elections (Crowley 2010). However, the miners' protests differed from other large mobilisations before and after as they focused on the grievances of a specific group of actors (industrial workers), relied on strikes, and were mostly concentrated in eastern Ukraine – thus they will not be studied in this article.

### ***Ukraine Without Kuchma***

The subsequent wave of mass mobilisation which was more all-national in character was the 2000-2001 ‘Ukraine Without Kuchma’ (*Ukrayina bez Kuchmy* or UBK) protests. President Kuchma had just won a second term in the 1999 Presidential elections (Central Election Committee 2000), but his return to office did not enjoy an auspicious start. Leaks implicating President Kuchma in the persecution of his opposition – including the murder of journalist Georgiy Gongadze, election falsification, and high-level corruption led to protests calling for his resignation (Wilson 2005; Melkozerova 2019; Kuzio 2007). Tents were set up in Kyiv on 15 December 2000, marking the beginning of a wave of ‘Ukraine Without Kuchma’ protests across Ukraine, which lasted until the following spring (Mykhelson 2011). Actors from across the political spectrum mobilised, united by a desire to unseat Kuchma (Onuch 2015a; 2021c). The protests did not succeed in removing Kuchma, but they laid important groundwork for mass protests several years later, in response to the election of his successor.

### ***The Orange Revolution***

Dissatisfaction with Kuchma’s regime only grew following UBK, accompanied by the sense that politicians were growing wealthy at ordinary Ukrainians’ expense (Onuch 2014a). Kuchma’s chosen successor, his Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich, was also implicated in corruption, and tied to the Donetsk oligarchic group (Onuch 2014a; Kuzio 2005). When in the run up to the elections it became clear that Yanukovich was unlikely to defeat his main rival – the charismatic and pro-European Yushchenko – the Kuchma regime committed election fraud on a massive scale (Kuzio 2005; L. Way 2005). Activists and the opposition had anticipated that Kuchma would use fraud to secure his successor’s victory, and began planning, training, and preparing for protests

months in advance (Onuch 2014). When the election results declared a victory for Yanukovych on 22 November 2004, these networks mobilised up to 2 million citizens in support of Yushchenko, in what became known as the Orange Revolution (Onuch 2014a; White and McAllister 2009). Protesters decried the fraudulent victory of Yanukovych, and successfully demanded fresh, fair elections, securing the challenger Yushchenko's victory in new elections on 27 December 2004 (Wilson 2005).

### *Regional dimension of the protest waves*

Many accounts of all three of these mass mobilisations focus on events in Ukraine's capital. Studies of the Revolution on Granite are few, and focus mainly on the hunger strikes in Kyiv (Onuch 2017; 2019). Research on Ukraine Without Kuchma also concentrates on Kyiv, where the largest protest events and the greatest repression took place (Kuzio 2007; Mykhelson 2011). And, many popular accounts of the Orange Revolution such as Wilson (2005) focus on the capital, and as a result, the casual observer could be forgiven for thinking that mobilisation only took place in Kyiv. Nevertheless, various sources have hinted at the regional dimensions of all these protests: Telegrams from across Ukraine sent to participants of the RoG demonstrate nationwide support (MAPA 2022); media reports of UBK suggests that when protests halted in Kyiv, mobilisation continued elsewhere (Ukrainska Pravda 2001d; 2001e; 2001f); and we know that half of Orange Revolution protesters originated from east, central and southern Ukraine (ESS 2004; Beissinger 2011). This article seeks to conduct preliminary mapping of where protests took place across Ukraine during these three mass mobilisations, and explore what may explain any changes in their geographic scope. Below I turn to the literature to examine precisely what factors may account for shifts in the geography of protests over time.

**Theoretical Framework: From opportunities, resources, and frames, to networks**

What might account for geospatial shifts in mobilisation over subsequent protest waves in a country? This question addresses not processes of diffusion precisely, but rather the continuities across and differences between waves of protests in the same country.

***Political opportunities***

Scholars of political opportunity structures would argue that it is differences in the available political opportunities of the three mobilisations which may account for differences in the geospatial scope of protest. Favourable political opportunities – such as the emergence of elite divisions and allies, and the opening up of a political regime – are thought to facilitate mobilisation by reducing the costs and increasing the possible benefits associated with collective action (Tarrow 2011; Kitschelt 1986). For example, falsified elections such as those which triggered the Orange Revolution have been identified as an important catalyst of mass protest, capable of empowering individuals to overcome the collective action problem (Tucker 2007). Therefore, we might expect mobilisation to be more widespread in the Orange Revolution than other protest waves.

***Frames and grievances***

Nevertheless, other scholars would argue that the grievances and frames of a protest are key in facilitating the expansion of protest across space (Benford and Snow 1992). In order to mobilise, people in a locality need to feel discontented about something – a grievance – and also feel that by engaging in collective action they can improve the

situation (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996). Frames are used to help create consensus around these grievances, and guide action (Benford and Snow 2000). These grievances and frames are an important factor in facilitating widespread mobilisation, as, particularly when they have cross-cleavage appeal, they can motivate citizens to mobilise across a country. Thus, if the grievances and frames of the different Ukrainian mass mobilisations varied in the extent of their nationwide appeal, this may help explain the shifts in the extent of nationwide mobilisation between the different protests.

### *Resources*

Other researchers would acknowledge that grievances, frames, and political opportunities are important in motivating individuals to mobilise across multiple localities, but highlight that mobilisation in itself is not possible without available resources. In order to stage a nationwide mobilisation, various forms of resources are needed: moral, cultural, social-organisational, human, and material (Edwards and McCarthy 2007). Without some configuration of these resources – including but not limited to legitimacy, organisational experience, equipment and funds, and labour – no matter how motivating a grievance, or how favourable the political opportunities, nationwide protest is impossible.

### *Networks*

Whilst these resources, political opportunities, and grievances and frames are undoubtedly vital elements which contribute to shifts in the geospatial scope of mobilisation over time, I propose that the development and expansion of activist networks across a country are crucial. Groups of activists and social movement

organisations (SMOs) are located in different towns and cities, and connections between them form networks which span across countries (Newman 2006; Porter, Onnela, and Mucha 2009; Diani and McAdam 2003). These networks play a central role in the other processes outlined above; some scholars view social networks as a resource (Edwards and McCarthy 2007), but these networks also play an important role in mobilising other resources, and channel funds, manpower, skills and human capital into action (Edwards and McCarthy 2007; McCarthy and Zald 1977). Networks provide access to resources, including information, from across a wider population (Granovetter 1983). Activist networks also do the important work of identifying favourable political opportunities, disseminating information about them, and organising campaigns around them, such as the Ukrainian activists who prepared in advance of the 2004 elections. Political opportunities are a ‘necessary prerequisite’ for mobilisation, but organisation is needed to seize these opportunities (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996, 7). Relatedly, grievances do not frame themselves; it is activists who do the work of framing grievances so that they will have wide appeal (Benford and Snow 2000). Mass mobilisations do not simply emerge when groups share claims or grievances – rather activists and SMOs must work to mobilise potential constituents by dynamically and interactively producing ideas and meanings, and disseminating them across a population (Benford and Snow 1992).

These activist networks are not static structures, but rather can expand and contract over time (Diani and McAdam 2003; van Duijn, van Busschbach, and Snijders 1999). New bridges can connect the network to a new group of activists, in new localities, or the loss of certain nodes can cause a network to shrink, and lose influence in a location (Granovetter 1983). Connections between actors in different locations are created by individuals who are members of multiple groups (Gould

1991), connecting protesters across space. All the above therefore leads me to hypothesise that, in the case of Ukraine, as the engagement and activity of activist networks changed over time, this shaped shifts in the geospatial extent of protest, across subsequent protest waves.

## **Methodology**

In order to test the above hypothesis, I employ a within-case, qualitative comparison of three mass mobilisations in Ukraine: the 1990 Revolution on Granite, the 2000-2001 Ukraine Without Kuchma protests, and the 2004 Orange Revolution.

I use protest event analysis to identify where and when protest events took place throughout Ukraine during each of these mobilisations, utilising archives and interviews with activists made available by The 3R Project (Kisly 2016; The 3R Project 2020), and newspaper reports from *Ukrainska Pravda*, *Korrespondent.net*, and *Radio Svoboda*. I present my results in map form, using QGIS software. There are many difficulties associated with conducting protest event analysis for mobilisation at the regional level, as such events tend to be under-reported (Hutter 2014). However, the chosen sources represent the best available data on these three protest waves for systematic data collection. For the RoG, as Soviet news outlets at the time were not accurately covering the protests, I primarily rely on newswires from the civic organisation *Rukh*, and KGB reports and interviews from the 3R Project archives. News reports from *Ukrainska Pravda* are the primary source for protest events for Ukraine Without Kuchma and the Orange Revolution. This online newspaper, one of the most trusted news sources in Ukraine, was founded in April 2000 by dissident journalist, Georgiy Gongadze, with an explicit focus on Ukrainian politics (Baysha and Hallahan 2004). Revelations about President Kuchma's involvement in

Gongadze's murder were one of the triggers for the UBK protests, and so the outlet had a keen interest in closely covering UBK and the subsequent Orange Revolution, which sought to prevent the election of Kuchma's hand-picked successor. Data from *Ukrainska Pravda* is supplemented by additional news roundups of the protests by *Korrespondent.net*, a news website launched in 2000, and *Radio Svoboda*, a pro-democracy news website under the umbrella of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, which published an online 'chronicle' of the Orange Revolution. As this article seeks to explore what shapes the geospatial scope of protest, my data collection focuses on the date and location of protest events, rather than numbers of protest participants. Information on protest size is collected where available, to enrich my analysis, but it is not the primary variable of interest as my theoretical focus is protest location, not protest intensity or participation.

Due to the small number of sources and limited data available, there will be protest events missing from my dataset. Still, this article represents, to the best of my knowledge, the most systematic analysis of nationwide protest during these three mass mobilisations. Nevertheless, I must highlight that my findings on the geospatial scope of the protests are constrained by my data sources. Coverage of the protests is likely to have improved over time, with reporting on the RoG in particular restricted by Soviet media censorship, and the absence of the internet. I have attempted to overcome these limitations by relying on activist news wires, activist interviews, and KGB reports<sup>17</sup>, for my RoG data. However, my findings on regional protests should be interpreted with caution, as earlier events may be under-represented. Future analysis of additional data sources can build upon the contribution made by my research.

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<sup>17</sup> All made available by the 3R Project

In addition to collecting data on where and when protest takes place, during my protest event analysis, I also identify activist networks involved in the mobilisations. To do this, I construct a timeline of events based on my PEA data, and systematically note all actors who are listed in my sources as participating in or organising protests in different localities. I also pay particular attention to any reported incidents of separate groups collaborating to jointly organise protest events. I then utilise qualitative analysis, drawing on process tracing techniques (Beach 2019), to examine in greater detail the changes and continuities in the activist networks involved in mobilisation across the three protests.

It is important to note that, due to the nature of these research methods and sources, this article does not attempt to capture the ways in which factors other than activist networks may have influenced changes in the geospatial dispersion of protest between the three protest waves. And, whilst I identify possible mechanisms of effect, the findings presented below relate to correlation between the development of activist networks and changes in the geospatial scope of protests, not a causal relationship. Other factors changing over time may have also influenced these shifts, for example the arrival of mobile phones and the internet, which can be powerful tools for protesters (Bennett and Segerberg 2013; Neumayer and Stald 2014), or demographic changes, such as a growing middle class and declining industrial sector (Huntington 1991; Acemoglu and Robinson 2006). This article focuses specifically on activist networks, and as such does not aim to assess the influence of these other factors. My findings are presented below.

## **Results**

### ***The changing scope of mobilisation***

My findings suggest that over the course of the three mass mobilisations, the extent of geospatial mobilisation shifted. As visible in Figure 1, during the RoG, although protests took place across the country, most mobilisation appears to have occurred in west Ukraine, and the westernmost oblasts of central Ukraine. During UBK (see Figure 2), protests were still nationwide but took place in fewer localities overall. However, protests were held in more oblast (regional) capitals in central Ukraine, such as Cherkasy and Kirovohrad. Figure 3 shows that during the Orange Revolution there was more widespread and larger mobilisation across all macro-regions and oblasts, compared to the previous two protests. Across all the mass mobilisations, oblast capitals in the west and central macro-regions tended to mobilise more frequently and on a larger scale than those in the south and east – even though, aside from Lviv, the ten most populous cities are situated in the latter regions (City Population 2020). Nevertheless, over time we see Kharkiv, Odesa and Dnipro in particular emerging as key sites of contention in the south and east, amidst comparatively low mobilisation in other cities in these macro-regions. Future research is needed to test the robustness of these findings, because as discussed above, the reporting of protests may have improved over time. Nevertheless, these results represent the first scholarly attempt to map these findings, represented visually in the maps below (the mapping of protest events via type are presented in Appendix 1 of this article).

But what explains the apparent geographic shifts in the scope of these protests over time? My analysis of the actors and networks involved suggests that as anticipated, the engagement and activity of activist networks over time may align with the changes in the dispersion of protest across space.

Figure 1 Locations of protest events during the Revolution on Granite (Source: author)

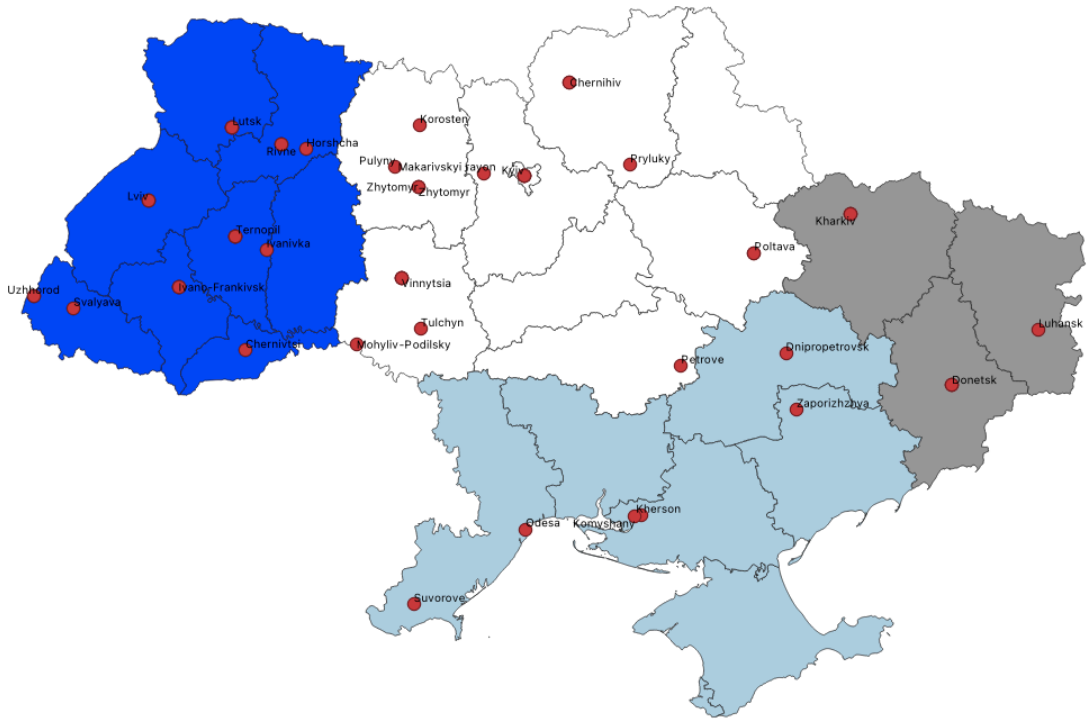


Figure 2 Location of protest events during UBK (Source: author)

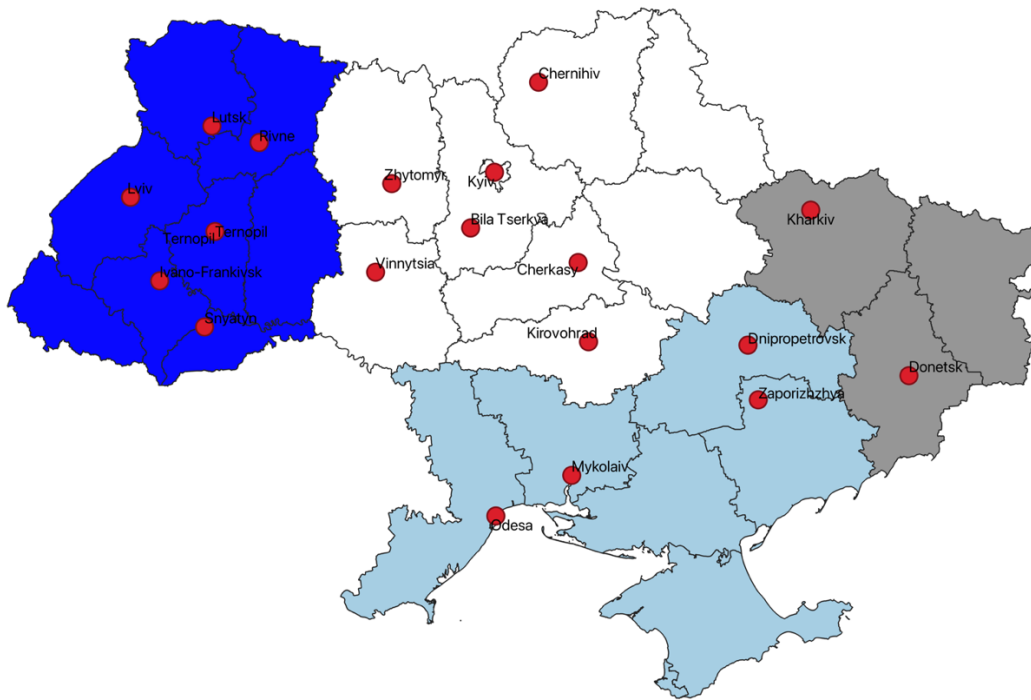
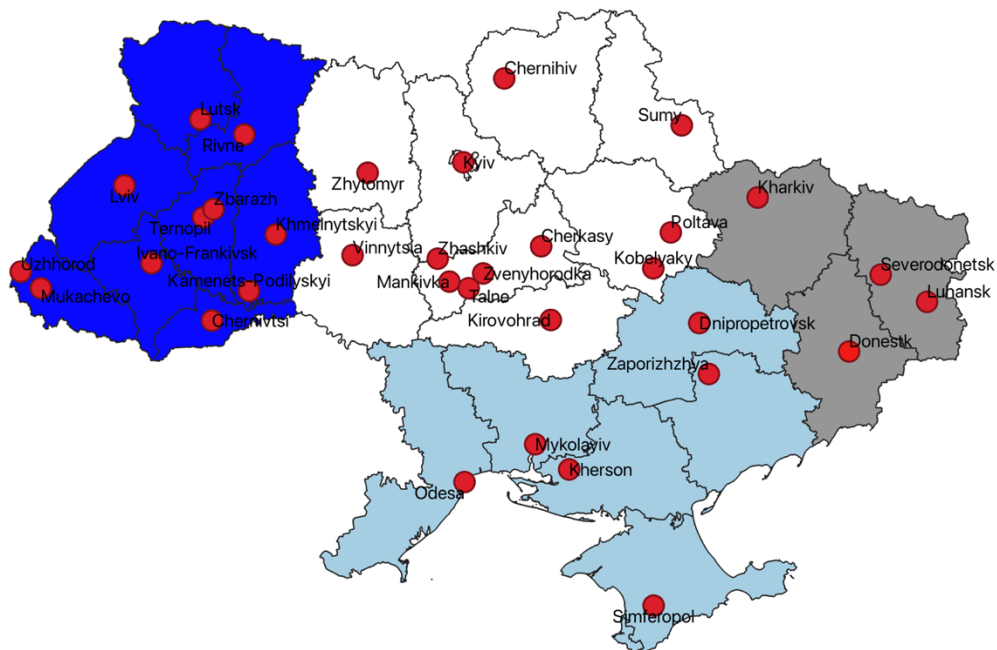


Figure 3 Locations of protest events during the Orange Revolution (Source: author)



### *The Revolution on Granite: National-democratic networks and developing student collaboration*

During the Revolution on Granite, there was a deliberate effort by student and activist networks to mobilise support across Ukraine's regions. National-liberation, pro-democracy civic and dissident organisations played a key role in organising protest events in late September 1990, using their networks to mobilise and prime the regions for later, large-scale protest. Meetings and rallies against the Union Treaty, overseas military service, and the politicisation of the security services were held throughout Ukraine. The extent and size of protest events varied: protests were widespread in west Ukraine, extending to smaller towns and villages; in central Ukraine, most regional capitals mobilised<sup>18</sup>; in the south, smaller protests took place in Odesa, Mykolaiv,

18 In Vinnytsia, Rukh organised at least two rallies; in Zhytomyr, machine gun factory workers went on strike; in Poltava, the Ukrainian Language Society held a conference; and in Kirovohrad, over a thousand residents signed a petition against the Union treaty (Rukh 1990a;

Kherson and Dnipro<sup>19</sup>; and in the east a rally was held in Kharkiv and a picket in Donetsk (Rukh 1990a; 1990e). My analysis reveals that most of these events were organised by groups such as *Rukh*, the Society of Ukrainian Language, or the Ukrainian Republican party<sup>20</sup>. Although some of these organisations had networks of local branches across the country, many of them originated from and had a stronger presence in western and central Ukraine (Marples 2019; Berezin 2018). This may in part account for the lower levels of mobilisation in southern and eastern Ukraine. Where protests did take place in these regions, workers and unions may have played more of a role, raising grievances over wages or workplace closures alongside those against the Union Treaty (Rukh 1990b; 1990e). These regional events laid the groundwork for an All-Ukrainian rally in Kyiv on 30 September 1990 attended by 100,000 protesters who had travelled from across the country (Rukh 1990f).

As protests moved into their second phase, in October, student networks became crucially important. The Lviv and Kyiv Student Brotherhood organisations lead the organisation of student hunger strikes<sup>21</sup> (Petrenko 2017). On 2 October 1990, three hundred students from across Ukraine took to the central square in Kyiv to pitch tents, and one hundred began a hunger strike (Rukh 1990h)<sup>22</sup>. Youth in cities across Ukraine been actively collaborating and preparing in the preceding weeks and months:

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1990d; 1990b). Rallies or pickets took place in smaller towns such as Petrove (Kirovohrad oblast), Chernovoarmiisk and Korosten (Zhytomyr oblast), and Pryluky (Chernihiv oblast), which saw up to 5000 locals participate (Rukh 1990e; 1990d)

19 Local Rukh groups organised rallies or pickets in Odesa, Mykolaiv, and Kherson, and metro construction workers went on strike in Dnipro (Rukh 1990c; 1990b). In contrast to other parts of Ukraine, some southern protest events targeted additional grievances besides the Union Treaty, relating to workers' rights. For example, Dnipro metro workers also demanded a wage rise (Rukh 1990b).

20 Sometimes these organisations jointly arranged and participated in events, such as a picket of the Donetsk Regional Council and Communist Party Headquarters (Rukh 1990e).

21 According to one account, hunger strikes were initially organised by the Lviv Student Brotherhood, who persuaded the initially reluctant Kyiv Student Brotherhood to join (Petrenko 2017).

22 Initial hunger strikers included students from Lviv, Drohobych, Ivano-Frankivsk, Zaporizhzhya, Luhansk, Vinnytsia, Dnipro, Dniprodzerzhinsk, and Sumy (Rukh 1990h). In the next few days were joined by students from Rivne, Chernihiv, Zhytomyr, Kerch, Mykolaiv, Kherson, Khmelnytsky, and Kamenets-Podilsky (Kozak 1990).

student activists had visited each other in Lviv, Odesa, Donetsk, and Kyiv (Kovalyk 2017). This activity built on student organisation emerging nationwide in the late eighties, which united under umbrella organisations such as the Ukrainian Student Union, founded in 1989 (Kovalyk 2017; Petrenko 2017; Studway 2020). As these student networks mobilised in early October, numbers in Kyiv swelled as students from across Ukraine travelled to the capital to join the hunger strike or show support (Burmaka 2018; Berezin 2018). Into the second week of October, students began to send representatives to towns in the south and east, to disseminate information and rally greater support (Khymych and Chayka 2010). Meanwhile, following rumours about the destruction of the tent camp, on 8 October, ten thousand Kyivites turned out to protect the students (Rukh 1990i). These two factors corresponded with and potentially contributed to an expansion in the geography of the protests; subsequent rallies proliferated in other localities, particularly in cities both large and small in central and western Ukraine.<sup>23</sup> Mobilisation was not entirely absent in the east either, with young people in Donetsk forming a human chain and hunger strike on Lenin square (Rukh 1990m). Overall, 100,000 students mobilised, an estimated twenty percent of Ukraine's student population (Ostrovskyi and Chernenko 2000), demonstrating the power of these student networks.

The student and dissident leaders believed in the importance of promoting cross-cleavage collaboration. They made a concerted effort to mobilise workers and miners in south and east Ukraine, to demonstrate nationwide support for the cause and increase pressure on the government (Khmara 2018; Volynko 2017; Kanafotskyi

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<sup>23</sup> In Ternopil, Lviv, and Vinnytsia students began strikes. Rallies were also held across multiple cities, including smaller ones such as Mohyliv-Podilsky and Tulchyn, both in Vinnytsia oblast (Rukh 1990m; 1990l). Hunger strikes also spread to West and Central Ukraine (Rukh 1990j; 1990k)

2018). Miners had engaged in mass strikes in summer 1989 and 1990,<sup>24</sup> and represented an organised and powerful force for political influence. Student activists reached out to Trade Unions (Kanafotskyi 2018) and travelled to Donetsk to make contact with Miners' Unions (Volynko 2017). Well-known dissidents such as Stepan Khmara also travelled to eastern and southern cities<sup>25</sup> to encourage businesses, workers and miners to support the student action (Khmara 2018). However, these attempts to collaborate with miners and other workers were not entirely successful, with interference by the authorities preventing a formal association between RoG activists and the Donetsk Strike Committee (Volynko 2017). During the 1 October national strike against the Union Treaty, strikes and rallies took place across the country, but west Ukrainian workers and businesses showed the strongest support, with over 90% of businesses in Ternopil and 65-70% in Lviv reported on strike (Rukh 1990g; 1990h). In contrast, there was no widespread mobilisation of workers or miners in the south or east. Nevertheless, there were some expressions of support – the leaders of the Donetsk miners' strikes sent a telegram to Kyiv expressing their solidarity with the students (Kowal et al. 2019). And, a RoG student leader, Oles Doniy, claims that the mounting threat of factory and transport workers mobilising in mid-October contributed to the government giving in to the students' demands (Khymych and Chayka 2010). While cross-cleavage collaboration was limited, it may have borne some fruit.

On 17 October 1990, as the student hunger strikers weakened, and widespread mobilisation was occurring, particularly in western Ukraine,<sup>26</sup> student protesters in

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24 In response to the deteriorating economic situation, poor working conditions, and a lack of investment, miners in the Ukrainian Donbas held mass strikes. For more, see Marples (1991).

25 Donetsk, Dnipro, Kharkiv, Zaporizhzhya.

26 By the final 48 hours of the protests, mobilisation was taking place across the country, particularly in western Ukraine which was witnessing school and universities strikes, rallies, and hunger strikes. Students from all universities and schools began to strike in Ivano-Frankivsk,

Kyiv reached a compromise with the government and ended their hunger strike, claiming victory and ending the RoG (Rukh 1990p). Student activists and dissident networks had sought to facilitate mobilisation in multiple locations throughout Ukraine, with their networks strongest in western regions. This may help explain why protest was more widespread there, despite the fact that there were more students in south and eastern Ukraine (Bilenky 2021). Aware of their limitations, these networks actively sought out cross-cleavage and cross-national collaboration, with limited success. While the protests did get the government to agree to some key demands, the extent of this nationwide mobilisation was nevertheless limited. For more widespread protest, greater cross-cleavage and cross-national collaboration would be needed.

***Ukraine Without Kuchma: A broad spectrum of party networks collaborate***

During the Ukraine Without Kuchma protests, western Ukraine remained the region with the largest and most frequent protest events<sup>27</sup>. Mobilisation occurred throughout Ukraine once again, this time with new oblast capitals mobilising in the centre of the country – although overall protests took places in fewer localities than during the RoG. A broad spectrum of political parties and civic and social movement organisations, united by a desire to unseat Kuchma, collaborated to mobilise their supporters (Ukrainska Pravda 2001f; 2001d; 2001e). These included left-wing Communist and Socialist parties; national democratic and centre-right parties such as the Ukraine

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along with universities in Chernivtsi, Uzhhorod, and Lutsk; citizens in Lutsk and Rivne held rallies; and eight protesters in Chernihiv, 200 students in Ternopil, and students and staff at Lviv Medical Institute joined hunger strikes. (Rukh 1990n; 1990o). In the central Ukraine, university strikes occurred in Vinnytsia, and rallies and hunger strikes in Poltava (Rukh 1990n; 1990o). Mobilisation in the east and south was limited, with the exception of a student strike in Kharkiv and student hunger strike in Zaporizhzhya (Rukh 1990n; 1990o)

<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, voting patterns from the election do not tidily map on to the geography of the protests – otherwise, we would expect to see the majority of mobilisation in central and south Ukraine, and very few protest events in the west (Central Election Committee 2000). In actuality, mobilisation was less widespread in southern and eastern oblasts, although the large cities of Kharkiv and Dnipro saw repeated protest events (despite police interference and the threat of repression).

Republican party, Ukraine Conservative Republican party, *Rukh*<sup>28</sup>, Ukrainian Christian-Democratic Party, *Sobor*, and *Batkivshchyna*; and far-right groups such as *Tryzub* and the UNA-UNSO (Ukrainska Pravda 2001f; 2001d; 2001e). Thus, across Ukraine, an unlikely combination of students, pensioners, liberals, intelligentsia, communists, socialists, and nationalists all participated under the same umbrella of UBK, united perhaps only by their desire to see Kuchma resign.

This extensive network of organisations involved in UBK may have contributed to the diffusion of protest events beyond Kyiv, as there was no single party or organisation which enjoyed widespread support across all Ukraine's regions. Cross-cleavage collaboration worked to mobilise support across the country: Left-wing parties and their supporters appear to be more involved in organising and participating in protest events in south, central and east Ukraine compared to west Ukraine, where national democratic parties and right-wing groups dominated (Ukrainska Pravda 2000a; 2001c; 2001e). However, this variation must not be overstated, as cross-cleavage collaboration also occurred within individual cities as a mix of parties and their supporters collaborated. Notable examples include Kharkiv, where socialists, UNA-UNSO (right wing) party members, and independent activists went on hunger strike together (Ukrainska Pravda 2001e), and Odesa, where activists from the Communist and Socialist Parties, the Union of Soviet Officers, the Green Party, and national-democratic parties and civic organisations jointly participated in a rally and picket on 6 February 2001 (Ukrainska Pravda 2001j). However, whilst potentially contributing to the dissemination of protest across Ukraine, this broad cross-cleavage coalition also had its disadvantages.

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<sup>28</sup> The civic organisation formed a political party in 1990 (Onuch 2019)

Onuch (2021c) has noted that different groups organising the protests did not collaborate as well as in 1990, and were divided by ideology and personality clashes amongst the various leaders. UBK began on 15 December 2000, and initially protest events outside of Kyiv were few, and small in size<sup>29</sup>. The Kyiv tent camp was dismantled after a court ruling on 23 December (Ukrainska Pravda 2000a). From 14 January, the different groups attempted to better coordinate the ‘second wave’ of protests, pooling their resources (Onuch 2021c), and protest events in the regions started attracting larger numbers, and new locations. Before mid-January, the majority of tent camps and rallies beyond Kyiv were small, largely comprising of opposition party members and dedicated activists. Mobilisation primarily took place in central Ukraine, where opposition to Kuchma during the elections had been strongest<sup>30</sup>. From mid-January, when coordination improved, protest events in the regions started attracting larger numbers, and occurring in more locations. The largest rallies were in central and west Ukraine, with meetings of around 4000 protesters in Cherkasy and Ternopil (Ukrainska Pravda 2001e).<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that repression may have also played a part in this expansion of protest – the violent dispersal of Kharkiv’s tent camp on 11 January also appeared to spur the mobilisation of tent camps in more cities in west and southern Ukraine (Ukrainska Pravda 2001b)<sup>32</sup>. Into February, we can also see that a complex combination of cooperation, repression,

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29 The initial phase of the Kyiv tent camp lasted from 15-23 December 2000. Events were limited to a handful of cities scattered across west, central and south Ukraine, with UBK tents erected in Lviv, Bila Tserkva, Cherkasy, and Mykolaiv (Ukrainska Pravda 2000b; 2000c; 2001a). Rallies of several hundred took place in Lviv, and around one thousand protesters gathered in Dnipro on 23 December.

30 Whilst UBK tents stood in the centre in the regional capitals of Vinnytsia, Cherkasy, Chernihiv, and Zhytomyr, they were only erected in Lviv in west Ukraine; in Kharkiv in the east; and Mykolaiv in the south (Ukrainska Pravda 2001a; 2001c; 2001b).

31 There was also much variation within some macro-regions. For example, in the south 1000 gathered on 27 January 2001 in Dnipro despite a ban on demonstrations, but little mobilisation was reported elsewhere (Ukrainska Pravda 2001h). Meanwhile in east Ukraine demonstrations of over 100 activists took place regularly in Kharkiv, with smaller protest actions in Donetsk, and nothing reported in Luhansk (Ukrainska Pravda 2001f; 2001g; 2001d).

32 In the following days, protesters attempted to erect tent camps in other cities including Rivne and Ivano-Frankivsk in the west, and Dnipro and Zaporizhzhya in the South, but they were often hindered by the police (Ukrainska Pravda 2001b; 2001c; 2001a)

and challenges in collaborating across diverse groups, corresponded with shifts in the geospatial extent of protest.

In February 2001, the protest coordinators in Kyiv launched a conscious effort to unite activists from across the country in large protests in the capital (Ukrainska Pravda 2001i; 2001k), similar to the 30 September RoG march. Tent camps from across Ukraine relocated to Khreshchatyk street in central Kyiv, where rallies of activists began numbering in the thousands (Ukrainska Pravda 2001j; 2001k). In one striking incident, protesters from Zhytomyr, 140 kilometres west of Kyiv, hiked en masse to the capital, led by a ram wearing an ‘I voted for Kuchma’ sign (Ukrainska Pravda 2001i). Protests were concentrated in Kyiv, but rallies in the low hundreds continued elsewhere, including in Dnipro, Kharkiv and Odesa (Ukrainska Pravda 2001j; 2001k; 2001l). Perhaps it was hoped that uniting protesters in Kyiv would maximise the impact of the protests and increase pressure on Kuchma to resign.

However, the different networks struggled to maintain their cooperation after the repression in Kyiv on 1 March (Onuch 2021c), when the Kyiv tent camp was attacked by police. Right-wing groups such as *Tryzub*, although in the minority of protesters, caused trouble in Kyiv and the various groups were divided over how to react (Kuzio 2007; Onuch 2021c). Violence between police and protesters broke out during a subsequent march on 9 March. The use of repression provoked a backlash, and demonstrations condemning the use of police violence took place in a number of other cities (Ukrainska Pravda 2001o; 2001m; 2001n). Notably in Lviv, over five thousand students participated in a strike and demonstrations between 13–15 March (Ukrainska Pravda 2001q; 2001p). Nevertheless, hit by the arrests of over two hundred activists in Kyiv, and struggling to reach a consensus between different groups on how to proceed, UBK faded away, its goals unachieved.

In studying UBK, we can see that the collaboration of different networks is associated with protest taking place across Ukraine. Activist groups and political parties from across the political spectrum engaged in mobilisation throughout the country. However, challenges in coordinating across these diverse groups may have contributed to mobilisation being slightly less widespread than during the RoG. We might have expected protest 2000-2001 to be more diffused than in 1990: by 2000, activist organisers and protesters could utilise mobile phones and internet to communicate and share information about their campaigns. The protests were also more widely covered in the media, spreading information about UBK throughout Ukraine. And yet, fewer locations mobilised in 1990, as the various political parties organising the protests encountered challenges in co-ordination and agreeing on tactics. Still, it is crucial to note that I cannot definitively confirm whether difficulties in managing cross-cleavage collaboration shaped a reduction in the geospatial scope of protest. A number of other intervening factors changed between 1990 and 2000, such as the grievances of the protests themselves, which focused on the ousting of one political figure, rather than reforms which would secure greater democracy and independence for the entire country. Nevertheless, these findings about nationwide protest and diverse activist networks are still important: they highlight the ways in which mass mobilisation was evolving in independent Ukraine, and the role diverse activist groups were playing in leading protest movements, despite the challenges they faced.

### ***The Orange Revolution: Primed and prepared nationwide networks***

Several years after UBK, mobilisation expanded much further into regional localities during the Orange Revolution. This expansion corresponds with efforts by a network

of youth activists across Ukraine to organise and prepare in advance of the 2004 Presidential elections. Much effort had gone into priming these youth networks throughout the country. The key youth organisation, *Pora* (meaning ‘It’s time’), was all-national from its launch: on 28 March 2004, a sticker campaign ‘What is Kuchmism?’ was launched simultaneously in 17 regions (Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group 2004; *Ukrainska Pravda* 2009)<sup>33</sup>. The broader civic campaign aimed to cover the entire territory of Ukraine, and activists and local branches were established in all oblasts (*Pora* 2004). Trainings for youth activists, and civic campaigns, were conducted throughout the country: by the beginning of November, *Pora* had organised over 170 street actions in 53 settlements, including some campaigns with simultaneous events across multiple regions (Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group 2004). These primed networks then mobilised following the election results. Students were significant participants in many of the regional rallies supporting Yushchenko (*Ukrainska Pravda* 2004b; 2004f). They were also responsible for setting up tent camps in cities such as Rivne and Kharkiv (*Ukrainska Pravda* 2004b), and an attempt to set up a tent camp in Donetsk<sup>34</sup>. Nikolayenko (2017, 172) suggests that over 17% of Ukrainian youth participated in protest events in the regions, demonstrating the efficacy of *Pora*’s work. All this suggests that youth activist networks sought to play a role in facilitating mobilisation throughout Ukraine.

These youth and student networks worked in cooperation with a cross-cleavage coalition of opposition party networks and other groups. In regional cities, ‘coordinating councils’ for the opposition were created, which brought together diverse

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33 Two organisations, ‘Black’ and ‘Yellow’ *Pora* emerged in 2004. Black *Pora* was the first to launch, but the two groups agreed to work together during the election campaign and subsequent protests.

34 An attempt to set up tents failed after unidentified youths tore down the tents and attacked the *Pora* activists sitting them (*Ukrainska Pravda* 2004k)

parties ranging from the Socialist Party to the centre-right *Batkivshchyna* (Ukrainska Pravda 2004b). Coalitions of activists also worked together to mobilise citizens beyond Kyiv and western Ukraine. In December, the ‘Train of Friendship’ tour saw a motorcade of activists, journalists, artists, filmmakers and musicians touring throughout fourteen central, southern and eastern oblasts (Ukrainska Pravda 2004). This ‘informational tour’ sought to promote contact between Ukraine’s regions, overcome local media censorship, and support territorial unity, freedom of speech and democratic values. Workers also mobilised on a greater scale than before, particularly in central and western Ukraine. Large manufacturing plants staged strikes in support of Yushchenko, including Chernivtsi Car Factory, Ivano-Frankivsk ‘Lukor’ chemical plant, and Vinnytsia factory ‘Keramik’ (Ukrainska Pravda 2004b). As during UBK, together these different networks of workers, students, political parties, and activists spanned the country. Moreover, Onuch (2021c) argues that these networks had learnt from the failures of UBK and worked to better coordinate their efforts and unite behind a single message and candidate. The nature of the available data means that it is not possible to definitively claim that these diverse networks and enhanced cooperation helped to spread more protest events throughout Ukraine’s regions. However, these networks certainly sought collaboration and worked to mobilise protesters in more locations.

Whether or not precisely due to these activist networks, both in terms of the number of locations and the sizes of regional protests, the Orange Revolution represented a clear expansion in mobilisation compared to the previous mass protests. Mobilisations took place in every regional capital of Ukraine. West Ukraine was still the site of the most frequent and largest protests outside Kyiv, with six of the eight

western capitals witnessing rallies of over 10,000.<sup>35</sup> Central Ukraine also mobilised extensively: rallies of 5,000-10,000 took place in every regional capital (Korrespondent 2004; Radio Svoboda 2004; *Ukrainska Pravda* 2004b; 2004a; 2004c; 2004i; 2004d) Nevertheless, rallies of over 10,000 were held in southern and eastern cities including Dnipro, Mykolaiv, Kharkiv and Odesa, with smaller protests elsewhere<sup>36</sup> (*Ukrainska Pravda* 2004b). The size and breadth of these protests in the east and south is particularly significant given that they were occurring in cities where the majority would not have voted for Yushchenko, and where protesters faced intimidation, threats, and even violence.<sup>37</sup> Whilst it is important to acknowledge that Ukraine's evolving media landscape means that coverage of the Orange Revolution's regional protests was likely better than the previous two mass mobilisations, I remain confident that the overall patterns identified in my data hold true. The *Ukrainska Pravda* and *Rukh* newswires used for PEA sources for UBK and the RoG respectively were effectively activist media, due to their close ties to the protests, and thus had keen interest in reporting events throughout the country as closely as possible. KGB reports

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35 On the first day of the protests, rallies of thousands took place in Khmelnytsky, Lutsk, Lviv, Ternopil, and Vinnytsia, and a smaller rally was reported in Kobelyaky in Poltava oblast (*Ukrainska Pravda* 2004a; 2004b).

36 Two thousand Yushchenko supporters rallied in Dnipro on 22 November 2004 – election day – (*Ukrainska Pravda* 2004a), and on 23 November at least ten thousand mobilised in Dnipro, Kharkiv, and Odesa (*Ukrainska Pravda* 2004b). During the first week, smaller rallies occurred in the other regional capitals of Kherson, Mykolaiv, Zaporizhzhya, and Simferopol<sup>36</sup> (*Ukrainska Pravda* 2004b). This increase in size marks a step up from previous protest waves, where east and south Ukraine saw relatively small protests. The cities of Dnipro and Kharkiv, which emerged as sites of sustained protest during UBK, continued to be important sites of contention in the east and south, with multiple mobilisations of thousands and tens of thousands. Luhansk witnessed three rallies of up to 2,500 protesters; and smaller protests occurred in Severodonetsk and Donetsk (Radio Svoboda 2004; Korrespondent 2004; *Ukrainska Pravda* 2004f; 2004e).

37 For example, journalists reporting on Orange protests were attacked in Luhansk (*Ukrainska Pravda* 2004h) and Donetsk (*Ukrainska Pravda* 2004k), and in Donetsk a tent camp was also destroyed (*Ukrainska Pravda* 2004k). These attacks were perpetrated by unidentified men, sometimes described as 'bandits' or 'sporty youths' (*Ukrainska Pravda* 2004g; 2004k) – the predecessors of the Euromaidan's 'titushky'. These men were the main perpetrators of intimidation or violence against protesters in the regions. The police, the main perpetrators of repression during UBK, tended to merely observe protests during the Orange Revolution (*Ukrainska Pravda* 2004b). Protesters in south and east Ukraine in particular also faced (and were often heavily outnumbered by) rival 'Blue' rallies in support of Yanukovych, which may have had an impact on the frequency and size of pro-Yushchenko protests in these regions (*Ukrainska Pravda* 2004j; 2004e; 2004g). However, it's important to note that whilst repression of protesters was not completely absent in other regions of Ukraine, isolated incidences did occur, notably in central Ukraine. Journalists in Kirovohrad were attacked, tent camps were vandalised in Cherkasy and Svitlovodsk (*Ukrainska Pravda* 2004j; 2004g), and in a rare instance of police force, police used tear gas against protesters outside Chernihiv city council building (*Ukrainska Pravda* 2004d).

for the RoG would also have sought to gather comprehensive information on the protests, and were not subject to the censorship or reporting biases of the media. The usage of activist interviews supplemented the information provided by these sources.

In the same way, data limitations mean that I remain cautious about claiming that the activity and cross-cleavage collaboration of activist networks was the key factor driving the geospatial spread of protest between 1990 and 2004. A variety of other factors were also at play, such as the increased usage of mobile phones and the internet, as discussed above, as well as differences in grievances across the protests. For example, we know that falsified elections can be a particularly motivating trigger to mobilise protesters on a massive scale (Tucker 2007). Nevertheless, what this article has done is note that a variety of activist networks, including students, political parties, and civic groups certainly played a role in Orange Revolution protests in Ukraine's regions. There were deliberate attempts by these student and activist networks to encourage mobilisation in regional localities, particularly those in the east and south of Ukraine which were less active in past mass mobilisations. Definitively proving whether these efforts were crucial in driving the geospatial expansion of protest remains a task for future research.

## **Conclusion**

The aims of this article were to identify regional patterns of protest during three moments of mass mobilisation in Ukraine, to examine how activist networks contributed to geospatial shifts in protest across space over time, and to provide context for research into more recent and future mass mobilisation in Ukraine. I hypothesised that as the engagement and activity of activist networks changed over

time, this shaped shifts in the geospatial extent of protest, across subsequent protest waves.

Presenting novel empirical findings on regional mobilisation during the RoG, UBK, and the Orange Revolution, I have suggested that whilst protest took place throughout Ukraine during all three mass mobilisations, between the RoG and the Orange Revolution it expanded to many more locations. In the intervening period, protests were held in slightly fewer locations during UBK, although new locations in central Ukrainian oblast capitals mobilised. With each subsequent protest wave, more frequent and larger protest events occurred in west Ukraine, and over time mobilisation increased in frequency and size in central, south, and east Ukraine. These results should be interpreted with care, as the nature of the changing Ukrainian media from 1990-2004 means that the accuracy of reporting protest events may have improved over time. Nevertheless, the usage of activist and KGB sources for earlier events means that I am confident that the broad patterns identified are accurate. The identification of these key patterns makes a valuable contribution to our knowledge about the regional dimensions of these protest waves. Future studies can build on this work, including systematic analyses of additional sources to capture more details about these protest events, as well as additional events that may have been missed. In future, I plan to develop and publish such a comprehensive dataset for these three mass mobilisations.

My analysis has shown that these geospatial patterns of protest align with the changing dynamics in activist networks and cross-cleavage coalitions over subsequent protest waves. I have demonstrated that student and national-democratic dissident organisations worked to mobilise Ukrainian cities during the Revolution on Granite, but with limited success in engaging with miners' and workers' networks in southern

and eastern Ukraine. Then, during UBK, a broad coalition of political parties worked together to try and unseat Kuchma, including those with greater popularity in the south and east; however, the sheer diversity of these groups made coordination and collaboration challenging. Come the Orange Revolution, youth groups such as *Pora* worked hard to organise and mobilise across all Ukraine's regions in the run up to the elections. Opposition parties and SMOs also sought to learn from UBK and unite more cohesively behind one candidate, in order to bring the Orange Revolution to as much of Ukraine as possible. Nevertheless, whilst I have identified these activist networks' undertakings, it remains the task of future research to investigate whether these activities were the primary cause of the geospatial variation of protest over time I have identified in Ukraine. More systematic tracing of key SMOs would help to further clarify the role of activist networks. Studies are also needed to investigate the role of other factors, such as how the usage of technology and new forms of media may have facilitated more widespread protest. Social media were still in their infancy by the time of the Orange Revolution, but future works could examine how mobile phones, the internet, and email were utilised by protesters and activists, and whether this helped facilitate increased geospatial protest. Repression is another factor that may have played a complex role in shaping protest – in some instances it appeared to provoke a backlash during UBK and the RoG, but in the case of UBK it may have brought protests to an end. Nevertheless, although unable to make causal claims, this article has made an important contribution in identifying the work of domestic, activist actors in attempting to bring protest to locations across Ukraine.

As such, these findings provide valuable context for the Euromaidan protests of 2013-14, as well as ongoing anti-war mobilisation in Ukraine. This article makes clear that although it has previously received limited attention in scholarly research,

Ukraine has a history of nationwide mobilisation. Nationwide mobilisation in Ukraine has been supported by wide-reaching, cross-cleavage coalitions of activists; and it is these kinds of networks which may help facilitate widespread protest across the country. Thus, studies of subsequent mobilisations in Ukraine should not neglect the regional dimensions of protest in the country, nor the role played by Ukrainian activist networks.

At the time of writing this article, I was witnessing video footage emerging from southern and eastern Ukrainian cities, showing local residents bravely mobilising against armed, Russian invading forces. Some observers were surprised by such sights, that citizens in these regions would mobilise. This article has shown that on the contrary, those in Ukraine's regions protesting against Russian invasion are the latest to mobilise in over thirty years of resistance in independent Ukraine. Ukrainian regional activist networks will have an important role to play in fighting back against Russian invasion, and rebuilding a better future for their country.

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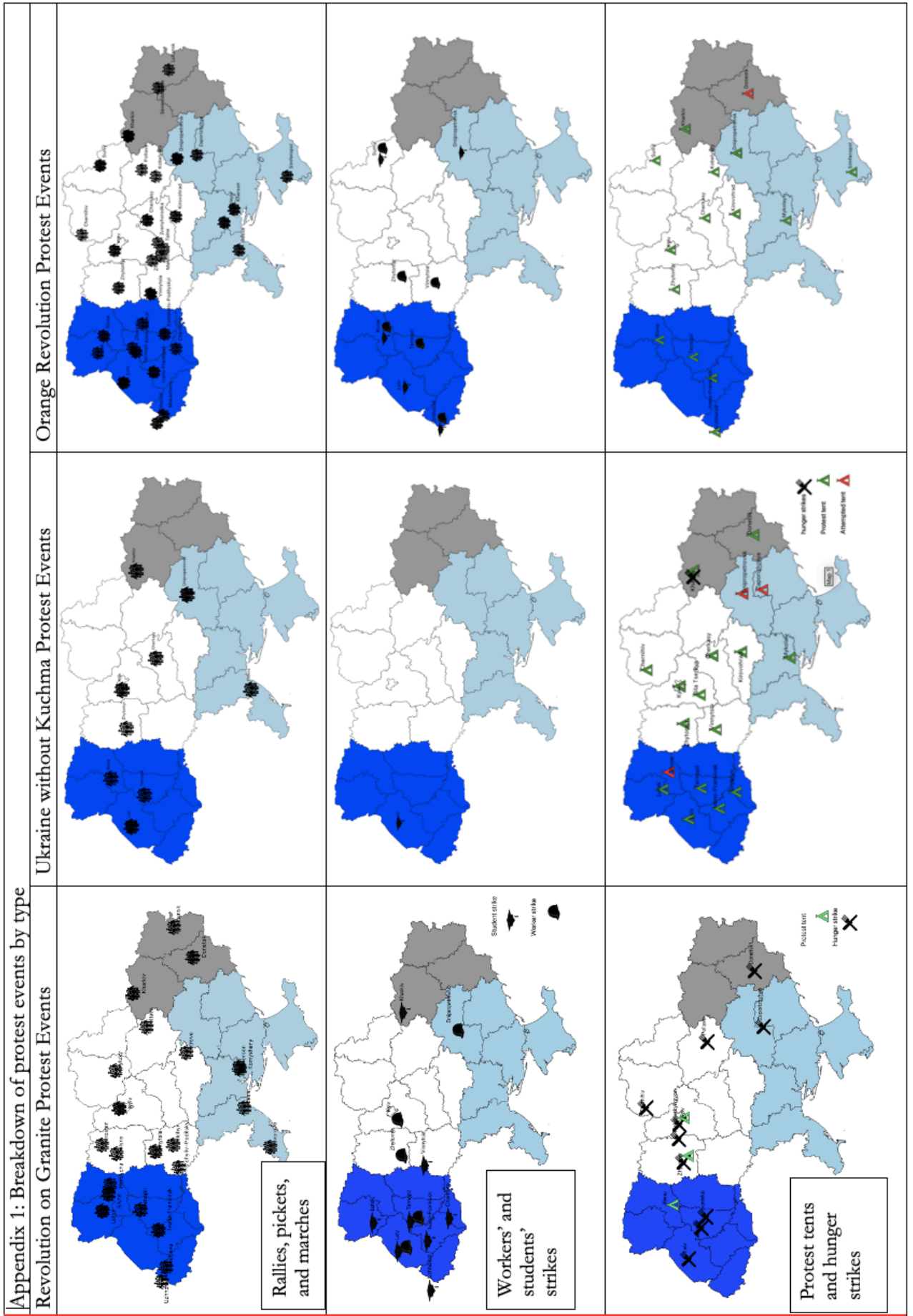
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## **‘All of Belarus has come out onto the streets’: Exploring nationwide protest and the role of pre-existing social networks**

Word count: 7199 (excluding references)

### **Abstract**

During moments of nationwide mass mobilisation, what distinguishes the towns and cities that rise in the first week from those that do not see protest? Taking the case of nationwide protests in Belarus in August 2020, this study employs an original protest event catalogue to investigate what drives mobilisation in early-rising localities. I test hypotheses in the protest literature relating to whether pre-existing social networks, or pre-election campaign rallies, influence subsequent protest mobilization. The innovative use of Telegram data demonstrates the platform’s value for social scientists studying protest. My results suggest that pre-existing social networks help drive mobilisation in localities by facilitating communication, coordination, and engagement prior to protest onset, priming people to be ready when the moment of protest arrives. This article also highlights the impressive scale of nationwide mobilisation in Belarus in 2020, and demonstrates that local networks were engaging in widespread opposition activity even before mass mobilisation.

### **Introduction**

When mass protest takes place, it is usually limited in geographic scope – typically occurring in capital cities, or large urban centres. However, in some cases, protests are widely dispersed across a given country. When this happens, certain towns and cities will rise early, whilst others will only mobilise later, once protest is established elsewhere<sup>38</sup>. During such moments of mass mobilisation, what distinguishes these early rising localities from those which do not see protest? Social scientists are divided

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<sup>38</sup> This process is often referred to as diffusion

as to what shapes the geography of protest. Local population size, transport and communication networks, and socio-economic factors have all been highlighted (Andrews and Biggs 2006; Brooke and Ketchley 2018). Meanwhile, some studies emphasise the role of the local political context in shaping where protest occurs (Lankina 2015; Lankina and Voznaya 2015; Robertson 2011). Other research foregrounds the centrality of social networks<sup>39</sup> to the mobilisation process (Gould 1991; Jost et al. 2018; Tucker et al. 2018; Tufekci and Wilson 2012; Onuch 2015c; Thomson 2018). The mass protests which erupted in Belarus in 2020 are one such instance of geographically dispersed protest, providing the opportunity to examine this puzzle.

From 9 August 2020, in response to extensive reports of electoral fraud, Belarusians took to the streets of towns and cities in every region of their country. Protests emerged rapidly across Belarus, with over 100 localities protesting in the first week. Whilst the geospatial dispersion of these protests was unprecedented, not every town mobilised. In fact, some localities saw protest, whilst other places in their district, otherwise similar in many respects, remained quiet. Why did certain localities see protest mobilisation in the first week, whilst others did not? Are these varying outcomes explained by differences in contextual factors, such as population, wages, or transport networks, as some scholars have suggested? Alternatively, might they be down to different political contexts, enabling pre-election campaign rallies? Or, given that neighbouring towns are otherwise similar in many of these respects, do pre-existing social networks, enabling communication, coordination, and engagement in advance of protest, play a role? This article seeks to answer this puzzle.

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39 'Social networks' is a broad term that can encompass formal and informal social movement organisations, grassroots activist groups, and networked publics.

Employing an original protest event catalogue curated by the author, and utilising multivariate logistic regression, supplemented by digital ethnography, I conduct analysis at the individual locality level for all Belarusian towns and cities with populations over 5000<sup>40</sup>. I deploy and test sociological theories about the role of social network ties in mobilisation. In doing so, I also assess empirical propositions in public and academic discourse about the role of social network ties in facilitating (or not) recent nationwide protest in Belarus specifically. I first map the extent of regional protest from 9-15 August 2020. I then run multivariate logistic regressions to test for the relationship between the presence of pre-existing social networks and the presence or absence of mobilisation in a locality during this period. I also test for alternative explanations centred on local political context, and control for relevant factors including population, local wages, and transport networks. Further qualitative analysis of the activity of local social networks, traced via community Telegram chats, enables me to elucidate ways in which these networks enabled communication, coordination, and engagement at the local level prior to the elections.

This article provides robust evidence to support the hypothesis that pre-existing social network ties are crucial to and drive mobilisation at the local level. Specifically, I find that in localities where social networks pre-dated the start of protests on 9 August, mobilisation was more likely to occur in the first week of protests. To conduct this analysis, this article focuses on social network ties captured through online (specifically Telegram-based) discussion and coordination. This approach makes this article highly innovative as it is one of the first to use Telegram for protest event data

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<sup>40</sup> Analysis is limited to localities with a population of over 5000 (n=132), due to the additional resources and time required to gather data for all settlements in Belarus. The findings of this article should thus not be considered applicable to localities with populations under 5000. However, over 75% of the population of Belarus is covered by the localities in my dataset.

and analysis. At the same time, the reliance on Telegram as a data source also means that the claims made here about pre-existing social networks must be cautious, as this data does not capture social network ties and social movement organisation networks that may exist 'offline'. And thus, whilst we must remain cautious in our interpretation, this fact does not undermine the article's main argument as there is a clear link between local communication, coordination, and engagement in advance of the elections, and first-week mobilisation. Whilst further, offline data collection and identification of local social networks are necessary, this study is ground-breaking in its identification of geographically widespread networks engaging in opposition in advance of the 2020 protests. As such, this article will form the basis for further study of local networks in Belarus, and their role in protest.

In the sections that follow, I first map regional protest between 9-15 August 2020, and examine how this Belarusian case allows me to leverage key expectations in theory on the role of social networks in mobilisation. I then present an analytical framework deriving theoretical expectations about how social networks may facilitate local mobilisation and early-rising protest, as well as a competing hypothesis centring on local political context and pre-election opposition campaign rallies. After outlining my data sources and analytical approach, I present my results. The article finishes with a conclusion discussing my findings and highlighting avenues for further research.

### **The Case of Early-rising Protest Localities in Belarus**

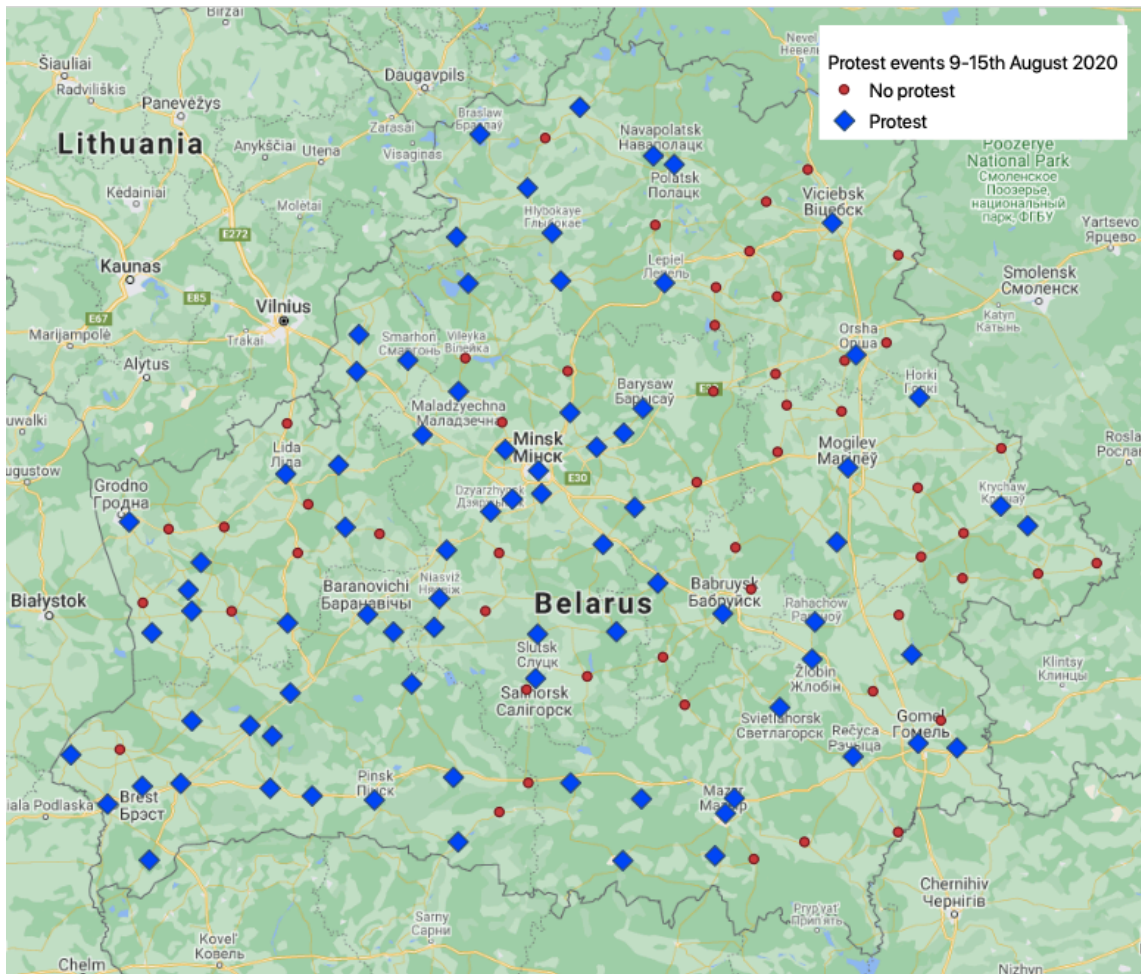
The question of what drives regional variation in mass mobilisation is an enduring puzzle in social science, and Belarus represents a particularly fascinating case of this phenomenon. The Belarus 2020 protests are a critical case of nationwide mass mobilisation, occurring in an authoritarian state, where there is limited past protest (de

Vogel 2022), criticism of the government is high-risk (Bedford 2017; Freedom House 2019), and protest is punished (Herasimenka 2017). And yet, the protests of summer 2020 were widespread and cross-national from their onset, with towns and cities mobilising from the very first day. On 9 August, when the incumbent President Aliaksandr Lukashenka claimed victory in fraudulent presidential elections, at least 19 locations saw protest, including many of Belarus' largest cities, but also smaller towns such as Lahoyusk and Lyakhavichy (with respective populations of 15,000 and 10,700). Within a week of the elections, over 100 localities mobilised, contributing to a truly nationwide protest wave (see Figure 1). I found that in a minimum of 27 localities, over 1% of the local population mobilised in a single event. A further 21 localities saw at least 0.5% of their population protest (see Figure 2)<sup>41</sup>. The most common protest tactic was 'chains of solidarity', where protesters stood single-file, facing a busy road, sometimes holding red and white flags, flowers, or banners. Marches were also held, particularly where protester turnout was higher. When security forces targeted protesters, marches dispersed, and then small groups would re-gather and keep moving. Towards the end of the first week, rallies and meetings were held in some localities. Protesters gathered on central squares, outside government buildings, demanding to speak to their mayor or local officials. Nevertheless, although this wave of protest activity was unprecedented in scale, as evidenced in Figure 1, dozens of towns and cities remained quiescent, with no protest at all.

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<sup>41</sup> Data on protester numbers are notoriously difficult to collect, so these figures are approximate and represent very conservative estimates.

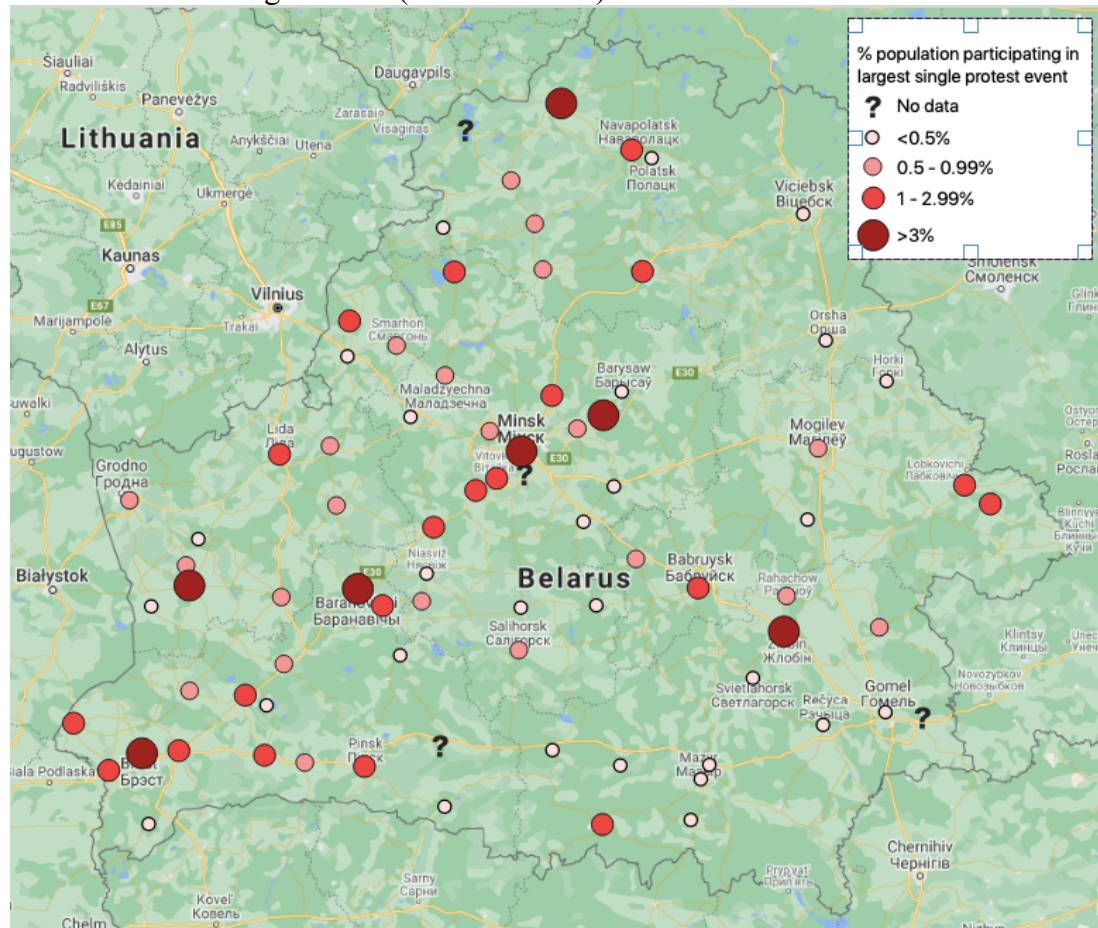
Figure 4: Map showing all Belarusian localities with a population of 5000+, indicating where mobilisation did and did not occur 9-15 August 2020. (Source: author)



This widespread mobilisation did not emerge from nowhere on election day. Awareness of and engagement with the upcoming elections was happening throughout Belarus in 2020. Using Telegram as a tool, I identified discussion and coordination around opposition to the Lukashenka regime in advance of the elections in dozens of towns and cities, pointing to the presence of pre-existing social networks throughout the country. In the weeks and months preceding 9 August, networks of local citizens and activists were discussing and engaging with political opposition activity – in some cases even organising protest events criticising Lukashenka’s government and the repression of opposition figures. The campaign for the main opposition candidate,

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, also attempted to rally support throughout Belarus, organising nationwide campaign events (Viasna 2020). Tsikhanouskaya and her team extensively toured Belarus between 19 July 2020, when her candidacy was confirmed by the Central Electoral Commission, and election day.

Figure 5: Percentage of local population that participated in largest recorded protest event from 9-15 August 2020 (Source: author)



So, can these pre-existing networks and campaign activities in advance of the elections help explain why some localities mobilised during the first week of protest, and others did not? Whilst there is some discernible variation in first-week mobilisation between the regions of Belarus, what is of particular interest are within-region, and even within-district differences in whether towns mobilised. For example, Iweye, a 30-minute drive from Lida in western Belarus, experienced protest in the first week – but Voranava, of a similar size, and roughly the same distance from Lida, did

not. And Kilmavichy and Kastsyukovichy, two towns in the eastern Mahilyow region, have roughly the same population size (16,000-17,000), are situated just 36 km apart, and yet the former mobilised whilst the latter did not. What accounts for these differences in early-rising protest, in localities which otherwise appear similar in terms of demographics and region? In addressing this puzzle, this article not only seeks to improve our understanding of the Belarusian protests specifically, but also to contribute to the study of nationwide protests more generally.

### **Framing the analysis**

#### ***Pre-existing social network ties hypothesis***

Scholars have long focused on the centrality of social network ties to the mobilisation process (Snow, Zurcher, and Ekland-Olson 1980; Diani and McAdam 2003; Gould 1991). Many studies assert that during moments of protest, participants are mobilised by their social network ties (Tufekci and Wilson 2012; Onuch 2015c; Tucker et al. 2018; Youmans and York 2012; McAdam 1986). However, social networks are important not only in the moment of mass mobilisation, but also form a crucial foundation in advance of mobilisation, helping to explain why some localities may rise first in protest.

Pre-existing social networks, be they grassroots organisations, formal or informal social movement organisations, or simply networked publics of ordinary citizens, are an important precondition for early-rising mobilisation in a locality (Gould 1991; Wackenhut 2020). This is because these networks enable communication, coordination, and engagement in advance of protest onset. Communication between members of the network allows information to flow via trusted sources, ensuring that the network stays up-to-date and informed on relevant

events – including grievances triggering the outbreak of protest (Oliver and Myers 2003; Klandermans 1997). Coordination is then possible via the tools the network uses to communicate, enabling the organisation of joint action in the locality when the moment of mobilisation arises (Tarrow 2011). Pre-existing networks also foster engagement: network members are already involved in some kind of shared discussion or activity with others in their local area, priming them for further action (Onuch 2015c). Given all this, I argue that where a pre-existing social network is present in a locality, this represents a collective who are informed and receiving up-to-date information, have the tools and ability to coordinate joint action, and are already engaged and active, maybe even having mobilised before. This puts them in an ideal position to rapidly mobilise when the moment of protest arrives – in the case of Belarus, on 9 August 2020. Hence, I anticipate the following hypothesis, that:

*During the first week of mobilisation, protest is more likely to occur in localities where pre-existing networks are present.*

***Competing hypothesis: political opportunities***

However, some scholars argue that geo-spatial variation in mobilisation is most significantly shaped by variation in local political context – sometimes referred to as political opportunities (Lankina 2015; Robertson 2011; Jasper and Goodwin 2011). This scholarship would suggest that protest is more likely to take place in towns and cities with more favourable political opportunities for mobilisation (Eisinger 1973; Tarrow 1996). Whilst fraudulent elections, like those in Belarus, represent a political opportunity for a nation as a whole (Tucker 2007; Beissinger 2007), political opportunities can also vary across a country (Lankina 2015). For example, in localities where elite allies are present, they can provide resources and support for protesters,

enabling mobilisation; and where local elites are divided, protesters may take advantage of these divisions to gain the backing of competing elites (Robertson 2011; Tarrow 2011). Favourable political opportunities are particularly important for the ‘early risers’ of protest: McAdam (1995) argues that early risers identify and capitalise on expanding opportunities, whereas later joiners are more influenced by diffusion processes. Therefore, political opportunities are particularly important for those mobilising early-on.

In Belarus, the authoritarian state allows for limited overt political competition, so elite allies or divisions may be challenging for researchers to measure. However, the series of rallies in support of the Presidential candidate Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya organised in advance of the elections provides the opportunity to capture some variation in local political context. The presence of a pre-election rally in a locality may represent more favourable political opportunities for later protest, as local elites permitted the event, and local residents turned out in support. Thus, in my analysis I will test for the following competing hypothesis, that:

*During the first week of mobilisation, protest is more likely to occur in localities where campaign rallies for the opposition candidate took place prior to election day.*

Nevertheless, I argue that where the political context of a locality may be more favourable for protesters, this does not necessarily mean that there is a group of primed citizens ready to mobilise locally when the opportunity arises. For example, local elites may have allowed the Tsikhanouskaya team to organise a campaign event in a city, but this does not necessarily mean that local grassroots networks are present, that will be ready and willing to initiate protest following the elections. As such, although favourable local political opportunities may facilitate protest, I postulate that the

presence of pre-existing social networks in a locality is of greater importance, as without these no mobilisation can occur.

### *Contextual controls*

Several additional contextual factors may also influence regional variation in mobilisation, and should be controlled for in my analysis. Firstly, transport networks enable information, resources and people, and thus, mobilisation, to travel across space, and should be accounted for (Hobsbawm and Rudé 1969; Aidt, Leon, and Satchell 2017; Brooke and Ketchley 2018). Consequently, I control for the presence of strong transport networks in a city. Secondly, numerous studies argue that the main participants of pro-democracy protests are wealthier, middle-class citizens (Ekiert 2010; Norris 2002; Acemoglu and Robinson 2006). They have more resources (time, money, social capital) enabling them to participate in politics, including protest (Norris 2002), and also a greater sense of political efficacy, which empowers and motivates them to participate in collective action (Paulsen 1991; Chen and Suen 2017). So, localities with more middle-class citizens may be more likely to mobilise, and I control for this in my analysis by considering average local incomes. Incomes do not perfectly capture the middle-class, which also entails better access to education (Rosenfeld 2017). Nonetheless, income is the best available measure for this study due to an absence of statistics for local education in Belarus.

I must also consider that the population distribution across a country may influence subnational variation in mobilisation. A large population increases the likelihood of local protest: greater human, financial and organisational resources are available (Edwards and McCarthy 2007); the locality is more inter-connected to other places, providing channels of information and mobilisation (Oliver and Myers 2003);

and the costs and benefits associated with mobilisation are more favourable, as more potential protesters are available (Oberschall 1973). Hence, I will control for population in my analysis.

Finally, in robustness checks I will run models to verify whether there is any significant difference between localities that mobilised before and after mass repression and the first protester death on 10<sup>th</sup> August. Robustness checks will also examine whether, similarly, there is any significant difference between localities that mobilised during and after the internet blackout of 9-12 August.

### **Data and operationalisation**

To test the theoretical expectations outlined above, I use my original protest event catalogue for Belarus; Telegram data capturing the activity of local social networks, and opposition campaign events; and data on local populations and wages from the National Statistical Committee of Belarus. My unit of analysis is the individual locality level. I include all Belarusian towns and cities with populations over 5000 (n=132), regardless of whether they mobilised. I use multivariate logistic regressions to test the above hypotheses regarding the early-rising mobilisation of localities, social network ties, and campaign rallies, whilst holding relevant contextual variables constant. This quantitative approach is supplemented by qualitative research on the activity of local social networks prior to and during the initial week of mobilisation. The following sections outline my variables and analytical approach in more detail.

#### ***The dependent variable: local protest event***

The dependent variable of interest is a binary, indicating the presence (or absence) of protest in a locality from 9-15 August 2020 – the first week of post-election protests.

Localities where protest occurred are coded as 1 (see Table 1). My analysis is limited to first-week mobilisation in order to examine what factors motivate early-rising localities specifically. Focusing on first-week protest also reduces the number of additional potential explanatory variables, as processes of cross-location diffusion become more prevalent over time. A protest event is defined as a public gathering of two or more people, expressing claims or grievances relating to falsified elections and/or the beating of protesters.

I have chosen to use cross-sectional data in the form of a binary variable because I am interested in what distinguishes early-rising localities from those that do not protest in the first week, rather than investigating variation between early-rising localities. These localities will mobilise at different times, as the information cascade about the protest takes time to travel from person to person, and location to location. Key events during the first week of mobilisation in Belarus, such as the onset of harsh repression, and internet shutdowns, may also shape temporal variations in when early-rising localities mobilise, with a wave of new locations rising after such events. However, explaining this variation within the first week is not the focus of this paper.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, robustness checks, discussed in the next section, will check whether there are significant differences between localities that mobilised before and after key first-week events.

Coding of this early-rising protest event variable is based on my original protest event catalogue, which relies on data from a channel on the Telegram messenger app. Telegram provides the best available data on regional protest in Belarus during initial mobilisation. It is widely acknowledged that news outlets under-

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<sup>42</sup> Future analysis could combine analysis of geospatial variation with time series data, to investigate how protest varies across space over time.

report protest events outside large urban centres (Hutter 2014). Moreover, state censorship means Belarusian media were not reporting accurately on the protests. Independent journalists covering regional events were also limited by repression (threatened and actual), and the challenge of tracking of all the places rapidly mobilising. In contrast, the Russian-language Telegram channel ‘Nexta Live’ provided a continuous stream of information on protest locations from election day (Herasimenka 2021). Nexta Live was the largest Telegram channel used by protesters, with over 1 million subscribers at its peak (Hurska 2020). Moderators shared near real-time updates of protest events across Belarus. They received this information from protesters and fact-checked posts before sharing them (Kingsley 2020). Thousands of messages were shared from 9-15 August, so I took a two-stage, semi-automated approach to processing this data. Using keyword-based searches informed by Weidman and Rod (2019), I used R to identify all messages referring to protests in Belarusian towns and cities. This automated round of coding identified protest dates, locations, and repertoires. In a subsequent round of hand-coding, I read the messages and viewed attached multimedia content, verifying the results of automated coding, and adding further information on protest participants and turnout. The resulting event catalogue was then used to code my dependent variable, as described above.

DV – Localities where protest occurred 9-15 August 2020

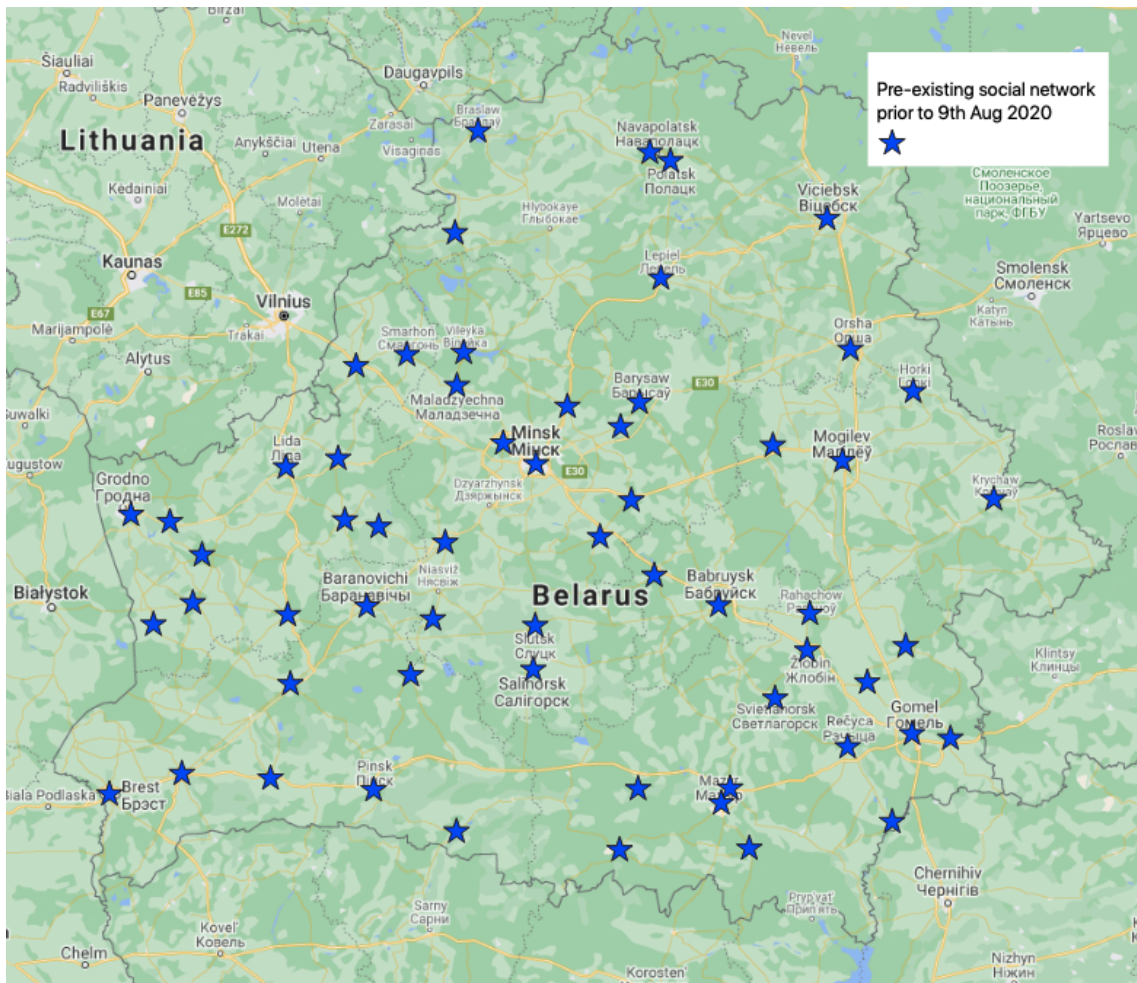
|            | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|------------|-----------|----------------|
| Protest    | 52        | 39.39          |
| No protest | 80        | 60.61          |
| Total      | 132       | 100            |

***Key independent variable: pre-existing social networks***

To identify pre-existing social networks in Belarus, I also turned to Telegram as an innovative data source. Local social networks were using community Telegram chats as a tool for discussion and coordination prior to 9 August. Tracing the existence of these chats thus makes visible social networks communicating about and coordinating resistance to the Lukashenka regime, which are otherwise challenging to identify. The activity in these Telegram chats provides evidence of local social networks discussing politics, organising around the elections, and even engaging in protest events in the weeks and months before 9 August.

To identify relevant chats, I used the crowdsourced list of regional Telegram chats on the website *dze.chat* as a starting point. I then identified additional chats missing from this database by searching location names using Telegram's native search function on the desktop app. As I am interested in pre-existing social networks, I excluded any chat created after 9 August. Most remaining chats were created in April-July, although some even pre-dated 2020. To ensure I was capturing social networks relating to resistance to the Lukashenka regime, I also excluded any chats where discussions did not centre around activities of the political opposition or criticism of Lukashenka. This focus was usually reflected in the chat names, combining the locality with references to Tsikhanouskaya's 'Country for Life' campaign, or the '97%' protest slogan – e.g. 'Braslaw for life' or 'Orsha 97%'. My list of Telegram chats is not exhaustive, as some may have been deleted prior to data collection (October 2020), but nonetheless represents an extensive map of pre-existing networks in Belarus pre-dating 9 August (see Figure 3).

Figure 6: Belarusian localities which had pre-existing social networks prior to 9 August 2020 (source: dze.chat and author)



Using this data described above, I created an independent variable for ‘pre-existing social network’, coded as 1 where a social network was identified in the locality prior to election day (see table 2).

Table 2: IV1 – Presence of social network in locality prior to protest onset

|                              | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|------------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Social network identified    | 86        | 65.15          |
| No social network identified | 46        | 34.85          |
| Total                        | 132       | 100            |

***Competing independent variable: local campaign events***

To identify localities where campaign events in support of Tsikhanouskaya took place prior to the elections, I also used Telegram data. Campaign events were published and promoted on the official channel of Tsikhanouskaya’s campaign, ‘Country for Life’<sup>43</sup>. Two types of events occurred: rallies where Tsikhanouskaya was present, often with Maria Kalesnikava<sup>44</sup> and Veranika Tsapkala<sup>45</sup>; and rallies that were organised in support of Tsikhanouskaya and featured ‘trusted’ team members speaking on her behalf. Campaign events took place from 19 July 2020, when Tsikhanouskaya’s candidacy was officially confirmed, and election day.

To capture these events, I used the same technique described above for the compilation of my protest event catalogue. I downloaded all messages between 19 July – 8 August 2020 from the ‘Country for Life’ Telegram channel, used R to identify messages referring to campaign events, and then conducted a round of hand-coding to verify my findings. My results indicated that campaign events were held in 67 Belarusian localities in my dataset. I created an independent variable for opposition campaign events using this data, coded as 1 where at least one campaign event for Tsikhanouskaya was held in the locality (see Table 3).

Table 3: IV2 – Campaign event for Tsikhanouskaya in locality prior to protest onset

|                   | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Campaign event    | 67        | 49.24          |
| No campaign event | 65        | 50.76          |
| Total             | 132       | 100            |

43 This channel was the most reliable available source of information about campaign events. The campaign website was offline during data collection, and other social media accounts did not publicise all campaign events.

44 Campaign chief for the imprisoned presidential candidate Viktor Babaryka

45 Wife of Valery Tsapkala, former presidential candidate who was denied registration and fled Belarus following threats to his life

### ***Controls and Robustness Checks***

To control for the fact that protest is more likely in towns and cities with strong transport networks, I used data from the Belarus Railways website to create a binary variable for each locality, where 1 indicates the presence of an active railway station. To control for income, I use a continuous variable of the local nominal average monthly wage in rubles, sourced from the National Statistical Committee of Belarus (2020). This data is available for towns of national significance and rayons (districts), so where town-level data was not available, I used the value for the relevant rayon. Finally, I include a control variable for population, using the log of population for each city, again using data from the National Statistical Committee of Belarus (2020).

I also run robustness checks to investigate the possibility that some localities were mobilised by mass repression and the first protester deaths on 10<sup>th</sup> August. To do so, I run my models with an alternate dependent variable, where all localities that mobilised prior to 11 August are coded as 1, localities which mobilised during the remainder of the first week are coded as 0, and those which did not mobilise are excluded. Similarly, to check whether there was a difference between localities which mobilised during and after the internet blackout, I run my models with a second, alternate dependent variable, where all localities mobilising 9-12 August are coded as 1, localities which mobilised in the remainder of the week are coded as 0, and remaining localities are excluded.

### ***Analytical approach***

To examine the relationship between regional protest and pre-existing social networks, I primarily use multivariate logistic regression analysis. Logistic regressions rather

than OLS were chosen because the dependent variable (presence or absence of first-week protest) is binary<sup>46</sup>. I first run a model with contextual variables only (population, wage, transport networks), before running models with my two key independent variables included separately, and finally together. As the log odds produced by logistic regressions are tricky to interpret, I report average marginal effects. Average marginal effects represent the average estimated likelihood of the dependent variable increasing from 0 to 1, when the independent variable of interest is increased by one unit, and whilst all other variables are held equal. For example, because my independent variable of pre-existing social networks is binary, the marginal effect represents the increase in the likelihood that protest takes place in a locality where I identify a local social network (1), compared to no network (0), and all other factors remain the same. For my variable of wage, which is scaled in units of 100 ruble increments, the marginal effect represents the increase in the likelihood that protest takes place in a town for each 100 ruble increase in the average local wage.

It is important to acknowledge that my analysis does not account for spatial dependencies and the ways in which potential contagion dynamics could influence the location and timing of protest. It is possible that towns and cities were more likely to mobilise once protest began in a neighbouring locality. This spatial dependence is not factored in my analysis as I am not trying to understand how protest diffuses from one locality to another<sup>47</sup>, but rather to identify the broad geographic pattern of first-week mobilisation. However, this does mean that observations in my regression analysis may not be fully independent of one another. This may influence the standard errors

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<sup>46</sup> Robustness checks using OLS models returned very similar results.

<sup>47</sup> Future research can utilise my protest event catalogue to investigate the potential role of contagion dynamics in shaping how protest spread across Belarus.

of my results, but not necessarily the coefficient, and should not produce misleading results, particularly if my models indicate strong associations.

The findings of my logistic regressions are supplemented by qualitative analysis of the ways in which pre-existing social networks were communicating, coordinating and engaging in opposition activity, as identified using transcripts of Telegram community chats. I only used transcripts of chats that were public, meaning that they could be found via Telegram's search function, and anyone could view chat messages.

## **Results**

My primary expectation, that *during the first week of mobilisation, protest is more likely to occur in localities where pre-existing networks are present*, is confirmed in my analysis. The effect of local campaign events upon first-week mobilisation is, however, not found to be significant, allowing me to reject the competing hypothesis identified in the literature that *during the first week of mobilisation, protest is more likely to occur in localities where campaign rallies for the opposition candidate took place prior to election day*. Table 4 presents the results of my statistical analysis, which are also visualised in Figure 4.

Table 3: Average marginal effects of variables on probability of mobilisation in a locality during the first week of protest

|                                    | Model 1                      | Model 2                      | Model 3                      | Model 4                      |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Population (log)</b>            | <b>0.36**</b><br>[0.24,0.47] | <b>0.35**</b><br>[0.23,0.47] | <b>0.32**</b><br>[0.19,0.45] | <b>0.32**</b><br>[0.19,0.45] |
| Average monthly wage (100 RUB)     | 0.03<br>[-0.02,0.07]         | 0.03<br>[-0.02,0.08]         | 0.03<br>[-0.01,0.08]         | 0.03<br>[-0.01,0.08]         |
| Railway station in locality        | 0.11<br>[-0.01,0.23]         | 0.11<br>[-0.01,0.24]         | 0.12<br>[-0.00,0.24]         | 0.12<br>[-0.00,0.24]         |
| Tsikhankouskaya campaign event     |                              | 0.05<br>[-0.08,0.18]         |                              | 0.02<br>[-0.11,0.15]         |
| <b>Pre-existing social network</b> |                              |                              | <b>0.23**</b><br>[0.06,0.39] | <b>0.22**</b><br>[0.06,0.39] |
| <i>N</i>                           | 132                          | 132                          | 132                          | 132                          |

95% confidence intervals in brackets

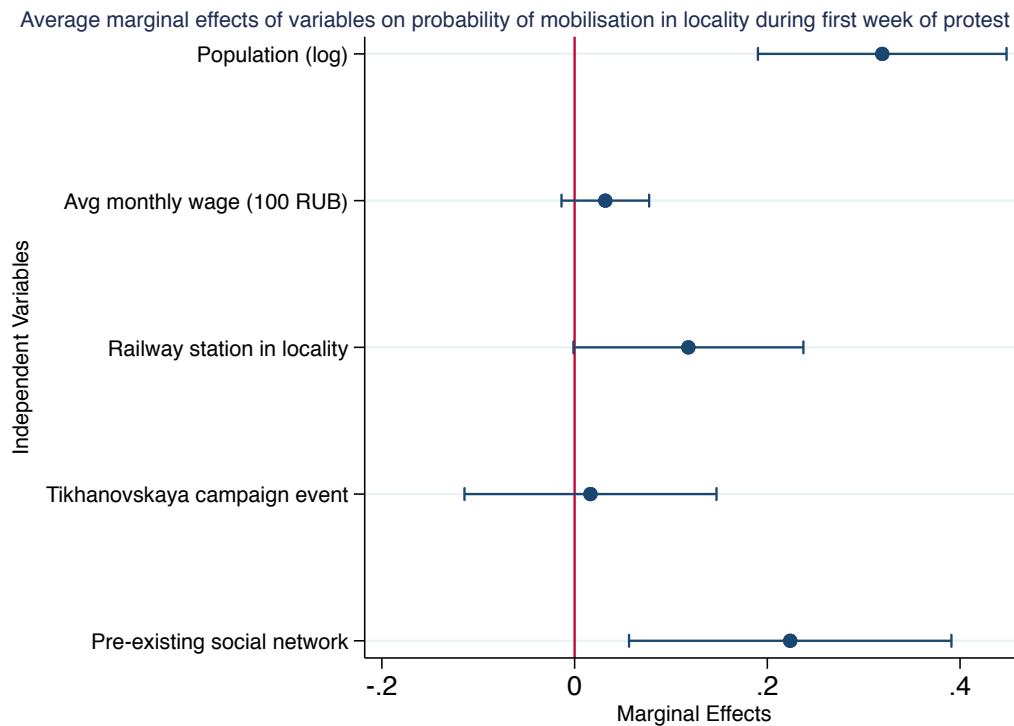
Note: Calculated using Logit model.

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

### *Pre-existing social network ties hypothesis*

My results indicate that when all other variables are held equal, the presence of a pre-existing social network increases the estimated likelihood of a locality mobilising during the first week of protests by 22%. This relationship is strongly statistically significant at the 99% confidence level. Although it is not possible to directly infer causality and the mechanisms of the association from this result alone, the theoretical assumptions about social networks outlined above, as well as my findings about the activity of these chats (detailed below), do suggest that pre-existing networks contributed to the mobilisation of towns and cities across Belarus during the first week of protest. Moreover, as my research analyses the effect of social networks which existed prior to the onset of protest, the direction of any causal relationship would involve these networks influencing subsequent protest occurrence, and not the reverse.

Figure 7: Average marginal effects of variables on probability of mobilisation in a Belarusian locality during the first week of protest (9-15 August 2020).



### *Political opportunities (campaign event) hypothesis*

However, contrary to the competing hypothesis identified in the literature, I found no significant association between the presence of Tsikhanouskaya campaign events in a locality in the run-up to elections, and subsequent first-week mobilisation. Essentially, towns and cities where the Tsikhanouskaya team held a campaign event in the three weeks prior to the elections were no more likely to mobilise in the first week after the elections than localities where no event took place. This finding suggests that in Belarus, regional-level variation in political context is not necessarily helpful in explaining why some localities mobilised in the first week, but not others. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that political opportunities are a complex and nuanced concept. Future research exploring other facets of local political opportunities – such as the repressive tendencies of the local police force, may produce different findings. It is also important to note that the highly personalised nature of Lukashenka’s

authoritarian regime means that political competition at the local level is limited in Belarus (Tsaryk 2018). Other country contexts with greater variation in local political context may find that local political opportunities are important to, or even compound the effect of pre-existing social network ties upon, cross-country variation in mobilisation.

***Controls: transport networks, wages, and population***

I note that my control variables do not all align with local mobilisation in the manner anticipated. I find no significant association between regional average monthly wages and mobilisation, suggesting that localities with wealthier or poorer (on average) populations were no more likely to mobilise. This result contributes to recent findings on the role of economic grievances: one survey suggests many Belarusians have financial concerns (Langbein et al. 2021), but a protester survey indicates socio-economic concerns were not a key protest driver (Onuch and Sasse 2022). The presence of a railway station, representing strong transport networks, was also not significantly associated with first-week mobilisation. This may indicate that in today's technologically advanced and highly-connected era, transport infrastructures no longer play a crucial role in spreading information about protest, as they did in the past. Finally, as anticipated, there is a strong positive association between population size, and first-week mobilisation. However, accounting for the presence of pre-existing social networks absorbs some of this effect. This implies that some of the negative impact of a locality having a smaller population may be mitigated by the presence of pre-existing social networks.

Finally, in robustness checks, I observed no significant difference between localities that mobilised before and after the onset of mass repression on 10<sup>th</sup> August,

or between localities that mobilised before and after the lifting of the internet blackout. Nevertheless, future studies are needed to probe the effect of repression upon early-rising local mobilisation in greater detail.

*Qualitative results: the mechanisms of social network ties*

Whilst the above quantitative results demonstrate a robust and significant relationship between pre-existing social networks and early-rising mobilisation in Belarusian towns and cities, my qualitative results highlight the mechanisms that I am likely capturing. Observation of community Telegram chats provides ample evidence of communication, coordination, and engagement within local social networks both in advance of and during the first week of protest.

*Communication*

In the months and weeks prior to the elections, local networks via community Telegram chats were engaging in lively discussion of current affairs, the upcoming elections, and criticism of Lukashenka. People shared their frustrations with life in Belarus, and sometimes their hopes for the future. Community Telegram chats also proved a useful tool for sharing information about the presidential elections, such as videos, livestreams, posts and messages about opposition candidates, their programs for reforms, and campaign events. Discussions of the elections often included slogans which later became well-known to the wider world during protests, such as ‘Long live Belarus’, ‘Stop the cockroach’, and ‘We believe, we can do it, we will win!’. There were also frequent calls for people to share information beyond the network present in the chat, and speak with their families and friends about ‘what is happening in the country’.

Following the elections, this communication continued and increased in frequency in many instances. Local networks were sharing information about the elections results as they were released and discussing their falsification. The emerging protests and repression in Minsk and other cities were also a common thread of discussion. Original messages, photos and videos were shared, providing information about local events or events elsewhere, that had either been witnessed first-hand, or reported to the sharer by someone they knew. Messages, photos, and videos from other Telegram chats, both national and regional, were also shared, providing information about events unfolding across the country.

### *Coordination*

However, local networks did not limit themselves to the discussion of events and sharing of information. Their usage of Telegram chats reveals extensive attempts to organise around the elections and support political opposition figures. In the weeks preceding 9 August, discussions of tactics were commonplace as people debated how best to undermine the regime. Some interactions became heated during debates about whether it was better to vote or boycott the elections altogether, useful or dangerous to protest on the streets, and whether Belarusians would be ready demonstrate following the elections. Lists of action points were shared, prompting people to do what they could in their community, such as sign petitions, call local news stations, hang flyers and flags, sign up to ‘initiative groups’ coordinating protest action, or become a local election observer. In-person meet ups and Zoom conversations were organised to enable locals to get to know one another and exchange views. In some localities, events in support of opposition candidates were organised and promoted, as well as protests and flash mobs following the arrests of activists. People were

encouraged to be ready to take to their town square on election night, and to stay home from work on strike on 10<sup>th</sup> August after Lukashenka would claim victory.

From election day onwards, these patterns of coordination continued. In multiple Telegram chats, it was possible to observe local networks organising protest events in their town or city in response to the developing situation in the country. These protests were organised in different ways. In some cases, one user simply published details about when and where to protest, calling on others to join. In other instances, a decision about when and where to protest was reached via discussion amongst chat members. Sometimes people were told what to wear and bring with them, and what to do at the protest, or how to react in case of repression.

### *Engagement*

Local Telegram chats also provide evidence that this communication and coordination amongst local networks translated into engagement and action prior to election day. Petitions and crowd-funding campaigns shared in the chats were signed and donated to. Flyers were printed, drawn, posted, and handed out. People turned out to meet-ups, protests, and events organised in support of opposition figures before 9 August, and discussed their impressions afterwards on their local chat. When some locals travelled to attend events in other locations, they offered a ride to others who might want to attend.

Therefore, it is of little surprise that all this discussion and activity resulted in mobilisation on election day and the subsequent week. The above evidence from Telegram chats demonstrates that local networks were well-informed about the situation unfolding in Belarus, had established trusted sources of information, and knew what was likely to happen on election day. They were already prepared to take

some form of action on election night and during the following days, possessed the tools to organise this joint action, and in some instances had already mobilised around the elections in the preceding weeks. Thus, local social networks were primed and ready to take immediate action when, as expected, Lukashenka claimed victory on 9 August.

This identification of such widespread social networks and opposition activity before the summer 2020 protests is in itself a major finding for research on protest in Belarus. However, potential directions for future research could include efforts to better distinguish who are the participants of these local pre-existing networks – for example, are they seasoned activists, or grassroots groups? The nature of the Telegram chats I used to capture the activity of these social networks means that unfortunately scant information is available about the nature of the networks and their members. Additional qualitative study could uncover more information about local activist networks and social movement organisations, and their role in facilitating local protest. The analysis of data from other social media platforms could also reveal variation in how digital platforms help to capture social network ties.

## **Conclusion**

In this article I have addressed the puzzle of what distinguishes early-rising protest localities from those which do not see protest, during moments of nationwide mass mobilisation. Taking the case of the August 2020 post-election protests in Belarus, I argued that pre-existing social networks were likely to be key to early-rising mobilisation, and also investigated a competing hypothesis centred on variation in local political context, represented by pre-election opposition campaign events. My results enabled me to confirm the former hypothesis, and to reject the later. Overall,

my findings make three key contributions relating to the study of protest in Belarus and research on mass mobilisation in general.

First, I have demonstrated the impressive extent of nationwide mobilisation during the first week of the Belarus 2020 protests. Mobilisation took place in over 100 localities and was not concentrated in a particular region, or clustered around the capital city of Minsk. In over two dozen locations, at least 1% of the local population mobilised. My research has also highlighted that prior to the onset of these protests, opposition to the Lukashenka regime was already well-established across Belarus. Protest did not emerge out of the blue on election day – rather, local networks were already engaged and organising in the preceding weeks and months. These findings challenge some of our understandings about civil society and activism in the country, often viewed as weakened by decades of authoritarian rule.

Second, I have provided both quantitative and qualitative evidence that these pre-existing social networks played a significant role in driving early-rising, geographically dispersed protest. Using Telegram as a tool to capture their activity, I have shown that these networks facilitated communication, coordination and engagement in towns and cities prior to the elections. This activity prepared and motivated people to be ready to mobilise from 9 August. These results have implications for research on mass mobilisation in general, as well as protest in Belarus, as they suggest that local social networks help drive mobilisation in ‘early-riser’ protest localities – even in contexts where civil society has been consistently repressed, and the costs of protest are high.

Third, this study has demonstrated that Telegram is not only a useful tool for people looking to communicate and engage in protest activity, but is also valuable for social scientists looking to study protest engagement and mobilisation. Here I have

used Telegram both as a source for otherwise difficult-to-collect protest event data on regional mobilisation, and also as a means to trace the activity of the social networks engaging in protest. Of course, this reliance on Telegram data also underpins some of the limitations of this study. The claims made here about pre-existing social networks must be interpreted with care, as this data does not capture social network ties and social movement organisation networks that may exist ‘offline’. Future qualitative work and detailed protest tracing will help to uncover more details about pre-existing social networks in Belarus and their role in early-rising and local mobilisation.

This work highlights the need to look closely at the actors involved in the early stages of mobilisation during cases of nationwide mass protest. What may seem like spontaneous mobilisation driven by social media, as was widely reported about Belarus, may in fact be at least partially initiated and coordinated by pre-existing social networks at the local level. And, this may be the case even under highly repressive regimes, where those who engage in dissent face great risk. The implications of this study suggest that scholars of protest should not forget to consider the role of pre-existing social networks in mass mobilisation, even when such networks are not obvious; and those looking to support democratising movements should consider how they can strengthen and support grassroots social networks and communities at the regional level.

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**‘Not sheep, not cattle, not little people – we are workers!’<sup>48</sup> : Industrial and white-collar employment and subnational protest variation in Ukraine and Belarus**

Word count: 10218 (excluding references)

**Abstract**

Are regional employment patterns associated with subnational variation in the occurrence of protest events? The literature is divided on the role of working-class versus middle-class protesters during mass mobilisations. Recent works have also highlighted the ways in which state employment may influence mobilisation. Thus, might local employment patterns shape regional variation in protest event frequency? This article takes two cases of mass mobilisations in post-soviet countries, Ukraine’s 2013-14 Euromaidan and the Belarus 2020 protests, and examines whether and how local patterns of industrial and white-collar employment, and state employment in these two sectors, relate to subnational variation in protest event frequency during the first week of mobilisation. In doing so, I seek to test theories on white-collar middle-class, industrial-sector, and state employment as potential drivers or inhibitors of protest participation. This article aims to identify the relationship between certain employment patterns and regional protest frequency, laying the groundwork for future quantitative and qualitative studies to investigate the underlying mechanisms in more detail.

**Introduction**

During nationwide mass mobilisations, is subnational variation in employment patterns associated with regional variation in the occurrence of protest events? Countries often see higher concentrations of industrial or white-collar workers in

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<sup>48</sup> This slogan was used by factory workers protesting in Minsk, Belarus, on 14 August 2020, in response to President Lukashenka’s comments about factory workers. The full, translated slogan: Not cattle, not sheep, not little people, we are workers of MTZ. There aren’t 20 of us, there are 16,000! <https://nv.ua/world/countries/protesty-v-belarusi-tysyachi-lyudey-vyshli-na-ulicy-novosti-belarusi-50106245.html>

certain areas. Might this shape local protest patterns during mass mobilisations? The literature is split on whether protest event frequency is higher in regional contexts where the dominant sector of employment is white-collar middle-class (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006; Beissinger 2013; Huntington 1991) or working-class heavy industry (Collier 1999; Crowley 2010; Valenzuela 1989). Thus, it is vital to explore whether protest events are indeed more frequent in contexts where there are more industrial or white-collar employees.

In post-soviet contexts some have argued that working-class employees – especially those in heavy industry – are less likely to mobilise, due to the weakness of labour unions and the tendency of employers to repress and threaten workers, or control them through patronal networks (Borisov and Clarke 2006; Robertson 2007; Varga 2014; Hale 2015). This sentiment was echoed by an informant during my past field work in Ukraine, who noted that people in her hometown of Kryvyi Rih were too scared to protest during the 2013-14 Euromaidan protests, because many worked in factories and were worried that they would be fired. Yet, social science literature would lead us to believe that there is more to debate as to whether certain kinds of employment facilitate or depress mobilisation. While on the one hand, much research has noted that industrial workers led mass mobilisations which have helped to bring down authoritarian regimes (Collier 1999; Crowley 2010; Valenzuela 1989), other research finds that most protest participants are middle-class (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006; Beissinger 2013; Huntington 1991).

More specifically, scholarship has highlighted the mechanisms connected to these two classes of employees. Heavy industry workers (those employed in factories) have long been found to benefit from working in close proximity and being able to form strong social network ties which breed a sense of collective identity – both factors

known to be important mobilising resources (Valenzuela 1989). Meanwhile, those who are employed in white-collar sectors also have mobilisational resources at their disposal, which are not necessarily a product of their work environment but rather other correlates such as financial security, more free time, and a better education (Stockemer 2014).

However, the workplace can also be an important ‘broker’ of coercion for governments, who can exert pressure on employees via their employer (Mares, Muntean, and Petrova 2018; Mares and Young 2019). Thus, who employs workers may also matter: state-owned enterprises are more likely to play such a role as they are particularly vulnerable to government pressure (Frye, Reuter, and Szakonyi 2014). Certain governments may seek to prevent industrial workforces mobilising by offering both ‘carrots’ and ‘sticks’ to workers in state-owned enterprises (Kim & Gandhi, 2010). And, middle-class employees of the state may not protest, fearful of losing their job or the benefits gained from their position (Rosenfeld 2017).

Two recent cases of protest highlight these tensions around mobilisation and employment: whilst protesters appeared absent from industrial sector localities during the first week of Ukraine’s 2013-14 Euromaidan, and protest only occurred in middle-class neighbourhoods in large urban centres (Onuch and Sasse 2016), during the first week of the Belarus 2020 post-election protests we saw workers in dozens of industrial enterprises mobilise (RFE/RL 2020; Artiukh 2021). Thus, comparing the factors behind regional protest event occurrence in these two post-soviet contexts allows us to probe the puzzle further.

This article takes these two cases of mass mobilisations in post-soviet countries, and examines whether and how local patterns of industrial and white-collar employment, and state employment in these two sectors, relate to subnational variation

during the first week of protest in how many protest events take place in a region. In doing so, I seek to test the above theories on white-collar middle-class, industrial-sector, and state employment as potential drivers or inhibitors of protest participation. This article aims to identify the relationship between certain employment patterns and regional protest frequency, laying the groundwork for future quantitative and qualitative studies to investigate the underlying mechanisms in more detail.

Both Ukraine's Euromaidan, and the Belarus 2020 post-election protests (henceforth referred to as the 2020 Belarus protests), represent recent, nationwide, pro-democracy mass mobilisations against ruling regimes in the post-soviet space. And yet, despite being in the same region and sharing a common past – allowing us to control for some factors – Ukraine and Belarus have differing types and levels of industrial, white-collar, and state employment across their geographic regions. Thus, the two cases provide adequate empirical leverage to test theories on whether and how local dominant sector employment relates to the frequency of protest events. Notably the country contexts also vary along the lines of regime type and specifically the extent of state control: Belarus is a fully authoritarian regime, and Ukraine in 2013, though backsliding at the time, remained a democracy (Freedom House 2013; 2019). Therefore, the cases provide scope to examine whether political and economic context alters the relationship between regional employment and subnational protest. Given a lack of survey data suitable for analysing the relationship between employment type and mobilisation at the subnational level, I employ (a) two original protest event datasets compiled using online news sources and social media data, (b) state statistics on regional population and wages, and (c) data on local companies and employment numbers from the Bureau van Dijk Orbis database (Bureau van Dijk 2020). Using these data, I conduct multivariate (OLS) regressions, to examine the relationship

between these factors – doing so at a regional level in both Ukraine and Belarus<sup>49</sup>. I specifically examine only the first week of mobilisation in order to capture localities that ‘first move to protest’, and to limit motivating grievances to those which emerged in the first week.

My findings suggest that the relationships between white-collar, industrial, and state-sector employment and protest mobilisation are nuanced, and shaped by contextual factors. Regional employment patterns are associated with regional protest event frequency, but which types of employment matter depends upon the country context. In Ukraine, protest events are more frequent where more of the workforce is employed in white-collar enterprises, particularly outside the state sector. In contrast, in Belarus, more frequent protest events are associated with higher levels of local industrial employment – regardless of whether workers are employed in state-owned enterprises. Future work can build on these findings, conducting analysis over a longer time period, to investigate whether the relationship between regional employment patterns and mobilisation changes over time. Qualitative studies are also required, such as detailed case study work at the locality level, to investigate specifically what factors may be shaping this relationship, and what workplace mobilisation looks like at the locality and individual level.

In what follows, I first outline the cases of Ukraine and Belarus, contrasting and comparing regime-type, industry, and mobilisation in the two countries. Then I draw from the literature on protest, labour mobilisation, and political economy to develop theoretical expectations for my investigation. Following this, I describe my

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49 Oblast (province) level in Ukraine, and rayon (district) level in Belarus

data, operationalisation, and methodology. Finally, I report my findings, and discuss avenues for further research.

### **The cases of Ukraine and Belarus**

During both Ukraine's Euromaidan, and the 2020 Belarus protests, mobilisation occurred across regional towns and cities on an unprecedented scale (Kłysiński 2020; Onuch and Sasse 2016). In Ukraine, this mobilisation was driven by the government's unexpected refusal to sign association agreements with the EU, followed by the harsh repression of peaceful protesters from 29 November 2013 (Onuch and Sasse 2016). In Belarus, protesters were primarily motivated by incumbent President Lukashenka's falsification of the presidential election results, and also by the brutal repression of protesters (Herasimenka et al. 2020). Although both cases were nationwide protests, mobilisation varied across each country: whilst many regions mobilised, some did not, and protest event frequency differed significantly between regions (Mateo 2022). Thus, this case selection enables me to hold country-contextual variables steady and examine how within-country variation in key types of employment may shape mobilisation. Moreover, Ukraine and Belarus have different regime types, economies, and employment structures, allowing me to investigate how context may influence the relationship between employment and protest mobilisation. Below I describe the two cases in greater detail.

#### ***Regime type***

When the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991, Ukraine and Belarus initially set out on similar paths to democratisation. However, when Lukashenka came to power in 1994 in Belarus, he set in motion processes of democratic backsliding and authoritarian

consolidation (Bedford 2017). He has been in power since, and Belarus is now a consolidated authoritarian country (Freedom House 2019). There is little independent media (Manaev 2014), civil society is closely monitored and controlled (Pospieszna and Galus 2019; Herasimenka 2019), and heavy punishments are handed out to those who challenge the regime (Freedom House 2019; de Vogel 2022). Power is concentrated in Lukashenka's hands and the state has tight control over many aspects of the economy, society, and culture (Rudy 2020b; L. A. Way 2020).

In contrast, Ukraine has followed a bumpy trajectory towards democracy. Between 1991 and 2013, Ukraine held five rounds of competitive elections, developed a vibrant civil society, a lively media landscape, and key democratic institutions (Åslund and McFaul 2006; Veira-Ramos, Liubyva, and Golovakha 2020). However, democratic backsliding occurred under certain presidents, including Yanukovich, who oversaw increased presidential powers, corruption, media censorship, and abuse of the judiciary (Freedom House 2012). As a result, Yanukovich's regime was downgraded to a 'partly free' democracy by Freedom House (2013). Nevertheless, Yanukovich's authoritarian consolidation was constrained by regional divisions and rival groups of political elites, also regionally based (D'Anieri 2011). Thus, at the time of mass mobilisation in 2013, Yanukovich's regime still retained many features of democracy, and differed significantly from Lukashenka's authoritarian Belarus, where the state dominated many aspects of day-to-day life. But Ukraine and Belarus diverged not only in terms of democratisation, but also economy and industry.

### ***Economy and Industry***

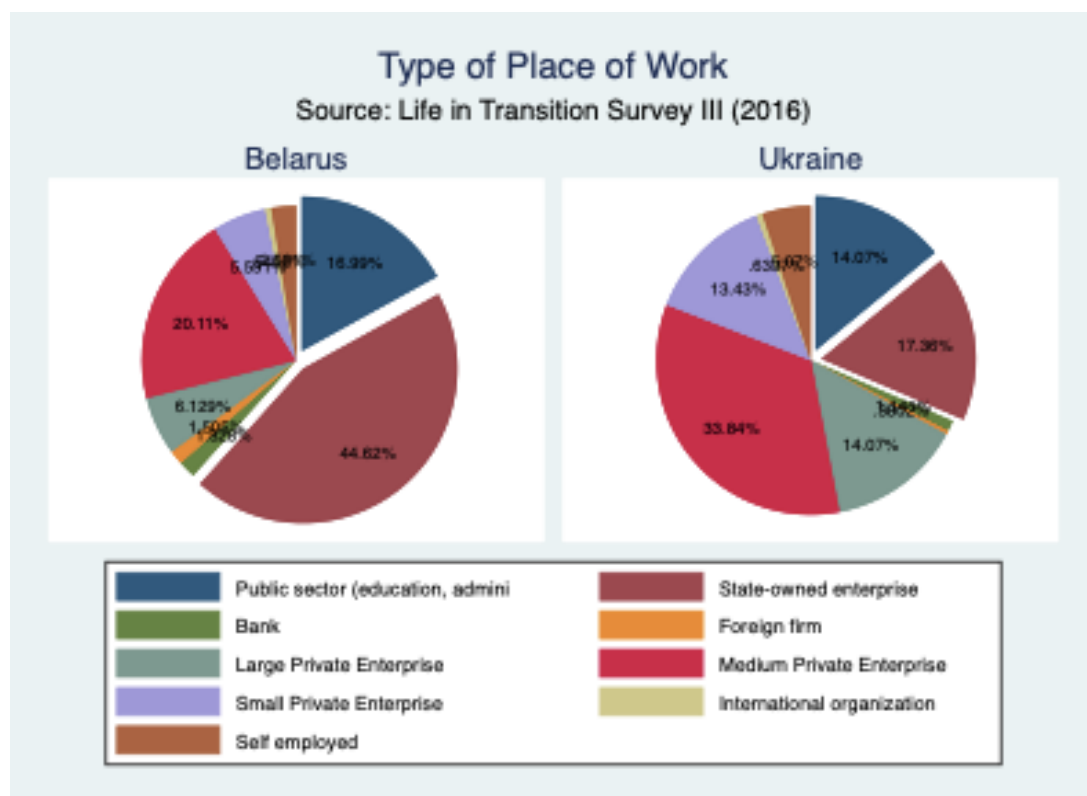
As post-soviet countries, Ukraine and Belarus share a history of state socialism, which entailed high state employment and heavily industrialised economies (Åslund 2002).

However, in Belarus, Lukashenka pushed back against privatisation from the beginning of his presidency (Wilson 2021). Limited efforts to modernise the economy mean that some market features remain present, such as private, foreign-owned, and small and medium enterprises (Rudy 2020b). However, the state retains much control over the economy, meaning state employment remains high (see Figure 1). The economy remains reliant on industry, which contributes approximately 41% of GDP (Sergi 2019). Moreover, Soviet legacies of mono-towns mean that industry and state companies are often highly embedded in certain towns and cities, providing the majority of local employment in some regions (Rudy 2020b).

In comparison, independent Ukraine pursued privatisation at pace. As a result, state employment is much lower, although the state still plays an important role in the economy as an enterprise owner (OECD 2016). Still, non-state actors gained significant economic influence: oligarchs flourished, buying privatized assets and amassing huge fortunes (Hale 2015). Oligarchs use their resources to influence regional and national politics, supporting certain parties and candidates or even running for office themselves (D'Anieri 2011; Pleines 2016). Moreover, Ukraine's economy is also much less reliant on industry than Belarus, with mining, quarrying, and manufacturing making up an estimated 21% of GDP in 2012 (OECD 2016).

As a result of these different trajectories, Ukraine in 2013 was a market economy, whereas the Belarusian economy in 2020 exemplified 'state capitalism' – largely governed by the state, with some market features (Rudy 2020b). Comparison of the two countries in 2016 demonstrates the difference in the size of employment sectors: between state-owned enterprises and the public sector, 61% of Belarusians were employed by the state, compared to only 28% of Ukrainians (see Figure 1).

Figure 8: Employment by sector in Ukraine and Belarus



### *Mobilisation*

Thus, the Euromaidan and the 2020 Belarus protests took place in very different political and economic contexts. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, the history of mass mobilisation in the two countries is also very different. Since independence, Ukraine has seen multiple ‘Maidans’, where large numbers of people have gathered in protest against the government (Onuch 2014a). The largest of these include the 1990 Revolution on Granite, the 2001 Ukraine Without Kuchma protests, and the 2004 Orange Revolution. Belarus lacks a similar history of mass mobilisation, but not a history of protest per se: small annual marches took place to mark Freedom Day and the Chernobyl disaster throughout the nineties (Nikolayenko 2015; 2017); limited mobilisation took place following presidential elections from 2001-2011 (Herasimenka 2017; de Vogel 2022); and several thousand people mobilised in cities

across the country in response to the 2017 Anti-Tax campaign (Herasimenka 2019). Nevertheless, none of these protests reached the scale of the mass mobilisations that occurred in Ukraine.

But are Ukrainian and Belarusian protesters typically industrial workers, or white-collar employees? During the late eighties into the mid-nineties, both countries did see strikes and demonstrations by industrial workers. In Ukraine, large-scale miners' strikes took place from 1989-1990 in support of independence (Marples 1991; 2019), and when expectations about improved life in independent Ukraine were not met, miners went on strike several times again from 1991 to 1998 (Crowley 2010). The largest strike, in 1993, saw up to 1.5 million miners and workers participate, mostly in eastern Ukraine (Makarenko 2016). In Belarus, workers' protests were smaller and less frequent, but still significant: hundreds of thousands of factory workers went on strike in April 1991 to protest unpaid wages and increased living costs (Golubev and Chadyka 2003). Another wave of strikes in 1995 saw transport workers strike over contract issues, disrupting transportation in several cities. However, from the late nineties onwards, miners' and workers' strikes dissipated in both countries.

More recent protests have not been dominated by industrial workers. Participants of Ukraine's Orange Revolution were more likely to be middle-class (Beissinger 2013; Onuch 2014a). In Belarus, large industrial workers' demonstrations have been absent from recent mobilisations. However, workers and independent trade unions did play a role as founding members of the Anti-Tax protest coalition, alongside opposition parties and NGOs (Herasimenka 2019).

Research into the most recent mass mobilisations, those studied in this article, suggests a continuation of these two patterns of middle-class and industrial worker

participation in Ukraine and Belarus. Protester surveys demonstrated that the median Euromaidan protester in Kyiv was middle-class (Onuch 2014b). Planned strikes in support of the Euromaidan failed to mobilise large industrial enterprises, and there were no mass strikes by industrial workers, even during the 13 February nationwide strike called in reaction to the killing of protesters (Ishchenko 2020; Ukrainska Pravda 2014). Online surveys of Belarusian protesters by the MOBILISE project found a somewhat similar pattern in terms of median protester occupation: 70% of those surveyed were middle-class (Onuch 2021a). However, in Belarus, protest actions in August to September were accompanied by a wave of labour strikes (Artiukh 2021). At the height of the protests, workers of state enterprises and large industrial plants staged walkouts and strikes (Bohdan 2020; RFE/RL 2020). This wave of labour unrest was the largest seen in Belarus since 1991 (Artiukh 2021). Although most protesters were middle-class, industrial workers' protests also appear to be a significant part of the 2020 Belarus protests.

Thus, an initial look at the case of the Euromaidan suggests that regions with higher numbers of white-collar employees may see more protest events. The case of the 2020 Belarus protests offers conflicting evidence about the role of white-collar and industrial employees: most protesters were middle-class, but industrial workers' mobilisation took place on a significant scale. I will now turn to the literature to develop a formal set of expectations for the relationship between subnational variation in certain types of employment, and protest mobilisation.

## **Protest participation, industry, and employment: framing the analysis**

### ***Industrial workers and protest***

Since the industrial revolution, industrial workers have played an important role in many protests, revolutions, and mass mobilisations (Collier 1999; Crowley 2010; Levitsky and Mainwaring 2006; Rueschemeyer, Huber, and Stephens 1992; Tilly 2015). In this article, I define industrial workers as those who work in factories or industrial enterprises, including mining and extraction, manufacturing, and energy production. Due to their experience working in and managing large groups of people, industrial workers have a high capacity to organise and coordinate protest events (Collier 1999; Thomson 2018). Labour unions also play a crucial role here, creating a network linking individuals and multiple workplaces, thus providing a vehicle via which large numbers of people may be organised and mobilised when a grievance arises (Collier 1999; Valenzuela 1989). Nevertheless, organised unions are not a fundamental prerequisite for labour protests, which have occurred in their absence in certain contexts (Abdalla and Wolff 2020; Beinin and Duboc 2013; Ketchley and Barrie 2018).

Furthermore, industrial enterprises unite large numbers of people in a single workplace, meaning industrial workers are embedded in a broad network of workplace ties, representing dense communication networks (Thomson 2018; Valenzuela 1989). These networks facilitate the sharing of information about protest grievances and protest actions necessary for mobilisation (Kuran 1991; Lohmann 1994). These network ties can also be mobilising in themselves, because individuals are more likely to mobilise if someone they know is already protesting (Diani and McAdam 2003; Gould 1991; Hedstrom 1994; Onuch 2015c; Snow, Zurcher, and Ekland-Olson 1980; Tufekci and Wilson 2012). Thus, once a few people in an enterprise start to protest, their colleagues may join them.

Moreover, industrial workers may also be motivated to protest because as a collective workforce, they possess the potential to significantly disrupt the economy, generating large costs for governments (Dahlum, Knutsen, and Wig 2019; Kim and Gandhi 2010; Zarate Tenorio 2014). And, the more industrial workers in a country, the greater their potential to disrupt the economy, making them a particular threat in countries with high levels of heavy industry – such as Ukraine, and even more so, Belarus.

Thus, turning to the Belarusian context, the large population of industrial workers represented a skilled, organised, and well-connected group in a context where the regime tightly controlled the population, its ability to mobilise, and the flow of information. Moreover, the specific grievances of the 2020 Belarus protests were relevant to industrial workers. Scholars have highlighted that the falsification of elections – such as on 9 August 2020 in Belarus – can be an important mobilisational trigger, with major fraud shifting perceptions of the costs and benefits of protest, and so galvanising collective action (Tucker 2007). Because Belarusian industrial workers were embedded in large networks, it could be straightforward to establish an idea of the extent of falsification, despite the regime’s propaganda: there are numerous reports of teams of workers holding impromptu votes (the raising of hands) to demonstrate how few people voted for Lukashenka. Whilst there are evident issues with this kind of straw polling, such incidents nonetheless demonstrate that in the interconnected networks of industrial workplaces, it could be easy to see how few people had voted for Lukashenka, contrary to what the local electoral commission claimed. Moreover, a number of studies have shown that support for the social contract upon which Lukashenka’s support was based had been waning in the years and months preceding the elections, even amongst his primary support base – which includes industrial

workers – due to a number of factors including the declining economy and social welfare provision, as well as the mis-handling of the COVID-19 pandemic (Wilson 2016; Douglas 2020; Krawatzek and Langbein 2022). Industrial workers expected to receive decent wages, pensions, and a good standard of living in exchange for their hard labour, but Lukashenka was no longer delivering this. Thus, the specific grievances of August 2020 had the ability to motivate industrial workers to protest, and make use of the mobilisational advantages outlined above.

All this leads me to expect that:

*H1. In Belarus, protest events are more frequent in regions where industrial employment is higher.*

### ***State-owned industry***

Nevertheless, research has highlighted that certain types of regimes seek to manipulate industrial workers to try and prevent them mobilising (Kim and Gandhi 2010; Robertson 2007; Schmitter 1974). The capacity of industrial workers to mobilise, highlighted above, makes them a significant threat to a regime. Because of this potential threat, authoritarian states often seek to gain greater control over this workforce (Kim and Gandhi 2010). They may repress or co-opt unions to impede workers' ability to organise (Robertson 2007; Schmitter 1974). Such regimes employ carrots as well as sticks, providing material benefits to workers in exchange for compliance, in the hope that industrial workers 'may acquiesce, if not actively lend support, to the regime' (Kim and Gandhi 2010). In particular, in state-owned enterprises the government will have more power to repress and co-opt workers and unions (Frye, Reuter, and Szakonyi 2014). In such workplaces, the state has more control over union membership, hiring and firing, and the provision or withdrawal of

certain benefits (Kim and Gandhi 2010). Industrial workers who rely directly on the state for their salary are less likely to mobilise against the government, fearing negative repercussions, or even being fired if they participate in protests (Lankina and Voznaya 2015; McMann 2006). In the case of Belarus, an authoritarian state with high state employment, this effect may mean reduced mobilisation in regions with high levels of state-owned industrial employment.

Therefore, taking into account the specific context of Belarus, and in line with Kim and Gandhi (2010) and Robertson (2007), I also test the competing hypotheses for industrial employment, that:

*H2. Protest events are less frequent in regions with higher employment in industrial enterprises owned by the state.*

### ***White-collar protest***

However, another area of the literature on protest has questioned whether workers drive contemporary mass mobilisation at all. Labour protest is declining in many western countries (Biggs 2015), and in former Soviet countries the wave of labour protest anticipated during transition did not materialise (Varga 2014; Przeworski 1991). Rather, it is middle-class protesters that have led many mass mobilisations (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006; Huntington 1991). It is argued that individuals need to possess a certain level of resources to engage in protest (Edwards and McCarthy 2007; Jenkins 1983) – and middle-class or white-collar workers generally have higher levels of education, human capital and political awareness, as well as disposable income (Stockemer 2014), facilitating their protest participation.

Past protests in Ukraine are amongst those found to be dominated by the middle class (Beissinger 2013; Onuch 2014b). Based on our understanding of the importance

of pre-existing networks in facilitating protest (see other papers in this thesis), as well as recent research highlighting the role of the middle class during the Euromaidan in Kyiv (Onuch 2014b), there are strong grounds to anticipate that it is white-collar rather than industrial workers who played a more significant role during the regional Euromaidan protests.

Moreover, this study focuses on the first week of the Euromaidan. The grievances during the first week of the protests focused on the non-signing of the EU association agreements and desire for European integration, excluding the beating of the protesters which took place in the second week of mobilisation (Onuch and Sasse 2016). These EU-related claims were much more relevant to white-collar workers, who were more likely to benefit from the economic and travel opportunities that closer ties with the EU would bring. In contrast, there is some evidence that industrial workers feared that closer ties with the EU would endanger their livelihoods, and so engaged in counter-mobilisation (Zhukov 2016).

All this leads me to a hypothesis centring on the role of white-collar workers in Ukraine, expecting that:

*H3. In Ukraine, protest events are more frequent in regions with higher employment in white-collar occupations.*

### ***State-dependent white-collar employment***

Nonetheless, recent work by Rosenfeld (2017; 2021) has challenged the idea that the middle-classes as a whole are more likely to protest. Rosenfeld (2017) finds that in the case of Russia, state-sector middle-class employees are less likely to protest against the government, regardless of their ideology. This is because middle-class state workers face ‘negative inducements’ such as possible job loss, as well as ‘positive

inducements': they tend to have greater job security, good work-related benefits, and the possibility to exploit their position for rent-seeking (Rosenfeld, 2017). Therefore, based on Rosenfeld (2017) I anticipate a second competing hypothesis centring on white-collar employment in Ukraine, expecting that:

*H4. In Ukraine, protest events are fewer in regions with higher white-collar state employment.*

### **Controls**

Of course, certain types of regional employment are not the only factor that can be expected to impact subnational variation in protest event frequency. The following factors are not the analytical focus of this article, but should be taken into account and controlled for in my analysis.

Firstly, regional variation in average wages may influence variation in local mobilisation. Some scholars expect that poorer and more disadvantaged citizens are more likely to protest as they have greater grievances and see themselves as unfairly disadvantaged compared to other groups (Gurr 1970; Klandermans 2015). This expectation is challenged by a number of studies on recent pro-democratic protests, that finds that on average wealthier individuals are more likely to protest, and those with lower incomes less likely (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995).

Second, differences in regional populations will also shape subnational variation in mobilisation. Regions with more residents have more potential protesters, more social network ties to other locations, and more available resources – all of which facilitate frequent protest (Edwards and McCarthy 2007).

Finally, in the case of Ukraine, numerous studies have noted variation in political behaviours at the macro-region level – the east, west, central and southern

regions of the country (Barrington and Herron 2004; Birch 2000; D'Anieri 2011). Of particular importance to this article, the western region tends to mobilise more readily in pro-democratic protests (Onuch 2014a). Hence in my models for Ukraine, I will control for the western region of the country.

### **Data and operationalisation**

To test these theoretical expectations outlined above, I use my two original protest event catalogues for the Euromaidan and the 2020 Belarus protests, alongside data from the National Statistical Committee of the Republic of Belarus, and the State Statistic Service of Ukraine. I also draw on local company ownership and employment data from the Bureau van Dijk 'Orbis' database (Bureau van Dijk 2020). For this article, I only use data on the first week of protest in my two event catalogues: 21-27 November 2013 in Ukraine, and 9-15 August 2020 in Belarus.

Differences in the available data on the two protests mean I took two different approaches to create my protest event catalogues. To gather event data for the Euromaidan, I hand-coded all information about protest events found in articles from the online news outlets *Hromadske*, *Ukrainska Pravda* and *Radio Svoboda*, as well as English-language newsletters issued by the civic organisation *Hromadskyi Sektor*, published between 21 November 2013 and 22 February 2014, which referred to 'Euromaidan' or the 'Maidan' in Ukrainian, Russian, or English. These sources presented the best available data on regional Euromaidan protests, as they reported regularly on the protests. Using regional news outlets would have proved too labour intensive, due to the resources needed to download and code articles from Ukraine's 24 oblasts, plus the Republic of Crimea. Moreover, local news coverage of the Euromaidan varied significantly by region. Social media data was also not a viable

source, because at the time of data collection, Facebook and Twitter API restrictions made it impossible to access social media data from the time of the Euromaidan.

To source protest event data for Belarus, I was able to turn to a key channel on the Telegram Messenger app, which provided detailed information about regional protests in near real-time, far beyond that available in traditional or online media. Media censorship and state control in Belarus meant that most news outlets were not accurately covering the protests. The few independent news sites did not manage to report on all protest locations either, as events on the ground rapidly unfolded, and independent journalists struggled against repression and internet blackouts. In contrast, the Telegram channel ‘Nexta Live’ provided a continuous stream of information on protest locations during the first week of mobilisation (Herasimenka 2021), so I used this as my source. However, processing large amounts of Telegram messages required a different approach to the hand-coding used for my Euromaidan data. Thus, I took a two-stage, semi-automated approach. Using keyword-based searches informed by the work of Weidman and Rod (2019), I used R to identify all messages shared in the Telegram channel ‘Nexta Live’<sup>50</sup> referring to protests in Belarusian towns and cities. These messages then first went through an automated round of coding to identify protest location, repertoires, and the extent of security forces engagement. This was followed by a round of hand-coding, where I read the messages and viewed attached multimedia content, verifying the results of automated coding, and adding further information on protest participants and turnout.

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<sup>50</sup> ‘Nexta Live’ was the main Telegram channel reporting on the protests for the first few months, with over a million subscribers at its peak.

Managed by a team of Belarusian activists based in Poland, the channel collected reports of protest throughout Belarus and shared details on the channel, fact-checking and updating data as far as was possible.

The resulting two datasets contained report-level data, with some protest events reported multiple times. I aggregated this data to combine reports referring to the same location and day, producing a catalogue of unique protest events, used in this study.

***Dependent variable: Protest event frequency during first week***

To examine whether the number of local protest events is correlated with certain regional patterns of employment, I create a continuous dependent variable for the total number of protest events in a region during the first seven days of protest, using my protest event catalogues. I operationalise protest event frequency in a region rather than protest size, as I am interested in examining variation in the geographic occurrence of protest events, rather than variation in protest size. There are strong arguments for analysing protest event size (Biggs 2018), but for the purposes of this article, capturing the number of protests in a region – whether large or small – matters more than protest size. Moreover, there are a number of challenges associated with accurately capturing protest event size (Biggs 2018). These challenges are intensified when studying protest in smaller, regional locations, as these attract less media attention and are reported in less detail. I was unable to verify the size of many protest events, so operationalising protest size would have forced me to drop many regional events from my dataset, thus undermining my analysis which aims at understanding the geospatial patterns of protest.

For Belarus, my unit of analysis is the second level of administrative division, comprising of 118 rayons (districts), plus the city of Minsk.<sup>51</sup> For each of these 119

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<sup>51</sup> At the first level of administration, Belarus is divided into 6 oblasts, providing an insufficient number of observations for my study. Using this variable would also collapse much of the variation in protest and employment within individual oblasts.

regions, I create a continuous variable for protest occurrence, representing the number of protests that took place in that region during the first week of mobilisation.

For Ukraine, my unit of analysis is the first level of administrative division: 24 oblasts, plus the Republic of Crimea, and two cities of regional significance (Kyiv and Sevastopol). For each of these 27 regions, I again coded a continuous variable for protest occurrence, representing the number of protests that took place in that region during the first week of mobilisation. The second level of administrative division – Ukraine’s 490 rayons (districts), plus 118 urban districts – was not used for this paper<sup>52</sup>. As there are many more rayons in Ukraine than Belarus, this level of division introduces greater complications in considering whether employees may work in one district and live (and therefore protest) in another. Nevertheless, future research can test whether results found at the oblast level in this paper hold at the rayon level, or whether more patterns emerge when analysis is conducted with a larger number of observations.

### ***Independent variables***

The literature discussed earlier in this article prompts me to investigate the relationship between regional protest frequency, and variables relating to industrial, white-collar, and state-owned industrial, and state-sector white-collar employment. In the case of Ukraine, I also consider industrial enterprises that are owned by oligarchs loyal to the party in power. I refer to companies owned by either the state, or oligarchs loyal to the party in power, as state-adjacent owned.

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<sup>52</sup> Following 2021 administrative reforms, Ukraine now has 136 rayons.

For information on local employment, I used Bureau van Dijk's Orbis database (Bureau van Dijk 2020), downloading the full list of Ukrainian and Belarusian companies and their subsidiaries. The Orbis database is the largest cross-country firm-level database and is used by researchers as well as government bodies for information on firms and employment (King 2017; Kalemli-Ozcan 2015; Zhukov 2016).<sup>53</sup> The database includes records for private and publicly owned companies in Ukraine and Belarus, with information on location, industry type, ownership, and employee numbers. To my knowledge, Orbis is the only source of information on employment in publicly and privately owned companies, and different economic sectors, which is comparable across Belarus and Ukraine, and able to be disaggregated to the subnational level. However, the data was at company level and so first needed some manipulation.

I first coded a series of binary variables for each company, indicating whether they are industrial sector, white-collar sector, state-owned, or state-adjacent owned (capturing ownership by the state or oligarchs loyal to the ruling party in Ukraine). These companies were coded as follows:

- Industrial, where 1 indicates that the company operates in the mining, quarrying, manufacturing, or energy production sectors, according to NACE classifications.
- White-collar, where 1 indicates that the company operates in a non-manual sector<sup>54</sup>, according to NACE classifications.

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<sup>53</sup> Zhukov uses Orbis for detailed local employment data in his 2016 study on the relationship between local pre-war employment and rebel activity in eastern Ukraine.

<sup>54</sup> I define non-manual sectors as including: accommodation; information and communication; financial and insurance services; real estate; profession; scientific and technical activities; administration and support service activity; public administration and defence; education; human health and social work activities; and arts, entertainment, and education. Agriculture, forestry, and fishing; mining and quarrying; manufacturing; electricity and gas supply; water collection, treatment, and supply; construction; sales and repair and trade of vehicles and parts; and transportation and storage are classed as manual and coded as 0.

- State owned, where 1 indicates the state in which the company is located has at least a 25% ownership stake in the company.
- State-adjacent owned, where 1 indicates that the company is located in Ukraine and either the Ukrainian state or an oligarch loyal to the party in power has at least a 25% ownership stake in the company.

I then aggregated the companies by region (rayon in Belarus, oblast in Ukraine), using their address data. I utilised government data on total employees in each region to calculate the percentage of regional employees employed in each relevant company type, in the year proceeding protest onset. Data on total regional employees is sourced from the National Statistical Committee of Belarus (2020) and the State Statistics Service of Ukraine (2014). This process produced the following independent variables for my analysis:

- Industrial employment: percentage of the workforce employed in industrial companies.
- State-owned industrial employment: percentage of the workforce employed in state-owned industrial companies.
- Non-state-owned industrial employment: percentage of the workforce employed in industrial companies not owned by the state.
- State-adjacent-owned industrial employment: percentage of the workforce employed in industrial companies owned by the state or regime-supporting oligarchs (Ukraine only).
- Non-state-adjacent industrial employment: percentage of the workforce employed in industrial companies not owned by the state or regime-supporting oligarchs (Ukraine only).

- White-collar employment: percentage of the workforce employed in white-collar (non-manual) companies.
- State white-collar employment: percentage of the workforce employed in white-collar (non-manual) companies owned by the state.
- Non-state white-collar employment: percentage of the workforce employed in white-collar (non-manual) companies not owned by the state.

### *Control variables*

As the literature also suggests that regions with higher wages may be more likely to see protest, regardless of their employment patterns, I control for average monthly wage by region in the local currency, with data provided by the National Statistical Committee of Belarus (2020) and the State Statistics Service of Ukraine (2014). I use figures for the year preceding protest onset. Wages can be controlled for separately from employment type in the context of Ukraine and Belarus, as wages do not necessarily align with employment sector in these countries: some white-collar jobs such as education and healthcare may receive low wages, while certain skilled industrial jobs such as manufacturing may be well-paid (Pastore and Verashchagina 2011; Ryabchuk 2015; Kupets 2016).

I also control for regional population, to take account of the fact that protest is likely to be more frequent in regions with larger populations. Regional population statistics are provided by the National Statistical Committee of Belarus (2020) for 2019, and the State Statistics Service of Ukraine (2014) for 2013. I produce population variables representing the total population living in a region, measured in ten thousand people, to make marginal effects easier to interpret.

Finally, for Ukraine, I control for macro-region. To take into account the fact that western Ukraine is more likely to protest, and the ruling Party of Regions had less influence over local government and business in the region, I create a dummy variable to indicate that a region is located in western Ukraine. I take Kyiv International Institute of Sociology's definitions of western Ukraine (KIIS 2015).

### *Analytical approach*

To investigate the relationship between protest and the independent and control variables discussed above, I use an ordinary least squares (OLS) multivariate regression for my continuous dependent variable (number of protest events). For the results of my OLS regression, I report the marginal effects of each variable upon the number of protest events in a region. As there is a degree of collinearity between my employment variables, I test for the effect of each variable one at a time in separate models, whilst including control variables.

There may also be an element of interdependence between my observations, as my analyses do not account for possible spatial dependencies across neighbouring regions. Contagion dynamics may mean that once a locality has mobilised, towns and cities nearby may also be more likely to see protest events. This is not considered in my models as this article aims to explore the relationship between local employment and regional protest patterns, rather than how protest diffuses across space. Nevertheless, the possible interdependence of the observations may influence the standard errors of my results. Future research can examine possible contagion effects of protest across different regions.

## **Results and Discussion**

My results suggest that relative levels of employment in industrial or white-collar sectors, or state-owned companies in these sectors, are significantly associated with the frequency of protest events in a region – but not always in the manner anticipated in my hypotheses. I am able to confirm my hypothesis (H1) that levels of industrial employment are positively associated with protest event frequency in Belarus, as well as my hypothesis (H3) that the local level of white-collar employment is positively associated with protest frequency in Ukraine. However, I must reject the hypothesis (H2) that levels of state-sector industrial employment are negatively associated with protest event frequency in Belarus. Instead, I find a surprising positive relationship. Lastly, I find no evidence to support the hypothesis (H4) that regions with higher state-sector white-collar employment in Ukraine will see fewer protest events – although my results do distinguish some difference between the effect of state-sector and non-state-sector white-collar employment. The nature of these associative findings means that I am unable to make causal claims about these results, or identify the mechanisms at play: this is a task for future research, now that these relationships have been identified. Moreover, in interpreting these results, it is vital to acknowledge the problem of ecological inference. We should be careful not to infer individual-level characteristics from analysis using aggregated data at the regional level (Robinson 1950). Where levels of certain kinds of employment are positively (or negatively) associated with protest event frequency, this should not be understood as signifying that this kind of employee is more (or less) likely to protest. Specific employment patterns could be correlated with other factors which contribute to protest event frequency, and this could be driving the association, rather than individual-level mobilisation.

However, as I discuss these results in greater detail below, I incorporate key

instances from my protest event catalogue which may point to possible mechanisms involved in the association between certain groups of employees and protest frequency. In what follows, I discuss my findings for each of my hypotheses in turn. I also briefly discuss the results of robustness checks, which examine the relationship between protest frequency and industrial employment in Ukraine, and white-collar employment in Belarus.

### ***Industrial employment***

The results of my analysis for industrial employment and protest event frequency are presented below, in Table 1 for Belarus and Table 2 for Ukraine. In Belarus, a 1% increase in the percentage of the rayon workforce in industrial employment is associated with an 11% increase in the likelihood of a local protest event taking place in the first week of mobilisation. These findings support my hypothesis, but nevertheless challenge conventional understandings about the weakness of labour protest in post-soviet contexts (Ashwin 1999; Crowley 2004). Although most Belarusian protesters were middle-class (Onuch 2021a), a large wave of mobilisation by industrial workers may have contributed to the frequency of protest events at the rayon level. Indeed, there is some evidence that in towns with big enterprises, workers organised large protests. For example, in Salihorsk, on 14 August 2020, the entrance of the local Belaruskali factory was the focal point of a protest, where several thousand miners and other locals gathered for a meeting with the company's director. A mechanic who would become co-chairman of the strike committee read out protesters' demands. Local media reported the surprise of a private sector worker that the miners came out: 'I am shocked that Belaruskali has come out [...] The miners get good money, they have wives, children, loans. But people still came out, because they are

worried about all the detainees. I was sure that only employees of private offices would speak out, but the miners...'<sup>55</sup>. However, accounts by miners highlight that they were discussing the election results before they came out, joking that they would emerge from their shift 'in a different country'. And, when workers were beaten and arrested as protests began, word spread quickly, potentially mobilising their colleagues.<sup>56</sup> A nascent strike committee was born on 14 August and meetings on subsequent days prepared a strike which began on 17 August 2020.<sup>57</sup>

There are also indications that workers in smaller companies mobilised as a collective, organising events in order to show their support for the protests. One hundred and thirty-five workers at VIRPIL Controls, a small factory in Hrodna producing videogaming hardware, staged a strike and a meeting, issuing a statement declaring 'we cannot stand aside and remain silent when catastrophic injustice is happening in our country'.<sup>58</sup> These factory workers were also aware that their actions could contribute to financial pressure upon Lukashenka, with the CEO stating that a strike meant less income tax for the state budget, and fewer export earnings. It is thus also possible that industrial workers more broadly were motivated to organise strikes and protest events, as they knew that the Belarusian economy was heavily reliant on industry, and their actions could undermine the Lukashenka regime in economic terms.

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<sup>55</sup> <https://realt.onliner.by/2020/08/14/soligorsk-shumit-na-ploshhadi-pered-belaruskaliem-nachalsya-massovyj-miting>

<sup>56</sup> <https://www.the-village.me/village/city/superheroes-in-city/288549-zabast-fate>

<sup>57</sup> <https://euroradio.fm/ru/ogromnyy-miting-v-soligorske-tam-bastuet-belaruskaliy-strim>

<sup>58</sup> <https://devby.io/news/virpil-controls-obyavil-zabastovku>

*Table 1: Marginal effects of industrial employment variables on frequency of protest events in rayon during first week of mobilisation in Belarus*

|                                                                 | Protest events<br>wk 1              | Protest events wk 1                 | Protest events<br>wk 1              |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Rayon population (10,000 people)</b>                         | 0.02<br>[-0.00,0.03]                | <b>0.02*</b><br><b>[0.00,0.04]</b>  | <b>0.02*</b><br><b>[0.00,0.04]</b>  |
| <b>Average rayon monthly wage (100 RUB)</b>                     | <b>0.64**</b><br><b>[0.38,0.89]</b> | <b>0.75**</b><br><b>[0.48,1.03]</b> | <b>0.66**</b><br><b>[0.38,0.93]</b> |
| <b>% employees in industrial employment (rayon)</b>             | <b>0.11**</b><br><b>[0.08,0.14]</b> |                                     |                                     |
| <b>% employees in state-owned industrial employment (rayon)</b> |                                     | <b>0.14**</b><br><b>[0.09,0.20]</b> |                                     |
| <b>% employees in non-state-owned industrial employment</b>     |                                     |                                     | <b>0.13**</b><br><b>[0.09,0.18]</b> |
| <i>N</i>                                                        | 119                                 | 119                                 | 119                                 |

95% confidence intervals in brackets

Note: Calculated using OLS model.

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

Interestingly, and in direct contradiction to my hypothesis (H2), a 1% increase in state-owned industrial employment specifically has an even stronger relationship with local protest event frequency, increasing the likelihood of an additional protest event by 14%. Both this result and that for H1 are statistically significant to the 99% confidence level. This is a fascinating finding, and the reverse of the expected effect for state-owned industry, which in an authoritarian country may be expected to depress protest. These results alone should not be interpreted as suggesting that industrial workers are driving protest event frequency. However, examples from specific workplaces do suggest that something interesting was happening at the individual and workplace level. It may be that in the Belarusian context, where state enterprises were the primary employer in many regional towns, uniting thousands in workplace networks, at least in the first week of protest the mobilising and information-sharing effect of these networks overcame the fear of potential repression.

Evidence from the Belarusian Metallurgical Factory (BMZ) in Zhlobin demonstrates that employees of state-owned factories were preparing to mobilise and sharing information even in advance of the elections. Concerned by detentions in the city in the run up to the elections, and the likelihood that the elections would be falsified, BMZ workers met on 8 August 2020 to discuss the situation in Belarus. The factory administration was warned that strikes would be held if the elections were falsified. The subsequent beating of protesters following the elections led to more anger amongst workers, who began strikes from 10 August, and held a mass meeting on 14 August (Ostorogorskyi 2020). This suggests that networks in state enterprises were facilitating the organisation of protest events even in advance of election results.

In another example in Hrodna, a Hrodna Azot employee volunteered as an election observer and reported back to his colleagues how results were falsified, sharing crucial information. Azot workers were amongst those detained and beaten in Hrodna in the first days of the protests, leading company employees to mobilise and demand meetings with factory management and local officials. A factory worker reported workers being assured that they would be allowed to protest unharmed on 13 August. When Azot workers then marched to the city centre on that day, local residents joined. The worker reported ‘it seemed as if people felt more protected because it was passed on quickly: the plant director said that no one would touch the Azot people’.<sup>59</sup> This story also highlights the possibility that local protesters felt emboldened by the mobilisation of state factory workers. The risks undertaken by protesting state factory workers – who were relatively well-paid and reliant on the government for their privileged position – may have acted as an important signal, encouraging others to

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<sup>59</sup> <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/strike-exile-arrest-what-happened-belarusian-workers/>

protest. However, the situation soon changed for Hrodna Azot workers: management refused to give permission for a march on 20 August, threatening messages were sent to employee's phones, and police began to target local activists. This pattern was repeated across Belarus, with increasing reports of the persecution and sacking of workers over time. Thus, it is vital for future research building on these findings to extend the time period being studied, and conduct longitudinal analysis to see if the relationship between protest and local levels of industrial employment, or state-sector industrial employment, remains constant over time.

In robustness checks for Ukraine, in contrast to Belarus I find no association between regional levels of industrial employment and protest event frequency (Table 2). There is no evidence to support a relationship between regional industrial employment patterns and first-week protest event frequency in Ukraine. This result suggests that a key difference between the two cases – which could be regime type, levels of industrial employment, or the nature of protest grievances – may be influencing the extent to which industrial workers mobilise in Ukraine. However, it is important to note that the small number of observations for my Ukraine analysis (27) may be contributing to the absence of significant associations in my results. More research is needed to definitively confirm these findings.

*Table 2: Marginal effects of industrial employment variables on frequency of protest events in oblast during first week of mobilisation in Ukraine*

|                                                              | Protest events wk 1                | Protest events wk 1                | Protest events wk 1                |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Western Ukraine                                              | 0.64<br>[-1.73,3.01]               | 0.63<br>[-1.72,2.97]               | 0.70<br>[-1.68,3.07]               |
| Oblast population (10,000 people)                            | <b>0.02*</b><br><b>[0.00,0.04]</b> | <b>0.02*</b><br><b>[0.00,0.04]</b> | <b>0.02*</b><br><b>[0.00,0.03]</b> |
| Average oblast monthly wage (100 UAH)                        | -0.06<br>[-0.36,0.24]              | -0.03<br>[-0.35,0.28]              | -0.07<br>[-0.33,0.19]              |
| % employees in industrial employment (oblast)                | -0.00<br>[-0.30,0.30]              |                                    |                                    |
| % employees in state-adjacent industrial employment (oblast) |                                    | -0.07<br>[-0.55,0.41]              |                                    |
| % employees in non-state-adjacent industrial employment      |                                    |                                    | 0.07<br>[-0.42,0.56]               |
| <i>N</i>                                                     | 27                                 | 27                                 | 27                                 |

95% confidence intervals in brackets

Note: Calculated using OLS model.

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

### ***White-collar employment***

Turning to my hypothesis (H3) about white-collar employment and regional protest in Ukraine, I find support for my expectation that more white-collar employees in a region are associated with more frequent protest events (see Table 3). Here, every 1-point increase in the percentage of the oblast workforce employed in white-collar companies is associated with a 40% increased likelihood of a protest event taking place. In other words, in oblasts where more people were employed in white-collar sectors, protest events were more frequent. The correlation is even more pronounced when we take only white-collar employees outside the state sector: a 1% increase in their share of the workforce increases the chance of an additional protest event in the first week in a region on average by 52%.

From these results it is not possible to establish a causal link, and based upon this finding alone we should refrain from assuming that this means white-collar employees were central to regional protests in Ukraine. However, drawing upon additional evidence, I tentatively suggest that the identified association between levels of white-collar employment and protest frequency may be motivated by two key factors. First, that the grievance of the first week of protests appealed to Ukraine's white-collar middle class, who moreover have tended to be the core protestorate in past mass mobilisations (Onuch 2014b). And second, and relatedly, the key organisers of first-week protests in many regional cities appear to be activists from white-collar professions. For example, in Odesa, leading activists of the first week were primarily students, journalists, professors, and opposition politicians. The slogans of Odesa's first week of protests highlight the key grievances: the first protest, planned in advance, in the expectation that Yanukovich wouldn't sign the association agreements, was entitled 'Odesa: Currency – the Euro' (a play on words which can also mean Odesa: path – Euro/EU). A memorandum issued by protesters proclaimed Odesa's European identity, and stated 'We are ready to show solidarity and determination to achieve the goals of modernising our country and integrating with the European community (...) our children are worthy of living in a better country.'

Across the country we see a similar pattern, whereby white-collar workers were key organisers and participants of early protest events, which focused on claims relating to the EU Association Agreements. In Lutsk it was a local journalist who first put out a call on social media to gather on a local square on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2013. He was soon joined by journalist colleagues, and local businesspeople and civic activists, who quickly began to collect signatures in support of EU integration, and worked to mobilise more of the local population in following days, particularly students. Future

research can further probe why it may be that white-collar employment aligns with first-week protest event frequency, and whether this association changes over time as the grievances of the Euromaidan widen beyond EU integration.

Nevertheless, my results for Ukraine do not support my hypothesis (H4), that the local level of state-sector white-collar employment is associated with reduced event frequency. I find no significant (positive or negative) association between regional levels of state-sector white-collar employment and protest event frequency. We should not necessarily understand this to mean that state-sector white-collar employment has no effect on the likelihood of protest participation; individual-level analysis would be needed to confirm this. The presence of other protest-prone populations in a region, such as private sector white-collar workers, may be masking the effect of state-sector employees. However, the contrasting results for H3 and H4 do lend some support to Rosenfeld's (2017) argument (upon which the hypothesis was based), that state-sector middle-class employees are less likely to mobilise against the government than their private sector middle-class counterparts. My protest event catalogue reveals some evidence in the Ukrainian case that state-sector, white-collar workers (along with their industrial counterparts) were pressured or incentivised by the government to engage in pro-government demonstrations. For example, when pro-government, 'Anti-Maidan' protests began in a number of cities in the second week of mobilisation, such as Kharkiv where an estimated 40,000 gathered, participants were reported to be civil servants and factory workers, who had been briefed in the 'risks' to Ukraine's economy of EU integration.<sup>60</sup> Later, reports followed that civil servants were bussed in, and were pressured to protest, fearing that they would lose their jobs

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<sup>60</sup> <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/25183921.html>

if they refused.<sup>61</sup> One woman participating in a pro-government gathering in Kyiv on 29 November told reporters ‘we are state workers, we didn’t come here by our own free will’.<sup>62</sup>

*Table 3: Marginal effects of white-collar employment variables upon number of protest events in oblast during first week of mobilisation in Ukraine*

|                                                                  | Protest events<br>wk1          | Protest events<br>wk1        | Protest events<br>wk1          |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Western Ukraine                                                  | -0.08<br>[-2.23,2.07]          | 0.32<br>[-1.92,2.56]         | -0.17<br>[-2.30,1.95]          |
| Oblast population (10,000 people)                                | <b>0.03**</b><br>[0.01,0.04]   | <b>0.02**</b><br>[0.01,0.04] | <b>0.03**</b><br>[0.01,0.04]   |
| Average oblast monthly wage, (100 UAH)                           | <b>-0.47*</b><br>[-0.87,-0.07] | -0.30<br>[-0.67,0.08]        | <b>-0.50*</b><br>[-0.90,-0.10] |
| <b>% employees in white-collar employment (oblast)</b>           | <b>0.40*</b><br>[0.07,0.72]    |                              |                                |
| % employees in state white-collar employment (oblast)            |                                | 1.33<br>[-0.29,2.96]         |                                |
| <b>% employees in non-state white-collar employment (oblast)</b> |                                |                              | <b>0.52*</b><br>[0.12,0.92]    |
| <i>N</i>                                                         | 27                             | 27                           | 27                             |

95% confidence intervals in brackets

Note: Calculated using OLS model.

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

Nevertheless, as discussed above, it is necessary to explore the results of my quantitative analysis for Ukraine with further research, due to the small number of observations in my analysis: with more geographically disaggregated data, providing a larger sample size, it is possible that the strength of the identified associations will change, or additional patterns will emerge.

In robustness checks, to investigate the relationship between white-collar employment and protest in Belarus, I found a contrasting result to those for Ukraine. For each 1% increase in the percentage of the workforce employed in white-collar companies in a Belarusian rayon, the likelihood of a protest event occurring decreases

<sup>61</sup>[https://galinfo.com.ua/news/harkivski\\_aktyvisty\\_chytayut\\_leksii\\_antymaydanu\\_152030.html](https://galinfo.com.ua/news/harkivski_aktyvisty_chytayut_leksii_antymaydanu_152030.html)

<sup>62</sup> [https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/politics/2013/11/131129\\_rally\\_party\\_regions\\_vc](https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/politics/2013/11/131129_rally_party_regions_vc)

by 8%. Moreover, the negative association is even more pronounced when accounting for white-collar employees *not* working in the state sector. For every additional percentage point this group increases, the chance of a protest event decreases by 10%. This finding contradicts arguments in the literature that would anticipate state-sector white-collar employment to be associated with *decreased* protest event frequency. In fact, I find no significant association between levels of state-sector white-collar employment and protest event frequency in Belarus.

This result is quite puzzling; it would be interesting to see if the associations remain the same in longitudinal analysis over a longer time period of the protest. However, in my protest event catalogue I did record numerous instances of state-sector, white-collar professionals holding protests and strikes during the first week of mobilisation. In particular, doctors and medical staff throughout the country staged dozens of protest events. Medics took to the streets of multiple cities on 13 August 2020, following reports of doctors being beaten in the protests, and medical professionals being pressured to provide information on injured protesters they were treating, or even hand them over to security forces.<sup>63</sup> It may be the case that strong network ties between certain groups of state-sector white-collar employees, such as medics – as well as specific grievances to these groups – facilitated mobilisation, in the same way as in industrial settings. Medical staff certainly attempted to leverage existing employment-based social network ties to mobilise around the protests: a Telegram chat created to unite medical staff in protest was created on 12 August 2020, and gained over 3000 subscribers in the first day. Perhaps private sector white-collar employees were not embedded in such strong networks as their state-sector

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63 <https://www.bbc.com/russian/media-53766696>

counterparts. Nevertheless, as discussed in the Ukrainian case, we should be cautious in making assumptions about individual behaviour based upon my quantitative analysis alone, and further research should probe this phenomenon in greater detail.

*Table 4: Marginal effects of white-collar employment variables upon frequency of protest events occurring in rayon during first week of mobilisation in Belarus*

|                                                                 | Protest events<br>wk 1         | Protest events<br>wk 1       | Protest events<br>wk 1          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>Rayon population (10,000 people)</b>                         | <b>0.03**</b><br>[0.01,0.05]   | <b>0.03*</b><br>[0.00,0.05]  | <b>0.03*</b><br>[0.00,0.05]     |
| <b>Average rayon monthly wage (100 RUB)</b>                     | <b>0.77**</b><br>[0.47,1.06]   | <b>0.81**</b><br>[0.52,1.11] | <b>0.76**</b><br>[0.46,1.05]    |
| <b>% employees in white-collar employment (rayon)</b>           | <b>-0.08*</b><br>[-0.14,-0.01] |                              |                                 |
| % employees in state white-collar employment (rayon)            |                                | 0.12<br>[-0.04,0.27]         |                                 |
| <b>% employees in non-state white-collar employment (rayon)</b> |                                |                              | <b>-0.10**</b><br>[-0.17,-0.03] |
| <i>N</i>                                                        | 119                            | 119                          | 119                             |

95% confidence intervals in brackets

Note: Calculated using OLS model.

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

## Conclusion

This study has provided evidence that higher regional levels of certain types of employment are associated with subnational variation in protest, during the first week of nationwide mass mobilisation. In Ukraine, higher levels of white-collar employment, and particularly non-state-sector white-collar employment, are associated with more frequent protest events in an oblast. In Belarus, white-collar employment has the opposite effect, with higher white-collar employment aligning with *fewer* protest events in a rayon. Rather, in Belarus, higher levels of industrial workers are correlated with more frequent protest events in a rayon. The effect of industrial workers employed in state-owned enterprises is even stronger.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from these results. Firstly, the relationship between subnational variation in protest event frequency and regional employment patterns is nuanced and mediated by contextual factors. In some cases, white-collar employment may be significant; in others, industrial employment. Whilst I have made clear that we should refrain from inferring individual-level characteristics from my aggregate-level analysis, I have discussed qualitative evidence which highlights potential mechanisms contributing to the patterns I identified. In Ukraine, the positive association between white-collar employment in a region and protest event frequency may be due to the fact that the grievances and claims of the first week of the Euromaidan were particularly important to white-collar employees, who stood to gain the most from closer ties with the EU. As a result, the organisers of the first-week protests were those from white-collar professions such as teachers, journalists, and university lecturers. Industrial workers, in contrast, may have perceived that they had less to gain from EU membership, so protests were not more frequent in oblasts where they made up a higher proportion of the workforce. The grievances of the first week of protests in Belarus had much wider appeal, relating to the falsification of elections, and the beating and arrest of thousands of protesters. Thus, strong industrial workplace networks may have contributed to mobilisation in Belarus. As information about election falsification and the repression of colleagues travelled quickly through these networks, this may have triggered industrial workers to organise and participate in protest events.

Second, I have shown that during the initial stages of mobilisation, higher levels of local state-sector employment do not necessarily dampen regional protest frequency – even in repressive, authoritarian countries, such as Belarus. In regions with more state-sector industrial workers, protests were more, not less, frequent. The

mobilising potential of strong industrial workplace networks may have been stronger than the threats issued by factory bosses – at least in the first week. It might even be that seeing state-employed industrial workers mobilise encouraged others to protest in a locality. However, this does not mean that state-sector employment does not have any effect. The situation in Belarus may have changed over time, as repression increased. And evidence from Ukraine does align with arguments that state- and private-sector middle-class employment might have differing effects upon mobilisation.

Finally, my results for Belarus specifically challenge notions about the weakness of contemporary labour mobilisation in eastern Europe (Ashwin 1999; Crowley 2004). Although most protesters were middle-class (Onuch 2021a), labour protests may have played a significant role in mobilisation at the regional level. This is even more remarkable given the fact that, under Lukashenka's authoritarian regime, many industrial workers faced the risk of losing their job for protesting against the government. Of course, in subsequent weeks and months, many workers did.

Nevertheless, it is vital to acknowledge that the findings of this article only establish associations, and whilst I have suggested some potential mechanisms of association above, I cannot make causal claims. Thus, this article lays the foundation for future work of both qualitative and quantitative nature. Longitudinal analysis can investigate how the associations between regional employment patterns and protest may change over time, as the grievances of the protests evolve, and the repressive responses of the regimes adapt. Qualitative research may examine specific case studies to try and better understand what motivates industrial and white-collar workers to mobilise in the two contexts.

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## **‘Where is your conscience?’<sup>64</sup> : Regional political networks, protest, and repression during Ukraine’s Euromaidan**

Wordcount: 11,959 (excluding references)

### **Abstract**

During moments of nationwide mass mobilisation, how does the repression used against protesters vary across a country? And why? This article makes the case for more nuanced approaches to the study of the protest-repression nexus, investigating how local political context shapes regional repression. Examining the case of Ukraine’s 2013-14 Euromaidan protests, which saw widespread but varied protest and repression, I employ a series of three paired comparisons of repression-protest dynamics in regional capital cities located in the same macro-region. Utilising qualitative research methods, primarily process tracing, I argue that the embeddedness of the ruling political party in local political networks – namely regional and city councils – helps to explain why responses to the Euromaidan protests varied in six Ukrainian cities. Where embeddedness was weak, repression was mostly limited to arrests and court cases; where embeddedness was strong, non-state actors were used to target and intimidate key activists; and where ruling-party networks were moderately embedded overt, coercive, indiscriminate repression was used.

### **Introduction**

When mass protests break out across a country, most governments respond with some form of repression, ranging from lawful arrests to brutal put-downs<sup>65</sup>. Repression is a very broad concept: ‘state or private action meant to prevent, control, or constrain

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64 The slogan ‘where is your conscience’ was used by Euromaidan protesters in Lutsk (one of the cities studied in this paper) who were attending an oblast council meeting to protest against the repression of local activists. Source: <https://www.volynnews.com/news/policy/aktyvisty-yevromaydanu-probralysia-na-sesiuu-oblrady/>

65 In a review of the literature on repression, Davenport (2007b) notes that the ‘law of coercive responsiveness’ (that authorities respond with repression to challenges to the status quo) is a key finding across multiple studies.

noninstitutional, collective action (e.g., protest), including its initiation' (Earl 2011). Given that there are many forms of repression available, do the repressive tactics used against protesters vary across a country, and if so, in what way? Evidence from mass mobilisations such as those in Ukraine 2013-14 and Belarus in 2020 would suggest that some towns may witness brutal attacks on protesters, whilst others will see demonstrations that continue undisturbed. If repression indeed varies across a country, what explains this variation? Literature on the relationship between protest and repression – sometimes called the protest-repression nexus – is famously divided (Davenport and Inman 2012).

Some scholars argue that repression is used in locations where perceived threats to the government are higher, for example, where protesters are more numerous (Earl 2011; Hendrix and Salehyan 2017). Others argue that the application of repression is shaped by protesters' tactics, and so localities with violent protests are more likely to be (violently) suppressed (Chenoweth, Perkoski, and Kang 2017; Carey 2010). Meanwhile, other researchers contend that the use of repression depends upon local politics and regime type (Davenport 2007a; 2007b; Ritter 2014; Pierskalla 2010). In this article, I argue that the embeddedness of the ruling political party in local political networks – namely regional and city councils – helps to explain why responses to the 2013-14 Euromaidan protests varied in six Ukrainian cities.

The Euromaidan protests saw Ukrainians mobilise in cities across the country from 21 November 2013, after President Yanukovich refused to sign association agreements with the EU. After peaceful protesters in Kyiv were beaten by security forces, protests escalated further, becoming larger in size and taking place in more towns and cities (Onuch and Sasse 2016). But, what is of note is that these protests were met with very different responses across the country. Some variation in

repression may be expected between macro-regions in a diverse country such as Ukraine. Regional differences mean that local support for a protest's aims may vary<sup>66</sup>, along with the allegiances of the regional political elites<sup>67</sup>. In the social science literature, Ukraine is commonly divided into four macro-regions: east, west, centre and south. What is particularly interesting about repression during the Euromaidan, as I will illustrate below, is that there is fascinating variation within macro-regions in the usage of repression. This suggests that something is happening at the locality level to shape the government response to local protest. For example, in Cherkasy, located in central Ukraine, protesters were challenged by pro-government supporters on the first day of mobilisation (22 November), and the following day police clashed with protesters. Then, in January, two attempts to seize the Regional State Administration building were brutally suppressed, with dozens arrested. By contrast, in Vinnytsia, also in central Ukraine, the City Hall agreed to provide a stage for protesters on 22 November, and when protesters seized the Regional State Administration, no attempt was made to take back the building. Why were protests in the same macro-region treated differently by officials? As suggested by some scholars (Earl 2011; Hendrix and Salehyan 2017), did larger numbers of protesters pose a greater perceived threat in some cities, leading to a crackdown? Or did protesters in certain cities use more violent tactics, provoking a harsh response, as other studies would argue? (Chenoweth, Perkoski, and Kang 2017; Carey 2010). Or, given that protests within the same region were often similar in size, tactics, and character, is it rather differences in local political

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<sup>66</sup> Ukraine has historically witnessed regional variation in support for pro-Russian and pro-European politics (Katchanovski 2006; Barrington and Herron 2004).

<sup>67</sup> For more discussion of regional divisions between elites in Ukraine, see D'Anieri (2011).

networks that shaped the response to protests in a city? This study examines this puzzle.

I employ a series of three paired comparisons of repression-protest dynamics in oblast (regional) capital cities located in the same macro-region<sup>68</sup>, and utilise qualitative research methods, primarily process tracing. I first explore the breadth of repressive tactics used within each macro-region and across the six cities. I then examine how the relative embeddedness of the ruling Party of Regions' networks influenced the variation in response towards protests. I define network embeddedness as the extent to which the Party of Regions controls the local city and regional (oblast) councils and local leadership positions. I compare Donetsk and Kharkiv in eastern Ukraine, Cherkasy and Vinnytsia in central Ukraine, and Ternopil and Lutsk in the west. The two cities in each region are broadly similar, with the crucial exception of differences in the embeddedness of Party of Regions' networks. I find that the relative local embeddedness of Party of Regions networks, representing the ruling regime, was an important factor in determining how repression was used in a city. Where embeddedness was weak, repression was mostly limited to arrests and court cases bought by the local prosecutor. Where embeddedness was strong, limited overt, coercive, and indiscriminate repression was applied; rather, non-state actors were frequently used to target and intimidate key activists. It was where ruling-party networks were moderately embedded that overt, coercive, and indiscriminate repression was used. Nevertheless, as this study is focused on the case of the Euromaidan and six cities within that case, it is hoped that this research will provide a

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<sup>68</sup> I use Kyiv International Institute of Sociology's definition of the four macro-regions of Ukraine (KIIS 2022)

departure point for future qualitative and quantitative research, including work on other cases, to test the broader applicability of these results.

In what follows, I first outline the selected case of the Euromaidan mass mobilisation and detail the reasons underlying the selection of the cities for within-case comparison. I then review the theory on possible factors shaping the variation in the usage of repression, constructing a framework for my analysis. This is followed by an explanation of the chosen research methods and data sources. The results section then examines each pair of cities. Finally, the conclusion summarizes my main findings and highlights possibilities for further research. Let us now begin by unpacking the case of the Euromaidan and providing information on local political dynamics in Ukraine, of relevance to this study.

### **The case of regional repression during Ukraine's Euromaidan**

Although much research has been dedicated to the protest-repression nexus, many key questions remain without definitive answers – including the question of how repressive tactics may vary during nationwide protest waves, and why. The Euromaidan represents a typical case of nationwide mass mobilisation: Ukraine has a strong history of mass protests with events taking place across large cities, and well-developed civil society, activist networks and protest repertoires (Onuch 2021c). A degree of political plurality and media freedom allowed protest movements to develop, although the ruling regime had a history of taking measures to try and combat protests, stopping short of lethal force prior to 2014. The response of President Yanukovich's government to the 2013–14 Euromaidan protests departed from this pattern, authorising the use of live ammunition against protesters in Kyiv, resulting in the deaths of over one hundred people.

The case of the Euromaidan presents a high degree of variation in the repressive responses to protest across the country. This provides ample grounds for this study (see Table 1). And yet, the ways in which repression of Euromaidan protests varied across Ukraine is intriguing. Given the differences in regional politics, and the extent of the ruling party's power throughout Ukraine, we might have expected the harshest repression to take place in eastern (and to a certain extent southern) Ukraine, with less repression in central and western Ukraine. However, some of the harshest repressive incidents took place in central Ukraine, including but not limited to the capital, Kyiv. For example, security forces never directly attacked protests in the eastern city of Donetsk<sup>69</sup>, but protesters were beaten in the central city of Cherkasy on multiple occasions. Moreover, there is variation in the way repression was deployed even within regions.

Consider western Ukraine. We might expect the repression of the Euromaidan to be rare in this region, where pro-European attitudes were the highest in Ukraine, and most political and economic elites supported the protests. However, when we examine individual cities more closely, we see that in the western city of Lutsk, leading local activists were systematically pursued with fabricated criminal charges, and stun grenades were used once against local protesters. In comparison, in another western city, Ternopil, the mayor supported protesters from the very first day of mobilisation, and repression was almost completely absent.<sup>70</sup> What explains this variation? The answer lies in city-level differences, perhaps in local political dynamics.

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<sup>69</sup> Repressive actions that took place in Donetsk following 22 February 2014, the end of the Euromaidan, are beyond the scope of this study

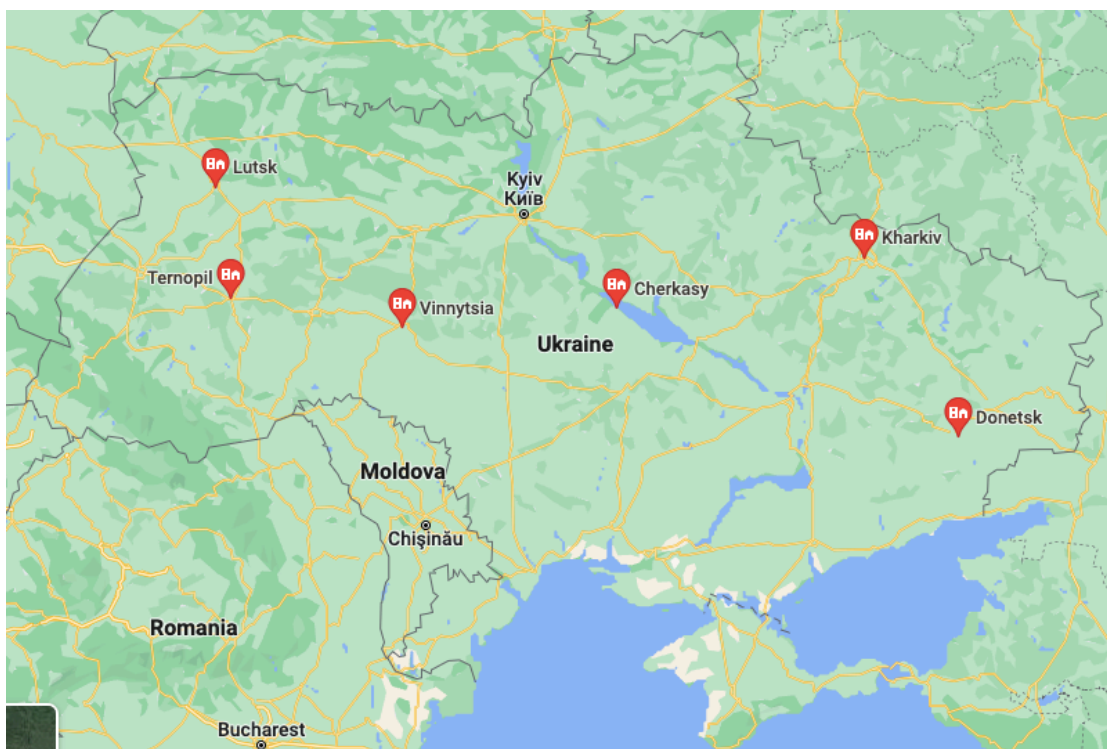
<sup>70</sup> Though the local prosecutor did successfully bring criminal charges against three activists over an incident on 2 December, many other attempted cases were rejected by the local district administrative court.

Local politics in Ukraine are complex. The extent to which the central government can exercise power at the local level is complicated by the existence of multiple institutions. In 2013-14, two branches of power co-existed at the oblast (regional) level – regional state administration and local councils – as explained by Aasland and Lyska (2016): Ukraine is a unitary state, subdivided into 24 oblasts (plus the Autonomous Republic of Crimea), and in each oblast the central government is represented by a regional state administration (RSA). Each RSA is led by a governor, who is appointed by the president. In order to exert control over the regions, Yanukovich had appointed a loyal member of his political party, the Party of Regions, as governor in every single oblast. Parallel to the centrally appointed administration, local self-government takes place via an oblast council, which is democratically elected in local elections. The oblast council is headed by the chairperson, selected by the elected oblast deputies. Within each city, the key governing body is the city council. Like the oblast council, the city council is elected by the local population. The mayor, who leads the city council, is elected by local citizens in a separate ballot. As a result of this mixed, multi-level system of governance, there are often tensions between the various bodies. The agenda of the centrally appointed regional state administration may clash with that of the locally elected oblast and city councils, which may be populated by representatives from opposition parties, rather than the ruling party of central government. In 2013-14, oblasts with very low representation of the ruling Party of Regions (PoR) in locally elected councils were still ruled by a centrally appointed PoR governor. These tensions are heightened by a lack of clarity around the different responsibilities of the centrally appointed and locally elected bodies (Chumak and Shavliakov 2009). Due to this mixed system of governance, there are often divisions in the local response to instances of resistance, such as the

Euromaidan protests. In 2013-14, in some cities, the RSA, regional council, city council, and their leaders were all controlled by actors loyal to President Yanukovych and the ruling political party. As such, they were united in their opposition to the Euromaidan. In other places, the city and sometimes oblast council and their leaders were populated by elected opposition politicians, who supported the Euromaidan, resulting in a contrasting response to that of the local governor and RSA.

Might these differing local political dynamics help account for the variation in repressive responses to the Euromaidan protests at the city level? In order to examine this puzzle in the context of the Euromaidan, I focus on six cities across three regions, conducting paired, within-case comparisons for each region: Kharkiv and Donetsk in eastern Ukraine, Cherkasy and Vinnytsia in central Ukraine, and Lutsk and Ternopil in western Ukraine (see Figure 1). This small-*n*, qualitative approach enables me to examine in detail the complex local political dynamics and protest trajectories of each city.

Figure 9: Map of Ukraine showing location of cities under study



I selected these cities were from the 24 oblast capitals, as I found oblast capitals were where the majority of regional protests were held. Within each oblast, the primary selection criteria were the two cities with the highest and the lowest percentage of Party of Regions representation in the city and oblast councils. Each pair of cities was also selected to be as similar as possible in other respects, including population, maximum protest size, and average monthly wages, in order to minimise the potential influence of other factors. For eastern Ukraine, the selection of Kharkiv and Donetsk was straightforward. In central Ukraine, Cherkasy was selected instead of Kropyvnytskyi<sup>71</sup>, which had higher PoR representation in local councils, because Kropyvnytskyi was much smaller than the comparison city of Vinnytsia and had much smaller protests, which complicated comparisons. For western Ukraine, Ternopil and Lutsk were selected because they were the two cities with the most contrasting PoR representation, which were similar in both population size and protest size, making comparison more straightforward. Altogether, the selected cities represent almost the full spectrum of PoR representation at the local government level, ranging from Ternopil, where the ruling party held 15% or less of seats in the city and oblast council, to Donetsk, where the PoR held over 92% of seats in both councils (see Table 1).

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71 Formerly Kirovohrad

Table 5: Details of the six case study cities

| City & macro-region | Population (2013) <sup>72</sup> | Average monthly oblast wages <sup>73</sup> | % PoR seats in city council <sup>74</sup> | % PoR seats in oblast council | Mayor and political party       | Largest protest event | Use of force by security forces against protests | Use of force by non-state actors against protests | Use of live ammo against protesters |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Cherkasy (Centre)   | 283,130                         | 2732 UAH                                   | 24.00%                                    | 54.80%                        | Bilousov, Communist party       | 5000 <sup>75</sup>    | Yes                                              | No                                                | Yes                                 |
| Vinnytsia (Centre)  | 369,860                         | 2744 UAH                                   | 10.00%                                    | 46.90%                        | Hroysman, <i>Sovist Ukayini</i> | 3000 <sup>76</sup>    | No                                               | No                                                | No                                  |
| Lutsk (West)        | 211,644                         | 2613 UAH                                   | 17.00%                                    | 27.50%                        | Romanyuk, Independent           | 8000 <sup>77</sup>    | Yes (single incident)                            | No                                                | No                                  |
| Ternopil (West)     | 215,636                         | 2407 UAH                                   | 15.00%                                    | 11.66%                        | Nadal, <i>Svoboda</i>           | 15000 <sup>78</sup>   | No                                               | No                                                | No                                  |
| Donetsk (East)      | 944,552                         | 3795 UAH                                   | 94.40%                                    | 92.22%                        | Lukyanchenko PoR                | 300 <sup>79</sup>     | No                                               | Yes                                               | No                                  |
| Kharkiv (East)      | 1,431,000                       | 3020 UAH                                   | 68.00%                                    | 68.39%                        | Kernes, PoR                     | 5000 <sup>80</sup>    | Yes                                              | Yes                                               | No                                  |

So, how might we expect the differences between each pair of cities and across these six cities to shape variation in the repression used against protesters? Will the differences in local politics play a role? Or might other factors be more salient, such as the size or tactics of local protests themselves? To shape our expectations, allow me to turn to the literature.

## Framing the analysis

72 Source: datacommons.org

73 As of October 2013, source: <https://index.minfin.com.ua/ua/labour/salary/average/2013/>

74 The percentage of seats rather than number of seats is used here, because each regional and city council had a different number of seats. Thus, percentages are preferable when comparing across councils.

75 Source: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2014/01/23/7011047/>

76 Source: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2014/01/23/7010880/>

77 Source: <https://www.unian.net/politics/858072-aktsii-protesta-prohodyat-v-desyatkah-gorodov-ukrainyi.html>

78 Source: <https://doba.te.ua/post/10613>

79 Source: <https://www.kyivpost.com/article/content/ukraine-politics/a-rally-of-300-in-donetsk-demands-yanukovychs-resignation-332735.html>

80 Source: <https://tsn.ua/ukrayina/jevromaydani-u-harkovi-porvali-prapor-partiyi-regioniv-323075.html>

How and why do the repressive tactics used against protesters vary across a country? And what explains this variation? We know that authorities almost always respond to protest with repression of some form, in order to counter challenges to the status quo (Davenport 2007b). Repression is defined for the purposes of this study according to Earl (2011), as ‘state or private action meant to prevent, control, or constrain noninstitutional, collective action (e.g., protest), including its initiation’. I deliberately take a broad definition of repression in this study. This enables me firstly to explore the breadth of repressive tactics utilised across a nationwide instance of protest. Secondly, this choice allows me to investigate not simply what influences whether repression is used or not, but how the usage of repressive tactics varies. Most research on repression tends to focus on protest policing, but there are many choices available to regimes in terms of what kind of repression they may choose to deploy, and how (Earl 2011). Earl’s (2003) typology of repression notes that it can vary a) in character, from non-violent channelling<sup>81</sup> to violent coercion; b) in terms of the identity of the repressive agent, i.e., national elites, state agents more loosely connected to national elites, or non-state actors; and c) in extent of observability, from overt or covert. More recent studies have noted that the target of repression can also vary, with repression being selective and targeted at key actors, or more indiscriminate (Demirel-Pegg and Rasler 2021). Thus, repression can take many forms and be applied in different ways, by a variety of actors.

Given that authorities are faced with a breadth of choices about whom and how to repress, and by what means, what determines which repressive tactics are used? Repression comes at a cost, and it can backfire, resulting in even more protests

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<sup>81</sup> Indirect repression, which reduces the capacity to protest, such as restricting resources or legal means to protest.

(Francisco 2004), or generate a backlash toward a political party at the polling station (Davenport and Armstrong 2004). Thus, authorities try to minimise the costs and maximise the benefits of repression, deploying the best option(s) available, depending on the context. During nationwide protests, this may mean that repression is used differently across the country. So what factors, more precisely, may shape which repression is used, and where? Much of the literature would point to the threat posed by the protest which is being repressed.

### *Threat*

Scholars such as Regan and Henderson (2002), and Hendrix and Salehyan (2017), argue that repression is more likely to be used in localities where protests represent a greater threat. Threat may be firstly manifested in the size of the protests. Smaller protests may represent a less significant threat that may not need to be dealt with at all. They are unlikely to cause significant disruption or sway public opinion. By contrast, very large protests may cause widespread disruption and pose a risk to public order, or even the future of the ruling regime, if they appear to show enough of the population stands in opposition to the authorities. As such, large protests are anticipated to evoke a stronger response in the form of overt, coercive repression deployed by state actors (Earl 2011).

Scholars alternatively argue that the usage of repression is influenced by the threat posed by the protesters' repertoires (Regan and Henderson 2002; Carey 2010; Davenport 1995). Thus, localities with peaceful protests are less likely to be repressed than those where more violent repertoires are used. A small but violent protest, such as a riot, may pose a greater threat than a very large but peaceful march. A violent protest can pose a threat to public and private property, the welfare of law enforcement,

members of the public, or even government. Any of these threats may be used as justification by the authorities for a crackdown against protesters. Therefore, more violent protests are anticipated to evoke a more coercive response from the regime.

However, the above arguments do not always match with reality of mass mobilisations and their repression. In one recent example, Sullivan (2021) highlights that comparing protests in two Mexican states, it was the smaller of the two protests that was repressed. And, in the case of the Euromaidan, my data reveals numerous instances where protesters at small, peaceful gatherings were beaten and/or arrested, whilst in other cities larger groups of protesters stormed government buildings with relative impunity. The two above, threat-based approaches also fail to account for how repression itself – actual, preventive, or anticipated – may influence the size and repertoires of protests. Dissent and repression are a ‘strategic, interdependent process’ (Ritter 2014). For example, expectations of repression in advance of a protest may lead to low turnout and very low-risk repertoires, in turn shaping the threat that protest poses. Regime type is one such key factor which may influence this relationship between protest and repression.

### ***Regime type***

Thus, I turn to other research on the determinants of repression, which emphasises the importance of regime type (Chenoweth, Perkoski, and Kang 2017; Davenport and Inman 2012; Davenport 2007a). Some studies argue that authoritarian regimes are more likely to use coercive repression (Gupta, Singh, and Sprague 1993), and more democratic regimes less so (Davenport 2007b). This is because authoritarian regimes rely on force to maintain control, whereas democratic regimes fear the electoral consequences of heavy-handed tactics, and have more means to channel public dissent.

Meanwhile, others scholars favour the ‘murder in the middle’ theory, arguing that authoritarian regimes are less likely to utilise overt, coercive repression as this kind of regime will keep protests at a low level anyway (Ritter 2014; Pierskalla 2010). Rather, it is semi-autocratic or hybrid regimes that are more likely to use force against protesters (Fein 1995; Pierskalla 2010). These theories about the relationship between national regime type and repression do not necessarily help to explain subnational variation in the use of repression. Regime type is usually a constant across a country. Nevertheless, these theories highlight that political context and the ways in which authorities strive to preserve their power are important factors in influencing responses to protest. Therefore, if we acknowledge that the state is not a unitary actor (Johnston 2012; Hendrix and Salehyan 2017), these theories are helpful. Local-level variation in the strength of the ruling government is possible. For example, in one region, most regional council members and local politicians could be members of an opposition party and refuse to enact the orders of the central authorities. But in another region, such actors may be loyal to the ruling party and strive to faithfully enact the central authorities’ policies and directives. Local politics matter.

### ***Subnational ruling-party networks***

Studies on the role of elite actors at the subnational level (and indeed more broadly), tend to focus on these actors’ capacity in determining how repression is used (H. Sullivan 2021; Johnston 2012). I argue that first and foremost the *embeddedness* of ruling party elites and their networks at the local government level is crucial in explaining variation in the use of repression at the subnational level. By embeddedness, I mean the extent to which the leadership and bodies of local government – oblast and city councils – are populated by actors who are members of,

or loyal to, the ruling political party in central government. Capacity is an important determinant of the ability to actually utilise repression – but the capacity of local elites is of limited importance if there is political pluralism in the country and local elites are not loyal to the central government (and so unlikely to want to deploy repression on its behalf). Orders to repress may be defied at the local level (Hendrix and Salehyan 2017), because, as Johnston (2012) argues, ‘state violence occurs in an ongoing and recursive relationship with the opposition at the different levels of its organization’, including local government.

Thus, the embeddedness of ruling-party networks in local politics is key. I suggest that if ruling-party actors are weakly embedded, e.g., not well-represented in key local political positions, such as regional and city councils, or holding mayors’ and chairpersons’ posts, they are less likely to be able to enforce the repression of protesters, particularly in overt, coercive, and indiscriminate ways, which require a lot of resources. At the same time, opposition networks in that locality are freer to support protesters targeting the regime, whose actions may align with their own political goals. Still, weakly-embedded ruling-party networks may try to exercise their influence via whatever limited means remaining possible, for example, via ordering local prosecutors to investigate activists, or conducting covert repression targeted against key individuals.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, I propose that when ruling-party networks are highly embedded in local political structures – strongly represented in regional and city councils and holding key leadership posts – protest and resistance will be limited in the first place, as protesting carries higher potential risks (Lacina 2014; Pierskalla 2010). In addition, highly embedded ruling-party networks are a result of greater electoral support for the party in that locality, so protest may have lower levels of

support amongst the population, resulting in lower turnout. Thus, less overt, coercive repression will be needed to manage the limited protests that do occur. This is because deploying police or other security forces to beat and arrest a crowd of a hundred people, for example, is a potential waste of resources, and may risk triggering a backlash due to the disproportionate response. Rather, in these contexts of high ruling-party network embeddedness, we are more likely to see less coercive and more targeted repression, which is aimed at weakening key activists and undermining local resistance without creating a backlash (Demirel-Pegg and Rasler 2021; C. M. Sullivan 2016; Khawaja 1993). Nevertheless, as Ritter (2014) notes, although these kinds of networks are less likely to utilise repression, when they do engage in repression it may be more severe in its scope and brutality.

When ruling-party networks are moderately embedded in local politics – occupying a significant proportion of, but not an absolute majority of key political posts and council positions – I argue that overt, coercive repression is more likely to be utilised. This is in line with the murder in the middle hypothesis (Fein 1995), whereby secure authorities are less likely to repress, because their very security will help deter their opponents from protesting (Ritter 2014). In localities where there is greater uncertainty about the security of ruling-party networks, the use of coercive repression is more likely in order to try and fend off threats (Pierskalla 2010). Moderately embedded ruling-party networks, which lack full control over local politics, fear their insecure position is under threat, and use what power they have to act to reduce this threat via repression. In such scenarios, these actors' considerations of threat may be heightened by the fact that division amongst local political elites represents openings in political opportunities, encouraging protesters to mobilise, and potentially pose a real threat to the status quo (Tarrow 2011, 166). These moderately

embedded ruling-party networks are not in a strong enough position to suppress protest through less violent alternatives, such as channelling, and so they are more likely to resort to overt coercion (Mason and Krane 1989).

### *Subnational political networks during the Euromaidan*

To apply these arguments to the context of the Euromaidan, we must first consider the political setup at the time: the central government was dominated by President Yanukovich and his so-called ‘family’ network of relatives and business associates (Kudelia 2014). Yanukovich and his ‘family’ were members of or strongly connected to the PoR. Yanukovich attempted to establish the power of his network throughout Ukraine by appointing PoR figures as governors in every region. In city and oblast councils, which were democratically elected, the PoR attempted to gain as many seats as possible, as well as key positions, such as the mayor and chairperson of the oblast council. In some cities, particularly in the east, the PoR succeeded in gaining control over these councils and roles. In other cities, especially in western Ukraine, their representation was much weaker. The Yanukovich government also exerted control over regional politics by choosing loyal figures for centrally appointed, powerful regional positions, such as regional prosecutor and head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Thus, I anticipate that in cities where the PoR was highly embedded in local politics via a strong presence in city and oblast councils and key positions, repression is less likely to be overt and coercive. Instead, repression will be more targeted, aimed at weakening key activists and undermining local resistance. In line with Ritter’s (2014) argument, if PoR networks do decide to escalate repression in such cities, it is possible that it will be very severe in scope and brutality. In cities where PoR networks

were weakly embedded, we are also less likely to see overt, coercive, and indiscriminate repression. However, the Yanukovich government may attempt to repress through the limited PoR networks which were embedded, such as Regional Prosecutors, resorting to measures such as court cases being levelled against key activists. And finally, in cities where PoR networks were moderately embedded, we are more likely to see overt, coercive repression, as PoR networks attempt to maintain their limited and insecure grasp on power.

### **Methodology**

To test these hypotheses, I utilise paired, qualitative comparisons of six cities in three regions of Ukraine, identified in the above case selection section. This small-*n*, qualitative comparison enables me to study in detail the different repressive responses to protest in these cities and consider how the specific dynamics of local political networks may have shaped variation in the way repression was used. The numerous quantitative studies of repression and protest have greatly contributed to the literature in this area. Nonetheless, they are somewhat limited by difficulties measuring the many types of repression, and accounting for the myriad contextual factors that influence repression's relationship to protest. In the instance of this study, qualitative research allows the foregrounding of the 'what' and the 'how' of repression, paired with detailed understanding of the city-level context. This better equips me to answer the 'why' question of what shapes subnational variation in repression and to uncover the different processes at play (Fu and Simmons 2021).

### ***Analytical approach and data***

I begin by constructing a detailed timeline for the six cities, comprising of protest events and repressive responses, as well as any other local government responses such as accommodative actions or public statements. To construct this timeline, I utilise my protest event catalogue for the Euromaidan, as well as interviews gathered with local activists and protesters by the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory (UINM) (UINM 2020). To compile my event catalogue, I coded all information about protest events found in articles from the online news outlets *Hromadske*, *Ukrainska Pravda*, and *Radio Svoboda*, as well as English-language newsletters issued by the civic organisation *Hromadskyi Sektor*, published between 21 November 2013 – 22 February 2014, which referred to ‘Euromaidan’ or ‘Maidan’. These sources presented the best available data on regional Euromaidan protests, as independent new sources that reported regularly on the protests.

The interviews gathered with local activists and protesters by the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory were conducted between December 2014 and June 2017 and include first-hand accounts by key participants of local protests. These accounts allow me to fill in missing details from my protest event catalogue about protest and repression in individual cities, enabling me to identify the variety of repressive tactics used. These accounts also help to highlight dynamics between key actors at the local level, which are valuable in helping to understand the role of local PoR networks.

To identify the relative embeddedness of PoR networks at the local political level, I use data from the Central Electoral Commission (Central Election Committee of Ukraine 2010) to establish which figures held key posts and how many seats were held by the PoR in city and oblast councils. Due to Ukraine’s patronal political system, party allegiances are not always a straightforward way of assessing which networks an official belongs to (D’Anieri 2011; Hale 2015). For example, an oblast prosecutor

may not be an official member of the Party of Regions, but a closer look at the prosecutor's background may reveal they were extensively mentored by a key PoR figure and have close ties to Yanukovich's 'family' network. Therefore, I also relied on the UINM interviews with local activists as well as local media reports on key figures to develop a more nuanced understanding of the extent of PoR embeddedness in each city, beyond that captured by purely quantitative data alone.

In order to examine whether and how variation in repression across the six cities was related to the embeddedness of PoR networks, I closely examined local government responses over time to the protests in each city. I then compared the emerging patterns with information about local political networks, using process tracing to identify how the local embeddedness of PoR networks may have shaped the use of repression in each city. I compared and contrasted these results across each pair of cases, as well as with the other cities being studied, in order to see how differences in PoR network embeddedness across the cases correlated with the use of repression. My results are presented below.

### **Analysis**

My analysis reveals significant differences between each pair of cities and across all six cities. The differences appear to be shaped by variation in the embeddedness of PoR networks, in line with my expectations. I also discovered the involvement of some actors not accounted for in my theoretical framework: non-state actors who perpetrated repression. Their role was particularly important in Kharkiv and Donetsk, as will be discussed below. I now turn to discuss in greater detail my analysis for the three pairs of cities.

#### ***Central Ukraine: Vinnytsia and Cherkasy***

Vinnytsia and Cherkasy are broadly comparable in terms of the size, repertoires, and trajectory of local Euromaidan protests, although protests were on average smaller and less frequent in Cherkasy. Nevertheless, repression was used frequently against protesters in Cherkasy, whereas those in Vinnytsia were rarely repressed; in some instances, protests were even supported by local officials. I argue that this disparity is at least partially related to the differing extents to which PoR networks were embedded in local politics. In Vinnytsia, the PoR was weakly embedded. Although the PoR occupied a sizeable proportion of seats in the oblast council (46.9%), together, the opposition parties held a majority – albeit a slim one. More significantly, the PoR’s position was even weaker in the city council, the most important body in a city. The PoR occupied only 10% of city council seats, compared to Mayor Volodymyr Hroysman’s pro-European opposition *Sovist’ Ukrayini* party, which held an absolute majority of 66%.

In Cherkasy, PoR networks were more moderately embedded in local politics. The PoR held an absolute majority of 54.8% in the oblast council. In Cherkasy city council, the PoR held 24% of seats, compared to the PoR’s 10% in Vinnytsia (just above). The 24% may still seem low, but it is important to note that the remaining seats were divided between multiple parties, with the Party of Free Democrats (PFD) leading with 28% and *Batkivshchyna* coming second, with 26% (both opposition parties). Moreover, the PoR could count on the support of the Communist party, which held 5.6% of seats. Furthermore, Cherkasy lacked an elected mayor. This setup gave Governor Serhii Tulub, a PoR member, greater control, despite his party’s limited hold on the city council. Tulub had helped the Yanukovich administration bring corruption charges against the originally elected mayor, Serhii Odarych, of the PFD, resulting in his resignation in April 2013 (Chernikova 2013; Chervonenko 2013). This effectively

left Tulub as the de-facto leader of Cherkasy: the acting mayor, Communist Viktor Bilousov, lacked authority. He placed fourth in the mayoral contest, and his party held only three city council seats – a stark contrast with Vinnytsia’s Mayor Hroysman, who was elected with 77% of votes and held a city council majority. As I explain below, these disparities in the embeddedness of local PoR networks appear to have an impact on the cities’ varying responses to local Euromaidan protests, starting from the very beginning.

The local governments of Vinnytsia and Cherkasy reacted to the first week of protests very differently. Daily Euromaidan protests took place in Vinnytsia from 21 November. The city council was supportive from the outset: Mayor Hroysman agreed to provide a stage (albeit after failing to persuade activists to protest in a less prominent location). On 28 November, the city council called an emergency meeting, approving a statement of support for Ukraine to adopt a ‘European’ direction. The EU flag was raised over the City Hall, and *Kozytskyi* square was re-named European square. Following the beating of protesters in Kyiv on 30 November, the oblast council also issued a statement supporting the Euromaidan’s aims.

In contrast, when protests began in Cherkasy on 22 November, police clashed with *Svoboda* supporters, and prevented Democratic Alliance party activists from erecting tents on a central square. A pro-government gathering was also held, attended by state workers and PoR supporters. The following day, 150-200 Euromaidan protesters were observed by around 100 police officers, who again prevented the erecting of tents. The acting mayor, Bilousov, put in a successful request to the local administrative court to ban mass protests from 26 November to 25 January<sup>82</sup>.

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<sup>82</sup> Bilousov claimed that with local elections on 15 December, there were too many conflicting requests for demonstrations to be held on main squares.

Nevertheless, daily protests continued throughout the first week, although smaller than in Vinnytsia, with up to 400 gathering on Sunday 24 November, compared to 1000 in Vinnytsia. A similar pattern continued throughout December, with police and hired thugs (colloquially known as ‘titushky’<sup>83</sup>) deployed to interfere with protests in Cherkasy. Meanwhile, larger protests continued undisturbed in Vinnytsia, sometimes with the participation of Mayor Hroysman and other city council members. Thus, from the Euromaidan’s onset we can see how the differing composition of local political networks shaped very different responses to protest in two cities within the same region. The weakness of PoR networks enabled local government figures in Vinnytsia to actively support the Euromaidan, whereas in Cherkasy, where PoR networks were more embedded in local government, repressive actions against protesters were taken almost immediately.

Even as the Euromaidan escalated and protesters increasingly resorted to direct action, blockades, and seizures, we can see that differences in the embeddedness of PoR networks continue to influence the level of repression used. The local authorities in the two cities reacted very differently to the seizure of local government buildings in January, part of a wave of similar actions across Ukraine triggered by the escalation of repression in Kyiv. On 23 January in Cherkasy, police repelled an attempt to seize the Regional State Administration (RSA) building. Protesters stormed the lower floors, breaking windows, throwing projectiles, and clashing with police. Security forces regained control by pouring water from upper floors, deploying teargas, and beating protesters. Fifty-eight people were arrested, many of whom were merely passers-by.

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83 The term ‘titushky’ refers to the groups of athletic young men hired by political actors to interfere with civic actions. See [https://www.informality.com/wiki/index.php?title=Titushky\\_\(Ukraine\)](https://www.informality.com/wiki/index.php?title=Titushky_(Ukraine))

More repression followed, much of it violent: on 25 January, *Berkut*<sup>84</sup> riot police from Luhansk raided Cherkasy's streets together with the *titushky* – both forces beat and arrested indiscriminately. Activist Tetyana Chornovol, amongst those attacked, claimed that the *titushky* were directly organised by Governor Tulub. During a second attempt to storm the RSA on 27 January, interior force troops immediately arrived and began to disperse, beat, and capture protesters. Their violence resulted in many injuries and 16 arrests.

In Vinnytsia, too, protesters caused significant disruption. On 22-23 January, several thousand people gathered outside the RSA and blocked central streets. But unlike in Cherkasy, no actions were taken against protesters, and *titushky* provoking fights were arrested. Police Chief Rusyn told protesters that police would continue not to interfere with peaceful protests, but attacks on government buildings would result in actions in accordance with the law. However, when the RSA was stormed on 25 January, police resisted with shields and teargas but did not beat protesters, despite being attacked with broken furniture and hoses, resulting in injuries. The seizure ended in 15 minutes, when protesters entered the meeting hall. A criminal investigation was opened, but officials made no attempt to reclaim the premises by force. Protesters voluntarily returned the RSA on 3 February. The central government was apparently displeased with the response of local officials – Police Chief Rusyn was fired by Interior Minister Zakharchenko on 4 February, reportedly for not sufficiently defending the RSA. Hence, even as protests escalated, became more violent, and posed an increasing threat to government property, the gap in the repressive responses of the two cities remained. In Cherkasy, the PoR Governor went as far as bringing in *Berkut*

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<sup>84</sup> Berkut were highly-trained, special police units, subordinate to the local ministry of internal affairs, rather than district police chiefs. Often used as riot police, they were better paid and had access to more sophisticated weaponry than ordinary police (BBC 2014).

from Luhansk oblast, who may have been more willing to use force than local troops, to help put down resistance. Governor Tulub may have even illegally engaged non-state actors, *titushky*, to attack protesters. Whereas, in Vinnytsia, police resistance to the seizure of the RSA building appeared perfunctory, and local leaders did not order the reclaiming of the building but awaited its return from the protesters. Vinnytsia had a PoR governor, but he did not act, and other local government bodies supported the protests. We can see that the composition of local political networks matters.

The contrast between the responses to protest in Cherkasy and Vinnytsia is most striking during the final days of the Euromaidan. Protesters across the country mobilised in response to renewed killings of protesters in Kyiv over 19-21 February. Protesters in Vinnytsia caused extensive disruption: thousands blocked central streets and protesters erected barricades, picketed government buildings, sacked the PoR and Communist party offices, blockaded military bases, and attempted to seize the police station using smoke grenades. Nevertheless, local officials deployed little repression – they even showed willingness to cooperate with protesters. The attempt on the police station ended after the head of police agreed to talks, and Mayor Hroysman agreed to protesters' demands to send ambulances to Kyiv to fetch injured protesters. On 21 February, the city council issued a statement condemning violence against protesters and supporting the Euromaidan's demands; the oblast council voted to suspend its chairperson and declare no-confidence in Governor Movchan.

Over in Cherkasy, protesters mobilised on a smaller scale, with rallies, pickets, and roadblocks. But the difference in official response was stark. On 20 February, a checkpoint of 300 protesters was brutally dispersed by the Luhansk *Berkut* using firearms, which resulted in protester injuries. The severity of this response in comparison to a much smaller threat is important, as it underscores the divergent

responses in the two cities. The Cherkasy authorities would have had to approve the deployment of the Luhansk *Berkut* against a small checkpoint, but local authorities in Vinnytsia chose not to deploy police to prevent total gridlock in the city centre or the sacking of political party offices.

Thus, in comparing protests and repression in Cherkasy and Vinnytsia, we can see that the contrasting repressive responses cannot be explained by variation in the size or repertoires of the protests themselves. Rather, the differing embeddedness of PoR networks in the two cities shaped local repressive responses. In Vinnytsia, the mayor and local councils condemned the repression of protesters in Kyiv and actively supported the local Euromaidan rather than repressing protesters. They were able to do this because the PoR were weakly embedded in the city council, and Mayor Hroysman's opposition party enjoyed a strong majority. The PoR held many seats in the oblast council but were still outnumbered by opposition parties, which passed statements supporting the Euromaidan. In Cherkasy, PoR networks were more moderately embedded, holding a majority in the oblast council, and being one of the three parties each occupying approximately a quarter of city council seats. Opposition parties in the city council managed to successfully adopt a resolution on 3 December supporting the Euromaidan's aims. But this did not translate into support for protesters in the city; rather, as described above, numerous repressive incidents took place, coordinated by the acting mayor and governor. The PoR's strength in Cherkasy had been bolstered by the ousting of the elected mayor, giving Governor Tulub more power. In Cherkasy, compared to Vinnytsia, protests were frequently met with interference, arrests, and the use of violence by both state and non-state actors – despite the fact that protest events were usually smaller. All this suggests that in central

Ukraine, local political networks were crucial in shaping repression in a city. Let us now turn to examine whether this is also the case in the western Ukrainian cases.

### ***Western Ukraine: Lutsk and Ternopil***

In Lutsk and Ternopil, PoR networks were more weakly embedded than in Cherkasy and Vinnytsia. Nevertheless, there was still a difference in the strength of PoR networks in the two cities. The PoR had a very limited foothold in Ternopil: only 15% of seats in the city council and under 12% in the oblast council. In fact, Ternopil had Serhii Nadal, the only *Svoboda* mayor in Ukraine, and also a *Svoboda* deputy chairing the oblast council – *Svoboda* being a right-wing nationalist party strongly supporting the protests from the outset. In fact, *Svoboda* was a strong party in the city, with majorities of 42% and 57% in the oblast and city councils, respectively. In Lutsk, PoR networks had greater (but still limited) embeddedness, with 17% of city council and 27.5% of oblast council seats. However, unlike in Ternopil, the chairperson of the oblast council, Volodymyr Voyitovych, of the People's Party, was an ally of PoR, giving them more influence in the city. Significantly, as I will explain below, the oblast prosecutor, Andrii Paraka, was also loyal to the ruling regime and experienced in fabricating cases against activists. I argue that these differences in local PoR networks map onto a difference between the treatment of Lutsk and Ternopil protesters, and a difference between the repression used in Cherkasy, where PoR networks were more moderately embedded.

The weakness of PoR networks and strength of opposition networks in Lutsk and Ternopil, like in Vinnytsia, enabled the local government to support local Euromaidan protests from their beginning. Ternopil's Mayor Nadal signed an order convening an emergency meeting of the city council on 22 November, and Nadal

coordinated with youth activists for the council to participate in the first Sunday's protests. Nadal then instructed the city council to do everything possible to actively support protesters, including providing fuel, sound equipment, and electricity. The city council even organised protest actions, declaring an indefinite 1 December city-wide strike. Local councils began coordinating the transport of protesters to Kyiv the following day. The oblast council provided strong support for Ternopil's Euromaidan, too, issuing a supporting statement for the Euromaidan on 26 November. Meanwhile, in Lutsk, city council deputies voted to support EU integration, the RSA provided a kitchen and shelter for protesters, and Mayor Mykola Romanyuk condemned the dispersal of the Kyiv Euromaidan. Thus, moral and practical support was forthcoming for local protesters from their governments in both cities, due to the strength of opposition networks.

Nevertheless, despite these Euromaidans receiving strong support from local government, the Yanukovych government tried to assert what authority it could through the means at its disposal via the limited PoR networks in the city and wider region. In particular, the Yanukovych government used what I will call 'administrative repression' – criminal investigations, arrests, and court cases – led by local figures appointed by the central government. This administrative repression was evident in both cities, but more severe in Lutsk. In Ternopil, following protests of 2-3 December, where approximately 15,000 gathered and blockaded local government buildings, the oblast prosecutor, Hennadii Movchan, opened a criminal investigation and called activists for questioning. Protesters alleged that the RSA made workers complain to the police about certain activists who prevented them entering their workplace. Prosecutor Movchan was reported to have ties to PoR deputy Volodymyr Oliynyk, and Prosecutor General Vyktor Pshonka (Hromnytsyka 2014). Three leading local activists

were charged and convicted in mid-December<sup>85</sup>. Movchan also repeatedly attempted to hinder local authorities' support for the Euromaidan: for example, he filed suits to cancel the raising of EU flags over government buildings, and to cancel the city council's declaration of a city-wide strike and refusal to fulfil 'criminal' orders issued by central government. Most such cases were rejected by the local district administrative court, again demonstrating the limited power of PoR networks in Ternopil.

In Lutsk, repression began following a 2 December protest where activists, including Maya Moskvych<sup>86</sup>, took portraits of Yanukovych from the RSA building, turned them upside down, marched to the central square, and destroyed them. The activists were protesting local Governor Borys Klimchuk's and Chairperson Voyitovych's refusal to condemn attacks on protesters in Kyiv or to resign. Moskvych and five other activists were later charged with hooliganism and calls to threaten public peace<sup>87</sup>. Local activists claimed that the trial was motivated by oblast prosecutor, Paraka, and First Deputy of Ministry of Internal Affairs, Dmytro Rudenko, who had a history of fabricating cases against nationalist activists in Ivano-Frankivsk<sup>88</sup>. Later in December, another seven opposition deputies were called for questioning, and Euromaidan's co-coordinator, Mykola Sobutshkyi, was informed he was suspected of a crime. Even Lutsk's Mayor Romanyuk was questioned by the prosecutor over a

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85 Activists Volodymyr Stayura, local head of National Resistance, Mariya Chashka, head of the oblast council's Svoboda faction, and Mariya Bab'yuk, the city councils' director of communal enterprise.

86 Head of the organisation 'National Alliance'.

87 Other activists were Volodymyr Bondar (former deputy), Bohdan Shyb (former mayor of Lutsk), Serhii Hryhorenko (city council deputy), and Mykola Sobutshkyi and Ihor Huz', members of the local Euromaidan coordinating committee. These events contrast with Ternopil, where the oblast council ordered the removal of Yanukovych's portrait from government buildings.

88 Paraka was previously involved in fabricating criminal cases against 'Tryzub' activists in his previous post in Ivano-Frankivsk, accusing them of 'terrorism' in a case condemned by the Ukrainian Helsinki Union. The accused were brutally tortured. Rudenko was part of Paraka's team in Ivano-Frankivsk and had been transferred to Lutsk with him. <https://www.volynpost.com/articles/353-volynskij-tyhonja-prokuror--kryvavyj-variag-z-trykarpattia>

raising of the EU flag. Subsequent protests directly addressed this repression of local activists, and protesters' claims repeatedly included the resignation of the governor, chairperson, and prosecutor. Following protesters' attempt to seize the oblast council building on 24 January, Governor Klimchuk and Chairperson Voyitovych did resign, the police declared they were 'with the people', and cases against Lutsk activists were closed. However, Voyitovych withdrew his resignation, the governor was replaced with another PoR member, Oleksandr Bashkalenko, and the administrative repression of activists renewed: In early February, over 100 political and civic activists and journalists were questioned after an oblast PoR deputy alleged her mother was threatened; fresh criminal cases were opened against Moskvych; and traffic police targeted the Automaidan (motorist-activists), monitoring and obstructing their movements, and opening criminal proceedings. The Lutsk Euromaidan was clear in who it saw as the perpetrators of this repression: the new and former governor, the oblast prosecutor, and the head of police. Thus, we can see that although the embeddedness of PoR networks in locally elected bodies was limited in Lutsk and Ternopil, the Yanukovych government still managed to target key Euromaidan activists in these cities via administrative repression applied by unelected, centrally appointed local officials. In Lutsk, where PoR networks were slightly more embedded, this repression was more persistent and widespread.

In fact, in Ternopil, where PoR networks were less successful in targeting protesters, the Party of Regions acted to directly pressure local authorities over their support for the Euromaidan. In a 24 December statement addressing Ukraine's prosecutor general, Pshonka, the Ternopil city council appealed for an end to politically motivated inspections and criminal proceedings against city council bodies and employees. They claimed that twelve criminal investigations had been opened in

a single week. This point is significant as it demonstrates that beyond the protesters themselves, local government bodies that support protesters can also become a target for repression.

Nevertheless, these administrative repressions of protesters and local authorities failed to have the desired effect of curtailing protest. In fact, PoR networks' ability to repress completely disintegrated by late February. Local authorities in Ternopil continued collaborating with the Euromaidan even as protests became violent from 18 February, with administrative buildings seized, sacked, and set alight, and documents and vehicles burned in what was dubbed the 'Night of Grief'. By the Euromaidan's final days, local police in Ternopil answered to the city council, who were taking decisions together with protesters, and Ternopil RSA was working with citizen's groups, including the Automaidan, to ensure security in the city. In Lutsk, protests intensified over 19-21 February. The local PoR and Communist party offices were sacked, and a number of administrative buildings were seized after peaceful protests were escalated by radical activists.<sup>89</sup> Protesters met minimal resistance at most administrative buildings. However, following a standoff outside the Ministry of Internal Affairs, where protesters used Molotov cocktails and troops from the Sokil rapid-response unit used stun grenades and threatened to shoot, security forces laid down their weapons and left through a 'corridor of shame'<sup>90</sup>. PoR networks then lost the ability to repress in a rapid series of events: Governor Bashkalenko was handcuffed, taken to the Euromaidan, and forced to resign; the oblast council fired Chairperson Voyitovych; and the oblast security services, Ministry of Internal Affairs,

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<sup>89</sup> Radical groups such as the UNSO and Pravyi Sektor escalated protests as administration buildings in Lutsk were amongst the only in western Ukraine not seized by protesters.

<sup>90</sup> Local Pravyi Sektor activist, Danylchuk, intervened to deescalate the situation, and the head of police agreed to discussions.

and prosecutor agreed to cooperate to provide law and order, which was overseen by an agreement jointly signed by *Pravyi Sektor*<sup>91</sup>, local self-defence units, police, and Interior Ministry troops.

Therefore, in the cases of Lutsk and Ternopil in western Ukraine, we see further evidence that repressive responses do not correspond to the size or repertoires of protests. Ternopil, in particular, saw some of the largest and most disruptive protests outside of Kyiv, and yet protests were strongly supported by local political networks, which were dominated by opposition (not PoR) parties. The weak embeddedness of PoR networks in local governments constrained the usage of coercive, violent repression against protesters. Instead, PoR networks resorted to targeting key activists via criminal investigations bought about by centrally appointed figures such as oblast prosecutors. Such administrative repression was particularly persistent in Lutsk, where PoR networks were stronger. This type of repression contrasts with the overt, coercive, and indiscriminate repression used in Cherkasy, where PoR networks were more moderately embedded and had more power. It also differs from the forms of repression used in the eastern cities of Kharkiv and Donetsk, as laid out below.

### ***Eastern Ukraine: Kharkiv and Donetsk***

In contrast to Lutsk and Ternopil, Kharkiv and Donetsk in eastern Ukraine saw PoR networks highly embedded in local politics. This network representation corresponds with the different usage of repression. In Donetsk, the PoR essentially had complete control of local politics. It also controlled most large and medium enterprise, as the region's economy was dominated by the activities of oligarch Rinat Akmetov, a PoR

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91 A far-right activist organisation formed during the Euromaidan

founder (Avioutskaa 2010). In Donetsk, the PoR held 94.4% and 92.2% of seats in the oblast and city councils. In Kharkiv, local politics were also dominated by the Party of Regions, but to a lesser extent, with 68% of seats in the city and oblast councils. Kharkiv's Mayor Henadiy Kernes, and Governor Mykhailo Dobkin, were both PoR members. However, there was more inter-elite competition in Kharkiv. Platonova (2020) has highlighted that prior to 2013, Dobkin and Kernes came into conflict with the Interior Ministry. They experienced frequent challenges from rival groups within and outside the PoR, and they faced regular political and socio-economic protest. Hence, although highly influential, local PoR networks in Kharkiv were more insecure than in Donetsk, leading PoR officials to take a more proactive stance against protest. Overall, the high levels of embeddedness of PoR networks in Donetsk and Kharkiv corresponded with significantly different repressive responses to the Euromaidan, compared to the cities in central and western Ukraine; however, the disparities between the PoR networks in Donetsk and Kharkiv also correlate with some differences between the two cities in approaches to tackling the local Euromaidan.

In Kharkiv, local authorities took a combative approach toward protests from the beginning, but they refrained from deploying state security apparatus against protesters until the very end. Rather, efforts to hinder organisation and intimidate activists were used from protest onset. Mayor Kernes acted quickly to ban mass events, claiming a 'flu epidemic', on 25 November. Several days later, the city council changed tactics, cancelling this ban to allow the staging of a pro-government meeting, attended by an estimated 40,000-70,000 factory and state workers, university faculty, and students. From December, the mayor began stating that there was no Euromaidan in Kharkiv – despite the presence of daily protests from 21 November, which gathered a not-insignificant 5,000 protesters on 1 December. Governor Dobkin echoed these

claims in mid-December, establishing a pattern of actions to undermine and downplay Kharkiv Euromaidan. Thus, local leaders sought to make clear they did not see Kharkiv's Euromaidan as a threat. Perhaps this is why overt repression was not initially used – overt repression would have demonstrated that the local government felt threatened, and draw attention to the protests. The staging of pro-government demonstrations was used in an attempt to show the strength of support for the PoR in the city, rather than the Euromaidan.

Despite this show of bravado, the local government likely did feel threatened by the Euromaidan, as isolated incidents of targeted intimidation and repression began. These repressive incidents became more frequent and systematic over time. The first reported Euromaidan activist beaten by unidentified perpetrators was Olga Miroshnyk<sup>92</sup>, attacked in her office on 30 November. In late December, oblast opposition deputy and coordinator of Kharkiv's National Resistance Headquarters, Ivan Varchenko, reported an attempt on his life, and Euromaidan organiser Dmytro Pylypets was stabbed. Mayor Kernes was believed by many activists to be ordering these attacks, targeting key organisers. Attacks on activists' property were even more frequent than assaults, with vehicles used by the Euromaidan burned on an almost nightly basis over a period in late December 2013. Despite these attempts to intimidate activists, daily protests continued in Kharkiv, although small, with an average of several hundred protesters, and over 1000 on key dates. We can see that rather than repressing the protests directly, the leaders of PoR networks were covertly targeting key protest leaders in an attempt to intimidate or even eliminate them, and thus undermine the Euromaidan by taking out the local leadership.

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92 President of the 'Fund of Local Democracy'

In comparison, in Donetsk, despite the city having the highest embeddedness of PoR networks in Ukraine, limited repression was used against protesters until late January 2014. Daily protests took place, observed by heavy police presence. Despite the police presence, no overt repression was used, and limited attempts to intimidate key activists took place, compared to Kharkiv. For example, local journalists reported being threatened with losing their jobs over their participation in the protests, and Vitalyi Pozhydayev, head of a local farmers' association supporting the protests, was targeted with an extraneous tax inspection. This relative absence of repression can be attributed to two factors: first, that the PoR dominated local politics so much that people were hesitant to express resistance and thus protest was small; and second, there was reportedly a divide amongst local party figures in how to deal with the protests, according to an inside source reporting to protesters. Activists themselves were surprised that they were not violently dispersed. In fact, in early December 2013, they were invited to discuss their demands with the city council. Yet, over time, repression against protesters did rise in Donetsk, as in Kharkiv.

The turning point for the repression of Kharkiv Euromaidan came in mid-January 2014. Kharkiv was the location for the First All-Ukrainian Forum of Euromaidans, held 11-12 January. Initially, PoR networks sought to undermine the event with covert tactics: pressure on venues meant that the forum's location changed several times, and electricity failed at the final venue. Eventually, non-state actors introduced violent tactics to repress protesters. *Titushky* and Anti-Maidan protesters targeted the meetings, attacking and injuring forum participants, provoking fights, and throwing firecrackers and smoke bombs. From this point onwards, *titushky*, widely believed to be directed by the mayor and governor, acted more frequently to repress protesters. Some were thought to be paid, others may have simply volunteered. Most

notably, over 25-27 January, *titushky* attacked the Saturday, Sunday, and Monday events using firecrackers, baseball bats, Molotov cocktails, and explosive and non-explosive projectiles. The police intervened but did not prevent several injuries, and they allowed *titushky* to leave without being arrested. Two activists were also taken hostage and beaten up after being observed photographing the matriculation plates of vehicles belonging to Mayor Kernes' associates.

There was a similar upswing in the targeting of protesters by non-state actors in Donetsk from mid-January 2014. A protest on Sunday 19 was attacked by *titushky* who provoked fights with *Svoboda* activists. Police did not intervene, but instead detained a protest organiser following a reported mugging. Similar attacks and clashes with Anti-Maidan protesters occurred over subsequent days, accompanied by rumours, actively encouraged by Donetsk city council, that radical protesters from outside Donetsk were planning to arrive and storm the RSA. In contrast to Ternopil, where local authorities supported the formation of Euromaidan self-defence groups, the Donetsk local authorities supported the creation of volunteer squads, 'druzhyny', intended to patrol and 'protect' the city from radical protesters. But why not use local law enforcement, rather than *titushky*, to repress protesters? Local PoR networks in Kharkiv and Donetsk were strong, and they had the capacity and authority to do so. I suggest this choice to use non-state actors may be due to three factors. First, it enabled local PoR networks to impede protests without being officially implicated in the usage of repression. Second, it gave the impression of grassroots local resistance to the Euromaidan. And third, it potentially required fewer resources than using police and courts to arrest and prosecute protesters. Perhaps local PoR officials had also learnt from events in Kyiv on 30 November and did not want to risk a backlash by using security forces to crack down hard on a small group of peaceful protesters.

Nevertheless, this tactic changed. When protesters' repertoires escalated in Kharkiv in the final days of the Euromaidan, security forces deployed overt, coercive repression. From late on 18 February, protesters began to blockade the Academy of Interior Forces Troops, described by activists as Kharkiv Euromaidan's only 'illegal' action. This resulted in a strong response by local authorities: *Berkut* and *titushky* dispersed the 100+ protesters using stun grenades, beatings, and teargas, resulting in injuries and arrests. Protesters maintained that they had come with peaceful intentions, to talk and negotiate. This disproportionate response to a relatively small and peaceful blockade (compared, for example, to the limited police resistance to the storming of Ternopil's RSA building) aligns with the expectation identified in the literature that if strongly embedded PoR networks do decide to escalate repression, it may be severe in scope and brutality. Whether this stronger response was influenced by the escalation of protesters' tactics in Kharkiv or worries about the deterioration of the security situation in the country more broadly, local PoR networks felt threatened and came down hard on protesters, using their power to deploy both state and non-state actors.

Local Donetsk PoR networks turned to different tactics to try to suppress protest. The use of *titushky* in the city had been effective: by late January 2014, the Donetsk Euromaidan had suspended mass events over security concerns. Local PoR figures still continued to target activists through intimidation. They actively participated in sharing information and contact details of key activists and journalists on social media, endangering them. The PoR attempted to turn public opinion against them by distributing leaflets and posters in the neighbourhoods where activists lived, accusing them of terrorism, and warning 'you are living near a radical criminal!'. These targeted intimidations were supported by real violence from *titushky* and Anti-Maidan organised groups, who attacked and threatened almost all of the limited

Euromaidan protests that did take place in February 2014. Given this hostile environment, few protest actions were reported in the final days of the Euromaidan. Thus, in Donetsk, we see that strongly embedded PoR networks had a preventative effect, keeping protest at a low level, and enabling the suppression of protests with little to no direct and overt use of force by state actors. At the same time, non-state actors, supported by the local authorities, were able to target protesters with impunity.

Therefore, in the cases of Donetsk and Kharkiv, we can observe that high levels of PoR embeddedness did not necessarily translate into greater overt, coercive repression. Donetsk had the strongest PoR embeddedness in Ukraine, but limited action was taken against protesters during the first six weeks of protest, likely because they were not perceived as a real threat. Later, as protest escalated throughout Ukraine, the local authorities managed to curtail Donetsk Euromaidan via a combination of intimidation and the use of non-state actors to threaten and attack protesters. No official state actors were deployed to repress, although local authorities certainly had the power to do so.

The approach to the protests differed slightly in Kharkiv, where the mayor and governor were more proactive in trying to ban and then downplay Kharkiv Euromaidan from the start – perhaps because they felt more threatened, given Kharkiv’s stronger history of protest and elite divisions. Still, except on one occasion in late February 2014 when *Berkut* were deployed, Kharkiv authorities relied on targeted intimidation and violence against key activists by non-state actors in an attempt to undermine the protests.

The approaches in these eastern cities contrast with those analysed above, in central and west Ukraine. In Cherkasy, where PoR networks were more moderately embedded, local authorities began deploying security forces to beat and arrest

protesters from the very first day. In Ternopil and Lutsk, where PoR networks were weak, local authorities, dominated by the opposition, supported the protests, and PoR networks attempted to target activists with administrative repression through the courts. All this is despite the fact that the largest and most disruptive protests in terms of the seizure of and damage to property occurred in Ternopil and Lutsk – demonstrating that the relative embeddedness of PoR networks, rather than the threat posed by the size or type of protests, was more important in shaping the repression of regional protests.

### **Conclusion**

When mass mobilisation takes place throughout a country, repressive responses to protests can differ dramatically between localities. It is first and foremost the local authorities in a town or city who choose whether and how to repress local protests. This article has shown that the repressive choices of such actors are primarily shaped not by the nature of the protests themselves. Protests may be large, as in Ternopil, demonstrating strong opposition to the government; or disruptive, as in Lutsk, involving the seizing of government buildings and threat to property and public order. But this does not necessarily entail that they will be harshly repressed. Rather, it is the nature of the local political networks themselves – those making decisions about how to respond to protests – that shapes the repression used. In this article, examining the case of Ukraine's Euromaidan protests, I have demonstrated via qualitative research that the relative local embeddedness of Party of Regions networks, representing the ruling political party, was a crucial factor in determining how repression was used in a city. I conducted within-case paired comparisons, examining repression used in

Kharkiv and Donetsk in eastern Ukraine, Cherkasy and Vinnytsia in central Ukraine, and Ternopil and Lutsk in western Ukraine during local Euromaidan protests.

Comparing within central and west Ukraine, I found that cities where the PoR held more council and leadership positions experienced more frequent and more severe repression of protesters. In eastern Ukraine, the situation was the inverse: the total dominance by PoR networks in Donetsk enabled local authorities to effectively suppress protests with less intimidation and violence than in Kharkiv. Comparing across all six cities, a pattern begins to emerge, in line with my hypotheses: where PoR networks were weakly embedded in local government, in Vinnytsia, Ternopil and Lutsk, the local authorities were free to support, rather than repress, the Euromaidan. Opposition figures dominated local councils and leadership positions and opted to support protesters in their grievances against the government with both statements and practical support. Where PoR networks were more moderately embedded, as in Cherkasy, local PoR leaders authorised overt, coercive repression to try and maintain their limited power. And where PoR networks were strongly embedded, in Kharkiv and particularly Donetsk, local authorities in a strong position relied more on intimidation and targeted, often covert repression, enacted primarily by non-state actors.

Overall, my findings make three main contributions to the study of Ukraine's Euromaidan and the repression of protest more broadly. First, I have demonstrated the extent to which repressive tactics can vary across a single nationwide mass mobilisation. A wide variety of repressive tactics were used across Ukraine during the Euromaidan, ranging from bans, arrests, and court cases; to intimidation via targeted assaults, the sharing of activists' details, and damage to property; and the coercive use of force deployed by both law enforcement and non-state actors – *titushky* – likely

supported by state actors. Both targeted and indiscriminate repression was utilised. I have also demonstrated that local authorities who support protesters can become targets of repression themselves.

Second, I have provided qualitative evidence that the extent to which ruling-party networks are embedded at the local government level influences variation in the usage of repression towards local protesters. In Ternopil and Lutsk in western Ukraine, where PoR networks were weakly embedded, local authorities, controlled by opposition parties, acted to support the protests. The central government tried to repress local activists by the limited means available to it – bringing court cases via the local prosecutor. This tactic was more successful in Lutsk, where the ruling party had limited but still stronger networks than in Ternopil. In cities where ruling-party networks were highly embedded, Kharkiv and Donetsk, repression tended to take the form of targeted violence and intimidation towards key activists, mostly perpetrated by non-state actors likely commissioned by local authorities. Activists were beaten and their property was damaged, and in the later stages these groups were sometimes deployed to attack protesters. In Donetsk, activists' personal details were also published in an effort to discourage them from protesting. In Kharkiv, local ruling-party networks, who had much influence but were nonetheless more insecure than in Donetsk, were more combative towards protesters, quickly acting to ban and downplay the Euromaidan after its onset, and eventually deploying security forces in late February 2014. In the comparison of Cherkasy and Vinnytsia in central Ukraine, we see the starkest contrast in repressive tactics: In Vinnytsia, PoR networks were relatively weakly embedded, and so little repression was used – the local authorities supported the protests. But in Cherkasy, where PoR networks were moderately

embedded, coercive repression in terms of the beating of protesters by security forces and *titushky* was frequently used.

Finally, this article makes the case for the utility of subnational and qualitative studies of the protest-repression nexus. It demonstrates that studies that treat the state as a unitary actor may miss important factors which influence the usage of repression. This study also answers the call to go beyond the quantitative study of the relationship between repression and mobilisation and research other questions, such as why regimes utilise certain repressive repertoires (Fu and Simmons 2021). Still, as a study focused on six cases, these results are limited in their generalizability. As such, it is hoped that this study will provide a foundation for future qualitative and quantitative research into the influence of local networks upon repression, including looking towards other networks such as those of local activists and economic elites.

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## Conclusion

Wordcount: 5515

### Introduction

This thesis began with two questions: during nationwide moments of mass mobilisation, what shapes subnational variation in where protest – and the repression of protest – takes place? And what can examining the drivers of this variation teach us about protest more broadly? I first began asking these questions almost four years ago. Today, the world, and particularly the region studied in this thesis, feels like a very different place, disrupted by a global pandemic, and a deadly war in Europe that has caused the largest displacement of people since World War II<sup>93</sup>. These questions, however, remain as relevant as ever. In recent years we have also witnessed nationwide mass mobilisations in the USA, Uganda, Kazakhstan, India, and Chile, to name just a few examples. In seeking the answers to these questions, and better understand such nationwide mass mobilisations, this thesis focused on the cases of Ukraine's 2013-14 Euromaidan protests, and the 2020 Belarusian protests. This research has highlighted the role of various kinds of social networks, demonstrating these networks play an important role in shaping subnational variation in protest, and repression, during nationwide mass mobilisations.

This completed body of work looks very different than originally envisaged, and it makes contributions to our understanding of mobilisation in Eastern Europe with wide-reaching implications I never originally anticipated. When I embarked upon this DPhil in 2018, Ukraine's Euromaidan protests appeared to be the most recent and striking example of nationwide mass mobilisation in Eastern Europe. All this changed in 2020 when Belarusians mobilised on a huge scale against the falsification of

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93 <https://ukraine.un.org/en/175836-war-has-caused-fastest-and-largest-displacement-people-europe-world-war-ii>

elections. I subsequently expanded my study to include the case of the 2020 Belarus protests. I also adapted my research methods in order to forgo fieldwork due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and research the Euromaidan as well as the new Belarusian case from afar. But more upheaval was to come. When I began working on the final article of this thesis, nobody expected that it would be completed in the context of Russia waging a full-scale war in Ukraine. The resulting thesis is submitted as the Ukrainian cities I have researched are bombed and, in some cases, occupied by Russian forces. Cities, towns, and villages across Ukraine have mobilised to protest invasion and occupation, to protect their territory, to support Ukraine's armed forces, and to assist those trapped or displaced by war. Many Belarusian cities have protested against Russia's war on Ukraine, and Belarus' involvement. My research demonstrates that we should not be surprised by this fierce, nationwide resistance of Ukrainians to the invasion of their country. Nor should we underestimate Belarusians' capacity to continue to resist Lukashenka's rule, and involvement in the war, even in acutely repressive circumstances.

This concluding chapter unpacks the main findings of this thesis, demonstrating how the separate papers build upon one another, accumulating a richer understanding of social networks, protest, and nationwide mobilisation. It then highlights how the papers as a whole contribute to methodological, empirical, and theoretical work on mass mobilisation. I also discuss avenues for further research, based upon my findings. Finally, I address civic resistance and mobilisation in Ukraine and Belarus taking place at the time this thesis was being completed, as a result of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. I connect the findings of this thesis to current events, and also highlight how some of the methodological innovations in this work may help us study the ongoing conflict.

## **Main findings**

This thesis began with an article examining the ways in which activist networks spanning across a country may shape subnational variation in protest over time. I demonstrated that the engagement of activist networks, and their increasing cross-cleavage collaboration over time, corresponded with shifts in the geospatial scope of protest over three protest waves in Ukraine between 1990-2004. Between 1990 and 2004, activist networks expanded across Ukraine, sought to bridge across diverse groups, and learned how to better collaborate. Although the article did not make causal claims, it showed that activist networks from across the country worked together, in an effort to try and mobilise more localities. Thus, activist networks may be acting as an agent of diffusion, shaping geospatial variation in protest in this way. This first article also demonstrates the importance of understanding the long-term context of mass mobilisations, particularly historic activist networks. Where relevant, research on a mass mobilisation must consider prior years of protest and activism, and the networks that have already developed and contribute to the protest being studied.

Nevertheless, this paper did not elucidate what may actually be happening in the short-term at the locality level to bring about mobilisation. Thus, the second article of this thesis built on these findings by illuminating what happens at the local, grassroots level, immediately prior to and during the initial week of protest. This article helps us better understand how the activities of pre-existing, local networks in a town or city contribute to the onset of mobilisation, thus shaping geospatial variation in protest. These networks facilitated communication, coordination, and engagement prior to the start of mass protests, preparing the local community for action. The use of mixed methods in this article also enabled me to make some causal claims in this

paper, demonstrating that the presence of pre-existing networks helps drive early-rising mobilisation in a locality.

Together, these first two papers also suggest that social networks likely matter both over the short and long term. Networks may shape geospatial variation in mobilisation over the period of a week, or over decades. In Ukraine, we saw that some of the same activist organisations involved in the 1990 and 2000-2001 protests were also engaged in the 2004 Orange Revolution, and I suggested that the development of these activist networks helped protest to spread to more locations over time. However, such long-established activist networks are not necessarily a prerequisite for protest. Whilst limited information was available on the nature of the pre-existing local networks analysed in Belarus, we know that activist networks in the country are weaker than those in Ukraine, resulting from decades of repression and persecution. Most of the Telegram groups used to coordinate local protests in Belarus were created only months or even just weeks before the start of mass protests. These crucial, pre-existing networks in the Belarusian case do not seem to have been engaging in resistance for years, like some of the activist networks in Ukraine. Nevertheless, they were still effective in bringing about mobilisation. This would suggest that grassroots networks do not necessarily have to be established and active for a long time to be effective in contributing to protest in a specific locality.

In my third article, I turned to examine the role of a specific kind of network that may shape subnational variation in protest – one which is not necessarily oriented around protest, activism, or resistance: the workplace. I demonstrated that protest events were more frequent in Belarusian rayons where more of the workforce was employed in industrial settings. In Ukraine, protest events were more frequent in regions with a higher proportion of white-collar employees. Although my research

identified correlations rather than causality, drawing on evidence from my protest event catalogues, I suggested factors that may be driving these divergent findings: workplace networks can act as a mobilising structure during a mass mobilisation, facilitating the sharing of information and the organisation of protest events, but the grievances of the protest may influence what kind of workplaces mobilise. In Belarus, industrial workers were concerned by the falsification of election results and the repression of colleagues, but in Ukraine the claims of the first week of the Euromaidan, which sought closer ties with Europe, were more relevant for white-collar employees. Analysis of the relationship between protest and employment should also consider who people are employed by. Although, based on the literature on state employment, I hypothesised that state-sector industrial employment would be associated with lower protest event frequency in Belarusian rayons, I found the inverse. Evidence from my protest event catalogue suggested that, in fact, the mobilisation of state industrial workers may have emboldened other groups to protest. This challenges our existing understanding about the relationship between state employment and protest. However, in Ukraine, the positive association between white-collar workers and protest event frequency in a region was primarily driven by those who were *not* state sector employees. This supports recent works by Rosenfeld (2017; 2021), who argues that state sector middle class workers are less likely to mobilise than their private sector counterparts. Overall, this article indicates that context matters when it comes to the role of different groups of workers in protest, and greater nuance and more analysis is needed to better understand the ways in which certain groups of workers contribute to mass protest. In some contexts, workplace networks can act not only as a means for mobilising a locality, but also demobilising, via the threat of repression and negative consequences when the state is an important employer.

The fourth article of this thesis explored this connection between repression and social networks in greater detail. After examining the ways in which three different kinds of network contribute to geospatial variation in protests, I shifted my attention to examine the local networks who respond to these regional incidents of mobilisation – the local government. I explored how the repressive tactics used against protesters can vary across a country, and how the composition of local government networks shapes this variation. I examined the case of Ukraine’s Euromaidan, specifically focusing on six cities: Ternopil and Lutsk in western Ukraine, Kharkiv and Donetsk in eastern Ukraine, and Cherkasy and Vinnytsia in central Ukraine. Using fine-grained qualitative analysis, I argued that the relative embeddedness of the ruling Party of Region’s networks at the local level was crucial in shaping how repression was used in these cities. Where Party of Regions networks had a strong hold over the city and regional council, limited overt and indiscriminate repression was used. Instead, non-state actors targeted and intimidated key activists. Where these networks were weakly embedded, repression was limited and tended towards arrests and court cases initiated by the local prosecutor. It was where Party of Region’s networks were moderately embedded that the most harsh, indiscriminate repression was used. This finding demonstrates parallels with the ‘murder in the middle’ hypothesis (Fein 1995) – that semi-authoritarian or hybrid regimes, rather than fully authoritarian regimes, are more repressive. This article also makes a notable contribution to theory on repression, by demonstrating the extent to which repression can vary across a country – even across just 6 cities. Thus, it offers a cautionary note to studies that focus on repression at the national or cross-national level, suggesting that they should consider whether they are ignoring significant within-country variation in repression, and what implications this may have for their findings.

In fact, together all of the articles of this thesis show that subnational analysis can be extremely useful in helping to enrich our understanding of mass mobilisations. Subnational analysis enables us both to deepen our knowledge about specific cases of protest, and also to test and build upon theories about the drivers of mass mobilisations more broadly. The main methodological, empirical, and theoretical contributions of this thesis are discussed below.

## **Main contributions**

### ***Methodological contribution***

Whilst this project did not set out to make methodological contributions to the study of protest, it has nevertheless offered some innovation for scholars of protest event analysis. In using Telegram Messenger data to gather information on regional protest events in the fast-evolving, highly censored, and repressive context of Belarus, this thesis has demonstrated the utility of social media data to scholars. Conventional methods of protest event analysis would have fallen short of capturing a number of events occurring during the first week of mass mobilisation in Belarus, as dozens of protests emerged in more towns and cities every day. Accordingly, this project suggests that Telegram Messenger, as well as other social media and messaging platforms, may well prove an important source of data on mass mobilisations. For example, now that Twitter has recently opened up its API for researcher access, similar techniques to those used in this thesis may also be applied to historic Twitter data, in order to source protest event data on the many mass mobilisations extensively covered on the social media platform.

Moreover, my research suggests that Telegram data is useful for more than protest event analysis. As the platform was extensively used by Belarusian protesters,

it is an extremely rich data source on many aspects of the protests, from activist networks, to the slogans and symbols of the protest, and much more. When the participants of mass mobilisations make intensive use of social media platforms, this often provokes debates about the extent to which social media helped mobilise protesters. Whilst questioning the role of social media in protest is undoubtedly important, this thesis has shown that we must also look beyond these debates, to see how the tools that protesters use can provide opportunities for researchers to better understand other aspects of the mass mobilisation. Social media data can make it possible to study mobilisation from afar, when circumstances do not allow in-country research – whether due to a pandemic, or dynamic political contexts that can make fieldwork impossible. We must, of course, remain mindful that social media data may not capture certain offline activity; and also consider the ethical implications associated with using social media data. Nevertheless, these platforms pose much potential for future research of mass mobilisations.

### *Empirical contribution*

Beyond methodology, this thesis makes an extremely valuable, empirical contribution to the study of protest specifically in Ukraine and Belarus. In terms of the 2020 Belarus protests, this thesis presents a seminal work on the study of the regional dimension of the mobilisation. The article ‘All of Belarus has come out onto the streets’ is the first to systematically show the nationwide extent of these protests. It is vital in helping us understand the incredible scale with which protests spread across the country. The article also presents new, important findings that challenge some pre-conceptions about the apparently weak state of civil society in Belarus, by demonstrating that local networks of resistance were widespread throughout Belarus prior to the onset of mass

protest in August 2020. The article on employment patterns and protest also challenges another set of pre-conceptions, this time around the apparent passivity of post-Soviet industrial workplaces, particularly in Belarus where so many workplaces are owned by the state. Together, these two articles are part of the first, emerging wave of scholarship on the 2020 protests, and will provide a foundation for future studies by the author and other scholars.

This thesis also makes a significant contribution to our knowledge about Ukraine's Euromaidan. The regional dimension of the protests has been researched to a lesser extent than other aspects of the protests, and so this thesis helps to complement the existing literature. Moreover, this thesis has also examined regional mobilisation and activist networks in three mass mobilisations prior to the Euromaidan, enhancing our understanding of regional protest not only in 2013-14 but also in 1990, 2000-2001, and 2004. Thus, I have provided vital context for the study of the Euromaidan and other mobilisations still to come. The repression of protesters during the Euromaidan – particularly beyond Kyiv – has also attracted less attention than other elements of the mass mobilisation. This thesis engages with this aspect by demonstrating the extent to which repression varied across Ukrainian cities and regions, and the differing ways in which local governments engaged with local protesters. It shows that whilst repression in Kyiv was a key driver of the protests, repression also occurred throughout the country, varying greatly in character. Future research should examine how this local variation in repression may have impacted local protests.

### ***Theoretical contribution***

When taken together, the articles of this thesis also engage with and contribute to broader social science theory on mass mobilisation, by highlighting the importance of

social networks. Much of the theorising around mass mobilisations has focused on structural factors, such as resource deprivation, political opportunity structures, and resource mobilisation. Social networks lie at the intersection of structure and agency, with a network itself being a structure, but the individuals making up the network possessing agency. Of course, this thesis is not the first to emphasise the role of social networks in mass mobilisation; many scholars have argued that social networks are crucial in driving mobilisation processes. As such, this thesis confirms and supports these existing theories about the centrality of social network ties in facilitating mass protest. However, it engages with existing theory in two novel ways.

First, this research tests theory on social networks and protest in a new case, the 2020 Belarus protests. Belarus is a highly authoritarian context, and the repressive environment makes it extremely challenging for networks of activism and resistance to flourish in the open. They have to remain underground, or risk facing persecution, arrest, and imprisonment. Hence, my findings indicating that networks of resistance succeeded in forming and mobilising in Belarus, despite great personal risk to the individuals involved, suggests that networks are still crucial, even in authoritarian contexts. My work reinforces existing theory, and suggests that networks are likely to play an even greater role in more democratic contexts, where they are able to operate more freely. My analysis of the new case of the Belarusian protests contributes to our broader understanding of mass mobilisations.

This thesis also tests this existing theory on social networks using innovative methods, by relying on Telegram data to help identify pre-existing social networks in regional Belarusian localities. Identifying social networks can be challenging, particularly in authoritarian or repressive contexts, but it can and must be done, as is demonstrated here. Other avenues to study these networks in Belarus were extremely

limited: fieldwork was not possible due to the severe repression of protesters and the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Social media, in the form of Telegram community chats, provided a window into the local social networks engaging in resistance prior to mass mobilisation, which would not ordinarily have been visible, due to my distance from the field site, and also these networks' necessity to maintain anonymity, or face repression. Thus, this thesis encourages more creative approaches to capturing and analysing social networks during mass mobilisations.

Whilst this project primarily works to confirm existing theory on social networks, and apply it to new cases, using some new methods, the papers presented here nevertheless do offer some opportunities to expand upon this literature. Much work on social networks examines how they help to mobilise individuals. In contrast, this thesis conducts analysis mostly at the locality level, highlighting specifically how social networks shape variation in *where* protests occur. As a result, it suggests that social networks are important not only in facilitating individual-level mobilisation, but also shaping geographically widespread protest. The structure and activity of social networks influence where mobilisation may take place. Moreover, different kinds of networks, at different levels, may play their own role in facilitating nationwide mobilisation: networks of activists that span across regions seek to expand and collaborate with other groups, to encourage mobilisation in new localities; workplace networks may act as a vehicle for facilitating mobilisation in a region, depending on the grievances of the protest; meanwhile, very localised, pre-existing networks in a town or city play a role in priming people there to protest, by encouraging communication, coordination and engagement before protests begin.

This work on communication, coordination and engagement is also a novel contribution, highlighting the way in which social networks help foster mobilisation

in a locality. Networks of various kinds – whether nationwide networks of activists, a local group of citizens, or a workplace – first enable information to flow to and within a locality, facilitating an information cascade, and providing a crucial means of *communication*. These networks can then act as vehicles for the *coordination* of action in that locality, in response to the information received: local resources can be mobilised, and skills utilised. This information and coordination then translate into *engagement* in collective action, as members of the network mobilise, and encourage others in the locality to do so. Future work can develop further on this ‘communication, coordination and engagement’ framework, examining in greater detail how the three processes feed into one another.

This thesis also contributes to the theory on social networks and protest in one additional way. Most of the theorising in this area focuses on activist and protesters’ networks. Nevertheless, with my fourth article I demonstrate that local government networks are also important, particularly in shaping local responses to regional protest. During nationwide mass mobilisations, it is not only protesters, but those in positions of power, who are embedded in broader networks. The ways in which local council members and those in key regional positions such as regional prosecutor are connected to various political parties collectively influences the response of local government to protests in a locality. Consequently, I highlight that local political networks are of import for research into the protest-repression nexus. This finding paves the way for future research considering the ways in which local political networks shape geospatial variation in responses to protest.

### **Avenues for further research**

Whilst avenues for research presented by the individual articles have been mentioned above, and discussed in the articles themselves, this thesis as a whole presents four primary avenues for further research. The first centres on the development of the datasets created as part of this DPhil; the second involves more systematically analysing the role of the networks identified here (using the expanded datasets); the third involves tackling a new puzzle relating to regional protest; and the fourth relates to examining the role of activist networks in Ukraine's ongoing resistance to Russian invasion.

First, the protest event catalogues for the Euromaidan and the Belarus 2020 protests represent a great data source for future research. I originally hoped that this thesis would lead to the creation of two comprehensive protest event catalogues for three-month periods of mobilisation in Ukraine and Belarus. Unfortunately, I did not achieve this aim within the scope of this DPhil. I realised that there are very good reasons why comprehensive, long-term protest event catalogues at the subnational level are rare! The challenges associated with obtaining detailed and accurate protest event data at the locality level should not be underestimated. Nevertheless, this thesis has made good headway towards this goal. The protest event catalogue for the Euromaidan covers the entire period of mobilisation; future work to include additional sources will fill in missing details about protest events in smaller towns and cities, providing a more comprehensive catalogue. My Belarusian protest event catalogue so far covers the first month of protest; this thesis only made use of the first week of events. The addition of other sources to these catalogues, as well as the analysis of (already collected) Telegram data for a longer timeframe in the case of the Belarusian protests, would establish two extremely rich and valuable data sources for future projects. One possible avenue, now that restrictions around the Twitter API have

become more accommodating for researchers, would be to add in Twitter data for the two mobilisations. Tweets with specific hashtags relating to the two mass mobilisations could be downloaded, and then analysed using R in the same way as my existing Belarus protest event catalogue. The inclusion of Twitter data would help to triangulate the existing event catalogues, based on Telegram data (for Belarus) and news media sources (for Ukraine). The expanded event catalogues would facilitate further studies of subnational protest and repression in Ukraine and Belarus. Work on these valuable resources will doubtless continue beyond my doctoral research. Eventually, I plan to make these datasets public, making a significant contribution to the study of protest in Ukraine and Belarus.

Second, whilst this thesis has identified some of the ways in which various networks shaped geospatial variation in protest during the Euromaidan, more systematic analysis of the role of different networks throughout the duration of the mass mobilisation is needed. The role of workplace networks should be examined in greater detail. Analyses of the relationship between local employment and protest could be conducted at the rayon rather than oblast level, and illustrative case studies of specific towns could make use of archives, interviews, social media, and news media sources, in order to examine in more detail the ways in which certain workplace networks influence mobilisation in a locality. There is also scope to more closely examine how elites' networks' responses to mobilisation influence geospatial variation in protest. This thesis focused on the role of one specific elite network, the Party of Regions, but these actors were often closely tied with local business elites and regional oligarchs. Quantitative analysis at the city level, utilising my datasets on protest and repression, would identify correlations between the extent and scale of local mobilisation and repression, and the domination of politics by certain political

factions and oligarchic networks. Qualitative case studies of key cities could be used to unpack the mechanisms via which regional political and economic elites together sought to prevent or shape local mobilisation. Future research could also test my theoretical findings for Belarus, which suggested that pre-existing networks are crucial in driving early-rising mobilisation in regional localities, in the case of the Euromaidan. Systematic mapping of activist networks and their activities throughout Ukraine prior to the onset of the Euromaidan would significantly improve our understanding of the condition of Ukrainian civil society in 2013, and enable us to further test these theories about the role of pre-existing networks. It is also important to examine whether pre-existing networks are primarily important for early-rising mobilisation, or whether they also help sustain protest over time.

Third, over the course of this DPhil project, a crucial question, beyond the scope of this thesis, kept recurring. Why do people make the decision to protest in their regional city, town, or village, rather than travelling to the capital city, or perhaps regional capital, to protest? Protesting in large urban centres such as these would appear to make more sense: protests are more visible, they can target the site of national or regional government with their grievances, and protesters' 'strength in numbers' would make them less vulnerable to personally being repressed, arrested or later persecuted at a capital city protest event than a smaller event in the town or city near to where they live. Nevertheless, as this thesis has shown, many people choose to protest in regional localities. There may be practical reasons for this – for example, local protests avoid the need to travel, which may be expensive and take a lot of time. Strategic decisions may also underpin these choices to protest in regional localities: during data collection for this thesis, I identified a number of instances when local protesters stated that they mobilised in their local town in order to show that that

specific location supported the protests, and reinforce the idea that the protests were a nationwide phenomenon. Still, given the ways in which this thesis has identified social networks matter in shaping geospatial variation in protest, I anticipate that social networks may also play a crucial role in shaping individuals' decisions about where to protest. Do people choose to mobilise in their local city, because that is where their friends, family, and pre-existing networks are already protesting? Or perhaps they mobilise in their local city in solidarity with those they know, already protesting elsewhere? And if people do decide to travel to the national or regional capital, what role do networks play in this decision: are activist networks encouraging and transporting protesters from the regions to the capital, for example? Or do people choose to travel to the capital because of their personal networks, who may already be protesting there? Addressing these questions would involve analysis at the individual, rather than locality level. Protester surveys, interviews, and focus groups would be an ideal way to explore this puzzle, during future moments of mass mobilisation.

Lastly, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 means that it is now imperative to investigate how my findings on regional mobilisation relate to the widespread resistance and mobilisation of Ukrainians in the face of war. In the final weeks of this project, when people learned I was writing a thesis that related to Ukraine, they would ask me, 'does the war mean that you have to change everything?'. Thankfully, the answer was no. But the war does mean that my work has very contemporary relevance.

Recent events in Ukraine have provided additional evidence that social networks are a crucial element of nationwide mobilisation. We have seen different social networks mobilise to channel resources towards humanitarian aid, support the military, evacuate people from besieged towns, and help defend their communities

from Russian aggression. Future research can examine how my findings apply to this wartime mobilisation: How did the activist networks identified in my first paper, that presumably developed and evolved further during the Euromaidan, respond to the Russian invasion? How have pre-existing social networks in Ukrainian towns and cities mobilised to protect their territory, support the Ukrainian military, and source humanitarian aid? Are regional repertoires of resistance seen during the Euromaidan being adapted to resist Russian occupation?

Studying these events and answering questions such as these will challenge our existing tools, as most scholars can only observe events from afar, and opportunities for fieldwork, data collection and surveys are severely restricted. But as the war is broadcast on social media, along with Ukrainians' resistance, this offers opportunities to make use of new technologies in order to study the conflict. This thesis has offered examples of how Telegram can be used to analyse mass mobilisation, which may be adapted to study elements of Ukrainians' wartime mobilisation. Telegram Messenger has been widely used by Ukrainian politicians, activists, and ordinary people to share information about and co-ordinate their response to Russian invasion. Telegram has become an important tool for Ukrainian resistance, and so is a rich potential source of data for analysing this mobilisation.

Ukrainians' resistance to the invasion of their country has attracted much surprise and admiration beyond its borders, from ordinary people, politicians, analysts, and academics alike. Many did not anticipate that Ukraine would successfully prevent Russian aggression from rapidly overrunning much of the country. I share this admiration, but not the surprise. The articles in this thesis have demonstrated that Ukraine has a strong history of nationwide mobilisation. Ukrainians mobilised across the country in 1990, 2000-2001, 2004, and 2013-14 when they perceived threats to

their democracy and freedom. On 24 February 2022, they faced the strongest threat yet to independent Ukraine's free and democratic future. Consequently, Ukrainians across the country are mobilising once again.