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Unique or modular? Armenian Velvet Revolution in comparative approach

Wyjątkowa czy modułowa? Armeńska aksamitna rewolucja w perspektywie porównawczej

Abstract: Most of the previous revolutions in the post-Soviet sphere were concentrated around two dimensions: reluctance to challenge abuses of power and the will to redirect the external trajectory. The Armenian Velvet Revolution marked the change of the axiology of revolution. Civil disobedience was only focused on the corrupt political system based on clientelism and patronage. It was not addressing any issues related to the international situation. In statements, activists avoided references to foreign policy and change of geopolitical direction. The purpose of the paper is to identify convergent and separate features characterizing the Velvet Revolution in comparison with breakthroughs classified as revolutions in the post-Soviet space after 1989. The research question is how the Armenian Velvet Revolution's features stand out from previous revolutionary changes of power in the post-Soviet space, and to what extent they are convergent. The theoretical framework is based on multi-dimensional academic reflection on the factors characterizing particular revolutionary waves in post-Soviet space. Using comparatively the rich achievements of study on the Autumn of Nations, Color Revolutions, and Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity, this essay aims to inscribe the unique and modular factors characterizing the Armenian Velvet Revolution into a broader spectrum of theoretical and practical considerations on political breakthroughs in post-Soviet space.

Keywords: Armenian Velvet Revolution, Armenia, revolution, post-Soviet revolutions, democratization

Streszczenie: Większość poprzednich rewolucji w przestrzeni postsowieckiej koncentrowała się wokół dwóch wymiarów: sprzeciwu wobec nadużywania władzy i woli zmiany trajektorii zewnętrznej. Armeńska aksamitna rewolucja wskazała na zmianę aksjologii rewolucji. Obywatelskie nieposłuszeństwo koncentrowało się jedynie na protestach przeciw skorumpowanemu systemowi politycznemu, opartemu na klientelizmie i patronażu. Nie zajmowano się w nim w sposób zasadniczy żadnymi kwestiami związanymi z sytuacją międzynarodową. W wypowiedziach aktywiści unikali odniesień do polityki zagranicznej i zmiany kierunku geopolitycznego. Celem artykułu jest wska-

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zanie zbieżnych i odrębnych cech charakteryzujących aksamitną rewolucję w porównaniu z przełomowymi wydarzeniami zaklasyfikowanymi jako rewolucje w przestrzeni postsowieckiej po 1989 r. Pytanie badawcze dotyczy tego, w jaki sposób cechy aksamitnej rewolucji wyróżniają się na tle wcześniejszych rewolucyjnych zmian władzy w przestrzeni postsowieckiej i w jakim stopniu są one zbieżne. Ramy teoretyczne opierają się na wielowymiarowej naukowej refleksji nad czynnikami charakteryzującymi poszczególne fale rewolucyjne w przestrzeni postsowieckiej. Wykorzystując bogate osiągnięcia badań nad Jesienią Narodów, kolorowymi rewolucjami i ukraińską rewolucją godności, esej ma na celu wpisanie unikalnych i modułowych czynników charakteryzujących ormiańską aksamitną rewolucję w szersze spektrum teoretycznych i praktycznych rozważań na temat politycznych przełomów w przestrzeni postsowieckiej.

Słowa kluczowe: armeńska aksamitna rewolucja, rewolucja, postsowieckie rewolucje, demokratyzacja

Introduction: The discreet charm of revolutions

In his analysis of social change, Piotr Sztompka states the following, while discussing the paradoxes of the study of revolutions: "Hence the paradox: the theory of revolution is impossible because if it provides predictions, they are bound to be falsified by events; if it does not provide predictions, it is not a theory at all."[1] The only thing that can be said undoubtedly is that revolutions are taking place. Thus, reflections over their dynamics and causality can be done only through particular case studies and, to a lesser degree, comparative analysis of events. As Pavel Baev mentioned, "the events define the definition."[2] Nevertheless, the social sciences tend to seek typologies, definitions and theories that rationalize unexpected alterations of power. Hannah Arendt in her profound study defines its dynamics as follows:

> Nothing, indeed, seems more natural than that a revolution should be predetermined by the type of government it overthrows; nothing, therefore, appears more plausible than to explain the new absolute, the absolute revolution, by the absolute monarchy which preceded it, and to conclude that the more absolute the ruler, the more absolute the revolution will be which replaces him.[3]

1   P. Sztompka, *Sociology of Social Change*, Oxford 1993, p. 321.
2   P.K. Baev, 'A Matrix for Post-Soviet "Color Revolutions": Exorcising the Devil from the Details', *International Area Studies Review*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2011, p. 4.
3   H. Arendt, *On Revolution*, London 1990, p. 155.

Written in the 1960s, her study investigates the examples of the American, French and Russian revolutions. Four basic elements are considered necessary for a revolution to take place in the classical model: a paradigm shift, violence, a pre-revolutionary crisis situation, and a new beginning as a revolutionary goal. Arendt did not have a chance to observe the events of the Autumn of Nations and Color Revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe. Consequently, she could not interpret their overwhelming impact on the notion of revolution. Nevertheless, most likely Arendt would not go back on her words, given that it is agreed that the new forms of patrimonial politics, authoritarianism, and hybrid regimes created after the collapse of USSR are of a novel character. The term "revolution" is broadly used for describing events of speculatively different causes, reasons, dynamics, and outcomes. In the discourse, there is a tendency to categorize and define similarly such experiences as the Autumn of Nations, Color Revolutions, or Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity. Analysis of the sudden ruptures of the last 30 years brought on the need to reconsider the whole notion of revolution itself. 2018 marked another unexpected alteration of power in the post-Soviet space. These changes in Armenia were instantly labeled a "Velvet Revolution". In a universal context, a precise puzzle appears: mapping and comparing "revolutionary" changes in the post-Soviet sphere and defining the recent events in Armenia in this broader perspective. The purpose of this deliberation is not to redefine revolution, insofar as the concept is fluid and debatable. The purpose is to identify convergent and separate factors and features characterizing the Velvet Revolution experience of change, in comparison with breakthroughs classified as revolutions in the post-Soviet space after 1989.

A precise research question arose: how do the Armenian Velvet Revolution's features stand out from previous revolutionary changes of power in the post-Soviet space and to what extent are they convergent? Consequently, two hypotheses appear. Firstly, that the Armenian Velvet Revolution had a unique character in the external dimension, not following the pattern of preceding revolutionary waves. At the same time, it had a modular character in the internal dimension, with analogies to the Autumn of Nations and Color Revolutions. Secondly, the Armenian Velvet Revolution took the only form possible at the time. The geopolitical conditions, the international situation, and the

failure of previous mass protests more convergent with of Color Revolutions constructed its essence inwardly.

This theoretical framework is based on reflection over factors characterizing revolutionary waves in the post-Soviet space. Comparing studies of the Autumn of Nations, Color Revolutions, and Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity, this essay aims to inscribe the unique and modular factors characterizing the Armenian Velvet Revolution into a broader spectrum of theoretical and practical considerations on political breakthroughs in the post-Soviet space. To date, scholarly inputs on the subject have been limited.[4] Nonetheless, the dynamics of changes and their deep character allow a comparison of their features to previous democratic changes. A comparative analysis with the Autumn of Nations is worthwhile for at least two reasons. The name chosen for the 2018 events in Armenia precisely alludes to the Czechoslovakian Velvet Revolution of 1989. The Armenian Revolution leader Nikol Pashinyan[5] alluded to this example himself.[6] Despite the uniqueness underlined by Armenian Revolution participants, the Color Revolutions and Revolution of Dignity stand as valuable comparative examples for a case study of the Armenian experience.

This analysis is divided into three main parts. Firstly, the essential conditions of two waves of revolutions – the Autumn of Nations and the Color Revolutions – are presented theoretically. The second part is a case study of the Armenian Velvet Revolution. The description of the causes, reasons, and dynamics of the revolution allows the fundamentals of this case to be examined. Thirdly, the distinguishing elements of the Velvet Revolution are juxtaposed with the most important

4   M. Zolyan, 'The Poverty of Authoritarianism: What Made the Armenian Revolution Possible', *Caucasus Analytical Digest*, 108, 2019, pp. 3-6; D.L. Feldman, H. Alibašić, 'The Remarkable 2018 "Velvet Revolution": Armenia's Experiment Against Government Corruption', *Public Integrity*, 0, no. 0 (11 April 2019), pp. 1-13; A. Shirinyan, 'Bridging the Gaps in Armenia's Political Space: The Political Party System after the "Velvet Revolution"', *Caucasus Analytical Digest*, 108, 2019, pp. 7-11; M. Lanskoy, E. Suthers, 'Armenia's Velvet Revolution', *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2019, pp. 85-99; S. Grigoryan, *The Armenian Velvet Revolution*, Independently Published, 2020; G. Derluguian et al., 'Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization. Special Issue', *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, vol. 26, no. 4, 2018, pp. 437-546.

5   All Armenian family names were written according to the most commonly used transliteration.

6   A. Grigoryan, 'Armenia's Constitutional Referendum', *The CACI Analyst*, 29 December 2015, https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13317-armenias-constitutional-referendum.html [2015-12-29].

factors characterizing previous upheavals. Comparative analysis and a case study allow the identification of differences and similarities.

1. Armenian Velvet Revolution in comparative perspective

1.1. 1989 Autumn of Nations

Arguably, it was the French Revolution that created the modern concept of revolution.[7] The character of the Russian and Chinese revolutions may be also described as an opening gate for modernity in agrarian-based and underdeveloped states.[8] As Harald Wydra argues, the implosion of communism and the revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989/1991 turned the term "revolution" upside down. The core of developments was typified by the negotiation-based and non-violent call for liberalization and democratization.[9] Charles Tilly underlines that the difference between the Autumn of Nations and a classical revolution lies in several lacks: "the violence, class base, charismatic vision, the faith in politics as an instrument of constructive change and resistance of old power-holders to removal."[10] Also, S.N Eisenstadt states that while there are some parallels, there are as many dissimilarities.[11] Probably the lack of violence is the greatest puzzle of 1989/1991. Long before the events of 1989, Tilly mentions that a lack of violence does not necessarily disqualify usage of the term "revolution." As Adrian Pop notes, Tilly was probably the only thinker that accepts the simultaneous existence of violent and non-violent revolutions, contradicting classical theories of such scholars as Marx, Huntington, Gurr, Skocpol, Arendt, Moore, Brinton, Johnson, and Zimmerman.[12]

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7   G. Therborn, 'Foreword. Roads to Modernity: Revolutionary and Other', in: *Revolution in the Making of Modern World: Social Identities, Globalization and Modernity*, eds. J. Foran, D. Lane, A. Zivkovic, London–New York 2008, pp. xiv-xv.

8   T. Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions Comparative Analysis France Russia and China*, Cambridge 1979.

9   H. Wydra, 'Revolution and Democracy: the European Experience', in: *Revolution in the Making of the Modern World…*, p. 27.

10   Ch. Tilly, *European Revolutions, 1492-1992*, Oxford (UK), Cambridge (Mass.), 1993, p. 234.

11   S.N. Eisenstadt, 'The Breakdown of Communist Regimes and the Vicissitudes of Modernity', *Daedalus*, vol. 121, no. 2, 1992, pp. 21-22.

12   A. Pop, 'The 1989 Revolutions in Retrospect', *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 65, no. 2, 2013, pp. 349-351.

Tilly constructs a definition that applies to diverse revolutions: "a forcible transfer of power over a state in the course of which at least two distinct blocs of contenders make incompatible claims to control the state, and some significant portion of the population subject to the state's jurisdiction acquiesces in the claims of each bloc."[13]

The crucial revolutionary outcome of 1989/1991 is the change in common consciousness. The typical triple transition is defined by a change from a centrally-planned socialist economy to neoliberal capitalism, a switch from an authoritarian regime to democracy, and state-building to establish stable norms and institutions. Taras Kuzio emphasizes the necessity to introduce a fourth crucial identity element: building modern nationhood and changing shared values.[14] The revolutionary character of changes in 1989 was rooted in modernity in a sense that they ignited the reimagination of nation-states.[15] The specificity of changes manifested the dual paradox of the Autumn of Nations. First, a novel criticism appeared within Marxist-Leninist discourse in the form of revisionism, without intending complete systemic change (Hungary in 1956, Poland and Czechoslovakia in 1968, Poland in 1980), and subsequently was complemented by mass mobilization that did require total change. Second, as Wydra mentions: "the revolutions of 1989 showed the conspicuous absence of charismatic actors, eschatological recipes, messianism, or teleological intentions. No new utopia of progress shone at the horizon of expectation but the overall feeling was the conservative 'return to normality'."[16] Thus, the revolutions of 1989/1991 were in a sense anti-revolutionary and labeled as democratically negotiated revolutions. It also can be argued that quadruple transitions counterbalanced the above-mentioned theoretical disadvantage of branding the Autumn of Nations as a revolution in a classical sense. Despite the complex relationship between classical revolution theory and factual novelties about its revolutionary nature, 1989/1991 brought a new dynamic to reflection on

13   Ch. Tilly, *European Revolutions…*, p. 234.
14   T. Kuzio, 'Transition in Post-Communist States: Triple or Quadruple?', *Politics*, vol. 21, no. 3, 2001, pp. 168-77.
15   B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London–New York 2006.
16   H. Wydra, 'Revolution and Democracy…', pp. 35-37.

the concept of revolution. In consequence, five essential innovations of 1989/1991 are frequently mentioned. These are: lack of violence (determined by the previous regime's character),[17] the anti-revolutionary character of the revolution ("return to normality"), politics/elite struggle (relatively low societal mobilization), democratization and marketization as a goal (new political community) and a nation-building outcome (revolutionary axiological change).[18] Certainly, there are focal differences between the character of events in particular examples, nevertheless these general innovative features are crucial in theoretical structuring and categorization. Moreover, these qualities can also be observed in the next wave of revolutions labeled as the Color Revolutions, and as such they should be categorized as a continuity of the changes that erupted in 1989.

1.2. Color Revolutions

The democratic revolution wave in the post-Soviet sphere resulted in numerous valuable studies.[19] As the main goal of this essay is to locate the successful Armenian Velvet Revolution on the map of post-Communist revolutions, only those that were likewise "victorious" are taken into consideration. Thus, the Georgian Rose (2003), the Ukrainian Orange (2004), and the Kyrgyzstani Tulip (2005) revolutions are

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17 The only exception is Romania, where Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife Elena were killed in Târgoviște during the Romanian Revolution. The turn of events is evidence for Arendt's thesis of interrelation between the previous regime and sequence of revolution as far as the Romanian version of communism was considered as one of the most authoritarian in Central Europe. See: 'Totalitarian and Post-Totalitarian Regimes in Transitions and Non-Transitions from Communism', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2002, pp. 79-106; V. Tismaneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons. A Political History of Romanian Communism*, Oakland 2003.

18 Author's categorization is built on features which are frequently repeated in works reconsidering the 1989 revolutions. See: S. Auer, 'The Paradoxes of the Revolutions of 1989 in Central Europe', *Critical Horizons*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2004, pp. 361-90; S. Auer, 'Violence and the End of Revolution After 1989', *Thesis Eleven*, vol. 97, no. 1, 2009, pp. 6-25; *Revolution in the Making of the Modern World…*; A. Pop, 'The 1989 Revolutions…', pp. 347-369; Ch. Tilly, *European Revolutions...*

19 See, among others: J. Gerlach, *Color Revolutions in Eurasia*, Cham 2014; S.F. Jones, 'Reflections on the Rose Revolution', *European Security*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2012, pp. 5-15; D.Ó Beacháin, A. Polese, *The Colour Revolutions in the Former Soviet Republics: Successes and Failures*, London–New York 2010; A. Polese, D.Ó Beacháin, 'The Color Revolution Virus and Authoritarian Antidotes: Political Protest and Regime Counterattacks in Post-Communist Spaces', *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, vol. 19, no. 2. 2010, pp. 111-132; D. Lane, '"Coloured Revolution" as a Political Phenomenon', *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, vol. 25, no. 2-3, 2009, pp. 113-135; E. Finkel, Y.M. Brudny, 'No more colour! Authoritarian regimes and colour revolutions in Eurasia', *Democratization*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2012, pp. 1-14.

compared. After Lincoln Mitchell, the Serbian Bulldozer revolution (2000) is excluded, as it does not share the temporal proximity and the post-Soviet context of the other three.[20] For those sequential events, Baev has constructed the following definition: "[a] colour revolution could be: a mass protest or an unarmed uprising aimed at replacing, through elections, the sitting government that represents a semi/quasi-democratic regime."[21] In this approach, importance and differences were linked with two separate issues. Firstly, with the political regime, the 'uprisings' were aimed against semi/quasi-democratic power structure. Thus (coming back to Arendt's idea), the character of the previous regime determined the revolution itself. It can be assumed that semi/quasi-democratic regimes defined by relatively low political and human rights violations (in comparison to more authoritarian and absolute regimes in the post-Communist space) did not require a violent revolutionary response. Georgia and Ukraine were deemed partly free by Freedom House's (FH) "Freedom in the World and Nations in Transit" report in the year following the Color Revolution and the year of its occurrence. In the case of Kyrgyzstan, FH's evaluation placed the country in the category of not free. Concurrently, the character of events during the Tulip Revolution was visibly more dramatic and violent since then-incumbent President Askar Akayev fled to Russia through Kazakhstan with his family.

Secondly, protests were closely related to allegedly rigged or fraudulent elections. This factor greatly differentiates the Color Revolutions from both the Autumn of Nations and the Armenian Revolution. Additionally, a linkage between elections and revolution is determined by the novel role of political elites. Protests were triggered by the political opposition previously related to the power structure, which then took power in consequence of the "uprising." In all cases there was no mass mobilization prior to the opposition elite beginning to address the allegations of electoral fraud, calling for non-violent civil disobedience, and staging sit-in protests, demanding the resignation of the current elite.

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20   L.A. Mitchell, *The Color Revolutions*, Philadelphia 2012, p. 3. Nonetheless, Mitchell mentions that 'it was an important model for the Georgians who went on to lead the Rose Revolution', so the references to it seem to be necessary.

21   P.K. Baev, 'A Matrix for Post-Soviet'..., p. 5.

Baev's definition has to be supplemented by a feature known as diffusion through external influence.[22] According to David Lane, most Western approaches situate the Color Revolutions within the "third wave of democratization" paradigm combined with democracy promotion, which stands as the core value of international institutions. Equally relevant was marketization as a goal of the changes. Both were brought about through the activities of powerful sponsors and represented by "revolutionaries" against the old system. In consequence, Lane describes the sequence of the revolution as follows:

> The reality is that the thrust for change comes from counter-elites, either from within the ruling political class, or from outside, who seek to replace (or join) the existing elite. Legitimacy is achieved through democracy promotion. Where internal regime change is precluded by the institutional structure, counter-elites sponsor and utilize a mass movement, and they legitimate protest as democracy promotion. Regime weakness is greatest at times of elections which then become a focus for political change. Allegedly fraudulent election results are the trigger for protest. Success leads to the fall of the incumbent elite and its replacement with another.[23]

In sum, Lane's definition avoids the term "revolution" to define the events, leaning towards the term "revolutionary coup d'état." Marc R. Beissinger notes Gene Sharp's agenda of democratic revolution in order to exemplify the characteristics of the Color Revolutions. Sharp's book, often quoted as the "guide for revolutionaries," includes a list of six basic features that non-violent postmodern revolution should possess. These include "the organization of radical youth using unconventional protest tactics prior to the election in order to undermine the regime's popularity and will to repress and to prepare for a final showdown" and "external diplomatic pressure and unusually large electoral monitoring."[24] These features were defined in a precise context of election fraud, and only in this context their

22 V.J. Bunce, Sh.L. Wolchik, 'International Diffusion and Postcommunist Electoral Revolutions', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol. 39, no. 3, 2006, pp. 283-304.

23 D. Lane, '"Coloured Revolution" as…', p. 131.

24 M.R. Beissinger, 'Structure and example in modular political phenomena: The diffusion of bulldozer/rose/orange/tulip revolutions', *Perspectives on politics*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2007, p. 261.

impact on the "uprising" stands as a meaningful factor. Maria Spirova adds overwhelming corruption as one more crucial element of the revolutionary causes that played a focal role in Georgia and Ukraine (2008). This is worth mentioning, given that anti-corruption discourse was central in Armenia in 2018. Another important element for comparison is the modular character of revolutionary occurrences. Similar to the Autumn of Nations, the essence of the Color Revolutions was sequential and the modus operandi was repeated in all cases.[25] Thus, as a method of explanation, diffusion has dominated inferences as Lucan Way rightly assumed.[26]

2. Armenian Velvet Revolution as a case study

The issue of why Armenia did not experience a successful power change remains problematic as different studies indicate a high probability of revolutionary diffusion in Armenia.[27] The answer is likely as complex as it is simple. There lingers in Armenia an unresolved conflict with Azerbaijan and a land blockade from Turkey. The question of the recognition of the Armenian Genocide stands as a core for nation- and state-building processes while simultaneously putting the country in a geopolitical trap. Arguably, consolidatory dimensions of Armenian identity play a central role in changes within the Armenian political system since independence in 1991. Around them are constructed political agendas and party manifestos. These are focal for the contentious politics and ruptures that determine the transformation. Perhaps no other post-Soviet state has faced as much and as frequent dramatic political changes as Armenia has.

2.1. Roots (causes)

The Armenian experience with transition is marked by the violent period of ethnopolitical conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh with Azer-

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25 M. Beissinger, 'Structure…'; H.E. Hale, 'Regime Change Cascades: What We Have Learned from the 1848 Revolutions to the 2011 Arab Uprisings', *Annual Review of Political Science*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2013, pp. 331-353.

26 L. Way, 'The Real Causes of the Color Revolutions', *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2008, p. 56.

27 P.K. Baev, 'A Matrix…', pp. 396-412; S. Hess, 'Protests, Parties, and Presidential Succession', *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol. 57, no. 1, 2010, pp. 28-39.

baijan. Its longevity practically caused the stagnation of the regime until 1994, since the collective effort was paid to achieve a victory. The leading political figures of this period were linked with the Karabakh Movement: initially the single-goal association was created in 1988 to express the common will of Armenians to unite the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast and the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic, later anti-Soviet sentiment-driven opposition.[28] The issue of Nagorno-Karabakh had been also crucial during the conflict between President Levon Ter-Petrosyan, who represented a moderate approach, and hardliners united around Karabakh-born Prime Minister Robert Kocharyan, national security minister Serzh Sargsyan, and influential veteran leader Vazgen Sargsyan. However short, their alliance opened the path for the consolidation of a quasi-democratic regime based on patronal relations, clientelism and clan connections.

Breakthroughs determining the shape of regime were marked by two critical turning points. Firstly, in February 1997 hardliners disappointed with Ter-Petrosyan forced him to resign. A soft coup carried Kocharyan to the presidential mandate. Boosting marginalization within the triumvirate, shortly after the elections, V. Sargsyan combined his assets with Communist apparatchik Karen Demirchyan. Despite a landslide victory in the May 1999 parliamentary elections, their rise did not last long. Secondly, on October 27th 1999, five armed men entered the building of the National Assembly in Yerevan with Kalashnikovs rifles, killing eight people and injuring at least 30. According to eyewitnesses, the main targets of the terrorist attack were V. Sargsyan and Demirchyan. Both were killed.[29] With V. Sargsyan and Demirchyan gone, Kocharyan and S. Sargsyan established control over the Republican Party and influential interest groups of veterans, becoming a typical post-Soviet party of power.[30] However, the regime consolidation led to the creation of civil opposition movements, which through recursive mass protests caused its fall in the Armenian Velvet

28   N. Dudwick, 'Political Transformations in Postcommunist Armenia: Images and Realities', in: *Conflict, Cleavage, and Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, eds. K. Dawish, B. Parrott, Cambridge 1997.

29   T. Hakobyan, *Karabakh Diary, Green and Black: Neither War nor Peace*, Yerevan 2010, pp. 243-261.

30   A. Iskandaryan, 'Armenia Between Autocracy and Polyarchy', *Russian Politics & Law*, vol. 50, no. 4, 2012, p. 23-36; N. Laverty, 'The "party of power" as a type', *East European Politics*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2015, pp. 71-87.

Revolution.[31] That makes a difference compared to the situation in the 1990s when civil society organizations were modeled and financed by Western donors and international NGOs.[32]

Still, the introduction of Western ideas about the role of civil activities in this early post-Soviet period prepared the ground for the first unsuccessful Color Revolution in the South Caucasus. Before the presidential election in May 2003, Aram Sargsyan, Vazgen's brother, and Stepan Demirchyan, son of Karen, joined efforts to overthrown Kocharyan. After a highly disputed first round of elections, mass protests began.[33] In the second round, democratic credibility was criticized on both the international and internal level, which triggered a continuation of the protests. In the middle of April, despite an ambiguous appeal of the Constitutional Court that underlined irregularities, Kocharyan was re-elected and the next round of civil disobedience erupted. Nevertheless, the lack of unity among oppositional politicians and loss of momentum caused a gradual dissipation of protesters' numbers and failure at attempted revolution. Significantly, the protest agenda was not anti-Russian and did not gain sufficient attention from the West.

Yet another chance for electoral revolution happened with the 2008 presidential elections, in which outgoing Kocharyan appointed Serzh Sargsyan, his long-lasting political ally, as power successor. This time a united opposition gathered around Ter-Petrosyan. Protests started shortly after the announcement of results, when Sargsyan was declared a winner, despite fraud allegations.[34] On February 26th Kocharyan called on civil servants and RPA supporters to gather in Yerevan's Freedom Square for a counter-demonstration. Until early morning on March 1st, the protests remained peaceful until law enforcement used explosives and automatic weapons, killing 10 people,

31   A. Grigoryan, 'Armenia's path to democratization by recursive mass protests', Caucasus Survey, 13 May 2019.
32   A. Ishkanian, Democracy Building and Civil Society in Post-Soviet Armenia, London–New York 2008, p. 25.
33   OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report, Republic of Armenia Presidential Elections 19 February and 6 March 2003, Warsaw: ODIHR, 28 April 2003, https://www.osce.org/odihr/ elections/armenia/ 14054?download=true [2003-04-28].
34   OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report, Republic of Armenia Presidential Elections 19 February 2008, Warsaw: ODIHR, 30 May 2008, https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/ armenia/32115? download=true [2008-05-30].

injuring 200, and detaining 150 leaders of protests, and Kocharyan introduced a state of emergency.[35] Also, during these protests reaction from the West was marginal, which prompted accusations from Armenian opposition politicians about Western double standards.

The last prelude to the Armenian Revolution happened in 2013. In presidential elections Serzh Sargsyan's main opponent was Raffi Hovannisian, the American-born leader of the opposition party Heritage and former foreign affairs minister. After announcing the victory of the incumbent president, Hovannisian rejected the results and called for protests. This time the opposition was not well-organized around the leader, and reports from international observers did not indicate serious violations and frauds.[36] Fading participation led Hovannisian to hold a hunger strike, which ended at the end of March. During the following months, smaller protests were held in Yerevan and other Armenian towns. The failure of this civil disobedience tactic led several Armenian activists and politicians to change their strategy. In addition to the protests related to the elections, it is worth mentioning the civil disobedience in 2011, which resulted in the liberalization of political life in Armenia. In 2015, as a result of the increase in energy prices, the "Electric Yerevan" protests lasted several months. Both of these mass protests began due to the economic situation, but were quickly politicized. Importantly, they led to the formation of a consolidated civil society, which had a significant impact on the events of the Velvet Revolution.[37] In 2015 Nikol Pashinyan with his allies created the Civil Contract party, which played a decisive role in the 2018 revolutionary events.[38]

35   Grigoryan has mentioned that: 'Pashinyan, sought as one of main organizers of the 1 March protests, went into hiding; he eventually gave himself up in July 2009, received a sentence of seven years imprisonment, and was amnestied in May 2011', A. Grigoryan, 'Armenia's path…', p. 6.

36   OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report, Republic of Armenia Presidential Elections 18 February 2013, Warsaw: ODIHR, 5 August 2013, https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/101314?download=true [2013-08-05].

37   A. Grigoryan, 'Armenia's path…'

38   A. Ishkanian, 'Self-Determined Citizens? New Forms of Civic Activism and Citizenship in Armenia', *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 67, no. 8, 2015, pp. 1203-1227.

2.2. Triggers (reasons)

On December 6, 2015, a constitutional referendum was held after the parliamentary majority agreed on amendments. The transformation was supposed to change the institutional and normative base of the political regime, decreasing the number of parliamentarians and boosting the duties and responsibilities of the prime minister at the expense of the president. The main reason for these protests was the desire of those in power to preserve the facade of democracy while maintaining the rule of Serzh Sargsyan. At the same time, the reform was calculated to distract the public's attention from the decision not to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union. The referendum results were in favor of the ruling RPA proposals: 66.2% votes in favor, with a turnout of 50.78%.[39] External observers noticed irregularities,[40] which led to allegations and criticism from the opposition. It was emphasized that the referendum was held to allow President Serzh Sargsyan to remain in power after his second term.[41] The implemented changes became binding for the parliamentary elections of April 2, 2017. The RPA won the elections with 49.17% of votes and a turnout of 60.86%.[42] International observers noted serious violations, highlighting the procedure of vote-buying.[43] The significance of the elections was linked with the appearance of a new political movement that from the onset underlined the resilient opposition stance against the RPA: the Way Out Alliance led by Edmon Marukyan, Nikol Pashinyan and Aram Sargsyan. At the end of March 2018, it was revealed that after the end of his presidency Serzh Sargsyan would be nominated for the

39 Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Armenia, Protocol on referendum results, 12 June 2015, https://res.elections.am/images/doc/06.12.15v.pdf [2015-06-12].
40 OSCE/ODIHR REFERENDUM EXPERT TEAM Final Report, Republic of Armenia Constitutional Referendum 6 December 2015, Warsaw: ODIHR, 2 May 2016, https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/220656?download=true [2016-05-02].
41 A. Grigoryan, 'Armenia's Constitutional Referendum', *The CACI Analyst*, 29 December 2015, https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13317-armenias-constitutional-referendum.html [2015-12-29].
42 Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Armenia, Protocol of the results of the elections to the National Assembly 2017, 4 September 2017, https://res.elections.am/images/doc/09.12.18v.pdf [2017-09-04].
43 OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report, Republic of Armenia Parliamentary Elections 2 April 2017, Warsaw: ODIHR, 7 October 2017, https://www.osce.org/odihr/328226?download=true [2017-10-07].

post of prime minister. When his candidacy was officially announced the revolutionary activities were already underway.

2.3. The revolution

On March 31, 2018, Nikol Pashinyan arrived in Gyumri, around 200 kilometers north of Yerevan. He announced the set out of a two-week long march to the capital to protest Sargsyan's candidacy, under the slogan "Make the step, reject Serzh." The protesters reached Yerevan on April 13th, four days after the official announcement of Sargsyan's nomination. On the 15th Pashinyan called for engagement in peaceful civil disobedience. The next day saw clashes between protesters and police, leaving dozens injured including Pashinyan. While the number of protestors grew on April 17, the RPA-dominated parliament elected Sargsyan to the post of prime minister with a vote of 77-17. Hundreds of demonstrators were detained on the streets of Yerevan. Over the next few days civil disobedience continued. Pashinyan met with President Armen Sarkissian on April 21 to discuss potential anti-tension negotiations with Serzh Sargsyan. Pashinyan agreed to meet Sargsyan the next day at 10 a.m. inside the Marriott Hotel on the Republic Square. Pashinyan demanded Sargsyan's immediate resignation, to which, according to Armenian media, the prime minister replied: "You haven't learnt any lesson from March 1."[44] Pashinyan along with other leaders were taken into custody but released the next day.

Sargsyan announced his resignation, addressing Armenians in a letter in which he stated, "Nikol Pashinyan was right. I got it wrong."[45] Parliamentary voting for the new prime minister was set for May 1. April 24 marks the anniversary of the Armenian Genocide. On this day Pashinyan declared that the next prime minister would not represent the RPA, after which he led a solemn march of remembrance of the victims of the 1915 slaughters. Over the next few days rallies were held in the biggest Armenian towns: Gyumri, Vanadzor and Ijevan. The Armenian Revolutionary Party announced its withdrawal from the coalition with the RPA. On the 27th the formal opposition, Pros-

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44 The reference to protests from 2008.
45 A. Heil, P. Baumgartner, 'It's Not You, It's Me: Serzh Sarkisian's Breakup Letter To Armenia, Annotated', *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, 23 April 2018, https://www.rferl.org/a/armenia-annotating-longtime-leader-sarkisians-breakup-letter/29187836.html [2018-04-23].

perous Armenia, allegedly cooperating closely with the RPA, declared support for Pashinyan's candidacy for the post of the prime minister through its leader Gagik Tsarukyan. After hearings on April 30, on May 1 Pashinyan still lacked sufficient votes. He called for a sit-in protest for the next day. On the 2nd protesters blocked the streets of Yerevan. The following day, the leader of the RPA majority proclaimed that on May 8 the Republicans would support Pashinyan in the next round of voting. On the 8th Pashinyan was elected prime minister. Shortly after the vote, he moved to Republic Square to celebrate his victory with supporters. Summer and spring were marked by a permanent struggle between Pashinyan and his government with the RPA majority. After a series of manoeuvres on October 16 he stepped down as prime minister. Parliament was unable to elect a replacement, therefore obliging President Sarkissian to announce snap parliamentary elections. Elections were held on December 9, giving Pashinyan and his allies an overwhelming victory with 70.42% of votes, a turnout of 48.63%, and positive feedback from the international observatory mission.[46] The step was made, the revolution came to an end.

3. Comparing the features of revolutions and defining the Armenian case

3.1. Autumn of Nations and Color Revolution

A comparative analysis of factors driving the Armenian Velvet Revolution and the 1989 Autumn of Nations shows that the analogy highlighted by the leaders of the protests in the Spring of 2018 was not only narrative:

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46   Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Armenia, Protocol of the results of the elections to the National Assembly 2018, 12 September 2018, https://res.elections.am/images/doc/09.12.18v. pdf [2018-09-12]; OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report, Republic of Armenia Early Parliamentary Elections 9 December 2018, Warsaw: ODIHR, 3 July 2019, https://www.osce. org/odihr/elections/armenia/ 413555?download=true [2019-07-03].

Table 1. Comparison of features of the Autumn of Nations and Armenian Revolution

	Autumn of Nations	Armenian Revolution
Violence	No	No
Anti-revolutionary character	Yes	Yes
Elite struggle	Yes	No
Democratization as a goal	Yes	Yes
Nation–building outcome	Yes	No

Soruce: own source.*

* Based on amalgamation of the most frequently repeating features of Autumn of Nations in 1989.

The uniqueness of the Armenian experience is evident in two elements. Firstly, the lack of an intra-elite, reformer vs. hard-liner struggle, typical for the twilight of the region's authoritarian systems. Although Nikol Pashinyan was an active participant in Armenian politics and a member of parliament for the Way Out Alliance since 2017, he was not a part of the patrimonial-clientelist elite. The exit of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation from the government coalition and the support given to Pashinyan by Tsarukyan and his party, Prosperous Armenia, should be seen in terms of an escape from a sinking ship, rather than a clash of elites. The second factor, the issue of nation-building highlighted by Kuzio in the context of the post-Soviet states after 1989/1991, was not relevant here, given the deep consolidation of the Armenian nation around the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, recognition of the Armenian Genocide, and a centuries-old state and national tradition. Yet, it is worth emphasizing that the factors considered most defining of the Autumn of Nations, i.e. the absence of violence, its anti-revolutionary nature ("return to normality") and an end-goal of democratization, were also constitutive elements of the Velvet Revolution.

Most researchers agree that the Color Revolutions were a continuation of the 1989/1991 transition and the final act of the "third wave of democratization." However, as indicated above, the Color Revolutions were characterized by additional unique factors. The table below compares these with the Armenian case.

Table 2. Color Revolutions and Armenian Revolution – feature comparison

	Color Revolutions	Armenian Revolution
Violence	No	No
Quasi-democratic regime	Yes	Yes
Mass mobilization	Yes	Yes
Relation with elections	Yes	No
Triggered by elites	Yes	No
Western support	Yes	No
Radical youth organization	Yes	Partially
External pressure	Yes	No
Targeting corruption	Yes	Yes
Modular	Yes	No

Source: own source.*

* Based on the amalgamation of the most frequently repeating features of the Color Revolutions.

Three convergent factors appear: a quasi-democratic political regime against which action for change is focused, mass societal mobilization, and binding the fight against corruption to a revolutionary event. Thus, the Armenian Revolution largely shared with the Color Revolutions those qualities aimed at changing domestic policy. The existence and activity of a radical youth organization is a partially coinciding factor. Some of the most active allies of Pashinyan were members of the organization *Hima* ("now" in Armenian). Their role before and during the revolution itself, however, was not comparable to that of organizations such as the Serbian *Otpor*, the Georgian *Khmara* or the Ukrainian *Pora*, active during the Bulldozer Revolution, the Rose Revolution, and the Orange Revolution respectively.[47] The most important internal factor that differentiated the Color Revolutions and the Velvet Revolution was the fact that revolutionary events were not triggered by elites. The second differentiating internal factor was a lack of connection to election fraud. The Armenian Revolution was a consequence of a reshuffle at the top of power (constitutional change allowing outgoing President Sargsyan to become prime minister). Although this eventuality was already anticipated at the referendum stage, the parliamentary elections held in 2017 did not cause mass protests, despite several irregularities indicated, among others, by the OSCE[48]. In both cases, the cause must be seen in social apathy and a lack of trust in the elite, resulting in an inability to usher forth a young, reformist leader of the oppositional elite, analogous to Michel Saakashvili in Georgia or Viktor Yushchenko in Ukraine.

However, the most obvious differences concern external aspects: the very agendas of revolutionary leaders and participants towards the outside world, and its likewise reaction to events in Armenia. All Color Revolutions were characterized by the presence of external pressure, Western support, and modularity. None of these factors appeared in Armenia. The lack of external pressure concerned not only the West, but also Russia and local regional powers such as Turkey and Iran. At the same time, the leaders of the revolution made sure that the nar-

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47   See: D.Ó Beacháin, A. Polese, "'Rocking the vote': new forms of youth organisations in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union', *Journal of Youth Studies*, vol. 13, no. 5, 2010, pp. 615-630.
48   Central Election Commission of the Republic of Armenia, Republic of Armenia Parliamentary Elections 2 April 2017.

rative was directed at emphasizing the need for internal change. Issues of redirecting geopolitical views or pro-Western reorientation were completely marginalized. Finally, the Armenian Revolution was a separate event, excluded from a wider, modular sequence of revolutions elsewhere, analogous to the Autumn of Nations or the Color Revolutions. It occurred unexpectedly, at a time when restricting democracy and increasing authoritarianism was tendential in the post-Soviet space.[49]

3.2. Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity

One more significant event took place along the way to the Armenian Velvet Revolution, one that was supposed to determine the course of possible subsequent changes in the post-Soviet space. The complex experience of the 2014 Ukrainian Euromaidan is noteworthy here, regarding issues of revolutionary violence, international circumstances, and post-colonial character.[50] The violence ordered by the Yanukovych regime was accurately interpreted by Kuzio: "[t]he bloodshed came about because of the nature of those who are in power."[51] Nadia Diuk added yet another crucial distinction to the Color Revolutions: "not one political leader could provide a quick solution to Ukraine's troubles, and… people themselves must be responsible for working and organizing for a better future."[52] As the Ukrainian uprising garnered international attention, many scholars assumed that the world had entered a new kind of Cold War. Predictions indicated that subsequent pro-Western democratic attempts at change in the post-Soviet sphere could face similar repressions by the Russian Federation.[53] The Armenian Velvet Revolution proved them wrong, mostly due to the specificity of post-colonial dependency and power relations with

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49   Freedom in the World: Democracy in Retreat, 2019.

50   I. Gerasimov, 'Ukraine 2014: The First Postcolonial Revolution. Introduction to the Forum', *Ab Imperio*, no. 3, 2014, pp. 22-44.

51   T. Kuzio, 'Ukraine's Anti-Soviet Euro-Revolution', *Research Institute for European and American Studies* (blog), 4 December 2014, http://www.rieas.gr/images/kuziotaras22.pdf [2014-12-04].

52   N. Diuk, 'EUROMAIDAN: Ukraine's Self-Organizing Revolution', *World Affairs*, vol. 176, no. 6, 2014.

53   A. Monaghan, 'A "New Cold War"? Abusing History, Misunderstanding Russia', *Research Paper*, London 2015, https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/field/field_document/20150522ColdWar RussiaMonaghan.pdf; R. Legvold, *Return to Cold War*, Cambridge, UK–Malden, MA 2016; *The Return of the Cold War: Ukraine, The West and Russia*, eds. J.L. Black, M. Johns, New York 2016.

Russia resulting from Armenia's geopolitical conditions. Nevertheless, the post-colonial dependency factor did play a role in the internal context. The consolidation of the political system before 2018 was only possible as a result of Armenia's actual dependence on Russia for security in the context of the land blockade and conflicts with Turkey and Azerbaijan. Even if the objectives of the revolution were not outlined as rejecting dependence and rebuilding alliances, the intent was to redefine internal politics. Equally significant were developments of Armenian civil disobedience during the 20 years of Republican Party rule. These circumstances, along with lessons learnt from Euromaidan, changed the discourse and dynamism of the 2018 events. As demonstrated in Table 3, out of four features defining the Revolution of Dignity, only one was fully observable in Armenia: the complete distrust in elites. Its relevance is doubtful though, as a lack of trust in political elites and populism are a mark of our times.

Table 3. Revolution of Dignity and Armenian Revolution – feature comparison

	Revolution of Dignity	Armenian Revolution
Violence	Yes	No
Lack of trust in elites	Yes	Yes
Post-colonial dependency	Yes	Partially
Pro-Western approach	Yes	No

Source: own source.[54]

3.3. Dynamics, goals, and agency of the Velvet Revolution

Analysis of the causes of the Velvet Revolution illuminates its most important factors, as shown below:

Table 4. Armenian Velvet Revolution

Armenian Revolution Features		
Dynamics	Goals	Agency
Lack of violence	Democratization	Quasi-democratic regime
Anti-revolutionary character	Targeting corruption	Lack of trust in all elites
Mass societal mobilization		Not triggered by elite

Source: own source.

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54   Based on the amalgamation of the most frequently repeating features of Revolution of Dignity.

In all its uniqueness, the Armenian Velvet Revolution is defined by several features observable in its processual development and categorizable alongside previous political changes in the post-Soviet space. These features can be divided into three groups, with multiple sub-factors. In the first group, the lack of violence resulting from the tragic experience of the post-election protests in 2008 determined the dynamics of the revolutionary experience itself. These events sensitized protesters and government forces to peaceful activities. Additionally, the revolution was anti-revolutionary, which manifested itself as a "return to normality." Last was the extent of societal mobilization, also outside of Yerevan, unseen during previous protests. In the second group, factors relate to expectations of protesters. The issue of democratization as the aim of protests was important here. Also, there was a strong will to fight corruption and clean up public life. The third group includes factors relating to the agency of revolutionary actors. First, the revolution was directed against a semi-authoritarian/quasi-democratic regime classified as an enemy of change. Second, the revolution was characterized by a complete lack of trust in the elite. This applied to both the government camp and the opposition. Finally, it was conducted by actors uninvolved in Armenian politics prior to 2018, aptly construed by the term elite/counter-elite struggle. Though Pashinyan was previously politically active, he was never considered part of the elite. Partially comparable are features of lesser relevancy: post-colonial dependency and the role of radical youth organizations.

Conclusions

A comparative study of different post-Communist experiences of political change allows conclusions for the Armenian experience to be drawn. It is worth juxtaposing Armenia's Velvet Revolution with the classical revolution model and other post-Communist cascade changes that Armenia did not experience, as per the table below:

Table 5. Armenian Velvet Revolution on theoretical map of revolutions

	Classical Revolution	Autumn of Nations	Color Revolution	Revolution of Dignity	Armenian Revolution
Paradigm Change	Yes	Yes	Partially	Yes	n/k
Crisis Situation	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
New beginning	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Violence	Yes	No	No	Yes	No

Source: own source.*

* Based on the amalgamation of the most frequently repeated features in classical theories of revolution.

At this stage, when post-revolutionary dynamics are still in flux, it is not possible to evaluate the scale of change, thus paradigm shift is not a given. The question regarding paradigm shifts depends on whether Armenia will choose the transition and transformation model or go through a different experience of post-revolutionary changes. That is what further studies should aim to address.

The comparative analysis presented above does not entirely exhaust possible explanations for this event's dynamics. However, it does make it possible to identify the similarities and differences that, when compared with the case, make it possible to indicate at which level – internal or external – the Velvet Revolution follows the modular transformations of the Autumn of Nations, the Color Revolutions, and the separate case of the Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity, and on which level it stands out uniquely. By defining the features and factors of the Velvet Revolution, it can be seen why Armenia did not undergo an earlier transformation during the "wave of revolution". The basic research question was: how do the Armenian Velvet Revolution's features stand out from previous revolutionary changes of power in the post-Soviet space and to what extent are they convergent?

The Velvet Revolution was revolutionary and a continuation of earlier breakthroughs only internally. The previous experience of unsuccessful protests, above all the trauma following the bloody suppression of the post-election protests in 2008, focused its agenda on speaking out against corruption and for democratization. The objectives thus defined, at the level of paradigm fitting into a "return to normality," tie the Velvet Revolution to the Autumn of Nations and the Color Revolutions. At the same time, the bloody experience of the Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity and its consequences was important for its internal dynamics and non-violent nature.

The external elements characterizing the Autumn of Nations, the Color Revolutions, and the Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity did not occur in the Armenian case, enforcing its uniqueness. While the desire to emerge from neo-/post-colonial subjugation to Russian influence and integrate with the West played a key role in the Baltic States in 1991, Ukraine in 2004 and 2014, and Georgia in 2003, it did not manifest here. This was primarily due to Armenia's strategic and geopolitical situation and its need for an alliance with Russia. The dynam-

ics of the new, post-revolutionary regime confirm this distinctness. Pashinyan made his first foreign visit to Moscow, Armenia remains a member of the Eurasian Economic Union, and the Russian Federation continues to be regarded as a guarantor of state stability and security. Thus, the internal character of the events was the only possible outcome at the time.

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