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Sociological Causes of the Colorful Revolutions in Central Asia and the Caucasus: A Case Study of Georgia and Kyrgyzstan.

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Dedication

To my mother

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Abstract

The regime changes in Georgia (2003) and Kyrgyzstan (2005) that resulted in the overthrow of Presidents Shevardnadze and Akayev are widely considered to be part of a common phenomenon of colorful revolution in the post-Soviet era. This dissertation explores the role of weak state and unpopular incumbent, widespread bureaucratic corruption and enough independent media in facilitating the colorful revolutions in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan.

The research project uses a mix of qualitative and quantitative research methods.

The results of content analysis have shown that both regimes in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan were extremely weak and collapse in the face of even minimal opposition. Georgia's Eduard Shevardnadze, who had not been able to pay many police in months, was toppled by ''undersized'' crowds of ''20,000-30,000'' Similarly, protests of just 5000-10,000 toppled the regime in Kyrgyzstan.

Media coverage contributed to the relatively high degree of transparency during the revolutionary events. The media's involvement in the conflicted situations was constructive and their coverage of hot points helped to prevent an outbreak of violence in many cases.

One additional common feature across the two colorful revolutions is that both of them took place in extremely corrupt societies. At the time of the Tulip Revolution Kyrgyzstan ranked 130^{th} out of 150 countries in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI), also in 2003, the year of the Rose Revolution, Georgia ranked 124th out of 133 countries, with a score of 1.8^{4}. So not only both of these countries were plagued with corruption, they were actually two of the most corrupt countries in the entire world.

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Introduction

The issue of possibility of colorful revolutions has been one of the main concerns of media and to the lesser extent policy-makers during the last two decades. Although it is believed that colorful revolutions are post-Soviet phenomena and are limited to the post- Soviet era, it seems that other governments in regions like Middle East are sensitive to the possibility of peaceful revolutions.

Colorful revolution is a term used to describe related movements that developed in several societies in the Commonwealth of independent state (CIS) and Balkan states during the early 2000s. Some observers have called the events a revolutionary wave[1].

We had the "Bulldozer Revolution" in Serbia in 2000, the "Rose Revolution" in Georgia in November 2003, the "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine in December 2004; and the "Tulip Revolution" or the "Yellow" and "Purple" Revolution in Kyrgyzstan in March 2005 where the situation was both more colorful and more confused, as well as more violent.

The Colorful Revolutions are often grouped together because each shared a number of common features. In all four countries mentioned above an election was held and results were widely viewed to have been seriously manipulated by the current regime. Protests then broke out, and after some period of uncertainty, the incumbent president either resigned from office and/or the election results were overturned, resulting in a member of the opposition becoming the new president of the country[2].

Participants in the colorful revolutions have mostly used nonviolent resistance to protest against governments seen as corrupt and authoritarian and to advocate democracy. These movments all adopted a specific color or a flower as their symbol. The colorful revolutions are notable for the important role of none governmental organizations (NGOs) and particularly student activists in organizing creative nonviolent resistance.

Studying of such revolutions are important in several aspects: 1- Continuing such revolutions in several countries indicate a model of changing political systems, which can be disseminated in other countries including Middle Eastern ones. 2- The political and security consequences of

such revolutions in Central Asia and the Caucasus. 3- Their impact on Russian-American strategic relations considering U.S democratization policy.

The regime changes in Georgia (2003) and Kyrgyzstan (2005) that resulted in the overthrow of Presidents Shevardnadze and Akayev are widely considered to be part of a common phenomenon of 'colorful revolution' in the post-Soviet era.

The focus of this dissertation is to explain how and why the colorful revolutions took place in Georgia (2003) and Kyrgyzstan (2005) by evaluating the role that weak state, enough independent media and widespread bureaucratic corruption played in facilitating colorful revolutions in these countries.

This dissertation aims to answer this question: What factors played key roles in the colorful revolutions in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan?

Hypothesis: a weak state and unpopular incumbent, widespread bureaucratic corruption and enough independent media to inform citizens about the manipulated elections, played a key role in facilitating the colorful revolutions in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan.

Both regimes in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan were extremely weak and collapsed in the face of even minimal opposition. Georgia's Eduard Shevardnadze, who had not been able to pay many police in months, was toppled by ''undersized'' crowds of ''20,000-30,000''. Similarly, protests of just 5000-10,000 toppled the regime in Kyrgyzstan.

Coercive state capacity, rooted in cohesion and scope, has often been more influential than opposition strength in determining whether autocrats fall or remain in power. Thus, the regime in Armenia that was backed by a highly cohesive state with extensive scope was able to maintain power in countering with highly mobilized challenges of opposition. By contrast, regimes in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan where the state lacked internal cohesion and scope fell in the face of even weakly mobilized opposition[3].

Both Georgia and Kyrgyzstan were semi autocratic or competitive authoritarian regimes. It particular regime type in turn allowed pockets of pluralism and opposition within the state, which facilitated colorful revolutions in these cases. Shevardnadze and Akayev in their early rule create conditions for opposition and democratic institutions. They harassed opposition movements and threatened independent media outlets but never outlawed them. This relatively

political free space was critical for breakthrough of colorful revolutions. Although incumbent regimes were popular at first, on the eve of revolutions they were unpopular because growing corruption and years of economic decline undermined their support and independent media began exposing the growing corruption of their governments.

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One additional common feature across the two colorful revolutions is that both of them took place in extremely corrupt societies. At the time of the Tulip Revolution Kyrgyzstan ranked 130th out of 150 countries in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI), also in 2003, the year of the Rose Revolution, Georgia ranked 124th out of 133 countries, with a score of 1.8[4]. So not only both of these countries were plagued with corruption, they were actually two of the most corrupt countries in the entire world.

In this dissertation I identify factors that influenced the timing and nature of the anti-regime efforts in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan that culminated in what are known as the Rose and Tulip Revolutions. I evaluate the role that a weak state, independent media and widespread bureaucratic corruption played in facilitating colorful revolutions in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan.

The dissertation is structured as follows: The first chapter introduces issues by discussing governance, independent media and corruption in Central Asia and the Caucasus (CAC) then briefly reviews the literature of colorful revolutions. The second chapter describes causes of the Rose Revolution by discussing the characteristics of a weak state, bureaucratic corruption and critical role of independent media. The third chapter inspects the main factors which facilitated the Tulip Revolution, by evaluating the role of weak state, independent media and widespread corruption in the Kyrgyz Republic. This is followed by a comparison between the Rose and Tulip in the fourth chapter. Finally the fifth chapter presents brief conclusions.

Notes:

1- Wikipedia-free encyclopedia- colored revolution:www.wikipedia.com

2- Joshua A. Tucker, "People Power or a One-Shot Deal? The Legacy of the Colored Revolutions Considered from a Collective Action Framework "**The Wilf Family Department of Politics**, November 2007, p.3 Available online athttp://homepages.nyu.edu/~jat7

3- Lucan A. Way, Steven Levitsky, "The dynamics of autocratic coercion after the Cold War", **Communist and Post-Communist Studies**, vol.39,2006, pp.390, Available online at www.sciencedirect.com

4- www.transparency.org/cpi

Chapter 1
Theoretical Framework

Introduction

Authoritarian rule, poorly functioning legal systems, widespread corruption and prosecution of independent media dominate the political space in the former Soviet republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus. The region has not however, developed uniformly since independence. Despite well-educated citizens and huge reserves of oil and gas, local populations in Central Asia and the Caucasus live under pitiable conditions. Many experts point to authoritarianism, endemic corruption, the cruelty of regimes, the impossibility of political opposition and extreme poverty as a favorable environment for extremists, and the resulting radicalization of the society.

The purpose of this introductory chapter is to discuss dimensions of governance and statehood, independent media and corruption in Central Asia and the Caucasus (CAC) it also, briefly reviews the litreture of Colorful revolutions.

1.1 Dimensions of Governance and Statehood

1.1.1Type of the Regimes

Steven Levitsky and Lucan A.Way distinguish between Competitive authoritarian regimes and full-scale authoritarian. According to them competitive authoritarian are civilian regimes in which formal democratic institutions are widely viewed as the primary means of gaining power, but in which fraud, civil liberties violations, and abuse of state and resources so skew the playing field that the regime cannot be labeled democratic. Such regimes are c*ompetitive*, in that democratic institutions are not a façade: opposition forces can use legal channels to seriously contest for (and occasionally win) power; but they are *authoritarian* in that opposition forces are handicapped by a highly uneven-and even dangerous-playing field. Competition is thus real but *unfair*[1].

They have also classified as *closed or full-scale authoritarian* regimes that are noncompetitive, in that no viable channels exist through which opposition forces may contest legally for power. This category includes regimes in which democratic institutions (i.e. multiparty elections, civil liberties) do not even exist on paper, as in China, Cuba, or Saudi Arabia. Yet it also includes regimes in which formal democratic institutions exist on paper but are reduced to façade or "window dressing" status in practice. In these regimes, which are often characterized as *pseudo-*

democratic or *electoral authoritarian* elections are so marred by repression, restrictions on opposition candidates, and fraud that there is no uncertainty about their outcome[2]

In Central Asia and the Caucasus some of the regimes are full-scale authoritarian and some of them are competitive authoritarian. Georgia, Armenia and to some degree Kyrgyzstan are competitive regimes while the others (Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan) are full-scale authoritarian.

By the late 1990s, almost all of the Central Asian states were engaged in the regular and widespread violation of human rights and attempts to repress not simply opposition forces but almost any independent voice. Together these developments left little doubt that rather than a transition to democracy in Central Asia, it was authoritarianism that had become the dominant political mode in the region a decade after independence[3].

Authoritarian rule is supported by traditional patterns of societal relations, corrupt government practices and, in some cases, highly repressive power apparatuses, against which existing elements of democratic power control are unable to assert themselves.

Even in Kyrgyzstan, regarded as the most liberal Central Asian state since even before the "Tulip Revolution" of spring 2005, political freedoms and basic civil rights have been introduced to only a very limited degree. In Tajikistan the power sharing arrangement which showed the opposing factions the way out of the 1992–1997 civil war has meanwhile given way to authoritarian normalization.

Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan form the region's autocratic extremes, the Turkmen regime assuming almost totalitarian traits until Niyazov's death in late 2006. Although Uzbekistan is ruled in a less monolithic manner, the high level of repression there has considerable potential to destabilize the region. In the Caucasus, Armenia and Georgia have established themselves as reasonably well functioning, though defective democracies. While in Azerbaijan autocratic rule has been reconsolidated to varying degrees since the early 1990s. In this region a generally more liberal political situation is eclipsed by as yet unresolved secession conflicts (Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia and Abkhazia), which can always be used for the purpose of political mobilization in all the countries concerned and recently have caused war between Georgia and Russia.

1.1.2 Transition and Stability

The post-Soviet era has involved major political changes that replaced the hegemony of the communist party. At the beginning of the transition, there was not a well-defined process for choosing leaders and demarcating their powers. There was a vacuum in terms of political institutions and minimal checks and balances existed. There were no political parties with a significant reputation; the press and media had no tradition of independent reporting and the judicial system was unprepared to challenge political leaders' abuses of power when necessary[4]. There are, of course, significant regional variations and some of these are discussed below. In Central Asia, the former elites simply reinforced their positions after the collapse of the Soviet Union—in contrast to Russia where there was a battle for power between various factions of the old elite and reformers. In the Caucasian countries (Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan), the outbreak of conflicts and/or incidence of political violence were major elements explaining delays in reform. The wars stopped ongoing reform efforts in the early 1990s, and had a profound and often lasting impact on subsequent political developments. All of the Central Asian and the Caucasian countries have experienced some degree of political instability. This may be significant since political instability, if it occurs jointly with a government captured by interest groups and no clarity on which group is winning, does not create the right incentives for those groups to invest in long-term process of building institutions and creating and controlling norms. When political power is dispersed, interest groups may not even benefit from the stability that would be brought about by normalizing political and social relations. Interest groups tend to increase 'social closure' (restrict access of outsiders to political power). As a result, public political participation can be blocked to a large extent. Dispersion of power and consequently social closure are among the main causes of institutional distortions observed in the CAC countries.

However, many political institutions that were created in most of the CAC countries were not effectively under democratic control. At the start of the reforms in the CAC, the former elites - essentially public-enterprise managers, government officials and Communist Party leaders -were the most organized political group, had a clear advantage over other groups and were very effective in extracting rents. Thus it was naive in retrospect-considering the tradition of authoritarianism, secrecy and lack of accountability of leaders and officials, repression and lack of freedom and pervasive state intervention which existed in the Soviet Union - to expect that

demand for institutions would create its own supply and that markets would "work" by themselves.

Nineteen years after independence, all of the CAC countries have made some progress toward democracy -with Uzbekistan showing the least progress. Yet all still lacking some essential features of democratic systems[5]. Some are strong Presidential regimes while others (Kyrgyz**st**an) have a more competitive parliamentarian-type system subject to significant pressures from interest groups. In other countries, autocratic rulers may have been less subject to pressure but have followed opportunistic policies when their survival has been at stake[6]. Finally, in countries that have experienced armed conflict (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Tajikistan), past wars have used up resources and delayed the political transition.

The nature of the political regime that developed in the CAC is a major explanatory factor of poor governance. Democratization is expected to gradually change the incentives for rent seeking.

As political leaders become more accountable for their policies in the light of free media and puplic opinion, incentives to maintain discretionary policies diminish. But in most of the CAC countries, the old elite has been resisting reforms, thwarting the development of more political freedom and preventing more openness, more accountability and democratization.

1.1.3 Legitimacy

Political power is highly personalized in the Central Asia and the Caucasus. Relationships based on personal obligations rather than formal rules define what is the appropriate behavior to be expected in social interactions, especially within the power elites. Political parties play a marginal role for the most part. Important for socialization, on the other hand, are regional "clans" within which the individual can expect protection and help, but must also pledge loyalty to the clan chief and assist other clan members. This is true not only of private and societal relations but also of the political sphere. In many parts of the region action regarded as legitimate thus results less from recognized democratic procedures than from the personal and traditional authority of the leading figure, to whom, in principle, allegiance is owed as long he for his part fulfills his obligations to provide protection[7].

Consequently, political legitimacy in Central Asia and the Caucasus stems essentially from two sources: the traditional attribution of authority and the ability and willingness of those in power

(at all levels and in all areas of activity) to defend, visibly and successfully, the interests of their clients. Formal democratic procedures may increase or decrease legitimacy in this context, but they are rarely the decisive criterion. In this respect, the political change in 1990-1991 did not signify a break in continuity since, rather than change the traditional clan system of Central Asia and the Caucasus during its seven decades in power the Soviet system used and, in some ways, strengthened it. The regular holding of "elections" to confirm the rulers in office by acclamation was similarly a feature of the Soviet system which the power elites of the region, who experienced their political socialization very largely in the Soviet Union, were able to adopt. However, with its successes in the areas of education, health and job security, the Soviet Union also aroused in the people relatively high expectations of government services.

1.1.4 Monopoly of power, weak state apparatus

Establishing or maintaining a state monopoly of power is a matter of some considerable political explosiveness in the majority of the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus. Only Armenia, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan can be said to have a state monopoly of power that functions in principle. In the other countries strong regional power structures in particular, combined to some extent with organized crime (drug trafficking), or a militant political opposition (Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan) challenge the state's claim to a monopoly of the physical means of applying force. In the Caucasus there is the added problem of secession conflicts, which impose clear territorial limits on state authority in Azerbaijan and Georgia.

Experience of the state monopoly of power has been characterized by clear ambivalence since the various countries gained their independence. A legacy of the Soviet Union was an unlimited state claim to power which placed any reason of state unquestioningly above the individual citizen's interest in protection. After 1991, however, the new states lacked, temporarily at least, the power effectively to uphold this claim against the general decline of state authority caused by the massive deterioration of government services that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. This was felt most clearly by countries engaged in war or civil war in the 1990s.

In virtually all theCAC **c**ountries, there is no tradition of administrative management; a shortage of trained civil servants; and a weak capacity to design and implement policies because policy, in the former Soviet Union, was made at the center, in Moscow and little autonomy was given to the executive in the Soviet republics. These inherited weaknesses have caused serious

shortcomings in policy implementation and budgeting. There are often no effective mechanisms to force recognition at the political level of the resource limits that exist and to force political choices in establishing expenditure priorities. Budgets do not take into account the real capacity of the government to raise revenue and do not fully reflect the new role of the government in a market economy. There are few mechanisms and little institutional capacity in government agencies to elaborate and implement realistic sectoral priorities. Bureaucrats retain a significant degree of discretion in policy and in the allocation of budgetary funds; and there is no built-in accountability system in the administration (e.g., there is generally no commitment control system so that it is not possible to trace those who overspend and to hold them accountable).

1.1.5 Nation-building

Some governance problems have their origin in nationalism in particular in the Caucasus where it has led to open conflict. National self-determination may result from legitimate aspirations but, it can also be a convenient cover for unscrupulous politicians and their apologists, and a recipe for economic difficulties. In the Caucasus and Central Asia, national/ethnic issues are of an extra ordinary complexity (partly as a result of the population movements forced by Stalin) and deep-seated nationalism was one of the many causes of the Soviet Union's demise. The creation of new nation-states in Central Asia and Caucasus is of great historical significance but it is too early to tell whether the countries that have been created are easier to govern than the arrangements that existed under the Soviet Union. The multinational nature of these eight newly independent states accounts for the profound post-1991 weaknesses of the nations and the nationalisms in almost all the successor states to the Soviet Union. And equally important is the circumstance that when the Communist Party, which alone held the federal union together, underwent "reform" and disintegrated, the Soviet Union's sub-federal administrative units became perfect vehicles for elite self-preservation and self-aggrandizement[8].

What the European Union has been struggling to transcend, the newly independent states of the dismembered Soviet Union have taken upon themselves. The fact that a country is a small political jurisdiction has several costs. First, the country does not benefit from having a large market. Second, per capita cost of public goods such as defense decreases with the number of people who finance it so they are more expensive in small countries. Whether the majority of the CAC population benefits from public goods such as law enforcement and the administration of

justice is an open issue. Third, being small does not easily allow for efficient fiscal policies and macroeconomic management. For example, it has been empirically shown that large countries tend to rely more on efficient forms of taxation (such as income taxes) than on less efficient ones - custom taxes - even controlling for differences in levels of income. This being said, there are significant costs in being a large country. First, beyond a certain size, for any given political system, there can be significant coordination problems as the Soviet Union showed. Second, especially in multinational countries (in which the population is demographically less homogeneous) there is more political difficulty in aggregating preferences. The average cultural or preference distance between individuals is likely to be positively correlated with the size of a country. In large countries, there is a trade-off between the cost of having a large heterogeneous population with diverse preferences and the benefit of having a large political jurisdiction, which allows economies of scale[9]. In a sense the CAC states have inherited the problem of diverse preferences within a heterogeneous population from the Soviet Union without its economies of scale.

1.2 Corruption

Corruption is the abuse of public office for private gain[10]. It covers a wide range of violations of norms including theft or misappropriation of public assets or funds; patronage in civil service recruitment or dispensation of state benefits; influence peddling and bribes. It is highly context specific and country-specific since economic relations are embedded in specific social and cultural contexts which foster to various degrees the respect of formal norms and beneficial collective action mechanisms. Corruption includes practices that both violate or circumvent formal rules, including laws, and that involve exchanges of cash or favors. The extent and prevalence of corruption in a particular country depends largely on four factors: political and economic incentives (opportunities) for rent-seeking; the effectiveness of transparency (information and monitoring) and accountability mechanisms in the political/administrative structures of the state; the level of discretionary authority of state agents; and the effectiveness of law enforcement by police, prosecutors and justice.[11]

The literature makes a major distinction between “grand corruption” and “petty corruption. ”Petty corruption (also called administrative corruption) includes mainly, but not exclusively,

bribes[12]. Distinguishes between bribes that clear markets in excess demand (when there is rationing); bribes as incentive bonuses for public officials; bribes lowering costs; and bribes permitting criminal activity (police protection, intimidation and organized crime). The prevalence of petty corruption should be viewed as a symptom of serious dysfunctions in a society. In the countries of the former Soviet Union, during the socialist period, petty bribery were common but social connections and social standing were more important than cash. With the transition (and the need to earn currency), bribery and the scope of arbitrary discretion of officials increased significantly compared with the socialist period.**T**he corruption of public institutions and public authorities in all sectors (education, health, social programs) had the effect of slowing down growth, deepening the social exclusion of low income persons, further limiting their economic opportunities and impeding their efforts to improve their standard of living. Corruption also contributed to cynicism toward political leaders and the political system, and contributed to the disengagement of the population from civil society and political life[13].

Grand corruption (also called high level corruption) is not a symptom but a key determinant of institutional and policy outcomes. Though it is similar in its manifestations to petty corruption (bribes, stealing public funds or receiving commissions on public contracts; dispensation of administrative jobs, etc.), it is distinct from the latter because of the effects it has on policymaking and on state decisions. A small group of people exert an influence over policymaking and decisions made by the government. This group plays an important role in shaping institutions and the "rules of the game"—and therefore in shaping the investment climate. This can be extremely damaging for growth because the policies influenced by these special interest groups generally do not improve the welfare of the majority, and because the investment climate shapes the environment for entrepreneurship and, ultimately, investment, job creation and productivity increases by small and large enterprises. This powerful minority can be made of politicians and/or public officials in a context of lack of accountability and checks-and-balances, or it can be a group *outside* of the public sector which has a disproportionate influence on state institutions and policies. There is no neat separation between investment climate 'makers'(politicians and government decision-makers) and investment climate 'takers' (the business sector). In Central Asian and the Caucasian countries, both politicians and officials vested interests in the private sector—including foreign investors—play a key role in shaping the investment climate[14.]