

Flowers in Place of Guns: An Analysis of Kyrgyzstan's Tulip Revolution in Theoretical Context

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In March 2005, more than 40,000 citizens staged a series of non-violent political protests in six provinces and the capital city of Kyrgyzstan. These protests, in response to the purportedly fraudulent parliamentary elections in February, “exposed the brittle façade of the Askar Akaev regime,” which collapsed under the strain.¹ This event quickly became known as the “Tulip Revolution,” linking it to a wave of similar revolutions occurring in former-Soviet countries in the Balkans and Central Asia. These revolutions earned the moniker of “Color Revolutions” because protestors generally adopted a specific color or flower as a symbol. The Color Revolutions were praised for producing non-violent, democratic breakthroughs in corrupt and unstable countries of the former USSR, and were particularly characterized by civil resistance and the refusal of the government to call in the military—although there were exceptions of violent outbreaks, particularly in Kyrgyzstan. Yet for all their lofty goals, the democratic outcomes of these revolutions could not be sustained, and the status of the Color Revolutions as the realization of true revolution in any of those states is questionable.

The Tulip Revolution was unable to affect last changes to state structures, having almost no effect on social or economic structures and only nominally revolutionizing the political institutions in order to become more democratic. There is, admittedly, an inherent problem in identifying any changes to state structures, as Kyrgyzstan was a relatively new state, first formed by the Soviet government in the 1920s. There is thus the question of whether this “revolution” attempted to change existing structures, or was simply a delayed attempt to establish political structures in what could be seen as a post-colonial state, after the collapse of the Moscow government. By 2005, however, enough time had passed that Kyrgyzstan and the Central Asian

¹ Scott Radnitz, *Weapons of the Wealthy: Predatory Regimes and Elite-Led Protests in Central Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 131.

states were “no longer the loose ethnic formations which Stalin-era social engineers transformed into nationalities,” but instead fully sovereign nations with state structures that, though potentially still in post-Communist transition, were fully established.² Rather than a democratic revolution, Kyrgyzstan’s 2005 Tulip Revolution should more accurately be termed a simple transfer of power, as the top-down, non-violent civil resistance proved insufficient in affecting fundamental changes to existing political, social, and economic structures. The attempt to truly establish democracy served only to transfer leadership to a new regime—led by an existing political actor—and entrench corruption.

Defining Terms: What is Revolution?

To make an assertion as to the nature of the Tulip Revolution, whether it was a fully realized revolution or whether it was a failed attempt, it is first crucial to define some terms. The most important term to define is, of course, “revolution.” What constitutes a revolution? Historically, the word “revolution” referred to the circular rotation of celestial bodies.³ It was not until the seventeenth century, according to Perez Zagorin, that the term acquired a political meaning, but even so, it “retained the idea of circularity... even as a political occurrence, *revolution* was understood merely as a synonym for the cycle of change in states, a cycle of turbulent ups and downs.”⁴ The modern definition of revolution constitutes a loose, vague amalgamation of ideas by historians and political scientists, and is popularly used to describe anything from educational, industrial, scientific, sexual, or political “revolutions.” Whatever the frame of reference, the modern definition of revolution breaks from the earlier linkage to a

² Martha Brill Olcott, *Central Asia’s New States: Independence, Foreign Policy, and Regional Security* (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996), 8.

³ Perez Zagorin, “Theories of Revolution in Contemporary Historiography,” *Political Science Quarterly* 88 (1973), 26.

⁴ Zagorin, “Theories of Revolution,” 26.

cyclical nature, and now generally refers to change, especially a fundamental change. In studying the Tulip Revolution, no one definition is superior to all others, but by examining the event through the definitions of leading theorists it becomes clear that the Tulip Revolution does not quite fit any one of them.

In the late 1960s, Samuel P. Huntington defined revolution as a “rapid, fundamental and violent domestic change in the dominant values and myths of society, in its political institutions, social structure, leadership, government activity, and policies.”⁵ Huntington also defined revolution as an aspect of modernization, asserting that they are rare and temporally bounded phenomenon. Theda Skocpol, in her landmark, 1979 *States and Social Revolutions* specifically examined social revolutions, which she defines as “rapid, basic transformations of a society’s state and class structures... [which are] accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below.”⁶ According to Jack Goldstone, revolutions:

Combine all the elements of forcible overthrow of the government, mass mobilization, the pursuit of a vision of social justice, and the creation of new political institutions. It is this combination that leads us to conceive of revolutions as the process by which visionary leaders draw on the power of the masses to forcibly bring into existence a new political order.⁷

Goldstone, unlike Huntington, disagrees that revolutions are bounded by and a product of modernity, suggesting instead that they have occurred throughout history.

Other revolutionary theorists, like Charles Tilly or Stephen K. Anderson, demure from providing conclusive definitions of revolution. Tilly writes in direct response to the revolutionary theories of Samuel Huntington, and questions the idea that revolution is a product of modernity.

⁵ Samuel P Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 264.

⁶ Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1979), 4.

⁷ Jack Goldstone, *Revolution: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 9.

He also critiques Huntington's failure to fully define his terminology, and argues that Huntington could push his theory further towards creating a predictive model for revolution.⁸ Sanderson examines revolutionary theory more broadly, providing synopses of the various contending theories of revolution, and critically analyzing their validity, through a series of case studies. Even without selecting one specific theory with which to examine Kyrgyzstan's revolution, there are still several evident common threads in these various definitions; it appears many theorists agree that revolutions constitute rapid and fundamental change, they create new institutions—be they political, social, or otherwise—they generally include violent or forcible overthrow of the existing government or political institutions, and according to some theorists, they require mass mobilization. Although one or two of these attributes can be seen at work in Kyrgyzstan's Tulip Revolution, not enough of these revolutionary factors were at play to classify the Tulip Revolution truly revolutionary.

Soviet Establishment of the Kyrgyz National Republic

In order to understand the events of the Tulip Revolution and its outcomes, it is crucial to first contextualize those events within the broader history of Kyrgyzstan. Rather than approach Kyrgyzstan with an analysis of the other "Color Revolutions," we need to begin with the establishment of the Central Asian national republics by the Soviet government, because that seminal event set the stage for the eventual attempt to establish democracy in 2005. The Kyrgyz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was established in 1920. According to Ronald Suny's *The Soviet Experiment*, when the Soviets turned their nation-building attention in Kyrgyzstan's direction, they discovered that "among the Central Asians distinctions between peoples were ill-

⁸ Jack A. Goldstone, *Revolutions: Theoretical, Comparative, and Historical Studies* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 49-51.

defined and fluid.”⁹ As Jeremy Smith notes in *Red Nations*, “local inhabitants before the [Russian] revolution were more likely to define themselves by language, region, religion, or clan than by ethnicity or nation. As these categories did not always coincide, individuals often subscribed to several overlapping identities.”¹⁰ In Soviet attempts to parcel up the outer reaches of their empire, the delimitation of Central Asia was perhaps their most difficult challenge.

In other regions under Soviet control, the creation of national institutions was largely driven by pre-existing local nationalities. In some cases, the Soviets simply gained territorial control over pre-existing countries/nation-states, as was the case in much of Eastern Europe. In Central Asia, however, and particularly in the region that today constitutes Kyrgyzstan, the creation of an autonomous republic was a complicated process, and the Soviet government employed ethnographers to survey the region in order to determine the boundaries of their new provinces.¹¹ The Kyrgyz region underwent five different iterations between 1920 and 1926, first as the Kyrgyz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR), then reconstituted as the Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Region in 1924, the Kazakh ASSR and Kyrgyz Autonomous Region in 1925, and finally again as the Kyrgyz ASSR in 1926. The remainder of Soviet Central Asia was known as Soviet Turkestan until 1925, but was subsequently divided into the Turkmen, Tajik, and Uzbek ASSRs.

The creation of these national republics was to some extent an artificial process, given the “ethnic complexity of the region and the low levels of national consciousness.”¹² Subsequent

⁹ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 129.

¹⁰ Smith, *Red Nations*, 76.

¹¹ Arne Haugen, *The Establishment of National Republics in Soviet Central Asia*, (Houndsmill: Hargrave Macmillan, 2003), 30.

¹² Smith, *Red Nations*, 76.

Soviet nationality policy under Lenin emphasized the creation and promotion of “distinctive ethnic and primordial identities [which were also] at times artificial creations,” especially in the case of the Central Asian ASSRs.¹³ During the earliest decades of Soviet control, especially during the 1920s, Soviet state policy promoted national cultures. The state enthusiastically promoted education in local languages and elevated local ethnic peoples throughout its empire to the status of “nations,” even providing designated territories. According to Ronald Suny, “The USSR was to be a model for a future world political order in which the rights of all nations would be respected.”¹⁴ The rights of the nations in question, however, concerned primordial ethnic identities that were basically fabricated by the state.

Soviet nationality policy towards non-Russians was also deeply contradictory. After 1938, it favored the teaching of Russian language over and against local languages, and restricted nationalist expression. Even during the periods that Soviet policy attempted to promote the titular nationality in any given republic, it simultaneously repressed minority populations. This was especially contentious in the Central Asian republics—and in Kyrgyzstan in particular—as the boundaries between these republics, drawn by the central government, did not always reflect actual ethnic divides.

Toward the end of the Soviet period, as separatism was gaining ground thanks to Gorbachev’s loosened controls on the expression of oppositional ideas, ethnic tensions created by soviet nationality policy came to a head in Kyrgyzstan. Violence broke out in 1990 in the Osh region in Southwest Kyrgyzstan, where Uzbeks comprised 26% of the total population.¹⁵ In

¹³ Diana T. Kudaibergenova, “National Identity Formation in Post-Soviet Central Asia: The Soviet Legacy, Primordialism, and Patterns of Ideological Development since 1991,” in *Social and Cultural Change in Central Asia: The Soviet Legacy*, ed. Sevet Akyildiz and Richard Carlson (London: Routledge, 2014), 161.

¹⁴ Suny, *Soviet Experiment*, 308.

¹⁵ Smith, *Red Nations*, 270.

addition to preexisting ethnic divides, “corruption and administrative incompetence contributed to tensions, and the situation was exacerbated by the growing nationalist tendency of its Kyrgyz leaders.”¹⁶ On June 4, 1990, violence erupted in Osh city and spread to other nearby cities and villages the next day. By the 10th of June, at least 120 Uzbeks and 50 Kyrgyz had died as a result. The 1990 Osh conflict, along with “elite manipulation, economic decline, indifference or incompetence in the response of the authorities, and a weakening of central power” sparked growing separatist and nationalist sentiment.¹⁷ Although support for secession had been initially weak during the 1980s, as Central Asia’s political elite was closely tied to the Moscow government, faced with the Osh violence and the fast-approaching implosion of the Soviet Union, the push for national independence gained momentum.

The Soviet Collapse and the Presidency of Askar Akaev

When the USSR collapsed, the Central Asian republics responded quite differently from their counterparts on the western end of the Soviet Union. There was no real regime change; instead the old Soviet cadre of existing leaders largely retained their power and incorporated into the new national governmental institutions. The ruling elites for the most part “conserved their positions within new, authoritarian regimes based on Soviet methods and mentality.”¹⁸ At first, Kyrgyzstan appeared to be the exception to this rule. According to Jeremy Smith, “Of the Central Asian states, Kyrgyzstan has consistently been viewed as the one most likely to pursue a liberal democratic path, and has equally consistently disappointed.”¹⁹ Before the republic gained independence in October of 1990, Parliament elevated Askar Akaev as President of the Kyrgyz

¹⁶ Smith, *Red Nations*, 270.

¹⁷ Smith, *Red Nations*, 271.

¹⁸ Theodor Tudoroiu, “Rose, Orange, and Tulip: The Failed Post-Soviet Revolutions,” *Communist & Post-Communist Studies* 40 (2007), 331.

¹⁹ Smith, *Red Nations*, 292.

ASSR, in place of the hard-line communist Absamat Masaliev. Akaev, an academic, had only joined the Communist Party in 1981. He was the popular candidate, and at the time many saw him as a “Jeffersonian democrat in the heart of Asia.” Popular sentiment both within and without Kyrgyzstan felt that the country was on its way to becoming a stronghold of democracy in the region.²⁰

Initially it appeared that these predictions might prove true. Even before Kyrgyzstan gained full independence in 1991, Akaev pursued a vigorous program of market-oriented economic reform. The aim was to “transfer state assets broadly into the hands of society, creating stakeholders who would defend their newfound wealth, demand property rights, and support the consolidation of a democratic system.”²¹ This optimistic goal, needless to say, never came to pass. By the mid-1990s the global economy was deteriorating, and the Kyrgyz economy was no different. President Akaev reportedly told the Japanese prime minister in 1993 that “if massive assistance did not come within six months, the country’s economic downturn [would] prove irreversible.”²² Although relatively unopposed politically in the beginning of his presidency, by 1994, due in part to the declining economy, opponents began to emerge.

After several years of pursuing a relatively liberal course of economic reforms, Akaev “changed tack: he joined the ranks of his Central Asian counterparts, noted for monopolizing power, enriching themselves and their families, and suppressing opposition.”²³ Akaev turned to increasingly authoritarian methods, cracking down on two independent opposition newspapers in

²⁰ Tudoroiu, “Rose, Orange, and Tulip,” 331.

²¹ Scott Radnitz, “The Color of Money: Privatization, Economic Dispersion, and the Post-Soviet ‘Revolutions,’” *Comparative Politics* 42 (2010), 127.

²² Olcott, *Central Asia’s New States*, 88.

²³ Dilip Hiro, *Inside Central Asia: A Political and Cultural History of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Iran* (New York: Overlook Duckworth, 2009), 296.

August 1994 by banning them from publication by the country's sole, state-owned publishing house.²⁴ He also disbanded parliament in 1994 and in 1995 held presidential elections early to disadvantage opponents. Although Akaev won with a majority of the vote, this was the first time in Akaev's presidency that rumblings of election manipulation and unfairness occurred. It would not be the last.

In 1998, Akaev coerced the Constitutional Court into allowing him to run for election for a third time in 2000. Akaev won, but international observers had serious doubts as to the fairness of the election.²⁵ By the early 2000s, perceptions of increasing corruption in Akaev's regime combined with slow economic growth, and popular support for Akaev severely declined. Scott Radnitz notes that, "As the resources available to Akaev to hold together his coalition were depleted in the face of large external debts... the incentives for remaining loyal to the regime declined, and some officials who were once loyal to Akaev defected."²⁶ Akaev's early policy of liberal economic reform had created a pool of autonomous elites that held substantial economic resources. Although Akaev eventually reversed his policies and attempted to suppress these elites, the damage was already wrought. In the early 2000s, independent businessmen joined the opposition, perceiving Akaev's regime as weakened and corrupt. This network of elites "would later prove crucial in organizing the mass mobilization that toppled the regime" in 2005. Before that regime toppling "revolution" came to pass, however, two other crucial events swept through the region—namely the "Color Revolutions" in two other Central Asian states, Georgia and Ukraine.

²⁴ Olcott, *Central Asia's New States*, 92.

²⁵ Smith, *Red Nations*, 292.

²⁶ Radnitz, *Weapons of the Wealthy*, 66.

The Color Revolutions: Georgia's Rose Revolution

Similar to Akaev in Kyrgyzstan and the ruling figures in other Central Asian states, Georgia's president Eduard Shevardnadze was the ruling official of the Georgian ASSR before the fall of the USSR. After the country gained independence, Shevardnadze established himself as President of the newly minted Republic of Georgia. Like Kyrgyzstan in the 1990s, Georgia faced severe economic struggles. According to Theodor Tudoroiu, the economic situation was so poor that "Georgia's per capita national income was lower than that of Swaziland. More than half the population was living below the poverty line."²⁷ A corrupt class of business elites controlled what little wealth existed and kept it from the hands of the general population. The country also faced poor relations with Russia, thanks to Shevardnadze's failure to support Russia's war with Chechnya.

Confronted with rampant corruption, opposition to Shevardnadze's regime gained ground in the early 2000s. Two of the most liberal members of the regime, the Speaker of Parliament Zurab Zhvania and Minister for Justice Mikhail Saakashvili, both resigned in 2001, joining opposition forces in protesting the current government's incompetence and lack of transparency.²⁸ In June 2003, another defector from Shevardnadze's regime, the Speaker for Parliament Nino Burjanadze, joined the opposition as well. The November 2, 2003 parliamentary elections in Georgia "promised to be an important test of Georgia's democratic development as well as of its increasingly unpopular president."²⁹ Shevardnadze failed the test. Official results declared that his government party, the Citizens' Union of Georgia (CUG) beat the opposition party, Mikheil Saakashvili's National Movement. Shevardnadze exposed his own manipulation

²⁷ Tudoroiu, "Rose, Orange, and Tulip," 319.

²⁸ Smith, *Red Nations*, 313.

²⁹ Lincoln Abraham Mitchell, *The Color Revolutions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 45.

of the polls, however, by allowing two separate, external polls. The International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy conducted a parallel vote and turnout tabulation, and several NGOs conducted an independent exit poll. These external entities reported that voting was marked by “rampant ballot stuffing, multiple voting, late poll openings, ballots not being delivered to some polling places, and voter lists that included dead people but excluded thousands of live voters. The scale of the fraud was even higher during the counting of the votes.”³⁰ In response to the election fraud, the various opposition leaders began calling for new elections or Shevardnadze’s resignation. The Rose Revolution began with a vigil in front of the parliament building, led by the three former members of Shevardnadze’s regime, Saakashvili, Zhvania, and Burjanadze. This vigil led to demonstrations in the center of Georgia’s capital, Tbilisi, eventually swelling to as many as 20,000 people demonstrating on November 14th. Protestors adopted a red rose as their symbol, passing them out to police as the protests grew larger.

Shevardnadze was unwilling or unable to use violence to suppress the protests, especially in light of an “internal split within the repressive apparatus (army, police, and presidential guards)” and the “memory of Soviet troops’ 1989 attack on civilians in Tbilisi.”³¹ On the 22nd of November, protestors peacefully took the parliament building as Shevardnadze was giving a speech to formally open the news legislative session. Shevardnadze declared a national state of emergency, but the next day called opposition leaders into his office and formally resigned as President.

After two months, Mikheil Saakashvili was elected president in the January 2004 elections, and the other opposition leaders, Zhvania and Burjanadze, became Prime Minister and

³⁰ Tudoroiu, “Rose, Orange, and Tulip,” 321.

³¹ Tudoroiu, “Rose, Orange, and Tulip,” 322.

Speaker of Parliament respectively. The new elections were hailed for their transparency and fairness, although Saakashvili ran virtually unopposed.³² Saakashvili initially attempted to tackle many of the issues of the previous regime, specifically the corruption and floundering economy. He also took a decidedly pro-Western tack in his foreign policy. As a result of the Rose Revolution, according to Ryan Kennedy, “Georgia made some minor improvement in control of corruption, but little to no improvement in democratic rights.”³³ As democratic as the goals of the Rose Revolution were, Georgia eventually backslid into intense national rhetoric and minority suppression, exacerbated by increasing tensions with Russia.

The Color Revolutions: Ukraine’s Orange Revolution

Only a year after the Rose Revolution, Ukraine followed in Georgia’s wake with its Orange Revolution in 2004. Like the Rose Revolution, the catalyst for the Orange Revolution was election fraud, although in this case the election was presidential rather than parliamentary. Viktor Yanukovich was the prime minister at that time, and had been groomed to succeed the corrupt outgoing President Leonid Kuchma. He was also the candidate favored by Russian president Vladimir Putin. Viktor Yushchenko, the popular candidate, was a previous prime minister, but Kuchma fired him in April 2001, allowing for the emergence of a viable, pro-Western opposition force.³⁴ In November 2004, exit polls reported opposition candidate Yushchenko winning the majority of the vote—53 percent—over Yanukovich, who reportedly won 43 percent of the vote.³⁵ Contrary to the results of the exit polls, however, official results put Yanukovich ahead. The inconsistencies between official and unofficial reports coupled with

³² Mitchell, *Color Revolutions*, 3.

³³ Kennedy, Ryan. "Fading Colours? A Synthetic Comparative Case Study of the Impact of "Colour Revolutions," *Comparative Politics* 46 (2014): 274.

³⁴ Mitchell, *Color Revolutions*, 35.

³⁵ Smith, *Red Nations*, 314.

inconsistent reports of voter turn-out and sparked growing public sentiment that the election was fraudulent.

The reported election fraud exacerbated already broiling turmoil. Before the election, opposition candidate Yushchenko faced black-balling from state-controlled media outlets backing Yanukovich.³⁶ Even more alarming, however, was the fact that Yushchenko faced several assassination attempts, thought to be carried out by members or supporters of Yanukovich's regime. The most notable attempt occurred on September 6, 2004, a month and a half before the first round of the election. Yushchenko suffered a case of dioxin poisoning after a dinner with the director of the Ukrainian Security Service, leaving him permanently disfigured.³⁷ Yushchenko had to withdraw from campaigning, but was still in the running. This and the purported fraud in the November elections led to an outbreak of rioting in the center of Kiev on November 22, 2004. Between 100,000 and 300,000 protestors gathered each evening for two weeks, blockading government buildings. Protestors adopted Yushchenko's campaign color, orange, as their symbol, thus earning the movement the name "Orange Revolution."

President Kuchma was unable to call in military suppression due to "many key officials in the regime, including the top of the police and army, having grown disillusioned with Kuchma," and to the sheer size of the protests.³⁸ As the protests continued, Kuchma's regime collapsed, along with any chance Yanukovich had of winning the presidency. Parliament eventually decamped to Yushchenko and declared the 2004 election invalid; the Supreme Court did the same a week later. A runoff election was scheduled for December 26th. Yushchenko won, and was sworn in as president on the 23rd of January. In a similar vein as Georgia's Rose

³⁶ Tudoroiu, *Rose, Orange, and Tulip*, 328.

³⁷ Tudoroiu, *Rose, Orange, and Tulip*, 328.

³⁸ Smith, *Red Nations*, 314.

Revolution, however, the democratic and revolutionary aims of the Orange Revolution never truly materialized. Putin had strongly backed Yanukovich in the 2004 elections, and therefore the economy took a hit in Ukraine after the revolution as a result of deteriorating relations with Russia, particularly in the form of gas line disputes.³⁹ Only six years after Yushchenko's victory, Ukraine found itself in much the same position as before the revolution.

People in Ukraine did not support the Orange Revolution as unanimously as the Georgian population supported the Rose Revolution. Tensions grew between supporters of the revolution in the west and the pro-Yanukovich Russian-speakers in the east. By the 2010 presidential election, the Orange Revolution and any headway that had been made in its wake were overturned, as Yanukovich, the “man whose false victory in 2004 had been annulled by the street protests,” won the presidency back.⁴⁰ As Ryan Kennedy notes, “In terms of corruption, one of the main motivations for the colour revolutions, Ukraine appears to have made little progress. Indeed, the election of Yanukovich and the lack of protest that followed seemed a sign of popular disenchantment with the Orange Revolution.”⁴¹ Ukraine saw an even greater backslide, in the wake of its “revolution,” than Georgia had several years earlier.

Examining Kyrgyzstan's Tulip Revolution

The Rose Revolution and the Orange Revolution are thought to have set a precedent and provided a model for Kyrgyz protestors to follow in 2005, and these revolutions are often lumped together and treated as homogenous pieces of a larger “wave” of Color Revolutions. This grouping is understandable, as there was significant diffusion between these events. They

³⁹ Smith, *Red Nations*, 315.

⁴⁰ Smith, *Red Nations*, 316.

⁴¹ Kennedy, “Fading Colours, 275.

followed a similar progression, beginning with perceived electoral fraud, followed by non-violent demonstrations, the displacement of the current—and corrupt—president, and the almost unopposed secession of the opposition leader. In spite of their similarities, however, these events were individual examples of attempted democratic revolution, and must be treated as such.

The situation in Kyrgyzstan was different in several respects from that in Georgia and Ukraine, but the catalyst was much the same; purported election fraud acted as a spark for already simmering discontent. By 2005, the current president Askar Akaev had been in power in Kyrgyzstan for almost 15 years, and was technically not permitted under Kyrgyzstan's constitution to run for another term in the presidential elections that were to take place in October 2005.⁴² However, due to such factors as “increasingly unfree media, restrictions on civil society, and harassment of political opposition figures,” it seemed increasingly likely that Akaev would leverage the February 2005 parliamentary elections to secure himself a fourth term in office in October.⁴³

Observing Kyrgyzstan's parliamentary elections on February 27th and March 13th, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) reported “widespread vote-buying, de-registration of candidates, interference with independent media, and a low level of confidence in electoral and judicial institutions on the part of candidates and voters.”⁴⁴ Protests broke out in response to the electoral fraud, but they did not begin in the capital of Bishkek, as they had begun in the capitals of Georgia and Ukraine during the previous Color Revolutions. Protests initially broke out in the south of Kyrgyzstan, particularly in the cities Osh and Jalalabad, and

⁴² Bunce, *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders*, 172.

⁴³ Mitchell, *Color Revolutions*, 54.

⁴⁴ Steve Hess, “Protests, Parties, and Presidential Succession Competing Theories of Color Revolutions in Armenia and Kyrgyzstan,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 57 (2010), 31.

quickly spread to the Bishkek in the north of the country. Akaev was from the North, and his attempts to steal votes throughout the country were seen as an attempt to focus government control on northern issues and suppress local southern issues, which were often based on differing ethnic concerns.

The protests that broke out in the south and in the capital were not a coordinated effort; rather, protests in Kyrgyzstan were markedly less peaceful, less organized, and less centered in the capital than in Georgia or Ukraine. In fact, small-scale violence broke out in the Tulip Revolution, making it an anomaly among the other non-violent Color Revolutions. According to Lincoln A. Mitchell, “Occasional violence broke out including looting and destruction of property. While most of the violence was against property, there was a real possibility that Kyrgyzstan would end up in civil war rather than the peaceful transitions that had characterized the Orange and Rose Revolutions.”⁴⁵ The outbursts of violence by protestors caused President Akaev to respond in kind—with force, something that the pre-revolutionary regimes in both Georgia and Ukraine had been either unwilling or unable to do.

On March 19, 2005, protests began to swell in size. Over 50,000 protestors assembled in Jalalabad and Osh, and 3,000 more attempted to enter Bishkek, only to be repelled by security forces. President Akaev decided to use force the following day, deploying Interior Ministry forces to break up protests in Jalalabad and Osh.⁴⁶ They were only successful to a degree, as protests quickly reassembled in the outskirts of the city. The next day, on March 20th, the government completely lost control of these southern cities, but Akaev publicly declared he would refrain from responding with violence—a concession to international observers. On

⁴⁵ Mitchell, *Color Revolutions*, 63.

⁴⁶ Hiro, *Inside Central Asia*, 305.

March 22, disillusioned with Akaev and resigned to a change in leadership, a third of Akaev's parliament defected to the opposition. The denouement occurred on March 24, when between 10,000 and 20,000 protestors gathered in the center of Bishkek, where they "overpowered the contingent of riot police posted along the perimeter of the [capitol] building, and seized the seat of supreme power."⁴⁷ Akaev, recognizing defeat, fled to Russia and resigned as president 11 days later.

One reason for the relative violence and disorganization of the Tulip Revolution was the different demographic of protestors in the Tulip Revolution from that of the Rose or Orange Revolutions. The youth element that figured so prominently in the others was almost completely absent in the earliest stages of the Tulip Revolution; instead the crowds in the south consisted mostly of "jobless or retired older men, with smaller numbers of older women and unemployed young men. Some urban residents and students passed by or observed, but few took part."⁴⁸ As Ryan Kennedy notes, demonstrators in Kyrgyzstan were protesting differing concerns, and the Revolution was "motivated less by national than by regional concerns, centered in the economically depressed and politically marginalized south."⁴⁹

Once protests spread from the South to the capital, student and political protestors—whose main complaint was the electoral fraud rather than economic conditions or ethnic/regional concerns—played a greater part. Even so, organized student groups were not instrumental, as the groups *Kmara* and *Pora* had been in Georgia and Ukraine. Kyrgyzstan's version of these groups, *KelKel*, had a significantly smaller membership than the other Central Asian groups it drew inspiration from, only about 300 members in 2005. Akaev was highly efficient in undermining

⁴⁷ Hiro, *Inside Central Asia*, 305.

⁴⁸ Tudoroiu, *Rose, Orange, and Tulip*, 333.

⁴⁹ Kennedy, *Fading Colours*, 275.

such student activism during his presidency, even offering increased scholarships and stipends to students who voted for candidates loyal to his regime, which he did in January 2005.⁵⁰ Even though students and the politically active younger subset of the population “formed the masses at the opposition rallies and stormed government buildings,” the majority of these students were not actually affiliated with organized student groups, contributing to the disorganized quality of the protests.⁵¹

The other important reason for the relative disorganization and violence of the Tulip Revolution was the lack of unification in the opposition forces. According to Scott Radnitz, the catalysts of the revolution were “autonomous elites (wealthy businessmen, former government officials, former or active parliamentarians) who were bound to ordinary citizens through clientelist ties.”⁵² These wealthy elites, though disgruntled for similar reasons, were not necessarily working in conjunction, and therefore the opposition movement in Kyrgyzstan was fractured. The country felt this division most clearly in the post-Revolution search for viable candidates around whom to formulate the new “democratic” government. Comparing Kyrgyzstan to Georgia and Ukraine, Lincoln A. Mitchell writes, “The emergence of political opposition occurred later and less clearly in Kyrgyzstan than in the other two cases. Kyrgyzstan’s weaker party system and electoral system made it difficult for a national leadership to emerge.”⁵³

It was several months after Akaev fled the country on March 24, 2005 before elections took place to select the new president. In the meantime, isolated eruptions of protest, looting, and

⁵⁰ Tudoroiu, *Rose, Orange, and Tulip*, 333.

⁵¹ Tudoroiu, *Rose, Orange, and Tulip*, 333.

⁵² Radnitz, *Weapons of the Wealthy*, 133.

⁵³ Mitchell, *Color Revolutions*, 68.

violence occurred across the country, unrelated to any specific oppositional leader or party.⁵⁴ A former Prime Minister—and one of several opposition leaders—Kurmanbek Bakiev, was named the acting president of the interim government soon after Akaev fled the country. Yet there was still contention over who would eventually win the presidency. Eventually, Bakiev and Felix Kulov, another oppositional figure, decided that the competition was hindering the country's post-Revolution progress, and they “formed an alliance, with Kulov agreeing to become prime minister if Bakiev won the presidential poll on July 10.”⁵⁵ Win he did, with almost 90% of the vote. After Bakiev was officially sworn in to office, his presidency followed a now-familiar decline into increasing authoritarianism, despite initial promises of democracy, transparency, and an end to corruption. In 2010, only five short years after his presidential win in 2005, Bakiev followed a similar fate to President Akaev before him.

Outcomes of the Tulip Revolution: Bakiev's Regime and Kyrgyzstan's 2010 Osh Uprisings

After the Tulip Revolution, the newly installed President, Kurmanbek Bakiev, promised to eliminate the excessive corruption that had characterized Akaev's regime, and to implement democratizing reforms. During the first two years of his presidency, Bakiev faced instability and continuing ripples of small-scale protests, and so he delayed these forms, making only small concessions toward increased democracy.⁵⁶ After 2007, Bakiev gave up any appearance of eventual democratization. He reformed the constitution to consolidate his power, and turned—like Akaev before him—to increasingly corrupt methods to bulwark his regime. Bakiev relied on “intimidation, threats, violence, and bribery, all of which are costly, unreliable, and ultimately

⁵⁴ Mitchell, *Color Revolutions*, 68.

⁵⁵ Hiro, *Inside Central Asia*, 307.

⁵⁶ Azamat Temirkulov, "Kyrgyz "Revolutions" in 2005 and 2010: Comparative Analysis of Mass Mobilization," *Nationalities Papers* 38 (2010): 594.

unsuccessful strategies for staying in power.”⁵⁷ Nepotism also marred Bakiev’s regime, as he inserted family members and political allies into key governmental positions.

By 2010, discontent with Bakiev’s government grew overwhelming. In 2009 and early 2010, Bakiev made several moves to suppress opposition leaders, imprisoning some, while others mysteriously disappeared or fled the country. Bakiev also completely suppressed all independent media outlets. At the same time, general population was already angered by economic depression—a result of the global crisis of 2008, in which Kyrgyzstan was hit particularly hard. Even as this crisis crippled rural communities and small businesses, the government made “the unpopular decision to increase tariffs for public services, including energy, heating, and mobile communications.”⁵⁸ On April 6, 2010, after Bakiev arrested the vice-president of one of the major opposition parties, widespread protests broke out across the country, much as they had in 2005.

Even though protests during the Tulip Revolution had been somewhat disorganized, the 2010 rioting was completely scattered, and significantly more violent. According to Azamat Temirkulov, the 2010 uprising were

the spontaneous collective action of dissatisfied people. People were not making appeals, they were not giving speeches... There were no leaders, either political or organizational. There were only dissatisfied people, men who were armed with sticks and stones, some with fire-arms taken from the police. Gunfire, explosions, the wounded, and the dead failed to disperse or even constrain the crowd.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Mitchell, *Color Revolutions*, 127.

⁵⁸ Temirkulov, “Revolutions in 2005 and 2010,” 596.

⁵⁹ Temirkulov, “Revolutions in 2005 and 2010,” 597.

Just as President Akaev fled to Russia in 2005, the man elected to the presidency in the post-revolutionary democratic glow of the Tulip Revolution, Kurmanbek Bakiev, retreated to first Belarus, then Russia only days after the April 6-8th protests.

In 2005, the Tulip Revolution consisted of weeks of protests; in contrast, it took only a few days to oust Bakiev in 2010. The violence, however, did not end when Bakiev fled the country. The April uprising were a wildly disorganized effort, in which numerous groups of people, with diverse grievances, joined the crowds. One of these groups comprised ethnic Uzbeks living in the southern regions of Kyrgyzstan (particularly Osh); these ethnic Uzbeks had faced growing discrimination under Bakiev. According to Vicken Cheterian, the mobilization of these Uzbeks “broke the modus vivendi that had developed after the violent inter-ethnic clashes of June 1990... The clashes in southern Kyrgyzstan transformed two decades of coexistence between the communities [of Uzbeks and Kyrgyz] into open ethnic violence.”⁶⁰

On the 10th of June, a fight between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in Osh evolved and spread into anti-Uzbek pogroms lasting four days. Nearly 500 people died as a result of the violence, mostly ethnic Uzbeks, and between 80,000 and 100,000 more were displaced, fleeing as refugees across the border to Uzbekistan. The president of the Interim Government, Roza Otunbaeva, was initially reluctant to sanction an international investigation, and since this ethnic violence in June 2010, “Kyrgyzstan has found itself increasingly at odds with international norms of successful statehood.”⁶¹ Clearly, the legacy of the “democratic” Tulip Revolution did not result in decreased corruption and increased democracy, as Bakiev promised. Instead, corruption flourished greater than ever, and deeply rooted ethnic tensions rumbled just beneath the country’s democratic

⁶⁰ Vicken. Cheterian, “Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia’s Island of Instability,” *Survival* 52 (2010), 22.

⁶¹ Cai Wilkinson, “Imagining Kyrgyzstan’s Nationhood and Statehood: Reactions to the 2010 Osh Violence,” *Nationalities Papers* 43 (2015), 422.

façade. Examining the Tulip Revolution in context, using the theories of Samuel Huntington, Theda Skocpol, and Stephen Sanderson, proves just how revolutionary the event was, or in this case, was not.

In Theoretical Context: Huntington and the “Values and Myths of a Society”

In 1968, Samuel P. Huntington published *Political Order in Changing Societies*, in which he made several assertions about revolution that diverged from earlier theory—and distinctions that later scholars of revolution did not necessarily agree with. Huntington argued that revolution is strictly a product of modernity, a rare and temporally bounded phenomenon with its earliest foundations in the English Revolution in the 17th century and in the French Revolution.⁶² Although not all facets of Huntington’s revolutionary theory are applicable to the subject of the Tulip Revolution, it is still useful to apply his specific definition of revolution, and provide a change-over-time analysis comparing revolutionary theory, from 1968 forward, to the event.

Huntington provides a very precise definition of revolution, stating that it is a “rapid, fundamental, and violent domestic change in the dominant values and myths of a society, in its political institutions, social structure, leadership, and government activity and policies.”⁶³ He therefore distinguishes revolutions from various other transformative phenomena, such as insurrections, rebellions, revolts, coups, etc. The two other salient definitions of social movements Huntington provides are coups d’état and rebellions/insurrections. He defines a coup d’état as an event that “changes only leadership and perhaps policies,” and a rebellion or

⁶² Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, 265.

⁶³ Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, 264.

insurrection as an event that “may change policies, leadership, and political institutions, but not social structure and values.”⁶⁴

Huntington outlines numerous and specific requirements for revolutions, and states very clearly that, “Revolutions are rare. Most societies have never experienced revolutions.”⁶⁵ It is apparent that, according to his strict definition, the Tulip Revolution does not, in fact, constitute a true revolution, although it did include some of the factors he identifies as necessary; it was a rapid domestic change in leadership, and it initially marked a change in government activity and policies. In terms of fundamental changes to the “dominant values and myths” of Kyrgyz society or its political institutions and social structure, however, none of these changes occurred in 2005. After the Tulip Revolution, Kyrgyzstan retained the basic political structure and institutions, and although there was a change in leadership in terms of the president, many former members of the political structure retained their positions. Many of these figures had defected to the opposition—in response to Akaev’s increasingly corrupt policies—before the revolution, and thus were both part of the old political regime and the new. In terms of the social structure or the “dominant myths” of Kyrgyz society, the basic class structure and ethnic divisions were unaltered by the Tulip Revolution.

Even in terms of political change, Huntington states that, “The political essence of revolution is the rapid expansion of political consciousness and the rapid mobilization of new groups into politics at a speed which makes it impossible for existing political institutions to assimilate them.”⁶⁶ Huntington goes on to write that a “complete revolution... involves a second phase: the creation and institutionalization of a new political order.” Again, when looking at the

⁶⁴ Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, 264.

⁶⁵ Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, 264.

⁶⁶ Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, 266.

Tulip Revolution through this lens there are several pieces of Huntington's definition that are clearly absent. The Tulip Revolution was carried through in part by the mobilization of the lower classes, but they did not mobilize into politics as Huntington specifies. The political figures—such as Bakiev—who wound up in power after the revolution were already part of the pre-Revolution political consciousness, and simply transferred power to themselves across the existing political structure.

If anything, the Tulip Revolution adheres more closely to Huntington's definition of a coup d'état or rebellion, rather than a full-fledged revolution. Huntington states that a coup d'état “changes only leadership and perhaps policies; a rebellion or insurrection may change policies, leadership, and political institutions, but not social structures and values.”⁶⁷ The Tulip Revolution caused a change in leadership, and at least initially a change in policies, in attempting to mitigate levels of corruption. It also had some effect on political institutions in the direct aftermath of the Tulip Revolution, attempting to make the government more democratic and even promising reforms of the parliamentary system. These reforms of the political institutions, however, never really came to fruition. As previously noted, the Tulip Revolution certainly had almost no effect on social structures or values. If anything, were Huntington to classify the Tulip Revolution himself, he would most likely label it a coup d'état. As he wrote in his book, “What is here called simply a ‘revolution’ is what others have called great revolutions, grand revolutions, or social revolutions.”⁶⁸ Huntington proposed a very narrow definition of revolution, and the Tulip Revolution simply does not measure up. The question is, are there other, later

⁶⁷ Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, 264.

⁶⁸ Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, 264.

theorists whose definition of revolution might prove better when examining the Tulip Revolution?

In Theoretical Context: Skocpol and Social Revolutions

In 1979, sociologist and political scientist Theda Skocpol, one of the “foremost students of revolution today” formulated a “widely popular definition [of revolution] that draws a distinction between social revolutions, political revolutions, and rebellions.”⁶⁹ Skocpol is seen as one of the founders of third generation revolutionary theory, which focuses on a more structural analysis than the earlier theories about the natural history of revolution, psychological theories of revolution, or system-disequilibrium theories of revolution. In her landmark *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*, Skocpol defines social revolutions as “rapid, basic transformations of a society’s state and class structures...accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below.”⁷⁰ Skocpol writes that social revolutions are distinct from other types of revolution and conflict by the “combination of two coincidences: the coincidence of societal structural change with class upheaval, and the coincidence of political with social transformation.”⁷¹ Therefore, social revolutions are distinguished from political revolutions, which Skocpol states, “transform state structures but not social structures... they are not necessarily accomplished by class conflict.”⁷²

According to Skocpol’s theory, the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan was not a social revolution. Although there was some degree of class-based revolt—more so in Kyrgyzstan than in any other Color Revolution—the revolution was not by any means “carried through” by these

⁶⁹ Stephen K. Sanderson, *Revolutions: A Worldwide Introduction to Social and Political Contention* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2010), 2.

⁷⁰ Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, 4.

⁷¹ Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, 4.

⁷² Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, 4.

lower classes. Networks of economic and political elites, disillusioned with Akaev's presidency and their lack of political wherewithal, were the driving force of the Tulip Revolution. Another reason that the Tulip Revolution was by no means a social revolution lies in the fact that social structures in place before the Tulip Revolution remained almost entirely unchanged in its aftermath. Before the revolution, in the 1990s and early 2000s, "a class of political and economic elites emerged that was separate from the regime [and] new linkages developed between the powerful and the powerless."⁷³ This elite class, and the clientelist relationships between it and the lower, rural class, remained in place post-2005. The desperate economic situation of the rural peasant classes—which engendered much of the outrage and mobilization during the revolution—persisted, and class mobility was unaffected.

Though certainly not a social revolution, thanks to the lack of basic transformations of Kyrgyzstan's social and class structures, according to Skocpol's definition neither was the Tulip Revolution truly a political revolution. In order to constitute a political revolution, the Tulip Revolution still had to "transform state structures," even if social structures were unaffected.⁷⁴ In the case of Kyrgyzstan, the economic structures remained in place, and Bakiev did little to restructure the existing government institutions, or even revise pre-revolution political policies. In terms of political transformation, even though the Tulip Revolution was initially lauded as a democratic revolution, this was clearly not the case.

More than anything the Tulip Revolution constituted a consolidation of existing political institutions, and a transfer of power from one political actor to another. The basic structure of the government remained unaltered in the transition from the old Soviet model to Akaev to Bakiev,

⁷³ Radnitz, *Weapons of the Wealthy*, 77.

⁷⁴ Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, 4.

whose regimes were similar even to the point of how they were eventually dismantled—with civil disobedience in 2005 and later 2010. According to Lincoln A. Mitchell, “Any change to the Kyrgyz regime between the late Akaev period and the post-Tulip Revolution period is minor compared to the consistently repressive and semi-authoritarian nature of the regime” under both Akaev and Bakiev.⁷⁵ Based on Skocpol’s theoretical framework, it is clear that—as with Huntington’s theory before her—the Tulip Revolution should not be considered a true revolution, either social or political.

In Theoretical Context: Sanderson & Post-Communist, Top-Down Revolution

Huntington and Skocpol’s definitions of revolution, proposed in 1968 and 1979 respectively, are sometimes difficult to apply to a revolution that occurred in 2005. One must also acknowledge that, although these definitions may conform to the so-called “great revolutions,”—social revolutions in countries such as Russia or France—they may not lend themselves as readily to modern revolutions, such as the post-Communist “Color Revolution” in Kyrgyzstan. Yet political scientist Stephen K. Sanderson examined some case studies very similar to the Color Revolutions in his 2005 book *Revolutions: A Worldwide Introduction to Social and Political Contention*, and the Tulip Revolution still does not fit the bill. Sanderson does not open his own examination of revolution by providing a neat, explicit definition of revolution as do Huntington and Skocpol. In fact, he states, “In this book I neither formulate nor rely on any single definition of revolution conceived as superior to all others... Although these theorists are broadly addressing the same basic issue, there are sufficient differences in the focus of each to warrant maintaining conceptual flexibility.”⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Mitchell, *Color Revolutions*, 190.

⁷⁶ Sanderson, *Revolutions*, 3.

Sanderson instead gives a breakdown of revolutionary theories provided by other scholars before him—including Huntington and Skocpol—critiquing them and uses them to examine new and varied case studies of revolution. One such case study—or grouping of case studies—Sanderson addresses is the post-Communist revolutions of 1989 and 1991. About the post-socialist or post-Communist societies in which these revolutions occurred, Sanderson writes that they were “in a state of transition from the old state socialist economies and Leninist governments to essentially capitalist societies with more open or democratic modes of government.”⁷⁷ Sanderson focuses on the fact that the Communist revolutions were primarily revolutions from above, as were the Color Revolutions in the Balkans and Central Asia. Sanderson states that, although these revolutions diverged in several key ways from earlier “great revolutions,” it is “still valid to call these events social revolutions... There were both major transfers of state power and major transformations of the social and economic structure... remnants of the old state socialism remain, but capitalism has largely replaced it.”⁷⁸

Although Sanderson does not make a case study specifically of Kyrgyzstan and the other Color Revolutions, and though he never provides his own specific definition of revolution, it is possible to extrapolate from his analysis of the 1989 Communist revolutions an idea of how he might classify the Tulip Revolution. According to the reasons he gives for classifying the Communist 1989 revolutions revolutionary, it becomes clear that, even though his theories might be more applicable to a Color Revolution than those of Huntington or Skocpol, the Tulip Revolution still does measure up to Sanderson’s idea of what makes an event revolutionary.

⁷⁷ Sanderson, *Revolutions*, 107.

⁷⁸ Sanderson, *Revolutions*, 136.

Sanderson writes that, even though the Communist revolutions occurred in countries in a state of post-communist transition, they were still true revolutions because there were “major transfers of state power and major transformations of the social and economic structure.”⁷⁹ Even though these were clearly top-down revolutions carried out by political elites, they were still social revolutions because of these structural changes. One could make a case that Kyrgyzstan was still in a state of post-communist transition itself at the time of the Tulip Revolution. Although it had been nearly 15 years since the country gained independence, the Communist leader, Akaev, was still in power, as he had been before 1991.

Yet even if Kyrgyzstan was in post-Communist transition, as were the countries Sanderson studied, the Tulip Revolution did not cause major transfers of state power and major transformations of the social and economic structure. The transfer of power from Akaev to Bakiev was relatively simple, as Bakiev was already a political figure in Kyrgyzstan. As previously noted in the examinations of the Tulip Revolution through Huntington and Skocpol’s theories, the Tulip Revolution affected no major changes in the social or economic structures in the country. Sanderson, like Huntington and Skocpol, seems to require at least some of the elements of a social or “great” revolution, and those elements, constituting fundamental structural changes, simply did not happen as a result of the Tulip Revolution.

How Revolutionary Was the Tulip Revolution, Really?

According to Lincoln A. Mitchell, the Color Revolutions were “little more than a footnote to the complex politics of the former Soviet Union. [They] were not the paradigm-shifting events they seemed to be at first.”⁸⁰ Far from revolutionary, the Tulip Revolution was

⁷⁹ Sanderson, *Revolutions*, 136.

⁸⁰ Mitchell, *Color Revolutions*, 2.

instead a speedbump in the larger narrative of the country's post-Soviet transition, and hardly represented a democratic breakthrough. The Tulip Revolution was "little more than a short, chaotic interlude in a broader trend towards greater centralization and authoritarianism in Kyrgyz politics that has been continuing since the mid-1990s."⁸¹ The cyclical pattern of liberalization and repression in Kyrgyzstan's history came full circle after the Tulip Revolution with the 2010 violence. In almost the same pattern, civil unrest and mass protests ousted President Akaev in 2005, and later overthrew his successor Kurmanbek Bakiev in 2010, replacing him with a shaky, pro-Russian interim regime.

The Tulip Revolution earned its name—and its democratic reputation—largely due to Kyrgyzstan's temporal and political proximity to the other Color Revolution countries, but an analysis of the Tulip Revolution using theories by leading scholars clearly shows that the Tulip Revolution does not truly deserve the name. Although Huntington, Skocpol, and Sanderson each defined revolution differently, according to the theories each proposed about revolution the Tulip Revolution lacked requisite elements, particularly fundamental changes to state structures. Rather than a true revolution, the Tulip Revolution was a simple transfer of power, from the regime of one existing political actor to that of another. The underlying political, economic, and social structures of Kyrgyz society did not change, and the democratic promises Bakiev issued in the early years of his presidency never came to pass, proving that the Tulip Revolution wasn't, after all, so revolutionary.

⁸¹ Lewis, "Dynamics of Regime Change," 265.

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