

# Explaining the Color Revolutions

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### **The Criteria of Color Revolutions as Modular Political Phenomena in Post-Communist Countries**

After the breakup of the Soviet Union, post communist countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia had been able to gain their independence. However, the ex-Soviet system still exerted an influence on the political development of these countries. Most of these countries did not fully make the transition to democracy but instead appeared as 'hybrid regimes' which inclines more to autocracy. These countries were referred as 'hybrid regimes' because their political institutions are not in the form of total Western democracy. Although there is parliament and opposition party in these regimes, the institutions of the post-Soviet regimes were dubbed with what is called 'patronal presidentialism', by Henry E.Hale. According to Hale, the definition of the 'patronal presidentialism' can be defined by two key components. Firstly, a directly elected presidency is invested with great formal powers relative to other state organs. Secondly, the president also wields a high degree of informal power based in widespread patron-client relationships at the intersection of the state and economy. In this case, to make it more precise, we can further define the term 'patronal' as the exercise of political authority primarily through selective transfers of resources rather than through formalized institutional practices, idea-based politics or the established rule of law.[1] In short, the transplant of democracy to the post-Soviet regimes is not successful as because president holds too much power within or outside the political institution.

However various political upheavals that have that happened following allegations of electoral fraud in national elections since 2000 seem to indicate democratic breakthroughs. Scholars witnessed a 'bulldozer revolution' in Serbia in 2000, a 'rose revolution' in Georgia in 2003, an 'orange revolution' in Ukraine in December 2004 and then a 'tulip' revolution in Kyrgyzstan in early 2005. Besides these four revolutions, such political upheavals also impacted other post-Soviet countries with related and connected anti-regime's reactions and movements. Although only the Orange color revolutions actually had a color as it symbolize this term, 'color revolution' has become a popular term for referring to the four revolutions that occurred among regional specialist and local politicians. The word 'revolution' means the term does not include the consequences after the political upheaval, but to identify that the anti-regime reactions and movements were successful in overthrowing the current regime. But it is also important to note that revolutions have long been known to be modular in nature. The term 'modular' in this article is taken according to Tarrow's definition which is to describe the spread of collective action across groups.[2] Older generations of historians have also treated revolutions as inter-related phenomena, not as a collection of unrelated cases.[3] Therefore, the use of color revolution among scholars indicates that they have attempted to explain the revolutions that happened in post-Soviet Eurasia as political phenomena that will spread across countries or regions. This is because since the 1980s there has been a general recognition that democratization has happened in waves affecting a particular world region, and scholars such as Samuel Huntington has demonstrated the effects of one case on another, therefore, treating these political overthrown as democratic breakthroughs, scholars began to speculate about a fourth waves of democratization.

Followed by the succession of several color revolutions, the popular term has been designed specifically to draw a parallel case. The United States President George W.Bush has been trying to transplant the model of color revolution in post-Soviet countries to transform Iraq, as he used the term 'Purple Revolution' to describe the coming of democracy to Iraq after the 2005 Iraqi legislative election and was claimed by commentators that he intentionally used the term to draw a parallel with the Rose and Orange revolutions. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to

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study the modular political phenomena of the anti-regime force that impacted the political stability in post Soviet States, especially in Central Asia. The Central Asia referred in this article consists of five former Soviet Republics: Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. It is found that all these countries except Turkmenistan had elections as the same period as Kyrgyzstan (all within 2005); however there is only a Tulip revolution in Kyrgyzstan. By drawing examples from the Rose, Orange and Tulip revolution, the first section of the article will try to uncover and explain the four criteria that are needed for a color revolution to occur. The second part of the paper will then give brief descriptions about what has happened in other Central Asia countries excluded Kyrgyzstan during 2005 and using the four criteria as a measurement tool, the paper will also compare the situation of these countries with the situation in Kyrgyzstan. Hopefully can provide a plausible explanation as to why color revolution did not happens in these countries and the criteria for color revolution as modular political phenomena.

These regimes all have similar historical experiences as they are all located in an area that is prone to wars and intrusion. The ruling of the Soviet Union on these regimes has also leads to rapid inter-regional migration from the Russian Federation and other Soviet members. The combination of these factors then brought to ethnic diversity in post-Soviet regimes, especially Central Asia. For example, in Kazakhstan there are many other races such as Russian, Ukrainian, Uzbeks, German and Tatars besides the Kazakhs. Moreover, these different races constituted of a large proportion of the population in Kazakhstan. Besides, due to the failure of planned economy and geographical factors, the economic developments in the post-Soviet regions are mostly slow and under-developed. The condition in those regions is even more severe when there is political corruption among the government officials. For example, a disillusioned former leader of the party, Erkin Kyrgyzstan estimated that approximately two-thirds of the new assembly consisted of corrupt officials and businessmen.[4] Furthermore, numerous post-Soviet regimes have experienced only a partial liberalization of electoral rules and conditions; a handful such as Turkmenistan has experienced none at all. Popular pressure for democratization in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan was relatively weak as established elites managed to exert a large measure of influence over the quasi-competitive elections.[5] Such sense of interconnectedness across case produced by common institutional characteristics, histories, cultural affinity or modes of domination made color revolution as modular phenomena possible. However, although these post-Soviet regimes mostly faced similar problems, from the study of cases of the color revolution, we can still derive variables that are able to manipulate whether color revolution will occur or not.

Derived from cases of color revolution it is found that the order for color revolution to occur or be able succeed, there are four criteria which must be satisfied. Firstly, their incumbent leader of the regimes must be very unpopular and face the so-called 'lame-duck syndrome'. Secondly, the anti-regimes forces are enforced by mass-media and foreign influences. Thirdly, the revolution must not be ideological; it must be for the sake of better national integration, freedom, democracy and economic development. Most importantly, the demand for such improvement should be massive among the population. Lastly, the anti-regime forces should also be motivated by the grievances on the corrupted government which is supported by a foreign state which the people do not desire. The anti-regime forces that happened in post-Soviet countries can only be transformed into a successful color revolution if these criteria are fulfilled.

As mentioned above, the first criteria for color revolution to occur is the incumbent leader of the regime must be very unpopular and face the so-called lame-duck syndrome. The lame-duck syndrome, according to Hale, refers to the elite defection related to their expectation about the future. There will be an elite defection from the incumbent president's team when elites believe the incumbent may leave the office. The key factors inducing the lame-duck syndrome include presidential term limits and public opinion.[6] In the first paragraph, it is mentioned that political institutions in post-Soviet regimes are characterized by 'patronal presidentialism' where the president holds tremendous power. Therefore it is logical to think that for a revolution to happen in such regime, the elite must believe that the incumbent will soon lose its power and they no longer want the incumbent to remain in power so that they have the courage for defection. In the case of Ukraine, before the Orange revolution, the incumbent president, Kuchma repeatedly stated that he would not seek re-election and in fact he did not run on the 2005 presidential election. Additionally, when Kuchma entered his constitutionally final second term, his opponents were emboldened by a subsequent major drop in his popularity. All these indicate that there will be a case of lame-duck syndrome and if the incumbent is experiencing low popularity. Similar logic happened in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan. In Georgia, one of the reasons that the opposition leader, Mikheil Saakashvili won during the Rose revolution was because the

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unpopular incumbent president Eduard Shevardnadze announced in April 2002, that he would abide by the constitution's two-term limit and leave office by 2005.[7] This onset of lame-duck syndrome has led many formerly pro-Shevardnadze elites to back Saakashvili. The tulip revolution also followed a similar pattern. The incumbent president, Askar Akaev declared that he would not attempt to amend the constitution that enabled him to seek a third term in the anticipated October 2000 presidential election. This led to various elites in Kyrgyzstan going into the opposition camp, including the police, those in charge of mass media and members of the Supreme Court.[8] It is important to note that Akaev was unpopular in his country because of autocracy and corruption from his government.[9]

The second criteria is that the anti-regime forces are enforced by mass-media and foreign influences. This and the next paragraph will mainly focus on the Orange revolution; although it will still bring out some examples from the Rose revolution, to illustrate how foreign influences such as NGOs or foreign ambassador and the mass media play an important role in shaping the success of color revolution. Starting with the Orange revolution, it is found that civil society flourished in the Ukrainian society and also Kyrgyzstan. This provided a good opportunity for donor support from the United States, European governments, the National Endowment for Democracy and private philanthropists such as George Soros.

In fact, the anti-regime movement in Ukraine was funded and organized by the US government, according to The Guardian. They claimed that The Democratic Party's National Democratic Institute, the Republic party's International Republican Institute, the US state department and the USAid are the main agencies involved in grassroots campaigns launched by the young activists in Ukraine as well as the Freedom House NGO and billionaire George Soros's open society institute.[10] Officially, the US government spent \$14 million in organizing and funding the operation of anti-regime movements.[11] In addition, Freedom House and the Democratic Party's NDI helped fund and organize the 'largest civil regional monitoring effort' in Ukraine where they sent in 1,000 trained observers and organized exit polls. It is very important in organizing the exit polls because they seize the initiative in the propaganda battle with the regime and put the onus on the authorities to respond. While in Georgia, the US ambassador during the Rose revolution played an important role in coaching Mikheil Saakashvili in how to bring down Eduard Shevardnadze. Besides foreign influences, the mass media also plays an important role to further stimulate anti-regime forces. During the Orange revolution, despite the government's nearly total control of political content on national television they also put pressure on independent media, some objective newspapers and local radio stations continued to function. More over, journalists also bristling at government control and censorship, launched strikes and public protests demanding the right to tell voters the truth in the days before the Orange revolution.[12]

The third criterion will be to be discussed in this paragraph. It will mention that that the revolution must not be ideological; it is much for the sake of better national integration, freedom, democracy and economic development and it must also be massive. Looking at the rose revolution, the incumbent president Eduard Shevardnadze and his government are well known for corruption. The political and socio-economic crisis in Georgia was also close to reaching its peak before election. Similar pattern happened to the Orange revolution as well, the November presidential election was accused of massive corruption and electoral fraud by the OSCE. Moreover, corruption has become rampant in Ukraine after Kuchma's election as president in 1994. The nomination of Yushchenko provides an opportunity of improvement as he has a strong capability in improving the country's economy. For example, he has successfully helped the country's economy to grow by nearly 6 percent at his first year as prime minister in 2000. In 2001, the country's annual growth rate even rose to 9.2 percent.[13] Thus, after the sitting as Prime Minister, Viktor Yanukovich was accused to cheat in the election and there was a nationwide civil disobedience and demonstrations. While throughout the mid-1990s, Kyrgyzstan was the poorest republic of Central Asia, it is logical to think that people would demand for improvement for the political system and economy. In addition, the established education system in Kyrgyzstan has produced many undergraduates in Kyrgyzstan 200,000 out of a population of five million. However, many of them are unemployed due to the country's bad economic performance. Therefore, we could see that there are high proportions of students in the Tulip Revolution.

The last criterion mentioned in this article is that the anti-regime forces are also motivated by the grievances on the corrupted government which is supported by a foreign state that the people do not desire. In this case, the foreign state which people do not desire refers to the Russian Federation. From the three color revolutions, we can see that

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the overthrown leaders such as Eduard Shevardnadze, Yanukovych and Akaev are all Russian-supported leaders. A possible explanation as to why people do not demand for Russian supported leaders, especially post-Soviet regimes in Eastern Europe, is mainly due to the West vs. East problem in Europe. People in Eastern Europe started to prefer leaders that lent to the West as they fear that their countries' current leadership could lead the country to a path of permanent exclusion from 'Europe' in general and European institutions such as the European Union. During the Rose revolution, Saakashvili described the Rose revolution as European-type velvet revolution while in Ukraine Yushchenko during his inaugural speech said that he could lead the country 'into the mainstream Europe'.<sup>[14]</sup> This use of language by opposition leaders during the color revolutions from these examples shows that they are pro-Western instead of pro-Russia to the East. Additionally, before the Ukraine residential election, a Russian political consultant Vyacheslav Nikonov commented that if Yushchenko won the presidential election it meant that Ukraine will become a NATO member in a couple of years. But if under Yanukovych's leadership, Ukraine will be part of the common economic space that is being created by Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan.<sup>[15]</sup> Besides the East and West framework, people rid themselves from the Russian influence because they have been too involved in their domestic politics. In Georgia, the Russian influence has led to separatism in that particular country. Three separate regimes (Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Ajara) that existed at the same period as that is in this particular country before the color revolution is a proof of this.<sup>[16]</sup>

Looking at the timeline and the way how each color revolution happened, we can see that color revolution could be modular phenomena as the previous successful example was contagious. Furthermore, the color revolutionary wave has even impacted the political institutions of many countries in Central Asia. However, although there is political impact the Central Asia, scholars are still wondering why did color revolution only happens and successful in Kyrgyzstan but not other countries in Central Asia. From the result of Kazakhstan election (Kazakhstan was the last country to have a presidential election in 2005) we can see that the impact becomes weaker as time passes by. Therefore, this section will be mainly describing how the color revolutionary waves have impacted countries in Central Asia during 2005 and assess why color revolutions did not happen in those countries.

To begin with, the situation in Uzbekistan will be first discussed. In Uzbekistan, a few months after the Tulip revolution, the Andijan crisis (also known as Andijan Massacre) happened during May, 2005. It started with violent riots among local populace in Andijan when 23 local businessmen were arrested and charged with 'extremism, fundamentalism and separatism'. The demonstrators then attacked a prison and released all the prisoners. On May 13, the Uzbek government violently dispersed thousands of demonstrators, killing hundreds and wounding more. This incident caused at least 500 people to flee from Uzbekistan to the neighboring Kyrgyzstan. This incident, however, did not bring further political implications in Uzbekistan. One of the reasons is because the Uzbeks government was able to ban foreign influence. After NGOs criticized the government's violent crackdown, NGOs based in the Western world had their operations in Uzbekistan shutdown The Winrock International which gave expertise to Uzbeks farmers was ordered to leave Uzbekistan by an Uzbeks court as it had "denigrated national values. Other foundations or organizations such as Eurasia Foundation, Radio Free Europe and Freedom House were also ordered or pressured to leave the particular country.<sup>[17]</sup> Thus, this incident did not further evolve to another color revolution in Central Asia because it has not fulfilled the second criteria that all color revolutions countries had, that is anti-regimes forces are enforced by mass-media and foreign influences. As we can see, the government immediately cut off influence from foreign civil society after the Andijan incident. Therefore, it is impossible for mass-media and foreign influences to further channel the anti-regime forces.

The next country to be discussed is Tajikistan who was also having a parliamentary election as Kyrgyzstan in between February 27 till March 13, 2005. Due to the impact of color revolution, before the election, the opposition party leader claim that hope to see the voluntary resignation from the incumbent Tajikistan president, Rahmonov, or otherwise they would a plan a 'violet revolution' in the spring.<sup>[18]</sup> But as the election result came out, it ended up with The People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan, headed by the president Emomali Rahmonov who won the majority seats in Parliament. In this case, the reason that color revolution did not take place in Tajikistan is because as the third criterion mentioned there is no massive need of better national integration, freedom, democracy and economic development. The country suffered from a devastating civil war which lasted from 1992 to 1997. Since the end of the war, newly-established political stability and foreign aid have allowed the country's economy to grow. After the war, people are psychologically fearful of change and the current situation does not need to change. Therefore, no

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massive response and no demand for improvement are the main reasons why color revolution does not occur in Tajikistan. On the other hand, the color revolution did not manage to bring any impacts to Turkmenistan due the political structure of the country. It is a single-party country with a strong leader, Saparmurat Niyazov President for Life in Turkmenistan. There is no lame-duck syndrome in that particular country and Niyazov is expected to rule till his death. Additionally, human rights and civil society are severely restricted in that particular country. There is no political opposition allowed and government treatment of religious activity ranges from tightly restricted to outright bans and no free press. The situation in Turkmenistan does not allow the first and second criteria to be met, so color revolution did not happen in Turkmenistan.

Kazakhstan was the last Central Asian country to have election in 2005. International scholars speculated as to whether it would be the next country to have color revolution as it is located next to Kyrgyzstan. However, the President, Nazarbaev won the election. There are three reasons why color revolution did not occur in Kazakhstan. Firstly, the socio-economic factor is always remaining stable. Its economy is always developing since Nazarbaev took charge of that particular country. Since 2000, the country's GDP growth has always continued to be more than 9 percent and it is now classified as an upper-middle income country by The World Bank.[19] There is no need for its people to demand for improvement on its political and financial institutions. Secondly, there is no lame-duck syndrome in Kazakhstan as Nazarbaev did not claim that he stepping down from his political career. He has many supporters and people expect him to continue to lead the country. Lastly, measures were taken by Nazarbaev to prevent influence from foreign civil society and mass media. In July 14, 2005, Nazarbaev signed a legislation amendment that demands foreigners to be responsible for funding or helping a particular political candidate. Once found that they are involved in such activities, they will be financially punished and expelled from the country. In addition, foreigners are not allowed to work for any Kazakhs newspaper or television channel.

In conclusion, the color revolution can only be modular phenomena if all the four criteria mentioned are fulfilled. This is because it is found that the three color revolutions shared the same characteristics of these four criteria. From the case of all Central Asia countries except Kyrgyzstan, it is found that even there are anti-regime forces color revolution did not occur in those countries as not all of the four criteria are fulfilled. Although there might be other variables that are also able to determine the color revolution, these four criteria can still be the fundamental conditions for color revolution to occur.

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