

In name only? The effect of color revolutions on press freedom in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan

Abstract: *Regime change through popular uprising may be seen as a triumph of democracy in the short run, but does it always lead to political and social transformation? This study examined press freedom as a democracy indicator in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan six months before and after the “color revolutions” in these countries. A content analysis of 614 political news articles revealed that limited changes occurred in Kyrgyzstan’s press freedom, while no statistically significant changes were observed in Georgia. The findings were then compared with external press freedom ratings for both countries. The results suggest that “color revolutions” have not led to immediate structural changes and may be “revolutions” in name only.*

Key words: *color revolutions, democracy, press freedom, content analysis*

The concepts of democracy and press freedom often go hand in hand. Thomas Jefferson famously wrote: “...were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter.”¹ More recently, Hudock argued: “Access to information is essential to the health of democracy. First, it ensures that citizens make responsible, informed choices rather than acting out of ignorance or misinformation. Second, information serves as a “checking function” by ensuring that elected representatives uphold their oaths of office and carry out the wishes of those who elected them.”²

¹ “Thomas Jefferson to Edward Carrington, 16 January 1787,” in *The papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Julian P. Boyd et al. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1950), 11: 48-49, http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/amendI_speechs8.html.

² Ann Hudock, *The Role of Media in Democracy: A Strategic Approach*, Technical Publication Series (Washington, DC: USAID/Office of Democracy and Governance, 1999), p. 1, http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/democracy_and_governance/publications/pdfs/pnace630.pdf (accessed September 22, 2011).

The so-called “color revolutions” – popular uprisings that led to non-violent toppling of *ancien régime*, particularly in former Soviet countries – present a unique opportunity to study political and social changes that occur when the masses take control from a non-democratic government. As was seen from Serbia in 2000 to, more recently, the Arab Spring of 2011, the likes of the “color revolutions” often lead to euphoria in the short run and may be seen as a triumph of democracy. A look at the Western news coverage immediately following the “revolutions” in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan testifies to this. The *Washington Times*³ called these events “a wave of democratic uprisings” and stated that “the people of Kyrgyzstan have won their freedom.” Even with reservations after the looting that followed the Kyrgyz “revolution,” the *Telegraph*⁴ called it “a famous victory.” Earlier in 2004, the *New York Times*⁵ published Mikhail Saakashvili’s op-ed titled “Georgia’s progress: Fulfilling the promise of the Rose Revolution.” Increasingly more scholars, however, voice pessimism about the actual changes that ensue.⁶

This study examined the characteristics of political news before and after Georgia’s Rose Revolution in 2003 and Kyrgyzstan’s Tulip Revolution in 2005 to understand whether the resulting change of the government affected press freedom, which is one indicator of the democratization level in these two countries. In the 614 political news articles identified for the content analysis, the following aspects of press freedom, as they relate to a democratic society, have been examined: plurality of voices, government transparency, and accountability (e.g., coverage of state-level corruption). The overarching research question guiding this study was: Were there more manifestations of press freedom in political news coverage in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan after the “color revolutions” than before those revolutions? In other words, could one argue that undergoing a “color revolution” enhanced democracy in Georgia or Kyrgyzstan, or both?

³ “Kyrgyzstan’s Tulip Revolution,” *Washington Times*, March 26, 2005, <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2005/mar/26/20050326-103550-7473r/>.

⁴ Richard Spencer, “After a Famous Victory Protesters Put the Tulip Revolution on Hold,” *Telegraph*, March 26, 2005, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/kyrgyzstan/1486506/After-a-famous-victory-protesters-put-the-Tulip-Revolution-on-hold.html>.

⁵ Mikhail Saakashvili, “Georgia’s Progress: Fulfilling the Promise of the Rose Revolution,” *New York Times*, November 27, 2004, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/11/27/opinion/27iht-edsaakash.html>.

⁶ See, for example, Susan Stewart, S. “Democracy Promotion Before and After the ‘Colour revolutions,’” *Democratization* 16, no. 4 (2009): 645-60; Ivan Krastev, “Democracy’s ‘Doubles,’” *Journal of Democracy* 17, no. 2 (2006): 52-62, Charles H. Fairbanks, Jr., “Revolution Reconsidered,” *Journal of Democracy* 18, no. 1 (2007): 42-57.

Democracy and its manifestations, including press freedom, are relatively new phenomena in post-Soviet countries and are still evolving in many regions. The dramatic change following the Soviet Union's collapse left many of the former USSR states with the need to build democratic institutions and civil society from scratch.⁷ Experience has shown that shedding old Soviet and communist standards is difficult, especially for politicians and ruling parties. In examining a similar transformation in the Balkans, Lani and Cupi⁸ noted that Balkan political elites cling to the notion that staying in power requires controlling information; such elites often find a high degree of criticism of their leadership unacceptable. Similarly in terms of press freedom, Price and Krug⁹ pointed out that "very few post-Soviet or transition societies have decided to abolish the pre-existing centralized broadcast institutions."

The early media laws in many of the former Soviet countries either combined the idea of *glasnost* with traditional state control (i.e., journalists enjoyed more freedom reporting some issues and incidents than others) or sought to depoliticize the media (e.g., by discouraging political content via a variety of repression tools)¹⁰. Furthermore, these laws were often vague and, in practice, allowed the government to dictate the nature and amount of news coverage. This effective lack of free press has consistently been one of the forefront criticisms of the degree of democratization in many former Soviet countries.¹¹ As a result, the plurality of voices, a necessary condition for well-functioning Western media, is often an alien concept in post-Soviet press, and coverage of state-level corruption is one of the most dangerous activities a journalist in many former USSR countries can engage in. This study sought to understand whether the indicators of press freedom have

⁷ G. Shabbir Cheema, *Building Democratic Institutions: Governance Reform in Developing Countries* (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2005).

⁸ Remzi Lani and Frrok Cupi, "The Difficult Road to the Independent Media: Is the Post-Communist Transition Over?" *Journal of Southeast European & Black Sea Studies* 2, no. 1 (2002): 75-89.

⁹ Monroe E. Price and Peter Krug, "The Enabling Environment for Free and Independent Media: Contribution to Transparent and Accountable Governance," Occasional Papers Series (Washington, DC: USAID/Office of Democracy and Governance, 2002), p. 8, http://global.asc.upenn.edu/docs/ENABLING_ENV.pdf (accessed September 22, 2011).

¹⁰ See, for example, Andrew K. Milton, "News Media Reform in Eastern Europe: A Cross-National Comparison," in *Post-Communism and the Media in Eastern Europe*, ed. Patrick H. O'Neil (London: Frank Cass, 1997), 7-23; Andrei Richter, "Post-Soviet Perspective on Censorship and Freedom of the Media: An Overview," *The International Communication Gazette* 70, no. 5 (2008): 307-24.

¹¹ See, for example, Freedom House, *Freedom in the world* (New York: Freedom House, 2003).

improved in the aftermath of the popular uprisings of 2003 in Georgia and 2005 in Kyrgyzstan.

The Rose Revolution in Georgia

Georgia declared independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 and elected Zviad Gamsakhurdia as its first president. Soon after, a coup to oust Gamsakhurdia propelled the nation into a civil war, which ended in 1995 with the election of Eduard Shevardnadze. In November 2003, fraudulent parliamentary elections led to the peaceful Rose Revolution spearheaded by the leader of the oppositional National Party, Mikhail Saakashvili, who became Georgia's president in 2004. The media, together with NGOs and student movements, proved to play a vital role in informing and galvanizing the public.¹²

Before the Rose Revolution, Georgia was considered one of the leaders in free media in the former Soviet Union. It created comprehensive laws on freedom of information, removed libel laws from its penal code, and required government officials to prove malicious intent when accusing a journalist of libel under the civil law.¹³ U.S.-based think tank Freedom House noted these aspects of Georgia's press freedom by declaring the country "partly free,"¹⁴ whereas most former Soviet countries were described as "not free."

Despite these positive developments, many Georgian journalists lacked professionalism, and the industry displayed an undeveloped business side.¹⁵ Koplataдзе cited a 2003 study by the Center of Democratic Innovations, which examined Georgian newspapers and found that 38 percent of news stories had problems with sources and accuracy checks, 50 percent mixed fact with opinion, and 20 percent had headlines that did not match content.

Apparently, these problems did not end with the Rose Revolution. Anable¹⁶ reported that Georgian journalists felt they worked in a less free environment; 76 appealed to international organizations with the following statement: "We, journalists working in Georgia, declare that the government tries to intervene in and control our activities; to ban information that is not wanted for them...; prevent us from collecting information and spreading it

¹² David Anable, "The Role of Georgia's Media – and Western Aid – in the Rose Revolution," *Press/Politics* 11, no. 3 (2006): 7-43.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Freedom House, *Freedom in the world* (New York: Freedom House, 2002, 2003).

¹⁵ Baadur Koplataдзе, "Media Coverage of the 2003 Parliamentary Election in the Republic of Georgia" (master's thesis, Louisiana State University, 2004), etd.lsu.edu/docs/available/etd-11082004-135255/unrestricted/Koplataдзе_thesis.pdf.

¹⁶ Anable, "The Role of Georgia's Media."

further; to carry out punitive measures against the media outlets that contain news, analytical shows or talk-show broadcasts that government dislikes.”¹⁷

Furthermore, journalists were reported to practice self-censorship and lack journalistic courage due to the new administration’s strong hold on the media and the hope of the public that the new government would succeed. Koplatadze¹⁸ observed that press freedom decreases when media outlets work in tandem with the government and argued that Georgia again may soon have to defend their freedom from the government once again. One question the present study asked is whether these concerns and fears found evidence in the manner of the news coverage in Georgia following the Rose Revolution of 2003.

The Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan

Having gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Kyrgyzstan quickly became known as the “island of democracy in Central Asia.”¹⁹ The country’s first president, Askar Akayev, carried out a number of reforms, helping the emerging state achieve macroeconomic stability²⁰ and allowing civil society to grow and become active. According to IWPR,²¹ by the mid-1990s, more than 2,000 NGOs were registered in Kyrgyzstan. However, Akayev’s reputation as that of a reformist came into question when he changed the country’s constitution in 1996 to broaden presidential powers. Nepotism and corruption became Kyrgyzstan’s everyday realities; the most vocal opposition figures and journalists faced imprisonment and several newspapers were closed.²² In 2001, popular presidential challenger Felix Kulov was sentenced to 10 years in prison on charges of corruption.

¹⁷ “Appeal of Georgian Media Club,” *HumanRights.ge*, July 11, 2005, <http://212.58.116.70:8080/cached.jsp?idx=0&id=1346794>

¹⁸ Koplatadze, “Media Coverage of the 2003 Election.”

¹⁹ David Mikosz, “The Kyrgyz Revolution: Civil Society Only Works When It Is Real,” UNISCI Discussion Papers (Madrid: Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2005), <http://www.ucm.es/info/unisci/Mikosz.pdf>

²⁰ Michael Camdessus, “International Monetary Fund: Challenges Facing the Transition Economies of Central Asia” (conference address at the Challenges to Economies in Transition, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, May 27, 1998), <http://www.imf.org/external/np/speeches/1998/052798.HTM>.

²¹ Institute for War & Peace Reporting, “NGO Sector under Scrutiny,” *IWPR.net*, December 4, 2006, <http://iwpr.net/report-news/ngo-sector-under-scrutiny> (accessed November 12, 2011).

²² BBC, “Country Profile: Kyrgyzstan,” *BBC Country Profiles*, 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/country_profiles/1296485.stm.

Two rounds of fraudulent²³ parliamentary elections in February-March 2005 were seen as a scene-setter for rigging the presidential election, planned for November that year. It was widely believed that Akayev, who had already stayed in office for 14 years, would try to modify the constitution again to seek another presidential term. This resulted in popular protests throughout the country and widespread demands for Akayev's resignation. On March 24, 2005, an angry crowd took over the Kyrgyz White House, and Akayev fled abroad. Opposition leader and former prime minister Kurmanbek Bakiyev became acting president. Felix Kulov was released from prison and cleared of all charges. On July 10, 2005, Bakiyev won the presidential election by a landslide and Felix Kulov was appointed prime minister. International observers said the poll showed "clear progress" in democratic standards,²⁴ even though the creation of Bakiyev-Kulov tandem effectively precluded any competition in that election.

Before the March revolution, the media in Kyrgyzstan experienced various forms of state control. In the lead-up to the parliamentary elections, broadcast media provided biased coverage of the candidates.²⁵ After the March revolution, initial gains for press freedom started diminishing. President Bakiyev never fulfilled his promise to let the main state-run broadcaster become publicly funded.²⁶ Several media outlets became targets of forcible takeover attempts, and the new prosecutor general, Kambaraly Kongantiyev, accused independent media of "destabilizing the situation in the country."²⁷ The present study examined whether the signs of Kyrgyzstan's rapid backsliding were reflected in the news coverage within the first six months since the "revolution."

²³ The public was largely enraged by the disqualification of several prominent candidates on often dubious grounds. For a more detailed discussion, see Scott Radnitz, "What Really Happened in Kyrgyzstan?" *Journal of Democracy* 17, no. 2 (2006): 132-46.

²⁴ BBC "Country Profile: Kyrgyzstan."

²⁵ Freedom House, *Freedom in the world* (New York: Freedom House, 2006).

²⁶ EurasiaNet, "Kyrgyzstan: Revolution Revisited. Timeline," *EurasiaNet.org*, 2006, <http://www.eurasianet.org/kyrgyzstan/timeline/index.html> (accessed December 12, 2011).

²⁷ Freedom House, 2006.

Political Democracy and Press Freedom

Press freedom is considered one of the markers of democracy²⁸ and a part of a “package deal” that comes with democratization.²⁹ While the relationship between political democracy and press freedom has been amply discussed in the literature, measuring these two concepts empirically often represents a challenge for researchers.³⁰

Bollen³¹ argued that political democracy can be defined as the “extent to which the political power of the elites is minimized and that of nonelites is maximized.” Political power refers to the ability to control the national governing system. Leaders of political parties, members of various branches of the government, local governments, and businesses, among others, constitute the elites. Furthermore, political democracy has two dimensions: political rights (e.g., fairness of elections, the extent of government accountability) and political liberties (e.g., freedom of expression, freedom of association, freedom of the press). While ratings of press freedom may be an appropriate measure of political liberties, Bollen pointed out that this measure is a subjective one and its validity could be challenged.³² For example, ratings such as those of Freedom House have to rely not on objective measures but on secondary sources of information (e.g., surveys). This can skew the findings in that respondents from more open societies may be more likely to report press freedom violations than those from restrictive societies. Furthermore, researchers’ processing of information may be affected by subjectivity and bias. One could argue, therefore, that in analyzing press freedom of a country, one should not rely solely on ratings but should also combine those data with empirical research.

Just as press freedom is one in a set of indicators of democratization level, several dimensions need to be taken into consideration when measuring

²⁸ See, for example, Freedom House, 2003; Walter Lippmann, *Liberty and the News* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Howe, 1920).

²⁹ Colleen Connolly-Ahern and Guy J. Golan, “Press Freedom and Religion: Measuring the Association between Press Freedom and Religious Composition,” *Journal of Media and Religion* 6, no. 1 (2007): 64.

³⁰ Christina Holtz-Bacha, “What Is ‘Good’ Press Freedom? The Difficulty of Measuring Freedom of the Press Worldwide” (paper presented at the annual conference of the International Association for Media and Communication Research, Porto Alegre, Brazil, 2004), http://www.kowi.wiso.uni-erlangen.de/publikationen/docs/good_press_freedom.pdf.

³¹ Kenneth A. Bollen, “Political Democracy: Conceptual and Measurement Traps,” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 25, no. 1 (1990): 9.

³² *Ibid.*, 11.

freedom of the press itself.³³ Kent³⁴ examined variables related to government control of the press as measures of overall press freedom. These included libel laws, subsidies, advertising, and licensing. Other studies also focused on government-based variables, including government ownership, economic pressure by government, political censorship, and restrictions on criticism of government as predictors of overall press freedom.³⁵

Most of these studies, however, examined press freedom in the United States. The difficulty of applying the same notion of press freedom across different countries has been noted.³⁶ Discrepancies often arise even when comparing press freedom in the Western world. The Anglo-Saxon model, for example, advocates for no or minimal state regulation of the media. The Scandinavian countries, on the other hand, tend to receive government subsidies to preserve diversity and prevent monopolies. Yet, as Holtz-Bacha³⁷ pointed out, the Scandinavian countries frequently top international press freedom ratings.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

One way to understand the transition that Georgia and Kyrgyzstan may have experienced as a result of undergoing a “color revolution” is to analyze a specific marker of democratization: the level of press freedom in these two countries. Because the “color revolutions” were widely seen as democratic breakthroughs in the former Soviet Union, it could be expected that more manifestations of press freedom in political news coverage existed in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan after those “revolutions” than before them. This study sought empirical evidence, if any, for this premise. As a broader implication, greater press freedom could point to a higher level of democratization, and this paper sought to understand whether this indicator was present in Georgia or Kyrgyzstan, or both, following the “color revolutions” in these two countries.

To deal with the subjectivity and validity issues described above (cf. Bollen),³⁸ I conducted a content analysis of political news stories to determine

³³ Ralph L. Lowenstein, “Press Freedom as a Barometer of Political Democracy,” in *International and Intercultural Communication*, ed. Heinz-Dietrich Fischer and John C. Merrill (New York: Hastings House, 1970).

³⁴ Kurt E. Kent, “Freedom of the Press: An Empirical Analysis of One Aspect of the Concept,” *Gazette* 18 (1972): 65-75.

³⁵ Connolly-Ahern and Golan, “Press Freedom and Religion.”

³⁶ Holtz-Bacha, “What Is ‘Good’ Press Freedom?”

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Bollen, “Political Democracy.”

whether there were more manifestations of free press after a “revolution” in these nations than before the “revolution.” The findings were then compared with Freedom House’s ratings that Georgia and Kyrgyzstan received before and after the Rose and Tulip revolutions, respectively.

To evaluate press freedom, this study used the measurements of government accountability, government transparency, plurality of voices, and the journalists’ ability to provide critical coverage. Government accountability, government transparency, and plurality of voices were measured by tallying the number of government officials cited, the number of government documents accessible to journalists, and the number of opposition figures voicing their opinions through the media. The journalists’ ability to provide critical coverage was defined in terms of the number of news stories about state-level corruption. The rationale for using these measurements is as follows.

Under authoritarian rule, governments will be more restrictive of information as a way to control the press. As a result, journalists will have limited access to government officials (e.g., press secretaries, spokespersons) and will include fewer different government sources. As governments transition through a democratic revolution, they will become more open to the concept of accountability, and journalists will have greater access to a diversity of officials. Regarding the connection between the type of a regime and journalists’ access to government officials, this paper suggests that:

H1. *After the revolution, the number of government officials sourced in news articles will increase relative to the number before the revolution.* Governments will be more restrictive of information as a way to control the press under authoritarian rule. As a result, journalists will have limited access to government documents and will include fewer document sources. As governments transition through a democratic revolution, they will become more open and transparent, and journalists will have greater access to documents. Hence, this paper suggests that:

H2. *After the revolution, the number of government documents sourced in news articles will increase relative to the number before the revolution.* Authoritarian governments will restrict journalists’ access to opposition groups through intimidation of the groups or tighter control over what news outlets can publish. As governments transition through a democratic revolution, more opposition voices will be given platform to state their views. For this reason, this paper suggests that:

H3. *After the revolution, the number of opposition groups and individuals opposed to the government sourced will increase relative to the number before the revolution.* Authoritarian governments will restrict

journalists' information about government corruption and will limit such news stories. As governments transition through a democratic revolution, news stories about corruption will appear more frequently. Thus, this paper suggests that:

H4. *After the revolution, the number of news articles about corruption will increase relative to the number before the revolution.*

Method

Four coders, two English speakers and two Russian speakers, conducted manual coding of the articles. One Georgian publication, *Civil Georgia Online*, was selected for this study based on online archive availability and its publication in English. A second coder coded about 25 percent of the articles; the Holsti coefficient for intercoder reliability was 91 percent.³⁹ Two Kyrgyz publications, *MSN* and *Vecherniy Bishkek*, were selected because at the time of the Tulip Revolution, they had the largest circulation in the country. *Vecherniy Bishkek* was a state-run newspaper in 2005, whereas *MSN* was a privately owned oppositional publication. Both were published in print and online, and their primary language was Russian. A second coder coded about 25 percent of the articles; the Holsti coefficient for intercoder reliability was 89 percent.

One year's worth of political news articles from Georgia and Kyrgyzstan – six months before and after the “color revolutions” – was coded for the above-stated press freedom indicators. All political news articles (based on section, headline, and lead paragraph) were deemed as qualifying for coding, with the following tallied for quantitative analysis: (a) names/titles of government officials and opposition leaders who appeared as sources in a news story, (b) references to official documents used as sources of information, and (c) reports of state-level corruption. A total of 614 news stories were analyzed for this study. The findings were derived using an independent samples t-test because the articles were separated into two groups – before the revolution and after the revolution – for comparison. Acceptable p value was taken as equal to or lower than 0.05.

³⁹ Statistical information for Georgia was taken from a study by Elena Chadova, Dwayne Mamo, and Morgan Cook, “News in Post-Soviet Emerging Democracies: A Content Analysis of Political News Stories in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan Before and After Their Revolutions” (unpublished manuscript, University of Missouri, 2007).

Findings

Content Analysis

The sample did not provide statistically significant results concerning H1, which stated that after the revolution, the number of government officials sourced in news articles would increase in comparison to the number before the revolution. There was no significant difference ($t = -1.258, p = .209$) in the number of officials sourced before the revolution ($M = .67$) than after the revolution ($M = .71$) for news sources for both countries combined. There was no significant difference ($t = -1.629, p = .104$) in the number of officials sourced before the revolution ($M = .62$) than after the revolution ($M = .71$) for news sources in Georgia only. Likewise, there was no significant difference ($t = -.326, p = .744$) in the number of officials sourced before the revolution ($M = .71$) than after the revolution ($M = .72$) for news sources in Kyrgyzstan.

Regarding H2, which supposed that after the revolution, the number of government documents sourced in news articles would increase in comparison to the number before the revolution, only Kyrgyz newspapers saw an increase in sourcing government documents. There was no significant difference ($t = -1.494, p = .136$) in the number of documents sourced before the revolution ($M = .08$) than after the revolution ($M = .12$) for news sources for both countries combined. There was no significant difference ($t = -.320, p = .750$) in the number of documents sourced before the revolution ($M = .02$) than after the revolution ($M = .03$) for Georgia only. However, there was a significant difference ($t = -2.248, p = .025$) in the number of documents sourced before the revolution ($M = .13$) than after the revolution ($M = .23$) for Kyrgyzstan.

Mixed results were found for H3, which stated that after the revolution, the number of opposition groups and individuals opposed to the government sourced would increase in comparison to the number before the revolution. Interestingly, there was a significant difference ($t = 2.585, p = .010$) in the number of opposition groups or individuals sourced before the revolution ($M = .35$) than after the revolution ($M = .25$) for news sources for both countries combined, with more opposition sources appearing in news stories *before* than after the “color revolutions.” This suggests an inverse relationship to the hypothesized one. It should be noted, however, that this overall result is mainly affected by the case of Georgia. More opposition groups or individuals were sourced in the Georgian publication before the revolution ($M = .40$) than after the revolution ($M = .20; t = .3958, p = .000$). There was no significant difference ($t = -.233, p = .816$) in the number of opposition groups or individuals sourced before the revolution ($M = .30$) than after the revolution ($M = .32$) for news sources in Kyrgyzstan.

The findings did not support H4, which proposed that after the revolution, the number of news articles about corruption would increase relative

to the number before the revolution. There was no significant difference ($t = -.902, p = .368$) in the number of news stories about corruption before the revolution ($M = .21$) than after the revolution ($M = .24$) for local news sources for both countries combined. There was no significant difference ($t = -.018, p = .986$) in the number of news stories about corruption before the revolution ($M = .23$) than after the revolution ($M = .23$) for news sources in Georgia. There was also no significant difference ($t = -1.236, p = .218$) in the number of news stories about corruption before the revolution ($M = .20$) than after the revolution ($M = .26$) for news sources in Kyrgyzstan.

Freedom House Ratings

The findings based on the content analysis were compared with Freedom House reports to see whether the two methods of evaluating press freedom corroborate each other. *The Freedom of the Press 2003* report for Georgia, covering 2002-2003, gave this country a total score of 54 (0 indicating the greatest freedom of the press and 100 indicating the most restrictions on press freedom). Considered “partly free,” Georgia was assigned 18 (30 being the worst score) for legal environment, 21 for political influences (40 being the worst score), and 15 (30 being the worst score) for economic pressures. *The Freedom of the Press 2004* report, covering 2003-2004, including the Rose Revolution, also gave this country a total score of 54. Georgia was assigned 16 (a slight improvement) for legal environment, 23 for political influences (a downward trend), and 15 (no change) for economic pressures. *The Freedom of the Press 2005* report, covering 2004-2005, gave Georgia a total score of 56 (marking a slight deterioration in press freedom). Georgia was assigned 16 (a slight improvement) for legal environment, 26 (a slight deterioration) for political influences, and 16 (a slight deterioration) for economic pressures.

The Freedom of the Press 2005 report for Kyrgyzstan, covering 2004-2005, gave this country a total score of 71. Described as “not free,” Kyrgyzstan was assigned 23 (30 being the worst score) for legal environment, 27 (40 being the worst score) for political influences, and 21 (30 being the worst score) for economic pressures. *The Freedom of the Press 2006* report, covering 2005-2006, including the Tulip Revolution, gave this country a total score of 64 (marking some improvement in press freedom). Kyrgyzstan was assigned 22 (a slight improvement) for legal environment, 22 (a slight improvement) for political influences, and 20 (a slight improvement) for economic pressures. *The Freedom of the Press 2007* report, covering 2006-2007, gave Kyrgyzstan a total score of 67 (marking a slight deterioration in press freedom from the previous year). Kyrgyzstan was assigned 22 (no change) for legal environment, 25 (a slight deterioration) for political influences, and 20 (no change) for economic pressures.

Discussion and Conclusion

The lack of support for most of this paper's hypotheses and the relatively stable ratings of Georgia and Kyrgyzstan by Freedom House suggest little progress in press freedom indicators of these two countries in the aftermath of the "color revolutions."

Interestingly, one statistically significant relationship found (the number of opposition groups or individuals sourced) did not support and instead showed an inverse relationship with hypothesis 3: Combined findings for both countries revealed that more opposition sources appeared in the media before than after the revolution. One possible explanation for this relationship for Georgia is that in the six months before the revolution, the opposition was vocal in an effort to rally public support. Unlike Kyrgyzstan in the respective period, Georgia enjoyed partial press freedom, which provided the opposition with the opportunity to voice their opinions. In the six months after the revolution, the opposition was in power and a new vocal opposition had not yet had time to form. In Kyrgyzstan, however, slightly more opposition figures were sourced after the revolution than before the revolution. A slight improvement in press freedom could be cited as a possible reason. Another explanation could be that Kyrgyzstan's Tulip Revolution did not produce a single candidate to become the country's new president but identified a handful of regional and party leaders who frequently disagreed with each other. They may have resorted to media in their struggle for the top post, and some were dissatisfied with their new positions, which may explain the post-revolution diversity of voices slightly increasing.

Although the results concerning document sourcing did not support hypothesis 2 for both countries combined, they supported this hypothesis for the individual case of Kyrgyzstan. A greater number of government documents were sourced in Kyrgyzstan after the revolution. This result may indicate some improvement in the press freedom in this country. It may also suggest that the quality of journalism and the accountability of journalists improved after the revolution: Before the Tulip Revolution, it was rather common for newspapers to publish governmental press releases as news sources without attribution. The change, therefore, might have been not due to a greater availability of government documents but due to appropriate attribution and the visibility of those documents within articles.

Notably, the diversity of government officials cited in news publications (hypothesis 1) as well as the number of news stories on state-level corruption (hypothesis 4) remained roughly the same before and after the Rose and Tulip revolutions. These results may suggest that press freedom overall was not significantly affected by the "color revolutions" and that governments remained difficult for the media to access. Lack of support for hypothesis 4 may be the

most telling indicator of stagnation in the freedom of the press in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan. In a cross-cultural study by Brunetti and Weder,⁴⁰ greater press freedom was significantly associated with and showed the causal direction to lower corruption. The inability of local newspapers to report cases of corruption in countries widely known for nepotism and disrespect for the rule of law may further perpetuate the vicious circle of the lack of press freedom—higher corruption—greater authoritarianism.

The findings from the content analysis were supported by the remarkably limited changes in press freedom ratings for both countries by Freedom House. Georgia's freedom of the press indicators did not change immediately after the Rose Revolution and even slightly deteriorated the following year. Kyrgyzstan gained in terms of press freedom ratings immediately after the Tulip Revolution but subsequently slipped back to a level only slightly better than before the revolution.

The non-uniform findings for the two countries for hypotheses 2 and 3 show that it may be difficult to generalize post-Soviet nations as to the way their media and governments work. In this study, Kyrgyzstan and Georgia showed some dissimilarities in their development of press freedom, even though they had similar popular uprisings that happened at approximately the same time. Because democratic societies could have different profiles of the political system, civil society, and the media, no specific matrix of press development can be considered essential as a part of the project of democratization.⁴¹ Development of free and independent media can itself take many forms, and freedom and independence can have many gradations.⁴² It is important to remember this when dealing with complex regions such as the former Soviet Union.

There were several limitations that affected this study. Lack of a Georgian speaker in the pilot project limited the choice of Georgian publications to those published in English or Russian. The Russian language is not used as widely in Georgia as it is used in Kyrgyzstan with few news sources published in Russian; hence, an English-language publication was chosen for analysis. Related to this is the issue of the sample size. A larger sample could have yielded stronger or clearer results. This limitation was addressed by the comparison of the findings to the press freedom ratings of Freedom House.

⁴⁰ Aymo Brunetti and Beatrice Weder, "A Free Press Is Bad News for Corruption," *Journal of Public Economics* 87 (2003): 1801-24.

⁴¹ Adrian Karatnycky, "Nations in Transit: Emerging Dynamics of Change" (New York: Freedom House, 2001), <http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/NISPAcee/UNPAN008081.pdf>.

⁴² Price and Krug, "The Enabling Environment," 3.

The findings and the ratings did not contradict each other; therefore, a larger sample size was not sought.

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, future research should take into account differences between individual post-Soviet countries whenever generalizations are to be made. While the USSR may have been seen as one centralized block of land in the past, each of the former Soviet republics has been and is a complex microcosm of its own. Future studies may focus on specific changes, or lack thereof, in media laws, access to documents and human sources, and restrictions on reporting state-level corruption in post-Soviet countries today. Inclusion of another post-Soviet country to undergo a “color revolution,” Ukraine, could provide a more complete picture of the revolution wave and its effects on political democracy. What is clear, however, is that the “color revolutions” in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan did not improve these countries’ press freedom, which may raise doubts regarding the democratic nature of the regimes that emerged in these two countries.⁴³ This, in turn, may imply that the “color revolutions” did not bring about a genuine regime change and were “revolutions” in name only.

⁴³ I would like to thank two anonymous reviewers for helping me to clarify this point.

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Резиме

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**Само по имену? Утицај обојених револуција
на слободу штампе у Грузији и Киргизији**

Кључне речи: *обојене револуције, демократија, слобода
штампе, анализа садржаја*

Промена режима путем народног устанка може се краткорочно сматрати победом демократије, али да ли она увек води политичком и друштвеном преображају? Ово истраживање испитује слободу штампе као показатељ демократије у Грузији и Киргизији шест месеци пре и после „обојених револуција” у овим државама. Анализа садржаја 614 новинских политичких чланака открива да се догодила само ограничена промена у погледу слободе штампе у Киргизији, док није било статистички значајних промена те врсте у Грузији. Налази су упоређени са спољним рејтинзима слободе штампе за обе државе. Резултати указују на то да „обојене револуције” нису довеле до непосредних и тренутних структуралних промена у друштву, те да се могу сматрати револуцијама само по имену.