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**NAVAL
POSTGRADUATE
SCHOOL**

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**PEASANT PROTEST IN KYRGYZSTAN: STANDING UP
NEXT TO A MOUNTAIN**

by

Colin W. Lober

June 2007

Thesis Co-Advisors:

Anne Marie Baylouny

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**PEASANT PROTEST IN KYRGYZSTAN:
STANDING UP NEXT TO A MOUNTAIN**

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Civilian, Department of the Navy
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES
(REGIONAL STUDIES)**

from the

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to explain peasant protest in Kyrgyzstan in both the Akaev era and the post-Akaev era through an analysis of five case studies spanning both periods. This thesis finds that during the Akaev era, successful mobilization occurred in the rural areas, when protestors were able to project their agendas and anger beyond the local arena. By framing the original issue of grievance as an issue of national concern, and employing aggressive methods of redress, such as road blockades and occupation of public space, Akaev-era protestors met with success on two of three occasions. The post-Akaev era has been marked by a transition to urban-based protests, which has reduced the methods of redress available to protestors and elicited mixed results. Throughout the cases studied, the motivations of the peasant protestors is best explained by a loss-aversion theory of human behavior, which stipulates that actors will accept high risks of action when they perceive that they have lost something previously attained. While peasants are traditionally thought of as conservative and risk-averse, the Kyrgyzstani peasantry has displayed a willingness not just to initiate protest, but to sustain protest until such a time as such losses have been regained.

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Listen to Mustn'ts, child, listen to the Don'ts.

Listen to the Shouldn'ts, the Impossibles, the Won'ts.

Listen to the Never Haves, then listen close to me.

Anything can happen, child, Anything can be.

— Shel Silverstein

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I. INTRODUCTION

What happened yesterday, named the revolution of tulips or narcissuses is a real people's revolution. People that entered the White House were not led by the opposition leaders. The situation only developed that way. As it was a people's revolution, now policies should be implemented in the interest of the people of Kyrgyzstan.

— Bishkek Elnura¹

A. BACKGROUND

Since President Askar Akaev fled Kyrgyzstan on 24 March 2005 in the face of nationwide protests surrounding the parliamentary elections of that February, the country has witnessed an unprecedented amount of political activity. From prisoners to pensioners, post-Akaev Kyrgyzstan has seen all strata of citizens taking to the street in an effort to redress grievances with the local, regional, and national government, an act hitherto unknown in all of independent Central Asia.² In reality, the democratic character and impact of such demonstrations remains questionable despite the trappings of democracy in the “Tulip Revolution” and ensuing protests.³ Formally, a prescribed structure of democratic procedure has yet to take hold, while the informal social protests that brought down the Akaev regime have become a common part of the Kyrgyzstani political landscape.⁴ Although the current government has attempted a partial revival of Akaev's authoritarianism, the Kyrgyzstani population has consistently rebuffed such

¹ Soros Foundation Kyrgyzstan. *The Spring of 2005 Through the Eyes of People of Kyrgyzstan: Anxieties, Expectations, and Hopes (Oral Histories)* (Bishkek: Soros Foundation Kyrgyzstan, 2005), 51.

² “Kyrgyz Parliament Discusses Prison Riot, Deputy's Death.” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty 21 October 2005, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/10/F18AABDF-A0DB-4481-BC8D-4DC96494A5A9.html> (accessed June 15, 2007); Pannier, Bruce. “Kyrgyzstan: Prison Riots, Protests, Parliament, and the Prime Minister.” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 25 October 2005, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/10/3e586d00-49b2-4d8f-aa64-8a54ca9c8165.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

³ International Crisis Group, *Kyrgyzstan on the Edge* (Bishkek: International Crisis Group, 2006), <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=4495&l=1> (accessed June 15, 2007); Scott Radnitz, “What Really Happened in Kyrgyzstan?” *Journal of Democracy* 17, no. 6 (2006): 132-146.

⁴ “Kyrgyz PM Airs Concerns over Constitution Process,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 10 November 2006, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/11/FB05D8FE-2217-42B4-B06E-80C1A8968B45.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

attempts through multiple-day protest events.⁵ As the government struggles for definition, mobilized Kyrgyzstanis are shaping their future political institutions, some at the behest of their patrons, others for their own concerns, all with consequences for future generations—indelibly shaping the form of debate and the understanding of democracy in Kyrgyzstan.

At the heart of these protests has been the Kyrgyzstani peasantry, which is surprising considering that peasants are commonly thought of as constituting some of the most conservative, risk-averse and least mobilized members of society. While the peasantry has not constituted the leadership of the protest movements, the fact remains that they have left their land to enact political protests on an unprecedented scale, which not only led to the ousting of President Akaev after fifteen years of rule, but continues to play a decisive role in Kyrgyzstani politics.

The current presidential administration, elected in July 2005 by the most open elections in Central Asian history, was born out of the protests surrounding the Tulip Revolution, which is crucial to understanding the current political situation in Kyrgyzstan. Having come to power as a direct result of popular protest, the current presidential administration is beholden to the support of the populous to a greater extent than was Akaev at any point in his tenure. In contrast to the Akaev era when protest actions were few, the protests that have ensued in the post-Akaev era have been numerous and comparatively less violent.⁶ Despite the increased levels of political participation, the elites, the governmental structure, and the population of Kyrgyzstan have remained unchanged from the Akaev period with the exception of a single politician

⁵ “Kyrgyzstan: Thousands Demonstrate Against Government,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 29 April 2006, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/4/488BDAAD-D6CC-46A5-9B55-5C57772F0FDB.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

⁶ “Demonstration in Bishkek Ends Without Incident,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 31 March 2006, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/3/EA90379C-C8D8-441A-91A7-9E6E8AE0C9DF.html> (accessed June 15, 2007); “Hundreds Pay Tribute to Slain Imam,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 7 August 2006, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/8/E016ADD3-B9BE-4D90-B2AB-18B3C15DA68B.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

released from prison. That is to say, *ceteris paribus*, the most significant change in the Kyrgyzstani political landscape since the ousting of Akaev has been the increased participation of the peasantry.

This thesis seeks to explain why Kyrgyzstani peasants were willing to protest, how these protests are becoming an institutionalized feature of Kyrgyz politics and the implications of this for the political development of Kyrgyzstan. Specifically, through an analysis of two case studies that occurred during the Akaev era, the 2005 Tulip Revolution, and two case studies in the post-Akaev era, this thesis seeks to answer three questions—under what conditions do peasants initiate, sustain and conclude protest events?

B. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to assess the evolution and impact of political participation in Kyrgyzstani politics from the Akaev to post-Akaev era, this thesis combines social mobilization and peasant rebellion theory. This thesis relies heavily on the social mobilization explanation of activism, which has attempted to give greater depth to the origins of grievance, and to reinterpret the rational-actor model in a setting reflective of contemporary reality.⁷ Concepts such as group identity (ethnic, gender, national, and religious), locality-based interpretations of grievances and resources, and the idea of a shared-fate amongst individuals trumping the free-rider mentality, have given political protest literature a more nuanced understanding of why and how protests occur.⁸ Bridging the gap between the individual and the collective involves an interactive relationship between the individual and her environment. Chief among these factors is the idea of a “frame,” the schemata by which events and communication are interpreted amongst a shared collective, which serves as a bridge between events and the ability of a

⁷ John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, *Social Movements in an Organizational Society* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transition Books, 1987); Carol McClurg Mueller, “Building Social Movement Theory,” In *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, edited by Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller, 3-25. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992).

⁸ McClurg Mueller, “Building Social Movement.”

collective to organize.⁹ As all frames occur in a larger political and cultural setting, the process by which those frames are constructed—frame alignment—and received by an audience—frame resonance—is of utmost importance for mobilization.¹⁰ In turn, the ability to act on a frame is dependent on the available range of protest actions known to a populace, such as protests, marches, sit-ins, etc., termed the “cultural repertoire” in social mobilization theory. This thesis will examine frame alignment and resonance, along with the evolution of the Kyrgyzstani cultural repertoire, as exemplified by protest events from the Akaev era to the present.

As noted, the role of the peasantry in the events leading up to and following the ousting of Akaev has grown, ushering in an era of unparalleled political activity and a seemingly fundamental shift of the peasantry’s role in the political arena, which dictates that this analysis evaluate other explanations of protest that highlight the role of the peasant.¹¹ Defining the moments in time when mobilized peasants chose to act and how each protest event relates to the larger history of peasant protest in Kyrgyzstan requires looking towards the relationship between the peasantry and risk, i.e. the motivating factors of action. To analyze such a relationship, this thesis compares the actions of the peasantry using two perspectives relying on fundamentally different assumptions: that actors will only take risk at the prospect of losing something and that actors are risk-neutral, and will act when benefits of action outweigh costs. For the former, this thesis draws on Scott's *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*, and Kahneman and Tversky’s prospect theory to define *loss-averse* behavior as risk-acceptant action employed only when the participants are hostile to the potential for the loss of something previously

⁹ Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, and Francesca Polletta, “Introduction: Why Emotions Matter,” In *Rethinking Social Movements*, edited by Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper, 1-24. (Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).

¹⁰ Rhys H. Williams and Timothy J. Kubal, “Movement Frames and the Cultural Environment: Resonance, Failure, and the Boundaries of the Legitimate,” *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change* 21, (1999): 225-48.

¹¹ Crisis Group, *Kyrgyzstan on the Edge*.

gained.¹² At the other end of the spectrum, this thesis extrapolates from Samuel Popkin's theory of political economy as articulated in *The Rational Peasant*, and employs a standard rationalist assumption that is *risk-neutral* in decision making and focuses on cost-benefit calculations of continuing or challenging the status quo patron-client system, assuming that the costs of change are worthwhile only when the rewards from maintenance of the status quo have become too small.¹³

C. RESEARCH DESIGN

This thesis is divided across two timeframes, the Akaev era and the post-Akaev era. While it is tempting to use of the term “Tulip Revolution” to describe the events of winter 2005 in Kyrgyzstan that led to Akaev's ouster, to do so would betray not just the reality on the ground, but also improperly divide the timeframe under analysis. As the author was told numerous times on his research trip to Kyrgyzstan in the autumn of 2006, the exact terminology for the events has yet to be agreed upon, rather the terms “coup,” “March Events,” and “revolution,” were all used interchangeably. To delineate a timeframe in keeping with the actual events, this thesis divides the periods of analysis into the Akaev and post-Akaev era, in which the protests of March 2005—commonly called the “Tulip Revolution” in the West—are classified as part of the Akaev era, and referred to as the March Events.

During the Akaev era, two major protests occurring prior to the March Events will be evaluated: first, the political events surrounding the Kara-Buura parliamentary elections of 2000 in Talas province; and the events surrounding the Aksy shooting of 2002. These proceedings were selected for evaluation as they were the two greatest political upheavals against the Akaev regime prior to March 2005, and neither protest fully met its stated goals. The events leading to Akaev's ouster in March 2005 will be

¹² James C. Scott. *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976); Prospect theory, as defined by Kahneman and Tversky, is a predictive tool, but not a tool of reasoning, which leaves room for the incorporation of social movement theory to account for the motivation for specific choices. Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, “Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision under Risk,” In *Choices, Values and Frames*, edited by Daniel Kahneman and Kahneman Tversky, 17-43. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹³ Samuel L. Popkin. *The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1979).

examined and treated as a part of the Akaev era timeframe, and as a single protest event that began in January 2005 and culminated two months later with Akaev fleeing the country. In the post-Akaev era, two major protests will be evaluated: firstly, the Akmatbaev affair which saw the deaths of two brothers, one a parliamentarian and the other a reputed mobster; and secondly, the opposition's major protest events spanning the year between April 2006 and April 2007. These events were the most widely attended and vociferous of the post-Akaev era, and they also represent instances where, at the conclusion of protest action, both gains and losses were suffered by the protestors.

Given that all of the protest events to be examined have occurred since 1999, the importance of each in the historical context of Kyrgyzstan's emergence as an independent nation is fundamental to analysis. While the primary thrust of the research examines events at the micro level, each of these occurrences informs the macro level history of protest in Kyrgyzstan and will continue to influence the future not just of protest but of democratic redress in Kyrgyzstan.

D. SOURCES

This thesis relies on secondary sources of information when collecting data regarding protest actions together with primary source material gathered from the author's research trip to Kyrgyzstan in September 2006. These sources include journal and newspaper accounts of protests in both English and local languages, which will serve as the basis for the case studies. Given the nature of the research question, the theoretical framework to be outlined will incorporate the works of leading social mobilization scholars such as Gamson, McCarthy and Zald, along with Moore's, Popkin's and Scott's contributions on peasant participation in political rebellion. The exact identities of the author's interviewees have been withheld at the behest of each interview subject.

E. CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter II will examine the two cases of protest in the Akaev era and apply the theoretical framework to elicit findings of each instance. The chapter will conclude with a comparative analysis of case-study findings in the Akaev era. Chapter III will examine the events that lead to the ousting of President Akaev and apply the theoretical

framework to each protest. The chapter will end with an analysis of how the events both concluded the Akaev era and set the stage for continued protest in the post-Akaev era. Chapter IV will examine the two major protest events of the post-Akaev era. Specifically, the chapter focuses on the Akmatbaev brother's ability to mobilize local constituents and the on-going attempt of the opposition party to mobilize for governmental reform. The chapter will further compare the impact of urban-based protest Kyrgyzstani politics. Chapter V concludes by analyzing the impact of time and space on protest in Kyrgyzstan, the limitations of the theoretical analysis, the implications peasant participation in protest and the impact of protest on the democratic development of Kyrgyzstan.

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II. PROTEST IN AKAEV'S KYRGYZSTAN

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines two case studies during the Akaev era in which the rural peasantry openly and vociferously demonstrated against the Akaev regime. The next section articulates the background of the two protest events. The following section, analyzes why the protesters mobilized, applying social mobilization theory focusing on frames and the cultural repertoire employed. The subsequent section analyzes peasant participation in terms of loss-aversion and risk-neutral peasant rebellion theory. Finally, the conclusion brings the two analytical pieces together and attempts to place each event within the larger context Kyrgyzstani protest.

B. BACKGROUND

The two protest events garnering greatest attention during the Akaev era occurred slightly over two years apart and in separate parts of the country. In the Kara-Buura region of Talas *Oblast* (province) the perceived manipulation of parliamentary elections results in 2000 sparked the ire of the local peasantry and gave rise to organized and openly defiant anti-Akaev demonstrations. Two years later, in the Aksy region of Jalalabad Province, anti-Akaev protests resulted in the deaths of seven people from clashes between protestors and police. Taken together, these events represented the greatest challenge to Akaev during his tenure.

1. Kara-Buura

To understand the Kara-Buura protests of 2000, a brief history of Feliks Kulov, the former prime minister, is necessary as without Kulov, the events of 2000 would never have occurred. Often described as the “Putin of Kyrgyzstan”—after Russian President and ex-KGB agent Vladimir Putin—for his career in the security sector and perceived “strongman” persona, Kulov’s reputation has been built on both his law-enforcement past and the events leading to his four years in a Bishkek jail on questionable charges brought

by the Akaev regime.¹⁴ Once thought of as Akaev's heir apparent, Kulov broke ranks with his long time political ally in April of 1999 and resigned as Mayor of Bishkek in protest over Akaev's tolerance of "anti-democratic activities" by members of the presidential inner circle.¹⁵ Shortly thereafter Kulov formed his own opposition party *Ar-Namys* (Integrity) in an attempt to challenge the ruling regime not just for parliamentary power but for the presidency as well. This act—the founding of an opposition party—was not an unprecedented political occurrence in Kyrgyzstan, as opposition parties already operated within the republic, but the Akaev regime's reaction to this event irrevocably shaped Kyrgyzstani politics.

After registering *Ar-Namys* in August of 1999, the party was banned from running in the parliamentary elections of 2000 under an obscure 1991 election code law that required a political party be registered for at least one year prior to an election in order to participate.¹⁶ When an appeals process came to no avail, Kulov chose to run as an independent candidate for the Kara-Buura parliamentary constituency of Talas Province. Despite the presence of observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe monitoring the vote, Kulov was not declared an outright winner and was forced into a run-off in a second round of voting, which resulted in a victory for Kulov's

¹⁴ Fred Weir, "Rivals' struggle locks Kyrgyzstan in power vacuum," *The Christian Science Monitor*, March 28, 2005, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0328/p01s04-wosc.htm> (accessed June 15, 2007).

¹⁵ Liz Fuller, "Backtracking in Bishkek," *Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest*, February 15, 2000, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200001/0003.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

¹⁶ "Another Kyrgyz Opposition Party Faces Election Restrictions," *Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest*, January 04, 2000, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200001/0003.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

opponent.¹⁷ Reaction to this situation was swift as Kulov supporters in the Kara-Buura constituency and in the capital, Bishkek, rallied to protest the election results.¹⁸

In between the first and second round of voting, on 6 March 2000, Kulov declared his intention to run for the presidency in elections scheduled for October of the same year. During the rally not only did Kulov declare his candidacy, but also stated that he favored abolishing the position of President of Kyrgyzstan in favor of a parliamentary system.¹⁹ Less than three weeks later, after “losing” the contested parliamentary seat, on 22 March, Kulov was arrested and charged with “abuse of authority” relating to actions initiated while he was Minister of National Security from 1996-1998.²⁰ Given the timing and the charges, the ensuing trial of Kulov was believed to be orchestrated from on high.²¹ Substantiating such suspicion was the venue in which Kulov was tried, a military court that was closed to the public. Nonetheless on 7 August 2000, he was found not guilty and released.²² Slightly more than a month later, the original not-guilty verdict was annulled, and the military court requested an investigation into the veracity of the

¹⁷ “OSCE Registers Flaws in Kyrgyz Poll,” Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, February 23, 2000, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200002/0037.html> (accessed January 15, 2007).

¹⁸ “Defeated Kyrgyz Parliamentary Candidate Alleges Fraud,” Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, March 15, 2000, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200003/0027.html> (accessed June 15, 2007); “Protest Demonstrations Continue in Kyrgyzstan,” Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, March 16, 2000, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200003/0030.html> (accessed June 15, 2007); “Protest Update by KCHR,” Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, March 20, 2000, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200003/0039.html> (accessed June 15, 2007); “Updates of yesterday developments,” Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, March 23, 2000, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200003/0047.html> (accessed June 15, 2007); “Latest Developments in Kyrgyzstan,” Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, March 30, 2000, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200003/0063.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

¹⁹ “Kyrgyz Opposition Party Leader Announces Presidential Candidacy,” Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, March 06, 2000, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200003/0008.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

²⁰ “Closed Trial of Opposition Leader to be Held in Kyrgyzstan,” Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, March 18, 2000, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200005/0031.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

²¹ International Crisis Group, *Kyrgyzstan: After the Revolution* (Bishkek: International Crisis Group, 2005), <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3411&l=1> (accessed June 15, 2007).

²² “Kyrgyz Opposition Politician Acquitted,” Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, August 8, 2000, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200008/0014.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

original decision.²³ Shortly thereafter Kulov declared that he would not run for the presidency because he believed that taking the state language test, as required by all presidential candidates by the Central Election Commission, was unconstitutional. Instead he threw his support behind another candidate.²⁴ On 22 January 2001, the Bishkek City Military Court convicted Feliks Kulov of the same charges of which he was originally acquitted and sentenced him to seven years imprisonment.²⁵

2. Aksy

Aksy, Kyrgyzstan was never thought of as a hot bed of political activity, but on 5 January 2002, the people in this small region of Kyrgyzstan would further the process of turning the peasantry into viable force in Kyrgyzstani politics and do so in a time frame of less than three months. On that same day, Azimbek Beknazarov, the local parliamentarian representing the Aksy region in Jalalabad Province, was arrested on charges of “abuse of power.”²⁶ The charges related to a murder case in which Beknazarov, as an investigator in the Toktogul District Prosecutor’s office in 1995, cleared the accused of murder by finding that the act was committed in self defense. Again, as with Kulov, the timing of the arrest was important. Beknazarov had recently complained publicly about an agreement signed by Akaev with the Chinese Premier that, in combination with a previously signed agreement, ceded 125,000 hectares of Kyrgyzstani land to China. For months leading up to the arrest, Beknazarov claimed that Akaev was ceding sacred ground to both China and Kazakhstan that also contained untapped Kyrgyzstani natural resources.²⁷ While imprisoned and awaiting trial,

²³ “Court Annuls Kyrgyz Opposition Leader’s Acquittal,” Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, September 12, 2000, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200009/0035.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

²⁴ “Kulov to Back Parliament Deputy Speaker in Kyrgyz Presidential Poll,” Kyrgyz Daily Digest, September 21, 2000, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200009/0067.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

²⁵ “Kyrgyz Oppositionist Sentenced to Seven Years Imprisonment,” Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, January 22, 2001, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200101/0049.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

²⁶ Ron Synovitz, “Kyrgyzstan: Arrest of Deputy Sparks Allegations of Persecution,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, January 9, 2002, <http://www.rferl.org/features/2002/01/09012002082600.asp> (accessed June 15, 2007).

²⁷ Ibid.

Beknazarov's supporters organized in Aksy and began to protest his detention. On 17 March 2002, the protests came to a head when five Beknazarov supporters were killed by the security forces on a march towards the regional center after having been promised a meeting with a local official, who never arrived. After the shootings the Beknazarov issue garnered greater attention and the issues which drove protest expanded to include "justice" for the shootings. Ultimately, the protestors forced the resignation of first the Jalalabad Province governor, then the chief prosecutor, and then Kyrgyzstani Prime Minister, Kurmanbek Bakiev. Beknazarov was eventually cleared of all charges and reinstated as a member of Parliament only after Akaev granted a presidential pardon for his one-year suspended sentence; however the leaders of the local law enforcement bodies were not held accountable for the shootings and were granted amnesty.²⁸

C. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK APPLIED

1. Frame Alignment and Frame Resonance

a. *Kulov and Kara-Buura*

In both the Kara-Buura and Aksy incidents, Akaev had unparalleled resources with which to frame his opponents; however, in neither locale did the frame resonate to the point of preventing or discouraging protest actions by the peasantry. The Kara-Buura incident is important in that the entire situation began as an attempt by the incumbent, Akaev, to maintain his power over the perceived threat from a challenger, Kulov, and evolved into an issue of competing identities. To begin with, Akaev, as president, used his vertical network of officials from the executive branch, the judicial branch and the electoral commission at the national and local levels, to implement his frame of Kulov as a "corrupt" politician. Such means combined with the sheer extent to which Akaev attempted to align his frame of Kulov as a corrupt official—party disqualification, vote-rigging—twice, and corruption charges—twice, suggested that not only the president, but the institutions he headed were culpable in the entire affair.

²⁸ Scott Radnitz, "Networks, localism and mobilization in Aksy, Kyrgyzstan," *Central Asian Survey* 24, no. 4 (2005): 405-424; "...And Fires Region's Top Officials," *Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest*, April 11, 2002, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200204/0036.shtml> (accessed June 15, 2007); Adam Albion, "Kyrgyz Prime Minister, Cabinet Step Down," *Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest*, May 23, 2002, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200205/0063.shtml> (accessed June 15, 2007).

Despite these vast resources, Akaev's frame did not resonate as public opinion in Kara-Buura remained on the side of Kulov. Instead Akaev's frame of corruption backfired against the entire governmental system which he headed as Kulov supporters protested the fraudulent election returns, along with the "corruption" charges brought in court. Supporting the idea of institutional corruption was the suicide of the Kara-Buura head election official. Not to mention the confessions of a second local Kara-Buura election official, and a television journalist, both of whom publicly stated that governmental officials had offered bribes at the behest of inflicting as much damage as was possible on the Kulov campaign.²⁹ Adding to this was the statement by the presiding judge in the first Kulov case that while Kulov's guilt was not proven, "his acquittal was just."³⁰ These statements from players complicit in the affair reveal both the extent to which Akaev's administration attempted to align the frame of Kulov as corrupt, and the absolute failure of such a frame to resonate with the populace. Importantly, this lack of resonance was not only with the public, but those in positions of influence as well. The result was that Kulov's reputation expanded to include an underdog persona as he took on the Akaev administration.

The frame used by Akaev that Kulov was "corrupt" and "abused his authority" did not resonate with the public because the reasoning behind the charge implicated the regime itself. Without regard to the timeline of the events, Akaev, in asking the public to accept Kulov as a corrupt official, did not give enough weight to the logic involved. For the frame of Kulov as a corrupt official to resonate, the public had also to accept the fact that Akaev was either inept or corrupt himself. As Minister of National Security, Kulov's chain of command began and ended with Akaev, yet in

²⁹ "Protests in Kyrgyz Capital Continue," Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, March 20, 2000, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200003/0036.html> (accessed June 15, 2000); "More Revelations of Poll Falsification in Kyrgyzstan," Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, March 24, 2006, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200003/0041.html> (accessed June 15, 2007); "Bishkek Protesters Address Demands to Kyrgyz Leadership," Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, March 21, 2000, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200003/0040.html> (accessed June 15, 2007); "Kyrgyz TV journalist said he was asked to slander opposition leaders," Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, February 14, 2000, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200002/0022.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

³⁰ "Kyrgyz Officials Seek to Justify Kulov Verdict," Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, January 29, 2001, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200101/0075.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

bringing the corruption charges, Akaev's frame reasoned that Kulov somehow acted outside of the purview of the most powerful man in the republic, Akaev. Had Kulov been a middle or low level bureaucrat, someone considerably removed from the president, then Akaev's impunity would have made sense, however, as Kulov was one person removed from the president, accepting the corruption frame as true dictated that either Akaev was clueless as to the behavior of his minister, or condoned the behavior, but chose not to act until politically advantageous.

Framing Kulov as a corrupt official did the most damage to Akaev as this frame actually reflected back upon the president rather than the accused. Beginning with the denial of registration to Kulov's Ar-Namys party and culminating with the seven year prison sentence, Kulov appeared as a politician trying to "play by the rules," but stopped by the institutional apparatus. Moreover, with the verdict pending, on 5 January 2001, Kulov was urged to leave the country and go into exile, rather than suffer the consequences of an unlawful trial. Kulov refused³¹ Thus, Kulov's acceptance of his imprisonment created not just an anti-Akaev identity, but also an identity of a man of integrity, which subsequently cemented his place in Kyrgyzstani lore as the sole man willing to stand up to the corruption of the president. This series of events solidified the battle of collective identities that would erupt later and lay the foundation for the Aksy protests between those that supported the integrity of the anti-Akaev resistance and the corruption of the Akaev-led establishment.

b. Beknazarov

At the time of his arrest, Kulov was essentially arguing for genuine democracy, an abstract political system and concept favored by the West, while at the time of Beknazarov's arrest, the embattled parliamentarian was arguing for something tangible, Kyrgyzstani land, sovereignty and natural resources. In so doing, Beknazarov was framing from a nationalist standpoint, which meant anyone who disagreed was either a traitor, or a Chinese puppet. As with Kulov, the charges against Beknazarov originated

³¹ "Kyrgyz Opposition Party Advises Leader to Leave Country," Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, January 5, 2001, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200101/0017.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

from violations of a past governmental position, and were designed to paint Beknazarov as a “corrupt official.” Akaev’s attempts to label Beknazarov failed to resonate not just for the reasons already articulated (ineptitude or complicity), but because Beknazarov’s frame resonated easily. Beknazarov’s reasoning was that the proposed treaty put Kyrgyzstan on the losing end of the deal on not one, but two fronts; firstly, the manner in which the treaty was proposed and signed by Akaev subjugated the Kyrgyzstani parliamentary process of legislation to Chinese financial interests; and secondly, the land that was being ceded contained potential renewable resources.³² In making this argument Beknazarov overtly appealed to the Kyrgyzstani sense of nationalism, while covertly attempting to exploit Kyrgyzstani xenophobia of the Chinese. As for Akaev’s frame, he asked the people to accept the fact that despite the passage of almost seven years since the original investigation, during which time Beknazarov had been promoted to Chief Investigator for the Jalalabad Oblast office, then to Judge of the October Regional Court in Bishkek, and finally elected by his own constituents, the charges against Beknazarov had nothing to do with the parliamentarian’s outspokenness and constituted the proper punishments of a corrupt official.³³ Failing to take into account the lingering memory of the Kulov incident, Akaev underestimated the possible consequences of leveling such charges against Beknazarov. By reverting back to the corrupt official frame, Akaev failed to shift his efforts at frame alignment from the man to the larger issue of equity for the Kyrgyzstani people in the face of Chinese pressure and in turn, his frame again failed to resonate. Unable to frame himself as pro-Kyrgyzstani without risking problematic relations with the Chinese, Akaev’s continued framing Beknazarov only helped to give rise to the notion that Akaev, in this second instance, was the actual corrupt official.

³² A. Beknazarov, “To safe (sic) our fatherland!,” Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, June 13, 2001, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200106/0036.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

³³ “Kyrgyz Presidential Election,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, <http://www.rferl.org/specials/kyrgyzzelections/bios/Beknazarov.asp> (accessed June 15, 2007).

2. Cultural Repertoire of Redress

As has been well documented by Scott Radnitz, the Aksy events were a watershed in Central Asian political history.³⁴ Unlike Kara-Buura, where the protestors were unable to attain the stated goal and the event dissipated after clashes with the security forces, the Aksy events were successful and gained more momentum after clashing with local security forces. While the Kara-Buura events are distinguished due to the unprecedented showing of popular discontent with the central authority, the Aksy events are marked by the actual results and scale of effectiveness reflected in the resignations of multiple government officials, including the prime minister and the reinstatement of Beknazarov to his parliamentary post. The various techniques used by both the Kara-Buura and Aksy protestors, the cultural repertoire, were not completely original, yet the outcome in the Aksy case was truly unique. Table 1 lists the various methods of civil disobedience that comprised the cultural repertoire of both the Kara-Buura and Aksy events. This list represents all techniques used by the constituency when advocating for the respective cause, which in the case of Kara-Buura began with the vote rigging of 2000 and culminated with Kulov's imprisonment in early 2001, whereas the Aksy events began with the jailing of Beknazarov and concluded with the presidential pardon.

³⁴ Radnitz, "Networks."

Table 1. List of Cultural Repertoire techniques used in Akaev era protests

Cultural Repertoire	Kulov/Kara-Buura 2000	Beknazarov/Aksy 2002
Hunger Strike(individual)	Yes	Yes
Hunger Strike(supporters)	Yes	Yes
Kurultai (people’s council)	Yes	Yes
Sit-in	Yes	Yes
Occupation of Administrative building	Yes	Yes
Occupation of public space	Yes	Yes
Marches	No	Yes
Road Blockade	No	Yes
Petition drive	No	Yes
Withholding Children from School	No	Yes
Hostage Taking	No	Yes
Torching of Ak-ui (administrative building)	No	Yes

When comparing the different cultural repertoires of the Kara-Buura and Aksy groups, the similarities suggest that the Aksy group, coming later chronologically, adopted and expanded the techniques of the Kara-Buura group. Of the new techniques employed by the Aksy group, the marches and road blockade appear to be the major difference in efficacy as these techniques transplanted the overall cause outside the local area. The effectiveness of the petition drive, while not concretely known, can be assumed to be negligible in comparison to the sheer numbers of protestors that turned out in support of Beknazarov. Withholding children from school during the winter time occurs quite frequently in Kyrgyzstan due to the poor medical facilities and scarce availability of local doctors, vaccines, and medicines. While the technique of “torching the local administrative building” appears as an extreme measure, this event occurred after the state had initiated a violent crackdown against the protestors, and thus was reactive. Here Kara-Buura and Aksy depart in that after the state initiated a violent crackdown in the former, the major protest was effectively quashed, while in Aksy, state initiated violence actually caused a violent reaction from protestors, and energized the protest. The effectiveness of taking hostages is slightly less clear, but possibly negligible

in the larger picture as Beknazarov supporters did take local administration officials hostage prior to the Aksy shootings, a move which yielded a minor concession, but ultimately appears to have not affected the actions of the local government.³⁵ Given all of this, the techniques of “marches” and “road blockades” first employed by the Aksy group, were the truly effective techniques able to produce results by reaching beyond the boundaries of the local constituency.

The success of these new methods was enormous and a result of the limits of Kyrgyzstan’s physical geography. As with many developing countries, the majority of state resources are concentrated in the capital, Bishkek, while the rest of the country is left to fend independently. Kyrgyzstani infrastructural needs are vast as the majority of the country’s roads at the time of Kara-Buura and Aksy were and remain in disrepair. Complicating this fact is the small size and mountainous geography of the country, which limits the connectivity of the provinces to the capital, often to a single two-lane road as seen in Figure 1. Of the two locations in question, Kara-Buura and Aksy, the former is not directly connected to the capital, which forces the traveler to either transit through Kazakhstan or traverse a mountainous dirt road only open for sporadic periods. The latter straddles the main artery of intra- and interstate commerce, the Bishkek-Osh (Kyrgyzstan’s “southern capital”) road, which is the lone road connecting the north and south—the country’s main economic artery.

In addition to these logistical realities, the “north-south” paradigm is also a major factor. While Kyrgyzstan is technically one state, the country is divided along two lines: the Russified north and the Uzbek south. An extension of these identities is that the north has always been in control of the state apparatus, and the south has traditionally been

³⁵ Hostages were taken in Aksy by Beknazarov supporters based upon information that Beknazarov was beaten while in jail, however the hostages were released a day later after Beknazarov supporters were allowed to meet the jailed parliamentarian. One report of the meeting infers that Beknazarov was intimidated into quelling his supporters’ ire by insisting that he had not been beaten, despite visible evidence to the contrary; Antoine Blua, “Kyrgyzstan: Protests over Lawmaker’s Arrest Seen as Crucial Test for Society,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, February 11, 2002, <http://www.rferl.org/features/2002/02/11022002094004.asp> (accessed June 15, 2007); “Kyrgyzstan: Twelve Hostages Released in Djalalabad,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, February 19, 2002, <http://www.rferl.org/features/2002/02/20022002061209.asp> (accessed June 15, 2007); “As Supporters Meet With Him in Detention...,” Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, February 20, 2002, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200202/0068.shtml> (accessed June 15, 2007).

politically restive as a result of this power vacuum. These factors were critically important to the cultural repertoire techniques employed by the Kara-Buura and Aksy groups, respectively.

Integral to the success of Aksy were the many marches that Beknazarov's constituents were willing to make. Rather than allow their cause to remain locally, at the district level, the Aksy group took the issue to the provincial capital, Jalalabad (Djalal-Abad), the original site of the Beknazarov trial, and finally, with smaller numbers to Osh. This was unprecedented and a direct confrontation with the provincial authority that could not be ignored at any cost, however similar action was not available to the Kara-Buura group. Marching to the capital of Talas Province, Talas, and attempting to seize an administration building would have meant walking directly into pro-Akaev territory, as the president's wife was from the eastern part of the province, creating the perception of Talas as an Akaev power base.³⁶

As a result of geography, the Aksy group was better positioned to institute a road blockade than the Kara-Buura group. To begin with, the Aksy grouping was positioned next to the main economic artery of the country, the Bishkek-Osh road whereas the Kara-Buura group was located on the periphery of Kyrgyzstan and dependent on trade from Kazakhstan, not Bishkek. For the Aksy group, instituting a road blockade had huge economic implications not just for Bishkek but for the entire country. By instituting the blockade the Aksy group signaled to Akaev the numbers, unity and commitment that they wielded and a willingness to bring commerce to a halt for their cause.

D. PEASANT REBELLION THEORY

1. Kara-Buura

The actions of the Kara-Buura peasantry do not fit the risk-neutral paradigm, but rather align with the loss-averse school. Integral to the loss-averse paradigm is the belief that the peasantry takes risky action when they perceive the loss of something previously gained and will continue to employ risky action until that loss has been recouped. In the

³⁶ Interview with Talas NGO leader, Talas, Kyrgyzstan, September 2006.

instance of Kara-Buura, the peasantry began to protest after the first round of voting when Kulov was not declared the outright winner and continued to protest through the second round of voting, ignoring the announced election results. The timing and vociferous protest action suggests that the peasants were ultimately upset not only with Kulov's loss, but also with the system that delivered Kulov's loss. In other words, the peasantry voted according to the supposedly democratic system of elections for the candidate, Kulov, whom best represented peasant interests, yet when that expectation was not met, the same grouping decided to act out. In directing protest action against both the means, the system of voting, and the ends, Kulov's loss, the peasants were seeking to recoup that which they lost, a fair election system, Kulov's victory, or both. Had the protestors simply advocated for Kulov's candidacy in a manner befitting cost-benefit analysis, then they would have accepted the election results. Instead the peasantry risked physical, social and economic harm by initiating and sustaining protest against the administration.

2. Aksy

The actions of the Aksy peasantry also fall in line with the loss-averse school, with the 17 March shootings amplifying peasant motivation and goals. Although the peasantry employed and expanded on the cultural repertoire of the Kara-Buura group, the explicit expansion of the cultural repertoire was not effectively leveraged until after the issue was transformed after the shootings. With the imprisonment of Beknazarov, and the ensuing demonstrations, the peasantry was advocating for Beknazarov's reinstatement, a recouping of their loss of political power. When the shootings occurred however, the losses of the peasantry exponentially grew and the goals of the peasantry expanded to include "justice for the dead," a broader goal that sought accountability from government officials for the deaths. This new goal necessitated an increased intensity with which the cultural repertoire was implemented, e.g. longer marches and more frequent blockades, in an effort to show local and national officials the power of the protesting peasantry. By taking to the streets in greater numbers, and for a longer period of time, the Aksy peasantry did meet with success, yet this success was a direct result from the motivation to recoup the loss of political power and the loss of life.

E. CONCLUSION

The actions of the Kara-Buura and Aksy protestors represented a major shift in Kyrgyzstani domestic politics and the development of democracy in the country. Although neither group met with total success, both instances contributed to the history of Kyrgyzstani domestic politics indelibly by establishing the idea that the citizenry could organize to redress the central government. Unfortunately for Akaev, the deliberate choice to ignore the larger issue that initially motivated the protestors in both constituencies, while attacking the man leading the protestors, only served to damage his own image. The rural nature of both protests and the difference in efficacy foreshadowed a major weakness which would be exploited during the March Events; the dependency of the central government on the regional power centers to exert control over the periphery.



Figure 1: Map of major roads in Kyrgyzstan

III. THE MARCH EVENTS

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter analyzes the events of March 2005, known globally as the “Tulip Revolution,” but locally referred to as the March Events, when Kyrgyzstan’s first president, Askar Akaev, fled the country after months of demonstrations against his administration. In the next section, a history of the events leading to the parliamentary elections are given, along with the case of a single politician attempting to contend for a seat, whose story served as a prelude of events to come. Then, a history of the events surrounding the elections is presented in three parts: the run-up, which summarizes the political maneuvering during the pre-election period in the weeks prior to the 27 February 2005 poll; round 1, which chronicles the middle stages of the March Events occurring between the first and second round of voting, 28 February to 12 March 2005; and the end, which articulates the protests that occurred after the second round of voting held on 13 March, that lead to Akaev’s ouster on 24 March 2005. The next section will apply social mobilization theory to the March Events. The subsequent section analyzes the two case studies in terms of loss-aversion and risk-neutral peasant rebellion theory. Finally, the last section looks at the March Events in the context of the Kyrgyzstani history.

B. BACKGROUND

1. Changing from Bicameral to Unicameral

After the Aksy events, the Akaev administration was shaken. Despite the resignation of the second highest ranking official in the country, the prime minister, political pressure was still being applied and Akaev’s resignation was still sought.³⁷ In light of such pressure, the Akaev administration decided to hold a nation-wide referendum, on two separate issues; one, whether or not Akaev was to serve out his entire

³⁷ “Opposition Congress Urges Effort to Force Akayev’s Resignation,” Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, August 14, 2002, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200208/0020.shtml> (accessed June 15, 2007); Albion, “Kyrgyz Prime Minister.”

term; and secondly, proposed constitutional amendments.³⁸ Of the proposed amendments, the most contentious was the conversion of the bi-cameral Parliament to a unicameral one, thereby reducing the number of parliamentary seats.³⁹ While some presidential powers were to be granted to the Parliament, the maneuver was widely seen as an attempt by Akaev to weaken the legislature.⁴⁰

Following months of contentious deliberation, on 2 February 2003, Kyrgyzstanis went to the polls and in what were widely criticized elections, voted to affirm Akaev's tenure and to reform Parliament into a unitary structure.⁴¹ While the serving parliamentarians would be allowed to complete their term, new elections were scheduled for the last Sunday of February of each election year with the next elections set for 2005. The implications for reduction in the amount of legislators were significant for both

³⁸ "Kyrgyz President Sets Referendum Date," Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, January 14, 2003, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200301/0025.shtml> (accessed June 15, 2007); "Experts Start Reviewing Proposed Kyrgyz Constitutional Amendments," Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, January 7, 2003, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200301/0014.shtml> (accessed June 15, 2007).

³⁹ "Kyrgyz leader addresses nation on constitutional change, democracy, antiterror," Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, October 18, 2002, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200210/0039.shtml> (accessed June 15, 2007).

⁴⁰ Sultan Jumagulov, "Kyrgyzstan: Opposition Slams Referendum," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, February 6, 2003, http://iwpr.net/?p=rca&s=f&o=177363&apc_state=henirc0ec33e6f2a91e14ae8220c344a5db3ab (accessed June 15, 2007); Bakyt Amanbaev, "Akaev Provokes Constitutional Reform Storm," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, January 10, 2002, http://iwpr.net/?p=rca&s=f&o=177731&apc_state=henirc4796f1d50976863fd92b4a29c882becb (accessed June 15, 2007); "Declaration of the members of Constitutional Council, which was made on press conference," Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, January 17, 2003, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200301/0036.shtml> (accessed June 15, 2007); "Kyrgyz Opposition Demands Postponement of Referendum on Constitution," Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, January 16, 2003, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200301/0033.shtml> (accessed June 15, 2007).

⁴¹ "Members of the public staff on referendum were arrested," Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, February 4, 2003, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200302/0008.shtml> (accessed June 15, 2007); "While Opposition Says Turnout Figures Were Inflated," Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, February 4, 2003, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200302/0010.shtml> (accessed June 15, 2007); "Mass Falsifications of Results of the Referendum and Methods of Reaching in Talas Province," Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, February 6, 2003, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200302/0012.shtml> (accessed June 15, 2007); "As Final Results Released," Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, February 7, 2003, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200302/0018.shtml> (accessed June 15, 2007); "Opposition Details Violations During Kyrgyz Referendum," Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, February 7, 2003, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200302/0020.shtml> (accessed June 15, 2007); "Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic," Kyrgyzstan.org, <http://www.kyrgyzstan.org/Law/constitution.htm> (accessed June 15, 2007).

Akaev and all serving parliamentarians, as those with ambitions of continuing in office were most likely to need to support and resources of the president. For opposition parliamentarians, the reduction in seats was hugely significant as they had always been less organized and less resourced than the pro-government parliamentarians, with whom competition would be fierce for fewer seats. Interestingly enough however, the death knell of the opposition never came. In fact, opposition numbers suddenly swelled two years later during the pre-election period and after the first round of parliamentary elections on 27 February 2005 when many pro-government parliamentarians who had fallen out of favor with the Akaev administration were disqualified from the voting rolls, thereby joining the ranks of the opposition over night.⁴²

2. Otunbaeva

The bellwether for the March Events began six weeks before the scheduled first round of parliamentary elections on 27 February 2005 when former Ambassador to the United Kingdom and United States, Roza Otunbaeva was denied an opportunity to run for office. This incident, while not unanticipated, stands out for two reasons. Her exclusion from the poll was an exemplar for a situation that occurred across the republic in the week prior to the February election and forced many would-be candidates to mobilize in reaction. Secondly, Otunbaeva's case eerily echoed that of Kulov. Like, Kulov, Otunbaeva represented not just the opposition but an opposition figure that had served in a prestigious position for the Akaev regime, yet who had also fallen out of favor and was denied the opportunity to contend for power through institutional levers. While the Otunbaeva affair was not unique in that three other former Ambassadors were also denied a chance to contend for a parliamentary seat, Otunbaeva was the most high-profile

⁴² Muratbek Imanaliev, "Comment: Kyrgyz Ballot to Sow Seeds for Future," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, February 23, 2005, http://iwpr.net/?p=rca&s=f&o=238635&apc_state=henirca6cd0b917b3e225e2048380e68c371c36 (accessed June 15, 2007); Ainagul Abdrakhmanova, "Kyrgyz Election Protests Spread," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, February 24, 2005, http://iwpr.net/?p=rca&s=f&o=238616&apc_state=henircaf687e3ab7a4d9b18017a1eb89a69b5ea (accessed June 15, 2007).

candidate to be denied and the means by which the Akaev administration denied her candidacy served to reinforce the frame of Akaev as a corrupt leader, heading a corrupt institution.

Otunbaeva, who wanted to contend for a Bishkek district seat, had taken the necessary procedural steps to do so, and was actually awarded the opportunity by the district election commission on 6 January 2005; however, within hours of approving of Otunbaeva's registration, the same commission rescinded approval and denied her the opportunity to run, citing a "lack of a quorum" at the time of approval as the reason for rescinding the registration, despite evidence to the contrary.⁴³ Complicating the district election commission's position was the fact that according to Kyrgyzstani Election Code any possible overruling of a district election commission action was only the purview of a court or a higher election commission body. Recognizing this inherent contradiction, the district election commission attempted to justify the action by invoking a recently enacted provision of Kyrgyzstani Election Code that stipulated only citizens residing in Kyrgyzstan for the previous five years could run for public office, a law that extended to diplomats well. As with Kulov, Otunbaeva appealed the decision all the way up bureaucratic ladder to the Constitutional Court, and was rejected on the grounds that she had not met the residency requirements. At that point, Otunbaeva's story broke from Kulov's in that Kulov was arrested on false charges and eventually imprisoned, whereas, after the first round of voting in the parliamentary elections, Otunbaeva was the victim of violence when a grenade was thrown at her apartment exploding on the balcony.⁴⁴ While no one was hurt, the intent of the grenade was clear; Otunbaeva was not a welcome figure

⁴³ "Kyrgyz Election Commission Denies Opposition Candidate's Registration," *Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest*, July 10, 2005, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200501/0001.shtml> (accessed June 15, 2007); Gulnoza Saidazimova, "Kyrgyzstan: Opposition Leader Claims Political Motivation Behind Rejection Of Her Election Registration," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, January 07, 2005, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/1/11D879D4-D093-4CD0-B522-8102649EE601.html> (accessed June 15, 2007); "Kyrgyz Opposition Rally Disperses," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, January 08, 2005, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/1/AF75AAD8-76A8-47B9-8090-D13A3C0A6A48.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

⁴⁴"Blast at Kyrgyz Opposition Leader's Flat Investigated," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, March 03, 2007, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/3/F62FA252-FFE6-4DA7-8FC3-5830BC2263F9.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

in domestic politics, just as with Kulov. Unfortunately for Akaev, such actions only served to galvanize the loosely affiliated opposition politicians across the country.

3. The Run-up: The Week Before the Election

The reality of the March Events is that the effective rural mobilization that brought down the Akaev regime on 24 March began in earnest across the country in the week prior to the parliamentary elections of 27 February, when, in similar fashion to Otunbaeva, a slew of candidates were disqualified from the election rolls.⁴⁵ During the course of the next week, in four of Kyrgyzstan's seven provinces, protestors began to block roads, seize government buildings, demand the resignation of local officials, and refused to disperse until grievances were addressed, all before a single ballot was cast. In recognition of such actions, Akaev, through governmental institutions, attempted to quell the situation, but rather than accept compromise the disparate protestors continued to demonstrate. In the Tong region, within the span of three days, supporters of Arslanbek Maliev, one of the disqualified opposition politicians, took to the streets, seized the local government building, demanded the reinstatement of Maliev, forced the first round of elections to be put off until 13 March—the scheduled day for second round voting—and forced the resignation of the head Region official—an act taken by Akaev, himself.⁴⁶ The timing and length of this incident are important in that the initial protests began on

⁴⁵ On 21 February, in three separate incidents occurring across the country, local supporters of opposition politicians disqualified from the election rolls gathered to protest the Kyrgyzstani Supreme Court's decision to uphold the election ban; Radnitz, "What Really Happened?"; Bruce Pannier, "Kyrgyzstan: Protests Erupt over Barring of Opposition Candidates from Election," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, February 22, 2005, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/2/8D610911-5CC7-4EF3-8846-5A3580027AFC.html> (accessed June 15, 2007); "Opposition Rallies Spread Across Kyrgyzstan," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, February 22, 2005, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/2/88DE04B7-9FF2-4D79-A381-63F5E556430A.html> (accessed June 15, 2007); "Kyrgyzstan: February 20 - 26 , 2005," Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, February 28, 2005, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200502/0037.shtml> (accessed June 15, 2007).

⁴⁶ "Thousands Protest Candidate Disqualifications in Kyrgyzstan," Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, February 23, 2005, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200502/0034.shtml> (accessed June 15, 2007); "Thousands Continue Protests in Kyrgyzstan," Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, February 24, 2005, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200502/0035.shtml> (accessed June 15, 2007); "Voting Postponed, Regional Head Removed in One Kyrgyz District," Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, February 28, 2005, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200502/0039.shtml> (accessed June 15, 2007); "Protesters Occupy Kyrgyz Administrative Building," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, February 23, 2005, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/2/C2A88BFE-7D72-4732-ABAC-C85C8A161F9A.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

23 February and by 26 February, the day before the first round of elections, Akaev had already conceded to one of the protestors' demands, the removal of the head Region official in Tong. While Akaev was presumably attempting to quell the larger threat of a "colored revolution" against his regime, he unwittingly fed the opposition more confidence as similar protests that had begun at the same time as the Tong events, continued and gained strength; in Tuip, Issky-Kul the district election commission reinstated the candidacy of Sadyr Japarov after protestors blocked the main highway of Issyk-Kul Oblast; in Jalalabad 400 protestors gathered in opposition to the exclusion of former prime minister, Kurmanbek Bakiev; in Kochkor, Naryn the thousands of protestors supporting three disqualified opposition candidates, Akylbek Japarov, Beishenbek Bolotbekov and Kurmanbek Baiterekov, agreed to end their protests and vote "against all" in the first round in order to force a second round of voting; in Bakai-Ata, Talas 1,300 protestors mobilized to force the reinstatement of Ravshan Jenebekov.⁴⁷

4. Round 1: Between the First and Second Round of Voting

Rather than relieve Akaev of political pressure, the first round of voting simply gave ground to expanded protest. During the pre-election period, only supporters of disqualified parliamentary candidates rallied to protest, yet after the first round of elections, this group was joined by supporters of candidates who either lost the first round or did not qualify for the second round of voting. In turn, the period in between the first and second round of voting saw protest erupt across the country, with the vast majority occurring in southern Kyrgyzstan, far away from the Akaev powerbase in Bishkek. In addition to the pre-election locations, protests began in Osh, Aaravan, Kara-Suu, Uzgen, Batken, Kara-Kulja, At-Bashi, Nooken, and the Ottuk and Kyzyl-Tuu regions of Naryn. As with the pre-election protests, the post-round one incidents were initially motivated by

⁴⁷ "Kyrgyzstan: 20 - 26 February 2005," Daily Digest; "Preliminary Results Out in Kyrgyz Parliamentary Elections...," Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, March 1, 2005, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200503/0000.shtml> (accessed June 15, 2007); "Kyrgyz Election Update," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, February 25, 2005, http://iwpr.net/?p=rca&s=f&o=238622&apc_state=henircaf687e3ab7a4d9b18017a1eb89a69b5ea (accessed June 15, 2007).

local constituents arguing on behalf of a local candidate barred from the election.⁴⁸ This is significant in that the protestors were picketing on behalf of a local patron and that the focus of concern was with the eligibility of each candidate. That is to say, all the protest actions of the pre and post-round one period began as disagreements over the implementation of local elections, for which a local remedy was necessary. The local focus remained in tact throughout the republic until 4 March, when the protestors in Jalalabad called on Akaev to step down from the presidency, a maneuver interestingly enough made by the protestors, not their candidate or a representative of any opposition party.⁴⁹ Not until two days later on 6 March, with protestors occupying the administrative building in Jalalabad, did the former prime minister and opposition politician, Kurmanbek Bakiev join the Jalalabad protestors in calling for Akaev's resignation in addition to the previously stipulated demands, a move that changed the face of the protests.⁵⁰ With Bakiev, the first major politician to publicly side with the protestors in his own constituency, at least one of the many seemingly natural and unconnected protest events besieging the country was given a newly political face, a move that would prove critical for both Bakiev and the larger cause. Shortly thereafter, many of the traditional opposition politicians began to take on a more visible role with Bakiev functioning as the de facto leader.

The week prior to the second round of elections saw an open dialogue between the leaders of the opposition and the Akaev administration. On 6 March Bakiev called for an emergency session of Parliament to decide if preterm presidential elections were

⁴⁸ "Kyrgyz Election Update: Round Two," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, March 4, 2005, http://iwpr.net/?p=rca&s=f&o=238814&apc_state=henirca4dd957f6e118be95b44637a5ee818265 (accessed June 15, 2007); Jalil Saparov, Sultan Jumagulov, and Leila Saralaeva, "Protests at Kyrgyz Vote Result," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, March 7, 2005, http://iwpr.net/?p=rca&s=f&o=238801&apc_state=henirca995846e4e35cc48dccb2b9a182013b97 (accessed June 15, 2007).

⁴⁹ "Kyrgyz Protesters Occupy Government Building," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, March 4, 2005, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/3/82DA5D4C-E0DF-4474-A33C-648030899464.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

⁵⁰ "Kyrgyzstan: Opposition Election Protests Grow Stronger," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, March 8, 2005, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/3/707980A4-8537-4145-82E3-95327F68B09B.html> (accessed June 15, 2007); "Kyrgyz Opposition Leader Calls for Pre-term Presidential Elections," Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, March 7, 2005, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200503/0008.shtml> (accessed June 15, 2007).

necessary to calm the situation in the country.⁵¹ The very next day in Bishkek, Otunbaeva echoed the same call but added that the outgoing Parliament should be reinstated to solve the country's crisis.⁵² For the Akaev administration's part, the week before the second round saw a flurry of activity beginning with Prime Minister Nikolai Tanaev telling the press that, "The organizers of these actions will be brought to account and we will not slip (sic) a single case of violation of the laws of this country."⁵³ On 10 March Akaev made his first statement since the first round of elections in which he attempted to resurrect the frame of corrupt officials for protestors.⁵⁴ To close out the week, presidential spokesman Abdil Segizbaev on 11 March challenged the protestors with the possibility of holding yet another referendum on whether or not Akaev should serve for another term.⁵⁵

5. The End: After the Second Round until Akaev's Ouster

Where the results of the first round widened the movement against Akaev, the results of the second round served to entrench anti-Akaev interests. With the announcement of only five parliamentary seats going to the opposition out of the seventy-five available, anti-Akaev interests looked at the second-round elections as confirmation.⁵⁶ While the Akaev administration looked towards the second-round of elections as the balm necessary for the country to return to normalcy, the opposition movement treated the 13 March run-off elections as yet another step in the long process

⁵¹ Daniel Kimmage, "Analysis: Uneasy Wait for Second Round of Kyrgyz Elections," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, March 8, 2005, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/03/5ecc8783-a76f-4a6b-bf29-e1b6a97f2121.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

⁵² "Kyrgyz Opposition Calls for Emergency Session of Parliament...," Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, March 08, 2005, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200503/0011.shtml> (accessed January 15, 2007).

⁵³ "Kyrgyz Authorities Promise to Punish Organizers," Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, March 7, 2005, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200503/0009.shtml> (accessed June 15, 2007).

⁵⁴ "Kyrgyz President Condemns Protests," Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, March 14, 2005, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200503/0023.shtml> (accessed June 15, 2007).

⁵⁵ "Kyrgyz Presidential Aide Hints at Referendum Possibility," Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, March 14, 2005, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200503/0025.shtml> (accessed June 15, 2007).

⁵⁶ "Pro-Akaev Candidates Win Majority in Kyrgyz Parliament," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, March 15, 2005, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/3/8B0B3D7C-AD38-45FB-8DE6-1395B24AEACE.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

of seeking Akaev's resignation.⁵⁷ This fundamental difference would prove to be crucial as the actions of the Akaev administration in the ensuing days would demonstrate.

On 15 March, after the second round of voting, the protestors of Jalalabad held a people's council, *kuraltai*, at which time the resignation of Akaev was agreed to by all present, a number rumored to be between 5,000 and 15,000.⁵⁸ Although the protestors failed to agree on a presidential candidate in Jalalabad, they remained united and continued to occupy the grounds of the administrative provincial administration building—a building which the protesters held since 4 March—revealing how comfortable the opposition felt in threatening Akaev's power. Moreover, only three days later on 18 March, the protestors of Osh met with little resistance when they took the Osh provincial building and the next day held another *kuraltai* deciding upon a chairman of the people's council, establishing a policing force, and maintaining the refrain of Akaev's resignation.⁵⁹ The establishment of a dual-government threatened Akaev's administration to the point that in the early morning of 20 March, Special Forces arrived in Jalalabad and Osh to take back the two administrative buildings. This maneuver represented a major turning point in the back and forth between the opposition and the Presidency, as Akaev had as yet resorted to non-violent measures of negotiation for fear of inciting another Aksy-type event.⁶⁰ While the security forces met with initial success

⁵⁷ "Kyrgyz President Appeals for Calm," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, March 15, 2005, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/3/37C95330-ECFB-4415-9E88-222CD7164A86.html> (accessed June 15, 2007); Gulnoza Saidazimova, "Kyrgyzstan: Fragmented Opposition Ponders Next Move After Election Defeat," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, March 15, 2005, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/3/99CC33BE-59DA-46DE-852F-7F2A59DD019B.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

⁵⁸ Leila Saralaeva, Bakyt Orunbekov, Ainagul Abdrakhmanova, and Sultan Jumagulov, "Kyrgyz Opposition Fights On," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, March 16, 2, http://www.iwpr.net/?p=rca&s=f&o=238784&apc_state=henirca8888a66ad6a6e09e5b2a383fb81a9d47 (accessed June 15, 2007).

⁵⁹ Alisher Saipov, Sultan Jumagulov, Leila Saralaeva, and Ainagul Abdrakhmanova, "Anti-Government Protests Solidify in South," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, March 18, 2005, http://www.iwpr.net/?p=rca&s=f&o=238771&apc_state=henirca6c0818e609e41d580d9761e5fa02f498 (accessed June 15, 2007); "Demonstrators Occupy Provincial Office in Kyrgyzstan," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, March 18, 2005, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/3/ED3AC95F-CB26-4C55-9575-F5567AA30259.html> (accessed June 15, 2007); "Kyrgyz Opposition Holds People's Congress in Osh," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, March 19, 2005, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/3/49A18B44-2BE2-466A-83A9-C87B35C56A2E.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

⁶⁰ Saipov, et al., "Anti-Government Protests."

in retaking the administrative buildings, the success was short lived. Within hours, the very same administrative building in Jalalabad and the police station, which housed as the displaced governor and police chief, came under siege from protestors. Shortly thereafter the administrative building was retaken, and the police station was burnt to the ground after the authorities surrendered to the protestors. Less than a day had passed before the same fate befell the Osh administration building on 21 March, with the protestors retaking the building while the security forces were attending a Nooruz (vernal equinox holiday) celebration. Moreover, the protestors occupied the airports of both Jalalabad and Osh, in an attempt to disallow the return of the Special Forces sent from Bishkek or a re-supply of new forces. Although these two incidents garnered the most attention from the Akaev administration, the fact remained that opposition forces had taken administrative buildings throughout the country, not just in the southern cities. Indeed, the southern rural regional offices were taken over along with the regional offices in Batken, Talas, Naryn, and Issyk-Kul provinces, leaving just Chui Province, home to the capital Bishkek, as the remaining power base for Akaev.

In his biggest admission yet, Akaev on 22 March called for an investigation into the instances of election outcomes that caused “social unrest,” but this gesture was a poor acknowledgement of a situation already beyond his control as rural protestors had descended upon the capitol to join the few Bishkek protestors on 23 March.⁶¹ Less a day later on 24 March, after a single day of protests that were met with police resistance, the protestors returned reinvigorated and stormed the White House, forcing Akaev to flee to

⁶¹ Alisher Saipov, Alla Pyatibratova, Ainagul Abdrakhmanova, and Leila Saralaeva, “Kyrgyzstan: Trial of Strength,” Institute for War and Peace Reporting, March 21, 2005, http://www.iwpr.net/?p=rca&s=f&o=238767&apc_state=henirca53b237a33ca8202eae122d9bc5eba771 (accessed June 15, 2007); “Kyrgyz Opposition Controls Key Southern Cities...,” Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, March 22, 2005, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200503/0035.shtml> (accessed June 15, 2007).

Russia with his family and signaling the end of an era in Kyrgyzstani politics.⁶² While the next twenty-four hours would see major looting across the capitol as a result of a power vacuum, not all the fallout from Akaev's departure would be destructive as Feliks Kulov would be freed from a Bishkek jail after spending four years as political prisoner of the Akaev administration.⁶³

C. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK APPLIED

1. Frame Alignment

To say that the March Events was the outcome of a frame competition between Akaev and the opposition is to state the obvious and miss the real substance of the situation. As with the Kara-Buura and Aksy incidents Akaev controlled virtually all means of institutional power necessary to create the frame of his choice and then force that frame on the country. In the weeks leading up to the March Events, however, Akaev's vast resources and the perceived abuse of those resources (candidate disqualification, preferential treatment of select candidates and the eventual rigging of elections) actually hurt the president and gave the opposition the frame behind which support could be mustered. As was evident from the pre-election protests, discontent with the election system was rife throughout the country, which meant that the opposition frame of Akaev as an abuser of power had fertile ground upon which to resonate, but the opposition's ability to capitalize on such discontent by transferring local dissatisfaction to the national level was still missing. Without the need to worry about crafting a new frame, the opposition simply needed to align their frame with the local protestors, which

⁶² Leila Saralaeva, Sultan Jumagulov, and Ainagul Abdrakhmanova, "Opposition Seizes Kyrgyz Government Building," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, March 24, 2005, http://www.iwpr.net/?p=rca&s=f&o=238753&apc_state=henircae5e7ae23379a250f69b29940842aae7e (accessed June 15, 2007); "Kyrgyz Protesters Storm Government Building," Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, March 24, 2005, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200503/0039.shtml> (accessed June 15, 2007); Meder Imakeev, "Eyewitness - Defending the White House," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, March 29, 2005, http://www.iwpr.net/?p=rca&s=f&o=238729&apc_state=henirca3e3d0684e0cd3507663f78db5c069e25 (accessed June 15, 2007).

⁶³ "Kyrgyz Deputies Appoint Interim President, Government," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, March 24, 2005, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/3/055547BC-8C26-4CBE-9183-C1285FFD294A.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

necessitated unification amongst the traditional opposition groups and with the newly disenfranchised “opposition” protests that had developed across Kyrgyzstan.

Prior to the pre-election period of the March Events, the opposition was scattered over eighty different political parties in Kyrgyzstan, each with a unique cause and leader.⁶⁴ Recognizing this fact, ten small opposition parties formed a coalition called the People’s Movement of Kyrgyzstan, in September 2004, headed by Bakiev, in an attempt to bring the different opposition parties together.⁶⁵ The previous five years worth of experience had revealed the opposition’s weakness; in the instances when factions of the opposition did unite behind a single cause, Kara-Buura and Aksy, the occurrences were primarily defined by issues of the local constituencies not broad enough to unite the entire Kyrgyzstani citizenry. As with previous elections, the Akaev administrations used institutional power to select parliamentary candidates and exclude others, however, unique to the March Events was the disqualification of candidates from the election rolls who were previously considered pro-government. In so doing, the Akaev administration expanded the opposition force to a greater extent than previously seen in Kyrgyzstani political history. Whereas in the fall of 2004, the opposition was a small group of political elites removed from power, by the time of the elections of 2005, the opposition had grown to include the traditional opposition candidates *and* all candidates disqualified from running for Parliament. While Akaev tried to stay above the fray throughout the protests, issuing only a couple of statements addressed at the lawlessness of the demonstrations, the reality was that his political capital was already spent, as he was seen to embody a corrupt regime that was, to his detriment, creating new oppositionists every day. Ironically, the new oppositionist figures could not have survived without the Akaev regime, as Akaev proved the necessary foil behind which each opposition leader rallied his supporters.

⁶⁴ Interview with opposition leader, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, September 2006.

⁶⁵ “New Political Bloc Formed in Kyrgyzstan,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, September 23, 2004, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2004/9/3F99824C-F1B3-4C64-B691-C2D44754515A.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

2. Frame Resonance

The importance of Otunbaeva's experience lies not with her, as the victim, but with Akaev as the perceived organizer of the affair and the resulting abuse of power. Otunbaeva's fate in joining her fellow former ambassadors as a rejected parliamentary candidate revealed the lengths to which Akaev was willing to go in order to maintain his control.⁶⁶ From the illegal mechanism by which her registration was revoked, the district election commission, to the timing of the revocation, only hours after her registration was awarded, and including the reasoning, lack of a quorum at the time of awarding the registration, Akaev "showed himself," as the Kyrgyz say, as willing to use whatever power necessary to maintain tight political control over would-be parliamentarians. This fact was only reaffirmed by Akaev's refusal to sign legislation allowing Otunbaeva and three other former ambassadors to compete in the parliamentary elections, despite passage in the legislature prior to the poll.⁶⁷ For the nascent opposition, the decision to bar the former diplomats in January 2005 helped to spark the frame that would come to dominate the March Events:

After assessing the current situation, we decided to start collecting signatures on 1 February, from the whole of Kyrgyzstan, from both the south and north, from villages and towns, demanding that Akaev resign from power immediately! "Is that right, fellow countrymen?" Turgunaliyev [opposition leader] asked. Protesters answered: "Yes, that is right! *Akaev, go away!*"⁶⁸ (emphasis added)

Although this refrain was repeated throughout the March Events, the fact remains that until the traditional opposition forces wedded their frame to the power of the newly formed opposition protests, discontent primarily remained at the local, not national administration. Moreover, the Tong, Kochkor, Talas, and Tuip protestors, the original

⁶⁶ "Akaev Will Not Allow Diplomats to Run for Office," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, January 26, 2005, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/1/EFA979C9-B0E2-4302-9DDE-ADF7E70495A2.html> (accessed June 15, 2007); "Initial Results in Kyrgyz Elections Spark Protests in Two Districts....," Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, March 2, 2005, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200503/0002.shtml> (accessed June 15, 2007).

⁶⁷ "Akaev Will Not Allow."

⁶⁸ "Kyrgyz Opposition Protests Supreme Court Decision," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, January 19, 2005, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/1/58BCF94B-1473-4CE5-8C47-AA6958AF6BFF.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

pre-election locations of protest, only demanded reinstatement of their candidate and, if necessary, nullification of any previous voting. Jalalabad was the notable exception to this group of original pre-election protestors, as the people there began calling for Akaev to resign as early as 4 March. In voicing displeasure with candidate disqualification, the majority of protestors took their discontent to the respective local administrations, not to the capital, Bishkek. However, to the great benefit of the traditional oppositionists, discontent with the local administration was portable to the national level which dictated that the previously crafted frame of “Akaev go away,” needed not to be refined, but only to resonate in the places where protest was strongest. This feat was accomplished after the second round of voting, when expanded protest events took root in regional power centers, and joined forces with the traditional opposition politicians. As has been documented above, the protests shared common ground for grievance, but not any common direction until after the second round of voting, when the first people’s council was held in Jalalabad on 15 March, then a second in Osh on 19 March.⁶⁹ What emerged from both of those meetings was the connection of the traditional opposition’s pre-election frame of “Akaev go away!” with the strength of the newly formed opposition protestors in control of the major southern cities. When Akaev sent Special Forces to take back the administrative buildings on 20 March, the violence that erupted and the resultant re-taking of the building by the protestors only further cemented the idea that the only acceptable solution to the situation was the resignation of Akaev.⁷⁰

3. Cultural Repertoire of Redress

The success of the March Events is directly attributable to the expansion of protest to rural areas. Mirroring the constituencies and methodologies of the Kara-Buura and Aksy groups, the majority of protestors of the March Events were rural peasants who employed the same cultural repertoire as their predecessors in 2000 and 2002, but on a wider scale. Unlike the Aksy constituency, the protestors of the March Events did not invent and use new techniques; rather the March Events simply expanded the locations of

⁶⁹ Saralaeva, Orunbekov, Abdrakhmanova, and Jumagulov, “Kyrgyz Opposition Fights”; Saipov, Jumagulov, Saralaeva, and Abdrakhmanova, “Anti-Government Protests.”

⁷⁰ Soros Foundation Kyrgyzstan, 10-22.

where the techniques of redress were to be utilized. Table 1 comprises not just the methodologies used by the Kara-Buura and Aksy constituencies, but also the tactics used by the protestors throughout Kyrgyzstan during the March Events, with the notable exception of Bishkek. While the capital was not without protests, primarily by Otunbaeva supporters, these protests were relatively small in number and tame in comparison to the events throughout the rest of the country. Moreover, once the cultural repertoire of the Bishkek protestors was expanded to include other forms of redress besides rallying, the Akaev regime collapsed within a matter of days, an outcome dependent as much on the cultural repertoire as the validation of such techniques occurring throughout the country in the weeks prior to 24 March.

Comparing the events of the capital with those of the rural areas prior to the 24 March ouster of Akaev reveals a cultural repertoire reliant on relative perspective. While Otunbaeva and others were able to mobilize supporters in Bishkek, these events barely gave Akaev pause for concern, whereas protests in the rural regions, of the same size and concerned with the same issues proved daunting. Beginning in January, over seven weeks before the scheduled elections, Bishkek protestors managed to hold rallies and picket the authorities, due to the disqualification of their candidate, yet these rallies proved largely ineffective. Never able to muster more than 500 people at any one rally, the number of Bishkek protestors proved just as limiting as the cultural repertoire employed, picketing the local administration buildings and holding rallies to decry Akaev.⁷¹ The Bishkek protestors garnered little local support and ultimately decided to halt protest in the beginning of February after almost a month of action, yet without the reinstatement of Otunbaeva.⁷² By contrast, the protests of rural Tuip, Tong, and Bakai-Ata villages, met with almost immediate success. In both the Tuip and Bakai-Ata regions, previously disqualified candidates were allowed to run after supporters staged

⁷¹ "Kyrgyzstan: 16 - 22 January 2005," Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, January 24, 2005, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200501/0023.shtml> (accessed June 15, 2007); "Kyrgyz Opposition Holds Demonstration in Capital," Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, January 21, 2005, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200501/0019.shtml> (accessed June 15, 2007); "Kyrgyz Opposition Protests Supreme Court."

⁷² "Kyrgyz Opposition Decides to Halt Protest Rally," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, February 1, 2005, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/2/AF30FB1D-524D-452F-8EEF-05E9DB9C52C9.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

protests and blocked roads.⁷³ In Tong, Maliev's supporters forced Akaev to intervene and remove the head of the local administration after they seized the local administration building. While the same success was not forthcoming in Kochkor, the protestors did manage to control the situation through a blockade of the Bishkek-Toragut road and as they agreed to vote "against all" forcing a delay in the initial round of voting. Moreover, the blockade of the Bishkek-Osh road, and the marches of rural peasants to the regional centers of Jalalabad and Osh in order to stage massive protests, along with the holding of *kuraltais* to establish a separate governing power, were the techniques of redress available to the rural protestors that continued from the Aksy events and revealed the limits of Akaev's power outside of Bishkek. In fact, Akaev's tenuous hold on power was finally squashed when his Special Forces were set against the cultural repertoire of the rural protestors in Jalalabad and Osh on 20 and 21 March, respectively. By taking, then losing the administrative buildings, Akaev's trump card that had worked in Kara-Buura in 2000 failed miserably. Making matters worse, the decision by the local security forces to side with the local protestors, signaled the true victory of the cultural repertoire employed by the rural protestors, who, armed with fresh victories marched on Bishkek.⁷⁴ By capitulating to the opposition in Kyrgyzstan's second and third largest cities, the security forces not only validated the cultural repertoire of the protestors, but gave the opposition the necessary momentum to levy the threat of employing similar techniques against the security forces and government in Bishkek. Indeed the cultural repertoire of the rural protestors succeeded in the capital on 24 March due to the momentum and effectiveness of the entire March Events.

⁷³ "Kyrgyz Opposition Candidate Allowed to Run," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, February 24, 2005, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/2/55E75F6E-6BB3-49A1-89D2-FE68967D1C09.html> (accessed June 15, 2007); "Kyrgyz Election Update."

⁷⁴ "Kyrgyz Demonstrators Storm Buildings," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, March 21, 2005, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/3/831B6D50-D0F9-4C51-B855-DBD6F7AEE566.html> (accessed June 15, 2007); "Kyrgyzstan: Authorities Attempt to Contain Protests, Negotiate," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, March 21, 2005, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/3/F49CE130-3ADD-4F04-B98A-88AED1C16A9C.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

D. PEASANT REBELLION THEORY

While not all of the protests that occurred over the entire time period of the March Events were fostered by and primarily composed of peasants, the protest events which began and sustained the momentum of the March Events were fundamentally peasant-driven. Even in the southern cities of Jalalabad and Osh, where the southern protest took on greatest attention, the composition of those occupying the administration buildings, holding rallies, and conducting the *kuraltais* were mostly rural peasants.⁷⁵ These protests took on a significant importance in the history of the March Events, as they beget similar protests around the country, which ultimately brought down Akaev.

When understood in the context of the parliamentary conversion from bi-cameral to unicameral, the March Events were protests motivated by a loss-averse peasantry seeking to prevent the loss of political power and acceptant of the risks involved. As outlined above, the initial locations of protest, outside of Bishkek, were all in rural constituencies where a traditional pro-government candidate had fallen out with the Akaev administration and was disqualified from the election rolls in the weeks prior to round one voting. By disqualifying these candidates, while promoting others, Akaev was essentially attempting to take away political power from not just the local politician but his rural constituency as well. In other words, the rural constituencies of the disqualified politicians took action against the potential loss of political power, advocating only for that which maintained the status quo. Taking on the state's decision in Kyrgyzstan was an inherently risky proposition, but by initially focusing on local election commissions, the peasantry did not set out to change the status quo. Had candidates not been disqualified, any ensuing protests could be considered risk-neutral as evidence of peasants seeking gains; however, protest did not erupt prior to candidate disqualification, suggesting that the loss of the status quo or potential loss of political power is what actually drove the peasantry to rally on behalf of their candidate.

In attempting to explicate the evolution of events, one cannot exclude the possibility of the peasantry adopting a risk-neutral stance intermittently; however in the

⁷⁵ Interview with NGO leaders of Jalalabad Oblast, Jalalabad, Kyrgyzstan, September 2006.

overall history of the March Events, the actions of the protestors suggest that any ground gained from risk-neutral action came to be seen as the status quo, which the peasantry was reluctant to relinquish. For example, the taking of the administrative buildings and blockading of roads throughout the country required ignoring the potential consequences involved in such behavior, a risk-neutral perspective, yet after a period of time, the occupation of the administrative buildings and the control over the various roads by the peasant protestors came to be seen as the status quo, or in social mobilization terminology, normalized. Thus, the reaction of the peasant protestors to re-take the administration buildings in Jalalabad and Osh after the Special Forces raids was action motivated by a peasantry refusing to relinquish that which they already possessed.

E. CONCLUSION

The manner in which the March Events played out revealed the extent to which Kyrgyzstan of 2005 was a rural country. Moving from the periphery to the center, the movement was able to slowly gain sufficient momentum that when married to the support already available in Bishkek proved too daunting for Akaev. Lacking tantamount resources, the traditional opposition and the new opposition had to take advantage of that which was available; primary among these options was manipulation of Akaev's own actions. Through his own hubris Akaev allowed the opposition to out maneuver him in the battle of frame resonance by capitalizing on the decisions of the local election apparatus and easily linking those decisions with the president. Further, Akaev underestimated the implications of parliamentary conversion, a transformation that was not lost on the candidates, but yet which pro-presidential parties took for granted. In his attempt to hand-pick the would-be parliamentarians from the available cadre, Akaev underestimated the consequences of taking away political power from those grown accustomed to such privilege. The marriage of the new opposition with the traditional opposition is ultimately the event that undid Akaev as the protestors concentrated not on how to mobilize, but on how to meet with success.

IV. PROTEST IN POST-AKAEV KYRGYZSTAN

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the two largest social-mobilization efforts in the post-Akaev era, the Akmatbaev affair and the on-going struggle of the opposition movement. The next section gives the necessary background on both cases, which span multiple months. Whereas the Akmatbaev affair began and concluded in a seven-month time period, the opposition's struggle to enact their political reforms has yet to cease, however, for the purposes of this thesis, the case study of the opposition will span a single year's worth of protest from April 2006 to April 2007. In the third section, the events are analyzed according to social mobilization theory. For the fourth section, peasant rebellion theory in terms of loss-aversion and risk-neutrality is applied to both case studies. Finally, the concluding section reviews the two cases in light of post-Akaev era protest.

B. BACKGROUND

1. The Akmatbaev Affair

a. Round One

Only months after taking office as the first prime minister in post-Akaev Kyrgyzstan, Feliks Kulov faced not just calls for his resignation, but accusations of conspiracy to murder.⁷⁶ On 20 October 2005, the death of parliamentarian Tynchbek Akmatbaev at the hands of prisoners in the very same prison where Kulov was held during the Akaev era sparked a furor and protest not seen in Kyrgyzstan since the March Events. Just as the details of Akmatbaev's death remain controversial in Kyrgyzstan, so does Kulov's role in the affair. The indisputable facts are: one, Akmatbaev, as chairman of the Kyrgyz parliament's committee for legal affairs, defense and law and order, traveled to the prison to quell the prisoner uprising; two, Kulov traveled to the

⁷⁶ "Kyrgyz Protest Prompts Appeal for Order," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, October 22, 2005, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/10/64071CA1-5848-40D1-829B-40C78B6A27EF.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

Moldavanovka prison as well on 20 October 2005; and three, while at the prison, Kulov negotiated the release of the bodies of those killed. Two days later, the parliamentarian's death caused 500 protestors to descend on Bishkek from Akmatbaev's constituency in the Issyk-Kul region to demand Kulov's resignation, accusing him of murder.⁷⁷ Protestor reasoning was based upon rumors of criminal connections between a supposed Kulov associate and Akmatbaev's brother Rysbek. During the Akaev era, Kulov was imprisoned at the Moldavanovka prison, where another infamous inmate was housed, Aziz Batukaev, an ethnic Chechen and reputed crime boss, who had accused Rysbek Akmatbaev of murder.⁷⁸ Also, during the Akaev era, Rysbek Akmatbaev, a reputed crime-boss himself, lived on the lam owing to pending murder charges against him, only returning to Kyrgyzstan in May of 2005.⁷⁹ For Tynchbek Akmatbaev's constituents, Kulov's imprisonment with Batukaev was sufficient enough reason to make the accusation that Kulov arranged for Akmatbaev's murder, necessitating removal from the post of prime minister.⁸⁰

Although the protests continued for only six days, short by the standards of the March Events, procedurally they represented a new path for the both parties involved. Deputy Interior Minister Alymbai Sultanov, accused of wrongdoing by the Bishkek protestors, was sacked by Kulov on 24 October, the third day of protests.⁸¹ Only one day later, Parliamentary Speaker Tekebaev met with Rysbek Akmatbaev and announced the creation of a seven-member parliamentary commission to investigate

⁷⁷ Leila Saralaeva and Aziza Turdueva, "Prison Riot Sparks Political Row in Kyrgyzstan," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, October 17, 2005, http://iwpr.net/?p=rca&s=f&o=257323&apc_state=henirca1b98f68e3bb6d2edd1a5cf2c01994b32 (accessed June 15, 2007).

⁷⁸ "Kyrgyzstan: Restive Days in Bishkek," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, October 30, 2005, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/10/88A189BD-7435-47A2-93EE-E4378C3E83E8.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

⁷⁹ Leila Saralaeva, "Tense Stand-off Ends Peacefully in Kyrgyz Capital," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, April 1, 2006, http://iwpr.net/?p=rca&s=f&o=260690&apc_state=henirca46c31befca9bc558c466494952e343ee (accessed June 15, 2007).

⁸⁰ Gulnoza Saidazimova, "Kyrgyzstan: Prison Unrest Highlights Alleged Political Power Struggle," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, November 2, 2005, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/11/AE30FC63-90E3-4B74-888A-9120CB9DB315.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

⁸¹ Pannier, "Kyrgyzstan: Prison Riots."

Tynchbek Akmatbaev's death. Concurrently, Kulov supporters held counter-demonstrations, reaching a peak of 1,500 demonstrators, to demand an end to criminality in the halls of power.⁸² Finally, on the six day of demonstrations, 27 October 2005, President Bakiev agreed to meet with a delegation of Akmatbaev's supporters and negotiated an end to the protests pending the results of the parliamentary commission.⁸³

b. Round Two

Separated by months, but connected by the same center of gravity, the second chapter of the Akmatbaev affair began on 7 February 2006, when Rysbek Akmatbaev registered to run in the by-election for his brother's vacated parliamentary seat.⁸⁴ By registering, Akmatbaev caused a legal crisis that again fostered pro-Akmatbaev protestors to gather in Bishkek. After reversing the initial decision granting him the right to run, the Central Election Commission barred Akmatbaev from running owing to the fact that he had not lived in Kyrgyzstan continuously for the previous five years, a fact supplied by the prime minister's office and a Bishkek nongovernmental organization (NGO), the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society.⁸⁵ In response to the disqualification, Akmatbaev supporters took to the streets of Balykchy, the open constituency, blocking the roads and halting traffic on 30 March 2006.⁸⁶ A day later, 1,000 Akmatbaev supporters gathered in front of the White House in Bishkek demanding the reinstatement of Akmatbaev and the removal of Kulov from the post of prime

⁸² "Premier's Supporters Rally in Kyrgyzstan," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, October 28, 2005, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/10/D2EEF2CF-E4EB-4745-8179-A21FACDA940B.html> (accessed June 15, 2007); "Bishkek Demonstrators Criticize President," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, October 28, 2005, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/10/53440415-EA51-41FE-86FD-B4F810FA2AC2.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

⁸³ Leila Saralaeva, "Kyrgyzstan Draws Breath After Political Stand-Off," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, October 30, 2005, http://iwpr.net/?p=rca&s=f&o=257310&apc_state=henircabc50d8082321cdadd936ab4495f2c1d5 (accessed June 15, 2007).

⁸⁴ "Slain Deputy's Brother Aims for Kyrgyz Parliament," Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, February 7, 2006, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200602/0012.shtml> (accessed June 15, 2007).

⁸⁵ Saralaeva, "Tense Stand-off."

⁸⁶ Bruce Pannier, "Kyrgyzstan: Supporters of Barred Candidate Block Roads," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, March 30, 2006, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/3/E0C2E268-77C0-464F-950C-915759F1947C.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

minister.⁸⁷ With tensions rising, President Bakiev exited the White House and addressed the protestors asking that they disperse and await the decision of the courts, a request granted the president.⁸⁸ On 3 April 2006, a Bishkek district court reinstated Akmatbaev's candidacy, allowing him to run, a decision later confirmed by the Supreme Court.⁸⁹ In response to the reinstatement, the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society staged a rally on the day prior to the by-election of 9 April in which 2,000 marched for a Kyrgyzstan "free from criminals."⁹⁰ The next day as expected Rysbek Akmatbaev won the Balykchy by-election, however, like his candidacy, Rysbek Akmatbaev's parliamentary status caused yet another legal crisis. Parliamentarians are not subject to court investigation, yet Akmatbaev's case was still technically open awaiting appeal, placing him in a true legal limbo until such a time as the issue was adjudicated. As such, Akmatbaev could neither appear in court as a parliamentarian, nor take his seat while his case was still open.

c. Round Three

Slightly over a month from the by-election, with the Central Election Commission still undecided, Rysbek Akmatbaev was gunned down and killed leaving a mosque in the village of Kokzhar on 10 May 2006. Protests erupted two days later in Balykchy where constituents blocked roads and accused Kulov of the murder and demanding an investigation. Despite initially refusing to meet with Akmatbaev's supporters, President Bakiev agreed to meet with representatives of the protestors on 16

⁸⁷ "Some 1,000 Protest in Bishkek," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, March 31, 2006, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/3/5ECDB596-E82D-484A-927C-125ECA984407.html> (accessed June 15, 2007); "Supporters of Would-Be Kyrgyz Parliamentary Candidate Protest in Bishkek....," Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, April 3, 2006, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200604/0000.shtml> (accessed June 15, 2007).

⁸⁸ Saralaeva, "Tense Stand-off"; "Demonstration in Bishkek Ends."

⁸⁹ Leila Saralaeva and Gulnura Toralieva, "Kyrgyz Premier Orders Mafia Clampdown," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, April 14, 2006, http://iwpr.net/?p=rca&s=f&o=261093&apc_state=henirca460fd112e87a390cb39f1ae85e2c9c2b (accessed June 15, 2007).

⁹⁰ "Kyrgyz Demonstrators Call for Law and Order," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, April 8, 2006, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/4/24EDFADD-58E2-44C4-B035-3D3CECA58618.html> (accessed June 15, 2007); Saralaeva and Toralieva, "Kyrgyz Premier."

May in an attempt to quell the unrest that had descended upon the Issyk-Kul region.⁹¹ While the exact details of the meeting between Bakiev and Akmatbaev's supporters remains unknown, upon return to Issyk-Kul, Akmatbaev's representatives publicly urged the protestors to halt the road blockade and protests.⁹² Despite the earlier calls for Kulov's resignation and an investigation into Akmatbaev's death, the 16 May meeting was the last public confrontation between the state and Akmatbaev's supporters signaling the end of the Akmatbaev affair.

2. The Opposition's Struggle

The year of intermittent opposition protests between April 2006 and April 2007 revealed an opposition movement organizing in a new location, beholden to a less aggressive methodology of redress, and with a different composition of actors. Decrying Bakiev for broken campaign promises—primarily constitutional reform—the opposition began their struggle where the March Events left off, with an April 2006 single-day rally in Bishkek. One year later however, in April 2007, the opposition found itself in no less the same position as the year previous, protesting unfulfilled promises, but with new leadership and the recipient of a violent government crackdown after a multi-day protest event. With leadership born out of the Akaev era, but reinvigorated by more recent fallout with Bakiev, and armed with the memory of the March Events, the opposition set out upon a path of urban protest directed at frustration with the presidential administration. Transplanted to the capital, Bishkek, the opposition shed the periphery to center paradigm of the March Events for a center-focused approach. Led by members of parliament such as Tekebaev, Beknazarov, Melis Eshimkanov, former Foreign Minister Otunbaeva, and the leader of the Social Democratic Party Almaz Atambaev, amongst

⁹¹ Gulnoza Saidazimova, "Kyrgyzstan: President Refuses to Meet with Slain Candidate's Supporters," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, May 16, 2006, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/5/B1A713D4-CEE7-4013-A772-D0866E4F5CCD.html> (accessed June 15, 2007); "Kyrgyz President Meets with Slain Figure's Supporters," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, May 16, 2006, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/5/64A95C47-4896-4648-B008-5BB0A0571C68.html> (accessed June 15, 2007); "Kyrgyzstan: President Discusses Government Reshuffle, Border Unrest," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, May 16, 2006, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/5/07902B84-753D-4BA7-902E-899B5874AB71.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

⁹² "Kyrgyz President Meets with Relatives of Slain Would-Be Deputy," Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, May 17, 2006, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200605/0011.shtml> (accessed June 15, 2007).

others, the opposition leadership was not short of experience, however, such experience would not translate into action until the third opposition protest of 2006 in November and the first of 2007 in April.⁹³

a. November 2006

Where the April and May single-day protests lacked equivalent numbers of protestors and failed to produce substantive changes to the Kyrgyzstani constitution, the November protests were the most heavily attended since the March Events and fostered the kind of major constitutional changes always desired by the opposition. In an attempt to head off major clashes, President Bakiev met with opposition leaders on 31 October promising to submit a draft constitution to Parliament on 2 November that conceded many opposition demands, however Bakiev failed to meet the deadline by four days submitting his proposal on 6 November.⁹⁴ In the interim, the opposition launched the planned protests on 2 November as both Bakiev and Prime Minister Kulov accused the opposition of plotting a coup.⁹⁵ Despite the accusation and Bakiev's broken promises, the first day of protests saw more than 15,000 people rally in support of the

⁹³ Leila Saralaeva, "Kyrgyz Summit Fails to Impress," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, April 21, 2006, http://iwpr.net/?p=rca&s=f&o=261289&apc_state=henircac51fab653144db539937df9f5535d61e (accessed June 15, 2007); Cholpon Orozobekova, "Kyrgyz Parliament Rebuffs Ministers," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, October 1, 2005, http://iwpr.net/?p=rca&s=f&o=257370&apc_state=henircac9196b36d364f02bcab9f4f38cac529e;%20http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/9/6D23B228-2644-4BE6-958C-93218A773403.html (accessed June 15, 2007); "Kyrgyz Parliament Speaker Steps Down," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, February 27, 2005, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/2/A0E19880-2D66-4263-9291-142E6A5B00D1.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

⁹⁴ Amanov Taalaibek, "Kyrgyz Opposition Rally Looms," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, October 27, 2006, http://www.iwpr.net/?p=rca&s=f&o=324922&apc_state=henircac2f2df73166665a3ffc855a94d9b3ab80 (accessed June 15, 2007); Cholpon Orozobekova, "Kyrgyzstan: No Olive Branch from President," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, November 6, 2006, http://www.iwpr.net/?p=rca&s=f&o=325156&apc_state=henircacbb53ec4cb9c2b66aa69b2358c60a76f (accessed June 15, 2007).

⁹⁵ Bruce Pannier, "Kyrgyz Protesters Vow to Continue," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, November 2, 2006, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/11/8AF20998-EA9B-4777-B1AD-890165FEFD0C.html> (accessed June 15, 2007); "Kyrgyz PM Alleges Coup Plot," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, November 3, 2006, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/11/6FC9A2AA-C124-4E89-8A54-FF13000EB5EF.html> (accessed June 15, 2007); "Kyrgyz Opposition Protest Continues," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, November 5, 2006, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/11/4F3DE4FB-73E4-4B8F-8CAB-91213FE99561.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

opposition calling for a new constitution.⁹⁶ Angered at Bakiev, the opposition expanded upon their platform by marching to the Bishkek Mayor's office and the state run media station in an effort to draw sympathy and air time, respectively, while awaiting Bakiev's proposed constitution.⁹⁷ When Bakiev did submit his proposed constitution on 6 November, he did so without the promised reforms of 31 October, a move that sparked opposition fury and even greater protestor participation.⁹⁸ Smarting from Bakiev's proposal, forty-five parliamentarians, lacking the requisite fifty-one for a quorum, in the early hours of 7 November created a body called the "Constituent Assembly" and drafted a separate constitution significantly curtailing presidential powers, all the while as protestors remained in the central square.⁹⁹ Infuriated, Bakiev accused the parliamentarians of attempting to "usurp power," but realizing the power of the opposition's supporters—rumored in the tens of thousands and convened outside the White House—he called on the opposition to negotiate with his representatives on a compromise constitution.¹⁰⁰ Despite the overture, rising tensions between the two parties spilled over into the street in the form of a clash between pro-presidential and opposition groups, with the former considerably smaller than the latter, necessitating police intervention to prevent further injury.¹⁰¹ As tensions hit a peak on the afternoon of 7

⁹⁶ Pannier, "Kyrgyz Protesters Vow."

⁹⁷ "Kyrgyz Opposition Protest Enters Fourth Day," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, November 5, 2006, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/11/967E3A9F-C6FC-4F28-8492-12381DD77D88.html> (accessed June 15, 2007); "Kyrgyz Opposition Protest Continues."

⁹⁸ Jean-Christophe Peuch, "Kyrgyzstan: Crisis Deepens After President Proposes Constitutional Changes," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, November 6, 2006, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/11/F80128A2-6787-48B4-A9D5-12BF9CFD44EC5.html> (accessed June 15, 2007); "Thousands Demand Kyrgyz President Resign," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, November 6, 2006, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/11/D0AF3587-2547-4BD6-AC47-25DED5B1734C.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

⁹⁹ Jean-Christophe Peuch, "Kyrgyzstan: Deputies Take Legal Steps for New Constitution," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, November 6, 2006, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/11/C1E7E6D1-A898-460B-9AC6-20B7B3E09A64.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

¹⁰⁰ Jean-Christophe Peuch, "Kyrgyzstan: Bakiev Accuses Opposition of Seeking to Usurp Power," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, November 7, 2006, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/11/4C9E8CE9-DAD3-4B9E-A8D2-714AD87FDD93.html> (accessed June 15, 2007); Peuch, "Kyrgyzstan: Deputies Take Legal."

¹⁰¹ "Minor Clash Erupts among Kyrgyz Demonstrators," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, November 7, 2006, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/11/6A73C550-A766-4C55-9397-959945041DBE.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

November, both parties announced that they had reached a tentative agreement on a new constitution thereby diffusing the potential for massive clashes between the security forces and the protestors and only two days later, the constitution became law.¹⁰² While the process of creating a weaker executive in the constitution was the prime demand of the opposition, the ensuing legal state of affairs unleashed upon Kyrgyzstan created an unanticipated constitutional crisis.

b. April 2007

In what can only be described as a Kyrgyzstani turn of events, the April 2007 opposition protests were precipitated and led by the same person, Feliks Kulov. Slightly more than a month after airing his concerns over the constitutional reform process, Feliks Kulov resigned as prime minister, forcing a constitutional crisis.¹⁰³ In short, the November 2006 constitution required government formation by a ruling parliamentary party of fifty percent or more, yet there was no ruling party, not to mention that the new constitution called for an expansion of parliament from seventy-five to ninety seats, which had yet to occur. As such, Bakiev seized the opportunity to submit new amendments to the constitution that returned certain powers to the presidency, one of which was the power to form a government, and on 30 December 2006, Parliament

¹⁰² Cholpon Orozobekova and Aziza Turdueva, "Kyrgyzstan Steps Back from the Brink," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, November 10, 2006, http://www.iwpr.net/?p=rca&s=f&o=325187&apc_state=henirca016cc5be19da8f4af802f6d8402e7442 (accessed June 15, 2007); Jean-Christophe Peuch, "Kyrgyzstan: Breakthrough in Sight in Political Crisis," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, November 7, 2006, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/11/A8FFFDE1-77A3-4BF2-95A8-722DD84F7BC2.html> (accessed June 15, 2007); Jean-Christophe Peuch, "Kyrgyzstan: Parliament Adopts Constitution Curtailing Presidential Powers," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, November 08, 2006, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/11/DEDF91B4-A729-421A-A157-4F569C5A2016.html> (accessed June 15, 2007); "New Kyrgyz Constitution Comes into Effect," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, November 9, 2006, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/11/85A7E30F-D905-40BA-96FF-9B9815EBAD79.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

¹⁰³ Bruce Pannier, "Kyrgyz Government Resigns," Eurasia Insight, December 19, 2006, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/pp121906.shtml> (accessed January 15, 2007); Daniel Sershen, "Kyrgyzstan: Conflict Over Constitution Continues," Eurasia Insight, December 22, 2006, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav122206.shtml> (accessed June 15, 2007); "Kyrgyz PM Airs."

approved Kyrgyzstan's third post-Akaev constitution.¹⁰⁴ Upon adoption of the new constitution, Bakiev nominated Kulov for prime minister, however, Parliament rebuffed the submission and rejected Kulov's candidacy, not once, but twice.¹⁰⁵ Three weeks later, Feliks Kulov joined the opposition and began the process of calling for early presidential elections, which would eventually lead to the April 2007 protests.¹⁰⁶

Where the opposition was forced to wait until mid-way through the November 2006 protests for compromise from Bakiev, the April 2007 protests precipitated presidential compromise before the first rally. On 30 March 2007, Parliament confirmed Bakiev's nomination of a new prime minister, Almaz Atambaev, chosen from the opposition.¹⁰⁷ Widely seen as a compromise gesture, Atamabev had been amongst the critics of the Bakiev administration at the November 2006 rallies, yet his confirmation was made without the widespread support of the opposition movement, which chose not to participate in government despite entreaties.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, since Kulov's joining of the opposition, the focus of demands changed from constitutional

¹⁰⁴ Cholpon Orozobekova, "Yet Another Constitution for Kyrgyzstan," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, January 16, 2007, http://www.iwpr.net/?p=rca&s=f&o=328510&apc_state=henircab1d32a602ddd58462a0587d71b950582 (accessed June 15, 2007); "Kyrgyz Lawmakers Amend New Constitution," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, December 30, 2006, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/12/1BEA548C-702F-44C6-91DD-359A37230EB0.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

¹⁰⁵ "Kulov Won't be Reappointed Kyrgyz Prime Minister," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, January 25, 2007, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/1/276264A3-2E4C-4E7F-A858-F5434EC5FE00.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

¹⁰⁶ "Kyrgyz Opposition Movement Calls for President's Resignation," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, February 19, 2007, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/2/C77EDCF-3FE4-4923-8603-D4A79B3759A4.html> (accessed June 15, 2007); Bruce Pannier, "Kyrgyzstan: New Opposition Movement Fuels Ongoing Political Dispute," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, February 20, 2007, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/2/B78CC47A-DDCB-44A9-BBF8-E65EDBFEBBD3.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

¹⁰⁷ "Kyrgyz Parliament Confirms New Prime Minister," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, March 20, 2007, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/3/978C8DB7-9029-4E51-B6DE-9B1C6FBC5FFB.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

¹⁰⁸ "Kyrgyz Opposition Leaders Won't Join Unity Government," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, March 29, 2007, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/3/8A72D178-9979-4A55-A431-2CD9EFC64EF2.html> (accessed June 15, 2007); "Kyrgyz Opposition Bloc Rejects Coalition Government Proposal," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, April 2, 2007, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/4/D227956C-3EF0-4AFA-8C2A-C30A0221A4EB.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

amendments to early presidential elections, a call which Bakiev roundly rejected.¹⁰⁹ Nonetheless, the opposition continued applying pressure on Bakiev before the planned rallies of 11 April.¹¹⁰ As a sign of further compromise, Prime Minister Atambaev created a working group for constitutional reform, comprised of opposition politicians less than a week after taking office and a week from the first day of scheduled rallies.¹¹¹ Despite these two gestures, the opposition held rallies across the country in the days prior to the scheduled 11 April mass rally in Bishkek, even as Bakiev accused the opposition of again plotting a coup.¹¹²

The 11 April rallies were widely attended by the opposition and revealed the sophistication of the maturing opposition movement; however, at the end of the nine day rally the opposition met not with success but with persecution. With over 10,000 protestors rallying on the first day, the April 2007 protests appeared to be following the same path as the November 2006 rallies, yet in a departure from the previous year's peaceful conclusions, the security services closed down the protests on 19 April. Unlike the relatively peaceful protests of 2006, the last day of the April rallies saw a group of

¹⁰⁹ "Kyrgyz Opposition Group Calls for Early Presidential Poll," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, March 5, 2007, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/3/84CC5191-B290-4125-B484-03D90CEE66CA.html> (accessed June 15, 2007); "Kyrgyz Opposition Leader Meets with Bakiev," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, March 19, 2007, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/3/E9BAE2A7-FE6F-45A4-9B40-D298E1A7B542.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

¹¹⁰ Bruce Pannier, "Kyrgyzstan: Opposition Groups Planning More Demonstrations," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, March 14, 2007, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/3/D042F96C-94DC-460C-AD2A-8370284428B1.html> (accessed June 15, 2007); Bruce Pannier, "Kyrgyzstan: President Offers Concessions Ahead of Mass Protest," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, March 28, 2007, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/3/C1506A50-2C0E-4726-AF92-2AC3F0803B1D.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

¹¹¹ "Kyrgyz Premier Creates Working Group on Reform," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, April 05, 2007, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/4/D37D3F93-6A5B-4B3A-9095-548A391224F1.html> (accessed January 15, 2007); Taalaibek Amanov, "No Give and Take in Kyrgyz Stand-off," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, April 03, 2007, http://www.iwpr.net/?p=rca&s=f&o=334604&apc_state=henircafe9035fdb123dd1c44cc8484dcfcc16 (accessed June 15, 2007).

¹¹² Bruce Pannier, "Kyrgyzstan: Protests Gain Steam Ahead of Major Antigovernment Rally," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, April 09, 2007, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/4/62CE11F8-BF73-4322-A80E-A1C45AA548BC.html> (accessed June 15, 2007); "Scattered Rallies Target Kyrgyz President," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, April 09, 2007, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/4/42BEF45A-1EC5-4167-B842-715810CED7B1.html> (accessed January 15, 2007); "Kyrgyz President Says Opponents Seek 'Coup'," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, April 10, 2007, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/4/D0B6EE4A-512F-497C-B9E3-55C39C3701BA.html> (accessed January 15, 2007).

2,000 supposedly opposition protestors sling stones at the White House, necessitating intervention on behalf of the security forces, and precipitating a further crackdown that evening, wiping out the opposition.¹¹³ Despite an average daily attendance of 4,000, peaceful marches to the state media outlets, and a call for debate on the dissolution of parliament, rumors persisted about the increasing levels of violence besieging the rallies.¹¹⁴ In the worst incident, a demonstrator who had returned to his home in Naryn province was found dead in a holding cell, after being detained by local authorities.¹¹⁵ This served as the basis for pro-presidential MPs to stand against taking any action on constitutional reforms under the threat of violence from an allegedly unruly and undisciplined opposition.¹¹⁶ For the opposition's part, the opposition leaders accused the authorities of persecution amidst post-rally detentions.¹¹⁷

C. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK APPLIED

1. Frame Resonance

a. *The Akmatbaev Affair*

The Akmatbaev affair represented a notable step in the evolution of frame resonance in Kyrgyzstan not due to the actual frames, but due to how the frames were presented to the public. Throughout the thrice initiated protests, Akmatbaev supporters were fundamentally advocating frames designed around individuals. In the case of

¹¹³ "Bishkek Police Fire Tear Gas at Protesters," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, April 19, 2007, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/4/74FD5E0D-90E0-4D1F-A44B-4D9D2499FEEF.html> (accessed June 15, 2007); "Kyrgyz Government Orders End to Opposition Rally," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, April 19, 2007, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/4/BDDE0D12-AE3D-43AB-9E98-A982DFBF3483.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

¹¹⁴ Bruce Pannier, "Kyrgyzstan: Positions Harden as Rallies Continue," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, April 18, 2007, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/4/9A2DB1A8-511B-46CB-890E-951BE87CC7C7.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

¹¹⁵ "Kyrgyz Lawmakers Want Naryn Officials Fired," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, April 19, 2007, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/4/7B115E91-560F-4E59-BE5D-AFF2EF6FE3C5.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

¹¹⁶ Pannier, "Kyrgyzstan: Positions Harden."

¹¹⁷ "Kyrgyz Opposition Leader Questioned Over Disorder," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, April 21, 2007, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/4/83B33B20-D57A-4E13-8333-D32076F59952.html> (accessed June 15, 2007); "Kyrgyz Activists Rally for Release of Opposition," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, April 25, 2007, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/4/B76903DB-D278-4D06-BE16-ACFCFA782FF6.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

Tynchbek Akmatbaev's death, the protestors' frame was crafted upon the involvement and personal history of Prime Minister Kulov. During the second round of Akmatbaev protests, in which supporters advocated for the inclusion of Rysbek Akmatbaev in the by-election poll, the demonstrators' frame centered again on Kulov as the organizer of the whole affair.¹¹⁸ In the last instance, the murder of Rysbek Akmatbaev brought an end to the entire affair, as the death of the individual leader resulted in the end of the larger cause.¹¹⁹

The initial Akmatbaev frame of Kulov as the “killer” of Tynchbek Akmatbaev failed to resonate with an audience outside of Akmatbaev’s supporters owing to Kulov’s high esteem and the Akmatbaev brother’s shadowy past. Less than two days after Tynchbek Akmatbaev's death, as the facts of the incident were still surfacing, Akmatbaev supporters took to the streets of Bishkek, labeling Kulov a “killer,” and calling for his resignation, a call that would last for six days until an end to the protests were negotiated by President Bakiev on 27 October.¹²⁰ In attacking Kulov, the individual, the protestors attacked Kulov’s past, and created two major assumptions upon which their frame rested; firstly, Kulov was a true criminal who served time for a real reason; and secondly, while incarcerated, Kulov garnered personal ties with fellow criminals for future exploitation.¹²¹ Unfortunately for the Akmatbaev group, the veracity of these two pillars was so doubtful as to essentially undermine both the frame of Kulov and the Akmatbaev brother’s credibility. Kulov's incarceration was widely seen as false and politically motivated by the Akaev administration which is why he was released from Moldavanovka prison on 24 March 2005, only hours after Akaev's flight to Russia.¹²²

¹¹⁸ Saralaeva and Toralieva, “Kyrgyz Premier.”; “Some 1,000 Protest.”

¹¹⁹ Cholpon Orozobekova and Leila Saralaeva, “Kyrgyzstan: Controversial Figure Meets Bloody End,” Institute for War and Peace Reporting, March 11, 2006, http://iwpr.net/?p=rca&s=f&o=261727&apc_state=henirca8d439f3cc902e1888fdd459b9e85a56d (accessed June 15, 2007).

¹²⁰ Saralaeva and Turdueva, “Prison Riot.”

¹²¹ “Kyrgyz Protest Prompts.”

¹²² Liz Fuller, “Profile: Feliks Kulov,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, March 25, 2007, <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/3/EC9E9641-1632-4981-A435-21505D93A517.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

Further, the Akmatbaev frame attempted to negatively associate Kulov with the underworld, while exempting the Rysbek and Tynchbek of the same association.

Undaunted by the facts, Rysbek Akmatbaev expanded his frame around individual culpability for his brother's death, "Besides Feliks [Kulov], there are some other people responsible [for his death] -- [parliamentary] speaker [Omurbek] Tekebaev and Deputy Interior Minister Alymbai Sultanov."¹²³ No where was the reaction to accusations of individual culpability more evident, than in the counter-protests staged by Kulov supporters, who laid the foundation for a reactionary frame targeting the larger issue of criminality within Kyrgyzstan. Three days after the Akmatbaev protestors descended upon Bishkek, Kulov supporters and various NGOs organized a rally for "Kyrgyzstan Without Criminality."¹²⁴ Given that Tynchbek Akmatbaev's death was the third assassination of a parliamentarian since the March Events, Kulov's supporters decided to not address the specific incident, but the larger issue.¹²⁵ With greater numbers and a different location, Kulov's supporters crafted a frame that both showed support for the prime minister and contempt with the overall criminal element inside Kyrgyzstan: "The people of Kyrgyzstan demand the imposition of order and an uncompromising battle with the criminal world, which will ensure [our] safety."¹²⁶ By creating a more general frame focused on an issue rather than an individual, and through appeal to a national, rather than local audience, Kulov was able to withstand the calls for his resignation despite the disciplined and vociferous Akmatbaev campaign.

Months later, when Akmatbaev applied to run in the by-election, the opposing sides chose to slightly enhance their previous frames. Kulov's original frame of criminality plaguing Kyrgyzstan proved to be not only apropos but coming to fruition. The controversy surrounding Rysbek Akmatbaev's registration involved not just his

¹²³ Pannier, "Kyrgyzstan: Prison Riots."

¹²⁴ "Premier's Supporters Rally."

¹²⁵ Leila Saralaeva and Aida Kasymalieva, "Politician's Murder Rocks Kyrgyzstan," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, September 24, 2005, http://iwpr.net/?p=rca&s=f&o=255809&apc_state=henircafb34135dc9b040d1559de56156e796b6 (accessed June 15, 2007).

¹²⁶ Saralaeva, "Kyrgyzstan Draws Breath."

criminal past, but allegations of death threats on government officials, and dubious dropping of charges against him in January 2006. Moreover, Kulov's frame was reinforced when an outspoken NGO organizer was attacked only days after coordinating a rally at which he advocated a Kyrgyzstan "free from criminals."¹²⁷ For Rysbek Akmatbaev, choosing to attack Kulov, as the prime minister, not as a criminal, garnered the most salient Akmatbaev frame to date. This was especially so considering that the prime minister's office wrote to the Central Election Commission exposing Akmatbaev's residency issues, forcing the Central Election Commission to disqualify Akmatbaev and sparking the second round of protests. Although, not illegal, the Akmatbaev camp framed the letter as an abuse of authority, while Kulov's side focused the larger frame of criminality in Kyrgyzstan with Akmatbaev as the poster child for the problem. Ultimately, the competition of frames between Kulov and Akmatbaev did not end until the latter's death. While the two frames drew inspiration from the opposing leader, they were never in competition for the same audience, as Akmatbaev concentrated on those in the halls of power, such as the president, and the courts, while Kulov's supporters concentrated on framing an issue deserving of national public attention.

b. The Opposition

When Akaev fled Kyrgyzstan he concurrently met the opposition's demands and presented the opposition with its first political challenge of the post-Akaev era, the challenge of definition. Motivated by the desire to see that which was promised by opposition politicians during the euphoria surrounding the March Events, mainly constitutional and governmental reform, the opposition was acceptant of the consequences involved in initiating the first major anti-government protest since the March Events. While the grouping began with the frame, "reforms, reforms, reforms," in April 2006, opposition leaders extrapolated their original frame to an actual platform a month later during the May 2006 rally, a move representing the clearest step yet towards definition. The May 2006 platform read:

¹²⁷ Saralaeva and Toralieva, "Kyrgyz Premier."

1) a new draft constitution; 2) the punishment of those responsible for the shooting of demonstrators in Aksy in March 2002; 3) an end to "family business" and a real fight against corruption; 4) guarantees of freedom of the press; 5) economic reform, including the return of all economic functions to the cabinet; 6) a stepped-up fight against crime; 7) an end to the use of state-controlled media to denigrate political opponents; 8) an end to monopolization and price-gouging in the construction sector; 9) compensation for merchants' losses in looting during the night of March 24, 2005; and 10) an end to "unconstitutional" attempts to limit free speech and demonstrations.¹²⁸

These demands were a major evolution from the demands of April 2006 and represented the first time in the post-Akaev era when major opposition politicians attempted to frame a message for not just the event, but for the movement. By enumerating the concerns and issues of the day, the opposition was able to distinguish not just their desires, but the Bakiev administration's shortcomings—a fact not lost on Bakiev in the run-up to the November protests.

Although May 2006 represented a major evolution of the opposition frame, the opposition would have to wait almost a year until the April 2007 protests for the next stage in frame development, as the November 2006 protests continued with constitutional reform as the centerpiece message. Shifting the frame from weakening Bakiev through constitutional measures to demanding his outright resignation, the April 2007 opposition message directly challenged the president, an evolution attributable to the inclusion of Feliks Kulov in the opposition movement and his nascent organization, United Front for a Worthy Future for Kyrgyzstan.¹²⁹ Without wasting anytime, United Front began to frame Bakiev as unfit for office releasing a statement on 19 February 2007 calling for early presidential elections, and by 9 March 2007, the main opposition organization had begun calling for fresh protests at which time the protestors would call

¹²⁸ "Kyrgyz Opposition Rally Gives Government Until September to Reform," Kyrgyzstan Daily Digest, March 30, 2006, <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/200605/003A3.shtml> (accessed June 15, 2007).

¹²⁹ Pannier, "Kyrgyzstan: New Opposition Movement."

for Bakiev's resignation, not just early elections.¹³⁰ Less than a month after United Front called for early presidential elections, the main opposition party had not just taken on the same demand, but threatened President Bakiev with violence should the demands not be met.¹³¹ While the November 2006 protests succeeded in weakening the president, Bakiev still managed to come back and regain his lost constitutional powers less than two months later, a process that neither Kulov nor the main opposition movement wanted to see again. As such, opposition efforts were combined to create a frame by which the only graceful exit for Bakiev was capitulation. Unfortunately for the opposition, Bakiev's outreach to the opposition in the form of a request to form a coalition government and the naming a leading opposition politician to the post of prime minister was enough of a compromise as to help shed the image of a president unwilling to work with the opposition, a move that the opposition could not counter.

2. Cultural Repertoire of Redress

The most startling change in the post-Akaev cultural repertoire of the Kyrgyzstanis was the shift from a rural to an urban-centric movement. Where the March 2005 protestors had been able to cut the capital off from the rest of the country, the post-Akaev movements have sought to bring the rest of the country to the capital. Although protests in the regions have occurred since the March Events, none have been on the scale of the protests occurring in Bishkek. From this change in location arises the question of whether or not the composition of the protestors has also changed? Informing the answer to this question are two major factors: firstly, as many of the current major opposition politicians are from the provinces, just as during the March Events, they have enjoyed the support of their rural constituents and most likely continue to do so; secondly, there is no hard evidence suggesting that the protestors have changed completely from rural to urban, yet rumors persist that non-Bishkek residents have been the main participants in the protests. Further, the Akmatbaev affair is a perfect example of rural protestors from

¹³⁰ "Kyrgyz Reform Movement Threatens Rallies," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, March 9, 2007, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/3/730C961A-13AB-4096-B593-12435306EEF0.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

¹³¹ "Kyrgyz Opposition Leader Meets."

Issyk-Kul descending upon the capital to demonstrate in support of their politician. Holding events relatively constant for protestor composition, the change in locale suggests that protestors' perception of access to power has undergone a dramatic transformation. Whereas Bishkek saw meager and ineffective protests during the Akaev era, the capital city has been subject to almost a constant stream of protests since the spring of 2005, including the cases examined herein and others.

a. The Akmatbaev Affair

The success of the Akmatbaev affair was primarily due to alacrity and discipline, as Akmatbaev was able to mobilize many supporters in a short time frame, all of whom followed his direction. In two instances, spanning five months, comprising eight total days, with supporters numbering between 500 and 2,000, and employing the same elements of the cultural repertoire of the March Events, Akmatbaev managed more success in less time than any other single protest event in post-Akaev Kyrgyzstan. To begin with, both protest events, the death of Tynchbek Akmatbaev and Rysbek Akmatbaev's disqualification, demanded and received a personal response from Bakiev.¹³² More remarkable than Bakiev's presence at each event was the protestors' acceptance of Bakiev's repeated suggestion to await the results the legal system, a suggestion far short of protestor demands. Given Akmatbaev's reputation, the possibility for criminal behavior was on the minds of the security forces, yet according to one account, Akmatbaev's supporters actually aided the law enforcement agencies in apprehending a thief.¹³³ Moreover, the security services were impressed by the conduct of the protests;

Our bureaucrats need to learn from these guys. Look at their discipline, their organisation! When they left, they did it in three hours' time, and didn't leave behind so much as a handful of litter. They had rubbish bins, they had portable toilets, they had communications – they all had cell phones, and some even had satellite phones. They kept their voices down when they talked – they're competent, all right.¹³⁴

¹³² Saralaeva, "Kyrgyzstan Draws Breath."

¹³³ A Faltering State, 15.

¹³⁴ A Faltering State, 16-17.

In conducting the protests with such discipline and order, despite the concerns of criminality, Akmatbaev demonstrated that that a small, but disciplined group of protestors was worthy of attention from the highest halls of office, and by conceding to the president's suggestion of not prolonging his demonstration to the point of confrontation with the security forces, Akmatbaev maintained control over the not just the situation, but the larger issues at hand. Unfortunately, for his supporters, Rysbek Akmatbaev proved to be the "center of gravity" in Clausewitzian terms, when after his murder, not only was there was no leader, but there was also no cause around which to rally, suggesting a rational-choice paradigm of motivation.

b. The Opposition

Concomitant with shifting the center of protest from a rural to an urban setting was a reduction in the opposition's cultural repertoire as well. First and foremost, two of the three most influential techniques, road blockades and extended marches, were no longer available by virtue of geography. As for the third option, occupying administration buildings, what ever vestige of hope opposition leaders had of employing this technique against capital security forces was quashed when the Bakiev administration pre-emptively accused the opposition of plotting a coup prior to both the November 2006 and April 2007 protests.¹³⁵ In so doing, the administration removed yet another method of redress from the cultural repertoire and positioned itself to take preventative physical action against even the *possibility* of building seizure by the protestors.

With a reduced cultural repertoire, the opposition's new challenge lay in convincing Bakiev that while not representing a threat, the movement still demanded attention. To meet this challenge, the opposition focused on expansion of the single-day protests of April and May 2006 to multi-day protest events for the November 2006 and April 2007 protests, thus dictating a tantamount expansion of protestor participation. Specifically, the November 2006 protests aimed at achieving long promised

¹³⁵ "Kyrgyz President Says Opponents.," "Coup Probe Begins as Kyrgyz Protest Continues," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, November 04, 2006, <http://rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/11/B2D240A2-573B-4C6B-8619-C6D92AD1B4EE.html> (accessed June 15, 2007).

constitutional reforms that devolved more power to the parliament, whereas in April 2007 the opposition increased the gravity of demands calling for early presidential elections and Bakiev's resignation. In light of the reduced cultural repertoire and these non-trivial demands, the opposition attempted to muster a force sufficient enough to motivate Bakiev to act, however, this logic proved faulty. The brief but active history of protest in post-Akaev Kyrgyzstan reveals that past events tend to dictate presidential action more so than the events of the present. That is to say, the historical memory of the previous protest, November 2006, motivated Bakiev to a greater extent than did the mass build up of protestors during April 2007.

In the context of the November 2006 protests, Bakiev's five-day delay in submitting his promised constitutional proposals was directly informed by the April and May 2006 single-day events. Fully aware that the November 2006 protests were the first attempt at the multi-day protest format, Bakiev waited to see how much "steam" the opposition could muster and maintain before taking any action. By drawing large crowds during the November 2006 protests, the opposition did pressure Bakiev to eventually act, but not in the manner desired, and only after he initially balked at the first five days of protest. On 6 November when Bakiev did finally submit his draft constitution minus the agreed upon concessions, he was forced to confront a wholly new situation for which he was not prepared.

Bakiev's actions in March 2007, during the run-up to the April protests, revealed the historical effect of the November 2006 protests. By April 2007, Bakiev faced major problems directly and indirectly related to the previous round of opposition protests, not the least of which was his reversal of constitutional concessions. More specifically, the November 2006 protests were well attended, prolonged, and initially achieved their stated goals, all resulting in a relatively successful protest event for the opposition. In an attempt to stave off a repeat of the November 2006 protests, Bakiev made pre-emptive concessions by choosing a prime minister from the opposition, inviting the opposition into a coalition government, and reforming the state-run television station into a public station. Despite such unprecedented concessions by the president, the opposition went ahead with the planned protests, but failed to achieve its stated goals of

early presidential elections and Bakiev's resignation. Instead the government-initiated crackdown proved to be the defining moment of the protest event, as the opposition never recovered. Although in making such major concessions to the opposition ahead of the planned protests, Bakiev evolved from his November 2006 position of initial reluctance to tacit appeasement, yet shortly thereafter in suppressing the actual protest events, Bakiev reverted to a position of intolerance. Deciphering down which path Bakiev will trod is a puzzle left to the next round of protests, when the effects of the April 2007 events will dictate action.

D. PEASANT REBELLION THEORY

1. The Akmatbaev Affair

The actions of the peasantry in the Akmatbaev affair are inherently risk-neutral in that the entire affair was an attempt to gain political ground. From the resignation of the prime minister to the candidacy of a reputed criminal for a parliamentary seat, the protestors had nothing to lose and sought to change the status quo to their advantage. Indeed the rhetoric surrounding the initial protests after the death of Tynchbek Akmatbaev revealed a peasantry challenging not only the status quo, but the very authority of the government. In essence, the protestors attempted to seize upon the opportunity to push Kulov from office as retribution for the death of Akmatbaev, an inherently dangerous proposition given Kulov's position as prime minister and Rysbek Akmatbaev's history of criminality. Further, the protests surrounding the candidacy of Rysbek Akmatbaev also sought to challenge the status quo by instituting the will of the people in place of the constitutional order. While the confusion surrounding the Central Election Commission's decision appears to lend salience to a loss-averse peasantry advocating for their candidate, such an assessment fails to take into account the larger picture of Akmatbaev's questionable candidacy. The peasantry was not attempting to maintain the status quo within the contested constituency, i.e., maintaining an "Akmatbaev" in power; rather they were attempting to challenge the system by demanding that Rysbek Akmatbaev, while under criminal investigation, be allowed to run for parliament. Neither of these protests embodied loss-averse behavior, rather the

peasantry, led by Akmatbaev, attempted to gain political power from where no previously existed. Moreover, upon the death of Rysbek Akmatbaev the peasantry ceased to demonstrate, suggesting that they were not motivated by the desire to recoup a loss, as in the loss-averse paradigm, but employed a standard cost-benefit analysis that no longer became feasible after the second brother's death.

2. The Opposition

The move to urban-based protests undoubtedly influenced the composition of the opposition movement. Anecdotal evidence from journalistic accounts of the protests maintains that opposition protests still had a definite peasant component; however, the exact composition is unknown. As explained to the author by an NGO representative, the peasant component was one of three forces involved in the Bishkek protests at the end of the March Events, with the other two forces being the Southern political clans and NGO supporters.¹³⁶

Examining the actions of the opposition protestors across the April 2006-2007 timeframe reveals a loss-averse peasantry primarily motivated by the desire to recoup that which was promised during the euphoria surrounding the March Events, and the November 2006 protests, but not delivered. By taking the mantle as the opposition leader during the March Events and in turn, capitalizing on that position to run for the presidency, Bakiev's campaign promises of 2005 took on not just Kyrgyzstan's future but the country's past as well. That is to say, by mid-2006, Bakiev's unfulfilled campaign promises of constitutional and governmental reform had the added effect of devaluing all that was accomplished during the March Events. Reluctant to lose the momentum for political reform, the peasantry rallied to protest on multiple occasions in 2006, and in April 2007. Adding to the frustration of the peasantry leading up to the April 2007 rallies was the passage of time without the passage of reform. Despite the multiple instances of protest during 2006, of which the November 2006 protest was a brief bright spot, Bakiev's promises were not just unfulfilled, but his actions gave rise to the belief that his promises would remain unfulfilled. By reversing the protestor-led constitutional reforms

¹³⁶ Interview with NGO leader, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, September 2006.

of November 2006, Bakiev effectively shut out the will of the people in favor of his own desire for power. The whole experience sent two different messages; firstly, the power of peasant protest in November 2006 had induced Bakiev to capitulate to protestor demands, proving that loss-recuperation was possible; and secondly, the constitutional reform reversal of December 2006 signaled the weakness of parliamentary opposition leadership.

With the addition of Kulov to the opposition leadership came a change in rhetoric but not peasant motivation, which proved to be a dangerous combination. At no point during the April 2007 protest event did the peasantry alter the cultural repertoire from that which was employed in the 2006 protests, seemingly suggesting that their participation was contingent on the same motivating factors of loss-recuperation as had been the case in the previous year. The opposition leadership however, chose to change the group's rhetoric from seeking constitutional reforms to seeking Bakiev's resignation, thus in combination with the peasant presence eliciting the most violent government response to date. Unlike the Kara-Buura or Aksy events, when loss-averse protestor rhetoric and action challenged authority through audacious behavior, the April 2007 protests were marked by challenging rhetoric, but standard action. Rather than attempting an outright takeover of power through bold action, the peasantry appeared willing to "wait out" the Bakiev administration. Given that the Bakiev administration had already rescinded protestor-led constitutional reforms, and instituted an opposition-led government, the president's desire to maintain power ultimately prevailed yet again.

E. CONCLUSION

The consequences of both the Akmatbaev affair and the opposition movement are far ranging for the Kyrgyzstani populace as the two situations offer a general, but not complete, departure from the March Events. Where one movement was reliant on a small but disciplined group of protestors, the other came to advocate large and vociferous gatherings, yet both intersecting in the capital city, at the office of the president. In contrast to the March Events, both the Akmatbaev and opposition movement case studies began and ended with petitioning Bakiev. Unlike the March Events, the Akmatbaev frame attacked Kulov the individual instead of his entire government, which proved to be

effective in the second instance. Similarly, the opposition movement attacked Bakiev, the president, not his institutions, as many of the opposition leaders were members of such institutions.

Although the change of location proved restrictive for the opposition's cultural repertoire, the grouping was able to overcome by increasing the intensity of protests in terms of both time and participation. Contrast that pattern with the small but disciplined protests of the Akmatbaev supporters and no single model emerges as more effective than the other, rather the only inference that can be drawn is that the overall paradigm of urban protest was reshaped dramatically by the recent events.

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V. ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter addresses the evolution of protest in Kyrgyzstan from 2000 to the present in four parts. The next section examines how time and space have impacted Kyrgyzstani protest, while the following section analyzes the patterns of peasant participation in political protest. The subsequent section considers the limits to the theoretical framework. Lastly, the final section explores the implications of continued protest on the development of democracy in Kyrgyzstan.

B. THE IMPACT OF TIME AND SPACE ON PROTEST

Protest in the Akaev era was marked by the ability of an aggrieved party to project a cause beyond the local constituency for an indefinite period of time. Of the three incidents under examination in the Akaev era, Aksy and the March Events are distinguished from Kara-Buura in that the latter was limited by time and space, which ultimately became the arbiter of success. Since the issue at hand in Kara-Buura surrounded the parliamentary election results, the protestors were beholden to the parliamentary election cycle in ways that did not constrain the Aksy grouping. With the parliamentary election cycle inherently limiting the time frame available for protest to only immediately preceding, during and succeeding the poll, the ability of the Kara-Buura demonstrators to expand the period of protest was greatly reduced. Furthermore, control over the election cycle, and hence the available period of protest, resided not with the angered constituency but with the institutions headed by Akaev, which meant that the Kara-Buura grouping was protesting both against Akaev and according to Akaev's schedule. Five years later, in the week prior to the 2005 parliamentary elections when protests erupted across the country, Akaev's control over the election cycle was lost before the first round of voting had even begun. By employing the cultural repertoire of protests, road blockades, marches and occupation of public spaces, the March Events protestors of the pre-election period laid the foundation to effectively remove the standard time frame limitations imposed by an election cycle, which was confirmed by

the post-round one explosion of opposition occupied territories. Further in finding common ground with protestors in multiple regions, the leaders of the March Events were able to project the idea of a national crisis enveloping the country, as opposed to the events in Kara-Buura of 2000, in which case the disturbance only occurred in a single section of the country. Through failure the Kara-Buura protestors revealed the necessity for demonstrators to control the period of protest in order to meet with success.

Just as important as the need to control the timeframe of protest was the necessity to project a local cause onto the national scene, a revelation that did not occur until two years later with Aksy. Beknazarov's undue persecution at the hands of the Akaev regime, while reminiscent of Kulov's situation was not *a priori* sufficient reason to elicit a response from the president as the issue remained at the local level; however the deaths of six protestors at the hands of the security apparatus, protesting on behalf of Beknazarov, transformed the entire situation. The original reason for protest, Beknazarov's imprisonment, was an issue inherently limited to the Aksy constituency, but the shootings dually garnered national attention and caused an expansion of constituent demands to include to "justice for the dead." With a redefined cause, the Beknazarov protestors became the Aksy protestors and confronted the Akaev administration with a level of intensity and organization never before seen, demanding political accountability for the shootings. Considering that the pre-shooting protests occurred outside of a limited setting such as an election cycle, the Aksy protestors essentially stumbled into a situation where their local issue had become a national one and where the time frame of protest was not controlled by Akaev. Anxious to limit the possible political damage from the shootings, the Akaev regime performed an about-face and within months attempted to appease the protestors with the cabinet's resignation. Where the Kara-Buura protests had proved to the Kyrgyzstani populous that organizing against the Akaev regime was possible, despite failure, the Aksy protests revealed that concessions from Akaev were also viable, provided that complete control over both time and space did not reside with the government.

For the March Events, the combination of control over both time and space was crucial. After the pre-election demonstrators seized control over the time frame of

protest, gaining control over the remaining factor, space, was only a matter of time. With the ensuing coupling of the traditional opposition frame to the undeniable force of the newly-ordained opposition protestors, local causes combined to form a national issue. No longer were the initial concerns of protestors restricted to local constituencies, rather accountability in the White House became the new goal. Only through gaining control over the regions, in essence, shrinking the area over which Akaev had control, was the opposition able to make such a demand as the resignation of the president, and take such action as the storming of the White House.

In the post-Akaev era the propensity for protest has increased dramatically; however, the most vociferous protests have occurred in an urban setting, a sharp contrast from the regional protests of the Akaev era. With the explosion of protests in Bishkek since the March Events, the Akaev era paradigm of time and space has dramatically changed. Where the success of the March Events was dependent on the opposition's ability to expand the period of protest and move from the periphery to the center, thereby reducing the Akaev regime's control, the post-Akaev paradigm has revealed a situation whereby the protestors maintain control of both time and space, with the government fighting to wrest control away. By holding multi-day rallies in the capital at locations around the White House and under direct White House control, the protestors have established a new status quo of time and space, which has confused the presidential administration. The implications for this paradigm shift are not yet known, however, the first major clash between the government and post-Akaev protestors occurring at the April 2007 protests, signaled a willingness by Bakiev to gain control over lost time and space. Despite such action, primary control over the post-Akaev time and space issues of protest still resides with the protestors; however the government's actions do suggest that the issue of control will no longer be the complete purview of one side to be leveraged against the other. Instead, control over time and space will be an issue over which both sides have input.

C. PEASANT REBELLION THEORY

Table 2. Summation of peasant rebellion analysis

Year	Event	Motive	Theory
2000	Kara-Buura	Rigged elections	Loss-averse
2002	Aksy	False imprisonment and shooting deaths	Loss-averse
2005	March Events	Rigged Elections	Loss-averse
2005-06	Akmatbaev Affair	Death and candidacy	Risk-neutral
2006-07	Opposition	Broken promises	Loss-averse

As seen in Table 2 of the five cases examined herein, four incidents, Kara-Buura, Aksy, the March Events and the opposition movement can be categorized as producing loss-aversion, while the Akmatbaev affair was fundamentally risk neutral. The distinction between the loss-averse and risk-neutral paradigms lies in a difference of motivating factors for actors. For the loss-averse actor, the prospect of recouping that which was lost is sufficient motivation to initiate and sustain risky action until their perceived losses have been restored. For the risk-neutral actor, employing a standard cost-benefit analysis, the motivation to act is only sufficient when benefits of changing the status quo outweigh the risks of action. For the instances of Kara-Buura, Aksy, and the March Events, motivation stemmed from the loss of political power, while in 2006-2007 the opposition movement was motivated by Bakiev's broken promises and the failure of the March Events to initiate promised reform. In contrast, the Akmatbaev affair was strictly risk-neutral, as the peasantry protested only for new political gains, which when not realized, failed to motivate further protest.

While loss-aversion was the motivating factor for the four cases, the level of effectiveness was directly related to the breadth of the cultural repertoire employed by each grouping. In the Aksy and March Events cases, the peasantry was unencumbered in implementing as many techniques of redress as desired, due to their motivation to recoup

their losses at any cost and favorable geographic conditions. In contrast, the peasantry of the opposition movement has been hampered by the move to urban-based protests and the ensuing restrictions of the cultural repertoire. Moreover the success of the November 2006 protests occurred only at a point when protestor numbers swelled greatly and behavior was seen as the most boisterous to date for an urban-based event, suggesting that even the mere threat of a return to a March Events-like cultural repertoire was sufficient to cause capitulation from Bakiev. For Kara-Buura, failure stemmed not from motivation or employment of the cultural repertoire, but from extraneous factors such as location and the inability to nationalize the issue at hand. In addition, Kara-Buura was the first incident of its kind in Kyrgyzstan—a major Akaev confidant had broken ranks to openly challenge presidential power—which meant that the peasantry was essentially breaking new political ground, the boundaries of which were unknown. Aksy and the March Events had the benefit of historical memory from which to make decisions on how to proceed.

For the Akmatbaev affair, the resolution of both the first and second round of protests holds the key to understanding the risk-neutral classification of the entire event. Like Aksy, the first round of Akmatbaev protests was the result of a death, yet unlike the Aksy peasantry, the Akmatbaev peasants never came close to success either partially or wholly. In fact, the Akmatbaev peasantry dispersed after meeting with President Bakiev, falling far short of their demand for the removal of Prime Minister Kulov. During the second round of protests, the Akmatbaev peasantry protested for two days until their demand, the reinstatement of Rysbek's candidacy, was met, then they dispersed. In the final chapter of the Akmatbaev affair, Rysbek's murder, the peasantry did not even muster sufficient numbers to manage a return to Bishkek as they had in both previous incidents. Moreover, the context of death as a motivator for the Akmatbaev affair is completely different than for the Aksy grouping. In the case of the latter the death of the protestors was and continues to be a major source of motivation for action as the desire for "justice for the dead" still lingers in peasant memory, yet for the Akmatbaev peasantry, Rysbek's death never elicited a response tantamount to the response of the Aksy peasants. By dispersing so easily and quickly in each round of protests, the

Akmatbaev peasantry revealed behavior motivated by cost-benefit analysis, as in the first round they chose not to incur risk by continuing to challenge the president, while in the second round, they dispersed after having met with success.

D. CONSIDERATIONS OUTSIDE THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This thesis has sought to explicate the mechanics of Kyrgyzstani protest and the ensuing impact on Kyrgyzstani political development. By focusing on social mobilization theory in conjunction with leading theories of peasant rebellion, this thesis has focused on both agency-based and structural modes of explanation. While this framework has served to shed light on the actions of protest in five case studies, the framework by no means purports to explain the whole of Kyrgyzstani political development. Further research would compare this approach with alternative explanations based both on structural and agency-based reasoning found in recent scholarship on Central Asia.

E. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The opposition's struggle for political reform represents the lone case study examined herein that continues to the present day. Unlike each other case, the issue of political reform has yet to reach a breaking point and the history of Kyrgyzstani politics suggests that the parties involved will continue to struggle to find a compromise. The addition of Feliks Kulov has surely been a boon to the opposition, if not for his reputation then for his attempt to change the direction of opposition rhetoric and demands. By instituting new rhetoric while maintaining the now standard cultural repertoire, Kulov is attempting to prepare the opposition for a long and drawn out movement that looks towards a post-Bakiev Kyrgyzstan. While Bakiev's unfulfilled promises of constitutional reform still serve as a fertile ground for opposition frame resonance, continuing to focus solely on such promises does nothing to expand the opposition's platform of ideas or entice potential protestors to action. In calling for early presidential elections, Kulov is not just challenging Bakiev's hold on power, but also challenging the president to define his position on multiple political issues. If Bakiev does indeed take up the challenge and

establish a set of political positions, then the responsibility will fall to Kulov and the oppositionists to do the same or risk appearing not as visionary politicians, but leaders of a revolution now past.

As protest becomes the institutionalized method of redress for an aggrieved party, Kyrgyzstan is engendering a scenario not yet seen in the fourth wave of democratization. Complicating the scenario ever further is the vibrant civil society existing in Kyrgyzstan, which was only a minor participant in the March Events, but has taken on a greater role in the post-Akaev era. Since independence, civil society groups have worked towards making Kyrgyzstan a more democratic country, as defined by Kyrgyzstani society and partially embodied in the nascent opposition platform. Considering that Bakiev was brought to office by street protests, his ensuing engagement with protesting parties does not come as a surprise. However, his initial lack of attention to protestor demands was startling and suggestive of a return to the authoritarian ways of Akaev. More recently his response to opposition demands and his willingness to fill the ranks of his cabinet with opposition members indicates an acknowledgement of protestor power. Harnessing such power, whether through capitalizing on loss-averse or risk-neutral motives remains the challenge of not just the opposition movement, but any grouping of Kyrgyzstanis wishing to redress the government.

While the inference that Kyrgyzstan is ruled by a mob has been made by international observers, this claim fails to take into account the relationship between the power structure and the protestors.¹³⁷ Inherent in this belief is the idea that the protesting masses have and will continue to dictate policy prescriptions to elected officials, primarily to the president. The reality on the ground however, belies this belief for two reasons; firstly, Bakiev's concessions to the opposition movement, with the exception of the November 2006 protests, have come prior to any major protest gathering; and secondly, the sitting parliamentarians of the opposition leadership followed their own course of action, rather than their constituencies' prescription, when forced to choose between the two options.¹³⁸ The prime example of this behavior was the December 2006

¹³⁷ Crisis Group, *Kyrgyzstan on the Edge*.

¹³⁸ Orozbekova, "Yet Another Constitution."

capitulation to Bakiev over reversing the constitutional reforms gained during the November 2006 protests. Rather than defend the constitutional reforms fought for by their constituents, and face the possibility of Parliament dissolution, the opposition parliamentarians sided with Bakiev. Moreover, the motivations of the opposition rank and file emanate not from a desire to see a continually weak president, beholden to the masses, but for the need to weaken the power of the presidency in order to strengthen Parliament, thus creating a greater balance of power. This is not to say that mob rule would never take hold, as the dominance of the loss-averse paradigm in explanations of Kyrgyzstani protest definitely lays the ground work for the perception of unending grievances and correspondingly risky behavior to regain perceived losses. Rather the current situation in Kyrgyzstan is not ripe for mob rule. Constitutional and governmental reforms matter to the Kyrgyzstani populace for a multitude of reasons, not the least of which is that power has always been vertically structured, with the president residing on top. Altering the balance of power in the highest halls of the land would lay the foundation for a similar transformation across the board, thus giving hope to thousands of Kyrgyzstanis that political change is possible and possibly opening up new avenues of redress. Opening up these new avenues would provide alternatives to the “street democracy” that marks Kyrgyzstan’s current political development.

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